



# Migration: An Opportunity or Threat to Adaptation?

PRUNE RESEARCH BRIEF NO. 1

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The Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR) and Deltas, vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation (DECCMA) projects are contributing to migration research in semi-arid and deltaic areas, respectively. Using participatory processes in the Upper West and large datasets from surveys on migrant households in the Delta, researchers from the University of Ghana and partner institutions are exploring temporal vulnerabilities, response strategies and the role of migration as a coping strategy to climatic and non-climatic stressors.

## Migration as an Adaptation Strategy or Threat to Resilience?

*Migration plays a significant role as a response strategy for coping with climatic and non-climatic stressors among vulnerable populations at the household level. Large numbers of people, particularly the youth, have migrated or are considering migrating in the future.*

In the Volta Delta, higher female household-headships are associated with increases in out-migration and therefore expected to intensify existing gender inequalities. However in the Northern Ghana, high out-migration of young females can lead to an imbalance in potential household structures (including scarcity of wives for young men).

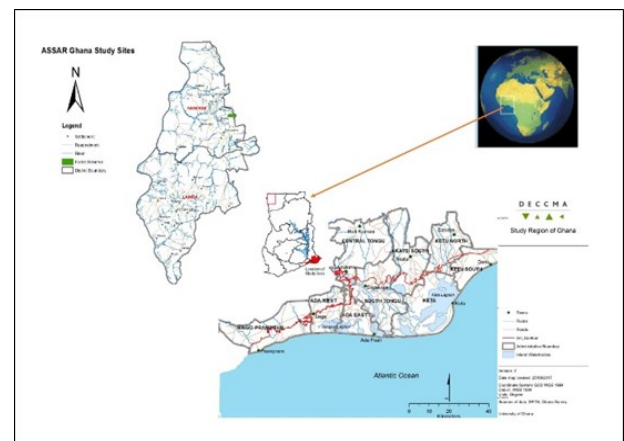
In Ghana, migration generally occurs in search of economic opportunities. It is a response to changing economic and livelihood situations, is usually rural-urban, and may be temporal or permanent. Migrants travel away from rural areas where climate variability and impacts have threatened the sustainability of major livelihoods, such as agriculture.

Migration offers an avenue for seeking alternative sources of livelihoods as well as a means to acquire education, learn new skills or build capacity. On the other hand, it can result in pressures on existing facilities in the urban centres or towns (receiving areas).

Migration may then become negative for the individual migrant, and receiving areas may suffer consequences that include the development of slums and associated social vices. The out-migration of the youth and active populations reduces the active labour force resulting in lower adaptive capacities and resilience in the communities.

Dominant livelihood activities include rain-fed agriculture in northern Ghana and fishing in the coastal areas of the delta, in addition to agriculture, salt extraction and trading activities.

A major climatic driver of migration is drought, a major hazard in both research areas. Coastal communities face additional threats from erosion, flooding, salinization and the destruction of critical habitats such as mangroves, which further threatens the sustainability of livelihood systems (Fig. 1).



**Fig 1:** Map of Ghana showing project study areas: ASSAR - the dry sub-humid (semi-arid) band that extends from the Upper West Region (Lawra and Nandom districts) through to southern Mali (Koutiala), referred to as the Wa-Bobo-Sikasso transect. and DECCMA research areas- the Volta Delta, which consists of nine (9) coastal districts that include South Tongu, Ada East, North Tongu, Keta Municipal, Ada West, Ketu South, Central Tongu, Ketu North and Ningo Prampram.

Key non-climatic drivers of migration include employment and education. In the Volta Delta, these were reasons for 47% and 49% of surveyed households, respectively. Majority of the migrants from the Delta are permanent migrants (66%) with a greater number considering future migration. While a significant proportion of migrants from the semi-arid regions tend to migrate (seasonally) to other agrarian communities in the middle belt to continue with farming activities, majority of migrants from the delta areas move to other non-fishing/agrarian cities and urban areas to engage in livelihood activities other than farming or fishing (Fig. 2). Drivers of immobility include community ties, obligation to family members, access to land and housing and established businesses or economic activities.

## Strengthening Migration Policy for Adaptation Planning

Migration presents a paradox for adaptation planning in both 'sending' and 'receiving' areas. It can provide access to alternative livelihoods in another location but undermines sending area households' capacity in terms of access to land and collateral particularly when male household heads migrate. Thus, the level of vulnerability or adaptability will depend on the demographics of the migrant household, i.e., gender, marital status, age, and family types (nuclear or extended), as well as on the nature and scope of employment opportunities in the receiving areas.

In Lawra and Nandom districts of the Upper West Region, small-holder farmers are using integrated management techniques involving composting, improved seeds, and rain harvesting technologies to cope, and to discourage out-migration and reduce vulnerability. Additionally, household income levels are being improved through off-farm livelihood activities and support through kinship ties. Remittances, generally in the form of cash, are a key way migrants contribute to their families back home. However, migrants in these districts tend to remit food items as a way of enhancing the food security situation of their families. In the Volta delta, increasing male out-migration in search of employment and female headship has exacerbated gender inequality with negative implications for household saving, tenure, and access rights for female-headed households. Migration is also seen as part of a social fabric to pursue income generating and educational opportunities that can be remitted to sending areas. Ada East and Ada West districts have been identified as net receiving migrant regions due to their closeness to two coastal cities Accra and Tema, known for their fishing and seaport activities.

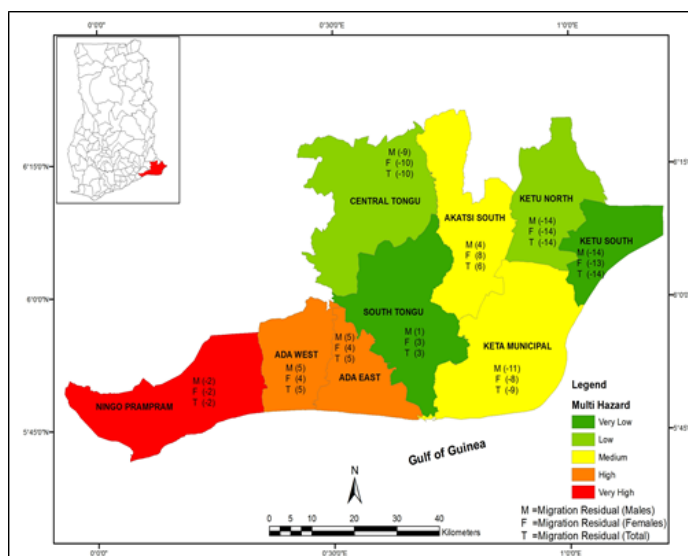


Fig 2: Migration patterns in the Volta Delta (DECCMA, 2017)

### Implications for Policy/Practice

The increased internal migration of people from the vulnerable areas has implications for community resilience and national development. The National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) of Ghana has objectives of promoting equal economic and social opportunities for migrants and, development and resilience/adaptation at origin and destination areas. Understanding the interactions between migrant communities and destinations will improve the capacity to meaningfully integrate new migrants into receiving areas and at the same time nurture a sense of place and belonging for those wanting to stay are tangible adaptation measures to pursue.

#### ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Promoting Research into Use through Networking and Engagement (PRUNE) integrates the activities of two CARIIA consortia in semi-arid regions and river deltas. They are: 1) Adaptation at Scale in Semi-arid Regions (ASSAR) and 2) Deltas, vulnerability and Climate Change: Migration and Adaptation (DECCMA). The Institute for Environment and Sanitation Studies (IESS), and the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) of the University of Ghana host ASSAR and DECCMA and adopts science-based approaches for networking, knowledge sharing and dissemination of research results in Ghana and the sub region. CARIIA is funded by the UK Department for International Development and Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

For more information about ASSAR, see [www.assaradapt.org](http://www.assaradapt.org) DECCMA see [www.deccma.com](http://www.deccma.com) CARIIA see <http://www.cariaa.net/home-Q>



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