

Socio-Economic Status of International Return Migrants to the Berekum Municipality, Ghana

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Abstract

The phenomenon of return migration has been neglected in many studies in Africa. But there has been a growing recognition that migration, both internal and international can offer an important route out of poverty for many people from developing countries. To unravel some of these claims, data from a survey involving 120 returnees in the Berekum Municipality, Ghana, were used to assess the socio-economic status of international return migrants to Ghana. The study adopted a quantitative approach to research involving both snowballing and simple random sampling techniques. The instrument for the data collection was an interview schedule, made up of both open and closed-ended questions. The results have shown that 84% of the returnees had acquired critical skills, particularly technical skills (44%) while more than half (68.3%) at return owned houses and a large proportion acquired consumer durable goods. But respondents who lived and worked in European destinations had the highest asset-holding status compared to their counterparts who stayed and worked in American and African destinations. The study, therefore, recommends that government through a multi-sectorial approach should design and implement comprehensive programmes such as post-arrival counseling and start-up support for returnees to ensure a maximum utilization of their skills and resources for the socio-economic development of the country.

Keywords: Return migrants, Socio-economic status, Berekum, Ghana

Introduction

There is a growing recognition that migration, both internal and international, can offer an important route out of poverty for many people from developing countries (Black et al., 2003). Migration is increasingly seen as part of a virtuous interaction in which development is enhanced, not only in the destination country but also in the sending country (Weinstein, 2001). The arguments used are, for example, the role of remittances and repatriated savings in overcoming capital constraints (Ilahi, 1999; Mesnard, 2004) and the accumulation of human capital (such as skills and ideas) through exposure to the host country's market economic environment (McCormick & Wahba, 2001; Dustmann & Kirchkamp, 2002). Well over a century ago, Ravenstein (1885) observed that every migration stream generates a counter-stream which suggests that return migration is taken for granted with any migration. This may explain the initial silence over the issue in the literature until the global economic crisis of 1973 (Ammassari & Black, 2001). Return migration is a central part of the ongoing migration process in this development, implying that it is no longer seen as the closure of the migration cycle, but rather as one of many steps within a continued movement (King, 2000).

It is this aspect of the contemporary form of international migration that has made it one of the thornier issues in international relations, especially since the beginning of the 1990s. It was a major theme of the G7 summit of the major industrialized countries held in London in July 1991 (Teitelbaum & Weiner, 1995). Although it is generally recognized that international migration and development are closely interconnected (Fischer, Martin & Straubhaar, 1997), the understanding of their relationship remains limited (Appleyard, 1992; Papademetriou & Martin, 1991). This is because both are highly dynamic and complex processes (Appleyard, 1992; Papademetriou & Martin, 1991). Massey et al. (1993) opined that the problem is also partly due to the fact that the theoretical base for understanding these forces remains weak. Meanwhile, the need to develop a thorough understanding of the migration-development linkage is very essential, particularly in an era characterized by increasing human mobility. Developing a sound policy on return migrants in particular will require a good knowledge of return migration including a deeper understanding of their socio-economic implications after return. This paper therefore explores the socio-economic status of international return migrants to Ghana using the Berekum Municipality as a case.

Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

Migration may be defined as a temporary or permanent change in the usual place of residence across space in a given time period (Weeks, 1999). It has time and space dimensions which are often used to classify migrants. For instance, in terms of time, migration can be classified as seasonal or permanent, and spatially, it could be designated as internal or international while internal migration is further classified into four components namely, rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-rural and urban-urban (Weeks, 1999). International return migration, which is the focus of this paper, refers to the act of a person returning to his or her country of citizenship after having been international migrant in another country and who is intending to stay in his/her own country for at least one year (United Nations Statistics Division, 1998; IOM, 2004).

In the 1970s, the theories on return migration viewed the returnee as a migrant who returned home because of a failed migration experience that did not accomplish the desired outcome (Cassarino, 2004). For instance, the neoclassical migration model viewed the return decisions of migrants as the outcome of a failed migration experience which did not yield the expected benefits. In other words, in a neoclassical stance, return migration exclusively involves labour migrants who miscalculated the costs of migration due to imperfect information before departure and who did not reap the benefits of higher earnings. Return occurs as a consequence of their failed experiences abroad or because their human capital was not rewarded as expected.

However, the focus shifted by the 1990s. Return then was understood as a successful experience abroad where the migrant accomplished the goals of higher income and the accumulation of savings while remitting part of their income to the household; acquisition of higher education, skills, and foreign work experience; as well as the accumulation of social capital in the form of networks, values and attitudes (Cassarino, 2004). From the perspective of the new economics model, international migration and return is viewed as a calculated strategy that aims to mitigate credit market imperfections at origin in which migration serves to accumulate sufficient savings to provide the capital or at least the collateral required to obtain a credit for investment at home, in particular in business activities. Once migrants have achieved their target level of savings, they return to their home countries (Stark, 1991; Mesnard, 2004).

One of the most debated issues has been that of human capital gains for emigration countries through the return of migrants (Ammassari & Black, 2001; Hunger, 2004). The human capital model of socioeconomic attainment views migration as a form of investment whereby the individual initiates a geographical move with the expectation of drawing net cumulative gains over his or her working life (Wilson, 1985). Brain gain generally denotes expatriates returning from abroad with highly skilled technical or intellectual expertise, which creates a positive outcome because they often bring back skills and/or norms (Ardovino & Brown, 2008). Brain gain usually has a positive connotation in the literature because migrants can potentially bring back skills and/or norms and implement them in their home society. Gmelch (1980) has distinguished two perspectives from which this question may be measured or approached.

On the one hand, the actual social and economic status of returnees can be examined, looking at employment and housing, participation in associations, their earnings and savings, and ownership of capital assets. On the other hand, the return migrants own perceptions can be measured based on their degree of “satisfaction” or “dissatisfaction” after the migration experience.

This study adapts the causes and effects framework developed by King (2000). As it has already been observed, there is no one single holistic theory that explains international migration (Kritz et al., 1981; Portes & Borocz, 1989; Massey et al., 1993). The two key effects of return migration according to the causes and effects model relate to the human capital accumulated abroad through education, training and gain on-the-job skills and the financial capital that is channeled into the home region through remittances and savings. Even though the various propositions advanced in the causes and effects framework were found insightful, variables regarding the socio-economic status of return migrants were not well articulated. In this regard, some variables which the original framework did not include as part of its analysis were added and these included assets and consumer durable goods, housing, occupational changes and the human capital accumulated abroad (Figure 1).

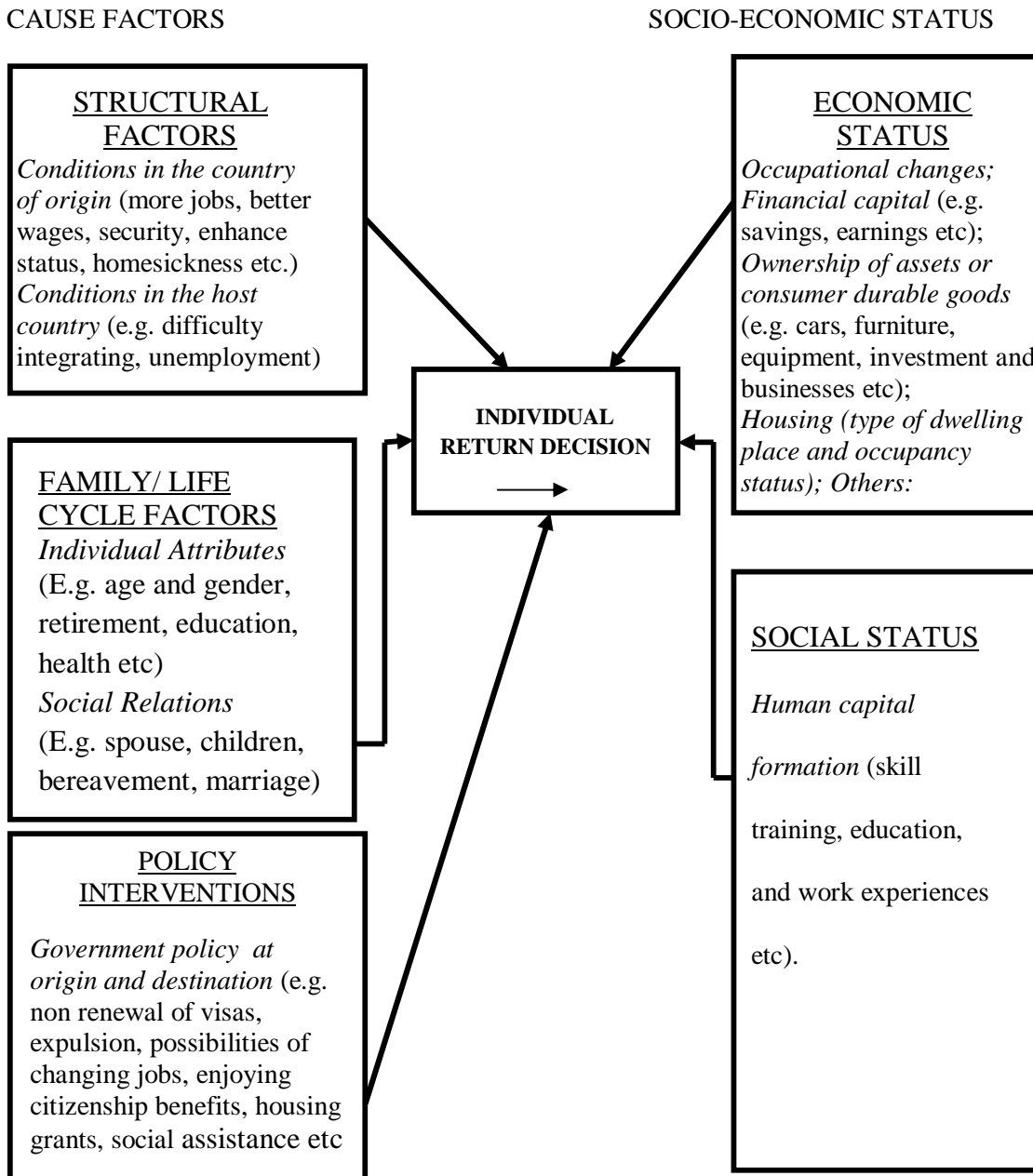


Figure 1: Conceptual framework on return migration

Source: Adapted from King (2000)

As shown in Figure 1, the section labeled ‘socio-economic status’ explained most of the variables which are required for this study and are broadly categorized into economic and social factors. Within the context of this study, assets and consumer durable goods include all the wealth and property acquired by returnees while abroad and after their return. Housing deals with the type of houses the returnees are living in and their occupancy status.

The human capital of the returnees is composed of the formal education, work experience as well as the skills and know-how they have acquired overseas. Occupational changes on the other hand involve issues regarding the returnees’ occupational outcomes after their return. That is, whether their occupational status has improved, remained unchanged or worsened after the return (issues of occupational mobility and fluidity). For instance, it is possible for a returnee to move from a production service occupation into trading or agricultural related occupation or to an occupation of similar status as the previous one.

Study Setting

Geographically, Berekum Municipality is located in the Western part of the Brong-Ahafo Region in Ghana. It lies between latitude 7° 5' South and 8.00° North and longitudes 2° 25' East and 2° 50' West. The Municipality shares boundaries with the Wenchi Municipality and the Jaman Municipality to the Northeast and Northwest respectively, the Dormaa Municipality to the South and the Sunyani Municipality to the East (Figure 2).

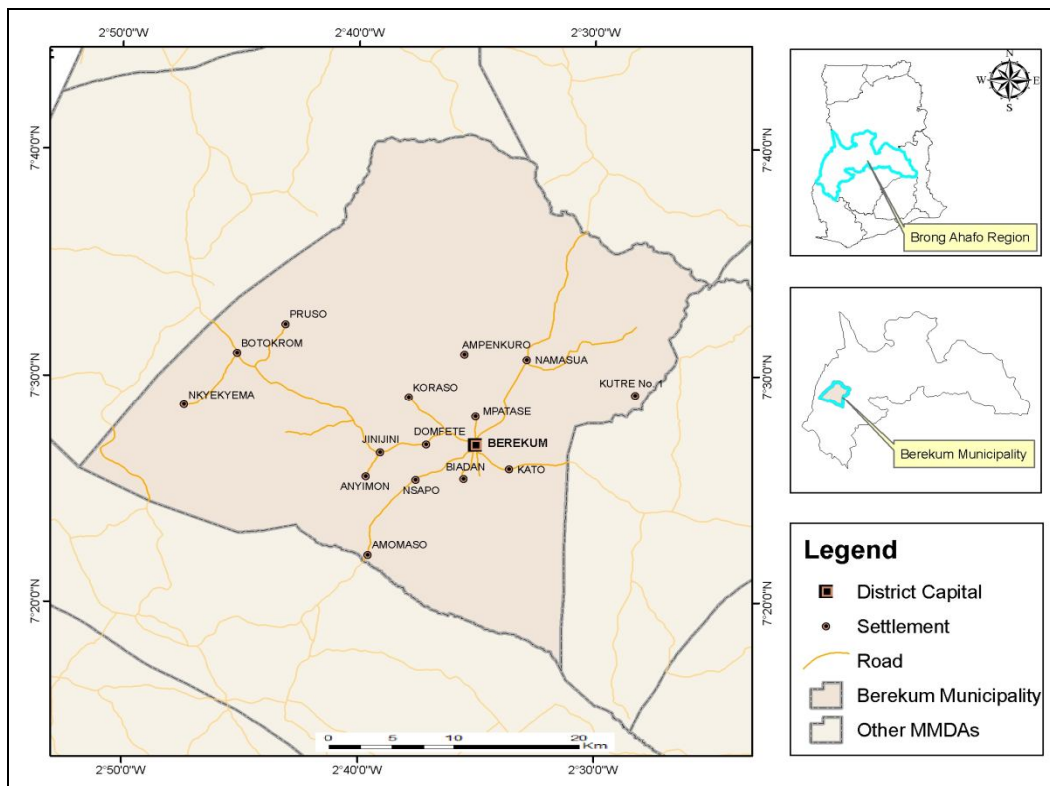


Figure 2: A Map of the Berekum Municipality

Source: GIS unit of the Department of Geography and Regional Planning, UCC

Berekum Municipality lies in the semi-equatorial climatic zone which has mean monthly temperatures ranging between 23°C and 33°C with the lowest around August and the highest being observed around March and April. Relative humidity is high averaging between 75 and 80 percent during the rainy seasons and 70 and 80 percent during the dry seasons of the year which is ideal for luxurious vegetative growth. The soils are mostly forest ochrosols which are well-drained and therefore suitable for agricultural activities. The population of the Municipality for the periods 1984 and 2000 were 78,604 and 93,235 respectively. This gives an annual growth rate of 3.3% between 1984 and 2000. According to the 2000 population and housing census, about 51.4 percent of the total population were females while 48.6 per cent were males, giving a sex ratio of 94.4% males to 100 females. Financial institutions in the Municipality include Ghana Commercial Bank, Agricultural Development Bank, Societie Generale-Social Security Bank and other Rural Banks. There are 74 public and private Junior High schools, eight Senior High schools/Technical Schools, one Teacher Training College and one Nursing Training College. The Municipal health service comprises the Ministry of Health, Mission and Private Hospitals and the community sector.

Statistics from a Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire in 2003 showed that the Berekum Municipality recorded the highest access to health care facilities in the Brong Ahafo Region. Given the favourable physical characteristics of the Berekum Municipality such as rainfall, temperatures, humidity and soils, the dominant economic activity in the area is agriculture (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). It employs about 57 percent of the working population. Aside agricultural activities, the people are engaged in non agricultural occupations such as trading, small and large scale businesses, service related occupations, artisan and a few are into construction and manufacturing. Berekum was selected for this study because it is well noted nationwide for international migration and return (Anarfi, Awusabo-Asare, & Nsawah-Nuamah, 1999). International migration is generally considered as an integral part of livelihood and advancement strategies for most families in Berekum (Berekum Municipal Assembly, 2007).

Data and Methods

The total number of return migrants found in the Berekum Municipality as at the time of the fieldwork was 204. This was obtained through a list compiled during a reconnaissance survey through the snowballing approach. Out of the 204 returnees identified, about two thirds (120) were selected for the investigation due to logistical and resource constraints. The unit of analysis for this study was the individual returnee aged 18 years and above. The rationale for interviewing people aged 18 years and above is that in Ghana 18 years is the age of maturity and consent (Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). The instrument used to collect the data from the field for the study was an interview schedule which covered the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, their human capital formation, housing (type of dwelling and occupancy status) and consumer durable goods acquired prior to and after migration. The sampling procedure used for the study was simple random, specifically, the lottery method. The main method used in the data collection was a structured interview and this was done using interview schedules. The fieldwork took place between March and April 2011. The respondents were contacted at home or workplaces based on their names and addresses collected during the reconnaissance survey.

The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 16 was employed to process and analyze the data. Specifically, descriptive as well as inferential statistical techniques such as chi-square were employed in the data analysis. The economic status of the returnees was assessed by looking at their asset-holding status as against their length of stay abroad. Length of stay abroad was the independent variable and asset status as the dependent variable. One main challenge encountered in the study was that there was no database on return migrants in the Municipality. To identify the return migrants therefore, the snowballing technique was employed which involved walking from one point to the other within the Municipality.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The results revealed that the respondents were mostly males (83%), who were young (68 per cent were 20-39 years) and were married (50%). This was consistent with previous findings by Anarfi et al. (2003) who opined that most return migrants to Ghana were young and were in their active ages who could be useful for the socio-economic development of the country. The fact that half of the respondents were married was expected in view of the observation that a large proportion (68%) of them were aged 20-39 years, the age at which it is considered ideal for people to marry (Anarfi et al., 2003). The analysis, however, appears to be at odds with Zlotnik (2003) and Twum-Baah (2005) observation that feminized migration is increasing in Africa as a result of higher levels of education for women and changing social norms. The disparity in male- female ratio could, however, be explained by what Anarfi et al. (1999) had observed that as custom requires, most females prefer to stay behind while their male partners emigrate and remit home.

The results further showed that a higher proportion (42%) of the returnees had attained Senior High/Vocational/Technical education while about a quarter had Tertiary level education. The respondents were mostly Christians (91%) which was in consonance with results from the 2000 Population and Housing Census report of Ghana which indicated that majority of Ghanaians were Christians (69%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002). The results also suggest that about six out of ten of the return migrants were more likely to be traders or artisans. Some returnees did not stay long at their various destinations while others did. Table 1 indicates that about eight out of ten return migrants mentioned that they have stayed at their destination for between five and nine years while 25 per cent said they have stayed for a period of ten years or more.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of return migrants

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	99	82.5
Female	22	17.5
Age		
20-29	40	33.3
30-39	41	34.2
40-49	26	21.7
50+	13	10.8
Marital status		
Never married	44	35.8
Married	59	50.0
Separated	14	11.7
Widowed	3.0	2.5
Highest level of education		
Primary School	8.0	6.6
Junior High/Middle Sch.	36	30.0
Senior High/Tech./Voc.	50	41.7
Tertiary	26	21.7
Religious affiliation		
Traditional	4.0	3.3
Christianity	109	90.8
Islam	6.0	5.1
Others	1.0	0.8
Current occupation		
Public/civil servants	13	10.8
Trading	43	35.9
Artisan	28	23.3
Farming	14	11.7
Unemployed	16	13.3
Others	6.0	5.0
Length of stay abroad		
5-9	90	75
10-14	18	15
15+	12	10
Total	120	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Socio-economic status of return migrants

Migration has been considered as one of the avenues for improving upon the socio-economic conditions of individuals and families in areas that are poorly endowed with resources (Anarfi et al., 1999).

To ascertain this, data were gathered on the returnees' ownership of consumer durable goods and household assets, issues regarding occupation and housing, and the human capital accumulated while abroad. This was assessed by looking at the returnees' socio-economic situation before and after migration.

Educational level and skills acquired prior to departure and after return

Most studies involving international migration and human capital formation of migrants had been very contradictory. While some studies have revealed a positive association between the two, others found no significant relationship between them. The results in Table 2 indicate that before departure, about 40% of the respondents had Junior High School education followed by those with Senior High School education (26%). Regarding those respondents with junior high level education, 42.4% were males while 24% were females. Of those with Senior High level Education, 25.3% were males while 28.6% were females. After their return, the results revealed that some of the return migrants had acquired additional degrees and qualifications. For instance, whereas none of the respondents had master's degree before their departure, the results showed that 15.2% males as against 9.2% females acquired masters' degrees abroad and the number of returnees with first degrees and diplomas increased phenomenally. That is, those with their first degrees rose from 8.4% to 17% and those with diplomas rose from 18.3% to 24.1% after the return.

Comparing the current data with that of the period before departure, it is clear that the educational level of some of the returnees have improved significantly even though about a third (32.1%) still returned with Junior High level Education. In fact, the present evidence partially supports studies by Anarfi et al. (2003) and Sjenitzer (2002) whose findings reported a positive association between international migration and higher education. The current findings have also reflected national demographics where a higher proportion of males than females attained higher education (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002).

Table 2: Educational level and skills acquired prior to departure and after return by sex

Education and skills	Before departure			After return		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Educational level						
Primary	7.1	14.3	8.3	4.0	12.6	7.2
JHS/MS	42.4	23.8	39.2	33.0	21.0	32.1
SHS/Tech	25.3	28.6	25.8	8.1	26.0	9.8
Diploma	17.1	23.8	18.3	23.3	20.8	24.1
First degree	8.1	9.5	8.4	16.4	10.3	16.8
Masters	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.2	9.3	8.2
PhD	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	1.8
Skills acquired						
Artistic skills	50.7	47.5	49.4	12.0	11.8	12.0
Technical skills	23.9	25.0	24.1	51.8	28.9	44.0
Entrepreneurial and managerial skills	16.2	17.0	16.7	25.3	20.9	31.0
Social work	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.3	21.8	3.0
Industrial skills	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	15.7	8.0
Others	9.2	10.5	9.8	1.2	0.9	2.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Migration optimists are of the view that migrants through international migration bring back critical skills and experiences which are useful for the developing world. Within the context of this study, skills refer to any formal or informal capacity enhancing endeavour that is specifically geared toward the acquisition of expertise in a particular vocation or profession. Such skills acquisition could cover broad areas including artistic skills (e.g. designing, tailoring and sculpture); specialized technical skills (e.g. construction and metal work); skills in social work (e.g. laundry, child care, aged care, cleaning, and home management); industrial skills (e.g. processing and packaging) as well as entrepreneurial and managerial skills (e.g. investment, marketing and hotel management). Most of these skills are often acquired through on the job training. As part of a measure of the respondents' human capital formation, they were asked to indicate whether they had acquired any skills in Ghana prior to their departure and also whether they had some skills training abroad.

Results from the survey showed that about 82% of the respondents said they did not acquire any skills training in Ghana before departure while after their return, a higher proportion (84%) said they had acquired some skills training abroad. With regard to the type of skills acquired, Table 2 revealed that the dominant skills gained before their departure was artisan (49.4%) such as carpentry, dressmaking and hairdressing but on return, over 40% of the respondents were equipped with specialized technical skills such as construction and metal works followed by entrepreneurial and managerial skills (31.0%). Of those with technical skills, 52% were males while 29% were females and of those with entrepreneurial and managerial skills, 25.3% were males while 21% were females (Table 2). The fact that males outnumbered their female counterparts among those who acquired technical and entrepreneurial skills was expected because jobs involving construction and other related occupations are often regarded as male oriented occupations because they require a lot of human brawn and risks taking. The above revelations are consistent with what Thomas-Hope (1999) and Taylor (1976) had observed among their study samples where most of the return migrants surveyed gained additional skills and capacities.

Occupational status prior to departure and after return

Respondents were asked to indicate the type of occupations they were engaged in Ghana before their migration and after their return. Using the Ghana statistical Service (2002) classification of occupation, the analysis in Table 3 indicates that before the migration, about half (47.5%) of the males as against 57% of the females reported that they were unemployed followed by 22.2% males and 19.0% females who were artisans. After their return, the results revealed that about four out of ten males as against two out of ten females were traders, and the number of unemployed before departure declined appreciably to 12.1% males and 19.0% females (Table 3). The number of respondents who were engaged in farming activities before their departure also increased after return (12.0 per cent). The above evidence finds credence in the observation made by Arif and Irfan (1997) who found that migrants on return are normally able to move out of production service occupations into business and agricultural occupations largely as a result of their experience abroad.

Table 3: Occupational status prior to departure and after return by sex

Occupation	Before departure			After return		
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Trading	10.1	1.0	8.3	38.4	23.8	35.8
Artisan	22.2	19.0	21.7	24.2	19.0	23.4
Public/civil	12.1	20.0	13.6	10.1	14.3	10.8
Farming	5.1	1.0	4.2	10.1	19.0	11.7
Unemployment	47.5	57.0	49.2	12.1	19.0	13.3
Others	3.0	2.0	3.0	5.1	2.0	5.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Type of dwelling place and occupancy status prior to departure and after return

The dwelling place of individuals is sometimes used as an indicator of the person’s status. In view of this, the respondents were asked to indicate the type of houses they were staying in before migration and after their return. Table 4 revealed that before departure a significant proportion (68%) of the returnees were living in compound houses (an enclosed area with a group of buildings often owned by members of the same family) followed by apartments/flats (17%). After their return, about half were living in separate houses (bungalows); two out of ten were staying in compound houses while 18% were living in apartments/flats. The results depicted an improvement in the dwelling places of the respondents. According to Tiemoko (2003), one of the motives for migration among some migrants is to accumulate capital for housing. For instance, a study by Tiemoko (2003) on African migrants living in London and Paris confirms this when migrants repeatedly mentioned that their main reason for returning was to build a house in the country of origin. The present study (Table 4) revealed that before migration, more than half of the respondents were living in rent-free houses while about four out of ten were living in rented houses. After their return, about seven out of ten returnees owned houses. The present finding supports studies by Gmelch (1980) among returning Yugoslav workers and returning Philipinos where housing or the purchase of a building plot for a house was the most common form of investment.

Table 4: Type of dwelling place and occupancy status prior to departure and after return

Dwelling and occupancy status	Before departure		After return	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Type of dwelling place				
Individual villa	8.0	6.7	10	8.3
Apartment/flat	20	16.7	21	17.5
Compound house	81	67.5	25	20.8
Bungalow	8.0	6.7	57	47.5
Semi-detached	0.0	0.0	5	4.2
Others	3.0	2.5	2	1.7
Occupancy status				
Owned	4.0	3.3	82	68.3
Rented	46	38.3	11	9.2
Perching	2.0	1.7	1	0.8
Rent-free house	62	51.7	19	15.8
Gov't house	5.0	4.2	5	4.2
Others	1.0	0.8	2	1.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Ownership of consumer durable goods prior to departure and after return

It has been indicated that, migrants after years of hard work and savings are able to acquire consumer durable goods and other property after their return (Black, King & Tiemoko, 2003). In this study, the respondents were asked to indicate the type of household assets and consumer durables goods acquired prior to their departure and after their return (Table 5). From the results, it was observed that generally, a higher proportion of their assets were acquired after their return.

Table 5: Ownership of consumer durable goods prior to departure and after return

Item	Before departure	After return
	(%)	(%)
Working television	25.5	74.4
Refrigerator/freezer	24.2	75.8
Computer/laptop	18.2	81.8
Washing machine	6.1	93.9
Electric/gas stove	16.5	83.5
Room furniture	31.4	68.6
Bed & foam mattress	27.3	72.7
Working camera	15	85
Video deck/DVD	20.8	79.2
Electric iron/fan	21.2	78.8
Private car	6.3	93.7
Commercial vehicle	7.9	92.1
Motor bike	30.6	69.4
Tractor	-	100
Provision store	4.0	96
Hardware shop	6.7	93.3
Savings account	22.5	77.5
Shares	10.4	89.6
Cooking utensils	17.8	82.2
Grinding mill	-	100
Others	7.6	92.4

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

For instance, among those respondents who said they had working televisions, about three-quarters were purchased after their return while a few (26%) were bought before their departure. Among respondents who indicated that they had purchased private cars, 94% were acquired after their return while a few (6.3%) were bought prior to their departure. These revelations are consistent with the observation made by Black et al. (2003) among Ghanaian and Ivorian returnees where a significant proportion of the respondents were able to purchase certain key assets after their return such as cars, refrigerators, furniture, telephones, computers or houses.

Destination region of stay and asset-holding status of respondents

This section relates the respondents’ destination abroad to their asset-holding status after their return. The rationale was to ascertain whether the destination region of the individual returnee had some influence on his or her asset-holding status. Results in Table 6 revealed that those who lived and worked in European countries had the highest asset-holding status compared to those who lived and worked in an African or American country. With regard to respondents who migrated to

Table 6: Destination region of stay by asset-holding status of respondents

Status	Destinations		
	Africa Percentage	America Percentage	Europe Percentage
Improved	61.4	87.5	90.3
Diminished	38.6	12.5	9.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

European countries, over 90% said their asset-holding status had improved significantly after their return followed by those who travelled to American countries. In all, respondents who migrated to destinations in Africa had the lowest socio-economic status in terms of their assets acquired. The current observation could be reflective of the overwhelming level of inequities inherent in global resource sharing and the level of economic development between developed and developing countries.

Length of stay abroad and asset-holding status of respondents

It has been observed that returnees with longer stays abroad are more likely to have a higher asset holding status than those with shorter stays (Bovenkerk, 1974; Dustman, 2001). Within the context of this study, shorter stays migrants were those who resided abroad for less than 10 years while migrants who stayed longer were those returnees who stayed abroad for 10 years or more. To unravel this claim, a chi-square test for the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between duration of stay abroad and asset-holding status of returnees indicated a significant relationship between length of stay abroad and asset status of return migrants (Table 7). This implies that return migrants’ assets status can be predicted or explained in terms of their length of stay abroad. This is also confirmed in Table 8 which showed that return migrants with the longest duration of stay abroad had the highest asset status. For instance, for those who stayed abroad for 15 years and above, 100% of them were found to have improved asset-holdings status after their return followed by those who stayed between 10-14 years (94.4%). This evidence goes to confirm the observation made by King (1986) and Dustman (2001). It is obvious from Table 8 that respondents with the shortest length of stay (5-9 years) had the least asset-holding status after return.

Table 7: Results of chi-square test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.156	6	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	34.437	6	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	17.962	1	0.000
No of Valid Cases	120		

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Table 8: Length of stay abroad by asset holding status of respondents

Rating of asset status	Length of stay (in yrs)			Total (%)
	5-9 (%)	10-14(%)	15+ (%)	
Improved	80	94.4	100.0	84.2
Remained unchanged	12.2	0.0	0.0	9.2
Diminished	7.8	5.6	0.0	6.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	90	18	12	120

Source: Fieldwork, 2011

Discussion and Conclusion

The study examines the socio-economic status of return migrants to Ghana using the Berekum Municipality as a case. The study has shown that about 83% of the returnees were males who were mostly young (20-39 years) and were married (50%) and a significant proportion of them (36%) were engaged in trading or business activities. The analysis has established that some of the return migrants had obtained additional degrees and qualifications abroad. For instance, while none of the respondents before departure had a master's degree, after their return, the results showed that about 15.2% males as against 9.3% females obtained masters' degrees and the number of respondents who held diplomas and first degrees before departure also rose significantly. It was however observed that, male return migrants had higher educational level than their female counterparts which was consistent with national demographics where males generally have higher education than females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2002).

In terms of skills acquisition, the results have established that most of the respondents (84%) had acquired some skills overseas and the dominant skills gained were specialized technical skills (81%) such as construction and metal work which supports existing evidence by Taylor (1976), Thomas-Hope (1999) and Sjenitzer (2002) where most returnees among their study samples at return gained critical skills through international migration. The implication is that those return migrants possessing different skills and higher degrees can stimulate or support a knowledge-based economic development in Ghana if their skills and education are properly harnessed. Even the less skilled returnees had gained some international exposure and work experiences and could be useful for the socio-economic development of the nation. Regarding their occupational status, the results have shown that over 60% of the respondents ventured into trading or business activities and the number of unemployed before departure consisting 48% males and 57% females declined significantly to 12.1% males and 19.0% females after their return. The above finding is consistent with what Black and Ammassari (2003) had found where more than half (55%) of their study sample was self-employed particularly in business activities. The economic implication is that some of the respondents are likely to expand their businesses or launch new ones and employ others from the Municipality thereby reducing the level of unemployment in the area. There is also the likelihood that those who were unemployed after their return are likely to compete with non-migrants in the Municipality for existing job opportunities.

With respect to issues concerning housing, it was observed that a little above two-thirds owned houses after return. On assets acquired, a higher proportion brought home consumer durable goods such as TV sets, living room furniture, refrigerators, cars, and businesses as discussed in the conceptual framework (Figure 1). But it was discovered that those returnees who travelled to European destinations had the highest asset-holding status than those who travelled to American and African destinations. Results from a chi-square test of the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between length of stay abroad and the asset-holding status of returnees showed a significant relationship between length of stay abroad and asset-holding status of return migrants. In general, due to migration abroad, the socio-economic conditions of the respondents had improved. One effect of the improved socio-economic status of the returnees is the propensity to create income differentials between return migrants and non-migrants households in the Municipality. Secondly, the improved socio-economic status of the returnees could serve as incentive for others (non-migrants) to also migrate abroad thereby impeding the government's effort to fight against the already high brain drain in the country. In conclusion, some of the returnees had acquired additional academic qualifications, foreign work experiences, and some skills abroad which are useful for their personal advancement and the socio-economic development of the country.

International migration can no longer be viewed absolutely as a drain on sending countries but as one of the key survival strategies.

Policy Recommendations

The study has revealed a number interesting results based upon which useful policies could be developed. In line with the main findings of this paper, the following policy recommendations are made: Among other things, the study has revealed that a high proportion of the returnees were in their active ages (young). They are therefore in their most economically active ages during which the experience gained could be put into useful purpose. It is therefore recommended that the country's economic development planners should factor return migrants into the scheme of things in Ghana's strive to achieve a middle-income status.

Furthermore, a special governmental effort should be made to attract skilled Ghanaian nationals in the diaspora to return home. This is important because some of the returnees as revealed by the study have accumulated substantial amounts of human capitals which represent a key potential for the socio-economic development of the nation. Provision of incentives such as access to credit facilities, job creation, tax reliefs, social assistance, and modernization of the country's investment climate are but a few that could be pursued to attract Ghanaians abroad to return home.

Again, government and all stakeholders involved in migration management such as International Organization for Migration (IOM) should through a multi-sectorial approach develop and implement comprehensive programmes such as post-arrival information and counseling and start-up support for returnees to facilitate optimum utilization of returnees' skills and resources for the benefit of both return migrants and society as a whole.

Moreover, future research regarding the socio-economic status of Ghanaian returnees should be replicated in other cities of the country in order to draw comparative analysis and generalization for the whole nation. Meanwhile, more detailed research could be carried out on each of the identified element that contributed to the improvement of the socio-economic status of returnees. This will help determine the relative importance of each of the capitals acquired.

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