

# Eldoret, a city on the move

## Drivers, dynamics and challenges of rural to urban mobility

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## Summary

This study looks at rural–urban mobility in Eldoret, a fast-growing secondary city of about 300,000 people located in Kenya’s Rift Valley. The aim of this study is to understand the dynamics of migration and its impact on the social and infrastructural fabric of the city. Eldoret is characterized by its cosmopolitan setting—with several ethnic groups mingling in the city and its particular history, the re-Africanization of the White Highlands after independence. Eldoret can be described as a city of migrants. Because of this context, however, migration is a politically loaded term and a sensitive issue.

Rural–urban migration is an important phenomenon in Eldoret and has contributed to the rapid growth of the city since the 1970s. The city is perceived as a dynamic urban centre attracting many newcomers due to its business opportunities, strategic location and renowned health and educational institutions. On the one hand, this influx is considered positive because it has given Eldoret more significance at the national level and has contributed to its image as a dynamic and cosmopolitan city. On the other hand, such dramatic growth has led to challenges in terms of urban development. The continuous influx of people has resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements and has put a strain on public amenities and housing. The price of land and rent have shot up and competition for urban space has increased. At the socio-cultural level, the influx of migrants has contributed to more mingling and exchange of ideas across communities. This influx has, however, also led to heightened tribalism that can fuel political violence around election periods. The nepotism that has accompanied the current devolution reforms contributes to these tensions.

This study shows that rural–urban migration to Eldoret generally enhances people’s livelihoods and resilience. Though migrants face challenges, especially in the first months following their arrival in the city, in most cases their situation improves with time. Social networks—predominantly relatives but also friends—play an important role in the process of migrating. They help migrants settle and get organized in their new urban environment.

Most migrants work in the informal sector, including petty commerce, transport and construction. Associated with both risks and opportunities, informal employment is deeply ambivalent. While it can lead to upward socio-economic mobility for some, others feel trapped, using the term ‘hustling’ to describe their struggle to make ends meet. The minority of migrants who are formally employed in the public or private sectors face fewer challenges than those in the informal sector.

The impact of rural–urban migration on sites of origin is predominantly positive, as many relatives in rural areas benefit from, or even rely on, migrants in the city to pay for school fees or medical care. Rural–urban migration is generally well perceived among

the rural population. It is often expected that young people move to the city after finishing school.

Finally, this study finds that a large majority of migrants in Eldoret do not plan to migrate further. Rather, some of them plan to return to their rural home to retire or even earlier if they can save enough money to start a business there. According to the people who participated in this study, Eldoret offers a good quality of life; business opportunities abound and it is cheaper, less congested and safer than the capital city, Nairobi. Hence, the case of Eldoret shows that secondary cities, often seen as off the map, are attractive and may offer more possibilities for people to thrive than both rural areas and larger metropolises.

# 1. Introduction

## Project context and aims of the research

This project aims to better understand the dynamics of rural to urban migration and the ways in which this phenomenon impacts the social and infrastructural fabric of secondary cities. It is conducted within the framework of the Research and Evidence Facility (REF) on migration in the Horn of Africa, supported by the EU Trust Fund. It is carried out in three secondary cities in East Africa: Gulu, Uganda; Eldoret, Kenya; and Dire Dawa, Ethiopia. The purpose of the project is to better understand the dynamics associated with rural to urban migration, their impact on people's movement to secondary cities and the extent to which migration to secondary cities leads to subsequent migration.

The three research questions are explored:

- i. To what extent and how does rural–urban migration enhance people's livelihoods and resilience? How much do such movements lead to improved access to services, higher incomes, better employment and improved security? How effective are urban linkages in introducing a safety net for those who live in rural areas?
- ii. What is the impact of people's movement into secondary cities on infrastructure and services, social cohesion, and security? What impact does a growing population have on strengthening the urban economy or on putting pressure on services, exacerbating tensions and contributing to insecurity?
- iii. How does migration to secondary cities affect subsequent migration? Does the first experience of migration prepare people for further migration?

## Significance of the site of investigation

With a population of approximately 300,000 people, Eldoret is Kenya's fifth largest city and the capital of Uasin Gishu County. Significant influxes of migrants have resulted in making Eldoret the fastest-growing city in the country. The relevance of Eldoret for this study can be summarized in four points:

- Due to Eldoret's particular history, migration is key to understanding the city's social fabric. Founded by white settlers at the beginning of the twentieth century, Eldoret is not considered as a homeland area. In the wake of the country's independence, Kenyans from all over the country settled in and around Eldoret against the background of the re-Africanization of the Rift Valley's White Highlands. Known for its cosmopolitanism, Eldoret can thus be seen as a city of migrants.
- Since independence, Eldoret has grown dramatically and witnessed tremendous development. Particularly under Daniel arap Moi's presidency, the establishment of

key infrastructure and institutions (including educational and health facilities, as well as industries) has contributed to Eldoret's attractiveness and consolidated its image as a dynamic secondary city. More recently, devolution has further contributed to developing the area and opening up new opportunities. The case of Eldoret allows exploration of how a secondary city compares, and sometimes competes, with capital or primary cities.

- The strategic location of Eldoret at the crossroads of important road axes linking Nairobi to northern Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan places the city at the heart of significant flows of people and goods. The connectivity of Eldoret with other cities and rural hinterlands suggests that it is important to consider this city as part of a wider network of places and people.
- Eldoret has been the epicentre of recurrent episodes of political violence in 1992, 1997 and 2007–2008, rooted in exacerbated tribalism and long-standing land grievances. Not only have these events cause substantial displacement—both to and from Eldoret—they also have contributed to deeply politicizing the issue of migration, belonging and claims to the urban space. Having left wounds both in Eldoret's population and image, political violence places the city's cosmopolitanism in perspective with tribalism, prompting an enquiry into the conditions under which migration and mingling may enhance social cohesion—or exacerbate political tensions.

## Methodology

The field research took place in September 2017. The team consisted of Miriam Badoux (lead researcher), Gianluca Iazzolino (research coordinator), and Elvis Abuga and Kennedy Mwangi (research associates). The data presented in this report is generated through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with a wide range of actors, mainly in Eldoret, but also in two migrant sites of origin in the surrounding rural area.

A total of 18 key informant interviews were conducted with respondents in Eldoret, the aim of which is to formulate an overview of migration flows to the city, the impact of these flows and how migration has evolved over the past few decades. These interviews include national and county officials, NGO representatives, community leaders, political and religious leaders, elders, youth leaders, entrepreneurs, urban planners and service providers—notably in the transport and financial sectors.

A total of 37 in-depth interviews were conducted with migrants in order to capture their experiences and understand the drivers of migration, the role played by social networks, the opportunities and challenges of urban life, and their financial practices. To create a picture of migration that is as complete as possible, the following criteria are taken into account to delimit the sample of interviewees: Gender, age, time of migration, place of origin, level of education and profession. A key objective of the in-depth interviews with migrants is to collect personal stories illustrating how migration impacts

not only their lives at the individual and family levels but also the wider space of the city to which they moved.

Three focus group discussions were held in Eldoret. These brought together carpenters from former Nyanza Province, young people from various places of origins and *jua kali* workers in the neighbourhood of Maili Nne, respectively. The discussions allow for an in-depth understanding of specific aspects of migration; for example, the use of information and communications technology to foster rural–urban linkages and the impact of migration on a particular neighbourhood of the city.

To complement the data collected in Eldoret, research was conducted in two rural areas in order to collect information on views of rural–urban migration from the perspective of the migrants' place of origin, as well as to assess the impact of migration on these sites. The two selected sites are Moiben, an administrative division of Uasin Gishu County and the village of Chesikaki in Bungoma County, on the slopes of Mount Elgon. Moiben, which can be reached in less than an hour by car from Eldoret, illustrates patterns of mobility from a surrounding area belonging to the same county, characterized by strong rural–urban linkages. Chesikaki in Bungoma County, located more than 100 km away from Eldoret, is representative of migration from western Kenya, with less connectivity between the city and the village of origin.

## Constraints and limitations

The field research started one month after Kenya's general election in August 2017. Due to the social and political tensions surrounding elections, many migrants return to their home areas to cast their ballot but also to spend the election period in a safe space. While it was expected that the tension would have decreased by the time the field research began, the ruling of the Supreme Court on 1 September 2017 nullifying the election results cast some uncertainty over the context in which the research would be carried out. Although politics was passionately discussed at the time of the fieldwork, the team did not feel that this impacted the research in a negative way. The main consequence of the political context on the daily lives of the interviewees seems to be poor conditions for business, which was echoed throughout the country.

In addition to the heightened political context, the team encountered challenges in creating balanced gender representation among the interviewees. Among all the people interviewed for this study, only 25 per cent are women. Although the team aimed at a gender balance, it is easier to gain access to male informants, who are in general more available than women.

## 2. Research setting and context

### Socio-cultural context

Eldoret is often referred to as a cosmopolitan city: A place where several Kenyan ethnic groups live and mingle. The most represented ethnic groups in Eldoret are the Kalenjin, the Kikuyu, the Luhya, the Luo and the Kisii. This cosmopolitan social fabric is a result of the particular history of the city and is central to understanding the discourses and perceptions of migration in Eldoret.

Eldoret was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century along the railway connecting Mombasa to Kampala, shortly after white settlers established themselves in the North Rift region for farming. During colonial times, with a population of 8,193 in 1948, the city consisted of four distinct areas for British settlers, Boers, Asians and Kenyans. Boers had migrated from South Africa to practice farming, while Asians—mainly from India—had been brought to the city by the colonizers to work as unskilled labourers on the construction of the railway.

Consequently, Eldoret can be seen as a colonial creation and a city of migrants. This makes any claim of autochthony highly problematic and blurs the distinction between locals and foreigners. While the city is located in a Kalenjin region, there was no settlement of Kalenjin in the current location of Eldoret during precolonial times. Only the Maasai used to graze cattle in the area and bring their animals to the shores of the Sosiani River, which flows through what is now Eldoret.

After independence in 1963, the White Highlands were re-Africanized through the settlement schemes, whereby Kenyans from various regions of the country moved to the North Rift, particularly to Eldoret. As a result, the city has been developed mainly by migrants (especially Kikuyu), for which the political context was favourable during the first two decades of independence. During this period, most Kalenjin associated urban life with a range of dangers, and preferred to stay in rural areas, where they kept cattle. Although Eldoret is considered to be Kenya's main Kalenjin city, urbanization has been a process of mingling, in which the Kalenjin only began to play an important role in the 2000s.

This particular socio-cultural context raises the question of who is a migrant in Eldoret. Some interviewees consider any non-Kalenjin (or non-Nandi, a sub-tribe of the Kalenjin) a migrant, even if this person was born in Eldoret. A clear distinction is thus made between locals and migrants; between Kalenjin and others. In most cases, however, non-Kalenjin residents born in Eldoret consider the city as their home because they have spent their whole life there. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge that the term 'migrant' is politically loaded and carries competing discourses of belonging.

This political dimension of migration becomes clear when considering the election-related violence that affected Eldoret and its surroundings in 1992, 1997 and 2007–2008. Taking place in a context of heightened ethnic tension and political tribalism, the clashes—mainly pitting Kalenjin residents against those of Kikuyu origin—are motivated by long-standing land grievances revolving around the question of who belongs in the Rift Valley. Although peace and reconciliation work has been carried out since the election violence in 2007–2008, the tragic events linked to election-related violence have weakened trust between communities. These events show that tribalism can be seen as the flipside of cosmopolitanism and that claims over (urban) space in the Rift Valley are highly politicized. A Kikuyu elder, for example, complains that even if he made Eldoret his home, Kalenjin residents would still refer to his community as passers-by in their local language, thereby implicitly expecting that foreign ethnic groups are not there to stay.

The extensive process of devolution in Kenya, under the 2010 Constitution, is another illustration of the workings of cosmopolitanism and tribalism in Eldoret, and how these dynamics relate to migration. With the promise to bring more resources to the local level, devolution created high expectations. While it is generally seen as a positive development, many people complain that, with high levels of corruption at the county level, devolution has mainly favoured locals, in particular those of Kalenjin or Nandi origin. As put by a leading entrepreneur in Eldoret: ‘We devolved government but also tribes. It is very unfortunate. Towns such as Eldoret, which used to be cosmopolitan, have reverted to tribal towns.’

Devolution thus seems to have reinforced the distinction between Kalenjin and migrants, as it has opened up opportunities for the former and closed some for the latter. This tendency is observed not only at the administrative but at the political level. Since 2013, for example, political mobilization has encouraged young Kalenjin from the rural areas surrounding Eldoret to register as voters in the city rather than in their rural homes. According to the views expressed by some interviewees, one reason for this is to avoid Eldoret being taken over by non-Kalenjin, such as has happened in Nakuru. As a result of the tensions exacerbated by devolution, some migrants are considering moving back to their county of origin, as this would offer them more employment opportunities; for instance, in the local administration or by obtaining tenders from the county government. Against this backdrop, non-Kalenjin who were born in Eldoret feel trapped in a place they call home but where they are often considered as migrants.

While the cosmopolitan dimension of Eldoret is usually seen as a positive characteristic of the city, this has gone hand in hand with tribalism. This conjunction is illustrated by the violent clashes around elections and through unequal access to resources, as in the case of devolution. This has, in turn, contributed to deeply politicizing the issue of migration in Eldoret. Hence, the term ‘migrant’ entails several layers of meaning. As this study focuses on rural–urban mobility, migrants are defined as people who left their (rural) home to seek a better life in the city. The political dimension of migration cannot be ignored, however. Perceptions of, and the discourses on migrants—sometimes referring

to residents born in Eldoret but of non-Kalenjin origin—must also be taken into consideration.

## Economic context

Eldoret’s vibrant economy and its image as a dynamic and prosperous urban centre has played a key role in attracting migrants. Located in the fertile highlands of the Rift Valley, Eldoret is often described as an agricultural centre. Surrounded by large farms producing mainly wheat and maize, the city plays a key role in the supply chain of agricultural products. It is home to flour-milling and food-processing facilities, and is renowned for dairy products, including milk, yoghurt and cheese. Eldoret is also a farmers’ hub: Where agricultural goods are brought to market and sold; where farming inputs and machinery are bought; and where money earned after the harvest is spent.

It would be misleading, however, to reduce Eldoret to its agricultural dimension. Under the presidency of Daniel arap Moi, who succeeded Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, the city witnessed tremendous development, with the establishment of infrastructure, industries and institutions. With Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital and Moi University, Eldoret became synonymous with healthcare and education. While these two facilities are still leading their respective sectors, many more institutions have joined the healthcare and education landscape in Eldoret, with dozens of colleges and campuses, as well as private clinics. In addition to its flour-milling and food-processing plants, Eldoret has another vibrant industrial sector—textiles—represented by Rivatex, Raymond and Ken Knit. The extension of the Mombasa–Nairobi pipeline up to Eldoret in the 1990s, and the establishment of the oil terminal in the neighbourhood of Maili Nne, also contribute to boosting the economy of the city.

While most economic development was state-led during the two decades following Kenya’s independence in 1963, structural adjustment and liberalization in the 1980s and 1990s led to the collapse of some industries and the rarefaction of job opportunities in the formal sector. As a consequence, city dwellers turned to the informal economy to make ends meet, mainly as *jua kali* workers in the construction or transport sector.

Despite this tendency, Eldoret is still seen as a booming urban centre and as a place that is good for business. Land prices are shooting up, opening new markets and opportunities. Banks, hotels and malls are mushrooming, and the construction of an industrial park raises hope for a better future. This development is supported by a small but rising educated middle-class that consists of doctors, lecturers and professors, lawyers and civil servants. High-profile Kenyan athletes who own properties in the city and train in the Rift Valley’s highlands have also contributed to boosting the development of Eldoret, which has become known as the ‘city of champions’ due to the success of these athletes in the world’s most prestigious marathons.

In the past few decades, at times the political context both has facilitated and hindered economic development in Eldoret. As stated earlier, Kenya's second president, Daniel arap Moi, contributed in significant ways to the emergence of Eldoret as an attractive urban centre during the 1980s. In contrast, recurrent episodes of electoral violence make investment in Eldoret risky and discourage many outsiders from engaging in business in the city. More recently, devolution reforms have opened up new opportunities by bringing more resources to the local level and allowing secondary cities to compete with Nairobi in terms of business and quality of life.

## Rural to urban mobility in historical perspective

As internal migration is not officially recorded in Kenya, migration flows cannot be quantified and are difficult to track. Nevertheless, the interviews and mapping exercises conducted during the field research help reconstruct the broad dynamics of these movements over time.

Eldoret was founded as a settlers' town. During colonial times, the city was already ethnically mixed. At that time, the Kenyan population in Eldoret mainly consisted of workers on settler farms. After independence, Kikuyu moved en masse to Eldoret and its surroundings. Some Kikuyu formed cooperatives to buy the farms the settlers had left. Others established their businesses in the urban area.<sup>1</sup> It is only after independence, during the 1970s, that the city started to rapidly grow. The infrastructural development taking place under Moi, with the establishment of industries and educational and health institutions, contributed to attracting both low and high-skilled migrants to Eldoret. These migrants were mainly Kikuyu from Central Province, Luhya from Western Province, and Luo and Kisii from Nyanza Province. At a time of rapid urban growth, these flows cemented the cosmopolitan character of Eldoret.

While there was a small Kalenjin elite under Moi, which contributed to developing Eldoret, most Kalenjin stayed in the surrounding rural areas. Active in farming, they came to Eldoret only to sell their produce and buy the necessary inputs, seeds and machines for their agricultural work. The contrast between Kalenjin being mainly rural and other ethnic groups more urban focussed has diminished as more and more Kalenjin have moved to Eldoret since 2000. As an indicator of this tendency, several interviewees note that the Kalenjin language now can be heard on every street corner, while twenty years ago Kiswahili was the main (and almost only) language spoken in the city centre of Eldoret.

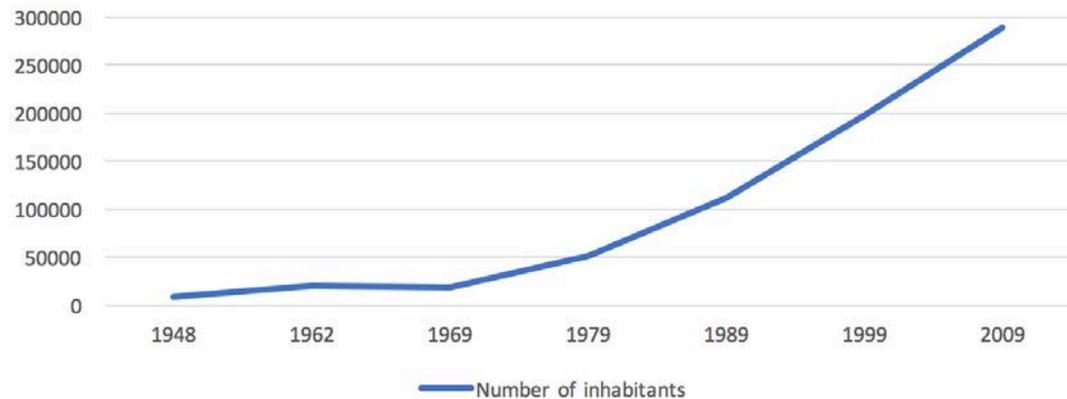
This new interest among Kalenjin to move to the city can be explained by several factors. First, an increasing number of young Kalenjin are pursuing higher education; with education being more valued in general, the city has gained significance. Second, natural population growth has made the subdivision of rural land among the children of

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<sup>1</sup> As many Asians went back to India after independence, Kenyans—mainly Kikuyus—took the opportunity to take over their businesses and properties in the city centre.

a family unsustainable, leading some of the children in a family to abandon agriculture and turn to jobs in urban areas. Third, in recent years Kalenjin have become increasingly involved in Eldoret, both in political and economic domains, with the underlying aim to make Eldoret their city.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the immigration flows from other Kenyan communities are gradually balanced by similar flows of Kalenjin, thereby further exacerbating competition over urban space.

**Figure 1. Evolution of Eldoret’s population, 1948–2009**



Source: Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics

Moreover, displacement caused by the recurrent episodes of political violence in 1992, 1997, 2007–2008 is also an important factor in migration. The flows resulting from these events are bidirectional. While some victims of the violence in rural areas have moved to the city to seek a safer place, some inhabitants of Eldoret have left and returned to their home areas for their protection. As a general tendency, many migrants have closed their businesses and ceased their economic activities in Eldoret—or have become reluctant to start new businesses—in the aftermath of the violence, thereby leaving a vacuum for Kalenjin to fill.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from internal migration, Eldoret has been absorbing international migration flows and hosts a significant community of South Sudanese and Somalis, who have sought refuge in the city since the 1990s. A small number of Congolese, Ugandan and Tanzanian migrants also live in Eldoret and are mainly active in business.

In the past few years, devolution has impacted migration to and from Eldoret. While devolution has attracted Kalenjin (especially the Nandi) because of the opportunities it has opened up at the county level, this unequal distribution of resources has pushed outsiders to look for business opportunities in other counties. Additionally, smaller urban centres around Eldoret, such as Iten in Elgeyo-Marakwet County or Kapsabet in

<sup>2</sup> ‘Organized Violence in the Rift Valley’, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/kenya0308/8.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Organized Violence in the Rift Valley’, Human Rights Watch, <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2008/kenya0308/8.htm>.

Nandi County, have become more attractive as a result of devolution, thereby reducing population pressure on Eldoret. Although the devolution reforms are still relatively recent, it seems that they have contributed to a reorganization of the population along ethnic lines, with more people considering a move back to their county of origin because of the opportunities they offer.<sup>4</sup>

## Impact on urban development

Although the city of Eldoret had been planned carefully during colonial times, dramatic urban growth since the country's independence in 1963 has made urban development plans difficult if not impossible to implement. Most people in Eldoret, including urban planners themselves, note that urban development happens ahead of planning, rather than vice versa. As one observer notes, 'The growth of towns and cities, and particularly the unplanned nature of some of these urban areas, is the biggest planning challenge in Kenya.'<sup>5</sup>

Rural–urban migration and urban development are intimately linked. In fact, patterns of settlement often reflect patterns of migration, with migrants tending to settle in the geographical direction of their place of origin. For example, Luo have settled in Langas, located in the south of Eldoret on the road to Kisumu. Many Luhyas are staying in the western part of Eldoret, while people from Elgeyo-Marakwet County have settled in Kiplombe, in the north of the city. It is worth noting, however, that not all neighbourhoods in Eldoret are ethnically homogenous. Some neighbourhoods are mixed and organized along class rather than ethnic lines; for example, Kapsoya in the east or Action in the north.

While urban development was state-led after independence, with the establishment of sites and service schemes in Kapsoya, for example, urban planning has not been able to cope with the fast and dramatic growth of the city. As a consequence of the lack of formal housing, informal settlements began mushrooming in places such as Langas, Huruma or Munyaka.<sup>6</sup> In reaction to the failure of the state to provide housing to its population, the entire sector has been privatized, with a wide range of actors involved, including land agents, brokers and surveyors. As one land agent explains, 'People have just improvised on how to own houses.'

This privatization of the housing and land sectors is to be understood in the context of strong pressure on urban land, with prices rising exponentially. Under this pressure, urbanization takes place through the subdivision of large parcels of land on Eldoret's

4 M. D'Arcy, M. and A. Cornell, 'Devolution and Corruption in Kenya: Everyone's Turn to Eat?', *African Affairs* 115/459 (2016): 246–273.

5 P. Ngau, *For Town and Country. A New Approach to Urban Planning in Kenya*, London: Africa Research Institute, 2013, 10.

6 R. Musyoka, *Informal Land Delivery Processes in Eldoret, Kenya: Summary of Findings and Policy Implications*, Policy Brief 3, Birmingham/Eldoret: International Development Department, University of Birmingham/Department of Physical Planning, Government of Kenya, 2004.

periphery, creating a conflict between residential and agricultural land use. In 2013, the county government of Uasin Gishu introduced a one-year ban on subdivision, both to preserve agricultural land and to make sure that planning preceded land development. This ban, however, was again perceived as a sign of hostility towards migrants and outsiders, with the aim of stopping development and keeping land in the hands of Kalenjin.

To cope with the rapid growth of Eldoret, local development plans have been sketched out that aim to make the city centre less congested by creating peripheral centres. Currently, a major infrastructural project is the construction of the bypass of the main road linking Nairobi to Kampala, which currently passes through the city centre.

### **Box 1. Tracing patterns of migrations through the history of neighbourhoods**

Looking at how specific neighbourhoods in Eldoret have emerged and evolved can shed light on patterns of migration and how these flows impact the city. For example, Munyaka, an informal settlement located in the east part of the city, emerged after Kikuyu were relocated from surrounding forests to the city. Munyaka witnessed rapid growth in the wake of the 1992 election-related clashes, during which many Kikuyu settled in the neighbourhood after being forcibly displaced from their homes. Langas, in the south, urbanized rapidly during the 1970s and 1980s due to its proximity to Eldoret's main industrial facilities. According to one respondent from Maili Nne, in the east, the neighbourhood had a population of only 25 families in the 1980s but developed into a busy neighbourhood after the oil terminal for the Mombasa–Eldoret pipeline was built in the 1990s, and when the energy market was liberalized under Kibaki's presidency in 2003. As of August 2017, three quarters of the businesses in Maili Nne are related to fuel supply and the neighbourhood has attracted an estimated 20,000 ethnic Somalis, both from Somalia and Garissa, Kenya.

## 3. Migrant experiences

### Drivers of migration

Migration to Eldoret takes various forms. The reasons why migrants move to the city, on the one hand, and why they move to Eldoret in particular, on the other hand, form a set of drivers consisting of two main strands of migrations: Aspirational migration, as a strategy to improve one's livelihood; and displacement, resulting from the need to look for a safe space to live. Behind these two broad categories, however, there are a variety of stories which are best grouped as follows:

#### *Livelihoods: Jobs and money*

The main reason to move to the city is to improve one's livelihood by getting a job and earning money, which is often not possible in rural areas. Depending of the type of employment and the level of education, several scenarios are possible:

- Migrants coming directly from the village, usually working in the informal sector (construction, transport, domestic workers), or as brokers, with the aim of establishing themselves in the city (definitive migration)
- Migrants coming directly from the village, working in the same sectors as above yet only temporarily, returning to their rural homes (usually close to Eldoret) when there are no opportunities in the city (circular migration); in most of these cases, only one member of the rural household migrates to the city, while the family (partner and children) remains in the village<sup>7</sup>
- Migrants who have already experienced urban life, usually during their studies, and who come to Eldoret to be formally employed; e.g. in public and private institutions
- Migrants who have been transferred to or posted in Eldoret, usually civil servants or employees of big companies; e.g. banks
- Migrants sharing their time between their job in the city and their home in the village: better-off migrants who have their own means of transport may go back to their rural home every weekend after spending the week in the city, thus sustaining strong rural–urban linkages

<sup>7</sup> R. Agesa, 'One Family, Two Households: Rural to Urban Migration in Kenya', *Review of Economics of the Household* 2 (2004): 161–178.

### *Displacement: Looking for a safe space*

- In the wake of the political violence of 1992, 1997 and 2007–2008, some of the internally displaced persons moved to Eldoret in search of a safer place; though most of them have since been relocated, others have stayed in Eldoret
- Refugees from South Sudan, Somalia and, to some extent, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have also come to Eldoret to seek a more peaceful environment in which to live

Another significant reason to move to the city is to pursue education. This applies in particular to Eldoret because it hosts a number of key educational institutions, with dozens of colleges and university campuses. As education has become increasingly sought after, educational institutions are attracting more and more people. Young graduates are often reluctant to return to rural areas after finishing their studies. According to a farmer in Moiben, this shift started in the 1990s:

Back in the 1990s, life in the village was better and only few people moved to the city. There was no pressure to get a good degree to find a job. But at the end of the 1990s, life in the village started deteriorating. Education disrupted things because you were expected to have a good degree to find a government job. People without degrees were outsmarted by younger ones who had better education.

The increasing importance of education goes hand in hand with the growing attractiveness of urban life, especially for Kalenjin, as another farmer states:

There was a time in which Kalenjin had no interest in urban life. Others were taking advantage of this, buying land and developing Eldoret. Kalenjin are now opening up. They think that it's better to have a quarter of acre in Eldoret than five acres in the village.

### **Box 2. International migration—A story from the eastern Congo**

A twenty-eight-year-old, this migrant to Eldoret comes from the rural surroundings of Bukavu, in the eastern DRC. He studied pedagogy but never finished his degree. In 2013, he came to Eldoret for the first time, where he has been hawking throughout the city centre in search of customers for the gold jewellery he carries in a small suitcase. The reason he decided to leave the DRC is that it is easier to 'get by in life' in Kenya. 'In Congo, there is no work', he says repeatedly. When he first left the DRC, accompanied by friends, he looked for opportunities in Kampala, Kisumu, Kisii, Nairobi and even Mombasa. He decided to stay in Eldoret because there were not many other Congolese jewellery sellers. He saw a good opportunity for business. In the meantime, more Congolese have arrived to sell jewellery, which makes his work more challenging. He might try his chances in Kampala next year.

The main problem he encounters in Eldoret is documentation. He stays on a three-month tourist visa that he can renew for another three months, after which he has to go back to the DRC to apply for a new visa. 'If they catch you, you get a fine or you go to jail', he says. It happened to him in 2014, when he was jailed and sent back to Bukavu. He came again on a tourist visa. As a result, he fears encounters with the police. Worse than the police, municipal agents patrol the streets of Eldoret and look for informal hawkers and street vendors. If he is caught, he usually pays USD 2 to 5. According to him, there are many Congolese in Eldoret. Most of them are jewellery traders, musicians or refugees who came to Kenya in the 1970s. His dream is to leave the African continent and establish himself in Europe or North America. Yet he is aware that it is almost impossible for him to do so. At the same time, he wishes there was more security and a good government in the DRC: 'If there was security in the DRC, not even one Congolese would decide to stay abroad. We would stay there!'

## Role of social networks

Social networks play an important role in the process of migrating from a rural area to the city. The presence of relatives or friends may influence the destination of migration, as they are a significant source of support for migrants in the first months following their arrival. In the case of Eldoret, most interviewees explain that they were hosted by a relative or friend before renting their own house. Similarly, initial access to casual jobs is often facilitated by family members or friends. Hence, social networks play the role of a broker, mediating the passage from life in the village to life in the city.

Support from social networks can be broken down into four levels. The first, and most common, is the family. In most cases, a newly arrived migrant stays with a sibling, an uncle or an aunt. The second level is that of the community, in which migrants get support from members of the same ethnic group (or sub-group), usually from the same region. A third possibility is to be supported by friends, who are not necessarily from the same ethnic background. This applies mostly to a rising educated middle class that has, for example, the opportunity to develop wide friendship networks during university studies. A fourth, rather rare scenario is to get support from colleagues. This happens mostly in the case of formal employment, when someone moves to Eldoret after getting a job in the city or after a transfer.

Although social networks are essential in the first weeks or months of migration, they often only represent a basis for a wider, more diverse network that migrants build over time. For example, a young male Kalenjin from Marakwet, came to Eldoret when he was still a teenager. He has been staying at his aunt's place for about ten years and has been running a fruit juice business and small restaurant owned by his aunt. With customers from different backgrounds, staying in a mixed neighbourhood and playing football with other youths, he has developed his own network of friends that cuts across ethnic

groups. He stresses his identity as a resident of Eldoret and a citizen of Kenya, rather than as a Kalenjin. Hence, the familial social network that helped him settle in Eldoret has transformed into an urban one.

## Opportunities and challenges

As diverse as they are, all experiences of migration include opportunities and challenges related to the new environment and lifestyle migrants have to adapt to. The two main dimensions relevant to this study are related to jobs and livelihoods, on the one hand, and to the socio-cultural and political consequences of migration in Eldoret, on the other.

The city is seen as a place of possibilities, where migrants can get jobs or start their own businesses and earn money. Compared to the village, where life is much cheaper, the city is equally a place where people have to work hard every day to make ends meet. Not all migration stories are success stories. Many migrants face the difficulty of gaining regular or formal employment. In fact, jobs in industries, big companies or in the county government are perceived as hard to access—without nepotism and corruption working in favour of obtaining such jobs. Consequently, many migrants end up in the informal sector, as hustlers. This is especially the case in the construction and transport sectors, where the demand is high because of Eldoret’s rapid growth. In addition, young workers in the informal sector often complain about exploitative conditions and their lack of agency because they are trapped by their need to earn money. This clash between the (imagined) economic opportunities offered by the city, on the one hand, and the exclusion from formal and regular employment of most migrants, on the other, is illustrated by the life histories of two migrant respondents. Both street vendors, their stories describe the different trajectories that led them to the informal sector.

### Box 3. The reluctant hustler

I was born in rural Kisii, where I went to primary school. After finishing high school in Nakuru, I came to establish myself in Eldoret in 1993. My brother was already staying in the city and helped me settle. I lived at his place for one year. I started working—or rather hustling—on construction sites, where my brothers had been working for a few years. But because of the harshness I found there, I decided to start my own small business. I thought that from school I could get something that you can call a job, not manual work, so I decided to quit the construction sector. I started cooking *mandazi* [doughnuts] and sold them on the construction site I had been working on. To me, the main challenge I encountered after moving to Eldoret was that I expected to get an office job, and yet there was no such job available. Accepting this mentally, that I would stay a hustler for my whole life, has been even harder than the harsh working conditions on the construction site. It took me time to accept this. Then I got married, in 1998, and because I could at least manage

my family with the revenues from the food I was selling, it helped me accept my situation. But getting enough cash to provide for the needs of my family, especially to pay school fees, is not easy. *Ile ya kutoka ni mingi na ile ya kuingia ni ndogo* [The money that enters is little and the money that is spent is much]. In these difficult times, the dream of an office job comes back and haunts me.

#### Box 4. Hustling as a stepping stone

I grew up in a village in Turbo and came to Eldoret in 2007, when I was eighteen years old. My parents had died and the elders of the village decided what would happen to my siblings and me. We were separated and I was sent to the city. I didn't know anyone here; it was very hard. During the first three months, I slept on the streets. I lived like a *chokora* [street boy] but at least I didn't sniff glue. I made a friend who was working in a car wash. He connected me to a street vendor, who employed me to sell vegetables. That's how I started earning small money. He also helped me find a room for 300 shillings [USD 2.4]\* per month in Langas. The room was small and dirty, and the rain would flood it regularly, but at least I had a place where I could sleep. Thanks to the job I was doing for the *mama mboga* [vegetable seller], I could afford it. I knew that I had to get 10 shillings [USD 0.8] per day to be able to pay the rent at the end of the month. From there, my living conditions improved slowly but steadily. I got to know more people. We help each other. I specialize in selling avocados that I buy from a friend who brings them from Kisii. The only problem is that county officers patrol the streets and disturb us. They say we are illegal, so we hide as soon as we see them. If they find us, we get a fine or we pay *kitu kidogo* ['something small'; a bribe]. In general, the business is good and I want to expand more. My dream would be to buy a plot of land here and build some rental houses so that it gives me regular income. I'm still far from that but I'm optimistic.

\* Currency rates are approximate and reflect oanda rates as of October 2017, when this study was completed. In direct quotes from respondents, reference to shillings is retained to better reflect speech patterns. Otherwise, the international currency code, KES, is used. See: <https://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>.

Another challenge encountered by many migrants in Eldoret is linked to the socio-political context of the region, in which the issue of migration is politically loaded and passionately debated. Migrants complain about tribalism, the lack of trust between Kalenjin and other ethnic groups, not feeling welcome and being denied access to local resources that only Kalenjin can claim. Since the last episode of post-election violence in 2007–2008, some migrants have feared investing in Eldoret because of the unstable political environment. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these negative stories

are countered by positive experiences of migrants participating in making the city theirs and creating an urban, cosmopolitan identity shared across ethnic groups.

In fact, for most migrants, one of the main benefits of their new life in Eldoret is the opportunity to mingle with other people from various backgrounds. For one woman, a fish seller in the neighbourhood of Langas, 'Migration is an opportunity for development. Having people from different tribes coming together can help solve conflicts.' A young male migrant from Bungoma County, summarizes his view as follows:

Since I moved to Eldoret, I've met other people from many different places. We share ideas and they can advise me on the difficulties of life. Through them, I get new ideas that in turn I can share with other people. In the village, you are used to the people around but in town everyone is new, which is good.

In this process of mingling, migrants gain exposure, a term mentioned repeatedly during the interviews. This exposure, or in other words, their integration in a wider urban network, should not be reduced to its social dimension. Rather, it also contributes to enhancing the economic opportunities of migrants, especially in the informal sector. Hence, cosmopolitanism has the potential to boost both individual opportunities and social cohesion. Migrants are thus not to be seen as an excluded group or outsiders. They are the ones producing and reproducing the image of Eldoret as a dynamic cosmopolitan city.

### *Financial practices*

In the first months after their arrival, most migrants to Eldoret learn, develop and adopt new financial practices. While some of them struggle to repay the money borrowed to cover the costs of moving to the city, others do their best to manage their savings carefully. With the cost of living in the city much higher than in rural areas, migrants have to adapt to new prices and make strategic choices about how to spend or save money. After this time of adaptation, and depending on their socio-economic background, migrants can benefit from the financial institutions available in urban areas—by opening a bank account or becoming a member of a saving group. At the same time, they are expected to provide support to the family members they left behind in their villages through remittances.

Though some migrants state that they save money individually, being 'their own bank', a majority of the migrants interviewed in Eldoret are members of saving groups—locally named *sacco chama* (merry-go-round),<sup>8</sup> or other groups taking the form of ethnic or burial associations. Saving groups are organized along various criteria, such as the ethnic origin, the neighbourhood of residence or the profession of its members. One migrant respondent, for example, is a member of a Bukusu saving group (his ethnic community),

<sup>8</sup> A merry-go-round consists of a group of people who contribute a specific amount of money to the saving group on a regular basis. The total sum collected each time is given to one of the members of the group on a rotating basis.

in which he saves KES 500 per month (USD 4). He trusts the chairperson and treasurer of the group, and enjoys the fact that they speak his local language when they meet. The issue of trust is key to the working of these—sometimes rather informal—savings groups. Another migrant from rural Naivasha is a *boda boda* (motorcycle taxi) driver and lost his money because the saving group he was part of turned out to be led by fraudulent individuals. He now contributes to a 16-member merry-go-round saving scheme.

Instead of ethnic-based saving groups, professional saving groups are the dominant choice for the migrants in Eldoret who are interviewed for this study. Groups for teachers, tailors, taxi drivers or journalists are organized without regard to ethnicity, with the aim of allowing their members to save and borrow money, as well as to further their professional interests. One man, who migrated from Nyanza Province to Eldoret twenty years ago, is a member of a carpenters' saving group, which allows him to borrow up to double his deposited savings and repay the loan in small weekly instalments. Saving groups enable members to plan for investing in business, paying school fees or building a house—and sometimes to realize these plans.

An important characteristic of rural–urban migrants is their moral obligation to support relatives in the village. All migrants interviewed in Eldoret who have parents staying in rural areas regularly support them financially. In Kenya, all interviewees use M-Pesa, the most used mobile money service throughout the country. Since its introduction in 2007, M-Pesa has dramatically facilitated the ways in which migrants send remittances and support their relatives in rural areas. Though fees are levelled on each transaction, it is still perceived as much safer than sending money physically with someone travelling to the village. International migrants mainly use Western Union to send money back home. In the case of Somali migrants, the *hawala* system (a traditional Arabic system of transferring money through agents) is generally used. Most people send money once or twice per month, or occasionally more often if a relative needs urgent medical care. The practice of sending remittances to the village shows that the dynamics of rural–urban migration are characterized by strong linkages between the city of destination and the sites of origin. Although migrants leave their village behind to start anew in the city, their impact on their home areas is considerable.

### Impact on the sites of origin

The field visits, conducted in Moiben, Uasin Gishu County and Chesikaki, Bungoma County, demonstrate that rural–urban migration has a positive impact on the migrants' sites of origin. In both places, family members and local authorities perceive migration to urban areas as a chance not only for the younger generation moving to the city but also for their families remaining in the village. In the words of a farmer interviewed in Moiben, 'Migration is a positive phenomenon because it brings ideas and money.'

In Moiben, located only 40 km from Eldoret, strong rural–urban linkages are observed. Especially since the main road connecting Eldoret to Moiben was tarmacked in 1991, regular travel between the rural and urban areas has become common. Better-off

people commute to Eldoret to work, or have properties both in the city and in the village. Lower-income people may move temporarily to Eldoret for casual labour and return to their rural homes when there are no job opportunities in the city. A farmer whose two children moved to Eldoret, confirms this tendency: ‘Migration to the city is a good thing but in case life gets difficult, my children are always welcome back home, where an easier life and a house is awaiting them.’

In Chesikaki, a three-hour drive from Eldoret, less commuting is observed compared to Moiben. Members of the village who moved to Eldoret usually only visit their home between one and three times per year. In most cases, however, the contact between migrants and their families at home is actively sustained through mobile phones. Despite the distance separating Chesikaki and Eldoret, relatives who had remained in the village state that they have benefited from having a family member in an urban area. The added value of rural–urban migration for the village is summed up by this rural respondent: ‘Migration to the city is a good thing because our people get new ideas, which they can apply or share back home. In some cases, migrants would invest in their home area, buying technical equipment such as solar panels, or even building a house with rooms to let.’

Receiving remittances constitutes the main advantage of having children or family in the city. While life is much cheaper in rural than in urban areas—in most cases there is no rent to pay and only little food to buy—most people interviewed in both villages rely on support to pay school fees and medical care. In most cases, it is the members of the family who work in the city who carry these costs. Sending money by M-Pesa has greatly facilitated the support rural–urban migrants provide to their families. The need for external financial resources is linked to seasonal events over the course of the year, as a farmer in Moiben explains: ‘Financially, September is difficult because we have just paid the children’s school fees. It is better from October to December because the harvest brings us a little income. From January to April, we again have to invest most of what we have in land preparation and school fees, so especially at that time of year we rely on our children who are in town.’

Another way in which migrants impact their sites of origin is through the rural–urban linkages they establish, notably in the agricultural sector. In both localities, agriculture is the main livelihood. In Moiben, the main activities include growing maize and wheat, as well as keeping livestock. The farms are large, with an average of 20 acres. In Chesikaki, parcels of land are smaller and the main produce includes coffee, maize, beans, onions and tomatoes. In both Moiben and Chesikaki, farmers complain of low revenues from agriculture. One of the reasons for this is the presence of go-betweens or brokers, who are criticized for maximizing their profit at the expense of the farmers’ margins.

In some cases, having children in the city is seen as a way to cut out go-betweens or brokers. For example, a young woman from Kapsaret studying in Eldoret, trades produce from her family’s farm at her school. A farmer in his fifties living in Moiben, has three children who work as brokers in Eldoret, Naivasha and Nairobi. They send lorries to the

village to pick up the goods and sell them in urban areas. He notes that the advantage of having his own children doing this work is that there is no risk of being cheated and that they communicate all price variations in advance by phone. In fact, rural–urban linkages have gained strength with the rise of information and communications technology (ICT). This trend is expected to continue in the next few years as technology develops and becomes increasingly accessible. A young Kenyan who has been in Eldoret for six years, works in web marketing for an online shopping retailer. According to him, ‘Kenya is moving forward. ICT can bridge the gap between rural and urban areas. You can be in the city and the village at the same time.’ These examples show that rural–urban linkages play a key role not only in the livelihoods of family members in the village but also in the business strategies of urban migrants.<sup>9</sup>

Although rural–urban migration is in general perceived and discussed in a positive way, the difficulty in monitoring children who have left home is described as the main challenge for parents. In rare cases, migrants who failed to establish themselves in the city simply disappeared and stopped communicating with the family in the village. In the case of young female migrants, the fear of what could happen to them after migrating to urban areas—or what they could do—is particularly present. As this respondent explains, ‘Sometimes a girl moves to town and comes back pregnant.’

All in all, only one interviewee judges rural–urban migration as a negative development, regretting that rural areas are emptying as a consequence of the exodus of the youth. For the majority of respondents, however, migration to the city is considered a normal phenomenon. In many cases, parents expect their children to move to the city—not only to improve their lives in terms of education and livelihoods but also to provide support for those who remain in the village.

## Onward migration

A large majority of migrant respondents do not plan to move again to another city or country. The few cases in which onward migration is mentioned can be listed as follows:

- Moving to Nairobi, the capital city, for a better job, to study or because relatives live there. Especially for young people, Nairobi is considered as more modern, more connected and more glittering, thereby attracting residents of smaller cities
- Moving back to the village or to one’s home area because of the presence of relatives, of better opportunities as an insider or emotional attachment. In addition, a few interviewees mention that they aim to save enough money in the city to start a business in their rural home.
- Moving to another city because of a job transfer or family ties

<sup>9</sup> S.O. Owuor, ‘Migrants, Urban Poverty and the Changing Nature of Urban–Rural Linkages in Kenya’, *Development Southern Africa* 24/1 (2007): 109–122.

- Moving abroad. In this category, several destinations should be mentioned. First, many Kenyans are keen to leave for the Gulf States for low-skilled labour, especially young women. Second, Eldoret is known as a transit spot for migrants from the Horn of Africa who try their luck going to Europe. According to one interviewee, migrants travel in trucks to South Sudan, where they continue on their way to Sudan and Libya. A chain of brokers facilitates their endeavour in exchange for cash payments. Europe and North America are seen as attractive places, yet the difficulty of getting a visa to western countries discourages most Kenyans from making such plans, except for the upper middle class.

In most cases, migrants see Eldoret as the best place for them to stay. As a booming urban centre, Eldoret has the potential to compete with other cities in Kenya. Compared to Nairobi, the cost of living in Eldoret is low, there is less traffic congestion and the city is considered to be safe, with less crime than in the capital. For ordinary Kenyans, Eldoret seems to offer a higher quality of life than Nairobi. Several of the migrants interviewed had spent some time in Nairobi but failed to meet their aspirations and then decided to come to Eldoret, where they found that it was easier to establish themselves. Only a few interviewees express interest in onward migration to Nairobi. For most of them, Eldoret is a better choice. The city of Eldoret offers an illustration of the attractiveness of secondary cities and how these can absorb the migration flows that contribute to congestion in megacities. Eldoret shows that secondary cities can be seen as a middle ground between the scales of the village and of the capital city, in which it is easier for migrants to navigate and build networks.

## 4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that rural–urban migration to Eldoret generally enhances the livelihoods and resilience of migrants. Though they face challenges, especially in the first months following their arrival in the city, in most cases their situation improves with time. Social networks—predominantly relatives but also friends—play an important role in the process of migrating. In particular, social networks help migrants settle and get organized in their new urban environment.

Most migrants work in the informal sector, including petty commerce, transport and construction. Associated with both risks and opportunities, informal employment is deeply ambiguous. While it can lead to upward socio-economic mobility for some, others feel trapped, using the term ‘hustling’ to describe their struggle to make ends meet. Challenges faced by migrants working in the informal sector include uncertainty, exploitative working conditions and, for some, harassment by the police or county officers because of their illegal or informal status. The minority of migrants who are formally employed in the public or private sectors face fewer challenges.

The impact of rural–urban migration on sites of origin is predominantly positive, as many relatives in rural areas benefit from, and even rely on, migrants in the city to pay for school fees or medical care. Rural–urban migration is generally well perceived among the rural population and it is often expected that young people move to the city after finishing school.

Rural–urban migration has contributed significantly to the rapid growth of Eldoret since the 1970s. On the one hand, this influx is perceived as positive because it has given Eldoret more significance at the national level and has contributed to its image as a dynamic and cosmopolitan urban centre. On the other hand, such a dramatic growth has led to challenges in terms of urban development. The continuous influx of people has resulted in the mushrooming of informal settlements and has put a strain on public amenities and housing. The prices of land and rents have shot up and competition for urban space has increased. At the socio-cultural level, the influx of migrants has contributed to more mingling and exchange of ideas across communities and across the rural–urban divide. It has, however, led to a heightened tribalism that can fuel political violence around election periods. It also encourages nepotism in relation to the current devolution reforms.

Finally, this study shows that a large majority of migrants in Eldoret do not plan to migrate further. Rather, some of them plan to go back to their rural home to retire. For other, if they can save enough money to start a business there, they would return earlier. According to the respondents, Eldoret offers a good quality of life: Business opportunities abound and it is cheaper, less congested and safer than Nairobi. Eldoret shows that

secondary cities, often seen as off the map, are attractive and may offer more possibilities for people to thrive than either rural areas or capital cities.

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