

Internal migration and multidimensional wellbeing: a case study of North-South migration in Ghana

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Abstract

Migration is widely regarded as a principal form of activity available to many of the world's poor to improve their household's standard of living. This paper investigates whether and in what ways internal migrants benefit from moving within Ghana's North-South migration context. This research uses an innovative multidimensional wellbeing framework to assess the effects of migration on migrants' wellbeing based on six domains: living standards, health, education, community vitality, environmental resilience, and governance. The wellbeing survey of 251 northern Ghanaian migrants working in the informal economic sector within the Sunyani municipality discovered that although most migrants reported improved living standards, a majority could not attain overall wellbeing due to low health and education wellbeing scores. Exploring the relationship between income and wellbeing across domains, the study found a weak positive association, and the complex interplay of factors beyond income was evident. This study challenges the conventional perspective that equates income with the attainment of wellbeing and argues that a multidimensional wellbeing framework permits a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of migration. It highlights the need for the government to actively monitor and address the wellbeing of internal migrants within the Ghanaian context.

Keywords: Bono region; internal migrants; northern Ghana; quality of life; wellbeing

1. Introduction

There is a general consensus that people migrate for many reasons, such as to enhance their quality of life and human development opportunities (de Haas 2010). Key factors that connect migration and human development include health, education, and remittances. However, much of the literature on the migration-development nexus focuses on the economic impacts of migration. At the individual and household levels, the decision to migrate is often explained by cost-benefit analysis, usually measured by monetary income (Nowok et al. 2013). In comparison, other aspects of wellbeing, as subjectively and objectively assessed by the individual migrant, have received much less attention. This study, however, aims to fill this gap by examining how migration affects the overall wellbeing of internal migrants in the informal economic sector in the Ghanaian context. By focusing on a specific group of migrants and using a comprehensive wellbeing framework, this research

provides a unique and valuable contribution to the existing literature on migration and wellbeing.

In sub-Saharan Africa, people migrating from rural to urban areas usually find work in the informal sector due to the limited opportunities in the formal sector (Awumbila 2015). In Ghana's towns and cities, the informal sector presents vital prospects for migrant and non-migrant workers to secure a livelihood and hope for a better tomorrow (Amoah and Owusu-Sekyere 2023). However, the industry also poses significant risks to individuals due to insufficient regulations, resulting in exploitation, abuse, insecurity, low wages, accidents, and health hazards (Achana and Tanle 2020). These factors have cumulative impacts on the quality of life of the migrants engaged in the sector. In Ghana, the economic and, to a lesser extent, the social implications of migration are well documented (Adaawen and Owusu 2013; Teye *et al.* 2019; Apatinga, Asiedu, and Obeng 2022). These studies show a close association between internal migration and socio-economic development, supporting the case for the significant role of migration in reducing poverty and inequality (Adams and Cuenquecha 2013; Agyei 2021). However, existing studies focus mainly on remittances and the impacts of migration in migrant-sending areas.

Studies of Ghana's social, economic, and demographic determinants of life satisfaction rarely focus on internal migrants (Addai, Opoku-Agyeman, and Amanfu 2014). Although recent migration research recognizes the significance of examining the wellbeing of migrants (Kuschminder, Andersson, and Seigel 2018; Atiglo *et al.* 2020), only a few studies focus on the migrants in destination areas and how they perceive and are satisfied with the quality of their lives (Adjei, Serbeh, and Adjei 2017; Turolla and Hoffmann 2023). A handful of studies in Ghana have examined migrants' experiences in the destination areas, but none have looked at migrants' overall wellbeing. When these studies have addressed migrants' wellbeing, the focus has been on one or two domains of their lives. For instance, Adamtey, Yajalin, and Oduro (2015) explored the socio-economic wellbeing of migrants in a suburb of Accra, Ghana's capital city, focusing only on income and education, while Kuyini *et al.* (2020) assessed health wellbeing among female migrant head porters in Accra. While the existing research has begun to look beyond economic impacts to explore outcomes of internal migration in Ghana, it works with narrow socio-economic definitions.

This article introduces a novel approach, arguing that a multidimensional approach is necessary to assess migrant wellbeing, which considers a broader range of factors. It asks the following questions: *How does internal migration to urban areas in Ghana impact the overall wellbeing of migrants, and what are the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing wellbeing attainment in this context?* Based on data collected from young northern migrants in Sunyani, this study assesses their overall wellbeing in six domains: Living Standards, Health, Education, Community Vitality, Environmental Resilience, and Governance. It also builds on the existing wellbeing literature in Ghana by examining the relationship between socio-economic and demographic characteristics of migrants and wellbeing attainment in the Sunyani municipality of Bono region.

This article is structured into five sections. The next section offers an overview of the multidimensional wellbeing approach to migration, highlighting how wellbeing is measured holistically. Section 3 outlines the research design, including data collection and analysis methods. Section 4 presents the results and discusses the key findings. Finally, Section 5 concludes the article.

2. A Multidimensional wellbeing approach to internal migration

Wellbeing is a multidimensional concept encompassing objectively measurable factors like standard of living, level of education and health, and subjective experiences such as a sense of satisfaction with life or being part of a community. This study adopts a comprehensive multidimensional approach to poverty and wellbeing, originating from the works of

Amartya Sen (1999), who persuasively argued that poverty goes well beyond monetary lack and encompasses deprivation in other areas of life, such as health and education. These areas of life are interrelated, and wellbeing is best conceptualized as ‘the tentative expansion of possibility and capability, in a meshwork of relations’ (Smith and Reid 2018: 822). Sen’s (1999) concept of wellbeing and public policy applications, such as the UNDP’s Human Development and Multidimensional Poverty indices and the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index (Ura, Alkire, and Zangmo 2012), have led to a range of studies that use the Living Standard, Health, and Education domains to measure wellbeing (Nussbaum and Sen 1993; Baulch and Masset 2003). Once the limitations of monetary measures of human progress had been made visible through Sen’s pathbreaking work on the Human Development Index, researchers developed the framework by adding other domains, such as Community Vitality, Governance, and Environmental Resilience, to enable a comprehensive examination of an individual’s wellbeing (Kuschminder, Andersson, and Seigel 2018; Saikia et al. 2021). Alkire and Kovesdi (2020: 6) note that there is ‘no consensus on what kinds of measures will be most intuitive, rigorous and policy salient’, but this is a strength of the multidimensional wellbeing approach. It needs to be flexible and adaptable to capture the relationships in specific contexts and places between the individual and collective, people and the state, and people and the environment, which shape efforts to improve wellbeing (Mahali et al. 2018).

Although wellbeing appears to be a concrete and fixed term, it is important to remember that it involves an evaluation based on judgements that reflect the researchers’ standpoints, purposes, theoretical views, and values (Gasper 2010). Humanistic values broadly inform investigations into wellbeing and quality of life about ‘what makes lives go better’, the requirements of a decent life, and how positive freedoms can achieve reasoned values (Gasper 2010: 354). Wellbeing measures can, therefore, focus on subjective states or a person’s objective conditions and circumstances, and some frameworks incorporate both types of measures. However, for policy and decision-making about providing opportunities and access to public goods, the fundamental ability to access something important, like employment, health, or information, is often a more relevant measure than individual choices or values. This consideration also applies to the wellbeing framework used in this paper, which we explain further below.

In migration, multidimensional approaches to poverty and wellbeing have started to be employed to improve our understanding of migration outcomes for migrants and their families beyond monetary measures. As with other wellbeing research, early work has focused on the Global North (McKenzie and Rapoport 2011; Waidler et al. 2018). In Africa, however, few studies have examined the relationship between migration and wellbeing from a multidimensional perspective (Kuschminder, Andersson, and Seigel 2018). These studies show that migration and wellbeing intersect in several ways. One is that people usually opt to move to places with promises for improving wellbeing. Objective wellbeing indicators, such as higher income and access to quality education, are essential motivators for people to move. For instance, in Ghana, individuals and households use migration to overcome household poverty through increased earning capacity and remittances (Teye et al. 2019; Agyei 2021). However, economic benefits alone are not sufficient to capture the individual wellbeing outcomes of migration. Subjective factors like personal aspirations and the capabilities to achieve them in the new environment are also crucial for a migrant’s overall quality of life (de Haas 2021; Papadopoulos and Fratsea 2021). A multidimensional approach that considers both objective and subjective factors is needed to understand the full impact of migration on wellbeing (Gasper 2010; Wright 2012). A multidimensional approach to wellbeing provides a nuanced grasp of how migration affects different domains of wellbeing, and how the impacts may differ depending on the migrant’s demographic positioning and subjective perspective. These domains complement each other in capturing how balanced wellbeing achievements are across them.

The multidimensional wellbeing framework used in this study has been developed by Saikia, Dasvarma, and Chalmers (2018) based on the works of scholars at the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (Alkire and Foster 2011; Alkire 2013). The philosophical foundation for this methodology is Amartya Sen's (1999) conceptualization of wellbeing as the freedoms and capabilities to make choices and take practical actions in specific aspects of life such as education, health, living standards, civic participation, and consumption (Saikia *et al.* 2021). It is a 'bespoke framework' that can be adapted and modified to fit different contexts and lines of questioning at various levels (Saikia *et al.* 2021: 2). Six domains relevant to the situation of internal migration in Ghana are used in this study to measure multidimensional wellbeing, namely: Living Standards, Health, Education and Skills Training, Community Vitality, Environmental/Ecological Resilience, and Governance (Fig. 1). We developed these domains and their corresponding sets of indicators (Fig. 1) through a review of relevant migration and social policy documents, including the Ghana National Migration Policy (NMP) and the National Development Plan. For instance, the NMP recognizes the importance of effective migration governance and the active participation of migrants in governance as a tool to 'promote the interest, rights, security, and welfare of migrants....' and for the 'socio-economic development in Ghana' (Ministry of the Interior 2016: 14).

The present study argues that migration outcomes should not only be evaluated based on economic factors but also on social criteria such as networks, inclusion, education, and health, as they all determine the wellbeing of migrants. Local governance, civic

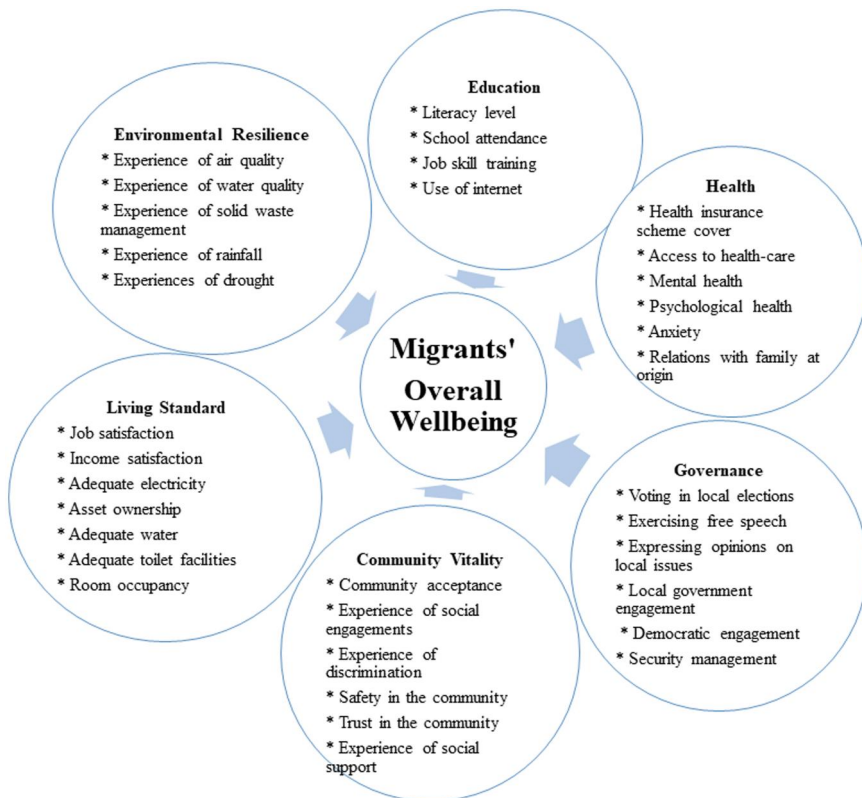
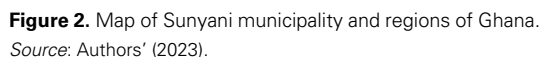


Figure 1. Conceptual scheme of multidimensional wellbeing—domains and indicators.

Source: Authors' illustration (2023).

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This research was conducted in the Sunyani Municipality of the Bono region of Ghana, a long-standing destination for migrants from northern Ghana (van der Geest 2011) (Fig. 2). Due to its favourable environment and vegetation, the Bono region is one of Ghana's important food production areas and attracts migrants working in the agricultural sector (van der Geest et al. 2016). In recent times, Sunyani has become the central hub for migrants from northern Ghana who are moving to urban centres in the region. Sunyani is the administrative capital, the region's political, cultural, and economic centre, and the primary destination for those seeking better opportunities. According to the authors' analysis of the 2021 Ghana census, seventy-five per cent of northern Ghanaian migrants who move to urban centres in the region settle in Sunyani. Most of these migrants find work in the city's bustling informal sector. The 2021 census data shows that the informal sector is the primary employment sector in the Municipality, employing over seventy-nine per cent of the labour force. The industry includes occupations such as motor vehicle repairs, orange



sellers, shoemakers, cassava sellers, second-hand clothes dealers, domestic workers, street vendors and barrow pushers.

We designed a survey using Qualtrics software to understand the wellbeing of Northern migrants better. The 2021 Ghana census questionnaire (Ghana Statistical Service 2021: PHC-1A) and national surveys, such as the Ghana Living Standard Survey (2017) (Ghana Statistical Service 2018: 5.1–5.2) and the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (2021) (Ghana Statistical Service 2023b: 4–5), and previous studies (Alkire 2013; Kuschminder, Andersson, and Seigel 2018), were essential sources of reference in the survey design. Survey questions were geared towards indicators and measures to suit the case of internal migrants in the informal economic sector in Ghana (Supplementary Appendix S1). The survey consisted of objective and subjective indicators targeting internal migrants in Sunyani. The survey contained six domains with thirty-five indicators. Respondents had to select their answer from one of five options that best describes their experience. These were: (1) ‘Not at all’, (2) ‘a little’, (3) ‘moderately’, (4) ‘very much’, and (5) ‘extremely’.

Alkire and Foster (2011) methodology for the multidimensional poverty index has been utilized to measure overall wellbeing. In measuring multidimensional poverty, Alkire and Foster code each variable/indicator as either ‘dissatisfied’ (‘0’) or ‘satisfied’ (‘1’) and use two cut-off points: one across variables in each domain to determine the proportion of (dissatisfied/satisfied) variables in that domain, and a second cut-off that is applied to calculate overall wellbeing across the six domains (Saikia *et al.* 2021; Equation 1). Following the Alkire-Foster method, we used a two-thirds rule to calculate these cut-offs. For instance, there are six variables/indicators in the Health domain, meaning the maximum score to attain wellbeing is 6. Applying the two-thirds rule, a migrant had to score at least 4 points to achieve sufficiency of wellbeing in the Health domain. We added all the scores in each domain for the overall wellbeing attainment, and the two-thirds rule was applied again to determine those ‘able to attain wellbeing’ and those ‘not able to attain wellbeing’ (Equation 2).

$$(\text{domain wellbeing}) : S_d = \sum (X_{dv}), \text{ for } v = 1 \text{ to } V \quad (1)$$

$$(\text{overall wellbeing}) : \sum (S_d), \text{ for } d = 1 \text{ to } V \quad (2)$$

where, S_d = Domain score, D = Number of Wellbeing Domains (e.g., Living Standards, Health), d = Index for each Wellbeing Domain ($d = 1, 2, \dots, D$), V = Number of Variables/Indicators within each Domain (e.g., $V = 6$ for Health), v = Index for each Variable within a Domain ($v = 1, 2, \dots, V$), X_{dv} = Score for variable ‘ v ’ in domain ‘ d ’ (0 = Dissatisfied, 1 = Satisfied).

We conducted a cross-tabulation analysis to understand the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of respondents and overall wellbeing attainment. The variables of interest were overall wellbeing attainment (dependent variable) and gender, age, duration of stay, marital status, and locality of residence (independent variables). A percentage distribution analysis was conducted on the selected variables to support the discussion. We also performed a correlation analysis to analyse the relationship between income and the attainment of wellbeing across various domains.

The survey consisted of 251 participants who had migrated from the five regions of northern Ghana (Upper East, Upper West, Savannah, North East and Northern regions). We targeted individuals between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five years. Across Africa, most rural-urban migrants are young people who aim to get better opportunities to improve their livelihood by moving (Amare *et al.* 2021). The National Youth Policy of Ghana defines youth as individuals aged fifteen to thirty-five (Ministry of Youth and Sports 2022: 13), while the Ghanaian Constitution considers individuals under eighteen years as children (Addey and Chobbah 2022: 6). For this study, we focused on participants aged eighteen to thirty-five due to their legal capacity to enforce rights, including to move and accept

the responsibilities of their actions. Additionally, this age group represents the most mobile demographic in Ghana, driven by the pursuit of better livelihood opportunities after completing high school (Ghana Statistical Service 2014; Turolla and Hoffmann 2023).

To be eligible for the study, a migrant must have resided in the Sunyani municipality for no more than ten years, a timeframe that allows them to recall any significant changes, or lack thereof, in their wellbeing since migrating. Since the aim of our study is not to compare individual wellbeing before and after migration, participants were able to assess their wellbeing even with a shorter stay at the destination. This approach was used to explore patterns in wellbeing attainment relative to the length of stay.

According to 10 per cent of data from the 2021 population and housing census, about 11,890 migrants from northern Ghana are residing in the Sunyani municipality. Applying the inclusion criteria, we arrived at a sample frame of 521 northern migrants. Statistically, this gives a sample size of 222 at a 95 per cent confidence level and a 5 per cent margin of error. However, given the population's willingness to participate in the study, the final sample stood at 251. Survey respondents were selected through a Respondent Driven Sampling (RDS) technique, which has been used in other studies of migrant populations (Johnston and Malekinejad 2014; Lattof 2017). The RDS is a snowball technique that uses social networks to identify, recruit, and build trust among research participants. It is based on the premise that some groups are more effectively approached through peers than researchers (Salganik and Heckathorn 2004).

Most (48.6 per cent) of the respondents are from the Northern region, followed by the Upper West (27.5 per cent), Upper East (18.7 per cent), Savannah (3.2 per cent), and North East (2.0 per cent) regions. There are more male than female respondents (57 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively), and the majority (67 per cent) of the respondents are young adults (18–25 years) with a mean age of twenty-four years at a standard deviation of 5.378. About 32 per cent never attended school, while 21.5 per cent graduated senior high school, and 1.6 per cent were pursuing tertiary education. Most (89 per cent) of the responses were collected from migrants residing in urban areas, with the remainder coming from the rural parts of Sunyani (Table 1).

The survey was conducted by coordinating schedules and locations convenient for the participants, most of whom were available at their workplaces. Many participants had jobs that kept them mobile throughout the day. Most respondents had never received formal education and were illiterate, so the survey questions were read aloud to them in the local language, Twi. Furthermore, a translator was available to assist those who did not comprehend Twi or English.

4. Findings

The section presents and discusses the survey findings focusing on the overall wellbeing attainment and wellbeing scores across domains. The analysis also explores the relationship between wellbeing and 'migrants' socio-demographic characteristics, emphasising the influence of income on 'migrants' wellbeing status. The goal is to provide insights for policy-makers to formulate effective strategies for enhancing services and support for the wellbeing of migrants.

4.1 Wellbeing of northern Ghanaian migrants in the informal sector in Sunyani municipality

The present study examines the wellbeing of northern Ghanaian migrants in the informal economic sector in Sunyani. The results indicate that 53 per cent of the respondents could not attain overall wellbeing because they failed to achieve sufficient wellbeing scores in at least four domains (Table 2). The Health and Education domains were the most elusive, with over two-thirds of the respondents unable to attain wellbeing in the Health domain.

Table 1. Characteristics of Respondents.

Variable	N = 251	Percentage
Gender		
Male	144	57.4
Female	107	42.6
Age		
18–20	84	33.5
21–25	84	33.5
26–30	42	16.7
31–35	41	16.3
Marital status		
Married	89	35.5
Unmarried	162	64.5
Duration of stay (years)		
<1	30	12.0
1–5	143	57.0
6–10	78	31.1
Locality of residence		
Urban	223	88.8
Rural	28	11.2
Religious affiliation		
Christian	102	40.6
Muslim	148	59.0
Traditional	1	0.4
Region of origin		
Northern	122	48.6
North East	5	2.0
Savannah	8	3.2
Upper East	47	18.7
Upper West	69	27.5
Education		
Never attended	79	31.5
Primary education	64	25.5
Junior high school	50	19.9
Senior high school	54	21.5
Tertiary	4	1.6

Source: Computed by the authors in SPSS from field survey (2023).

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Wellbeing Status.

Wellbeing domain	All respondents	
	Able to attain	Not able to attain
Overall wellbeing	46.6	53.4
Living Standards	84.5	15.5
Health	25.1	74.9
Education and Skill Training	34.3	65.7
Community Vitality	55.4	44.6
Environment Resilience	86.1	13.9
Governance	53.4	46.6
Total no. of respondents	251	

Source: Computed by the authors in SPSS from field survey (2023).

Although over two-thirds of respondents were covered by the national health insurance scheme, which allows them to access premium hospitals in the Sunyani Municipality, only 13 per cent reported that they routinely used the services of hospitals and health centres when they fell ill. One explanation is offered by Afeadie (2022), who found that discrimination and stigmatization due to linguistic problems prevent most rural-urban migrants in Ghana from seeking professional healthcare. As respondents were young and univocally reported good physical health, the Health domain questions probed mental and emotional health. About half of the respondents reported anxiety related to homesickness (51 per cent), pressure from family in the origin areas (70 per cent), and lack of financial support from friends (54 per cent), while 60 per cent reported a lack of self-confidence in making significant life improvement changes.

Two-thirds of the respondents failed to achieve the wellbeing threshold in the Education domain (Table 2). About 76 per cent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with their literacy, education, and skill levels, while only 24 per cent were content with their level of educational attainment. The low literacy level (45 per cent) contributes to this outcome, with most migrants having incomplete primary schooling. Moreover, 68 per cent had no skills training, and 73 per cent did not know how to use the Internet, contributing to the low levels of education wellbeing. These findings confirm census data stating that most of the internal migrants in the informal sector in Ghana either did not go to school or had not completed primary school or continued education after finishing high school (Ghana Statistical Service 2014, 2023a). As Sen (1999) has convincingly argued, education has intrinsic and instrumental value in promoting human capabilities and wellbeing, which is why it is included in important global indicators such as the Human Development Index and Multidimensional Poverty measures.

While many migrants struggle to attain overall wellbeing, some have achieved satisfactory life satisfaction in some of the six domains. Over 80 per cent of the respondents reported achieving wellbeing in the Living Standards and Environmental resilience domains (Table 2). Notably, the Living Standards domain reveals that many respondents who migrated from rural areas could attain sufficient levels of wellbeing by working and earning money for themselves. The study finds that a majority (61 per cent) of migrants earned above the monthly minimum income of GH¢312.48 (A\$40.74), enabling them to afford basic necessities like clothing, electricity, mobile phones, and televisions for themselves and their families. This income is based on Ghana's 2023 daily minimum wage of GH¢14.88 (A\$1.94), calculated over twenty-one working days. Most of the respondents were satisfied with their current living arrangements in terms of access to electricity (75 per cent), access to potable water (85 per cent), and acquisition of household assets (94 per cent), but 59 per cent and 77 per cent, respectively, were dissatisfied with accommodation and household sanitation facilities. In the urban areas of Ghana, most migrants in the informal sector reportedly live in congested shanty and temporary structures due to the high cost of accommodation (Afeadie 2022).

According to this study, over 80 per cent of participants expressed contentment with the natural and ecological setting of the Bono region (Table 2). When asked to rate the environmental settings in which they live and work, more than two-thirds of the migrants declared themselves as satisfied with the quality of air (78 per cent), water (88 per cent) and solid waste management (71 per cent). This finding aligns with the long-standing claim that Sunyani is among the cleanest cities in Ghana due to improved waste management practices by the local government (Anane 2013). The environment is crucial in promoting human wellbeing by providing essential services. A diverse and robust environment fosters a sense of community, promotes social bonding, and contributes to health and welfare (Marsh et al. 2023). Just over 80 per cent of the respondents indicated that the natural environment in the Bono region effectively supported their livelihood activities. The region, situated in the Forest Savannah agroecological zone, boasts a resilient natural environment capable of

withstanding harsh weather conditions. The environment supports the cultivation of various food and cash crops, including plantains, cocoa, cashews, yams, and cassava, which attracts migrant farmers.

Furthermore, over half (55 per cent) of the respondents achieved wellbeing in the Community Vitality domain (Table 2). Community vitality is the quality and inclusiveness of relationships that foster collective and individual wellbeing (Thümmler and Scheuerle 2013). Our wellbeing model comprises indicators of personal security and acceptance in the current location and local and trans-local social ties. The survey analysis shows that 85 per cent of the respondents were happy with the level of community acceptance, and 61 and 55 per cent expressed satisfaction with the levels of social engagement and communal safety, respectively. Yet, 51 and 53 per cent of migrants were not satisfied with support from friends and the level of trust of the broader neighbourhood, respectively. Interpersonal links and connections play a significant role in internal migration, as migrants often rely on interactions with families, friends, and the broader community for migration information. While migrants rely on their social networks to organize their move, these social connections may become less active in the destination place when they must navigate the challenges of settling in a new place, finding work, and caring for their families. The lack of strong social support for migrants in destination places appeared to affect their lives. Here, governance structures could play a role; however, a lack of engagement by the local government in promoting social inclusion and support networks may leave migrants without support when they move.

In most cases, migrants depend solely on their personal support networks, and when these networks are not well-developed or fail to function in times of need, they are left to fend for themselves. According to a study on the aspirations of rural-urban young migrants in Ghana, many migrants expressed frustration with the lack of social networks, support, and community connections upon moving (Yeboah 2021). The absence of such networks can hinder migrants' abilities to secure desirable job opportunities and impact their perception of community vitality.

In Ghana, people are free to move and settle in any region, but migrants may still struggle to attain governance wellbeing. Governance wellbeing relates to how individuals engage with government through such activities as participating in local government elections, having a political voice, and experiencing government efficacy. Being involved in the public and political life of one's community can support personal autonomy, empowerment, and higher levels of trust in public policies and confidence that they will assist citizens in times of need and enhance their wellbeing (Mahali *et al.* 2018). Analysis of the Governance domain indicates that two-thirds of the migrants reported they exercise their freedom of speech, association, and worship without fear or intimidation and are happy with the ability to exercise such freedom. Yet, the majority do not engage in local government elections (73 per cent) and local politics (76 per cent). The lack of civic participation may hinder their ability to achieve higher levels of wellbeing, as civic engagement is known to enhance the welfare and integration experiences of migrants. For example, in Canada, increased levels of civic engagement are associated with improved life satisfaction, mental health, and socio-economic development (Li 2020). Therefore, it is essential to encourage civic participation among migrants in Ghana, as it may support their wellbeing and integration.

4.2 Socio-demographic variables and ability to attain wellbeing

Socio-demographic factors are vital to understanding individuals and their level of wellbeing. The study analysed selected variables through cross-tabulation to determine their association with the ability to achieve sufficient wellbeing (Table 3). The results reveal a significant disparity of 16.5 per cent points between the overall wellbeing attainment of female and male respondents. Female migrants outperformed their male counterparts in four of the six wellbeing domains, as shown in Table 3. Other studies have found that female

Table 3. Able to Attain Wellbeing by Domains and Demographic Characteristics.

Wellbeing domain	Gender		Age (years)					Duration of stay (years)			Marital status		Locality of residence	
	Male	Female	18–20	21–25	26–30	31–35	<1	1–5	6–10		Married	Unmarried	Urban	Rural
Overall wellbeing	39.6	56.1	25	57.1	46.6	68.3	26.7	40.6	65.4		66.3	35.8	45.7	53.6
Living Standards	81.9	87.9	82.1	89.3	78.6	85.4	83.3	84.6	84.6		97.6	82.7	86.1	71.4
Health	18.8	33.6	15.5	29.8	23.8	36.6	23.3	16.8	41		40.4	16.7	23.8	35.7
Education	36.8	30.8	33.3	42.9	35.7	17.1	36.7	33.6	34.6		29.2	37	34.5	32.1
Community Vitality	42.4	72.9	39.3	56	54.8	87.8	23.3	52.4	73.1		73	45.7	53.4	71.4
Ecological	82.6	90.7	83.3	86.9	90.5	85.4	96.7	82.5	88.5		92.1	82.7	86.5	82.1
Governance	53.5	53.3	25	54.8	83.3	78	50	45.5	69.2		71.9	43.2	50.7	75

Source: Computed by the authors in SPSS from field survey (2023).

migrants face many challenges, including health issues, physical abuse, marginalization, economic hardship, and cultural and religious discrimination in origin areas and express these experiences with hurt after moving (Lattof, Coast, and Leone 2018; Kuyini *et al.* 2020; Rizwan, Malagón, and Richter 2022). Higher levels of wellbeing in Sunyani demonstrate female migrants' remarkable resilience, adaptability, and determination.

The study reveals a clear link between age and overall wellbeing attainment. Migrants between thirty-one and thirty-five years old showed the highest success rate, with a wellbeing attainment rate of 68 per cent. This is a significant jump compared to the youngest migrant group (18–20 years old), where only 25 per cent achieved overall wellbeing. However, the individual domains show another side of the story (Table 3). For instance, only 17 per cent of respondents aged thirty-one to thirty-five could attain high levels of education wellbeing. The higher levels of wellbeing among respondents over thirty years of age in domains such as community vitality and governance could be related to their extended stay in Sunyani, which enabled them to settle and establish social networks.

A more extended stay of a migrant in the Sunyani municipality significantly enhances their ability to attain overall wellbeing. Most (65 per cent) of the migrants who have been in the Municipality for more than six years could achieve adequate overall wellbeing than those with fewer years of stay (Table 3). This finding holds across all six domains except Education, where migrants with less than a year stay in the Municipality were marginally more able to attain adequate levels of wellbeing (Table 3). This could be explained by the finding that young migrants between eighteen and twenty-five years have higher educational attainment than those in their thirties. Generally, these findings were expected given that migrants need time to adjust to their new environment, learn a new language, and assimilate into the overall culture of the host community amidst grief and longing for their families left behind. Research has shown that globally, migrants with shorter lengths of stay are less able to learn or understand the host community's language and less able to access available services tied to their wellbeing than their counterparts with longer lengths of stay (Lebrun 2012).

Marital status also impacts wellbeing attainment, with more than 66 per cent of married migrants achieving higher overall wellbeing than 36 per cent of their unmarried counterparts (Table 3). The findings support research by Ansah *et al.* (2022) in Ghana and by Botha and Booysen (2013) in South Africa, who reported that married people have higher levels of life satisfaction than unmarried/divorced people while contradicting Addai, Opoku-Agyeman, and Amanfu (2015) finding that marriage is negatively associated with happiness and life satisfaction.

Across all the domains except Education, a higher percentage of married migrants reported sufficient wellbeing attainment. The study observes that after length of stay in the municipality (41 per cent), marriage is the second most strongly associated demographic factor with achieving sufficient wellbeing in the Health domain (40 per cent). This observation is consistent with the findings of other studies showing higher mental and psychological wellbeing of married migrants compared to those who are unmarried (Liu and Umberson 2008). Studies have revealed that through marriage, couples share financial resources and household work to reduce stress, ultimately affecting their economic status and wellbeing (Musick and Bumpass 2012; Tong, Chen, and Shu 2019). The kind of wellbeing migrant parents have can also affect their children's psychological wellbeing (Raturi and Cebotari 2023).

With these connections in mind, the study sought to find out whether the presence of a migrant's spouse would have any relationship with overall wellbeing. The analysis shows that a higher proportion of married migrants with absent spouses attained higher wellbeing levels than those who live with their spouses (Fig. 3). This finding may be explained by migration relieving marital tensions for migrants struggling to make ends meet before moving.

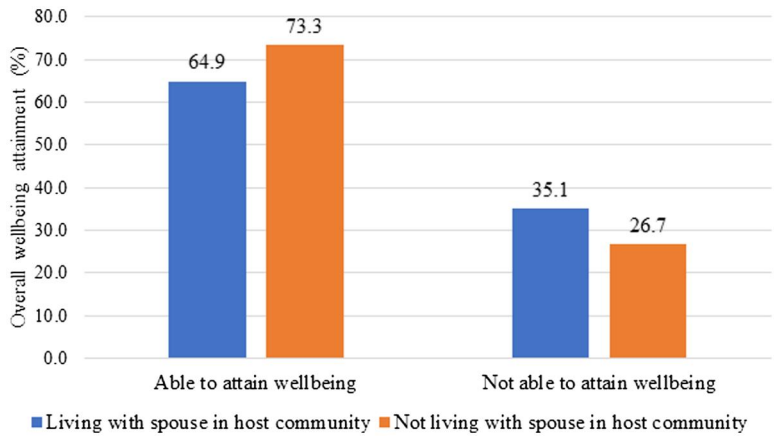


Figure 3. Distribution of overall wellbeing by married ‘migrants’ living status.

Source: Computed by the Authors in SPSS from Field Survey (2023).

Another possible explanation is that some partners feel they achieve a sense of individual freedom and agency by migrating and living alone.

Analysis of the psychological and emotional wellbeing indicates that about 63 per cent of married migrants whose partners live with them are satisfied with their psychological/emotional health wellbeing compared to 37 per cent who are not. Of the married migrants who live apart, about 57 per cent are satisfied with their psychological/emotional health and wellbeing. In both cases, however, the majority (91 per cent of married migrants living with their partners and 93 per cent of married migrants not living with their partners) expressed that they often/always experience anxiety. Yet, just 59 per cent of migrants whose spouses are not with them related their anxiety to familial relationships. In comparison, 74 per cent of those living with their spouses attributed their anxiety to family issues. By providing a temporary respite from domestic responsibilities and associated pressures, mobility can empower individuals to focus on achieving their motivations and aspirations and effectively take care of their familial obligations through remittances. This study shows that nearly 75 per cent of migrants send money home to their families. A study by [Teye et al. \(2019\)](#) in Ghana indicates that the remittances sent by internal migrants positively impact the wellbeing of the household members who stay behind. The current findings add to the literature on how spousal separation could influence the wellbeing of migrants in different ways. While living with family has emotional benefits, it could also cause worry depending on the quality of the relationship, the number of children and living standards. This article, therefore, underscores the importance of considering each migrant’s unique circumstances when evaluating the impact of migration on their overall wellbeing.

Despite fewer rural participants in the study ([Table 1](#)), findings reveal that 54 per cent of rural migrants exhibit overall wellbeing, surpassing the 46 per cent among urban counterparts ([Table 3](#)). This is partly due to more rural migrants (36 per cent) reporting elevated wellbeing in the Health domain compared to urban migrants (24 per cent). Despite urban migrants earning higher monthly incomes (average GHc944, approximately A\$123), rural migrants (average GHc800, approximately A\$104) demonstrate higher overall wellbeing, highlighting the complexity of factors influencing migrants beyond income considerations.

4.3 Income and wellbeing attainment across wellbeing domains

This article argues that while income is a valuable wellbeing indicator, it is insufficient to measure overall wellbeing comprehensively. The study aimed to explore how income

Table 4. Correlation between Income and Attainment of Wellbeing across Domains.

Variable1	Variable 2 (wellbeing domain)	Statistic			
		Correlation	Count	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.
Income	Community vitality	0.128	251	0.005	0.248
	Environmental resilience	0.028	251	−0.096	0.151
	Governance	0.145	251	0.021	0.264
	Health	0.166	251	0.043	0.284
	Education and skills training	0.067	251	−0.057	0.190

Note: Missing value handling: PAIRWISE, EXCLUDE. C.I. Level: 95.0.
Source: Computed by the authors in SPSS from field survey (2023).

relates to wellbeing across various domains. Almost all participants engaged in income-generating activities, such as wheelbarrow pushing (40 per cent) and street vending (34 per cent). Other activities included farming (7.2 per cent), domestic help (6.4 per cent), and various occupations like dressmaking and commercial motorbike riding (12.8 per cent). Most (61 per cent) migrants earned above the average monthly income of GHc312 (A\$41). [Table 4](#) presents correlation statistics between income and various wellbeing domains.

The correlations are calculated based on pairwise exclusion of missing values, and the confidence interval level is set at 95 per cent. The study reveals a weak positive association by examining correlations between income and wellbeing across various domains, excluding the Living Standards Domain where income is an inherent indicator. The data suggest a noticeable trend of individuals reporting higher levels of wellbeing with increasing income. This positive correlation aligns with a significant body of literature which posits that higher income is generally linked to enhanced subjective wellbeing ([Tay, Zyphur, and Batz 2018](#); [Alloush and Wu 2021](#)).

Positive psychology research underscores the role of financial resources in facilitating individuals to attain personal goals, ultimately contributing to elevated overall wellbeing ([Ryu and Fan 2023](#)). However, the positive relationship between income and wellbeing is not straightforward across every income level. The analysis reveals that the ability to achieve wellbeing in each domain does not consistently rise with higher income. This observation is consistent with economic theories such as the income-happiness paradox, suggesting that while income contributes to wellbeing, its impact tends to diminish with time as people begin to value other aspects of their lives ([Khalil 2022](#)).

It is essential to acknowledge the weak strength of the correlations observed. While income emerges as a factor influencing the various wellbeing domains, it does not comprehensively account for the diverse variability in these aspects of migrants’ lives. As mentioned earlier, most migrants remit some of their income to families back home. For this reason, rising income may not benefit them as much as it would benefit non-remitters. The weak correlations, therefore, highlight the notion that other influential factors play substantial roles in shaping individual wellbeing. Socio-economic disparities, for instance, significantly impact access to critical resources such as education, healthcare, and social support, thereby influencing an individual’s capacity to achieve satisfactory levels of wellbeing ([Adler and Newman 2002](#)). The findings suggest a complex interplay of factors beyond income alone, indicating the need for a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between income and wellbeing across various domains.

5. Conclusions

This article contributes to the literature on multidimensional wellbeing measurement by using an innovative framework to measure the wellbeing of young northern migrants in the informal economic sector of Sunyani municipality in Ghana. Combining objective and

subjective indicators offers a nuanced understanding of their wellbeing across various domains. One key finding is the diminishing impact of income on wellbeing beyond a certain point. The finding aligns with Amartya Sen's capability approach, highlighting income as a means to an end, not the sole determinant of wellbeing. This demonstrates the importance of looking beyond income to include individuals' judgements, standpoints, purposes, views, and values on what makes life better when evaluating migration outcomes. The study strengthens the argument for a multidimensional approach by demonstrating that education and health, often neglected in migration-wellbeing studies, significantly influence wellbeing. Our finding of educational dissatisfaction among migrants aligns with existing research on their educational barriers.

The study reveals disparities in wellbeing based on gender and age. Female migrants reported higher levels of wellbeing in most domains, indicating their resilience and adaptability. Similarly, older migrants exhibited better overall wellbeing, possibly due to longer stays enabling better social integration. The study challenges the existing literature, which often does not differentiate wellbeing outcomes based on these demographic factors. The findings underscore the resilience and adaptability of female migrants and the benefits of longer stays in the destination area, emphasizing the importance of considering gender and age when designing policies and interventions aimed at improving the wellbeing of migrants. A critical takeaway is the disconnect between migrants and public institutions. The low engagement with public services highlights the need for policies promoting social engagement and support for migrants. Community liaisons could bridge this gap, ensuring migrant needs are communicated to the local government for redress. Future research should build on these findings by comparing migrants with non-migrants, exploring older age groups, and delving deeper into the roles of education and health across diverse contexts.

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Supplementary data

[Supplementary data](#) is available at *Migration Studies* online.

Conflict of interest statement

None declared.

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