



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Decision-Making Processes of Young African Migrants Seeking to Enhance Their Livelihoods in Accra, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Young people are increasingly migrating within their own countries and across different countries to enhance their livelihoods. These migrations are often driven by economic factors, with young people seeking to take advantage of opportunities that are less available at their places of origin. At the centre of these migrations are the range of decisions young people go through, which are often not entirely taken by themselves alone. In this context, we explore via a qualitative investigation of young migrants in Accra, Ghana, the decision-making processes these young migrants engaged in to understand the complex system of interactions involved. Data collection employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions among migrants of 15–24 years from within Ghana, and other neighbouring West African countries, bound together by the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement; namely, Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Niger. Our findings reveal that for young migrants, ‘independent’ pre-migration decision means less dependent on household parents but often linked to supportive roles including funds provision by their peers, parents and other close relatives abroad that concretize their final decisions to migrate. Considering the complex decision-making processes young people traverse, our paper broadens the scope of researching young people’s migration decision-making architecture in Western Africa to be understood within the context of the New Economics of Migration Theory where migration decisions are more collectively taken to maximize income and employment opportunities while minimizing risks.

1 | Introduction

Several socio-economic and relational factors and actors are involved in migration decision-making processes among migrant youth either within or across geographical borders of countries in Africa. Such decision-making is usually linked to the kinds of people who migrate, and the choice of country or place of destination (van de Werfhorst and Heath 2019). Several alternatives are often open to the migrant regarding the choice of destination (Anarfi and Adjei 2009). As far back as the late 1980s, research has demonstrated that people from low-income countries emigrated largely because they perceived their

countries or places of origin as poor, underdeveloped and lacking economic opportunities. Several years down the line, it appears not much has changed in many African countries, where the desire to realise economic independence and self-sustenance continues to drive many young people to migrate from their homes of origin to different locations within and outside their home countries. For example, more recently, Czaika and Reinprecht (2022) note that growing socio-economic inequalities, which translate into generally unfulfilled life aspirations underline several migration intentions of people around the world.

Against this background, we examine the complex and multiple processes young people engage in towards making decisions to migrate to Accra, the capital city of Ghana. We also examine the migration enablers young migrants mediate and reasons for migrating. Situated within the context of migration-development nexus literature (de Haas 2010; Carling 2014, etc), youth migration has become an important process in their quest for enhancing their quality of life and that of their families as well as places of origin through knowledge and skills acquisition, and remittances they send back home to support household members left behind. However, youth migration outcomes cannot be entirely disentangled from the kinds of decision-making architecture they go through and the enabling factors that strengthen their resolve to migrate. To analyse these, we begin with a brief overview of migration trends in Ghana, key theoretical perspectives and some background literature before an analysis of the decision-making processes young migrants undertake in our study. The paper conceives the origin countries of the study participants as one large neighbourhood with Ghana by virtue of the relative ease with which their nationals enter and exit each other's territorial space due to the porousness of their national borders and the common ECOWAS Protocol on free movement of persons and goods that governs movement within the region.

1.1 | Migration in Ghana

In Ghana, the 2021 Population and Housing Census (PHC) classified 28.9% of the total population of the country as migrant and 71.1 percent as non-migrant. A higher proportion of the migrant population was also recorded to be females (52.5%) compared to males (47.5%). Again, a relatively higher proportion of the female migrant population (23.1%) than males (22.1%) was within age 15–24 years. The same PHC further indicates that a higher proportion of the rural (33.9%) than urban (22.2%) population were migrants in the country (Ghana Statistical Service 2023). On the other hand, among children 5–17 years, 18 percent were migrants, composed of 52.6% females and 47.4% males. This shows that females are increasingly becoming more migratory at younger ages in Ghana. The 'kayaye' phenomenon has become quite common and is mainly engaged in by young female migrants who carry headloads for monetary rewards around marketplaces and lorry stations in the cities (see Anarfi and Kwankye 2009).

Migration decision-making in Ghana is a complex process and often involves a range of actors including family and peers or other contacts. The network of migrants at the destination, for example, has been found to provide strong support for young people's migration (Mora and Taylor 2006). At the same time, in Ghana, wage differentials between regions have been identified to constitute a major determining factor for high school students to decide on the choice of destination region for migration (Duplantier et al. 2017).

1.2 | Theoretical Perspectives and Frameworks of Young People's Migration Decisions

Lee (1966) classical theory of migration describes a range of factors that can be seen to push migrants out of the origin and

others that attract them to the destination. According to this theory, there are intervening obstacles, including distance and technology that could impede the individual's decision to migrate. Finally, Lee speaks of personal factors, which describe how an individual may perceive all other factors, including the intervening obstacles (such as the cost of movement for the young migrant in contemporary times), that could influence the actual act of migration. This suggests a clear interplay of push and pull factors that inform migration decisions among people irrespective of age.

In recent times, a few studies have applied Lee (1966) framework in different contexts. Helbling and Morgenstern (2023) have examined migration aspirations in relation to political, economic, and social environments in Africa, while Hagen-Zanker et al. (2025) have analysed multi-level determinants of migration aspirations across several regions. Specifically, the former looks at how people's perceptions affect their migration aspirations and how these perceptions are determined by the objective situation in their origin countries and concludes that positive perceptions of the structural environment are related to lower migration aspirations, but this relationship is only partly dependent on the objective situation in a country. Thus, perceptions do not simply mediate the objective environment as people's knowledge of the objective situation may vary, and perception may be influenced by their different expectations while the socio-economic and political conditions may not equally be affected by the objective conditions.

Hagen-Zanker et al. (2025) also discuss migration aspirations in the context of the push factors at the individual and community level and report that community level factors that determine international migration aspirations are not always consistent with individual-level factors that explain differences in migration aspirations among people. Thus, factors that may push people to migrate must be examined from both the individual and community levels for a more nuanced understanding of how people become motivated to consider migration in response to community level conditions, suggesting that hardships experienced from governance and public services tend to produce higher migration aspirations.

The Neoclassical Economics of Migration Theory also conceives migration as being the result of geographical differences between labour supply and labour demand, where potential migrants estimate the costs and benefits of moving to alternative locations, considering the differences in wages and employment between the origin and destination areas (European University Institute 2024). On the other hand, the New Economics of Migration Theory suggests that migration decisions are not made by people as isolated individuals but instead is a collective decision amongst several individuals to maximize income and employment opportunities while minimizing risks (European University Institute 2024). Thus, economic disadvantages could propel people to move to seek wider opportunities for employment elsewhere (Massey 1988).

Bushin (2009) has also proposed a framework for understanding migration decision-making among young people below age 18 years. Bushin (2009) framework identifies five levels of decision-making using a 'children-in-families approach', defined to range from low to high propensity for the child to eventually migrate, reflecting different degrees of children's

agency in the decision-making process. The first level is conceived to begin with a situation where parent(s) decide while others notify the child, followed by a second level where parent (s) decide, and parent(s) notify the child. At the third level, parent(s) consult their child, but parent(s) make the final decision. At the fourth level, the child is said to participate in decision-making with parent(s) while the fifth level identifies how the child initiates the decision and discusses it with parent(s).

While the other frameworks focus generally on migration, Bushin (2009) model directly describes the different levels of migration decision-making regarding children where all the five levels identified involve a parent(s) to varying degrees. However, what is missing are the situations where the child solely makes the decision to migrate without the involvement of the parent(s) and in circumstances where the decisions may be purely influenced by peers or other social networks. These theoretical frameworks and the relevant literature provide a useful context for this paper. In sum, this paper attempts to broaden the scope of analysis of young people's migration decision-making in West Africa in the context of these different theoretical frameworks and contemporary literature where migration decisions are more collectively taken rather than independently to achieve livelihood enhancement goals.

2 | Background Literature

There is a vast body of literature on young people's migration and, therefore, it is not possible to chart all contributions in this paper. As a result, we present an overview of relevant literature that are related to migration decision-making and its enablers with specific reference to "independence" of young people's migration decisions, migration financing, aspirations/motivations, remittances and social networks.

A few studies have directly or indirectly through financing of the movement discussed the extent to which youth migration decisions are "independently" taken (Kwankye et al. 2009; Anarfi and Adjei 2009). In some respects, however, the "independence" of youth migration decisions may be called to question in circumstances where parents may be financially capable to support their young children's decision to move but may not be willing to do so, thereby making their migration aspirations to be abandoned (Osei et al. 2022). There have also been instances where some young people have migrated without consulting parents or other family members, and according to Anarfi and Adjei (2009), a higher proportion of females (66.5%) than males (45.9%) were likely to have decided to "independently" migrate. It is also reported that although some young migrants were more likely to fund their migration solely by themselves, most probably through savings made from earnings from engaging in occasional jobs at their place of origin, not all of them were able to do so and, therefore, needed funding support from their parents, an indication that persons other than young migrants contribute towards not only the decisions to migrate but funding as well. In this case, the notion of complete independent decision-making by potential young migrants may not exist.

Young people's motivations and aspirations have been found to influence their decisions about migration in different ways

(Assan and Kharisma 2023; Carling 2002; Huijismans et al. 2021; Yeboah 2021; Carling 2014 and Vigh 2009). Studies focusing on young migrants' aspirations as instigating their decisions to migrate point to the perceived employment opportunities at destination settings relative to the origin. This motivates them to resort to migration as a panacea and avenue to access wider employment opportunities outside their places of origin, although they may often find themselves engaged in less stable, non-contract employment, that makes them vulnerable to employer abuses and exploitation. These studies have also demonstrated how job aspirations have selected young people who are poor, with unstable employment and little education rather than the wealthy, educated and with stable jobs to aspire to migrate. While these could be enablers for migration decisions, there may be the need for funding support from parents or household members, which may negate any independent migration decisions despite young people's motivation to migrate. Quite clearly, therefore, young people's migration should not be viewed from only one perspective since there may be a multiplicity of factors and processes that are involved (Collins 2020), notwithstanding the varying aspirations, motivations and enablers that may be at play.

In the migration literature, remittances from the migrant to the left-behind family or relations have contributed to many young people's motivation in deciding to migrate as a demonstration of their attachment or loyalty to the family or community at the origin (Castañeda and Buck 2011). Reverse remittances in different forms, including the provision of childcare assistance or support to enable young people to embark on their migration have served as good incentives to enable them to actualize their migration decisions (Yeboah et al. 2021). Reverse remittances also come in the form of material and non-material resources. Young people from the northern part of Ghana, for example, migrate to the south to seek employment opportunities that would enable them to remit to support and improve the well-being of their left-behind family members, thereby demonstrating the positive role of remittances in pre-migration decisions (Kwankye 2011; Adaawen and Owusu 2013; De Haas 2010 and Akom Ankobrey et al. 2022). The prospects of being able to send remittances back home could, thus, provide huge motivation for young people's migration in many circumstances, and have been found to influence other young migrants' decisions in different country contexts. The remittances are mainly used to buy food for consumption, maintain the household, etc., all of which help to improve the household's well-being. Thus, in anticipation of receiving remittances to strengthen household living conditions, providing support for young people from within households to realize their migration decisions may not be withheld if such support is available. This is also fueled by the belief that being able to give back means that one has become successful and holds cultural value. Giving back remittances as both entrepreneurship and charity is part of a socially desirable and honourable culturally embedded narrative among Ghanaians and, therefore, even in cases where young people faced significant challenges, they expressed a renewed sense of purpose, which could motivate them to decide to migrate, often with support from household members as potential direct beneficiaries of their migration.

Social networks have been identified as strong enablers for young people's migration decision-making as the presence of

close family members, friends or peers abroad has constituted a form of social capital that increases the likelihood of both wishing to emigrate and being enabled to realize such aspirations (Carling 2002; Ogden and Mazzucato 2022). This also includes transnational peer relationships that act as support systems to migrant youth in their decisions to migrate. In their study of how social networks influence migration in Ghana, for example, Turolla and Hoffmann (2023) note that livelihood and lifestyle dimensions work in diverse ways to drive motivations for migration. They conclude that although social relations seldom drive motivation to migrate, strong social networks of migrants constitute a major enabling factor that could shape both the livelihood and lifestyle dimensions of the migration process. The importance of social networks as social capital is further strengthened by the emerging digital environment, where social media has become a powerful tool for potential migrants in their pre-migration information-seeking and decision-making. It is, however, possible that some young migrants may operate outside the realm of transnational networks, with no established connection to their destination, and with no deliberate discussion of their migration plans with close family and household members (Kalir 2005 and Kwankye et al. 2009), although this may not always be the case across all youth groups in all spatial settings.

Another dimension of social networks in migration decision-making is within the realm of religion with reference to shrines and other belief systems that may be intricately connected to youth migration and the family system, thereby sustaining youth migration (Tweneboah and Agyeman 2021). This may stem from the kinds of spiritual support and protection that young migrants may seek from supernatural realms, including shrines and deities, assuring them of success in their migration adventures, which is another indication that the young migrant may not be alone in making pre-migration decisions.

From the available literature presented here, several combinations of factors, actors and enabling conditions influence decisions young people make before their migration, negating any idea of complete “independence” on the part of the potential young migrant. In Ghana, youth migration literature is largely skewed toward child migrants (below age 18 years), with limited focus on how young migrants (both children and older youth 18 years and above) from within the West African Region navigate decision-making processes to settle in Ghana. Given the increasing numbers of migrants from within West Africa to Ghana, understanding their decision-making processes is important. This is within the context of SDG target 10.7, which calls on countries to adopt policies that facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including young people who migrate within countries and across national boundaries. Thus, drivers of migration decisions go beyond the existing explanations of migration being influenced by push-pull factors, to a broad categorization of drivers, including predisposing, proximate, precipitating and mediating drivers as well as actors and enablers that appear to influence migration and offer greater potential for intervention (Van Hear et al. 2020).

Against the background of these theoretical perspectives and relevant literature, our main objective is to examine the pre-migration decision-making processes that shape young migrants’ livelihoods, drawing on a study exploring the livelihoods

of young migrants in Accra (from within and outside Ghana). To advance understanding about young people’s pre-migration decision-making processes, we seek to answer two main research questions:

- i. Who are the main decision makers of youth migrants to Accra from within and outside Ghana and how do they arrive at these decisions?
- ii. What are the key enablers of young migrants in Accra from within and outside Ghana?

To answer these questions, we explore two closely related aspects of migration decision-making architecture. These are the processes involved in deciding to migrate, and the enablers of the actual movement. While the former relates to what young migrants engage in to decide whether to migrate or not, the latter provides the conditions that directly or indirectly strengthen the migrants’ decision to finally move that subsequently shape their livelihoods, post-migration.

3 | Methodology

The paper draws on a qualitative study with 59 young migrants (15–24 years) including both Ghanaians and nationals from within neighbouring West African countries made up of Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, Burkina Faso and Niger living in Accra, Ghana. These are considered as neighbouring countries with Ghana by virtue of the relative ease with which their nationals enter and exit Ghana as destination due to the porousness of the borders in addition to the ECOWAS Protocol that regulates movement of people across each other’s borders without visa for up to 90 days.

The paper is part of a broader qualitative study exploring migrant youth livelihoods and empowerment (Spencer et al. 2025). The study participants were selected purposively with the support of our collaborative engagement with local community organisations that provide support for young people in Accra. Throughout the paper, “children” is used to refer to persons of age 15–17 years while “young people” describes the entire study population 15–24 years, made up of both children (15–17 years) and young adults (18–24 years).

Data collection involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants, with considerations for gender dimensions. The FGDs were organized separately for the males and females to ensure that each group felt at ease responding to the questions posed to them.

Study participants decided on how they wished to enroll in the study. Some opted to be interviewed in a group or dyad, while others were comfortable with one-on-one interview. Data collection took place at different locations in Accra, Ghana’s capital city, where participants preferred, usually where they lived or worked, often in marketplaces, community centres, slum areas or key street localities. In all, there were four focus group discussions, four dyads, two triads and seven individual interviews with the participants who were from Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Togo and Burkina Faso. Written consent was taken from all participants prior to data collection.

The interviews were largely conducted in English, but where participants could not communicate in English, interviews were

conducted using other languages such as French, Hausa and Twi with an interpreter engaged to assist in interpreting the questions to them and translating participants' responses in English to the interviewers. Discussions lasted between 40 and 90 min and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by our research assistants with the consent of participants. The research assistants had field data collection experience and were recruited from a pool of past graduate students from the University of Ghana. Our positionality in data collection was to train and guide the research assistants in the conduct of in-depth interviews and FGDs as well as the transcription of recorded interviews. The conduct of data collection also benefited from support offered by our project Young Person Advisory Group members (Spencer et al. 2023).

FGDs and interviews explored issues pertaining to the timing and why the young migrants decided to migrate to Ghana/Accra; how they felt being migrants; how they spent their time, support available to them in accessing and attending work/school/healthcare; decision-making, influence and choice; their work and livelihoods and their understanding of the term 'Empowerment' (Spencer et al. 2025). In this paper, however, the focus is specifically on their pre-migration decision-making.

Thematic data analysis using NVivo was undertaken through a careful examination of all transcripts to identify relevant descriptive codes that were considered to reflect the key ideas emerging from the data. The codes of the main themes from the interviews under decision-making were with respect to opportunity, destiny and autonomy. Other themes that emerged from the analysis included people, livelihoods, cost of living, aspirations, work, etc. The codes were then discussed and scrutinized by the research team to develop emerging categories and then core thematic areas that captured the 'meanings' of the data. Explanatory analysis was thereafter undertaken by reflecting on the themes in relation to the extant evidence base and theoretical perspectives, especially Bushin (2009) decision-making model, which details the different levels of decision-making among young people. Although this model's focus is on child migrants (below 18 years), we found it useful in our context and to consider its relevance for our study target (15–24 years).

The study received research ethics approval from a UK University Research Ethics Committee and the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana. Some participants were below age 18 years who were said to have migrated independently of adults and lived and worked in vulnerable contexts. The research team, therefore, worked closely with local community organisations and ensured participants had access to local support systems as they became necessary. Participants were provided with both written and verbal information about the study and their expected involvement. The information explained the purpose of the study, data storage and their rights throughout the data collection exercise. They were also offered a small honorarium for their time and contribution to the study.

It is acknowledged that study participants responded to questions about their pre-migration decisions that happened in the past, making it possible for biased or incorrect accounts. To this end, responses from participants were subjected to in-depth probing during data collection to ensure that biases and inaccuracies were minimized as far as possible.

4 | Results

Drawing on the New Economics of Labour Migration, Bushin's model of Children's migration decision-making processes, etc., and the relevant literature, we highlight how young people go about deciding to migrate and what they consider as the enablers of their migration decision-making. Our findings reflect an intricate migration decision-making process – crucially highlighting the importance of social networks that provide support and safety nets for young people's migration. The results clearly reflect the role of multiple actors that are involved at different stages of the decision-making process as part of a complex interwoven system of interactions. While there are cases appearing as independent decision-making by some young migrants, there are equally important situations where roles played by the family, peers and social networks become critically relevant. These results highlight the different levels and actors involved in young people's processing of their decisions before and even after migration, often motivated by their aspirations and desire to take advantage of socio-economic opportunities at the place of destination.

4.1 | Deciding to Migrate

Our analysis highlights a high degree of 'independent' decision-making by many of the young migrants to embark on their migration journeys – partly reflecting the fifth level of Bushin (2009) model where the young person initiates the decision-making. However, in our study, the young person did not always discuss their decisions with parents and, instead, highlighted how their deliberations were more often discussed with peers. This is perhaps not too surprising given the age of our participants (15–24 years) – reflecting the tendency for young people to make decisions in line with peer preferences or influences (see e.g., Ciranka and van den Bos 2019; Steinberg 2005). Key reasons for migration included the dissatisfaction they had about life at the place of origin, signifying their desire to explore other opportunities elsewhere and improve their living conditions.

I took the decision on my own to come to Accra because I was not happy with my situation.

(Ghanaian young male migrant)

In this context, the young migrant's exercise of agency is important, but cannot be completely disentangled from a system of interdependent actors that shape their final decision to migrate. This should be understood in a much broader context of negotiations and deliberations that are socially informed. Here, the young person is situated in a socio-economic space, which could exert a push on him/her to consider migration as an option when they perceive the socio-economic situation at origin as not conducive to the achievement of their livelihood goals and aspirations as our subsequent analysis reveals.

A Nigerian young man narrated his specific decision to migrate to Ghana, rather than another neighbouring country, for example, and how his brother and his friends influenced this decision. Although claiming to have 'independently' decided to migrate, this young man changed his choice of destination in the light of advice from friends and family.

Yes, I made the choice to come to Ghana. I wanted to travel to Libya initially, but my brother told me that in Libya they suffer a lot. I also have some friends there who told me it's not easy over there and they are even planning to come back so I shouldn't plan to come to Libya. So that was before I told my brother that I would come to Ghana. That is why I came to Ghana here.

(Nigerian young male migrant)

In this instance, participants' decisions to migrate highlighted their long-standing desires to move to a more prosperous place that offered greater opportunities for work and what they described as 'a successful life'. Yet, as we can see from the above account, such decision-making was not purely independent, as peers or siblings influenced decisions about where best to migrate to, with Ghana being the preferred choice because of its perceived relative (economic and political) stability and greater prospects for a 'better life'. Destination country-specific information provided was particularly important for these young people. For example, some of them said they were motivated by the information their peers gave about Ghana that enticed them to decide to migrate. Assessments of socio-economic situations and opportunities could act as 'push factors' when the young person was not satisfied with their current circumstances. The above quote highlights the importance of friends/family also providing negative information about other countries relative to the migrant's destination that could influence young migrants' choice of the destination country, which may be different from that which was originally contemplated.

For others, decisions to migrate reflected some endorsement from family members, as amplified by a Nigerian young migrant, which suggests the importance of social support from family members.

I made a movement, there [Nigeria] am still a student, Mummy crying here and there, looking at your younger ones and no job and all those things so I decided to make a movement. At least I pick a step, if it is good for me then it's good for them over there. Am the number one person that decides what happens, followed by influence of family members. For me too, it's what I chose but other people like my family members were like it's okay.

(Nigerian young male migrant)

From the foregoing, the decision-making processes Ghanaian and other young migrants within West Africa go through appeared similar and largely driven by economic motivators that influence their migration to Accra. Invariably, participants were involved in either deciding on their own, or jointly with parents and family members, as well as peers in what appears to be a complex web of varying circumstances. This complexity describes the different overt and covert consultations that these young migrants could make with parents, friends and other family members, which take different forms, with some of them initiating the decision-making process, with endorsement from their parents or families and, in some cases, family members initiating the process. This is quite consistent with Tuki (2025) study in Nigeria, suggesting that family support positively correlates with migration aspirations by raising the migrant's confidence in their safe arrival at their destination in Europe,

thereby decreasing their perception of migration risks, and strengthening their resolve to migrate. This clearly shows that migration decisions involve some important consultations with family members at different levels and, therefore, the decision to migrate may not always be taken solely by the individual migrant.

On the other hand, Liu (2024) study in Nigeria uses the term "japa" to explain contemporary migration of gainfully employed middle-class youth just like refugees and asylum seekers who have long been documented to migrate for survival by fleeing from persecution, wars, and natural calamities. According to Liu (2024), many young Nigerian academics also decide to migrate for survival to escape from worsening domestic conditions, deteriorating development situations and prolonged university strikes they are unable to cope with. This development constitutes emotional or existential motives that are consistent with the framework of push factors that drive people to migrate largely for economic reasons, which may not necessarily involve any motivation or support from family members.

Participants further highlighted what appeared to be a more subtle pressure that could be mounted on them to migrate. In this context, parents and family members could suggest that one of their young members should migrate when they consider the migration of these members to be beneficial to the entire family. However, the ultimate decision to move rested with the young person. In other instances, however, it seemed that some element of compulsion by parents or other family members was evident, indicating that the young person may have little choice but to yield to such family suggestions.

They will decide that you have to go, but they won't force you to do that. But you too, you know your parents and family members are on you, go, go, go, you have to say yes to them.

(Nigerian male migrant)

This shows that young migrants' decisions to migrate also reflect situations where some families bring some kind of 'pressure' to bear on them to migrate. In such situations, the pressure may be mounted so incessantly that the young person may eventually decide to move if they want to have their peace. This may be consistent with views expressed by Sayad (2004) that remittances contribute to economic inequalities between remittance-receiving households and those who do not, such that it could compel family members in non-transnational households (households with no migrant member abroad) to feel social and moral pressure to emigrate themselves. In such circumstances, it would be understandable that pressure could mount on a member to migrate to bridge such inequality gaps (Sayad 2004). What this implies is that the notion of young migrants taking independent decisions to migrate cannot be entirely extricated from the complex family and socio-economic circumstances these young people find themselves in. Any suggestion of a completely 'independent' decision-making in the context of migration could, therefore, be too simplistic to capture the range of deliberations these young people make when deciding to migrate. This finding draws attention to an important missing link where there is often some seeming pressure that the family could bring to bear on a young migrant to migrate, perhaps contrary to their will, especially in

circumstances where financial and other material support from the family is assured in expectation of return remittances from the migrant.

Once again, peer influence held importance even after migration. As one of the young Ghanaian migrants intimated, he took the decision to move to Accra. However, he described how he listened to and was influenced by his friends regarding making decisions about the type of work he pursued.

Yes, I took that decision. When I came here, I saw my friends doing other things that I think I can copy. Like the Police I talked about, I saw my friends applying for it, so I also followed suit.

(Ghanaian young male migrant)

Our analysis indicates that peers and family members had greater influence on concretizing the final decision to migrate and thus, the independent decisions described by the young migrants may not be truly independent. Such inter-dependency reflects how intertwined young migrants' decision-making is with family and peer influences, particularly when financial support is required from these influencing actors. These findings suggest a more complex web of decision-making that is associated with young people's 'independent' migration.

4.2 | Enablers of Migration Decision-Making

Whilst participants' accounts reflected the importance of friends or peers and family members, they also highlighted other social and contextual enablers. These included supportive family settings at origin and as described, the availability of funding and strong social networks. Participants variously described these enablers or circumstances that strengthened both their determination and confidence in deciding to migrate.

For example, some young migrants took advantage of enabling family settings that facilitated dialogue and consultation to actualize their migration intentions. As previously noted, some of the families of the young migrants provided care-giving support to children of potential migrants and thus, enabled them to be 'free' from such responsibilities and to migrate either within Ghana or from countries close to Ghana such as Nigeria.

I come from the Volta Region. I gave my child to my mother and moved from that place. I went to stay with a certain woman, and we sold kenkey (a staple food i.e. associated with the Ga and Fanti ethnic people of Ghana) at the lorry station. But my sister who was already staying and operating her baking business (meat pie and bread) at Accra told me to join her at Accra. Before my sister informed me to come to Accra, I had started saving since I wanted to purchase a sewing machine so I could pursue tailoring. So, my sister informed me to come because she can help, if only I am serious to pursue the tailoring.

(Ghanaian young female migrant)

Another Ghanaian female migrant pointed out how her expectation to pursue further education and the assurance from a

sibling of a job opportunity upon her migration served as pull factors towards her actual movement. The sheer determination to take advantage of possible opportunities for livelihood enhancement at the destination area, which to them had been shut, gave impetus to many young people to embark on migration.

I lost my mother in the process, which made furthering my education quite difficult. So, I decided to move in with anyone who could help me. At that point, one of my sisters suggested that there is a job opportunity at Kumasi, and I went with her.

(Ghanaian young female migrant)

Behind their individual desires to move in search of better opportunities was the strong family support system. This was particularly the case for the Ghanaian migrants, especially among the females, with the support of their older sisters who had earlier migrated to the city. The presence of a family member at the destination who was willing to provide support to the young migrant constituted an enabling factor, especially when there was an assurance of financial support for the movement.

I came here with my sister after she said I should come and help her make money so that she would in turn help me learn a trade. So, I came with her, and I have even started learning hairdressing just this year. I was with my mother over there and my sister was here in Accra, so she came and suggested taking me with her, and my mother wasn't against it. I also liked the idea of coming because I wanted to make money and learn a trade and that is what my sister too suggested; so that is why I came.

(Ghanaian young female migrant)

As the above accounts indicate, an important enabling factor was funding for migration. Participants narrated how they had to engage in some stepwise migration towards mobilising enough resources; including finding any job that would give them some income to continue their movement to their ultimate destination. Perhaps, unsurprisingly, the costs associated with migration also heavily influenced if, how and when young people migrated. Many participants described how family members offered financial support and funded their transport costs. In some cases, a family member accompanied the young migrant on their journey, taking responsibility for the travel costs.

I came here with my mother, and she bore the transportation cost. There was no job at where we were so she suggested I come with her to Accra to work so that she would help me learn a trade and I agreed to come.

(Ghanaian young female migrant)

I came here alone but it was my mother who gave me money for my transportation fare after I had a conversation with her, highlighting how my coming here would help both of us since she can work there, and I would be

here to make money as well. So, she agreed and gave me the money.

(Ghanaian young female migrant)

In the case of non-Ghanaian migrants, a male Togolese participant explained that he chose to come to Ghana instead of a French-speaking country because of the strong bond between him and a family member living in Ghana. He described how he did not know much about Ghana, but because his father was already living in Ghana, a move to the same place seemed wise. Here, the importance of young migrants' social networks is evident as they describe knowing someone at the destination country.

I will say my father is here. He is a Togolese, but my mother is Ghanaian, and I don't have any relatives in other countries too. Everything, we started from here, so that's why I decided to come here". First, he was the one who decided that I should come and stay with him, but I said 'No', but after one or 2 years, I decided that I want to change the environment and then visiting another country will be a good idea. That is why I changed my mind, I called him, and he was like okay now I've agreed on what he said and then I came in, so from there he came here, and we all travelled together.

(Togolese young male migrant)

This shows that beyond the push-pull theory and all its ramifications, the young person is also situated in a society where they belong to a socio-cultural network of families and peer groups that facilitate interdependence, consultations, and influences on decisions they take both at origin and destination.

Crucially important is the role and importance of peer connections to the migration decision-making process for young people. This may be particularly important for young international migrants in the context of globalisation. Rapid expansion of online communication spaces via social media and the internet may help to explain the increasing importance of these networks. Information from their friends and peers domiciled at different geo-political and social spaces across the globe is more readily available and young people are today highly connected through technology and social networks to facilitate knowledge about migration (Global Migration Group 2014).

Quite clearly, young migrants' decision-making as to whether to migrate and the choice of destination area may not always produce the same results. Rather, it may vary depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of each potential migrant, including their gender, level of education and the employable skills they possess, their type of place of residence (rural or urban) and the type of migration they contemplate (internal or international, temporary or permanent).

Participants also spoke about reverse remittances as important enablers for their migration. This included family members sending money from the origin to the young migrants after the latter's movement to support their adjustment to their new environment at the destination area. Most importantly, mention was made of family members providing care-giving support for some migrants' left-behind children that offered a way for young people to migrate or free them to engage in livelihood

activities in their destination cities to make more money and to remit home.

I came with my auntie, but she left that same week. My parents send me money anyway, but I have been taking care of myself.

(Nigerian young female migrant)

Furthermore, the presence of a parent, sibling or family relations in Ghana or in Accra was another major driving force. It was thus common to find these family members suggesting to their young children or siblings to consider migrating to Accra, with the promise of providing them with some support to come and helping them to adjust to life in a new city. The support came first in the form of paying for their trips to Accra, secondly supporting them to settle in the city environment including finding accommodation and thirdly encouraging and funding them to learn a trade to be self-dependent. In a few circumstances, the young migrant from a neighbouring country was accompanied by an older family member to the destination country, who stayed with them for a while and then returned to the home of origin once the young person had settled in the city. This is, however, largely possible because of the closeness of Ghana to the countries of origin as for example between Togo and Ghana.

Remittances are integral to migration, irrespective of which person migrates. With some of the female migrants having to leave behind their children in the care of other family members to embark on migration, it is deemed only fair in the Ghanaian culture for them to support the upkeep of the left-behind children with resources through remittances. This largely constitutes a sign of attachment or loyalty between the migrant and the family or community at the origin (Castañeda and Buck 2011). The role of the family in reciprocating in such situations by providing physical and non-physical support otherwise described as reserve remittances cannot also escape our attention here. This is what Yeboah et al. (2021) describe to include material and non-material support from family members at origin to the migrant, which is not limited to financial support only.

In our study, young people's migration decision-making can be seen to reflect a mix of the different levels of Bushin (2009) model in a manner that makes it difficult to draw neat lines between them. There is also another level (not contained in Bushin's model) where the young migrant could appear to be solely responsible in making the decision to migrate, but not entirely without the collaborative or selective engagement with their family.

Migration decision-making by young people is, therefore, complex and cannot be viewed as a simple activity where young people are always able to exercise their agency without family or peer influence and vice versa. The young migrant's exercise of agency in migration decision-making is bounded by a system of social networks and contextual influences that shape how they arrive at their decisions to move or otherwise. To take out one part of this system and treat it as if it is solely responsible to determine how decision-making is arrived at will provide a partial view of this complexity. Based on our findings and the extant literature, the interconnections and relationships among these different factors and actors require highlighting in

researching young people's migration decision-making architecture in Africa.

Our findings further suggest the need to broaden the scope of young people's migration decision-making architecture. We encourage future research to consider the relevance and contribution of these different combinations of factors to young people's decision-making before, during or even after migration.

5 | Conclusion

Young people have different pathways towards realizing their socio-economic goals. One of these is migration, either within their countries of origin or to another country perceived to provide opportunities towards the achievement of these livelihood goals. Accra, Ghana's capital, has been a recipient of many young people both from within and outside the country, usually from countries in the West African sub-regional neighbourhood. Ghana's porous borders, supported by the ECOWAS Protocol of free movement of people and goods among member states have facilitated these migration flows within these countries as one large neighbourhood. These migration considerations always involve one decision or another on the part of the young person either alone as an "independent" migrant or in consultation/collaboration with peers and family members, aided by the speed at which information sharing has become easier because of widespread patronage of social media and information technology. Examining these young migrants' decision-making engagements has demonstrated that several people have been directly or indirectly involved in the decisions they make to migrate, supported by enabling factors such as supportive family settings at origin, funding availability and social networks that collectively enable them to realize their migration aspirations. Analysis of the missing link of how young migrants could "independently" make migration decisions suggested that "independent" migration decisions could be masked by the many actors playing different roles and supported by varying enabling factors or conditions. Consequently, while young migrants could make their own "independent" decisions to migrate, their quest to migrate may not be realized without the active collaborative support from other players within and outside their family circles. The study participants' articulation of their decision-making processes that culminated in their becoming migrants is, therefore, largely consistent with the New Economics of Migration Theory that migration decisions are not made by people as isolated individuals, but instead is a collective decision of diverse dimensions, all aimed at maximizing income and employment opportunities while minimizing risks. In sum, the findings presented in this paper challenge the validity of the complete independence of young people's migration decisions, thereby igniting further thoughts and reconsideration of how to examine young people's pre-migration decision-making in a broader context towards providing a better understanding of this important growing phenomenon, particularly within the West African sub-regional context.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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