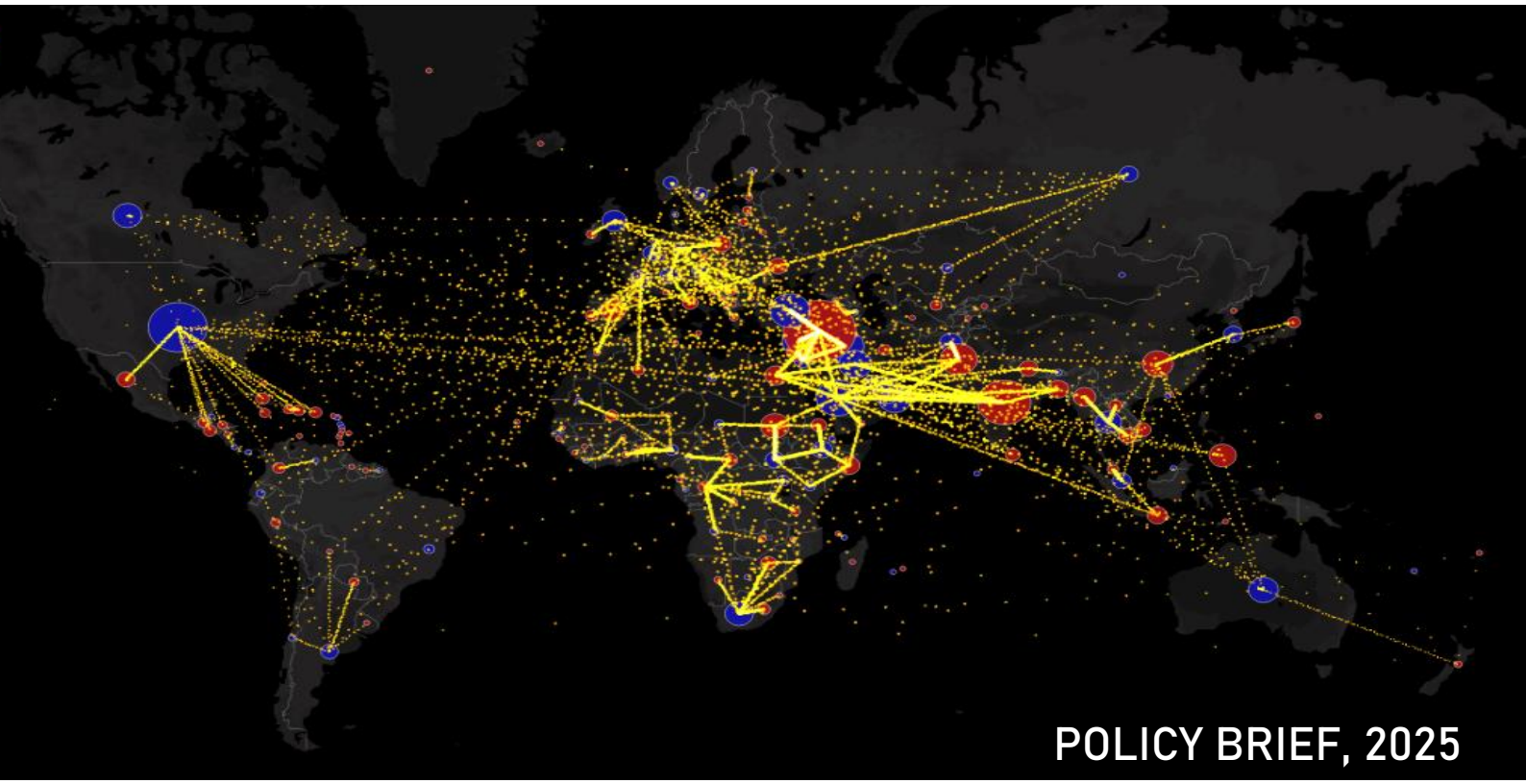
MITRA | WA
Migration & Translocality in West Africa

SPONSORED BY THE
Federal Ministry of Education and Research

WASCAL
West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use

KNUST
KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



POLICY BRIEF, 2025

MOBILITY DYNAMICS OF TRANSMIGRATION FROM THE NKORANZA SOUTH MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA

Key Policy Messages

- Migration is important livelihood coping strategy to many households
- Majority of outmigration are to destinations outside the region of study
- Libya reminds the popular destination to outmigration to other African country and is characterized by the perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Spain and Italy
- People migrate predominantly for employment and economic opportunities
- A large majority of transmigrants have visited the place origin in the past one year prior to the study

INTRODUCTION

Migration is an important livelihood coping strategy explored by many households/individuals across the globe (Gautam & Andersen, 2016). Globally over 763 million people migrated within countries compared with 281 million people who migrated across international borders (IOM, 2024). Migration within the West African region involves about 7.5 million persons; the figure represents more than seven times migration from the West African region to other parts of the world. The foregoing highlights the dominance of internal/regional migration or migration across international borders. Human migration is seen as an important feature that shapes the dynamics of human population in both the place of origin and destination.

An array of reasons account for migration of people migrate, including the search for employment, livelihood and economic opportunities, education, escape from rural poverty, violence, environment and climatic conditions (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2020; Dinbabo et al., 2021). Similarly, poverty has been identified as one of the major factors influencing migration from and within Africa. People migrate to get better opportunities at the destination, meaning people with limited livelihood options are the most likely to migrate for employment and other socio-economic opportunities.

Although there have been several debates about migration from the both pessimist and optimist perspectives, most of the arguments have often centered on whether migration should be prevented or harnessed, brain drain or brain gain, modernization or dependency, etc. The positive outcome of migration have been established as critical to many households and individuals and broadly contribute development beyond territorial boundaries due to their linkage to different facets of development at the area of origin, destination, and the migrants (International Organisation for Migration, 2020).

Several studies (e.g.,Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020) have reported temporal or seasonal migration where migrants maintain a dual identity of living and working in both the place of origin and destination. Premised on the foregoing, translocality was adopted for the study. Translocality encapsulates the understanding of phenomena involving migration, mobility, networks and spatial connectedness which are not limited to geographical areas (Djurfeldt, 2021). The concept provides a comprehensive approach to understanding urban and rural development or the origin and destination of migrants as a single unit. Transmigrant is a person (migrant) who maintain a dual identity of living or working in both the place of origin and destination (Steinbrink & Niedenführ, 2020). Despite the importance of transmigration to livelihood and wellbeing many households there is limited focus on the dynamics of this form of migration in Africa and Ghana. This paper explored the mobility dynamics of transmigration from the Nkoranza South Municipal area in Ghana. The municipality was purposively selected as it is among the top outmigration hotspots in the Bono East region and Ghana. Using data collected from 443 transmigrants households from the municipality, the study examined the dynamics and manifestation of transmigration and their implications on socioeconomic development.

THE FINDINGS

Migrant Destination

Two-thirds (66%) of people migrate to a destination outside the Bono East region (see Figure 1). The survey shows that a large (30.64) number of migrants migrate to the Ashanti region than any other region in Ghana apart from the Bono East region (39.71). The data also showed Greater Accra region is the second most destination, receiving 12% of migrants from Nkoranza Municipality. Other regions such as Bono, Eastern and Upper West regions (6.62, 1.47% and 0.49% respectively) serve as destinations for migrants.

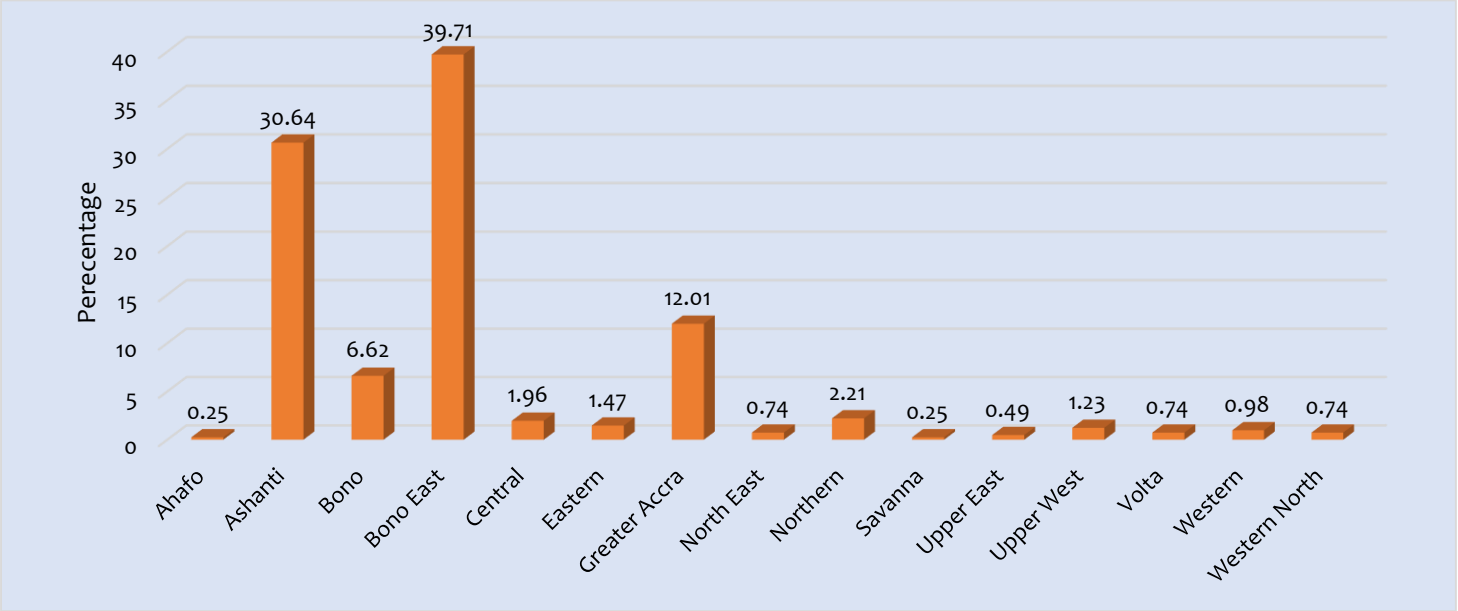


Figure 1: Migrant's destination

Moreover, the results from migration to other African country shows that more than 95% of migrants migrate to Libya. An interview with a chief of one of the communities confirmed Libya has long been the topmost destination for migrants from the Municipality and the region at large (see Figure 2). He argued that migration to Libya evolved in the late 1990s and has been the topmost option for migrants in the Municipality predominantly for young men. Consequently, the data from the survey shows that all migrants who travel from the municipality to Libya all males. An Assemblyman from one of the communities during an interview revealed that migration to Libya from the Municipality is mostly embarked by males in their youthful years.

The interview further shows that translocal ties through family members, households and friends have driven and maintained the mobility of young men to the North African country. Libya was not just a destination but also a transit point to Spain, Italy and other European countries through the Mediterranean Sea. He argued that migration to the North African country is not only motivated by masonry and other occupation but also the opportunity to cross to Europe (locally described as "push").

Furthermore, the data from the survey on migration to destinations outside Africa revealed Italy and Spain (44.68% and 34.04% respectively) as the topmost destination for migrants from the municipality (see Figure 2). Other destinations are the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, France, Belgium, Qatar and Malta. The dominance of Italy and Spain during the interview is attributed to the aforementioned migration to Libya and the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. The two European countries are widely known to be the largest recipient of migrants who cross the Mediterranean Sea from Libya and North Africa.

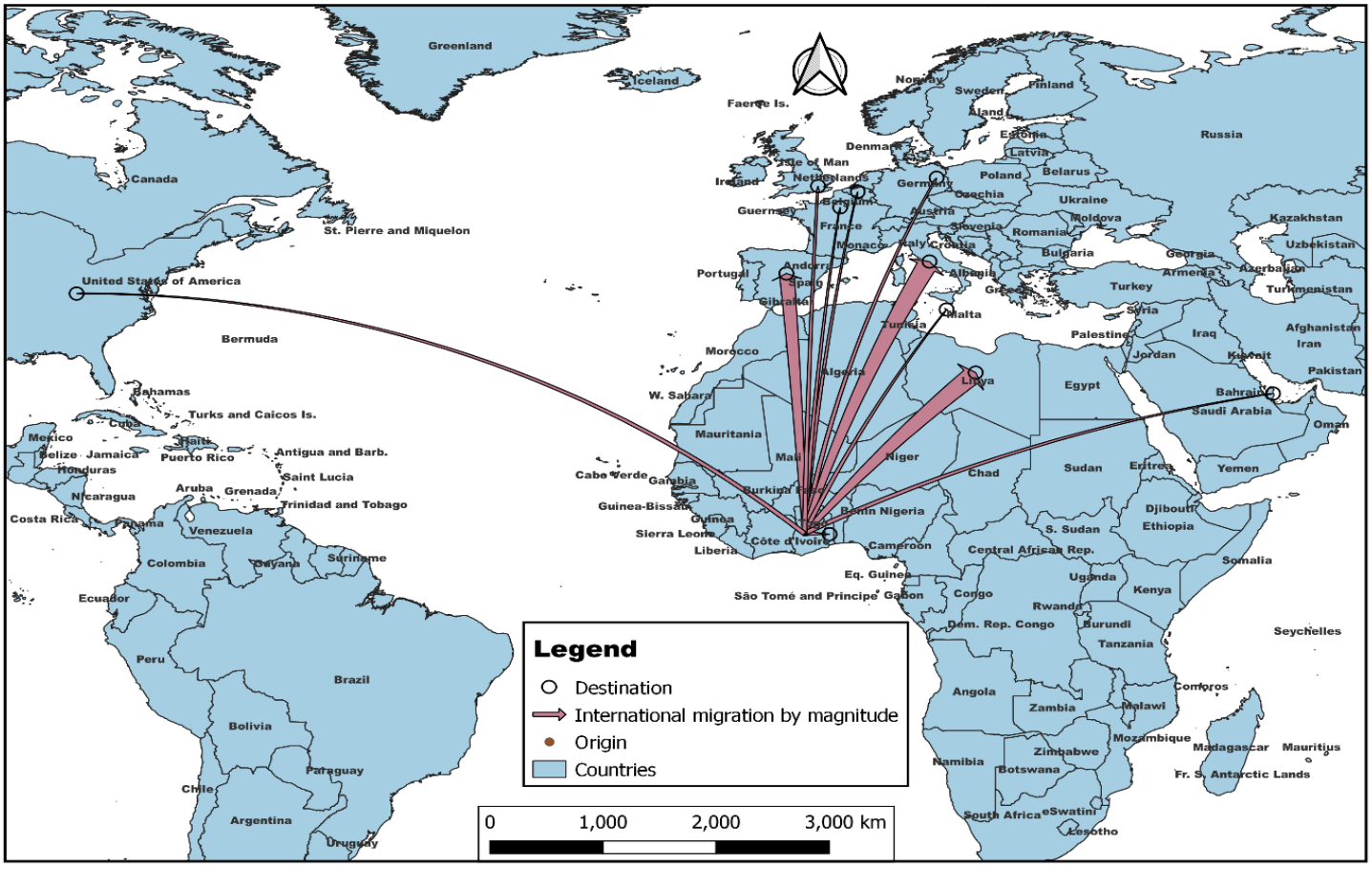


Figure 2: Aggregate of out-migration in study communities.

Reasons for Migration

The decision to migrate has usually culminated from several factors such as social (like poverty, family unification, educational opportunities), political (such as conflicts, war, loss of human rights, oppression etc.) economic (including employment opportunities, higher wages, higher living standards etc.) and environmental factors (such as floods, desertification, drought among others). The survey showed that about 48% of migrants from the Nkoranza South Municipal migrate for employment reasons (see Figure 3). Also, an Assembly member in the area during an interview argued that most people from the municipality usually migrate for employment and economic opportunities which are unavailable in the area of origin. The Assembly member further indicated that the people of Nkoranza are predominantly farmers and the deteriorating conditions of farming coupled with increasing prices of inputs, continuous dependent on rainfall and rudimentary tools and techniques of farming continue to drive many people out of the municipality.

Additionally, about 25% of migrants migrate for family and personal reasons such as family unification, new-home for newly married couples, fostering of grandchildren and children of relatives among others. The data also revealed that around 18% of migrants migrate to further their education, while others (5.70) move to learn different trades.

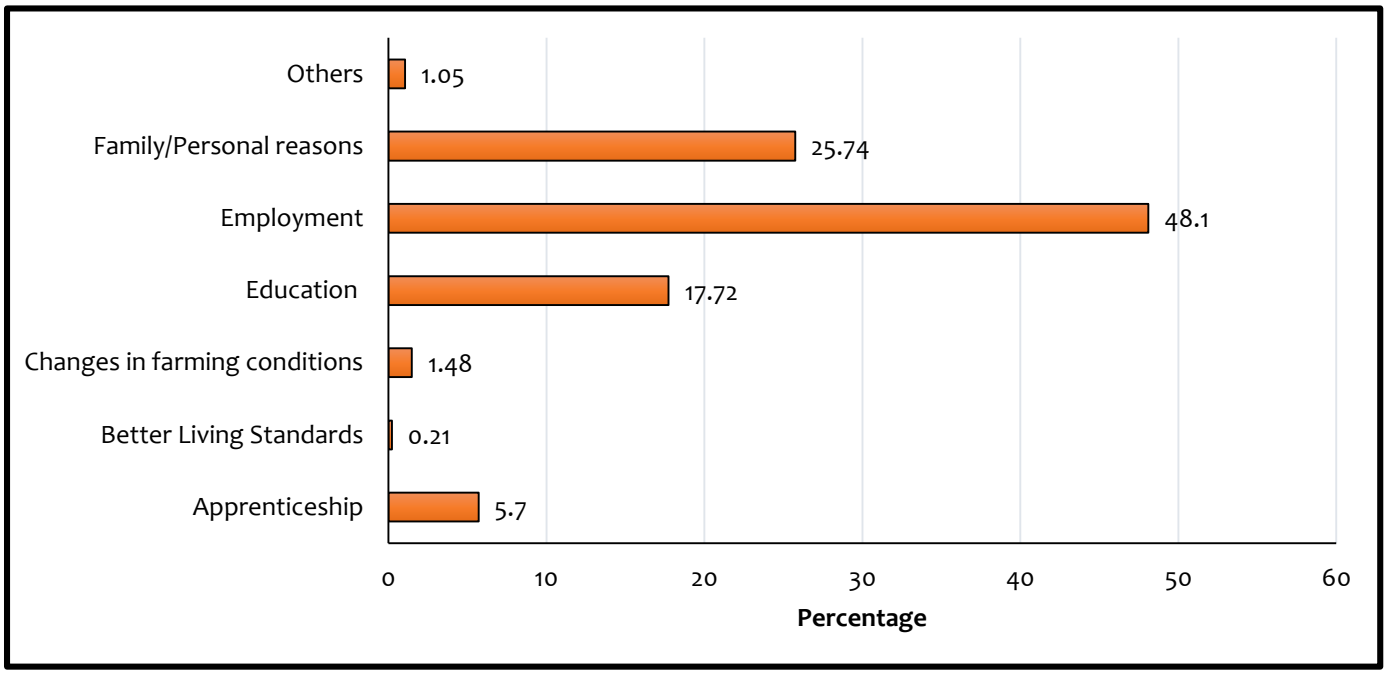


Figure 3: Reason for migration

Migrant Major Occupation/Activity at the Place of Destination

Migrants are involved in different varieties of occupation at the area of destination predominantly in the informal sector. Using the International standard classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), the survey revealed that about 29% of migrants from the Nkoranza South Municipal are engaged in elementary occupations, about 14% are involved in services and sales trade while 13% are in craft-related occupations. Additionally, about 9% of migrants are professionals mainly employed in the formal sector while a little under 2% are engaged in military occupation (formal security service). Moreover,

about 15% of migrants are fully pursuing education in the university, colleges and senior high schools in the area of destination. The survey also showed that about 1% of migrants are unemployed in the area of destination. However, households at the area of origin during the survey could not provide the exact occupation of 1.6% of migrants at the area of destination (see Figure 4).

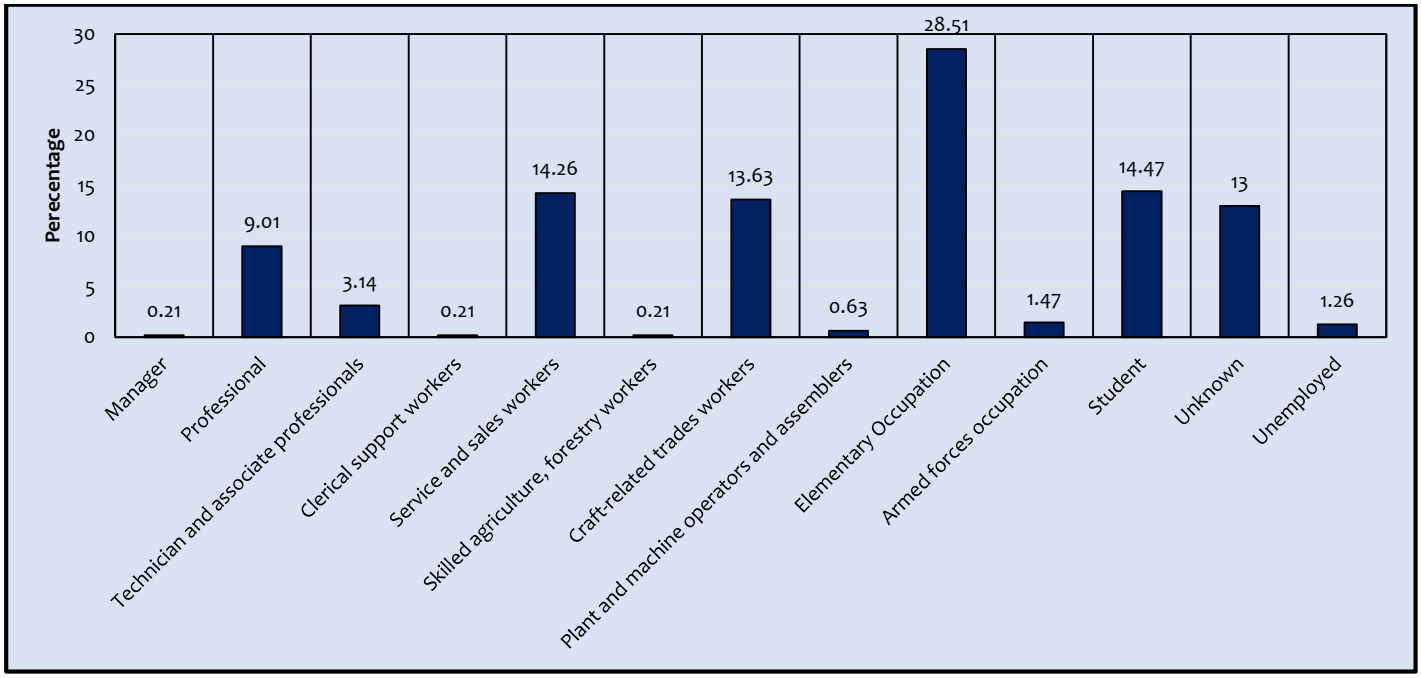


Figure 5: Main occupation/activity of migrants
Source: Field survey, December, 2022

Visitation

Migrants to the Area of Origin

Migrants visit the area of origin at different frequencies. Most (23.7%) of the migrants visit the area of origin at least once a year. Others visit occasionally and 2-3 times a year accounting for about 19% and 18% respectively. Moreover, other migrants visit the area of origin more than once every three months (15%), more than once every six months (9%), and monthly (5.5%) among others. The survey also showed that most migrants (52.5%) usually visit the area of origin to be with their families or attend to family matters. Others visit the communities to attend community, family or religious festivities such as funerals and weddings (23.8%), send money or goods (5.1%), pick food and other goods (5.1%), work at family farms (4.9%) among other reasons.

Visitation of Migrants at Destination by Household Member

Household members from the area of origin visit migrants at the place of destination. The results revealed that about 40% of migrants have received visitors from the area of origin for the past six months before the survey. It further revealed that migrants received visitors once a year (22.3%), 2-3 times a year (19.7%), more than once every three months (16.5%), more than once a month (15.4%), monthly (9.6%) among other durations. Moreover, it was revealed that about 54% of household members usually visit migrants purposely to attend to family matters or be with the migrants. Others visit to send money or goods to migrants (16.9%), attend family or communal festivities such as funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies (8%), for recreational purposes (3.6), conduct business (2.7), collect money or goods from migrants (1.8) among others.

CONCLUSIONS

Migration continues to be important livelihood strategy for many households and individuals in Ghana like other sub-Saharan Africa countries. Internal migration in Ghana has been a long-standing trend since the colonial era, and it continues to be a significant phenomenon. The findings indicate that the majority of people move out of the region and municipality rather than within it. Kumasi and the Ashanti region were identified as the top destinations from the municipality, followed by the Greater Accra region. Migration outside of Ghana is largely characterized by the perilous journey across the Sahara Desert to Libya, followed by a dangerous voyage across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy and Spain. This route has gained global attention due to reported deaths and associated challenges.

A significant number of people migrate for economic and employment opportunities, suggesting that out-migration from the municipality is driven by limited local opportunities. Unfortunately, the dynamics of mobility have not been adequately integrated into policies and planning. There appears to be limited or no effort at regional, national, and international levels to address the root causes of the hazardous journey to Libya, Italy, and Spain. Studies have shown that the majority of people in the municipality are farmers. The challenges of farming in the municipality are exacerbated by labour-intensive agriculture, adverse climatic conditions, and a lack of infrastructure and investment in agricultural facilities. As a result, many people, especially the youth, are turning to migration as a viable option. Furthermore, this study has found that migration is not a one-time event, as Steinbrink & Niedenführ (2020) suggest, but rather a socio-spatial interaction that goes beyond geographical and political boundaries. It is important to acknowledge that mobility and spatial interconnectedness are common practices for many households and individuals in Africa and should be considered significant factors in development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Incorporate Mobility dynamics into development plans and policies

To harness the potential of transmigration for socioeconomic development there is the need to integrate the attributes of this mobility into development interventions. The Ministry of Transportation in partnership with the Ghana Highway Authority, Ministry of Roads and Highways, National Development Planning Commission, Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and other agencies should ensure the dynamics of migration and mobility are appropriately incorporated in transportation planning. The approach will help policymakers to better understand and address the underlying causes of migration, such as economic opportunities, infrastructure deficiencies, and social networks. By integrating these factors, targeted and effective interventions can be implemented to improve transportation systems, create job opportunities, and support sustainable urban planning. Additionally, policies should facilitate the flow of resources, information, and support between different regions to ensure that both sending and receiving areas benefit from migration. This comprehensive approach will enhance the quality of life for transmigrants and contribute to the overall development and resilience of the communities involved. By acknowledging and incorporating the complexities of mobility into strategic

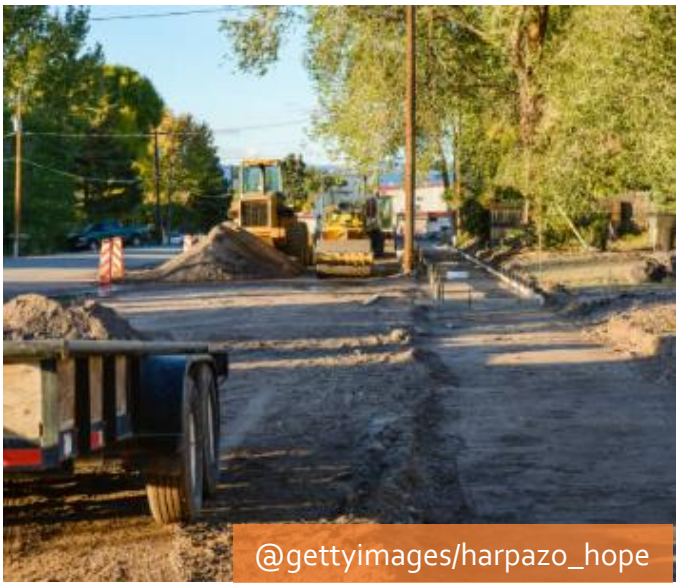
planning, the Nkoranza South Municipality and areas with similar features can leverage migration as a catalyst for positive change and sustainable growth.

Support agricultural modernisation and promote non-farm employment

Migration is predominantly driven by livelihood and economic gains. The complicated nature farming acerbated by climate change/variability has made farming unattractive many people the youth. Migration has consequently become coping strategy for many individuals. Many individuals desperately embark on perilous crossing of the Mediterranean Sea to Europe which is associated may deaths and deplorable conditions. Supporting agricultural modernisation and non-farm employment opportunities will boost the local economy and address the root cause of desperate migration. The ministry of local Government, Digitization and Local Government, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies, Community Based, Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations can play different roles in developing the local economy for socioeconomic development.

Improve rural Infrastructure development

The study notes that most residents are farmers, and the challenges of labour-intensive agriculture, poor infrastructure, and lack of investment have worsened conditions, making migration a more appealing option, particularly for the youth. The lack of appropriate infrastructure to support livelihood and wellbeing serve as a driver of migration. The survey in the communities highlight how poor transportation specifically affect farming and local business. Providing quality and efficient infrastructure like roads, utilities, health among other will enhance the quality of life in rural areas which may reduce desperate migration. The government of Ghana and relevant agencies can play different roles to improve rural infrastructure to improve quality of live, support rural livelihoods and improve the wellbeing of rural folks.


@gettyimages/harpazo_hope

REFERENCES

Dako-Gyeke, M., Kodom, R. B., Dankyi, E. K., & Sulemana, A. (2020). Drivers of independent migration among adolescents from selected West African countries. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *117*(June), 105293. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105293

Dinbabo, M. F., Badewa, A., & Yeboah, C. (2021). Socio-economic inequity and decision-making under uncertainty: West african migrants' journey across the mediterranean to Europe. *Social Inclusion*, *9*(1), 216–225. https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v9i1.3663

Djurfeldt, A. A. (2021). Translocal livelihoods research and the household in the Global South – A gendered perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *86*(May), 16–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2021.05.018

Gautam, Y., & Andersen, P. (2016). Rural livelihood diversification and household well-being: Insights from Humla, Nepal. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *44*, 239–249. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2016.02.001

International Organisation for Migration. (2020). World Migration Report 2020. In *International Organization for Migration* (Vol. 2020, Issue 1). https://doi.org/10.1002/wom3.11

International Organization for Migration. (2024). *World-Migration-Report-2024_0 (1)*.

Steinbrink, M., & Niedenführ, H. (2020). *Africa on the Move. Migration, Translocal Livelihoods and Rural Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22841-5

Acknowledgement

This policy brief was written by Michael Osei Asibey, Michael Poku-Boansi, Daniel Kwame Blija and Emmanuel Amponsah (Researchers affiliated to the Department of Planning, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi) for the MITRAWA Project. This MiTra|WA study was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF) [grant number: 01LG2079A].

The authors would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their comments on the earlier drafts of this brief. Further information about this series of Policy Briefs is available at: (WASCAL website and University of Passau website). Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from our Briefings in their own publications; in return, we request due acknowledgement.