



# Migration and development dynamics in Gbane, Ghana

Major development interventions have contributed to a prominent mining sector in Gbane. Yet a lack of job opportunities and severe land degradation are having an increasing impact on lives and livelihoods.

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Over half of young adults (65%) in Gbane consider it difficult to earn a living and feed a family.

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Internal migration, both to and from Gbane, is a major livelihood strategy for young adults. This, however, varies considerably between men and women.

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While international migration is a common aspiration, it is perceived as a distant option. Less than 1% of young adults have lived abroad for at least one year.



Marie Godin  
Leander Kandilige  
Hannah Murray



Photo: Marie Godin for MIGNEX.

Gbane is a farming and mining community in the Northern Talensi-Nabdam district of Ghana, with an estimated population of around 2,700 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The climate is tropical, with two distinct seasons that have long influenced the community's livelihood activities, in particular farming.

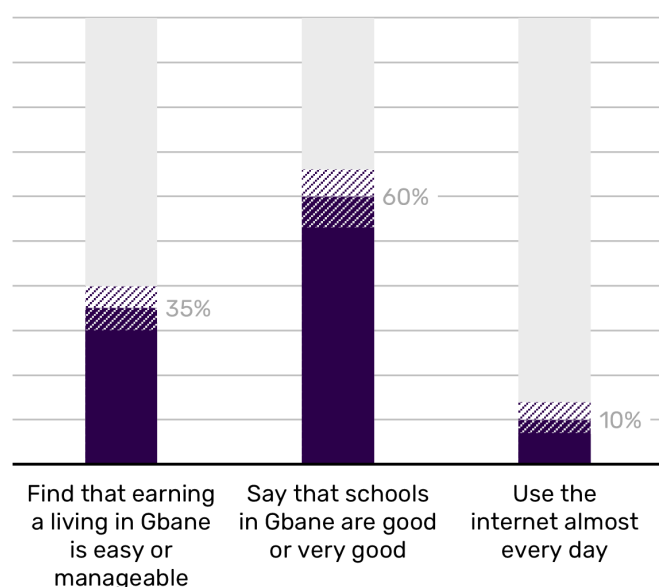
Since the discovery of gold in 1995, agricultural production in Gbane has declined and mining is now the major source of livelihood support. Significant environmental degradation during this time, including frequent drought, underground blasting and

water pollution, are also having an increasing impact on agricultural production.

The largest mining company in the district, Earl International Group Ghana Gold Limited (formerly Shaanxi Mining Co. Limited), has major government-backed plans to expand in the region. However, the formal mining industry offers little support for local livelihoods. Among young adults in Gbane who participated in this MIGNEX research, few (9%) have steady jobs that pay a salary and close to half are either unemployed or self-employed (21% and 18%, respectively).

Young adults are often engaged in freelance surface mining. Most work in small-scale mining characterised by a high exposure to toxins and risk of mine accidents and death; widely referred to as *galamsey* ('gather them and sell').

This case study brief is based on fieldwork and survey data. The MIGNEX team also conducted research in Golf City and New Takoradi and carried out a review of migration-relevant policies in Ghana.<sup>2</sup>



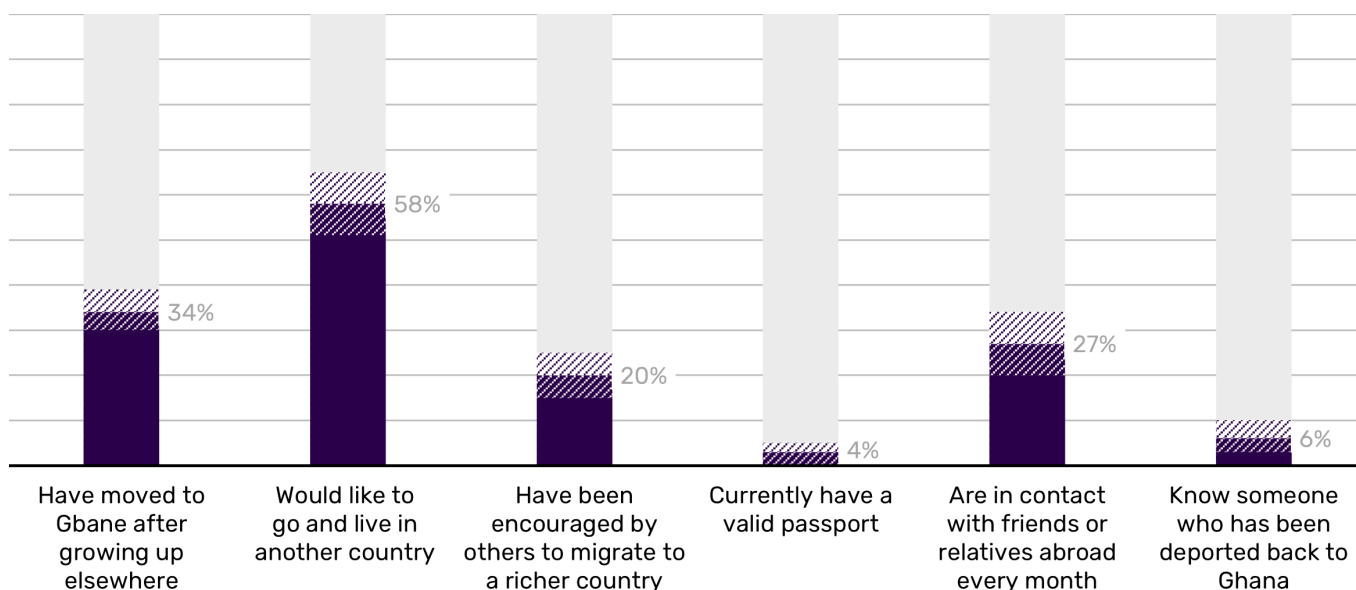
**Figure 1. Indicators of development**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

### Migration from Gbane

International migration is a rare phenomenon in Gbane. Less than 1% of surveyed young adults have lived abroad for at least one year.

Despite over half (58%) of young adults preferring to leave Ghana in the next five years, it is generally not perceived as a feasible



**Figure 2. Indicators of migration dynamics**

Source: MIGNEX survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

option. This is in part due to perceptions of international mobility as dangerous, expensive, and unrealistic. While only 5% of young adults reported personally knowing someone who has been injured or detained en route to another country, these incidents are widely known within the community.

A lack of social networks abroad also makes it more difficult to facilitate migration. Only 27% of surveyed young adults have family or friends living abroad, predominantly in the United States (18%), the United Kingdom (12%) and the United Arab Emirates (6%).

The presence of local economic opportunities is also a factor in migration decision-making. Workers at mining sites are perceived to acquire assets and provide for their families. As such, they prefer to make a living locally without the risks and costs of international migration.

### Migration aspirations

Many survey respondents are optimistic for the future of Gbane, citing recent development projects by the mining sector. This includes improved access to financial resources and higher quality housing units. The provision of potable water sources and access to healthcare and schools by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were also noted.

However, perspectives on the mining sector and its impact on Gbane vary. Many young men spoke of the future as one of prosperity; hoping to find gold. Women tended to be more critical, expressing concern for the safety and sustainability of mining as the major source of development for the community.

Despite this variance, migration aspirations are prevalent. Most men (85%) and women (87%) reported that they would migrate to a richer country if given the chance.

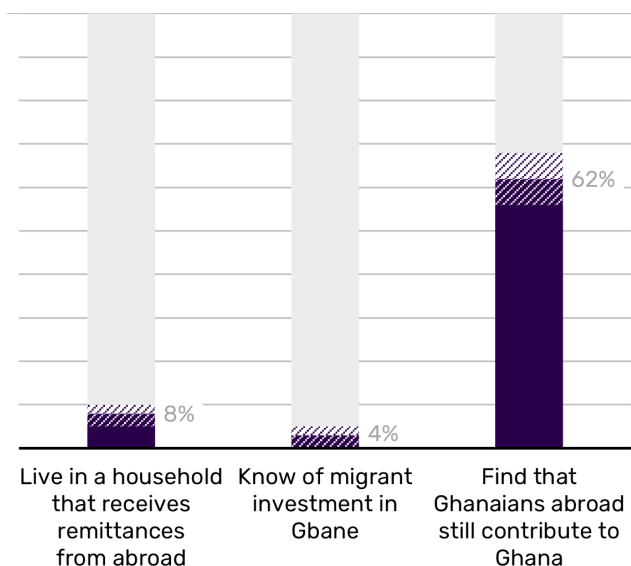
### Return migration

Travelling within Ghana for a limited period with a specific goal is common in Gbane. As such, return migration can be understood as part of a ‘travelling culture’ rather than a ‘migration culture’.

Prior to the discovery of gold in the area, Gbane residents often embarked on seasonal domestic out-migration during the dry season, predominantly to the Kumasi, Accra and Brong-Ahafo regions in southern Ghana.

*There’s always a reason a person will choose to migrate, largely it is about bitter experiences and poverty. When they migrate, they can work, accumulate capital, and improve their life.*

Focus group participant



**Figure 3. Migration–development interactions**

Source: MIGNEX Survey. Hatched area: confidence interval.

Now, Gbane’s ‘mining season’ supports livelihoods while agricultural production ceases. This has led to increased return migration as many have returned from other mining communities for improved prospects at home. Return migration is reportedly less common among women, who have fewer opportunities in the sector.

Most surveyed young adults (83%) know of someone from Gbane who has migrated internally in the past five years, while 63% have seriously considered migrating internally within Ghana in the past year.

### In-migration

Growth in the mining industry has led to increased internal and international migration. One third (34%) of young adults surveyed were internal migrants. Recently, young adults have been arriving from rural communities and cities in the north (Sandema, Navrongo, Bongo and Bolgatanga) for mining

work. This trend may also be informed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Free Movement Protocol.

International migrants come from West African countries, mostly Mali, Niger, Togo, Nigeria and Burkina Faso. Others come from China and Australia, yet they have little interaction with the local community other than for negotiations on mining concessions.

### Links between migration and development

Very few young adults (3%) know of migrant investments in Gbane while nearly half (46%) know of foreign investment. In 2013, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Earl Group Ltd and the Gbane community for lease of the land and a series of development projects. However, not all were funded as planned, leading to local tensions.

While there has been some improvement in educational infrastructure, more children are dropping out of school to take up gold mining as the sector develops. Crucially, despite significant development interventions and investment, a lack of formal employment opportunities for young adults impacts lives, livelihoods, and mobility in Gbane.

### Notes

1. Based on data from University for Development Studies, 2019.
2. Fieldwork consisting of key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations was carried out by Marie Godin and Leander Kandilige in March 2020, assisted by Theophilus Kwabena Abutima and Maurice Korah. A face-to-face survey of 500 randomly selected residents was conducted by Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana.

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MIGNEX – Aligning Migration Management and the Migration–Development Nexus – is a five-year research project (2018–2023) with the core ambition of creating new knowledge on migration, development and policy. It is carried out by a consortium of nine partners: The Peace Research Institute Oslo (coordinator), Danube University Krems, the University of Ghana, Koç University, Lahore University of Management Sciences, Maastricht University, ODI, the University of Oxford and Samuel Hall.

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