

From pastoral to displacement economy? Protracted displacement and livelihood in the Somali Regional State of Ethiopia

Prof. Dr. Fekadu Adugna Tufa (Addis Ababa University)

Abstract

Pastoral mobility established Somali clans and families in the territories that extend from Djibouti in the Northeast to North Kenya in the South criss-crossing the present national borders. Since the 1960s conflict has significantly affected the Somali inhabited territories. The 1977-78 Ethiopia-Somalia war, also known as the Ogaden war, displaced close to a million Ethiopians, mostly Somali who took refuge in Somalia until 1990 (Lewis 2002). Towards the end of the 1980s, when the civil war in Somalia intensified, a reverse exodus started. Millions fled the country and took refuge in Ethiopia and Kenya as the state of Somalia eventually collapsed. In the late 2000s with the rise of the extremist Salafist movement called Al Shabaab, and due to recurrent drought (and also flood) displacement has been renewed once again among the Somali. As of September 2024, over 900,000 refugees from Somalia live in displacement camps and peri-urban areas in the Horn of Africa, mostly in Kenya and Ethiopia.

On the other hand, Ethiopia, besides hosting refugees, has also experienced unprecedented level of internal displacement caused by conflict and climate change in the last decade. As of September 2024 there are over four million IDPs displaced by conflict and climate change. By setting the context of displacement among the Somali population in the Horn of Africa and the situation in Ethiopia, the presentation will highlight the complexities of cross-border displacement and return; Somali's 'displacement economy', and the problematic approach with categories such as refugees, returnees, IDPs and the host communities among the humanitarian communities in the Somali context.



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