



## LIVELIHOODS, DREAMS, AND REALITIES: EXPERIENCES OF ETHIOPIAN DOMESTIC WORKERS RETURNED FROM HOST COUNTRIES

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**ABSTRACT** The study explores the lived experiences of Ethiopian women migrants returned from the Middle East and Gulf countries. We employed the life history method to explore the lived experiences of return migrants. Semi-structured questions, specifically focusing on the study participants' dreams and real experiences covering pre- and post-migration periods, were used to collect data. Findings of the study reveal the following: most of the study participants migrated to host countries after facing a crisis situation. Initially, they aspired to support their parents, secure a better life for their child, and save some money to the betterment of their future life. For most of them, the reality is quite different from their expectations. Living as migrant women, they were exposed to many challenges (e.g., heavy workloads, harassment, and rape) while they found very limited opportunities to fulfill their dreams. Despite this, however, obtaining good opportunities accompanied by migrants' agency could enable returnees achieve betterment in terms of material possession and social status when they come back home as the story of one of the study participants demonstrated.

**KEYWORDS:** Domestic workers; Ethiopia; International migration; Livelihoods; Return migrants.

### INTRODUCTION

International labor migration from Ethiopia is a recent development (IOM 2017). Economic migration of Ethiopians to foreign countries was very limited during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I (1930–1974), the last king of the Solomonic Dynasty (1270–1974). A small number of Ethiopians travelled to the Western world to pursue their studies and most of them returned to their country (Terrazas 2007). Ethiopian migrants in the United States in the late 1970s were diplomats, students, tourists, and businessmen who could not come back to their country because of the 1974 Ethiopian revolution, subsequent regime change, and political instability. The period of the military regime (1974–1991), the socialist government ruled the country after the downfall of the monarchy, exhibited an increasing political migration of Ethiopians to the United States. For example, by 1991, out of the 33,000 Ethiopian refugees in the United States, 28,000 (85%) were political migrants settled in the country with the support of the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Bureau (Solomon 2002). Though Ethiopia was a poor country, the major cause of migration in the 1970s and 1980s were political violence and persecution. For example, thousands of young Ethiopians migrated to the Western world fleeing the 'Red Terror', a bloody campaign launched by the military regime to eliminating members of the opposition parties (Solomon 2002; Fransen



& Kuschminder 2009).

The reasons of international migration of Ethiopians change overtime (Solomon 2002; Fransen & Kuschminder 2009). As noted above, the pre-1974 period, especially the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, witnessed migration of elites including diplomats and students. Migration of Ethiopians during the military regime (1974–1991) was mainly triggered by the following main factors: the Red Terror, political violence and persecution targeting members of opposition parties; civil wars in northern Ethiopia; the war between Ethiopia and Somalia (1977–1978); and recurrent drought and famine. Generally, the main destinations of most migrants were Western countries, especially the United States, until 1990s. The main causes of migration during the post 1991 years were ethnic violence and political suppression (Fransen & Kuschminder 2009), unemployment and poverty (Mesfin & Guday 2018).

Large scale migration of domestic workers from Ethiopia to Arab countries is relatively a recent development. Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen are the major destinations of Ethiopian labor migrants (IOM 2017). The number of female domestic workers migrated to Arab countries was small before the last decade of the 20th century. The rates of migration of Ethiopian domestic workers have been dramatically increasing after the fall of the military regime in 1991 (Fernandez 2011; Girmachew 2018). The actual number of female migrants to the Middle East and Gulf countries is unknown because, as IOM's assessment indicates, a significant number of Ethiopian migrants travel to destination countries as irregular migrants supported by human smugglers and traffickers (IOM 2017). Despite this, the number of Ethiopian women domestic workers in Middle East and Gulf countries had been considerably increasing. For example, the number of Ethiopians migrated to the Middle East and Gulf States increased from 21,268 (September 2008–August 2009) to 182,696 (September 2012–August 2013). The overwhelming majority (94%) of Ethiopian migrated to the same region from September 2008 to August 2013 were women (Carter & Rohwerder 2016).

Studies outlined drivers of migration of Ethiopian domestic workers to Arab and Gulf states. The main drivers include economic problems associated with poverty and unemployment (Abebaw 2012; Girmachew 2018; Mesfin & Guday 2018), political instability and displacement of people triggered by ethnic politics (Fransen & Kuschminder 2009). Post 1991 government policy also had an overwhelming implication. The migration of domestic workers radically increased after the Ethiopia government introduced policy and legal provisions. About 460,000 Ethiopians migrated to the Arab and Gulf countries via legal channels from September 2008 to August 2013. Ninety nine per cent of those Ethiopians migrated to two countries: Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (Carter & Rohwerder 2016). The policy changes include the endorsement of the 1998 Private Employment Agency Proclamation that allowed private agencies to facilitate the process of migration and employment of Ethiopia female domestic workers in Arab and Gulf countries. The changes involve “making passports easily available, ratifying agreements with labor receiving countries, and granting licenses for hundreds of labor recruiting agents in Addis Ababa and other major cities.” (Girmachew 2018: 8).

Ethiopian women's labor migration to the Middle East and Gulf states has become one of the biggest current global migration phenomena (Fransen & Kuschminder 2009). Lebanon was the major destination of Ethiopian domestic workers until the first decade of the 21 century. Most of the Arab countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and United Arab Emirates) that received domestic workers from Asian countries such as the Philippines and Sri Lanka have become major destinations of Ethiopian domestic workers in recent years. The following are among the major reasons for the shift from Asian to African

domestic workers. First, the monthly payment for domestic workers from Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia (around 100 to 150 USD) was much lower than that of Asian (Filipinos and Sri Lankans) domestic workers (250 to 300 USD). Second, unlike their Asian counterparts, employers may not need to consider legal requirements to hire African domestic workers (Girmachew 2018).

Experiences of Ethiopian migrant women served as domestic workers in the Middle East and Gulf states have been studied and documented (e.g., Fernandez 2011; Pande 2012; Asnake & Mohammed 2015; De Regt & Medareshaw 2016; Fassil 2018; Gomes 2018). Some researchers (e.g., De Regt 2010; Fassil 2018; Girmachew 2018) studied experiences of migrant domestic workers in host countries while others explored experiences of returnees in their home country (e.g., Abebaw 2012; De Regt & Medareshaw 2016; Gomes 2018; Mesfin & Guday 2018; Nisrane et al. 2020). Most of the studies (except Gomes 2018) focus on narratives of exploitation and abuse putting aside migrants' agency - migrants' 'ability or freedom to control their movement' (Girmachew 2018: 2) and 'improve their situation, even under difficult circumstances' (De Regt 2010: 238). Nisrane and colleagues (2020), for example, studied exploitation experiences of returnee domestic workers and their coping strategies in the process of reintegration into their home communities in Addis Ababa. The phrasing of their article's title, "exploitation narratives..." reveals the inclination of the study. Focusing on a rural town, Mesfin & Guday (2018) examined the living and working conditions of Ethiopian women return migrants and the negative impacts of migration on "child care and family survival and debt management". De Regt & Medareshaw (2016) studied the effects of migrant domestic workers' deportation from Saudi Arabia on economic, social and psychological wellbeing of women return migrants.

Our study differs from the aforementioned studies in two ways. First, employing the life history methods, we explored the discrepancy between pre-migration dreams of study participants and realities they encountered as migrant workers in destination countries and finally as returnees in their home country, Ethiopia. To achieve the study objectives, we explored diverse experiences of return migrants, the choices they made at different phases of migration experiences, and their struggle to achieve their dreams (De Regt 2010). Second, using Gomes' (2018) work as an exemplar; we employed the betterment approach to explain the role of migration in changing the lives of returnees in terms of material possession, livelihoods opportunities, and social status.

## GENDERED ASPECT OF MIGRATION

The patterns of international migration have gendered aspects. Several authors pointed out the feminization of migration (e.g., Yamanaka & Piper 2005; Labadie-Jackson 2008; Acharya 2010; Fernandez 2011; Hofmann & Buckley 2013; Le Goff 2016). Feminization of migration is driven by different factors including growing divorce rate and lack of economic opportunities in migration origin countries. The other drivers of female migration include demands in the labor market that embraces an increasing 'feminized occupation' in destination countries (Hofmann & Buckley 2013). Domestic work is a female dominated sector. Based on the 2015 ILO estimates, 73% of migrant domestic workers in the world were females. Domestic work in Arab countries embraced more than 27% of all migrant domestic workers in the world. Arab states of the Middle East offered job opportunities for more than 3.1 million domestic workers (ILO 2016).

Feminization of labor migration is a global reality. The Asian and African experiences demonstrate this situation. In the 1990s, 60% of the migrants from the Philippines were

women whereas 65% of the 1.9 million Indonesian migrants in the same decade were females (Yamanaka & Piper 2005). When we come to Africa, Ethiopia provides a good example of the feminization of migration. Labor migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East and Gulf countries involves the mobility of men and women. Despite this however, the percentages of female migrants have been increasing in the last two decades. Figures on Ethiopian labor migrants to the Gulf countries demonstrate this reality. Based on figures collected from Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs of Ethiopia, out of 310,064 Ethiopians legal migrants moved to the Gulf countries between 2008/9–2012/13 from Addis Ababa, Oromia and Amhara regional states, 297,512 (96%) were female domestic workers (Asnake & Mohammed 2015). Ninety six per cent of over 160,000 Ethiopian domestic workers moved to Saudi Arabia in the first six months of 2012 were women (De Regt & Medareshaw 2016).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We employed the betterment approach as a theoretical framework considering its relevance to explain the discrepancies between the initial dreams of migrant domestic workers and the realities they encountered afterwards, especially in terms of economic betterment and improved social status after coming back to their home country. The betterment approach is a theoretical framework employed in migration studies. Gomes (2018) employed this approach to analyze the experiences of a female migrant returned from Saudi Arabia. The concept of betterment has been used in the Caribbean countries to explain social status gained by migrants as a result of better material ownership, livelihoods, and prestige. Betterment refers to the impact of an improving material possession (e.g., purchasing a house in migrant's home country) that could be observed, assessed and judged by other community members (e.g., neighbors and friends). The person gaining material possessions would also gain the recognition and respect of others in their local community (Olwig 2005). In the analysis of drivers of labor migration, the concept of betterment is not limited to economic factors such as poverty and basic needs. Gomes' (2018) findings reveal that Ethiopian labor migrants use their earnings for long term investment such as building family houses and enabling siblings to study in private schools. These investments are considered as improvement of social status that could be observed and recognized by other community members. We employed the betterment approach to analyzing the lived experiences of returnee migrants, particularly focusing on the role of migration in improving material possession and social status of returnees, based on the narratives portrayed in this article.

## OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODS

### I. Objectives

The major objective of the study is exploring the lived experiences of Ethiopian women return migrants stayed in Arab and Gulf states. The study specifically focuses on pre-migration livelihood circumstances of returnees, their experiences in the host countries and after coming back home. It also examines the disparities between pre-migration dreams of study participants and the reality they encountered after coming back home.

## II. Research methods

This study explores the lived experiences of four female return migrants stayed in Middle East and Gulf countries: United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Lebanon, and Qatar. We employed the life history method to achieve the objective the study. The contributions of life history method to understand lived experiences of individuals have been recognized (Dhunpath 2000). Before its expansion to disciplines such as sociology and psychology, the life history method had served as a research method in anthropological inquiries since the beginning of the twentieth century. After passing through times of decline, the method revived during the turn to postmodernism and poststructuralism (Goodson 2001). According to Murno (1998), the revival of the life history methodology was facilitated by an increasing focus on “the subjective, multiple and partial nature of human experiences” (cited in Goodson 2001). It’s potential to uncover the hidden voices of women (Goodson 2001) and celebrate the voices of the silenced (Dhunpath 2000) increases the relevance of the life history method in gender inquiries. The method has also been employed to explore the lived experiences of women returnee migrants (e.g., Gomes 2018; Mesfin & Guday 2018).

Returnees interviewed for this study were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: 1) pre-migration residence in Addis Ababa; 2) two or more years’ migration experience in Arab and Gulf countries; and 3) at least two years post-migration experience in Addis Ababa. We relied on personal network and snowball sampling to find study participants fulfilling the above-mentioned criteria. The first two returnees were found through the first author’s personal network and other five returnees were identified with the support of returnees participated in the interviews. Three of the five returnees selected through snowballing were not included in the study for the following reasons: 1) the first one did not meet the selection criteria (she had below one year post-migration experience in Ethiopia during the period of data collect); 2) the second one declined after giving her consent to be interviewed; and 3) the third returnee did not appear for follow up interview aimed at enriching the data gathered during the first interview session. Finally, we relied on the data gathered from four of the returnees who participated in follow up interview sessions and narrated their lived experiences before, during, and after their migration. We limited the number of study participants to four as the life history/narrative method is ‘best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences’ of an individual or a small number of individuals (Creswell 2007: 55).

Data for this study were gathered through in-depth interviews with returnee migrants stayed in their respective destination countries from two to twelve years. The bulk of the data were collected in October 2019, whereas additional data were gathered via brief conversations and phone calls during the later stage of the study. The following Table 1 summarizes basic information about the study participants (real names are replaced by fictive names to maintain the anonymity of study participants).

As noted above, we collected data informed by the life history method. Returnees participated in this study were asked to narrate their story starting from childhood experiences and proceeding to pre-migration experiences, reasons that encouraged them to migrate, and their experiences in destination countries and after coming back home. The study explores participants’ socio-economic circumstances, their pre-migration dreams and their real experiences during and after migration. A semi-structured interview guide was used to interview study participants focusing on their pre-migration, migration and post migration experiences. All participants were interviewed twice and contacted via phone calls to obtain additional information. The interview was conducted in Amharic, the first language of the interviewees. One of the authors, whose mother tongue is Amharic,

**Table 1** Basic information about return migrants participated in the study

Informant	Age	Education/ grade level	Marital status	No. of children	Host country/year stayed
Gera	34	12	Divorced	1	Beirut, Lebanon/2 years [2008–2010]
Lidet	33	8	Married-separated-remarried	2	Kuwait/3 years [2014–2017]
Tigist	39	12	Married-divorced-remarried	1	Dubai, UAE/8 years [2010–2018]
Selam	38	8	Single	—	Doha, Qatar/12 years [2005–2017]

Source: Interview data

conducted the interviews, transcribed and translated to audio data while both authors participated in the data analysis activities.

## NARRATIVES OF RETURN MIGRANTS

In this section, we portrayed the lived experiences of four returnee migrants based on their narratives and analyzed the data in the subsequent sections focusing on pre-migration household livelihood circumstances, experiences of migrants in host countries, post-migration experiences, and disparities between migrants' dreams and realities they experienced. Let us begin with the reconstruction of Gera's narrative.

Gera: "God did not allow me to make my parents happy for a single day"

Gera, one of the returnees, was born in Addis Ababa and lived with her parents, two sisters and a brother in a *kebele* house.<sup>(1)</sup> She was the second child in the family, younger than her sister, Alem. Her mother was a housewife whereas her father, a bread winner of the family, earned income working at a grain market. His main job was loading and unloading sacks of grain (e.g., wheat, barley) often weighting 100 kilograms. The family shifted to home-based cow raising and milk selling business in 2000 as her father was getting older. Gera was a 15-year-old primary school student at that time. Gera and her sister were responsible to accomplish tasks such as carrying fodder from distant places, delivering milk to customers on daily basis, washing utensils including milk containers, and taking care of cows.

In addition to the work burden, the cow raising business involved frustrating events, including intermittent death of cows. The family was frustrated after Bure (the name of the cow), a cow that provided the family with a better milk yield, died. Gera's parents shifted to other livelihood alternatives in response to stressful situations associated with the death of cows and subsequent decline of family income. They sold the remaining two cows and used the money to facilitate the migration of Alem, Gera's older sister, to Lebanon hoping that she would support the family. The family survived with the income generated by Gera's father who was employed as a guard in a small private company. After three months of her migration, Alem started sending some money to the family. Using the remittance, the family renovated the small house where the cows had been kept and earned some income renting out the room.<sup>(2)</sup> The family income declined when Alem diverted her remittance from her family to her boyfriend to save money for her future marital home. The interruption of the remittance and the decline of family income forced Gera to think about helping her aging parents. After completing her high school education, Gera migrated to Lebanon in 2008.

The major challenge Gera encountered while working in Beirut was what she called

“endless household chores” she accomplished every day. She was working in the context of a big extended family. The madam (Gera’s employer) and her two married sisters with their families stayed together in their mother’s house during school vacations and the month of Ramadan. Gera and other two Ethiopian women employed by the other two families were responsible to accomplish all the household chores to the satisfaction of the big extended family. Gera’s work load did not subside when the three families moved back to their respective houses. Often times, her madam ordered Gera to work for her relatives. Gera was tired of the heavy workload after serving for a year. Eventually, she suffered from a severe back pain and stopped working. Although she was eager to recover, continue her work, and fulfill her dreams, she was forced to go back to her country due to her severe health problem.

Gera’s lived experience back home was also challenging. She remained sick for several months and spent most of her money for medical treatment. After getting some relief from her back pain, she started searching for jobs that do not require a considerable physical effort. Her first work was serving as a waiter at a Café with 100 Birr<sup>(3)</sup> monthly payment. Afterwards she was employed at a bakery and then at a hair dressing salon, and a printing house earning from 200 to 850 Birr monthly payments. Gera was shifting from one job to another with short intervals in response to her health condition. For example, she quit the job at the printing house when her back pain relapsed. Finally, in 2018, she was employed as an office girl in a public institution with a 946 Birr salary, raised to 1,338 Birr after a year. Experiencing the labor market in Addis, Gera complained that the payments in Ethiopia are by far lower than what she earned as a domestic worker in Lebanon. This is similar to the experiences of returnees who face problems such as returning to low-wage jobs (Parrenas 2021).

Although she complained about the amount of her earnings in Ethiopia, Gera’s feeling about her life as a migrant domestic worker was dominated by a sense of deep sadness. She regretted her decision to migrate for two main reasons. First, she came back home with a severe health problem. Second, the amount of money Gera had when she came back home was about 12,000 Birr, equivalent to 333 USD<sup>(4)</sup> based on the current rate of foreign currency exchange. She spent more than 50% of the money for her medical treatment. Gera complained that migration did not help her achieve her dream.

My dream was to change my family’s living condition. My father and mother did their best to nurture us. They were struggling as much as they could. As children, our life was also challenging. Though we lived in town, our day-to-day life was similar to what children do in rural areas. We grew up carrying fodder [dried grass] on our back from distant places to feed the cows. My dream was to change our life; to assist my parents and make them happy... It was also to make my life better .... God did not allow this to happen... [She kept quiet, long sigh].... I did not help my parents. I could not do that!

Gera often became emotional when she talked about her lived experience. Though she came back home in 2010, nine years before interviewed for the present study, she had an active memory about the exploitation she experienced in Lebanon. The interview with her was repeatedly interrupted as she was weeping in the middle of her narrative. She replied as follows when she was asked what she gained as a result of her migration.

There is nothing! Nothing! I came back from Lebanon with ill health. I feel the pain until this time. I cannot perform heavy tasks. The pain relapses when I perform tasks that require physical effort.... I let my mind accept what had happened to me. This is

to persuade myself and accept things as they happened with the will of God. My flesh has a wound deep inside. People, including my parents, do not understand my agony; because they do not see my inner pain.

As the above excerpt reveals, in addition to physical pain, Gera continued suffering from what she called *yewust himem*, literally mean an ‘inner pain’ or a ‘hidden pain’. The phrase *yewust himem* (Amharic terms) illustrates Gera’s deep-rooted trauma. Gera’s ‘inner pain’ resonates with the findings of Abebaw (2012) who found that Ethiopian women return migrants suffer from ‘deep emotional pain’ as a result of various forms of exploitations including heavy workloads, sexual and physical abuses, and unfulfilled dreams. Gera complained that no one, including her parents, could see the wound residing beneath her flesh. The coping mechanism she employed to forget the past includes accepting the misery she endured as something happened to her ‘with the will of God’, which seems similar to what Nisrane and colleagues (2020) conceptualize as ‘sense-making’. Sense making refers to return migrants’ coping strategy that involves searching for explanation for their traumatic experiences during their migration. Despite the challenging circumstances she encountered, Gera was pursuing her college studies aspiring for better job opportunities.

Lidet: “I experienced mistreatment...including rape in my own country”

Lidet was born in Wollo, northern Ethiopia. She lived in a small town in a resource poor family with her parents, two brothers, and two sisters. Her mother was engaged in petty trading and her father earned some money transporting goods on a donkey back. Her parents could not send Lidet to school after she completed grade four. The wife of her uncle brought her to Addis Ababa in 1990 promising to send her to school. Her uncle was working as a guard whereas his spouse was a housewife. Lidet helped the family in household chores and continued her education. After staying for two years, she left the family when her uncle and his wife encountered economic problem to feed their own children. Lidet began her new life as a domestic worker when she was 16. The wife of her uncle encouraged Lidet to get employed as a domestic worker saying “Let you work and get your daily bread instead of suffering with us.” Although she managed to get her daily bread serving as a domestic worker, life was not smooth and easy. As the following excerpt shows, Lidet experienced sexual abuse, exploitation, and disrespect in her own country, Ethiopia.

I started working for a man lived with his old mother. He was asking me to sleep with him... sometimes promising to make me his wife... He was much older than me. I quitted the work and moved to another family. There were problems in every family. Men were good in some families while women were harsh... I experienced many problems, including starvation, in some families. One of the women, my employer, kept some of the food items in a cupboard and locked it when she went out. I also worked for a woman who had a habit of counting the *injera* [Ethiopian flat bread]... I also faced rape while working for unmarried men.

Lidet entered into a new life trajectory after working as a domestic worker for ten years in Addis Ababa. She married to a young man, gave birth to a baby girl, and lived with her husband for 5 years. Her husband was an assistant of a truck driver whereas Lidet was working in a small coffee roasting business firm until the interruption of her marriage. The marriage was broken suddenly when her husband deserted her with a 4-year-old child. Lidet portrayed the problems she encountered after her husband abandoned her.



I did not expect that to happen to me. It was too difficult to manage life, keeping a child, in the absence of my husband... I was working for a person running a coffee roasting business earning 400 Birr per month. I paid 180 Birr for the house rent. I used the remaining money carefully to feed myself and my kid. It was impossible to working and living the same way keeping a baby girl. After struggling for 8 months, I got an opportunity to go to Kuwait. I did not hesitate to go... I travelled to Kuwait giving my child to my mother<sup>(5)</sup>...

As her experience demonstrates, Lidet did not migrate just because of poverty or unemployment, widely mentioned drivers of migration (e.g., Abebaw 2012; Girmachew 2018; Mesfin & Guday 2018). She decided to migrate as a result of the frustration caused by the marriage crisis and subsequent challenges, including a drastic change in social status (from married to a deserted woman) and the burden of raising a child alone. She migrated to Kuwait leaving her child to the wife of her uncle.

Migrating to Kuwait, Lidet served as domestic worker in one family for three years. Her employer, a nurse, was a single mother. She had four children: two sons aged 23 and 17 and two daughters aged 14 and 12. Lidet was responsible to manage the household chores and take care of the children. Unlike the other two returnees participated in this study, Lidet did not complain about the heavy work load she accomplished as a domestic worker. One of her major problems was protecting herself from the two boys who attempted to rape her several times. She said that “the boys got mad whenever they saw me, especially when their mother is not at home”. Sexual abuse by employers (husbands), relatives, and male children is one of the gendered abuses reported by migrant domestic workers (Abebaw 2012; Fassil 2018).

Sexual abuse was not the only problem Lidet encountered. As a migrant mother, she was worrying about her daughter living in Addis Ababa. She said the following about her situation: “I was living with a lot of worries while working in Kuwait. My mind was not free at all... I was thinking about my child... day in day out.” Oftentimes she was regretting her decision to leave her daughter behind under the care of someone. Lidet’s narrative demonstrates the challenges of migrant mothers who face a dilemma related to their competing roles: expectations related to motherhood and their role as breadwinners. As a migrant mother working abroad, she must ‘cope with the spatial and temporal separation’ from her child living in her home country isolated from her parents (Raijman et al. 2003). After struggling for three years, Lidet came back home as she could not stay longer separated from her daughter.

Lidet moved back to her uncle’s home when she came to Ethiopia and start her post-migration life. Her feeling after coming back home was mixed: she was happy for getting her child safe; however, she also worried that she placed a burden on the family. She was employed as cleaner after staying three months with her daughter. In the meantime, she met her former husband who had deserted her four years back. He asked her to forgive him, forget the past and remarry him. She refused the idea initially but finally accepted it considering the advantages of reestablishing the marriage union including nurturing her child in her own marital home. Based on her request, the man sent *shimagle* (elders) to Lidet’s uncle and his wife, secured their consent and blessing, and remarried the mother of his child.

Lidet did not complain about her experiences working as a migrant domestic worker. She reported that the benefit of migration was not bad. Although migration did not change her life in a significant way, she claimed that her condition was better than the situation of other returnees. Lidet knows returnees who came back home with mental illnesses. She narrated the story of returnees whose money, the money they had remitted, was ‘eaten-up’

by their relatives and boyfriends. For instance, Lidet's friend was betrayed by her aunt; she could not find a penny from the money she sent her aunt while working in an Arab country. This testimony concurs with the findings of other studies (e.g., Nisrane et al. 2020). Lidet considered herself as blessed with good luck because she received 60,000 Birr from the wife of her uncle when she came back to Ethiopia. Despite this, Lidet felt that the overall contribution of migration to change her post-migration living condition was not significant. When she was asked about the effects of migration on her life, she said: "There is no significant change in my life. Life after coming back home is the same as before. However, living with my daughter, even being starved, is better than living as a migrant in an alien country."

Even though Lidet complained about her post-migration living condition, she admitted that her livelihoods after coming back home were better than her pre-migration situation. She confirmed this saying "Thanks to God, my current situation is good. My husband is working. I am also working..." Lidet's husband earned 4,000 Birr monthly salary working as a chauffeur. Lidet earns 1,500 Birr per month engaged in the Urban Productive Safety Net Program<sup>(6)</sup> introduced in 2017 to support poor urban households. Beneficiaries of the program, most of them women, are engaged in activities such as solid waste management and 'city beautification', which includes activities such as planting trees and flowers in open urban spaces.

Tigist: "I lost many opportunities at home because of migration"

Tigist had lost her biological parents when she was around 7-year-old. Her mother died in a hospital in 1985 in Asosa, a town in western Ethiopia. A nurse who was treating her mother in the same hospital adopted Tigist. The nurse lived with her two children: a son and a daughter. Tigist came to Addis Ababa in 1986 with her foster mother and remained completely isolated from her biological relatives. She did not know whether her father is alive and had no information about her relatives. Tigist did not have a clear memory about her parents either; but she talked about the mobility of people to western Ethiopia due to a severe drought and her parents came to Asosa at that period. The time coincides with the 1984–85 drought and subsequent famine that led to the death of about 700,000 people in Ethiopia (Markos 2001). The Ethiopian government implemented a large scale resettlement program in the same year and transferred about 200,000 households from highly populated highlands to less populated peripheral areas of the country (Pankhurst 1986). Tigist's parents could be among northern highlanders migrated to western Ethiopia due to the severe famine of the time.

Tigist had a mixed feeling about her life with the foster family. Her relationship with her foster mother and 'sister' (daughter of her foster mother) was good. However, the seemingly harmonious family life did not protect her from domestic violence; she had been abused by her 'brother', the son of her foster mother. Living in a troubled situation of love and abuse, she was worrying about her future and aspiring for getting a job, establishing her own marital home and family. After completing her high school education, she was engaged in low income jobs including working at a parking lot with small earnings. She started relationship with a boyfriend and married him shortly afterwards. Contrary to her long-term dream, as she stated below, the marriage was short lived and frustrating.

I considered the marriage as a good reason to leave that house [of her foster family]. I was waiting for a pretext to do that. My dream was being healthy, getting my own home and family.... He [her boyfriend] managed to marry me quickly because of my

weakness. I wanted to go away... to be free from the problem [sexual abuse].... I started living with my husband with a great hope and stayed with him for three years. I had borne him a baby girl. But we could not continue...he chased me away with my two-month-old baby. I felt bitter; my feeling was harmed; my hope disappeared.

“Why did you marry very quickly?” That was a follow up question. After a quiet moment she disclosed the difficult time she had in her foster family. She loved her ‘mother’ and ‘sister’ as they were good for her. However, she had been abused by her ‘brother’ for years. She uttered: “My older brother was raping me... I do not believe that I had survived that misery. I remember that as if it were a bad dream.” Even though she did not disclose the details in words, her silence could not hide her deep-rooted pain; tears were rolling down her cheek while she was talking about the situation. According to research findings, such kinds of domestic violence are common in Ethiopia (Shanko et al. 2013; Agumasie & Bezatu 2015) though most of them remain unreported.

Although Tigist hastily decided to get married in order to run away from her abusive brother, the marriage did not liberate her. She moved back with her baby girl to the same family when her husband chased her away. Life became unbearable. Staying in close proximity with her ‘brother’ stirred up her memories of pain and abuse. She also suffered from the feeling of adding more burdens on the family as her foster mother was getting sick at that time. Tigist was surrounded by frustrating circumstances: managing the pain caused by the failed marriage, assisting a sick mother, living with her abusive ‘brother’, and nurturing a baby girl. One of her friends informed her about the possibility of getting a job in a foreign country when she had been in a desperate situation. Tigist gave her one-year-old baby to her foster family and migrated to the United Arab Emirates.

Tigist served a domestic worker in Dubai for eight years in two rounds. In the first round, she worked for two years, came back home to see her daughter, and stayed in Addis for about six months. Tigist faced several challenges and made tough decisions during her second round experience in Dubai. Her first decisive action was running away from her employer because she was tired of accomplishing heavy workloads and sexual abuse. Tigist said the following regarding the exploitation she experienced: “The woman was exploiting my labor while her husband was restlessly trying to raping me. The man often threatened me to report to the police and sending me back home.” Finally, Tigist decided to run away from her employer and work as a freelancer. She stayed with Ethiopian migrant women and started the risky business: moving around and searching for job without legal documents. She worked for six households, shifting from one household to another for more than five years, without finding what she was searching for: ‘good employers’, better working condition, and payments.

Working as a freelancer, a common practice among migrant domestic workers in Arab and Gulf states, involves risks including detention and deportation (De Regt 2010; Pande 2012; Fernandez 2014; Fassil 2018; Parrenas 2021). For example, Tigist was captured by a police officer while she was searching for a job but released after begging for mercy. She was also cheated by two young men when she was desperate for getting a job. Promising to help her getting a better job, a young man picked up her with his car. After driving a long distance he picked up his friend and headed to the beach. Tigist was afraid of being with two strange young men in a vehicle and moving to an unknown destination. Feeling the insecure situation she begged them take her back to the city. She could not get any response until the car was stopped around the beach at sunset. Tigist could not forget what happened to her shortly afterwards: the two men raped her one after the other. Finally, Tigist was captured by the police and deported back home in 2018.

Tigist's migration experiences involved dissatisfaction and regret. While working as a domestic migrant worker, she had been struggling to build assets to her marital home and to make her daughter's life better. The challenges continued during her post-migration life. She was employed as a cleaner in a public organization after coming back home. Although she joined her boyfriend and live with him, the challenges she encountered in her marital life were also beyond her expectations.

I thought that he [her second husband] was a good man. But he was not! I live with him sharing the same house with his parents. I feel that I am living in a trap... It is not only in a foreign country, you could also face various problems living in your country... His sisters live with us...we quarrel over minor things. So, it is disgusting. He had a job previously, now he is unemployed. We live on what I earn...sometimes I sell some of the articles I brought from Dubai to cover some of the household expenses. My salary is very small. I give part of this money to my 'sister' [daughter of her foster mother] who raises my daughter after the death on my [foster] mother... I got exhausted working in an Arab country for years. I am still struggling after coming back home.

As her lived experience illustrates, Tigist has been struggling to build her own family and nurture her daughter. However, she was not successful to achieve either of her dreams. Her post-migration life involved stressful socio-economic circumstances and competing responsibilities as a wife and a mother. Building her marital home was the only viable option to get home and family. However, Tigist encountered several problems in her marital life, including conflict with her sisters-in-law. Living with an unemployed husband, she was the sole economic provider. She was also worrying about her 12-year-old daughter living in her foster family. She said: "Who knows? My 'brother' could do the same to my daughter" to disclose her fear that her 'brother' could also rape her daughter. Despite the challenges she encountered, Tigist showed a remarkable resilience and adaptability. She crafted multiple livelihood strategies including working as a cleaner in a public organization and generating additional income engaged in petty trading. Moreover, she was pursuing her studies in secretarial science in the evening and weekend classes hoping that she would get promotion after completing her studies.

Selam: "My employers helped me change my life"

Selam was born in Addis Ababa in a large family. She is the youngest of ten siblings. Her father was a small scale grain trader struggling to open a grain store with his partner. Selam's mother was a housewife in the good days of the family. The family faced a livelihood crisis when the bread winners' business got bankrupt. Her father, betrayed by his trade partner, lost his financial capital accumulated for years, and could not continue running his business. Selam was a primary school student at that time. The crisis forced her parents to make major shifts in their livelihood strategies. After staying unemployed for a year, her father was employed as a guard in an edible oil factory. Her mother started selling vegetables at an open village market locally called *gulit*. She was also engaged in brewing *tela* (local beer) and selling it at home in weekends. Selam's older sisters assisted their mother in selling vegetables and in the *tela* business.

The income generated by Selam's parents was too small to feed the large family. In response to the precarious livelihood circumstances, older children were engaged in income generating activities to support their parents. For example, before employed as teachers, Selam's two older brothers were involved in income generating activities including shoe

shining. Their junior siblings were also contributing to the family income. One of the sons was working as an assistant of a mini-bus taxi driver. The oldest of the sisters was a good hair dresser in traditional style called *shuruba*. Selam learned *shuruba* skills while working with her older sister. The family situation had a strong influence on Selam. She stopped her education after completing grade 10 and took over the hair dressing business when her older sister died. Subsequently, she opened a small hair dressing salon purchasing second hand hair salon chairs and other equipment with the support of her brothers and run the business combining *shuruba* and modern hair dressing styles. The business was initially successful as Selam had several customers. However, after running the business for two years, a mid-night robbery destroyed her hope. She suddenly lost everything she had within a night, including some money kept in the hair dressing salon. That was a shocking crisis for Selam who was struggling to build up the business. She had been in a desperate situation when she migrated to Qatar.

Unlike the other three returnees, Selam's story followed a different route. She served as a migrant domestic worker for two years. Her employers were educated Sudanese couple working for a private company in Doha. The couple lived with their daughter who was also employed in a private company in the same city. The spouses treated her as a family member. She did not have a heavy workload as the family size was small and the spouses and their daughter enjoyed serving themselves. Moreover, her employers assisted Selam to get a job in a small business firm before they left Doha. As a result of her smooth transition to the public sphere, Selam managed to work in business firms, including working as a sales person in a shopping mall, for 10 years.

Selam's experiences as a migrant worker in Qatar positively influenced her post-migration livelihood opportunities. She had built financial and material assets during her 12 years stay in Qatar. She purchased a house in the outskirts of Addis Ababa. When she decided to come back home, Selam purchased a second hand Toyota Corolla automobile and shipped it to Addis Ababa. She came back to Ethiopia amid economic crisis in Qatar caused by the blockade imposed on Qatar by Saudi Arabia and her allies in 2017. Her assets and the support of her relatives enabled Selam to maneuver through various livelihood opportunities after coming back home. First, she was engaged in business that involved buying items such as clothes and shoes from Dubai and selling them in Addis through her social network. Dissatisfied with the profit, she stopped this business and shifted to other livelihood opportunities. Renting out her car, she managed to earn 20,000 Birr monthly incomes. After collecting some money and selling her house located in the outskirts of Addis Ababa, she purchased a condo house in the city, and rented it out for 6,000 Birr per month. Selam was also looking for other livelihood opportunities when she was interviewed for this study.

## DISCUSSION

The reconstruction of returnees' lived experiences outlined in the previous section throws light on pre-migration, migration and post-migration experiences of returnees. In the following we discuss the findings in light of the available literature and theoretical perspectives.

### I. Pre-migration livelihood circumstances

Various motives and stressful life events motivated participants of the study to migrate

in search of livelihood opportunities. According to previous studies, economic factors such as poverty, the desire to support family, and build assets for future marital life (Abebaw 2012; Girmachew 2018; Gomes 2018; Mesfin & Guday 2018; Nisrane et al. 2020) are among the major motives that encourage Ethiopian women to migrate to the Middle East and Gulf countries. Our findings are consistent with the aforementioned general conclusion. Prior to their migration, returnees interviewed for the present study lived in resource poor families struggling to survive. Despite this, however, the study participants migrated to a foreign country to serve as domestic workers not simply because of poverty and precarious livelihood circumstances. Each returnee had unique pre-migration lived experiences within her immediate social and economic setting. As the narratives of returnees revealed, study participants migrated to destination countries after they encountered stressful life events such as divorce and a sudden loss of livelihoods.

The pre-migration experiences of returnees clearly demonstrate the implications of stressful life events such as divorce. Two of the returnees experienced divorce or marital separation, one of the severe stressful life events, which trigger psychological disorder such as depression (Maciejewski et al. 2000; Stroud 2010; Paula Couto et al. 2011) and diverse socio-economic problems. Tigist, a returnee raised by a foster family, had been abused by the son of her foster mother before her migration. She had been thinking to move away from her foster family's home to escape from her abusive 'brother'. She also aspired to establish her own family and become a good wife and mother. Although she got married and established a family, the marriage union came to an end adding more distress on her previous pains. When her husband chased her away with her baby girl, she was forced to go back to her foster family's home despite her deep-rooted memory of sexual abuse. She decided to migrate after separated from her husband and encountered socio-economic and psychosocial problems. A similar stressful life event triggered the migration of Lidet who was deserted by her husband, with her four-year-old child, after five years' marital life. Although her experience is quite different from the story of the two returnees, Selam migrated to Qatar after encountering another stressful live event, a sudden livelihood crisis. Prior to her migration, Selam had been running a small hair dressing business with encouraging achievements. However, she lost her financial and material assets as a result of a mid-night robbery. Selam was in a desperate situation when she decided to migrate to serve as a domestic worker.

## II. Experiences in host countries

Return migrants had diverse experiences in their respective host countries. Three of the four returnees participated in this study experienced different levels of gendered economic exploitation, harassment, and sexual abuse, findings consistent with the results of previous studies (e.g., De Regt 2010; Abebaw 2012; Fassil 2017; Mesfin & Guday 2018; Nisrane et al. 2020). For example, in her two years stay in Lebanon, Gera experienced an extreme form of labor exploitation, involving working for multiple households, which had severe repercussions on her health. Tigist experienced multiple forms of exploitation and dehumanization including starvation and eating leftovers, denial of payments, confiscation of jewels, and sexual abuse during her eight years stay in Dubai. Her vulnerability increased after running away from her first employer searching for better payments and working conditions.

Although gendered exploitations and sexual abuse are pervasive in host countries (e.g., Jureidini & Moukarbel 2004; De Regt 2010; Fassil 2018; Nisrane et al. 2020), they are not universal phenomena. For example, Gera, one of the returnees, did not report any

form of sexual abuse while serving as a domestic worker. Selam's employers treated her with compassion and assisted her to get a job in a business firm, a trajectory that enabled her getting better opportunities. Besides the support of her employers, Selam worked in business companies for about 10 years because of her personal efforts, including learning Arabic and English, essential languages to work in business settings like a shopping mall. Although it seems an exceptional case, Selam's experience challenges migration studies dominated by narratives of gendered exploitation and sexual abuse (e.g., De Regt & Medareshaw 2016; Fassil 2018; Girmachew 2018; Nisrane et al. 2020) and demonstrates the imperatives of examining diverse individual experiences of migrant domestic workers, the agency they exercise, and the strategies they employ to achieve their goals (De Regt 2010). As Selam's lived experience illustrates, meeting 'good people' and getting better opportunities, accompanied by migrant's agency, would enable migrant domestic workers achieve upward social mobility and better livelihoods during their post-migration lives in their country of origin. This finding resonates with Gomes' (2018) conclusion that utilizing opportunities in the host country return migrants could achieve betterment in terms of material possession and upward social mobility in the context of their home country.

### III. Post migration experiences

Return migrants had varied post-migration experiences in their home country. Returnees' achievements during their migration and their post-migration social and livelihood circumstances influenced their reintegration into local realities. Savings and assets building are essential to achieve a better life after coming back home. Three of the four study participants had a small amount of savings and material assets when they come back home. They spent their meager savings for medical treatment, purchasing basic household goods, and daily expenses. Although remittance enabled Selam to accumulate assets and utilize them for long-term investments, the other returnees did not achieve betterment in terms of material ownership, social status, and livelihood opportunities. This supports the findings of Parrenas (2021: 11) who asserted that spatial mobility of migrant domestic workers helps them achieve a 'limited socio-economic mobility'.

Though migration did not help them achieve betterment, return migrants showed a high level of resilience to adapt to socio-economic circumstances in their home country. After coming back home, returnees continued crafting diverse strategies to enhance their livelihoods maneuvering through their specific socio-economic settings. Most of them, as Parrenas (2021) noted, returned to low-income and low-status jobs and served as office girls and cleaners. Returnees also employed survival strategies such as establishing marriage ties. Two of the returnees got married after coming back to Ethiopia whereas the third one rebuilt her previous marriage reconciling with her former husband. They have also been involved in additional income generating activities (e.g., petty trading) and pursued college education aspiring for better job opportunities and promotion. Returnees' narratives illustrate capabilities of return migrants to adapting to local circumstances despite multifaceted socio-economic challenges.

Selam's post-migration experiences varied from the situations narrated by other returnees. During her long years' stay in Qatar, she built financial and material assets that enabled her to achieve betterment in terms of material ownership, social status, and livelihood opportunities during her post-migration life in Addis Ababa. She can be considered as one of the returnee migrants who succeeded in realizing their dreams. In addition to accumulating assets (e.g., purchasing a house and a vehicle), she utilizes them a means of generating income. Renting out her automobile and a condo house, Selam

managed to generate about 26,000 Birr per month, a fairly big income as compared to the earnings of other returnees participated in this study. For example, the joint income of one of the returnee and her husband was 5,500 Birr. Selam's income is also greater than most of the civil servants in Ethiopia, the initial monthly salary of a degree-holding teacher employed in public schools is 5,358 Birr.

#### IV. Dreams and realities

Ethiopia has been one of the main sources of migrant domestic labour force working in the Middle East and Arab countries (e.g., Fransén & Kuschminder 2009; De Regt 2010; Fernandez 2011). According to study findings, most migrant domestic workers had been exposed to success stories of migrants, including betterment achieved by migrant domestic workers and their families, prior to their migration (De Regt 2010; Silvey & Parrenas 2020). For example, Gera was influenced by the migration experience of her older sister. The other three returnees had different levels of exposure via personal observations and information received from friends and neighbors. Prior to their migration, returnees also knew that working as a domestic worker in Arab countries involves challenges including exploitation and abuse. Despite this however, they decided to migrate hoping for better opportunities to achieve their dreams.

The analysis of returnee migrants' experiences show the disparity between what they aspired prior to their migration and the reality they encountered during and after their migration. Three of the study participants, with varied level of emphasis, reported that migration did not help them fulfill their dreams and improve their livelihoods. Two of them regretted their decision to migrate and work in a foreign country. In addition to her painful memory of migration, Gera was worrying about her basic needs after coming back home. Despite her pre-migration dream, she could not support her parents and alleviate her mother's pains. "... I do not worry about my agony... but ... I could not relieve my parents' pain, alleviate their problems, and make them happy... How long they continue living like this?", she complained.

Tigist was not free from dissatisfaction and regret. She migrated as a domestic worker to secure a better life for her daughter and build assets to her future marital home. Despite her persistent struggle to make things better, the reality she experienced was quite different from what she aspired for. The material and financial assets she obtained after eight years of migration life did not help her achieve her dream. The post-migration challenges she encountered, including living in unhappy marriage isolated from her daughter, made life painful. Comparing her experiences during and after her migration, she complained saying, "I am still struggling to survive after coming back home. I get nothing after working for eight years in an Arab country...[migration] killed my time that could have been used to pursuing my education and searching for other opportunities in my country." The feelings of depression and regrets are common among migrant domestic workers who failed to meet their dreams (De Regt 2010; Abebaw 2012).

Selam's experiences represent a different scenario. She migrated to Qatar after facing a sudden livelihood crisis. Her dream was to assist her natal family and save some money to start a small business coming back home. Selam's life history provides a good example of successful returnees who realized their dreams. She assisted her natal family sending remittance, clothes, and household goods such as a TV set; renovating the old family house; and covering medical expenses of her parents. She was satisfied with what she had done to her parents and relatives. Remembering her deceased parents, she said "I do not regret, I clothed and adorned my parents and received their blessing." Unlike returnee migrants



regretted their decision to migrate, Selam considered herself as blessed with good luck. Consistent with Gomes (2018) findings, Selam achieved betterment in terms of visible material ownership, a vehicle and a house, symbols of high social status in the Ethiopian context. She also attained better livelihood opportunities and earnings, which enhances her economic wellbeing and social status.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of Ethiopian migrant women who came back home after serving as domestic workers in the Middle East and Gulf countries. Multiple factors motivated them to migrate to a foreign country. Notwithstanding desperate economic circumstances and precarious livelihood opportunities, the study participants decided to migrate in response to stressful life events such as divorce and sudden loss of livelihoods, and subsequent frustration and despair. Our findings indicate the imperative of examining distinctive lived experiences of each return migrant, including the influence of significant life events on individual's decision making, to identify the drivers of migration instead of outlining general findings confined to factors such as poverty, lack of job opportunities, and the desire to support family.

Returnees had diverse dreams before their migration. Migrants' dreams include supporting their natal family, building assets for future business endeavor, securing a better life for their children, and building assets for future marital home. Unlike their expectations, however, return migrants experienced a huge discrepancy between their dreams and realities they encountered during and after their migration. They had struggled to fulfill their dreams withstanding multiple challenges they encountered in host countries, among others, heavy workloads, denial of payments, ill-health, harassment, and sexual abuse. Some of them exposed themselves to risky situations, including running away from their employers (sponsors) and working as freelancers, aspiring for better payments and working condition. Regardless of their remarkable efforts, however, migration did not enable most of the returnees achieve betterment in terms of material ownership and social status. Contrary to their expectations, most of the returnees were forced to go back to low-income jobs and struggle to fulfill their basic needs after coming back home. Some of them regretted their decision to migrate and complained about the hardship they encountered after coming back to their country.

The experiences of return migrants were not homogeneous, however. As the life history of one of the returnees demonstrates, migrant women could achieve better material possession and social status during their post-migration period if they find enabling opportunities in receiving countries. As Gomes (2018) argued, what this returnee did with the assets she built was beyond fulfilling basic needs. She invested her assets for long-term purposes including renovating her family house, purchasing a house and importing a second-hand automobile, which enabled her achieve betterment in terms of material ownership, livelihoods, and social status. Even though the experience of such a returnee could be an exceptional case, it inspires researchers to examine diverse experiences of individual domestic workers, their struggle to achieve their dreams, and the positive implications of migration instead of confining to 'exploitation experiences' of returnees.

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## NOTES

- (1) The phrase ‘*Kebele* houses’ refers to private houses nationalized in 1975 by the military-socialist government that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991. Most of the *Kebele* houses were constructed of mud and wood. The government rented out the houses to urban residents with low prices; tenant of most of these houses pay less than 20 Birr, less than 1 USD, though the costs of renting houses in the city have been increasing at alarming rates. Like most of the poor families of the city, the natal families of the returnees participated in the present study live in *Kebele* houses.
- (2) *Kebele* (currently *woreda*) administrations do not strictly control and follow up the status of the *kebele* houses. Moreover, *kebeles* do not have budget to cover maintenance costs of *kebele* houses. Tenants have the right to renew the house they live in at their own expenses, with the permission of their *kebele* administration. Tenants can add a room or rooms if the space is available with the permission of *kebele* officials. In some cases, tenants add a room/rooms exploiting opportunities, for example, when state control is loose (e.g., during political crisis or transition). As the result of desperate livelihood circumstances, some tenants rent out a room/rooms to earn additional income. The parents of one of the returnee rented out a room when their income declined after they lost their cows, the sources of their income.
- (3) Most cafes and restaurants in Addis Ababa employ younger girls (girls in their twenties) with small payments. However, the waiters receive some money every day as customers, adopting the Western tradition, give ‘tip’ after being served. The money collected from tip would help the girls cover their daily expenses including transport fees.
- (4) Birr is the unit of currency in Ethiopia. The exchange rate of Birr was stable for decades. The official exchange rate of Birr with US dollar was 2.48 in July 1945; slightly changed to 2.50 (January 1, 1964). Birr was re-valued to 2.07 in 1973. The Ethiopian currency was devalued by 142% in October 1992 to 5.00 per 1 US dollar (Fassil 2017). The devaluation of Birr continued since 1990s. For example, the exchange rate of Birr with US dollar reached 8.31 Birr in 2000 while the rate increased to 12.68 in 2010 (National Bank of Ethiopia). The exchange rate of the Ethiopian currently with 1 US dollar on May 11, 2021 was 42.71 (on line source).
- (5) In Ethiopia, it is common to consider adults parenting someone as a ‘mother’ or a ‘father’. Lidet used the term ‘mother’ when she talked about the wife of her uncle. Tigist, another study participant parented by a foster mother, called the latter as ‘mother’ and the children of her foster mother as ‘sister’ and ‘brother’.
- (6) Urban Productive Safety Net Project (UPSNP) was introduced into Ethiopia in 2017 and scaled up in 2020. The objective of the project is improving incomes of poor urban households and establishing urban safety net approaches. When it was introduced in 2017, the UPSNP supported more than 600,000 beneficiaries in 11 cities with 450 million USD budget, of which two-third donated by the World Bank. The project is scaled up in 2020 to be implemented in 83 urban areas with 738 million USD (500 million USD donated by the World Bank) to support more than 800,000 urban beneficiaries (Hagos Gebreamlak, Fortune, May 09, 2020, Vol. 21, No. 1045).

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