



# Social Benefits and Losses of Migrating into Cities in Ghana

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## Briefings for Policy Makers

While the literature tends to focus on the economic impacts of migration into cities, there is little understanding of the social gains and losses associated with migration into the city. As cogently noted by Switek (2012), financial domain is not the only life aspect affected by migration. This briefing for policy makers provides evidence on the social counterfactuals (i.e. gains and losses) of migration from rural areas to cities in Ghana. It is based on the study 'Migration into Cities in Ghana: An Analysis of the Counterfactual' which was conducted by Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium at the University of Ghana in collaboration with the University of Sussex. The briefing argues that migration to the city can affect migrants and their households in relation to marriage, child birth, education, and psychological wellbeing. It also argues that these social outcomes of migration into the city can be either positive or negative, depending on particular contexts. And finally, it draws attention to policy implications of the social benefits and problems of migrating into cities in Ghana.

### Introduction

There is little emphasis on the relationship between internal migration and social benefits and losses in both academic and policy circles in Ghana. The literature is dominated by works on the economic gains and losses of rural-urban migration. However, a recent study, conducted by the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) and the University of Sussex, in five regions of Ghana indicate that even though migrants may benefit economically and socially as a result of their migration into cities in Ghana, they may also sometimes suffer socially, in terms of marital problems, delays in starting a family and psychological stress. This briefing for policy makers reports on interviews with some in-migrants in Accra on a range of social outcomes.

**Key point 1: Previous studies on the effects of migration mostly analyse only economic gains and losses. There are very few studies on the social counterfactuals associated with migration.**

### Study Approach

This briefing for policy makers draws from the study 'Migration into Cities in Ghana: An Analysis of the Counterfactual' which examines how migrants would have fared in the absence of migration. The study was conducted in five migrant sending regions of Ghana (Brong-Ahafo, Upper West, Upper East, Northern Region and Volta Region) and a migrant destination (Accra). The data used for this brief was based on semi-structured interviews

conducted with 68 recent rural-urban in-migrants in Accra and in-depth interviews with 10 of these migrants.

### Effects of migration on timing of marriages

The findings show that migration can impact on the timing of marriage and quality of marriage, both positively and negatively. In terms of timing of marriage, the study found evidence to suggest that migration to Accra has contributed to delays in the timing of marriage among 10% of the 68 recent migrants in Accra. When differentiated by gender, however, the proportion of respondents who reported that migration delayed their marriages was higher among males (14.7%) than females (5.9%). Some men reported that an inability to get better jobs or enough money to rent their own rooms/houses delayed marriage. For instance, Awunyor, a 27 year security guard from Volta region, lives in a lotto kiosk he has rented at Spintex, a suburb of Accra. He feels that his inability to rent a room is a major reason for his unmarried status:

*"I do not have any better place to stay. Currently I stay in a kiosk with no comfort, I cannot even stretch well when am sleeping then come to think of getting married, bring in someone to join me".*

Some migrants reported that they would have married if they had remained in their communities.

The cities are more relaxed, with little or no pressure pushing them to marry, and for that reason, their values change around marriage and child bearing. Our findings suggest that



the migrant's exposure to new ideas, changing values, and knowledge coupled with their personal situation can have an effect on the timing of their marriage.

Some migrants reported that as a result of migration to Accra, they rushed to marry before leaving their villages because of fears of losing their girlfriends to other suitors. Some men also reported that they married two wives. They left their original wives at origin and needed another partner in Accra. This was the case of Mullar who stated that:

*"I am married with two wives. I married my second wife after my migration to Accra".*

**Key point 2: The majority of migrants report that migration did not delay their marriage. However, in some cases, poor male migrants delay their marriage plans because they do not have accommodation and a stable income. However, some migrants rush to secure a marriage before they migrate.**

### Effects of migration on quality of marriage

Migration into cities can affect the quality of marriage between migrants in Accra and their spouses left behind, both positively and negatively. As shown in Table 1, about 24.1% of men and 15.6%

of women report that migration has positively enhanced their relationship. For some men, improved incomes after moving to Accra enabled them to provide for the needs of their wives and children, which contributed to a happy marriage. Others reported that they used to quarrel often when they were staying with their wives at origin, but the quarrels have stopped, now that they are living apart. On the other hand, 27.6% of men and 15.6% of women reported that migrating to Accra has negatively affected their relationships because of inability to communicate with their partners regularly and false accusations of infidelity.

**Key point 3: Migration can enhance the quality of marriage in situations where the male migrant receives better income, remits home regularly and communicates effectively. Limited spousal communication as a result of migration can affect the quality of marital relationships.**

### Effects of migration on child birth and child rearing

Although in general, the majority of migrants observed that starting a family is not delayed by migration, a minority of migrants (27% of men and 15% of women) reported that they would have

had their first children earlier if they had remained at the origin, thus implying that migration had resulted in delays to starting a family. Men who have delayed the timing of their first child reported that economic hardships in Accra prevented them from starting a family earlier. It is also important to note that the absence of a migrant can have effects on childrearing, particularly when the father is a migrant. In patriarchal societies of Ghana, for instance, the absence of a father makes it difficult to control growing child. Thus putting emotional and psychological strain on the mothers and migrant fathers.

**Key point 4: Migration can result in delays to starting a family.**

### Effects of migration on education of the migrant and their family at home

Majority (76.2%) of migrants believed that migration to Accra has not affected their level of education. About 19% of men and 7% of women reported that their level of education would have been higher than it is today if they had remained at the origin. Some of these people explained that they stopped schooling in order to work in Accra to take care of other siblings. A few migrants (11.1%) also reported that migrating to Accra has enhanced their access to education.

**Table 1:** Effects of migration on relationship with spouse

| Effects of migration on relationship with spouse            | Male |      | Female |      | All |      |
|---|------|------|--------|------|-----|------|
|   | N    | %    | N      | %    | N   | %    |
| Migration has positively enhanced our marriage/relationship | 7    | 24.1 | 5      | 15.6 | 12  | 19.7 |
| Migration has negatively affected our marriage              | 8    | 27.6 | 5      | 15.6 | 13  | 21.3 |
| No effect   | 14   | 48.3 | 22     | 68.8 | 36  | 59.0 |
| Total   | 29   | 100  | 32     | 100  | 61  | 100  |

Source: MOOP, Fieldwork, 2015



Our study also revealed that in most cases, migration has positively affected the education of migrant's household members. About 62% of respondents believed that migration enhanced the level of education of their children and or household members. In a minority of cases migration may negatively affect education of the migrants themselves but at the same time migration may positively affect education of their household members left behind, as captured in the statement below by Kato:

*"In fact, my aim was to go and further my education. Unfortunately, I lost my Father who happened to be the breadwinner. With other siblings behind me and an old mother, I realized if I had to further my education, there would be no one to care for my mother and siblings' education. So I had to sacrifice my education to enable my siblings go to school... For mine [education], no. It has helped only that of my siblings whom I have helped. As at now, one has just completed the nursing school, another training College, and the third one is now in the Secondary School".*  
(Kato, 41, from northern region)

**Key point 5: Migration has positive effect on education of members of migrant's household.**

### Psychological and emotional impact of migration to cities

Studies show that one's state of mind is an important factor of welfare gains. Though migrants may be better off financially in the cities, they may lose emotionally and psychologically as a result of not meeting certain targets, such as educational attainment. For instance, Poko, a migrant from the Northern region of Ghana, indicated that the thought of being unable to complete school affects him both emotionally and psychologically as he puts it:

*"I am healthy but psychologically I am not. What made me to lack in a way is basically my education. The whole day, I would just be thinking. If I get up and I do not have anybody around me I get worried. I think a lot about my future and plan ahead of how I wish I could be"*

Some migrants also develop emotional stress which has a strain on their health rising from missing family members. Some of the migrants also suffer psychologically as a result of living in poor neighbourhoods and frequent threats of eviction by city authorities.

### Migration and Social Status

Migrants' jobs and livelihoods in Accra are generally regarded as low status, with low incomes, and this is associated with a feeling of lack of respect in urban areas (Awumbila et al, 2014). However, by sending and making investments home, migrants earn the respect of the household members. Abda, a 39 year old migrant from Yendi in the Northern region indicated that he has gained a lot of respect from his community back home because he has been able to open a provision shop for his wife. Also, the way he dresses whenever he visits family members back home make people respect him more. Others also feel that migrating to Accra has raised their social status at home and now community members accord them much respect, as highlighted by the statement below by Awum, 27 year old migrant from the Volta Region:

*"I think my current social status have changed since I came to Accra because when I go to Kpando Tokor people accord me with a lot of respect, some see you and they ask for assistance as if you are working with bank of Ghana"*  
(Awum, Kpandor Tokor)

Dadu also feels he is better off and that he will gain more respect in his village because of the exposure he has gained as

a 'traveller', when comparing himself with his colleagues living in the village:

*"Yes I think I am better off than my colleagues who are living in the village there. Because I am more exposed to other things in life. My way of doing things in the village has now changed. I am not saying I have money more than my colleagues back home but the exposure I have now they have not gotten that. If I go back home today the community will welcome me and respect me more than my colleagues I left behind, because they know I am a traveller"*

Findings from our study thus show that although migrants may lose respect as a result of the work they do, they are accorded much respect back home because of the remittances they send and the investments they make back home. Migrants are again accorded respect because they are exposed to "city life".

**Key point 6: Migration raises the social status of migrants.**

### Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that rural-urban migration has both positive effects on the migrants in terms of marriage, child birth and education. They gain the respect of their families and friends because of financial transfers and investments in their villages. Travelling to the cities is enough to gain public recognition and respect in the originating communities. Nonetheless, migration to the cities can lead to delayed marriages and childbirth. Migrants suffer emotionally and psychologically as they miss their families back home. Migrants suffer a loss of respect in the cities but, to the contrary, are highly revered in their originating communities.



### Policy recommendations

#### **Provision of data on social benefits of migration:**

There is the need for more research on the relationship between internal migration and social benefits/losses. The research on counterfactuals of migration should document not only economic differences but also social benefits for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between migration and poverty reduction.

**Information for would-be migrants:** There is a need to produce quality statistics and better information on the potential gains and losses to would-be migrants. This could play a key role in preventing a mismatch between would-be migrants' perception of migration and migration's actual realities. Additionally, potential migrants could receive education on how to manage communication and financial transfers with the spouse, left behind at origin, to maintain quality of marriage.

### References

Teye et al, (2016). 'Migration into Cities in Ghana: An analysis of the counterfactual'. Migrating out of Poverty. Unpublished Project Report, Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana.

#### **Other key readings**

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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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