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license**MIGRATION AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA: A
TRANSFORMATIONALIST PERSPECTIVE****Ester Amoako^{1*}, Yaw Agyeman Adjei¹, Kwaku Owusu Nyarko¹**¹University of Ghana, P.O Box LG 25, Accra GA117, Ghana*Correspondence E-Mail: estheramoako@ug.edu.ghDOI: <https://doi.org/10.30598/baileofisipvol2iss3pp465-480>**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the role of migration as a catalyst for socio-economic development in Ghana through a transformationalist approach to social change. The primary objective of this study is to explore how the dynamics of social transformation influence and are influenced by migration, with a focus on the bidirectional relationship between the two. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates both qualitative and quantitative analyses and applies a transformationalist theoretical framework to understand the processes of social change that have unfolded in Ghana over the past decade. The findings reveal that while a reciprocal relationship between migration and social transformation is widely perceived, the influence of social transformation on migration patterns and flows is significantly more pronounced. Regressive changes were recorded in the economic domain, whereas technological and demographic aspects experienced considerable progress. In contrast, political and cultural dimensions have remained relatively stagnant. Notably, exceptions to this directional influence are found in the areas of higher educational attainment and improved household income—both of which are directly stimulated by migration experiences. These findings offer new insights into migration not merely as a consequence of social transformation, but also as a selective driver of specific forms of change. The article recommends the adoption of a cross-sectoral approach in socio-economic development policies, positioning migration as a strategic variable in social planning and the advancement of social sciences and humanities, particularly within the context of developing countries such as Ghana.

Keywords: Development Policy, Migration, Social Transformation, Socio-Economic Development, Transformationalist Theory

INTRODUCTION

Migration has long been an integral part of social dynamics across various parts of the world, including the Sub-Saharan African region such as Ghana (Madondo & Dhobha, 2025; Weldemariam et al., 2023). Over the past few decades, migration has evolved not only as a survival strategy but also as a form of social adaptation to increasingly complex structural changes and economic pressures (Amo-Agyemang, 2023; Fernández et al., 2024). In Ghana, both domestic and international migration have shaped the social, economic, and even identity landscapes of communities (Arthur-Holmes & Abrefa Busia, 2022). Nevertheless, an increasingly

urgent question arises: is migration merely a response to limitations, or does it serve as a catalyst for broader social transformation? This question is crucial to address because migration is not merely a demographic phenomenon, but also a multidimensional social phenomenon that holds transformative potential.

Data from the Ghana Statistical Service show a significant increase in the number of internal migrants over the past two decades, particularly from the northern regions to the more developed southern regions (Amoah et al., 2022). This increase has coincided with various forms of social transformation—in the contexts of education, technology, and employment structures. However, amid these changes, the economic conditions of communities show a regressive trend, with widening social inequalities and persistently high youth unemployment rates (Adinkra-Darko & Ahiakpor, 2024; Dzanku & Tsikata, 2022). This reality highlights the tension between the empirical facts and the expectations of migration as a pathway toward a better life. Therefore, a renewed understanding of the relationship between migration and social transformation is needed—not merely viewing migration as a consequence of limitations, but as a process intricately linked to broader social changes.

Various previous studies have attempted to unravel the relationship between migration and development. For instance, research by Khan (2024) and Yadeta & Hunegnaw (2022) demonstrated that international migration has significant economic impacts through remittances and skill transfers. Similarly, a study by Attah-Otu et al. (2024), Chetto et al. (2025), and Sheldon & Zhan (2022) emphasized that migration decisions are often based on family strategies to maximize household income. In Ghana, Assan (2021), Chetto et al. (2025), and Yeboah et al. (2021) noted that remittances from the Ghanaian diaspora play an important role in local community development. Meanwhile, Cebotari & Dito (2021), Dotsey et al. (2025), and Spencer et al. (2022) focused on internal migration, particularly young people moving to major cities in efforts to improve their living standards.

In the study of social change theory, structuralist approaches such as Agnew et al. (2025) and Wanner et al. (2024) structuration theory see change as the result of the interaction between structure and agency. However, this perspective often gives limited attention to the subjective experiences of migrants as agents of change. On the other hand, the transnationalism approach, as described by Ehrenfeld (2024), opens space for understanding how migrants build social spaces across national borders. Nevertheless, this approach has not fully captured the dynamics of social transformation at the local level, especially in developing countries.

Other research using a development perspective shows that migration is often ambivalent. Adger et al. (2024), Brzozowska (2025), and Trinidad & Faas (2025) demonstrated that not all migration leads to upward mobility; many cases, in fact, exacerbate social inequalities. Similar findings were highlighted by Manolova (2022) and Zapata-Barrero (2024), who argued that migration could reinforce existing power structures if not accompanied by inclusive policies. Meanwhile, Cleave et al. (2023) and Natter & Thiollet (2022) emphasized the importance of local political contexts and policies in determining whether migration results in transformation

or stagnation.

Nonetheless, in some local contexts such as Ghana, studies directly examining the link between social transformation and migration using theoretical frameworks that bridge structural dynamics and micro-level changes remain limited. Most research still tends to separate migration as a demographic phenomenon from social transformation as a broader historical process. In reality, both processes occur simultaneously and mutually influence one another.

This is where the present study positions itself. Without explicitly setting the concepts in opposition, this study seeks to explore the spaces where migration is not merely read as a response but rather as a catalyst that triggers specific forms of social change. In the context of Ghana, this article illustrates how migration can become part of the narrative of change, while at the same time, pre-existing social transformations also direct migration patterns. Thus, migration and social transformation not only coexist but also generate and reshape each other—particularly when viewed through the lens of transformationalism.

The aim of this study is to illustrate the relationship between migration and socio-economic transformation in Ghana by employing a transformationalist theoretical approach and a mixed-methods strategy. By highlighting how changes in technology, demographics, and education correlate with migration patterns, this study offers a new understanding of migration as a process imbued with social meaning rather than merely geographical movement. It also seeks to contribute to the advancement of the social sciences and humanities, particularly in understanding how migration processes can be strategically harnessed in the formulation of more inclusive and equitable national development policies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the relationship between migration and social transformation in rural Ghana. The decision to adopt this methodology is rooted in the recognition that migration is a multifaceted phenomenon, shaped not only by structural-economic conditions but also by deeply personal experiences. Quantitative data alone cannot capture the subjective realities of migrants and their communities, while qualitative narratives may lack generalizability. Therefore, a combined strategy provides a more holistic understanding, capturing both aggregated trends and the diverse lived experiences that underlie them (Mrabti & Alaoui, 2024; Park, 2025).

Fieldwork was conducted across 21 rural communities in seven districts of Ghana: Wa West, Wa East, Sissala East, Lambussie-Karni, Daffiama-Bussie-Issa, and Nandom in the Upper West Region, as well as Sawla-Tuna-Kalba (STK) in the Savannah Region. These areas were selected due to their high rates of out-migration and socio-ecological vulnerability. Characterized by a unimodal rainfall pattern, they support only one cropping season annually and are heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture. The limitations in irrigation infrastructure, coupled with increasing climate variability, have made these districts increasingly exposed to economic and

environmental shocks (Primecz et al., 2023).

To collect quantitative data, a structured household survey was conducted with 2,107 randomly selected households during May and June 2021. Respondents were evenly distributed across the study districts, with 300–303 households sampled per district. The survey captured demographic profiles, migration histories, motivations for migration, and perceptions of changes across five dimensions of social transformation: economic, technological, political, demographic, and cultural. Data collection was facilitated using the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method via CPro 8.0.1, which enhanced reliability and accuracy in rural contexts (Klevens, 2023; Roberto Moraes et al., 2021).

Complementing the survey, qualitative data were collected to gain deeper insight into the meanings behind migration patterns and community-level change. A total of 105 in-depth interviews were conducted. These included 71 interviews with community members, household heads, and local leaders in the origin communities, along with 34 interviews with migrants now residing in urban destinations. Among the migrants, 15 were based in the Bono and Ahafo Regions, while 19 lived in the Greater Accra Region. Participants were selected purposively, considering gender, migration duration (recent vs. long-term), and economic roles, to ensure a diversity of perspectives. These narratives helped contextualize and interpret the survey findings, in line with best practices in mixed-method research (Choi & Liu, 2024; Waller et al., 2021).

Importantly, ethical considerations were integrated into every stage of the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and interviews were conducted in participants' preferred languages to ensure clarity and comfort. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, with all names and identifying information removed from transcripts. The study adhered to the ethical standards set by the Ghanaian Ethics Review Board for Social Research, and was guided by the principles of respect, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, the study employed multiple forms of triangulation. Data were triangulated across methods (survey and interview), sources (households, leaders, migrants), and locations (origin and destination areas). This process enabled the verification of findings while also revealing nuanced contradictions and convergences between different perspectives (Schlunegger et al., 2024). Thematic coding was applied to all qualitative data using NVivo, allowing for systematic analysis of patterns across interviews, and ensuring analytical rigor without compromising the richness of respondents' narratives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Reciprocal Relations: Migration and Social Transformation

Societies often perceive migration not merely as a physical movement from one place to another but also as both a response to social change and a trigger for that change itself. This view

contains the understanding that there is a reciprocal relationship between the phenomenon of migration and the dynamics of social transformation. In many agrarian communities experiencing economic pressures, land scarcity, and shifting social values, migration emerges as an adaptive strategy, and in some cases, a means of social and economic survival.

A survey of 2,107 households revealed that general perceptions of migration are closely linked to changes across various social dimensions. As shown in Table 2, a majority of respondents perceived that economic aspects such as the availability of capital (55.2%) and labor for farming (43%) had significantly declined. Income levels were also perceived to have decreased by 43.8% of respondents. Conversely, access to education (60.7%) and electricity (51.9%) were seen to have improved. However, cultural aspects such as traditional beliefs (57.8%) and social norms (61.5%) were perceived as remaining largely unchanged. These findings suggest that social transformation, as experienced by residents, occurs selectively—not uniformly across all aspects of life.

Table 1 Social Transformation Dimensions

Social Transformation Dimension	Improved (%)	Declined (%)	Remained the Same (%)
Availability of farmland	25.0	33.3	41.7
Availability of capital	18.2	55.2	26.6
Agricultural labor force	19.2	43.0	37.8
Income levels	23.7	43.8	32.5
Access to education	60.7	14.9	24.4
Access to electricity	51.9	7.4	40.7

Source: Research Data Analysis, 2024

Narratives from focused group discussions (FGDs) enrich this quantitative data with real-life experiences. A man in an FGD in Bugubelle stated that “income from farming is very low,” and that “many people migrate to seek alternative livelihoods, such as illegal mining.” He also cited land scarcity and declining soil fertility as key drivers of migration. Similarly, in an FGD in Sentu, participants explained that “if the number of males in a family keeps growing, eventually there won’t be enough land for everyone to farm.”

Further, a 27-year-old migrant in Accra emphasized that he moved because he believed “income in Accra is higher” and “there are more jobs available that don’t exist in the Upper West.” He described his decision to migrate as the best life choice he had made. This narrative reflects what Turolla & Hoffmann (2023) termed ‘the cake is in Accra’—indicating that urban centers have become epicenters of opportunity and dreams for a better life.

Beyond economic factors, social aspirations also play a role. A household head in Bulenga recounted that shifting social aspirations have altered community living standards. He mentioned that people now “want to build better houses” and “send their children to school to become successful,” making migration a means to achieve social mobility and status.

However, not all forms of social transformation directly influence migration decisions.

About 64% of respondents stated that improved access to electricity and 65% stated that social media access had no impact on their decision to migrate. Likewise, agricultural mechanization (67%) and automation of production processes (77.7%) were not perceived as drivers of migration. This confirms that not all social changes act as catalysts for migration—selective dynamics are at play.

Conversely, migration itself also transforms the social structures of origin communities. As shown in Table 8, 48.3% of respondents felt that migration led to a decline in community income levels, while 48.7% noted a reduction in capital availability. Around 40% felt a negative impact on the availability of labor, yet 47.3% believed that migration improved access to education, particularly because rural communities often lack higher educational facilities.

Table 2 Impact of Migration on Social Transformation

Impact of Migration on Social Transformation	Improved (%)	Declined (%)	No Impact (%)
Income	23.6	48.3	28.1
Capital availability	19.0	48.7	32.3
Labor availability	12.0	39.8	48.2
Access to education	47.3	15.0	37.8

Source: Research Data Analysis, 2024

These findings highlight how migration is not merely a response to social conditions but also an agent of change itself. The social transformations triggered by migration create new life patterns: a widening gap between rural and urban areas, a reduction in agricultural labor, and an increased value placed on education as a symbol of success. As one migrant said, “if you’ve ever been to my village, you know it’s not an easy place to survive...” —a testimony that captures the urgency and depth of migration dynamics.

The reciprocal relationship between migration and social transformation appears neither linear nor deterministic, but complex and situational. While many respondents stated that changes in economic aspects, such as capital availability and income levels, drove migration, their perceptions of migration’s feedback effects on social and economic structures varied.

As seen in Table 3, around 48.3% of respondents felt that migration worsened income levels in their home communities, and 48.7% believed it decreased capital availability. This suggests that remittances may not be optimal or evenly distributed within communities, or it could reflect the loss of productive labor negatively impacting local economies. Additionally, 39.8% believed that migration reduced labor availability for agricultural and productive activities, implying that although migration is seen as a solution to local economic crises, it also creates productive voids that weaken community resilience.

However, there was a relatively positive perception of migration’s effect on education access. About 47.3% of respondents noted that migration improved educational access. This aligns with qualitative narratives from various interviews, such as one from a migrant household head in Bulenga, who noted increased family aspirations to educate their children to become

“important people” in society—a goal achieved through migration to cities or abroad. This shows that migration is not merely an escape from economic pressures but also an active family strategy for social mobility through education (Turolla & Hoffmann, 2023).

Moreover, migration appears to have a positive influence on urbanization (41.4%) and population growth (45.4%), suggesting that migration processes not only impact origin communities but also contribute to demographic and spatial changes in destination areas. Indirectly, this indicates that migration drives modernization processes, although not always accompanied by improved living standards in the places of origin.

On the other hand, cultural aspects such as traditional values and customary beliefs were perceived by the majority of respondents as unaffected by migration, with 76.2% and 79.2% respectively stating that migration had no impact on these aspects. This indicates that cultural identity and value systems remain relatively strong and resilient despite high mobility. It shows a form of cultural resilience, where communities retain their local cultural values as a form of social stability amid dynamic changes.

In follow-up interviews, a 27-year-old migrant now living in Accra explained that his migration decision was driven by the belief that the city offered better economic opportunities and a higher quality of life. His statement, “Moving too, has been one of the best decisions I have made,” illustrates an individual aspiration that aligns with the push-pull paradigm, where poverty in rural areas and the attraction of the city are dominant reasons for migration decisions.

Meanwhile, in a women’s FGD in Bugubelle, it was mentioned that despite poor road infrastructure, improved transportation accessibility had facilitated migration. This confirms that infrastructural changes also play a key role in driving migration dynamics. Thus, migration can be seen as part of a broader process of social transformation, where structural factors such as infrastructure, education, and social aspirations shape migration directions and patterns.

Dominant Direction of Influence: Social Transformation as a Driver of Migration

Field findings and quantitative surveys in this study indicate that the direction of influence between migration and social transformation predominantly flows from social transformation to migration, rather than the other way around. In many cases, changes in the socio-economic systems of communities in the areas of origin have created structural pressures that gradually push individuals and households to make migration decisions as part of adaptive strategies. This social transformation includes shifts in livelihood structures, degradation of agricultural land, declining access to stable local employment, and increasing perceptions of climate change risks affecting agricultural production and household economic security.

Survey data reinforces this narrative. Around 57.6% of respondents stated that reduced access to employment in their home regions was one of the main drivers of migration. This is compounded by other data showing that 54.9% of respondents cited agricultural degradation and declining crop yields as the dominant reasons pushing family members to migrate. Furthermore, 38.5% of respondents expressed concerns about increasing climate risks such as

drought, irregular planting seasons, and declining soil fertility as significant factors shaping migration decisions.

In an interview with a farmer from Tumu, who now relies on remittances from his child who migrated to Accra, he mentioned that over the past five years, his maize yields had drastically decreased due to unpredictable rainfall patterns. He admitted that he eventually agreed to his child's departure to the city in hopes of covering the family's living expenses. This narrative illustrates how climate change—part of broader socio-ecological transformations—gradually erodes the foundation of rural livelihoods and compels households to seek alternatives beyond their regions of origin.

Field observations support these findings. In the Tain and Sissala areas, many farmlands have been abandoned because they no longer yield adequate returns. Staple crops such as sorghum and maize increasingly fail due to inconsistent rainfall. Additionally, in the Bugubelle community, there is a noticeable decline in seasonal farming activities and a growing dependence on remittances from migrated family members. Poor village infrastructure and deteriorating road access further reinforce migration as a rational way out.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the transformative adaptation approach proposed by Colloff et al. (2021) and Filho et al. (2022), which emphasizes that major changes in ecological and economic conditions can drive individuals and communities to undertake radical adaptive responses such as migration. Within this framework, migration is not merely an escape but a transformative adaptive response to recurring and escalating pressures. When traditional agricultural systems can no longer sustain livelihoods, migration becomes a realistic and effective strategy to avoid structural vulnerabilities.

In the context of livelihood transformation, migration is understood as an effort to sustain livelihoods amid a structurally regressing socio-economic system. The declining local capacity to provide access to employment and sources of livelihood forces communities to shift their economic orientation. Migration to urban areas such as Kumasi and Accra—viewed as having better-developed employment infrastructure and better access to education and healthcare services—becomes a logical destination. These cities are seen as aspirational hubs where opportunities, albeit highly competitive and challenging, still exist.

Migration, however, is not limited to major cities; some migrations also target forest zones such as Bono and Ahafo, mainly in the form of seasonal labor migration. These areas, with their active oil palm and cocoa plantations, are regarded as places offering temporary employment opportunities for migrants from degraded savannah regions. One informant, Y.K., who migrates seasonally to Ahafo during the cocoa planting season, mentioned, "Even though it's tiring and I'm far from my family, I can bring back money to pay for my younger siblings' education." This reflects migration dynamics as a flexible family economic strategy oriented toward future investment, especially in education.

Thus, the migration patterns that emerge reflect not only physical relocation but also a paradigm shift from traditional economic systems toward new orientations that are more

individualistic, urban-based, and cash-driven. Migration serves both as a survival mechanism and as an entry point into further social transformation within households and originating communities. In conclusion, the dominant direction of influence in this context is that social transformation in the areas of origin triggers migration, not the reverse. Migration reflects the inability of local systems to respond to the challenges of modernity and ecological crises, and it represents an adaptive strategy in the face of broader changes.

Dimensions of Social Transformation: Progress and Stagnation

Social transformation within communities does not occur uniformly across all aspects of life. This study explores community perceptions across five main dimensions of social transformation—economy, technology, politics, demography, and culture—to understand the direction and pace of ongoing change. Based on survey results and in-depth interviews, it is evident that social transformation is not linear. Some dimensions have accelerated, while others remain stagnant or have even regressed.

Table 3 Perceptions of Five Dimensions of Transformation

Dimension of Transformation	Majority Perception	Empirical Indications in the Field
Economy	Experiencing decline	Rising unemployment, weakening agriculture
Technology	Experiencing progress	Increased gadget ownership, internet usage
Demography	Experiencing significant change	High birth rates, rapid urbanization
Politics	Relatively stagnant	Low participation, unchanged power structures
Culture	Relatively stagnant	Strong traditions, resistance to social innovation

Source: Research Data Analysis, 2024

A majority of respondents (63.2%) felt that their economic conditions had deteriorated over the past five years. This decline is especially apparent in agriculture, which once formed the backbone of household economies. Climate change, limited access to fertilizers and capital, and insufficient institutional support have worsened the situation. One informant, B.T., noted that fields once cultivated twice a year are now planted only once due to production cost constraints. He stated, “Previously, harvests could be saved; now they’re barely enough for daily meals.” Furthermore, the rise in youth unemployment points to a structural regression in the local economic system.

In contrast, the technology dimension has seen significant advancement. Field observations revealed that although access to electricity remains limited in some areas, over 75% of households own at least one smartphone. Young people are accustomed to using social media, often relying on it as the primary means of community communication. Respondents noted that access to information and entertainment has become much broader compared to a decade ago. This technological progress was driven less by direct government programs and more by the massive influx of digital markets and the expansion of mobile communication networks.

Demography has also undergone rapid change. Birth rates remain high even in economically strained areas, and urbanization is increasing, with many youths opting to live in major cities like Accra or Kumasi in search of work. Migration has also shifted family structures from extended families toward more nuclear family models, especially in urban settings.

On the other hand, political and cultural dimensions appear relatively stagnant. Most informants reported no significant change in local power structures over the past decade. Village leadership elections remain elitist, dominated by traditional leaders and long-standing political figures. One informant, K.N., noted, “Unless you’re from the chief’s family, it’s hard to get into village politics.” This suggests that despite economic and demographic mobility, transformation in the political arena is hampered by rigid social structures and longstanding patronage systems.

Culturally, there is also relative stagnation. Traditional values such as age hierarchies, gender roles, and customary rituals remain strongly upheld. Even though communities are open to technological change, they continue to preserve traditional norms, especially concerning marriage and communal decision-making. This reflects a form of ambivalent modernity—where communities pragmatically engage with change while simultaneously clinging to old values for identity and social stability.

This phenomenon can be interpreted by Lin et al. (2024) and Vaid (2024), which argues that social transformation does not occur uniformly but rather unfolds in fragmented arenas of change. In this context, the economy and technology have progressed faster due to globalization and climate pressures, while politics and culture remain trapped by structural resistance—either due to the dominance of local elites or inherited traditional values. Stagnation in political and cultural dimensions suggests that while there is social mobility and openness to information, changes in power structures and social relations are slow because they are still bound by traditional legitimacy. This could potentially create social tensions, particularly among younger generations who are more exposed to change and who expect more inclusive socio-political participation.

Migration as a Selective Driver of Social Change

Within the broader dynamics of social transformation, migration is often positioned as an adaptive response to economic and environmental pressures. However, findings from this study indicate that in certain specific cases, migration is not merely a response, but also plays an active role as a selective driver of social change—particularly in terms of access to education and the improvement of household income. Although the general pattern shows that social transformation has a dominant influence on migration, these two exceptions demonstrate that migration can generate significant and constructive feedback loops of change.

One of the most prominent dimensions of migration’s positive impact is the improved access to higher education. Qualitative data from interviews with return migrants reveal a consistent pattern of investment in their children’s education. A respondent, A.S., who worked as a construction laborer in Kumasi for over 12 years, stated that the main reason he remained

in the city was to ensure his child could attend university. After returning to his village, he opened a small grocery shop and continued to allocate part of his profits to fund his youngest child's university education in Accra. "I didn't get much schooling, but I want my child to avoid the hard labor I once did," he declared with determined resolve.

Similar narratives were found during a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with a group of women in Nkrumah village. One participant shared that her husband, who had worked in the city for years, consistently sent money to ensure their children could continue their education through high school, even hiring private tutors for additional lessons. These narratives show how migration experiences have instilled new aspirations for social mobility through education—something that was previously not prioritized in traditional farming households.

Another dimension emerging as a direct outcome of migration is the rise of micro-enterprises and local entrepreneurship, serving as channels for economic reinvestment by returning migrants. Field observations noted the establishment of several small shops, motorcycle repair businesses, and small-scale livestock farms owned by former migrants. Many utilized skills or capital accumulated during their time in the city. For instance, T.K., a former minibus driver in Accra, now manages a small street food stall near the village market. He shared that he learned stock management and customer service skills from his city job. He also noted that his interactions with colleagues in the city reshaped his views on the importance of punctuality and basic marketing strategies. This phenomenon supports the transformative adaptation framework proposed by Cantat et al. (2023), which sees migration not just as a survival strategy but as a form of agency in the face of social and ecological crises. In these cases, migration is not a passive exodus due to poverty or environmental degradation but an active redefinition of future prospects and the social structures individuals and families seek to build.

The FGD findings also revealed a highly transformative aspect: shifts in social aspirations after experiencing urban life. Several FGD participants shared that living in the city made them realize that traditional values, such as rigid gender-based labor divisions or customary obligations in household economics, began to feel outdated. One participant, M.Y., who had worked as a shop assistant in Kumasi, said that she now felt confident speaking up in village meetings and participating in a women's cooperative—something she had never done before because she once believed women should not "interfere in men's matters."

This indicates that migration has triggered changes not only economically but also within the cultural realm—generating new hopes for more egalitarian roles, statuses, and social relations. Although these transformations may not be immediately visible, they exert a long-term driving force toward the formation of more open and adaptive social structures. While migration is typically triggered by external pressures like economic crises or climate change, in certain cases, it also acts as a selective agent of change. In the local context, migration serves as a bridge between different lived experiences—rural and urban, traditional and modern—creating new pathways for social transformation rooted in real-life experiences and aspirations formed through adaptation.

Policy Implications: Positioning Migration at the Center of Transformation Planning

In an ever-changing socio-economic landscape, migration can no longer be viewed merely as a peripheral phenomenon or a side effect of poverty and regional inequality. Instead, the findings of this study underscore the importance of migration as a strategic variable in designing adaptive and contextual development policies. When migration is understood not merely as an escape, but as a reflective social response to structural pressures and new opportunities, its role in social transformation becomes central.

The transformative governance framework developed by Cilliers et al. (2024) provides a crucial foundation for understanding this. In this framework, managing social change requires more than technocratic or sectoral approaches; it demands a policy system open to complexity, inclusive of citizen voices, and flexible to directional shifts. Migration, in this context, should not only be managed but encouraged as an instrument of social innovation—bringing flows of ideas, new knowledge, aspirations, and relationships that enrich both origin and destination communities. At the practical level, evidence-based interventions are crucial. One strategic proposal is the integration of migration data into regional planning. Currently, migration rarely features explicitly in local development plans, despite the direct impacts of population movements on infrastructure needs, access to basic services, labor distribution, and pressure on local resources. Local governments need to build dynamic internal migration monitoring systems, including migration flow maps and migrant skills databases, to formulate more precise and responsive policies.

Furthermore, skill training programs for returning migrants should become a priority intervention. Many returnees, like R.A.—a farmer who came back after ten years in Accra—reported struggling to readjust to village life due to the lack of reintegration support, despite acquiring technical and social skills in the city. Without training schemes and business incubation programs, such potential would be wasted. Therefore, training programs should be designed based on urban experiences and focus on empowering local economies, recognizing migrants as development actors, not just beneficiaries. These policy implications also open new avenues for the development of contextual social sciences and humanities. Migration is not merely an economic issue; it is deeply intertwined with cultural, gender, and identity dimensions. Returning to the village brings not only money but also life experiences that challenge local norms, shape new aspirations, and trigger changes in social relations. Thus, an interdisciplinary approach—combining socio-cultural studies, local political analysis, and household economics—is vital to fully understanding these dynamics.

In the context of developing countries like Ghana or Indonesia, mainstreaming migration into public policy is not a luxury but a necessity. Transformation cannot proceed without acknowledging migration's role as a bridge between stagnant local realities and a dynamic external world. If designed inclusively and based on local knowledge, migration can become a tool not only for survival but also for creatively transforming social landscapes long constrained by structural poverty and regional disparities. Migration must be understood as a living social

process—it moves, brings ideas, sparks hopes, and reshapes social structures at the origin. Placing migration at the center of transformation planning is not only a logical step but also a strategic act toward building a more adaptive, just, and dignified future.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that migration, in the context of Ghana, is not merely a response to socio-economic pressures, but rather an active agent in selectively restructuring the direction and form of social transformation. Through a transformationalist approach, this research demonstrates that the relationship between migration and social transformation is bidirectional, yet asymmetrical; migration has proven to exert significant driving force in advancing certain dimensions, particularly education and household income, while also breaking through structural stagnation within the local context. These findings offer an important theoretical contribution: migration not only reflects a changing social reality but also actively reshapes norms, aspirations, and social configurations within origin communities. This is the key novelty of the study: migration is repositioned as a selective catalyst capable of triggering targeted, though uneven, sociocultural change, and therefore deserves to be treated as a strategic variable in development planning for developing countries. A cross-sectoral approach and the mainstreaming of migration into public policy are essential to manage and optimize the transformative potential of human mobility within the framework of equitable and sustainable development.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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