

SOME DEVELOPMENTAL EFFECTS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF SKILLED LABOUR FROM GHANA

By

Alex B. Asiedu

Department of Geography and Resource Devt.

University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana

E-mail – abasiedu@ug.edu.gh

INTRODUCTION

The debate on the effects of migration of skilled labour from developing countries continues to intensify in recent years as more and more academic research and gatherings and civil society actions respond to the increasing outflow of skilled professionals to the developed world and its resultant effect on the socio-economic development of these relatively less endowed countries.

Fuelled largely by increasing demand for skilled labour in a more competitive global market place, advanced developed countries have adopted various selectivity policies to woo people with the requisite technical skills and backgrounds and trained with the meagre resources that is available in these source regions to help augment their depleting skilled manpower resources. As a result of the poaching of best brains that developing countries need so badly to engender growth and development, developed countries are now being perceived to be undermining the development agenda of poor countries (Skeldon, 2005).

Whilst agreeing to the fact that some levels of skilled emigration of labour is necessary for the integration of developing countries in to the global economic system, especially as it relates to further skills acquisition, remittances and other beneficial effects associated with emigration, Lowell et..al.(2002) have cautioned that large outflows are detrimental to the smooth and sustained development of these emerging and lagging economies, implying the need for some restrictions in skilled labour outflows from developing countries.

Given this background, the paper focuses on some of the developmental effects of international migration of skilled labour from Ghana and interrogates the widely held view that that these migrations hold back socio-economic development in developing economies. Ghana provides a very ideal setting for this study because of the long history that is associated with the migration of her citizens abroad for the pursuit of further education or employment and the continued existence of strong familial ties and bonds between these expatriate communities and the people of their motherland (Akyeampong, 2000,. Anarfi. et.al., 2005, Asiedu, 2005). Contemporary anecdotal evidence indicates that close to four million Ghanaians reside outside the borders of the country . Among these non-resident citizens are professional trained with the taxpayers money and whose services are badly needed for national development. In recent years however these expatriates have become major sources of critical resource mobilization for national development. Skeldon (2005) has further elucidated that Ghana represents one of the countries in the developing world that has experienced substantial and protracted outflows of her skilled labour due to some post independence political and economic difficulties, yet the country has persevered and in recent years regained her position as one of countries in sub-Saharan Africa with the highest human development index. It appears therefore that these movements out of Ghana do not appear to have seriously prejudiced the national development agenda. The question that arises from the above accounts is that – Has Ghana gained or lost in this exchange.

The specific focus of the paper is to provide answers to the question above by (a) reviewing the literature on relationships between globalization, international migration of skilled labour and remittances and other related benefits (b) using Ghana as a case study, attempt a discussion on the positive and negative aspects of this migratory process and (c) provide recommendations towards enhancing the benefits associated with these movements.

THEORIES ON SKILLED LABOUR MIGRATION AND POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Highly skilled workers” sometimes also referred to as “Professionals, Technical and Kindred (PTK) workers” are generally and collectively workers who are in executive

and managerial positions as well as professionals such as accountants, lawyers and doctors. Martin (2003) defines them as *workers with more than a high-school diploma or secondary education, usually at least a college/university degree or equivalent work experience*. Iredale (2001) simply defines “highly skilled” workers as *professionals with a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field*.

Highly skilled migrants represent an increasingly large component of global migration streams. The phenomenon is not new but numbers and trends are changing rapidly (Iredale, 2001). Highly skilled workers have moved from industrial to developing countries as expatriates for decades. However, the number of such workers moving from developing to developed countries increased substantially in the 1990s for various reasons (Lowell and Findlay, 2000; Martin, 2003).

It has been estimated that there are 1.5 million professionals from developing countries in the industrialised countries alone, with the types of movements including permanent settlement, temporary migration both within and outside multinational corporations, refugee flows and family reunion (Iredale, 2001). Estimates indicate that there are losses of between 10 and 30 % of the highly educated workforce from developing countries (Lowell and Findlay, 2002)

Most of the developed countries consider the migration of skilled workers as way of filling skilled labour shortages, whereas other countries utilise skilled migrants to improve the “stock” of brains (Iredale, 2001). Attracting highly skilled human resources has become one major aim of the immigration policies of industrialised countries. However, from the standpoint of the countries of origin, emigration of skilled labour is serious as such resources represent one means of consolidating the advanced sectors of their economies (Pellegrino, 2001).

It has become conventional in migration studies to assume that movements between points of origin and destination are instigated by pull factors at the origin and push factors within the point of destination. Various extensions, interpretations and contextualizations have however been applied to this notion to reflect varying situations and circumstances. Based on this preamble, three (3) theories have been

used to explain the migration of skilled labour – the human capital theory, the structuralist neo-Marxist macro level approach and the “structuration” approach.

The human capital theory, explains that people move to find employment and remuneration more appropriate for their formal education and training.. The main assumption governing this theory is the absence at the points of origin of the basic, requisite resources or inputs needed to attain what is required for delivery of optimal service in ones professional practice. The second body of theory, structuralist neo-Marxist macro level approach assesses the impact of gender, race, class on this migratory process. It as well assesses the impact of differences between rich core and peripheral nations as a result of migration of skilled labour. This approach shuns institutional factors such as ethnic or other networks, various types of agents or the role of professional/industry unions. The third body of theory, the “structuration” approach incorporates individuals, structural and institutional (structuration) elements in the international skilled migration process. Gross and Lindquist (1995, cited in Iredale (2001), proposed this approach. They argued that both private capital and the state are engaged in active recruitment to fill labour needs, and that there are important individual and organisational agents who do not only provide the employment opportunities that motivate migration, but also directly recruit workers and exert indirect control over recruitment by setting qualifications for employment.

According to Iredale (2001) professional migrants can be classified under the following themes or subgroups -.

- (i) Motivation for migration
- (ii) Nature of source and destination
- (iii) Channel or mechanism of migration
- (iv) Length of stay at destination
- (v) Mode of incorporation into destination economies
- (vi) National/International professionals

It has however been noted that none of these typologies can best explain the process of skilled labour migration adequately calling for more studies on the subject matter (Iredale, 2001).

Immigration of the highly skilled labour is becoming increasingly an inseparable segment of national technology and economic development policies. With certain sets of skills and competencies being so specialised, or in short supply, they are being sourced on a global basis. Because some whole classes of jobs are being sourced globally, the increased internationalisation of labour markets posits both challenges and opportunities for the formation of human capital at the national level.

The flux of the migration of highly skilled workers varies not only across types of professions but also with the type of work. Mahroum (2001) identified five major groups of professions:

- i) Senior Managers and Executives
- ii) Engineers and Technicians
- iii) Scientists
- iv) Entrepreneurs
- v) Students

He further advised governments to play a positive or negative role in influencing incentives for highly skilled workers to stay or move abroad (Mahroum, 2001). Due to changing demographic trends and globalisation, there has been a growing change in legislation governing immigration to most EU member states. The main tendency has been to allow skilled immigration to occur in a legal and much facilitated form. Again, the motivation for this change has been due to pressing skill shortages and strong signals of imminent demographic decline without continued immigration. Changes in legislation governing immigration have included new categories of visa and work permits to facilitate entry procedures (Mahroum, 2001). For instance, there is now “entrepreneur’s visa” in the UK, “scientist visa” in France, and the “green card” in Germany and the United States of America.

Remittances which have become central in the debates on the benefits of skilled professional from developing economies are defined generally as the portion of a migrants earnings sent from the migrants destination to the place of origin. Although they can also be sent in kind, the term is usually limited to monetary and other cash transfers transmitted by migrant workers to their families and communities back

home. Recent global studies estimate that migrant remittances now surpass development assistance receipts in a number of developing economies such as Ghana (Ratha, 2003, cited in Addison, 2005). Remittances have also been theorised from different perspectives and two (2) of them are considered here (Cui, 2003).

First, remittances are viewed as part of family adaptive strategy to help diversify the family pattern of labour use, reduce risks and dependence on a single economic activity and maximise family rather than individual welfare. In other words, it serves as a means of ensuring family risk diversification and income maximization. In return the migrant receives emotional support and economic security in times of need.

Second, the migrant's altruism and self interest also influence these transfers. Transfers could be attributed to (a) fulfilment of family obligations and commitment to it (b) ensuring his self interest as the remittances is in exchange for the services provided to the migrant by the family (c) reducing risk to family back home and oneself during difficult periods, for example, when is out of job over a certain period.

MIGRATION OF SKILLED LABOUR FROM GHANA

Over the generations, people in Ghana have migrated in response to certain economic, political and related factors. These include population pressure on land, poor economic conditions, political persecutions and lack of democratic governance system, ethnic conflicts, and the effects of implementation of macroeconomic adjustment programmes like the structural and economic recovery programmes (Adepoju, 2005). Generally however Ghana's migration history shows a complex relationship between the economy and the political situation. Emigration from Ghana has to a large extent been influenced by periods of relative prosperity and stability, economic decline and/or political and social stability/insecurity. Anarfi et. al. (1999) have distinguished five periods in the migration history of Ghana: (i) the period of net immigration and minimal emigration; (ii) the period of initial emigration; (iii) the phase of large scale emigration; and (iv) the period of intensification and diasporisation of Ghanaians. Acheampong (2000) has similarly isolated phases in the migration history of Ghana, but particularly based on the political history of the country.

During the colonial era in Ghana, the prospering cocoa farms in the then Gold Coast attracted migrants from other countries in West Africa, even up to the immediate post-independence era (1957-1965). Emigration from Ghana during this period was mainly for education and /or training, shipping, trading and foreign service postings (Anarfi et. al., 1999).

The decline in the economy of Ghana around 1965 and the enforcement of the Aliens Compliance Order of 1970 contributed to make Ghana unattractive to immigrants. At the same time, the general malaise of the economy led to mass migration of Ghanaians to foreign countries in search of jobs. Majority of these migrants included professionals such as university lecturers, school teachers, lawyers, medical doctors, engineers and administrators. There were also those who travelled for education and/or training but extended their stays after completing their respective programmes of study.

At the beginning of the 1980s, there occurred substantial migration of unskilled, semi-skilled workers and professionals out of the country due to the virtual collapse of the national economy and the institution of a very repressive government in 1981 following a military overthrow of the then civilian government. During this phase, Ghana lost most of its trained personnel through emigration. For instance, in the early 1980s about 13% of the 163 paid-up members of the Ghana Institute of Architects had addresses in Nigeria. The migration was precipitated by loss of faith in Ghana's future as successive military and civilian regimes mismanaged the economy (Anarfi et. al., 1999). This trend continued into the mid and late 1980s with the economy assuming a negative growth path. Anarfi. et.al (1999) describes this period as the onset of the diasporization of Ghanaians. The growing numbers of Ghanaians abroad was accompanied by growth of second generation Ghanaians abroad with most of them continuing to maintain their links and identity with Ghana.

VOLUME AND CHARACTERISTICS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS

i. Volume of International Migrants

Available data fall short of what would be needed to discuss Ghanaian international migration, particularly the volume and characteristics of migrants (Twum-Baah, 2005). Despite a trend towards greater diversity, most migrants into or out of Ghana have involved only a few countries with special links or within the same geographic region. Political and historical ties such as those between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries also influence the direction of Ghanaian international migration flows. Recent political crises and changes in the fortunes within the sub-region have reduced the significance of the intra-regional migration streams, in favour of American and European destinations and South Africa to some extent.

Arrival and departure statistics for 1999 to 2002 show that on balance there is more movement out of the country than into it. Movement out of the country through documented channels more than doubled from 208,897 in 1999 to 440,430 in 2002 before declining slightly thereafter. On the other hand, movement into the country almost quadrupled from 112,323 in 1999 to 432,805 in 2001 before declining to 315,000 in 2002 (Twum-Baah, 2005).

The national concern about the emigration of Ghanaians is with the emigration of highly skilled professionals. The clamour is for such labour to return to Ghana to participate in the development process, but such calls need to be assessed against the background of migrants' motivation for leaving. An analysis of two sets of data from a migration research study conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service in 1991 revealed that majority of them left the country to seek employment or better employment opportunities (45.3%). More than half of them (28.8%) returned due to unfavourable political and social circumstances at their various destinations (Table 1)

Table 1: Reasons for Leaving and or Returning to Ghana by Migration Status

Reasons	International Return Migrants	
	Initial reason	Reason for Return
Work-Related	45.3	7.4
Join Family/Marriage	11.5	19.1
Better Living Conditions	-	1.4
Unfavourable Political and Social situations	2.4	28.8
Education Related	26.4	-
Objective of Migration Achieved	-	24.1
Other (disabled, retired, property)	13.2	15.8
Don't know/Can't tell/Not stated	1.1	3.4
Total N =	2169	2169

Source: Migration Research Study in Ghana (1991), Cited by Twum-Baah (2005)

Characteristics of International Migrants

The significance of international migration of skilled labour for national policy does not rest only on size, but also in its composition. Such characteristics as age and sex have profound implications for development in both the sending and receiving countries.

Males have been more numerous than females in the migrant stock. However, the proportionate share of female migrants increased noticeably from 41% in 1960 to 47% in 1990 as a result of higher levels of education for women and changing social norms, which have increased opportunities for women to migrate for overseas employment in their own right (Twum-Baah, 2005).

Available evidence show that Ghanaian emigrants, particularly to developed countries, are generally well educated, many with skills for immediate employment. There is a substantial number of Ghanaians involved in professional activities abroad. The United States Department of Justice data indicates that out of the number of Ghanaian immigrants admitted into the United States in the 1980s, about 15% were in

highly skilled occupations. In 2000, more than a third of the employed Ghanaian migrants were highly skilled and qualified, with implications for human resource development, utilisation and retention in Ghana (Twum-Baah, 2005).

BENEFITS OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

(i) Remittance Flows.

In Ghana, three methods have often been used in research to estimate remittance flows; the use of balance of payments estimates, micro or household surveys of recipients of remittances, and through banks or financial institutions in origin countries where the focus is on the resource transfer institutions.

According to the balance of payments data, total transfers to the Ghanaian economy ranged between US\$400 million in 1990 and US\$900 million in 2002. In terms of the regional flows of remittances, the USA and Canada appear to be the most important sources. For instance, between March and June 2004 a total of about US\$100.6 million of inward remittances were received from USA and Canada (Table 2). This was followed by the United Kingdom which recorded about US\$50.6 million, the European Union US\$25 million, others US\$ 9.2 million, ECOWAS US\$5.8 million, and the rest of Africa US\$2.8 million (Addison, 2005).

Table 2: Source of Private Inward Remittances Receipts (US\$ million) – (March-June 2004).

	March	April	May	June	Total
United Kingdom	11.3	4.7	11.8	22.7	50.5
USA and Canada	29.7	23.5	24.0	23.5	100.7
European Union	7.2	6.1	4.7	7.4	25.4
ECOWAS	0.8	0.5	3.8	0.7	5.8
Rest of Africa	1.1	0.7	0.5	0.5	2.8
Others	4.3	1.6	1.5	1.7	9.1
TOTAL	54.4	37.1	46.3	56.5	194.3

Source: Addison (2005)

One major impact of remittances is its effect on the current account of the balance of payment. Remittances help in raising national income by providing foreign exchange and raising national savings and investment as well as by providing hard currency to finance essential imports thereby curtailing any balance of payments crisis (Adelman and Taylor, 1990; cited in Addison, 2005). The Bank of Ghana's estimates of the balance of payments suggest that remittances placed second after exports in terms of resource inflow in 2003.

Essentially, the growth effect of remittances in receiving economies is likely to lead to an increase in savings and subsequently in investment. Migrant workers' remittances come in as a component of foreign savings and complements national savings by increasing the total pool of resources available for investment.

The difficulty involved in raising enough and cheap capital in developing countries to finance investment activities implies that remittances can serve this purpose. In Ghana, migrants also send money for the purposes of setting small-scale businesses on their behalf. Aside from the income it generates, employment opportunities are created for the youth in the respective localities (Addison, 2005).

Another important macroeconomic impact of remittances is its impact on poverty reduction and income redistribution. This is based on the fact that recipients of remittances are often low-income families whose offspring left the country to work abroad. In this case, migration is perceived as a response to escape poverty at home and improve the income-earning capacity of the migrant by attempting to enter foreign labour markets in richer countries. At the same time, migration serves to alleviate the poverty of the migrant's family in the home country by supporting their income through transfers that are essentially needed for financing education of younger folks, paying the hospital bills of aged relatives and other family members and supporting investments in critical sectors of the national economy such as agriculture, small scale manufacturing, trading and information technology-related enterprises.. On the other hand, there is a tendency for the recipients of remittances to be dependent on remittances. This in turn can impair efforts to escape from poverty through education

and work by the recipients of remittances. According to Black et.al (2004) the remittance culture can create dependency and lack of work motivation on the part of younger members of the society who depend on remittances rather than finding a livelihoods for themselves. In addition, if not carefully utilised, the injection of huge levels of these remittances into the economic system for consumption related purposes without recourse to productive and investment related ventures that can generate multiplier effects for further economic development can lead to the generation of inflationary pressures in the national economy.

(ii) Contribution of Returned Skilled Migrants

Using data derived from the Trans-National Migration Return and Development (Transrede) study conducted by the Institute for Statistical Social and Economic Affairs of the University of Ghana, Anarfi et. al (2005) concluded that more than half return migrants were in the economically active age of 30 and 49 years. Thus return migrants are not returning home on retirement, but are actively working and could therefore be useful in Ghana’s development efforts.

Over 70% of skilled return migrants worked in professions that related to their various fields of specializations (Table 3) .

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Return Migrants by Occupation Type after Return

Occupation Type	Percentage Skilled Migrants after Return
Unemployed	0.0
Media/Communication	3.3
Self-employed	6.6
Professional	73.1
Sales/Marketing	2.6
Other	12.5
Not Stated	2..9
Total	100.0

Source: Anarfi et. al. 2005

The Transrede study further showed that three in every four return migrants decided to return and settle permanently at home. For the skilled return migrants, 86% and 76% of the male and female respondents respectively decided to return permanently. Also,

it was observed that 70% of the return migrants themselves decided to return home without any one else playing any role; which points to the high level of independence most migrants have in making their own decisions in return migration. This suggests that any appeal for return should be made directly to migrants themselves.

(iii) Benefits of Migrants Return Visits to Relatives and Friends

Migrants have an emotional attachment to their birthplace or place of origin, which is often manifested through return visitations of migrants to friends and relatives for the purposes of re-establishing old ties and re-affirming blood relations. This is referred to as ‘visiting friends and relatives’ (VFR) tourism.

In a study to examine the benefits accruing from return visits of Ghanaian migrants in the United Kingdom, Asiedu (2005) noted that the health sector attracted the highest number of donations accounting for 37% of the total. It was followed by the education sector (34%), while donations to socially and physically handicapped in institutions accounted 17%. The donations came from 17 countries during the period of the research (between 2001 and 2002) and were donated by individual philanthropist (31.6%) groups and associations (68.4%). The United States topped the list with 40% of donations, followed by the United Kingdom with and Germany with 13.2% each. The goods donated included new and used cars, health and education equipments, essential drugs, used and new clothings, shoes and vehicles.

Asiedu (2005) further observed that even though the major underlying objective of the donations was to alleviate poverty, against the background of Ghana’s poverty indicators, the poorest regions made up of the Upper West, Upper East and the Northern regions benefited only marginally from the donations (4.2 percent) while the relatively wealthier Greater Accra, Ashanti, Eastern and Central regions received most of the donations (65.2%)(Table 4). It is therefore most unlikely that these benefits ‘trickled down’ sufficiently to help poverty alleviation in the most impoverished regions.

Table 4: Regional Distribution of Benefits

Region	Total Number of Donations (2001-2002)	Percentage
G. Accra	36	22.0
Ashanti	25	15.2
Eastern	24	14.6
Western	10	6.1
Central	22	13.4
Brong Ahafo	16	9.8
Volta	10	6.1
Northern	2	1.2
Upper East	3	1.8
Upper West	2	1.2
National	14	8.5
Total	164	100.0

Source: Asiedu (2005)

Again to examine the effectiveness of the donations in alleviating poverty, Asiedu (2005) noted that the metropolitan areas of Accra-Tema, Kumasi, Sekondi, Takoradi and Tamale received close to 26% of the donations while 27% went to other urban areas (Table 5). Rural areas in general received more than a third of the donations but it is most probable that most of these donations went to the rural areas in southern Ghana at the expense of their most deprived counterparts in the three northern regions.

Table 5: Local Areas Receiving Benefits (2001-2002)

Locality	Number Received	% Involved
Metropolitan Areas	43	25.9
Other Urban Areas	45	27.1
Rural Areas	60	36.2
Entire Region	1	0.6
National	17	10.2
Total	166	100.0

Source: Asiedu (2005)

Expatriates on return visits also reported substantial use of local products and services, especially food and drink and this generated direct revenue and also had an appreciable multiplier effects in agriculture, transportation and handicraft sectors of the Ghanaian economy.. They also reported making multiple visits to local banks, exchange bureaux, restaurants and chop bars during their stay here in Ghana (Asiedu, 2005)

Furthermore, it was also revealed that on average emigrants invested an equivalent of about £1965 in housing development and an average of £1210 in businesses during their last visits. These investments definitely created jobs and generated revenue for national development through the payment of taxes and other charges.

It has been shown that while abroad Ghanaian emigrants have variedly sent remittances primarily to support the welfare of family members in various spheres of human and physical development. At the same time the migrant undergoes a period of training and skills upgrading. Therefore the impact of return migration on development will depend to a large extent, on financial capital accumulation, the enhanced skills of migrant and individual programmes for their successful re-integration into Ghanaian society.

As noted earlier many return migrants have also used their remittances in physical projects, particularly housing, which go to increase the housing stock in Ghana. Housing investment has the ripple effects of generating jobs to a section of the population in construction industry and also improving upon the living standards of the population through increased availability of houses for a segment of the homeless and low income people.

In the area of education, a large proportion of return migrants embarked on further education while abroad, which might not have been possible if they had remained in Ghana. This is also a positive development considering the role of education as major vehicle for achieving a wide range of development goals, especially poverty reduction and the socio-economic advancement of certain marginalised sections of the Ghanaian society, especially women. .

CONCLUSION

Mahroum (2001) has asserted that the emigration of highly skilled workers from the developing world represents a “brain drain”, a transfer of human capital from one country to another whiles Martin (2003) has supported this viewpoint by indicating that the major beneficiaries of the migration of highly skilled are the migrants and their new host societies. Martin further alludes to fact that unlike trade, where the economic theory of comparative advantages suggests a tendency toward convergence, economic theory suggests that highly skilled workers’ migration can increase inequality by speeding up growth in destinations and slowing growth in sending countries.

Like most social processes the net impact of skilled emigration from developing countries is a balance of direct and indirect effects. The most direct effect of skilled emigration is a reduction in the number of educated workers who are critical to productivity and a developing country’s economic growth, but it also sets in play a

number of forces that can increase economic growth.

Findlay and Lowell (2002) believe that there are three major feed back effects of skilled emigration: (i) return migrants bring back their skills and work experience from abroad, thus boosting productivity; (ii) Expatriates who remain abroad contribute money via worker remittances; and (iii) expatriates transfer of knowledge or technology to developing countries can increase productivity and economic development.

The most effective and desirable way of managing international migration is not to tighten control but to co-operate, through bilateral and multilateral negotiations, on the modalities for the movement of persons across national borders in the same way as goods and capital are treated.

Sending and receiving countries must seek mutual advantage in orderly migration and regulated conditions for settling migrants, as well as strategies that support the sustainable development of sending countries. Managing international migration, if it is orderly based on bilateral or multilateral agreements, can have positive impacts on both the countries of origin and destination, providing the former with remittances and the latter with needed human resources. International migration of skilled labour also has the potential of facilitating exchange of skills and also helping to secure job avenues for the large streams of unemployed but skilful university graduates who have acquired various skills from our institutions of higher learning.

What is needed is more research on the impacts of skilled labour migration to help us assess their relative impacts on the various geographical spaces and professions in the country . This background information could help in the formulation of relevant policies on migration that is not likely to undermine the realization of our development policy objectives and targets as we make maximum use of the emigration in the era increasing demands for specialised skills fuelled by increasing production, labour shortages in the developed world and globalization.

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