GIVING WOMEN VOICE: THE ETHIOPIAN FEMALE SKILLED DIASPORA'S POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Migration research, which tends to focus on the low paying and exploitative nature of female migrants' work, often neglects female skilled migration. Under-representation of the gender dimension is not only common in international migration research, but is also present in policies, development strategies and initiatives. This lack of acknowledgement also impedes, and continues to marginalise, the role of women in development, and further perpetuates disparities between the sexes. Overall, the focus on gender within the study of international migration and diaspora mobility studies remains inadequate. The methodology behind this article involved questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with Ethiopian skilled and highly-skilled professionals residing in North America. Some temporary and permanent returnees were interviewed, including government officials, local NGOs and members of international organizations. The research sheds new light on the gender dimensions of the role of the diaspora in contributing to the re-shaping of Ethiopian society. The article explores aspects of ambiguity among gender roles in both North America and in Ethiopia. This article will explore these themes and also discuss the gender dimension of skilled migration and female diaspora mobility in the context of African development, specifically relating to Ethiopia. It will analyse the role of women in the realm of international skilled migration, in order to recognize and empower migrant women as agents of development and change.

Key Words: skilled migration, diaspora mobility, female skilled migration/mobility.

Introduction

Women are the heartbeat of nations, especially in developing countries, where they not only work outside the home to provide for their families but also undertake the bulk of domestic work (Connell, 2009). Yet their contribution is undervalued and they continue to be marginalized. As

with many issues involving women, the potential impact of skilled migrant women on development in their home countries has not been given the attention it deserves. Although there is extensive literature on international migration and increasingly on skilled migration, the issue of gender within this literature has been neglected. This disregard for half of the world's population (women) makes it difficult to understand the full extent and impact of international migration including the relative mobility of each sex, gender segregation among highly-skilled migrant workers, and the differing experiences of men and women abroad.

Most developing countries are affected greatly by the emigration of their trained professionals. The Human Development Reports by the UNDP, has made it clear that *"development efforts which do not involve women as full partners and beneficiaries and which do not reach men and women equally have limited impact" (UN-ECA, 1998, p. 6).* For gender to be so important and yet under-represented, not only in research on international migration, but also in the policies, strategies and initiatives of development and economic growth, leaves many countries at a disadvantage.

It is crucial that we investigate and discuss gender trends and patterns in international migration, specifically skilled migration, in order to recognize and empower migrant women as agents of development and change. Although there is some discussion about female migration, and although it is evident from the data that female migration patterns have changed, there is still not much in literature focusing on how gender influences potential emigration behaviours, nor how skilled migrant women play a part in the economic development in their country of origin. This article will explore these aspects and also discuss the gender dimension of skilled migration and female diaspora mobility in the context of African development, specifically Ethiopia. It will argue that the increased need for skilled and highly-skilled trained professionals necessitates gender being at the forefront of development policies and, without it, progress and change in developing countries will likely suffer setbacks.

The data presented in this article is from a larger study on mobilising the Ethiopian highly-skilled diasporas. The data collection took place in United States, Canada and Ethiopia. All participants were drawn from highly-skilled Ethiopians residing in the diaspora as well as returnees in Ethiopia.

Methodology

This study analyses the influence of different components of gender on skilled migration, hence the contributions of women to development in their country. Given the nature of this study, a mixed-method exploratory design was used to impart both breadth and depth in understanding the

complexity around the mobilisation of the Ethiopian knowledge diaspora. The mixed-method exploratory design was chosen for this research due to the lack of a detailed understanding, or enough existing systematic research into Ethiopian diasporas, and the impact that this can have or is already having on development in Ethiopia (Creswell and Clark, 2007). Questionnaires and semi-structured in-depth interviews with skilled and highly-skilled Ethiopians in the diaspora in North America, temporary and permanent returnees, government officials, local NGOs and international organizations in Ethiopia helped to provide a rich picture. A combination of purposive, criterion and snowball sampling strategies was utilized in selecting participants. The data set consisted of 165 questionnaires and 13 interviews in North America and 19 questionnaires and 31 interviews in Ethiopia. Subjects were chosen based on the different perspectives that they were able to provide on the relevant issues. It was important to capture the views of both males and females.

The data analysis was an important step in identifying the relationship between diaspora mobility and the factors which inhibit mobility. Distinguishing between inductive data and deductive data was critical in the process of identifying the factors and inhibitors which contributed to the effective mobility of the knowledge diaspora (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996). With this in mind, an inductive approach to the data analysis was taken whereby findings emerged from data through the discovery of patterns, themes and categories (Patton, 2002), rather than first establishing hypotheses to be tested. Through this analytic process, factors related to the core of the issues of mobility were identified in terms of major themes, which influenced the topic at hand. These major themes were analysed and interpreted in a way so as to highlight empirical evidence for the phenomenon. In order to ensure a comprehensive analysis, the relationships between the different characteristics of skilled migration and knowledge transfer strategies were taken into account.

The data analysis techniques used included coding, grouping, and interpretation of the trends which affect the effective mobility of the Ethiopian diaspora. Participants' perceptions were obtained through both a qualitative and a quantitative approach using probabilistic and purposive sampling. Respondents were drawn from both the Ethiopian diaspora community in North America (United States and Canada) and returnees who had migrated back to Ethiopia from the Western world, mainly countries in North America and Europe. Analytical questionnaires were administered prior to the qualitative data collection (mainly interviews). The analysis consisted of 165 questionnaires and 13 interviews from North America and 19 questionnaires and 31 interviews from Ethiopia. To aid the qualitative data analysis, Nvivo coding software was utilised to assist in classifying the information and coding the text. Using Survey Monkey, the data gathered through the questionnaire

were subjected to a simple descriptive statistical analysis. The results were then summarized and interpreted for meaning.

Gendering International Migration

The growing feminisation of migration flows coupled with the increased need for skilled and highly-skilled trained professionals necessitate gender being at the forefront of development policies. Currently, skilled migrant women are one of the many groups that are overlooked in international migration, which is unfortunate, because, according to Docquier et al. (2007), female brain drain may generate a higher loss in national growth than male brain drain. Martin (2007) reiterates this point, stating that *"emigration of tertiary-educated women has a significant negative impact [and that the] negative impact of brain drain of women is not compensated for by the positive impact of remittances"* (p. 8). This is due to the fact that in most developing countries there is unequal gender access to tertiary education and skilled jobs, thus migration drains a well that is almost dry. Furthermore, *"educated women tend to invest more in their children's health and education…skilled women can transfer skills and knowledge, as well as financial resources to their home countries, which can then help in developing human capital at home"* (Kikkawa, 2008, p. 1). African countries have the highest gender differences in the brain drain phenomenon (Martin, 2007), which could possibly be attributed to the underdevelopment of the region. In other words, societies that lose a high proportion of skilled women through emigration, and are unable to attract them back, may experience slower growth and reduced income (Docquier et al., 2007).

It is also worth noting that the discourse of international skilled migration itself undervalues the contribution and impact of women. For instance Bailey (2003) defined skilled migration as *"individuals who have received some form of specialised education and training, who possess a high level of expertise and competence in a particular area, and who utilize these skills (i.e. are economically active) in a professional context"* (p. 236). This definition of skilled migration, like many others, does not take into account gender as a characteristic that affects skilled migration. This omission is often justified on the grounds that migration was once considered to be the act of single male labourers looking for work and that women were migrating simply to join husbands and family abroad. However, *"the invisibility of women in international migration scholarship does not correspond to [the] …reality of international migration"* (DeLaet, 1999, p. 13). It is true that in earlier times men dominated the international migration arena; however, by 1960, 47 per cent of all international migrants were women (ILO, 2003). There is a widespread misconception that female

migration is a new phenomenon, but this is not the case. In the last four decades female migration increased by only 2 per cent, standing presently at 51 per cent in the more developed regions (i.e. the OECD countries), and 49 per cent elsewhere in the world (UN-DESA, 2006). Thus, the change has not been in the volume of female migration, but in the pattern in which women are migrating.

It has been recognized that international migration can be an empowering experience for women. By migrating internationally, women (e.g. Ethiopian women) may move away from situations where traditional roles and patriarchal authority control their actions and de-value their skills and education. Migration can result in exercising greater autonomy over their own lives (UN-DESA, 2006). According to UN-DESA (2006) even when women do not migrate with their spouse and children, they take on new roles and responsibility for decisions related to the social and economic well-being of their households. Female empowerment (socially, economically and politically) has a spillover effect in such a way that the wider community benefits. Sen (2001) puts it best, stating that *"the expansion of women's capabilities not only enhances women's own freedom and well-being, but also has many other effects on the lives of all. An enhancement of women's active agency can, in many circumstances, contribute substantially to the lives of all people, men as well as women, children as well as adults"* (p. 10).

Today many women are migrating on their own terms, where their stay in the country is no longer contingent upon their family association. According to Martin (2007), emigration rates increase with educational attainment and highly-skilled women have a higher rate of migration than that of men. Docquier et al. (2007) point out that *"the rise in women's educational attainment, the increased demand for women's labour in health care sectors and other services, or cultural and social changes in the attitude towards female migration in many source countries"* (p. 2) are contributing greatly to decisions that females are making to migrate. Thus, transnational migration offers women the opportunity to break away from the traditional constraints placed on women's roles, which in turn allows them to pursue goals of self-interest (Tacoli, 1999). It allows them to escape from unhappy marriages, violent husbands, family pressures to marry, increases their chances for new and healthy relationship opportunities and, most of all, creates opportunities for women to re-define their role in society. Irrespective of this, many national emigration laws discriminate against women by having provisions that affect their protection. UN-DESA (2006) note that certain migration laws restrict women from bringing their husbands and children to join them, require pregnancy tests, prohibit immigration of women without their guardian's permission and impose age limits on immigration/emigration of women and girls.

Literature shows that women and men do experience international migration differently, and that they tend to move for different reasons (see Grieco and Boyd, 1998). These gendered experiences are affected by class, race and migration schemes of destination countries. To further grasp this point, it is important to understand certain patterns and trends associated with female migrants. One might assume that women migrate for the same reasons as men: to escape poverty or persecution, or to improve the socio-economic situation of their families. Indeed, many do; however, one should not overlook the socio-cultural aspects when investigating the push factors that contribute to migration of highly-skilled women.

Mobilising the Ethiopian Diaspora

Many researchers have claimed that necessary measures to attract nationals in the diaspora in an effort to engage them in development of the country are critical (see Welch, 2010). This is evident in international and regional initiatives by institutions such as African Union and New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) who are taking steps to ensure that intellectual African diasporas become partners in the development arena. For instance the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has established national diaspora coordination offices in many African countries, although so far the results have been mixed (Teferra, 2010). The United States' Fulbright Fellowship Program encourages African diasporas to participate and France's benefits and support for African scientific diasporas in their 'priority solidarity zone' (i.e. Senegal, Mali and Benin) are also proof of efforts being made to harness the diaspora's intellectual capital (Teferra, 2010). Many governments have been quite successful in mobilising their diaspora to contribute either by permanent return or by temporary or virtual contributions. Diaspora involvement can no longer be ignored or limited to remittances and, as a result, governments need to create favourable conditions for migrants to contribute.

Unfortunately, that is not always the case. Highly-skilled migrants are expected to return home to contribute, under unfavourable conditions at times. As Hart (2006) puts it: *"highly-skilled migration cannot overcome civil conflicts, dictatorship, or deeply embedded corruption [and] migrants from nations suffering from profound maladies like these may well choose not to look back, much less go back, until respect and stability and respect for human rights are established where they came from" (p. 61).*

Hart (2006) is partially right, but such individuals still have a role to play in building up and stabilizing the country. How are highly-skilled and knowledgeable nationals meant to help their

country if the countries themselves do not contribute to establishing stability and human rights? Should they wait until everything is perfect for them to contribute and return home? Skilled and educated diasporas could play a role in bringing about the change they want to see in their country. The participation of the diaspora community is needed at all levels of development. The need for them to be actively involved in the process of development is just as important as reaping the benefits of it when it comes. It is not only the responsibility of those left behind (after the depletion of skills) to bring about change, stability, justice and human rights. These are the responsibilities of all, including those in the diaspora, because they are in a position to contribute a great deal in building up the change they would like to see.

The political instability in Ethiopia makes the government's job of mobilising the Ethiopians in the diaspora even more difficult. Although they have enacted several policies and directives (e.g. Proclamation No. 270/2002, Directive FX 25/2004, etc.) to harness the diasporic resources, there is still a lot more to be done. As confirmed by several sources (AHEAD, 2007; Shinn, 2002; Yacob, 2005), the government has undertaken a number of initiatives to engage the diaspora using an ad hoc approach; the fact that their main focus is on procuring financial investment further undermines their initiatives in attracting diasporic intellectual capital. The need to promote knowledge exchange and the potential that highly-skilled and knowledgeable Ethiopians can offer are still left unexplored. The Chinese government has national policies for knowledge exchange and deployment of the diaspora (Welch and Cai, 2010; Yang and Welch, 2010); the Ethiopian government could attempt the same. Knowledge exchange initiatives is not the sole duty of overseas-based migrant networks or individuals, but also the duty of businesses and government sectors, civil society groups, academic and research institutions and international organisations. Brain gain strategies, or the lack thereof, deserve more attention.

Mobilising the Female Diaspora

African women migrants are no longer migrating as 'plus one' or as part of family reunification or as forced migrants in displaced situations but as main family supporters. Nonetheless, migration-related policies and regulations, both in the country of origin and in the destination country, have generally not adjusted to this trend (IOM, 2005). The shift in the nature of female migration has not changed the way it has been viewed; as a result, diaspora women are still neglected in terms of potential roles that they can play in the economic development of their country. This oversight is due to lack of gender-specific data which *"impairs the understanding and the appropriate*

assessment of women's unique role in development" (IOM, 2010, para. 1). It is important that African governments, in this case the Ethiopian government, promote the *"mainstreaming of the African women as leaders in the social and economic development of their country of origin"* (IOM, 2010, para. 3).

It is difficult to determine the magnitude of impact and long-term contributions of African migrant women owing to the unavailability of data in most parts of the world. Nevertheless, it has been suggested that gender dimensions of migration are salient to the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (Murison, 2005). Since both men and women play substantial economic roles, this point does seem sensible. For instance, in Africa women provide more than half of the labour, but lack equal access to education. At present, only one in four rural girls attend primary school, let alone graduate (World Bank, 2001). Many studies of various African countries show time and time again that gender-based inequality acts as a constraint on economic growth and poverty reduction. Thus, measures to increase gender equality in Africa, in addition to their social and distributional implications, have considerable potential to accelerate growth and to reduce poverty (World Bank, 2001).

Many studies show that women's education complements their children's education levels and this has important effects on the human capital of future generations (World Bank, 2007a; World Bank, 2007b; Docquier et al., 2007). Thus, more educated women, including female diasporas as role models, could produce children with higher levels of education. The literature also shows that allowing women to migrate and to become financial providers for themselves and their families, increases their self-esteem, personal autonomy and status, and thus improves their bargaining position within the household and the wider community.

Ultimately, it is important to specify the gender dimensions of the equation because contributions of women may be overshadowed by their association with men (Reddock, 2006). In other words de-gendered analysis tends to mask the specific contribution of women. Gender analysis can also lead to more complex and differentiated approaches in mobilising the diaspora. We should not underestimate the potential impact that women in the diaspora are capable of making. This is highly relevant to the debate on the developmental impact that transnational communities have or are having on their country of origin.

Key Findings

Gendered Treatment of Ethiopian Female Returnees

Returnees in general are treated differently not only by locals but also by other expatriates. However, female highly-skilled returnees get treated even less favourably when compared to males. Women who participated in temporary return programs felt that they were treated differently, not only in comparison to white foreign volunteers in the same program, but also in comparison to their Ethiopian male counterparts. One young Ethiopian woman volunteer, however, could not attribute the differences in treatment she was receiving and the difficulties she was experiencing, to anything in particular (sex, age, being Ethiopian etc.):

> *A lot of people didn't think I was a doctor... they treated me like the respiratory therapist or they treated me like the nurse. And then when the nurses would say 'well, she's the one making the call' they are kind of like, huh? I got a lot of that... (AT)*

Even visiting Ethiopia is different for an Ethiopian diaspora woman. While Ethiopian men from the diaspora enjoy all the perks that come along with being from the diaspora, many diaspora women have to struggle with the realities of being a woman from the diaspora on their visit back to Ethiopia. One of the participants recalled an incident while visiting Ethiopia with her husband:

> *In Ethiopia I don't know if it is discrimination but...people kind of take their cues from men...we were sitting at this restaurant...and I am the one who has all the money...I have [my husband's] money and my money...whenever I asked him [the waiter] for something he looked to [my husband] and asked for approval...like 'can she have this sort of thing'...the guys [my husband] love it...his guy friends are like, 'yeah it's funny'...some [are] elderly gentleman and I don't want to be disrespectful. (MT)*

This feeling of wanting to break away from a traditional perception of women and yet struggling to preserve cultural ideals was expressed by many of the returnee participants, especially the women. It resulted in personal tensions; although they wanted to express their dissatisfaction with the way they were being treated, they also wanted to be accepted as being a traditional Ethiopian woman. This is one of the greatest challenges of being a woman from the diaspora. How do you not compromise yourself and beliefs about gender, yet still embrace what it means to be a woman in Ethiopia?

Ethiopian women in managerial positions also have to manage the 'double standard' that is applied to a woman, probably even more so than women in other professions. The lack of women in these

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leadership positions makes it very difficult for the very few that are employed as managers. One participant reflected on an experience while working in Ethiopia:

> *Before I came here [Canada... I was a member of a management group and I was the only woman... and what used to happen is after the meeting, after work, the six men used to get together and I would go home... the next day or after a while... I would be told that they made changes to some of the decisions that we had made. And... they say, yes we got together and we have suggested that we do this. And I think 'when did you make that decision?' (CA)*

Barriers to Contribution

Several female participants felt at times that their participation and their contribution to the development of Ethiopia was limited to sending money, books and other actions that will not challenge the gender-defined roles for their sex. They encountered difficulties when trying to actively participate in the bigger processes of development (i.e. politics) even in their host country. As one female participant stated:

> *...when you want to be... actively involved, you are a woman... you have to be... the background voice... you can't be the voice who wants to be heard... and most people would label you that, 'oh she is a radical'... you are out of the norm. Even to show political interest puts you in... a different category. ...Even here [Canada]... my way of thinking, my way of doing things put me mostly with men's groups... as a woman I can't sit, I can't go into the group and sit with the men because they will say, 'oh, you go to the women.' You're always... reminded that you are a woman. (CA)*

Some of the female participants found it difficult to fully break out of traditional gender roles, even in the Ethiopian communities overseas. Picking up from above, some participants felt constantly reminded of their limitations because of their gender, and felt excluded from the bigger processes that are considered male orientated.

Females participating in short-term returns found they had to prove themselves more than their male counterparts. They were not taken seriously which led to some frustrations and not wanting to go back in that capacity, or in fact any other capacity, to help in the development of Ethiopia. These female participants at times could not tell whether they were experiencing this because of their age or because they were female. One female participant said:

"...it's hard to be taken seriously as a professional and you definitely have to... just make more of a ruckus... you just [have to] present yourself differently there than you would here [United States]". (MB)

It is important to note here that gender is not the only factor that comes into play when looking at these differences between the sexes; class and age also impact the way one is treated. Sometimes it is very hard to differentiate when one has been discriminated against. It is common in Ethiopia for an individual's views and expertise to be dismissed because of their age.

The nature of Ethiopian society inhibits women's roles and thus negatively impacts their potential contribution. The way women are treated and looked upon is not conducive to asking highly-skilled and educated women to return and want to contribute, as their knowledge and education will not be valued. At the same time, how will female roles in Ethiopia change if those who are highly educated and skilled do not participate in the process? The argument here is not that Ethiopian women in the diaspora will revolutionise women's roles in Ethiopia, but that they can contribute to the process of change. Gender role modification takes time; the expectation is not that change will happen instantaneously, but that the wheels can be set in motion.

Image of Women in Ethiopia

Women in Ethiopia are being encouraged through government policies (i.e. affirmative action), but very few are able to take advantage of the opportunities. Even though attempts are being made at the federal level to encourage girls to pursue education, the issues that prevent girls from equal educational participation remain the same. Nothing has changed in terms of societal roles and attitudes towards women that would allow greater participation of Ethiopian women.

In Ethiopia the issue is not that girls are not allowed to go to school or get an education. In fact girls are formally encouraged to get an education, but are also expected to attend to all their other duties. Boys' sole responsibility is to get an education; however girls have to go to school and after school they must fetch water, cook, clean and take care of their young siblings, leaving little time for them to do their homework. Encouraging formal access to education for girls has been accepted as equality, without taking into account these other factors.

This mentality continues in the workforce as well, where a woman's career is usually secondary and should be compromised without question for family life. Everything in her life, including herself, should be secondary to being a wife and mother. One female participant expressed it as follows:

> *…when it comes to women and men… it's not like other countries where parents don't want you to go to school. We are encouraged to go to school… yes, we were encouraged to get married as well… I am sure people would be happy to settle and play the role of a mother. But at this time, I think even the economy doesn't allow you to be a housewife. One income is not sufficient enough for survival so you have to work outside the house… and inside the house as well (CA).*

As elsewhere, Ethiopian women not only work inside but also outside the home. However, Ethiopian society has yet to acknowledge the multi-layered roles of women. Ethiopian women, especially in rural areas where over 85 per cent of Ethiopians live, always have to work on the farm as well as in the home. In other words, while men's roles remain the same over the years, women's roles have widened, with expanded responsibilities and expectations.

Displacement of Gender

Several female returnees highlighted the mentality of Ethiopian women themselves about their roles as one of the barriers. Another inhibitor to the progress of Ethiopian women is what Ethiopian women themselves consider to be the essence of being Ethiopian. As one participant said regarding Ethiopian women's perception of their roles, *"there are still many women… who believe… who prefer that their children get married as early as possible, have children and settle"*. (CA)

The issues of the difference in experiential terms between life in the west and the roles of women that are typical of Ethiopia as to why women are not able to settle back comfortably into Ethiopia after living overseas, is exemplified in this sort of response from a female participant:

> *…After a while you live in America you start thinking this is so unfair… and you don't question that in Ethiopia… they [Ethiopian women] came here and they are like why, why should I be the one schlepping… around everyone's stuff. It's just doesn't make sense, so then the dynamics change…. (MT)*

In other words, an Ethiopian wife newly arrived overseas will continue to do what she used to do back home, such as cooking, cleaning and minding the children, in addition to working outside the home. But she will come to a point in her life where she will question this pre-assigned gender role and start resisting and pushing the boundaries. This resistance is also a contributing factor to why female diasporas tend not to return.

The treatment of women in Ethiopia becomes more noticeable to women in the diaspora because in

Ethiopia, as one participant puts it, *"…everything is sort of buried within the structure and it's not an anomaly, you're part of the larger thing, so it's okay you know" (MT).* This could also explain why many Ethiopian women in Ethiopia are resigned to their assigned role, simply because it is taken for granted.

Another finding is that within Ethiopian society in Ethiopia, women returnees were able to live a life free of the obligation to be the traditional Ethiopian woman. They have created a sub-society in which to exist as the hybrid self that they have become because, as one female participant put it, *"when you… board that plane or you cross that border, whatever age you are, there's no going back home... You can never go back to what you're leaving… things will change because life moves forward, right?" (MT).* The term hybrid refers to the in-between state that such women experience - no longer fully belonging in Ethiopia because of their experiences overseas, yet still having the desire to return to their homeland (see Hall, 1990; Amazan, 2012).

This may also be manifested in the contradiction whereby returnees move back to Ethiopia to share their knowledge with the community, yet interact mainly with other returnees. This behaviour is not unique to the Ethiopian returnees; however, a potential consequence is that the returnees are unable to optimize their contribution to the community which could best be made through interaction with the locals.

It can be said that the Ethiopian environment caters more to male than female returnees. Male returnees can thrive in Ethiopia because, as one female participant put it, *"it's a sexist society... men definitely have an upper hand... I don't think I was even conscious of it until I went back and I just saw how people interact with me and the way they treat me" (AT).* Female diaspora returnees who point out these differences have been accused of being hypersensitive, too westernized and of forgetting the tradition of their country. Being exposed to such accusations and the existence of a cultural bias against women creates an unwelcoming environment for female diasporas who wish to contribute to the development of their country.

Migration of labour is not a static or finite process. Regardless of the current situation of Ethiopian women, many participants felt that the situation has changed and continues to change. Women's roles in Ethiopian society are changing, but it will take some time before the impact is noticed. As one participant noted, *"as women go back... most with their own money, with their own career or whatever, they make a big impact… I would think they make an impact… but I think that's going to take a generation or two". (AT)*

Ethiopian Female Skilled Diaspora Potential Contributions

Ethiopian women in the diaspora are not represented in skilled migration literature. Reports that focus on harnessing Ethiopian diaspora resources do not mention women in this process (see AHEAD, 2004 and 2007). Although the 2006-2010 Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) in Ethiopia has focused one of its eight areas on promoting and facilitating the realisation of Ethiopian women's potential (MoFED, 2006), not much has been done by the government to directly engage Ethiopian women in the diaspora. Migration policies, and for that matter policies and directives set in place to attract and mobilise the Ethiopian diasporas, do not reflect the government's rhetoric about gender equality, nor do they acknowledge the unequal relations between women and men (see the Policy Directive Intended to Reach a National Consensus with Ethiopian Diaspora, Proclamation No. 270/2002). Migration is assumed to be gender-neutral and thus gender differences are not taken into account in the development of government policies and strategies regarding migration and mobility of diaspora intellectual resources (IOM, 2005).

Poverty reduction is not the only area where women in the diaspora can be helpful. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the most challenging health issues facing the country and women in the diaspora could be mobilised to help combat this pandemic. Ethiopia is one of 25 countries with the largest number of pregnant women living with HIV (UNAIDS, 2010). According to the Ethiopian Ministry of Health Single Point Report (2010), women are 1.5 times as likely to be infected as men in urban areas. Data from UNAIDS and WHO indicate HIV/AIDS prevalence is higher among women (2.6 percent) than men (1.8 percent) (USAID, 2010). This should send a warning to the government to include Ethiopian women in the diaspora as part of its HIV/AIDS combating strategy. None of the government's initiatives and directives to attract the Ethiopians in the diaspora express anything about the possible and potential role of women in the development of the country (see the Policy Directive Intended to Reach a National Consensus with Ethiopian Diaspora, Proclamation No. 270/2002). There are several female offices, such as the Women's Affairs Office, the Women's Affairs Departments at the ministerial level, the Women's Affairs Bureau at the regional government level, gender desks at the lower administrative level and the women associations in Addis Ababa, Tigray, Amhara, Oromia; however, none have specific schemes to attract Ethiopian women in the diaspora for development purposes. As the Deputy Director General of IOM, Ndioro Ndiaye, said: *"the leadership of African Women in the diaspora is a prerequisite in finding sustainable solutions to the development of their country of origin"* (IOM, 2010, para. 4). Thus, engaging skilled women to contribute at all levels of development should be a priority.

Concluding Observations

There are many barriers and difficulties that have come to light in this study, which affect all the stakeholders in this process: the government, the Ethiopian people, the diaspora and the returnees. For a better Ethiopia, these stakeholders must work together, yet the findings reveal that barriers are being built which undermine relationships and prevent the parties from working together.

The findings underlined that women returnees were treated differently to their male counterparts. There appeared to be a real sense of struggle among the women returnees between wanting to break away from the traditional norms and perceptions placed upon Ethiopian women, yet at the same time wanting to preserve cultural ideals. This was not an issue for some as they chose to interact mainly with other returnees.

How women's contributions were shaped by the gender regime (Connell, 2009) was a further focus. The study revealed that Ethiopian women in the diaspora might be better at contributing owing to their greater pragmatism, setting their priorities on practical survival. At the same time, patriarchal practices continue to hinder contributions by women in the diaspora. This was evident in the returnee women who struggled to find a space to exist between the world of men and the gender regime's expectations of women. There is not yet a space in Ethiopia where women returnees can exist, without feeling like an outsider living on the fringe of society, or a trouble maker. These factors – the patriarchal nature of the country, and restricted gender roles of women – limit the capacity of Ethiopian women diasporas to contribute equally. Ethiopian women have so much more to offer, but so far, they have only been able to offer less.

The failure to attend to the gender dimensions of the diaspora in the context of Ethiopia is partly related to the lack of attention that is given to it by both the international migration literature on diaspora mobility for development, as well as the lack of data that is available. The gender-neutral perception evident in the government's directives and policies in dealing with migration, brain drain or diaspora mobility for development (both at an economic as well as intellectual level) neglects the gender differences that exists within the country as well as in current migration trends. This neglect in itself is reflective of the dynamics of gender in Ethiopia and how the lack of importance given to gender issues mirrors the status of women in Ethiopia. Arguably, there is a strong case for mobilising Ethiopian skilled and intellectual women in the diaspora for development.

There are challenges and difficulties faced by the Ethiopian skilled diaspora and the returnees in

their attempt to contribute to the homeland. There are many factors which inhibit this process from occurring at the level needed for sustainable development. The difficulties and the challenges in mobilising the diaspora may be great, but the willingness of the diaspora to contribute back continues to outweigh the alternative (i.e. continuous skilled migration, poverty and lack of development). This further underlines that the skilled diaspora are valuable and need to be considered as part of the solution in building sustainable development in Ethiopia.

It is safe to say that the barriers faced by the diaspora and the returnees are resolvable, given a strong partnership between the different stakeholders (i.e. the diaspora, the government, international community, etc.) and the interest of the Ethiopian people at the core. However, for the success of this partnership to occur, the acknowledgement of interdependence needs greater recognition.

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