

Begging and Urbanization: A Sociological Analysis of the Impacts of Begging for Urban Security, Sanitation and Tourism Development in Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Dessalegn Mekuriaw Hailu¹

Abstract

To contribute its part in understanding and dealing the problems of begging for development in general, this study examined impacts of begging on health, security and tourism development in Bahir Dar city by collecting data from 98 participants drawn, using convenience, and purposive sampling and census, from governmental, non-governmental, and community based and religious organizations; the public, beggars, tourists and a tour guide. It employed mixed research methods, cross sectional and approximating cross sectional with longitudinal designs and an integrated vulnerability model. Descriptive survey and thematic analysis were employed to analyze the collected data. The study found that beggars live in degrading social life; marginal levels of economic activities and poor access to many of basic services of the urban life. By obstructing traffic flow and the flow of tourists in particular; and participating in deviant and criminal acts and concealing offenders, beggars in the city also presented pressing negative health impacts for residents; impeded city government's plan to create defecation free city of Bahir Dar. However, dealing with begging in the city is at a nascent stage with the involvement of only one non-governmental organization and continual shift of responsibility to different bodies; poor coordination among many and lack of it with some on top of the application of sporadic, inconsistent and incomprehensive measures taken by the city government. As human labor and land resources are officially recognized as the two key development sources of Ethiopia, multifaceted impacts of begging needs to be adequately and timely responded pursuant to individual and national needs.

Keywords: urbanization, begging, tourism, urban security, urban health, urban sanitation, human resource development, Bahir Dar city, Ethiopia

1. Introduction

Despite tremendous developments and innovations the world has been witnessing, recurring local and global changes and transformations have brought immense poverty and income inequality that pushed many to the edges of life and development. The rate and impacts of these changes for developing countries has been immense. Being a developing country, Ethiopia has suffered from recurring droughts, floods and extreme poverty; population growth that surpassed from 53.1 million in 1994 to 73.9 million in 2007 (CSA, 2007; MoFED, 2012); high and continuing growth of orphans and only 13.89% (500, 000 out of 3.6 million) of elderly having regular public sector pension (MOLSA, 2012).

Partly because of this, begging has become ubiquitous feature of the Ethiopian society in general. ERDA (2007), for example, estimates the number of beggars in Ethiopia to range from 180,000 - 200,000 indicating Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) to accommodate the largest regional share (44, 843) though it is suggested to be 11,900 (ANRS BoLSA 2014). ANRS has also declining agricultural productivity and has been affected for a long period by natural and man-made disasters which create fertile grounds for mass rural-urban migration (MOLSA, 1992) that potentially contributed for growing number of beggars. On top of being one of the top centers of tourist attraction in the country, Bahir city, its capital, has a rapidly increasing population trend that jumped from 54,766 in 1984, to 96,140 in 1994, and 221,991 in 2007 (CSA, 2007).

2. Statement of the Problem

In Ethiopia, studies have been conducted on begging as a survival strategy (Woubishet, 2003; Tatek, 2008), prevalence, causes and socioeconomic conditions of beggars (MOLSA, 1992; ERDA, 2007; Teweldebrhan, 2011); beggars experiences (Fireyihun, 2011) and measures of begging and responsibilities of different stakeholders (Demelash, 2010) in general. Dejectedly, however, many failed to include other diverse group of beggars and non-beggars as research participants; to analyze the interactional effects of failure in system and individual character and to be comprehensive by employing diverse methods and adequate respondents. All these studies have also basically focused to study beggars of Addis Ababa and have not covered the consequences of begging on urban security, tourism development and health and sanitation of dwellers and beggars themselves. Methodologically, most of these studies have only employed qualitative methods, and, hence lacked triangulation.

The only studies conducted on the subject in Bahir Dar city were by Dube (2014) and Kerebih, Tizita

¹ The author is lecturer of sociology in Debre Markos University.

and Alemtsehay (2014). While the most recent, these studies, too, failed to comprehensively address the impacts of begging on health situations of beggars' and non-beggars; and of tourism development, and urban security; hence, unable to comprehensively capture current realities and future developmental impacts of begging in the city.

3. Objectives

- Examining the impacts of begging on urban sanitation and health development programmes
- Describing the impacts of begging on urban tourism development
- Exploring the impacts of begging on urban security

4. Materials and Methods

To collect data pertinent to the objectives, this study employed cross-sectional and approximating longitudinal design with cross sectional designs as well as quantitative method (survey) and qualitative methods (focus group discussion, in-depth and key informant interviews and observation). Out of 98 research participants of this study, 50 beggars were participated in survey, of which 6, 2 and 42, were respectively sampled using purposive and convenience sampling and census from beggars who reside along road sides, verandas and religious centers; those who were provided houses in the eve of the celebration of the seventh Ethiopian Nations, Nationalities and People's Day (ENNPD) in Bahir Dar in December 2012; and those who were evacuated to the city's periphery during *Dergue*¹ regime but who are now resident of their built houses in *kebele 14*.

Survey data were collected using pre-tested closed and open ended questionnaire items which were prepared in English and translated into Amharic (national and regional working language) in order to make it easy for communication during data collection. The researcher and one trained female facilitator (4th year computer science student of Bahir Dar University) have collected survey data from all respondents owing to failure to get respondents who provide self-administered survey.

The remaining 48 samples were employed to collect qualitative data. Accordingly, a total of 33 participants were recruited for an in-depth interview from beggars (6), residents (6), tourists (6), a tour guide, community policing officers (4) and health extension workers (3); officers from ANRS Bureau of Labour and Social Affairs (BoLSA) (1), Bahir Dar city Culture, Tourism and Parks Development Bureau (CTPDB) (1) and Public Sphere Charity and Development Organization (PSCDO) (1), the only non-governmental organization working on begging in Bahir Dar city; and three religious institutions (Mosque (1), Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) (2) and Protestant church (1)). Two FGDs, one with officers from different organizations (BoLSA, PSCDO, regional CTPDB and Bahir Dar city association of the elderly), and the other with members of the public, each consisting of six discussants, were also conducted. Furthermore, the study involved key-informant interviews with three individuals recruited from regional BoLSA, Bahir Dar city CTPDB, and PSCDO.

The collected data were analyzed using appropriate methods of data analysis. The research used triangulation where data collected through survey, interviews and FGDs were used to complement one another. Generally, non-sequential mixed approach was used in the discussion of the analyzed data collected using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Furthermore, the results of survey were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. More specifically, descriptive survey, thematic and content analysis were employed by complementing one another.

5. Results

People start begging as a result of the interplay of root causes, dynamic pressures and unsafe conditions. Review of related literature indicates that the larger the size of begging population, the greater is its impact on economy, health, beggars themselves, the public, safety and tourism development in particular. The study found that there is generally low emphasis given by HEP to address health impacts of begging and health problems of beggars in the study area. More specifically, the program has no specific targets aimed to solve health issues specific to begging and beggars. Furthermore, urban health extension package goals have neither stipulated special emphasis for mobile people such as beggars nor have developed health extension packages pertinent to them. These have strong bearing on the health impacts of begging. Data collected from beggars (through survey and in-depth interviews) and residents and health extension workers' using in-depth interviews are in congruence to the literature.

Health extension workers are generally worry of health impacts of begging from two angles: unhealthy lifestyles of beggars and weaknesses in health policy. Beggars social interaction with residents while begging and living, she added, presents high potential for the spread of their diseases. All of them have also suggested that beggars unclean begging places, dirty clothes they wear, and congested sleeping places contributes for the

¹ *Dergue* is another name given for military regime which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991.

birth and proliferation of bed bugs, fleas and lice which in turn result their contraction for typhoid and typhus. And these are communicable diseases which can be left over to the public. All of health extension workers have also reported of open defecation by most beggars. This was also mentioned by many of surveyed beggars who revealed their preference to go for open defecation rather than using their toilets which demand to wait much time. This has pernicious impact on the health of residents and the beauty of the city as well.

Residents, too, have reported of the potential health impacts of beggars' children for their children in schools. A tour guide has also mentioned begging to have serious health consequences as beggars not only use children for begging but they also deliberately withdraw their eyes and use them for begging permanently. By considering BoLSA's data on the size of begging population (511) in Bahir Dar, and data from this research on the size of begging population who have houses (72+64=136), it is plausible to say that 73.39% (375 (511-136)) beggars live in such situations. Having beggars without fixed settlements also impedes to create defecation free city which has a significant bearing on human health in general. Furthermore, among beggars who live in temporary houses, survey results showed HIV/AIDS prevalence rate of 4 (16.67%) out of 24 beggars who took HIV/AIDS status test (or 9.5 % from a total of 42 beggars surveyed) or 8 (12.5%) out of 64 residents as results from in-depth interview suggest.

5.1 Impacts on residents, the city and its tourism development

This study has discovered a number of impacts begging/beggars can bring on residents. In the first place, resident interviewees explained that no resident is psychologically and morally satisfied or happy to see people begging in different corners of the city. Beyond social and psychological dissatisfaction brought by begging, beggars disturb passer byes along the roads, in café's, hotels, taxi/bus stops and near religious institutions by using different strategies that range from soliciting and accidentally hugging to insulting. This is particularly destructive when applied to foreign tourists who want to freely enjoy our country's cultural, social, religious ceremonies and festivities and natural beauties. It also impedes upon national image. This is not only the outlook of all interviewed residents but also their portrayal of the views of others. Beggars also present pressure on urban employment. Traffic congestion, pressure on resources and other basic services are among the impacts many interviewees have mentioned.

5.1.1 Impacts on tourism development and tourists

The presence of beggars begging along all corners of the city not only impact upon its beauty but also on tourist flows. Specifically, interviewed community policing officers have expressed negative impacts of begging both for the beauty of city and safety of tourists. Tourists have also express their insights to the situation and practice of begging in Ethiopia in various ways. One of the female tourists from Germany who explained of her stay for three weeks in Ethiopia visiting Addis Ababa, Hawassa, Bale mountains, and Bahir Dar for the first time expressed her insight as follows:

"When you come out of a bus, beggars come and beg; they even enter to the buses for begging. Many are disabled people and mothers with children. Begging in Bahir Dar is quite similar to its practice in Addis Ababa in the style of begging and the size of begging population. However, they beg not only from (a) tourist(s) but from everybody. I don't know how the social welfare system works in Ethiopia. "

Interview with an American national who indicated a number of issues on begging has provided the following insights with respect to the impacts of begging on tourism:

... Begging has 100% negative impact for tourism but tourism is the way for economic development which everybody wants. As a foreigner, I felt that many beggars think as if we have more money; that is why they ask money even without greeting us. Primarily, this is great annoyance. Ethiopian people should understand that a foreigner is just a person like an Ethiopian. They have to treat a person equally. They should not just come and say money, money, money, pen, pen, pen.... If they live with the mentality of getting money by begging all of the time, they cannot develop; hence harmful to them as well. They should be taught to work hard as working for one's income is hundred times better than begging on the streets. Of course foreigners should provide some assistance but Ethiopians must be respectful to work hard than beg further. Secondly, foreigners want to freely observe indigenous, cultural and historical sites of the country. But if there is always somebody begging behind them, it is emotional annoyance. And foreigners do not want to be disturbed.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Creating open defecation free city of Bahir Dar requires the development and implementation of specific packages for beggars and other street people. Yet, while living adjacent to Han health center, beggars in the city have not been assisted to keep their health and sanitation status enjoyed by most urbanites. In addition, neither Ethiopias health extension program nor health extension workers addressed health problems of beggars. Beggars have also brought challenges for urban safety, security and beauty. Therefore, the police, bureau of labour and

social affairs; women, youth and children's office; universities located in towns where beggars are found; culture and tourism bureau; religious institutions and other governmental, non-governmental and development organizations need to strongly cooperate to reduce the multifaceted problems of begging for urbanization, urban security, urban safety and sanitation.

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