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Reintegration of Return Migrants in Northern Ghana and their Remigration Decisions: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

A political discussion has recently erupted over the return of migrant *kayayei* (head porters) from Northern Ghana. Return migrants were studied meagrely with regard to their reintegration process, skills acquired at their destinations, and chances for productive engagement. These chances allow the return migrants to pursue socially desirable goals. This study attempts to answer the questions pertaining to why migrants remain at home in terms of their experiences in the reintegration process and the reasons for re-migration. The purpose of this study was to explore how the socioeconomic environment of home communities aids the reintegration of return migrants from Ghana's Northern Region. Eighty-nine (89) return migrants from eight districts in Northern Ghana were selected using snowball sampling and their reintegration processes investigated. To analyze the process of reintegration of return migrants, the study adopted the interpretivist and ethnography research design under which qualitative case study approach was used to collect data. Thematic analysis was applied in analysing the qualitative data. The study discovered that some return migrants were eager to stay in their home communities after returning home, not because of greater economic prospects, but because of improved social considerations. They will re-migrate, however, if the individual places a high value on economic factors and the destination offers greater economic possibilities. However, if we want return migrants to stay in their hometowns, government has to increase the job opportunities in their home communities with healthy economic possibilities.

Keywords

return migrants, social networks, reintegration, Northern Ghana, Kayayei, qualitative study, interpretivist approach

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Reintegration of Return Migrants in Northern Ghana and their Remigration Decisions: A Qualitative Study

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A political discussion has recently erupted over the return of migrant *kayayei* (head porters) from Northern Ghana. Return migrants were studied meagrely with regard to their reintegration process, skills acquired at their destinations, and chances for productive engagement. These chances allow the return migrants to pursue socially desirable goals. This study attempts to answer the questions pertaining to why migrants remain at home in terms of their experiences in the reintegration process and the reasons for re-migration. The purpose of this study was to explore how the socioeconomic environment of home communities aids the reintegration of return migrants from Ghana's Northern Region. Eighty-nine (89) return migrants from eight districts in Northern Ghana were selected using snowball sampling and their reintegration processes investigated. To analyze the process of reintegration of return migrants, the study adopted the interpretivist and ethnography research design under which qualitative case study approach was used to collect data. Thematic analysis was applied in analysing the qualitative data. The study discovered that some return migrants were eager to stay in their home communities after returning home, not because of greater economic prospects, but because of improved social considerations. They will re-migrate, however, if the individual places a high value on economic factors and the destination offers greater economic possibilities. However, if we want return migrants to stay in their hometowns, government has to increase the job opportunities in their home communities with healthy economic possibilities.

Keywords: return migrants, social networks, reintegration, Northern Ghana, Kayayei, qualitative study, interpretivist approach

People migrate for a variety of reasons, such as work opportunities, educational possibility, a high standard of living, escaping conflict and poverty, etc. However, migration is a significant means of subsistence for many people, particularly the poor. Studies have shown that migration has a substantial positive influence on people's livelihoods and welfare and is a key engine of growth and a way out of poverty (Awumbila, 2015). The distribution of economic opportunities has always had a significant impact on both internal and international migration in Ghana (Kwankye et al., 2007); particularly, internal migration is a necessary component of any region's structural change and development processes. International migration received more attention globally, particularly in Africa, whereas internal migration received less attention despite being more crucial for reducing poverty and promoting human welfare.

However, how it actually affects society will rely on a variety of economic, social, and political variables and how they interact (Awumbila, 2015). Internal migration literature in Ghana has primarily concentrated on the opportunities, difficulties, and coping mechanisms employed by migrants in their day-to-day lives in the destination places. People are moving from Ghana's northern regions to the southern regional cities, such as Accra, Kumasi, and Takoradi, to engage in a variety of economic activities, such as Kayayei or porters who carry heavy loads on their heads (Kwankye et al., 2007).

Due to the fact that the development of Ghana's northern regions received the least attention and that the south received vastly more investments than the north, there is a significant divide between the northern and southern regions of the nation, which has led to internal migration. Both temporary and permanent internal migration are possible. Urban areas provide migrants with economic opportunities that improve their quality of life, and if they feel successful, they return to their hometown, as many migrants wish to do at some point (Okome, 2014). When relocating from one place to another, migrants encounter difficulties, and these difficulties vary depending on whether they leave or return.

There has been much research on migration's potential and problems, particularly with regard to international migration (Agadjanian, 2008; Adepoju, 2011; Bauer & Zimmermann, 2018) and internal migration (Bell et al., 2015; Ntshidi, 2017). However, the issues of return migrants have been studied meagrely with regard to their reintegration (Cordell, 2020; Setrana & Tonah, 2014). There are not many studies on internal return migrants. It is important to research their issues and effects during the reintegration process. The following questions are addressed in this study: (1) What explanations do migrants give for why they remain at home? (2) What are their experiences with the reintegration process? (3) Why would a returning migrant want to migrate again? This study examines the reintegration experiences and remigration decisions of internal return migrants. The experiences of people and communities in Ghana's northern region is captured, and some pertinent policy implications and suggestions are made.

Literature Review

Migration is a phenomenon that has gotten a lot of attention from academics in recent decades (Gou et al., 2020; Porat & Benguigui, 2016, 2021). Migration is described as the act of moving one's habitation from one geographical location to another, whether permanently or temporarily (Rees et al., 2017; Stillwell et al., 2016). Migration, according to De Haas (2014), is a result of people's goals and ability to migrate. Temporary migration is mainly prompted by regional variations in agricultural production seasonality, which encourage economic production and growth, notably in the agricultural sector, according to Yahaya (2021). Individuals may also choose to relocate domestically or globally. Internal migration, the topic of this research, occurs when people move within a country from one geographical place to another. The concept of internal migration employed in this study is that of Abdulai (2016): persons relocating from their place of origin to a destination within Ghana by crossing a well-defined geographical boundary. Inter-district or inter-regional mobility of persons is possible (Abdulai, 2016). The decision to relocate, however, is not made in a vacuum. Migration, according to De Haas (2014), is a result of people's goals and ability to migrate. Political, economic, and societal factors may have affected the decision to migrate. According to Flahaux and De Haas (2016), migration can be triggered by poverty, violent conflict, or environmental hardship on the African continent.

Migrant capacities are one of the most precious resources available for a country's growth, development, and poverty reduction. Return migrant reintegration occurs when an individual migrant is successful in combining various capitals, such as financial and

entrepreneurial skills, and human capital, such as education, technical skills, and knowledge, to return to the home community with productively within the social and affective capitals, and thus able to contribute to the development of the home community (Okyerefo & Setrana, 2018).

An important facilitator of reintegration is social capital, which consists of a stock of trust, mutual understanding, shared values, and socially held knowledge. The social capital theory postulates that networking relationships provide value to actors by allowing them to tap into the resources embedded in such relationships for their benefit (Adu-Okoree & Arku, 2014). The concept of social capital is a complex one and its definition shows that it encompasses different types and components that operate at individual, organizational and community levels (Au, 2019). The necessity to understand the determinants of reintegration is based on the fact that it will be unrealistic to assume that, for the period when the migrant was away from the community, the social and economic milieu to which migrants return has not changed (Setrana et al., 2018; Tizazu et al., 2021). Following a residential shift, Guest and Stamm (1993) looked at how people integrate into their new communities. Social and community integration, formal residential integration, and personal integration are the three types of integration. Community integration is best described as dense networks and deep linkages among community members.

In this study, we look at how kinship ties in the studied locations impacted the reintegration of return migrants. There is little doubt that return migrants assist their families and communities. In light of the foregoing, the purpose of this research is to see how the socioeconomic environment of home villages aided in the reintegration of return migrants from Ghana's northern region. The northern part of Ghana at the time of this research was divided into three political administrative regions: the northern region, the upper west region, and the upper east region. However, northern Ghana is divided into five political administrative regions, which are: Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East and Upper West Regions. The northern part of Ghana is particularly vulnerable to food insecurity because the majority of households depend on rain-fed agriculture and livestock herding for their primary sources of income. There is a high prevalence of poverty in the north because it is dry and unsuitable for growing crops. It is also underdeveloped because of the lack of investments (Rademacher-Schulz et al., 2014). People are compelled by these circumstances to migrate to southern cities in order to survive. But returning to one's homeland brings comfort, as Essien emphasised in his article, "Home is Home," while discussing the possible reverse migration of slaves who could establish a society with a shared cultural kingship (Essien, 2014). Many migrants yearn to go back home, but they have all faced opportunities and problems in the process of reintegration. This study examines the reintegration process of returnees and documents their experiences. The study also observes the types of reciprocal support exchanges in which return migrants and their social networks engage. The situation also examines the perspectives of return migrants on what factors they will consider when deciding whether to stay in the community or remigrate following their return.

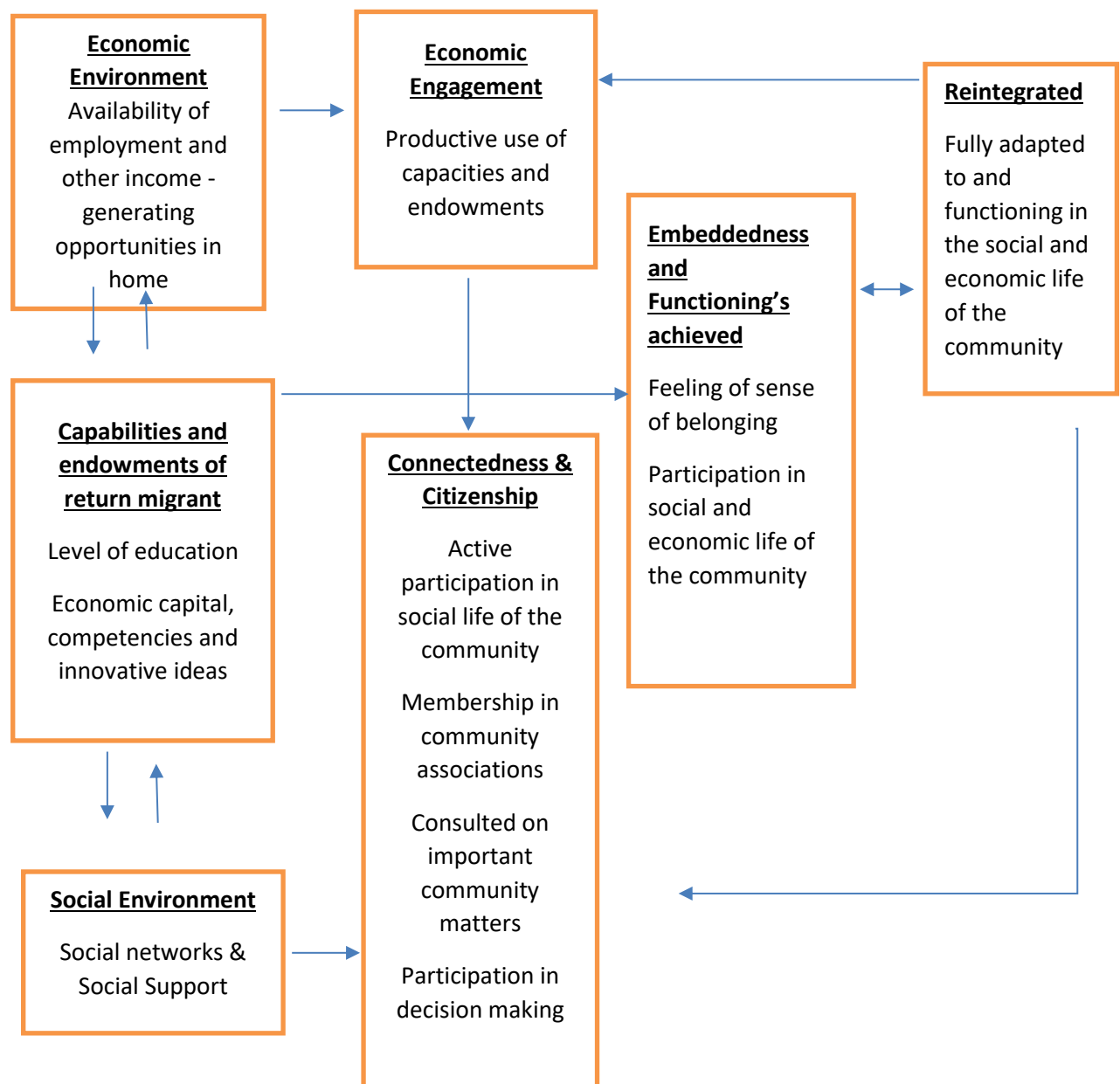
Conceptual Framework

The research was based on a conceptual framework that depicts the interaction of human capital (the individual return migrant's capacities or endowments) and social capital (opportunities within the socio-economic environment) in facilitating the return migrant's reintegration back into the home community. According to Veenstra and Abel (2019), Bourdieu contends that capital is the accumulated labor (in materialized or embodied representations) that permits people to improve and preserve their social status. Social capital refers to the notion that social networks can be a resource for people, groups, and society. Economic capital, on the other hand, refers to tangible assets, such as wealth, and other resources like property ownership. Figure 1 describes the relationship between individual

return migrant capacities and opportunities and social network support systems in the home communities' environments. It asserts that the strength of the receiving community, as measured by the amount of economic and social resources available, is critical to return migrants' capacity to reintegrate into society. If the community can provide the essential chances for the return migrant to apply his/her skills, the worker will be able to put his/her skills to good use. The capacity and endowments of the return migrant, on the other hand, affect the extent to which the individual can take advantage of socioeconomic chances.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework on Return Migration and Reintegration



(Source: Adapted from Yendaw et al. (2013))

When a return migrant is allowed to engage in community activities, he/she develops a sense of belonging to the community and, as a result, becomes integrated and functions well in

the community's social and economic life, leading to his reintegration. The reintegration of the return migrant strengthens the individual's integration and functioning, as evidenced by social connectivity and economic participation. As a result, migrants returning to communities with greater social and economic capital are more likely to reintegrate more smoothly than migrants returning to communities with less capital. Migrants who return to the same socio-economic context with superior economic and human capital are able to integrate more easily than those who return without these advantages. As a result, it may be claimed that the migrant's reintegration success or failure is decided by the interplay of the social and economic milieu into which the migrant returns and the capacities with which he/she returns.

Finally, the framework provides a dynamic interaction between the socioeconomic environment and the capital that migrants return with, culminating in the ability to reintegrate into the home community's social and economic life.

Research Context

Northern Ghana is made up of five regions – Savanna, Upper East, Upper West, Northeast, and Northern Regions. The climate of the region is characterized by a predominately dry environment, with only one rainy season that runs from around May to October. Despite agriculture being the main economic sector, the lengthy term of dry weather conditions compels people to migrate to southern Ghana for non-farming economic activities. One of the most noticeable characteristics of Ghana's geography is the severe development differential that exists between the comparatively developed south and the less developed north (Kambala, 2023). It is Kambala's (2023) contention that the repercussions of earlier colonial development initiatives have continued to this day and continue to profoundly influence the outcomes of Ghana's present development efforts. Households in Northern Ghana are therefore relatively poorer creating a push factor for migration.

Methodology

Research Design

Interpretivism and ethnography are the guiding theories in this research. Interpretivist research, as described by Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991), aims to comprehend experiences by analyzing the meaning given to them by participants. It takes into account that people are distinct from physical phenomena because they provide meanings more depth and assume that people cannot be studied in the same manner that physical processes can (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). The researchers' goal was to find out how respondents perceived their experiences and how they came to those conclusions. Thus, interpretivism adopts the epistemological tenet that reality can be interpreted in so many ways. According to Kirk and Haines (2020), examining participants' regular behaviours and social significances in a given particular social environment is a key component of ethnography as a data collection technique. According to Brewer (2000), ethnography is the study of individuals in their natural environments.

Participants and Recruitment

A qualitative case-study approach was used to choose study participants. Using a variety of data sources and data gathering techniques, qualitative case study methodology allows researchers to explore phenomena in their contexts (de Vries, 2020). A case study is one of the most extensively used strategies of qualitative social research. It is important to note that, as Yin (2009) pointed out, a case study is not a technique for gathering data but rather a plan

or strategy for researching a social unit. The study participants were migrants who had spent at least a year at a place outside of Northern Ghana before returning to their communities. The research was carried out in 30 communities selected from eight districts in Northern Ghana that served as cases in order to boost the credibility of the conclusions drawn. Return migrants in the study region, as well as key informants such as community leaders, assembly members (Councillors), return migrants' household heads, and community members, made up the study's population. The eight districts were Tamale, Yendi, Nanumba North, East Gonja, Savelugu/Nanton, West Mamprusi, Chereponi, and Zabzugu, out of which 89 participants were randomly selected for the study as shown in Table 1. The key informants were purposively selected due to their rich knowledge in issues pertaining to their respective communities. About 82% of the 89 return migrants interviewed were below 30 years old. The study showed that 20% of the respondents were 20 years or younger whereas 62% were between ages 21-30 years old. Age and gender were significantly correlated with each other ($r = 0.351$; $P \leq 0.000$; $n=89$) with men significantly older, on average, than women. The oldest return migrant interviewed was 73 years old.

Table 1

List of Communities of Return Migrant Participants

No.	District communities	Communities	Number of participants
1	Nanumba North	Bimbila, Masaka, Wulensi,	3 3 3
2	East Gonja	Kpandai, Salaga, Kpekpeni, Lungni	3 3 3 3
3	Yendi	Yendi Diare, Nakugu, Mohifong, Balishie	3 3 3 3 3
4	Tamale	Nyohini, Gulpela, Gumbihini, Lamashegu, Kalariga,	3 3 3 2 3
5	Savelugu Nanton	Janga, New Bambia, Tampeligu	3 3 3
6	West Mamprusi	Gbunbaliga, Yendi-Naayillifong, Kulpaligu, Nadoli,	3 3 3 3
7	Zabzugu Tatale	Nansoni Tatale Woribogu	3 3 3
8	Chereponi	Solayaali, Nakpali,	3 3

	Kpakpali	3
Total		89

Source: Fieldwork, 2016

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

The following schedule was followed in collecting data from the study area:

- i. Community leaders and assembly men were located, and research team was introduced.
- ii. The purpose of the visit into the community was explained and consent was sought to conduct the interviews.
- iii. Focus group discussions and individual interviews with assembly members and community leaders were carried out.
- iv. The residences the return migrants were in the community through snowballing.
- v. Participants were then interviewed using pre-prepared interview guide but when the need arose, unstructured questions were asked.

Data was transcribed after which consistency was checked between transcription and audio recordings after which thematic analysis was done. In using our thematic analysis, the study employed a four-stage content analysis as proposed by Venkatesh et al. (2016). This four-staged content analysis comprised codes creation plan, codes formulation, themes creation and the consolidation of themes based on the objectives of the study.

Phase one involved reading the responses, identifying the ones that were pertinent to the research questions, and including them for coding. The researchers assigned codes to similar replies in phase two using a more formal coding procedure. In phase three, the researchers organized the associated data into overarching themes and subthemes. In phase four, the researchers revised, altered, and clarified the themes in accordance with the study's objectives. The following are a few of the themes that emerged according to the study's objectives (see Table 2).

Table 2
Themes

Themes	Criteria	Sample Responses
Return Migrants' reason for returning home	Reasons for Remaining in Their Home Communities	"...you know, no matter how much money you make, you will not be respected till you marry so I came back to marry"
Re-integration	Participation in Employment/ Economic activities	"I started my own shop after returning with the money I saved and I am content with what I earn"
	Involvement in Community activities	"When I was away, I missed home. Now that I am back, I attend weddings, naming ceremonies, festivals and other social functions. Home is home."
	Membership in social groups	"After I return, I attend church regularly and even I am part of a women fellowship committee"

	Acceptance by their community	<i>“I visited a return migrant who was sick a few months ago. I was surprised to see that many community members including the chief was with him with gifts. I stayed there for about one hour and when I was leaving many of the community members were still there and more were coming”</i>
Re- Migration	Reason for desire to re-migrate	<i>“There are just no better means of making a living here. I will remigrate because my parents are old and I need to work and remit them”.</i>

Ethical Clearance and Consideration

Approval for this research was obtained from the Ethics Review Board of the Presbyterian University, Ghana. Informed consent was also secured from all participants of the study.

Results and Discussion (Conversations)

Returning Migrants’ Reasons for Remaining in Their Home Communities

Respondents were asked to explain why they wanted to stay in their current community. Table 3 shows that the most important factor in deciding to stay in the home community was a sense of belonging (32.9%). Desire to marry and establish a family (18.5%), better social conditions at home (15.8%), having accomplished the objective of return (15.0%), and dislike of the harsh conditions in the destination location were all key factors in the decision to stay in the community (10.9%).

A female respondent¹ who indicated that her return purpose had been realized stated: I traveled to Kumasi to purchase enough bowls to marry my husband. I was able to accomplish this, and I even managed to save enough money to establish my own company. What is the point of returning to Kumasi? It was challenging at first, but things are improving today.

Table 3

Reasons Why Migrants Might Rather Stay at Home

Reason	Number	Percent
Feeling of belonging	48	32.9
marrying and starting a family	27	18.5
Favourable social circumstances at home	23	15.8
The goal of the return has been accomplished	22	15.0
Sickness	2	1.4
Family obligations must be met	8	5.5
Detest cruel surroundings in destination area	16	10.9

*Multiple responses resulted in a higher number of responses than the total number of respondents.
Source: Field data, 2016

¹ A female return migrant from the Bimbilla community, Nanumba District

One returning migrant² said that his family forced him to return home when he was not ready:

When my father became ill and there was no one to look after his fields and animals, I had to return home to take care of them. I was at the market when I noticed some of my family members approaching. I took them to the kiosk where I slept, thinking they were also looking for work, only to be told that they had come to take me home because my father was ill, and as the firstborn, I was responsible for him as well as the farm and livestock. I didn't have any money, so I had to borrow it from a friend before we could return home.

Another remarked³:

I was weary of having to get up before I had enough sleep to clean the area before the business owner came over to dump water or even urine on you. You work hard all day and are denied the few hours of sleep you desire. I can get up whenever I want here. Even if there is nothing to do, you can count on a lot of food to fill your stomach, but who will feed you if you don't work for a day?

The study's findings emphasized the importance of social network participation in promoting reintegration. Return migrants' opportunities at home may be limited, but their sense of belonging to their communities may encourage them to stay. Living in a distant place with no one to turn to in tough situations gave more security to these respondents than living in a foreign land with no one to turn to in difficult situations. The discovery backs up the "home is home" idea (Kleist, 2013), in which home is defined as a safe haven (Setrana, 2017). Return migrants cited mostly social reasons for remaining in their home communities.

Reasons why Return Migrants Would Desire to Re-Enter the Region

The researchers wanted to know what factors influenced return migrants' decisions to re-migrate. Several variables have been suggested as motivations for return migrants to re-migrate. Table 4 shows that the main reason for return migrants wanting to re-migrate was a lack of employment possibilities at home (22.4%).

Table 4
Why Would a Return Migrant Desire to Re-Migrate

Reason	Number	Percent
Basic needs at home are difficult to meet	18	15.5
a scarcity of job options at home	26	22.4
In a destination region, you can earn more money	22	19.0
Unable to attain our return goal	20	17.2
Dissipated all the resources	19	16.4
Family members are putting too much pressure	11	9.5

*Multiple options have resulted in a higher number of return migrants.
Source: Field data, 2016.

² A male return migrant from the Nakugu community, Yendi District

³ A female return migrant from the Nakpali community, Chereponi District. While in Kumasi she worked as a head porter and slept in front of shops in the evening.

Other key motivations for re-migrating return migrants included: relatively low levels of income in hometowns compared to destination areas (19.0 %); failure to fulfill return intentions (17.2%); dissipation of resources returned with (16.4%); difficulties meeting basic necessities (15.5%); and family pressure (9.5%).

One return migrant⁴ who expressed an interest in re-migrating responded: Despite the fact that my family provides me with food, I must contribute a tiny amount to purchase fish and to offer money for the medication of anyone who becomes ill in the house. The little money I returned with has gradually depleted, but I have yet to start a business. I believe it is in my best interests for me to return to Accra. Every day, I'll be making money. I'll get plenty to send home and be able to purchase whatever I require. I'm not going to be able to make it here. I'm going to be a laughingstock among my buddies in no time.

Community members' opinions on migration were also sought. The vast majority answered they would urge other community members to migrate. It was in this context that one of them said:

Take a look behind you at that store. Do you know who owns this property? It's for my niece, who returned two years ago from Accra. She sells a variety of products, including Milo (cocoa product) and sugar. Most notably, she has hired and pays my son on a monthly basis Isn't that fantastic? I would also migrate to bring money home if it were possible. My son has been requested to migrate, but he refuses. Migration is a positive thing!

The study's findings showed that return migrants migrate again because their hopes for economic integration – that is, their expectations for a higher socioeconomic position – are not satisfied. Migrants are more prone to remigrate when they face economic difficulties, such as unemployment or low-paying jobs in their hometown. (Constant & Massey, 2002). Return migrants stated mostly the economic capital as the reasons for desire to remigrate.

Social Networks and Reintegration of Return Migrants

Participants in this study were asked to estimate their involvement to understand the reintegration experiences in four different reintegration paths:

- i. First, participation in economic and income-earning activities was used to assess employment and other income-generating options.
- ii. Second, return migrants' acceptance by their home society was measured by their being consulted by other people in the society, being given positions of trust, sharing experiences with other members of the community, and being visited by community members.
- iii. Third, engagement in social functions such as naming rituals, marriage ceremonies, and funeral ceremonies; participation in communal labour organized by the community; and participation in community meetings were all examples of involvement in community activities.

⁴ A female participant from Janga community, Savelugu/Nanton District

- iv. Finally, engagement in the religious life of people in the mosque, church, or local shrine, as well as local gender-based groupings, was used to determine membership in social groups.

Return migrants in this study were asked to determine which of the indicators of reintegration into the community were true for their conditions, using these paths as models for evaluating reintegration. The participation in the community activities, acceptance by the community, membership in social groups, and participation in employment shows the reintegration process which is found in Table 5. The data indicate that the return migrants were active participants in the community's life. Visits by community members (12.7%), sharing of experiences with others (6.0%), being placed in a position of trust (5.6%), and being advised by community members were all factors in the home society's acceptance (3.6%). Participation in community activities included attending social functions (14.7%), communal labour (11.7%), and community meetings (9.1%). These were regarded as a sign of the community's acceptance.

Table 5
Indicators of Reintegration of Return Migrants

Indicator	Frequency	Percent
Engagement in employment opportunities	78	13.4
Acceptance by the home society		
Consulted by community members	21	3.6
Given position of trust	33	5.6
Sharing of experiences with others	35	6
Visit by community members	74	12.7
Involvement in community activities		
Participation in communal labour	68	11.7
Participation in community meetings	53	9.1
Participation in social functions	86	14.7
Membership in social groups		
Participation in gender-based group meetings	53	9.1
Participation in the religious life of the community	82	14.1

*Multiple options have resulted in a higher number of return migrants.

Source: Field data, 2016.

Members of the community also felt that the return migrants had been accepted as members of their communities. Participation in the life of the communities demonstrated this. This emotion was expressed by one older⁵ individual as follows:

A few months back, I paid a visit to a sick return migrant. I was startled to see how many members of the community, including the chief, came to see him with gifts. I stayed for nearly an hour, and when I left, many members of the community were still present, and more were on their way. Despite the fact that I am older, I have never had such visits when I was sick. I wondered if I should

⁵ A household head from the Kpandai community, East Gonja District.

also relocate to the south so that when I return, many people will be able to visit me while I am ill.

One return migrant⁶ replied when asked about signs that show their reintegration:

I am always invited to all social occasions in this town, and I am always given a special seat to sit in. When I accept their invitation to attend a social event such as a naming ceremony or a wedding, everyone is thrilled. Even the community's female leader wants me to accompany her wherever she goes.

Another person⁷ added:

I've always been to the mosque since I arrived. I'm now studying Quranic Arabic. Because there was no Mallam I (Islam clerics) in the village when I was growing up, I didn't have the opportunity to study it, but when I went to the mosque near Agbobloshie market (In Accra), I began to learn it. There are several Mallams that are willing to teach you there. I've seen one in the mosque since I arrived, so I wrote my name down to keep learning it.

Returning migrants came from a variety of social backgrounds (23.2%). The most common social group membership among return migrants was that of a mosque, church, or shrine (14.1%). The findings of the study back up the claim that Africans are intrinsically religious and that religion shapes their lives and work (Beyers, 2010). As a result, involvement in the community's religious life (14.1%) was more essential than membership in gender-based groupings (9.1%) as indications of social group membership. The members of the social groupings in the communities helped each other with various sorts of support. Helping each other build houses, weed their farms, and donate various supplies during delivery and funerals were all examples of the support. The social organizations also organized and carried out a variety of activities to help the communities grow. Return migrants were engaged in various forms of employment and income-generating activities (13.4%), and this was cited as evidence of their reintegration. This suggests that the return migrants adapted to the socio-economic conditions in the home community and engaging the capitals they returned within productive economic activities.

The data, however, imply that social elements were the most relevant indicators of return migrants' reintegration. The data suggest that employment opportunities ranked first on the list of reintegration indicators. These data imply that social elements are more significant for reintegration for return migrants than economic considerations. Return migrants were pleased with their circumstances as long as they felt included in society. The return migrants' sense of belonging and understanding that they were part of a bigger group was crucial. Membership in the group, according to Kuschminder (2017), provides opportunities for mutual support, which helps the return migrant reintegrate. Adu-Okoree & Arku (2014) have demonstrated the value of social group membership in facilitating migrant integration in the destination location. The same finding is perceived as easing return migrants' reintegration into their home communities in this case.

⁶ A female participant from the Diare community, Yendi District

⁷ A male participant (Nadoli community, West Mamprusi District) who returned from Agbobloshie market. Agbobloshie happens to be the largest destination of Northern migrants. The migrants get jobs as porters and truck pushers.

Return Migrants Receive and Give Support to Members of Their Social Networks

This section discusses the assistance provided by return migrants to members of their social networks with the assistance the former received from the latter. The study's findings revealed that return migrants provided more than they received from their social networks.

A closer examination of the data reveals that migrants provided more economic assistance than social assistance. Financial aid (32.9%), food (21.3%), clothing (9.8%), fees (6.7%), assisting on farms (5.3%), gifts (1.3%), and medical costs made up the economic support (0.9%). Sharing of experience (16.9%), helping with home tasks (1.8%), and church or mosque service were all examples of social assistance (1.8%).

Migrants, on the other hand, received 76% social assistance and 24% economic assistance. Accommodation (43.3%), prayers (13.5%), encouragement (11.5%), and love and care made up the social support (7.7%). It is not surprising that respondents regard accommodation as a social support and not economic. Drucker-Brown (2001) explains that the layout of homes separates inhabitants by age and gender in very different ways and reflects significant variances in how work and leisure are organized highlighting distinctive political disparities among members in a household. Food (9.6%); employment connections (5.8%); trade capital (3.8%); cash aid (2.9%); and training costs (2.9%) made up the economic support (1.9%). In terms of its financial cost, food is viewed as an economic support. The findings of the study show that return migrants were economically better off than the members of their social network who had not migrated. They also demonstrate that the home environment was better at addressing return migrants' social demands but not so much at meeting their economic needs. As a result, return migrants may profit from the social wealth of their home communities, but they had to share their economic resources with the locals. Individuals who can fulfil their social obligation of aiding others gain social approbation and dignity, as well as a better likelihood of obtaining help from others when they are in need. As a result, persons who refuse to assist others may be rejected by society and labelled as wicked. Indeed, all people from whom one has received a favor, whether directly or indirectly are expected to return the favor. A return migrant⁸ echoed this assertion, saying:

You never know when you'll need other people's help, my brother. Because we are all one here, you will not be able to keep your meal when others are hungry. You must share what little you have with those who require assistance. It is only the wicked that refuse to share.

Even if a return migrant has not received any assistance from an individual, the migrant is expected to offer assistance to the individual if the migrant is regarded by society to be in a better situation (Adu-Okoree & Arku, 2014). Return migrants' reintegration into their home communities is aided by such goodwill acts.

Reintegration is described by Putnam (2001) in terms of social capital and reciprocal benefits. As a result, return migrants and members of their social networks exchanged resources. Mutual resource sharing aided in the development of trust and trustworthiness, friendship, and connectivity, all of which contributed to a sense of identification, recognition, and belonging. These are virtues that are socially acceptable in the development of social capital and act as the glue that binds individual migrants to their social networks and helps their reintegration (Putnam, 2001).

Table 6 shows that migrants and their parents gave about similar amounts to each other. Migrants offered their parents 26.7% of their assistance, but parents gave them 26.9% of their

⁸ Male participant from the Nyohini community, Tamale Metropolis

support. Migrants also provided nearly as much (26.2%) as they received from their siblings (25.0%). As a result, return migrants and their close family members had a mutually advantageous connection. On the other hand, respondents received 16.4% support from their uncles and aunts, despite giving 10.2%. As a result, migrants benefited more from their uncles and aunts than they did from their parents. These results indicate the relevance of the family in the reintegration of return migrants, as well as the reciprocal link between family members. The results also demonstrate the significance of the social network in the reintegration of return migrants, given the mutual support they enjoy.

Table 6
Return Migrants Receive and Give Support to Members

Support extended	Percent
Support extended to their parents	26.7
Support extended to their siblings	26.2
Support extended to their relatives	10.2
Support extended to their friends	20.4
Support received from parents	26.9
Support received from siblings	25.0
Support received from relatives (uncle and aunt)	16.4
Support received from friends	14.4

*Multiple options have resulted in a higher number of return migrants.

Source: Field data, 2016.

Benefit exchanges between return migrants and former friends were the polar opposite. Friends gave 20.4% and earned 14.4 % from return migrants. This demonstrates that the return migrants valued their friendships and were willing to help them. The importance of friendship in social networks is highlighted by this research (Pena López et al., 2021). A respondent⁹ explained why return migrants helped their friends in numerous ways:

I didn't have any money when I went to Kumasi. Until I returned, one of my old acquaintances provided me money and supported my parents whenever they were in need. Despite the fact that I have refunded his money, I feel obligated to reciprocate by giving what I brought with me. Who knows, maybe I'll need his help again tomorrow.

Social networks may deplete a return migrant's resources, causing money to be squandered in the form of gifts and other social responsibilities rather than being invested in productive activity. As a result, the researchers wanted to know how the sharing of resources affected the economic situation of return migrants. Some of the returning migrants complained that it was a waste of their time and money. This is what one returning migrant¹⁰ had to say:

Everyone ran to me with one concern or another as soon as I arrived home. Unfortunately, I was unable to decline their request for assistance. Before I knew it, all of the money I had brought with me had vanished, and there was nothing left to establish the business I had envisioned. Now I have to use credit

⁹ A male return migrant from Salaga community, East Gonja District who migrated to Kumasi. Kumasi is the second largest city in Ghana after Greater Accra, the capital of Ghana.

¹⁰ A female participant from the Wulensi community, Nanumba North District.

to purchase the ingredients for the cuisine I cook for sale. I'm humiliated at times, but there's nothing I can do about it.

Another migrant¹¹ who returned home said:

Because my father is quite old and unable to bring in food or money, I have assumed the role of home earner since my arrival. My siblings are now completely reliant on me to pay their school expenses. As a result, all of my resources have been depleted in order to sustain the household.

The study's findings revealed that return migrants and members of their social networks engaged in a mutually beneficial exchange of assistance. As a result, members of return migrants' social networks were able to meet some of their demands, easing their reintegration. This is consistent with findings from prior studies, which show that reciprocity exists in social networks and that members of social networks can meet their needs by interacting with other members of the network (Adu-Okoree & Arku, 2014). Putnam (1995), for example, claims that social networks improve rural people's coordination and cooperation for mutual gain, and that they act as a glue that binds them together.

Conclusion

In this study, the respondents' sense of belonging was critical to their reintegration. Return migrants and members of their social networks participated in a reciprocal support system with their relatives, which were determined to be mutually beneficial. Return migrants, on the other hand, were judged to have given more than they got. The return migrants received more social help than economic support from their hometowns. Return migrants, on the other hand, provided more financial support to their hometowns. Return migrants had some of their requirements supplied by members of their social networks, which provided an anchor for their reintegration, thanks to this mutually beneficial support structure between return migrants and members of their immediate families.

Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrate that, while one may agree with the declarations about the value of social networks in easing reintegration, family members' high expectations may obstruct successful reintegration. Some return migrants might want to stay in their home areas because they believe the social conditions are better there. Others cited the better economic conditions in the destination as a motive to re-migrate. As a result, even if economic chances back home are not favorable, return migrants' sense of belonging to their communities may encourage them to stay.

Finally, the study's findings suggest that the socioeconomic context of the home community has an impact on return migrants' ability to use the skills and capital they gained in the destination region to ensure successful reintegration (King, 2022; Riaño, 2022). The social conditions in their home countries were typically satisfactory to return migrants due to the popular Ghanaian mantra of 'home is home,' where return migrants feel safer and welcomed among their communities. This is not a sentiment they usually feel when they migrate to Southern Ghana, due largely to the menial jobs in which they engage. As illustrated in the conceptual framework of the study, the social environment, connectedness, and citizenship experienced by return migrants are major factors that determined their reintegration into their communities. Lack of economic possibilities, on the other hand, may force some of them to relocate. Following that, the study suggests that if we want return migrants to stay in

¹¹ A male participant from the Nasonni community, Zabzugu Tatale District.

their hometowns, we should work to increase job and other income-earning options in their home communities. Government strategies and programs for the Northern sector must be aimed at providing these areas with healthy economic possibilities.

This means that NGOs and other organizations working to repatriate migrants to their home countries must pay close attention to the social and economic conditions in which they left and returned. This will aid in the reintegration of return migrants; otherwise, when they re-migrate, they will feel out of place. Government development policies should also aim to close the development gap between sending and receiving areas, making it easier for return migrants to reintegrate into their communities.

As this study is qualitative, the reader should take the findings cautiously because they may not be highly generalizable to other situations and settings. Nevertheless, researchers may use these findings for more research that takes socio-economic and political elements from many contexts and locations into account to support returnee migrants in reintegration. Future research may further examine the relationship between the returnees' familial backgrounds and their experience relocating from their occupational, educational, and political contexts. As a result, it may be possible to design pertinent policies and strategies for the socioeconomic advancement of the local community, on the one hand, which can deter returnees from deciding to re-migrate and, on the other, will strengthen the social cohesiveness of the returnees.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the fact that migration from the rural areas to the cities is not just a north-south movement in Ghana, it is almost impossible to cover the entire nation in a single study. It is envisaged that the lessons learned from Northern Ghana would be indicative of the experience of the entire country because the study area fairly represents the distribution of country's internal migration. The major limitation of the study, however, was the issue of language. The researchers were not natives of Northern Ghana and therefore could not speak the *Dagbani, Gonja and Mampruli* languages which are the major languages spoken in Northern Ghana. As a result, the research team relied on translations provided by research assistants who were selected Rural and Community Development students from the Presbyterian University, Ghana and were fluent in the selected communities' languages. The risk of factual falsification was minimized because the researchers were knowledgeable about the significance of their research and proficient in research methods.

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