



Migration into Cities in Ghana: The Economic Benefits to Migrants and their Households

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Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

Briefings for Policy Makers

In the light of the rapid pace of urbanisation and associated challenges such as urban unemployment, urban poverty, and the emergence of slums, policy prescription in Ghana has largely occupied itself with attempts to curb rural-urban migration. There is a widely held perception that rural-urban migration cannot lead to positive outcomes for migrants and their households. Yet, there is little understanding of how rural-urban migrants in Ghana fare in the city relative to how they would have fared had they stayed in their original areas, or how their households would have fared had the migrant not left home. This briefing for policy makers is based on research conducted by the Migrating out of Poverty Research Consortium. It argues that while rural-urban migration can cause unemployment and lower income for a minority of migrants, most people who migrate from rural areas to cities in Ghana gain from enhanced incomes and improved wellbeing. The findings indicate that migration from rural areas to cities in Ghana must not always be portrayed as detrimental to socio-economic development. Migration can be employed as a strategy to move out of poverty. The research findings also call for the need to make potential migrants aware of the economic gains and losses associated with rural-urban migration.

Introduction

Despite the significance of internal migration in terms of the numbers of people involved, and the quantum of remittances and its poverty reduction potential (Haar, 2009), the relationship between internal migration and wellbeing outcomes has received little attention in both academic and policy circles (Srivastava, 2005). The few studies on migration and poverty outcomes have not directly examined how rural-urban migrants in Ghana fare economically in the city relative to how they would have fared had migration not occurred. However, our study 'Migration into Cities in Ghana: An Analysis of the Counterfactual',

conducted at the Centre for Migration Studies of the University of Ghana, in collaboration with the University of Sussex, examines the economic gains associated with migration to the city. The analysis of the study is underway to explore the size of the gain, if any, in living standards to households with migrants. This briefing for policy makers reports on research findings based on interviews with migrants in Accra on a range of economic outcomes.

Key point 1: There is paucity of data on the relationship between migration and poverty outcomes in Ghana



Picture 1: A migrant working to improve his economic wellbeing in the city.



Study Approach

The data used in this brief is extracted from the study aforementioned, where a questionnaire survey was used to collect data from 1132 representatives of migrants and non-migrant households from migrant sending regions (Brong-Ahafo, Upper West, Upper East, Northern Region and Volta Region). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 68 recent rural-urban in-migrants in Accra. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 of the recent rural-urban in-migrants in Accra and Tema. This briefing for policy makers largely based on the data collected from a survey of the 68 recent in-migrants and in-depth interviews with ten of these migrants. Migrants were asked about their perceptions of changes in their living standards, and expectations about marriage and childbirth, since migrating.

Effects of Migration to Cities on Income

The impact of migration on income has been a source of debate in the literature. According to Ajaero and Onokala (2013), migrants are likely to gain from increased income and improved wellbeing from their migration. At the same time, some migrants may also be affected negatively as they may lose the income they would have generated locally had they not moved from the rural areas to cities. Our study shows that a few migrants experienced declining income as a result of inability to get a stable job. Maji, a woman from the Volta region reported that she used to sell alcoholic drinks in Volta region and was comparatively well off. She moved to Accra 8 years ago with the hope of earning more in the informal sector. But her situation not only did not improve, but became worse. She lost the trading capital due to poor terms of trade. Despite the few cases of declining income after moving to Accra, the majority of the migrants are currently earning more than what they would have earned if they had remained at origin. Similar to earlier findings by Awumbila et al (2014), more

than 80% of the rural-urban migrants interviewed in this study reported an increase in income levels after migrating to Accra. These findings suggest that while migrants may be struggling with work and life in the cities, they still believe that they are earning higher incomes than those they could have earned in their home regions.

Migrants' perceptions of wellbeing after migrating to Accra

The majority of the migrants (66.7%) report that the wellbeing of their households has improved after migrating to Accra. When differentiated by gender, more males (68.8%) than females (64.7%) believe that their current wellbeing in Accra is better than what it would have been if they had remained at the origin (see Table 1). Even though the majority of migrants believe that they have gained, in terms of wellbeing, 21.9% of men and 20.6% of women believe that they lost, in terms of wellbeing, after moving to Accra. These findings suggest that while the majority of migrants gained from their migration into cities, others lost from their migration into cities in Ghana. The study shows that migration to Accra can impact positively on migrants' households left behind. 51.5% of men and 40.6% of women reported that the family would have been worse off if they had not migrated.

Key point 2: Migration generally enhances income and wellbeing

Asset accumulation and transfer of remittances

The study indicates quite clearly rural-urban migrants' interest in asset accumulation, not only as a means of survival, but also to enhance their social status. Many of the migrants interviewed

Table 1: Migrants' perceptions of wellbeing after migrating to Accra

Migrant's perceptions of wellbeing	Male		Female		All	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Current wellbeing here is better	22	68.8	22	64.7	44	66.7
Wellbeing at origin would have been better	7	21.9	7	20.6	14	21.2
No difference	3	9.4	3	8.8	6	9.1
I don't know	0	0	2	5.9	2	3.0
Total	32	100	34	100	66	100

Source: MOOP, Fieldwork, 2015

Picture 2: Dela, a female migrant selling fried plantains in Madina, a suburb of Accra. Dela remits regularly and feels she has gained in terms of wellbeing after migrating to Accra



reported acquiring various assets including land and household durables after moving to Accra. The study found that beyond income generation, the majority of the migrants had cultivated the habit of saving to prepare for future eventualities once in the cities. They learned to cut down on spending and save more than they would have done had migration not occurred. The case of Abda, a 39 year old migrant from Yendi in the Northern Region of Ghana, shows changes in rural migrants spending behaviour when they migrate to cities:

“For this place, because it’s not my hometown I am careful how I spend but back there because it was my hometown, I know that even if I spend it all I can get some the next day. Here even if I make 20gh, I don’t spend up to 10gh. I try to manage like 7gh and I put it in the letter box. I have a letter box that I put money in so there’s a time I open it and send the money in it to them as the money I was able to make”.

Similar to the scenario highlighted by Abda above, almost all the migrants interviewed in Accra send remittances to their people back home. Similar to an earlier study on migrants in the slums of Ghana (see Awumbila, 2014), our interviews reveal that, even when the rural-urban migrant himself or herself felt migration had not been very helpful in moving him/her out of poverty, sending remittances home is still a top priority. Such remittances take several forms including: money for the migrant’s parents, either for themselves or to help pay the school fees of the migrant’s siblings; food items for the mother, in particular; and school items for the siblings. Remittances from urban employment can substantially supplement rural incomes, boost consumption in rural areas, and contribute to household savings, thus stimulating the local economy (Deshingkar, 2005). In this way, migration is helping to improve livelihoods of migrant household members left behind and improving the local rural economy.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that although a few rural-urban migrants lose in terms of income and welfare, rural-urban migration generally leads to improved wellbeing for the majority of the migrants as a result of enhanced income. The findings raise a number of policy issues related to rural-urban migration and poverty outcomes.

Policy recommendations

Information for potential migrants: It is essential to enhance households and potential migrants understanding of economic gains/losses of rural-urban migration, which will enable them to make informed decisions about migration.

Evidence based research: A more realistic and evidence-based debate on rural-urban migration is needed to dismiss the negative perceptions of migration. A well managed rural-urban migration programme must be considered as one of the options for poverty reduction in rural Ghana and not necessarily as a negative outcome of rural underdevelopment.



References

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Other key readings

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RESEARCH PROGRAMME CONSORTIUM

The Centre for Migration Studies (CMS), University of Ghana is the West African core partner for the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium (RPC), aims to promote policy approaches that will help to maximise the potential benefits of migration for poor people, whilst minimising its risks and costs. Following on from the Migration DRC which was established in 2003, Migrating out of Poverty is undertaking a programme of research, capacity-building, training and promotion of dialogue to provide the strong evidential and conceptual bases needed for such policy approaches. Migrating out of Poverty is funded by UK aid from the UK government, although the views expressed in this briefing for policy makers do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

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