

## **Introduction**

**By Prof Joseph Kofi Teye\***

In recognition of the benefits of migration and the challenges associated with its management, many governments and development partners have, in recent years, been discussing how to develop effective frameworks for migration governance at the national, regional and international levels (Mangala, 2017). As a result of the increasing realisation that population mobility can contribute to socio-economic transformation of both migrant sending and receiving areas, migration management was, in 2015, included in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (OECD/ILO 2018), marking the first time that migration is formally integrated into the global development agenda.

Although population mobility, in West Africa, is not a recent phenomenon (Adepoju, 2006), the region has become the focus of academic and policy discussions on population mobility in recent years because it is characterised by high level of labour migration (Olsen, 2011) and displacement (Boateng, 2012). While political narratives and media images suggest an ‘exodus’ of Africans to Europe, a majority of West African migrants travel to destinations within the region (Teye et al, 2015). In 2006, for instance, SWAC and OECD (2006) estimated that 84% of migrations from West Africa are directed towards another country in the region. Similarly, more recent data provided by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) shows that about 72% of West African migrants remain in the region (UN DESA, 2018). Intra-regional migration patterns in the West African region have shown a certain historical continuity of mobility patterns observed in the colonial era, with many migrants moving from countries in Sahel zone (i.e. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) to the mineral-rich and plantation-rich coastal countries, especially Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal and The Gambia (Awumbila et al, 2014). It is estimated that West African intra-regional migration movements, which involve about 7.5 million persons, are seven times greater than migration movements from West Africa to the rest of the world (SWAC and OECD 2006). Olsen (2011) asserted that, with more than 3% of the regional population circulating within West Africa, migration within the region is about six times higher than intra-European mobility. Internal

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migration is also very pervasive in West Africa due to rapid urbanization. Trafficking in children and women is also common in the region. Large-scale refugee movements, mainly caused by civil wars and ethnic conflicts, are also widespread in contemporary West Africa (Boateng, 2012).

Intra-regional migration in West Africa is largely facilitated by the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Right of Residence and Establishment which was adopted in 1979 by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), made up of 15 of the 16 in countries in West Africa. The Free movement protocol, which is based on an understanding that regional cooperation in the field of labour migration could promote the transfer of skills and assets, seeks to ensure that citizens of ECOWAS states are able to enter any ECOWAS member state visa free for up to 90 days.

Outside Africa, Europe is the most popular destination of West African migrants. Since 1970s, economic crisis and political conflicts have contributed significantly to migration from West Africa to North Africa towards Europe. Both highly skilled and unskilled migrants continue to migrate to Europe, either regularly or irregularly. Although irregular migration from Africa to Europe is not a new phenomenon, irregular entry of Europe by West Africans who travel through the Mediterranean has received public attention in recent years. West Africans constitute about 60% of irregular arrivals in Italy and Spain (de Haas, 2006). As a result of restrictive visa regimes imposed by traditional countries of destination in Europe, there has been increasing migration of West Africans to Asia countries, especially China and the Gulf States, in recent years.

Despite the high level of mobility within West Africa, there is a general paucity of data and research findings on various dimensions of population mobility and its outcomes within West Africa. Existing knowledge gaps make it difficult to integrate migration into development planning processes in the region (Awumbila et al, 2017). For instance, policy prescription in many West African countries tend to discourage migration because of its negative effects, such as shortage of labour, migrants smuggling, human trafficking and pressure on social amenities in urban centres. Yet, there is little understanding of the developmental impacts of various types of migration on migrants, host communities and families left behind. As a way of helping to fill some of these gaps in knowledge, this special issue seeks to provide an analysis of migration within, from and towards West Africa, particularly from the perspectives of migration scholars in the West African region.

The first article written by **Teye, Awumbila and Nikoi** examines the challenges to the implementation of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, with particular reference to Ghana and Sierra Leone. The authors demonstrated that the factors that negatively affect the implementation of the free movement protocol include policy ambiguities, harassment of migrants at the borders, migrants' lack of travel documents, low level of knowledge about ECOWAS protocol, resource constraints, securitization of migration, economic challenges and political instability. The authors conclude that future implementation outcomes of the ECOWAS protocol will largely depend on the commitment of the Member States and ability of ECOWAS to develop mechanisms to deal with states that continue to violate the rights of migrants.

In the second article in this issue, **Kandilge and Hamidou** collected data on the experiences of Ghanaian and Nigerian migrants who were affected by the 2011 Libyan crisis to examine how micro-level factors shape migration decision-making processes. The authors argued that migration culture, the desire to improve household livelihoods, existence of social networks and activities of migrant smuggling rings promote migration to Libya. Having identified the limitations of repatriation and evacuation programmes put in place by the Ghanaian and Nigerian governments during the Libyan crisis, the authors make a recommendation for the development of regional evacuation and repatriation programmes to facilitate the timely extraction of trapped migrants from countries in crisis.

The third paper written by **Obeng** employed multiple ethnographic methodologies to examine African importers' participation in the burgeoning economy of China. He argues that strategies employed by these importers are based on various factors such as the size of capital, trading experiences and locations of their imports. The fourth article by **Agyeman and Gyampah** also adopts a historical perspective to analyse cross-cultural ties between Ghana and Egypt through an analysis of the agency of the Egyptian Community in Accra, Ghana. The authors examine the type of cross-border and transnational ties that Egyptian migrants in Ghana have established between Ghana and Egypt and how these ties generate cross-cultural relations between Ghana and Egypt. They argued that due to high profile intermarriages between Ghanaians and Egyptians and the Nkrumah factor, the Egyptian community in Ghana occupies a privileged economic and political position in Ghana.

The last paper, written by **Adzande**, discusses how climate induced migration of itinerant pastoralists from countries in Central and West Africa into Nigeria

is contributing to conflicts. The author noted that states in north and central Nigeria are experiencing heightened conflicts between sedentary farmers and itinerant herders, and this has given rise to the disruption of livelihoods, leading to a major threat to food security. They argue that the ECOWAS protocol on free movement is unintentionally contributing these conflicts.

Taken together, the papers provide multi-disciplinary perspectives on contemporary migration issues within the West African region. Although the papers presented in this special issue are diverse, they all indicate the need for policy interventions that can reduce the negative outcomes associated with migration while maximising its developmental impacts. The article led by Teye and Adzande's paper demonstrate the weaknesses of the ECOWAS free movement protocol for the management of migration within the region. Similarly, the paper led by Kandilige demonstrates the need for effective regional level framework for dealing with humanitarian crises associated with migration. The three papers taken together therefore discuss the weaknesses of current regional level migration and displacement governance systems. Obeng's article and the paper led by Agyeman demonstrate the importance of social networks in facilitating migration flows and enhancing the outcomes of migration. While Obeng showed how Ghanaian traders rely on networks of social capital with agents in their trading activities, Agyemang and his colleagues demonstrated how similar networks help Egyptians to enjoy certain privileges in Ghana.

The papers demonstrate that despite the undesirable outcomes of migration, there are unique windows of opportunity to make it a triple win situation for the migrant, the origin and the receiving countries. This requires intensification of lesson drawing, knowledge sharing, and purposive interactions among researchers, policy makers, development partners, social partners and other stakeholders. The special issue discusses topical issues which should be of interest to migration scholars, policy makers, and development practitioners.

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