

# RURAL -URBAN MIGRATION IN WEST AFRICA: ANY CHANGES POST COVID

*Professor Mariama Awumbila  
Centre for Migration Studies  
University of Ghana*

*KNOMAD SEMINAR  
31<sup>th</sup> March 2021*



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

# Rural-Urban Migration in West Africa– Changing Dynamics and Drivers

- **Rural -Urban migration remains a critical part of life / livelihoods** - importance of temporary, seasonal, cross border mobility for multi-local households/ diversified livelihoods.
- Internal migration is significant for development in terms of the numbers of people moving and their poverty reduction potential and well-being outcomes.
- **Changing dynamics of rural urban- migrants – Life Cycle and other Changes:**
  - *Age (youth, child migration)*
  - *Gender (independent female migration and girls) ,*
  - *Educational levels. - Comparatively higher levels of education among rural -urban migrants in informal settlement in Ghana, eg Old Fadama (junior High School, Senior High school and a few with tertiary levels of education).*
- **Increasing educational levels** of rural -urban migrants coupled with increasing access to information and networks generally increases people's capabilities and aspirations to migrate, and.



# COVID-19 and Migrant Livelihoods

- **COVID-19 and response measures have had the severest impact on those already in vulnerable situations and migrant livelihoods in the informal sector**
  - Impact on Agricultural Labour Force and West African food systems.
  - Impact on Women's Livelihoods- Both internal and cross border trade, food sector, food value chain from production to distribution to nutrition in West Africa are dominated by women, Migrant girls/women headload porters (kayayei) in markets, Domestic workers
- **The Informal Sector Economy –**
  - Employs a majority of the work force in West Africa ( 80% in Ghana – GSS, 2016), and particularly low skill and low-income migrants
  - Heavily reliant on face-to-face exchanges, and earn a living on a day-to-day basis,
  - Limited ability to work from home and maintain an income.
  - Border closures and movement restrictions hampers the ability of informal sector workers to engage in seasonal, cross-border labour migration.
  - Mitigation measures largely exclusive of vulnerable migrants and migrant businesses.
  - Highlights the full range and dynamics of vulnerability of Migrants



# What are the likely Post COVID 19 Changes for Migration in West Africa?

- **Two Scenarios:**

- **“Life is all about survival”** - May not make any significantly change to the future migration decisions of West Africans. Migration is an integral part of life in the region and the aspirations to migrate in search of better economic opportunities, appear to outweigh the perceived risks of contracting the disease, a large number of people in the region will continue to make decisions to migrate both internally, intra-regionally and internationally. eg Old Fadama
- **Reduced Job opportunities in Urban destinations**, reduced demand for migrant labour may affect migration flows and make rural- urban migration undesirable:

- COVID 19- with reductions in job opportunities in urban areas may reduce rural urban migration flows, but may also provide opportunity for paying more serious attention to developing rural areas of origin and providing livelihood opportunities in the rural areas and generally providing a positive future for youth in rural areas so that migration becomes a choice rather than a necessity .

- **Mainstreaming migration into COVID-19 strategies-** to ensure an inclusive and integrated approach which “leaves no one behind” because our individual and collective wellbeing are precariously interconnected

- National responses to COVID-19 may not achieve maximum impact unless all populations are included, otherwise those who are most marginalised risk being left behind.



**Thank you**



UNIVERSITY OF GHANA