Human Insecurity and Migration in the Horn of Africa: Causes and Decision Processes

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Abstract : The Horn of Africa is marred by complex and systematic internal and external political, economic and social-cultural causes of conflict that result in internal displacement and migration. This paper engages with them and shows how such a study can help us to understand migration, both in this region and more generally. The conflict has occurred within states, between states, among proxies, between armies. Human insecurities as a result of the state collapse of Somalia, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the whole region, recurrent drought affecting the livelihoods of subsistence farmers as well as nomads, exposure to hunger, environmental degradation, youth unemployment, rapid growth of slums around big cities, and political repression (especially in Eritrea) have been driving various segments of the regional population into regional and international migration. Eritrea has been going through a brutal dictatorship which pushes many Eritreans to flee their country and be exposed to human trafficking, torture, detention, and agony on their way to Europe mainly through Egypt, Libya and Israel. Similarly, Somalia has been devastated since 1991 by unending civil war, state collapse, and radical Islamists. There are some important aspects to highlight in the conflict-migration nexus in the Horn of Africa: first, the main push factor for the Somalis and Eritreans to leave their countries and risk their lives is the physical insecurity they have been facing in their countries. Secondly, as a result of the conflict the economic infrastructure is massively destroyed. Investment is rare; job opportunities are out of sight. Thirdly, in such a grim situation the politically and economically induced decision to migrate is a household decision, not only an individual decision. Based on this third point this research study took place in the Horn of Africa between 2014 and 2016 during different occasions. The main objective of the research was to understanding how the increasing migration is affecting the socio-economic and socio-political environment, and conversely how the socio-economic and socio-political environments are increasing migration decisions; and whether and how these decisions are individual or family decisions. The main finding is the higher the human insecurity, the higher the family decision; the lower the human insecurity, the higher the individual decision. These findings apply not only to the Eritrean, Somali migrants but also to Ethiopian migrants. But the general impacts of migration on sending countries' human security is quite mixed and complex.
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