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Co-creation of transnational livelihoods through 'door-to-door' shipping operations along the Ghana-UK migration corridor

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ABSTRACT

Transnational approaches have led to conceptualisations of migration as a phenomenon that is embedded within globalisation processes. Overwhelmingly, emphasis is placed on the transnational connections migrants maintain with their relatives. Technological advancements have facilitated sustained communication, remittance transfers and return visits between migrants and their relatives. However, the role of shipping companies, as transnational actors based in destination countries with partners in origin countries, that help migrants and their relatives to co-create/maintain their livelihoods has been overlooked. Drawing on data from Ghanaian migrants in the UK who send in-kind remittances, their relatives in Ghana who receive in-kind remittances, Ghanaian migrant-owned shipping businesses in the UK and their partners in Ghana, this paper fills that gap in the literature by discussing the operation of 'door-to-door' shipping businesses as a type of crucial transnational migrant entrepreneurship that empowers migrants from the 'Global South' and their relatives to overcome transnational livelihood making challenges.

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Introduction

Migration has long been considered a viable livelihood making strategy of many in the developing world (McDowell and De Haan 1997; Deshingkar and Start 2003; Thieme 2008; Cohen 2011; Pholphirul 2012). Many migrants send remittances to fulfil livelihood obligations they have in the home country. Academic and policy discussions on remittances focus overwhelmingly on financial remittances, relegating in-kind remittances to the background (see for example De Bryun 2006; Maphosa 2007; Bladé 2011). In-kind remittances are treated almost as an afterthought. They are, however, crucially important for migrants and their relatives in their livelihood strategies. In-kind remittances from migrants to their relatives ease the livelihood burdens on these relatives as they do not have to spend money buying consumer goods, since these are provided by the migrant. In this discussion, the concept of livelihood is operationalised as the act of making a living as well as the processes adopted in improving the quality of lives. It

includes people's assets, capabilities and activities required to secure the necessities of life (Chambers and Conway 1991). To that extent, livelihood strategies refer to activities carefully undertaken by families to provide a means of living. This includes migration which results in the sending of remittances (in this paper we focus on in-kind remittances).

When in-kind remittances are discussed they are usually discussed together with monetary remittances and mostly in a passing manner (see Quartey 2006; Ajilore and Ikihide 2012; Gueta and Sridi 2014). Such an approach obscures the specific and important contributions that in-kind remittances make to the livelihood strategies of migrants from the 'Global South' and their relatives who stay behind. Access to material goods as a result of migration has been known to enhance the social status and prestige of those who have access to them (see Sana 2005; Cohen 2011; Nieswand 2014). Less discussed, however, is the role enhanced social status, due to access to in-kind remittances has on livelihood-making. Even less discussed and theorised are the businesses that facilitate the movements of these transfers. In this paper, understanding and theorising the transfer of in-kind remittances as part of livelihood making strategies in an African context takes centre stage. Before the advent of transnational shipping businesses, African migrants struggled to send in-kind remittances to their relatives. These businesses, which we conceptualise as transnational migrant entrepreneurs are now indispensable in helping migrants and their relatives accomplish their transnational livelihood strategies such as building houses, starting businesses and taking care of their families.

Transnational migrant entrepreneurship, a form of economic transnationalism (Guarnizo 2003) allows migrants and their relatives to achieve their economic targets without giving up ties with their origin country or fully assimilating into the culture of the destination country (Jasso and Rozenzweig 1990 cited in Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002). The transnational migrant entrepreneurs we discuss are 'door-to-door' shipping companies that collect and ship goods from specific addresses in the UK and deliver them to specific addresses in Ghana. Their activities facilitate transnational lifestyles of migrants by enabling these migrants and their relatives in their country of origin to undertake some projects, for example, to establish a business, build a home, cater for children's and relatives' needs and accumulate social assets among others. This is because 'door-to-door' shipping operators ease the movement of goods from migrants to their relatives.

Every transnational migrant entrepreneurship requires multiple interactions between actors in more than one geographical location. In recent times, technology allows such interactions to take place in real time. These 'door-to-door' businesses connect people: agents, migrants, families and friends of migrants among others, across borders through the sending and receiving of in-kind remittances. Following Vertovec's (1999) conceptualisation of transnational lifestyles as an avenue for capital formation, transnational migrant entrepreneurship is a good example of how migrants use their multiple ties to create economic capital through the use of their networks. These actions also enhance the interconnectedness of multiple actors across diverse social fields.

The question at the heart of this paper is how do transnational migrant entrepreneurs, set up by migrants from the 'Global South', assist their co-ethnics and their families back home to meet their social obligations, overcome livelihood making challenges and sustain transnational livelihoods? Literature suggests that some livelihood making

challenges in the 'Global South' include disappearing job prospects, lack of investments, lack of access to assets or capitals such as financial, human, natural, physical and social assets (Carney 1998; De Haan 2012; Francis 2019; Yendaw, Tanle, and Kumi-Kyereme 2019). This paper argues that 'door-to-door' operators make it possible for migrants and their relatives to sustain transnational livelihoods. Their operations make it possible for migrants to be virtually present to fulfil their transnational obligations and erode the previously held assumption of the transfer of remittances being conditioned on the physical return of migrants.

The next section outlines our theoretical approach. We focus on the intersection of transnational livelihood making between migrants and their relatives and transnational migrant entrepreneurship. We then discuss our methodology, followed by our findings. We conclude by discussing our contributions to the transnational theory.

Transnational livelihood strategies and transnational migrant entrepreneurship

In a bid to develop more effective poverty alleviation strategies and policies, the livelihood approach was developed. The livelihood approach, which evolved in the 1970s but gained intense scholarly attention in the late 1990s and early 2000s focuses on how poor people in 'developing countries' organise their lives by adopting a strategic or deliberate choice of a combination of activities to maintain, secure and improve their lives generally (Carney 1998). Rather than focus on their impoverishment, the emphasis is on opportunities, their agency, their strategies, and the resources they possess which enable them to make a living. According to De Haan (2012) these resources or assets usually include human capital, natural capital, physical capital, financial capital and social capital. These resources enable people to make a living and also improve their wellbeing by substituting one for the other (Thieme 2008; De Haan 2012). For example, in instances where financial capital is unavailable, households may utilise their social capital to achieve their livelihood goals. One of the common assets that individuals from the 'Global South' draw on in the absence of financial assets is their social assets or capital i.e. relations developed over the years with family, friends, and acquaintances and what they can offer. This paper explores the agency of migrants and their relatives by showing how these social assets use in-kind remittances to improve their lives and also exhibit high standard of living. We show in this research that migrants and their families use in-kind remittances to meet their livelihood making goals in a structural context where such goods are highly regarded and enhance the social status of those who possess them.

As Thieme (2008: 4) notes the assets that people possess, the livelihoods they desire and the strategies they adopt are all influenced by the social context in which they live. According to her, this context has, broadly speaking, two spheres: the first sphere is an overarching structural context, including organisations and institutions such as rules, norms, policies and legislation shaping livelihoods. The second sphere of people's living context is their vulnerability. This means the insecurity of people's wellbeing in the face of a changing ecological, social, political or economic environment (Rakodi 2002 cited in Thieme 2008). In a Ghanaian social context where migration is highly regarded (Nieswand 2014) and its fruits, remittances, are highly appreciated

(Kabki, Mazzucato, and Appiah 2004), it becomes an important tool to alleviate vulnerability.

Migration has become an important avenue for the acquisition of resources for livelihood making. People mostly migrate with the hopes of improving lives for themselves and fulfilling social obligations to their families (de Haas 2007; Eversole and Johnson 2014). Many migrants from 'developing countries' usually earn more income doing menial jobs abroad than they do engaged in professional work in their origin country (Piore 1979; Akyeampong 2000; Vasta and Kandilige 2010). Having earned some income, migrants send portions of it to their relatives back home to contribute to the household or family income pool. Transnational livelihood in this study therefore refers to the strategies migrants and their relatives adopt to make a living as well as to improve the quality of their lives that traverse national boundaries.

In-kind remittances form an important aspect of transnational livelihoods. The prestige and status enhancement that come with having access to Western consumer goods potentially contribute to livelihood making because they are perceived to be of 'higher standards' and reflect the notion of 'good living'. Such sentiments can be attributable to the legacies of colonialism and imperialism where European consumer goods and products have been elevated as superior compared to locally produced ones (Chulu 2015). In-kind remittances also instrumentally enhance societal inequalities because they serve as markers of distinction. However, by sending these 'high standard' items and goods (food, clothing, stationery, medicines, etc.) to their relatives back home, their relatives do not have to dispense already meagre incomes to acquire these items anew. Relatives can, therefore, focus on using their scarce resources for other pressing needs. Transnational migrant entrepreneurs that facilitate the movement of in-kind remittances to relatives from migrants are notably providing crucial services that enable the fulfilment of familial responsibilities and obligations.

Transnational migrant entrepreneurs operate between origin and destination countries and crucially they tend to be recent arrivals to the destination country (Vershina et al. 2019, 239). The Ghanaian migrants in this study who set up these businesses are part of the 'New African Diaspora' (Van Hear 1998; Koser 2003), with many of them arriving in the 1990s and 2000s. These entrepreneurs differ from transnational diaspora entrepreneurs, who, though engaging in similar activities, are second or third generation migrants (Elo 2016 cited in Vershinina et al. 2019, 239). Transnational migrant entrepreneurs in this study are however different from those in Vershinina et al.'s (2019) study because they are recent migrants who started their transnational businesses from scratch in the destination country in part as a response to labour market constraints in the destination country and also because they saw a profit-making niche while at the same time helping their co-ethnics to fulfil their transnational livelihood responsibilities. These businesses are not extensions of previous ones in origin countries. They are also different from other migrant businesses in the destination country which only cater to migrants in the destination country, for example various migrant-owned shops that serve the needs of migrants in the community. As much as they stock items of symbolic significance that align with or facilitate 'practices of sociability, mutual help, and public rituals rooted in the cultural understandings that pertain to the sense of belonging and social obligations of immigrants' (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002, 768), these businesses are not typically transnational in their operations.

While the literature on transnational migrant entrepreneurship highlights the duality of the everyday experiences of business people operating across transnational spaces (Yamanaka 2005, Thai 2012, Brzozowski et al. 2017 cited in Vershinina et al. 2019), to date very little is known about their role in fulfilling migrants' and their relatives' transnational livelihood obligations. As other aspects of this research show [not covered in this paper] many of these businesses are not fixated on profit-making and in many cases, they do not make profits. They are very altruistic in their outlook and orientation. They find fulfilment in helping their co-ethnics and their families achieve their social obligations and livelihood goals.

'Door-to-door' shipping businesses as transnational migrant entrepreneurships

The 'door-to-door' shipping is a type of transnational migrant entrepreneurship business that falls under the category of 'circuit firms' as conceptualised by Landolt, Autler, and Baires (1999). This is because they are a combination of formal, semi-formal and informal courier services that facilitate the transfer of goods across national borders. In a study of Latin American migrants in the US, Landolt, Autler, and Baires (1999) identified four types of transnational enterprises: circuit firms which involved the transport of goods across national boundaries through informal couriers; cultural enterprises which involved the importation of local goods from the home country to the destination; ethnic enterprises which are small retail businesses catering to the migrant community dependent on a steady supply of imported goods, such as foodstuffs and clothing from the home country; and lastly, return migrant microenterprises which are businesses established by returnees who rely on their contacts in the destination country for their merchandise (Landolt, Autler, and Baires 1999 cited in Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002).

These transnational enterprises are usually established by the migrants as an alternative form of livelihood in order to integrate economically into the host community (Landolt, Autler, and Baires 1999). Migrants have been noted to form part of the minority population in their host nations; their minority statuses sometimes constrain their access to socio-economic opportunities (Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2004). According to Portes and Zhou (1999), migrants create their own economic opportunities by being self-employed; such migrant entrepreneurs have been said to be more economically stable than their co-migrants who work for others. 'Door-to-door' shipping operators are transnational migrant entrepreneurs and emerging literature on transnational migrant entrepreneurs (Portes, Guarnizo, and Haller 2002; Zhou and Liu 2015) has revealed the contributions of such transnational actors to their origin countries' development prospects. This shipping model is a type of transnational enterprise within the Ghana-UK migration corridor which allows Ghanaian migrants to contribute to the livelihood improvement of their relatives back home. The activities of such enterprises support the construction of livelihoods especially at the household level across transnational spaces.

There are ongoing debates about the impacts of transnational lifestyles on migrants' integration in their host countries. Some scholars claim that living 'here and there' does not allow a migrant to fully integrate into their host nation. However, akin to the

views of Zhou and Liu (2015), this study corroborates the idea that transnationalism allows migrants to integrate in their host communities without having to lose their identities. The 'door-to-door' shipping businesses help migrants to connect with their home country. Owners of such transnational migrant enterprises use their self-employment to be able to integrate economically in their host countries, while helping their co-migrants to connect with their origin through the sending of in-kind remittances. Migrants are able to use such transnational businesses to create some form of back up or insurance in their home country. The 'door-to-door' shipping business allows many migrants to engage in economic activities in the origin as a form of security and insurance either in their home country or destination country. For example, this shipping model helps Ghanaian migrants in the UK to send home building materials for their building projects in Ghana or to send home goods for commercial purposes. These investments in Ghana serve as a form of insurance should they have any economic challenges in the UK. This supports reasons why migrants engage in transnational activities as espoused by scholars such as Guarnizo (2003); Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002); and Levitt and Jaworsky (2007). This form of transnational lifestyle also supports migration theories such as the New Economics of Labour Migration Theory (Lucas and Stark 1985; Stark and Bloom 1985; Stark and Lucas 1988) which describe migration as a means of spreading risks, protecting households from poverty and safeguarding against market failures and poor access to credit.

This paper contributes theoretically to the transnational literature by demonstrating how transnational migrant entrepreneurship that facilitates the transfer of in-kind remittances enhances the fulfilment of transnational livelihood responsibilities and social obligations. We also emphasise the need for a better appreciation of the role of these businesses in the transnational space between the 'Global South' and 'Global North' through our focus on the under-studied role of these businesses in livelihood making across transnational spaces.

Research methods

To answer the research question, we adopted a case study research methodology, which consists of a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context (Hatley 2004). We ensured proper community entry through key community gatekeepers (such as Heads of Hometown Associations and professional groupings) as a means of establishing a good rapport between study communities and the research team.¹ This reduced any suspicions community members might have had about the study. We used different entry nodes to avoid sampling from close-knit groups who might have similar perspectives on phenomena.

This study focused on 'door-to-door' operators in the UK using London as a case study and their partners in Accra, Ghana. As the capital city of the UK and one that hosts the majority of Ghanaian migrants as well as Ghanaian migrant businesses, London was deemed critical as a study site. Accra, as Ghana's capital city and final national location for Ghanaian stepwise migration to the UK and the hub of many businesses, including enterprises that partner UK-based 'door-to-door' operators, was equally selected for the study. 'Door-to-door' migrant entrepreneurships that serve the needs of Ghanaian migrant communities in the UK are usually situated as close to

their customers as possible in order to cut the transportation costs involved in collecting items for shipment. As London has the highest concentration of Ghanaian migrants, therefore, it serves as a good context for an in-depth analysis of the operations of these businesses that facilitate transnational livelihood making.

Interviews were conducted with five (5) key informants in the UK who were purposively sampled owners and managing directors of 'door-to-door' businesses and eighteen (18) migrants who use 'door-to-door' businesses on a large scale to facilitate their own businesses in Ghana as well as those who use their services on a regular basis to transport personal in-kind remittances to Ghana. We also engaged in non-participant observations, where feasible, in order to compare what we gathered through interviews with what we observed. The motivation for this approach was its ability to allow for an analysis of the disjuncture, contradictions and discrepancies between discourse and practice (Herbert 2000; Eyles 1988).

In Ghana, in-depth interviews were conducted with five, purposively sampled, Port Officials and officials of the Ghana Revenue Authority. Another five key-informant in-depth interviews were conducted among local staff and business partners of 'door-to-door' operators in Ghana. In addition, twenty (20) in-depth interviews were conducted among recipients of in-kind remittances through 'door-to-door' operators in order to gain a deeper understanding of bi-directional transnational livelihood making processes. These interviewees were not necessarily matched with senders in the UK and their views were not meant to directly validate submissions by UK-based migrants. In addition to the in-depth interviews, one focus group discussion was held among recipients of goods in Ghana and a phone-in radio programme at a Ghanaian-owned radio station in London.

The aim of the radio programme was to provide a platform for migrants to discuss collectively how the 'door-to-door' phenomenon has impacted their transnational livelihood strategies. The medium of broadcast radio is an innovative approach for sampling the views of diverse participants in situations where there are challenges to assembling people in one physical space. The potential limitation of having too many participants was offset by a cap in the number callers within an hour-long slot. In the interest of maintaining a balanced discussion, apart from the host of the radio programme and the researchers, a representative of the five biggest 'door-to-door' companies was a panellist. The focus group approach placed participants in a group context, where 'conversations can flourish in what can be considered more common place social situations' (Bedford and Burgess 2001, 123). Participants at the focus group discussion in Ghana were selected from individual interviewees on the basis of divergence of views, depth of knowledge or experience and gender. Data were analysed with the help of Nvivo Version 11. This package was used to help explain the patterns generated by qualitative data. All efforts were made to ensure that the identities of respondents were protected. Data were anonymised and pseudonyms are used to prevent the tracing of specific information to any individuals or groups.

Findings

Relying extensively on primary data collected through the key informant interviews, individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and review of secondary data, this section examines the contributions of the 'door-to-door' business model to the co-

creation and/or maintenance of transnational livelihoods simultaneously across transnational social fields. The units of analyses are the recipients of in-kind remittances in Ghana, senders of in-kind remittances from the UK and the broader Ghanaian economy.

Overcoming livelihood challenges: construction/maintenance of individuals' and families' transnational livelihoods in Ghana

One of the ways in which transnational migrant entrepreneurs assist Ghanaian migrants and their relatives to overcome livelihood making challenges is through the accumulation of social assets, that is, enhancing social status in the community. The facilitating factors that characterise globalisation such as the Internet, mobile phone technology, advanced transportation networks, social media and online market platforms enable the growing middle class in Ghana as well as return migrants from the 'Global North' to participate in buying consumer goods that are either believed to be of superior quality or that are perceived as a status symbol. Additionally, family members of migrants benefit from non-cash remittances that help enhance their social status within their immediate community. There is a societal expectation in Ghana (similar to other 'developing countries') of a higher standard of living among households that have relatives living abroad (Nieswand 2014). These are actualised through overt markers of affluence among migrant households in terms of what they eat, how they dress and what they use. These markers actively reinforce the perceived expectations and obligations on migrants. Sometimes, in order to satisfy these community-imposed standards, Ghanaian migrants ship European foods, soaps, perfumes, clothes, shoes, electronics, equipment and other items (from clearly visible European brands) to their households or family members. Such in-kind remittances further shape societal expectations on migrant households and impose significant pressures on them to fulfil the obligations. While financial remittances could potentially buy similar prestigious goods in Ghana, the fear of inadvertently purchasing imitated Chinese products dissuades stay-behind families from relying on cash to attain enhanced social statuses. Receipt of authentic British prestigious goods tends to consolidate certain practices of socio-economic distinction and differentiation between migrant and non-migrant households in Ghana. As one family member (recipient, Ghana) notes, the 'door-to-door' business model has facilitated the receipt and use of foreign items:

... in the first place, families are directly benefitting from family members who are outside the country and then also, people now have an opportunity to use items which previously they couldn't have gotten on the Ghanaian market. (Osafu, Recipient, Ghana)

The transnational nature of the 'door-to-door' business model allows Ghanaian consumers to access goods from countries that are outside their usual social and economic realm. These trans-border exchanges enable the circulation of non-financial and social assets across disparate economic geographies (De Haan 2012; Francis 2019). The fundamental design of the 'door-to-door' business model hinges on its ability to guarantee the collection and transportation of items from a given address in the destination country, and then shipping, clearing and the delivery to a specific address in the origin country. This is convenient for recipients in Ghana because, it eliminates the need for recipients to hire the services of clearing agents and also arranging for private transportation of goods from the harbour to their homes.

Our study also found that transnational migrant entrepreneurship also allow migrants and their relatives to overcome bureaucratic hurdles that characterise livelihood-making in many parts of Ghana. Bureaucratic hurdles and pervasive incidents of bribery and corruption tend to increase the costs incurred by recipients who do not receive their goods through the all-inclusive 'door-to-door' business option. These sentiments are shared by receivers in Ghana:

They [door-to-door] are convenient; I don't need to hire a clearing agent to clear my goods. They contribute a lot, prior to this we had no convenient and cheap means of receiving our goods from our people abroad but now they even have very small boxes that cost about £30 so you don't have to save so much to be able to send something home. (Kofi, Recipient, Ghana).

I can say that its operation [door-to-door] is fast and stress-free because one needs not to go to the harbour to go through stress in clearing the goods. That is, once the door-to-door company gets our residence address and telephone number, they'll deliver the goods to our home. So, there is no excuse for them [migrants] not to send us things' (Odame, Recipient, Ghana).

These accounts of convenience notwithstanding, challenges persist in relation to delays, non-delivery of goods and damaged packages. Some of these frustrations are demonstrated by what some recipients said:

Yes, the last time, they took my goods to another person, I also do some catering as a side business and they delayed with the delivery of my cake tins, I ended up losing my client because she wanted that particular type of cake for her wedding. Concerning the delivery of wrong goods, they later brought my things when I called to complain. But the delay of goods is a constant thing and they never compensate (Amankwa, Recipient, Accra).

Yes, the last time we bought a baby walker and there was a stick that was supposed to come with it but it wasn't in the box. We called them several times but we have not had any response, so it's just lying around and cannot be used now (Daniel, Recipient, Accra).

These transnational migrant entrepreneurship also assist with transnational care delivery to ensure that migrants fulfil their livelihood responsibilities to their stay-behind relatives. Family separation that ensues from the physical absence of migrant parents is sometimes bridged by the transfer of both financial and in-kind remittances, in order to cater for the needs of stay-behind children and family members. Extant literature examines aspects of the role of parents, grandparents and other caregivers in the absence of migrant parents (Mazzucato 2011; Mazzucato and Schans 2011). 'Door-to-door' businesses are found to be a critical component in facilitating transnational care delivery and also the amelioration of the emotional and psychological stress that is associated with long-distance familial relations. Such in-kind remittances could be scripted as *help*, *obligation* and *entitlement* (Carling 2014) in the sense that they are meant to support the recipient while also being perceived as an obligation on the part of the giver and a sense of entitlement from the recipient's perspective.

... their [door-to-door] existence has helped to bridge the distance between me and my parents in some way. In order not to lack, they send me lots of stuff, which I wouldn't have been able to receive before. I managed to even do business at some point for extra money so it's good ... (Janet, Recipient, Ghana).

Ultimately, recipients of goods through 'door-to-door' shipping operators are motivated to do so because they find it convenient and relatively cheap. Recipients actively

encourage their migrant relatives abroad to patronise the services of ‘door-to-door’ operators because goods are delivered to their preferred address and at no direct cost to the recipient since the sender, who is based abroad, prior to the shipment, mostly covers the fees. A cross section of recipients interviewed, all points to these two factors (convenience and cost) as their main motivation for their positive reviews of the role of ‘door-to-door’ operators. These views are equally echoed by senders of items from the UK:

It is more convenient ... so I'm home and then I get a call from the agency, I direct them to my location and then they just drive to my gate and then hand over the stuff to me and I sign ... (Stephen, Recipient in Ghana)

From my personal observation, what I would say is that it's a sigh of relief. Like I stated earlier on, the hustle of shipping this thing, going to the port, clearing it personally is gone. You know what happens at the port, this thing is supposed to cost you GHc10, by the time you realise you've paid about GHc50 for it. All because you have to go to so many people or offices ... so many chains before you can clear something. So, I think they [door-to-door] have reduced a lot of unwarranted time wasting for some of us, somebody like me. (Dominic, Sender, UK).

The above narratives demonstrate how transnational livelihoods are constructed and maintained through a shipping business model that consolidates the previously fragmented stages in cross-border transportation of goods into a seamless and coherent operation. Given the high expectations on migrants and their families in the origin to exhibit higher standards of living, the ability of transnational migrant entrepreneurship to help secure, maintain and potentially durably improve migrant households' **living standards is complementary**. The ease and convenience of sending in-kind remittances to Ghana, offered by these transnational migrant entrepreneurs mean that migrants and their relatives are able to maintain the high standards that are expected of them.

Facilitation of transnational livelihoods among Ghanaian migrants in the UK

‘Door-to-door’ operations support the facilitation of transnational livelihoods by Ghanaian migrants in the UK. The transnational turn in migration literature points to the ability of migrants to have a virtual presence in multiple social fields, including their country of origin, while being physically based at a remote destination country (Vertovec 1999). This is manifested in the form of economic, socio-cultural and political interconnections among diverse geographical locations (including origin and destination) where migrants use modern technology and communications systems to foster and maintain multi-stranded relations with their social networks based in diverse locations, including in origin countries (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992; Basch, Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994).

Research participants in the UK reported using the services of ‘door-to-door’ operators, for instance, to facilitate their participation in economic transnationalism through the setting up and running of business enterprises in Ghana. Convenience, cost-effectiveness and reliability of the ‘door-to-door’ model (hassle-free shipping) allows for the establishment of profitable businesses in Ghana by migrants employing the services of local employees to manage the day-to-day operations while they monitor profitability remotely. Though there are instances of some failed transnational

business ventures whereby invested capital is squandered by trusted familial relations, there are equally examples of successful ones. Some of the successful transnational business enterprises are sometimes managed by non-familial social networks (Smith and Mazzucato 2009). The virtual immersion of Ghanaians abroad in the economy of their country of origin extends beyond their purchase of financial packages or portfolios such as 'diaspora bonds' to include the shipping, for sale, of either used equipment/items and clothing or brand-new items that are bought at discounted prices during seasonal sales abroad.

Again, relatively lower costs that characterise the 'door-to-door' shipping option compared with the air freight option serve as the main strength in migrants relying on it to consolidate their transnational existence. Such economic activities do not necessarily preclude migrants from actively participating in the economy of their destination country but rather speak to the validity of the concepts of *simultaneity* and *duality* that are embedded in the theory of transnationalism. These key concepts highlight the contemporary reality of migrants' lives whereby loyalty to and participation in more than one social field are not mutually exclusive. The economic case for migrants' patronage of 'door-to-door' shipping is demonstrated in the following quotes by Augustine and Stella:

A box of about 50kg to 80kg will cost about £50 and the same weight on the airlines will cost me in a region of about £500 plus. So, cost-wise, it's very, very price-effective: (Augustine, Sender, UK).

People are able to do businesses and it creates jobs as well in Ghana. I know, because people buy stuff here and take it to Ghana for relatives to sell (Stella, Sender, UK).

Another layer of long distance belongingness by migrants in countries of origin is the ownership of physical assets (especially houses) in their countries of origin. The building of houses in Ghana by migrants is perceived to be critical to the projection of success and attainment of upward social mobility (Kandilige 2017; Mohan 2006; Van der Geest 1998). In actualising such constructions, migrants draw on either familial or distant social networks. As Smith and Mazzucato (2009) note, migrants sometimes prefer working with non-family members as such relations are freer from social obligations than those with family relations. Examples of exploitation of migrants by their own social networks exists. A classic example involves misappropriation of funds sent towards house building projects:

That has been a problem honestly ... it started off with my sister-in-law, she actually bought the land and you know Ghana the way they are, when I eventually got home I realised that they inflated the price of the land like five times (sic). Then she told me the boyfriend was a contractor. When I was sending the money, they were not even using the money to do the project she was now using it for her own thing. So, I had to get rid of that contractor get another person to do it, so the initial money I spent was just wasted (Charles, Sender, UK).

Nonetheless our study confirmed the shipment of building materials and furniture from the UK to Ghana through 'door-to-door' operators mainly because it is a cheaper option than through air freight. Beyond the cost calculus, these actions help cement migrants' social status within their origin communities. The prevailing acknowledgement that goods made in or bought from the UK are of a higher quality suggests that migrant households are presumed to enjoy a higher standard of living compared with their non-migrant household contemporaries. Paradoxically, as Kandilige (2017) notes, migrant-owned mansions are sometimes constructed without the knowledge of family

members and left vacant for most times of the year – only occupied by waged caretakers. These scenarios arise when such migrants are either fearful of envious extended family members harming them through juju (i.e. voodoo) on account of their wealth or when they want to avoid heavy demands on their resources by relatives who see house building by migrants as an outward sign of affluence. Moreover, house building by migrants has broader direct economic benefits to Ghana by relieving the pressure on demand for housing (by increasing the housing stock), providing rental accommodation and creating construction-related employment opportunities.

A lot of people living abroad have houses but they're not living in them, it's their relatives rather who are living in them, which is reducing the pressure on the government of Ghana to build houses for the Ghanaians. So, the door-to-door business is very, very important especially to the people in Ghana'. (Kojo, Operator, UK)

The role of 'door-to-door' operators also brings intangible benefits to Ghanaian transnational migrants in the UK. This includes migrants gaining respect among their stay-behind household members, helping establish and maintain emotional connections between families and relations based in different geographical locations and enhancing the wellbeing of migrants through the peace of mind that is associated with feeling fulfilled and valued by recipients of remitted goods. These mechanisms help bridge the physical distance between migrants and their families in Ghana and foster transnational livelihoods. As one sender of goods through 'door-to-door' operators notes, 'It helps to bridge the distance between me and my parents in some way' (**Eugena, Sender, UK**). Other accounts of transnational transfers of in-kind remittances equally demonstrate the depth of bonding ensuing from seemingly benign gifts from a destination country:

The past years that I've sent clothes to them [family members in Ghana], they called me to say, look it's been of immense help to us. And hearing that alone, I felt very fulfilled that at least these things I was going to give away anyway are being valued so much at home. Hearing that response from them really made me feel that little things are also valued. At the end of the day, I was going to throw these things away in the UK but they are helping somebody somewhere (Aduah, Sender, UK).

For instance, someone called me that their microwave was broken and so they needed a microwave. If you send them cash, they will probably buy an inferior microwave that will get spoilt within a short time. But if you buy one and send to them, then you know you've given them what they want and you know you've given something of a better value. (Fati-matu, Sender, UK)

... sending things back home, it is making life easy and people back home are able to get most of the stuff we eat here. They also get the opportunity to eat, because I've got a cousin who likes rice pudding so much. So, when she sees the rice pudding she is so excited, because the way they do it in Ghana is not the way they make rice pudding here [UK]. So, they get the opportunity to eat some of the stuff we eat here. (Samata, Sender, UK)

As Nieswand (2014, 11) notes, for instance, of one Ghanaian returned migrant from Germany, 'not being able to give material evidence of having been to Europe is problematic because it would disappoint one's significant others' expectations and could even lead them to question his moral integrity'. When such expectations are met, migrants are able to live transnationally and draw moral credit from household and community members at the origin. Transnational migrants sometimes inhabit the lower sectors of the destination societies' economies, especially the informal economies, due to lack of

appropriate immigration documentation, work permits or as a result of discrimination and racism against them. As a result, these situations compromise migrants' ability to negotiate commensurate wages with their employers. However, as target earners (Piore 1979; Vasta and Kandilige 2010) migrants accept these jobs as those low wages still translate to substantial amounts when converted to their home country's currency or compared with the likely unemployment they would have faced by not migrating. When in-kind remittances are transferred by transnational migrants with the help of transnational migrant entrepreneurship to their relations in Ghana, there are what Nieswand (2014, 13) calls 'collaborative silences' whereby transnational migrants 'do not address how they acquired their resources but also their significant others, who take pre-emptive measures not to ask'. The facilitating role of this transnational migrant entrepreneurship thus simultaneously bolster migrants' and migrant households' ability to strategically or deliberately use migration, in combination with other strategies, to secure, maintain and improve their livelihoods both at the destination and origin.

Co-creation of transnational livelihoods: benefits to the Ghanaian economy

The economy of Ghana is predominantly supported by the export of primary products such as cocoa and gold which are affected by unstable world prices for these commodities. As the economy of Ghana continues to be diversified, 'door-to-door' shipping businesses have the potential to be a significant source of revenue to the country. The research clearly indicates a significant emerging contribution to revenue (taxes and levies) from this business model. Interviews with officials at the Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority and 'door-to-door' operators in the UK suggest that on a daily basis, on average, one hundred and sixty 40-footer containers are cleared from the Jubilee Terminal at Tema (Ghana) alone. Duties and taxes on each 40-footer container are about ₵35,000. As a result, 160 containers cleared at the unit price generates ₵ 5,600,000 per day. Consequently, an annual estimated income of ₵2,044,000,000 is generated from shipping businesses in taxes and duties. In addition, the Postal and Courier Services Regulatory Commission of Ghana charges about GH₵3,500 per annum for the renewal of registration documentation of shipping companies. This also generates some needed income for the Ghanaian economy. As a key component of the shipping sector in Ghana, the 'door-to-door' business model enables Ghanaians abroad to co-create wealth for their country of origin through their transnational activities.

Additionally, it is estimated that the shipping industry directly supports over 5000 jobs in Ghana and these workers pay taxes which contribute revenue to the economy (Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority 2015). Employment opportunities also exist indirectly for allied businesses that facilitate the operations of shipping companies. Between 2006 and 2015 another major port, the Tarkoradi Port, in Ghana received 256,094 metric tonnes of cargo and contributed substantial tax revenue to the government of Ghana (Ghana Ports and Harbours Authority 2015). Job creation in a lower middle-income country such as Ghana is critical to national development. Multiplier effects of the receipt of wages and salaries from shipping-related employment go beyond the immediate beneficiaries to positively support the local economies at the community level. Demand for goods and services is enhanced and the ability to enrol children into

educational institutions rises. In addition, access to better healthcare is improved by the receipt of wages in the shipping sector. Direct employment opportunities are available to clearing agents, warehouse operators, drivers, manual labourers who load and offload goods, salespersons at fuel stations and Ports and Harbours Authority officials among others. As one UK-based 'door-to-door' operator notes, for example, 'In Ghana, we have around 40 employees in Accra and 15 in Kumasi' (*Operator, UK*). While the numbers (per business) do not seem to be large, cumulatively they amount to a significant contribution towards minimising the unemployment challenge in the country. The above economic activities speak to the disparate perspectives on the concept of development both as 'human development' (Sen 1999) and 'economic growth' (Rostow 1960). These socio-economic outcomes support Sen's (1999) conceptualisation of development as 'expanding the substantive freedoms that people enjoy' and the concept of human capability which refers to the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to improve the substantive choices they have. In addition, tax revenues contribute to 'economic growth' as analysed by the Bretton Woods institutions, in the form of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) indices.

The nexus between receipt of remittances (cash or in-kind) and development is, however, contested and context specific (UNDP 2009). The 'dumping' of foreign manufactures into a 'developing economy' potentially has detrimental implications for the viability of local companies and industries. Additionally, consumption habits of Ghanaians have transformed, over time, thus diminishing confidence in local products. Moreover, the injection of remittance capital into communities that already have disparate levels of development could further widen the income and welfare inequality gap between migrant and non-migrant households.

This notwithstanding, as stated earlier, the establishment of businesses by transnational migrants and the building of both commercial and private housing contribute to national development. Direct as well as allied employment associated with migrant-owned businesses help reduce the unemployment rates in Ghana. Construction-related jobs that ensue from migrant-funded projects also support the construction sector and provide revenue to retailers of cement products and other hardware businesses. As such, access to human, financial, social and physical assets (Carney 1998; Yendaw, Tanle, and Kumi-Kyereme 2019) is enhanced at the national spatial level through the activities of 'door-to-door' businesses as transnational migrant entrepreneurships.

Even so, there were instances of senders attempting to use the channel of 'door-to-door' to launder cash illegally into Ghana.² Potential acts of criminality therefore expose a vulnerability that needs to be plugged if this means of transnational in-kind transfers is to be adopted on a larger scale.

Conclusion

This research has put in-kind remittance, which have been mostly relegated to the background in migration and remittance studies, front and centre of its analysis. We discussed that these transfers are crucial to the transnational livelihood making strategies of migrants and their relatives. 'Door-to-door' business operations set up by relatively recent arrived African migrants in the UK are part of an important linkage that migrants

maintain with their relatives back home which makes it possible for migrants to fulfil their transnational livelihood obligations and high expectations placed on them.

Theoretically, we argue that this research offers a different perspective of in-kind remittances which are usually subsumed under cash remittances and transnational migrant entrepreneurship by accounting for their role in helping migrants and their families to gain direct access to various resources including social and physical assets that ordinarily are outside their economic and social realm. By critically analysing the role of these transnational actors we highlight the need to broaden the transnational migration debates and include other non-traditional actors to assess their role in simultaneously co-creating migrants' and their relatives' livelihoods. Two crucial interrelating factors emerge as shaping the use of these transnational migrant entrepreneurs: convenience and cheaper transfer costs. As such, these services go a long way to alleviate migrants' and their families' livelihood challenges and should therefore be firmly incorporated into wider transnational migration discourses.

Additionally, we provide innovative insights by focusing on African migrant businesses that operate across transnational spaces. Indeed, by focusing on these businesses we were able to understand the value placed on in-kind remittances and how African migrants and their relatives co-create, maintain and potentially durably improve their livelihoods in a context where formal social protection schemes are limited. A focus on these migrant entrepreneurs has enabled us uncover the pre-emptive ways migrants and their relatives ensure that 'collaborative silences' Nieswand (2014, 13) are maintained within an otherwise intrusively judgemental migrant community. Transnational migrant entrepreneurship thus concurrently intensifies migrants' and their families' ability to strategically use migration, in combination with other strategies, to secure and improve their own livelihoods while satisfying the social image that is expected of them by their immediate societies.

Finally, in terms of national development discourse, we have argued that the 'door-to-door' business model enables Ghanaians abroad to co-create wealth at the macro (national) level for their origin country through their transnational activities. The potential developmental effects accrue from the payment of taxes, duties and other levies by 'door-to-door' entrepreneurs and their allied businesses. These transnational migrant entrepreneurs also create jobs that reduce unemployment in a country where there are many economically active young people but inadequate job opportunities. However, the consumption of foreign consumer goods in a developing economy potentially has pernicious implications for the sustainability of local companies and industries. Though the operations of these niche businesses are on a relatively small scale, this research has exposed their potential contribution to national income generation and national development.

Notes

1. The research team consisted of the authors, research colleagues and research assistants from the Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana.
2. A classic example unearthed by our research is the case of the UK police (upon a tip off) invading the offices of a 'door-to-door' company to investigate the shipment of so-called

baby foods to Ghana. Upon inspection, it was discovered that each tin container was filled to the brim with Fifty Pound Sterling bank notes.

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