

Sudanese Return Migrants Under the New Saudi Economic Policies Towards Migrants and Their Dependents.

Sudanese migration to neighboring countries is known for a long time, some Sudanese have migrated to Makkah to perform Haj (Pilgrimage) and Umrah, and to Egypt for study and for work, and to East and West Africa for trade and for teaching Quran, teaching Islamic education and Arabic Language. However, the last three decades have witnessed heavy flow of labor migration to oil producing countries, especially to Saudi Arabia. A recent migration study has shown that more than 60% of Sudanese living abroad are working in Saudi Arabia (Nour, 2014). Many Sudanese who migrated to the Gulf countries are professionals, highly skilled and skilled workers. The 2014 migration study by the author shows that, about 42% of the migrants are mainly medical doctors, engineers, pharmacists, economists, consultants, university professors, teachers, financial analysts, economists, accountants and other professionals (Nour,2014). These findings are confirmed by the fact that 75% of Sudanese working abroad hold university degrees and higher. Economic factors and political unrest are usually cited as the main factors for the recent Sudanese migration to many countries, especially, to the Gulf countries.

During the last three decades, the Sudan economy has been adversely affected by many factors such as: the ongoing civil war in Darfur, Southern Kordofan, and Blue Nile, the long standing economic sanctions, and the secession of South Sudan in 2011, that led to a loss of three quarters of its oil production. In addition, the Sudan remains highly indebted country, compared to many developing countries. According to the reports of the world bank, Sudan's external debt amounts to \$43.6 billion (World Bank,2014). Despite the series of negative economic indicators plaguing Sudan, the country is suffering from the ongoing political crises that did not come to an end with the secession of South Sudan.

The economy of the receiving countries has recently been affected by the decline in oil prices, and by the damaging and highly expensive wars in Yemen and Syria. This economic situation has forced Saudi Arabia to impose additional fees on foreign workers, and to introduce new financial policies on migrants and their dependents. The Saudi companies have to pay 800 Saudi Riyals (\$213) per month

for every expatriate worker, to be phased in by 2020. In addition, the Saudi government has imposed fees on dependents of foreign workers by July 2017, starting with 100 Saudi Riyals per month for each dependent, to be increased gradually, to reach 400 Saudi Riyals (\$107) by the year 2020. It is worth noting here that, these fees don't apply to domestic helpers, such as drivers and cleaners. Also, the fees of entry visa, exit/re-entry visa and visiting visa have recently been increased significantly. These economic policies have been imposed by Saudi government to increase non-oil revenue. In 2017 the Saudi government announced: "A Nation Without Illegal migrants". As a result of this announcement, 300 thousand illegal migrants, from seven countries, including Sudan, have benefited from the 4-month amnesty offered by Saudi government.

Moreover, the job market in Saudi Arabia is becoming very tight, especially for non-Saudis. During the last five years, many foreign workers have lost their jobs, due Saudization Policy, more than 70 occupations have been assigned for Saudis, especially women. All these Saudi policies, left many foreign workers out of the job market.

The preliminary findings of the 2019 survey by the author shows that 14.7% and 23.8% of the migrants working in Saudi Arabia are planning to return back to Sudan by 2019 and 2020 respectively, because of the new Saudi economic policies towards migrants and their dependents, and because their jobs will soon be assigned to Saudis. Also the 2019 study shows that 15.1% of migrants who could not afford to pay the monthly fees imposed on their dependents, have sent their families back home by 2018. In addition, 53.5% of them have decided to send their families to Sudan soon, as they will not be able the pay the high fees imposed on their dependents.

A recent study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the government of Sudan has shown that 70112 migrants and their dependents have returned finally to Sudan during the last two years (see the Table below).

Percentage Distribution of Returnees and Their Dependents from Saudi Arabia by Gender, During 2018--2019. (Source: IOM survey of Return Migrants, Sudan)

Gender	Head household	Dependents	Total
Males	36026 80.4 %	12140 48.0 %	48166 68.7 %
Females	8794 19.6 %	13152 52.0 %	21946 31.3 %
Total	44820 100.0 %	25292 100.0 %	70112 100.0 %

The objectives of this paper are to investigate the phenomena of Sudanese returned migrants from Saudi Arabia, under the adverse Sudanese economy, and to explore the size of returnees, their characteristics, causes of return migration and challenges facing them at their home country. The paper will also try to explore the intentions of Sudanese migrants in Saudi Arabia, regarding their future plans, under the new Saudi financial policies towards migrants and their dependents.

The paper will address the above issues, using ethnographic large survey data, conducted by three researchers headed by the author in January 2019. The 2019 survey is designed to study several aspects of Sudanese migration to Saudi Arabia, such as reasons of migration, characteristics of migrants, return migrants and challenges facing them at their home countries, remittances, savings, money transfer, migrant's investment in their home countries, and problems facing migrants at place of destination. About 2000 migrants were selected using systematic random sample, from a list of migrants applying for exit visa, at the three "Public Services Complexes", located in Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman. The 2019 Survey is supported by a grant from New York university/Abo

By Prof. Osman El Hassan M. Nour

Dhabi branch, under a large migration project entitled: “Research and Empirical Analysis of Labor Migration (REALM)”, for Asian migrants working in the Gulf countries. The paper will also make use of the preliminary findings of the ongoing study of return migrants from Saudi Arabia, implemented by IOM and the government of Sudan.