

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent Girls Migration in Ethiopia

Background of the study

From January 2014 – December 2015 the research project “Time to Look at Girls: Adolescent girls’ migration and development in Ethiopia” took place. The research was part of a larger project that also includes research in Bangladesh and Sudan, and carried out under the umbrella of the **Global Migration Centre of the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies** in Geneva, Switzerland. The overall research project is funded by the **Swiss Network for International Studies (SNIS)**. The case study in Ethiopia was co-funded by **Girl Effect Ethiopia**. Additionally, the project was supported by the Terre des Hommes Federation, the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom, Feminist Review Trust and VU University Amsterdam.

The research project focused on *the experiences, life choices and aspirations of adolescent girls and young women who migrate internally and internationally*. It specifically looked at the life course and at how the decision to migrate intersects with other important choices, which characterise this particular life stage. By examining choices related to education, marriage and having children the study provides insights into adolescent girls’ aspirations and decision making capacity as well as into changes in their status resulting from their migration. The research also looked into the effect of girls’ migration on certain aspects of social development, such as education, employment, health care, and decrease of early marriage.

Methodology

The fieldwork in Ethiopia took place between March and September 2014. The research was carried out by a team of Ethiopian researchers under supervision of Dr. Marina de Regt (VU University Amsterdam). The main researchers were Felegebirhan Belesti and Arsema Solomon. Aynadis Yohannes and Medareshaw Tafesse carried out interviews with young women who returned from the Middle East. Two migrant girls assisted in identifying migrant girls for interviews and carried out interviews themselves. The fieldwork was facilitated by the following Ethiopian NGOs: NIKAT Charitable Association, Timret Le Hiwot (TLH), CHADET (Organization for Child Development and Transformation) and OPRIFS (the Organization for

Prevention, Rehabilitation and Integration for Female Street Children).

The research methodology used was common for all case studies (in Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Sudan) in order to be able to compare the findings. The research methods were of a qualitative nature and included 60 questionnaires, 20 life story interviews, 6 focus group discussions and 20 expert interviews. In view of the absence of policies and statistical data concerning adolescent migrant girls the team was unable to collect this type of data.

The research focused mainly on domestic workers and sex workers as they form the large majority of adolescent migrant girls in Addis Ababa. Most of the interviewed girls were between 12-18 years old, yet women in their 20s who had migrated while they were under 18 years old were also interviewed in order to study the impact of migration on their lives. In addition, interviews were carried out with 30 young women who migrated to the Middle East while they were under 18 and who returned to Addis Ababa (15 of them were deportees from Saudi Arabia). They were between 18-24 years old at the time of the interviews. 10 experts working for ministries, international organizations and Ethiopian NGOs were interviewed in Addis Ababa.

In order to study the impact of migration in the places of origin fieldwork was carried out in South Gondar and in the city of Shashamene. Parents of girls who migrated to Addis Ababa and to the Middle East and peers who had not migrated were interviewed; 4 focus group discussions were organised with peers and with returned migrants and 10 expert interviews were carried out with people at



organizations and institutions involved with migrants (such as the police, the Bureaus of Women, Youth and Children, and local NGOs).

Key findings

Family relations and decision making

The large majority of the interviewed girls reported that they took the decision to migrate themselves, sometimes without consulting their parents. As the most important reasons to leave their place of origin they mentioned poverty of their families, experiences of abuse at home, escaping early marriages and abduction and the aspiration to continue their education. Quite a number of girls experienced situations of abuse at home, often related to dramatic events in the family such as a divorce, death of one of the parents or even of both parents. There was a strong link between the decision to migrate and the negative role of step-parents, aunts and uncles, who abused the girls physically, mentally or sexually. Other girls reported that they migrated to help their parents financially. The interviewed parents hoped that their daughters would be able to improve their own lives in the city. In addition, there would be “one mouth less to feed”. Sometimes girls ran away from their families but more often they were invited by a relative or acquaintance to move to Addis Ababa. They offered them accommodation and education in exchange for domestic work. Relatives and friends (including boyfriends) affected the decision to migrate in many cases; most girls migrate with the help of others, very few migrate on their own.

Adolescence as a particular phase in life

In Ethiopia, adolescent girls suffer from the gendered restrictions on their lives, in particular in rural areas. Those that come from farming families have to help their parents with agricultural work and with housekeeping, in addition to their schoolwork. While the number of girls that attend school has rapidly increased in the past decade, girls that come from poor families tend to drop out when they reach puberty. Parents fear that girls may start sexual relationships, get abducted and raped, become pregnant and therefore keep them at home and do not allow them to continue their education. The sexuality of girls is restricted and taboo, but the numerous stories about rape, sexual violence, unplanned pregnancies and boyfriends show that these restrictions work against girls’ wellbeing. Some girls long for freedom of movement, and want to experiment with sexual relations, yet the restrictive environment puts them automatically in a stigmatized position affecting their future lives.

Living and working conditions in Addis Ababa

The living and working conditions of domestic workers and sex workers in Addis Ababa differ to a great extent. Domestic workers depend on their employers, who determine the extent in which they can have contact with their family back home, go outside of the house to meet others, and/or attend evening classes. They live isolated lives; going to evening classes is sometimes the only way in which they can establish contacts with peers. Evening classes are therefore not only important for educational reasons but also for social reasons.

Domestic workers spoke about a heavy workload, low salaries (or no salary at all) and various forms of abuse. Sex workers are much more mobile and have a bigger say over their own lives. There is a clear trajectory from domestic work to sex work: a large proportion of sex workers in this study started to work as domestics but moved into sex work after having encountered abuse and exploitation in domestic work. Sex work has advantages over domestic work with regard to payment, freedom of movement, access to social networks, building up human capital and other resources. Both domestic workers and sex workers encounter abuse during their work, yet sex workers are more able to cope with their vulnerabilities and express greater self-esteem, which could be related to their age. The interviewed domestic workers were often younger than the interviewed sex workers. Sex workers have learned to fight for themselves and have often developed strong personalities. They also have more social capital than domestic workers: they meet more people and are able to build up a social network. Yet, many interviewed sex workers mentioned that it is “easy to get into sex work but very difficult to get out.”

Expectations and aspirations

Almost all of the interviewed girls had high expectations of their life in Addis Ababa. They had hoped to continue



their education, improve their own lives and those of their families back home by obtaining well-paid jobs, and become financially independent. While all of them enjoyed the infrastructure, the availability of shops and health services in the city, in addition to its cleanliness and entertainment possibilities, most of them were disappointed by the way in which their lives had turned out after migration. Both groups aspired to become economically independent, have their own accommodation and improve their living conditions.

Domestic workers who attended evening classes hoped that they would be able to continue their education and find better jobs. On the long run, they were interested in getting married but they first wanted to become economically independent and build up their own lives. Sex workers also aspired to continue their education but they did not see any possibilities to do that; they work at night and are unable to attend school during the day or in the evening. Most of them hoped to set up a small business, such as a hair salon or a shop, so that they would become economically better off. They had little hope that they would find a suitable marriage partner, because they were disappointed in men or because they thought that nobody would be interested in marrying them, and sometimes intended to migrate to the Middle East. In short, almost all of the interviewed girls valued economic independence over marrying.

Social development

Migration has sometimes contributed to girls' increased self-esteem; they feel that they have gained new experiences, become more independent and have more social capital. Yet they are faced with new structures of inequality and obstacles to develop themselves. They have limited opportunities to continue their education and find better jobs, often face abuse and exploitation, and this may affect their self-esteem negatively. In addition, very few of them were able to send back money home, and oftentimes they had lost contact with their parents. The impact of the migration of girls to Addis Ababa on their families seems to be minimal. Sex workers preferred not to have contact with their parents and siblings out of fear that their work would be concealed. Domestic workers kept more often in touch and sometimes returned home for holidays. None of the interviewed girls wanted to return home permanently, yet almost all of them said that they regretted their migration. They were of the opinion that they would have been better able to improve their lives by continuing their education at home.

Returned women from the Middle East

The young women who had returned from the Middle East

were between 18-24 years old. They had left with high hopes about earning a lot of money but often faced with hardship, exploitation and abuse. They had changed their birth certificates in order to be able to migrate through legal channels. Some spent years abroad in different countries. They returned to Ethiopia for various reasons, related to their work abroad, sometimes for personal reasons and others were deported (in particular from Saudi Arabia during the large scale deportations in 2014-2015). They were disappointed about the limited impact of their migration on their own lives and those of the family they left behind. The remittances did not lead to a structural change in their livelihood for example by building a house, buying land, and setting up a business. The money they sent home was used for daily expenses, health care, and consumer goods (often furniture and audio equipment). Half of them said that their own lives had improved after migration; most of them were happy to be home but all of them were frustrated about the limited job opportunities in Ethiopia. They would like to stay in Ethiopia but said that there is little work available and that the salaries are low. Most of them aspire to set up a small business such as a beauty salon or a small shop, yet they lack the capital to do so. In addition, while they desire to get married and have children, they mentioned that the chances to find a suitable husband are limited. As a result, quite a number of young women intend to migrate again despite the hardship they went through.

Support for migrant girls

The expert interviews showed that adolescent girls' migration is an important topic in Ethiopia but a legal framework and policies to improve the situation of migrant girls are lacking. The Ethiopian government is a signatory to various international conventions regarding children's rights and there are policies protecting them but the implementation of the policies is not fully realized.



A number of local NGOs also have activities protecting adolescent migrant girls. The focus of the activities is often on the rehabilitation of migrant girls with their families back home or on the prevention of migration. Very few organizations work on improving the lives of migrant girls in the places of destination. In view of the large numbers of migrant girls in Ethiopia and the numerous girls that aspire to migrate, there is a strong need to initiate activities that improve the lives of migrant girls.

Recommendations

Tackling the drivers of girls migration

Preventing girls' migration is seen as a priority for many organizations, yet such approach will only yield results when the living conditions for girls in the places of origin will be improved. Adolescent migrant girls expressed a strong interest in education. In the past few years, girls' school enrolment has improved in Ethiopia but there are still many regions lagging behind. Secondary school enrolment is also much lower than primary school enrolment. Education is, however, not considered useful when there are no jobs available. In short: the creation of job opportunities for girls together with improving girls' education, campaigning against early marriages and strengthening girls' decision-making power are important fields for interventions.

Promoting safer migration of girls

There is an urgent need to organize migration in a safer way, protecting the rights of children and ensuring their safety. Adolescent girls should have access to information about the living and working conditions in the places of migration so that they can make well-informed decisions. When they do decide to migrate, they should be protected and have access to services during their journey, such as lodging, food, health care and legal assistance. Several NGOs in Ethiopia are offering services for migrant children along the main routes of migration, yet the focus is often on rehabilitation while many girls do not want to return home. The voices of girls have to be taken serious.

In addition to a shift from prevention to protection, more coordination is needed between the various interventions that are already being implemented by local and international organizations in Ethiopia. There is a clear link between the limited opportunities for migrant girls in Addis Ababa and the increasing migration of adolescent girls in rural areas to the Middle East. Protecting and promoting migrant girls in Ethiopia may prevent girls from migrating internationally.

Improving the living and working conditions of migrant girls

More activities should be developed for migrant girls that

are not victims of abuse and exploitation but that want to live and work in Addis Ababa in better circumstances. One of the most important goals of such interventions should be to increase the agency of migrant girls. Developing projects together with migrant girls, which are based on their own interpretation of their needs is necessary. Interventions could start with workshops in which migrant girls discuss among each other how their lives can be improved and how their aspirations can be realized. These discussions should go further than stressing the importance of education and the need for alternative jobs, but also include how to improve their social status, make them aware of their rights and increase their access to various types of resources. A peer education system could be developed in which migrant girls support each other, and those who have been longer in the city can advise those who have arrived recently. This would tie in with the wish of some interviewed migrant girls to be in touch with each other. Instead of protecting girls, girls should be assisted to protect themselves.

Awareness raising about gender, sexuality, and sexual violence

The extent in which girls' sexuality is restricted and the resulting vulnerabilities around sexuality for adolescent girls demand a collaborative effort. It is of utmost importance to strengthen girls' and young women's say over their own bodies. This could be done via information campaigns, workshops for girls and developing training material that could be used in schools. Yet, awareness raising and increasing the decision-making power of girls and young women is not enough. This goal can only succeed when it includes interventions aimed at boys and young men about gender and sexuality. Campaigns against domestic violence and sexual abuse should be developed in cooperation with men. In addition, girls and young women must become more aware of the possibilities to file court cases in the case of sexual abuse. Excellent work is being done in this field by Ethiopian NGOs (such as the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association) but adolescent girls often do not know the way to such organizations. Improving girls' access to information about legal protection is therefore important.

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