

Internal Migration and Poverty Reduction in Ghana

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Abstract

This study utilizes primary data from seven (7 out of the 10) regions to assess the impact of internal migration on poverty reduction in Ghana. Internal migration is interpreted in this study as short-term coping strategies that help migrants and their dependants to achieve a basic level of consumption. The analysis show that there is a positive relationship between internal migration and poverty reduction because of the opportunities they provide in areas of short-term and flexible labour force. The study therefore recommends for policy makers to take a critical look at the phenomenon of internal migration in order to institute policies that lessen the burdens of internal migrants. There is also the need to explore avenues for enhancing the resource capabilities of current migrants and their beneficiaries as a potential strategy to diversify their remunerative options in the long term.

Keywords: Migration, Poverty reduction, Economic Development

1. Introduction

Internal migration, when compared to international migration, has a greater potential for poverty reduction, meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Siddiqui, 2004) and contributing to economic growth in Ghana. This is because of the following propositions that guide this study: first, internal migration permits smaller sums of money to be evenly distributed to a broader base of poor families in specific areas through internal remittances (rather than international remittances, which reach fewer people). Internal migration also has the potential to continue to increase at a faster rate than international migration. Additionally, internal migration involves poorer people from poorer regions and has a strong role to play in achieving the MDGs. Finally, it is an important driver of growth in many sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, construction, coastal economies and services.

The study therefore argues that the potential benefits of internal migration are not realised fully in Ghana because of an inadequate understanding of internal migration issues (especially temporary and circular migration), continuing misunderstanding of internal migration policy, urban middle-class attitudes, gender and poor enforcement of legislation meant to protect the rights of the poor. The study begins with a discussion on the reasons for recent increases in internal migration. It then goes on to describe Ghana's policy positions on internal migration.

The history of migration relates to people's struggle to survive and to prosper, to escape insecurity and poverty, and to move in response to opportunity. Migration is not a panacea for development problems, but properly managed, it can deliver major benefits in terms of development and poverty reduction. The balance and distribution of costs and benefits depends upon the nature of the migration in question, and on the links which migration establishes between places of origin and destination.

The internal movement of people due to work and economic opportunities is not new. However, there is convincing evidence from locations across the North and South divide in Ghana, and especially urban to urban that population mobility has increased at an extraordinary rate in the last two decades (North to Kumasi and between Kumasi, Accra, Takoradi, Sunyani and Tamale). What is especially striking is the increase in temporary and circular movements of people within regions in Ghana and include a spectrum of movements from trips that last several months, to daily commuting for work. The overall effect is that while more people are moving permanently out of rural areas to urban areas, a growing number of people are also migrating temporarily or circulating between villages and other destinations. Circular migration appears to be emerging as the dominant pattern of movement of poorer groups who keep one foot in the village either by necessity or choice.

Internal migration is important almost everywhere and in some countries, the phenomenon is far greater than international migration. It is estimated that in 2001, close to 120 million people were estimated to migrate internally in China, compared to the mere 458,000 people migrating internationally for work (Ping 2003). In India too, internal migration numbers run into millions while international migration is only a fraction of this (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003). There are references to the importance of internal labour migration and remittances in many other countries, including Bangladesh (Afsar 2003); Pakistan (Gazdar 2003); Cambodia (ADB 2001), Vietnam (Anh et al 2003, Government of Vietnam 2003), Lao PDR (Acharya 2003), Mongolia (Tsogtsaikhan 2003), Ethiopia (RESAL 1999), Sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson et al., 2003), Lesotho, Maldives and Papua New Guinea (Jerve 2001).

In Ghana for example, about 40% of the total population move within the country, and out of these number,



about 70% of migrants come mostly from the three northern (Northern, Upper East and Upper West) and Volta regions towards the cocoa growing and mineral deposits areas in the southern parts of the country. However, the remaining regions move within urban centres and outside the country for better living conditions. The basic problems the study seeks to find out include the following: is internal migration in Ghana a problem? It is the poorest, most desperate people, who migrate, how can we minimize it?

2. Objectives of the Study

The overall objective of the study is to find out whether internal migration can reduce poverty and engender development in Ghana. Specifically, the study seeks to achieve the following:

- To raise awareness among key stakeholders namely the government, legislature, and the general public of the development dimension in ongoing debates about internal migration.
- To examine the nature of the relationship between internal migration and development especially poverty reduction.
- To identify examples of best practice, where internal migration has achieved some positive gains on poverty reduction efforts.
- To make policy recommendations on how government policies relating to internal migration might successfully and comprehensibly factor in development and poverty reduction objectives.

3. Research Methodology

The paper employs primary data collected in seven (7 out of the 10) regions of Ghana. Questionnaires were sent out to respondents 800 respondents in the selected regions: Greater Accra, Ashanti, Western, Brong Ahafo, and the three northern regions (Upper East, Upper West and Northern). These regions were chosen because they are either conducive for migrants or have push and pull factors. Although nationally representative data on internal remittances are lacking in Ghana, which hampers our understanding of the role of internal migration in poverty reduction and development, there is mounting evidence through micro-studies as well as larger surveys that internal migration can reduce poverty, inequality and contributes to overall economic growth and development.

4. Important Drivers of Internal Migration in Ghana

There are many factors that drive people to migrate, especially from the three northern regions and Volta region to the south and also from urban to urban. While some are common to several countries, such as regional inequality, under-employment in rural areas and the spread of labour intensive industries, other factors differ depending on the history, culture, policy environment and social structure of the country. Some of the main drivers of internal migration that appear to be common to Ghana today are discussed in order to draw the attention of policy makers to the magnitude and significance of the phenomenal increases in internal migration.

4.1 Growth Determined in Pockets and Growing Inequalities

Ghana as a developing country is characterised by uneven development between the north and the south, as well as between some urban areas. Additionally, spatial inequalities are highly visible. The argument has been made that dramatic improvement in communications, services, construction, manufacturing and transport facilities has been a contributing factor that has created the conditions for the large-scale internal movement of people at unprecedented levels within Ghana (Balisacan and Ducanes 2005; Kanbur and Venables 2005).

The relationship between migration and inequality is two-way: inequality may drive migration and migration has an effect on inequality both within the sending area and between regions. We return to the latter issue under the impact of migration on poverty and inequality. Non-income inequalities related to, tribe, gender and ethnicity are also extremely important in shaping migration streams. In Ghana, inequalities related to income, tribe, gender and many others do not exist like some of the Asian Countries. High growth rates driven by labour-intensive production and services, labour-intensive manufacturing, construction and urban services are attracting large numbers of migrant workers from under-developed regions mostly in the north to the southern and other urban areas in Ghana.

4.2 Construction, Processing and Manufacturing

Construction activity in the cities as well as rural areas has been one of the most significant forces attracting labourers from the agricultural sector since the early 1980s. In Ghana, these are commonly found in Kumasi, Accra, Takoradi, and the mineral deposits towns (mining communities) and other urban areas. Majority of the active population in Ghana therefore tend to move to these regions and areas for perceived better economic opportunities. Thus labour mobility in Ghana is greatest between the rural/agricultural regions and the urban informal labour markets. In addition, small rural industries employ significant numbers of landless and marginal paddy farmers for the past year. It is known that most rural labourers pursue multiple income-earning activities combining a portfolio of farm and non-farm activities. In general, labour mobility is greatest between



rural/agricultural regions and the urban informal labour markets. Again in Ghana, Cocoa growing areas, mining, robber plantation, oil and gas and many others attract most young Ghanaian migrants.

4.3 High Productivity Agricultural Zones

Rural-rural labour migration of poor people from marginal regions to more prosperous agricultural areas is widespread in Ghana with sharp regional differences in productivity and wages and low/moderate levels of mechanisation. The case in point is the North which has one long dry season compared with the south which has two seasons, thus compelling people from the North and other similar areas in the Country to move to the South especially Kumasi and other areas that have two seasons. There is some indication that a switch from rural-rural to rural-urban circular migration is occurring in areas where agricultural employment is shrinking and industrial jobs are being created either at the same destinations or elsewhere.

Again in Ghana, Cocoa growing areas, mining, robber plantation, oil and gas and many others attract most young Ghanaian migrants. A common feature across Ghana and other countries is that agriculture alone cannot sustain rural livelihoods. In Ghana, agriculture employs 70% of the total labour force in Ghana, yet she spends half of her foreign exchange to import rice and other cereals to Ghana. Female migration from the north to the southern cities in search for minor jobs is also on the increase, as they engaged in head porter jobs and other less-paid jobs.

4.4 Migration and Economic Development

Migrant labour has clearly contributed to economic development through the kinds of subsectors described above but precise estimates on this contribution are not available. However, it is cleared that number of children are now in schools because of the parents migration, better health care especially health insurance registration, improved food, clothing's, housing and improved investments in Ghana due to the efforts of migrates workers. Based on data from Bangladesh, China, Vietnam and the Philippines Anh (2003) concludes that migration is a driver of growth and an important route out of poverty with significant positive impacts on people's livelihoods and well-being.

In the case of China, Murphy (2005) notes that migration has made major contributions to development, by accelerating economic growth, building up cities and establishing rural—urban linkages and return flows. Research by Chinese scholars estimates that labour migration from rural to urban areas contributed to 16 per cent of total GDP growth in China over the past 18 years. They argue that migration has remained one of the key reasons that China has been able to sustain GDP growth rates above 8 per cent over the past 25 years. A cheap and literate workforce has given China a competitive advantage relative to other countries. It has also been noted that migration has stimulated the transport sector.

4.5 Growing Population Mobility

The internal movement of people due to work and economic opportunities is not new. However, there is convincing evidence from locations across the North and South and especially urban to urban that population mobility has increased at an extraordinary rate in the last two decades (North to Kumasi and between Kumasi to Accra, Takoradi, Sunyani and Tamale). What is especially striking is the increase in temporary and circular movements of people within regions in Ghana and include a spectrum of movements from trips that last several months, to daily commuting for work. The overall effect is that while more people are moving permanently out of rural areas to urban areas, a growing number of people are also migrating temporarily or circulating between villages and other destinations. Circular migration appears to be emerging as the dominant pattern of movement of poorer groups who keep one foot in the village either by necessity or choice.

4.6 More People Migrate Internally in Ghana

Internal migration is important almost everywhere and in Ghana is far greater than international migration. Close to 120 million people were estimated to migrate internally in China in 2001 against a mere 458,000 people migrating internationally for work (Ping 2003). In Vietnam roughly 4.3 million people migrated internally in the five years before the 1999 census whereas the number of international migrants was fewer than 300,000 (Anh et al 2003). In India too, internal migration numbers run into millions while international migration is only a fraction of this (Srivastava and Sasikumar 2003). There are references to the importance of internal labour migration and remittances in many other countries, including Bangladesh (Afsar 2003); Pakistan (Gazdar 2003); Cambodia (ADB 2001), Vietnam (Anh et al 2003, Government of Vietnam 2003), Lao PDR (Acharya 2003), Mongolia (Tsogtsaikhan 2003), Ethiopia (RESAL 1999), Sub-Saharan Africa (Bryceson et al 2003), Lesotho, Maldives and Papua New Guinea (Jerve 2001).

4.7 Internal Migration and Poverty Reduction at the Household Level

The volume of internal remittances within Ghana is enormous. Even though, the figure is not statistically available, it is estimated that about GHC 500,000 is sent as remittance every year across the length and breadth of Ghana for various purposes by individuals. There is ample evidence that migrants from the northern regions, especially female ones, sends up to 80% of their earnings to their families back home. In China it is estimated that each migrant labourer sent home on average 4,522 yuan (US\$545) in the year 2000. The Coalition for the



Urban Poor (CUP) in Bangladesh estimates that migrants in Dhaka send up to 60 per cent of their income to relatives.

Remittances are used to finance a range of expenses including food, health, housing, weddings, funerals, schooling etc. and even if not spent directly for 'productive uses', such spending can have an overall positive impact at the household level by freeing resources for other productive uses. And even if not reducing poverty directly, remittances are probably helping to sustain rural livelihoods by preventing people from sliding further into poverty which would be the prospect facing them had they depended solely on a deteriorating agricultural base. The evidence from Vietnam illustrates this powerfully; a recent study synthesized a number of studies which show that remittances have played a critical role in supporting rural households.

The important role for remittances in repaying debt and providing investments in human capital through supporting educational and health expenses was documented. Other research in Vietnam has also shown that the vast majority of migrants benefit economically from their moves. Recent research in China found that remittances have an important effect on measured poverty rates of both the migrants themselves and the household members left behind. The evidence from South Asia is more mixed but there appears to be growing evidence of the poverty reducing effects of migration. For example, a recent survey conducted in 12 villages in the poor state of Jharkhand found that 98 per cent of the migrants reported an improvement in their lives because of migration.

Migrant households had a better diet and spent on average 15 per cent more on food than non-migrating households. In Bangladesh, it was found that the extent of poverty was much lower (around 30 per cent) for households having migrant members than for non-migrant households (around 60 per cent). In a study of garment manufacturing unit workers, it was concluded that migration had brought people out of poverty. In

Cambodia, a survey conducted by the CDRI in 2000 found that more than half of the households with a long-range migrant were able to meet short-term food and farming requirements. Almost all short-range migrants were able to save money. They also reported development of skills, such as construction, hairdressing, petty trading, tailoring and other vocations.

4.8 Remittance Services: the volume of internal remittances is very large.

Sending money home can be an expensive and risky affair for migrants for several reasons. First, migrants with low levels of education and few assets usually do not deal with formal banks and financial institutions. They rely on friends, family and other informal channels such as the hundi system to remit money. Theft, cheating and delays are common. Facilitating remittance flows is one area where more work is needed. In China, a Ministry of Agriculture sample survey of 20,089 rural households estimated that, in 2004, the remittance contribution by migrant workers to rural household incomes was about to overtake earnings from agriculture (quoted in Harris 2004).

These projections were made on the basis of the previous year's figures, where the 98 million or so rural out-migrants remitted roughly US\$45 billion (Rmb 370 billion), up 8.8 per cent from the previous year. There are successful initiatives and experiments at the international level but financial channels within countries are still not suitable for migrant workers. One example related to internal remittances is the ICICI bank in India, who is currently conducting household surveys in several states with a view to developing financial services for poor migrant labourers.

4.9 Building Human Capacity/Capital

Low educational attainment is known to be a major factor underlying the exclusion of the poor from the opportunities that come with economic growth (Ravallion and Datt 2002) and there are strong correlations between caste, tribe, gender and education. Building education and skills are important in helping poor and discriminated against people to break away from oppressive and low paying jobs. A well-known example from China is the Ministry of Agriculture initiative launched in 2003 of providing free vocational training for rural people who are preparing to migrate or who are already in the cities. The programme is now working well due to the combined efforts of NGOs, government and academics. Other tripartite partnerships have initiated migrant art projects aimed at building social capital among migrants and reducing urban public prejudice against them.

5. The Future of internal migration

Given current development patterns and future projections on urbanization, the growth of manufacturing and agricultural development, it is very likely that internal migration, both temporary and permanent, will persist and grow. There will be a transfer of populations from rural/agriculture to urban/non-farm areas and occupations but the rate at which this will occur is uncertain.

Demographic factors also matter – there will be more migration where the population of young adults continues to grow but in regions such as Ashanti, Greater Accra and Takoradi where this is likely to slow down, migration streams will also be affected. Circular migration is likely to continue and increase in Ghana where growth is likely to be limited to a few areas, employment is predominantly informal in the destination areas and where



structural problems in the countryside continue to hamper access to capital and rapid poverty reduction. The introduction of social security for migrants in India; the reform of the Hukou system in China and the KT system in Vietnam, the urban environment will become more welcoming and secure for migrants.

This would speed up the transfer of populations from rural to urban areas and the transformation into more urbanized societies.

6. Policy Direction and Responses

Facilitating or at least not hampering the movement of people from low-productivity areas (rural) to high productivity areas (urban) is now being viewed as an effective way of reaping the gains from localised growth in globalising economies that are experiencing growing rates of inequality (Kanbur and Venables 2005). But managing migration in order to maximise the benefits while the reducing costs and risks requires effective partnerships between governments, civil society, private sector organisations and donors. Different kinds of policy responses are required in the case of permanent and temporary migration.

6.1 Official Positions on Internal Migration

The evidence reviewed so far shows that although a majority of poor migrant workers end up working in informal sector jobs, they may be able to exit poverty themselves and migration can contribute to development in both sending and receiving areas. Yet, migration continues to be viewed negatively by many people including policy makers in Ghana. Most governments have tried to control rural—urban movement through a combination of rural employment creation intervention programmes, anti-slum drives. Past and present governments continue to design policies and programmes that will discourage people to move especially to urban areas.

India, while not implementing direct controls on population movement, has a range of policies that indirectly work against migrants. For example, people who are classified as 'Below the Poverty Line (BPL)' are entitled to subsidise food, education, healthcare and a range of other benefits. The proof of BPL status is a 'ration' card but this is issued on the basis of place of residence and cannot be used to claim benefits in another village, town or city. Added to this are regular urban slum clearances where municipal corporations bulldoze unauthorised settlements. Vietnam has an elaborate and complex KT system of classification for residents in urban and rural areas: KT1 indicates that a person is registered in the district where he/she resides; KT2 indicates that the person is not registered in the district where he/she resides, but registered in another district of the same province; KT3 indicates a person who has temporary registration for a period of six months or more; KT4 indicates a person who has temporary registration for less than six months (GSO 2005).

Only those with KT1 registration have full entitlements to government services, the rest must pay for them or are excluded. Indonesia has taken several measures to re-direct population movement to rural areas or provinces which have labour shortages but does not encourage rural—urban migration due to concerns about pressure on urban areas (Munir 2002). Despite these measures, people have continued to move but have faced unnecessary hardship in doing so because they are often perceived as engaged in illegal activities. There is an urgent need to reform policies related to migration and also make other policies which may indirectly affect migrants, more migrant friendly.

6.2 Policy Responses to Circular Migration

Circular labour migration can yield strong win-win outcomes for most concerned. Based on evidence from 17 countries, the recently released Global Prospects Report 2006 on Migration and Remittances by the World Bank argues that controls on labour migration should be relaxed in order to maximise benefits for both poor and rich countries. The main stakeholders that stand to lose from the process are labourers in the receiving areas but even that may not be an issue if segmentation in the market creates jobs that only migrants can fill.

Similar arguments apply to internal migration where State boundaries often work in the same way for migrants. Supporting circulation would have the added advantage of easing the pressure on urban areas.

Deshingkar and Start (2003) for example, found that the scheduled tribes had higher migration rates in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Similar observations have been made by Dayal and Karan (2003) regarding Jharkhand: whereas 15 per cent of scheduled castes and tribes migrated, only 8 per cent of upper castes and 3 per cent of 'other backward castes' migrated. A study by Jagori, an NGO on migration in Rajasthan found that 95 per cent of the migrants congregating at recruiting are dalits coming from Bhilwara, Ajmer, Tonk, Kota. The latest Human Development Report for the state of Punjab notes that many migrants coming in to the State from Bihar and UP are dalits and tribals.

However, policies and investment priorities must be developed in accordance with existing national priorities. In China for example, the government views circular migration as standing in the way of making China into a modern urban nation because it hinders the complete movement of people off the land and the formation of large-scale mechanised farms. Even so, Chinese policy makers recognise that in the absence of hukou reform, secure urban employment and access to social security, circulation will continue and is advocated as a medium-term solution to rural poverty within the context of a longer-term objective of urbanising China (Murphy 2002).



On the other hand, India views its villages and agriculture as the engine of rural growth, poverty reduction and continues to pursue a small farmer model of development. India currently invests in excess of US\$1 billion in watershed development, but fewer public resources are available for pro-poor urban infrastructure and transport. Policy needs to recognise that rural livelihoods in marginal areas are strongly linked to urban development and manufacturing and re-allocate resources accordingly.

The development of small towns could be an important area for partnership programmes. The DFID-funded Andhra Pradesh Urban Services Project is certainly a step in the right direction but it does not cover small and medium towns. The project has developed effective partnerships between government and NGOs especially in the areas of livelihoods, gender and social development analysis which have helped in the identification of vulnerable groups and the development of interventions that can help them.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Improving Data and Information on Migration

National statistics are usually unable to capture internal migration and part-time occupations and therefore severely underestimate internal migration. Also, research and studies on poverty often completely miss out migration and remittances, thus seriously underestimating the role of urban growth in rural livelihoods. There is also a need to gain a better understanding of the diversity in migration streams in terms of who goes (men only, men and women, entire families, groups of adolescent girls or boys etc.), the duration (one week to several months), distance (within the district, to the neighbouring district or cross country) and the returns.

These deficiencies need to be set right urgently and donor funding could provide the resources needed. A good start would be to incorporate modules on migration for work into existing surveys such as censuses. Qualitative methods are also important in order to understand the importance of social factors in the migration process: intrahousehold and gender dynamics and how these shape decisions and remittance patterns; the role of history and culture in the development of specific migration streams; power relations/corruption in labour contracting arrangements and exclusion based on caste or ethnicity. While it will not be possible to fine-tune interventions for each specific migration stream, there is a need to accommodate these concerns as far as possible.

7.2 Providing Services to Temporary Residents

In order to liberalise but regulate labour migration, it is essential for state/province governments to cooperate with each other to develop flexible social services and pro-poor schemes that can be accessed by people on the move. There are no easy answers and specific interventions will need to be devised through piloting and learning. Donors can play an important role by supporting pilot programmes on migrant-friendly services. DFID India has recently initiated steps to set up a national 'hub' on migration, with a view to creating dialogue on such issues between researchers, civil society organisations and policy makers at the national and regional level. There will be useful lessons on health, education and housing from this initiative that could inform donor funded projects in other Asian countries.

Remittance Services: the volume of internal remittances is very large. Sending money home can be an expensive and risky affair for migrants for several reasons. First, migrants with low levels of education and few assets usually do not deal with formal banks and financial institutions. They rely on friends, family and other informal channels such as the hundi system to remit money. Theft, cheating and delays are common. Facilitating remittance flows is one area where more work is needed.

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There are successful initiatives and experiments at the international level but financial channels within countries are still not suitable for migrant workers. One example related to internal remittances is the ICICI bank in India, who is currently conducting household surveys in several states with a view to developing financial services for poor migrant labourers.

8. The Future of Internal Migration in Ghana

Given current development patterns and future projections on urbanisation, the growth of manufacturing and agricultural development, it is very likely that internal migration, both temporary and permanent, will persist and grow. There will be a transfer of populations from rural/agriculture to urban/non-farm areas and occupations but the rate at which this will occur is uncertain.

Demographic factors also matter – there will be more migration where the population of young adults continues to grow but in regions such as Ashanti, Greater Accra and Takoradi where this is likely to slow down, migration streams will also be affected. Circular migration is likely to continue and increase in Ghana where growth is



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9. Conclusion

Policy makers need to recognise the importance of internal migration for poverty reduction and development. Policy should aim to ease the hardship of migrants and facilitate a flexible labour force in the short term in order to distribute the benefits of growth as evenly as possible. But there is a need to build human capabilities over the long term so that people who currently have to depend on such livelihood strategies can diversify into more remunerative options.

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