

# RETURN MIGRANTS AND THE CHALLENGE OF REINTEGRATION: THE CASE OF RETURNEES TO KUMASI, GHANA.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes the nature of migrants' return to Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, and the strategies employed by the returnees to establish links with their relatives and friends, as well as reintegrate into their neighbourhoods, and participate fully in city life. Using interviews and observations carried out among 30 return migrants and some migrant associations, the paper concludes that return migration is a negotiated process among family members. Migrants face several challenges including finding accommodation and jobs, establishing contacts with former colleagues and friends, meeting the high expectations of extended family members, and adjusting to the poor infrastructural facilities in the city. Return migrants are able to surmount these difficulties with support from family members, friends, colleagues, and a host of social organizations and networks.

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## INTRODUCTION

Although a small number of Ghanaians has always migrated to neighbouring West African countries and overseas since the 1960s, it was not until the mid-1970s that Ghana experienced the mass migration of its nationals abroad. Besides Nigeria and Ivory Coast, the main destinations of Ghanaian migrants include the United States, Canada, and Western European countries, particularly the United Kingdom, Germany, Holland and Italy (Asiedu 2005; Anarfi et al 2004; Twum-Baah 2005; Manuh et al 2010). These migrants included highly skilled professionals such as lecturers, teachers, accountants, doctors, and nurses as well as unskilled workers including masons, carpenters, drivers, tailors, watchmen, cooks, etc. (Dei 1991; Asiedu 2010). By the mid-1990s the number of Ghanaians abroad was estimated at more than three million persons, constituting about 10-20 percent of the population (see Anarfi et al 2004; Peil 1995). As a result, the development of the “Ghanaian diaspora” began to take shape (Awumbila et al 2011; Manuh 2005; Nieswand 2009; Tonah 2007). The return of these migrants since early 1990 has been attributed to the stable political conditions, improvements in the economy in Ghana and the recent discovery of oil (Awumbila et al 2011).

While new migrants continue to leave Ghana in search of greener pastures abroad, an increasing number of Ghanaians who migrated abroad have been returning home; however, less attention is given to how these migrants survived on their return. In the past decade, following the expansion in the banking, telecommunication, and the services sectors, combined with the economic crises that have hit the Western industrialized countries which once served as the main destination points for Ghanaian migrants, an increasing number of Ghanaians abroad have been returning home for varied reasons (Kabki 2007; Orozco et al 2005; Smith 2007). Available data on return migration to Ghana indicates that 10 percent of emigrants return in any given year

(1999 Ghana Living Standard Survey cited in IOM 2009). Recent studies reveal that most of these return migrants remain in the urban centres, particularly Accra and Kumasi (Anarfi et al 2003; Taylor 2009).

So far, few studies have delved into how Ghanaian returnees reintegrate into the home community, and the challenges they face upon return. This study analyses the experiences of Ghanaians who have voluntarily returned to Kumasi, Ghana's second largest city, and examines some theoretical perspectives on return migration and reintegration. This is followed by a detailed description of the study area and the study population. The paper then examines the processes of reintegration and the experiences of return migrants to Kumasi. Thereafter, there is an analysis of the main challenges facing return migrants to the city. The paper concludes with an examination of the pathways towards the successful re-integration of return migrants to Ghana.

## **THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RETURN MIGRATION AND REINTEGRATION**

The process of return migration can be conceptualized under four main theoretical perspectives, namely, Neo-classical perspective, New Economic of Labour Migration Theory, Structural Approach and Transnational Approach.

According to the neo-classical perspective, the migration process is motivated by wage differentials between origin and destination countries, in which case migrants generally move from areas or countries with low wages to those with higher wages (Borjas 1989). Using this framework, Thomas (2008), argues that migrants will only return home if they fail to derive the expected benefit of higher earnings abroad (see also Constant and Massey 2002; Cassarino

2004). In contrast to the neoclassical theory, the New Economics of Labour Migration theory (NELM) considers return migration “as part of a defined plan conceived by migrants before their departure from their countries of origin” (Thomas 2008: 657). Adherents of this theory argue that the original plan of migrants includes designing an eventual return to their destinations after accumulating sufficient resources abroad. Therefore, most migrants leave home with the intention of acquiring skills, savings, and other resources that would be useful to them upon their return home. The time abroad is often considered a temporary enterprise, and most migrants are said to return home soon after they have achieved their goals (see Ammassari 2004).

Structural theories on return migration, on the other hand, stress the importance of the social, economic, and political conditions in the home countries, not only as major factors in the decision to return, but also as components affecting the ability of returning migrants to make use of the skills and resources that they have acquired abroad (Diatta and Mbow 1999; Thomas-Hope, 1999). Unlike the other two theories, structural theories of return migration do not consider the success of the migration experience abroad as a key factor in the decision to return; instead they focus on the productivity of return migrants after arriving home. Structural theorists argue that returnees may not be able to reintegrate and consequently may decide to leave again if the “gap” between their own norms and values and those at home is too large (Cassarino 2004). Alternatively, they may also respond to expectations at home by spending their savings on consumption or unproductive investments.

Transnationalism compared to the NE, NELM and Structural approaches, provides a better framework for explaining return and reintegration. It sees reintegration as a process of re-adaptation which may not entail the abandonment of the identities they acquire while abroad. Of course, returnees are faced with challenges of reintegration. Through regular contacts with their

households in countries of origin, as well as the back-and-forth movements which illustrate transnational mobility (Cassarino 2004; 2007; Portes 1999), they are able to better prepare and sustain their return and reintegration. Unlike the other three theories, explanations about the activities of migrants during and after migration between home and host countries further explain return and reintegration as a process which is sustained through advanced technology and telecommunication. In this respect, return migrants are more likely to be reintegrated through contacts with host countries; however, there is hardly any empirical evidence on how the transnational perspective helps us to understand return migration and reintegration in the Ghanaian context. More importantly, there is less critical attention on any evidence supporting the challenges faced by returnees despite their cross-border activities during their stay abroad; hence, the purpose of this study.

Within the context of this paper reintegration is defined as the process of give-and-take in the home country as return migrants learn to live with their families and communities back home (Kyei 2013). Preston (1993) argues that upon return from a chosen destination, the migrant needs to be reintegrated into the original society as it will be unrealistic to assume that the social and economic milieu to which migrants returned, had not changed since they left their communities (Potter 2005; Preston 1993). There is also the need to appreciate the different social settings of the two destinations in question. Several factors determine the extent to which migrants would be estranged upon their return home. These, according to N'Laoire (2007) include the age of the migrant prior to leaving home, the length of time spent abroad, the nature of contact with family members and friends back home, and the level of engagement in transnational activities.

## **THE STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODS**

### *THE STUDY AREA*

Kumasi, with an estimated population of 1.9 million inhabitants is Ghana's second largest city. The city is located about 270km (168 miles) north of the national capital Accra. The city lies within the transitional forest zone with an elevation of between 250 and 300 metres (820-984 feet) above sea level, and an area of about 254 square kilometres (98 square miles). The traditional capital of the Asante Kingdom and seat of the Asantehene, Kumasi is also the overlord of the Asante people in Ghana and regarded as one of Ghana's foremost cities of culture and tradition (Fynn 1971). Kumasi is a rapidly growing city which has incorporated many of the surrounding settlements into the metropolis as a result of rapid population growth and physical expansion (Dickson and Benneh 2001).

Kumasi is the commercial and administrative capital of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Besides being a main market for forest and agricultural produce, the city owes its wealth to the manufacturing of light industrial goods, the production of cloth, handicraft and working tools as well as for the processing of gold and other minerals. During the 1950s and 60s, Kumasi enjoyed a boom as a result of the large revenues accruing from the expansion in cocoa plantations, and wood processing. Kumasi has quite a number of prestigious health and educational institutions, including some of Ghana's best high schools, several universities, a teaching and referral hospital, and an airport (Dickson and Benneh 2001).

Although the indigenous Asante constitute the majority, Kumasi has a large number of migrants from all parts of Ghana and the neighbouring West African countries. Kumasi is also

well known for its residents who have migrated abroad. Many of the city's residents were pioneers in the migration trail from Ghana to other parts of West Africa, Western Europe and North America during the 1970s and 80s. Indeed, more of Ghana's diaspora population trace their origin to Kumasi (Manuh 2000; Sidney-Boateng 2008). It is in Kumasi that the popular term for a Ghanaian return migrant from overseas (*Burger*) was coined.

## **RESEARCH METHODS AND STUDY POPULATION**

This qualitative study is mainly based on observations and in-depth interviews conducted between October 2009 and April 2010, with 30 return migrants and members of their households and extended families residing within Kumasi and its environs. In the absence of reliable data on return migrants in the city, the study relied on information obtained from individual returnees and members of three return migrant associations in the city. The individual return migrants were located using the snowball method. In the first wave of the survey, fourteen returnees were selected. Through chain referrals by the fourteen respondents in the first wave and personal contacts, the researcher finally achieved its sample size. A questionnaire was administered to these migrants on their migration history, their experiences abroad and the challenges of reintegration. Additional information was obtained from the family members of returned migrants. Thus within one migrant family, all who had sojourned abroad, including the spouses and their children were interviewed. This method enabled us to access different perspectives and experiences of family members. The researchers also engaged the relatives of migrants resident in Kumasi. Tabled for a focus group discussion were some executives and members of the three

return migrants' associations in Kumasi. All the names used for the interviewees are pseudonyms.

The returnees interviewed consisted of 16 males and 14 females, who were aged between thirty-two and seventy-two years. This means that many of the returnees arrive home at the peak of their productive working age. The selected respondents had returned from abroad for a minimum of one year. Indeed, our respondents had returned home for a period of between one and 10 years. On the average, our respondents had since their return lived in Kumasi for a period of five years. There was a wide variation in the year of departure abroad and the number of years spent abroad. The earliest migrant left Kumasi in 1984, while the majority left Kumasi for abroad between 2000 and 2004. The number of years of stay abroad ranged from 4 to 28 years, although most of them spent less than 10 years abroad. The countries of residence abroad varied considerably and included the United Kingdom (50 percent of respondents), Netherlands, Denmark, Italy, Germany and the United States of America.

Most of the respondents (62 percent) were married while 26 percent of them were divorced or separated. Only 3 out of the 30 returnees were single. Almost all of them (90 percent) were Christians with the rest (10 percent) being Muslims or Traditionalists. The educational level of the respondents, though diverse, was generally high; ranging from elementary school education to post-graduate degree. Sixteen of the respondents had a higher education degree while the remaining had completed their primary and secondary school education. At least half of our respondents worked as teachers, administrators, economists, computer and ICT experts prior to going abroad. The other half had been trained and worked as mechanics, drivers, traders, masons, hairdressers, tailors and farmers. Highly qualified persons tended to work in the formal sector while most of the low-skilled ones were self-employed or

worked in the informal sector of the city. Four of the respondents upgraded their educational status while abroad; three pursued a master's degree while one was awarded a diploma. Nine of the female respondents continued their education while abroad, and all but one did not work in the area of their training and qualification while abroad. Indeed, almost all the respondents were underemployed and worked at levels far below their qualifications while abroad. All the women were employed as cleaners while the men worked as sorters and packers or as line staff in a factory during the entire stay abroad.

### **RETURN AND REINTEGRATING INTO KUMASI**

This section analyzes the nature of migrants' return to Ghana and the strategies employed by the returnees to establish links with their relatives and friends. Their efforts at reintegrating into their neighbourhoods and participating fully in city life are also examined.

Before their return, the migrants frequently discussed the idea of relocating to Kumasi amongst the family members and with friends over some period of time. However, the decision to relocate and when to do so was seldom unanimous and often had to be negotiated; male returnees informed us that their spouses and adult children were not always pleased with returning to Ghana. Nonetheless, because they were tired of their jobs, frustrated by their underprivileged status and could not cope well with the weather, they had to pressurize the family to return. Elderly females, on the other hand, were wary of the poor infrastructure in Ghana, the high cost of living and the likely demands on them by the extended family. Adult children, like their elderly female relatives were also not particularly interested in returning to Ghana, but for a different reason: they had their network of friends and acquaintances abroad and did not want to break up with them. Besides, most of them did not know much about Ghana and had been told

by their friends that conditions there were not particularly good. Indeed, one of our respondents returned to Ghana after nearly 28 years in the United Kingdom without his wife and children because they “found conditions in Ghana too difficult and preferred to remain in the UK”.

Three distinct factors determined respondents’ decision to return to Ghana. These were events at home [Ghana], events in the host countries and the age of respondents. Events in the host countries were more important in the decision to return than those at home. Two major factors in host countries which influenced decisions to return home were the accomplishment of the purpose of migration and the expiration of residence permits (visas). One of the returnees recalls her experience:

I took a decision about three years ago to return home to settle; because of this I came home on about three separate occasions ... I needed to do some checks so I would know where to invest upon return. Due to that I rented a shop around Kejetia, [a portion of the Kumasi market, Ashanti Region] and started a provision shop, specifically selling rice, cooking oil and so on. After some months, I started a hair dressing saloon at Afful –Nkwanta [a suburb of Kumasi, Ashanti Region]. I employed shop attendants to take care of the shops. I left these shops in the care of the attendants and returned to Italy intending to stay for six (6) months. I however returned to Ghana after three (3) months. I had to come because business was booming back home (Sonia, interview in Kumasi, 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2010).

The conditions at home which influenced some respondents’ decision to return to Ghana were generally family related; they included returning to assume extended family responsibility as a result of the death of parents, to fulfil a social obligation or to join spouses and children in Ghana. One of the returnees explained:

I came because my husband wanted me to come home with him. I thought about it. As a married woman I couldn't just abandon my children and husband; who would take care of them? Had it not been that, I would have stayed in Denmark. After all, the system is far, far better than Ghana's; our system is bad. I wonder! Anytime I visited, the differences were so obvious. Ghanaians don't follow or obey any laws (Mary, interview in Kumasi, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2009).

Prospective returnees had several opportunities to obtain news about the situation in Ghana. Besides newspapers, radio and the internet, they acquired first-hand information from friends who had just visited Ghana and others who had successfully relocated to the country. They also had contacts with persons who had returned abroad after a failed attempt to resettle in Ghana. The opportunities open to them as well as the risks were carefully assessed with their friends. Some returnees actually visited Ghana several times to assess the situation before taking a decision to return. Such visits were used to reconnect with friends and relatives, commence a building project, or explore the job market and the likely areas of investment. The typical case was for the man to initially return to Ghana and make the necessary preparations in terms of acquiring a place of residence, looking for a job or establishing his business, and finding a suitable school for the children. It is only after the most basic arrangements had been put in place, usually lasting between one or two years, that the rest of the family then joined him in Ghana.

The next section presents a summary of the experiences of return migrants in Kumasi. These have been grouped into social and economic spheres in spite of the often difficult task of delineating between the categories of activities. Similarly, the context in which return and

reintegration took place also differed considerably amongst the various returnees. Individual experiences as related to us will therefore be presented where necessary.

## **SOCIAL REINTEGRATION**

The immediate task of every returnee was to find suitable accommodation within the city, as all of them considered it inappropriate to live together with members of the extended family. Most returnees wanted to be socially close to their extended families, but spatially distant from them. The returnees expressed the desire to be “independent, have a decent place to live in and be comfortable”. All of the returnees considered building a house for themselves as one of the major expectations of their relatives (cf. Henry and Mohan 2003; Smith 2007). In line with this, 8 out of the 30 respondents had built their own houses prior to returning to Ghana. The remaining 22 returnees had reached various stages of their building project at the time of the study. The state of the building was nonetheless a function of the length of their stay abroad. All those who had completed their buildings had lived abroad for more than ten years, while those whose structures remained uncompleted had stayed for a period of less than six years. Many of the returnees had acquired land and commenced their building projects or had actually completed them while abroad. Family members and friends typically assisted with the purchase of a plot, preparation of a building plan, obtaining the required permits, securing the services of masons and other artisans, purchasing building materials and supervising the construction of the house. Only three returnees indicated that they did not have relatives whom they could entrust with such tasks, and therefore decided to rent a house upon their return while they made arrangements to start their building projects.

After finding decent accommodation, the next task for the returnee is usually to reach out to extended family members, friends, former school mates, and colleagues and re-build their social network. The returnee is expected to visit members of the extended family and inform them of his or her return. This is seen as a sign of respect for the extended family members. In this regard, the returnee has to carefully consider those to be visited immediately and those who can be contacted later. Persons visited were usually given small gifts in cash or kind, depending on the closeness of the relationship. With the widespread availability of mobile telephones some returnees would visit only a few family members and friends and call up the rest to inform them of their return. Such calls are conventionally followed by promises to visit them at a later date and bring along their gifts.

Most returnees also acknowledged the importance of friendship networks for integrating effectively into life in Kumasi; consequently, they had to reconnect with old friends and colleagues as well as institutions with which they were previously associated. The measures adopted include attending alumni and hometown association meetings, joining religious groups and churches, linking up with former friends and colleagues at meetings, training sessions and workshops, in addition to building up a network of friends through exchange of addresses, phone numbers and e-mail contacts. The returnees also attended social gatherings to improve upon their status and build social networks (cf. Anarfi & Jagare 2005). This finding supports the structural argument that family members and friends play a crucial role in the behavior of return migrants.

## ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION

Return migrants to Kumasi can be broadly categorized into two main groups with respect to their integration into the city's job market. The first consists of those who returned with some capital, skills and resources and wanted to establish their own businesses in the private sector or the informal sector. These include setting up a vehicle maintenance and spare parts shop, hair salon, a school, training centre or hiring a store in one of the city's huge central and satellite markets (cf. Dei 1991). The second group is made up of skilled returnees with a higher level of education and professional qualifications, seeking employment with private or public sector establishments.

Many returnees were astonished about the paper work and bureaucracy that accompanied the setting up of a business, obtaining a permit for a task, or simply getting an appointment with the relevant city officials. They were also dismayed by the red tape, bribery and corruption that characterized the public service. While return migrants who wanted to establish their own businesses relied primarily on the support of extended family members, those seeking employment in the formal sector depended mainly on their friends and their social networks. Friendship ties such as those with former school mates, colleagues, their superiors, teachers, church leaders and members were revived. Besides obtaining relevant information on job opportunities, the primary purpose of reviving such ties was to get in touch with people who would link them up with heads of institutions and recruitment agencies. This finding supports the structural approach that emphasizes the "reality" of the home economy (Cassarino, 2004). It also highlights the importance of family and organization networks as local contextual factors, for reintegrating into the local economy. One returnee related how he used his social networks in securing his current employment:

...anyhow, it was a link through my uncle, because I eventually wrote an application after I had had the job. They (the employers) called me for an aptitude test, an interview and later called me to start work. I remember my uncle was among the first people I saw when I came back and he asked me for my CV and particulars when I said I was looking for a job. He said he was going to circulate them to his friends and colleagues. I often called him when I was in Denmark. That's how I was able to get this job as an administrator. It took me almost two years before I finally secured the job (Samuel, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 2009).

Despite their social networks and family ties, returnees indicated having to go through a rigorous process before finally getting a job in the formal sector. Many indicated having to write a series of application letters and attend interviews, most of which proved futile. Furthermore, they had to endure long waiting periods of between one and two years before they finally secured jobs. This was attributed to the high unemployment situation in the country and the fact that recruitment of skilled personnel appeared limited to the teaching, banking, telecommunications sectors and some non-governmental organizations (cf. Anarfi & Jagare 2005).

Returnees were generally flexible in their demands, and willing to work in areas below their educational qualifications in professions they were less enthusiastic about, particularly during the initial phase of returning home. Some accepted offers of employment that did not match the qualifications and experience they had acquired abroad. Others explained that since they did not work in their professions while abroad, they were prepared to take cuts in their salaries to enable them get a job as quickly as possible. It was not uncommon for returnees to abandon the search for employment in the formal sector when such attempts proved futile. Furthermore, a few among the returnees expressed the desire to work in non-bureaucratic and

hierarchical environments and therefore preferred to be self-employed. Here again, instead of being drowned by their own huge expectations of the home country, returnees found an alternative means to escape some of the problems of reintegration, by setting up their own businesses with their accumulated capital. In this case, the findings support the NELM perspective that resources transferred home enhance the smooth reintegration of returnees despite challenges back home. Some who had intended to work in the formal sector changed their minds midstream, as the search for jobs proved futile and was beginning to take a toll on them and their families. They subsequently decided to invest their capital in private businesses. One returnee who had worked as a professional teacher prior to leaving for the United Kingdom, decided to set up a primary school in a Kumasi suburb after his failure to get a job in the public service. With the assistance of his relatives, he purchased a sizeable piece of land, built a classroom block, recruited a few teachers and then started his school project.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATION**

Although most returnees had planned their return to Kumasi and were quite excited about their prospects, they nevertheless faced several challenges. While some of these challenges have been mentioned in the previous section, they will be discussed extensively below.

### *POOR INFRASTRUCTURE*

Generally, the first challenge all the returnees encountered was the poor state of infrastructural facilities in the city. During the first few months, most returnees were exasperated by the erratic supply of water, the frequent disruptions in power supply and the poor state of the health and educational facilities in and around Kumasi. While they acknowledged that the city

had changed and progress had been made in the country since their departure abroad, the returning migrants had expected much improved infrastructural facilities in the urban areas. Another issue frequently discussed was the poor sanitation and littering of the city with plastic and other household wastes. Many were also overwhelmed by the difficulties associated with finding good schools for their wards within their immediate neighbourhoods. They thought a lot of time was wasted driving their children to and from school daily. In the absence of an expansive public transport system they organized private transport (taxi) services to bring their children to and from school. Another issue of concern was the poor health infrastructure in the city, particularly the absence of emergency services. Many returnees dreaded having to face emergency situations (cf. Taylor 2009: 25).

#### *EXPECTATIONS FROM FAMILY, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS*

A major challenge facing all return migrants is meeting the high expectations of relatives and community members. It was usual in Kumasi for returnees to be inundated with visits and telephone calls from friends and relatives, many of whom expect to be given gifts and support in one form or the other. Some of the presents made by the returnees in the first few weeks of returning home include clothing, perfumes, mobile phones, cameras, toiletries, footballs, as well as cash donations to relatives and friends. Some friends and relatives specifically request funds to feed their families, pay school fees, hospital bills, and other household expenditure. While it was common for returnees to avoid persons making persistent demands for assistance, there was unanimity amongst the returnees that the reception given them by their kinfolk and acquaintances in Kumasi was warm and rousing. The extent of support obtained, however, depended on the support given to the family members while they were abroad. Migrants who

maintained close relationships with their kith and kin through regular telephone calls, visits, sending of gifts and remittances to cover the payment of school fees, medical bills, and funeral expenditure, were very warmly received (Kyei 2010; cf. Kakbi et al 2004).

Besides gift-giving, residents expect returnees to display some level of affluence and sophistication in all spheres of their life. Returnees are regarded as “burgers” or “been to” and are expected to distinguish themselves as having lived abroad. This should be evident in what they wear, where and what they eat, where they reside and the means of transport used. They are expected to display a higher standard of living than other residents in the community. They are also expected to make substantial and generous donations at social events such as weddings, funerals, church programmes, associational, and club meetings. Many returnees described these demands from their friends, neighbors and relatives as “unrealistic, overwhelming and beyond their capabilities”. According to one returnee:

You see, there is so much expected of us as returnees. Unfortunately we are not able to meet these expectations and we are seen as being frugal and uncaring about the plight of people in our communities. Many still think that the streets of Europe and America are littered with gold. People whom you employ to assist you, like the masons, electricians and plumbers seize the opportunity to dupe you; they think I have enough money to spare anyway. It has happened to me on countless occasions. Now I do not even know whom to trust (Evelyn, interview in Kumasi, 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2009).

### *BUREAUCRACY AND WORK ETHICS*

The bureaucracy associated with obtaining public services, coupled with poor work ethics of public and civil servants, were other issues that frustrated many returnees. For some of them,

everything seemed to be “too bureaucratic” in Ghana. They were frequently frustrated by the delays associated with obtaining services such as the registration of land, building permits, vehicle licensing, registering a business, obtaining water and electricity services. They were exasperated by the frequent inability of public officials to take decisions instead of deferring such decisions to higher authority. Many returnees were also worried about the poor work ethics and behavior of most public workers in the city. They were impatient with the slow rhythm of life in general, and the laid-back attitude of residents to work. Returnees also had problems with the attitude of most residents to time. People were generally late to meetings which usually started 30 minutes or an hour later than the advertised time. The situation was even worse with respect to social events such as funerals, weddings, church services and family gatherings which often started several hours late and continued well beyond the scheduled time. Returnees felt that life was very slow in Kumasi and it took so long to get things accomplished (cf. Potter 2005; Taylor 2009). One returnee who was frustrated with the working environment in Kumasi claimed that:

It is not easy to initiate anything here, there is so much bureaucracy, go here, get this documentation and so on. Worst of it all they don't even keep their promises. Things are not as easy as in the UK... Can you imagine I went to the Metropolitan Assembly to set up a rubbish dump in my school; this simple thing, for months was not done. I had to finally do it myself. It is so frustrating. If it was anybody else, I am sure the person might have given up. Ha! Things must really change (Paul, interview in Kumasi, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2010).

### *EXCESSIVE RELIGIOSITY*

Some return migrants were also concerned about what they considered to be the “excessive religiosity of many Kumasi residents”. They were alarmed by the mushrooming number of churches in Ghana and the numerous “prophets, pastors, bishops, and evangelists of all sorts who claimed to have solutions to people’s daily life problems such as illnesses, divorce, witchcraft and, poverty”. Returnees were amazed about the ease with which religious explanations were provided as cure for all sorts of challenges in life and the impact of such attitudes on residents. Though they considered themselves to be religious, their experiences abroad, in largely secular environments, had shown them the importance and limits of religious explanations. It was difficult for some returnees to “comprehend the irrationality associated with the number of hours Ghanaians spend in churches instead of engaging in productive activities, only for them thereafter to beg for alms”. Perhaps the driving force of this excessiveness could be due to the lower opportunity cost of time in Ghana than in industrialized countries. Another returnee complained about this:

...in the US, church services were brief and one was not obliged to frequent them as happens in Ghana. Here people are always in the church. I don’t know but maybe it is because they are poor...we spend close to seven hours in church and even have to give a number of offerings and we seem not to gain anything. At least out there, [the United States] after church we are provided with snacks. I think they should invest some of the collection in that or use the money to support the poor. ... Why should church members be suffering, while the pastor is in a four wheel drive? (Mercy, interview in Kumasi, 18<sup>th</sup> February, 2010)

Indeed, the finding supports the proposition of the structural approach, that these challenges form part of the institutions and traditions of the home country that prevent returnees from having a smooth reintegration. Most return migrants could not utilize the skills and knowledge acquired abroad within the existing system to change and contribute to the development agenda of their home country. Yet almost all respondents were much more concerned about the impact they could make in their communities; since, according to them, there is “no place like home”.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

The stable political situation and the improving economy have often been mentioned as the main factors responsible for the large numbers of return migrants to Ghana (Awumbila et al, 2011). Further emphasizing the significance of the structural approach on return migration, migrants return when they expect better conditions at home, armed with resources that establish them in the local economy of the home country. With advancements in technology and telecommunication, returnees were able to secure their return through remittances, and intermittent visits home (Cassarino, 2004; 2007).

This paper describes the experiences of return migrants to Kumasi, Ghana’s second largest city, as well as the challenges migrants face in reintegrating into the extended family and their communities. The study shows that return migration is often a well thought-out and planned process, involving all members of the family over several months. It also proves that the decision to return is often contentious, with divergent interests, from various members of the family. This study further indicates that while migrants are generally well received back home, the level of enthusiasm shown by friends and relatives depended on the strength and

sustainability of the relationship while the migrant was abroad. In this regard, return migrants also anticipated a good reception back home when they had given material support to friends and relatives while in sojourn.

Finding suitable accommodation and employment remain immediate pressing challenges facing return migrants. Most of the return migrants to Kumasi had already made various forms of investment in the city prior to returning home. Others returned with funds and resources that had been earmarked for the acquisition of land and the completion of their homes; indeed, more than anything else, the completion of a house was considered indispensable for a successful reintegration into Ghanaian society. This paper also implied that while most of the unskilled returnees set up their own businesses, skilled returnees preferred to work in the formal sector. Most returnees were very flexible with respect to the type of jobs that they were prepared to do; and those who could not obtain employment in the formal sector, later opted to set up their own businesses. Other challenges include the pressure of unrealistic expectations from their relatives and friends, the frequent demand for gifts and other assistance, the poor infrastructure and sanitation condition in the city, as well as issues related to work ethics.

The structural approach helps us understand family and organization networks as the contextual factors necessary for a successful reintegration into the local economy (Thomas, 2008). Similarly, the assistance of family members and friends was indispensable towards the social integration of newly-arrived returnees into the city. Upon arrival, returnees expanded their social networks by participating actively in social gatherings such as funerals, weddings, alumni associations, town and ethnic associations, and other social clubs. This extensive network of friends and relations aided in the successful integration of the migrant into the society.

Aside from illustrating how return migrants reintegrate into their original society, this research shows that return migrants considered themselves as agents of change (Ammassari 2004; Anarfi et al 2004; Taylor 2009). As development agents, they undertook new businesses and brought their skills and experiences to bear in running these businesses. In addition, they brought new work ethics into their businesses and communities by making generous financial contributions towards the welfare of their extended family members and by initiating useful projects in their communities.

The paper indicates that Ghana has been quite successful in attracting some of its most qualified and experienced professionals back home. These highly educated persons are contributing in diverse ways to national development, especially by establishing a school, creating jobs through businesses, ICT centers and other economic activities. Analyzed within the context of the need to attract human capital back to their countries, this paper shows that Ghana has been able to reverse the phenomenon of brain drain that has gripped the country since the 1960's, into a brain gain.

Finally, the paper shows that the decision to return is taken solely by the individual migrant, and the success of the reintegration process depends largely on the effort of the returnees. There is neither a government policy, nor program to encourage and support migrants to return home nor are returnees supported financially and administratively to reintegrate into their home communities. Returnees mostly receive some financial support from Non-Governmental Organisations and donors located in the country.

Based on the findings, the study makes the following policy recommendations: First, policy makers and the government should develop a collaborative effort to institutionalise return programs and policies. The governments of the country of residence of these migrants could be

approached to support these endeavors. A comprehensive and collaborative migration policy is required since Ghana lacks a well-defined or a holistic policy on return migration, in spite of efforts by the International Organisation for Migration, various international agencies, Development Partners and researchers to address specific issues relating to return migration. The policy should include, for example, the provision of assistance in the form of tax incentives, grants and subsidies to cover the initial costs of resettlement and support towards the acquisition of some form of accommodation in the short term.

Second, most initiatives such as those originated by the Migration for Development in Africa (MIDA) program, the Dual Citizenship Act of 2002 by the Ghana government, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and Development Partners so far, aim to alleviate the economic obstacles that returnees face (Kyei 2013; Mazzucato 2008). However, this study found that returnees also faced cultural difficulties. Return migrants often have to regain an understanding of how local structures work at home, and often face a period of adaptation due to prolonged time spent abroad, during which a realistic picture of the home context may be lost. Some of the major factors that obstruct the return migrants' ability to induce change include poor local work ethics, poor working conditions, lack of adequate and modern infrastructure as well as a slow bureaucracy characterized by corruption. These largely cultural conditions create tensions for migrants trying to introduce change. Attempts to introduce change were received in a number of ways by the community or population at large. These initiatives may, for example, cause difficulties or tensions with colleagues in the workplace, including local jealousies and returnees' superiority complex and consequent deterioration of the relationship between return migrants and non-migrants. For this reason, programs and policies facilitating return need to consider that the impact of returnees depend

both on the efforts of the returning migrants, and the attitude of residents at home. This paper recommends that the respective districts, municipal and metropolitan assemblies receiving these return migrants be well-endowed both in terms of logistics and skilled personnel, to be able to provide psychological and material support to returnees.

## **BIOGRAPHY**

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