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# Involuntary Return Migration and Reintegration. The Case of Ghanaian Migrant Workers from Libya

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**Abstract** This paper presents findings from a study that investigated the experiences of the returning Ghanaian migrants from Libya during the Arab Spring of 2011. The study used qualitative methods to explore involuntary return and reintegration of migrants in a south–south migration framework. Information from semi-structured interviews of migrants from selected communities in Ghana in addition to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) were used. The objective of the study was to find out the major difficulties returnees faced in reintegrating into their societies of origin as a result of their hasty departure and to assert the factors that may influence reintegration. The study finds that the combination factors including of high levels of family dependence on returnees, weak governance and the absence of reintegration policies may foster re-emigration.

**Keywords** Involuntary return · Migration · Reintegration · Development · Libya

## Introduction

The relationship between migration and development has been both debated and largely recognised by scholars such as De Haas (2008), Dustmann (2003), Manuh (2005) and Castles and Wise (2007), policymakers and global organisations such as the United Nations. Several empirical studies on the migration–development nexus have focused on the direct and indirect benefits of migration for development with remittances and the 'brain gain' gaining a lot of attention especially for developing countries such as Ghana. Developing countries were estimated to receive about $414 billion out of the $550 worldwide flow accounting for over 75 % of global remittances in 2013; of this, Ghana was set to receive about $1 billion (World bank 2013).

Within the theory of circular migration is the assertion that return can contribute much more to development when it is undertaken voluntarily (The Hague Process on

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Refugees and Migration Foundation 2007). Thus, the issues of return have become critical in asserting the benefits of migration. So far, there has been a lot of study into the benefits of voluntary return for development especially in a south–north framework. South–south migration however has not received that level of attention especially in the context of involuntary return (Bastia 2011; ACP Observatory on Migration (ACPOM) 2013; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (UNDESA 2006)). This is in spite of the fact that 61 million people moved from one southern country to another in 2006 (UNDESA 2006) The high level of skewness in the literature on voluntary return has resulted in the lack of sufficient information on involuntary return especially in a south–south context. Studies on involuntary return have also focused on refugees and deportees (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2004, 2012b).

Involuntary return has unique challenges for returnees, their families and communities as well as conceptual difficulties for scholarly enquiry. Unlike voluntary return, there is no preparation period before departure. According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2012a), the spontaneity of involuntary returns in the past has made it difficult to study; hence, there are few precedents for this kind of study. In 2011, Manuh (2011) reported that 18,115 Ghanaian migrant workers from Libya had returned home primarily through the intervention of the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) which is Ghana's primary disaster response organisation and the IOM which was the major international organisation facilitating the evacuation of migrant workers during the crises. Manuh (2011) estimates a figure that is higher than the IOM figure of 11,395 because it may have not captured those who returned home through their own means (Naik 2012). For the purposes of this paper, the total number of returnees will be based on that provided by Manuh (2011) which captures all evacuees and returnees. The Libyan crises created an opportunity for the study of the involuntary return–reintegration nexus in a south–south migration context. The objective of the study therefore was to find out the major difficulties that returnees face in reintegrating into their societies of origin after being forced to return home and to assert the factors that influence reintegration and possible re-emigration.

This paper begins with a brief literature review on involuntary return and reintegration and highlights the role of family in migration. The challenges of reintegration for involuntary returnees are highlighted as well gaps that are yet to be in the literature on involuntary return in south–south migration framework. The paper highlights the methodology used in acquiring the data as well as methods of analysis. The main findings of the research highlight the importance of the level of preparedness, high levels of dependency on returnees and remittances and unfavourable local conditions as challenges to successful reintegration.

## Theorising Migration and Return

> ..much still remains to be understood about the complex and multi-layered issue of return migration processes… [which] remains the great unwritten chapter in the history of migration (IOM 2012a).

Migration and return for the past three decades has been predominately theorised using the neoclassical approach as well as the new economics of labour migration (NELM) approach. While return in the neoclassical school was seen in a negative light, i.e. migrants return due to failure at the destination, the NELM approach defined return in a positive light as the logical outcome of a calculated strategy which involved remittances to the family (Cassarino 2004; Castles and Wise 2007). The NELM approach despite some critique (Gold 2008) highlighted the importance of remittances as a livelihood strategy (De Haas 2007a) and is especially useful for understanding migration trends between developing countries, i.e. south–south migration. In the neoclassical approach, migrants were theorised to seek maximisation of their earnings and seek family reunification as a successful outcome of their journey (Cassarino 2004; Mezger Kveder 2013).

In spite of the usefulness of both theories, Cassarino (2004) noted some shortcomings worth mentioning here. First, issues bordering skills utilisation in home countries as well as the structural and other socioeconomic constraints are not exhaustively explained by either theory (Cassarino 2004). Nevertheless, both theories posit the relationship between outcomes of staying abroad (positive or negative) and return in addition as well as the role of remittances and family. The NELM is germane in studying issues of remittances within developing countries where the raison d'etre for migration borders on risk diversification and livelihood preservation. What is unclear however is its silence on the type of return, whether it is voluntary or involuntary and how that may affect our understanding of return.

The structural approach to theorising return however seems to make up for some of the shortfalls in the NELM by incorporating social and institutional factors present at returnees' countries of origin into the mix (Hautaniemi et al. 2013). This approach makes room for the effect of realities of home countries on the returnee in addition to highlighting difficulties of return and posits the possibilities of re-emigration when reintegration fails. The structural approach presents a wholistic framework for analysing return migration because of its acknowledgement of contextual factors at the home country upon return. In addition to the role of the family and friends in shaping return, the structural approach cites institutional factors and their characteristics (business-friendly, innovation-friendly) as major factors in theorising return migration (Cassarino 2004; Hagen-Zanker 2008). This framework also hypothesises the ability of structural constraints in home countries to stifle and waste returnee's skills and expertise (Kuznetsov 2013; Cassarino 2004).

The concept of transnationalism made popular by the seminal work of Portes et al. (1999) is important in discussing involuntary return and reintegration. Transnationalism proposes return migration as part of 'a circular system of social and economic relationships and exchanges facilitating the reintegration of migrants while conveying knowledge, information and membership' (Cassarino 2004). According to transnationalism, returnees through regular periodic visits prepare their home communities for their eventual return. The theory suggests that this regular contact helps to cope with the expected difficulties of reintegration at professional and social levels (Cassarino 2004). Transnationalism connotes the maintenance of strong relationships between migrants and their families at the countries while in sojourn.

All the four theories discussed have the common denominator of family or household. This implies the fundamental role of the family in all aspects of migration and

return. Another common observation is the lack of differentiation between voluntary and involuntary return and the possible implications for reintegration. It appears that the basic assumption of return is that it is voluntary.

## Conceptual Issues: Voluntary, Involuntary Return and Reintegration

According to the IOM (2012a), voluntary return is based on the voluntary decision of the individual which has two elements: *freedom of choice* that is the absence of any physical, psychological or material pressure; and an *informed decision*, comprising the concept of having enough available, accurate and objective information on which to base the decision (Ammendola et al. 2006:18). Black et al. (2003) assert that such voluntary returnees are assets for development because of their ability to create businesses and contribute expertise for the development of their communities. Perhaps these perceived benefits of voluntary return for 'migrant's own development in both economic and social dimensions' has made it a more popular area of study for many academics (Global Migration Group (GMG) 2010:12). Return is only deemed voluntary "when after reviewing all available information about the conditions in their country of origin, refugees decide freely to return home…decision to repatriate is based on a free and informed choice" (Dimitrijevic et al. 2004:29). Thus per these two definitions, the main emphasis for voluntary return are the elements of freedom and informed choice. Hence, any decision made under any kind of compulsion or duress or pressure as indicated by the IOM (2012a) definition would constitute involuntary return.

The absence of a clear taxonomy of involuntary returnees is problematic for scholarly inquiry. Differences in the categorisation of returnees in the literature, largely as a result of the absence of a harmonised taxonomy of returnees present theoretical challenges for theorising the dynamics of involuntary return. The ACPOM (2013) on the basis of Gmelch (1980), distinguishes three groups of return migrants as temporary migrants, forced returnees and voluntary returnees. Forced returnees are defined as 'returnees who intended permanent migration but were forced to return' (ACPOM 2013) while voluntary returnees are those 'who intended permanent migration but chose to return'.

Along these lines, Cassarino (2004) conceptualises that successful reintegration depends on the degree to which returnees have mobilised resources and are prepared to return home. Thus, resource mobilisation which requires time and preparedness (which includes the element of readiness) makes a case for an involuntary act of return. On this basis, he postulates that returnees' preparedness is shaped by circumstances in host and home countries; developmental impacts of return are dependent on the level of preparedness. The literature defines involuntary return in relation to rejected asylum seekers, refugees and deportations (Dimitrijevic et al. 2004; IOM 2012a, b). However, it also indirectly indicates that migrants who do not go through this process of reviewing their options 'cannot be expected to remain where they did not want to be in the first place' (De Haas 2005; Anarfi and Jagare 2005). Involuntary returnees are therefore said to have greater spatial mobility, which makes reintegration efforts, especially formal assistance, much more difficult to plan and implement (Anarfi and Jagare 2005; Haour-Knipe and Davies 2008).

The circumstances of return to a large degree determine the sustainability of return. Favourable circumstances coupled with planning ensure better results for migrants, their host countries and the country of origin. Returnees from Libya were posited to affect and be affected by the prevailing socioeconomic conditions such as the availability of unemployment opportunities. Considering the types of jobs migrants in Libya are known for, it is possible that returnees may be low skilled and have low accumulated savings due to the circumstances of their departure. This however does not rule out the possibilities of any exceptions such as high-skilled labour or accumulated savings and investments in Ghana (Table 1).

While some studies on return of refugees into their home communities have been shown to contribute positively to development (Van Hear 1995), others have shown mixed results (Omata 2012). Involuntary return therefore can have significant long- and short-term consequences for development, whether or not they will be positive or negative depends on a host of factors in the home community. The challenge for home countries therefore is managing such return to ensure positive outcomes. One way of doing this is through the provision of effective reintegration strategies (Laczko 2005 in

**Table 1** Returnees' level of preparedness

| | Types of returnee | Pre-return conditions | | | | | Post return conditions | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Status | Motivation | Resource mobilization | Length stay | | Reintegration process | Role of institutions |
| High level of preparedness: Voluntary Return | Labour migrants | May own property in host country (land, houses, etc.) | • Objectives reached<br>• Perceived positive changes in job market at home<br>• Perceived political and or economic improvements and opportunities in home country | Savings Networks Skills, Expertise Higher education | 4-15 years | Voluntary Return | Rediscovery of real characteristics of home country | Minimal |
| | Highly skilled migrants | | | | | | | |
| | Irregular Migrants | | | | | | | |
| Low level of preparedness Involuntary Return | Labour migrants | May own assets at host country (equipment, television sets etc.) | Objectives not reached as planned: Disappointment<br>Unexpected family events in home country.<br>Political Instability/Conflict in host country | Few savings | 6months-3 years | Return Migration: | Household and relatives provide moral and financial support. Limited resources to invest at home Formal assistance needed | Minimal |
| | Irregular Migrants | | | | | | | |
| | Highly skilled migrants | | | | | | | |
| No preparedness Involuntary Return | Rejected Asylum seekers | None | Deportation, Expulsion, Rejected visa extension.<br>Political instability/ conflict /War in host country | None existent | Less than 6 months | Involuntary return | Difficult conditions at home.<br>Formal assistance Required. | Maximum support needed |
| | Irregular migrants | | | Loss of resources | 6months-15 years | | Re-emigration may be envisaged | |

Source: following Cassarino (2004)

Manuh 2005:180). Many developing countries, however, rarely have reintegration policies for return migrants, and even where they exist, they are not designed with development goals in mind but rather as a reaction to emergencies (Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) 2009:3). This poses significant challenges for returnees and ultimately makes return migration more of a development challenge than an opportunity.

## Return Migration for Development: a Challenge and an Opportunity

The dynamics of involuntary return makes it complex and challenging for returnees (Chu et al. 2008). As described by Ghosh (2001), sustainable return is achieved when 'returnees are able to reintegrate in the community of return, often through taking on productive roles as members of such communities, *without immediate inducement to leave again*'. Sustainable return therefore implies the successful reintegration of returnees, and perquisites the availability of the receiving community to receive and accept the returnee as well as social and physical stability in the area of return (Chu et al. 2008; Ammendola et al. 2006:32).

Admittedly, it can take several months and even years to determine how well adjusted an individual is upon return. However, by Ghosh's (2001) definition, returnees must not have an *immediate inducement to leave*. That is, re-emigration must not occur within the first year of return. Authors Van Houte and De Koning (2008) have contested the 'sustainability' of return in contributing directly to development. Ghanem (2003) has also questioned the positive association between return and sustainable development, arguing that returnees cannot be assumed to make a positive impact in their homelands if the 'very reason they left was that they did not feel at home'.

Undoubtedly, the problem of identity and changes that their home communities have undergone presents a significant challenge for reintegration (Cassarino 2004) especially where long absence means that returnees are out of touch with the realities at home (Van Houte and De Koning 2008). Despite the many challenges of involuntary return, the experiences and skills acquired at the destination can still be harnessed under the right conditions. Willoughby and Henderson (2009) however warn that this is more than 'merely finding job placements that align with the qualifications of the returnee'. For Dustmann and Glitz (2011), the few skills learnt may not be applicable or useful because the industries that returnees may have been trained for may not exist at the home community.

### South–South Migration from Ghana to Libya and Back

Prior to the Arab Spring of 2011, migration patterns of West Africans included prosperous Saharan countries of the north: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco with whom there were no previous historical or economic links (Manuh 2005; Hamood 2006; De Haas 2007b). This was in contrast to the traditional destinations for Ghanaian migrants which included the United Kingdom, USA, Germany, the Netherlands and Canada (Manuh 2005). Before the Arab Spring, there were indications that more sub-Saharan Africans lived in North Africa than in Europe (De Haas 2007a:20). Migration

of Ghanaians to Libya were primarily due to six main reasons: economic prosperity due to its oil, the rapid industrialization of Libya, the high standard of living and its welfare systems, geographical proximity to West Africa and also to Europe (Spain and Italy), Gadhafi's Pan African policies and the entry without visa (Hamood 2006; De Haas 2007a). Unlike migration to Europe and the Americas, North Africa was more accessible and affordable for migrants who were poor, illiterate and unskilled.

Prior to the civil and political unrest of 2011, migration to North Africa had not been given the needed attention because of the erroneous belief that remittances from within Africa were low and thus insignificant (Manuh 2005). Perhaps this may be the reason for the lukewarm attitude of governments in protecting such irregular migrants and ensuring their reintegration back home. Migration to Libya was also not without its challenges; from the perilous desert crossing to the clamp down on migrants from border authorities, West African migrants faced a constant threat of violent attacks, verbal abuse and racial discrimination (De Haas 2007a; Cook and Sail 2013).

Post Arab Spring studies on return migrants such as that of Naik (2012), study of returnees from six West African countries Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger and Senegal indicated that the vast majority of returnees were males, mostly aged 20 to 40 years with low levels of education. IOM and AfDB (2012) study of 689 Tunisian returnees also indicated increased violence against migrants, an assertion confirmed by Cook and Sail (2013).

### The Role of the Family in Return Migration

The family has been studied extensively, and evidence from the literature indicates that family welfare serves as one major motivation for migration (Jennissen 2007; Adu-Okoree and Onoma 2012). In migration, remittances and return, the family plays a pivotal role in where migrants go and what they do with their money (Adu-Okoree and Onoma 2012). Migration scholars are increasingly beginning to appreciate how migration decisions are taken collectively. The NELM and structural approach both highlight the important role of families (individuals, households) in circular migration. For some, the economic difficulties faced by the family become the motive for parents or children especially the male child to migrate. Income-seeking migration of one or several family members is used as an element of the household's risk diversification strategy (Jennissen 2007). In the global south, the family normally includes the extended family, which usually translates into multiple dependents for returnees. This can put enormous pressure on migrants to succeed. Success in this context can mean anything from sending money home to bringing other families over to the destination. This also means that migrants from the south are more liable to overworking themselves or using unsafe channels to get to their destination.

## Methodology and Study Area

The study was carried out from November 2011 to March 2012 in four areas in Ghana: Tafo in the Ashanti region, Sekondi in the Western Region, Agona Swedru in the Central Region and Techiman in the Brong Ahafo region. The study employed a case study design and was dominated by qualitative sampling techniques. Such a design

presented the advantage of better understanding the various perspectives of the different actors involved in the communities and responsible agencies. The study involved four principal actors: Ghanaian migrants from Libya, families, members of the communities as well as a governmental organisation, NADMO and a nongovernmental organisation, IOM. Qualitative methods were preferred because of the need to probe issues further with respondents (Bryman 2008). Snowball sampling made it easier and faster to identify respondents as migration to Libya is not a general attribute of all members of the selected communities. Snowball sampling was used to identify 63 returnees most of whom lived in the Zongo communities (which are typically migrant communities in southern Ghana whose residents are usually originally from northern Ghana) except for those in the Brong Ahafo region. As a result of snowballing, most of the respondents from the four regions were residents of Zongo communities. Majority of the interviewees (58.7 %) of the respondents were from the Tafo Zongo in the Ashanti region.

Tafo Zongo falls under the Tafo sub-metropolitan area and has two main suburbs, Tafo Zongo (Mile 3) and Old Tafo (Moshie Zongo) with populations 97,534 and 63,564, respectively, as projected by the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly for the year 2011 (Ghanadistricts.com 2009). The area is predominantly Muslim, and residents are usually migrants from various parts of the Northern, Upper East and Upper West regions. The study was conducted primarily in Old Tafo Zongo, in an area popularly referred to by residents as "45".

**Table 2** Research design matrix

| Method | Actor(s) | Sample size | Area (number of respondents in area in brackets) | General demographic characteristic(s) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Semi-structured | Involuntary returnees | 48 | Tafo (30), Sekondi (4), Agona Swedru (9) | Male, 20–68 years old |
| | Involuntary returnees in IOM / NADMO reintegration programme | 11 | Techiman | Young males, 20–45 years |
| | Voluntary returnees | 5 | Tafo (3), Agona Swedru (2) | 4 males, 1 female |
| | Family members | 3 | Tafo | 1 male, 2 females |
| Open interview | Nonmigrant community members | 6 | Tafo | Male, 30–55 years |
| | Community leaders | 3 | Tafo | Males, 45–60 years |
| | NADMO official | 1 | Accra | Male |
| | IOM official | 1 | Accra | Male |
| Focus groups | Nonmigrant community members | 4 | Tafo | Young males, 20–45 years |
| | Involuntary returnees | 5 | Sekondi, Agona Swedru | Young males, 20–35 years |
| Secondary data | NADMO | 1 | Accra | Male, mid 40s |
| | IOM | 1 | Accra | Male, mid 30s |
| Total | | 89 | | |

The main tool for data collection was qualitative semi-structured interviews (Table 2). Returnees were asked the reasons why they emigrated, why they choose Libya, the circumstances of their return as well as the difficulties they face in Ghana with respect to employment, finances, how they are coping and family obligations. The responses from these interviews were further discussed in the focus group discussions. In the Tafo community in the Ashanti region of Ghana, four community leaders were interviewed. In order to assert the impact of the return on the community, leaders were asked about the unemployment situation as well as the role migration of their young men to Libya played in the functioning of their community. Family members were also sampled for interview. It was difficult to get the wives of returnees to consent to an interview. Those who agreed would only grant the interview in the presence of their husbands except in one instance. Family members were asked about the effect the return of their loved ones had on their lives in terms of support and finances. Questions boarded on the differences they were experiencing in the financial support they used to receive before their loved ones went to Libya, during their stay in Libya and when they returned at the time of the interview.

Focus group discussions were used in three out of the four study areas to solicit information from returnees, their families and nonmigrant community members. In the focus groups, returnees discussed their journeys to Libya, their lives in Libya, their economic independence before the conflict, the things they lost during the conflict and the mode of return. Questions also focused on their lives in Ghana after their return, the difficulties they faced in finding jobs, supporting their families and the means through which they were sustaining their livelihoods since they returned.

Officials from NADMO and IOM were interviewed to find out their role in the evacuation of returnees from Libya, the number of people they had evacuated and the kinds of re-integration programs they had initiated to help returnees settle back into their communities. Secondary data from the National Disaster Management Organisation (NADMO) and the International Organisation Migration (IOM) was also used. Statistics on the return migrants, as well as national statistics on remittances, migration written by NADMO and IOM were used. Assessment reports and data on the going on reintegration workshops for returnees from the Brong Ahafo region were provided by IOM.

Thematic analysis was used to decipher recurring themes that were common threads in the interviews and focus group discussions (Braun and Clarke 2006). Inferential and descriptive statistics are used in the subsequent chapters to describe relevant socio-demographic characteristics of returnees as well as other relevant data on returnees' challenges in reintegrating back into the Ghanaian society.

## Research Findings

In consonance with Naik (2012) and Di Bartolomeo et al. (2011) studies, returnees' interviewed in this study were all male; the youngest was 20 and the oldest, 68 years. The majority of returnees were between ages 20–25 years with 51.6 % being single, 43.5 % of them being married and 3.2 % being divorced either as a direct or indirect result of their trip to Libya. Most of those who were married asserted that it was one of

the benefits of their trip to Libya, and this was confirmed in a focus group discussion where some single returnees cited marriage as a motivation for making the trip. All 52 respondents (83 % of total sample) from the Zongo community were Muslim.

The level of education of most of the returnees was basic. The majority of them (56.5 %) had dropped out of school at the basic primary and junior high school levels. In the Zongo communities, some returnees (17.7 %) had only been through the Makaranta/Islamic school system and had no other form of schooling. Seven persons (11.3 %) had gone through the senior high school system with three persons (4.8 %) having a tertiary level diploma. These were older returnees, from ages 32 to 55 years. This conforms to the literature on irregular migrants to Libya and is similar to the profile of Tunisians who also migrate to Libya (IOM and African Development Bank 2012).

The average number of years spent in Libya was 3.4 years which compares favourably to Cassarino's (2004) estimated timeline of 6 months to 3 years (see Table 1) for a low level of preparedness. The length of stay in combination with the type of work one did was a factor that influenced migrants' perception of their success. The most preferred jobs were in construction jobs in a multinational company, 20 % of respondents were permanent workers in such companies. The 28.5 % of them who worked as 'Malagas' were casual construction workers, many of whom aspired to become permanent workers. Casual construction work was the commonest among low-skilled migrants especially as Libyans were unwilling to work in such positions (Aghazarm et al. 2012). This is not at all uncommon as Toksoz et al. (2012) in their study of immigrants in Turkey assert that the construction industry is the most significant employment avenue for unqualified male labour. Almost 50 % of respondents started their careers in Libya as casual construction workers. The length of stay in Libya was important in combination with the type of job. Those who stayed an average of 3 years had the opportunity to get better paying jobs with time and experience (Table 3).

**Table 3** Employment areas for migrants

| Type of work/industry | Number of respondents | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Electricity company | 5 | 7.9 |
| Construction company (road and building) | 13 | *20.1* |
| Water works company | 2 | 3.2 |
| Installation company | 1 | 1.6 |
| Mason (Malaga) | 18 | *28.5* |
| Other jobs (shop attendant, cleansers, domestic workers, hospital workers) | 11 | 17.4 |
| Mechanic shop | 4 | 6.3 |
| Factory | 1 | 1.6 |
| Self-employed painter | 1 | 1.6 |
| Tailor | 6 | 9.5 |
| Total | *63* | *100.0* |

Values in italic are high frequencies

The commonest professions among returnees (acquired prior to migration) was usually artisanal and in the informal sector. Tailoring followed by farming, auto mechanic and taxi driving which are typically non-salaried jobs in the informal private sector. Naik (2012) in his study of Ghanaian returnees in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana had similar findings with 10.7 % of his respondents in farming. Comparatively, in their study of Tunisian returnees from Libya in 2012, a study by IOM and AFDB reported that returnees mostly had basic artisanal skills such as carpentry (40.3 %) and welding (15.6 %). Skills such as tailoring, auto mechanic and electrical repairs helped migrants to get casual jobs at their destination.

At the destination, company jobs were preferred because it presented the opportunity to obtain proper documentation such as a work permit. This also provided pathways for migrants to change their status from irregular to regular. Whereas a study of migrants in Europe typically reveal that migrants who enter legally fall into irregularity when they overstay their permit, it seems to be the reverse for irregular migrants to Libya who use formal employment as a regularisation pathway (Vogel and Cyrus 2008).

## Circumstances of Return

The returnees interviewed in this study had come home under compulsion because they feared for their lives. Many were initially reluctant to return because their objectives for their sojourn had not been met. As indicated by Table 1, return is involuntary when assets (in this case property and monies) were left behind or destroyed. According to most of the returnees' account, gadgets like laptops, phones and television sets were not allowed out of the country for fear of negative exposure about the conflict. Most returnees recounted smashing their own plasma screen televisions because they could not stand the pain of losing it to the soldiers. Because of the urgent nature of the evacuations, there was little room for bulky equipment; hence, equipment that made it to the airports had to be left there. The sudden nature of the events that unfolded in Libya and the consequent evacuation also led to the loss of incomes. Most returnees who worked for companies described how the quarterly mode of payments had caused them to lose their earnings.

Returnees who had stayed for a period less than 2 years were most aggrieved. Those in this category felt they had made double loses because not only had they lost what they laboured for but also they owed people in their home communities and had no idea how they were going to pay. This is line with Cassarino's (2004) assertion that the concept of failure of a returnee is influenced by the length of stay at the destination. Because migration was a livelihood strategy for most families (Siddiqui 2003; De Haan 2000), the loss experienced by returnees and their families was greater. In some cases for this study, returnees and their families had leased out land, shops and rooms for a maximum of 5 years and used the money to finance their trip. Some families had also taken the risk of selling properties such as land to finance the journey. This meant that they now had huge debts in addition to the loss of income. Thus, a failed return can exacerbate poverty of households as attested by the Department for International Development (DFID) (2007) report.

## The Burden of Dependence on the Family

The state of the family was found to be a critical determinant for migration and re-emigration. The burden of dependence as well as the state of the family's income was a determining factor that put pressure on returnees.

Returnees were persons who supported children and other relatives irrespective of their marital status. Most married returnees had more dependants apart from their own children than single returnees. The dependency ratio was an average of one returnee to three dependants. This normally included parents, siblings especially sisters and children. Male siblings did not remain dependants for long; most of them became migrants themselves and helped support younger siblings. For some families, this hierarchy of responsibility enabled all the children in the household to get an education. Migration to Libya was the sole preserve of men and so women were not expected to become migrants; thus, females continued to be supported until they finished school and got married. In cases where they married migrants, they were deemed to be in 'dependable hands', and the dependency was stopped or significantly reduced.

Forty-seven (74.6 %) of the 63 returnees had at least one dependant. These were those that they were directly responsible for. For unmarried returnees (49 %), dependants included older adults, siblings and parents. The unrecorded numbers of those who are indirectly dependent on returnees' income though unrecorded here may be significant. Because of the large extent of dependency on migrants, returnees such as this 35-year old from Tafo complained about being unable to support their dependants like they used to.

> My biggest problem is that I cannot support all 18 people who depend on me. I do not earn much, let alone save [A22, 35 years, Tafo].

Because of the long-term dependency, other family members who are in the position to ease the burden felt reluctant to do so for fear of becoming the next source of income for the entire family. For those whose dependants were restricted to their nuclear families, it was not any easier because the wives were usually stay-at-home mothers whose primary responsibility was to raise the children in the absence of the husband.

## Challenges Faced by Returnees at Home

Most of the returnees were interviewed 8–9 months after their arrival, but it was obvious that they were still in shock about the rapid change that occurred in their lives; this alone presented a significant challenge for them. Returnees' greatest difficulty in settling and reintegrating into mainstream society has been the difficulty of finding jobs. Returnees were unemployed not for a lack of trying or lack of skill. Returnees indicated that they had tried to find jobs but without the formal certification, it was difficult to prove their competencies. As illegal migrants, they had no documentation to support any claims of technical competencies.

> I have the experience and technical ability because I worked in the water company in Libya and I can handle all the machines but here in Ghana if you do not have a school certificate to prove that, then one has a big problem [A32, Aboabo].

Finding a job that suited their professional experience was also difficult because in Ghana, certain skills such as painting or plastering alone do not constitute employable skills. Dayton-Johnson et al. (2009) have recognised this as a common challenge to return for migrants in a global context especially where returnees worked in low-level skills sectors. The large-scale construction jobs in Libya which allowed entry for low-skilled construction workers were nonexistent or not accessible to them in Ghana.

> In Libya, I learnt how to operate a roller machine but since I came back, I have tried to find such work but to no avail. No company like that wants to hire me [A22, Primary school dropout]

> Now to get a job in Ghana it is who you know unless you know somebody you can't get it. Bribery and corruption everywhere, some of us have been away so long we do not know anybody, we do not know where to go. I have come to Ghana, I want to continue to paint but where will I get contracts? [A36]

## Self-Employment Among Returnees

The literature indicates that returnees accumulate savings and expertise that can help them establish business in their home countries (Ghosh 2001). The study found that the circumstances of return in this case presented significant obstacles in setting up one's own business. Apart from those who had savings in Ghana, most of those who were saving their monies in Libyan banks or on their person lost the capital they needed for their start-ups.

Twenty returnees (33 %) indicated that they had started or were continuing a business venture since they arrived home. The majority of them had had gone into business partnerships with family or friends. Per their own assertions, most of their business (15.6 %) were struggling, four (6.3 %) had already collapsed at the time of the interview. The popular ventures undertaken include sale of general goods, motorcycles, aluminium spare parts and cattle rearing. Others had opened shops for sale and repair of DVDS and other electronics, and others had purchased vehicles for commercial purposes. Returnees faced the challenge of getting credit facilities and business management skills to support their business. Those who had tried to get loans had problems with finding guarantors who would support their applications. These findings reflect the literature on returnees investing in small businesses in Ghana, Black et al. (2003) in their analysis of returning migrants have asserted that while most of the expenditure of Ghanaian returnees tends to be consumptive, the few cases where migrants do invest in small businesses remain marginal to economic development.

## Coping Strategies

### Savings and Investments

Returnees indicated that they were dependent on their savings and investments that they had put away in Ghana. Others depended on relatives to whom they sent monies when they were away. These included mothers, siblings and friends. Returnees in some cases stayed with these relatives as dependants without jobs. Currently, accounts such as 'susu' savings (a form of co-operative banking) and other bank accounts were the main financial support for most returnees.

Currently, it was their 'susu' savings, a form of co-operative banking, and other accounts which they used to take care of their families.

> … I could save between GH 500 and GH 600 a month in an account in Ghana. It was a Susu savings. I would send the money to my wife who would send it to the Susu operators [N5, Farmer, and Techiman].

> Since my return, my siblings continue to be in school because they saved some of the money [A13, 26 years].

This is how many of them have survived months in Ghana without any income. Others had also used their savings to buy tools for their business.

> I sent money home to be saved for me; I came home to meet it I did not buy any assets when I was in Libya. Since I returned, I started this trade in motorcycles I used my savings from Libya to do that business, I work with my brother [A21].

> I was saving that money in an account here in Ghana. It is this money that I have used to buy this car am driving, so I can say that the trip has helped me [N7, self-employed taxi driver, Techiman].

> When I was here, there was no way I could have been able to afford this car but despite all the problems I experienced in Libya, I was still able to buy this car [A40].

For those who were not working at all, their long-term plan was to find a way back to Libya or another destination where they felt it they would be paid well enough to be able to save, acquire property and educate their children.

### Instability of Returnees

From observation, many returnees were shaken by their experiences, and for some, this had significantly diminished their interest in migrating again. However, many expressed that the circumstances under which they left Libya and the economic hardships they have come to meet at home were pushing them to return to Libya. Thus, most had adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the crises in Libya.

> ...now I do not agree with anyone who says they are going back at this time, because things are not the same, you have to wait till after the elections, even after elections you will have to wait a while to make sure things start getting normal first before you go. If I get the chance then, I will go [A42]

The majority of returnees, 57.1 % had decided to re-emigrate because of the unfavourable economic conditions at home as well as the problems created in their families as a result of their sudden return. Many of them had made plans to return to Libya at the time of the interview.

> Yes, I want to return to Libya even if now, my company calls me back, I will go, because things are hard. My passport is even in my pocket now, at all times! If I meet someone who can take me there I won't even go home to change my clothes….. [A9]

A few returnees, 30.2 % were confident that they could stay and work in Ghana. This group of returnees was in the minority, they were primarily those who were under the IOM reintegration programme, others in this group had established businesses in Ghana. The minority, 9.5 % said they would stay if they found good jobs and made a decent living but would re-emigrate if that did not happen.

For those respondents who stated that they would return if they had the chance, 58 % of them were working in either state or multinational companies. Returnees complained that their companies owed them salaries, which would only be paid if they went and claimed their monies in person. This re-enforced their desire to go back to Libya. Even when returnees could not say explicitly whether they would re-emigrate, the language used when describing their plans indicated that it was a matter of course to go back to Libya. For instance, they would say 'when I go back' as opposed to saying 'if I go back'. Most of the returnees in the IOM training workshop had temporarily made the decision to stay pending the reintegration assistance that they were going to receive. These were some of the reasons why they felt they did not have to re-emigrate:

> Now, I have decided not to travel again. I have tried twice now… the first one helped but the second trip caused me to lose all the benefits of the first trip…I have acquired some knowledge especially on how to do business, and I think that will help me [Farmer, Techiman].

Others had plans to re-emigrate elsewhere as the conflict in Libya had made that destination no longer a safe option. Although only 11 out of the 122 participants of the IOM-led reintegration programme were interviewed because of time constraints, there were indications that there were positive changes in the perceptions of the returnees concerning their options in Ghana. They were more optimistic than the other 52 returnees who were not in the programme; most of them had already initiated their re-emigration at the time of the interview. One such returnee went back to Libya and phoned to confirm his arrival in November 2011. By April 2012, most of the returnees in the Tafo Zongo had left for Libya, five of whom confirmed their arrival by phone call. The findings also revealed that many new migrants had tried to enter Libya during

the conflict period. The notion behind that thinking was that the conflict situation would lead to lose border patrols into Libya and ultimately into Italy.

### Formal Reintegration Assistance

The returnees in the IOM training programme indicated greater hope and willingness to stay in Ghana than those who were not enrolled in the programme. The majority (19 %) of returnees, who indicated that they had some savings as well as emotional support from their family and friends, still had plans of re-emigration. Generally, returnees have had varying degrees of emotional support from family and friends; those who were married had even more support from their wives. Financial support however was rare from family and friends as they themselves are poor. Returnees (14.4 %) who had no reintegration assistance but had savings, investment and emotional support desired to re-emigrate. It appears as though the support from family especially went alongside the pressure on returnees to continue meeting the financial needs of the family.

It is interesting that the only returnees who indicated that they had neither savings, investments nor support from family and friends had no plans to re-emigrate. Perhaps the absence of the family push gave them no urgency as families represent a very important push factor for irregular migration among the poor (Kothari 2002). These persons were enrolled in the IOM-led reintegration–training workshop in Techiman. Although the ratio of returnees receiving assistance to those not receiving any assistance is too low to make any conclusive statements, it can be inferred that formal reintegration assistance may positively influence returnees' orientation towards staying. The type of assistance and the type of migrants involved also count in reintegration outcomes. As noted by the HIT foundation (2010), when reintegration policies are not in line with the wishes of returnees, re-emigration is more likely. The results of the study indicate that irregular low-skilled migrants may require the kind of reintegration assistance that will equip them to access financial capital and training on how to grow a business. Chobanyan (2013) study on Armenian returnees highlights the importance of counselling as well as medical health assistance for involuntary returnees especially. For involuntary return, psychological counselling will be critical given the low level of preparedness coupled with the loss experienced by both migrants and their families. Reflecting from Cassarino (2008), the lack of preparedness of involuntary returnees in this case is a challenge to reintegration efforts and this requires a different approach.

### The Absence of Migration Policy and Government Fatigue

Although policy analysis is not the aim of this paper, it is posited that the challenges of employment that returnees face maybe as a direct result of the absence of an explicit migration and return policy in Ghana. As ready indicated in this paper, institutional factors and their characteristics (business-friendly, innovation-friendly) in addition to the role of the family and friends help to make return sustainable (Cassarino 2004, 2008). Respondents (80 %) indicated dissatisfaction with the state in fostering their reintegration after the initial evacuation efforts by NADMO and IOM. Apart from the IOM reintegration programme which had been started in Brong Ahafo region, there was no other formal programme for returnees. The absence of an explicit migration

policy has been noted by many authors who have stressed the negative impact of ad hoc, uncoordinated programs on managing migration in Ghana (Asare 2012; Yeboah et al. 2010; Black et al. 2003).

The strategies that have so far been used in handling migration-related issues have been reactive at best. Tiemoko (2004) in his study of Ghanaian and Ivorian returnees also illustrates the challenges faced as a result of the absence of a migration and return policy.

Institutional failure has been a recurring theme in the literature on return migration in developing countries as noted by (Tiemoko 2004). This was a common theme in all four study areas with many returnees citing a lack of confidence in the state. Discussions with 46 returnees in the Brong Ahafo region indicated that participants did not have confidence in the Municipal Assembly to be in charge of the distribution of the support… *because of their experience with government officials*.

Concerning the reintegration workshop, returnees feared that 'the project will be interfered with politics or discrimination from local authorities'.

Respondents in all the study areas attributed their lack of interest in staying to bad governance and leadership by successive governments. Many felt that the political and governance mechanisms had let them and indeed all Ghanaians down. This lack of confidence fuelled their desire to find solutions elsewhere in other countries.

When asked if they thought it was possible to stay, work and succeed in Ghana, one returnee replied '[…] I do not believe in our leaders so I cannot stay here and succeed'.

Because of these sentiments, returnees had not taken advantage of existing socio-economic policies that have been put in place for the benefit of all Ghanaians. This mistrust and lack of confidence reflected in their answers to questions about government agencies and programs such the National Youth Employment Program (NYEP) and the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS). Most returnees dismissed the possibility of the NYEP helping them to get jobs. One remarked that he would not even try because he could not afford to pay for it '[…] even if you pay them GH 100, someone will come and pay them even more, and my money will not be enough for them'.

They refused to believe that they did not have to pay to be enlisted under the NYEP, which will help them with job placements. Two returnees who said they had contacted the organisation complained that they were not getting any positive response; they had filled in forms and even paid monies but still were not placed.

From the findings of this study, it can be realised that reintegration efforts should also be geared at educating returnees on new national polices that can be beneficial to them. The long bureaucratic processes that hamper the absorption of returnees into the labour force need to also be examined.

The other telling effect of the absence of a streamlined policy and migration body is reflected in the frustration expressed by some officials in charge of the evacuation. According to the key informant at NADMO, the evacuation of irregular migrants from Libya had occurred more times than has been reported:

> In 1998, 5200 citizens were evacuated from Libyan prisons. In no time, they organized themselves and returned to Libya and this cycle is repeating itself with the current set of evacuees [NADMO official].

In his opinion, the provision of monies upon return was not helping the situation at all; in fact, it was providing an incentive for them to make the trip and was bad for reintegration:

> We have not concluded the operation yet, but in my report, I would recommend that they should not be given any money when they come, it's pampering, we pamper them and some have come and gone more than two times [NADMO Official].

The above statement reflects the frustration of officials dealing with migration-related emergencies. Yeboah et al. (2010) suggest that having a coordinated migration body which has the capacity for research into migration policy will be a step in the right direction. Reintegration can occur and succeed when state officials have the technical capacity and logistical ability to assist returnees.

## Conclusion

The combination of the three factors: unfavourable circumstances of return, family settings (high levels of dependency on returnee and remittances) and unfavourable local conditions (low employment opportunities, ineffective existing policies and absence of reintegration policy) usually led returnees to consider re-emigration. However, the quaint size of the sample requires mores studies into the issues raised to enable further analysis and generalisations. Still, the findings give an indication of the kind of assistance returnees require in relation to self-employment, entrepreneurship, marketing, generation of capital and general business management skills.

It is interesting that after spending so many years abroad, older returnees (50–68 years) still had not achieved their aim or considered retiring. This may be because their sojourn has enabled a certain form of dependency of family members on remittances, which can ultimately have, negative consequences for development. This should be further explored by research into the dynamics of migration-enabled dependency. The import of all these different implications on reintegration is that migration, return and reintegration policy and strategy should be designed to be holistic and consider many factors, both the obvious and subtle.

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