

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization



**Return Migration and Development
Nexus:
Casual Labourers of Kabul**

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Working Paper

موسسه مطالعات عامه
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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Objectives and Methodology.....	6
3. Conceptual Framework	7
4. Key Findings	9
5. Conclusion and Recommendations.....	14

Abstract

There is much enthusiasm for the linkages between return migration and development. However, this has hardly been researched for low-skilled returnees in a south-south migration context. This research samples a host of returnees among casual labourers in Kabul. The main question is to what extent these low skilled casual labourers have gained from their migration experience upon return in terms of accrued skills and techniques. The hypothesis is that those who are better prepared (*circumstance*) for their return will have more gains (*impacts*) from their migration experience upon return. The main conclusion of this study is that despite the many problems that plague Afghanistan's socio-economic conditions, and the distant prospect of these problems being addressed, the migrants that have gained skills abroad have a significant relative advantage over others without those skills as far as employability. They learned new generic and technical skills, aesthetic values, and the use of tools they were not accustomed to before. Upon return their quality of work is claimed to be better, their employability increased and source of income is less volatile.

Key words: return migration, development, innovation, south-south migration, skill transfer, Afghanistan

1. Introduction

South-south migration is generally defined as migration between two 'developing' or 'less-developed' countries. South-south migration on a global scale constitutes about 50% of the international flows, and of these 80% takes place between neighbouring countries.¹ South-south migration happens because of spatial and cultural proximity, hence a higher incidence of available networks and migration becomes affordable for larger segments of the population. Neighbouring countries are also by and large used to seek refuge from disaster and conflict, or to transit to another country at some point.²

South-south migration is associated with instability, as south-south migration is for many affected families the most obvious option to seek refuge in case of conflict. High numbers of sudden influx puts socio-economic pressures on host countries. Likewise there are larger return fluxes in a south-south context, putting pressures on social services and boosting unemployment in countries of return. Moreover there is a higher incidence of expulsions of migrants in a south-south context, as in many cases they migrated irregularly. Lastly, it is postulated that south-south migration is more subject to economic cycles. Hence there are specific characteristics and vulnerabilities associated with south-south migrants.

Since the US led invasion in 2001 and the ousting of the Taliban regime around 6 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan to Afghanistan.³ Most returnees moved to the cities in Afghanistan, as a result Kabul's population has grown expansively in recent years.⁴ Estimates of the population of Kabul vary from 3 to 7 million, whereas Kabul had approximately 1 million inhabitants in 2001.⁵ Such an unprecedented urbanization is taking its toll on socio-economic well-being in terms of access to services, goods and infrastructure.⁶ Moreover too rapid urbanization puts high pressures on the labour market. There is an oversupply of labour, which promotes the informal sector and heavy competition.⁷

In these circumstances it remains unclear in what ways and to what extent return migration in a south-south migration context changes the socio-economic outlook of a 'developing' country or benefits a migrant (family). Several studies carried out in Afghanistan have indicated that a significant portion of Afghans that have been to Iran and Pakistan have learned new skills, including low-skilled labourers, however.⁸ And according to ILO (2008:xiv),

¹ See Ratha and Shaw (2007) p. 3. It is unclear whether this number includes refugees.

² See Ratha and Shaw (2007) Ch. 3 and Hujo and Piper (2007) p. 2

³ See UNHCR, Afghanistan Country Operations Profile, at www.unhcr.org/pages/49e486eb6.html. The total number of returnees is 6,234,922. From Pakistan 3,607,673 have been assisted, 349,583 have returned without assistance. From Iran 859,611 have been assisted, 1,403,015 have returned without assistance.

⁴ For instance UNHCR estimated 41% of assisted returns come from Iran and 48% from Pakistan.

⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA-World Urbanization Prospects-2007) estimates.

3227000 inhabitants, whereas Beall and Esser (2005) suggest a number between 5.6 – 6.4 million.

⁶ See Altai Consulting (2010) p. 8

⁷ See Beall and Schutte (2006) p. 5

⁸ See Altai Consulting (2006, 2009, 2010), Kronenfeld (2011), Saito (2009)

Improvements in human capital (through skills development) is one of the key determinants of how, and for whom, productivity growth translates into employment growth and, possibly, into better work in the informal economy and to movement from the informal to the formal economies.

The extent to which low-skilled return migrants gain from the newly acquired skills in Afghanistan in terms of increased employability or higher wages has not been studied specifically. This study investigates the extent low-skilled workers have learned new skill, how they have learned them, what the circumstances of return were and how they have gained from those newly acquired skills upon return if at all.

The conceptual framework for this research draws largely on the model developed by Casserino (2004) in his paper *Theorising return migration: the conceptual approach to return migration*. He argues “the propensity of migrants to become actors of change and development at home depends on the extent to which they have provided for the preparation of their return” (p. 271). The notion of preparedness links the *circumstances* of return migration with *impacts* of return migration. That link is particularly important in a south-south migration context and return to a post/in-conflict situation like Afghanistan, where unusual circumstances of return are likely to affect the preparedness and the impact upon return.

This study is relevant for a number of reasons. In Kabul only 6% percent of jobs are formal. The pool of casual labourers is estimated on 32% of the total labour force in Kabul.⁹ There are about 20 points in Kabul where casual labourers come together and sit on the side of the road waiting to get picked up. There is no state regulation, support or protection for them. Moreover there is high level of competition, hence there is a high incidence of under-employment and in some cases exploitation.¹⁰ Casual labourers work in conditions that violate the most basic standards of dignity, safety and health.¹¹ Therefore information on how casual labourers can gain more from their migration experience, or what untapped resources there are amongst them in terms of enhanced human capital as a result of migration, could be very valuable in informing policy making aimed at addressing the plight of casual labourers and formalization of the labour market, both as necessary conditions for expanding the base of economic activity and generating employment growth in the longer term.

Second, integration of returnees is considered one of the most important issues in post/in-conflict Afghanistan.¹² In a recent interview Peter Nicolaus, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in Afghanistan, called the massive repatriation programme “the biggest mistake UNHCR ever made ...[]...We thought if we gave humanitarian assistance then macro development would kick in”.¹³ It is, therefore, important for the Government of Afghanistan and the International Community to have a better understanding of the conditions in which returnees can gain from their migration experience upon return. Furthermore, if preparedness is the decisive factor in the ability to gain from the migration experience of return,

⁹ See Beall and Schutte (2006) p.35

¹⁰ See Beall and Schutte (2006) and Wright (2010)

¹¹ See Wright (2010)

¹² See f.e. UNHCR objectives to provide livelihoods to returnees, global appeal 2010-2011 Afghanistan. Furthermore return to Afghanistan is seen as the major durable solution to refugee problem. See also ANDS section for MoRR

¹³ See <http://www.reliefweb.int/node/467313>

this study can point out concrete directions of intervention to better prepare returnees.

Finally, this study fills several gaps in the body of literature on the (return) migration-development nexus by looking at a specific group of low-skilled returnees in a South-South and post/in-conflict context. The (return) migration – development nexus has mostly been discussed within a North-South migration context. Moreover, the studies on the (return) migration – development nexus have mainly focused on ICT and healthcare sectors. As well, they have in most cases focused on the return of high-tech skilled labourers, hardly ever on the return of low-skilled labourers.

The paper is structured as follows. First the objectives and methodology are described in the next section. Section 3 elaborates on the conceptual framework developed by Casserino. The findings are presented in section 4 and the conclusions and recommendations of the study in section 5.

2. Objectives and Methodology

The main aim of this research was to establish the extent to which casual (low or unskilled) Afghan labourers returning from Iran and Pakistan have gained from their migration experience. The first objective was thus to establish whether the returnees had obtained new skills and techniques in Iran and Pakistan while the second objective was to establish the extent to which they had gained from their migration experience in terms of employability and higher wages upon return to Afghanistan. The third objective for this research was to establish whether preparedness was a decisive factor connecting the *circumstances* of return to *effects* of return, thereby linking the findings to the conceptual framework.

The objectives were met through an extensive literature review to take stock of what is known about the return migration – development nexus in a south-to-south migration context with a focus on Afghanistan. The primary data was collected through 1 focus group discussion (FGD), 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews, and 56 short surveys. Since returnees from Pakistan and Iran are amongst non-migrants, the short survey was used for both to single out the returnees for further in-depth questioning and to provide some of the counterfactual data of non-returnees. The randomly selected field sites were Taimani Street 8, Baharistan square and Shomali roundabout in Kabul. The survey questions and semi-structured interviews were conducted at these three locations. The FGD participants also came from those three locations. The FGD was conducted at a designated location.

There are several methodological limitations in this research. First, Kabul, as any other capital city, is a melting pot of ethnicities and backgrounds prevalent in society at large. Other studies show that the pick-up points for casual labourers are often (self) organized along ethnic lines and ethnicity bears a direct link to the destination of migration.¹⁴ Second, full random sampling was not carried out due to resource constraints and concerns about security in some of the locations. The sample is therefore not representative and serves only as illustration of some of the main issues regarding return migration from Pakistan and Iran.

¹⁴ See Koepke (2011).

Third, 'skill' is often understood as having the structure of a 'program' or a routine.¹⁵ The knowledge about the routine gives skill its economic value through its repeatability. Since low-level skills in, say, bricklaying, are based mostly on tacit knowledge, it is difficult to capture it by asking the low-skilled labourers whether they have enhanced their skill while being a migrant. As a result, part of their skill levels might be overlooked not only by the researchers asking the question but also by the newly skilled, low-skilled, labourer. Moreover, skill would be too narrowly defined if one would focus only on task performance. There are also cognitive and generic competences involved in acquiring skills, which tend to be intangible at first sight.

Even though the survey asked the respondents to indicate generic skills such as ability to learn and supervisory skills, and technical skills such as bricklaying and welding, the respondents were not able to relay to the researchers how well they could master these skills. The tacit features of skill, the interdependence of skill on more generic competences, and the different techniques deployed within a certain skill came mostly forward in the focus group discussion where researchers had more opportunities to probe and verify answers. Another constraint in this research was the chaotic environment at the pick-up points. As soon as the casual labourers sighted the researchers, there would be a swarm of labourers toward them in the expectation of getting casual work or handouts.

3. Conceptual Framework

The developmental impact attributed to migration has been estimated differently over time. Up until the 1970s there was mostly sheer optimism with migration being considered as a means to overcome wealth disparities between developed and developing countries. From the 1970s onwards, pessimism was the dominant mood based on some of the identified negative impacts of migration on development and because of the dependency of developing countries on developed countries and the flight of human capital from developing countries. From the 1990s onwards the picture becomes more nuanced, and tends to be more optimistic again.¹⁶

The relatively recent faith and interest in the developmental impact of migration can be largely attributed to the 'discovery' of new channels through which migration contributes to development. Firstly, there is much enthusiasm for the flow of remittances, which for some developing countries can make up as much as 30% of GNP.¹⁷ Secondly, return migration is considered a channel through which migration can potentially contribute to development in the countries of origin by means of the influx of accrued human capital and savings. Also the (political) involvement of diaspora communities can potentially contribute to development in the countries of origin, through unilateral action, co-development programs and facilitation of foreign direct investment (FDI).

The literature on the (return) migration- development nexus is spread over different disciplines such as economics, sociology and anthropology. Analyses are carried out on different scales from household to national level, with functionalistic (Neo-classical Economics, New Economics of Labour Migration) and structuralistic (Marxist) approaches to development. And recently

¹⁵ See Nelson, R.R. and S. Winter (1982) Chapter 3.

¹⁶ See cf. Haas, H de (2006), Black, R & Sward (2009)

¹⁷ World Bank (Ratha, D. 2003).

there have been more pluralistic approaches, including livelihood framework, network analysis and transnationalism.¹⁸ Casserino's (2004) deploys a crosscutting model that incorporates the macro and micro level of analysis, the extent of agency and structure, and different academic disciplines through the denominator of 'preparedness'.

Casserino argues "the propensity of migrants to become actors of change and development at home depends on the extent to which they have provided for the preparation of their return" (p. 271). The preparation entails willingness and readiness to return, which in turn concerns tangible (financial capital) and intangible (i.e. contacts, relationships, skills, etc.) resource mobilization (see figure 1).

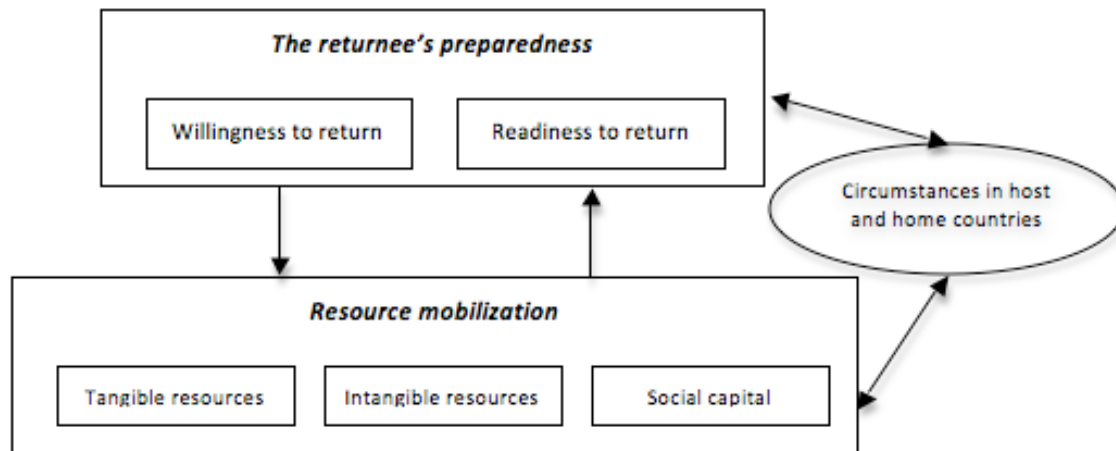


Figure 1 Model taken from Casserino (2004) p. 271

Besides reconciling many of the theoretical discourses on (return) migration and development, Casserino's (2004) model places the propensity of gaining from the migration experience in a set of observables. The focus on tangible and intangible resource mobilisation seems to be especially of importance to explain return migration in a south-south context, since it is known that Afghans rely heavily on social networks during migration.¹⁹

Moreover preparedness as an explanatory variable cross cuts the usual conceptual spectrum of migrant identities such as refugee returnee, high-skilled returnee, student returnee, entrepreneur returnee, which are often used to explain the extent returnees gain from their migration upon return. In the context of Afghanistan this is particularly useful as migrant identities are very fluid and migrant experiences dynamic. The model leaves room for circularity, interplay of structural constraints, opportunities in host and home countries, and pro-activity through agency.

¹⁸ See Castles and Miller (2009) *The age of migration*.

¹⁹ Cf. Harpvikken (2009)

4. Key Findings

Out of the 18 persons selected for in-depth interviews, two had been to Pakistan, five to Pakistan and Iran, and eleven to Iran. Ten interviewees had been to Pakistan and Iran at multiple times, consistent with the view of migration as being a way of life and a coping strategy for many Afghans. On average the interviewees had spent 5.5 years abroad, with 15 years as the longest and 9 months of the year as the shortest period. Out of the seven focus group participants two had been to Pakistan, two to Iran, and three to both Pakistan and Iran. On average the focus group participants had spent a little over 8 years abroad.

Most of the interviewed returnees indicated that the reasons for going abroad was a mix of push and pull factors, though there were many more push-factors than pull factors. The push factors include the intermittent conflict / war, the coming to power of the Taliban, drought, and general unemployment. Many of the respondents pointed to family members or friends living abroad as pull factors in their decision to migrate. The general mood and desperation of most of the respondents is well captured in a comment from one of the respondents: "... there was war in Afghanistan and there wasn't any work to do, so I walked to Pakistan in 14 days" (Respondent #4). Similarly, a focus group participant (Participant #5) said,

I was in Matak bridge [Parwan province] and saw my house getting burned down. The Taliban took me to Charikar center of Parwan province, they put me in the Pul-e-charkhi jail. After some time we had been exchanged for Taliban prisoners that were captured by Ahmad Shah Massoud. When I got released from jail, I went directly to Pakistan with my family.

The following graphs and narratives demonstrate the differences in skill levels between non-migrants, as a control group, and returnees. The emphasis is on how the migrant casual labourers find work and what type of work they perform away from Afghanistan.

Most migrants knew a friend or family member that helped them finding work in the host country. In two instances the smuggler helped with finding work. The type of cross-border networks that migrants can rely on is well illustrated in the comments from one focus group participant (Participant #2),

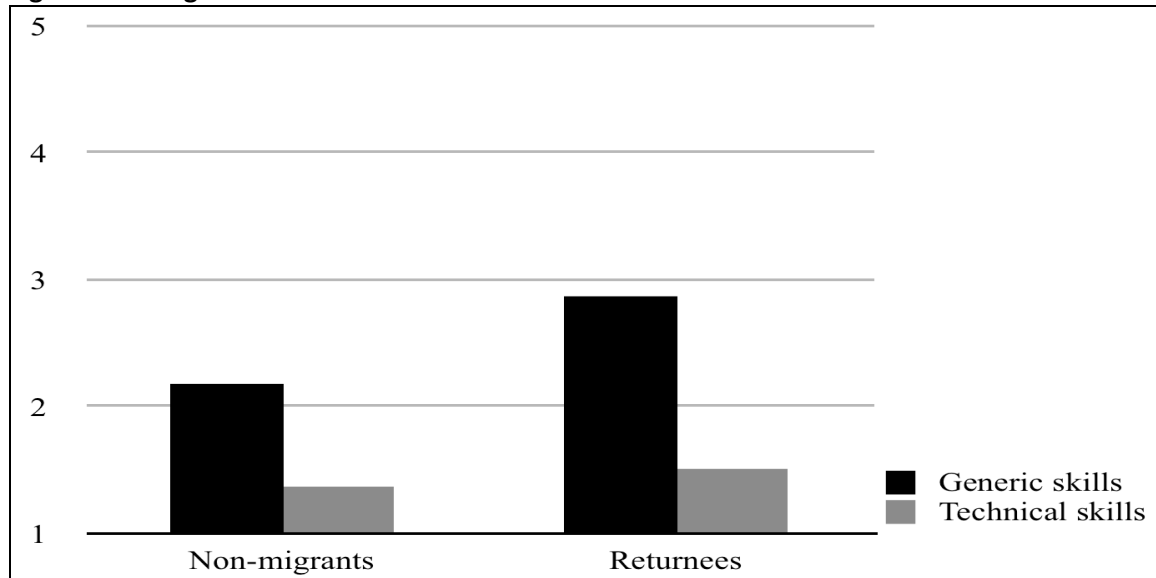
I was in Peshawar with my uncle. He knew Pashtu and I worked with him. I came through the mountains back to Afghanistan and found my house destroyed. Again I went to Pakistan, .. I started working with my uncle again. My uncle had bought land from Pakistanis and built small houses to rent to Afghan migrants.

Despite existing networks, in most cases the migrant workers were performing casual labour in Iran and Pakistan. Most of them worked at construction sites and were picked up from designated pick-up points by contractors. The workers found work as a guard, a vendor in a shop or as a menial worker in a factory. Many had performed multiple of jobs during their migration span.

To determine whether returnees had learned skills, non-migrants were interviewed as well to create counterfactual data. To capture the differences in skill levels the survey contained a list of

24 skills typically used in construction work. Of these, 7 skills were general such as the ability to work in a team, learn and deploy new skills, and fulfil a leadership role. The other skills listed were techniques such as masonry, carpentry, and electrical construction. The respondents were asked to indicate their proficiency level for each of the listed skills from 1 to 5, with 1 being no mastery at all and 5 being excellent mastery.

Figure 2 Average skill level score



The differences between returnees and non-migrants are quite significant. The survey data suggests that returnees are significantly better endowed with generic skills compared to non-migrants. In particular, the ability to work in a team, perform leadership and decision-making roles, and learn new skills were reported to be higher among returnees than non-migrants. This might be attributed to exposure to a different culture and a different work environment though this needs to be verified.

There is a difference in technical skill level, but is not very big. In general, returnees reported that they could master each of the listed skills slightly better. In particular, they reported significantly higher levels of mastery in bricklaying, masonry, and painting and decorating. Woodcarving, on the contrary, was the only skill that non-migrants reported to be better at.

In the individual interviews and focus group discussions returnees reported to have learned a range of skills, such as concreting, plastering, roofing, and masonry. The vast majority of the respondents reported to have learned their skills on the job and not through formal training. As one respondent (FGD Participant #6) put it:

... We were working as simple workers with an Iranian skilled worker. The Iranian workers are trained and stylish and did their work very beautifully. After much time of working under their supervision and directions given by the skilled workers there, we learned the skills and became skilled.

Another focus group discussion participant reported that when he was in Afghanistan he liked masonry and was self-taught. On going to Iran and working with masons there, he learned new

ways of doing masonry, particularly in mixing masonry with plaster work as new styles (FGD participant #1). Some participants indicated to have learned how to use certain tools and techniques for, for example, precision tile cutting as compared to before when they used only a nail and hammer to break off pieces from a tile.

At the same time, a significant number of the participants reported that they had not learned anything from their experience of working abroad. One respondent reported, “I was working there, I was taking on any kind of job or duty. I wasn't thinking about whether it was easy or hard...” (Respondent #7). Another respondent confirmed, “... unfortunately I didn't learn anything, I didn't learn any skill, I was just working as a labourer” (Respondent #11). These comments suggest that leaving Afghanistan for work in neighbouring countries is often just that, finding work, and that going abroad to work does not necessarily result in an increase in the skill set of the migrant workers.

For those who reported to have learned skills, there were also numerous examples of upward mobility due, in part, to acquisition of new skills. Some also reported that they actively pursued upward mobility through acquiring new skills:

I escaped to Pakistan and started working with a Pakistani mason. I wanted to learn the plastering as part of doing masonry and so I started to work under a Pakistani mason from whom I could learn plastering. After some time I learned masonry and plaster work and started working as a [skilled] mason (FGD participant #5)

Or,

In my first year in Iran I worked as a simple worker, then I became a mason. I worked independently as a plasterer, roofer and tiler in Tehran for six years (FGD participant #6).

Most respondents and focus group participants indicated that they would not have obtained their skills, had they stayed in Afghanistan.

Casserino's (2004) concept of 'preparedness' consists of a willingness to return, social capital, and mobilization of tangible and intangible resources. The decision to return for most of respondents and participants is a mix of push and pull factors. In nearly all the cases the respondents reported to have come back soon after the Taliban regime was ousted, in 2002 through to 2010. For many, the promises of a better, peaceful, and more prosperous Afghanistan in 2002 by the Afghan Government and the international donors and military forces were key in the decision to return to Afghanistan as exemplified in the following comment by one focus group participants:

When we heard about the new regime in Afghanistan [in 2002] we came back with about twenty people together. We were told that if we hand in our green card [issued by the Iranian Government for Afghan migrant workers and refugees] we would be taken to Herat free of charge. We thought that if the American people and soldiers are in Afghanistan, we would enjoy security and live in safety (FGD Participant #1).

In addition, for many of the migrant workers / refugees, the preferred option was to work in Afghanistan since home was where their families were. Many of the respondents expressed a strong sense of belonging to Afghanistan. Apart from the promise of safety and prosperity, some

returned to take care of family problems or were simply asked by family members to come back. Other pull factors included a felt desire to contribute to the reconstruction of a new Afghanistan. This is best illustrated through comments by many respondents about their love of the country, missing home, and home being the best place to be.

The main push factor for the migrants to return was the mistreatment of by host country authorities, and in some cases, by the citizens of the host countries. Almost all respondents had gone to Iran and Pakistan irregularly. But, even for those who had migrated with documents there appears to have been no difference as far as mistreatment in the host countries:

... even if we were there in Pakistan legally, the police would stop us and interrogate us. During Ramadan my father came and I gave him 18,000 Rupees to get back home. On the way the police stopped my father and took the money from him. Harassment of Afghans by the police happened everyday in Pakistan. (FGD participant #4).

About half of the respondents reported that they had been deported from Iran.

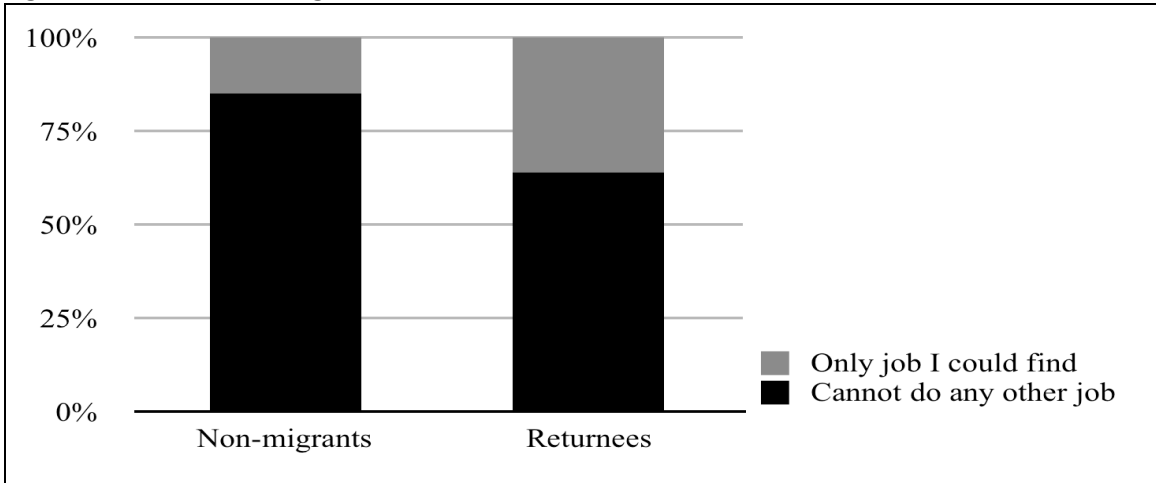
In Afghanistan social capital would most manifest as extended family. In terms of their social capital, almost all returnees had family members in Afghanistan. In most cases the remaining family members informed the migrant workers abroad about the situation in Afghanistan. However, in only a very few cases the respondents reported that they have been helped by their family members upon return, and only in terms of being housed when back in Afghanistan. This may well be due to the fact that in 2002 hardship was, and remains today, as a key feature of existence for the vast majority of Afghan families.

Most of the respondents and focus group participants had some savings when they returned, but in most cases this money did not go very far in sustaining them. The savings would help them with the cost of the return trip, but was insufficient to sustain them over the longer term or serve as capital for a small business venture. A number of other respondents reported having borrowed up to 500 USD to return to Afghanistan.

About half of the respondents and focus group participants were beneficiaries of the repatriation programme of UNHCR. In most cases this was just a cash grant of, reportedly, 10 USD per family member. In some cases, in addition to the cash payment, some families had been given a bag of wheat, blankets, tools for work, and transportation costs or ticket. None of the respondents reported that the programme of UNHCR was the incentive to return.

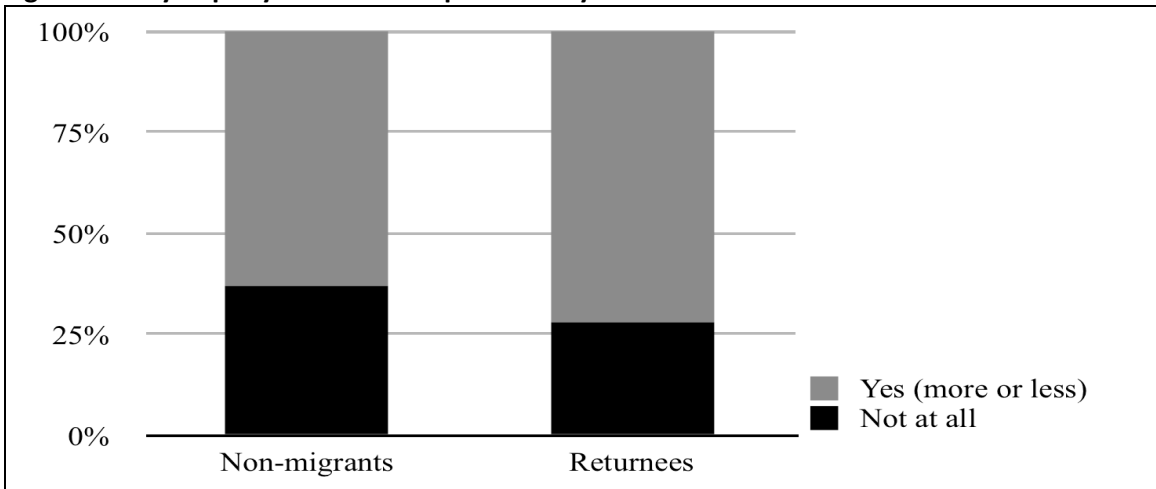
The next series of findings relate to the reintegration of the returnees in terms of employability and how the migration experience might have helped. To the question why they were doing casual labour, a significantly higher percentage of the non-migrants indicated that it was the only type of work they could do. In contrast, a higher percentage of the returnees said that casual labour was the only employment they could find (Figure 3). Regardless of this significant difference the majority of both returnees and non-migrants indicated that they could not do anything other than casual labour. It should be noted that the vast majority of manual labour is organised informally.

Figure 3 Reasons for doing casual labour



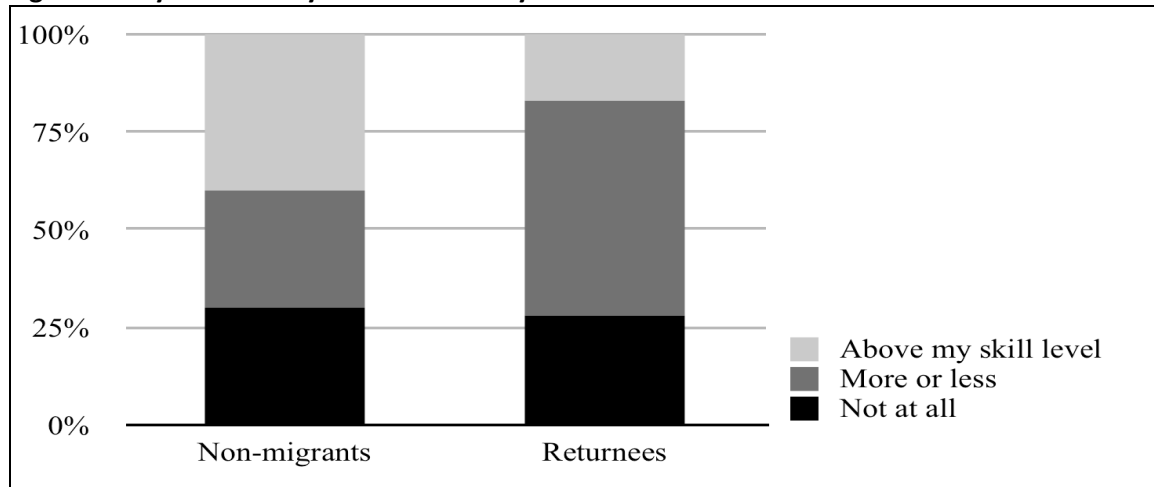
Furthermore, there is a small difference between the extent they are able to put their skills into practice (see figure 4). The question was meant to find out to what extent they can deploy certain techniques within a certain skill. This seems to be consistent with the question whether they work at their skill level.

Figure 4 Can you put your skills into practice in your current work?



Returnees have indicated that by and large they work more or less at their skill level (figure 5), which means that they can put their skills into practice. There is some ambiguity in the answer 'not at all', either persons have the techniques but are limited by the nature of the work, in which case they work below their skill-level, or they don't have techniques they can deploy in a certain skill, in which case they work above their skill level.

Figure 5 Do you work at your skill level in your current work?



Those that had learned skills and techniques during their migration span indicated that employers favour them, as compared to those who did not learn skills and techniques:

The quality of our work [of returnees] is different from the others. If they go somewhere for work and they don't do it so well, the employer will dump them after the first day of work, but [because of our skills] we will stay till the work is completed (FGD Participant #5).

Another respondent revealed, "I don't want to work as a daily wage worker and I make every effort to take work as a contractor, through *Ejarah*". *Ejarah* is a verbal agreement between the employer and the casual labourer based on pricing a job. The contractor fulfils the assignment for the fixed price regardless of the time it takes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The first objective was to establish whether low-skilled workers have learned new skills in their migration span. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that a significant number of returnees have gained skills and techniques they would not have had, had they not migrated. Those who acquired new skills during migration did so in at least four ways. First, returnees report having learned aesthetic values and superior workmanship in the finish of their construction work. Second, they have learned different skills and techniques through training / supervision and imitation of from host country workers. Third, they have been exposed to tools that they did not use in Afghanistan. Fourth, reportedly, returnees are significantly better endowed in generic skills such as decision-making, supervising, and ability to work in a team.

The main aim for this research was to establish the extent to which migrants to Iran and Pakistan have gained from their migration experience. Those that have, appear to have gained from their migration experience in at least three ways: better quality of work, increased employability in a highly competitive labour market, and thus relatively higher income security. The main conclusion of this study is that despite the many problems that plague Afghanistan's socio-economic conditions, and the distant prospect of these problems being addressed, the migrants that have gained skills abroad have a significant relative advantage over others who

without those skills as far as employability in a highly competitive market.

The third objective was to establish whether preparedness was a decisive factor in the ability to gain from the migration experience. Casserino's (2004) model starts with the willingness and the readiness to return. The examination of the 'push and pull' factors reveals that many returnees were willing to return to Afghanistan, enticed by the sheer optimism of a new beginning after the fall of the Taliban. However from the findings the picture emerges that people were ill prepared, as the readiness has been minimal for most respondents.

The tangible and intangible resource mobilization has been limited for most respondents. The financial resources were limited, if any it was certainly not enough to bridge the time needed to resettle. Skills however is one of the intangible resources that constitute preparedness, in that respect those that learned skills turned out to be better able to cope with the pressures of the urban labour market. In most cases social capital didn't play a significant role in the preparedness of the returnees. Furthermore in a post-conflict situation the preparedness is embedded in an unusual 'event' of mass return. Acting on the assumption that many of Afghanistan's problems would be solved soon after the fall of the Taliban, the initial policy by the Government and the international donors was to favour repatriation as the most durable solution. The political implication of setting up large repatriation programmes is to convey the message that Afghanistan under president Hamid Karzai was normalizing.²⁰ Moreover in a number of cases people were arrested and deported, in these cases the readiness was totally absent.

Many respondents did return to their provinces upon returning to Afghanistan but became migrants to the cities within Afghanistan. Urbanization as the extension of return migration is best described as 'urban unsettlement'. That is to say, these returnees do not appear to be in a state of permanent settlement or return. Many of the returnees engaged for this research, and more broadly, vast segments of the population in Afghanistan, appear to regret the decision to have returned. As such the model also focuses too exclusively on the initial moments of return and, therefore, overlooks the return migration – urbanization nexus in a post/in-conflict situation, as is the case in Afghanistan and many other post-conflict countries. Urbanization should be incorporated as the extension of return that determines the impacts of return migration in a post-conflict context.

In conclusion, the main aim for this research was to establish the extent to which migrants to Iran and Pakistan have gained from their migration experience. Those that have, appear to have learned skills and techniques in at least three ways: quality of work, increased employability in a highly competitive labour market, and thus relatively higher income security. The main conclusion of this study is that despite the many problems that plague Afghanistan's socio-economic conditions, and the distant prospect of these problems being addressed, the migrants that have gained skills abroad have a significant relative advantage over others who without those skills as far as employability.

The following recommendations follow out of this research. Without exception all casual labourers have said that they would be helped the most by stable employment. Both government and international donors recognize this, but have failed in their attempts to create

²⁰ See also Marsden and Turton (2002)

more employment in a structural manner. Even though there is a numerous construction projects by the private and public sectors, they do not appear to be sufficient to accommodate the oversupplied, both skilled and largely unskilled, labour force. Fixing Afghanistan's socio-economic problems is obviously not something that can be addressed in isolation from the conflict that persists in many provinces and even major cities from time to time. The first and most obvious policy implication from this study is, that unskilled casual labourers should be employed in public construction work such as fixing the roads in and around Kabul, whether or not through cash for work programmes.

Second, donors and the Government should consider developing a system to certify informally obtained skills or other ways to make informally obtained skills marketable in both formal and informal sectors. This contributes to the emergence of a more systemized and fair wage system. Also, skill certification would complement other projects on apprenticeships and skills training. For instance, Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) has Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools where they provide vocational training.

Third, given the fact that south-south migration will remain an integral part Afghanistan's development, and in fact one could speak of a post-repatriation phase,²¹ donor agencies such as UNHCR and International Organization for Migration (IOM), in conjunction with the administrations in Tehran and Islamabad, should attempt to manage the migration flows. One way is to allow for legal entry and (temporary) work permissions for Afghan migrants. Their illegal status and subsequent deportations didn't allow them to stay in one place too long, so as to build up connections and learn new skills, and undermined the potential for a contribution to development.

To that end governments of Afghanistan, Iran and UNHCR have signed a tripartite agreement to issue 200.000 work visas for one family member of a returned family in 2007.²² In 2010, at a meeting in Geneva, the minister of labour of Afghanistan reiterated the promise of the Government of Iran to issue work permits to Afghan workers.²³ There have also been plans to let Iranian companies arrange legal entry for Afghan workers when they want to hire Afghan workers.²⁴ The status of the issuance of Iranian visa's and permits is unknown. At the same time 211,023 Afghans were deported from Iran in 2011.²⁵ The governments of Iran and Afghanistan should expedite current talks and sign similar temporary labour migration agreements as has been done with Qatar (2008), Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia.²⁶

Fourth, the conditions under which return is the most desired outcome should be rethought. It has become clear that Afghanistan has not been able to absorb the huge influxes of returnees. A more coordinated response that levels out the influx of returnees could reduce pressures on labour markets and urban services. In this respect Donor Agencies and the Government should devise policies that could bridge the relief phase and the development phase. Most casual

²¹ See <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/94174/AFGHANISTAN-Numbers-of-returnees-down>

²² See Tripartite Agreement, signed February 17, 2007

²³ See Koepke (2011)

²⁴ See Koepke (2011)

²⁵ See Department of State Country Report on Human Rights practices (2011).
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper>

²⁶ See Istanbul RECCA Progress Report

labourers fall between the cracks between these two phases: most of the interviewed casual labourers had received relief assistance upon return, but there were few opportunities to sustain a living once in Afghanistan.

Finally, the vast majority of returnees appear to have returned with much optimism and hope, only to be disappointed and in many cases regretting return. While this research did not focus on the politics of return migration, it appears that inducing return for political purposes can undermine the livelihoods of a most vulnerable segment of the population, as Afghanistan was fundamentally unable to absorb such huge numbers of returnees. Clearer, politics-free, and more honest communication about the fundamental risks and uncertainties of return to a post-conflict situation could have contributed to a more manageable situation and preparation for the returnees than currently prevalent.

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