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Les migrations de retour en Afrique

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Nassim Majidi

Introduction

- 1 In the Horn of Africa, returns to Somalia are once again at the forefront of the news, in the wake of the Kenyan government's call, in May 2016, to close the Dadaab refugee camp complex that hosts today about 250,000 Somali refugees [UNHCR, 2016a]. The population in Dadaab has decreased by more than 100,000 mainly through spontaneous returns and assisted returns, since 2014, according to UNHCR's narrative of the flow. Human Rights Watch [HRW, 2016] and Amnesty International [Amnesty International, 2016], followed by Médecins Sans Frontières and the Norwegian Refugee Council [NRC, 2016], have spoken of an involuntary – and forced – return process that could jeopardise the rights of returnees.
- 2 Returns to Somalia are part of a new political reality: from the returns of Somali refugees from Kenya, to the on-going 'voluntary' returns of failed Somali asylum seekers from Europe, the years 2014-2015 have seen a formal shift to assisting returns with a close pairing of two concepts into one: return and reintegration, pointing in policy terms to a process linking return with political, social and economic inclusion. This process is not as natural as policies portray it to be. In reality, programmes tend to prioritise return over reintegration [PRIO, 2015], rendering the reintegration components opaque. What happens after return is often not known.
- 3 Research presented in this article and conducted in 2014-2015 shows the lack of preparedness and resource mobilization that hamper return and reintegration goals for

Somali refugees. A sustainable return is not only dependent on the individual, but on the family, community and immediate surroundings, in other words, on the ability to rely on information and effective networks. This article poses a central question: were refugees' access to information and networks in 2014 sufficient to allow for a sustainable return to Somalia?

Conceptual framework

- 4 In *Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migrants revisited*, Cassarino [2004] reviews why some returnees may appear as actors of changes, while others do not. This is linked to the contextual specificities of time and space to which they are returned. In the case of Somalia, when return happens after years or decades of protracted exile, in a context of conflict, two criteria will impact their ability to reintegrate: their level of information and their ability to rely on networks upon return.
- 5 The conceptual framework used in this article is based on Cassarino's dual focus on preparedness and resource mobilisation [Cassarino 2004] seen here through the prism of information as the founding element of preparedness, and networks as the founding element of resource mobilization. In this article, preparedness is analysed through refugees' access to information about return. Reviewing information sources available, and the quality of these sources, the data reveals that preparedness is hampered due the disconnect between expectations and reality, and the fact that perceptions – rather than “objective, accurate and neutral” information – lead to the decision to return. The paper distinguishes between perception and information. While the former can lead to a specific action [here, the act of return], the latter is required to reinforce the cause and effect within the return process, to reduce uncertainty and enhance rational decision making – all of which are requirements to a safe and dignified return. J. J. Gibson's work on “perception-in-action” [2002] shows that perception can be enough to generate an action without being informed or adjusted to external input. As such, not only does it not reduce uncertainty; it can create uncertainty if misinformed.
- 6 In a second section, resource mobilisation is discussed with a focus on the role (or lack thereof) of networks, and the economic capacity to rebuild lives, often hampered by the situation in exile.

Context

- 7 It seems counter-intuitive to speak of returns to Somalia when the country is marked by indicators of displacement, resource gaps, famine and conflict. Over 1 million Somalis are internally displaced and a ‘youth exodus’ from the Somali regions of Somaliland and Puntland is shaping migration outwards. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) states that 70 per cent of Somalis are under the age of 30, with a 67 per cent unemployment rate for youth, and a sizeable 40 per cent searching for jobs. This economic reality, paired with conflict, insecurity and famine, are driving forward displacement and migration. Who in this context is speaking of sustainable returns?
- 8 While repatriation of Somali refugees may not be the optimal solution for many Somali refugees on Kenyan territory, the limited possibility of integration across the border in Kenya coupled with the 2012 Directive on Urban Refugees calling for refugees residing in

urban areas to relocate to Kakuma and Dadaab refugee camps, have been among the factors leading refugees to return to Somalia.

- 9 Somalis in Kenya have since 2012 faced restrictions including arrest and harassment under operation 'Usalama Watch' led by the Government of Kenya and resulting in the detention of Somali refugees considered to pose a threat to national security. During the period of November 2012 to January 2013, the numbers of Somali refugees asking for permits to return to Somalia had increased to 3,200 – compared to previous monthly averages of 150. The main reason cited for return was the fear of arrest by the police and police harassment. This environment was specifically present in urban centres, and within the span of three years, extended to those living in Dadaab refugee camp complex, in northeastern Kenya, bordering Somalia.
- 10 Since 2013, security and political changes in Kenya and Somalia have led to spontaneous returns of Somali refugees. Between January and November 2013, UNHCR recorded 33,000 such returns to Somalia owing to a number of push and pull factors: shrinking of asylum space in Kenya, increase in arbitrary arrest and harassment by the police in Kenya, food aid cuts and perceived stability, greater livelihood opportunities, and prospects for family reunification and access to land in Somalia.
- 11 UNHCR signed a Tri-Partite Agreement on November 10th 2013, with the governments of Kenya and Somalia to allow for the voluntary repatriation of Somali Refugees living in Kenya over the next three years. This agreement put an emphasis on returns as a durable solution for Somali refugees in protracted refugee situations in Kenya, while underscoring the operation of the government of Somalia to protect its citizens and create conditions for a safe and organised return.
- 12 Yet, the vast majority of Somali refugees to date do not want to return – 97.4% of refugees interviewed in Dadaab [IOM-UNHCR, 2014]. This research focuses on the minority who have decided to return, spontaneously, before the launch of a pilot returns programme orchestrated by UNHCR, and later turned into a full-fledged repatriation programme.
- 13 A pilot returns programme started on December 8, 2014, for six months, to implement the Tri-Partite Agreement. UNHCR launched the pilot to support the voluntary return of an estimated 10,000 refugees. Two years later, evidence collected by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty international, Médecins Sans Frontières and the Norwegian Refugee Council, all point to the lack of voluntariness of returns and call for the end of involuntary and unsustainable returns to Somalia.
- 14 This paper contributes to the existing debate on the viability of returns of refugees to Somalia by analysing the requirements for a safe, dignified and voluntary return: the level of access to information and networks that compose returnee's prepared and resource mobilization levels.

Methodology

Figure : Multi-sited research: Kenya (Dadaab / Nairobi), Somalia (Mogadishu / Kismayo)



- 15 A cross-border research was conducted with two groups: first, refugees who returned from Kenya to Somalia; second, potential returnees interviewed in Kenya prior to their return to Somalia, and refugees in Kenya unwilling to return to Somalia. The locations for this research were:
- Kenya: Dadaab refugee camp complex (northeast) and Nairobi (capital city)
 - Somalia: Mogadishu (capital city) and Kismayo in Lower Juba.
- 16 The research team was composed in total of seven researchers: two international researchers, one Kenyan/Somali team leader and qualitative researcher who travelled to all locations, and five interviewers in Mogadishu and Kismayo. Interviews were conducted in refugee and returnees' native language, with the support of a translator [in the camps, refugees who work as incentive workers were recruited as translators]. Conversations were not recorded due to sensitivities and respondent preferences but notes were taken in a transcript format. Each case study lasted on average 1.5 hours while focus group discussions lasted 2/5 hours.
- 17 A qualitative approach was privileged with a total of 160 refugees and returnees to allow for an in-depth discussion of their experiences, before, during and after return. Conducting interviews on both sides of the border allowed for in-depth discussions and a multi-location view of preparedness and resource mobilisation. By comparing responses given by refugees pre-return to those given by returnees post-return, the research methodology allows for a discussion of refugees' expectations of return in Kenya, against the reality of return in Somalia.

Table 1. Respondents by location and method of interview

	Location	Case studies	Focus Discussions	Group	Key Interviews	Informant

KENYA	Nairobi	10	3	7
	Dadaab	26	3	7
SOMALIA	Mogadishu	14	3	8
	Kismayo	10	3	4
TOTAL per category		60	12	27
TOTAL No. of respondents		160		

- 18 Each interview was framed using an open-ended guideline to understand if return was a well-informed process, looking in-depth at questions of source, quality of and access to information before and after return. Is return a well-informed process? Beyond information then the tools were designed to assess the protection needs, risks, challenges faced upon return to allow us to go beyond a static view of return and reintegration.
- 19 Respondents were selected based on a snowball sampling using several mechanisms: 1] refugees present at UNHCR field offices in Dadaab were interviewed with the support of incentive workers [refugees themselves living in Dadaab], 2] returnees introduced by the research team members in Nairobi, Mogadishu and Kismayo, and 3] returnees introduced by aid organisations and civil society organisations in Somalia, and 4] returnees referred by other refugees and returnees. The profile of returnees included representation of all demographic and age groups:
- Family units in Dadaab refugee camp represented by heads of households
 - Women who were either female heads of households, elderly, spouses of returnees left behind to join them later
 - Youth in urban and camp settings
 - And children, interviewed in the presence of at least one relative present.

1. Information gaps on returns

- 20 For most Somali refugees, return is conditional not merely upon finding political stability and security but on access to education, jobs and health care. Access to information plays a central role in determination the strength of decision making processes on returns. UNHCR's Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation [UNHCR, 1996] stipulates that an informed and voluntary decision to return must be based on the availability of an "objective, accurate and neutral" information. The findings of this research show that perceptions surpass credible information on returns. The lack of information, and at times even misinformation about returns to Somalia endanger the voluntariness and safety of return.

1.1. Return is a conditional process

- 21 There are three durable solutions for refugees globally [UNHCR, 2003]: local integration in the place of exile, resettlement elsewhere or return to one's homeland. In the case of

Somalis in Kenya interviewed for this study, return is the last resort. The inability to integrate locally in Kenya – a country where refugees are not given the right to work or to move freely [ReDSS/Hall, 2016] – and the inability to access resettlement means that return is perceived as their only remaining option. A 65-year old interviewed in Dadaab shared his experience of a decade of living in Kenya, and trying out different alternatives, without success:

“My hope was to be resettled but that did not work out, and since Kenyans will push us out, so I will return.” [Refugee preparing for return, 65, Dadaab]

- 22 The concerns of the elderly were echoed by young Somali refugees who spoke of the inability to find work in Kenya, and the perception that they would be able to find work in Somalia. By law, in Kenya, Somali refugees can only work as incentive workers, without a fee but with a nominal monthly stipend. Incentive workers are hired by international organisations in the camps, for instance, to support their field office’s work translating, interpreting or providing administrative support.

“Here, I can only be an incentive worker, without a work permit or work prospects; there I can find work with an international organisation and earn a good salary” [Youth planning to return, 23, Dadaab]

- 23 As a result, refugees framed their decision to return in relation to the strict environment in Kenya [push factors] and the perceptions that their future could possibly be better in Somalia [pull factors]. An assessment in Somalia by UNHCR shows that 45-50% of returns are triggered by push factors related to harassment and the tightening asylum space in Kenya [UNHCR, 2016b]. Not being welcomed in Kenya, and the fear of being repatriated forcefully, are part of the triggers motivating return.

- 24 Perceptions, rather than information, play a role in shaping the decision to return. The discourse of return rests not only on the perception of security in Kenya but also on the perception of security in Somalia. One 29-year old refugee, preparing for return in Dadaab camp, said:

“If violence starts again in Somalia, the things that made people flee in the first place, will make people flee to Kenya again. But if it is a peaceful place, my return will be permanent.” [Refugee preparing for return, 29, Dadaab]

“Return has to be temporary, I have never been to Somalia so for a first time, I want to go step by step, with a probationary period first” [Youth planning to return, 22, Nairobi]

- 25 In the words of this 22-year old urban refugee, return would be tried out as a ‘test’. With no concrete information, nor preconceived thought of what his ‘homeland’ could do for him or what he could do there, he bases his willingness to return on the uncertain hope that there might be more opportunities in the place of return than in the place of exile, which has been his home since he was born. His definition of return is flexible and mobile, it is about going “to see” before making a final decision. In his words, a cautious and realistic approach to the situation in Somalia is needed.

- 26 Return becomes a way for some Somali refugees in Kenya to prepare for entry into the labour market, for the youth particularly; for family reunification, for women; and for self-improvement and betterment of their life for those who do not see any other solution open to them. ‘Voluntary return’ is conditional: if security is provided, if the government is stable, if jobs are available.¹

“But even if I return to Somalia, I can also then return to Kenya, right?”

[Youth planning to return, 22, Nairobi]

1.2. Returns generate a snowball effect with limited information

- 27 One respondent decided to return when he heard that other Somali refugees had decided to return:

“When I heard people are going back home, that’s when I decided to go back. I don’t know when this information started circulating” [Respondent Dagahaley Settlement]

- 28 While refugee discourse is closely tied to the official discourse, return means different things to different generations of refugees. For urban refugees, the discourse on return reflects varying views. Return is a distant reality for most Nairobi residents. In Eastleigh, home to as many as 100,000 Somalis refugees,² return is neither popular nor sought after. The vast majority of respondents interviewed in Eastleigh did not consider return and did not know or hear of anyone returning to Somalia. The mere concept of return seemed absurd to them.
- 29 Refugee youth in urban settings are an important exception and distinct group requiring distinct solutions: return is a popular feeling amongst a sub-group of youth in Nairobi. They understand return in both more practical and more abstract terms than their elders. For them, return is an escape from the discrimination they face in Kenyan society, and Somalia a place that can potentially lead to a longed for sense of dignity, respect and individual possibility. In this sense, return for them is a vision. In more pragmatic terms, for the educated urban youth – return is also seen as the right to better opportunities and a better life.

1.2.1. Limited information on returns

- 30 There is a clear gap of information regarding conditions upon return, whether on the security situation en route to Somalia, or specifically on the availability of livelihood opportunities and basic services upon arrival in Somalia.
- 31 The data shows a general sense of confusion regarding rights and status upon return, the level of assistance that returnees will be given and whether assistance includes shelter provision. Similar findings were established by the Return Intention Survey which highlighted that most refugees would like to receive more information [HRW, 2016] notably on security in their home area, and the availability of basic services – food, water, shelter, education and health [IOM-UNHCR, 2014].

1.2.2. Information about the journey

- 32 Information levels about the journey differ greatly between those who live in Dadaab and those who live in urban settings located far from the Somali-Kenyan border. For those in Dadaab, the geographical proximity to the Kenya border results in more frequent contacts with people who cross the border - whether to visit family and friends or trade. Such contacts often result in more knowledge regarding conditions on the road. Moreover, information is available from lorry drivers who were often cited as accurate providers up-to-date information. On the other hand, refugees in the Somali neighbourhood of Mogadishu, Eastleigh, have less knowledge or information about the journey to Somalia and expressed a stronger fear of the journey given the lack of contact with people who cross the border. Many returnees went back without any information on

the road or with very basic information only to find that the journey is not what they expected.

I had no previous good information about the kind of route we will be travelling through, and sincerely speaking my journey was unexpected. If I had information regarding the journey, it would have been helpful to me. For example if I knew that we would spend a few nights along the journey, I would have prepared for it. I would carry beddings and other important items for protection from the cold and harsh weather at night.

[Respondent, Kismayo]

1.2.3. Information about conditions of return

33 Most respondents had very general information about life in Somalia. The vast majority has not received regular information on Somalia unless they had immediate families with whom they communicated on a regular basis. This is corroborated by the Return Intentions Survey, which indicates that very few households receive regular information regarding Somalia – 51% of households receive updates sometimes while 46.2% do not obtain any information at all [IOM-UNHCR, 2014]. For the majority, there is very little information from family members - almost no reliance on networks for information with a ‘we will go and see’ approach to return. Most return with little information to find out that the situation is worse than what they expected.

34 The first information gap is on livelihood opportunities and the market situation in Somalia. There is an assumption that livelihood opportunities are abundant in the port city of Kismayo and the capital city of Mogadishu, without any precise knowledge on the type of jobs available or the type of jobs they can engage in upon return. When asked about plans on return to Kismayo, a respondent in Dadaab answered:

I have no house nor land in Kismayo but I know it is a town with a lot of jobs for people like us. I will just rent a house when I get there - I have relatives there too but I have not been in touch with them since I left.

35 There is another assumption that business opportunities are present in Mogadishu and Kismayo with respondents believing it will be possible for them to start a business with minimal capital. However, little planning is involved - “I will go there and decide what to do after” - was the most typical answer when asked about future plans upon return. Respondents discussing their future livelihood plans upon return:

I am into business. I can be successful as a businessman back in Somalia - I can do anything from selling cosmetics, or having a pharmacy or selling food. I will go there and decide what to do after. My life will be better there as the security will be better. I just need some help setting up a business, creating my business. I don't need more skills; I know how to operate a business. I just need the financial assistance to get going. [Respondent Dadaab].

I don't know what type of business I'll be doing. I need to observe my situation and once there I'll decide. Do you have any information about the market situation there? I have no information but I heard it is easy to do business. [Respondent, Dagahaley].

36 The second information gap is on the level of assistance they will receive. Interviews and focus group discussions in Dadaab with potential returnees indicate a general assumption that assistance is available in Somalia and is superior to assistance in Dadaab, although when prompted most people did not know who is giving assistance or what is the exact level or what they should expect. A woman in Ifo2 explains:

Yes, I know a lot of people who have returned. Life in the country is very ok and there is peace. They are living a better life. They are given food better than the one distributed here - wheat, rice, and oil. I know there are organisations distributing those food. I don't know exactly which organisations. [FGD, IFO2].

- 37 The third information gap is on shelter and where returnees will physically be able to settle. Whenever asked or prompted about shelter or accommodation in Somalia, most respondents could not give an answer as to their most basic need. These become even more crucial questions for those who have no networks to rely on upon return, no family ties, no shelter or land and no livelihood opportunity. Some respondents were actively requested information regarding shelter.

I don't have a land or farm but I'm hoping as I go there I'll find shelter. We have been given information from UNHCR that when we reach there, there are agencies we'll be referred to help us. We will be taken from here to Baidoa then agencies will take us from borders to Kismayo. Once I reach there, I'm hoping to get land or farm from one of the agencies. I don't know whether it is true or false but I have seen from T.V there is a place prepared for people going back. Third return convoy, Dagahaley.

- 38 The information gaps are critical indicators of the lack of preparedness for return, and point to the lack of networks informing them about returns. Whether those networks do not exist or are not mobilized, the next section shows that resource mobilization is altogether weak or impossible for returnees to Somalia. These findings go against the assumption that aid organizations have about the ability of returnees to access information on their own or to trigger networks for support. This is difficult for protracted refugees, and practically impossible for children and youth born and raised in exile, for whom Somalia is a homeland but not a home.

2. The role (and limits) of networks

2.1. Adapting to life in Somalia

"I was received by my cousin and lived with him for about a month. I left him because the house was too congested and could not house all of us. The environment at home was bearable, but the environment outside was the toughest as we had been away for 7 years. Adapting to life in Somalia became harder every day, for my children and for myself. Adapting in terms of the culture was hardest for the children, who ask me to go back to Kenya". [Egad, 40, 6 children, currently lives in Mogadishu]

- 39 Adapting to life in Somalia is particularly difficult for the second-generation refugees who return to a homeland that they only have vague memories of, if any. In over two decades of a protracted refugee situation in Kenya, many Somali refugees have been born and raised in exile in Kenya. The definition of 'home' may not simply be equitable with that of the 'homeland', the land of their parents. Although they are prepared to try, as they have developed an imaginary of what this homeland is, adaptation is a rocky road for returnees. Assimilation is problematic at three levels: culturally, linguistically and mentally, adjusting to a new environment and climate affects returnees in ways that they had not anticipated, further expanding the perceptions vs. reality gap in return.
- 40 Cultural assimilation is an unforeseen challenge for girls who return to their families' homes in Somalia. Returnees report specific problems faced by girls. Language barriers impact social and family cohesion – The use of Swahili and Kenyan slang impacts daily vocabulary (food, vegetables) and sets them as outsiders in their own homeland. Children realise that returning is not as easy as their parents had told them it would be, creating tensions at home. Obstacles are also linked to the lack of resources for education in Somalia. This has led to instances of split families whereby children are left behind in

Kenya [Majidi, 2017]. Education having been a driver to leave Somalia in the first place, the lack of education remains an obstacle.

“All my relatives were happy except my son’s children, especially the daughter, she went to school in Nairobi, she had friends there, whereas here she does not meet any children as she does not go to school. My grandchildren are not able to adapt to life here, they want to go back to Kenya” [Returnee, 60, female living in Mogadishu]

“I want to go back to Kenya, I am unable to continue living here in Somalia, I miss my friends and classmates in Kenya. The education standard in Kenya is better than this one in Somalia. I also miss my parents, I hope that they come soon.” [Returnee girl, 14, Mogadishu]

2.2. Strength of ties tested upon return

- 41 While traditionally, networks are an important and valuable resource facilitating migration and return, not all Somali refugees returning have or can rely on networks for support. Two major obstacles persist: the lack of networks and the inability of existing networks to provide the type of support that returnees need or expect. Weak family and network ties affect all returnees interviewed – children and youth, but also heads of household, single men and women irrespective of whether they were going back to their original homes or not.
- 42 Different forms of isolation persist across the board. Some respondents have not been in contact with their families in years: although they know of family remaining in their place of origin, Kismayo or Mogadishu, they have lost their number and have not been in touch with them. Others simply do not have any relatives, as they had all left together at the time of the famine or earlier on. Some refugees decided to relocate to Mogadishu because of a lack of stability in their village of origin, without networks in the capital.
- “I don’t have strong support system and I also don’t have relative around me since I am not in my regions of my village of origin. (He lives in Mogadishu).” [Yarrow Mohamed Ali, Mogadishu].*
- 43 As for those who have networks, they cannot always rely on them. A very common grievance comes from those who have family members in Somalia but have not been able to rely on them for information or any kind of assistance given that they themselves have their own problems – and that everyone in Somalia is living in similarly distressing conditions. A common settlement pattern reported is for returnees to start at a close relative’s upon arrival to Somalia then gravitate towards an IDP settlement upon realisation that they cannot afford to pay rent nor depend on their family member – typically a brother or cousin.
- 44 For youth, the biggest obstacle to return is lack of educational provisions, lack of employment opportunities and lack of networks in Somalia. Although the youth have expressed the most enthusiasm for return, they are the quickest to leave.
- 45 A common scenario is for youth to travel to Somalia looking for a job opportunity only to realise that given their lack of connections and understanding of Somalia, they are unable to find support in a new context. The difference between the expectation and reality of return is very pronounced amongst this group. Most, if not all, of youth returnee respondents interviewed in Somalia expressed a desire to return to Kenya when the opportunity arises. Others have already gone back to Kenya after a short experimental period. Among the most critical voices upon return were those of youth and women who spoke about the lack of networks to facilitate access to an income generating activity, the lack of skills or lack of pertinent skills for the local context, lack of capital and local

labour market knowledge. At the cross section of the lack of both information and resource mobilisation, are the youth and women who find their expectations of return different from the reality of return.

Women want to work, but lack the network, the capital and the local knowledge

- 46 Women's voice on livelihoods is particularly promising: they want to work, they are looking to contribute, but do not know how or where to start.

Yes, I am an able person who has the ability to work, I can be a housemaid, or can own my own business if I am invested for a start capital. For now I am not working neither learnt any skill in Kenya, particularly the refugee camps.

- 47 The problem for women is the lack of support given to them – with a lack of female-sensitive training programs and labour market integration mechanisms. Yet their skills in cooking, tailoring, farming are repeatedly cited in interviews. Women go as far as asking for capital to start-up their own business in Somalia. Women are also most often working as maids, and in small businesses – whether cafés, selling stacks.

Yes, I can work. I can do several things if I am given money to start a small business, I know how to operate a clothes shop or work in a hotel as cook. Unless I start a business, which I do not have the capital, it is difficult to get a job in Somalia.
[Khadija, 40, Mogadishu]

- 48 Men face similar challenges – not knowing the right people to get them back to work. “I am a farmer from a farmer society, these are my only skills” – not ones adapted to life in Kambios, Dagahaley or Ifo camps. In Kismayo, the hope of these farmers is to resume agriculture work – but on which land? “I will need to find someone to hire me” – the focus being on the people who can offer jobs, not particular locations or sector that can offer jobs.

- 49 This is linked to the lack of preparation to return – economically, business start-ups were reported to fail, wasting all the initial investment and savings brought back by refugees.

“With the little saving I was carrying from the camp, I decided to start a small business. I rented a room in the market and purchased all the required equipment for the shop. Then, in the first months, I was not able to get enough customers and quite quickly, all my money went in the shop. I took the decision to close the shop and run towards the camp, later get some more customers”. (Furefarah, 28)

2.3. The structural pressures on networks

- 50 Experiences of return require adjustment to a society. All Somalis – whether returnee or not – face low access to basic services, clean water, education, and food. While they enjoy free movement and a sense of ‘home’ that they may have lacked in Kenya, their coping mechanisms remain too few to handle life back in Somalia. “I have not been able to cope with the challenges”, “I used to just manage by skipping breakfast, lunch or supper” but that is no longer enough. There is a gap of assistance and presence of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Kismayo and Mogadishu, and insecurity in Mogadishu, that returnees did not expect – not to such an extent. There are other nuances – transition remains more difficult in Kismayo than in Mogadishu, for youth than for elders, for families with children than for split families with multiple migration strategies.

- 51 When family networks work, return is reinforced, yet networks remain rare. Either through split families keeping one foot in Somalia and one foot in Kenya [Majidi, 2017], or through supportive and resourceful families upon return, transnational support systems

in split families or with links to the diaspora are essential to those experiencing a positive return process.

52 Signs for youth are promising but dissatisfaction or disenchantment is most common for youthful returning nationals who face unemployment and police harassment. These youth are unable to find spaces in Somalia that are theirs. They are caught in ambivalence about their return – but still hopeful.

53 Compromise is apparent among all returnees who highlight a set of advantages and disadvantages to return. All talk about having more coping strategies in Somalia than in Kenya where they were solely dependent on aid. Although faced with very similar difficulties, and often a more challenging reality in Somalia, they boast coping mechanisms. Some can have a negative impact on wellbeing, others can be reinforced.

I am unable to feed all of my family members. We sometimes stay unfed for long hours or skip meals. I have not been able to cope with these challenges, I use to manage like skipping breakfast, lunch or supper.

[Respondent, Kismayo]

I left 5 of my children with my brother in Kenya. I could not afford their upkeep, so my brother suggested that they should stay with him. He works as a casual labourer. But my children in Kenya do not go to school because my brother whom they live with cannot afford to pay for their school fees, he pays for their most important basic needs.

[Respondent, 46, Mogadishu]

54 The role of networks is key in assessing people's ability for re-integration. In Somalia, upon return, networks are weak and unable able to offer material support. As a result, those with strong family ties are not better integrated. In the absence of family networks many returnees face isolation.

I was received by one of our cousins, who could not support us that much because he too is in a very poor state. (...) I do not have a strong system of support here in Somalia. People are just not better off than me.

55 Lack of networks impedes the ability to cope as well as the returnee's ability to find work opportunities. Respondents mentioned that in order to gain access to the most menial jobs such construction work, one must have direct link with engineers or managers to become part of their construction tea.

56 The same reality confronts all Somalis in Kismayo, whether returnees, IDPs or locals. The only ones to receive family support are the elderly for whom relatives make special efforts to provide assistance. Elders are confident that they will be supported. But for the rest, they talk about the lack of any special treatment, even for the most needy.

"All humanitarians were supportive in the camps, people in the camps were divided in two special cases, just like me, I was a divorcee – that is why they helped me several times. But here all people are victims no one is safe. In the refugee camps where I was recognized as a divorcee, I could get some privileges but here all the IDPs are all vulnerable to the same circumstances of having poor basic requirements." [Sitey, Somali female returnee, Dalxiis boolow]

Conclusion

57 Somali refugee returnees' experience of return to Kenya was marked by the fact that perceptions – rather than information – shaped their decision and limited their preparedness. To what extent Somalia constitutes a permanent home for those who lack

information, supportive networks and assets question the idea of a voluntary and safe return, and of a sustainable reintegration process.

- 58 For those able to work, Somalia provided a life with opportunities, and more freedom, compared to refugee life. But for the majority of returnees with no access to land or livelihood opportunities, no entry point in the local labour market or knowledge of the context, compromises were made as many found themselves in worse off conditions than they were in Kenya – no education for their children, poorer health facilities, little or no aid, and the lack of counselling. For those with weak ties, going back to the camps in Kenya remains an attractive alternative – with legal ramifications that need to be further explained.
- 59 A cross-border, flexible return and reintegration approach is needed between Kenya and Somalia, where dynamic flows rather than one-way movements have been a historical reality. The border is porous and marked by movement and crossings. Yet, UNHCR on each side of the border contradicts itself. While UNHCR Kenya facilitates returns to Somalia, UNHCR Somalia released in 2016 an advisory of non-return to South Central Somalia. In the words of the UNHCR Somalia country representative, “UNHCR Kenya is returning refugees, UNHCR Somalia is receiving them. We do not share the same interests”, stating further that the agency would help those who still decide to return. “If they can make an informed decision, then we can support them” [UNHCR, 2016b].
- 60 The crux of the issue remains information. The sources, quality, access to information in the camps is limited and shaped by the fear of being expelled. Better information on the realities of living back ‘home’ in Somalia are needed, from livelihoods for women, men and youth, to the education and health services available for children. With this, returnees can plan what happens after. Without it, return to Somalia will not lead to reintegration, no matter the willingness of returnees’ to make it, they will not have the required prepared and resources mobilised to succeed. Better information on the alternatives to return is needed, too. Local integration in Kenya could be a more viable alternative for the quarter million refugees still living in Dadaab.

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NOTES

1. Danish Refugee Council [2013], *Durable Solutions, Perspective of Somali Refugees living in Kenyan and Ethiopian settlements and Selected communities of Return*, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.
2. While only 33,537 Somali refugees are officially registered in Nairobi, the total number is estimated to be significantly higher according to the UNHCR and Kenyan government officials.

ABSTRACTS

The decision for refugees to return should be an 'informed decision' based on "objective, accurate and neutral" information, including on the limits of assistance upon return [UNHCR, 1996]. This article presents findings from the spontaneous return of refugees from Kenya to Somalia in 2014 to illustrate the risks that uninformed decisions, and the weakness of networks, can pose post-return. Without information and networks, returnees fall short of the levels of preparedness and resource mobilisation [Cassarino, 2004] needed to make returns a positive and

sustainable experience. Based on 160 qualitative interviews with refugee returnees and key informants, in Kenya and in Somalia in 2014-2015, this paper asks the following: were refugees' access to information and networks in 2014 sufficient to allow for a sustainable return to Somalia?

La décision des réfugiés de rentrer dans leur pays d'origine est censée être « informée » et fondée sur une information « objective, exacte et neutre » [UNHCR, 1996]. Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche menée en 2014 sur le retour spontané des réfugiés Somaliens du Kenya. Ils mettent en évidence les risques que le manque d'information et la faiblesse des réseaux peuvent faire peser après le retour. Sans ces deux dimensions, les réfugiés de retour ne disposent pas du niveau nécessaire de préparation et de mobilisation de ressources [Cassarino, 2004] pour permettre une expérience positive et pérenne du retour. Sur base de 160 entretiens qualitatifs réalisés avec des réfugiés au retour ainsi que d'autres parties prenantes, au Kenya et en Somalie entre 2014 et 2015, cet article pose la question suivante : l'accès des réfugiés de retour à l'information et aux réseaux socio-économiques était-il suffisant pour permettre un retour durable et la réintégration des Somaliens ?

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Mots-clés: information, réseaux, retour, réintégration, réfugiés, Kenya, Somalie

Keywords: information, networks, return, reintegration, refugees, Kenya, Somalia

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