



Challenges and Prospects on the lives of Wag Himera Sekota Rural Migrants in Bahir Dar City: The Case of Kotetina Kebele

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Abstract

Migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one geographic area to another and it can be either temporary or permanent. A person or group moving from a highly rural area to a town is known as rural to urban migration. The purpose of this study is to investigate the opportunities and difficulties encountered by Wag Himera Sekota rural migrants who have relocated to Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, with a particular emphasis on the Kotetina Kebele region. The researchers used a qualitative research approach and phenomenological case study design were employed in this study with a variety of data gathering tools, including focus groups, field observations, and key informant interviews. The researchers choose the informants via purposive sampling. The researchers developed themes based on the codes, and the data were analyzed in a thematically organized way by pursuing the original descriptions of the interview and field note and narrate the life story of the participants by using narrative analysis mechanisms. The social difficulties that most migrants face when they publicly solicit charity from the local community include embarrassment, shame, and guilt as well as other significant issues. The study revealed that there were varieties of challenges but the major challenges was getting food. The finding revealed that migrants have their own survival strategies to cope up their challenges. The most frequent survival strategies and coping mechanisms they use are minimizing the frequency of meals per day, eating cheaper foodstuffs, living in a group in Veranda and sharing clothes. The government should have improving the Socio-economic infrastructures of rural people. The government should have also developed new agricultural technologies to improve agricultural products in the rural area.

Keywords: Beggar, Bahir Dar, Rural-Urban Migration

1. Introduction

The movement of individuals from one geographic area to another, whether temporarily or permanently, is referred to as migration. Depending on the circumstances that led to the decision, people migrate for a variety of reasons, and their motivations differ from one another. The term "migration" refers to a broad range of situations and movements involving individuals from many origins and occupations. The selected process of migration affects individuals or families with particular economic, social, educational, and demographic traits (Adewale, 2005).

Globally, a person or group moving from a very rural area to a town is known as rural to urban migration. In addition to this, the two geographical locations are significant because, in

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contrast to rural areas, urban areas are crowded with people and have comparatively better infrastructure, which allows them to enjoy improvements in social service delivery, governance, and better institutions that protect citizens' rights. Rural areas are isolated farming areas with very limited access to infrastructure (Von Braun & Keynote, 2007).

Furthermore, for many impoverished communities throughout the developing world, especially in Africa, moving from rural to urban areas has been a crucial means of subsistence and survival. Migration has been viewed as a way of life in Africa, as people move from one location to another for demographic, socioeconomic, and political reasons. Half of Africa's urban population increase in the 1960s and 1970s and roughly, 25% of urban growth in the 1980s and 1990s were caused by rural-urban migration (Waddington & Sabates Wheeler, 2003; Adepaju, 1977; Lall et al., 2006).

Regional disparities and disparities in economic prospects have been caused by the concentration of investment in towns' industries, commerce, and social services. Furthermore, rural out-migration to urban and industrial sectors is a result of the lower productivity of the agricultural and rural sectors (Adepaju, 1977).

Currently, emerging nations are experiencing significant rates of migration, with a particular emphasis on rural-urban movement. This phenomenon has notably impacted Ethiopia, a developing country. The mobility of populations can be attributed to a range of socioeconomic factors. Key drivers of rural-urban migration include the pursuit of improved employment opportunities, access to education, the quest for political and social stability, advancements in technology, and enhanced economic prospects (Solomon, 2018).

Historically, Ethiopia has exhibited a low rate of rural-urban mobility; however, recent years have witnessed an increase in migration across all regions of the country. Despite the constitutional right of Ethiopian villagers to access farmland, the escalating scarcity of land has hindered the younger generation's ability to exercise this right, particularly in the highland regions where population densities have reached critically high levels (Bezu & Holden, 2014). Furthermore, Ethiopia is grappling with issues such as land scarcity, poverty, hunger, overpopulation, and a deficiency in agricultural resources. In addition to these pressing challenges, the transformation of Ethiopian cities into more significant business hubs is attracting a substantial influx of rural residents to urban areas (Birhanu, 2011).

People naturally prefer to remain in the locality where they were raised, surrounded by an ethnic community with whom they share language and culture, rather than find themselves among strangers. One of the reason men and women move from one area to another is in face of unfavorable circumstances at their own end and desirable outcome at the proposed destination (Jansen, 1970).

The problem of poverty and lack of opportunities in rural areas are also presented and identified as push factors, while urban job opportunities is the pull factor. It is a common phenomenon that rural urban migrant workers moved in large scale to urban areas in the processes of industrialization and urbanization, and it could be proved by the previous experience of developed countries. There are different reasons as to why people migrate into urban area. Since urban areas are known to be places where money, services, wealth and opportunities are centralized, many migrants move from rural to urban for reason of seeking fortunes and social mobility (Jansen, 1970).

Another cause of rural-urban migration is urban bias. Government policies supporting disproportionate increases in wage rates and employment opportunities in the urban areas contribute to imbalances in the rural urban landscape. Migration should be seen as an equilibrating response to disequilibrium existing in the economy. As long as there are gaps in rural-urban employment opportunities caused by urban bias, there will be migration (McCatty, 2004).

Migration put great strain on the city life to cope with rapid growing numbers, in broad perspectives, the shift of people from rural-urban area mainly reflects the process of industrialization and changes in the demand for labor in some condition, landlessness ,agricultural mechanization, natural climate in the forced labor migration have strongly influenced population movement in many countries, poor employment , natural disaster, housing shortage, low wage, harsh climate people migrate from rural – urban because of lack of farmland, better school, medical care, lack of basic facility in rural areas. Seek better living standard, better environment to live in, better opportunities (Barrett, 2007).

Migration affects both the young migrants themselves and those young and old persons left behind. It has a direct and often profound impact on migrants and their immediate families, but the wider community can be directly or indirectly affected as well. The consequences are complex, context,

specific and subject to change over time. They may be influenced by factors such as the type of migration, migrant category, national migration policies, and programmatic interventions that are in place in origin, transit and destination societies or countries (UN, 2013).

Migration also entails the absence of an economically active family member and the loss of that member's time inputs to both market and household production. In particular, this absence may translate into disrupted personal care for dependent family members, including children and the elderly, and a greater burden of responsibility for work and household chores among family members (Antman, 2015).

At its best, migration can be a rewarding experience that is made in the interest of the household welfare, but in most cases moving to another country and being conflate separated from one's immediate family takes place at considerable emotional cost. Especially temporary circular migration increases the risk for family breakdown, fragmentation of social networks and psychosocial stress. The emotional impact is not just limited to the migrants themselves, but also to the family left behind. Especially in poorer households where the whole family cannot afford to emigrate together, they emigrate one member at a time resulting in eroded family structures and relationships (D'Emilio *et al*, 2007).

New economics of labor migration theory criticizes the Neo-classical model, which deals with the migration trend of the industrial period. According to this model, economic disparities appear to be obligatory but not sufficient conditions for today's migration. Therefore, the decision to migrate is not made by isolated individuals rather than collectively by larger family units and communities. This is because migration not only increases expected income but also a risk-minimizing strategy not for the individual but for the household as a whole (Castles and Miller, 2003).

The essential premise of the aforementioned theory is that individuals do not make the decision to migrate to the urban region, but rather that a group (household level) makes the decision and then migrates to the urban area in order to minimize their own risk. Similarly, no individuals in Wag Himera Sekota rural migrants make decisions at the home level to reduce their own risk. As a result, the new economics of labor migration theory is appropriate for this study to better understand on the lives of migrants in the study area.

In Ethiopia, there are a number of researchers conducting studies on different aspects of migration. A study Undertaken by Abebe (2014) has studied rural to urban migration, causes, a

migrants town livelihood activities and social capital in Berehet district, Ethiopia. The study also further focused on migrant's social capital after migration in the town Metehbila. A study Undertaken by Birhan (2011) conducted on causes and consequences of rural urban migration: the case of Woldiya town, northern Ethiopia. The aim of his study establishing the major causes and consequences of the movement of people from rural to urban areas. Teferi (2013) also studied patterns, causes, and consequences of rural to migration in Amhara regional state of Ethiopia: The case of Debre Markos Town. In addition to this, Solomon (2018) studied the socio- economic challenge of migrants from rural areas of Western Shewa rural urban migrants in Burayu town. His study mainly focused on the socio-economic challenges that migrants have faced at the place of destination.

However, practically all of the above research investigations have placed a greater emphasis on quantitative approaches, resulting in surveys. Furthermore, all of the previous researchers concentrated on individual labor rural-urban migration; however, this study focused on family (household level) rural-urban migration. Furthermore, study outcomes may differ depending on the situation. Migration is a significant sociocultural and economic issue for the country. Due to a variety of challenges, several social groups from the Amhara region, ranging in age and gender, have been displaced to Bahir Dar city. Due to different concerns, a huge number of people from Wag Himera Sekota have relocated to Bahir Dar. Many Wag Himera Sekota rural migrants can be spotted in a study area begging for money from people at bus stops, hotels, churches, and wedding events. Thus, the primary goal of this research is to identify the possibilities and challenges experienced by Wag Himera Sekota rural migrants in Bahir Dar city, notably in Kotetina Kebele.

2. Method and Materials

2.1. Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted in Bahir Dar town, which is located around 563 km from Addis Ababa, the capital city of the country; and some 180 km away from Gondar town. Being the center for the second biggest and most populous regional states of the country, Amhara National Regional State, Bahir Dar was given a metropolitan city administration status in 1997 E.C. Located within $11^{\circ}28'49''$ north and $11^{\circ}38'29''$ north latitudes and $37^{\circ}23'28''$ east to $37^{\circ}36'34''$ east longitudes, the altitude of the town is about 1801 m above sea level. The total area of the town also covers 16,000 hectares. Bounded by two large water bodies, Lake Tana and Abay River, Bahir Dar town is adjoined on the south by Yilmana Densa, on the southwest by Mecha, on the northwest by the

Gilgel Abay River which separates it from Semien Achefer, on the north by Lake Tana, and finally on the east by the Abay River which separates it from South Gondar Zone (Amhara Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2013).

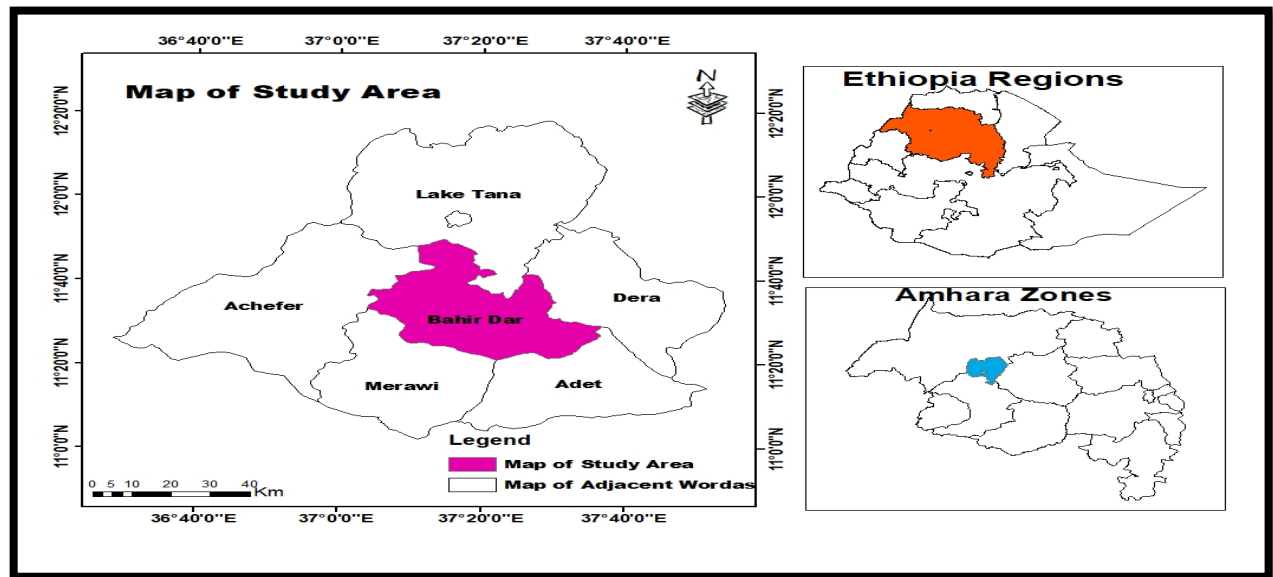


Figure 1 Map of the study area (designed by using ARCGIS software 10.8)

Bahir Dar is the capital city of Amhara region that is situated in the southern shore of Lake Tana. Bahir Dar is one of the leading tourist destinations in Ethiopia, with a variety of attractions in nearby Lake Tana and Blue Nile River. The city is known for its wide avenues lined with palm trees and a variety of colorful flowers. Bahir Dar is one the largest and fast-growing City's in Ethiopia, which consists of 17 kebeles (CSA, 2007).

Central Statistical Authority of Ethiopia (CSA, 2007) indicates that, total population of this City is about 221,991, out of the total population, 108,456 are men and 113,533 of them are women. The inhabitants are predominantly Amhara ethnic group (96.23%), including minority groups such as Tigray (1.11), Oromo (1.1), and others (1.56). In Bahir Dar City Amharic language is used as a first/common language almost by 96.78 percent, and 1.01% percent speak Oromiffa, the remaining 2.21% use other minority group languages. Majority of the inhabitants or 89.72 % are followers of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, 8.47 are Muslim, and and 1.62% are Protestant followers. The people of Bahir Dar City engage in different activities like Governmental and nongovernmental occupations, small-scale enterprise, trading, brokers, and other activities.

Bahir Dar city temperature fluctuates from January to December. The monthly mean maximum and minimum temperature record in the years between 1961 and 2000 (in the bare blew) indicates that the highest mean monthly maximum temperature occurs in the month of April which is about 29.7°C and the lowest is in the months of July and August which is about 23.3°C . While the mean monthly minimum temperature ranges for the lowest from 7.1°C in January to the highest 14.2°C in the month of May (Seltene, 1988).

The mean annual precipitation depth recorded at Bahir Dar Station in the 37 years period from 1962 to 1999 is about 1437 mm. There is a significant seasonal variation for rainfall. Almost 60.3 % percent of the mean annual rainfall occurs in two raining months of July and August with maximum mean value of more than 432 mm (Seltene, 1988).

Lake Tana is the primary reason that Bahir Dar exists. It is a huge lake - one of the largest in Africa and it feeds the Blue Nile River. There are several small islands on the lake. Lake Tana that is the largest lake in Ethiopia situated in the study Area. It covers 3,050 km². Lake Tana has a shallow depth with a maximum of 14 m deep and an average of about 9m. Lake Tana is among 250 important lake regions of the world. In the lake there are greater than 60 islands covering 4304.43ha of terrestrial land in side Tana Lake of which 45 have an area greater 1000m² including the biggest Deke and Dagastifanos. Among 45 islands 19 have churches and/or monasteries that are home for monks and other service providers to the churches and monasteries (ibid, 1988).

2.2. Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, a qualitative research approach was employed. This approach was chosen to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of rural migrants. It enables the researcher to explore the subject matter in depth, capturing detailed, context-rich information from participants through direct engagement in their natural settings. As Creswell (2007) notes, qualitative research facilitates the creation of a complex, holistic picture by analyzing words, behaviors, and narratives in a manner that reflects the lived realities of the participants. It emphasizes subjectivity, human expression, and the interpretation of meaning rather than numerical data.

Aligned with this approach, the study adopted a phenomenological case study design. This design was appropriate as it focuses on exploring the lived experiences of individuals within their specific contexts. It allowed for in-depth engagement with a small number of participants over a prolonged period, offering insight into their real-life environments and interactions.

Kotetina Kebele was purposively selected as the study site because it hosts more than three hundred rural migrants from Wag Himra Sekota. Using purposive sampling, seventeen participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. These included twelve migrants and five local community members. Participant selection was guided by criteria such as age, education, occupation, marital status, and religious background. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached, ensuring that the findings reflected a comprehensive range of perspectives.

Data for the study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and focus group discussions. Secondary data were obtained from government reports, legal and policy documents, media articles, and both published and unpublished academic works related to rural-urban migration. These diverse sources enriched the research by providing both firsthand insights and contextual background.

To collect the primary data, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted in Amharic and later translated into English. These interviews provided detailed narratives about the migrants' socioeconomic challenges and integration into the host community. A total of nine interviews were conducted: four with migrants and five with members of the host community. The researchers used audio and video recording devices to ensure accuracy and to facilitate transcription.

In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was used to document the migrants' daily activities, their interactions with the host community, and their living conditions. This method enabled the researchers to capture behaviors and environmental factors that might not be easily expressed in interviews. Observations were systematically recorded using checklists, field notes, and photographs, enhancing the reliability and depth of the findings.

Furthermore, a focus group discussion was conducted with six migrants who were selected based on their age, gender, religion, cultural background, and social status. The discussion aimed to explore collective experiences and generate additional insights that complemented the interview and observation data. The session was audio-recorded, and key points were noted during the discussion. These recordings were later transcribed and included in the data analysis process.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involves organizing the data, coding, categorizing themes, and synthesizing insights. According to Ritchie et al. (2003), this method is

effective in uncovering patterns, concepts, and meanings within qualitative data. The collected data were analyzed in relation to the existing literature to identify recurring themes and emerging issues. Through this process, the researchers were able to develop a credible and nuanced interpretation of the experiences and challenges faced by Wag-Himra Sekota rural migrants living in Kotetina Kebele.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study in line with the research questions. The results were obtained through qualitative methods, including key informant interviews, direct observation, and focus group discussions. The chapter outlines the primary challenges faced by rural migrants from Wag Himera Sekota in Bahir Dar, particularly in securing food, maintaining health and nutrition, and achieving socioeconomic integration. It also highlights the coping strategies adopted by the migrants in response to these challenges.

3.1. Socio-Cultural Challenges of Migrants

Upon migrating to the city, many individuals encounter difficulties adapting to unfamiliar environments. These challenges include navigating new social norms and cultural practices, which often conflict with those of their places of origin. As Solomon (2018) notes, migration leads to the development of new behaviors and norms that may adversely affect both the migrant and the community they left behind.

Participants in the focus group discussions reported significant difficulties adjusting to the urban cultural environment. These included emotional issues such as stress, sadness, and culture shock. Many migrants also abandoned or altered their traditional customs in order to fit in, leading to a loss of cultural identity. Social exclusion was another common experience, with migrants being labeled as dirty, disgraceful, and deviant by members of the host community. They were often denied the opportunity to engage in socio-cultural discussions and activities.

One 32-year-old migrant reflected on the stigma associated with begging:

"Even though I am doing this, the life of begging is boring, but I do not have another option. Asking alms from people is very shocking. The outlook of the people was negative on my begging activity. Conversely, to challenge my financial problems, I have convinced myself to tolerate and resist all forms of social consequences resulting from begging." (December 12, 2019).

The emotional toll of such exclusion is severe. Migrants frequently experience shame, guilt, and humiliation when soliciting support from the local community. One 51-year-old woman shared her experience:

“Treating life through begging is not considered as life at all. Actually, I am doing what I hate because of poverty. In addition, few local people insult me while I am asking them for money. Consequently, I developed confusion, shame, guilt and frustration. I found soliciting the people to give anything that you have is the most mortifying and humiliating phenomenon.”

3.2. Challenges in Accessing Food and Clothing

Food insecurity was among the most pressing challenges identified by participants. Migrants reported persistent hunger and a dependence on leftover or donated food, often going to bed without dinner. One 52-year-old migrant described the situation:

“I came from Wag Himera. I am 52 years old. My major problem is lack of adequate food; therefore, I always have problems getting food. There is no sufficient food, I am often hungry and consume mostly leftover foods. Most of the time, I sleep without having dinner.” (January 7, 2020)

Clothing was another serious concern. Many migrants lacked blankets, additional garments, or clean clothing. They wore the same outfits day and night, often in poor condition. A 49-year-old female migrant explained:

“My major problem is lack of adequate clothes; I have no blanket, sheet, or spare dress. I always wear a mended dress day and night. I feel ashamed to act together with people because of my dirty and torn clothes. I feel cold at night, and half of my body becomes numb.” (January 19, 2020)

Field observations supported these accounts, noting that most migrants wore unclean or insufficient clothing that failed to protect them from the environment. One key informant explained:

“Food is the major challenge for me. I cannot always get food easily. I spend time searching for food. Usually, I can get food on holidays, Teskar, Christmas, and wedding ceremonies of the community. However, sometimes, I cannot get food quickly from the host community.” (February 12, 2020)

3.3. Health and Nutrition

Health and nutrition emerged as major challenges among the migrants. Many reported not receiving a balanced diet and surviving on minimal meals, such as a small piece of bread and tea in

the morning and injera with shiro for dinner. Some mentioned they were lucky to have even one meal per day. Their diets, combined with poor sanitation and hygiene, exposed them to various health risks.

During interviews and observations, it became clear that most migrants ate without washing their hands due to lack of access to clean water. The food they consumed was often sourced from informal vendors operating in unsanitary conditions. This environment increased their vulnerability to infections such as diarrhea, typhoid, pneumonia, and other illnesses. Despite recurring health problems, few could afford medical care. Most had never undergone any form of medical check-up or follow-up, further exacerbating their health issues.

Field observations revealed widespread lack of hygiene, including shared clothing, absence of toilets, and limited access to clean water. One informant noted:

*"The sun heat burns the whole day as it comes directly from the sky since I have nothing to protect myself with. Because of this, I suffer from a serious headache during the nighttime due to repeated exposure to sun and wind for a long time."
(December 19, 2019)*

Another migrant added:

"Both the cold and hot weather conditions are not favorable. The hot weather condition of the study area was very difficult to live outside home."

3.4. Integration with Co-workers in the Workplace

Upon arrival in Bahir Dar, many migrants—especially women—entered labor-intensive and low-paying jobs. Female migrants were more likely to accept these roles due to economic necessity. However, integration into the urban labor market posed additional challenges, including language barriers, job discrimination, and lack of support networks.

Language, particularly limited proficiency in Amharic, hindered migrants' ability to access services and communicate with employers and co-workers. Many received lower wages compared to local workers and were often excluded from stable employment opportunities. One informant described his experience:

"For several days after my arrival, I was unable to begin work. During this period, a friend introduced me to several construction employers and guided me in adapting to city life. A week later, I started working as a construction laborer, earning 70–100 ETB daily. One of my initial challenges was finding accommodation. The labor

was strenuous, and I faced difficulties from employers and co-workers. I even considered returning home, but circumstances prevented me. Migration has not fulfilled my expectations; instead, it introduced new challenges that I must endure." (December 29, 2019)

3.5. Survival Strategies and Coping Mechanisms

Migrants have developed adaptive strategies to survive the harsh urban conditions. These include reducing meal frequency, consuming low-cost food, sharing clothing, and sleeping on verandas. Food is typically sourced from street vendors, cafés, or collected as leftovers during social events such as weddings and holidays. Despite these efforts, many remain food insecure and malnourished, especially children, whose physical and cognitive development may be compromised.

"Food is our primary concern. We have adapted to eating only once a day. Our breakfast is typically around 5:30–8:00 AM, which combines our breakfast and lunch into one meal." (February 2020, 24-year-old male migrant)

In addition to food shortages, migrants also struggle with inadequate clothing. Field observations confirmed that many wore the same clothing day and night, often in poor condition. Some migrants shared clothing among themselves as a means of coping.

3.6. The Fates of Migrants

The study also examined the socio-economic status of migrants before and after migration. While a few experienced improvements, many reported a decline in living standards and expressed a desire to return to their hometowns. Key concerns included high living costs, limited services, and inadequate job opportunities. Focus group discussions revealed that, despite their rural origins, many migrants preferred urban life due to access to essential services, including clean water, electricity, education, and health care.

"I currently live with my family in Bahir Dar and work as a day laborer. I have saved some money and plan to move back to Wag Himera. I want to start my own business and continue my education. Therefore, I plan to return and live with my family." (February 2020)

However, not all shared this optimism. Others described urban migration as a survival strategy, rather than a path to improved living conditions:

"Working in the city of Bahir Dar has not brought any meaningful change in my life. The income I earn as a construction worker is just enough to survive. Therefore, I

plan to return to Wag Himera, as rural-urban migration is primarily a means of livelihood for the impoverished."

4. Conclusion and recommendation

In conclusion, this study provides critical insights into the lived experiences of rural migrants from Wag Himera Sekota residing in Bahir Dar. It demonstrates that migration, while often seen as a solution to rural hardship, brings with it profound social, cultural, and economic challenges. The findings highlight not only the resilience of migrants in confronting these difficulties but also the structural barriers that perpetuate their marginalization. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment from policymakers and stakeholders to implement targeted, sustainable, and community-centered solutions that reduce the necessity of rural-urban migration and enhance the dignity and well-being of those who migrate.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Improve rural socio-economic infrastructure:** The government should prioritize the development of essential infrastructure in rural areas—such as electricity, clean water supply, road networks, and healthcare services. Enhancing these services will improve the quality of rural life and make rural communities more livable and attractive, particularly for the youth.
- **Promote agricultural modernization:** New agricultural technologies should be introduced to increase productivity in the rural sector. Improving access to agricultural inputs, tools, and techniques will make farming more efficient and appealing, reducing the push factors of migration.
- **Create employment opportunities for rural youth:** The government should expand non-farm economic activities and promote rural entrepreneurship and agribusiness development. Providing vocational training, credit access, and market linkages will help generate meaningful employment for rural youth within their communities.
- **Strengthen public awareness about the impacts of migration:** Government and private mass media outlets should disseminate findings from studies like this one to educate the public about the realities and consequences of rural-urban migration. This will foster informed decision-making and encourage behavioral change among potential migrants.

- **Enhance youth-focused development strategies:** Policymakers must pay particular attention to rural youth, ensuring that they have access to economic opportunities, land, education, and support services. By doing so, the pressure to migrate can be significantly reduced, and rural households can be safeguarded from the socio-economic strains of migration.

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