Remittances to Conflict Zones: the Sudanese Diaspora in Cairo

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Abstract

Refugees and migrants in transit countries like Egypt are linked into wider Diaspora networks that help support them, and in turn enable the migrants to support their families and communities back home. The research project presented here was conceived as the second phase of a larger study of remittances to Darfur, conducted by the Feinstein International Center (FIC), Tufts University. The earlier study explored remittance patterns amongst internally displaced people in and around the urban centers of Darfur, and this study aimed to extend the research to explore remittance patterns of Sudanese refugees and migrants in neighboring countries. We selected Cairo as a case study because it is a good example both of a country of first asylum in a conflict affected region, and a country with significant ‘south-south’ migration flows.

This final technical report summarizes the activities of the above-mentioned collaborative research project between the Feinstein International Center (FIC), Tufts University and the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS), The American University in Cairo since the start of the project in July 2009 to its end in June 2012

Keywords: Remittances, Diaspora networks, transnational linkages, Sudanese refugees and migrants, livelihoods.
II) The Research Problem

Much of the existing research on remittances is focused on the diaspora in the US or Europe but very few studies focus on south-south transfers, even though much remittance activity takes place in transit countries. The main rationale for this research was to cover such gap in the remittance literature by focusing on remittances flow from Sudanese in Cairo to their families in Sudan and the remittances flow from the Sudanese Diaspora to their families in Cairo and Sudan.

The original research problems that the project aimed to address were the following:

1. The research on refugee in transit countries lacks quantitative evidence about the impact of transnational linkages—how these linkages affect the financial and social capital of refugees and their livelihood strategies.
2. The channels and mechanisms that are used to transmit remittances.
3. The difference between the experiences of senders versus non-senders and receivers versus non-receivers
4. The importance of remittances for survival during conflict, reconstruction as well as the role of remittances to the conflict itself.

The role played by Diasporas in fueling the conflict in their countries of origin or supporting peace agreements, is a well-established research area. One of our original objectives, as mentioned above, was to explore whether and how remittances influence Sudanese political, social and economic involvement in their home regions. However, after initial exploration of the situation of Sudanese in Cairo and consultation with the Sudanese members of our research team, it was clear that inquiry about political matters related to the conflict in Sudan was not feasible. The situation of the Sudanese in Cairo was already tense before the Egyptian revolution in January 2011 and it became more so afterwards, and we did not want to crate additional problems by asking questions (See the full research report (output 1) for more information on the suspension of this activity).

Our survey findings indicated that regular remittances were received only by a small proportion of our respondents, and did not allow us to make statistical comparisons between receivers and non-receivers. Remittance transfer appears to play a relatively minor role in the livelihoods of Sudanese refugees in Cairo; their survival largely depends on their economic activities and on humanitarian assistance. We did try to explore implications of remittance receiving qualitatively, however.

Accordingly as our research evolved, we focused on the livelihoods of Sudanese in Cairo and their survival strategies as well as the transnational linkages with the Sudanese in Sudan and the Diaspora.
III) Objectives

Our study’s goals were to fill some of the empirical gaps in our knowledge and understanding about the livelihoods of refugees and migrants in the urban centers of countries neighboring conflict zones, and specifically the relationship between remittances, livelihoods and vulnerability of refugees.

Our first objective was to map the distribution of Sudanese refugees and migrants in Cairo, and determine the main areas where they lived. Then, based on this map, we sought to conduct a survey of Sudanese that would allow us to gather information on Sudanese migration routes and their livelihoods in Cairo, transnational linkages and remittance patterns both with the diaspora in other countries, and with ‘home’ communities in Sudan. This information would allow us to explore how transnational linkages support livelihoods.

The study’s objectives could be summarized as follows:

1. To map the distribution of Sudanese refugees and migrants in Cairo, and determine the main areas where they lived.
2. To understand the extent of transnational linkages and remittance patterns of Sudanese in Cairo with both the diaspora in other countries, and with ‘home’ communities in Sudan.
3. To explore and understand how transnational linkages and remittances support the livelihoods of Sudanese in Cairo.
4. To understand the obstacles to remittance sending and receiving and how these obstacles could be addressed by policy or programmatic interventions.

Objective 1: To map the distribution of Sudanese refugees and migrants in Cairo, and determine the main areas where they lived.

This objective was successfully met. We identified the districts, sub-districts and neighborhoods where there were concentrations of Sudanese households throughout Cairo. Our information drew on two main sources: key informant interviews and mapping tools from online software and satellite imagery. We began with a large map of Cairo, then worked with Sudanese key informants and community-based associations to mark up the map according to the main areas of Sudanese density. Finally, we identified 20 relevant districts and 42 sub-districts, and we conducted field visits to these areas to verify this information. The Research Coordinator and Field Supervisor conducted field visits to each of the 42 sub-districts to identify individual residences of Sudanese. These residences were approached and requested to participate in the survey. The final number of household visited was 788.
Objective 2: To understand the extent of transnational linkages and remittance patterns of Sudanese in Cairo with both the diaspora in other countries, and with ‘home’ communities in Sudan.

This objective was successfully met through the survey research and the qualitative methodology. The questionnaire included direct questions on the extent of transnational linkages and remittance patterns both with the Diaspora and with Sudanese in Sudan. Remittance patterns were further explored with survey questions on livelihoods (see objective 3 below) and through key informants interviews and focus groups discussions.

Objective 3: To explore and understand how transnational linkages and remittances support the livelihoods of Sudanese in Cairo.

The research focused on three issues: the migration experience of Sudanese; their livelihood experience and problems in Cairo, and the importance of remittances. Remittances questions like income questions are sensitive questions that could be misrepresented. Accordingly, we explored remittances through our questions on livelihoods that covered all aspects of Sudanese livelihoods. In addition to direct questions on income, the questionnaire asked about economic activities, survival strategies, household size, assets owned, and external income in the form of assistance from aid agencies and remittances. Detailed information on livelihoods and survival strategies enabled us to understand the role and the importance of remittances in their livelihoods. As such, the objective was successfully met.

Objective 4: To understand the obstacles to remittance sending and receiving and how these obstacles could be addressed by policy or programmatic interventions.

The objective was partially met. Our survey explored the mechanisms by which how remittances are received and sent. These indicated that Sudanese use Western Union, the informal ‘hawala’ system, and hand carrying. In qualitative research, we explored bank policies on remittances, through qualitative interviews with bank officials. We explored the impact of the new policies by Egyptian banks to facilitate sending and receiving remittances on non-Egyptians including Sudanese refugees. However, given the fluid and politically uncertain state of affairs in Egypt at the present time, we cannot confidently recommend policy or programmatic interventions. Such recommendations will have to wait until Egypt is more stable.

(For detailed information on the achievement of these objectives, please see the final research report: output 1)

IV) Methodology

The main research method used in this research was a household survey. The tool for the survey was a questionnaire that was designed to capture household demographic, migration and livelihood information, and included a detailed module on remittances. The questionnaire was fully structured and coded, with space for a few descriptive
comments. The initial questionnaire was designed by the research team, then tested and revised during the enumerator training before it was translated into Arabic, and back-translated.

At the beginning of our study, we were aiming to cover all Sudanese migrants and refugees in Cairo. However, defining and describing this population is difficult, there is the old arrivals who are well integrated and do not perceive themselves as refugees although many of them are not economically well-off and there is the new arrivals after the conflict in Sudan who not necessarily have formal refugee status but they identify themselves as refugees. Our sample is biased toward this second group. One reason for the biased sample is that we did not cover the whole of Cairo, only areas with Sudanese concentrations and it is likely that the well-integrated old Sudanese in Cairo are in other areas that are not concentrated with Sudanese. Despite such limitation, our sample is a good representation of the Sudanese refugees in Cairo in terms of gender, place of origin, education, and age.

To prepare for the door-to-door random sampling survey of Sudanese households, we conducted a mapping exercise of the areas known as highly concentrated by Sudanese. This constituted the first phase of our data collection that took place from July 2009 to October 2010 (see objective 1). In the meantime, we sent the survey questionnaire to CAPMAS (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics) for approval to conduct the door-to-door household survey. After a year of waiting, the Egyptian government refused to give us the permission and were instructed that data collection could only take place on the AUC campus. This meant that the methodology need to be revised. After consultation with the field researchers, we worked out a way to target the sample identified during the mapping process. Each week, the field researchers visited the already identified districts, and with the help of local informants in the community, went to the homes of potential interviewees whom we identified during the mapping process, explained the survey, and asked whether the head of household would come to AUC for the interview. If the respondent agreed, a time and date was agreed (one or two days later), and he/she was given a slip of paper with a code which the respondent handed to us when they arrived. This was to ensure anonymity and it enabled us to check whether the person who came was from the identified household. The total number of questionnaires administrated on campus were 565.

The survey was complemented with in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to investigate areas not fully covered by the survey. Twenty-four key informant interviews and seven focus groups were conducted during the data collection phase. The focus groups sought to understand Sudanese perceptions about remittances and their social support networks in Cairo, Sudan, and other countries. One set of focus groups comprised remittance senders and receivers, and another set consisted of individuals identified by other Sudanese as having “successful livelihood strategies” whom we thought interviewing them was important to understand who can make it and who can not make it in Cairo and the strategies that can lead to success. The interviews, on the other hand, was conducted with Sudanese community leaders and with individuals identified as having insight into particular issues, including migration to Israel, the use of hawala for
money transfer, and the success of particular Sudanese migrants. Finally, we conducted interviews with three financial institutions where Sudanese conducted money transfers: the Western Union office in Garden City, the Arab-African Bank in Garden City, and CIB (Commercial Industrial Bank). With these interviews we sought to gain an understanding of the institutional constraints and enablers involved in facilitating money transfer.

We entered the survey data with CSPro software, and after cleaning and re-coding, analyzed the data using SPSS. Qualitative data were analyzed by hand (rather than with software).

The survey method used in this research was relatively successful, but proved vulnerable to political exigencies. We had to substantially revise our survey approach because of political difficulties. The survey gave us good understanding of the demographic and migration experience, and worked as a starting point for getting quantitative information on income and livelihoods strategies that was further deepened by qualitative methods. The combined (mixed) methods approach was relatively successful and we recommend implementing the same methodology with other refugee groups in urban settings.

Refugee communities in Cairo, and particularly the Sudanese, have been subject to much research in recent years and this has created 'research fatigue' resulting in a lack of trust and sometimes hostility towards researchers. We tried to overcome this by actively seeking to gain the trust of the interviewees. Our two main research assistants were Sudanese who are much trusted and respected by their communities, and they helped identify enumerators from the Sudanese community, Before each interview, we spent time explaining the research and its purpose and made it clear that the interviewees would not gain anything from participating in the research other than contributing to our knowledge. We stressed that no personal gain or benefit would result from their contribution to this research. An important aspect of this project was the dissemination phase where we went back to the refugee communities and shared with them our results to give them a sense of ownership of the project (See under Activities below).

Another important learning experience from this project is the importance of doing research with institutions that are in contact with and respected by the government. AUC's contact with the government agency, CAPMAS, enabled our research to go forward after the government initially refused us permission to conduct the survey. Only after AUC's negotiation with CAPMAS, and based on AUC's good reputation doing research in Egypt, did the agency agree to allow us to continue our research (but with a changed methodology).

(For detailed information on the methodology, see the full research report (output 1) and the research instruments - questionnaire and interview guides (output 2)
V) Project Activities

The following activities were conducted throughout the duration of the project

1. Preparing for the Household Survey
Karen Jacobsen, the project’s co-principal investigator at Tufts University, visited Cairo in June 2009 to prepare for the mapping activity \(\textit{objective 1}\) and the sampling for the household survey. During her visit, the research coordinator and research assistants were recruited and extensive meetings took place with the research team to discuss the sampling strategy and to construct the questionnaire. The questionnaire was built on the questionnaire used on the previous research on remittances conducted in Darfur and Portland, Maine. The questionnaire was tested on the research assistants, revised and then preliminarily translated into Arabic. After the translation, it was tested again on some members from the community during a focus group organized at the American University in Cairo. New questions were added and some questions were re-phrased.

2. Mapping Sudanese in Greater Cairo
This activity constitutes the first phase of our data collection process, it took four months from July 2009 to October 2009. Although CMRS was familiar with neighbourhoods of Sudanese concentration, the mapping process sought to verify this knowledge and provide the baseline for the sampling strategy \(\textit{See Objective 1}\).

The technical guidance provided by the co-principal investigator of Tufts University during this phase as well as the phase of constructing and testing the research tools was of vital importance to the success of implementing this activity. Another important element was our two Sudanese research assistants who knew, were trusted by and had access to the Sudanese communities.

The data collected during this mapping phase was also useful because it was later used by CMRS along other data to provide an estimate of the number of Sudanese in greater Cairo. Previous estimates were crude and lacked sound methodological base. The mapping activity used for this project provided CMRS with a sound baseline to work on a more accurate estimate.

3. Enumerator training and field pilot
The enumerator recruitment began in October 2009, focusing on Sudanese who were bilingual in Sudanese Arabic and English. In the second visit by the co-principal investigator in November 2010, we conducted a three-day enumerator training to explain the methodology, the sampling strategy, and revise our survey questionnaire. Following the training, we piloted the survey in two sample areas \(\textit{See full research report and previous technical reports submitted to IDRC}\).

4. Conducting the survey
As mentioned above, the Egyptian government only allowed data collection to take place on the AUC campus, which required us to work out a way to target the sample identified
during the mapping process (See methodology section above). We made a series of field visits in which we contacted 25-35 households per visit focusing on the sample of 788 households identified earlier during the mapping process. Of the 788 households initially contacted, almost three quarters - 565 respondents - came to the AUC campus and completed the full interview. Out of these 565, just under half, 257 questionnaires, were completed before the Egyptian revolution (January 2011) and 308 questionnaires afterwards, from March –April 2011 (For detailed information on the data collection process see the full research report: output1).

5. Qualitative methods
From December 2010- December 2011, we interviewed 24 key informants, and conducted seven focus groups. Each focus group contained four to five participants, for a total of 28-35 focus group respondents. The focus groups sought to understand Sudanese perceptions about remittances and their social support networks in Cairo, Sudan, and other countries. Our key informant interviews were with Sudanese community leaders and with individuals identified as having insight into particular issues, including migration to Israel, the use of hawala for money transfer, and the success of particular Sudanese migrants. We also conducted interviews with three financial institutions where Sudanese conducted money transfers (For detailed information on the qualitative method, see the full research report (output1).

6. Evaluation of the research project
As per the agreement with IDRC, in February 2012, we hired an independent consultant to evaluate the project. The consultant was Ms. Azza Kandil who has over twenty-five years of experience, fifteen of which in the field of development on CIDA and EU funded projects.

The evaluator began with a review of the basic project documentation which, included the research proposal to IDRC, literature reviews, all progress reports covering the different phases of the project, the customized research questionnaire, a random sample of the completed questionnaires, the final project report and other documentation provided by CMRS. Moreover, she conducted interviews with all members of the research team as well as with key stakeholders and attended three of the dissemination workshops.

A 23 pages evaluation report was produced and submitted to CMRS in June 2012 (See the full evaluation report output.8)

7. Dissemination Workshops
In March, April and May 2012, the research team conducted a series of workshops in order to disseminate our findings and receive feedback from both refugee organizations and the Sudanese refugee community. We held four community workshops with a total of 61 participants, and four organization workshops, with a total of 50 participants, total 111 participants. Five of these workshops were conducted in Sudanese organizations,
three were held on AUC campus. Five of the workshops were led in Arabic, and three of the organizational workshops were led in English. The purpose of the workshops was to inform stakeholders about the findings from the study, and to get their feedback on whether the findings resonated with their experience. The format of the workshops was usually a PowerPoint or flipchart presentation of key findings, followed by a validation exercise where participants discussed the findings. We asked:

1. To what extent the findings resonated with their experience;
2. Whether they were surprised by anything they heard, or heard new information;
3. If they thought the validity of the findings was questionable due to contextual factors;
(For detailed information on the dissemination activity and results, see full research report: output1)

VI) Project Outputs

Research outputs

1. A 56-page Research Report of findings (Output 1)
2. The questionnaire used in the survey (Output 2)
3. An executive summary of the research report (Output 3)
4. An Arabic translation of the executive summary (Output 4)
5. Presentation of findings at the following workshops:
   a. An Arabic presentation of preliminary findings at the conference “Egypt and the Nile Basin Countries: Towards a Social Policy that aim to enhance the situation of refugees from the Nile Basin Countries,” organized by the Information and Decision Making Support Center of the Prime Ministry (IDSC) (Output 5)
   b. An English presentation of findings at the workshop attended by UNHCR, IOM, Caritas, Refugee Egypt and other stakeholders (Output 6)
   c. An English presentation on the difficulty of doing research with refugees in an urban setting at the conference “A Growing Challenge: Psychosocial and Mental Health Support for Refugees and Migrants living in Urban Setting” organized by the Psycho-Social Services and Training Institute in Cairo (PSTIC). The presentation outlined a number of strategies to prevent the consequences of research fatigue and the possible mistrust from the communities studied. (Output 7)
6. A 23-page evaluation report produced by an independent consultant (Output 8)

Capacity Building Outputs:

1. The Co-Principal Investigator of Tufts provided three days of Training of Trainers to the research team (the project manager (now the Principal investigator), the research coordinator, and the research assistants) on sampling techniques and data collection methods.
2. 18 Enumerators attended three day training on the research ethics, how to ensure a representative sample, and how to administrate the questionnaire.
3. Two full-time research assistants were trained by the principal investigator on
how to conduct in-depth interviews and run focus group discussions

4. Regular assistance and guidance was provided by the principal investigator and the research coordinator to the two research assistants on data entry

VII) Project Outcomes

1. The research was important in explaining the difficulty and complexity of doing research with refugees in urban settings.
2. The research was innovative in revising the methodology to meet the restriction imposed by the government without compromising the rigor of the research and the representativeness of the sample.
3. The technical assistance provided by Tufts/FIC to CMRS added to the institutional capacity of CMRS as a center as well as the capacity of the research team members. This is the first field research of this type and size undertaken by CMRS and it constitutes an important milestone in the development of the center. CMRS has gained practical capabilities in conducting a full scale research project from A to Z, starting with project design and proposal writing to the final phase of developing results and disseminating information. This has been particularly important for the two Sudanese research assistants who were engaged in all steps of the research design, implementation, and data entry. Such practical engagement had increased their research skills and will hopefully open up more possibility in the future.
4. During the course of the research project, the original principal investigator left AUC and Egypt resulting in the need for a new principal investigator. On the recommendation of Tufts/FIC, the project manager was chosen as the new principal investigator. The new responsibility added to her skills and opened up further future opportunities.
5. The dissemination phase (see Activity 7) was important in ensuring the trust of the refugee community and in enhancing networking with other stakeholders and with the refugee community

VIII) Overall Assessment and Recommendations

The partnership between CMRS and Tufts/FIC has proved to be very successful. Tufts provided invaluable technical assistance, and AUC/CMRS’s strong connections with both the refugee community and the Egyptian authority provided the needed access. Together, the combination ensured the successful implementation of the project. Thus, one of the lessons learned is the importance of partnership with strong local institutions when doing research in the south. However, the success of this project was due to the fact that such partnership was on an equal basis, where members of both institutions collaborated in the design and implementation of the project.

Another important reason for the success of this project was the flexibility of the donor in terms of the timeline. Enough time was given to design the research methodology, build rapport with the research team, and construct the research tools. The donor was also
understanding in allowing for the extension of the project to make up for the lost time because of the political unrest that occurred in Egypt during the research.