

# Social Networks, Migration Trajectories and Livelihood Strategies of Migrant Domestic and Construction Workers in Accra, Ghana

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## Abstract

Recent studies indicate that poor migrants are more likely to depend on social capital among other resources for livelihoods in host communities. Relying on insights from the social networks theory and using qualitative data from two migrant sending regions and one migrant destination area in Ghana, this paper examines the role and effects of networks of social capital on migration processes and livelihood strategies of migrants in the construction and domestic work sectors in Accra, Ghana. The paper argues that different categories of migrants fashion out specific migration strategies based on a complex intersection of social networks, which is shaped by specific contexts. Therefore the various ways in which migrants access, maintain and construct different types of networks in varied social locations and with diverse people needs to be interrogated in a more nuanced way and their policy implications addressed.

## Keywords

Migration, social networks, domestic work, construction work, livelihoods, informal sector

## Introduction

Urbanisation is an emerging reality facing many developing countries. Partly as a result of the high level of rural–urban migration, the proportion of Ghana’s population living in urban areas has increased rapidly from 43.8% in 2000 to 50.9% in 2010 (GSS, 2012), and is projected to increase to 63% by 2025. A major impact of such a high level of urban population growth is pressure on job opportunities in urban areas (Agyei-Mensah and Owusu, 2010; Owusu et al., 2008). As the formal

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sector has not seen much growth in Ghana in the last few decades, this has meant an influx of the urban population and particularly poor urban migrants into the informal sector.

Recent studies have shown that many of the people who have migrated from rural areas to urban centres in Ghana tend to engage in low-paid, short-term and insecure occupations, such as waste management, domestic work, construction work and street-hawking (Awumbila et al., 2014; GSS, 2012). Given the unregulated work conditions and the irregularity and low levels of wages of migrants in these precarious occupations, their livelihoods and survival strategies have attracted the attention of researchers in recent times (see, for instance, Awumbila and Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2008; Awumbila et al., 2014; Oberhauser and Yeboah, 2011). Many of these studies have indicated the dependence of particularly poor migrants on networks of social capital as a key strategy to survive in the harsh urban informal sector. However, the ways in which migrants access and use social networks in their migration experiences and trajectories, how these differ by type of network used, the variety of actors, how these are mediated by place, and how these relate to the survival strategies of migrants in precarious sectors in the Ghanaian context has not been adequately explored.

This paper examines the role of social networks on migration processes and livelihood strategies of migrants in the construction and domestic work sectors in Accra, Ghana and how these sustain the continuation of migration flows over time. These two occupations were chosen for this study because they are common jobs for poor rural–urban migrants in many developing countries including Ghana due largely to the ease of entrance into these occupations (Tsikata, 2011). Using typologies of social capital as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1985) and Woolcock (2001), the paper argues that migrants in precarious sectors, in this case domestic and construction work, fashion out specific migration strategies based on a complex intersection of social networks, which is shaped by specific contexts.

The paper contributes to the social network and migration literature in several ways. First, while earlier studies on social networks and migration tend to focus on *either* the role of social capital in the migration process and flows from source regions (Anjos and Campos, 2010; McKenzie and Rapoport, 2007) *or* effects of social networks on economic survival of migrants at the destination (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000), this paper argues that there is the need to broaden the conceptualisation of social networks to consider the multiple configurations both in area of origin and destination and at different stages of the migration process, and which are driven by the differences in migrant motivations in different spaces. The paper also contributes to our understanding of *spatial dynamics* of social networks by comparing the nature of networks among poor migrants from two ecologically and culturally different regions of Ghana, namely the Volta and Northern regions. The paper also highlights the gendered dimensions of social capital utilised in social networks. Furthermore, given that most studies have concentrated on the enabling role of social networks (Anjos and Campos, 2010), there is little understanding of the various forms of exploitation that can occur within social networks. This paper therefore highlights how social networks can be relied upon to exploit some migrants in precarious sectors in urban Ghana.

## **Social Networks Theory and migration**

While the main tenets of the Social Networks Theory were developed between the 1960s and 1970s (Bourdieu, 1985), it has gained much currency in recent years (Anjos and Campos, 2010). In their Social Network Analysis Model, Wasserman and Faust (1994) asserted that the Social Network Theory is primarily based on the notion that all aspects of life entail social relations (Wasserman and Faust, 1994: 3). According to Teye (2013), social networks are organised based on mutual dependency. Relying on the ‘Foucauldian entanglements of power’ perspective

(Foucault, 1980), Teye (2013) argued that due to resource constraints and the fact that power is fluid, individuals in many social, economic and political processes tend to cooperate with one another in pursuing common goals.

Applying networks theory to migration studies, migrant networks are defined as recurrent sets of interpersonal ties that bind migrants and non-migrants together within a web of reciprocal obligations that can be drawn upon to facilitate entry, adjustment and employment at points of destination (Boyd, 1989). A social connection to a migrant at a particular destination represents an important resource that can be utilised to facilitate movement. Boyd (1989) argues that the recognition of social relationships in migration permits the understanding of migration as a social product and focuses the act of migration away from individual actors to a focus on a combination of factors which influences migration (Boyd, 1989: 642). This therefore implies as noted by Tilly (1990: 84) that networks, not people, are at the centre of the migration process.

An important implication of the network theory then is that the process of being socially connected to someone who has migrated necessarily creates a migratory information feedback mechanism, where contacts act as conduits of information to potential migrants. Therefore migration as a network-creating process, developing an increasingly dense web of networks and contacts between places of origin and destination, 'allows the migration process to become self-sustaining and impervious to short-term changes in economic incentives' (Portes, 1995: 22). Network connections thus increase the likelihood of migration because they lower the costs and risks of movement and increase the expected net returns to migration.

Several conceptual models have been employed to explain how social networks operate, with the concept of social capital being one of the main frameworks used. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 119), 'Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.' Thus as Portes (1995: 12) notes, the resources themselves are not social capital, but rather the individual's ability to mobilise them on demand. The social capital model thus assumes that actors migrate to maximise returns on their investments in human capital and, in doing so, draw upon the social capital embedded in their interpersonal networks.

The key characteristic of social capital is that it can be converted or translated into other forms of capital to improve or maintain their position in society (Bourdieu, 1985). Thus social capital, for example, has often been substituted for economic capital to enhance the livelihoods of vulnerable migrants as shown by a study in Ghana by Teye and Yebleh (2014). Although Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993) point out that social capital may have negative as well as positive consequences, migration research has generally emphasised the positive role it plays in the acquisition and accumulation of other forms of capital.

The literature also identifies three main types of social capital that people can depend on for survival in the host communities. These are *bonding social capital*, *bridging social capital* and *linking social capital* (Woolcock, 2001). According to Boateng (2012), bonding social capital connects people in similar situations and exists among family members, neighbours and friends. In this paper, we analyse relationships between migrant domestic/construction workers and their family members, friends and neighbours at both the origin and the destination as bonding social capital. Bridging social capital refers to distant relationships, such as those with service providers, traders and fellow workers. Linking social capital connects actors in dissimilar situations (e.g. people who live in entirely different circumstances). In this study, linking social capital will be analysed in terms of the links between migrant construction/domestic workers and local government officials, city planning authorities and other relevant organisations. We assume that various groups of migrants depend on different types of networks and as such our analysis examines the types of

networks of social capital that migrant domestic/construction workers have relied upon at various stages of the migration process and for survival in the host communities.

Ryan (2011) argues that within the migration studies literature there is a tendency to assume that migrants have ready access to kin and friendship networks which facilitate the migration and settling processes. Through tight bonds of trust and reciprocity, these networks are considered to be sources of social capital, providing a counter-balance to the disadvantages that migrants may encounter in the destination society. However, although migrant social networks clearly hold many benefits, they can also work to disadvantage migrants in various ways. This paper therefore argues that the various ways in which migrants access, maintain and construct different types of networks, in varied social locations, with diverse people, needs to be interrogated in a more nuanced way and their policy implications discussed.

## Data sources

A combination of qualitative data collection methods was employed to collect primary data from migrant domestic and construction workers in Accra and members of their households left behind in the Northern and Volta regions of Ghana. The Northern and Volta regions were chosen because they are dominant migrant sending areas in Ghana (GSS, 2012). Both regions are also highly deprived. The multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) ranks the Northern region as the poorest region in Ghana, while the Volta is the fourth poorest region in Ghana (GSS, 2012: 49). While the two regions have high poverty levels in common, they also have distinguishing environmental, cultural and spatial characteristics which provides a good context for exploring the spatial dynamics of migration and social networks. In particular, the further distance of the Northern region from the destination area, Accra, compared to the Volta region, which is located quite close to Accra, has different implications for resource requirements by potential migrants for the move to Accra.

The primary data collection methods were non-participant observations, key informant interviews, informal conversations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Specifically, in-depth interviews were conducted with *one adult* in 40 selected migrant sending households (20 for construction work and 20 for domestic work) and 10 non-migrants households that were identified in the Volta and Northern regions using data from a 2012 migration survey and a screener survey conducted in 2014. Each of the 40 households selected had at least one household member who had migrated and was working in the construction or domestic work sectors in Accra. Members of the selected households were asked to provide contact addresses and phone numbers of migrant household members in Accra. At the destination (in Accra), 10 migrant domestic workers and 10 migrant construction workers traced from the 40 households and four recruitment agencies were interviewed on migration and recruitment processes and livelihoods. Four FGDs in the two migrant sending areas were also held.

## Migration into domestic and construction work in Accra: An historical context

Migration flows in Ghana and particularly from the Volta and Northern regions of Ghana to the Greater Accra Region have their roots in historical antecedents, unequal distribution of natural resources, and the adoption of neoliberal policies since the 1980s. These have created spatial inequalities in development particularly between southern and northern Ghana and also between urban and rural areas. Several authors have noted that these contemporary regional inequalities in spatial development in Ghana have their historical antecedents in the country's colonial legacy, which have been reinforced and accentuated by post-colonial development policies and strategies (Aryeetey et al., 2009; Songso, 2009).

During the colonial era, the government emphasised the production of export crops and minerals, and this required the flow of labour from all parts of the colony and the northern territories, in particular, towards the mining areas and plantations in southern part of the then Gold Coast (now Ghana). There were deliberate policies to 'force' people to migrate from other regions to southern Ghana. For instance, the colonial administration passed the Poll Tax Ordinance, which required families to make payments that subsistence farming areas could not afford. This forced families to send some of their members from northern Ghana to the export crop zones to work as wage labourers (Hill, 1956). Additionally, traditional rulers were required to provide annual quotas of labour from their governable spaces to the production zones in southern Ghana (Austin, 1987). Relying on these policies, the colonial administration managed to create the northern part of Ghana as a labour reserve from where labour migrated to the production zones in southern Ghana (Yaro, 2013). Northern Ghana was also deprived of infrastructural investments and this led to further out migration of labour. The continuation in the post-colonial era of investing in regions with exportable products, such as cocoa, timber and gold, and with easy access to seaports, and providing supporting infrastructure in such regions reinforced the regional and spatial inequalities (Dickson, 1975). Post-independence import-substitution industrialisation policies and more recently economic reforms and market liberalisation policies of structural adjustment policies since the early 1980s have done little to reduce these spatial inequalities and indeed have sustained the north to south migration flows (Songsore, 2009). This situation has led to very high levels of deprivation in northern Ghana and in rural areas, with all major socio-economic indicators showing clear north-south, and the rural-urban differentials.

On the other hand, the massive out-migration from the Volta region of Ghana since 1960s was largely an outcome of the construction of the Akosombo Dam in the early 1960s. The creation of the dam in this region disrupted the livelihoods of fishing communities and forced a significant proportion of the population to migrate to other parts of Ghana (Yaro and Tsikata, 2015). Economic challenges in the 1960s and 1980s also forced people to migrate from poorer regions to Accra, as migration became a survival strategy for poor people (Anarfi et al., 2000). Structural adjustment programmes, as part of broader neoliberal policies implemented in the 1980s and 1990s, further led to the worsening of spatial inequalities in Ghana and thus created the context whereby people from poor regions continue to migrate to Accra and other cities in southern Ghana in search of greener pastures.

Thus colonial and post-colonial policies compounded by environmental factors actively promoted labour migration from the deprived marginalised north and from rural areas in general to urban centres in the south. The high level of emigration from both the Volta and Northern regions therefore is situated within this historical context. Indeed, given the current policy regime of allowing market forces to determine prices and allocation of resources, it has been argued that the resource-rich areas of southern Ghana and the large urban centres will continue to attract key investments due to the existing relatively better infrastructure and economies of scale enjoyed by these areas (Songsore, 2009) and therefore continue to reinforce existing socio-economic differences and thereby sustain the rural to urban and north to south flows.

### **Role of social networks in the migration process**

Having made the decision to move to Accra, and to work in either the construction or domestic work sectors, migrants then fashion out various strategies to enhance their economic survival in the large urban space of Accra. Many of these strategies are based on a complex intersection of social networks, which provide some source of social capital to counterbalance the disadvantages that migrants may encounter in Accra.

In Ghana, several studies indicate that migrants do not move blindly to cities in search of jobs, but are often assisted and supported in making decisions, travelling, settling, finding jobs, solving

problems and optimising livelihoods. These networks of support, which are socially constructed, constitute social capital which gets transformed into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1985). Yaro et al. (2011) and Awumbila et al. (2014), for example, observe that rural–urban migrants in Accra, Ghana, usually receive information about the destination and financial support for migration and settlement through social networks. Similarly Awumbila et al. (2015) using data from a household survey of 1500 households in Ghana showed that about 58.3% of 1611 return and current migrants had a contact person at the destination prior to migrating.

Most of the migrants in both sectors and from both the Volta and Northern regions relied on *bonding social capital* derived from networks with friends and family members (see Boateng, 2012) during the migration process. In most cases, friends and family members provided information and paid for travel cost and initial accommodation. There were spatial variations in the nature of these networks. Migrants from the Volta region tend to rely more on family members (i.e. networks based on kinship ties) while migrants from the Northern region tend to rely more on friends for information and financial assistance. For instance, Jandu, a female domestic worker from the Volta region, was brought to Accra by her brothers who were already living in Accra. In contrast, Marie, who travelled from northern Ghana without the consent of her father, arrived at the Tema lorry station in Accra with a friend. Similar spatial variations in the nature of networks were observed in the construction sector. In the Volta region, most families in the construction industry often have several other members drawn into the network. This leads to family members supporting each other by bringing relatives facing economic challenges at the origin to join in executing construction tasks in cities. This was often the beginning of migration for many construction workers, such as Gbevo (Box 1).

**Box 1.** Family networks in the migration process: the case of Gbevo, a construction worker.

Prior to migrating to Accra, 28-year-old Gbevo was a kente (traditional cloth) weaver living in Mepe in the Volta region of Ghana. He was a father of three and was using proceeds from his kente business to cater for the family. His business later collapsed as a result of low demand for the cloths he produced. After the collapse of his business, he relied on some brothers who were already in Accra to migrate to the city. He now works with them as a labourer in the construction sector. He explained how he moved to Accra:

I was no longer able to weave like previously due to two reasons. The work was tiring and our outputs were also not selling “as hot” as before. The people whom we supplied the cloths to, always came back with complaints of low sales. They told us that customers were buying the products on credit. As a result, they became indebted and could not pay me on time. I also became bankrupt. Because of the piecemeal nature of payments, I lost my capital and could not sustain the Kente weaving business ... My brothers were already in Accra and so I informed them that I would like to move to Accra and they should call me when they get a job for me. They are also construction workers here in Accra. I came to Accra in March 2012 when they called me about a job.

Source: Fieldwork, 2015

Similarly, in 2010, Yadzi (24 years old) migrated from the Volta region to work with his senior brother as a labourer in the construction sector. In these instances, the ‘family sponsors’ cater for the cost of travel, settlement and finding further work. The family as a primary support base for social capital in African societies is still very strong due to the feeling of obligations towards each other and especially siblings and children of siblings. There were stronger family bonds in the

Volta region as shown by a majority of respondents migrating and working first with family members, before moving on, compared to the Northern region migrants. Networks of friends seem to be a more important source of social capital for the Northern region migrants compared to family networks. A major reason for this was the fact that comparatively there were fewer migrant construction workers from the Northern region compared to the Volta region, and therefore the possibility of finding family relations is higher in the larger pool of migrants in Accra. Construction workers from the Northern region tend to rely on friends to move to Accra. For instance, Shetu was brought to Accra from the Northern region by the husband of his wife's friend to work with him on contracts that he had obtained first in the city of Kumasi and then in Accra, the final destination. However, where migrants in stepwise migration found themselves stranded, friends and family members tended to provide loans. Hence the savings of migrants, borrowing and family grants play important roles in financing migration rather than sale of assets as theorised. Also the use of agents or sub-contractors who finance these trips in exploitative arrangements as observed in the case of Asia (Zeitlyn et al., 2014) does not appear to apply in these cases.

The networks observed in the cases above are thus situated within the social structure of traditional Ghanaian society, which encourages support systems with rules of obligations and responsibilities and reciprocities. Social capital in the area of origin spawns into new relations in the destination. For instance, Shetu who was assisted by relations between his wife and her friend has created a new network whereby Shetu is indebted to the friend. Shetu in turn is obliged to provide support to him and his family in the future as the need arises. Thus through tight bonds of trust and reciprocity, these networks provide the resources to enhance migrant livelihoods in the destination and minimise the disadvantages that migrants may encounter in the destination society.

### *Social networks and employment strategies in domestic and construction work*

Social networks were also very important in securing a job in these precarious sectors in the city. Positions for domestic workers are usually not advertised in the media. In most cases, therefore, employers inform friends, relatives, other domestic workers and sometimes agents to look for domestic workers for them. Similar to the findings reported elsewhere by Apt (2005), our study reveals that family members, church members, friends and neighbours of both the potential domestic workers and the employer play a major role in recruiting and negotiating the informal contract between domestic workers and employers. For instance, Amulu, a 24-year-old woman from Dzolo in the Volta region of Ghana was first recruited into the domestic work sector through networks established by her pastor who linked her up with a woman in Accra in 2010 to work as a 'baby sitter'. Amulu later left the employment of this woman but got other domestic work positions through networks she established while in Accra. Similarly, domestic workers such as Adjoa and Benjamin from the Volta region and Marie from the Northern region got their jobs through social networks. One reason why social networks are important in this sector is the fact that employers are usually sceptical about employing people they do not know. Tsikata (2011), in a study of domestic workers in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale, found that 80% of respondents were informally recruited. While recent operations of the recruitment agents are somehow slowly formalising recruitment processes in Ghana, they have not been able to reduce the role of social networks in the recruitment process of domestic workers.

There were also spatial differences in the nature of social networks in the recruitment process. Given that young migrants from northern Ghana are more likely to arrive in Accra alone as noted above, most of them were connected to their employers by friends or informal agents. On the other hand, migrant domestic workers from the Volta region were more likely to be connected to their

employers by relatives. In some cases, some domestic workers were initially brought to Accra by relatives or friends of relatives. However, upon leaving their initial jobs, they relied on friendship ties with recruitment agents or friends to get subsequent jobs. The migration and employment history of Bridget, a domestic worker from Volta region, aptly demonstrates this scenario (Box 2).

**Box 2.** Domestic work employment through multiple networks: the case of Bridget.

Bridget is from a poor farming family in the Volta region. After the death of her mother, she had nobody to depend on for her livelihood and payment of school fees. Consequently, her aunt sent her to Accra to live and work with someone who was not known by any of her relatives in the Volta region. She was exploited, physically abused and later sacked by this woman. However, through her social networks she was employed by an expatriate who wanted a domestic worker and so she went to stay with him. She worked there for two years but the expatriate later left Ghana due to sickness. Based on her social networks, she subsequently found another expatriate who employed her and she was living with this employer during the time of the research. The current employer was reportedly taking good care of her and Bridget was doing so well that she sends remittances to her grandmother and relatives in the Volta region.

These cases illustrate that even where migrants were initially brought to the city by relatives, they later used their own social relations to obtain subsequent jobs. Social networks to seek out ‘expatriate employers’ was especially highly valued as expatriates were reputed to pay higher wages and provide better working conditions compared to Ghanaian employers as the case of Bridget illustrates.

Migrant construction workers also relied heavily on social networks to obtain jobs. Three forms of work were discernible for construction workers. These were employment with a formal construction firm with formal wages, working for a fellow craftsman, and becoming a ‘small scale’ contractor employing others on contracted jobs. Migrants normally arrived to the first two forms of work, often working for small companies who paid them specific wages per day or working for their peers or seniors who are ‘popular and known’ by clients as shown by the case of Shetu.

In almost all cases, finding jobs in the construction sector depended on the ‘connections’ a migrant has with other migrant workers, previous employer/client recommendations and group membership, as construction jobs of private individuals are not advertised and hence the need to ‘know’ someone. The known and ‘renowned’ masons/small contractors easily obtained jobs through the recommendations of previous clients. The case of Gbenyo (Box 3) demonstrates the importance of social networks for getting jobs in the construction sector.

**Box 3.** Enabling role of social capital for accessing contracts in the construction sector: the case of Gbenyo.

Gbenyo is a 39-year-old mason with five children from Kpando in the Volta region of Ghana. He migrated to Accra in 2005 with the help of his uncles who are also construction workers who migrated to Accra earlier. Prior to moving to Accra, Gbenyo had completed technical school where he obtained a certificate in building and construction but he was not getting any major contracts in the Volta region as only a few people had funds to build houses. In many cases, Gbenyo was only getting contracts given to him by his uncles to build graves for dead bodies in his home town. He told his uncles that he did not like that job so he wanted them to help him move to Accra. His uncles obliged and brought him to Accra in 2005. Based on their reputation as established building contractors in Accra, they relied on their networks to get Gbenyo a contract to build somebody’s house for him. Gbenyo put all his energy into this and built a ‘nice house’ for the client. While working on that house, another person saw him

and also gave him a contract to build for him. This has helped him but he still sometimes relies on networks with friends and clients to get jobs. He described the role of networks in the construction sector:

You know it is usually through the people you've worked for that you can get other jobs to do. For instance we could be working at a site, and then a neighbour who also has plans to build will contact us when s/he is ready to build. We worked at Dawenya for almost a year for an expatriate. He saw a job I did at Dadome which impressed him. It was a church we built. He then invited me to come and build for him.

The in-depth interviews revealed that when migrant contractors such as Gbenyo in Box 3 obtained contracts, they then searched within their networks for hardworking and trusted workers to help execute the contract, while migrants seen as lazy and unreliable tend to be avoided. Thus even within networks, one must show qualities of reliability, trustworthiness and hard work to obtain and sustain jobs. Therefore principles of reciprocity inherent within networks are mediated through notions of the qualities of what is perceived as an 'ideal worker'. 'Work group networks', whereby an artisan who has been awarded a contract mobilises friends and family, usually in his village, with the required skills to migrate as a group to Accra specifically to execute the contract was common among migrants from the Volta region. This group having migrated together then developed bonds that results in reciprocal job exchanges in the future as the case of Gbenyo illustrates.

Our analysis therefore shows consistent spatial variations with the Volta region sending out more skilled migrants into construction work, and using network connections of family and kin compared to migrants from the Northern region. FGDs identified the proximity of the Volta region to Accra which enables easier movement, better flow of information on work opportunities and above all through the high number of migrant workers in Accra which then ensures constant connectivity between the two places as the major reasons for these stronger social networks for migrants from the Volta region. Therefore we argue that migrants in the Volta region depend more on *bonding social capital* in the search for jobs compared to migrants from the Northern region.

### *Social capital as a substitute for economic capital*

In both the construction and the domestic work sectors, migrants from both regions depend on social capital for accommodation, food, basic services (especially water and electricity) and psychological support. Newly arrived migrants in both sectors were offered free accommodation by relatives and friends. Those from the Volta region were mainly accommodated by family members. For instance, when 22-year-old carpenter Lorma from the Volta region moved to Accra in 2012, he went straight to his uncle's house and remained living with his uncle for six months even after he had secured a job. In contrast, most of the migrants from the Northern region tend to live with friends, as their network connections were mainly through friends. For instance, Marie joined a friend to come to Accra but both of them had no relatives in Accra. Consequently, they joined some friends who were living in a shed at a lorry park. This was where Marie stayed for some years before finally moving to live with one of the people she worked for.

Apart from getting free accommodation on arrival, some migrant domestic and construction workers from both regions pulled resources together to finance accommodation. Male migrants from the Volta region tend to live together mainly in uncompleted buildings compared to their counterparts from the Northern region. Momo, a 39-year-old construction worker, explains that

when they get to a new location, they each roam out in different directions looking for an uncompleted building, and once one of them finds one, they jointly negotiate the terms with the owner by providing in-kind services. These services include keeping intruders out of the premises, clearing the bush and keeping the place clean, secure and safe. Migrants living together also usually share common cooking arrangements and contribute to pay for public services, such as water and electricity. Living together also made life easy as interest-free loans could be obtained from colleagues in times of need. Repayment was often only after obtaining a job and receiving some payments.

As the discussion has shown, many of the migrants in both construction and domestic work and from both regions depended on networks of family, kin and friends to move to Accra, to settle in through offering initial accommodation and other forms of support, seeking and connecting migrants to jobs among others. In times of trouble, such as sickness and loss of a job, most of the migrant domestic and construction workers rely on social and psychological support from their networks. Psychological support is not only obtained from bonding social capital from friends and relatives but also from *bridging social capital* from members of religious groups, as most migrants in both sectors go to church or the mosque regularly. Religious organisations also provide central points of contact for community life among migrants. Our findings resonate with studies elsewhere which show that migrants who lack financial capital can use social capital as a substitute for economic capital to enhance their economic survival and success (see Boateng, 2012; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000).

### *Maintaining links with household members and friends at the origin*

As Coleman (1988) and Liang (1994) have noted, migrants rely on social capital not only in their relationships within their communities of destination, but also with their friends and families back home. Maintaining links with relatives and friends back home is a desirable goal for both international and internal migrants, as supporting poor members of families or communities is seen as a responsibility in Ghanaian society. Tonah (2007) argues that some migrants also maintain ties with relatives and friends at the origin in order to obtain recognition independent of their precarious social status in the destination areas.

Networks of social capital are thus very important for maintaining links and assisting family members left behind at the origin. In order to make up for their physical absence from the area of origin, migrants rely mostly on extended family to perform functions on their behalf. However, to maintain these networks, the migrants have obligations which includes sending remittances that also impact on the lives of these support givers. For instance, Ayis, the mother of a migrant, assumed the position of household head when her son Eitu migrated. She organises the siblings and children of Eitu to cultivate the family farm and represents him in all social gatherings and communal work. In return, Eitu sends down money annually for his siblings to pay for tractor services, buy fertilisers and fuel motorbikes for journeys that they make on his behalf and for the general family. As the case of Eitu shows, to maintain these links effectively, the migrant must also be seen to solve some of the material needs of family members through sending gifts without any request. The sending of remittances is thus partly often in fulfilment of the need to maintain the network.

A study of migrants in two large slums in Accra shows that about 87% of migrants in the slum send out remittances (Awumbila et al., 2014). Remittances sent by migrants were of two kinds: cash and non-cash remittances for the upkeep of their families and other investments. Although informal channels such as friends going home or drivers are used to send remittances, in recent years, however, the preferred means of sending money is through 'mobile money' systems of telecommunication companies. The family members back home also occasionally send foodstuff to

the migrant. However, these reverse remittances are intended to ensure that the migrants do not spend all their money on food. Migrants also sometimes ask friends and relatives to represent them at social functions. Sama, the wife of a migrant mason in the Northern region, describes this situation when she stated:

In his absence, his brothers represent him at social functions such as child-naming and funerals. His absence has created a lot of problems. All his responsibilities are on his brothers. They attend all the social functions on his behalf and that involves a lot of money.

Attending these functions is a critical component of the livelihood-creation process. Members of the society keep record of all these interactions and make considerations on granting livelihood assets based on them.

### *Exploiting migrants within social networks*

While social networks have often been presented as contributing positively to enhance livelihoods of poor migrants (Boateng, 2012), we argue that under certain conditions these networks may be used to exploit either the poor migrants or their employers. While the exploitation of female domestic workers, in particular, is usually a result of unequal power relations between the domestic worker and the employer which makes it difficult for the employee to bargain for equitable employment terms (Nyamnjoh, 2005), there are occasions whereby the migrant domestic worker does not request improved working conditions because of the social networks between them and their employers. For example, female domestic workers who were recruited through family or friendship networks were sometimes exploited because the relationship between them and their employers were not clear. For instance, Briduwa from the Volta region who was sent to Accra by her aunt to work for her aunt's friend thought she was just going to stay with a family friend in Accra:

I had no idea that I will be doing this kind of work. I was made to understand that I was moving to Accra to live with a family friend whom I will help and she will in turn cater for me. (Briduwa, return migrant, Mepe)

She considered the employer an 'aunt', who requested that Briduwa tell people in the area that they were related by blood. This enabled the woman to exploit her until she ran away. Similarly Dari, who was recruited as a domestic worker through her grandfather's networks with her current employer, could not bargain for better remuneration because of the 'good' relationship existing between her employer and her grandfather, which she did not want to upset. She performed multiple tasks in two homes (for her employer and her employer's mother) for just GHC40 (about \$10.50) per month. This made her work for more hours. Similarly, some migrants in the construction sector were exploited by employers they considered as friends. In some cases, employees were overworked or paid less than the market rate but they did not complain because of the desire to keep their networks with the employer. Gbevo who is a labourer provides clear insights into exploitation by stating, 'Oh, yes, as for exploitation, it is common in construction work. We work overtime but they do not pay for the overtime. Even the rate at which we work is bad. We are overworked.'

While employers usually exploit employees in network relationships, some employers of migrant domestic workers also complained of being exploited by domestic workers and their families as highlighted below by an employer:

Most of the time, people only think of one side. They think of the different tasks the girls [domestic workers] are doing for us but, my sister, we also spend more money on them. As she is here with us, we give her food, buy clothes for her, buy her medicine if she is sick ... We also spend money on her extended family who see my husband as a rich person and therefore bring all their family troubles to us to solve ... I tell you, my sister, it is we the employers who are rather exploited.

## Conclusions and policy implications

These findings demonstrate how migrants in the domestic work and construction sectors have relied upon social networks in the migration process and the type of social capital employed by different categories of migrants in different contexts for their livelihoods. Bonding social capital, which connects people in similar situations together (Woolcock, 2001), appears to be the dominant type of network in both the construction and the domestic work sectors. Friends and relatives tend to provide useful information about opportunities at the destination, and also financially assisted some potential migrants to travel to Accra. Bonding social capital is also important for the survival of many migrants at the destination. The adoption of the 'group residential stay' system as a survival strategy by the Volta region migrants in particular enabled them provide for each other in times of need as well as served as each other's protector. Beyond the material needs, the social and psychological support and feelings among the group members made their stay in the city bearable without their families. The migrants from the Northern region similarly tended to live in 'residential enclaves' which enabled them to utilise diverse support systems. Thus, bonding social capital enables the migrant to build economic and political capital in both destination and origin areas.

There were, however, spatial differences in the nature of bonding capital. While most of the migrants from the Northern region relied on networks of friends, kinship networks were dominant among migrants from the Volta region. Given that kinship networks have stronger ties (Boateng, 2012), newly arrived migrants from the Volta region tend to benefit more from social capital than their counterparts from the Northern region. There were also gendered dimensions of the networks. Female migrant workers were more likely to live together with other colleagues than men. To some extent, bridging social capital was also relied upon mainly by migrant construction workers who depended on their connections with 'known' contractors to get jobs. In the domestic work sector, experienced domestic workers rely on bridging networks with agents to get employment with wealthy or expatriate households.

The findings also indicate that while social networks have often been portrayed as facilitating migration and enhancing livelihoods of migrants, they can also be utilised to exploit vulnerable migrant workers, in particular. While social proponents of networks theory tend to focus on cooperation and thereby ignoring power differentials in society, in reality, actors within the network do not have equal power relations, even though power is fluid (Foucault, 1980). Exploitation comes about because interactions within networks are based on 'bargaining games', which are aimed at allocating scarce resources within the networks (Carlsson and Sandstrom, 2008; Teye, 2013).

The empirical findings therefore indicate that networks of social capital are effectively employed for migration from rural areas, enhancing economic survival, providing social support and maintaining links with family members back home, thereby confirming the relevance of social networks in facilitating migration. However, given the multiple configurations involving different social networks under different contexts and at different stages of the migration process, which our findings show, we argue that there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of the role of social networks in migration trajectories and processes and how these impact on migration outcomes.

These findings also have significant policy implications. Given the fact that the study did not find much evidence of the influence of 'linking social capital' on the livelihoods of migrant domestic and construction workers, there is the need for deliberate action by state agencies and non-governmental organisations to ensure that vulnerable domestic and construction workers are not exploited by actors within their social networks. Although a number of laws such as the Labour Act 2003 and other laws exist which are expected to regulate work conditions and protect the rights of all workers including migrant workers in Ghana, these are only enforced mainly in the formal sector. The enforcement of laws and regulations is weak in the informal sector, which is the main source of employment for 88% of workers in Ghana (Osei-Boateng and Ampratwum, 2011), and even higher for migrant workers in the urban informal economy. It is therefore important that relevant state institutions are strengthened to enforce the laws as well as monitor wages and work conditions of vulnerable workers in these sectors effectively. This is particularly crucial for work sectors, such as domestic work, which tend to be 'invisible' because of their hidden nature.

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