

The Development Foundation: Mobilizing and Governing Migration at the Translocal Level in Ghana

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This paper explores how migration is (attempted to be) mobilized and governed for local development in Ghana. Ghana has a long history of migration, consisting of a mix of internal, regional and international movements, including both highly skilled professionals and irregular migrants. No matter their destination, many migrants keep in touch with their relatives and hometowns. Migrants send regular or ad hoc remittances in cash or kind, they build houses, organize themselves in hometown or youth associations, return for shorter or longer periods, fund lavish funerals, and many other things. Because of these contributions migrants are seen as potential development agents by a range of different actors and institutions, from the government to local traditional authorities. Indeed, during the last decade, the Ghanaian government has explicitly reached out to international migrants in Western countries to engage them in national development, introducing a range of policy initiatives to court and encourage these groups. However, most Ghanaian migrants are involved at the family and local level, supporting their relatives and hometowns, rather than focusing on national development, indicating that it is important to examine migration policies in a (trans)local perspective as well.

The paper is based on seven months of fieldwork in Ghana in 2008 and 2010 among government officials, return migrants, hometown members, traditional authorities, and supplemented with interviews with migrants in Copenhagen. It presents a case study of how internal, regional, and transnational migration from a destitute Ghanaian village is governed and mobilized at the local level, with particular focus on a development foundation. The foundation is funded by the local authorities who have also introduced a range of techniques to engage hometown members to support it, including significant social control as well as ‘the caressing of egos’. Examining these techniques as well as how different actors have established, supported or contested this foundation, the paper explores the role of hometown affiliation, local power relations, and family obligations in migrant involvement, arguing that migrant contributions to development – and the attempts to govern it – are embedded in a moral economy of reciprocity and belonging.