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Moving to 'greener pastures'? The complex relationship between internal migration, land tenure and poverty in mid-Ghana

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Abstract

This working paper uses a multi-level approach to investigate the recent trend of semi-permanent migration of tenant farmers from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo's transition zone. Significant numbers of migrants have moved to this 'agricultural frontier' since the 1970s, for the purpose of accessing farmland through rental or sharecropping arrangements in order to engage in smallholder commercial agriculture of food crops such as maize, yam and cassava. Using both qualitative data collected at three migrant 'settler' communities in Brong Ahafo in 2014 as well as census data, the paper seeks to explore the relationship between migration and shifting conditions at migrant destinations, including evolving local customary tenure norms, changing land use patterns, and the emergence of trans-local migrant social networks. The paper's key findings include that migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo's transition zone reflects discrete mobility corridors, rooted in trans-local kin networks, which have resulted in the movement of migrants from particular northern origin areas to particular destinations. Echoing van der Geest (2011a), the paper suggests that this migration is perceived by migrants themselves to be a migration to 'greener pastures', owing to the fact that the transition zone offers access to better agro-ecological conditions than they have access to in Northern Ghana. However, the paper's qualitative research findings suggest a substantial divergence in migrant livelihood outcomes amongst Northern Ghanaian migrants in Brong Ahafo, showing that there are limits of migration to 'agricultural frontiers' in terms of poverty reduction, for both migrants and their northern kin.

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Executive Summary

This paper investigates the recent trend of semi-permanent migration of tenant farmers from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo's transition zone. Significant numbers of migrants have moved to this 'agricultural frontier' since the 1970s, for the purpose of accessing farmland through rental or sharecropping arrangements. Most migrants engage in smallholder production of food crops, in particular maize, cassava, and yam, using rain-fed agriculture. This paper conducts a multi-level analysis of this migration trend: Firstly, it considers this migration pattern in terms of its relation to the longer history of out-migration from Northern Ghana to mid-Ghana as well as to other destinations; secondly, it scrutinizes this migration at the regional, district, and community-level, in the latter case using new qualitative data collected in three migrant settler communities in Brong Ahafo in 2014. By utilizing such a multi-level analysis, the paper seeks to explore:

(1) The relationship between migration and shifting conditions at migrant destinations, including evolving local customary tenure norms, changing land use patterns, and the emergence of trans-local migrant social networks;
(2) How small-scale interactions at the local level between migrants and such conditions can inform wider meso- and macro-level migration trends that emerge in household and survey data.

In exploring these questions, the paper looks at the reasons why the transition zone in Brong Ahafo has emerged as an 'agricultural frontier' in recent decades, and explores how in-migration from Northern Ghana has contributed to this process.

The working paper's key findings, utilizing this multi-level analysis, are that:

(1) At the macro-level, migration to Brong Ahafo's transition zone from Northern Ghana has numerous historical antecedents, dating from the pre-colonial period through to the country's independence. However, the recent emergence of Brong Ahafo as an 'agricultural frontier' nevertheless represents a new trend, characterized by changes in land tenure norms, population dynamics, and the transformation of agricultural market conditions.
(2) At the meso- or district-level, it is clear that migration to various parts of Brong Ahafo Region draws migrants from particular origin areas of Northern Ghana. This reflects particular 'mobility corridors', which are influenced by transportation infrastructure as well as the emergence of discrete, ethnically-rooted migrant social networks at particular destinations in Brong Ahafo.
(3) At the qualitative level, migrants perceive their migration to be very much a journey to 'greener pastures', often based on recommendations from kin or friends. However, shifting conditions at the community level also have an important impact on local level migration trends, with fluctuating land availability, population density and other factors apparently affecting the ebb and flow of migration to individual sites.

Finally, the qualitative findings from three case study communities provide ground-level insights into the potential relationship between migration to agricultural frontiers and

poverty reduction. The livelihood outcomes for migrants across the three sites broadly fell into three groups:

(1) Transformative: a minority of migrants who had been highly successful in their farming ventures and had been often been able to establish significant off-farm sources of income, and typically provided substantial support for kin in Northern Ghana through sending remittances, food or other material goods.
(2) Adaptive: a large second group of migrants across the three sites were generally experiencing success in their farming ventures, and thus had achieved a subjective improvement in their livelihoods as a result of migration, and were often providing fairly significant support to kin in the North. However, without substantial off-farm income, they were potentially vulnerable to seasonal environmental variability.
(3) Coping: a significant number of other migrants were experiencing marginal harvests, with some caught in a cycle of 'farming at a loss'. They had sometimes experienced financial hardship as the result of crop failure, and typically provided only meager support for relatives in Northern Ghana.

There was a positive relationship between migrants having access to larger plots of land and those who had 'transformative' or 'adaptive' livelihoods; however, it was equally clear that multiple social and environmental factors contributed to divergent migrant livelihood outcomes in Brong Ahafo. Thus, while migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo's transition zone does potentially represent a migration to 'greener pastures', offering migrants an opportunity to access better agro-ecological conditions than exist in their origin communities, it does not represent a pathway out of poverty for all migrants.

Based on this multi-level analysis, the paper concludes with lessons for policy and research in the wider Ghanaian and West African context:

(1) While migration to 'agricultural frontiers' follows general 'rules of thumb', which are expressed in clear patterns at the regional or macro-level, at the community-level migration may be highly sensitive to relatively small changes, such as shifts in land's availability or quality.
(2) Internal migration to 'agricultural frontiers' in Ghana reflects – to a significant degree – trans-local social networks between areas of out-migration, such as Northern Ghana, and destination communities; in many instances, these linkages play a critical role in poverty reduction and enhancing household resilience – both in Northern Ghana and at migrant destinations in Brong Ahafo.
(3) Finally, migration to 'agricultural frontiers' is a long-standing feature of mobility in Ghana and neighbouring countries, and an important feature of agricultural innovation – yet this type of migration is typically ignored in national and international development policies that discuss migration. For example, the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda, 2014-2017, and the draft version of Ghana's new National Development Policy (2014), do not have any specific policies that deal with migration to agricultural frontiers.

Section 1: Migration as part of a 'complex adaptive system' in Brong Ahafo, Ghana

The aim of this paper is to position the recent trend of internal migration of tenant farmers from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo Region in mid-Ghana's 'transition zone' within a broader 'complex adaptive system' made up of a series of complex and evolving relationships between social systems and the environment. Using the 'complex adaptive systems' (hereafter 'CAS') framework (cf Rammel *et al* 2007) to assess this migration trend enables us to appreciate:

(1) The relationship between migration and shifting conditions at migrant destinations, including evolving local customary tenure norms, changing land use patterns, and the emergence of trans-local social networks;
(2) How small-scale interactions at the local level between migrants and such conditions (or 'feedbacks') can inform wider meso- and macro-level migration trends that emerge in household and survey data.

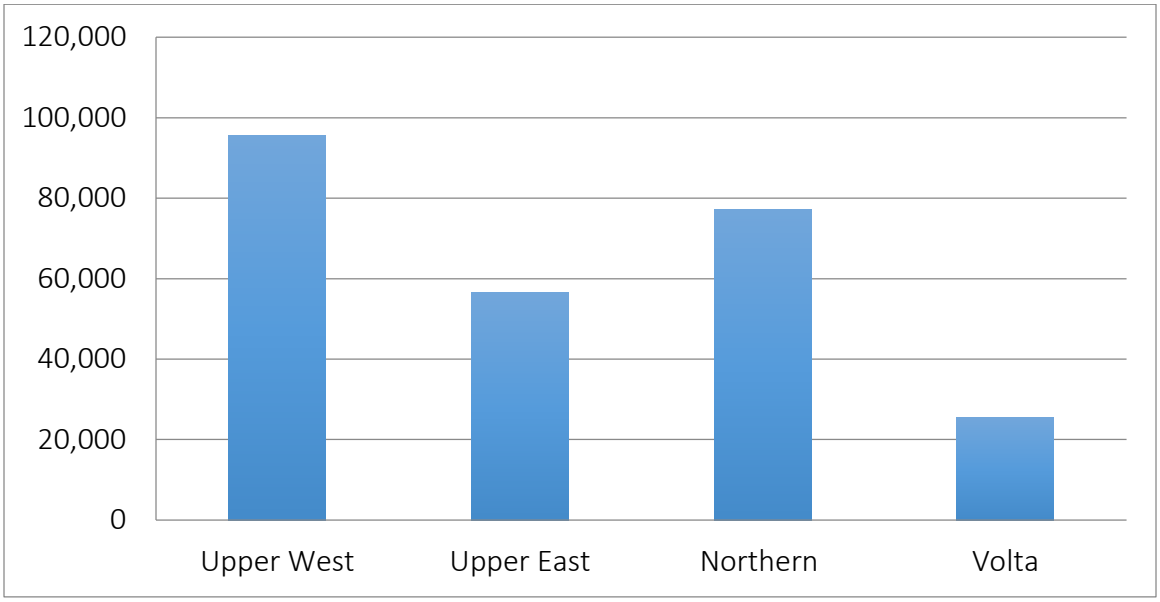
In particular, this framework helps to explain why, notwithstanding the existence of large-scale 'drivers' of *potential* out-migration from Northern Ghana, including relatively high poverty rates, a comparative lack of infrastructure and a structural scarcity of arable farmland (see van der Geest 2011a), out-migration has not occurred *en masse*. Rather, I suggest that in addition to such structural factors in Northern Ghana that would seem to encourage migration, the CAS approach illustrates that migration is also highly sensitive to factors at potential migration destinations – which helps to explain the frequent occurrence of non-linear migration trends across both temporal and spatial scales.

This paper takes as its case study the relatively recent phenomenon of increased permanent migration from Northern Ghana into the mid-Ghana region of Brong Ahafo where migrants can access land for commercial farming. This internal migration trend, though less voluminous than migration from Northern Ghana to urban centres such as Accra and Kumasi, is nonetheless important: internal migrants now account for around 20 per cent of Brong Ahafo's population, according to the 2010 census, with the majority of these coming from Northern Ghana (see Fig 1). Northern Ghanaian migrants in Brong Ahafo are typically engaged in tenant farming, and live in semi-permanent 'settler communities' which have been established across the region since it became a key source of domestic food production in the 1970s (Amanor 1994: 34). These migrant tenant farmers usually practice smallholder, rain-fed agriculture of commercial food crops including maize, yam, cassava and groundnuts. They typically access plots of land through local landlords via rental or sharecropping arrangements[1]. This migration trend forms one of a number of examples in Ghana of migration to 'agricultural frontiers', a form of mobility that has historically influenced shifts in cocoa production areas (cf Amanor 1994),

[1] Land tenure norms vary across Brong Ahafo, as does land quality and availability. Rainfall can also be quite variable, owing to micro-climatological differences across the region, as well as seasonal variability. These form part of the focus of my PhD research, but an in-depth discussion of these is beyond the scope of this working paper.

for example. Although this type of internal migration is arguably marginalized in both policy discourse and academic research in comparison to rural-urban migration, it has important implications for agricultural production for both domestic and international markets.

Figure 1: Net migration from neighbouring regions to Brong Ahafo (2010 census)[2]



Thus, this paper undertakes a multi-level analysis of migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo. At different levels of analysis, distinct aspects of the complex relationship between migration and relevant 'feedbacks' become visible. In terms of migrants' own individual perceptions of their migration, membership in social networks is clearly important, as is the perception of better livelihood opportunities in Brong Ahafo as well as the diverse livelihood outcomes migrants experience upon arrival in Brong Ahafo. At the community level, on the other hand, specific local conditions related to land access emerge as important factors affecting localized migration trends. At the district level, defined migration corridors, facilitating particular patterns of mobility from specific parts of Northern Ghana to particular destinations in Brong Ahafo are clearly visible. And at the national and regional levels, spatial economic inequality and the relative abundance of available, comparatively fertile farmland in Brong Ahafo in comparison Northern Ghana emerge as key factors that have stimulated this migration trend. Through synthesizing these findings across multiple levels and scales, I argue, it is possible to gain a better understanding of this under-researched migration flow; to conceptualize its potential impact on poverty reduction; and to discern points of policy leverage.

[2] Author's calculations, based on GSS 2013.

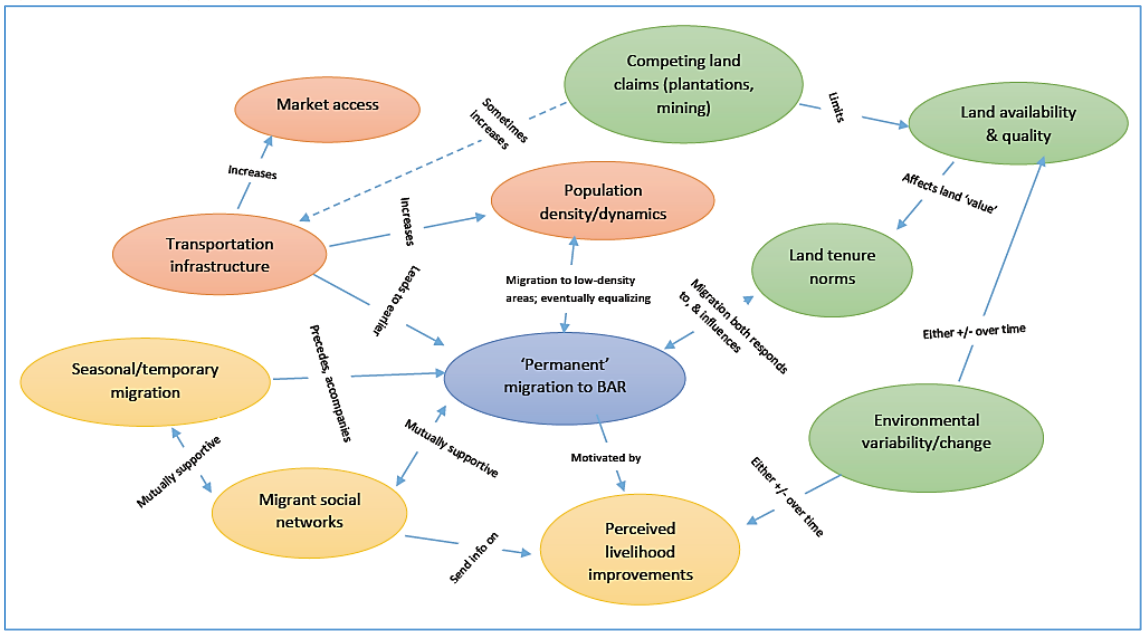
1.1 An introduction to 'complex adaptive systems' theory

In adopting complex adaptive systems (CAS) theory, my aim is to identify key factors that constitute important 'feedbacks' that interact with migration, depending on locally evolved conditions in different migrant 'receiving' areas. However, before proceeding with this argument, a general introduction to CAS theory is needed. CAS theory investigates the dynamic and emergent behaviour of systems, across different scales, including at the micro-, meso- and macro-level. As Rammel *et al* (2007: 10) observe, complex adaptive systems are driven by small-scale behaviours or interactions, that in turn help define how larger patterns and processes are shaped: 'Characterised by self-organisation and co-evolutionary dynamics, …[complex adaptive systems] express large macroscopic patterns which emerge out of local, small-scale interactions'. They further argue that complex adaptive systems have components that are inherently unpredictable, and are thus characterized by dynamism and change:

> Analyzing CAS means to incorporate variability, adaptations, uncertainty and non-linearity while heading for improved understanding of how co-evolutionary processes and dynamic patterns emerge [in human and ecological systems]' (Rammel *et al*, 2007: 10).

In this regard, qualitative research has a specific role to play in CAS analysis, as it can provide insights into the 'local, small-scale interactions' through which larger patterns – in this case migration flows – emerge (Rammel *et al*, 2007: 10). This paper draws on field research, which consisted of such a qualitative study of three settler communities in different districts in Brong Ahafo Region that were selected because of their differing migration histories, ecological conditions, and land tenure norms.

Fig 2. Envisioning migration as part of a complex adaptive system in Brong Ahafo – key variables



How is the CAS framework to be applied to the study of migration? There have been recent forays into systems theory by migration scholars: for example, Kniveton *et al* (2011) used CAS theory to inform an agent-based model of future migration and climate change in Burkina Faso, and, relatedly, Bakewell *et al* (2011) adopted systems theory in an effort to re-conceptualise the role of social networks in influencing migration. My aim here builds on this, but I use CAS theory as an over-arching framework through which I attempt to identify specific factors that have 'co-evolved' with migration at specific localities in Brong Ahafo Region over time (see Fig 2). On the one hand, this analysis provides general 'heuristics' or 'rules of thumb', which explain the context in which migration occurs, and the manner in which flows are directed. On the other hand, my analysis also shows that migration is potentially sensitive to relatively small changes in particular 'feedbacks', which can cause the movement of people to accelerate, stagnate, or become re-directed to new destinations.

In order to draw out how and why these inter-linkages are important, this paper considers migration at multiple levels, synthesing observations at macro-, meso- and micro-scales. At the macro scale, I assess the emergence of the recent trend of 'permanent' settler migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo by looking at it in the context of historical North-South migration trends, dating from the pre-colonial period to present-day. At the meso scale, I use census data to analyse district-level migration flows, which have tended to occur from specific origin areas in Northern Ghana to particular destination points in Brong Ahafo, in part reflecting 'mobility corridors' that are at once infrastructural (as defined by 'modern' transport networks) and social (shaped by previous waves of migration). Meanwhile, at the community and individual levels – which are informed by qualitative data from migrant communities – migration emerges as a story of kin linkages, the perception of improved livelihood prospects, and a search for 'greener pastures' (*i.e.* better quality, available farmland)[3]. I hope to show that by alternating between these multiple levels, we gain fresh insights into the complex system of migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo, with macro- and meso-level data revealing the larger patterns that are ultimately the product of small-scale, local interactions between Northern migrants and receiving areas across Brong Ahafo.

1.2 Why use Complex Adaptive Systems theory?

My use of CAS theory in this paper is in response to a set of methodological and conceptual issues that have emerged in recent migration studies research. In simplified these terms, these challenges revolve around how to gain a better understanding of migration processes, while also accounting for how migration is influenced by – and in turn influences – relevant 'structural' factors, including development, poverty, environmental conditions, and so on. I echo De Haas (2014: 11), who observes that:

[3] The notion that migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo is a migration to 'greener pastures' was previously put forward by van der Geest (2011a) in the case of Dagaba out-migration from Upper West Region.

> '…the central challenge in advancing migration theory [is to] develop conceptual tools that improve…our ability to simultaneously account for structure and agency in understanding and explaining migration'

CAS theory provides one tool for conceptualizing how migration is at once the result of migrants' own agency – as characterized by small-scale interactions between migrants, kin relations, and other 'actors' in their sending and receiving communities – as well as being part of larger complex processes and patterns that unfold in specific structural conditions.

This research thus sits at the confluence of the literature on: (1) migration and environmental change; and (2) migration and development/poverty reduction. Northern Ghana is widely regarded as marginal environmental area, and research on out-migration from this part of the country forms part of the fairly substantial evidence base on West African 'drylands' in the migration and environment literature, with significant attention paid to whether this migration is a form of 'adaptation' to changing environmental conditions (see for instance van der Geest 2011a; van der Geest 2011b; Rademacher-Schulz *et al* 2014). On the other hand, Northern Ghana is also characterized by its relative lack of economic prosperity in comparison to the South – and out-migration from this area has a long-standing history that pre-date the British colonial period and in part reflects economic and political cleavages (see Section 2 for a full discussion of this). One key challenge underlying both the migration and environment literature and the migration and development literature is how to conceptualize the interactions between migration and these other related processes.

In this paper, I thus deploy CAS theory to analyze migration from Northern Ghana at multiple scales, and in the process, I attempt tease out how migration is related to such broader processes. Section 2 places migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo in the larger macro-context, clarifying its position in present-day migration trends and its historical antecedents. Section 3 focuses on the meso-level context, looking at the emergence of differential migration trends from Northern Ghana in each district where I conducted my fieldwork – based on census data. The next two sections utilize qualitative data from grounded fieldwork: Section 4 illustrates how migration patterns in each case study community are locally evolved, and reflects on the interaction between migration and 'feedbacks' such as land availability, mobility corridors and social networks. Lastly, Section 5 highlights migrants' own narratives of their mobility, their connections with their Northern Ghanaian origin communities, and the diverent livelihood outcomes for migrants at each case study community. I conclude by drawing out wider lessons for research and policy that emerge from such a multi-level CAS analysis of migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo.

1.3 A Note on Fieldwork Methodology

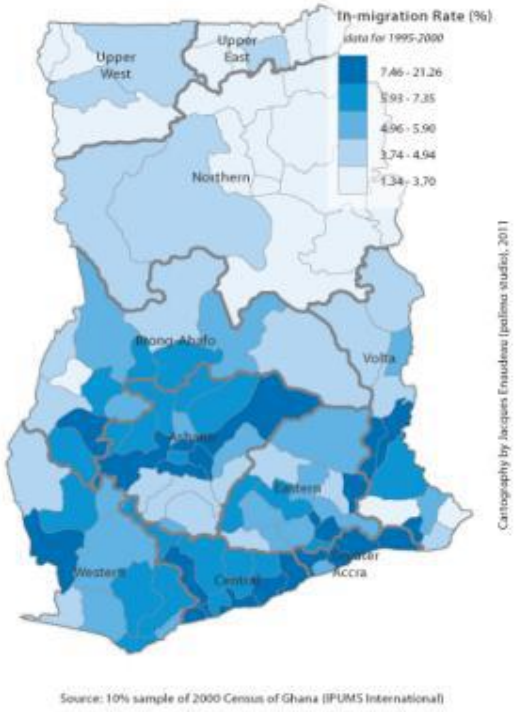
I identified three fieldwork sites in different districts of Brong Ahafo Region – Nkoranza South, Wenchi Municipal and Pru (NB: hereafter referred to jointly as 'case study districts') – on the basis of key differences in migration histories (in terms of 'source' locations and timescales of migration), local land tenure norms, and ecological conditions (rainfall, soil quality, etc). These sites were selected after a preliminary visit to Brong Ahafo in November 2013. Qualitative research was subsequently undertaken in the first half of 2014. In all cases, community access was gained through initial meetings with local chiefs secured through local gatekeepers. The research itself consisted primarily of individual, semi-structured interviews[4] conducted in Twi (an Akan dialect and local *lingua franca* in Brong Ahafo), which were translated during each interview by interpreters from an Nkoranza-based NGO that works on migration issues. These interviews were supplemented by focus group discussions and visits to local farms. At each research site, 40-50 interviews were conducted with migrants. While these could not be randomly selected to ensure they were representative, care was taken to ensure that they did reflect a cross-section of migrant groups living in the community, as well as different age groupings and genders. Key 'non-migrant' members of each community were also identified and interviewed to provide local perspectives on migration and related issues. The names of both the research sites themselves, and the research participants are withheld in this paper to protect the anonymity of research participants owing to the 'high risk' nature of this fieldwork, which took place with relatively at-risk internal migrants, as per University of Sussex's research ethics guidelines.

[4] NB: The interviews contained a set of questions on migration, land access and environmental change; data collected on migration forms the main basis for the findings presented later in this paper.

Section 2. Placing migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo Region in national and historical context

Data from Ghana's national census shows a clear trend of continued out-migration from the country's three northern regions – Upper West, Upper East and Northern – to areas in southern Ghana (see Fig 3), in particular to urban areas including Accra and Kumasi, as well as to agricultural frontiers. In the case of this latter trend, van der Geest *et al* (2010) investigated how Northern Ghanaian migration flows captured in census data relate to population density and vegetation cover, demonstrating that in-migration to central and western Ghana, in particular, was – on aggregate – linked to destinations with higher vegetation cover and relatively low population densities. This study confirms that much of this movement is being undertaken by migrant tenant farmers from the North to 'agricultural frontiers' in other parts of Ghana in order to gain access to farmland. Relatedly, Moller-Jensen and Knudsen (2008: 319), note that beyond the significant urban growth that is occurring in Accra and Kumasi, many of the fastest growing urban areas in Ghana are rural areas 'that have very high relative growth due to the national movement of farming activities, thereby acquiring the status of frontier areas.' They note that one of the primary motivating factors of this migration appears to be access to farmland – for cocoa production in the case of Western Region, or food crop production in the case of Brong Ahafo Region.

Fig 3. National in-migration rates in Ghana, 2000 census (Castaldo, et al*, 2012).*



As already noted above, Amanor (1994: 34) observes that the substantial migration from Ghana's three northern regions to Brong Ahafo since the 1970s has coincided with the region's emergence as one of the country's primary food production areas. However, while

this particular trend can be said to be 'new' in some sense, it is at least partly related to previous migratory movements from Northern Ghana to southern Ghanaian destinations for the purposes of agricultural production and/or labour. For example, Amanor (1994: 41) also notes that in pre-colonial times, slaves from what is present-day Northern Ghana made up much of the agricultural workforce in mid-Ghana under the Asante and other imperial states that emerged beginning in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While the British colonial period saw the (eventual) abolition of slave labour in 1908 (Austin 2006: 201), the British imposed a taxation regime in the Northern Territories (which constitute present-day Northern Ghana), the main goal of which was to encourage northern men to migrate seasonally for work in the gold mines and agricultural plantations of southern Ghana (Amanor 1994: 44). As Austin (2006: 203-204) notes, northern migrants gained considerable autonomy in the wake of the abolition of slave labour, with commercially successful northern sharecroppers being commonplace in cocoa farming operations in Ashanti Region, for example. Despite this fact, migrant farmers from the north remained relatively marginalized, owing to the fact that they only rarely gained permanent land-ownership rights, meaning that their livelihoods were contingent on continued access to land via locals who claimed customary land ownership over the areas they used for cocoa production based on 'first settler' narratives (Austin, 2006: 206).

Recent academic research, meanwhile, has looked at the specific reasons for contemporary migration out of Ghana's northern regions. Clearly, there is an underlying economic rationale for much of this out-migration. For example, Marchetta (2013) cites household data to suggest that migration is often a strategy adopted by relatively poor households in the north, who do not have the capital to pursue non-farm ventures *in situ*. Relatedly, recent household data collected in four communities in the Upper West Region by the *Where the Rain Falls* project (Rademacher-Schulz *et al* 2014) shows that seasonal migration is now more common during the rainy season, suggesting that many migrants are foregoing agriculture for the pursuit of potentially more lucrative – but also more risky – artisanal gold mining (known in Ghana as *galamsey*). Recent studies have also considered the specific cultural dimensions of migration among a number of northern groups including the Dagaba (van der Geest 2011b), the Frafra (Sow *et al* 2014), and the Kassena [or Grusi] (Awedoba and Hahn 2014). These studies reveal that the economic rationale for migration is typically linked to the production of both personal and family prestige or status, which is achieved through material improvements that are expected to come from migration. Meanwhile, in the case of the Northern Region in particular, conflict is clearly an important additional dimension of population mobility: As Olebaum (2010: 2) notes, an estimated 200,000 people were displaced during the 1990s by the so-called 'Guinea Fowl War', the most recent manifestation of long-running dispute in the region over land access and customary land ownership, in particular among the Konkomba and their neighbours the Gonja and Dagomba.

A handful of studies have also considered specific dimensions of northern migration into Brong Ahafo in recent years. Van der Geest (2011b) looks specifically at the establishment of ten Dagaba settler communities in west-central Brong Ahafo, where migrants have

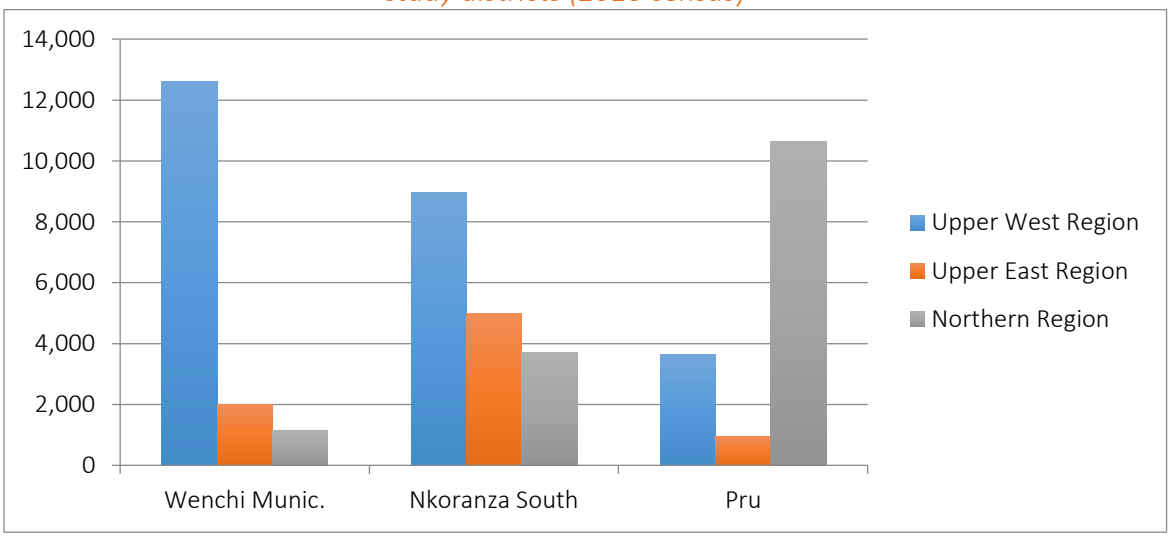
come to engage in farming activities; his focus is primarily on how the Dagaba have implemented farming practices common in Northern Ghana which are in fact quite 'sustainable' – a response to the common narrative that settler farmers contribute to land degradation at destination. Abdul-Korah (2007), meanwhile, focuses on step-migration of Dagaba to Brong Ahafo, highlighting the fact that a number of these migrants initially move to a wide range of other rural and urban destinations in southern Ghana before relocating to Brong Ahafo. Meanwhile, Tonah (2006), Lognibe (2008) and Yelsang (2013) all highlight how migrants have become directly or in-directly involved in low-level disputes over land ownership and land use. Tonah's focus is on disagreements between pastoralists and farmers – including migrants – over land use and access near Yeji in the vicinity of Lake Volta. By contrast, Lognibe (2008) shows how migrants can be used as leverage in disputes *between* local landlords as leasing lands to migrants is one strategy that is used to keep contested lands occupied on behalf of certain parties. Meanwhile, Yelsang (2013) looks at how migrants sometimes become embroiled in disputes over land use and rental payments *with* local landlords. Finally, Abu, *et al*, (2014: 357) show that – despite the relatively permanent nature of much recent migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo – a significant proportion of migrant household heads (nearly 63 per cent of a two village sample) said that they intended to move to new locations within five years. This was almost double the number of non-migrant household heads surveyed who intended to move (37 per cent) highlighting the fact that onward mobility is a significant characteristic of northern migration to Brong Ahafo.

In short, the existing research suggests that the recent increase in migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo is broadly related to a range of historical, economic, cultural and other factors, including conflict. While macro-level data show that migration is occurring to areas with lower population densities, wherever they move migrants must navigate local land ownership issues, including competing claims to land. With this general picture in mind, I shall now turn to an analysis of the district-level migration trends in the three districts where I conducted qualitative research. As I begin to drill down through complementary levels of analysis (district, community, and individual) I shall illustrate how migration can be usefully thought of as embedded in a wider 'complex adaptive system', even if only partial glimpses of this system are evident at each level of analysis. The large-scale, generalized pattern of migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo begins to emerge as coherent 'meso-level' sub-systems and 'micro-level' networks at the district- and community-level, respectively, which I argue reflects interactions between migration and specific structural factors in Brong Ahafo.

Section 3. District-level analysis of migration into Brong Ahafo: Highlighting variations across the region

The district-level census data on migration for the case study three districts provides a meso-level picture of how in-migration trends across Brong Ahafo vary in terms of which areas attract migrants from particular origin regions, and also provides some insights into how this migration has evolved over time. As illustrated in Fig 4, data from the 2010 Ghana Population and Housing Census (PHC) reveal the following migration 'sub-systems': In Wenchi Municipal district, migration from Northern Ghana is dominated by arrivals from Upper West Region; in Nkoranza South district, meanwhile, arrivals from Upper West also constitute the majority of northerners in the district, but flows from Upper East Region and Northern Region are also significant; and in Pru district, by contrast, arrivals from Northern Region are a clear majority. These district-level migrant numbers show that migration flows from Northern Ghana are not uniform across the region, presumably due to particular constellations of social networks, differing migration histories and other factors such as transportation infrastructure and conditions at destination that have attracted migrants from specific parts of the north.

Fig 4. District-level snapshot: Migration from Northern Ghana to case study districts (2010 census)[5]

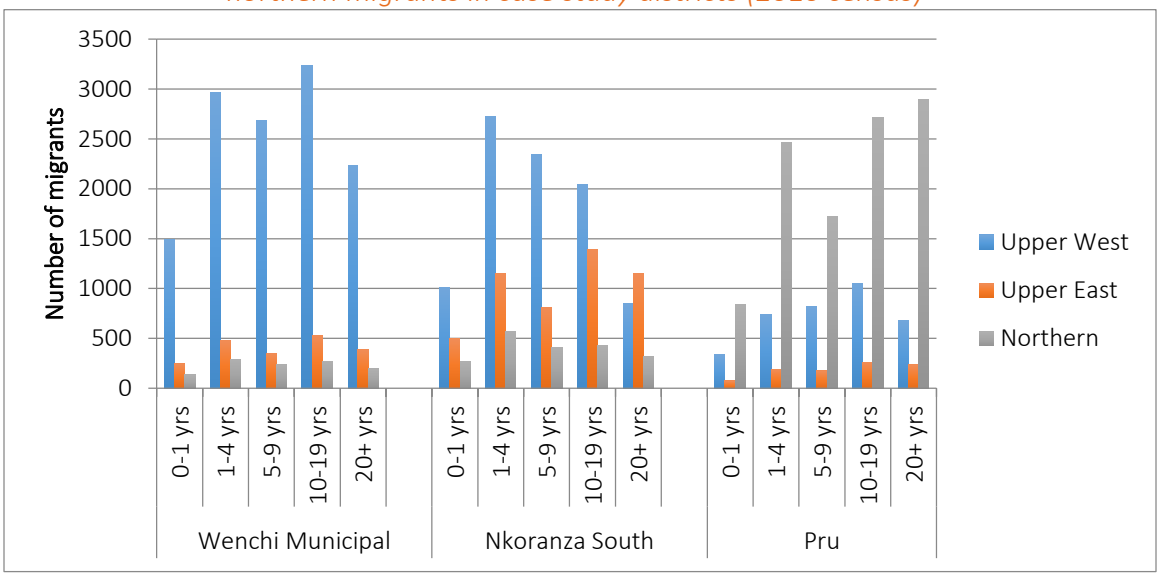


Moreover, data from the most recent Ghana census also shows that migration from Northern Ghana to all three case study districts has occurred at different rates historically (see Fig 5), especially where the most significant migrant-sending regions are concerned. In Wenchi Municipal District, migration from Upper West has occurred fairly steadily over time and continues to be robust, with nearly 1,500 migrants from the region arriving in their current locality within a year of the 2010 census. In Nkoranza South District, by contrast, migration from Upper West appears to have accelerated in the past decade,

[5] Author's calculations based on GSS 2014a, GSS 2014b, and GSS 2014c.

whereas significant in-migration from Upper East is to a greater extent an artefact of migration that occurred more than a decade ago. Finally, in the case of Pru District – which is dominated by migration from Northern Region in terms of arrivals from Northern Ghana[6] – those who have been in their current locality for over a decade represent more than 50 per cent of all migrants, pointing once again towards significant previous migration to the area that appears to have reduced in recent years, relatively speaking.

Fig 5. Internal migration trends over time: 'Years in current locality' of northern migrants in case study districts (2010 census)[7]



Interpreting the reasons for these changing flows over time involves some speculation, as even at the district-level these figures aggregate distinct migration flows that are responding both to factors at particular destinations and migrant origin communities. Moreover, census data does not elucidate how the numbers captured form distinct elements of migration patterns, including seasonal and temporary migration (ranging from six months to several years), step migration (where people move to Brong Ahafo from elsewhere in Ghana), and fostering arrangements for child schooling or other purposes. However, these data do show that migration has occurred along particular mobility corridors, and at different rates over time. With these meso-level trends in mind, I will now turn to my qualitative fieldwork findings, where I will explore how, given what we know about these district-level patterns of migration, looking at migration at the community- and individual-level can add additional granularity to our understanding of migration processes, helping us better understand how they interact with human and natural 'systems'.

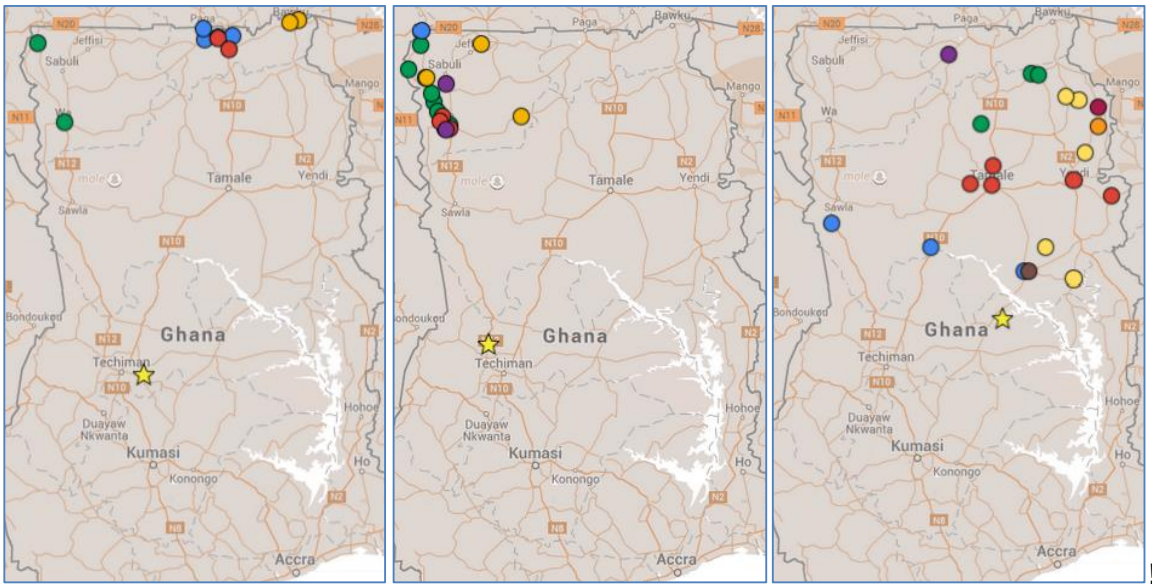
[6] In addition to migration from Northern Region to Pru District, there have also been a relatively large number of arrivals to the district from other parts of Ghana, including Ashanti, Volta and Greater Accra – due to the migration of fisherfolk to Lake Volta and other factors (Tonah 2006).

[7] Author's calculations based on GSS 2014a, GSS 2014b, and GSS 2014c.

Section 4. Community-level migration flows: understanding the interplay between social networks and opportunities at destination

Qualitative data from my fieldwork reveals that at the level of settler communities – which are a widespread phenomenon across Brong Ahafo – migration flows take quite a distinct character. These flows are apparently the result of the interaction between migration networks and historical migration trends, on the one hand, and how such networks interact with local factors, including land tenure practices, population density, ecological conditions and infrastructure linking migrant origin communities and specific destinations (refer again to Fig 2 for a graphic representation of the key 'feedbacks' influencing permanent migration from northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo). In each of the three case study sites, quite evidently different local migration patterns had emerged.

Fig 6. Community-level flows: origin communities of migrant interviewees in Nkoranza South (left), Wenchi Municipal (centre) and Pru (right) field-sites[8]



As Fig 6 illustrates, the Nkoranza South site was dominated by migration from Upper East Region, with members of the Grusi ethnicity forming a strong majority. Thus, this research site defied the overall district level in-migration trend (see Fig 4) that has seen the majority of in-migration occur from Upper West Region. As I shall explain below, this is due to a clear pattern of 'chain migration' at this particular site, with a large number of migrants following a small handful of pioneer settlers from Upper East, and has largely occurred since the 1980s, as a result of significant changes in land availability in the area. At the

[8] Note: in Fig 6, all field sites' approximate location indicated by 'star' icon. For **Nkoranza South district field-site dots represent origin communities as follows**: Grusi = blue; Frafra = red; Kusasi = yellow; Dagaba = green. **For Wenchi Municipal district field-site dots represent origin communities as follows**: Dagaba = green; Sissala = yellow; Wala = red; Mossi = blue; Fulani = purple. **For Pru district field-site dots represent origin communities as follows**: Gonja = blue; Chokossi = orange; Konkomba = yellow; Dagomba = red; Mamprusi = green; Buli = purple; Nchumuru = brown; Anufo = maroon.

Wenchi Municipal site, by contrast, migration has been dominated by arrivals from Upper West, with prominent groups including the Dagaba, Sissala, Wala and Mossi. The timing of initial waves of migration to this site occurred from the 1940s onwards, reflecting a long-standing mobility corridor between northwest Ghana and this part of mid-Ghana (which was sometimes used as a staging point for destinations further south). At the Pru site, meanwhile, arrivals typically hail from the relatively nearby Northern Region, although my interview data shows that the communities of origin are quite dispersed. Migration to this site has occurred solely within the last 30 years – when this settler community was established – and at least some of this migration has been influenced by the long-running conflicts in Northern Region between so-called majority and minority ethnic groups over customary land ownership rights.

Interview data collected during my fieldwork in the first half of 2014 helps shed further light on the distinct migration histories of these three settler communities, and also illustrates how migration can be a lens for understanding underlying social and environmental systems in these areas. For example, in the case of migration from Upper East to the Nkoranza South site, much of this was spurred by bushfires in the early 1980s that destroyed the cocoa plantations that had existed in the area, causing many erstwhile cocoa farmers to either abandon their farms completely or switch to other crops, with maize being the most common replacement. It was in this context of significant land use change that migrants from Upper East began arriving to the area *en masse*. As articulated by one Grusi pioneer migrant who came in the years just prior to the bushfires (when the local migrant population was sparse and mostly employed as labour on cocoa farms), the migrant population swelled in the intervening years, owing to the newfound availability of relatively good farmland in the area, which was available for rent from local landlords. He noted, 'I went and informed them [other Grusi] that the land was fertile and that they should come. … Yearly, we have been bringing people down' (Nkoranza Interview 3).

Grusi migrants now constitute the majority here, although minority populations from Upper East, including Frafra and Kusasi, also exist in this settler community, along with a small number of Dagaba migrants from Upper West (see Fig 6 for origin communities of migrant interviewees). Generally speaking, migration from Upper East to mid-Ghana was clearly significant in the early 1980s, when droughts affected much of Ghana, and to a certain extent migration from Upper East to Nkoranza South has started to tail off in recent years, as illustrated in Fig 5. This is also supported by my own interview data: Another Grusi pioneer migrant commented:

> 'Before the [1983] fire, people were not coming…in their numbers. After the fire, for about three years, there were plenty of people coming here as well as to other places around the Nkoranza area' (Nkoranza Interview 9).

As shall be explored in Section 5, the majority of these migrants remain part of trans-local social networks, with both patrilineal family hierarchies and relatively 'soft' linkages between distant kin and non-kin relations playing a role in migration decisions, ongoing mobility dynamics and the flow of money, food, other material goods, and information between Brong Ahafo and Upper East.

Likewise, the Wenchi Municipal site reflects distinct migration dynamics that link particular origin communities in Northern Ghana – in this case in Upper West – to this particular part of Brong Ahafo. In this community, Dagaba migrants are the clear majority, complemented by other arrivals from Upper West including Wala, Sissala, Mossi, and Fulani migrants (see Fig 6). As Amanor and Pabi (2007: 55-56) note, major state-led farms were established in Wenchi Municipal District in the 1950s and 1960s, a development that helped draw northerners to the area as seasonal farm labourers, and eventually contributed to the permanent settlement of northern migrants there. My interview data indicates that migration from Upper West began as early as the 1940s, although the Dagaba only began arriving from the 1960s onwards. As one second-generation Dagaba migrant relayed:

> [My parents] came in the early 1960s, in the 'time of Nkrumah'[9]. … They were one of the first Dagaba families to come here. They walked [from Upper West] to this spot! … [T]hey came here to earn some income. They came to labour and then went back. Finally, they came and acquired land and got stuck to the place. Before that they were going back and forth (Wenchi Interview 8).

Social networks – for the most part – remained active amongst migrants who were part of my interview sample, with even second-generation migrants sending remittances, material goods and regularly visiting kin relations in Upper West, showing the apparent durability of such networks. New migrant arrivals were also still coming to this settler community – and to the district in general, as illustrated by Fig 5.

In the Pru District site, by contrast, the settler community was composed of a range of different groups from Northern Region, including the Chokossi, Dagomba, Mamprusi, Gonja, and Konkomba, as well as tribal groups such as the Anufo, Buli, and Nchumuru (see Fig 6). Prior to the community's establishment, some migrants – or their kin – had settled in the general area many decades previously, with the Konkomba and Gonja in particular reporting a long history of pioneer migrants moving southwards in order to gain access to farmland. The migration history of this site has undoubtedly been partly influenced by the long history of conflict over land rights and chieftaincy in Northern Region, the most serious outburst of which was the so-called 'Guinea Fowl War' in the 1990s. This conflict – which was waged between the Konkomba, a 'minority' group, and 'majority' Gonja and Dagomba combatants – affected eight districts, displaced upwards of 200,000 people and claimed between 2,000 and 25,000 fatalities, according to wide-ranging estimates (Oelbaum 2010: 2). Although most of the migrants who were part of my interview sample came from communities that were outside of the areas affected by the conflict, a minority of respondents did indicate that they left Northern Region specifically to get away from trouble at home. However, other migrants were motivated by a similar set of issues to those in the other two research sites, most notably the scarcity of good quality farmland in Northern Region, as shall be discussed in more depth in Section 5. As with the other sites, migrants in this community generally retained active links with kin in the north, with continued migration, fostering arrangements, regular visits, remittances and other forms

[9] Kwame Nkrumah was Ghana's first president and prime minister following independence, and served from 1957-1966 before being deposed by a military coup.

of material support being some of the concrete manifestations of these continued linkages.

The community-level perspective of these migration histories reveals additional important dimensions of how migration is related to a wider set of complex interactions in Brong Ahafo. As accounts from the Nkoranza site show, sometimes seemingly small changes at destination can drive big changes in localized migration flows. In the case of the Wenchi site, by contrast, older migration flows continue to feed a trans-regional connectivity between Brong Ahafo and Upper West, with second-generation migrants remaining involved in continuous exchanges with northern kin. In the Pru case study site, meanwhile, migration from Northern Region represents part of a long-standing response to both land scarcity and conflict over land in communities of origin. Thus, considered through the lens of CAS theory, these distinct histories invite us to consider why certain flows have happened in different locations, across different timescales, and how they are inter-related to social conceptions and uses of land.

Section 5. Individual-level views: Mobility, networks, and material and information flows

At both the regional and district level, it's clear that certain factors have influenced the flow of migration from specific origin points in Northern Ghana to particular destinations in Brong Ahafo Region, apparently due to historical migration patterns, opportunities to gain access to (relatively) fertile land in a (relatively) sparsely populated region and the existence of particular mobility corridors, partly dictated by transport infrastructure. At the individual level, migrant perceptions of their own mobility tend to echo these factors, albeit with a specific focus on: (1) kin or other social linkages that brought them to their current location; (2) problems or limitations of life at home in the North that encouraged them to migrate; (3) the recurring theme of Brong Ahafo constituting a place of 'greener pastures' from a farming perspective, relative to their prospects at home; and, relatedly, (4) the opportunity to earn a better living in Brong Ahafo. These were common components of migrants' narratives about their mobility in all three of my case study communities. As this section will show, migrants' narratives reveal that they are active 'agents' who tend to be involved in trans-local social networks, which facilitate the continuous flow of people money, goods, and information between Northern Ghana and Brong Ahafo. However, these networks are not without inequalities: migration outcomes vary widely for migrants in all three case study communities, with some experiencing transformative livelihood changes, others having more modest improvements, and still others apparently stuck in cycles of 'farming at a loss'.

5.1 Migration decisions and return migration intentions

The factors that influenced migrants' decisions to leave the North and move to Brong Ahafo varied considerably in all three case study sites. However, the question of *where* people moved to was – with only a few exceptions among my interviewees – usually expressed in terms of having kin connections already at destination. Thus, while the motivating factors underlying migration varied among sub-groupings of migrants, social networks consistently acted as a conduit that facilitated flows to the case study sites, helping to explain the peculiar character of district-level and community-level migration flows discussed earlier in this chapter (refer to Figs 4, 5, and 6).

At the Nkoranza South site, men expressed a variety of reasons for pursuing migration, including to access better farming opportunities, get money for marriage dowries, fund their education, or to escape 'family problems'. By contrast, women's migration was often linked to marriage, with both moving together with husbands and reuniting with them following men's initial solo migration constituting common trajectories among my interviewees. Migrants' own narratives show how the kin connections and economic reasons underlying migration decisions form fluid linkages, and that the former are an important factor in migrants' decisions to relocate to specific destinations, amid a plethora of options of where to move to. For example, one Frafra male migrant remarked:

> My sister was married to someone who was living here, and so I came down here to labour. I worked as a labourer for two years, and then I acquired my own piece of land (Nkoranza Interview 22).

Similarly, a Grusi male migrant recalled how he arrived in the community as a result of having kin located there, after previously migrating to another location:

> I came almost 20 years ago, because I had an uncle here. Before that, I moved to Kumasi, and worked for about 11 years…there (Nkoranza Interview 20).

In the Wenchi site, the more established nature of the community meant that a large number of migrants were of the second-generation, and they had not played an active role in their parents' decision to migrate to Brong Ahafo. In the case of other long-term migrant residents and more recent arrivals, access to fertile farmland, marriage or kin linkages, and the opportunity to earn higher incomes were again significant motivating factors that helped to spur migration. As articulated by one elderly Sissala male migrant who initially came to Brong Ahafo in the 1940s:

> There was hardship [in the north], so I came over here to farm. ... I went to my brother's place at Dormaa [Brong Ahafo], then from there I moved to this place, because I heard that the land here was fertile (Wenchi interview 16).

Similarly, the account of one female Dagaba migrant showed the transient, kin-oriented nature of northerners' mobility in Brong Ahafo:

> At first, we lived at Nkawsaw [Brong Ahafo], since we [her and her then-husband] had paid my father a visit there. [After my divorce] I came here because my brother was here, and I engaged in pito selling[10].

In Pru District, reasons for migration included conflict in the North – particularly the 'Guinea Fowl War' of the 1990s, which was directly referenced by a handful of my respondents as the main reason that they decided to move to Brong Ahafo:

> I had some relatives here; I had previously been displaced by the 1990s conflict [in Northern Region]. I was looking for a place, and I decided to come here. I came to farm, as my relatives here were also farming (Pru Interview 31).

However, for other migrant arrivals who had moved from areas outside the conflict area, a structural scarcity of good quality farmland was also a key motivator of migration. One Dagomba male migrant, who had moved to the area over 20 years ago, noted:

> We used to farm over there, in Northern Region. But the land was difficult to get and it had lost its fertility. My grandfather was here…and so I joined him (Pru Interview 8).

Other reasons for migration included fostering arrangements, professional placements of kin in the area, and, in the case of a number of widows, reunification with children at destination following the death of a spouse. Overall, links with kin at destination were often

[10] Pito is a millet-based beer that is commonly brewed in Northern Ghana and is also found in settler communities – and elsewhere – in Brong Ahafo.

articulated as a key reason for choosing to move to this destination, in particular. For example, one Mamprusi man, who arrived over 30 years ago, noted:

> My sister got married to a man who was from this place, so I followed my sister to this place, as my brother-in-law was here (Pru Interview 14).

Across all three research sites, return migration intentions were relatively *uncommon* – except in the case of the planned return of older migrants to their communities of origin, especially for the purpose of senior men who had ascended to the role of 'head of the family'. In some cases, these family responsibilities clearly ran counter to migrants' own personal migration preferences. As on Dagaba male migrant at the Wenchi Municipal District research site remarked:

> I'm not going back…this is my home! When I go there [to Upper West], I will not know anyone and I will become a stranger. All my friends are here! … Unless I need to become the head of the family: Then there is no choice. They will come and carry you back! (Wenchi Interview 6)

Others expressed a general desire to retire in their home communities in the north when they had finished farming in Brong Ahafo. However, in most cases, return migration was contingent on the completion of a successful migration project, which allowed migrants to 'get money' in order to prepare for their return. As one Grusi male migrant from the Nkoranza South research site noted, 'If I get money, I'll go, but without it, I'll stay, so it's 50-50' (Nkoranza Interview 2). By contrast, many others expressed a clear desire to retire in the settler communities that they had relocated to. One Chokossi male migrant at the Pru research site commented, 'I have no plans of going back. I have land… and I have peace. And here I also have a house' (Pru Interview 1).

As evidenced by the above interview extracts, seasonal migration before taking up 'permanent' settlement in Brong Ahafo was relatively commonplace – showing the continuum between 'temporary' and 'permanent' types of migration. While step-migration from other destinations in Ghana to Brong Ahafo was not the norm among migrants, it was evident in a significant minority of cases, both in terms of movement from other farming communities within Brong Ahafo and in the case of relocating from locations in neighbouring Ashanti Region. As with other forms of migration, information received by migrants from kin and other relations about farming opportunities at specific locations in Brong Ahafo was said by migrants themselves to be pivotal in influencing their decisions to relocate.

5.2 Social linkages: remittances, visits, and other links

Whatever migrants' reasons for moving to Brong Ahafo initially, the majority of migrants remained embedded in social relations with northern kin and acquaintances. These were extremely active social networks that were typically characterized by: relatively frequent visits to the North, particularly for funerals or festivals; migrants sending internal remittances, food and other forms of material support to northern kin; and flows of people

from the north for temporary or seasonal migration, fostering arrangements, and visits. Relatively cheap travel via *tro-tros* (group taxis) is a key component of this ongoing mobility, and until recently travel served as the primary way of passing information from the north to Brong Ahafo, per the interview data. These social linkages are now easier to maintain due to the penetration of mobile phone technology in Brong Ahafo: Many migrants now own mobiles or have access to one via others in their settler communities.

In Nkoranza South, remittance levels tended to vary widely, reflecting a fairly substantial divergence in the success of migrant farmers in this settler community, as well as the importance of larger remitters in enhancing their families' prestige and status through the funding of elaborate funeral arrangements, as well as housing, schooling and healthcare needs. As one senior Grusi migrant noted of the support he sent to relatives in Upper East:

> There, too, they farm. If they don't get a good yield, I will send 15 bags of maize to the [family] house; if they do get a good yield, I'll usually send 6 bags. I also usually send around 1,000 [Ghanaian] cedis[11] a year. … They use it for school fees, hospital bills, funerals, and other uses (Nkoranza Interview 14).

On the other end of the spectrum, less successful or struggling farmers were only able to send small remittances, exclusively sent support in the form of foodstuffs, or – in rare cases – gave no support at all. However, smaller levels of support also tended to be tailored to the specific needs of kin. As another Grusi migrant noted:

> If there is no problem, I usually send money once per year. But if there are some problems, I send money two or three times a year. One hundred cedis is the usual amount. I also send food, usually between a half bag and a full bag of maize (Nkoranza Interview 2).

In Wenchi, visits and remittances were also common, particularly among the Dagaba – a striking fact given that many of these were second-generation migrants who had grown up away from Upper West. First-generation Dagaba migrants were also often buried in their communities of origin, reflecting the durable nature of social networks for this group, in particular. As one second-generation Dagaba migrant noted:

> I send food and cash because life is much more difficult there than here, so once you go there, they will be looking for something. So you have to go and prove it [that you are successful] (Wenchi Interview 7).

However, support from second-generation Dagaba migrants was usually relatively small (typical remittances per visit were usually 50-100 cedis) in comparison to their first generation migrant counterparts at Wenchi and other research sites. For example, a senior Sissala migrant who was planning to move back to his community in Upper West and take up the mantle of head of the family took 300 cedis home for each of his three-to-four annual visits. He remarked, 'It's used for food for visitors who come to the place. We have a feast, with a cow, goat and all the rest of it' (Wenchi Interview 18). In both the case of smaller and larger monetary gifts, however, it's clear that that an important dimension of

[11] At time of writing, 1 Ghanaian cedi = 0.17 pounds sterling.

these material exchanges was about maintaining social networks, based on ongoing practices of patronage and attempts to enhance family prestige.

Similarly, in Pru District visits and remittances were common – although the prohibitive cost of sending food to Northern Region via Lake Volta meant that, compared to the other two sites, fewer migrants sent food crops to northern kin, instead sending cash for relatives to purchase food or other goods. One Konkomba migrant, who had been displaced by fighting during the 1990s, commented:

> I send them [his relatives in Northern Region] 600-1,000 cedis a year. Part of it is for healthcare purposes, to pay for health insurance. They also use it for buying clothes, soap, and other daily essentials (Wenchi Interview 31).

In this settler community, fostering arrangements for the purpose of education were common, both in terms of northern kin sending children to Brong Ahafo, and migrants sending their children in the opposite direction. At times, these multiple forms of support for kin in Northern Region overlapped: As one Chokossi migrant commented, 'I send them [Northern relatives] 600 cedis a year. I am also supporting three brothers who are here, including paying their school fees' (Pru Interview 6).

Frequent visits to the north were fairly common for all but the poorest farmers – or in rare cases where migrants had become estranged from northern kin. Most migrants went to the north at least once a year, while others went as many as 3-4 times a year, often to attend funerals or deal with other family matters. The existence of migrants' trans-local social networks was also not confined to their origin communities and the settler communities in which they resided: Many migrants indicated that they were in regular contact with members of their ethnic groups who lived in other communities in Brong Ahafo. As one Frafra migrant at the Nkoranza South research site remarked,

> They [other Frafra migrants] are circulated all around Brong Ahafo. I meet them at the market [in Nkoranza], or they come here to visit, or I see them at funerals, too.

5.3 Moving out of poverty? Making sense of migrants' different outcomes at destination

Qualitative research in the case study sites indicated that at the level of individual migrants, the success of their migration was fairly divergent, according to their own accounts of their current livelihood situations. Whilst the qualitative research was not representative, these distinct trajectories nevertheless offer insights into differential outcomes for migrants at the individual level, with these in turn having implications for migration's potential impact on poverty reduction for both migrants and, by extension, their northern kin.

In all three of the case study communities, the livelihood outcomes for migrants fell into three main groupings:

(1) Transformative: There was a small minority of migrants who had experienced a genuine transformation of their fortunes since moving to Brong Ahafo. These were highly successful farmers who – through the commercial success of their farming

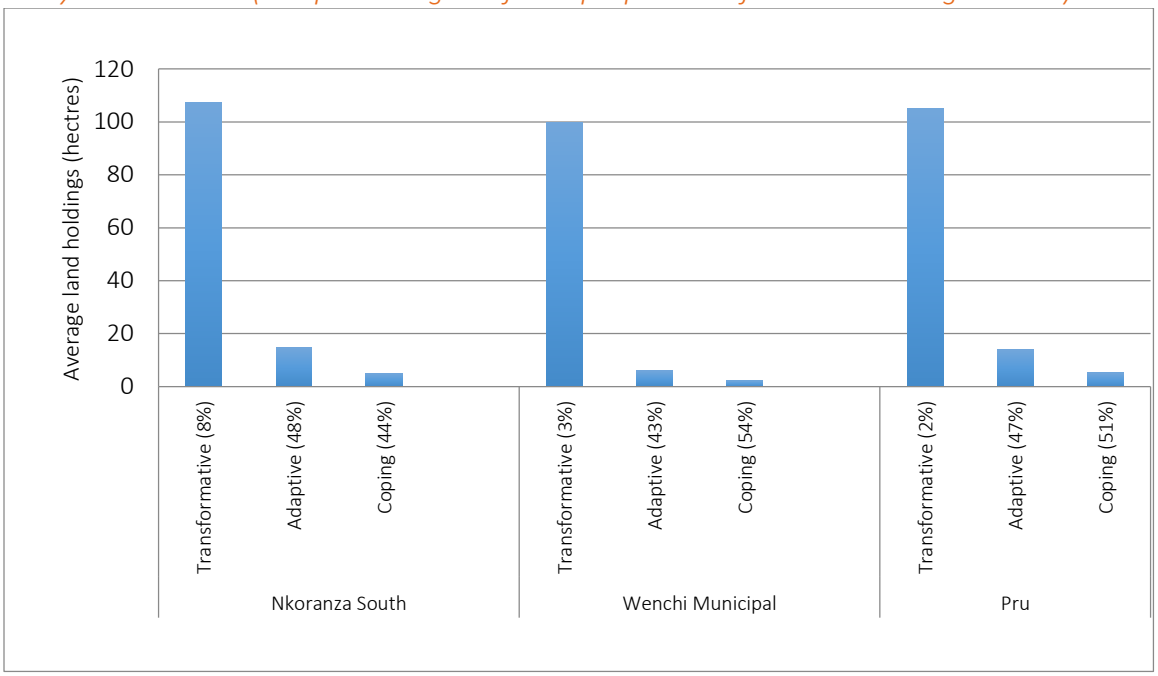
ventures – had been able to significantly increase the acreage of farmland that they rented, and had also been able to make productive investments that yielded significant non-farm income, for example through building rental properties in nearby towns, starting businesses, investing in livestock, or pursuing their own higher education (or investing in the higher education of their children).

(2) Adaptive: By contrast, a substantial number of migrants I interviewed were generally experiencing success through farming, but lacked significant livelihood diversification, making them relatively vulnerable to the environmental variability that characterizes farming in mid-Ghana, due to its reliance on rain-fed agriculture and related risks posed by rainfall variability, bushfires and declining soil quality. Nevertheless, these migrants had generally experienced a subjective improvement in their livelihoods as the result of migration, and were often providing significant levels of support for kin in the north.

(3) Coping: A final group of interviewees were struggling to eke out a living in Brong Ahafo. Their farm plots were usually small and they were often just 'breaking even' or, worse, 'farming at a loss', and were sometimes in-debt either to landlords or other members of the community. If they were involved in off-farm work, the income they earned from it was fairly small. With limited sources of income, they were particularly vulnerable to seasonal environmental variability, and often were able to provide only meagre levels of support to kin in the north.

In all three of the case study communities, these groupings in part reflected migrants' access to land – and indeed migrants with 'transformative' livelihoods tended to have much larger land holdings (whether rented or partially owned) than other migrants (see Fig 7). There also tended to be differences in land access between migrants who had 'adaptive' and 'coping' livelihoods at the three case study sites. At the Nkoranza site, those who were 'adaptive' tended to have larger land holdings (and have cash rental agreements or own part of their plots), or have significant forms of off-farm income, in comparison to those who were 'coping', who had smaller land holdings and tended to be engaged in sharecropping land access arrangements. At the Wenchi site, plots of land accessed by migrants were smaller, in general, pointing the fragmented nature of land holdings in this relatively developed corridor of the region. The 'adaptive' migrants here tended to have more favourable land access arrangements (such as free access or access to family land) or fruitful off-farm ventures, whereas 'coping' migrants had smaller plots, and/or marginal off-farm employment activities. At the Pru site, migrants were often able to access comparatively large plots of land, although this was perhaps offset by poorer rainfall and land quality in this part of the region. Those migrants with access to greater than ten acres were much more likely to be 'adaptive' and to have acquired their land directly from chiefs or other landlords, while those with smaller land holdings often had more marginal livelihoods and in many cases were farming a plot of their relatives' land. Significantly, in both Wenchi and Pru, some female migrants earned substantial off-farm income through market trading – and were thus 'adaptive' – but this was apparently absent at the Nkoranza site.

Fig 7. Relationship between land access and migrants' livelihood 'status' in the three case study communities (NB: percentages refer to proportion of each status in given site)



The reasons for these disparities cannot be easily explained: while the small number of migrants with 'transformative' livelihoods were all male farmers, the other two livelihood statuses cut across ethnic, generational and gender lines. Factors such as migrants' access to land or – in the case of some women – successful market trading, appeared to be partly a function of certain migrants' exploitation of opportunities at destination, linked to fairly concrete entrepreneurship strategies. This was sometimes buoyed by particularly strong kin links, favourable time of arrival at destination (when environmental or land access conditions were comparatively good), or the ability to curry favour with local landowners. In general, migrants who had 'transformative' or 'adaptive' livelihood statuses were often influential senior members of their communities (of either gender), and/or had strong social links within the sites; on the flip side, many 'coping' migrants were, relatively speaking, newer arrivals to their communities or were part of less robust ethnic social networks. However, as already mentioned, such advantages did not completely explain migrant outcomes, possibly because they had little influence over a range of other factors that affected livelihood outcomes, including ecological variability, shifting market conditions, or competing claims to land. Thus, the reasons migrants ended up having different statuses can be summed up as 'complex' – and indeed in some cases migrants who had initially been experiencing success in farming saw their livelihoods beginning to erode over time, due to (reportedly) more erratic rains, declining soil fertility, and increasing rental costs of land[12].

[12] While these factors form some of the key themes of my PhD research, expanding upon them further is beyond the scope of this working paper.

Broadly speaking, these divergent outcomes show, on one hand, that migration often allows northern migrants to access better farming opportunities than exist in their home communities, at least opening up the potential for enhanced income, which can have important implications for the resilience of not only migrants situated in Brong Ahafo but also their kin in Northern Ghana. On the other hand, they also reveal the limitations of this type of migration in terms of poverty reduction. Different migrant outcomes also have the potential to influence future migration patterns, with more 'successful' migrants potentially more likely to encourage the further migration of kin, and also to be more likely to be able to fulfill their desire to return home, as interview data cited earlier in this section illustrates. Meanwhile, less successful migrant farmers may be more likely to move on to other destinations, if they get information about what they perceive to be better farming or other income-generating opportunities. As one Grusi male migrant from the Nkoranza site who was experiencing marginal success remarked, 'I am here purposively for farming, so if I hear of any place where the yields are good, I'll decide to go there' (Nkoranza Interview 7).

Taken as a whole, these individual-level perspectives of migration provide insights into the small-scale interactions that have led to the emergence of the relatively recent trend of settler migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo. On the one hand, this is a migration to 'greener pastures', with better and more accessible farming opportunities, according to the perceptions of migrants themselves. On the other hand, this migration is an expression of trans-local kin networks, both in terms of shaping migration flows and with regard to ongoing interactions between migrants and northern kin. However, as outlined in previous sections, this ground-level migrant agency unfolds in specific structural conditions, with migrant social networks acting as a conduit through which changing conditions at particular destinations are relayed to migrants in the north and elsewhere in Ghana. Thus, migration flows are continuously co-evolving with other factors, or 'feedbacks', such as land availability, ecological variability, and changing population dynamics, all of which can ultimately impact the success of migrants' farming ventures.

Section 6. Conclusion: lessons arising from the complexity of internal migration

This paper has examined the increase in (semi-)permanent migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo, where the majority of migrants are engaged in smallholder commercial agriculture. By using the complex adaptive systems framework to analyse migration processes at the regional, district, community and individual level, this paper has demonstrated that migration patterns emerge as part of locally evolved conditions at specific migration destinations, such as evolving land tenure conditions, land use changes, and the emergence of trans-local social networks. At the meso- and macro-level, migration patterns also correspond to particular mobility corridors, reflecting transport infrastructure and other contingent factors. The paper has also considered Northern Ghanaian migration to Brong Ahafo in a wider national and historical context in order to show that current migration flows are the latest iteration of historical mobility patterns from Northern Ghana to mid-Ghana for the purpose of labour in agriculture.

This multi-level analysis has sought to tease out the complex interplay between migration patterns and other social and environmental factors. Migrants' own accounts of their mobility reveal three important points. Firstly, migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo is clearly mediated by trans-local social networks. These operate along the lines of what Bakewell and colleagues (2011: 5) refer to as 'migration systems', which they define as trans-local networks that help to direct migration flows to particular destinations, in way that is far from 'random'. Secondly, the perception that better livelihood opportunities are available to migrants in Brong Ahafo in comparison to their prospects in Northern Ghana is an important factor that drives this migration. Finally, the divergent livelihood outcomes for migrants at the three case study communities show that migration 'success' is variable, affecting both the poverty reduction potential of this type of migration, as well as its implications for onward mobility.

However, a different perspective on migration emerges when considering the evolution of community-level migration histories across the three case study migrant communities. Different lessons are evident across the three case study sites: The Nkoranza South site suggests that migration can be highly sensitive to sudden changes at would-be migration destinations, with social networks in this case facilitating a fairly rapid flow of migration from Upper East Region to this destination in response to changes in land availability. The Wenchi and Pru district sites, by comparison, show that migration can also follow more diffuse, slow-burning patterns, with previous waves of migration facilitating the continuous flows of people, goods and information between northern destinations and Brong Ahafo, even in cases where new 'permanent' migrant arrivals begin to reduce.

These 'small-scale interactions' between migrants and their destinations in Brong Ahafo provide greater granularity to what we already know about migration from Northern Ghana to Brong Ahafo via census data that captures flows at the district and regional level,

as well as analysis by van der Geest and colleagues (2010) that links in-migration to areas with relatively low population densities and relatively high vegetation cover. Through this multi-level analysis, a clearer picture of how migration patterns have developed over time emerges, and we can also begin to trace the outlines of how migration is part of a complex adaptive system in Brong Ahafo, interacting with evolving conditions related to land availability, population dynamics, and transport infrastructure. Thus, the migration of farmers to rural areas in Brong Ahafo has a very particular role in the 'human-nature system' that is co-evolving in this part of Ghana. Migration is at once an expression of historical and current social and environmental factors in Brong Ahafo, and also plays an important role in redefining land use practices and land tenure norms. In other words, migration is one important feature of in 'frontier' agricultural dynamics that, Amanor (1994) argues, have characterized changing farming practices in Ghana's transition zone since the 1970s.

What are the lessons of this analysis for research and policy in the wider Ghanaian and West African context? I suggest that this analysis offers a number of key points for thinking about both current and future migration trends in terms of how we conceptualise the relationship between migrants' agency and the wider structural factors that would seem to encourage (or indeed discourage) migration. I highlight three over-arching lessons below:

1) *While migration patterns follow general heuristics, or 'rules of thumb', the complex interplay between migration and other related factors ensures that there is an inherently unpredictable element to migration flows.* While at the national level migration appears to be the result of spatial inequality, or disparities in population density and vegetation cover, the ground-level view of migration in the Brong Ahafo case study undertaken here shows that local changes in land availability, the presence of kin networks at particular destinations, and transport infrastructure also affect how migration takes shape. The wider lesson here is that migration can *potentially* be highly sensitive to relatively small changes at potential destinations. Rather than assuming that migration will occur in response to structural factors – such as rural-urban wage differentials – or in response to environmental impacts at origin – such as environmental degradation or desertification – policy and research needs to also acknowledge that a dynamic relationship exists between mobility, land availability and population dynamics, which characterizes much migration to rural areas in Ghana and elsewhere in West Africa.

2) *Internal migration reflects trans-local connections between migrant populations and areas affected by spatial poverty dynamics*. Networks appear influential in determining where people move to, and in providing information about evolving livelihood opportunities at migration destinations – thus acting as a bridge between migrants' agency and larger structural factors. Therefore, such trans-local linkages potentially have a role to play in poverty reduction and resilience of poor communities. However, while membership in such trans-local networks can act as an informal safety net (see,

for example, Dzingirai *et al* (2014) for a discussion of this in the Southern African context), my research shows that there are also significant differences in outcomes for migrants at destination in Brong Ahafo, ranging from those who have transformative livelihood changes to migrant farmers who struggle to earn much income at all. Policy interventions could potentially enhance the poverty reduction impact of migration – by providing bespoke support to migrant farmers, for example – but would need to be constructed in a way that acknowledged the importance of these existing trans-local social networks.

3) *Internal and regional migration to rural destinations is a significant feature of West African mobility patterns, and an important dynamic of agricultural innovation:* As already alluded to above, Northern Ghanaian migration to Brong Ahafo is just one example of migration to agricultural 'frontiers' in both the national and regional context. For example, internal migration played a key role in shifting of cocoa 'frontier' in Ghana to new areas production from the 1940s onwards (see Amanor 1994), and the movement of Burkinabé farmers into neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire was also an important dimension of the emergence of the cocoa sector in that country, prior to issues over Burkinabé migrants' access to land contributing to the outbreak of civil war in the 1990s (see Berry 2008). However, this type of migration is marginalized in policy discourse: Neither Ghana's draft National Migration Policy (Ghana Ministry of Interior 2014) or its national development framework, the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda 2014-2017 (Government of Ghana 2014), include any specific policies on migration to rural 'agricultural frontiers'. While there is an underlying economic rationale for this migration, in both the Ghanaian and wider West African context this migration also involves negotiating local customary tenure systems to access land, as well as the complex interplay between migrants, locals, national and international markets, and environmental factors. I argue that CAS theory offers us a tool to better understand these migration processes, offering an opportunity to conceptualise potential linkages to wider development, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation efforts insofar as they interface with migration to 'agricultural frontiers' in the region.

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About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

Migrating out of Poverty is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions - and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of ***Migrating out of Poverty*** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The ***Migrating out of Poverty*** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

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