

Migrants' Assessment of Prospects in Migration: A Case Study of Conservancy Labourers in the University of Cape Coast, Ghana

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Introduction

In Ghana, the main pattern of migration is north–south, which is mostly from rural areas in the northern areas (comprising the Northern, Upper West and Upper East Regions) to urban centres in the southern areas (covering the remaining seven regions) of the country. North–south migration was initiated during the colonial era through a policy of forced labour recruitment of men from the then Northern Territories to the mining and construction industries in the southern parts of the country. Since then, migration has become a colonial legacy, as people from the three northern regions continue to migrate voluntarily to the southern sector of the country in search of job opportunities (Anarfi *et al.* 2003; Songsore 2003; Tsegai 2005; Tanle 2010).

In general, compared with the northern parts of the country, the southern possess better natural resources and therefore enjoy increased socio-economic activities, which makes these areas centres of development and growth, while the three northern regions have remained underdeveloped. Also, further socio-economic developments by successive governments continue to widen the gap between the northern and southern parts of the country (Addo 1980; Tsegai 2005; Kwankye *et al.* 2007; Abane 2008; Tanle 2014).

A number of studies have been conducted on various aspects of north–south migration in Ghana, some of which have focused on remittances from migrants to their home villages, migration as a livelihood strategy adapted by the migrants, migration and agricultural productivity, and migration and development of northern Ghana (Songsore 2003; Geest 2010; Tanle 2010). Although migration has generally been recognized as a strategy aimed at improving the socio-economic status of migrants, little is known about how migrants themselves assess the prospects associated with migration. This paper focuses on the conservancy labourers in the University of Cape Coast who are migrants from the three northern regions of the country. The main objectives of the paper are to assess the motives for migration and the migrants' views on prospects associated with migration. The study contributes to the

current debate on migration and livelihood and also adds to the existing literature on migration.

Conceptual and Theoretical Issues

Migration can be defined as a temporary or permanent change of usual place of residence from one geographical area to another within a given time period. It can be classified into various forms, such as internal or international, and voluntary or involuntary migration. Internal migration is movement within the same country, while international migration involves the crossing of one or several international borders, resulting in a change in the legal status of the individual concerned (International Organization for Migration 2003). This paper focuses on internal migration from the three northern regions to the Cape Coast metropolis located in the southern part of Ghana.

The study is guided by the 'push-pull' theory of Everett Lee (1966) and the theory of the circular process of cumulative causation of Gunnar Myrdal (1957). In 1966, Everett Lee developed a theoretical framework to analyse factors which predispose people to migrate. The push factors include deteriorating socio-economic conditions in an area of origin, which literally 'force' people to move out of such localities. The pull factors include the attractions or the socio-economic opportunities available at a destination (Arango 2000; Stock 2004; de Haas 2008). One of the merits of the push-pull theory of migration is that it identifies a set of unique factors at origins and destinations that influence migration. The uniqueness of both places of origin and destination can inform analysis of motives and patterns of migration (Conway & Cohen 1998). The migration of people from the three northern regions to work in the University of Cape Coast as conservancy labourers may be a response to the push and pull factors at the places of origin and destination, respectively.

The theory of the circular process of cumulative causation was first developed by Gunnar Myrdal (1957). It provides a general perspective on the uneven distribution of development, the concentration of economic activities at one locality at the expense of another. The theory holds that deepening spatial and personal income inequalities between periphery and core regions inevitably marks development that is dictated by market economic forces. Consequently, internal and external economies of scales will perpetuate and deepen the differences between periphery and core, such that a periphery area will be characterized by general poverty and underdevelopment while a core area constantly experiences accelerated economic development (Abane 2008; de Haas 2008). Although the periphery region can benefit from positive 'spread

effects' from the core by way of increased demand for agricultural raw materials and labour, the 'backwash effects' in the form of stagnating growth and limited economic opportunities can outweigh the benefits. The assumption underlying the theory is that there is no government intervention; market forces alone dictate the pace of development between the periphery and core regions.

Relating the theory to internal migration in Ghana, it has been noted that the unequal socio-economic development in the country has created two main economic zones, namely the northern and southern zones. The northern zone is characterized by poor physical conditions, a perceived lack of natural resources, poor health and educational facilities, and widespread poverty. On the other hand, the southern zone is endowed not only with better natural resources but also the presence of quality infrastructural facilities, which have boosted socio-economic development, making regions in the south centres of development and growth while the northern regions remain largely underdeveloped (Abane 2008). Consequently, a migration gradient is established whereby people from the three northern regions tend to migrate to the southern parts of the country for various reasons.

Data and Methods

A qualitative research approach was adopted in order to understand and explain how the conservancy labourers assess prospects associated with their migration. The instruments comprised both in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion (FGD) guides. The questions covered background characteristics, factors that influence migration, and assessment of prospects in migration. The field assistants—four National Service Personnel from both the Department of Population and Health and of Geography and Regional Planning—were given a day's training on the instruments. Using the snowball sampling procedure, four IDIs were conducted in each of the six traditional halls of residence in the university, namely Kwame Nkrumah Hall, Valco Hall, Casely Hayford Hall, Atlantic Hall, Adheye Hall, and Oguaa Hall, providing a total of 24 respondents. In addition, two FGDs were conducted: one at the old site of the university, with six participants drawn from Atlantic, Adheye, and Oguaa halls; and the other at the new site of the university, with the same number of participants drawn from Kwame Nkrumah, Valco, and Casely Hayford halls. With the consent of the respondents, the interviews/discussions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. Through content analysis, the relevant sections of the data were teased out and discussed in line with the objectives stated.

Study Area

The three northern regions of Ghana (Northern, Upper East, and Upper West) constitute the places of origin of the migrants. These areas lie in the savannah agro-ecological zone, which is characterized by a mono-modal rainy season defined by an annual estimated mean rainfall of 1,100 mm (Nyarko 2007). Rainfall over this region exhibits temporal and spatial variability. To understand the social and economic value of the annual rains and their effects on migration, it is important to define the period when rainfall is agronomically useful (Laux 2009). A trend analysis of rainfall data revealed no clear pattern as regards onset and cessation of rainfall over these areas. Therefore, with the high variability in the onset of the rainfall dates, farmers in these areas have difficulties in deciding when to start with their sowing preparations. According to Laux (*ibid.*), the onset of rainfall (Figure 1a) and cessation of rainfall (Figure 1b) in the northern part of the country shows a similar pattern.

Aside from the onset of the rainfall, dry spells are an important measure of agriculture activities in this region. Within the rainy season, it has been observed that a lack of rainfall for more than six consecutive days at a site constitutes a dry spell and affects crop physiology. This northern sector of the country is sensitive to climate variability, and farmers and pastoralist have to contend with the extreme conditions caused by *El Niño Southern Oscillation*

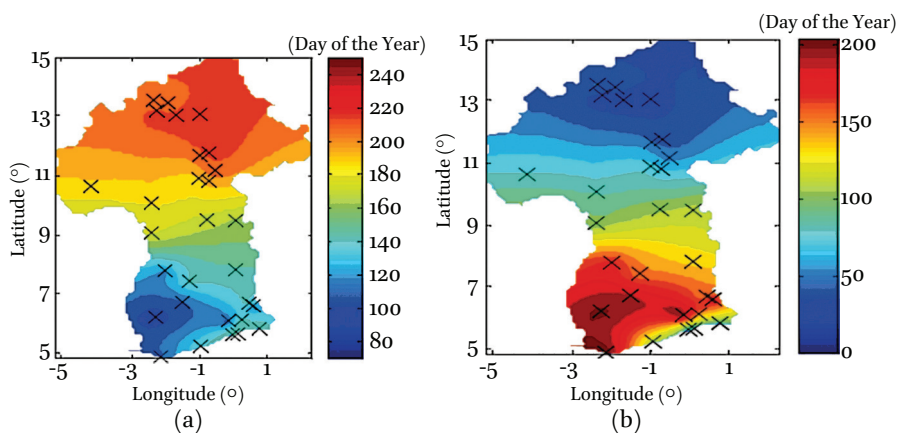


FIGURE 1 (a) Onset of the rainy season (b) Rainy season length.

SOURCE: P. LAUX (2009), *STATISTICAL MODELING OF PRECIPITATION FOR AGRICULTURAL PLANNING IN THE VOLTA BASIN OF WEST AFRICA*. IMK-IFU, GERMANY.

(ENSO) and extended dry spells. The soils are also generally infertile. Although agriculture is the main livelihood activity in these areas, cultivation is seasonal due to the short duration of rainfall. This encourages seasonal migration to the southern part of the country.

The available socio-economic indicators generally show that the three northern regions together have the worst socio-economic conditions. About 80% of the adult population have never received formal education, poverty is widespread (Tanle 2010), and infant and maternal mortality rates are above the national averages. Owing to inadequate government investment in the area, agriculture constitutes the population's main occupation, with about eight out of ten people engaged in agriculture compared with fewer than five out of ten in other regions (Ghana Statistical Service 2012).

The Cape Coast metropolis, which is the destination of the migrants, is bounded to the south by the Gulf of Guinea, to the west by the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem Municipal, to the east by the Abura Asebu Kwamankese District, and to the north by the Twifu Hemang Lower Denkyira District (Figure 2). The metropolis covers an area of 122 square km and is the smallest metropolis in the country. The capital, Cape Coast, is also the capital of Central Region and was the first national capital of the Gold Coast (now Ghana).

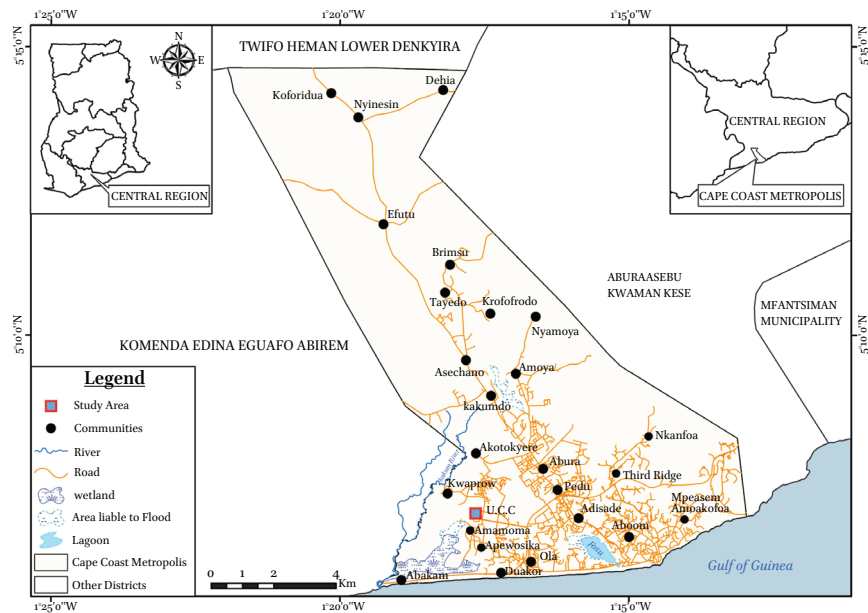


FIGURE 2 Map of the study area.

The Cape Coast metropolis has an estimated population of 169,894, comprising 48.7% males and 51.5% females. The metropolis is 77% urbanized and has a 90% literacy rate, which is higher than the national average of 74.1%. Although farming thrives in the northern part of the metropolis, fishing is the main source of livelihood along the southern coastline (Ghana Statistical Service 2012). The Cape Coast metropolis is endowed with historical, traditional, and cultural resources, which have made it a tourism destination of the country.

All parts of the metropolis are connected by roads that are motorable throughout the year. Over 90% of the residents have access to potable water, and the main source of lighting is electricity from the national grid. The metropolis has a wide range of banking and health facilities. The main industry of the town is formal education. Besides the University of Cape Coast, the Cape Coast Polytechnic, and the OLA Training College, it has some of the best first- and second-cycle institutions in the country.

When it became the first national capital of Ghana, it attracted migrants from the three northern regions, and since then people from the three northern regions continue to migrate to Cape Coast in search of employment, particularly in the University of Cape Coast.

Results

This section presents the results, which cover background characteristics of the respondents and factors that influence their migration and assessment of migration prospects.

Background Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents were mostly males aged between 25 and 45 years who were married but had only basic education or no formal education. They hailed from the three northern regions and were mainly of Mole-Dagbani and Gruni ethnic background. Most of them had lived in Cape Coast for at least ten years. The background characteristics of the respondents, particularly their age, sex, and level of education, are consistent with the findings of some previous studies: migrants from the three northern regions are mostly young and illiterates males (Songsore 2003; Geest 2005; Kwankye *et al.* 2007; Tanle 2010, 2014).

Factors that Influence Migration

The factors that influence migration from the three northern regions to the Cape Coast metropolis are analysed within the context of the two theoretical perspectives outlined above.

Push Factors at Places of Origin

Information from the interviews indicates that many varied economic, socio-cultural, and physical factors literally pushed the respondents to migrate from the three northern regions to the Cape Coast metropolis, where they now work as conservancy labourers in the University of Cape Coast. Unfavourable economic situations or factors such as inadequate job opportunities, inability to pay fees at school, and poor rainfall were some of the reasons given for out-migration from the northern sector to the Cape Coast metropolis. The following interview excerpts illustrate these factors:

I came here to look for a job to better my life but initially I was in Takoradi and later I decided to come to Cape Coast because I couldn't do anything with the school education I had. After school there was no work for me because I didn't get good grades and I couldn't also better my grades because I didn't have money to register the courses again to write the exam. From my hometown, I went to the rubber factory in Takoradi and some of my relatives were also living in Cape Coast, so I told them that I was looking for a job because the Takoradi job was paying less. I had a friend here who was like a brother to me, so I told him also and he told me that the university is looking for conservancy labourers, so he would send my name. After some time, he called to tell me that my name is in the list of names that the university had picked as labourers. (Male, 35 years, senior high school graduate)

When I was in school, issues of money were very hard for my mother. I used to join my brothers to Sunyani to work as a farm labourer so that I can pay my fees and also use some to take care of my mother. That is what my brothers and I used to do till I went to Takoradi and finally to Cape Coast here to work as a conservancy labourer and get money to take care of my mother at home. (Male, 39 years, junior high school graduate)

In the north, we were farmers, and the rainfall pattern was not reliable; and also I have large mouths to feed. Sometimes when we cultivate our

crops they don't do well because the land was not fertile and we would have losses. (Male, 35 years, no formal education)

I was a farmer. When I plant, the rains were not consistent. Sometimes it doesn't rain at all for a long period of time; other times, it rains heavily and the crops are destroyed. This usually results in low yield. The soil was also not very fertile. This is because heavy rainfall washes away all the nutrients in the soil, while absence of rainfall makes the land too hard for crop survival. As the plants lack water, they begin to die. The low yields from my farm compelled me to migrate to Cape Coast. (Male, 31 years, no formal education)

Pull Factors at Destination

The main pull factor or attraction to the Cape Coast metropolis, as reported in the interviews, is the possibility of gaining employment in the formal sector, particularly in the University of Cape Coast. This was the main motive for most people who migrated from the three northern regions to the metropolis, as illustrated in the following interview excerpts:

Well, I migrated to Cape Coast because I was not having any better job doing at my home town; and because I did not have a good formal education, I could not access any good job. In fact, living conditions wasn't easy. I do very tedious work and do not earn much. My brother motivated me when he last visited our home town that he was into clothing business, which at least offered him good money and he could bring me to Cape Coast for us to be doing that together. After working with him for some time, he got a job for me at the sanitary section of the University of Cape Coast. (Male, 32 years, junior high school graduate)

I came to Cape Coast to look for a job. I knew a teacher who comes from the north and works in the university. I went to him to assist me find job and he helped me get a job in the university. I was first at Atlantic Hall and was later transferred to Casely Hayford Hall. I worked for four years in that hall, and later I was taken to Oguaa Hall and I worked there for four years and was brought to Casely Hayford Hall, where I have worked for nine years. (Male, 48 years, no formal education)

I come from [...] in the Upper West Region. When I completed JHS and had nothing doing, I used to visit my people here who motivated me to be here, so that if any chance comes in their workplace [University of Cape Coast], they can help me get the chance to work with them. I finally got a

job in the university as a conservancy labourer. It is very difficult getting work to do at our home town, especially when you do not have good formal education. (Male, 34 years, junior high school graduate).

Views about Socio-Economic Status

The ultimate motive of most migrants is to improve upon their socio-economic status. In the study, the migrants were asked to assess their own socio-economic status, whether it had improved, had remained unchanged, or had instead deteriorated. From the results, most of them indicated that their status had improved in a number of ways, including acquisition of durable consumer goods, ability to build a house (either in Cape Coast or their home town) or rent their own accommodation, enrolment of their children in school, and ability to remit funds to relations at home. The following excerpts attest to the diverse ways the migrants reported on improvement in their socio-economic status:

There has been a significant change in my life compared to when I was in the Upper West Region. I see this change because now I'm married, I have two kids, and I have been able to put up my own house at Efutu, where I currently stay with my nuclear family. I also have everything in my room. I have television, DVD deck, furniture, and so on. My wife is also a food seller at Efutu Secondary School. (Male, 32 years, junior high school graduate).

I have been able to take care of my children in school. One is in the University of Ghana, Legon (Level 300), one is at the Fosu Senior High School (Form 1), and four other children are in the Basic School. Also, I have built a 4-bedroom house; I live in one of the rooms with my wife, and the others have been rented out. I own a television set, a refrigerator, computer, and other material things, but I don't have a bicycle, motor, or a car. (Male, 48 years, no formal education)

Migration has really done to me a lot of good. When I finish taking care of my siblings in school in my home town, my next agenda is to build a small house for myself and my nuclear family. (Male, 28 years, primary school graduate)

Besides caring for my nuclear family, I also cater for children of my siblings in my home town. I pay their school fees and buy clothing for them. Because my siblings are unemployed, they don't have money to take care of their own children. (Male, 34 years, junior high school graduate)

Discussion and Conclusions

From the interview excerpts, inadequate job opportunities at the places of origin (the three northern regions) account for migration to the southern parts of the country, particularly to the Cape Coast metropolis. This is consistent with some earlier studies, which also concluded that north–south migration in Ghana is largely induced by inadequate job opportunities in the northern sector compared with the southern (Plange 1979; Addo 1980; Songsore & Denkabe 1995; Anarfi *et al.* 2003; Songsore 2003; Tsegai 2005; Lentz 2006; Kwankye *et al.* 2007; Abane 2008; Tanle 2010, 2014). It is important to note that both colonial and post-colonial government policies on socio-economic development in Ghana were concentrated in the southern sector of the country at the expense of the northern sector (Plange 1979; Songsore & Denkabe 1995; Anarfi *et al.* 2003; Songsore 2003; Tsegai 2005; Abdul-Korah 2006; Tanle 2010). This was due to the fact that the southern sector is more endowed than the northern sector with precious minerals, such as gold, diamond, bauxite, and manganese, and fertile soils favourable for cash crops such as cocoa and oil palm. Owing to this development gap, north–south migration is a common phenomenon in Ghana; as a result, although the north has 41% of the total land area of Ghana, the population of the three northern regions together has since 1970 been less than 20% of the country's total population (Ghana Statistical Service 2012).

The other economic factor which induced out-migration, as reported by some respondents in the study, is the inability to pay school fees. In Ghana, through the government's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy, pupils in basic schools (primary and junior high schools) do not pay school fees. However, they are expected to pay certain approved fees/levies, such as parent–teacher association fees; information, communication and technology fees; and examination fees. Some pupils from poor homes, whose parents cannot afford these fees/levies, either stop schooling and migrate to search for jobs in the southern sector or engage in menial jobs during holidays to be able to pay their fees/levies—as indicated in one of the preceding excerpts (male, 39 years, junior high school graduate). Consequently, these graduates with low levels of formal education, including those who are illiterate, opt for migration to the southern parts of the country, where they engage in all kinds of menial jobs such as conservancy or sanitary work, like those in the University of Cape Coast.

Although most of the migrants were attracted by job opportunities in the University of Cape Coast in particular, the majority of them recounted that they gained employment as conservancy labourers in the university through various social networks, which usually contain a family relation, a friend, or a

known person who hails from the northern sector and lives in the Cape Coast metropolis, and who preferably works in the University of Cape Coast (see some of the preceding interview excerpts under the push and pull factors of migration). In both internal and international migration, social networks have been recognized as an important social mechanism that facilitates the migration process through various means, such as funding the cost involved in migration, arranging jobs in advance, and providing accommodation, food, and general security for new arrivals (Synnove 1999; Ardayfio-Schandorf & Awumbila 2005; Tanle & Awusabo-Asare 2007; Tanle 2010).

The unfavourable physical characteristics of the three northern regions, such as inadequate rainfall and poor soil, were mentioned as some of the major causes of out-migration from the northern to the southern sector. As indicated above, the northern sector is characterized by low, erratic, and seasonal rainfall lasting barely five months, with the rest of the year being hot and dry, and therefore farming becomes impossible without irrigation. It is worthy of note that rainfall patterns continue to change, food security has become unstable, and as a result people in the three northern regions are making efforts in order to improve their survival. Successive governments have, over the years, paid lip service to the need to provide irrigation facilities to supplement the low rainfall. In the Upper West Region, for example, the proposed Kaabaa irrigation project has been on the drawing board for decades, while the Tono and Vea irrigation dam is beset with a myriad problems, such as siltation, low water levels due to high rates of evaporation, and infestation by waterborne diseases such as bilharzia. The soils, which are mainly savannah ochrosols, are generally infertile; moreover, erosion, frequent bushfires, and continuous cropping have made them even more impoverished. Due to these poor physical conditions, the only option for some people, especially the young and energetic ones, is to migrate to the southern sector of the country (Songsore 2003; Lentz 2006). Previously, out-migration from the northern sector was mainly seasonal, but within the last three decades some seasonal migrants have become permanent migrants in the southern parts of the country, a fact which can be attributed partly to the deteriorating physical conditions (Braimoh 2004; Geest 2010). Perhaps this is evidence of climate change in the northern region.

Migration is generally perceived as one option through which migrants can improve upon their socio-economic status (Geest 2010; Tanle 2010, 2014). The views of the migrants were unanimous on the fact that through migration their socio-economic status had improved, through acquiring household durable goods, living in decent rented accommodation, building their own houses (either in Cape Coast or in their home towns), providing quality education for their children, and catering for the education of their siblings and/or their

siblings' children at home. Although this finding is based on their own subjective assessment, it is consistent with the findings of some previous qualitative studies: migrants' socio-economic status improves at their destination (Tanle & Awusabo-Asare 2007; Geest 2010; Tanle 2010; Yendaw *et al.* 2013; Tanle 2014). It is instructive to note that conservancy labourers earn the lowest salary among the junior staff of the university, yet they claim that their socio-economic status has improved. This is to be expected if one compares their status before and after migration (see excerpt above from the male, 32 years, junior high school graduate, under views about socio-economic status).

From the findings, some household or family members at the places of origin also benefit from improvement in the socio-economic status of migrants, through remittances and the funding of education of close relations and/or their children. This gesture, which supports children's education in deprived communities at the places of origin, can contribute to poverty reduction, since the three northern regions are the three poorest in the country (Ghana Statistical Service 2014).

In conclusion, the study revealed that the conservancy labourers who work in the various halls of residence in the University of Cape Coast are mostly migrants who hail from parts of the three northern regions of the country. Inadequate job opportunities and the possibility of being employed in the university constituted the push and pull factors at the origin and destination, respectively. Although these migrants fall within the lowest income bracket in the university, from their point of view their socio-economic status has improved, particularly when compared with their status before migrating.

Policy Recommendations

The study revealed that inadequate socio-economic opportunities and poor physical characteristics account for out-migration from the northern to the southern parts of Ghana. Although some households benefit from migration, the three northern regions have over the last three decades remained classified as the three poorest regions in the country. There is therefore the need for conscious efforts by government and other stakeholders to bridge the gap of unequal socio-economic development between the north and the south. In this regard, the SADA (Savannah Accelerated Development Authority) project, which is a development fund initiated by government to bridge the wide socio-economic gap between the northern and the southern parts of the country, is a step in the right direction and needs to be given all the necessary technical and political support.

With the increasing evidence of climate change in the country, the rainfall regime in the three northern regions could become even worse in terms of onset, amount, and duration. This means that irrigation farming will have to be promoted as an alternative to the rain-fed agriculture practised in the area since time immemorial. The other complex natural hazard, which develops slowly, is difficult to detect, and has many facets in any single region, is drought (Morid *et al.* 2006). The three northern regions, and even the entire country's economy, is strongly dependent on rain-fed agriculture; however, droughts pose a potential huge future risk. Droughts have already contributed to human migration, cultural separation, and loss of properties. Several people in northern Ghana have already suffered from the impact of drought; this is exacerbated by health problems such as guinea worm infestation, diarrhoea, and malaria. The economic loss from drought in 1983 in northern Ghana, where agriculture is the mainstay of about 80% of the population, is valued at several millions of dollars (Songsore 2003; Braimoh 2004; Yaro 2006; Tanle 2010).

Migrants could form associations through which they could provide some socio-economic support to schools, healthcare centres, and agricultural inputs to supplement government efforts in the three northern regions. Child fostering should be encouraged among out-migrants resident in the southern parts of the country. Building the human capital of such fostered children, through formal education and/or skills training, could enable them to contribute to the socio-economic development of the northern parts of the country.

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