

**Engendering “Voluntary” Repatriation: The Planned Repatriation of
Maban Refugees from Sherkole Refugee Camp, Ethiopia, to South
Sudan**

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Abstract

This thesis contributes to the literature on gender, refugees, returnees and repatriation studies. The thesis presents the gendered analysis of the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole Refugee Camp, Ethiopia. It critically looks in to the concept of voluntariness, as given in the United Nations High Commission for Refugee Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation, from three different angles: first political and organizational interests that might affect the decision of refugees; secondly the perception of refugee men and women towards the process of repatriation, current situation in their places of origin and the degree of their involvement in the process; third the practical arrangements of the repatriation process. The findings of the thesis suggest that the degree of involvement of refugee men and women in the process and the benefits they might get from the repatriation differ across their gender and their social status.

The analysis also shows how difficult it is to establish voluntariness of repatriation independently from the socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic context under which any repatriation is planned to be conducted. This dependency on contexts in the case of the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole Refugee Camp results in uneven representation of men and women in terms of access to information, decision making and the benefit they get from repatriation. The community leaders take the largest part in access to information and decision-making followed by refugee men, refugee women in male headed households and refugee women headed households and their families.

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Table of Content

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1. Background.....	1
1.2. Thesis Interest, Hypothesis and Arguments	5
1.3. Methodologies, Informants and Sampling	6
1.4. Structure of the Thesis	9
2. Contested Frameworks of Repatriation: International Tools, Debates and Experiences.....	12
2.1. The UNHCR Framework: The Normative Prerequisites.....	13
2.1.1. The Concept of ‘Voluntary’ Repatriation.....	13
2.1.2. Underlying Assumptions regarding Repatriation.....	15
2.1.3. What are the Pre-Repatriation Procedures?.....	16
2.1.3.1. Making the Returnee Places Attractive.....	16
2.1.3.2. Establishing and Ensuring the Voluntary Nature of Refugees’ Decision.....	16
2.1.3.3. Facilitating Return under Conditions of Safety and Dignity	18
2.2. Scholarly Debates Surrounding “Voluntary” Repatriation and its Gendered Impacts	19
2.3. Evaluating Experiences of Other “Voluntary” Repatriation Operations in Relation to Gender	23
3. Gendered Analysis of the Planned Repatriation of Mabans Refugees from Sherkole Refugee Camp.....	27
3.1. Possible Interest Groups in the Repatriation Process	28
3.2. What Preconditions Do Refugees Consider before Deciding for Repatriation?	34

3.2.1. Availability and Quality of Services in Sherkole.....	36
3.2.2. Travel and Timing of the Repatriation	46
3.2.3. Relationships with those who remained in South Sudan	47
3.3. Realities on the ground: Where does repatriation get gendered?	49
3.3.1. The preparation from UNHCR Sherkole side – Are Refugees Convinced to go?.....	49
3.3.1.1. Unbiased and Complete Information?	50
3.3.1.2. Who decides?.....	56
3.3.1.3. The Repatriation Operation.....	63
3.3.1.4. Who benefits?.....	66
3.3.1.5. Perceived challenges in the repatriation process	68
3.3.2. The preparation from UNHCR South Sudan side: Are the returnee places ready?.....	71
4. Conclusion.....	78
Appendices	83
Appendix I – Focus Group Discussion Guide for Focus Group Discussion with Refugee Women and Men	83
Appendix II – Focus Group Discussion Guide for Focus Group Discussion with Refugee Community Leaders	86
Appendix III – Interview Guide for UNHCR and Other Organizations’ Officials.....	86
Bibliography	91

List of Abbreviations

ARRA – Administration of Refugee and Returnee Affairs

CBM – Cross Border Meetings

CPA – Comprehensive Peace Agreement

FGD – Focus Group Discussion

FOA – Field Office Assosa

GOSS – Government of South Sudan

IDP – Internally Displaced Persons

IP - Implementing Partners

IRC – International Rescue Committee

NGO – Non Governmental Organizations

POP – People Oriented Planning

SPLA/M – Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army

UNHCR – United Nations High Commission for Refugees

VRF – Voluntary Repatriation Forms

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

After 22 years of armed and political struggle between the Islamic, northern based Sudanese Government and the predominantly Christian, southern based Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), the two sides finally came to signing a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. This agreement granted autonomy for South Sudan for six years until a referendum is conducted about independence in 2011. The Government of South Sudan was established in December 2005. The Peace Agreement also granted the second highest political position of the country, the First Vice President, to the head of the Government of South Sudan. But before the referendum, census will be conducted by the end of 2007. The result of the census will determine the number of seats to be allocated to the South and North Sudan in the national election that will also take place by the end of 2008 (Sudan Tribune, 5 Jan 2007, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article19582>). The other activity scheduled to take place before the 2011 referendum is demarcation of the areas between the Southern and Northern part of Sudan. This demarcation will determine where areas such as the Blue Nile states and the Nubian Mountains will fall under. These areas are ethnically Black African whereas administratively they are under the Northern part of the country. Currently the population of South Sudan is estimated to be 15 million. By the end of 2004 (just before the signing of the CPA) the number of South Sudanese refugees in neighboring and other countries was nearly one million and the number of

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) was about four million (United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR 2004).

It was against this background that UNHCR together with Sudanese government, SPLA/M (now the Government of South Sudan) and refugee representatives set out to assess the situation in South Sudan. According to UNHCR reports, the assessment confirmed the 'conducive situations' in South Sudan for possible repatriation of refugees from neighboring countries. In February 2006, UNHCR, Sudanese and Ethiopian governments signed a Tripartite Agreement for the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees and by March 2006, UNHCR announced that 14000 Sudanese refugees in Ethiopia have been registered for 'voluntary' repatriation (UNHCR 2006a). UNHCR claimed that the South Sudanese 'voluntary' repatriation would follow strictly the major guiding principles of repatriation: individual voluntary decision, the right to return under 'conditions of safety and dignity' and the right not to be forcibly returned to situations of persecution or serious danger (UNHCR 1996). According to Reuters by the end of May 2007 UNHCR assisted the return of 20000 refugees from Ethiopia to their places of origin (Reuters, 29 May 2007, <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/UNHCR/85379c3cd6e97234f68c2ccd53cc400a.htm>).

Sherkole refugee camp was founded in 1997 following an influx of refugees as a result of armed conflict in Blue Nile and Upper Nile States in the Sudan. It is found in North Western part of Ethiopia, approximately 50 kilometers from the Ethio-Sudanese border.

The camp hosts 13,421 (6394 female) Sudanese refugees (UNHCR 2007a). This number is a result of continuous reduction from 16,545 in September 2006 because of organized and spontaneous repatriation. Currently, most of the inhabitants of the camp are from Meban ethnic group followed by Uduks, Funj, Denka and other minority groups. The camp is divided into seven zones (including the newly established Zone G for refugees from the Great Lake Region) according to the ethnic backgrounds of the refugees. Up to the end of March 2007 the Mabans occupied three zones, the Uduks, the Funj with North Sudanese ‘minorities’ and Denkas with South Sudanese ‘minorities’ occupy one zone each. Refugees mainly settle in households and with their closest clan members. In March 2007, 580 Funj refugees (165 heads of families) in Sherkole were repatriated with 300 to follow in April (UNHCR 2007a). The repatriation operation is currently stopped until the rainy season ends as the roads in South Sudan are only accessible only during the dry season.

Every refugee family is given a piece of land by the Ethiopian government on which they build their huts and use the rest for cultivating vegetables to supplement their subsistence food aid provided by UN World Food Program. The overall refugee administration, protection and health services are provided by UNHCR and Administration of Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA), an Ethiopian governmental organization under the Immigration and Security Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. United Nations World Food Program provides the food aid whereas education (from preschool to high school education based on the Ethiopian education system), income generation activities, recreational activities, support to girls education, support for elderly refugees, peace

education, follow up of unaccompanied minors and separated children, adult education, HIV testing, clean water supply, grinding mills, civic education, vocational trainings and environmental awareness activities and so on are provided by UNHCR's implementing partners (IP). Among the major implementing partners include Save the Children Sweden¹, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and ZOA² Refugee Care (UNHCR Sherkole, 2006b). The overall refugee program of UNHCR Sherkole is under Field Office Assosa. This office is located 50 kilometers from the camp, about 100 kilometers from the Ethio-Sudanese border and 680 kilometers from Addis Ababa in the North Western part of the country.

Repatriation is mainly organized by UNHCR in collaboration with the Ethiopian government, Sudanese Government and Government of South Sudan. Refugees who are 'willing' to return back to their place of origin get registered at UNHCR. During the return journeys UNHCR provides transportation, food and medical services in both territories. Refugees will also be provided with nonfood items they need during repatriation and in the reintegration phase. World Food Program provides food ration for three months upon arrival. The Ethiopian government provides military escort up to the border whereas the Government of South Sudan takes this responsibility in the Sudanese territory. While carrying out the repatriation of Uduks and Funjs from Bonga and Sherkole camps, UNHCR organized visit for Maban refugee community leaders from

¹ Save the Children Sweden phased out its programs in the Sudanese refugee camps in Ethiopia as of December 2006.

² ZOA the name is used as it is. But originally it is the Dutch abbreviation for Zuid Oost Azie (Asia) meaning South East Asia.

Sherkole to South Sudan, in March 2006. The group reported that the returnee places are ‘conducive enough’ for return (UNHCR 2006a).

1.2. Thesis Interest, Hypothesis and Arguments

The central interest of this thesis is a gendered analysis of factors that affect the decision of men and women for the planned ‘voluntary’ repatriation of South Sudanese refugees from Sherkole refugee camp in Ethiopia and if there are any gendered effects that might negatively affect the lives of returnee women as compared to both their lives in refugees camps and to returnee men. In relation to these two questions, the thesis will also investigate whether these gendered factors, if any, have been taken into consideration in the planning of the repatriation operation by men and institutional decision makers. I will explore the forms of representation of refugee men and women in the decision for repatriation. According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1969 Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa and the UNHCR Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation (UNHCR 1996). These provisions in the international instruments will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

My assumption is that there are gendered factors that affect the decision of refugee men and women. I hypothesize that there is a great chance of UNHCR (and other actors) ignoring these gendered factors in the planning of repatriation of South Sudanese refugees from Sherkole refugee camps. This is because first there are not enough choices UNHCR can provide in case refugees might not want to go back. This is to say the practical aspect of the concept ‘voluntary’ repatriation is highly influenced by the current

financial and political pressures on UNHCR. The second assumption is that information about the places of return/places of origin is highly manipulated by community leaders who are directly related with the SPLA/M (currently the Government of South Sudan) and whose interest is political mobilization within the camp. The other equally important factor is that the decision of refugees to repatriate might be conducted taking the patriarchal family as a unit than individuals in the family. Based on this I would argue that the repatriation process might be non-voluntary for some groups of refugees whose voice might not be heard in the planning and implementation of the repatriation. I expect that because of the socio-cultural status of Maban refugee women, the degree of involuntariness will be harsher on them. Even if generally, untimely repatriation might result in negative conditions for all segments of the returnee population, Maban returnee women might be among the ones who will be victims of harsher results of the repatriation including further migration (for economic reasons), violence, armed conflicts, lack of employment opportunities and lack of/limited access to services.

1.3. Methodologies, Informants and Sampling

In my empirical analysis I used a combination of focus group discussion, interviews, informal discussions, observation and document analysis. I conducted seven focus group discussions, two each with female heads of households, women in male headed households and male heads of households, and one with refugee community leaders. The number of participants in the focus group discussions varied from seven to ten. The focus groups discussions served several purposes. First they helped me find out what

needs, assumption, expectations and fears refugee men and women have towards the planned repatriation. And second, they helped to identify positions of Maban refugee women and men in their communities across the categories of gender, class, authority, political views, and marital status and its relationship with their access to information and ability to make decisions regarding repatriation. The focus group discussions also helped to draw conclusions about the extent of voluntariness of the repatriation process for the different groups involved.

I conducted interviews with four UNHCR staff at camp and Field Office levels. In the camp I interviewed the Repatriation Assistant, the Senior Protection Assistant and the Senior Field Assistant and at the Field Office level I interviewed Head of Field Office Assosa. I also interviewed a member of refugee staff of International Rescue Committee. I had informal discussions with two UNHCR staff members in Addis Ababa Liaison Office and one ARRA Staff. The other informal discussion was with an ex-staff member of Save the Children Sweden, who has been working in the refugee programs until the organization phased out its programs in December 2006.

The purpose of interviews and the informal discussions was to see how the concept of voluntary repatriation is viewed by different actors in the repatriation process. The other purpose was to identify what other factors motivated the operation of the repatriation process other than end of the Sudanese Civil War and the reported intention of refugees to 'voluntary' go back to their places of origin. These interviews and discussions also

helped to compare the institutional provisions of repatriation with the practical arrangements of the repatriation operation.

The document analysis was to investigate what legal and human right provisions by the United Nations and Organization for African Union are in place concerning repatriation. This information provides the basis to compare the formal provisions/regulations with the practical application in the process of planning and carrying out of repatriation in Sherkole refugee camp. I used the periodic reports and updates from different websites as sources of information on the developments within UNHCR at both ends and South Sudan and its preparation to receive the returnees mainly in the areas of economic, political and security issues this part of the sentence is unclear. I also had the opportunity to look at some Voluntary Repatriation Forms (VRF) used when a family comes and registers for repatriation. In relation to this I had the opportunity to look at few repatriation confirmation forms where those members of families who want to go separately from the family confirm their declaration to go to a different place. The other documents I could see were minutes two out of three of Cross Border Meetings (CBM) held so far.

In all the focus group discussions, interviews, informal discussions and the document analysis, I have attempted to compare the ways concepts such as family, head of a family, voluntariness, decision making, and going back in safety and dignity are viewed by different actors involved in the planned repatriation of Maban refugees. For focus groups discussions, I used UNHCR's database of refugees to randomly choose refugee men and

women. I took all members of the Refugee Central Committee except two who were not in the camp during my field research. I used interview and focus group discussion guides for the interviews and focus group discussions respectively (please see appendices 1, 2 and 3).

I chose Sherkole Refugee camp because, as a result of its geographical location and ethnic compositions, this is one of the camps from where the first large scale repatriation operations of South Sudanese refugees are planned to be carried out from Ethiopia. The other reason is that because of my previous experience and communication it was easier for me to conduct the research within a short time frame.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

The first chapter is intended to familiarize the reader with the sociopolitical, socio-cultural and socioeconomic background of Sudan in general and Sherkole refugee camp and its inhabitants in particular. The chapter further introduces with the research plan, its interest areas, the assumptions, arguments, the methodologies and informants of the research.

The second chapter that deals with the international instruments and scholarly debates about voluntary repatriation starts by defining the concept of voluntary repatriation from the legal perspective and continues with the presenting the 'ideal' assumptions and procedures involved in voluntary repatriation. The final part of this chapter presents some of the scholarly debates with regards to the practice of voluntary repatriation and research

findings on experiences of other ‘voluntary’ repatriation operations including problematic gendered dimensions of the concept and experiences.

The third chapter, which is about the planned repatriation operation of Maban refugees from Sherkole, has three subchapters that deal with interrelated topics. The first part of this chapter presents the finding about the possible interest groups in the Maban refugees’ repatriation. This part mainly is responsible for answering the question what other factors than end of the Sudanese Civil war motivated the repatriation of Maban refugees? The second part presents the findings on concerns, expectations, fears and preconditions Maban refugee men and women consider before deciding to be repatriated. And the final part presents the practical operation of the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole. This part will help to draw the conclusions about what ways the normative framework has been translated in to practice and how this translation affects the prospective returnees. This part will present and analyze factors that might affect the decision of refugees and the voluntariness of repatriation. Based on this analysis the subchapter also attempts to show how the social status of refugees, including their education, political views, gender, age, marital status and so on, might affect the voluntariness of their repatriation and the benefits they might get from repatriation afterwards.

The final chapter summarizes the major findings of the research and relates them to the normative framework, the concept of voluntary repatriation and the effects of the current

practice of repatriation of Maban refugees on the certain groups of the refugee community with specific attention to gender.

2. Contested Frameworks of Repatriation: International Tools, Debates and Experiences

The main mandate of UNHCR is to provide and coordinate the provision of physical, psychological and legal protection of refugees and facilitate, promote and advocate for durable solutions for refugees problems. According to UNHCR, there are three durable solutions for refugee problems, namely resettlement to a third country, integration of refugees with host communities and ‘voluntary’ repatriation to their country of origin (UNHCR 1996). This chapter will explore the concept of voluntary repatriation as it is discussed in detail in the 1996 UNHCR Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation in relation with some scholarly debates and experiences of returnees in other repatriation programs.

UNHCR identifies two types of voluntary repatriation. One is spontaneous where the refugees decide to go back to their places of origin with minimal support from UNHCR and arrange their travels by themselves. The second is organized voluntary repatriation where refugees voluntarily decide to go back to their places of origin but their return is organized by UNHCR (UNHCR 1996). UNHCR’s role in the first case is limited to providing assistance through issuing documentations of clearance and (sometimes) facilitating passage so that the returnees will not face problems in their places of return (Chimni 2000). I focus on the second version of voluntary repatriation, itself being one of the three durable solutions because this is what is commonly at stake in my research.

In the following sections, I first present a critical analysis of the UNHCR framework critical in view of the concept of voluntary repatriation, underlying assumptions and formal provisions for addressing the specific need and concerns of different groups among the refugee community. Then I go further into a critical analysis of the concept and practice of voluntary repatriation by discussing the scholarly debates concerning the fluidity the concept of voluntary repatriation and its gendered experiences in other repatriation programs.

2.1. The UNHCR Framework: The Normative Prerequisites

2.1.1. The Concept of ‘Voluntary’ Repatriation

Though the Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation does not give a definition of the term, voluntary repatriation is put as implying “the absence of any physical, psychological and material pressure” (UNHCR 1996: 7). It is a process where UNHCR through serious planning and communication with governments and all other actors across both borders facilitate the return of refugees. According to the Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation (UNHCR 1996) primarily, the concept of voluntary repatriation derives its meaning from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations 1948):

Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country (UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948 Article 13.2).

One other basis of the general stipulations regarding the term voluntary repatriation comes from principle of non-refoulement in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The relevant Article prohibits states from returning refugees and asylum seekers to their places where there is a well founded fear of persecution (UNHCR 2003). The 1969 Organization for African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa elaborates on the term as a condition where the country of asylum makes sure that refugee will return under conditions of adequate safety and the country of origin welcomes the returnees and treat them with equal rights and obligations as the rest of the nationals (OAU 1969 Article V).

These provisions and the related stipulations in the UNHCR Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation imply that return is considered voluntary when conditions that led to the refugee situation have ceased and conditions are favorable for returnees to enjoy their basic human rights such as freedom of movement, the right to employment, education, health services, social security and other social services (UNHCR 1996). The term voluntary also implies that refugees go back to their places of origin not because they are afraid of facing the consequences of staying in asylum but only because they are convinced to go back and restart their lives. The consequences might include being considered as betrayers of their countries and losing the privileges of citizenship as well as being penalized for fleeing/not going back in their countries or losing their entitlements in their countries of asylum (Stoessinger 1956). To fulfill the concept of voluntariness any voluntary return should, according to the definition currently in use by UNHCR, satisfy three major principles: the principle of voluntary and informed decision

to return back to places of origin, the principle of free and individual decision and principle of returning under conditions of safety and dignity (UNHCR 1996:10-12).

2.1.2. Underlying Assumptions regarding Repatriation

The major underlying concept for the initiation and promotion of voluntary repatriation is that absence/presence of persecution in the refugees' places of origin. This seems to be in contradiction with what you say in the previous subchapter; see the last sentence there, for example. This underlying concept of voluntary repatriation is problematic insofar as it tends to lead to the assumption that when conditions that led to refugee situation ended, the places of origin will be favorable for return and the conditions that might cause persecution would cease. Related to the tendency to relate repatriation to the end of conditions that led to fleeing the Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation, Updates and many other literature from UNHCR reflects a pattern of assumption that refugees are eager to go back to their places of origin as soon as the immediate situations that led them to leave their countries cease (UNHCR 1996, UNHCR 1997). While it might be the case that eventually most refugees want to go back to their places of origin, it is problematic to assume that when the immediate causes of refugee conditions that cause the flight cease (such as conflicts and war) the places of origin might be fine for return. This assumption combined with the political and financial constraints UNHCR face in providing services for refugees (UNHCR 1997) might hinder the organization to give due attention to refugees concerns and needs in relation to return. This in turn sabotages the voluntary nature of the repatriation and the primary responsibility of the organization, protection of refugees.

2.1.3. What are the Pre-Repatriation Procedures?

2.1.3.1. Making the Returnee Places Attractive

Once after the immediate conditions that led to displacement of refugees cease, UNHCR with the governments of the host country and refugee's place of origin and other actors start to facilitate the rehabilitation and reconstruction of infrastructures in preparation for repatriation. In addition to preparing the physical infrastructure, UNHCR also advocates for equal enjoyment of rights by refugees and their counterparts in the areas of origin. All in all UNHCR assesses the conditions in the places of origin if they are attractive enough in terms of social, psychological, economic, political, physical and legal security for returnees (UNHCR 1996: 15, 41, 44, 68, 69, 70).

2.1.3.2. Establishing and Ensuring the Voluntary Nature of Refugees'

Decision

One of the main parts of establishing and ensuring the voluntary nature of repatriation is individuality of the decision-making for repatriation. UNHCR acknowledges, in some cases, the inevitability of group based intentions and decisions to return. Even in these cases, however, UNHCR underlines that its staff members should acknowledge and counterbalance the power of refugee leaders to suppress the voices of particular groups such as women. It is also suggested that UNHCR will take the responsibility to make sure that individuals get accurate and complete information. This goes to the extent where

UNHCR staff members conduct house to house visits and talk to families individually, especially in the case of male headed households. During the registration for repatriation, it is also advised to make sure that each and every member of the family is going back on voluntary basis. In cases of suspicion of forceful return the UNHCR staff members should conduct separate interviews and counseling for members of families (UNHCR 1996: 26-37).

In relation to ensuring free and individual decision making, UNHCR is also mandated to facilitate accessibility and exchange of complete and unbiased information between refugee camps and places of origin. This can be done through sending representatives of community members to the place of origin (called “go-and-see visits”), bringing representative from the other end to the camps (called “come-and-inform visits”) and producing print and electronic information materials. In line with producing unbiased information, refugees are also entitled to have access to information at individual level. UNHCR is responsible for ensuring that complete and correct information reaches refugees. To ensure the accessibility of complete and accurate information to all refugees, the Manual suggests establishing separate information committee and conducting counseling meetings for groups that have less access to information such as women.

It is important to note that the principal concerns expressed by women in connection with repatriation may not be identical to those voiced by men. If this has been identified, the information needs of women have to be addressed with

the same attention as the concerns and questions raised by men (UNHCR 1996: 34).

The Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation also underlines that cultural barriers can not be taken as excuses to not to create equal access to information for men and women:

Cultural barriers are no justification for not involving refugee women fully. Use the People-Oriented Planning (POP) Framework to identify adequate ways and means to ensure consultation with and participation of refugee women from the planning stages of a repatriation operation (UNHCR 1996: 19).

2.1.3.3. Facilitating Return under Conditions of Safety and Dignity

The role of UNHCR in facilitating the return in safety and dignity include making sure that the return takes place under conditions of legal safety, physical and material security so that returnees will be guaranteed with amnesties or public assurance of personal safety, integrity, freedom from fear of persecution or punishment up on return, non-discrimination, protection from armed conflict and availability of at least landmine free demarcated settlement areas, and access to land or means to livelihood. Return under the conditions of dignity refers to no manhandling of returnees, freedom of unconditional return, freedom for spontaneous and self paced return, treatment of returnees with respect and their acceptance by their national authorities with all their rights restored (UNHCR 1996: 8). The Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation further underlines the importance of making appropriate arrangements “for the physical safety of unaccompanied women and

women heads of households in departure, transit or reception centers (such as separate areas, close to the relevant infrastructure with adequate security arrangements, and lighting³)”(UNHCR 1996: 9).

2.2. Scholarly Debates Surrounding “Voluntary” Repatriation and its Gendered Impacts

UNHCR on one hand argues that the process is totally voluntary informed by the legal provisions that entitle refugees to decide their fate without any influences and threat from outside. UNHCR further insists that these rights are individual rights underlining that UNHCR makes sure that this individuality of decisions is respected (UNHCR 1996). However, I share Westin’s position that despite the fact that UNHCR tries and claims that the repatriation process is a voluntary process, there are always factors that affect the decision of men and women to repatriate so as to challenge the very concept of voluntary repatriation. The key problem of the concept of voluntary repatriation, I argue, lies in the fact that it tries to separate “individual decision-making” from many of the complex social, political, cultural and economic factors of which it is inevitably part. First, in most of the cases repatriation is influenced by political and financial situations. This is to say repatriation operations might not live up to the prescriptions in the standards in the formal regulations and/or conventions established to guide the decisions, timing, and forms of repatriation as a result of momentary and political constraints from UNHCR’s side (UNHCR 2005a, UNHCR 2005b, Newman & Schnabel 2002) . In addition, in most

³ Close to adequate light.

cases, after end of war, donors are not as willing to fund refugee programs as they were during the war. Another point, return of refugees to their original places marks political success for warring sides, UNHCR and other international and transnational bodies involved. It is also important to consider how far the host countries might be willing to host refugees after the end of the wars (Westin 1998).

Secondly, not everyone in the refugee camps and in every refugee family might get the chance to voice individual concerns and decisions. According to Steiner, Gibney and Loescher, there are many incidents of repatriation operations where only male member of the household were asked about their decision to repatriate (2003). There is a reasonable probability of some groups of refugees to have their voices unheard, women being one of them.

The other factors considered important in determining the refugees' desire to repatriate and to get them decide to go back depends on the kind and intensity of information they receive about their places of origin. The authority that is behind the information supplied to refugees has an impact on the voluntary nature of the decision. These authorities might function in the return places (such as the government of their country, rebels) or in the refugee camps (such as rebels). The presence of political motivations might also alter source and dissemination of information about the 'home area' of refugees (Chimni 2000, Moore 1998). Chimni further elaborate on the importance of correct information to meet the definition of voluntary repatriation by precisely putting:

Refugees agreeing to repatriate ‘voluntarily’ on the basis of misinformation fed them are anything but voluntary returnees (2000:357).

If there is evidence for this kind of influences in the South Sudanese repatriation operation, then, I would argue, it will be very difficult to consider the repatriation voluntary for women in general. Especially if we question whether these women will be willing to give up the relatively better position they held in the refugee camps in terms of economic, social, political protection they enjoyed in the camps.

It is also argued in the literature that end of war is not a sufficient precondition to conduct a large scale repatriation of refugees. In addition to the physical and logistic arrangements from refugee camps, which are highly important for reintegration of returnees, there should also be a fundamental restructuring of the political and economic situation backgrounds of the returnees and receiving population (Indra 1998).

My argument, which partly agrees with the above statement, is that even if the repatriation can be ‘voluntary’ and the logistic for the repatriation is well organized, there is a risk that is almost inevitable. When refugees stay in asylum for long time they will lose most of their social ties and networks that help them get access to resources and employment as well as land that used to be theirs or their ancestors. This probably leads to marginalization from equal access to the social, economic and political resources (Indra 1998: 140). The attempt to access these resources can pose a fierce competition between returnees and the ones who stayed in their places. The degree of competition

might vary across ethnic, social, gender and age categories among returnee population. However, I would strongly agree with the suggestions by Black and Koser (1998) that women can be among the most vulnerable ones due to family responsibilities combined with weak supportive social ties and no or underdeveloped physical and social infrastructures to access these resources. This can be significantly pronounced when the cause of displacement is armed conflict and if the returnees lived for long time in their countries of asylum (Indra 1998) as armed conflicts result in destruction of infrastructures, economic means for survival and social ties in the place of origin.

In most of the instruments related to repatriation, there is the assumption that all refugees want to go home. This pattern of assumption mainly focuses on facilitating return other than identifying assessing concerns and opinions of different groups might have regarding going back to their places of origin. Bascom in “The Dynamics of Refugee Repatriation: The Case of Eritrean in Eastern Sudan” strongly opposes the media images that that presumes refugees as undifferentiated “masses” (1994: 245). He introduces the concept of “refugee differentiation” and argues that the refugees’ considerations for decision to repatriation differ considerably across political, ethnic, gender and age categories impacting on the entire operation of repatriation. Hence, without this refugee differentiation it becomes difficult to assume that repatriation is voluntary for refugee communities in general. Other authors such as Stoessinger (1956) even argue that some refugees are afraid to go home and they prefer to go for resettlement over repatriation. The reason is, according to Stoessinger, that the decision to go back home is almost final. Refugees know that once they go back to their places of origin, it is very difficult to flee

if they do not like the situation there whereas it is always possible to come back from resettlement.

2.3. Evaluating Experiences of Other “Voluntary” Repatriation

Operations in Relation to Gender

Exploring the experiences of Mozambique returnees, Patrick Matlou in *Engendering Forced Migration* argues that generally repatriation results in the relegation of women to their traditional roles as mothers, wives and daughter (1998). During armed conflicts women take responsibilities which they do not under normal circumstances in their societies. For example, they might participate in the armed struggles or carryout responsibilities of heads of households and take part in different skills trainings in asylum. These roles give women the chance for a relative degree of independence. However, when the armed conflicts are ended these women go back to their traditional roles in their households and they will have limited or no opportunities to apply the skills they learned in exile. This is because end of armed conflicts do not guarantee change of the underlying societal structures and values.

Experiences of return of Sierra Leone women from Guinea camps after end of the civil war 2002 shows that lack of economic opportunities in repatriation places might result in a new cycle of displacement for women and girls while men found other forms of supporting their families. A large number of Sierra Leone women and girls who returned from Guinea camps had to either go back to refugee camps or engage

commercial sex work in nearby towns as they could not find other ways to maintain the survival of themselves and their families. It was also discussed that the situations facilitated trafficking of women and girls to cities and other countries (Martin 2004).

Willis and Yeoh's observation (2000: 508-511) in Somali refugee camps suggest that most women in general get less access to income generation and leadership opportunities compared to men. However, because the refugee camps have relatively better organization and accessibility of services than places of origin the refugee camps create better opportunities for women to participate in education, income generation and reproductive health services (Martin 2004). Because of the availability of services preschools get some extra time from their family responsibilities and take part in literacy classes and income generation activities specially targeting women organized by different NGOs (Willis & Yeoh 2000).

Experience in repatriation of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees from the Sudan in 1995, following the collapse of the military regime in Ethiopia, proved that returnee women found it very difficult to live in their places of origin as compared to the situation in asylum. Food security and social services had been better in refugee camps than in their returnee places. Returnees were relocated in an area where the health, education and other services were non existent and/or poorly developed. Farming was not promising because of the arid and desert climatic conditions of the places. These settlements particularly disadvantaged women because, in addition to participating in harsh farming activities with their male family members, they also had to take care of the household.

This demanded walking long distances to fetch water, collect firewood and do the mills. The underdeveloped health infrastructures entailed particular risks for women as they could not access reproductive health services (Black & Koser 1998).

Helton brings in to light the political nature of repatriation in his exploration of the Namibian and Cambodian repatriation projects in 1989 and 1991 respectively. In both cases the national elections followed the repatriation of large number of refugees from neighboring countries. In conclusion, the author underlines that the returnees led long difficult time afterwards as the repatriation operation was not mature enough to integrate the returnees in the socioeconomic life of the host population (Helton 2002).

The Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation, informed by major international and regional human rights documents such as the 1948 Human Rights Declaration and 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects Refugee Problems in Africa, outlines the specific procedures and activities in carrying out repatriation programs. Nevertheless, the experiences of other repatriation operation show that it is almost impossible to detach the concept of voluntary repatriation from the sociopolitical, social economic and cultural context of the given refugee community. Research suggests that these contexts affect the degree to which a certain repatriation program keeps in line with the provisions outlined in the above sources. This dependency leads to openness for interpretation of the term voluntary repatriation and its implementation. . Research further suggest that due to the dependency of repatriation programs on the social, political, cultural and financial situations, these programs often fail to meet the preconditions for voluntary repatriation

resulting in return of refugees non-voluntarily. As gender plays a major role in the position of returnees with regards to the social, economic, political and security contexts of the returnee places, women end up in being one of the groups which mostly suffer from the negative consequences of non-voluntary repatriation.

3. Gendered Analysis of the Planned Repatriation of Mabans Refugees from Sherkole Refugee Camp

This chapter is dedicated to presenting the findings from my field research arranged in three sections. The first one is regarding the possible interest groups. This part analyzes what possible benefits motivate the different groups that are involved in the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees in general and that of Maban refugees in particular. Identifying possible interest groups will help to understand potential sources of influence that might compromise the voluntary nature of the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole. The findings for this part come both from interviews and focus groups discussions as well as analysis of documents from the internet.

The second part discusses the major concerns that are raised by refugee men and women regarding those circumstances they consider as preconditions for them before they decide to go back to their places. As it is mentioned in the Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation the needs of refugees before the start of the repatriation process should be assessed and planning of their repatriation should be based on the needs assessment. It is against this background that this part of the chapter presents some of those circumstances the refugees themselves consider important and how they compare Sherkole with their places of return. As the findings are from focus group discussions with separate gender groups, one can also see whether and which difference between men's and women's needs.

This will further lead, in the third part, to comparing and contrasting how UNHCR has taken in to consideration the needs and concerns of refugees, and if not, how this can affect women during the pre and post stages of the repatriation process. Furthermore, the section aims to show how repatriation might be beneficial only to certain groups of returnee and prevent others from enjoying the benefits of ‘voluntary’ repatriation and how that can be even worse for women as they will be among the most negatively affected by the process of ‘voluntary’ repatriation among Maban returnees from Sherkole.

3.1. Possible Interest Groups in the Repatriation Process

In the course of my research I identified the following major groups and interests with important stakes in the refugee and repatriation issues surrounding Sherkole Camp. The first important actor is the South Sudanese government. The main interest of the South Sudanese government in the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees, including Maban refugees from Sherkole Camp, is getting all the South Sudanese refugees back to South Sudan for the upcoming census by the end of 2007. This census is crucial for the future of South Sudan as it determines the number of seats to be allocated for Southerners in the parliamentary election, including the number of seats every ethnic group will get.

The second important group of actors is the refugee community leaders. The refugee leadership in Sherkole has a decentralized structure where every zone will have its representatives in the Refugee Central Committee. The Central Committee serves as a communication bridge between the refugees and the aid organizations in the camp. The

leadership participates in needs identification and assessment of refugee status together with UNHCR and ARRA. They are also responsible for handling issues such as conflict resolution in a traditional way. Theoretically the refugee community elects its leaders, both men and women, at zonal level although in reality they are usually appointed. The zonal leaders are responsible for taking care of issues that arise in the zone and representing the zone in the Central Committee. Above the zonal leaders, still in the central committee there is the Omda⁴ who represents *his*⁵ tribe. The Central Committee is led by the Head who is elected among the members of the Committee. Nevertheless, the UNHCR Senior Field Assistant stresses that

There is a direct relationship between community leaders and the South Sudanese Liberation Army/ Movement. Even if these leaders are supposed to be 'elected' by the refugees, they are actually assigned by the Movement. Refugee camps are places of political struggle. This is where people learn about the Liberation Movement and its political objectives. It is also a strategically cheaper way of surviving the families while the men go and fight. Usually rebel groups have no source of support. They rely on contributions from refugees' rations. There are even some soldiers who hold refugee status and stay in the fight. I know some soldiers who come to the camp during weekends to 'grease' themselves and eat well. There are incidents when the SPLA/M entered the camp and took the people who did not abide to the objectives and goals of the Movement. The SPLA/M might take severe punishments such as killing and torture for deviations as little as

⁴ Omda is the traditional name for tribal chiefs in most parts of South Sudan.

⁵ I have never heard of any female Omda throughout my contact with the South Sudanese refugees and during my research

unwillingness to contribute from the monthly ration (Interview, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

According to this UNHCR Official, collection of the contributions, recruitment of soldiers and mobilization of refugees for repatriation are organized by the community leaders.

I hear that now they are mobilizing and even threatening the refugee community to go back as soon as possible because everyone has to be there before the census.... And these days, there is a rumor that the ex-rebel soldiers are going to be integrated into the Sudanese Army. This means there is a good reason to assume that the Government of South Sudan wants to keep the proportion in the Army. So, they might even want to recruit young men from the camps or from the returnees. If so, this will also be done by the community leaders (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The focus group with the refugee leaders revealed that they strongly view the return of Mabans to their places of origin from their particular point of view closely related with the interests of the south Sudanese government. The difference in the views of this group is that the Maban community leaders mostly focus on the relationship of Maban refugees with the future of South Sudan. Timothy, Zonal Leader, said: "The repatriation of Maban refugees is vital to the future of South Sudan. The census is coming soon and we all want to go back and participate. We [Mabans] are many in number. And our participation in

the census will affect the number of seats we are getting in the election....we don't know why UNHCR took Uduks before us. They are from the Blue Nile State⁶. We are many in number and we should have been taken before them. Now the rainy season has started so we have to wait until it ends. We do not want to stay her and miss the census..." (FGD with Community Leaders 23 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

UNHCR in general claims that there is no influence from the SPLA/M that might affect the decision of refugees for repatriation. The UNHCR Repatriation Assistant commented: "I hear about that but there is no official report about it and no incidents related to the SPLA/M in the camp.....As far as we know refugees decide to go back without any influence from anywhere (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). Also, most of the UNHCR staff denied that they do know about the census and its implication on the repatriation process. For example, the Head of Field Office Assosa said: "I do not know much about this census. I heard about it but I have not enough information to comment on it" (Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa). However, the UNHCR Senior Field Assistant believes that the "interest of the Maban community leaders is mobilizing the Maban refugee community and convincing them to get to the census and contribute to the population of South Sudan and their representation in the upcoming election in 2008" (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The following quote from Sudan Tribune, a pro South Sudanese government news letter, summarizes how the election is very important.

⁶ This means the Uduks technically will not contribute to the number of seats for South Sudan because their area is still under the Northern part of the country .

The year 2008 will witness an unprecedented and internationally-monitored general election in the Sudan. In other words, the Sudanese people in that year will cast their votes to elect the President of the country, members of both upper and lower houses of the National Parliament, states governors, members of states' assemblies, counties commissioners, payams administrators, city councils members; in addition, the people of southern Sudan will also cast their votes to elect a president for the Government of Southern Sudan and members of the Southern Sudan Legislative Assembly ... the coming general election is no less than the war we fought itself. (Sudan Tribune, 5 Jan 2007, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article19582>).

A third important view in handling the refugee question is the Ethiopian government. In the course of my research I could not identify explicit statements by the Ethiopian government regarding this topic, but there are two main ways through which the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees might affect the government of the host country. The first one is that the Ethiopian government benefits from the repatriation in terms of the border control, especially considering the current situation with Eritrea. The Ethiopian Government suspects infiltration of Eritrean supported Ethiopian rebels across the Sudanese border. Because of the open Ethio-Sudanese border, it has been very difficult to control infiltration of opposition rebels from Sudan and Eritrea. Border control has been a topic of discussion between the Ethiopian and Sudanese governments. For example in a recent meeting of the Ethiopian Prime Minister and the Sudanese

Foreign Minister, they discussed about “the use of the Sudanese territory by Ethiopian rebels based in Eritrea”. The Ethiopian government believes that the “Asmara backed rebels attack the positions of the army through the Sudanese border”. The source continues that “Sudan admitted the existence of such movements” (Sudan Tribune, 14 May 2007, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article21869>). Hence, the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees would make border control relatively easier for the Ethiopian government. This is also in harmony with what UNHCR reported as a challenge for the organization to handle its mandates as states are becoming stricter to receive refugees and more eager to repatriate those who are already in their territories (UNHCR 1997).

The second contrasting point of view is that the Ethiopian government might not be in the list of beneficiaries from the process. One of the major partners of UNHCR in refugee camps is the representative of the Ethiopian government in the form of Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs (ARRA). This organization creates jobs for hundreds of Ethiopians in the camps. Hence the repatriation of Sudanese refugees is very likely to result in unemployment of these people. However, looking at the two sides, it might be suggested that for the Ethiopian government the first issue outweighs the second one.

With nearly one million refugees in the neighboring countries and around four million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) by the end of 2004, the South Sudanese refugee crisis is one of the biggest in the history of UNHCR (UNHCR 2004). In the case of the successful repatriation of South Sudanese refugees back to their places of origin, this operation in general will be considered as one of the landmark success stories of the

organization. In addition, such an operation will mean easing the serious financial shortages the organization is facing globally (UNHCR 2006c).

Although the focus of this research is mainly on the actors that are directly involved in the repatriation of Maban refugees, the literature suggests that Western nations might also have a stake in the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees in general. According to Chimni “their [the industrialized states] favoring the durable solution of voluntary repatriation appear to be self-serving”. The advantage these nations might extract from this operation is reducing the number of refugees that might intend to request for third country resettlement (2000:332).

The possible benefits and concerns surrounding repatriation voiced by refugee men and women are situated on a very different level and mainly related to their living conditions.

3.2. What Preconditions Do Refugees Consider before Deciding for Repatriation?

For us, the most important sign for the repatriation is the intention of refugees to go back.

We conducted intention survey, with a sample of ten percent of the Maban population both men and women [in Sherkole]. It came out that with the exception of few cases everyone wants to go back (UNHCR Repatriation Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

...I am very happy that these refugees are going back voluntarily. Most of the refugees want to go back to their places of origin. The elders said that they want to die and be buried in their villages (UNHCR Community Services Assistant, Informal Discussion, 9 Apr 2008, Addis Ababa,).

According to the UNHCR reports, all except in a few cases all expressed their intention to go back to their places of origin and my focus group discussions with Maban refugee men and women also confirm this intention. At the same time, refugees consider different factors which, if not fulfilled, might affect the voluntary nature of their decision. In this part, I will attempt to answer the question what are the gendered expectations and fears about the repatriation? These are factors, expectations and fears refugees consider important in relation to the planned 'voluntary' repatriation. Most of these factors, expectations and fears are common to the general refugee population, while some of them stood out as gender specific to men and women. The other categories of the factors are specific to female headed households bringing the availability of adult male in the family as a dimension of analysis. Discussing these factors will later help evaluate to what extent the planned repatriation has taken in to consideration the needs of specific groups of refugees. The factors and preconditions presented below are by and large the ones that came out very repeatedly in the different focus groups discussions. Most of the data under this part comes from the focus group discussions with refugee men and women and from referring to the opinions of UNHCR staff members, a staff member of IRC and an ex-staff member of Save the Children Sweden.

3.2.1. Availability and Quality of Services in Sherkole

Refugees most basically compare the living conditions in Sherkole and the envisioned living conditions at their places of origin in South Sudan. As one woman in a male headed household puts it:

We all want to go back. After all it is our country and that is where we belong. We want to go back and develop our country with our brothers. We want to eat fish and harvest our crops again. We want to eat more than once. In the camp, we get rations that are just enough for survival and we are thankful for the education and medical services us and our children are getting. But we are not saying that we are satisfied with the services in the camp. No. People are growing thinner. We are only saying we don't want to go back to Sudan currently as we expect things to be even worse than in Sherkole. We are hoping that UNHCR and other NGOs will have everything ready before we go back (Focus groups discussion with women from male headed households (FGD, 26 Apr 2008, Sherkole).

Women in female headed households think that it is difficult to compare the situation in South Sudan with that of Sherkole as they don't have enough information about their places of return.

We can't compare Sherkole with our places of origin as we do not have enough information about it. UNHCR and the community leaders say that the repatriation

of Uduk and Funj was successful. How can we compare their repatriation with us? Their places might be better than ours and they are fewer in number than Mabans... (FGD with women heads of households (FGD, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Refugee men are suspicious about the reduction of quality and quantity of the services in the camp. One focus group discussion with men heads of households suggests that some of the men in the Sherkole refugee camp believe that UNHCR and other organizations in the camp are reducing the services because they want the refugees to give up and go.

Life is getting tougher and tougher here. They reduced the ration three years ago. We used to get clothes twice a year. Now it has been stopped for three years....(FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Women heads of households are not sure about the reasons for the reduction of the ration but one woman said: "The ration was good when we came. But it was reduced...we don't know the reason. UNHCR reduces everything from time to time without letting us know why..."(FGD, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Regarding the reduction of services and the possible financial reason behind it, the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant commented:

I can't comment on this as I don't have enough information. But as far as I can tell, UNHCR looks for other sources of funding to take care of its mandates. Even with the tight budget we continue providing services and look for durable solutions for refugee problems. Lack of additional services such as provision of clothes might be reasons for refugees to decide to go back. But clothes are not categories of assistance for UNHCR. We give clothes only when we have them. But the 2100 kilo calorie per person per day is what we are responsible for. Even after the reduction of the ration, nutritional standards are met and that is just enough for survival (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Availability of social services in the returnee places, in terms of diversity, quantity and quality is the major concerns of all the groups I had discussion with. A woman in a focus group discussion with women from male headed households put it this way:

It is very difficult to go to a place where we have to start life from the beginning. If I am given the chance to decide about my return, then I would not go to places where there are no grinding mills, not enough water points, where we needed to perform men's work such as cultivating (FGD with women from male headed households 30 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

However, in contrast to what refugee men and women, UNHCR and other organizations think, Maban refugee leaders believe that the repatriation of Maban has been delayed. The Omda Maban pointed out:

...Me and most of my colleagues here went to South Sudan and saw how conditions look like. UNHCR Sudan told us that they are working on preparing the place to make it ready to receive the refugees. Sudan is a resourceful country, and as far as I can tell there is enough water. I do not understand why, of all tribes in Sherkole, the repatriation of Maban who are the biggest population is delayed (FGD with Refugee Community Leaders, 23 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

This view was supported by other community leaders too. The other speaker in the group said: "...I have been to South Sudan very recently. It is very good....I really wanted to stay there. The only reason I came back is because I have a family here" (FGD, 23 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

All of the refugee community, whom I talked to, share the idea of going back with the refugee leadership. In all of the focus group discussion with refugee women, men and the refugee community leaders, they said they will have better freedom, they will cultivated their own lands, they will change their meals, and they will reunify with their family members. Difference of opinion with the community leaders is that refugee men and women stress that they do not believe that now is time to go back to their places. As one refugee elder in the focus group discussion with refugee men summarizes:

...Who does not want to go home? We are tired of staying here. Going back means changing diet and living outside of the strict rules in Sherkole. We are told

that things are improving in South Sudan and repatriation is being organized. I even see some people going by themselves. That is fine as long as they can afford it. Some people have relatives abroad who can help them start a new life. But my heart does not tell me that South Sudan is ready enough to accommodate us. I don't want to take my children to a place where they will face hunger, disease and lack of drinking water (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The other specific consideration that repeatedly stood out in the discussion is that refugee men and women do not want their children to live the kind of life they lived. Another elder in the discussion with men said:

...I do not want to go back to Sudan just for the sake of returning to my country. We lived uncivilized life. We plowed our land by hand. We do not want our sons to be like us. We are here. Our children are studying and we want them to go further and set themselves free from the traditional way of living. For me, as I am old enough and want to go back to my country, I want UNHCR to make sure that I am not going back to plow the land as I did long ago (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

This view was shared by women too. One female discussant pointed out that she would not like to go to a place where her children will grow up as farmers as she did (FGD with women from male headed households, 26 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

As one can see from the above discussion, most of the preconditions and concerns raised by refugees are more or less common to refugee men and women. However, there are also other factors that concern men and women differently. For example, even if risk of landmines has been raised by both men and women, the way it was expressed by women shows the specific implication it might have on them. As one woman puts it; "...it is true that landmines are risks for both men and women. But the landmines are usually places in the bush. This means, we are more exposed to the risks than men as we often go to the bushes to collect firewood" (FGD with women from male headed households, 30 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

While comparing the services in Sherkole with the their places of return, all refugee men and women in the focus group discussions, mentioned availability of grinding mills as an attraction to stay in the camp until their destination places are ready to receive them. However, both groups of women stressed that the grinding mills should be one of the preconditions under the social services. One woman from the men headed household's group pointed out:

We lived here and saw many new things. We opened our eyes. We no more do the grinding by our hands. We benefited from the grinding mills as they minimize our labor and the time we spend doing the grinding. So, we need grinding mills to be available in our villages in South Sudan. We don't expect things to be worse than in refugee camp (FGD, 30 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The discussion with refugee men revealed that what concerns them most is the availability of jobs and job related services such as skills trainings. The other concern they raised was the recognition of their qualification in Sudan, as they have most of their certificates from Ethiopia. Another group of male heads of households mentioned that their business have been taken by others who remained in their villages.

When we left our country, we did not take anything with us. We just left to spare our lives. We left everything behind including our business. We are going back to a place where everything is destroyed and if there is anything left these things will be taken by other people. Are we getting our jobs back? Are we getting our trades back? (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

In the same focus group discussion another participant said: “This is a hard decision to make. And it is very difficult to decide until we know if we can come back to Ethiopia if we find situations hard to live on” (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Still another member of this discussion group asked; “What is the use of training us in different skills if we are not getting the chance to use them? Many people have been trained in starting up business, plumbing, bee keeping...and we expect these people to get the chance to use the skills they acquired in the refugee camps. Otherwise, why did the refugees and the organizations in the camp spend their time and money in training us?” (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Women heads of households have some other factors they consider preconditions for repatriation. One is the support women headed households need and/or expect from UNHCR and other organizations that are involved in the reintegration of returnees.

There are many things that would be simple for other people but they are difficult for us. Who is going to construct our houses? Our brothers? They have their own families and even if they are willing to construct our houses they will do it only after they finish theirs. Are we going to cut grass from the bushes or are we going to look after our children? Things are much more difficult for us than for other returnees...” (FGD, 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

“It is not only this,” said another female household head, “here we take the monthly rations for granted. And when I want to buy some things, I can go to the Bartas⁷, work for them and earn some money. That can not happen when we go back as everyone is a returnee like me and they do not have jobs for me. Did UNHCR think about women like me? (FGD, 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Female heads of households expressed their fear that the process will be even tougher for them because of lack of men in their families who can access information on different matters in the returnee places. One of the participants elaborated: “...Once we are back to our place of origin everything will depend on how you access information about everything. For example, women in female headed households will not get the

⁷ Barta is an ethnic group found in the Ethio-Sudanese border. Sherkole refugee camp is located neighboring this group.

opportunity as much as men or women in male headed households. This is because the information about jobs or other services is mainly accessed by men and members in their families easily...” (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Women in male headed households believe that the degree of benefit one might get from repatriation depends on the extent of education one has. “If you are educated then you will get jobs. So, men will have more opportunities than women. Women will not be among the beneficiaries. We are used to the life in Sherkole; giving birth in clinics. We will not have that now in South Sudan”. (FGD, 26 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The other concern that came out very strongly in the focus group discussion with women heads of households is fear of conflict. “We are afraid of facing war and starvation again. We heard that there is a conflict going on in Jamam⁸....our situation as widows will make us vulnerable. If conflicts happen then it will be more difficult for us to escape than other people in male headed households”. (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The women in heads of households also voiced their concerns that they face discriminatory practices by the community leaders even when they are in the camp. These leaders do not identify them as female headed households and they do not forward their list to UNHCR so that they will get the services properly. For example, one of the participants mentioned: “...We do not get information about additional services such as distribution of Jerri-cans and about job opportunities in the camp. The community leaders

⁸ Jamam is a village in Upper Blue Nile State.

give the list of other women in male headed households...”(FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

A related concern of these women is that they might be facing even worse discriminatory and violent actions after they go to their places of origin as the presence of UNHCR will be limited. Another participant underlined that after they leave the camp they will not have an organization to which they will turn to: “Men will harass us. Even in the camp men call us ‘old women’ when we refuse them for marriage. If we go to South Sudan and are left there...it is going to be a problem...” (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

For this reason the women heads of households pointed to provision of additional services for women headed households as prerequisites for repatriation. For example, having a different corner in their villages where they can be close to security and protected from violence and additional ration as it will take them more time to get jobs as compared with men and women in male headed households. “I would only consider repatriation beneficial for me if UNHCR guarantees that we [women headed households] will get extra support in the rehabilitation process...” (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

While UNHCR thus claims that almost all of the Maban refugees showed their intention to return, my research shows that UNHCR needs to make a distinction between ‘wanting to go back’ and ‘deciding to go back now’. Moreover, in the cases of decisions (not just intention), their decisions might be motivated by situations that would adversely affect their lives if they choose to stay in the refugee camps. The focus group discussions also

revealed that there are varied factors that refugees consider important depending on their gender and the status of men and women in their communities. All groups except the refugee community leaders asserted that at the moment they have more reasons to stay in the camps than to go back to their places of origin. But again it cannot be stated that the refugees' current expression about their suspicion towards the planned repatriation does mean that refugee men and women do not want to go home ever.

3.2.2. Travel and Timing of the Repatriation

Both men and women in the focus group discussion mentioned that their safety during travel is one of the most important factors that affect their decision to repatriate. "We have seen them [UNHCR] taking the previous returnees on trucks. They put goods and people on the same truck. Sudan is a hot country and the roads are not good. I have heard that someone lost their eyes because of the thorns... How do they take us in such uncomfortable way?" (FGD with women heads of households, 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The services on the way and mode of transportation are also an area where UNHCR should seriously think about for improvement. Children get sick because of the hot weather conditions and the food they eat. The food is produced for masses of people and which is not suitable for the children (FGD with men heads of households, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

A refugee staff member of IRC expressed his doubts about the timing of the repatriation by saying "...repatriation is what we all want to happen. It is good that refugees want to

go back. What I am not sure about is the preparation and the timing. I doubt if enough work has been done in both sides of the border. Refugees have to be convinced to return and for that there should be enough preparation in the receiving end” (Interview, 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Similar concerns are voiced by other NGO workers. For example, the ex-staff member of Save the Children Sweden said that the “time of repatriation is inconvenient. The repatriation happens in the dry season when students are in school. Then there are difficult choices to make. Either children remain behind without their parents or they leave school and go with the parents” (Informal Discussion, 10 Apr 2007, Addis Ababa).

3.2.3. Relationships with those who remained in South Sudan

As most of the Maban refugees in Sherkole lived between seven to eleven years in the camp (UNHCR Repatriation Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole), the relationship between them and their counterparts in Sudan, as well as with the ex-rebels came out as one of the major concerns they would consider before deciding to go home. The discussants in the focus groups discussion believe that their exposure to a different cultural environment will affect their relationship with their family members back at home. “We don’t exactly know what the people who remained in South Sudan will think about us. We don’t know if they welcome us. Now we are different from them. Our children are educated and theirs are not. They might say that they don’t want to live with us because we are educated. Moreover, there are more people coming back from different

places just like us. It will not be easy to get along with all these different people”. (FGD with women heads of households, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Similarly the relationship between returnees and ex-fighters is perceived as a potential source of fear in the focus groups. Refugee men mentioned repeatedly their concerns regarding their relationship with ex-rebels. “We do not know what the ex-soldiers and the ones who stayed behind would think about us. We hope that the South Sudanese government will give due attention for our wellbeing” (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Another participant in another focus group discussion with refugee men expressed similar fear and expectation about this relationship. “Some of our relatives remained in South Sudan when we left. Hopefully they have kept our lands safely. But we know that the men who have been fighting have bad attitude towards us. Again we hope that the Government of South Sudan has a good system to make us live peacefully” (FGD, 28 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Different UNHCR Officials took contrasting views with regards to this concern. The Repatriation Assistant thinks that this it is not that much of an issue. “...They are from the same place they know each other and after the peace agreement some people have been going back and forth to show their places to their children...” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). Yet the Senior Protection Assistant admits that there are many people who will find the reintegration with the rest of their villagers difficult. He said; “In general many people especially the ones who were born here will find it difficult to

reintegrate with the others in South Sudan. Different trainings will be organized and schools will integrate this issue with their curricula. The South Sudanese Government promised to fight discrimination against returnees and that is what UNHCR hopes for. However, UNHCR can only lobby, it has no power to force” (Interview, 27 April 2007).

3.3. Realities on the ground: Where does repatriation get gendered?

3.3.1. The preparation from UNHCR Sherkole side: Are Refugees

Convinced to go?

This section will attempt to answer the question, how have men and women been represented in the decision to repatriate? I will analyze the principle of voluntary and informed decision in relation to the planned ‘voluntary’ repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole refugee camp in Ethiopia. I will argue that even if the major cause of the refugee situation for South Sudanese refugees (the civil war) is ended, there are other factors that make the repatriation operation unprepared to start. Despite the fact that there are detailed provisions related to the right for voluntary return and about the responsibility of UNHCR to facilitate this return (see chapter 2), the planned ‘voluntary’ repatriation of Maban refugees in Sherkole shows that these provisions are problematic for interpretations at ground level and their implementation depend on situations. In the previous sections it was shown that the principle of providing refugees with complete and unbiased information can be easily compromised. From this, I argue that a good number of Maban refugees in Sherkole might be returning back to their places of origin without being convinced that the places of origin are attractive enough for return in terms of

security, property, employment, access to health services, educational opportunities and access to vocational training.

In the next section, the relationship between individual, collective, and asymmetric decision making will be discussed in relation to the household or family as a unit of decision making. The purpose of this section is to show the challenge of applying the principle of free and individual decision making across gender and other social factors such as availability of adult male person in a family. Another section will present the potential beneficiaries of the planned repatriation for Maban refugees. The findings in this section suggest that the extent to which the returnees will benefit from the return is a result of the intersection of the gender and social status of the returnees. This subchapter ends with presenting the practical side of the planned repatriation together with the perceived challenges on both sides of the border.

3.3.1.1. Unbiased and Complete Information?

“Only an informed decision can be a voluntary decision. It is therefore important to provide bridges which refugees can use to gather information from sources they can *trust*⁹”

(UNHCR 1996:32)

⁹ Emphasis added.

“The role of refugee community leaders is to facilitate dissemination of information. We trust the information they tell us only if we hear the same thing from UNHCR. But UNHCR never held a meeting with us about the repatriation so far” (FGD with men heads of households 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

According to the Manual, the role of UNHCR and governments of both territories is providing refugees with choices and opportunities. “As a general rule, UNHCR should be convinced that the positive pull-factors in the country of origin are an overriding element in the refugees' decision to return rather than possible push-factors in the host country or negative pull-factors, such as threats to property, in the home country” (UNHCR 1996: 34).

In the case of Maban refugees in Sherkole camp the “go and see visit” is conducted and some print materials are produced and distributed in the camp. However, the findings in the research suggest that the representatives that have been sent to see the area are all from the refugee leadership and the visit did not live up to the standard that has been set in relation to women’s representation in the visit. Furthermore as I have found out from the discussion with women’s group not a single woman was included in the group of nine representatives who went to South Sudan.

Originally it was planned that one woman from the Women’s Association will be included in the group that will go and visit. However, it did not go as promised. We just heard that they left... Women should also see what South Sudan currently

look like. They [the male community leaders] simply say that the country is good, but it might not be the same for women. Men and women see different things. (FGD with Women from Male Headed Households, 26 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

When asked about the reason why men and women were not represented equally in the delegation, the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant in Sherkole refugee camp answered: “I only know about the Uduk case where we gave 50% of the quota for women. I don’t know about this one”. (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole)

The other area that raises question as to whether the information is unbiased is the nature of the visit. According to one UNHCR official, the representatives of whom together with UNHCR representatives went to South Sudan and held discussions with a group of local community leaders in South Sudan and South Sudanese government officials in Kurmuk a border town controlled by SPLA/M (currently the South Sudanese government) near Sherkole refugee camp. The delegate from Sherkole stayed in Kurmuk at a camp-like accommodation and held meetings with the group from South Sudan. I believe this type of brief visit is inadequate to assess and produce neutral information about situations in a vast area that has been affected by a 22- year-long civil war because first physically the area is much broader than just Kurmuk and the effects of this long civil war can only be visible through time and serious investigation.

Another crucially important factor in addition to the production and dissemination of information about the return places that will potentially affect the free and independent

decision of refugees to return is the political mobilization from SPLA/M through the refugee leaders that stresses the duty of all South Sudanese people to go back to South Sudan and participate in the census that is planned to happen in 2008. One of the community leaders in the focus group discussion stated: "...True Sudanese should go back to their land 'Maban' and participate in the rebuilding of South Sudan. Those who say they don't want to go to South Sudan are the ones who want to go for resettlement in other countries. We all know that they do not like their country as we do" (FGD, 23 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

In the Maban refugees' case in Sherkole, refugee community leadership, whom the refugees, UNHCR Senior Field Assistant and NGO Officials believe to be strongly connected to the South Sudanese Government, is in-charge of the information dissemination. UNHCR almost completely relies on reaching the refugee community through the leaders. The Repatriation Assistant asserted that "UNHCR trusts the leaders to pass accurate and complete information to the refugee community". He further confirmed that no UNHCR official has been with the community leaders when these leaders hold meetings with refugee men and women. (UNHCR Repatriation Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Similar to the Repatriation Assistant, the Senior Protection Assistant of UNHCR Sherkole believes that information is accessible to each and every refugee in the camp. He stated: "We have information ready in written and verbal form. Mainly we use the traditional system of information dissemination through the community leaders. Yes, this

method can ignore women but anyone can come and seek information from UNHCR”
(Senior Protection Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole)

In the reality of the camp, however, the strong presence of SPLA/M (now South Sudanese Government) in refugee camps makes refusing or differing from the agendas in the political mobilization very difficult. Hence, this presence of SPLA/M, through the strong connections with the refugee community leaders in Sherkole makes the free and unbiased decision of refugee men and women very unlikely. My interview with the refugee IRC staff confirmed this:

Since the beginning of this camp, SPLA/M has been handling the local refugee administration through the community leaders. Most of these leaders are SPLA/M soldiers or ex-soldiers who are assigned to work in the camp. We have witnessed some community leaders leaving their assignments in the camp to take a bigger responsibility in the independence war in South Sudan. The presence of these officials in the camp serves different purposes including political mobilization and recruitment of soldiers. Refugees know what would happen if they don't want to confirm to what these leaders say
(Interview, 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Finally, the issue of whether all members of the Maban refugee community access information (whether accurate and complete or not) depends on the availability of men in the household. As it is discussed in the previous subchapter, the concept of voluntary

repatriation might be compromised as the information about the whole process has been produced by groups that have the power to affect the lives of refugees and returnees. To make things worse, this information in all likelihood reaches men members of the refugee community only.

It is expressed by men and women in the focus group discussions that they do not have enough information about the situation in their places of origin. However, men in their discussion mentioned that some of them hear about the situation in South Sudan from informal sources such as in social gathering at *merisa*¹⁰ places rather than through UNHCR. Women from men headed households said they get some information from their husbands' conversations whereas the focus group participants from female headed households said they hear about the situation in South Sudan from their women friends mainly during fetching water and collecting firewood (FGD with Women from Male Headed Households and Women Heads of Household on April 26 and 24 respectively, Sherkole). A woman from another focus group discussion with women heads of households further said:

We know that the community leaders are responsible for dissemination of information. We expect them to gather us together and tell us the developments about repatriation. But this is not happening. We get information from our friends, our friends get the information from their husbands and other men...I don't think both men and women have correct information. But it is harsh on us [women heads

¹⁰ Merisa is a Sudanese, traditional home made alcoholic drink. Merisa places are where men from different ethnic, social and age background get together and enjoy their free times. However, Merisa is more popular among Maban and Uduk men than the other South Sudanese tribal groups.

of households]¹¹ as we don't have men in our families (FGD, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

This does not provide enough evidence to say that UNHCR's role to "ensure that refugee women and men have the same access to information pertaining to their voluntary repatriation" have been played well (UNHCR 1996:34).

3.3.1.2. Who decides?

"... Let me be honest here, from 16 years of experience in the field, let me tell you the truth, the provisions in the papers and the practical implementations of the provisions¹² are too different, especially in Africa..." (UNHCR Senior Field Assistant, Informal discussion, 23 Apr 2007, Sherkole)

"The man is responsible for decision making and she [the wife]¹³ should listen. The husband should tell her what is happening and she has to listen". (FGD with men heads of households, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

According to the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant in Sherkole, usually the refugees come to be registered for repatriation after they decide by themselves. He said: "Usually the families come intact and we register members of the family under the name of its head

¹¹ Elaboration added.

¹² The official was referring here to the UNHCR Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation 1996.

¹³ Elaboration added.

which is usually the husband. The rest including the wife are dependants of the husband....” This means that the family is considered decided to return when they come for registration. The Repatriation Assistant mentioned that there will be no further discussion about the decision as long as there is no misunderstanding and quarrel about the destiny of return among members of the family. “As far as it works we always try to make sure that a family goes intact. But when it happens that they don’t want to go together then we provide them with separate repatriation kits and usually the women take the kids...” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). The Senior Protection Assistant also strengthens this view as “unity of family members is one of the basic principles of UNHCR as an organization. UNHCR encourages all members of the family to go together. But if they decide to go separately, they can do so”.

In the previous chapter it is evident that men and women have different concerns they would consider in the decision making to repatriate. This is an area where UNHCR as a leading organization in the process of repatriation could (and should) intervene in terms of addressing these gendered factors. One of the ways to ensure that these gendered factors could be to have individual refugees declare his or her decision to go home. In reality however it is the head of the family that is hold responsible for the decision about repatriation except in the few cases where the women (and other adult dependents of the family) expressed different choices of destination from their families.

Things might be much more complicated than the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant simply put it. He said: “...In the case of couples who do not agree about their places of destiny,

we [a group of UNHCR, ARRA and refugee community leaders] will sit in a committee and try to harmonize the couple's decision about the places of return. If they stick to their decisions, we will fill separate repatriation forms, we will make the wife sign that she is doing it by her own decision. We will provide them with different repatriation kits and finally they will be repatriated in the places of their choices". But according to the records, the ratio of women who decide to return to the places of their choice is significantly small. For example, from the 165 families that were repatriated in March only three families returned based on the wives' requests to go to a different destination than the husband (VRF 2007b). Behind this, however, surfaces that the right to free, individual decision is a difficult principle to carryout because in cases of deviation from the decision of the husbands women might face violence from their husbands. One statement by the UNHCR Senior Field Assistant made this clearly visible: "...In the cases of split in decision-making between the couple, we encountered problems such as wife beating and long term problem of divorce. It is not an easy thing. Even if the wife wants to go to a different destination, the husband might not accept..." (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

In all my focus group discussions with refugee men and women, refugee community leaders and interviews with staff of UNCR in Sherkole refugee camp, they consider head of the family as the one who is responsible for making decisions about the family. One of these responsibilities is the decision about repatriation. "Our husbands will come to us and tell us that we are going or not. We will follow their decisions as they are the heads

of the families” said a woman in focus group discussion with women from male headed households (FGD, 26 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The concept of head of the family is not only male-biased in case of households with two (a male and a female) partners. It is male-biased even in case of female headed households. As the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant pointed out; “...Under normal circumstances it is the husband who is the head of the family. In case of no husband in the family, the wife will be the head of the family..... Generally speaking, a woman head of a family is a replacement of her husband...” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). From this one could infer that, in the absence of a man, a woman head of the family will assume all the responsibilities of the head of the family. However, findings from focus group discussions with women heads of households suggest that the decision for repatriation is out of the scope of responsibilities at least for many, if not most of these women. When it comes to the decision to repatriate these women will have the chance to exercise their responsibilities. “In the case men headed families, the men decide and share the decision with their wives. In our case, if we have older sons, we follow their decisions. But in most cases the community leaders decide whether we have to go or not and we will go and register” (FGD with women heads of households, 25 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

According to Ager in *Refugees* (1998) refugee assistances fail to recognize the ‘forces and mechanisms’ that subordinate, dominate and exclude women from the political power structures in the camps reinforce and strengthen patriarchal tendencies of

communities. The pattern in the refugee assistance in Sherkole as described in the focus group discussions with mainly women underscores the fact that their presentation in the leadership (the camp power structures) was either minimal or nonfunctional. This was mirrored, as showed above, in the representation of women in the “go and see” visit and their minimal or no part in the decision-making regarding repatriation. The presentation of families through male members of a family (including older sons) and perception of women heads of families as only replacements for lack of men in their families is also evidence for the working of similar power dynamics in Sherkole refugee camps. My research further suggests that women heads of households, despite substituting lacking men members of the family, are prevented from taking full responsibility for the household in the same manner that men do. Women are not in the position to take on their on a decision as serious as to repatriate. At this level the patriarchal responsibility tends to be taken over by community leaders.

This tendency puts women headed households on the most disadvantaged end of on a continuum of the distance from practicing free decision comparing their counterparts in male headed households. This is to say, even though the decision to repatriate in male headed households is made by men, my evidence suggests that there might be a glimpse of chance for women to voice their preferences about the repatriation in some of these cases. This becomes virtually impossible for women headed households as their repatriation in most cases is mostly by community leaders and these families are treated in groups unclear. As these men are the one who decide to go [or not to go] back to Sudan, then the voices of some groups namely women headed households will be

unheard and their needs unattended. While women in women headed households have many more concerns than men headed households, the fact that there are no men in their households makes it particularly difficult for their concerns and needs to be heard.

The UNHCR officials repeatedly stressed that it is because of the South Sudanese culture that men and community leaders take the lead and make the decision about their families and their communities in general.

....African culture, especially South Sudanese culture, gives no or very little room for women to participate in decision making in their family affairs. This is reflected in the decision making about their repatriation. If we take the example of repatriation of Uduk and Funj from Sherkole, women mostly followed the decision of their husbands and their fathers on whether to return or not and the where about of their returnee places, except in few cases where women refused to go with their husbands. Even in these cases, the refusal was mainly motivated by direct or indirect influence from their patriarchal [natal]¹⁴ families. So, they refuse not to go with their husbands so that they will go to their patriarchal villages... (UNHCR Field Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The Head of Field Office Assosa shares the view of the Field Assistant. “It is a common decision for all the community members. Husbands decide for their families. The female headed households usually follow the decisions of their community and clan leaders.

¹⁴ Elaboration added.

They want to go back together so that they will not separate from their acquaintances” (Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa).

The Head of the Office also suggested that there can be another dimension to the group decision. There are other things the refugees might consider when deciding to go with their clan members in addition to fear of separation. For example, “the refugees always fight with each other. The fights are between and among clans and subclans. If members of a certain clan decide not to go and remain here, they might face revenge from others who have previously been engaged in fights. It is their culture” (Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa).

With all these information on the potential forcing factors at the back of the decision making, UNHCR at all levels believe that the operation is voluntary. “We consider it voluntary because everyone made a decision based on their choices” (Head of UNHCR Field Office Assosa, Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa).

As the findings suggest, decision for repatriation in the Maban refugees’ case tends to be, from the side of the refugees, a decision to avoid further complication of their lives in the refugee camps and in South Sudan rather than preference to go to repatriate. By deciding to go back the refugees can partly avoid the risk of persecution and revenge, job insecurity at the destination and the risk of being singled out as enemies of the Liberation Movement and the Government of South Sudan.

From the above subchapters one can see there are many factors that affect the voluntariness of the planned repatriation of Mabans from Sherkole Refugee Camp. Among these are the possibility of political and organizational benefits for the actors involved in the repatriation program, lack of clear understanding of the intentions and wishes of refugees, gendered and classes factors considered decisive by refugees and problematic production and dissemination of information about the process of repatriation. These, aggravated with lack of individual decisions, make the planned repatriation of Mabans from Sherkole unfit with the guidelines in the Handbook for Voluntary Repatriation.

3.3.1.3. The Repatriation Operation

The UNHCR Officials I had talked to underlined that there are no other reasons, whatsoever, for the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees rather than the cease of the cause that led to the flight which is the Sudanese Civil War. The Repatriation Assistant in particular stressed that “refugees will not be refugees forever. When situations in their country of origin improve then they should go. Voluntary repatriation is the most durable solution and that is what we are doing now”. He further elaborated on the role of UNHCR in refugee camps. “UNHCR’s role is to provide protection to refugees and seek for durable solutions. But we can not force refugees to stay in camps or go back to their places of origin. If refugees are forced to go back, that is deportation against humanitarian laws” (UNHCR Repatriation Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). As mentioned above (see section 3.2.1), this staff member also believes that the financial shortage UNHCR is encountering these days is not a reason, in any manner, to push

refugees to go back to their places, namely in the form of reducing the quality and quantity of the services in the camp.

As to the services that are rendered to returnees from UNHCR Ethiopia side, UNHCR's responsibility is preparing the refugees for repatriation, arranging the transportation and providing the items that are necessary during transportation. These items include blankets, soap, kitchen sets, mosquito nets, buckets, food item and three months ration at the end of the journey. Conditions that are expressed as basic for repatriation are land mine free areas, availability of clean water, availability of health centers and availability of roads/air strips for transportation. The basic steps in repatriation operation are explained by the Repatriation Assistant as follows:

Repatriation always depends how UNHCR and its partners in the other side of the border are dealing with the situation. If we assume all things to work well, the first step of repatriation is to identify the intention of refugees to go back. This is followed by constructing and rehabilitating infrastructures and clearing landmines in returnee places. Then we will conduct either of the 'go and see' or 'come and inform' visits. There is always information exchange about the absorption capacity of the returnee places. After that we start registering the returnees and preparing way stations. Before the start of the actual repatriation we give non food items the refugee families need during the transportation and reintegration. The Cross Border Meetings are big parts of the preparation process (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Concerning the fears raised by refugees regarding the travel, the officials have contradictory opinions. On one hand they suggest that the travel arrangements are up to the standard and are believed to be the best for everyone. For example, the UNHCR Senior Protection Assistant

We respect the principle of safety and dignity and that is why we work towards making the return as comfortable as possible. I do not know about the exact number of persons to be put on one truck. But roughly from 40-50 persons will be on one truck together with their belongings. They are put on trucks because first of all there are no buses available in South Sudan currently and second, as Sudan is a hot country it is best for everyone to be on truck than in buses (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

They also suggested that there are some groups that need special protection such as female headed households, unaccompanied minors, elders, severely ill, people and children with disabilities. And the Senior Field Assistant believes that “these people should be treated differently. During transportation there might be sexual violence against women and girls. Based on needs assessment, there should be a way to help these groups” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). However, the Repatriation Assistant confirms that there are no special arrangements for returnees that are identified as fit for the operation.

Those who are not fit to go will remain behind and the ones that are will go. There is no special treatment for any groups (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole)

3.3.1.4. Who benefits?

...we have been discriminated here in the presence of UNHCR. Do you think we will benefit equally when there is no UNHCR?

(FGD with women heads of households 24 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

In the previous sections of this thesis, Gender is already identified as a reason for different forms of discrimination that might negatively affect women during repatriation and the reintegration phase. However, while discussing the question, whether repatriation can be equally beneficial for men and women, with refugee men and women as well as staff of UNHCR other two important factors surfaced. One is availability of men in the household and the other one is education/training. Generally, more men participate in education/training than women (UNHCR 2007a). Hence the pace of returnees' integration in their places of origin will mostly be the function of their gender combined with their education/training. This will create stronger challenge on women who have no men in their households and have no or little education/training.

From many experiences in repatriation programs in Africa and elsewhere, it is seen that it is not an easy task to have returnees lives reestablished. There are always some groups of returnees who benefit most from repatriation (Cernea & McDowell 2000). The concerns from Maban refugees in Sherkole also confirm that they believe the rehabilitation process

to challenging even when repatriation happens after a serious planning. In the case of the planned ‘voluntary’ repatriation of Maban refugees, women headed households can be expected to be among the ones who will benefit the least from the repatriation.

The Senior Protection Assistant believes that life will not be as easy as in the camp, especially for women but still UNHCR expects that the repatriation will be equally beneficial for men and women. “Generally, we expect the repatriation to be equally beneficial to everyone but in practice this might not be true. They are going back to places where there is less protection and lower level of awareness about gender than in Sherkole. So, voluntary repatriation might have bad faces for women. Here the facilities make their life easier. There are water points and grinding mills close to their villages. There is continuous education on women’s rights but in returnee places the infrastructures will not be at the level of Sherkole. But I am sure,” he says “they don’t look forward to a perfectly good environment. We know that women have concerns but they weighed the sides and decided to go *voluntarily*” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The Head of Field Office Assosa explains the possible differences in the degree of benefit only from the perspective of class. “All returnees are the same and their entitlements are equal. Only those educated and/or trained here and elsewhere might be better off. The rest are the same” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

3.3.1.5. Perceived challenges in the repatriation process

UNHCR in general is confident that the planning and repatriation of Maban refugees and the previous repatriations of Funj and Uduk followed all the procedures of voluntary repatriation. However, UNHCR Staff members at different level consider that there are different challenges that might affect the repatriation program and hinder the ‘quick’ reintegration of returnees in their places of origin. Apart from the approaching of the rainy season, most of these challenges were seen as related either to the culture of Mabans or the capacity of the implementing partners of UNHCR. No one except the Senior Field Assistant commented on the concept of ‘voluntary’ repatriation as a challenging issue for implementation. The Senior Field Assistant commented on ‘voluntariness’ as

...There is no such a thing called absolute voluntary repatriation. The refugees are fatigued here. They are bored and tired of refugee life. They have different reasons to go. Their places might not be ready even. If they choose to go we will arrange their return. And from UNHCR’s angle there can be some minor particulars of the voluntary repatriation missing. But compared to their number and the situations we consider them very minor (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The UNHCR staff emphasize that most of the problems that arise during repatriation programs are related to the “traditions” of the refugees making intervening “very difficult”. For example,

We some times encounter problems that are related to their cultures. For example, most of the tribes here never lived together in such a confined place. But here they started to know each other and the younger ones even intermarry. But when it comes to repatriation, then the families of these youngsters start to fight in the attempt to take the couple to their respective places (UNHCR Field Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Similarly, the Repatriation Assistant mentioned polygamous marriage practices [among men] as a challenge UNHCR can not intervene with. According to this official “...there are even cases when the senior wife knows about the other marriages only during the registration [for repatriation]. Usually the men want to go with the senior wives and leave the others by their own...” (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The UNHCR Head of Field Office Assosa mentioned more varied challenges than the staff members in Sherkole. However, she still thinks that the challenges are more related to the implementing partners than UNHCR itself. For example asked about her opinion about potential relationship between returnees, their fellow citizens who remained in their villages, and the ex-soldiers, she stressed: “UNHCR and NGOs are willing to assess the situation but the Government of South Sudan is difficult to handle”. And she added

another dimension: “Refugees want to go home as soon as possible because there are only limited jobs in South Sudan and the competition will be fierce as the IDPs will also come back. Everyone want to go back to grab possible chances of jobs and better pieces of lands. Currently, the case of IDPs is one of the biggest headaches of UNHCR because the Sudanese Government is bringing these people back to South Sudan to minimize the number of IDPs in towns.” She continued:

Working with the Ethiopian Government representatives, especially at the camp level, is the other challenge. They do not know what voluntary repatriation means. We have to tell them now and then about the developments. The problems we have with them are mostly related to the logistical arrangements during transporting the returnees. At the way stations, they do not arrange the meals very well and they do not care about the type of food the refugees prefer. They only order injera¹⁵ which is not preferred by the Sudanese people. Voluntary repatriation needs experience and these people have no experience to handle this operation. They have problems in record keeping. Sometimes the physical count of refugees...they do not update their records...(UNHCR Head of Field Office Assosa, Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa).

¹⁵ Injera is the widely consumed Ethiopian traditional food.

3.3.2. The preparation from UNHCR South Sudan side: Are the returnee places ready?

I have already shown the disparity between the factors women and men consider for repatriation. In a rough comparison of the concerns of refugee men, women and UNHCR, it can be seen that the factors considered as basic for repatriation are mostly the ones that are commonly voiced by both men and women. However, issues such as the availability of grinding mills are not mentioned as basic facilities UNHCR and its partners are planning to provide during the repatriation operation and rehabilitation. Concerns that are specific to women in female headed households such as amount and quality of support extended to these categories of women and their families are not in the 'list' of UNHCR's priorities in the preparation for repatriation.

According to an UNHCR Repatriation Assistant in Addis Ababa the basic prerequisites for repatriation include absorption capacity, landmines clearance, availability of enough clean water and availability of clinics to accommodate the refugees. The Repatriation Assistant in Sherkole repeatedly voiced that there are only limited services in the Sudanese end and the absorption capacity is one of the major problems UNHCR is expects to face. This is because "there is a large number of Internally Displaced People in Sudan and following the Peace Agreement there are also coming back to their places of

origin. This means UNHCR will face constraints in resource as it [*UNHCR*]¹⁶ and other organization will divide their efforts” (UNHCR Repatriation Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Once the refugees are in the Sudanese territory, the concerned Sudanese government body and UNHCR Sudan will arrange their transportations, take them to their destinations and provide them with three-month ration. The reintegration process continues with the support of the other organizations. UNHCR officials at camp, Field Office and Liaison Office levels expressed their hopes that the implementing partners of UNHCR at South Sudan end will actively participate in the rehabilitation of Maban refugees from Sherkole. They also expressed their trust on the South Sudanese government in protecting the physical security of returnees. According to these officials UNHCR will monitor reintegration of these returnees for about one year. However, the responsibility of UNHCR might look different on the ground and in reality in South Sudan. The Repatriation Assistant, for example, commented:

I can not specifically talk about the responsibilities of UNHCR in South Sudan. But generally speaking, our role is facilitating the communication among UN agencies and NGOs and making travel arrangements. After the returnees arrive at their destinations, UNHCR coordinates with the Government of South Sudan to monitor the reintegration process. But this is only for a year, maximum (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

¹⁶ Elaboration added.

This statement clearly suggested that once after they are taken to their place of origin, refugees will have to start living by themselves. But according to Sudan Tribune, series of assessments in South Sudan suggest that there are only limited opportunities for self sufficiency in south Sudan in general as there are only limited job opportunities especially for men and women who have little qualification (Sudan Tribune, 27 Apr 2007, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article21608>). Similarly, according to UNHCR's March 2007 Update there has been increased vandalism in South Sudan since the signing of the CPA as a result of increasing unemployment rate (<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900SID/YSAR-6ZHRB7?OpenDocument>).

This proves that doubts of refugee men and women were well founded concerning the security and job opportunities in their places of origin. This I could show that there is a tendency of UNHCR reducing its responsibilities and convincing refugees to return to their places of origin where they will get at most underdeveloped social, economic and physical infrastructure, fragile security conditions, three months ration and limited monitoring from UNHCR for only one year.

From the updates on the developments in the Maban returnee places I learned that some organizations are working in the areas of health, sanitation, food security, micro-enterprise, education and water. And according to the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant in Sherkole, what they are waiting for is the end of the rainy season to start transporting the refugees. However, when asked about the challenges involved in carrying out the repatriation operation, the responses of this and the other UNHCR staff members sound contradictory to what they say about the preparation. For example, the Repatriation

Assistant said: “In general the implementation of the Peace Agreement is believed to be working well. No conflicts so far and we don’t expect any major conflicts in the near future. What we consider a challenge at this point is the pace of the development activities in the South Sudanese side. The capacity of the South Sudanese government, landmines and the huge number of internally displaced people returning to their villages are some of the reasons for slow pace of the preparation to receive the returnees from Ethiopia. He further stressed the problem of landmines.

The area is infested by landmines. There are no clear roads. It is difficult to go through Yabus¹⁷ as there are no sustainable bridges or one has to use airstrips for the repatriation. (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole)

About the concerns of refugees in general, the UNHCR Repatriation Assistant commented:

We [UNHCR]¹⁸ know that the major concerns of returnees are social services. They have been part of refugee life. They are now going to meet other people and organizations. They think this is a challenge. They also consider security as a major challenge in their places of origin. They might be right. They have international standard protection here and it will only depend on the capacity of the Government of South Sudan (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

¹⁷ Yabus is one of the biggest rivers in the Sudan.

¹⁸ Elaboration added.

And asked if there were any specific activities that might ease the living conditions of women in South Sudan:

Women's concerns are mainly related to their responsibilities in the family. They worry much about food, health of the family, shelter and so on. NGOs are working in South Sudan to smoothen the transition from refugee life to reintegration to their communities. However, as my latest information is concerned, there are no organizations that are specifically in the area of supporting women. May be some of them have these programs in their main projects. For example grinding mills might come under food security projects. (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

The other dimension on the gendered effects of repatriation on women is sexual and gender based violence. In the minutes of the, where the progress in the preparation for the repatriation operation of Mabans is discussed, the issue of gender based violence is not mentioned (UNHCR 2005c, UNHCR 2007c). My interviews with the staff members of UNHCR in Sherkole Refugee Camp and at Assosa Field Office did not give any hint of activities that are related to sexual and gender based violence, except the Repatriation Assistant mentioned that "Gender Based Violence is one of the areas UNHCR wants to stress at. UNHCR South Sudan will advocate among its partners for giving this issue attention..." (Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole). The UNHCR Head of Field Office Assosa admits that they "Know that women have many interrelated problems". She continues that she sees "many women without husbands and women giving birth to

children on after another. Because I do not know their customs and traditions, I can not say if these problems are related to culture or women's vulnerability. I believe this is an area where UNHCR should put more emphasis in the future" (Interview, 1 May 2007, Assosa).

UNHCR in its *The State of the World's Refugees* (1997) strongly admits despite the well-established international principle of 'voluntary repatriation' and returning under conditions of 'safety and dignity', quite large number of the world's refugees goes back to their homelands involuntarily. This is because, according to UNHCR this return is induced generally by "deterioration of conditions" in the country of asylum. The book goes further on: "...Such duress in many instances has been deliberate, exercised by host governments, host communities and other actors, with specific intention of forcing refugees to go back to their homeland" (147). At the same time, UNHCR staff members in Sherkole, Assosa and Addis Ababa believe that the planned repatriation of Maban refugees in Sherkole is voluntary and free from any influences similar to the ones enumerate here that compromise rules and regulations for voluntary repatriation. "Repatriation is absolutely voluntary. I do not see and gap between the provisions and the practical implementation. The refugees have enough information about their places of origin and they decided based on their choices. (Senior Protection Assistant, Interview, 27 Apr 2007, Sherkole).

Despite the UNHCR's insistence on the voluntary choice and decision of refugees to go back to their places of origin, only one feasible choice remains for refugees to make.

Because of the different factors and influences discussed above refugees will be forced to choose to go back to their places of origins rather than stay in Sherkole until they believe that it is time to go back.

4. Conclusion

Most of the findings of this thesis research confirm other research findings in the area of repatriation. Most literature suggest that repatriation programs that take place immediately after end of conflicts do not guarantee the readiness of the place to receive returnees, in all social, economic, political and security aspects. The experiences of other repatriation operations also showed that repatriation is unlikely to be voluntary among women. My research goes beyond this to show that involuntariness of repatriation can be observed among almost all members of the Maban community in Sherkole but in varying degree. Gender is a factor that plays a significant role in determining the voluntariness of the repatriation but not the only one.

The concept of voluntary repatriation is open to interpretation and its applicability depends on the situation under which the repatriation program is carried out. My findings suggest, there is no group of Maban refugees that can be granted voluntary repatriation living up to the UNHCR stipulations and definitions regarding this issue. In general, the voluntariness of a repatriation program is 'evaluated' based on the extent of the persons involvement in the process in the form of access to information, free and individual decision, direct contact with UNHCR and the ability to express their wishes and needs. The other vital aspect of the voluntary nature of a repatriation program is the perception of potential returnees about the benefit they might get from repatriation in comparison to their lives in refugee camps. The readiness of the returnee places to receive the returnees

in socioeconomic, sociopolitical, legal and security aspects comprise another big part of the preconditions for voluntary return.

In the case of planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole, to begin with, end of the civil war in the Sudan was not the only reason for the initiation of the return of South Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia. Even if the coming to an end of the civil war was the biggest reason, there were additional, organizational and political, reasons from UNHCR and the SPLA/M sides respectively. There are also potential political push reasons for other parties such as the Ethiopian government to press for the repatriation of the South Sudanese refugees. Because of the political mobilization, the scarcity of resources in South Sudan and the other push factors from UNHCR and Ethiopian government side, the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole refugee camp gives only one choice of decision: going back to their places of origin.

As the findings suggest there are clearly gendered factors that affect the decision of refugee men and women about repatriation. Furthermore the expectations and perceived fears of their perspective repatriation to their place of origin vary among men and women and among men and women of different social status in their communities. UNHCR's preparation for the repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole mainly considers the 'basic' necessities that are common to almost all members of the returnee community, such as food, water and basic health services. The specific needs of returnee women, more security arrangements, grinding mills, easily accessible health centers and protection from sexual and gender based violence are not taken in to consideration in the

planning. Women heads of households and their families are the groups with more specific needs and concerns but who have extremely less access to the information about their return and no or minimal involvement in the decision making.

But the degree of involvement in the repatriation process varies from person to person and from group to group across the gender of the person, the extent of closeness to access of information and the extent of the preparation at both ends of the border. The responsibility of head of a family is representing the family in all aspects of their lives including the decision for repatriation. The research showed that this practice interferes with the principle of free and individual decision of each and every refugee to repatriate. But the gender of the head of the family plays a vital role in determining the seriousness of the roles that can be taken by the head of the family. This research showed that men heads of households are more likely make 'decisions' regarding going back to the place of origin at household level whereas the decision for repatriation in the case of female headed households is taken at a higher level of the community structure, namely the community leaders and/or male family members if available. Hence, women heads of households with their families will be the most disadvantaged as most of the decision making regarding their return is likely to be made by community leaders. Women in male headed households in general follow the decisions of their husbands except in the rare cases where they decide to go by themselves where to go, including the responsibilities of taking all the children with them. But again, from the experiences of Funj and Uduk returnees, there is no case where women decided to stay in the refugee camp

independently, the difference in decision from their husbands is about the destiny not about returning or staying in the camp.

On top of these aspects of voluntary repatriation and its applicability, UNHCR admits that the pace of preparation in the South Sudanese end is not as fast as it should be. The UN updates and even pro South Sudan news letters suggest that South Sudan is still facing problems of conflict though at smaller scale than the civil war. This slow paced preparation and ongoing and spontaneous conflicts in South Sudan have high potential of jeopardizing accessibility of most of the needs and concerns raised by refugee men and women such as the right to have access to education, health services, employment opportunities, right of expressing thoughts and freedom of movement. At the moment repatriation is not the most attractive choice for most refugees but especially women and women headed households.

Therefore, with all the openness to interpretation, and the relative applicability of the concept of voluntary repatriation, the planned repatriation of Maban refugees from Sherkole to South Sudan is more involuntary to some groups than others with refugee community leaders at the top of the ladder in terms of the extent of the voluntariness. All the interviews, focus group discussions, documents and literature suggest that the challenges of reintegration are most likely harsher on women as difficult socioeconomic, sociopolitical and legal and security situations generally tend to have more pronounced negative effects on women than men and women headed households than men headed ones. Moreover, the planned repatriation might end up in further inconveniences,

economic and social marginalization of returnees with a more significant negative impact on returnee women headed families. This may lead returnee women and their families to further migration, exploitation, separation of families and more severe poverty in the future.

From this research and the experiences of other repatriation operations, it is possible to conclude that the concept of voluntary repatriation works differently under different circumstances. In principle, return is voluntary only when the decisions are made at individual levels and the returnee places are ready enough to receive the returnees with reasonably enough social services, economic and political opportunities and security situations and when the repatriation operation is free from any financial, political and social factors that press the return of refugees. As the research and experiences of repatriation operations show the above preconditions are extremely difficult to meet and certainly not met in the planned repatriation of Mabans from Sherkole Refugee Camp. Because these preconditions are almost always present in most repatriation cases and because they are difficult to meet, it is possible to conclude that most repatriation operations are involuntary for most of the returnees.

Appendices

Appendix I – Focus Group Discussion Guide for Focus Group

Discussion with Refugee Women and Men

1. How do you define voluntary repatriation?
2. Did show your intention for repatriation?
3. What do you expect from repatriation?
4. What is good about repatriation?
5. What are your fears about repatriation?
6. Do you have any concerns about the repatriation?
7. Are there any reasons that make you go to your country even if there are problems in the repatriation places?
8. Are there any reasons that you consider as hindering from going back to your place of origin?
9. What are the most important things you want to consider in deciding to go home?
10. Did you decide to go home?
11. If yes, what made you decide to repatriate?
12. If you had the chance, would you decide not to go home, even if it was without your spouse?
13. Who do you think should decide about the repatriation?
14. What is the advantage of repatriation?
15. What are the disadvantages of repatriation?
16. What are the services you are not sure to find in the returnee places?

17. What are the services you are concerned about in the refugee camps?
18. Are there any changes in the services in the refugee camps? If yes, since when?
19. Why do you think these services are not the same as before?
20. Do you think these services will improve in the near future?
21. Do you think the preparation is enough before implementing the repatriation?
22. What issues should be addressed before implementing the repatriation?
23. What was the role of the UNHCR and ARRA officials in the preparation?
24. What is the role of the refugee administration in the repatriation process?
25. Who is the most trustworthy source of information about the situation in South Sudan?
26. Do you have any contact since you came to the refugee camps?
27. What information did you get before deciding to go home?
28. Do you think men and women have equal access to information about the repatriation program?
29. Whom are you going to live with in the returnee places?
30. Are there any clan members left in your returnee places?
31. Do you have any reason not to go back to your places of origin? If yes, what?
32. Did you tell this to the repatriation officials? If yes, what was the response? If no, why not?
33. Who do you think will benefit most from the repatriation? Why?
34. How do you think men and women will benefit from repatriation?
35. Have you heard about the situation in your villages? If yes, what is the situation?

36. Have you heard from the refugees in the pilot repatriation program? If yes, what is the reaction?
37. If yes, did this have an effect your decision about the repatriation?
38. What is the most important factor that helps to adapt the situations in the returnee places?
39. Do you think the repatriation has different impact for men and women? If yes, who do you think will benefit most? In what way?

Appendix II – Focus Group Discussion Guide for Focus Group

Discussion with Refugee Community Leaders

1. How do you describe the planned repatriation process?
2. What do you think the main cause to initiate the repatriation of South Sudanese refugees from Ethiopia?
3. Did you visit the returnee places?
4. What is the situation in the returnee places?
5. How do you compare the situation in South Sudan and in the refugee camps?
6. What are the advantages of living in the camp, and returning to South Sudan?
7. Do you see any difference in living in refugee camps since the peace agreement between the northern based Sudanese government and SPLA/M?
8. If yes, what are these changes? And what do you think the reason for the difference is?
9. How do you describe the services in the camps across time? Is there any difference? If yes, what do you think the reason is?
10. Who do you think will benefit from the repatriation?
11. Do you think men and women will benefit from the repatriation equally?
12. Do you think there are any gendered factors that affect the decision of men and women about repatriation?
13. If yes, what are these gendered factors?
14. If there are gendered factors, how do you think they are accommodated in the planning and implementation of the process?
15. Do you think these factors affect the rehabilitation process in the returnee places?

16. If yes, do you think the organizations that are involved in the rehabilitation are ready enough to accommodate these needs?
17. Who do you think should make decisions regarding repatriation?
18. What do you mean by head of a family?

Appendix III – Interview Guide for UNHCR and Other Organizations’

Officials

1. What is voluntary repatriation?
2. Are there any working definitions of voluntary repatriation in Sherkole context?
3. What are the conditions that affect the voluntary nature of decisions and the process of repatriation?
4. What are the main reasons for facilitating the repatriation of south Sudanese refugees?
5. What are the most important things that have to be considered in the repatriation process?
6. What is the unit of persons who decide on the repatriation?
7. Who decides to repatriate?
8. How do you define head of a family?
9. Is there any difference in family and individual decisions?
10. What are the major issues that concern UNHCR and ARRA in the repatriation of refugees?
11. Do you think there are any gendered concerns about the repatriation? If yes what are they?
12. If there are any gendered concerns about the repatriation, how did the organizations deal with them in the decision making?
13. To what extent did UNHCR and its partners work on the individual free decision for repatriation?

14. What does UNHCR and its partners do if a family is split in their decision to go home? What is this goes until the final consultation?
15. What happens to refugees who do not want to go home?
16. Does the gender of the person who refuses to go have any impact in the procedures?
17. What methods did UNHCR and ARRA use in dissemination the information about the repatriation and the situation in the returnee places?
18. What are the services you provide in the repatriation process?
19. What are the criteria to decide that repatriation is the most appropriate durable solution?
20. Is there any plan for refugees who are under political prosecution and eventually can not go home?
21. What is the preparation in the receiving end?
22. What does UNHCR do once after the refugee go home?
23. How do the international organizations assist the returnees rehabilitate in their new places?
24. Do you think the situation in the returnee places is better that the situations in refugee camps?
25. If yes, in what sense?
26. What situations have improved in South Sudan since the peace agreement? What things got worse?
27. How do you think these situations affect the lives of the returnees?

28. Do you think there is any relationship dynamics between the returnees and the ones at home?
29. What are the possible challenges in implementing the repatriation program?
30. What are the perceived gaps in between the theoretical and practical parts of the repatriation?

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