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March 2020



Migration and migration management on the Ethiopia–Sudan border

Research from Metema

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The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not indicate a position or opinion on the part of the European Union or the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

Suggested Citation: Research and Evidence Facility (REF). March 2020. 'Migration and Migration Management on the Ethiopia–Sudan

Border: Research from Metema', London and Nairobi: EU Trust Fund for Africa (Horn of Africa Window) Research and Evidence Facility.

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Funded by the European Union
Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

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Migration and migration management in Metema, Ethiopia

Executive Summary

This research project examines the interests of a range of stakeholders in different forms of migration in Metema, Ethiopia, in particular those who are indirectly involved in designing migration responses, such as the Bureau of Agriculture, health and education staff, traders and local community leaders. It asks what they know about migration, smuggling and trafficking, and what they see as the major challenges these create. It asks about their knowledge of the existing interventions addressing migration issues and what they see as the major gaps. Finally, it asks about the impact of migration on the wider socioeconomic conditions in the local area and what impact (if any) they think migration interventions may make.

The report identifies three different narratives of migration that people in the area use when talking about migration.

1. *Misery narrative*: this narrative focuses on irregular and unsafe migration, including that facilitated by smugglers and traffickers, and involves people moving across the Ethiopia–Sudan border, often to reach Europe or other remote destinations.
2. *Livelihood narrative*: unlike the misery narrative, which sees migration as a problem in itself, this livelihood narrative frames it as a response to failings in development. People are seen to be moving in response to limited livelihood options in their place of origin. Some of this movement is temporary, in response to economic conditions, while some is more long-term or permanent.
3. *Fact of life narrative*: this narrative takes the history of the Metema border area as evidence that mobility and border crossings are a central part of the lives of people who live in proximity to the border. Mobility is necessary for the survival of the border towns, as their markets depend on it. The focus of this narrative tends to be the seasonal migration of agricultural workers and traders who pass back and forth on a regular basis.

Migration across the Ethiopia–Sudan border at Metema is dominated by two broad sets of movements. The largest by number is made up of agricultural seasonal workers, the *saluge*. The other set of migrants comprises those who cross into Sudan with the aim of reaching Khartoum and possibly further afield, including North Africa and eventually Europe.

The interventions funded by the EU Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa have been seeking to address the needs and problems of migrants by supporting direct services (such as the Migration Response Centre (MRC) or drop-in centres), and by working with officials to improve the judicial process faced by irregular migrants and their capacity to prosecute smuggling and trafficking. However, it is still too early to assess the success of these programmes and this research is anyway not intended to be an evaluation of these activities. What the research does identify is the gap between perspectives of many local actors and those immersed in migration management. While the latter are focused on reducing irregular migration, the importance of cross-border migration in the local economy and labour market mean that many others have a strong interest in ensuring mobility is unhindered. These findings clearly show that there is a need to expand the reach of migration management activities to include a wider range of stakeholders in the design and implementation of programmes.

This report provides several recommendations that may help future programmes strengthen their engagement with those stakeholders who are often not involved in migration management planning, activities, consultation and information dissemination.

Better design of interventions

1. *Broader evidence base* - In order to reduce the gap between interests of local stakeholders and aims of migration management interventions, the design phase for any future programmes should start with a critical analysis of *the relationship between all forms of migration and the local community and political economy*.
2. *Ongoing dialogue* – The design phase should establish a mechanism for ongoing dialogue and consultation on migration issues with this wider group of stakeholders.
3. *Flexibility in response to stakeholder interests* – based on this analysis, there needs to be a commitment to design programmes to address the needs of migrants as well as the concerns and needs of local communities.

Improving implementation

4. *Wider and more substantive participation* – Implementing agencies must open up more opportunities for local stakeholders to participate in ongoing programmes.
5. *Build up links between local and national dialogues* – Efforts to develop national agreements on cross-border migration issues need to be accompanied by local level exchanges.
6. *Critical real-time evaluation of programmes* – Given the complex array of factors that drive migration and the potential for programme interventions to have unintended and unanticipated consequences, it is very important to establish mechanisms for the ongoing evaluation of impact (not just monitoring of outputs).

1. Introduction

This report critically reviews the idea and practice of migration management as an area of development intervention through a case study of experiences on the border between Ethiopia and Sudan. Its analysis is based on interviews conducted with key informants in the town of Metema, in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. Sitting close to the border with Sudan and on the main overland route between Addis Ababa and Khartoum, Metema is an important hub for migration between Ethiopia and Sudan. It is noted for two major flows of people out of Ethiopia. First, Ethiopians, Eritreans and Somalis pass through Metema with the aim of going onwards through Sudan and Libya or Egypt towards Europe. Second, there is a long-standing labour migration of Ethiopians, many of them following the fluctuating seasonal demand for workers on commercial farms as well as other sectors in Sudan. There is also a steady flow of people into Ethiopia, including returning labour migrants, ‘failed’ migrants whose plans to move further through Sudan have been thwarted, forcing them to turn back, and some Sudanese coming to Metema on business or for pleasure. In addition, internal migration plays a very important role in the area, with thousands of labourers, many from other parts of Amhara region, coming to work on the large-scale commercial farms there growing sesame and cotton.

Much of the international migration is undertaken irregularly, with smugglers and traffickers controlling a significant part, especially for those who hope to move on to Europe. This renders the migrants vulnerable to widespread abuse of rights at the hands of both smugglers and traffickers and, if apprehended, by police or other officials. It is this irregular migration towards Europe that has generated the most concern and made Metema an important site for aid interventions that seek to reduce the scale of irregular migration and address the associated rights violations.

1.1 Research aims

Smuggling and trafficking between Ethiopia and Sudan has been clearly identified as a critical migration concern that needs to be addressed. However, it is taking place in a wider context of migration that needs to be understood in order to maximise the effectiveness of any interventions. A better understanding of the different forms of migration – labour migration, internal migration as well as irregular migration towards the north – will help uncover the interlinkages between them.

This study focuses on a set of interventions collectively referred to as ‘migration management’. While this term is widely used, it is rarely clearly defined. Geiger and Pécoud (2010) have argued that there are three interrelated aspects to the concept. First, there are the different actors that invoke migration management as a way of framing and justifying their disparate activities concerned with migration. Second, we can look at what is becoming a standard set of practices, including capacity

building, policy coordination, and counter-trafficking, which make up the migration management canon. Third, there are the pervasive discourses – the written and spoken statements and practices – that help to build up an idea of what migration is, what challenges it brings and how these can be addressed; in short, ‘migration management’ creates the idea of what well managed migration looks like, what problems need to be addressed and why this matters.

In the context of the EUTF programme in the Horn of Africa, migration management is concerned with a range of activities which aim to improve the quality of migration to ensure that people’s rights are respected as they move, their movement is facilitated by more efficient and effective border regimes, and there is an appropriate framework of law that enables regular, and reduces irregular, movement. One of the largest investments (initially €40 million across the region) has been for the Better Migration Management (BMM) programme implemented by a consortium led by the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). Migration management activities are focused around four priorities: supporting the development of coherent national migration policies; building capacity to implement these policies, including improving the quality of law enforcement through the training of front line actors; enhancing the protection of migrants who are vulnerable to abuse, in particular those who are subject to trafficking; and awareness raising on the dangers of irregular migration and the benefits of alternative options. This involves interventions with a wide range of stakeholders, including government officials, NGOs and others who have some direct engagement with migrants or potential migrants.

In areas such as Metema, the high levels of migration are likely to impact many different sectors. These effects will ripple out far beyond the limited circle of actors directly involved in migration management programming. Hence, in order to understand the potential impact of migration management programming, it is also important to consider both how it may affect the interests of this broader range of actors, and what role they play in responding to the challenges of migration.

This research project set out to examine the interests of a range of stakeholders in different forms of migration in Metema, in particular including those who are not directly involved in designing migration responses. It asked what they know about migration, smuggling and trafficking, and what they see as the major challenges these create. It asked about their knowledge of the existing interventions addressing migration issues and what they saw as the major gaps. Finally, it asked about the impact of migration on the wider socioeconomic conditions and what impact (if any) they thought migration interventions might have.

1.2 Methods

To address these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three sets of key informants in Metema:

- Officials or others working for organisations and departments directly involved in migration interventions or migration issues (migration key informants – MKI)
- Those engaged in areas of activity or working for organisations and departments not directly focused on migration issues (non-migration key informants – NMKI)
- Representatives of other organisations in the community (CKI)

The original intention was to hold interviews with 15 migration key informants, 25 non-migration key informants and ten community key informants in Metema. Unfortunately, when the research started in October 2018, there was growing insecurity in the area with political unrest and violent conflict between the Amhara and Qemant people. Not only did this make it unsafe for the researcher, it also meant that it was hard to track down respondents, many of whom were out of their offices because of the disturbances. There were high levels of suspicion about being interviewed, which meant that many refused or insisted on keeping the interviews very short. As a result of the insecurity, the research had to be limited to just one field visit to Metema. Because the distinctive focus of the research project is to look beyond the perspective of those directly involved in the management of migration, the first priority for interviews was non-migration key informants; 16 interviews with these informants were completed. It was only possible to interview two community key informants and one migration key informant in Metema. These were supplemented by four further migration key informant interviews with officials from BMM, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in Addis Ababa and an Ethiopian NGO running a migrant support programme in Metema.

1.3 Report structure

After briefly describing the research setting in the next section, the report presents the analysis of these interviews, arranged around five headings in order to address the research questions outlined above. During the research, it rapidly became clear that different people use the term ‘migration’ in rather different ways. These various ideas about migration and views of it are examined in the third section. The report then turns to explore the changing patterns of migration through Metema and the array of actors involved in facilitating their movement. The fifth section discusses the impacts of migration on the area, highlighting its important role in the local economy and both the opportunities and challenges it presents. The subsequent section looks at the various migration management programmes that are being implemented; this is followed by a discussion of the limitations of these initiatives. The final section provides a set of conclusions and recommendations arising from this analysis.

1.4 Limitations

It is important to note the limited scope of this report. It does not attempt to provide verified facts about migration on the ground. Nor does it attempt to evaluate the migration management programming. Instead, it presents the perceptions people have of migration and its impact on the area, and of the various responses to migration. Where the research makes an original and distinctive contribution is in its focus on the views of actors who tend to be on margins of migration programming. We argue that this provides a valuable and refreshing critique of current approaches to migration management. We acknowledge that the number of interviews is rather limited – in particular, no research was conducted in Sudan and interviews were held only on the Ethiopian side of the border – and we make no claim to providing a representative sample of respondents. In the analysis, we have drawn on narratives that recurred in different interviews, which suggest a common story rather than one person’s opinion. While people’s views may be skewed and open to

challenge, the fact that such stories are prevalent provides valuable information about the way both migration and responses to it are perceived. This has important implications for the effectiveness of programming, in so far as such programming relies on buy-in from these stakeholders, whether to deliver results immediately, or to continue action beyond the end of the funded programme – that is, to ensure a sustainable impact.

2. Setting the scene¹

Metema *woreda* (district) is in the North Gondar Zone, the largest of the administrative zones of Amhara National Regional State. According to the most recent (2007) census, the population of Metema *woreda* is 168,000, of whom just over 20,000 reside in Metema town, which is situated right on the border with Sudan. The census shows that the largest ethnic group by far is the Amhara (79 percent in 2007), with large minority groups of Qemant (10 percent) and Tigrayan (7 percent). Over 83 percent of the population are Orthodox Christian and 16 percent Muslim.

Metema abuts the administrative unit of Gallabat East in Gedaref State, Sudan. The town of Gallabat is a similar size to Metema and the overall population of Gallabat East is about 150,000, according to the 2007 census. The population is much more ethnically mixed than on the Ethiopian side of the border, with the largest group being the Baria (seen as indigenous to the area – they are known as the Baria in Sudan but as the Nara in Ethiopia), the Masaleet and Dajo (originating from Western Sudan) and the Fallata (of West African origins).²

The main economic activity on both sides of the border is agriculture. Sesame, sorghum and cotton are the main crops being produced both by local farmers and large-scale farms owned by investors; these large operations take up over half of the cultivable land. As the region is rich in pastureland and water, livestock herding is an important household investment and makes a significant contribution to the household economy.

Cross-border trade is also a key economic activity for communities living along both sides of the border. Commodities, mainly agricultural products, including coffee, sesame, sorghum, red pepper, spices (especially ginger), chickpeas, beans, tomato, garlic, honey, hand-made clothes and fish are traded across the border between Ethiopia and Sudan, both legally and illegally. Live animals such as goats, cattle and camels are also bought and sold. Products that cannot be produced locally, such as beverages, soap powders, detergents, perfumes, electronics and vehicle parts are also imported, mainly illegally, from Sudan.

While cross-border trade is widely practised along many parts of the Ethiopia–Sudan border, it is particularly concentrated in and around Metema *woreda*. A number of factors have encouraged this. First, a cross-border agreement allows lorries and drivers from both sides of the border to pass through Gallabat and Metema without the need to carry passports or obtain a visa. Second, the construction of the Kassala–Gedaref–Gallabat (Sudan) to Metema–Gonder (Azezo) (Ethiopia)

¹ This section draws on the earlier REF report on Cross Border Analysis and Mapping: Amhara (N. Gonder Metema, Quara, Mirab Armachiho) and Eastern Sudan (Gedaref, Sennar) Cluster, September (2016).

² See Miller & Abu-Manga (2005).

highway is an invaluable shared infrastructure across the border which is widely used for the transportation of goods and merchandise.

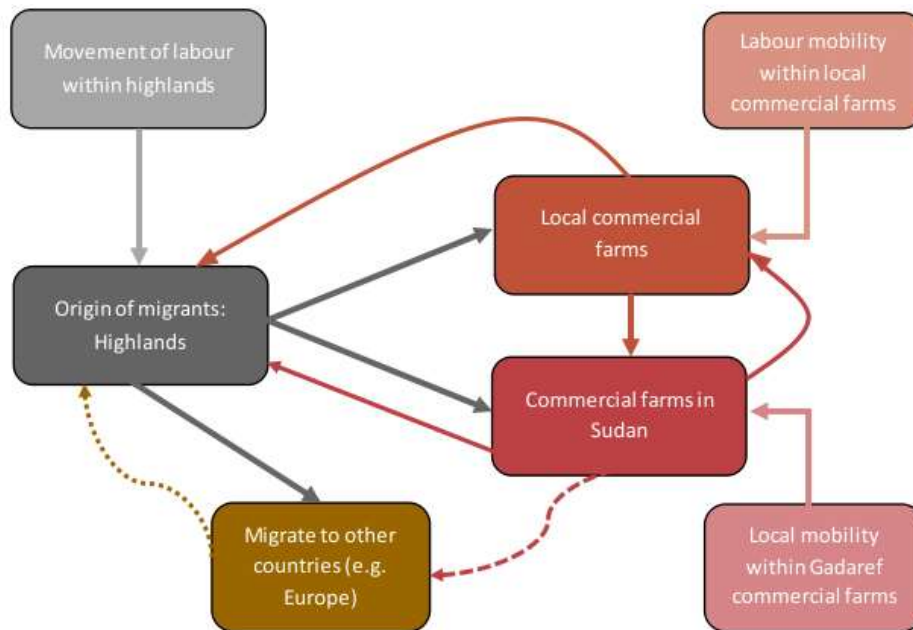
Third, border markets have also been established as part of the cross-border collaboration effort by Ethiopian and Sudanese authorities, with the purpose of encouraging informal trade and social interactions. The border cooperation agreement between the two countries has allowed for joint market days, with people from both sides of the border officially allowed to buy and sell to each other. While other border markets are set up on one or the other side of the border once or twice a week, the markets at Metema and Gallabat are particularly open and regular. Here, Ethiopians are allowed to cross the bridge that marks the border and use the market in Gallabat in Sudan. The markets in Sudan offer a range of manufactured goods, such as cosmetics, electronics, clothes, shoes, bedding, etc (most of which are cheaper than they are in Ethiopia), as well as vegetables, crops, spices, soft drinks, snacks, hazelnuts, coffee and tea. There are also electronic goods repair shops. Ethiopians are permitted to spend the whole day (from 8:30am–5:30pm) in the market. The shops and market slots are owned by the Sudanese; however, the workers, labourers and service providers (in coffee, tea and snack shops) are Ethiopians who return to the Ethiopian side of the border to spend the night. Likewise, the Sudanese are allowed to cross the border and enter Metema town, where they can stay from 8:30am–5:30pm. As we show below, this institution of cross-border trade also plays an important role in facilitating migration (mainly of seasonal agricultural workers) reaching beyond the markets of the border towns.

3. Mixed understandings of migration

Before considering the idea of migration management, we have first to consider what we understand by the idea of migration: which movements are to be counted? As many respondents noted, different forms of movement are often interrelated. Ethiopians travel from other parts of the country to Metema with the intention of crossing into Sudan and then end up staying in the Ethiopian border town. Those planning to reach Europe may set off from Metema alongside the seasonal agricultural labourers going to Sudan. People may move legally with a visa on the bus to Khartoum and then overstay, so their migration becomes irregular. Despite recognising this complexity, and while some respondents appeared to adopt a very broad definition of migration, most focused on some movements and excluded others from consideration.

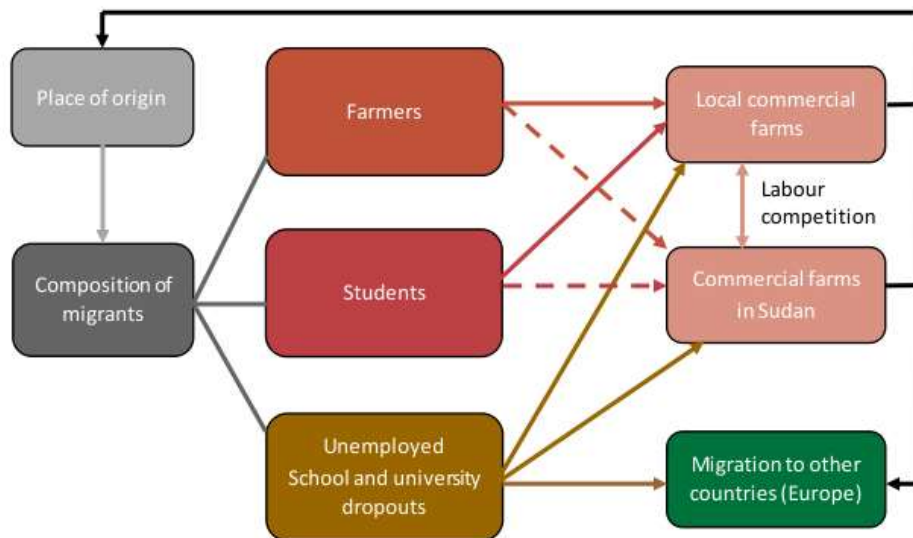
In their detailed study of seasonal labour migration, Eldin and Ferede (2018) present a series of diagrams (see Figures 1 and 2) to show how the composition of potential migrants, the destinations they aspire to reach and their forms of circulations are interrelated. They suggest that, while unemployed educated youth are those most likely to set off for Europe, many also work on farms in Sudan. Some of those who start working on the farms may go from them to Europe while others will not travel further. There is also extensive circulation between farms on both sides of the border and wider labour markets in towns in Sudan (such as Gedaref) and Ethiopia. Eldin and Ferede's report presents a highly complex picture of movement and this is echoed in our research.

Figure 1: Migration patterns and circular movement of labour within and across borders



Source: Eldin and Ferede (2018, p 53, Fig 6).

Figure 2: Patterns of migration among the different groups



Source: Eldin and Ferede (2018, p 62, Fig 7).

In particular, the seasonal movement of people in search of wage labour on commercial farms and plantations, either in Ethiopia or Sudan, was not recognised as migration by many respondents. The term *saluge* is used to describe Ethiopian agricultural labourers who move across the lowlands working on farms in both Ethiopia and Sudan. They tend to be organised in groups based on ethnicity and area of origin (many are from northern Ethiopia) and have well-established networks to pass on information about changing labour needs and job opportunities (Eldin & Ferede, 2018).

There are no migrants coming through Delelo [the agricultural area in Metema *woreda*]. They do not come to that part of the town. The only ones who come to the plantations are the *saluge* [daily labourers]. They are all men and come from Gojjam, Gondar and Wollo. But they cannot be called migrants; they are temporarily here for work. They go back to their hometown when they are done working here. They come all year round to work on the farmlands. But they do not stay for long or live here permanently. That is why we cannot call them migrants. (Eth-NMKI-06)

There are daily labourers who come here to work on farmlands. They are not migrants. They are rather people on the move. (Eth-NMKI-04)

As we show below, any interventions designed to affect one form of migration is likely to have some impact on others: for example, increased border checks will not differentiate between those crossing to Sudan with the intention of reaching Europe and those going to work on farms. Hence, for the purposes of this report, we adopt a broad notion of migration to include these ‘people on the move’.

The term ‘migration’ elicited contrasting responses not only in terms of the definition of who is a migrant but also in terms of attitudes towards migration. The interviews revealed different understandings of the idea and its implications. When asked about the migration patterns in the area, three broad narratives emerged. The first, and most frequently invoked, can be characterised as a ‘misery narrative’. Here respondents referred only to irregular movement into Sudan, in particular focusing on those trying to reach Europe via Libya. They moved very rapidly into concerns about smuggling and trafficking and the abuse of migrants. Migration was described in very negative terms, such as ‘terrible’, ‘like darkness’ and bringing ‘chaos’. From this perspective, respondents struggled to understand why people took the risk in search of what they saw as “the fantasy of having a good life” (Eth-NMKI-01). They saw no benefit to be gained by moving to another country:

For me, migration is dreadful. Good or bad, you are better in your own country. No one listens to you in a foreign country; you are an outsider. You might not be successful there too. You live a life of worry and stress. But in your country, that is not the case; at least, you are safe. You can do whatever you want, however you want it. You might want to have a better life but migration is not the answer for that. (Ethi-NMKI-02)

This narrative largely neglects other forms of migration – the movement of labourers into Sudan, internal migration or, in many cases, regular international migration.

By contrast, other respondents focused more on migration as a response to the difficulties in securing a livelihood in Ethiopia.

Sedet [migration] is migration for economic reasons, looking for a better life or income. It is your decision to migrate and for a better life when it is *sedet*. It can be within or outside the country. For instance, if you move from Addis Ababa to Metema or from Addis Ababa to

Sudan, it is both called *sedet*. It is, however, usually international, outside Ethiopia. (Eth-NMKI-03)³

From this perspective, the high levels of unemployment facing young people on completing school or university drives them to consider moving in search of better opportunities. Their expectations may be misguided and they may be misled and exploited by brokers, but their desire to migrate is a reflection of the social and economic conditions that prevail in Ethiopia. One respondent also noted the role of gender inequalities in driving women's migration. Women are pressured into marrying very young, often to older men, and then are stuck with household tasks and few opportunities to earn their own living. If they divorce, they are very vulnerable to impoverishment, as they are not likely to get much or any of their husband's property. As a result, many divorced young women migrate to other areas, often moving into towns and cities (Eth-NMKI-11). Unlike the misery narrative, which sees migration as a problem in itself, this livelihood perspective frames it as a response to failings in development.

For others, migration is a continuously changing fact of life in Metema. As a border town, it has for many years been a place of people on the move. Men and women come from all over Ethiopia using many different crossing points to go into Sudan. Some disguise themselves as agricultural labourers and move freely, while others migrate with the help of brokers. The numbers of people moving in any particular direction ebbs and flows with the seasons and in response to any attempts to restrict migration. Whatever the merits of these movements, they are deeply embedded in the fabric of Metema and the surrounding area. Some interviewees acknowledged this in rather resigned terms:

Metema is like a mini Addis Ababa. You find people from all over the country. Not all people come to cross to Sudan. Some are here because it is their fate to live in Metema ... There are so many who are here to work. That is their right as citizens. That is why you find all nations and nationalities in Metema. There are people who come here to migrate but end up staying in Metema. There are also those who come to Metema to work and decide to migrate. (Eth-NMKI-04)

For others, migration is not only inevitable but it is fundamental to the functioning and growth of the town. It makes the town what it is.

A town cannot develop if there is no movement. There will be no income if there are no movements. As rain is important for a farmer, movement is essential for a town's growth. Metema Yohannes is considered as an inland port. (Eth-NMKI-07)

Given that the lives and livelihoods of many people are tied up with migration, from this perspective it is not surprising that any attempts at controlling the operations of smugglers will be thwarted by their close relationship with the authorities:

³ In Amharic and Tigrinya, a refugee is referred to as *sedetegna*, one who migrates.

There are so many people who work as brokers in Metema. In case they get caught, they have a relationship with government officials and so get released. Even if we know who they are, we need substantial evidence to put them in prison; you cannot accuse a person without any proof ... As we have security forces who guard the border and movement across it, there are also those who are involved in illegal activities such as human smuggling. (Eth-MKI-01)

There are overlaps between these three narratives –migration as misery, as a response to development failure, or as a fact of life – and many respondents adopted a mix of them in their responses. While the boundaries between them may be somewhat fuzzy, as we show below, they do seem to shape different people’s understanding of what they mean by migration, its impacts and possible responses to it.

4. Actors, journeys, routes

Migration across the Ethiopia–Sudan border at Metema is dominated by two broad sets of movements. The largest by number are the agricultural seasonal workers, the *saluge*. Thousands of labourers, mainly from northern parts of Ethiopia, migrate to work on the commercial farms of eastern Sudan, especially around Gedaref. Large numbers also stay on the Ethiopian side of the border to work on sesame production in Metema *woreda*.⁴ Their numbers fluctuate with the seasons and changing economic and political conditions. Respondents suggested the numbers crossing into Sudan declined in 2018 when the value of the Sudanese pound fell and in 2019 the political insecurity in Metema, which was an extension of ethnic violence in Ethiopia, and the political uncertainties associated with the regime change in Sudan also resulted in a significant slowdown in migration.

The other set of migrants comprises those who cross into Sudan with the aim of reaching Khartoum and possibly further afield. Metema is well known and is considered to be the most important route to Sudan for migrants from all over Ethiopia, as well as for some Eritreans and Somalis. Migrants mainly come from Jimma and Arsi (Oromia), South Wollo (Amhara), North Gondar (Amhara), and some parts of Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR). These migrants, however, tend to have Sudan as their intended destination.

Many respondents reported that the number of migrants moving through Metema fell significantly during 2018. They put forward a number of reasons for this. On the Ethiopian side, would-be migrants had been waiting to see what happened under the new political regime in Addis Ababa. On the Sudanese side, the economic deterioration and political upheaval in Khartoum was deterring migrants from moving there in search of employment. With the fall in value of the currency, Ethiopians are no longer able to earn as much in Sudan as they once could, making the opportunities in Ethiopia more attractive. While the movements from Ethiopia to Sudan have decreased, there has been an increase in the number of Ethiopians and Eritreans returning from Sudan via Metema. Another factor is the start of direct bus services from Addis Ababa to Khartoum that pass through Metema without the need for migrants to stop in the town as they once did; this is an important regular route for travelling to Sudan.

⁴ Since the vast majority of labourers cross irregularly, there are no detailed figures. According to Eldin and Ferede (2018, p 10), there were 84,000 formally registered crossings in 2016/17; they estimate that this is 20 percent–30 percent of the total. See also REF (2016).

Some respondents suggested that government restrictions on migrant brokers appeared to have reduced the flow of people moving irregularly through Metema into Sudan. However, this may have simply diverted them to use other more hidden routes that avoid the town. For example, some migrants disembark from vehicles at Kokit town (before Metema) and walk through the desert in order to avoid detection. This use of the 'illegal' route, also commonly referred to as the 'desert route,' is particularly common for migrants, mainly men, whose destinations lie beyond Sudan, either in Libya, Egypt or even Europe. Those who aspire to get to Europe, mainly Germany and the UK, are relatively well-off migrants from all over the country, mainly from major cities and towns. Respondents described how migrants stay in sparsely inhabited neighbourhoods of Metema, disguise themselves as locals by leaving their luggage behind, walk at night time to avoid detection, sleep in private residences rather than hotels, and stay away from the town by sending one from among their group to purchase supplies and other goods.

In most cases, the migrants moving irregularly have their border crossing facilitated by layers of brokers, which run from rural villages up to destination countries. The broker networks in Metema are mainly based on ethnicity and language. Because of the long-established practice of migration from parts of Oromia to Sudan, the majority of brokers based in Metema and Sudan are from this regional state, mainly from Jimma zone. Recently, however, there has been an increase in brokers and migrants from Amhara National Regional State. Brokers have used Metema as a centre for their operations because of its location on the border, which makes it easy for them to connect with their networks in both countries.

Here, you can use SIM cards of both countries, which make the life of brokers easier [...] Living here, I can call brokers in Addis Ababa and Sudan at the same time. They can also easily exchange money into different currencies and make transactions [...] It is brokers in Metema who play a major role in the migration network [...] Unlike other places, Metema is well located to transfer money and transit people. (Eth-NMKI-08)

Besides brokers, respondents referred to many other actors involved in facilitating irregular migration to Sudan. Brokers will recruit bus, taxi, lorry and *bajaj* (motorised rickshaw) drivers to transport migrants. They sometimes use vehicles that are not checked, such as ambulances, to smuggle people. Hotel and pension owners provide shelter to migrants. Brokers use intermediaries called *sheqaba* to make the arrangements for accommodation and local transportation of migrants. The *sheqaba* may also be involved in guiding migrants through the desert, sometimes assisted by government officials and security forces, who are bribed to help migrants and brokers cross the border.

Brokers pay 50,000 ETB⁵ or more to bribe officials and security forces. They invest in this even more when migrants are from Somalia and Eritrea. These migrants are expected to pay well, unlike migrants from Ethiopia, who have nothing to offer [...] Brokers go all the way to

⁵ Ethiopian Birr – approximated 35 ETB to €1, so approximately €1400.

protect these migrants from being caught. If you smuggle out ten Somali migrants, you get over one million ETB; it is a very profitable business [...] Migrants are like transacted goods. When they believe the migrants are profitable, brokers invest more money and energy into smuggling migrants to Sudan. (Eth-NMKI-08)

Not all of those who end up as irregular migrants in Sudan start their journey following illegal pathways. Some travel directly by bus with one-month tourist visas issued by the Sudanese embassy in Addis Ababa. Others use temporary Sudanese identity papers issued by Sudanese officials in Gallabat, the Sudanese town just across the border from Metema. Whichever means they use, their departure is regular and documented in Ethiopia by officials at the Immigration and Nationality Affairs office as they leave. However, their stay in Sudan soon becomes irregular, if they do not secure an employment contract or work permit and overstay their visa. This legal avenue to irregularity is reportedly predominantly used by women.

As noted above, government officials also play a critical role facilitating irregular migration through their links with smugglers and traffickers. Many respondents claimed that government officials profited by turning a blind eye or even directly collaborating with smugglers and traffickers. One hotel owner showed his despair and anger at the lack of action taken against traffickers exploiting migrants in his detailed account of a particularly distressing episode:

We caught two brokers fighting over migrants. The migrants were only teenagers and they kept them in a hotel. We handed them over to the police together with their phone. The brokers claimed that they were taking them to their families in Metema. The Sudanese broker with whom they were in contact then called on their phone and told the brokers to move the migrants as she had already wired the money to their accounts. She was not aware they were under police custody at that time. Later the police told us to take these brokers and migrants to immigration and told us it does not concern them anymore ... We begged the police officer to consider his measure and think about the children; they were three girls of age 13 and 14 years old. We had no choice but to take them all to the immigration. When the federal police gave the brokers a good beating, they confessed to being human smugglers. They told us we will be called in three days to be witnesses in court. But we saw one of the brokers on the streets after two days. He made fun of us ... He gave 6000 ETB to the federal police and they let them go. They had four eyewitnesses who could put the brokers in prison but they were released from the station. This is what is happening nowadays here in Metema. They are letting them go regardless of the evidence they have against them. Even if residents and the militia are committed to stop human smuggling, government structures are letting them go. The police refuse to take over brokers we caught. And the federal police let the brokers loose after taking a bribe. We even took this case to the town administrator. He said he will get back to us after he looked into it. So far there is no news. We did not have any solution even if we went to all the government offices. So now, we have decided not to apprehend brokers or illegal migrants. Even if we see them walk on the streets, we will not do anything about it. (Eth-NMKI-14)

This was one of many accounts of collusion between government officials and smugglers. One respondent claimed that:

If you walk to Mandefro Mountain just at the outskirts of the town, you will see federal police vehicles and militia escorting illegal migrants across the desert. The migrants come up to the custom station and avoid the main road then they go into the 'desert' but not far from the town. Everyone can watch them walking in the desert but [they] have no power to do anything about it. The federal police have become the main human smuggling institution. (Eth-NMKI-02)

Another important set of people facilitating migration in the area is the members of *Shanta Mahiber* (Baggage Association), an association established by the government with the aim of assisting legal migration and countering human smuggling. They provide services to migrants such as loading and unloading their luggage on buses, escorting them to the immigration office and helping them prepare the required documents, exchanging money and providing temporary shelter. Migrants are expected to pay the association a small fee for these services. One member of the *Shanta Mahiber* described the support they gave to migrants returning from Sudan:

We welcome them in when they come back from Sudan. Returnees are respected around here; they are treated with respect. They come back after facing hardship and so we try our best to make them feel at home. They come back sick or without money. At present, because of the inflation in Sudan, returnees come with no money. They only bring with them clothes and other goods. We carry that for them for free. If they do not have money, we pay from our pockets for their transportation. Because they are citizens, we need to support them. (Eth-CKI-01)

However, according to many respondents, in practice there is often little difference between the activities of the *sheqaba* and those of many *Shanta Mahiber* members on the ground. The latter are accused of overcharging migrants for their services and even directing them into the hands of smugglers. For example, one hotel owner complained of the fees demanded from migrants and businesses by the *Shanta Mahiber*.

Returnees [migrants coming back from Sudan] want rooms to rest and maybe a garden to have beer. In such hotels, you rent the 50 ETB room for 100 ETB. Then the hotel owner, *Shanta Mahiber*, and brokers will all benefit. Actually, it is members of *Shanta Mahiber* who benefit most. They are the ones who exploit these migrants. They ask for money when they carry their luggage to the hotel and back to the bus. For this, they receive more than 500 ETB. The hotel owner also pays them commission for the migrants they bring to the hotel. If you rent rooms for 100 ETB, the 50 ETB extra is for them. If they bring ten migrants to a hotel, they get 300 or 400 ETB commission. If you refuse to pay them, they will take the migrants to another hotel. The *Shanta Mahiber* was supposed to work fairly and put migrants into registered hotels turn by turn. In such a way, all can benefit. But they do not work like that. (Eth-NMKI-14)

It is clear that the organisation of the various forms of migration through Metema relies on a broad range of actors, reaching beyond the various brokers and the migrants themselves. In this section, we have focused on those, such as government officials and some members of the *Shanta Mahiber*, who take advantage of the precarious position of the migrants to exploit them. Their profits depend on the migrants' border crossing being illegal and subject to government sanction. In addition, as discussed in the next section, there are many other actors, such as hoteliers, retailers and other business owners, who provide essential services to migrants regardless of their legal status.

5. The impact and role of migration in the area

The large numbers of migrants passing through Metema inevitably have a significant impact on the economy and society in the area. In particular, they play a vital role in agriculture as the large-scale production of sesame and, to a lesser extent, cotton and sorghum is dependent on seasonal labour migrants, especially at harvest time. As one farmer put it, “if there are no *saluge*, there is no farm” (Eth-NMKI-04). While many of these migrant workers may be from other parts of Ethiopia, with no intention of crossing into Sudan, they move alongside those who are looking to travel further afield. Some take local agricultural jobs to help fund their onward journey, especially those who find themselves stranded after being stopped by police, or who lack sufficient funds to pay off brokers. Although some respondents do not consider these agricultural labourers as migrants unless they are illegally crossing borders (as noted above), both these groups include many of the same people, just at different stages of their journeys. Hence, in practice, drawing a sharp line between them is impossible. This means that taking action to control one group is likely to have repercussions for the other.

While the supply of migrant labour inevitably drives down agricultural wages, only one respondent presented this as a concern; perhaps a different story would emerge if interviews were conducted among the rural poor, who may be competing for work with migrants. The negative impact of migrants on local wages was only raised in relation to those who were stranded in town and desperate to find skilled or semi-skilled work, perhaps as domestic workers, hotel and restaurant staff or security guards.

While agriculture is the sector most dependent on migrants’ labour, many other businesses rely on migrants as customers. Whether people are under the control of brokers or making their own way, if they stop in town, they need to find shelter, food and other services. This has stimulated the growth of hotels, restaurants and other shops in Metema. The *saluge* also use the town as a resting place when they finish their stint of work in the fields, and may spend a large part of their wages before they move on to their next job (Eth-NMKI-02). However, some respondents complained that at times the migrants’ extravagant spending resulted in prices increasing for local residents.

Those involved in smuggling and trafficking attempt to keep their clients, or victims, out sight, particularly from the security forces, by placing them in ‘safe houses’. House owners on the outskirts of Metema benefit from this by renting out rooms to brokers, who use them to lock migrants up while they wait to cross the border. This may be done openly, but often the brokers claim to be renting as an individual and assert that the migrants are visiting relatives. As a local government

official (Eth-NMKI-08) noted, this has the effect of enriching the local house owners while pushing up rents for others, such as civil servants, who cannot compete with the sums the brokers will pay.

Alongside these economic impacts of migration, many respondents pointed to diverse social impacts; for the most part these were negative. In general, respondents did not see migrants themselves as criminals or presenting any significant threat to security, although many referred to the tendency of the *saluge* to get drunk and start fights among themselves when they were spending their wages in town. However, there was much more concern about the criminality associated with the activities of smugglers and traffickers. In particular, the disputes over money that arise between these brokers and migrants may result in violent conflict (Eth-NMKI-12). Respondents referred to a catalogue of abuses of migrants by brokers, including violence, starvation, sexual exploitation and organ harvesting. The last of these was raised as the most horrific illustration of the evils of migration, with migrants being passed on to organ traffickers in Sudan, who remove their kidneys, often resulting in the death of the migrants. It is impossible to know how widespread this practice is, because respondents were referring to stories that they had heard, rather than from any first-hand knowledge of the issue.

Migration is widely associated with the expansion of commercial sex work and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Metema. While migrants looking to pass through Sudan tend to avoid spending money en route, the *saluge*, traders and Sudanese men coming back and forth to town create a ready market for sex workers. Young women stranded on the border, lacking the money to move on, are all too easily drawn into prostitution. Some respondents struggled to understand why young, sometimes educated women, should become trapped into such work; yet one noted that this was one of the few ways for women to make a living, especially after divorce, when they were likely to lose all property rights (Eth-NMKI-11).

Migration plays a major role in the shaping of Metema. As one respondent put it, perhaps hyperbolically:

There is no resident of the town who was born in Metema Yohannes. Metema is a place of migrants. I, myself, came from other place to work in the government office. Everyone came from somewhere. (Eth-NMKI-01)

Migration permeates the lives of residents in the town, who observe people moving back and forth across the border, learn about the different ways and means to travel – whether legal or illegal – and see the risks and potential benefits of success and failure displayed by migrants. As a result, they are more likely to consider the possibility of migration for themselves.

Anyone can migrate if they are in a difficult situation. I myself might migrate if life is unkind to me. To tell you the truth, we take migration as an option because we are well aware of the routes as we live along the border. Those living far from here might not even have any knowledge about migration. (Eth-NMKI-05)

That is how I got to know about illegal migration, not through awareness creation. It is the place itself which taught me. (Eth-NMKI-01)

Respondents complained that young people in the area were no longer looking to work in Ethiopia or to develop businesses there; instead they had their eyes set on opportunities abroad. Some were seeking work as agricultural labourers in Sudan, which is better paid than similar work in Ethiopia. A teacher suggested that among these are many students who drop out of school to take up work across the border, where they can earn nearly four times the wages of a farmhand in Ethiopia (Eth-NMKI-05).

Those with more education and resources aspire to reach Europe on the desert route via Sudan and Libya. As a result, in recent years a growing number of residents of Metema town have migrated to Libya and beyond. Their movement is facilitated by their easy access to broker networks and information about the route. The success of a few has inspired others.

Within the past two years, there have been 15 to 20 young men from Metema who made it to Germany. These are the ones I know personally. There might be more from Metema who made it to Europe. Thanks to technology, we keep in touch with each other. They all say it is better to rot in a European prison than stay in Ethiopia. I have a relative who has been trying to make it to Europe for the past 15 years. He tried to go through Libya and Sudan and failed. He wasted so many years trying to get out of the country. He was in the military and always dreamed of living abroad. He finally made it to Germany last year. He is now in school learning the language. He says the government pays them to learn the language. He calls me and compares my monthly salary with what the German government pays him. Last year, he told me he was paid 400 euros per month. That is more than a bank manager earns here in Ethiopia. That is why they go through so many difficulties to get to Europe. They prefer to live in the prisons there than work in Ethiopia. (Eth-NMKI-11)

Some of them have used the government scheme to support micro and small enterprise start-up (MSE) as way to finance their journeys. After they have saved 20 percent of the amount needed to establish a business, the remaining 80 percent is provided as a loan. However, rather than starting their business, they use the money to migrate.

For many respondents, it is the impact on the young people of Metema (and Ethiopia more widely) that is the most damaging, as it erodes the future life of the area. There was no clear consensus on where the root cause of this problem lies. For some, it is a reflection of the upheaval in Ethiopia and the failure of the government to provide enough jobs for the growing population. For others, it is about the changing attitudes of young people, who prefer to take the lottery of migration rather than pursue the more mundane opportunities available locally; “they want a shortcut to success” (Eth-NMKI-04). From either perspective, this exodus of young people from Metema is undermining the prospects for development in the town.

6. Migration management initiatives

As a border town lying on a key transport route between Ethiopia and Sudan, Metema has always been a site for the control of immigration. In recent years, there has been growing concern about irregular migration and human trafficking, which leaves migrants vulnerable to the widespread abuse of rights, whether at the hands of smugglers and traffickers or, if apprehended, at the hands of police or other officials. In response, the range of migration interventions in the area has expanded to include the development of new policies and procedures, capacity building for officials and front-line staff, support and protection for migrants and information campaigns: that is, all the ingredients of migration management.

At national level, the Ethiopian government has introduced a number of measures to address the challenges of trafficking in persons and other exploitative migration. The Anti-Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants Task Force (2011) and National Anti-Trafficking Council (2012) were established with the aim of tackling human trafficking and smuggling by bringing together different stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, international organisations and faith groups. In 2015, the government issued the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants Proclamation No 909, which clearly defined human trafficking and smuggling and the penal codes for such crimes, including fines up to 500,000 ETB and sentences of 15 years to life imprisonment for those found guilty of being involved in human trafficking. It also worked with IOM to develop the National Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2014).

The Ethiopian government has also introduced regulations on labour migration,⁶ under which bilateral agreements were set up with receiving countries and a system of licensing for employment agencies that meet standards for responsible recruitment was established. Potential migrants were required to have completed education to grade eight. These measures have primarily been targeted at regulating the large-scale movements of Ethiopian labour migrants towards the Gulf, in particular Jordan, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, where migrants have been subjected to gross violations of rights. However, they have had no impact on the largely irregular flow of labour migrants into Sudan through Metema. In the light of a recent study examining seasonal agricultural labour migration between Ethiopia and Sudan (Eldin and Ferde 2018), the Better Migration Management programme is supporting the first bilateral discussions on improving the situation of these labour migrants. It facilitated a cross-border workshop on this theme in Khartoum in June 2018.⁷

⁶ These were the Employment Exchange Services Proclamation (Proclamation No. 632/2009); and the Overseas Employment Proclamation (923/2016).

⁷ See EUTF 2018 and BMM October 2018, pp. 2-3.

Despite the importance of different forms of migration in the lives of many people in Metema and the extent of irregular border crossing, smuggling and trafficking in the area, respondents saw the responses to it as rather limited and uncoordinated. For example, the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force in Metema is expected to facilitate a coordinated effort among members, although respondents reported that it is neither well-coordinated nor working effectively. There is a core set of actors responsible for different aspects of migration management; they include law enforcement bodies, the immigration and national affairs office, IOM and the *woreda* Labour and Social Affairs bureau.⁸ While law enforcement bodies apprehend irregular migrants, IOM assists in their return and the *woreda* Labour and Social Affairs bureau and town administration office manage the finances to assist the return of stranded migrants from Metema.⁹ In addition, training sessions are provided to government officials and selected community members. For instance, in 2018, the Labour and Social Affairs office, together with IOM, provided training for trainers in 22 *kebeles* [neighbourhoods – the smallest administrative unit] – seven of which border Sudan – in Metema *woreda*. On various occasions, government officials joined training courses where they shared experience on human trafficking and smuggling. For example, an official from the Metema town administration reported:

We participate in meetings and trainings held in the town. We were called last month for training in Adama to discuss on irregular migration. The training was organised by IOM and they shared with us the experience in the border of Djibouti and Somalia and how they have been managing irregular migration. Officials from all the three regions [Amhara, Afar and Somali] came together to share their experiences and assess what is being done at the borders. People from Labour and Social affairs bureau, Women and Children Affairs bureau and the town administration all came to the meeting. We also discussed about what to do next and what works best in the future. (Eth-MKI-01)

Complementing these initiatives, in 2014 IOM established a Migration Emergency Response Centre (MRC) in Metema to support migrants stranded or vulnerable to exploitation, either with direct assistance or by referring them to other stakeholders. After registration and screening, migrants who arrive at the MRC are offered shelter, food and assisted voluntary return and/or onward transportation. However, Metema MRC does not offer other forms of support such as counselling, medical assistance, information sharing and awareness-raising, or an information hotline. Victims of abuse, exploitation and violence are not attended by social workers or medical professionals, or provided with legal advice and psychosocial support.

More recently, the BMM programme funded by the EUTF has started working in the area. It supported the development of the National Referral Mechanism for victims of trafficking being developed in Amhara, Oromia, Tigray and SNNPR National Regional States, which has included

⁸ There is no Labour and Social Affairs office in the town administration. The *woreda*-level office is responsible for all activities, with one officer appointed as a representative of the office in Metema town.

⁹ Since completing fieldwork, local contacts have reported that IOM has now taken over the management of the finance.

awareness-raising activities in Metema. It is providing border officials with training on border management, migration-related legal frameworks, the interrogation and prosecution of human traffickers and smugglers, and how to handle migrants and victims of trafficking (adopting a do-no-harm approach). Three-day training courses were provided to law enforcement bodies (police officers, prosecutors, judges, immigration officials) on the investigation and prosecution of trafficking and smuggling cases in 2017 and 2019.

BMM is also funding direct support to migrants through projects being implemented by two local NGOs, Timret Le Hiwot Ethiopia (TLHE) and the Forum on Sustainable Child Empowerment (FSCE). They are working in three regions in the country (Oromia, Amhara and Benishangul Gumuz) and focusing on support for vulnerable migrants, in particular unaccompanied minors. In 2018, TLHE opened a drop-in centre in Genda Wuha, a town about 30 km from Metema town on the main road towards Gondar and the capital of Metema *woreda*. The centre supports stranded migrants with temporary shelter, food, psychological first aid, referral medical assistance, and information on legal migration and assisted returnee identification. At the time of the research, TLHE was also accommodating stranded minors, but this role will be taken over by FSCE when it starts its project in the area, since this is focused on unaccompanied minors.

Respondents also highlighted the work of a local NGO Mahibere Hiwot that focuses on protecting children from sexual and physical abuse and from being exploited. An important aspect of their work is addressing the problem of internal child trafficking, where children are brought to Metema by relatives or brokers, who promise to send them to school but then force them to work in local businesses or on farms. Mahibere Hiwot run workshops in schools and the local community, raising awareness of these issues and of child rights. They have established community committees of volunteers who assist them in identifying children who are being exploited or trafficked to Metema. They can support children who have come from other parts of Amhara region to return home. Those who come from other parts of Ethiopia are referred to IOM to provide help with their return. While Mahibere Hiwot's work does not address international migration, as one of their facilitators observed, the reasons for both internal and international migration are often the same: the low incomes and very poor living conditions endured by many families (Eth-NMKI-15).

To reduce the incentives for the economic migration of young people, the government has made youth employment a policy priority at national, regional and local levels. It created a national revolving fund of 10 billion ETB for the year 2017-18, from which Metema town received over 1.5 million ETB. Within the same year, the town administration added a further one million ETB to the fund. The revolving fund, specific to unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 34, provides beneficiaries with training, credit and workspace to establish small businesses. This fund complements the existing MSE scheme, which is also designed to get young people into work, but charges a higher interest rate (15 percent compared with 8 percent) and provides smaller loans in relation to savings (80:20 compared with 90:10). It also requires applicants to secure the loans with assets or a guarantor. Both young people and returnees from Sudan and the Middle East are given priority access to such government programmes. However, in practice, few have benefited from this, as they cannot raise the savings required to obtain the loans (Eth-NMKI-01).

Another element of the government strategy is the formation of the *Shanta Mahiber* association discussed earlier, whose membership includes unemployed youth. Its aim is to assist legal migration and prevent migrants from being lured by brokers into taking illegal routes. It provides basic services, including help with papers, transport, baggage and accommodation for which it makes a small charge. The fees it levies provide a small income for the young members and it is hoped that this helps them avoid being drawn into irregular migration themselves. However, as noted in the previous section, respondents suggested that members of *Shanta Mahiber* were exploiting migrants, overcharging them and pushing them into the hands of brokers.

7. Gaps in perception and action

According to research respondents, the various initiatives to manage migration through Metema appear to be having limited impact. While there has been some reduction in the numbers of irregular migrants and the visible activity of brokers in the town, few were confident that this was a result of the attempts to improve control on the border. First, many respondents suggested that, rather than there being a fall in the level of irregular migration, this is being diverted into more remote routes in the face of border controls, thus leaving migrants even more exposed to the activities of brokers and in greater danger (Eth-NMKI-04). Second, there is the problem of attribution. There are so many other security, economic and political factors affecting migration, that it is extremely difficult to attribute reliably any change to these local initiatives.

Many complained that any attempt to address smuggling and trafficking was being undermined by corruption and the extensive involvement of Ethiopian officials in facilitating irregular migration (as noted in section 4 above). Moreover, there is a need for more coordination between different agencies, including those without direct responsibility for migration issues. One local official noted that civil servants are expected to catch irregular migrants but there is no mechanism for then dealing with them.

According to the government workings, there is no structure established for migration. For instance, security and administration office is concerned with peace and security of the town. ANDM [Amhara National Democratic Movement] works on political issues. Women and Children affairs office is responsible for issues related with women and children. As such, there is no structure concerned with migration. All sectors are working on migration indirectly as with any illegal activity. Migration is not our office's concern but it does not mean we neglect this issue; it is neither our priority nor in our plans. Plans for our office come from regional and zone office and we do not have the authorisation to change it. (Eth-NMKI-08)

Even among those tasked with responding to migration, there were important gaps in coordination. For example, there was no effective system in place to recognise victims of trafficking and provide the necessary support. This was creating confusion:

When immigration sends migrants to IOM, sometimes they do not accept them. I believe they have a quota and their own system of working with migrants. I am not sure but I do not think they accept Ethiopian migrants [and] non-Ethiopian migrants; they only accept one or

the other. I am always confused about which migrants IOM provides service for. For me, be it Oromo, Eritrean or Somali, all are migrants. (Eth-NMKI-08)

The interventions funded by the EUTF have been seeking to address these problems by supporting direct services to migrants (such as the Migration Response Centre or drop-in centres), and working with officials to improve both the judicial process faced by irregular migrants and officials' capacity to prosecute smuggling and trafficking. Respondents saw these delivering some positive results. A government official noted that the establishment of the MRC and IOM's activities have reduced the pressure on government offices to provide support for migrants in the area.

In the past, we were unable to send back migrants because we did not have the budget. It was the community which used to raise money for stranded migrants to return them back to their hometown. If these stranded migrants are not returned back, the men end up being criminals and the women become commercial sex workers. (Eth-MKI-01)

Some suggested there is more understanding and support for stranded migrants or those who are deported back to Ethiopia. In particular, unaccompanied minors are being looked after and helped to return to their families.

There is now increased information about migration and its dangers and it is becoming a routine part of the school curriculum, but one primary school principal argued that these messages are reaching people too late to be of use. They need to talk to students at younger ages:

Different government sectors come to us to teach students about their different programmes in our classes. Students learn about health issues in science class. The same goes for migration; it needs to be included in this programme. We had a meeting with Mahibere Hiwot last Saturday. They were interested to work with students in higher elementary (from 5th to 8th grade). I told them they were mistaken to ignore younger students. Those in higher grades have all the information and some of them already decided to migrate. They can cross the border if they want to. Thus, we need to work on the younger ones who are yet undecided. They are the ones who can take over the country. If we can teach them to love their country and work hard to develop it, we do not need to worry about migration. We are laying the foundation when we work with younger students. (Eth-NMKI-05)

Sharing this information with migrants passing through Metema is of little value, according to one local official. Instead the information needs to reach them in their area of origin before they start off on their journey:

Migrants who came all the way from Shashemene [Oromia] will not back down even if they are told the risks involved in crossing the border. Once they are in Metema, they do not want to go back. They already spent their money and so they do not want to waste it. Detaining illegal migrants or trying to return them is no use once they come to Metema.

They have travelled a long way to reach Metema. They do not listen to anyone who tells them to go back to their hometown. At this point, they are eager to leave the country and reach their destination. (Eth-NMKI-08)

Alongside these reported problems with the design and implementation of projects, our research highlights two other critical factors that play a major role in shaping the outcome of these initiatives. First, as shown in sections 3 and 4, there is a wide array of interests and actors who have a stake in the continued flow of people back and forth between Ethiopia and Sudan. While some are clearly criminal – such as the traffickers capturing migrants and selling them on to others – in many cases the boundaries are more blurred. For example, the agricultural sector and many businesses in Metema depend on both regular and irregular migration. Many of those on the move – such as the *saluge* crossing with or without papers into Sudan – depend on their migration for their livelihood. Hence, at the local level, reducing the level of all irregular migration in the absence of much more open and well functioning legal channels for people to move would be quite damaging for the area. This is made very clear in the recent BMM study on seasonal agricultural labour migration between Ethiopia and Sudan (Eldin and Ferede 2018). It is also recognised on the ground, with a staff member from BMM explaining that she did not expect their programme to have any impact on employment or the labour market.

The main reason for this limited impact on the labour market may be that the initiative does not focus on controlling or reducing migration, which would have some impacts on the economic activities and related sectors. BMM recognises the critical role of mobility in the functioning of the local economy and employment market and is concerned to avoid any negative impact on it. It focuses on making migration safer and providing appropriate supports to vulnerable migrants. It therefore advocates for safe and legal migration pathways. (Eth-MKI-02)

As a long-term goal this may be desirable; ideally, nobody should have to migrate using irregular routes. However, in the absence of any substantive changes enabling people to move legally – in particular the conclusion of bilateral agreements, sufficient funding to implement them and effective implementation – it seems inevitable that many, if not most, people will continue to move irregularly. This irregular movement will continue to play a critical role in the livelihoods of many people and the wider local economy. This creates an important gap between the aims of programming (to curtail irregular migration) and the interests of many of the key actors involved (to facilitate migration, whether regular or irregular).

Second, there is the question of which actors are involved in migration management initiatives. Some respondents said that they had no direct engagement with migration programming in their work but their organisation should be included much more fully. For example, the head of the local trade bureau noted that migration had a large impact on their work as they provide support to returning migrants to set up businesses and may also help deter emigration.

Our office has not been involved in any migration-related initiatives, though it should have [been]. I believe migration is main concern for this office and hence is among the key stakeholders. I will tell you the reason why. When returnees come back, they come to our office to get services which we provide diligently. We also have activities which concern potential migrants to put off the idea of migration. This involves promoting entrepreneurship and supporting local businesses. However, there is no platform to collaborate and work together with other stakeholders concerning migration. We are not part of the migration taskforce. We have not been given trainings or invited to any migration-related workshops or conferences. (Eth-NMKI-03)

An official at the Amhara National Democratic Movement office, the local ruling political party, also argued strongly that they could play a much greater role in addressing migration issues.

As an ANDM officer, I have never been part of any migration-related initiative though we should have been called for such programs ... There is no office that can better raise awareness among the public. If the office is given training on migration and is well informed, we can then in turn raise awareness among the community. Illegal migration is an issue which concerns administration and security office. We are the head of that office. We are their boss and yet we have no formal training on migration. If we are well informed, we can support that office properly rather than work on common sense. I always call MSE [Micro and Small Enterprise] officials for meetings to hear their report and progress on job creation. But I have never done such thing with stakeholders who are concerned with migration. (Eth-NMKI-11)

Another point of concern was the nature of the involvement for different actors. An official at the MSE office described going to one 30-minute training workshop on child trafficking organised by IOM and Mahibere Hiwot. Since that session, he had been called to occasional meetings but he felt that IOM and Mahibere Hiwot only called when they needed something from stakeholders. MSE is called to participate in these workshops as a secondary stakeholder and to provide entrepreneurial training to potential migrants.

However, we should have been seen as key stakeholders. We should not be perceived as secondary stakeholders; rather we are the most important stakeholders in dealing with human trafficking. (Eth-NMKI-01)

While it is not clear how valid are the claims of these different organisations that they should be at the centre of things, they do show that there are a number of stakeholders who feel excluded from the migration initiatives being undertaken in Metema.

Others echoed these complaints that meetings and training events are too short to provide sufficient information. The material is not delivered in an interactive way and the participants easily lose interest, especially when they feel they are being told what they already know rather than anything new. One reported that he forgot what he had heard even as he left the room.

In the eyes of a local official working for the *kebele* administration, this sense of distance between local stakeholders and migration management is magnified by the lack of local understanding. He has been to training courses and workshops on child trafficking and smuggling but did not feel they were effective, because the project leaders and trainers were not local residents and could not understand the realities of life in the town. Like others, he also noted that the discussion seemed to be one-way:

They tell us what is there in Metema and what to do. We are not even given the chance to explain. Though we know better about the reality on the ground, we are told by a stranger from another place what needs to be done. After these trainings, there is no one that follows on the activities of participants. The trainings and meetings are mainly there to just raise awareness. There is nothing else to it. (Eth-NMKI-12)

He drew a comparison with the approach adopted by Mahibere Hiwot in its other projects on child exploitation, where it works with volunteer social workers who are local residents. He felt they had been much more successful in mobilising the community. However, one of the staff of Mahibere Hiwot felt that any impact would be very limited unless projects were adopted by the community:

Any activity that comes to the town needs to be community-centred. The different parts of the community can be mobilised to tackle migration. If the community is involved in projects from designing to implementation, they then can take responsibility. This is what worries me with our project. We [Mahebere Hiwot] have been doing everything, though the community and the government should have taken over the initiative. When the project phases out, I am sure all our activities will cease to exist. (Eth-NMKI-15)

Others who had also been involved as volunteers likewise expressed doubt about the value of the programmes they observed. A local business owner described helping as a volunteer at the MRC with migrants caught at the border, providing both friendship and also advice about the dangers of the road. However, he was doing this with no training and he compared his efforts with those of IOM salaried staff who are well paid. He felt their work of simply providing shelter, food and transportation to get migrants home had little effect as people just came back again (Eth-NMKI-02).

A local farmer was very sceptical about being involved with any of the current initiatives to stop trafficking and smuggling. As he argued, they see the posters and television advertisements advising them to inform on brokers, but since government officials are involved in the criminal networks (as discussed in section 3), this has no effect. Even when faced with coming across the dead bodies of migrants in the fields, people avoid making reports:

As a farmer, we find dead bodies of migrants in the fields. Some are afraid to report because they might be accused of murder. Many bury the body in the fields. If not for humanity, we do it for the saying *“if you bury someone, you will have someone to prepare your burial”*. When we find them alive but weak, we bring them to town, give them food and water and

show them the way. We do not take them to the police because we might get accused of robbing them. (Eth-NMKI-04)

From his perspective, the efforts being made to address the issues of migration are failing to respond to the underlying problems. The farmer had been invited to participate in meetings about migration but refused to go. "Most meetings are at the end for nothing: they are just lies. They report statistics that do not show the reality" (Eth-NMKI-04). Others reported that they were never invited to join any meetings or discussion about migration, even when it had important implications for their work. For example, when asked if he had been involved in any migration initiatives, a hotel owner who relies on migrants as his customers said, somewhat bitterly, "No, who would remember to invite us?" (Eth-NMKI-14).

8. Conclusion and recommendations

It is clear that Metema is a town that, to a large extent, exists because of its strategic position on the border between Ethiopia and Sudan. It is a place of people on the move and cross-border migration in various forms plays a vital role in its growth and development. At the same time, as many reports have shown, migration is associated with many challenges for the local area. Moreover, given that so many local people have some direct or indirect, legal or illegal, interests in migration, the idea of controlling it, even just irregular migration, seems unrealistic in the short term.

The value of migration to the area is widely recognised by many migration players, including the Better Migration Management Programme and IOM. The stated aim of their programmes is on improving the conditions in which migration takes place; improving the quality of migration governance. However, on the ground these programmes are widely seen as attempting to reduce migration because, for many people wanting to move, irregular migration is the only game in town.

This study has focused on the views of actors who do not have a direct stake in migration management programming. As we saw at the start, they tend to discuss migration in rather fragmented terms, with many focusing only on those crossing into irregularly into Sudan in the hope of reaching Europe and not recognising the much larger seasonal movement of agricultural labourers as migration at all. However, as many respondents recognised, and other studies have shown, these movements are deeply interconnected.

The responses to migration are widely perceived to be shaped by a misery narrative that only sees the dark side of migration, focusing on exploitative, irregular migration at the hands of brokers. The discussion on migration is associated with smuggling and trafficking, criminality and abuse, and respondents were only aware of responses that address these concerns. Hence, none of the respondents in Metema seemed to know of the ongoing bilateral discussions to improve the conditions of seasonal labour migrants or any attempts to address problems associated with the *saluge* – such as the growth in commercial sex work and drunken violence.

Most respondents appeared to be very sceptical about the effectiveness of migration responses in Metema. They referred to the lack of co-ordination, limited resources, inefficiency and other such issues. Since this study has not examined the operation of migration management programmes nor did it set out to evaluate them, it cannot comment on the validity of many of these complaints.

However, it is possible to identify three broad grounds for concern that underpin their scepticism. First, they saw that some of the key migration actors involved, in particular government and security officials, were working in collusion with those organising irregular migration. Second, 'anti-migration' programmes were often poorly conceived and executed, for example running information campaigns to deter irregular migration aimed at people who were already fully committed to their path, and increasing border controls, thereby pushing irregular migrants further off the main roads and into greater danger. Third, such programmes did not involve some of the key local stakeholders who are affected by migration. Moreover, even when respondents observed changes in migration patterns, they tended to attribute them to wider changes in the economic, political and security conditions.

This disconnect between the perspectives of many local actors and those immersed in migration management has important implications. There is a problem with the migration management rhetoric, which suggests the only safe migration is regular migration. Around Metema, there are many people and organisations who are involved in irregular, illegal migration and benefit from it. In particular, there are many thousands of *saluge* crossing the border on a regular (in the sense of repeatedly and in a well organised way) basis. For their employers the legality of the workers' movement may be largely irrelevant; their principal concern is securing their labour.¹⁰ Noting these interests in perpetuating irregular migration, many respondents doubted that initiatives to curb irregular migration could be effective. Even efforts to start up new initiatives, such as *Shanta Mahiber*, designed to support legal migration, can be counter-productive, as they simply create another avenue for people to get involved in making profits from irregular migration.

The dominant narrative framing action in relation to migration is that of migration leading to misery. Perhaps this is inevitable in as far as the most visible interventions focus on the sharp end of migration problems – the abuse and exploitation of migrants by criminal actors. However, this research shows that, for a border town such as Metema, there is no easy separation between these wholly negative aspects and the wider role of migration, both as part of people's search for livelihoods and as part of the basic dynamics of the local economy and society. These alternative narratives need to be brought more into the foreground in the discussion of migration in the area, to ensure that both the challenges and opportunities are recognised and incorporated in the design, planning and implementation of interventions.

No doubt a detailed evaluation of migration management programmes in Metema could show there are many ways in which their operation could be improved – particularly in terms of resources and coordination. That has not been the purpose of this study. Instead, this research points to a more basic problem: the lack of clear consensus both on what well-managed migration would look like in Metema, and on the way to reach it. In particular the research has highlighted some of the problems that can arise if one of the principal aims of the project – to reduce irregular migration – clashes with local interests in ensuring migration continues, regardless of whether it is regular or irregular.

¹⁰ Whatever the status of their migration, there is a semi-formal system called *toleb* to legitimise their work, where daily labourers agree, verbally, with the employer who will process all the necessary paperwork on the Sudanese side.

As long as local actors in Metema, who have a very important stake in cross-border migration, feel excluded from the migration management programming and identify it as a package of measures coming from outside (as some respondents suggest), they have little stake in its success. Of course, any local measures have to be undertaken in co-ordination with national programmes and priorities, but if they are not embedded into local institutions and owned by them, they will have little sustainability beyond the end of any programme funding.

8.1 Recommendations

In the light of these findings, this report makes the following broad recommendations to help improve the design and implementation of future migration programming on migration management.

Better design of interventions

1. *Broader evidence base* - In order to reduce the gap between the interests of local stakeholders and the aims of migration management interventions, the design phase for any future programmes should start with a critical analysis of *the relationship between all forms of migration and the local community and political economy*. This may be initiated by external actors (such as central government, EUTF or other donors) but it must include a broad range of stakeholders, such as the local administration, schools, business groups, civil society and migrant associations, in particular drawing in those who may not appear to be directly concerned with migration matters. For example, in Metema, these stakeholders may include the Bureau of Trade, the office of the Amhara National Democratic Movement, hotel owners, school staff, and local organisation representatives, as well as migrants themselves.
2. *Ongoing dialogue* – The programme design phase should establish a mechanism for ongoing dialogue and consultation on migration issues with this wider group of stakeholders. It is important that this dialogue is started before the agenda for programming is set. This will help build up trust and ownership of any emerging initiatives.
3. *Flexibility in response to stakeholder interests* – Based on this analysis, there needs to be a commitment to design programmes to address both the needs of migrants and the concerns and needs of local communities. This may entail accepting somewhat different or expanded aims and priorities from those that may be promoted by external actors such as the EU, donors or central government.

Improving implementation

4. *Wider and more substantive participation* – Implementing agencies must open up more opportunities for local stakeholders to participate in ongoing programmes. For example, different branches of government, local businesses, schools and civil society should be involved in the planning and delivery of any seminars and training workshops. Rather than setting up one-off training events, there should be a shift to building up ongoing exchanges

and dialogue. This may have two aims: first, to improve direct effectiveness as these stakeholders may have a valuable role to play in supporting programmes. And second, even if their immediate role is limited, this will help to keep local stakeholders on board and avoid them undermining action.

5. *Build up links between local and national dialogues* – Efforts to develop national agreements on cross-border migration issues need to be accompanied by local level exchanges. For example, in the ongoing efforts to improve working conditions for seasonal migrant labourers working on both sides of the Ethiopia-Sudan border, the bilateral national government discussions should be informed by and inform the exchanges between the Metema and Gallabat administrations, and between local businesses and/or farmers' associations across the border.
6. *Critical real-time evaluation of programmes* – Given the complex array of factors that drive migration and the potential for programme interventions to have unintended and unanticipated consequences, it is very important to establish mechanisms for the ongoing evaluation of impact (not just monitoring of outputs). For example, in Metema, the research picked up the following issues, which should be further explored through evaluation:
 - a. The need to adopt standardised criteria for identifying trafficking and abuse *and communicate them* to the wider group of stakeholders, to allow them to recognise and take action if they should witness such activities taking place. While the current programme may have established such criteria, respondents were not aware of them.
 - b. While there are some mechanisms for coordination and the exchange of experiences and information (such as the Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force), there is little evidence of their functioning on the ground. An evaluation *of the existing structures could help identify obstacles to effective working*. This may involve drawing in participants from the wider community who are not currently consulted much.

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