

# Examining (Water Stress Driven) Migration as Opportunity for Enhancing Food and Economic Security

Technical Session: **Water and Migration**

**WASAG** | The Global Framework on Water Scarcity in Agriculture

**WASAG WORKING GROUP**  
**WATER & MIGRATION**

**Lako Stephane - Water Youth Network, Cameroon**  
**Nidhi Nagabhatla - UNU CRIS, Belgium**  
**Osei Amponsah Charity - IWMI, Ghana**



**UNITED NATIONS**  
**UNU-CRIS**  
Institute on Comparative Regional Integration Studies

**IWMI**  
International Water Management Institute

## INTRODUCTION

Local, regional and global migration has shaped the history of all civilizations and lead to crucial expected and unexpected societal, environmental and economic changes. The migration pathways are driven by a mix of various political, sociological, economical or environmental factors, settings and conditions acting directly or indirectly. Amid all the drivers water scarcity is one of the key cause of 'internal and cross border migration' in various geographies and socioeconomic landscapes, including in Africa. The voluntary and forced movement of people brings changes in cultures, practices, technologies, societal organization, living environments and standards and often, negatively influence food security of the region, mostly in circumstances where rural-urban migration is rampant. While most studies examines these impact from a viewpoint of pressures (negative impact of migration) on host countries/hosting sites, it is also important to examine how these migration trends are presenting opportunities both for migrants and host communities.

## OBJECTIVE

We present learnings from 2 case studies in Africa to inform research community and decision makers on this undeflected dimension in the migration discourse, anticipating that this knowledge could support SDGs implementation (FAO, 2016) and position migration as a positive phenomenon, providing productivity gains (Lagakos, 2020).



Integrated urban design providing livelihood, shelter, food, clean air and healthy natural environment can be an approach for migration settlement

## MIGRATION AND OPPORTUNITIES

### Migration Context in Ghana

The Upper West Region of northern savanna zone of Ghana has been experiencing delayed rainfall and prolonged dry season for the past 10 years—decline in crops and livestock production is noted. Farmers there have limited resources and use low technology production systems often resulting in limited income. Further, due to low revenue, farm manager tend to limit labor recruitment for subsequent farming cycle.

**In this region the migration pattern show high rural-urban flow and features below stated aspects:**

- **>half of households (young men) migrated to forest zone** for labour in cash crop plantations in Tiabante, Juaboso in Western North Region.
- The **gender disaggregated trends** are noted in migration patterns where women and girls often migrate to urban centres for jobs in the informal sector

### Key changes (noted and anticipated) due to migration:

For **departure community**, it includes reduction of pressure on natural resources viz. land and water, reduction in workforce in rural landscape, reduction in cropped area, increase in land restoration and grazing area, experimentation of water stress tolerant crop varieties, more focus on irrigated farming, and likely 'buy in' for inclusive participation mechanisms for sustainable management of land and water resources in pureview of challenging conditions.

For **Host community**, aspect to consider include: increase in workforce, reduction of labour cost with more supply of human capital (migrants), increase in crop production (for migration to rural area), new settlements, dynamic livelihood businesses, increase in revenue from transportation businesses.

**Migrants can bring new and improved skills, techniques/technologies to the host community.**

### Migration context in Cameroon

In Western highlands of Cameroon, access to water and land resources is challenging with reduced land available per capita(13 892 km<sup>2</sup> for 2 million inhabitants in 2016) which doubled since. With additional pressure over resources, people are often compelled to migrate, youth at adult age systematically migrate to either other rural areas offering options and or to urban areas. In 2021 & 2022 rainfall delay and late monsoon (01 month) and early dry season, farmers dependent on commercial agriculture felt the heat of loan repayment.

### Migration pattern in the region

As a result of above mentioned factors **young men and women** move to nearby towns like Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, Obala to search alternative income sources. With their inherent skills in agriculture, this youth capital can be directed to develop gardens, expand farming in host areas, land development and urban food zones to contribute to food security.

### Key changes (noted and anticipated) due to migration:

**For 'Departure' communities:** reduction in pressure on natural resources including land and water, reduction in workforce, reduction in social dynamics, development of the migration culture at young age, dependence on remittances.

**For Host communities:** increase in workforce, more labour options, potential to expand food production system, diversification of economic activities, evolution of social relations between city dwellers in win-win strategies are put in place, more appreciation for rural/local cultures, mixed settlement schemes are other co-benefits that can be harvested if institutional and policy support is provided to support innovative water management practices and integrated systems, land restoration, food prices segregation (subsidies for rural migrants).

**For Migrants: diversification of income sources, new skills, coping agricultural practices, new market value chains.**



Effect of drought on tomato plant, water stress may need planning different land use and cropping systems

Related References : Nagabhatla, N. et al 2021. Water, conflicts and migration and the role of regional diplomacy: Lake Chad, Congo Basin, and the Mbororo pastoralist. Environmental Science & Policy, Volume 122, Pages 35-48.

David Lagakos, 2020. Urban-Rural Gaps in the Developing World: Does Internal Migration Offer Opportunities? Journal of Economic Perspectives—Volume 34, Number 3—Summer 2020—Pages 174–192  
<https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.34.3.174>

FAO, 2016. Migration, agriculture and rural development. Addressing the root causes of migration and harnessing its potential for development.  
<https://www.fao.org/3/i604e/i604e.pdf>

## CONCLUSIONS : 5 key points

1. Managed migration flows can create opportunities for host and departure communities as well as migrants and if opportunities are utilized well.
2. Managed migration opportunities can facilitate better access to resources, technology, knowledge, revenue and local economy as well as cross-learning.
3. Water stress driven migration can spark to new natural resource governance thinking, smart practices for efficient use of resources, knowledge transfer, new settlements, more income generation activities, harmonious social structures with benefit to all groups.
4. It is important to examine and analyse opportunities, context of migration and support managed migration at all levels national, regional, global
5. Global governance tools like the 'Global Compact for Migration' can be referenced and adapted to this context.

**2ND WASAG INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON WATER SCARCITY IN AGRICULTURE**

7-10 FEBRUARY 2023, HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT. PRAIA, CABO VERDE

**2º FÓRUM INTERNACIONAL WASAG SOBRE A ESCASSEZ DE ÁGUA NA AGRICULTURA**

7 A 10 DE FEVEREIRO DE 2023, ASSEMBLEIA NACIONAL, PRAIA, CABO VERDE