

# Urban Migration Policies, Migrant Contributions, and Rural Development: Evidence from Ghana

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**Abstract:** This paper explores how urban migration policies are linked to migrants' contributions to rural development in Ghana. By integrating Migration Systems Theory, the New Economics of Labor Migration, and the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, this research employs a quantitative cross-sectional research design that uses survey data with 200 urban migrants, for which there are 165 valid responses. The analyses used descriptive statistics, correlation methods, and factor analysis to examine migrants in socio-economic terms, migration drivers, and perceived policy effectiveness, as well as the ways in which migration does influence rural development. Results show that employment is the most important migration facilitator, followed by education and healthcare. The correlation results show further evidence of a significant positive association between beliefs about policy influence, migrants' contributions, and rural development impacts. Factor analysis reveals five latent factors that drive the migration–development nexus: policy awareness and perception, migrant participation in agricultural development, institutional provision, perceived development outcomes, and policy effectiveness and sustainability. Although migration has made colossal contributions in terms of remittance flows, investment, and knowledge transfer, weak institutional capacity, lack of rural infrastructure, and policy volatility impede its full development potential. The analysis contends that migration is not just a household-level choice, but rather it is a developmental process shaped by policy and institutional environments. Policy communication and institutional support, as well as rural infrastructure construction to promote the increased contribution of migrants to rural development. Policy implications for decision makers and development practitioners who are interested in mainstreaming migration into the rural development planning of Ghana are discussed based on the results.

**Keywords:** Development, Ghana, Migration, Rural–urban linkages, Sustainability, Urbanization, Youth.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Urban migration is increasingly becoming a characteristic of current demographic transition, albeit exerted by interrelated economic, social and environmental dynamics that keep reordering the distribution of population and development processes in the world [1], [2]. The global trend of urbanization has been surging fast for several decades. According to the United Nations, 55% of humanity is in cities today compared with 30% in 1950, and this proportion is forecasted to keep growing [3]. Urbanization is generally considered to be one of the four most important demographic mega-trends (in addition to population growth, population ageing and international migration). The increasing urbanisation will develop largely in Africa and Asia, not only influenced by economic reorganisation and demographic transformation, but also environmental forces acting on levels beyond the local or national [4].

Urban migration in the digital era has become more pronounced within Ghanaian society and has been especially dominated by youth migration. According to United Nations Network on Migration data, over 60% of internal migrants in Ghana are

between the ages of 18 and 35, while migration is primarily economic and educational aspiration driven [5]. This is not only adding to the labour and dynamic strength available in urban areas, but also leading to important implications on rural areas such as shifts in household composition, availability of labour and on possibilities for local development. The increasing prominence of youth migration points to the need for youth-friendly migration policies so that migrant skills can be mobilized for urban expansion and rural transformation.

Findings have highlighted the exposure to risk among many of the internal migrants, especially migrants who originate from northern Ghana, including insecure jobs or livelihoods, unstable income and limited basic service provision in host areas [6]. Government migration programmes, in turn, have aimed to upgrade urban living standards and at the same time serve as a 'safety net' for the welfare of rural households. Questions linger over whether these policies contribute to rural development and the trans local relations between migrants and their places of origin.

Most rural areas have insufficient infrastructure, service delivery and employable skills, further widening the divide between rural and urban. While government and non-government organizations' interventions have played a significant role in reducing this gap, the sustainability of such interventions raises concern [7]. From the perspective of Sustainable Development Goals, building strong rural-urban linkages and inclusive development strategies in addition to targeted investments on infrastructure and ensuring gender equality are important to achieving balanced and resilient growth [8]. Against this backdrop, it is important to examine the effects of migration policy on migrant behaviour and rural conditions.

This paper is concerned with recent urban migration policies in Ghana, and how they affect rural development. This study also examines migrants' knowledge and attitudes towards these policies, the level and kinds of contribution that migrants make in rural areas, as well as how institutional environment conditions whether or not migrant-led development is able to happen. By doing so, the article aims to contribute to a better understanding of the policy-migration-development nexus and turn the debate towards pathways to building rural resilience in a time of (protracted) urban migration. The analysis is driven by five main research questions, specifically: (1) What is the nature of awareness and perception of urban migration policies among urban migrants in Ghana?; (2) To what extent do urban migrants enhance rural development through remittances, investment and knowledge transfer back to their place of origin? ; (3) What role does the institutional support arrangements and government's initiatives play in facilitating migration-led rural development in Ghana? ; (4) How do socio-economic characteristics of migrant shape the nexus between migration policy and rural development outcomes in Ghana? ; And finally (5), What are more fundamental drivers that explain the interaction between migration policies and rural development outcomes in Ghana?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural-urban migration has become one of the most significant demographic and development trends shaping modern Ghana. Throughout history, Ghana's economy and settlement patterns were predominantly rural. And agriculture is what has mostly served as the backbone of livelihoods. However, accelerated rural-urban migration in recent decades has reshaped the country's social structure, spatial development, and economic prospects, with important consequences for both migrant-receiving cities and migrant-sending rural areas.

The literature identifies economic opportunity as one of the main causes of urban migration in Ghana. Expanding urban economies, particularly in Accra and other major cities such as Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, and Tamale, offer greater employment prospects in construction, trade, manufacturing, services, and informal sector activities. Empirical evidence from the Ghana Statistical Service shows that economic motivations make up for a greater share of internal migration flows, as rural residents seek livelihoods that are unavailable or increasingly unviable in rural areas [9]. As urban centres consolidate their roles as place of commercial and industrial activity, they send a strong pull on young and working-age populations from rural communities [10].

Apart from employment considerations, access to social services plays a crucial role in shaping migration decisions. Urban areas host a higher concentration of educational institutions, including universities, vocational training centres, and well-resourced secondary schools. This has encouraged both individual and family-level migration, especially among most youths. Studies show a steady rise in school enrolment in urban areas, reinforcing migration as a strategy for educational advancement [11]. The differences in the number of healthcare infrastructure between rural and urban areas is also seen as a factor. Whereas rural communities often face limited access to medical facilities and specialized care, cities on the other hand offer relatively comprehensive health services, motivating migration in pursuit of improved health outcomes [6].

Some environmental and climatic pressures are also considered as factors that cause rural-urban migration trend, especially among those from Northern part of Ghana. In most cases, land degradation, water scarcity, erratic rainfall patterns, and recurrent droughts undermine the viability of smallholder agriculture, making rural households to seek alternative livelihoods in urban areas. The literature highlights climate change as an increasingly important structural driver of migration, interacting with economic vulnerability to accelerate rural out-migration [12].

As given by the Ghana Statistical Service (2013), Ghana's migration landscape is dominated by internal rural-urban movements, although international migration also remains significant. That is, Accra continues to attract the largest share of internal migrants, accounting for a substantial proportion of urban migration flows. This is followed by key urban centres in the Ashanti, Western, and Volta regions [9]. These patterns show uneven distribution of regional development and economic opportunities and service provision.

The impact that urban migration has on rural areas are often complex and contradictory. On the one hand, sustained out-migration has led to rural depopulation and the loss of young and productive labour. This demographic shift has weakened agricultural systems, reduced productivity, and constrained local economic growth, particularly as older populations are left behind with limited capacity to sustain labour-intensive activities [13]. Declining agricultural output has, in turn, increased rural dependence on urban food markets and heightened vulnerabilities related to food security [14].

On the other hand, migration has also strengthened rural-urban linkages. This has mostly been through remittances, skills acquisition, and knowledge transfer. Barkat et al. (2024) suggest that financial remittances from urban migrants play a pivotal role in supporting rural households. In the form of funding education, healthcare, and small-scale investments, it contributes to poverty reduction and improved living standards. In addition, return migrants mostly bring new skills, professional experience, and social networks that can support entrepreneurship, agricultural innovation, and community development initiatives in their home areas [16]. However, maintaining these benefits remains uncertain. This happens particularly where long-term settlement in urban areas weakens migrants' attachment to rural communities.

Despite the scale and significance of urban migration, the literature points to persistent challenges in Ghana's migration governance framework. Policy responses have mostly emphasized managing urban growth rather than addressing the structural conditions that result in rural out-migration. Inadequate rural infrastructure exists such as poor road networks, limited healthcare facilities, and under-resourced schools. These conditions mostly discourage return migration and rural investment (Baffoe et al. 2021). Weak rural-urban linkages mostly constrain the ability of migration to generate balanced development outcomes, underscoring the need for policies that promote stronger economic and institutional connections between rural and urban areas [17].

Moreover, migration policies are often reactive and fragmented. There is mostly limited coordination across institutions and insufficient attention to rural development priorities [18].

Taking all together, the literature suggests that urban migration in Ghana is mostly driven by interconnected economic, social, and environmental forces and produces uneven development outcomes across space. While migration offers opportunities for poverty reduction and skills transfer, its potential to contribute to sustainable rural development depends largely on the effectiveness of migration policies, rural investment strategies, and the strengthening of rural-urban linkages.

#### **Research hypothesis:**

**H1:** There is a positive and significant relationship between urban migration policies to the level of rural development in Ghana.

**H2:** Facilitatory urban migration policies have a significant positive influence on migrants' rural development participation.

**H3:** The socio-economic profile of migrants mediates the impact of migration policies on rural development outcomes.

**H4:** The perception of policy effectiveness had significant positive influence on the rural infrastructure, education and livelihood improvement investment made by migrants.

**H5:** There are discoverable latent factors which account for the relationship between migration policy enactment and rural development outcomes.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper was to explore the link between urban migration policies and migrants' contributions to rural development in the Ghanaian context. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study. This was believed to be an appropriate design format, as it permits acquiring numerical information from a rather large sample, at once in time, for the purpose of describing current status and statistically examining relationships among key substances.

Urban migrants were surveyed using an electronic based structured questionnaire. The covered population combined internal migrants who had moved from rural areas to urban centres within the borders of Ghana, and international migrants living elsewhere. A convenience sampling method was pursued and the objective of the study was to reach 200 participants. While all participants were able to voluntarily and anonymously take part, only 165 questionnaires were suitable for analysis. This sample size was judged to be adequate for attaining variation in experiences and views related to the research themes.

The questionnaire was formulated drawing on the conceptual framework of the study and findings from previous research on migration and development. It included 5 parts on demographic and socio-economic characteristics, the attitude to and awareness of policies on urban migration, contributions by migrants to rural development, perceived institutional support, and changes in the perception of rural development. Answers were collected by a mix of multiple-choice questions and five-position Likert scales. Transferability was addressed by expert assessment, and a group of 20 urban migrants validated the clarity and order of the questions in a pilot study. Internal consistency reliability was measured by means of Cronbach's alpha, which has shown to be reliable in all scales with adequately exceeded cut-off point of 0.70.

The outlier labelling rule was applied to examine missing values and outliers in the dataset before analysis. The statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics were used to present respondent profile and main variables, whereas Pearson correlation test and factor analysis was adopted to analyse relationship among migration policies, institutional support, migrant remittance and rural development outcomes.

Ethical concerns were carefully followed during the research process. Institutional approval was obtained prior to participants' enrolment, and informed consent taken. The respondents were informed that their participation was anonymous and voluntary, kept confidentially. To manage realist issues like language barriers and respondent reluctance, clarifications were introduced when needed, the support of translation was used judiciously, participation was treated with sensitivity to non-pressure. These measures contributed to maintain ethical standards and the robustness of collected data even in fieldwork-restricted situations.

### IV. RESULTS

**Table 1: Demographics of Respondents**

Variable	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male: 56%, Female: 44%
Age	18–24: 19%, 25–35: 53%, 36–50: 22%, Above 50: 6%
Education Level	Secondary: 27%, Tertiary: 64%, Other: 9%
Employment Status	Employed: 72%, Unemployed: 28%

Source: Organized by the current article

The demographic profile of the respondents gives us an idea of who the city migrants are that make up our sample. Statistical analysis is drawn on 165 valid responses of rural to urban internal and international movers in Ghana.

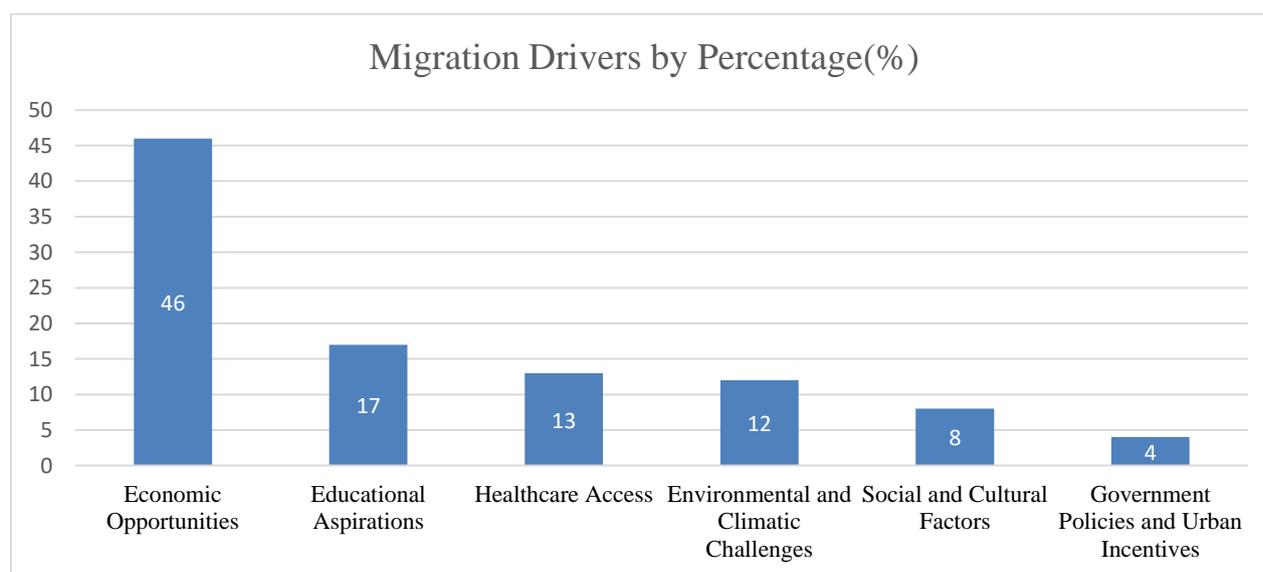
With respect to gender, 56% of the respondents were male and 44% were female. This pattern mirrors known migration patterns with men being more likely to migrate and also suggests a high and rising level of female participation in urban migration. The remarkable representation of female migrants may indicate an enhancement of the role of females in migration decisions related to education, health care accessibility and family support via remittances [19].

When distribution is by age, it is observed that urban migration in general is focused on young adults. Of the participants, 53% were aged between 25 and 35 years, followed by those who were aged 36 to 50 (22%) and those aged 18 to 24 (19%).

Just 6% were over the age of 50. This trend emphasizes the significance of youth in migration and, further, suggests that the youth may contribute to rural development by increasing skills and enterprises and transferring knowledge.

Respondents had a high level of education. Most of them (64%) had tertiary level of education, followed by those who completed secondary school 27%. Other types of education, such as vocational or technical training, were reported by 9% only. The fact that young immigrants are more concentrated and highly educated, is a mirror of the urban concentration of higher studies and professional opportunities and suggests possible brain-drain effects out on the countryside.

As for socio-economic status, 72% of the respondents were employed in urban-based work (mainly related to formal work such as education, health care and trading) market. The other 28% were unemployed or worked in the informal sector. This re-emphasize economic factors that motivate migration, and also demonstrates how migrant participation in both types of urban work, is quite variable.



**Fig. 1: Primary factors driving urban migration (Organized by the current article)**

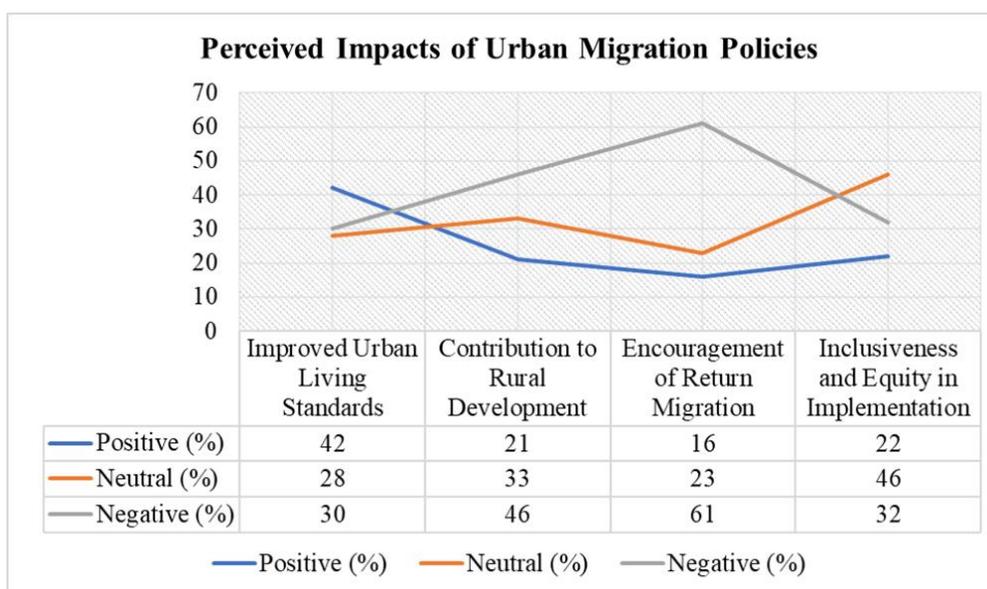
The survey responses suggest a mix of economic, social and environmental motivations for moving among respondents, with a significant level of variability in their significance. The economic opportunity became the overwhelmingly dominant motivator, at 46% of those polled. This outcome represents continued structural inequalities between the rural and urban localities in Ghana where there are limited jobs, seasonal livelihoods dependent agriculture incomes and increased production cost that drive people from rural to urban areas for a variety of livelihoods in trade, construction, manufacturing and services [20]. The agglomeration of small and medium-scale industries in urban centres like Accra and Kumasi also deepens this trend.

The next most commonly cited motivator was educational aspirations (mentioned by 17%). Educational migration was especially common among younger participants and households, suggesting disparities in access to good secondary, vocational and tertiary education between the rural and urban communities. The physical location of universities and training colleges in urban settings, as well as policy interventions (e.g. the Free Senior High School programme) that are meant to cater for the most marginalised learners [21], has indirectly reinforced urban pull factors against a backdrop of a larger ambition around educational equity.

Thirteen percent of respondents cited accessing health care services as a major reason for migrating. That plays to existing gaps in rural healthcare infrastructure, staffing and specialized services compared to urban areas. For the respondents, urban health care facilities were accessible and believable- it became clearer during COVID-19 pandemic how health related interventions focused on urban areas.

Environmental and climatic factors mostly influenced the migration decisions of about 12% of individuals, especially those from northern Ghana. In addition, unpredictable rainfall, persistent droughts, soil erosion and floods were identified as key constraints to agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. These results align with a wider body of evidence on climate induced migration among agrarian communities with limited adaptation support [22].

Social, cultural and policy-level reasons were less common but significant ones. Some respondents, mainly youngsters, took such migration decisions based on imaginations of family reunion and life in towns and at the hands of peer influence and social media. Only about 4% of respondents directly mentioned government policies and urban development programmes, though a few cited rural-based correlations between industrial or infrastructure investment that indirectly stimulated migration by their reproduction of emerging rural–urban development disparities. In all, the findings underscore that although economic motives predominate migration choices, they interact with educational, health, environmental and institutional considerations in influencing urban streams of migration in Ghana.



**Fig. 2 Perceived Impacts of Urban Migration Policies (Organized by the current article)**

The analysis of the questionnaire results reveals a high level of ambiguity in the respondents' opinions about urban migration policies' effects. While 42% of them believe that urban migration policies have been effective in improving urban living conditions, almost equal numbers of people reported negative or neutral impacts, at 30% and 28%, respectively. The latter groups, consisting mostly of those unaware of the existing policies or their effects, also showed uncertainty due to certain reasons: while 61% the existing policies create constraints on their ability to return to rural areas, another 33% claimed that such policies did not directly affect the rural development. The analysis by the socioeconomic characteristics showed that people earning more and living in urban areas for a long time tended to have a favourable view of the policies, which is the opposite of low-income migrants from the most underserved regions, northern and Volta areas in particular. The overall conclusion is that the sample profile precludes the perception of urban bias and lack of efficiency in rural development support or direct counter-urbanization.

**Table 2: Correlation matrix**

Variables	PEMP	MC	RDI
Perceived Effectiveness of Migration Policies (PEMP)	1.000	0.612**	0.578**
Migrant Contributions (MC)	0.612**	1.000	0.655**
Rural Development Indicators (RDI)	0.578**	0.655**	1.000

Source: organized by the current article

To analyse the association between perceived effectiveness of migration policies, migrant contributions and the rural development outcomes, a correlation analysis was performed. Three composite factors were considered: perceived effectiveness of migration policies; migrant contributions (remittances, community investment, and skills transfer); and indicators of rural development in terms of education, health care, infrastructure development—such as roads and bridges—and economic opportunities.

The results reveal that migrant contributions and perceived effectiveness of policies are positively correlated with a moderate level ( $r = 0.612$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that migrants who consider policies to be effective are more likely to be

involved in developing their rural societies. Perceived policy effectiveness and rural development outcomes also maintained a significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.578$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating when policies were perceived to be effective, the condition in the rural area would be better. The largest coefficient was observed between the amount of migrants' contributions and rural development measurements ( $r = 0.655$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that migrants' engagement plays essential roles in rural development. Despite the significance of the associations shown in these finding results, the researcher cannot infer causality from them.

**Table 3: Total Variance Explained (Factor Extraction Table)**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6.254	24.09	24.09
2	3.167	12.67	36.76
3	2.724	10.90	47.66
4	2.033	8.13	55.79
5	2.388	9.52	65.31
6	0.912	3.65	68.96
7	0.721	2.88	71.84

Source: organized by the current article

A factor analysis was used to uncover the latent dimensions for unobserved variables associated with rural development outcomes, urban migration and migrant contributions. Factor analysis with Varimax rotation was used to provide a more interpretable and less correlated factors. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value of 0.782 attested to the data being appropriate for factor analysis, indicating adequate sampling, as well as a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 842.13$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Based on the Kaiser criterion, five components with eigenvalues above 1.0 were retained, explaining in total 65.31% of the variance. The first factor explained 24.09% of the variance, and was followed by four factors that explained 8.13–12.67% each. After the implementation of Varimax rotation, the overall cumulative variance that was accounted for by the factors was 60.26%, which suggests stable and interpretable factor structure.

The factors emerged were named policy awareness and perception, migrants' involvement in rural development, institutional support and enabling environment, perceived developmental results, and policy effectiveness and sustainability. All retained items had high factor loadings ( $\geq 0.60$ ) and the factor structure corresponded well with the conceptual framework of the study, which showed that migration policies, behaviour, and rural development are multidimensional constructs.

**Table 4: Rotated component matrix**

Items / Variables	Component 1(Policy Awareness & Perception)	Component 2(Migrant Engagement in Rural Development)	Component 3(Institutional Support & Enabling Environment)	Component 4(Perceived Developmental Outcomes)	Component 5(Policy Effectiveness & Sustainability)
I am aware of government policies on migration and development.	<b>0.812</b>	0.132	0.188	0.092	0.054
I understand how migration policies affect migrant welfare.	<b>0.784</b>	0.174	0.165	0.087	0.063
Migration policies encourage migrants to invest in rural areas.	<b>0.713</b>	0.269	0.191	0.156	0.109

I frequently send money to support my rural community.	0.171	<b>0.833</b>	0.145	0.120	0.084
I invest in rural projects such as schools or farms.	0.185	<b>0.801</b>	0.128	0.167	0.062
I share new skills and knowledge with people in my hometown.	0.102	<b>0.766</b>	0.191	0.193	0.079
There are institutional incentives that encourage migrant investment.	0.175	0.143	<b>0.832</b>	0.192	0.112
The government provides information on rural development opportunities.	0.219	0.111	<b>0.807</b>	0.174	0.096
Banks and agencies support remittance investment in rural projects.	0.190	0.161	<b>0.786</b>	0.193	0.142
Migration has improved education in my rural community.	0.121	0.191	0.145	<b>0.821</b>	0.107
Migration has improved rural infrastructure and livelihoods.	0.165	0.162	0.183	<b>0.793</b>	0.123
Migration has increased entrepreneurship in rural areas.	0.139	0.182	0.172	<b>0.762</b>	0.145
Migration policies are consistent and sustainable over time.	0.097	0.104	0.168	0.129	<b>0.816</b>
Policies promote inclusive development for all regions.	0.122	0.131	0.181	0.141	<b>0.783</b>
Policies ensure long-term support for returning migrants.	0.145	0.120	0.178	0.152	<b>0.751</b>

Source: organized by the current article

Five major domains-policy awareness and perception, migrant participation in rural development, institutional support and enabling environment, perceived developmental outcome, policy effectiveness and sustainability-accounting for 65.31% of the total variance were extracted from factor analysis. These elements display robust empirical evidence for the inferences derived (H1–H5) and demonstrate that migration policies, institutional settings, and migrant actions work together to influence rural development outcomes in Ghana.

Policy awareness and perception were found to be an important factor in supporting H1, showing that the knowledge as well as positive perceptions of migration policies by migrants are closely related to rural development outcomes. The positive contribution that migrants make to rural development, in the form of financial, social and knowledge capital is evident in H2 which demonstrates that good policy environments stimulate transfers, investments and skills from migrants (as per the NELM). Institutional support and enabling environment support H3, thus confirming the mediating role of institutional access and incentives in bridging migration to development, as per the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. Perceived developmental effects provide for H4, suggesting that perceived positive policy beliefs are followed by direct improvements in education, infrastructure and livelihoods, as found previously [23], [24]. Lastly, policy effectiveness and sustainability buttress H5, highlighting the significance of inclusive, stable and coherent policy settings in maintaining long-term rural development impacts.

## V. DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper explored the linkages between urban migration policies and migrants' contribution to rural development in Ghana, by applying Migration Systems Theory, New Economics of Labor Migration and Sustainable Livelihoods Approach. The factor and correlation analyses results show that migration is not just an individual or household strategy but has a policy and institutional dimension with development implications. The results show that supportive, transparent, and stable migration policies play a crucial role in influencing the extent and quality of migrant-led rural development and thus lend support to previous empirical research as well as theoretical contribution on the migration–development interface.

Results indicate a strong and positive relationship between policies on migration to urban centres and their effect on rural development. There was a strong association among respondents between policy tools of remittance incentives, return migration programs and infrastructure investment that supported ways in which they could invest in their home communities. This is in line with Osei-Bonsu (2012) and Balli, Nguyen, & Ozer Balli (2023), who demonstrate that policy environment matters to how migration translates into gains for development. The five retained factors-policy awareness, migrant engagement, institutional support, perceived development projects and policy effectiveness and sustainability-together account for a large percentage of the variance, indicating that the impact of migration on rural development is multi-dimensional and inter-related rather than linear. At the same time, respondents observed a residual bias toward urban policy implementation that has long been raised in Nations (2020), suggesting greater need for equitable Rural-Urban development strategies [28], [29].

Economic opportunity was the dominant push factor for rural–urban migration, which dovetails with findings in Ghana and similar context [30]. While migration has positive impacts on individual welfare, as well as enhancing the potential labour supply in urban areas, it gives rise to structural problems for rural areas, such as the danger of skill depletion and lower levels of value added from agriculture [31], [32]. "These results confirm the importance of creating jobs in rural areas by agro-processing, rural entrepreneurship and local value chains to avoid overwhelming out-migration," [33].

The contribution of urban migrants to rural development was significant, mainly due to remittance income, skills and social investments in education, health and community infrastructure. This supports Barkat et. al. (2023) and other international surveys on remittances and poverty alleviation. Such contributions are hamstrung by poor rural infrastructure and lack of institutional support, assuring Fuseini (2024)'s argument that enabling conditions are preconditions to scaling-up and sustaining migrant-led development.

Policy knowledge has a crucial influence on whom migrants engage. Migrants who were knowledgeable about migration-related policies were much more engaged in remitting, investing, sharing skills and these supported Cleton & Schweitzer (2021) and Magnano et al. (2021). However, views of policy efficacy were varied. Some progress in urban life was recognized, but numerous participants sensed a disregard of rural matters too [38]. These are the implications of segmented policy making which does not seek and overlooks rural-urban connections.

Beyond the economic impacts, migrants frequently act as cultural ambassadors, staying connected with their communities through festivals, social events, and mentorship programs [39]. However, the lack of institutional ways to acknowledge and encourage such contributions constrains their potential to shape a broader development agenda.

### Implications

The policy implications of the findings are that good migration governance is as much about communication, institutional capacity, and policy stability as it is about policy content. Clear, consistent messages that are communicated through migrant-anchored channels are crucial for translating the policy intention into practice [30], [40]. Strong institutions are equally critical. The more transparent and easier it is to access financial systems, local government, and investment agencies where remittances are sent, the higher the probability to smoothen out migrants choice on how they utilise their savings [41], [42], [43]. Policy stability also proved to be a central factor in driving long term commitment, supporting the case that uncertainty also dampens diaspora investment [44], [45].

Theoretically, the results empirically support Migration Systems Theory, NELM and Sustainable Livelihoods Approach by showing that migration is influenced by interlinked policy, institutional and social contexts instead of independent economic considerations [24], [46]. Migration choices and remittances are household risk-coping strategies, which are rationally decided in relation to opportunity structures as well as governance environment. Institutional assets stand at the heart of livelihood outcomes [41].

Operationally, the findings have implications for practitioners, local authorities and development agencies. Efforts that assist migrants to better understand and navigate policy environments, lower bureaucratic obstacles, and obtain access to trustworthy investment vehicles can greatly enhance development returns [47]. At the district level, clearer processes and more formalised collaboration arenas can reduce transaction costs and enhance migrant involvement [48], [49].

### Recommendations

A few suggestions can be derived from these findings. It will be important for Ghana to enhance policy communication through reliable channels such as diaspora associations, social media and community radio that migrants can use to know about programmes and incentives [50], [51]. Second, institutional capacity at national and district levels needs to be strengthened by reducing decision time through digital services delivery, training staffs and migrant-friendly administrative procedure in a bid to shorten delays so as to mitigate the risk of investment [52]. Third, policy consistency should be sought by way of a long-term national migration strategy that transcends political cycles which in turn instils trust and commitment amongst migrants [53], [54].

Fourth, there should be an explicit consideration of migration in planning for rural development. Matching migrants' skills with local development needs, facilitating return migration and collective investment through Hometown Associations could enhance development effects [55], [56]. Finally, long-term investments in rural infrastructure—transport, energy, digital connectivity, health and education—are needed to capitalize on the development gains resulting from migrants' contributions and to ensure that migration helps drive inclusive and resilient rural economic transformation [57], [58].

These combined recommendations suggest a policy driven, coordinated approach where migration is viewed not as a problem to be controlled but rather a strategic asset for rural development in Ghana.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper has shown that the contributions of migrants to rural development in Ghana are influenced by migration policy, institutional support and local developmental conditions. The factor analysis highlights the importance of policy knowledge, institutional responsiveness, engagement with migrants and long-term policy stability for both the spread and sustainability of migrant participation. Overall, these elements act in synergy which, in turn, accounts for why some migrants continue to have intense developmental connections with their home communities while others de-attach. In summary, the results reinforce that migration contributes significantly to rural development potential but this is conditional on explicit policies and institutions as well as sufficient infrastructure in the countryside.

More generally, the study supports the idea that migration should be seen as a national development issue rather than purely a household coping mechanism. Migrants are highly motivated to support their home communities, but the ability of migrants to do so is determined by the opportunities and constraints found in policy and institutional settings. Positive, consistent, and transparent policies foster the maintenance of a commitment to participate, while weak or volatile structures result in undermining the migrant's participation. The findings suggest that better policy communication, stronger institutional capacity and a higher level of policy consistency are required for effective pro-poor and sustainable rural development.

While making valuable theoretical contributions, the study also indicates new research directions. Comparative cross-sectional analyses of internal versus international migrants could help clarify the role of distinct temporal dynamics on development aspirations. If longitudinal, they would be able to observe the evolution of engagement with migrants, and test the effect of change in policy environments on behavior. It would also be useful for future work to incorporate qualitative methods such as interviews and focus groups to gain further understanding of the lived experiences and motivations driving migrants. Furthermore, a closer focus on the perceptions and experience of migration at community level (including households as well as traditional leaders and local councilors) would enhance understanding of how migration is being received in rural communities. Finally, another promising research avenue is investigating the increasing role of digital technologies in enabling remittances, investments and knowledge sharing. Taken together, these orientations advance insight into the migration–development nexus and policy attention to more effective policies and institutions.

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The authors declare no potential competing interests.

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