Child Migration Decision Making in Ghana: The Actors and Processes

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Abstract

The discourse on child migration decision making tends to present children as vulnerable and without agency. This presupposes that decisions are often imposed on the individual child who only complies with decisions of adults. On the contrary, the process is complex and continuous, and can only be well understood within the contexts in which such decisions are made. It involves many actors and varying conditions under which the decisions are made. Therefore, understanding child migration decision making requires a deeper understanding of the context and the actors involved. Drawing on interviews with young migrants from rural farming communities in the north east of Ghana to Accra, and using the child-in-family approach to migration decision making, this paper examines the actors and intricacies in child migration decision making in Ghana. In contrast with perceptions that migration decisions are often imposed on children, this study finds a complex but congenial process on a continuum from unilateral, to consultative and imposed, involving children, their parents and members of their communities. The paper suggests that parents and policy makers be more proactive and sensitive to the concerns of children, with local government and traditional authorities focusing on education, to expose the realities of child migration before the decisions are made.

Key words: child migration, tripartite consultative volition, unilateral decision making

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Introduction

There are various theoretical discourses regarding who decides for the individual or group of persons involved in migration. According to Adepujo (1977) and Massey et al (1998), the households or families of migrants and communities (Harttgen and Klasen, 2008) usually make the decision while the individual migrant (adult or child) only complies. In other words, the individual migrant involved in the act of migration does not really matter in the decision making process. In this regard, migration decisions are made by families rather than the individuals involved in the movement. Mincer (1978) suggests that migration decisions are not made solely by the individuals physically embarking on the migration journey, but are determined by the family. This thinking is within the context of the New Home Economics (NHE) started by Becker and Mincer in the 1960s (Molina, 2011). The NHE is concerned with joint decision-making by individual household members, either in the form of a game that is supposedly played or a Social Welfare Function (SWF) that the household adheres to (Grossbard, 2011). Accordingly, the net family gains motivate households more than the personal gains of the individuals involved in the process. For instance, Raihelhuber (2001), cited in Schmidt-Kallert (2009: 329), observed how households in Nepal decided that some members migrate into urban localities with children of school going age, while the older generations continued to cultivate the land in the village. In this context, the decision to migrate is a household decision and not one made by the children embarking on the journeys. Furthermore, to understand the migration experiences of child domestic workers in the Philippines, Agnes Camacho (2006) observed that migration decisions are usually made within the context of the household and guided by the needs of the household economy. These, according to her, are informed by asymmetrical power relations along gender and generational lines, and influenced by information and support from earlier migrants, as well as sustained by a widespread culture of migration. This is not only limited to children; women as well are likely to have less agency than men. They can either be put under considerable pressure to migrate (alone or in the context of family migration) or be excluded from access to mobility against their will (De Haas and Fokkema, 2010).

On the other hand, the Neo Classical Theory of migration focuses individuals as solely responsible for their migration decisions. It explains migration to be driven by differences in returns to labour across markets (Kurekova, 2011), with the assumption that migration is stimulated primarily by rational economic considerations of relative benefits and costs, mostly financial but also psychological (Todaro and Smith, 2006: 342). This suggests that the individual potential migrant has "perfect" knowledge of the labour conditions of both the origin and potential destinations which informs their migration decision making. Although attributed to Gary Becker, independent individual decision-making models do not make any specific assumptions of jointness of decision-making in households (Grossbard, 2011). The responsibility for decisions to migrate is that of the individuals (including children) embarking on migration (Camacho, 2006; Hashim, 2007; Frempong-Ainguah et al, 2009; Anarfi and Agyei, 2009; and Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). For instance, Frempong-Ainguah, Badasu and Codjoe (2009: 90), in a study of independent child migrants in Ghana, observed that about 64% of 450 child migrants involved in the study took the

decision to migrate to Accra and Kumasi on their own. Similarly, in the same study Anarfi and Agyei (2009) argued that child migrants themselves are major decision makers in the whole process of migration. They observed that 59.8% of the respondent child migrants took the decision to migrate on their own. This evidence suggests that children in Ghana are active participants in their migration decision making process, although this may be negotiated, as observed by Camacho (2006).

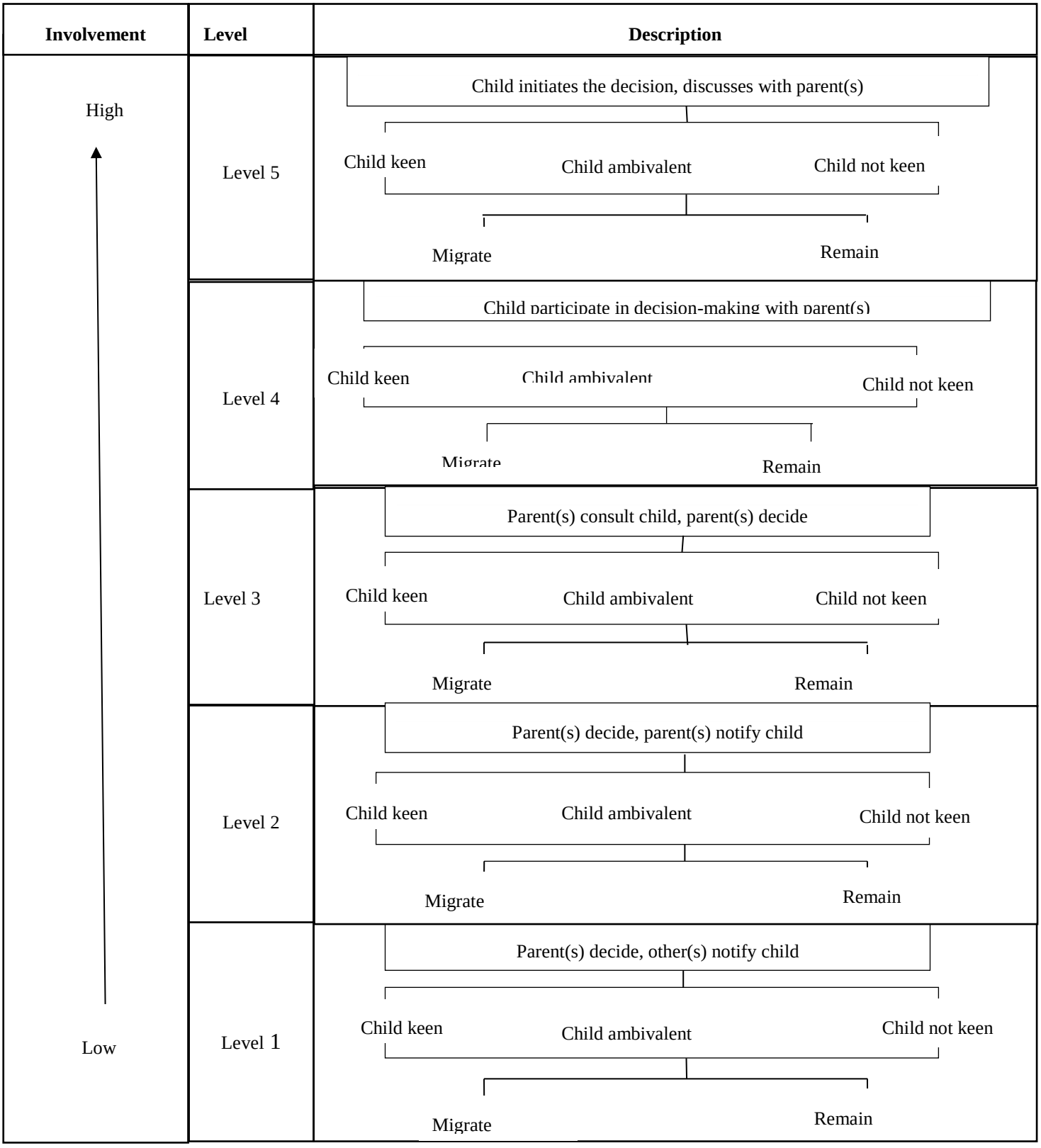
Although the discourse has been elaborate on the involvement of children in their migration decision making in Ghana, none has focused on the processes of engagement with household members and parents during the decision making process. For instance, whereas Mincer (1978) and Becker (1967) focused on decision making among couples, Frempong-Ainguah, Badasu and Codjoe (2009), and Anarfi and Agyei (2009) focused on who made the decision for the children to migrate, but not how the decisions were made. Although Bushin (2008) explored the processes of decision making, her focus was on family migration but not children migrating independent of their parents. Therefore, knowledge and understanding of the processes in child migration decision making remain fragmented. This study therefore seeks to fill this research and knowledge gap by exploring the intricate processes involved in child migration decision making in Ghana for a deeper understanding and to recommend ways of enhancing the phenomenon.

Theoretical framework of child migration decision making

Child migration decision making is a complex process that involves different people or groups (individuals, families/households and/or communities) and takes place in varying conditions and contexts. Consequently, theories to explain the phenomenon are rare. Nevertheless, children continuously engage in decision making and do migrate independent of their birth parents. This suggests that children have some agency in their migration and decision making process (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). This study employed Naomi Bushin's (2008) child-in-family decision-making framework (see figure 1) to enhance good understanding and clarity on the phenomenon of child migration decision making in Ghana.

The child-in-family decision making framework is attributed to Naomi Bushin who used a mixed-methods approach in a family migration research project with 37 families who moved within the UK. The framework requires that researchers include children in their research frameworks and allow them to be active research participants. This is mainly because research suggests that children are not necessarily helpless or passive in contemporary migratory processes but are active in the decision making process (Fass, 2005; Hashim, 2007; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Tamanja, 2014). Consequently, negotiation between parents and children is becoming common in contemporary families (Thomas, 2007). Therefore, recognising children's agency in migration decision-making within familial networks of power is very necessary. This results in a dynamic and contested process of decision-making within family contexts (Bushin, 2008). Bushin distinguishes five levels of decision making, involving children and parents in her framework, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1 Children's involvement in family migration decision-making framework



Source: Bushin (2008)

These are when parents make the decision and other people notify the child; when parents decide and inform the child; when parents consult the child and then make the decision; when the child participates in decision making with parents; and when the child initiates the decision and discusses it with his/her parents.

According to Bushin, Levels 1 and 5 were not experienced by any of the children she interviewed in her study, but her experience of working with migrant families indicates that they are possibilities. At each level, except for Level 5, children may be keen, ambivalent or not keen about the idea of family migration; it is assumed that children are keen at Level 5 because they initiate the decision themselves. For levels 1 and 2, children are notified of the decision to migrate by parents, and in some instances, by other household members. Parents make the decision to migrate without any direct input from children within the family (Level 1), and children are told of the parents' decision once it is definite that the family will move.

On the other hand, with Level 3, children are consulted by their parents about the initial decision to move. In this case, family members, parents discuss the possibility of moving with children, talk through the likely process of migration, and ask children their opinions about moving. The final decision of whether or not to migrate is made by the parents, but the children's views are sought by parents prior to their making the final decision. With Level 4, children are active participants in the entire process of making and arriving at the final decision to migrate. Finally, with Level 5, the decision is initiated by the child and discussed with parents before the family arrives at the final decision.

Although laudable, Bushin's (2008) framework is not without challenges. She herself admits that her framework is not intended to facilitate understanding of all aspects of children's involvement in family migration decision-making, but that it does provide a useful starting point in understanding the processes involved. Also, she recognises that it may not be possible for children to have a high level of involvement in family migration decision-making in every circumstance, and thus it should not be inferred from the framework that Levels 4 and 5 should always be aimed for. However, as suggested earlier by Smith et al. (2003), it is in children's best interests for their abilities as decision-makers to be fostered first within the context of the family. Therefore, their active involvement in family migration decision-making may present opportunities for developing their decision making skills and abilities.

Although Bushin's (2008) framework was based on decisions which involve the movement of entire families, but not the migration of children moving independent of their parents, as is the case with this study, the classifications are suitable for this study and could help shed more light on the processes involved in child migration decision making. Child migration decisions are made by and between children, their parents or households and other members living in the communities with children.

Locational context of the study

This study was conducted in two administrative districts in Ghana: Accra in the coastal ecological zone and Bongo district in the northern savanna zone. Accra (the National Capital) is a popular destination for most migrants in Ghana (Anarfi et. al, 2003; GSS, 2013), while Bongo district is the origin of many migrants (BONDA, 2010, 2012; Mohammed and Apusigah, 2005; Tamanja, 2012). In order to get a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of child migration, migrant children were interviewed in Accra while their parents were traced and interviewed at their home villages in Bongo district. Figure 2 shows the destination (Accra) and origin (Bongo district) of the study.

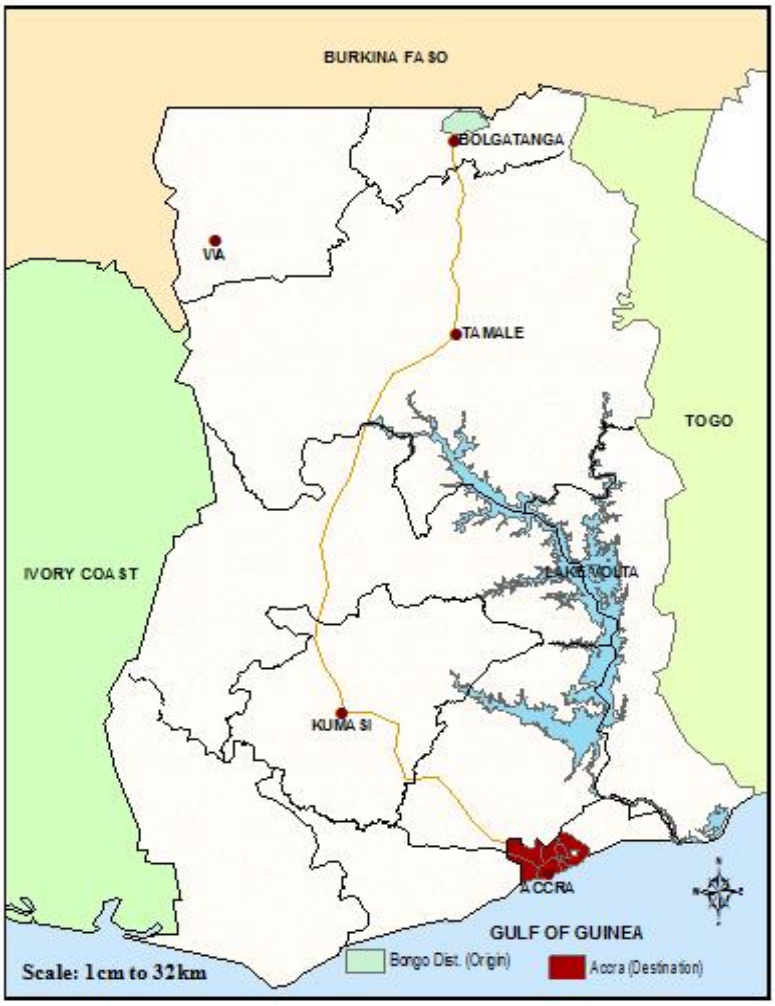
Bongo District, with a population of 84,545 (47.4% males and 52.2% females) inhabitants, is one of thirteen (13) districts and municipalities in the Upper East region. Covering an area of 459.5 km^2, The district shares boundaries with Burkina Faso to the north, Kassena-Nankana East to the west, Bolgatanga Municipal to the south west and Nabdam District to south east (GSS, 2014). About 40% of the land surface is occupied by rocks (BONDA, 2010), reducing the land available for farming activities, which are predominantly subsistent and rain-fed, with small land holding and animal husbandry.

The actual density on the arable land is much higher (about 307 persons per square kilometre), making it the highest in the three northern regions with huge challenges to subsistence compound farming and household poverty (Tamanja, 2014). These figures and conditions have implications for household poverty and migration since for most inhabitants, subsistence agriculture is the main economic activity.

The social organisation of inhabitants of the district is mainly the patrilineal and extended family system (Hart, 1971), with many members living in common compounds in different household units. This enjoins them to engage in communal social activities and farming, and to help one another in times of distress (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011).

Although the population is mostly youthful (42.7%), with a growth rate of 2.8%, and mostly rural (49%), education in the district is bedevilled with serious challenges, including inadequate teachers, furniture, teaching and learning materials, resulting in poor academic performance in schools. This poor trend in performance and other conditions constitute a disincentive for children to attend school, as schooling is perceived as waste of time. Consequently, migration among school-aged children is common in the district. Although there are no official statistics on the phenomenon, it involves adults (regardless of their marital status) and children, some of whom attend school but migrate during vacation to work and return when schools reopen (BONDA, 2010; Tamanja, 2012 & 2014).

Figure 2 Map of Ghana showing origin and destination of child migrants



On the other hand, Accra (see figure 2) is the national capital of Ghana with a land size of 200 km^2 and a population of 1,848,614 (48% males and 52% females) in 2010, constituting 7.5% of the country's total population of 24.6 million (GSS, 2013). The metropolis has the highest density of about 9,243 persons per square kilometre as against the national density of 103.4. This high density has implications for livelihoods, as dependence on the land (as is the case with many rural areas) cannot sustain the population. It is therefore not surprising that sales and general work constitute the major occupations within the metropolitan area of Accra (GSS, 2013).

The concentration of population, commercial and industrial activities in the metropolis places mounting pressure on the limited infrastructure and services including housing, transport, water supply, sanitation and waste disposal. While the city of Accra continues to grow rapidly, its boundaries are not clearly demarcated, a situation which poses problems for the planning and management of the city and results in the formation of slums which accommodate migrants from the hinterlands. The commercial activities and centres offer ready employment for migrants, especially children from the northern part of the country who ply their trade in these centres. Even though the Children's Act of 1998 prohibits children under 13 years old from doing any work for pay or profit, many of these children who do 'any work for pay or profit' are found in the metropolis and work as head porters, servers in food and drinking joints (popularly called chop bars), and as house helps. Accra therefore serves as a magnet that attracts children from the Northern Savannah region who migrate with the hope of achieving their life goals.

Methodology

This study is exploratory and involves narrations of children in Accra who migrated from Bongo district in the Upper East region of Ghana. The rationale was to give children the voice to share their individual experiences of migration decision making. The narrative approach refers to the elicitation of and analysis of sensitive data from respondents as they provide accounts (usually in the form of stories) about themselves or events that affect them in their lives and surroundings (Bryman, 2012: 582). Also, using a children-in-families approach to researching family migration decision-making within a qualitative research framework allows for the exploration of children's agency in making family migration decisions (Bushin, 2008). This was done through in-depth interviews with migrant children and other key stakeholders and actors involved in child migration, such as children, parents and community members. Furthermore, migrant children were observed in their natural environments (places of abode and work) to help deepen the contextual understanding on the issue of child migration. Therefore, the qualitative approach was considered appropriate since it enables seeing the social world and the events that take place in it through the eyes of the researched; allows for the gathering of detailed accounts of actions that occur in the setting being explored; and provides ready evidence of change and flux (Bryman, 2012). It also seeks the discovery of relationships between variables, enables comparisons, makes for conclusions about the significance of certain factors for the relationships and establishes integrated constructs (Agbesinyale, 2003:80). Furthermore, the qualitative approach is useful for going beyond the surface to the deeper issues about child migration and the processes involved in deciding to migrate. The study further employed a case study approach which Yin (2009) considers an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2009: p. 18). It consisted of three levels. The first was the phenomenon of child migration decision making, followed by the geographical location of the study (Accra and Bongo district) and finally, the individual experiences of migrant children in the decision making process.

Participants

In all, 35 child migrants and 12 parents were interviewed while two community meetings were held. The children, who consisted of 13 girls and 22 boys, were aged 12 to 17 years. Only 5 (3 boys and 2 girls) had never attended school. The rest dropped out of school at various stages due to family and other circumstances. Furthermore, 13 (5 girls and 8 boys) of the children had lost a parent.

Procedure

The child migrants who participated in this study were purposefully selected using the snowball technique whereby the initial contact led to the contact of other children from Bongo district who migrated and were living in Accra. The first child migrant to be interviewed was identified through

a trader and community leader from Bongo who resides in Accra. This child linked me to a colleague who also put me in contact with others through snowballing until the sample of 35 child migrants, all from Bongo district, was obtained. Snowballing is useful because of its ability to draw on children's own networks (Rapley, 2014) to select the required participants for the study. Also, the choice of migrant children from Bongo district was informed by the reason that it is one of the districts where migration is an important part of living and involves people of all ages: young and middle-aged, male and female (Mohammed and Apusigah, 2005). Every household in the district has someone who has migrated (BONDA, 2012), and Accra and other cities in the south of Ghana are their preferred destinations (Tamanja, 2012). The children then helped to contact their parents back in their home villages who were then located and also interviewed. Chiefs (community leaders) of two communities, where most of the children migrated from, helped organise community meetings to discuss issues of child migration in their communities and the decision making processes involved.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with parents of child migrants in their origin communities and discussions held with community leaders to solicit their perspectives on migration decision making of their children. This was facilitated by the children who were interviewed in Accra. They provided the telephone contacts of their parents and suggested the people to contact for help in their home communities when a follow up was made to interview their parents. In some cases, the children spoke with their parents on the phone from Accra to introduce the researcher to their parents. Data for this study was collected in two phases within a period of six months. The first in-depth interviews were conducted with migrant children between October and December 2011, mainly at their places of destination in Accra, while the second phase, which was from October to December 2012, comprised interviews in the Bongo district with parents of the child migrants who were interviewed in Accra. The interviews with migrant children in Accra were conducted in homes and at workplaces of child migrants, as and where it was convenient for them.

The interviews were conducted in English (mostly pidgin), Twi and Gurene (local languages), in accordance with the preferences of the participants. As I could not speak Gurene (the native dialect of the people of Bongo district), interviews in this language were interpreted by a trained local person whom I engaged for this purpose. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed, with those in Gurene translated into English by the trained interpreter.

Analysis

A thematic approach to data analysis was adopted, which involved categorising and organising data into themes and patterns as they emerged from the data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data I analysed included in-depth interview transcripts, samples of children's profiles, dairies and field notes. Data from all interviews were analysed manually by making summaries of the views of the participants; supporting them with relevant quotations that captured these views; and augmenting the findings with data from field observations. The analysis of data

primarily involved an iterative process of reading, reflecting and coding the interview transcripts, and then drawing out major and recurring themes. Individual accounts and responses to questions were carefully examined, the responses categorised and themes derived from them.

As the study involved children, issues of ethics were given outmost consideration. Consent was sought from children, parents and community leaders before they participated in the study. Participation was thus by verbal consent and at respondents' own volition. All stages of their involvement were explained to them and they consented verbally before participating in the exercise. Furthermore, pseudo names are used in the presentation and quotations from interviews in this report. This is necessary in order to protect the identity of the participants, many of whom are children.

The data were subsequently presented in a diagram and discussed in accordance with the emerging themes such as actors (children, parents and community members) as well as the decision making processes (unilateral, consultative and imposition).

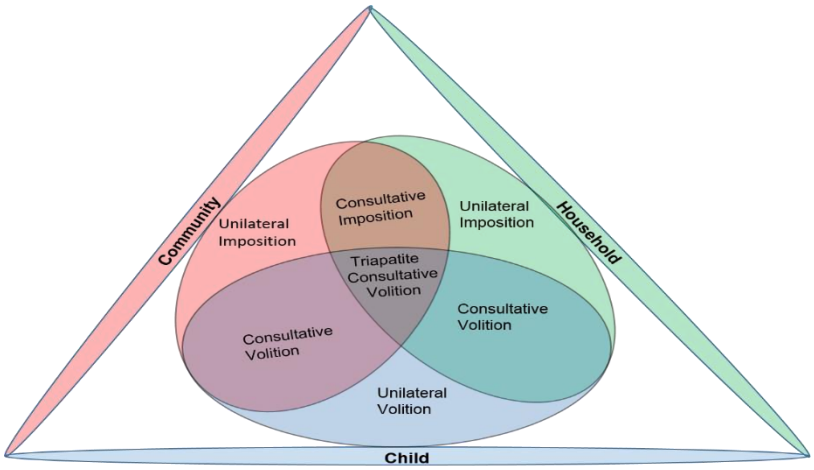
Findings and Discussion

The participation of children in decision making (including migrant children) is firmly supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which advocates recognition of the views of children and young people in any decision that is likely to affect their wellbeing (UNICEF, 2013). Therefore, people involved in migration should be actively involved in the relevant decisions and conscious of their likely outcomes and possible ramifications. In this regard, the various roles that children play in their own migration decision making processes have been explored and the findings presented and discussed in accordance with the levels of involvement of the actors (children, parents and community). Items in the sequence are dovetailed into one another and range from unilateral decisions by children, through consultation or informing parents, to imposition of decisions on children. The responses from transcripts of interviews with the 35 migrant children on who made their decisions to migrate are presented and discussed.

The decision making processes

Further analysis of the interrelationships and interaction in child migration decision making processes as they emerged from the transcripts are summarised and illustrated in figure 3.

Figure 3 Child migration decision making triangle



Source: Own illustration from field data, 2016

As shown in figure 3, three main processes of child migration decision making emerged from the data. These are mainly unilateral, consultative and imposed. On the other hand, the actors involved consisted of migrant the children themselves, their households, and community members. At the individual level, it emerged that the migrant child takes a unilateral decision on his/her own volition. This is usually without the involvement of his/her parents or other people living in the community. The child also consults either members of the household, the community, or both.

These consultations are all on the volition of the child. Similarly, it also emerged that migration decisions are sometimes imposed on children by members of their households. On the other hand, besides the consultations already described, some members of the communities in which children live do decide (without the involvement of the child and household members) for the child to migrate. Although this category was rare, it was associated with trafficking, where children are coerced to migrate with people who are not directly or closely related to them. Finally, a tripartite consultative decision making process emerged which involved all three actors deciding for the child to migrate. Even though it was the least popular, all the participants were unanimous that it should have been the most acceptable and preferable decision making process.

Unilateral decision making in child migration

The unilateral decision making emerged as the process whereby any of the actors (children, household and community) makes the decision without the involvement of the others. Two main types of the unilateral decision making process emerged from this study. They are unilateral volition and unilateral imposition (see figure 3).

Unilateral volition

Children play active roles in the process of their migration decision making. Although this process involves negotiation between children and their parents, it sometimes appears normal for a child

to decide to migrate by his/her own will, or play a substantial role in that decision making process. It emerged from the data that 12 of the 35 child migrants interviewed admitted they took the decision to migrate unilaterally and on their own volition. In other words, they made their own decisions without informing or consulting their parents, members of their households or the communities where they lived. The following narration by a 14-year-old boy (Jaafa), who migrated to Accra without the consent of his parents, epitomises how children make unilateral decisions to migrate.

I didn't tell anyone that I was travelling. If I had told my mother or father, they will say no, I should not travel, or even beat me. So I didn't tell them anything (Interview with Jaafa in Accra, October, 2011).

From this narration, Jaafa had to shield his decision from his parents in order to execute his plan, because they would not have approved of it if he had told them. The case of Jaafa appears similar to the observations of Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013) of children running away from home. Although Jaafa's narration is not consistent with the five level classification of Bushin's (2008) framework, it is consistent with Rice's (1978) and Fallon and Bowles' (1998) permissive classification of parenting styles. According to these authors, adolescents have more influence than their parents in family decision-making. Jaafa's parents would neither have listened to him nor consented to his decision if he had informed them. He therefore had to ignore his parents and unilaterally decide to migrate without their consent. The unwillingness of parents to consent is supported by the response of his father in an interview at his home village in the following narration.

One day he [Jaafa] *just left. I don't know how he got his lorry fare or how he managed to get to Accra. If he had told me, I will not have allowed him to go. Is it that I cannot take care of my own child at his age? It was from there* [Accra] *that he called me on one of his friends' phone and said that he could no longer attend the school. At that time, I was confused. I didn't know what to do* (Interview with Jaafa's father in Namoo, November 13, 2011).

It is obvious from this narration that Jaafa's father would not have permitted him to migrate if he had divulged his intention to them. So he kept it to himself until it was successfully executed. He then called the father from Accra to inform him that he was safe at the destination. It can be inferred from the narrations of both Jaafa and his father that the boy perceived his parents as autocratic in their style of leadership (Rice, 1978; Fallon and Bowles, 1998) and as exerting a high level of parental authority on him in the family. This style of leadership is consistent with the findings of Steinberg et al. (1991) on parenting styles in African-American families which allow little or no leverage for the child to express his/her views. Jaafa therefore had to unilaterally decide, as he thought they would have prevented him from migrating.

Further narrations emerged during community discussions and appear to support unilateral decision making by child migrants. The following is an excerpt from one of such discussions at

Namoo (one of the two villages where I organised community discussions) when I followed up to interview parents of the migrant children I had interviewed in Accra.

They don't tell us when they are travelling. They just run away to where they want to go. So we don't know where and how they make their decisions to migrate (Community discussion in Namoo, November 30, 2011).

This narration as well as those of Jaafa and his father support unilateral decision making by children, which although done at the volition of children, appears to be of concern to parents of child migrants and members of the sending communities. For instance, parents appear perplexed by the situation and can apparently do little or nothing about it. In a 2006 study of migrant children from north-east Albania for UNESCO, Aida Orgocka (2010) found that about 50 % of 804 children aged between 10 - 18 years took the decision to migrate seasonally themselves. Similarly, Kwankye (2009) and Frempong-Ainguah et al. (2009) observed in a study of migrant children in Ghana that children decided and migrated on their own to the major towns of Accra and Kumasi, often independent of their birth parents. Although this study is on a small scale, involving few children and a narrow age range (12-17) years, Yee and Flanagan (1985) and Dornbusch et al (1985) observed that children's involvement in either deciding with parents or deciding on their own increases with age. In rural settings in northern Ghana (places of origin of the child migrants in this study), traditional and family ties are still strong, with family heads wilding more authority than children and women. Consequently, women and children have little control over decision making (Hashim, 2007; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). Indeed, Mincer (1978) observed that parental control over young people is a deterrent to migration. It is thus not surprising that 14 year-old Jaafa and 11 other children (see table 1) made unilateral decisions to migrate to Accra, implies many of the children could initiate and execute their decisions to migrate on their own (Yakub, 2010). Nevertheless, some of the children consulted other actors in arriving at their decisions to migrate.

Consultation in child migration decision making

Consultation, generally referred to as a discussion about something that is being decided, is an important component in the process of child migration decision making and takes different forms. In this study and as shown in figure 3, children consulted with parents and members of their communities at their own volition. On the other hand, sometimes consultation was done between households and community members and decisions imposed on the children, while in other cases consultation involved all categories of actors (child, household and community). The latter emerged as a tripartite consultative volition (figure 3) and was considered the most appropriate in the decision making process.

Consultative volition

The involvement of children in migration decision making appears to depend on the category and circumstances under which the migration was done. For instance, family raptures (usually resulting

from the death of a parent or breadwinner in the family) bring about sudden changes in the family circumstances (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011, Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013) and compel the family to make decisions to adapt to their circumstances. In this study, and among five (5) children who migrated because of the death of a parent, the decision to migrate was made by the children in consultation with, and with approval by the surviving parent. In other words, it involved the child, household and community members at the volition of the child. Consultation in decision making was very famous among the child migrants who participated in this study. Consequently, 20 of the 35 child migrants interviewed admitted they informed or consulted their parents in deciding to migrate. This appears to conform to three levels (Levels 3, 4 and 5) of Bushin's (2008) framework where children and their parents consult at different levels and where two or more family members have convergent interests with inconsistent parental control (Rice, 1978; Fallon and Bowles, 1998). The following narration by a 17-year-old boy (Attis) in Accra is an example of how children consult or inform their parents when making decisions to migrate.

I discussed with my mother that I wanted to come to Accra to look for job to help her take care of the family. She was not happy. She said I was too small to be on my own, but I told her that nothing will happen to me. I didn't want to stay there and be suffering and she too will be suffering alone to take care of all of us. So my mother agreed and advised me to behave well (Interview with Attis in Accra, October 12, 2011).

It is worth noting that Attis is the first born of a family of seven. His father died when he was only 13 years and he migrated when he attained 15 years in order to help his mother take care of his five siblings. As a first born son in a patriarchal family, Attis was conscious of his role in the family after the demise of his father and thought of contributing to the family's upkeep. From his perspective, the only way out was through migrating to Accra, where he could work to help his mother take care of his siblings. Furthermore, a 16-year-old migrant girl (Lamisi) narrated the following.

I was staying with my mother alone in Boku, but life in Boku is difficult and I was not doing anything. Only small, small farm work on our compound. So I told myself that why don't I come to Accra, where I can get some work to do. Then I told my mother that I wanted to go to Accra so that I can find some work to do there. When I told her, she first agreed that it is true because I was not doing anything in Boku. But when I told her the evening that I will be leaving the following day, she wept the whole night. She said I am her only daughter and she loves me and she didn't want anything bad to happen to me. I was also weeping when my mother was weeping. I felt sad and sorry that my mother was weeping, but I wasn't doing anything and didn't have money too in the village. Finally, I gathered courage and begged her to stop crying and then I promised her that I will take care of myself and nothing bad will happen to me. So she stopped crying and then she prayed for me, that God will take care of me. Even now, she is still praying for me (Interview with Lamisi in Accra, December 22, 2011).

The two narrations suggest how children initiate the idea to migrate, but inform or consult and try as much as they can to convince their parents to give their approval. The decisions are often motivated by poverty and family circumstances such as ruptures (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013). In both instances, the death of their fathers made it difficult for their mothers to disapprove of such suggestions. Although these narrations clearly show consultation of children with parents, it was at the initiation of the children, not parents as identified by Bushin (2008) in her classifications. Nevertheless, the repeated mention of not doing anything at home and not having money seems compelling and convincing for parents to accept the proposed decisions by children. Unlike the cases observed by Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi (2013), where many children in similar circumstances were forced to migrate due to maltreatment and neglect, children in this study had cordial relationships with their parents and were forthright and open about their migration intensions. Although approvals were given in both cases, they were very emotional, as the parents gave their consent while in tears. These points were corroborated during interviews with the mothers of Attis and Lamisi in the following extracts.

I hear Accra is far from this place, but I had to allow him to go because I didn't have anything (money and other resources) *to take care of him, his brothers and sisters. I cried for a long time because I didn't know what was happening to him. I was only praying and crying to God to take care of him for me. I stopped crying when he called through one of our neighbours' phone and spoke to me. He told me he was fine and nothing was wrong with him. I have still been praying that God should give him work. He only told me that he is now in Accra and working there, but I don't know the kind of work he is doing there* (Interview with Attis's mother at Namoo, November 9, 2012).

I prayed for her [Lamisi] *and two of her elder brothers who are also there* [in Accra], *that God should be with them and guide them. I advised them to take good care of themselves. I don't want to hear that they have involved themselves in stealing or doing what is not good. So they should be very careful and handle themselves well. I was very particular about Lamisi because she is a girl and men can do bad things to her. I asked her to be very careful and take good care of herself. …… I didn't go to any church or mosque to pray for them. I prayed here, in the house, to God through our ancestors. That is how we pray here and I have still been praying because I want God and our ancestors to protect them there* (Interview with Lamisi's mother in Boku, November 29, 2012).

It is evident from these excerpts that allowing children to migrate is a painful and emotional decision which parents make. This is mainly because the children are young and their (parents and children) knowledge about Accra and situations in which children could find themselves is limited. Both mothers admitted they did not know Accra and were uncertain about what could happen to the children if they migrated, although they approved of the decisions of their children. They however had strong words of caution for them, to be of good behaviour and avoid deviant acts such as stealing. Lamisi's mother was particularly worried about her, because although Lamisi is not her only child to have migrated (two of her sons had earlier on migrated), she is her only daughter and could be abused by unscrupulous men at the destination.

Furthermore, the faith people profess in God is clearly demonstrated in the narrations of both parents. Although there were uncertainties regarding what could happen to the children as they ventured into unknown destinations, both children and parents placed their faith in God. Both parents prayed for God's protection for their children and had faith that God would protect and provide opportunities for their children to get work in Accra. Theirs was not an Islamic or a Christian faith, but a belief in the Supreme God through their ancestors. Lamisi's mother recounted praying in her house to God through their ancestors, for the protection of her children who have migrated out of the village.

It is evident from the forgoing discussion that some children discuss their migration intentions with parents and other actors. The findings also suggest ways in which children negotiate (Camacho, 2006) with parents. Unlike Bushin's (2008) framework where parents were initiators and informed or discussed with children, children in this study were the initiators and only sought consent and approval from parents. It would thus be erroneous to depict children as passive victims, as they do exert a certain level of influence on household decisions (De Haas and Fokkema, 2010; Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013). Nevertheless, parents and adults play active roles in mobilising resources for children to finance their trips (Tamanja, 2014).

Furthermore, communities in which children live play very important roles in their migration decision making. Some of the children interviewed admitted their decisions to migrate were influenced by some members of their communities whom they informed or consulted. These influences were in the form of providing information about prospective destinations and on the lifestyles of visiting migrants during home visits; and financial and other forms of support to children. For instance, Attis and Mumuni who were interviewed in Accra recounted that:

Anytime people from my village came back to the village with bicycles and other items which they acquired from Accra and Kumasi, I felt like I should also go there. My late uncle, who was a khebab seller in Accra, encouraged me to come to Accra. He told me I will be able to get a job here in Accra and also make my own money (Interview with Attis in Accra, October 12, 2011).

When I was at home, my friend (also from our village but living here in Accra) was calling me and asking me to come to Accra, but now he has travelled to South Africa. His younger brother, who is now here, was also always inviting me to come and help him to sell Khebab, especially during Christmas. Because they were always calling and encouraging me to come to Accra, I was not afraid. I knew that I will get work to do and not struggle looking for work. So I decided to come here and work to get my own money (Interview with Mumuni in Accra, November 12, 2011).

It is evident from the account of Attis that the lifestyles of migrants from the village during home visits, as can be seen from items such as bicycles, influenced his decision to migrate. Besides lifestyles and material possessions, both Attis and Mumuni were informed and persuaded to migrate by migrants from their home villages, who were resident in Accra. According to Attis, his late Uncle who was selling roasted meat (Khebab) in Accra encouraged him and assured him of a job in Accra which would enable him earn his own money. Similarly, Mumuni narrates that his

friend (also from his home village but living in Accra) was calling him and asking him to come to Accra. Although the friend migrated further to South Africa, his younger brother, who took over the business, continued to invite him, which culminated in his decision to migrate to Accra. This seems to support the assertions by Adepujo (1977) and Massey et al (1998) that the households or families of migrants and communities (Harttgen and Klasen, 2009) have immense influence on the decision making of migrants. Consequently, the decision making process of these children was consultative, involving people from their communities. Furthermore, migration decisions are also made with the involvement of all actors, a process referred to in this study as tripartite consultative volition.

Tripartite consultative volition

Further analysis of the data revealed a novel form of consultative decision making. This involves all three actors (children, households and community) deciding together on the migration decision making of children. This process, as shown in figure 3, is the tripartite consultative volition in decision making. About 10 of the 35 migrant children reported consulting members of their households and the communities in which they lived when they were deciding to migrate to Accra. The narration of Attis is a typical example of the tripartite consultative decision making. Not only was he willing to migrate, but also his mother consented while his uncle in Accra encouraged him to migrate. However, his recount about encouragement from his uncle in Accra suggests that the decision might have been instigated by the uncle, and convinced by the job availability, Attis consulted and convinced his mother to consent. The uncle assured him of work and gave him information about other livelihood options in Accra. This model is similar to consensual decision-making which occurs when all members of the family mutually agree to a decision (Pearson, 1989). While this process of decision-making is viewed as the best method of reaching a decision, it is probably the least frequent.

Imposition in child migration decision making

Imposition in child migration decision making emerged as the process whereby the migration decisions were forced on the person involved in the migration. It is a process in which the decision is made without the consent and involvement of the person who actually embarks on the journey. In this study, households played very active roles in children's migration decision making. Two main types of imposition emerged in this study. These are unilateral and consultative imposition.

Unilateral imposition

Unilateral imposition emerged as a process in which either parents/households or non-related community members make migration decisions for children without their (children's) involvement or consent. Three (3) of the children interviewed said their migration decisions were imposed on them. These were all girls who lived and worked in the homes of none family relations in Accra.

The lamentation of a 14-year-old girl (Atipoka) who was working as a house help in Accra at the time of the interview narrated that:

I didn't want to come here [Accra]. It was my mother and my uncle who asked me to come. They said this place is better for me than if I stayed in our hometown, because I was not doing anything there and she [my mother] didn't have money to take care of me and the whole family. If I get some money or if someone I know is going home, I will go back because I miss my mother and my two brothers and sister. Although the family I work for here is taking good care of me and give me money every month, I miss my family back home. If I had the power, I will not have come here, but I was just asked to come to Accra to work and get some money (Interview with Atipoka in Accra, December 7, 2011).

From this narration, Atipoka had to migrate to Accra at the instance of her mother and uncle. She had to accept the decision in response to the family's circumstances in order to help her mother cater for the family. This is similar to level 2 of Bushin's (2008) framework where parents make the decision and only notify the child. Atipoka was not part of the decision making process but only complied with it. However, although she considered the decision as an imposition and was hoping for an opportunity to return, possibly to visit her family because she missed them, it was a prudent decision, considering the circumstances of the family. Unfavourable family economic circumstances and raptures render parents and households unable to meet their obligations (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013; Hashim and Thorsen, 2011), resulting in child migration as an alternative livelihood option.

Consultative imposition

Consultative imposition of migration decision making emerged as a process whereby parents and non-related community members decide for children to migrate without seeking their consent. Although this type was rare, involving only three (3) respondent migrant children in this study, it is worth considering and implicit in the forgoing narration of Atipoka. She admitted that her mother and uncle decided for her to migrate to work, earn some money and support her mother to cater for the family. She recounts further that:

My mother and my uncle talked among themselves and asked me to come here. I didn't know anything about this place [Accra]. I was only asked to follow one of our relatives who was coming here. She said she was bringing me here to live with my mother's friend to be helping her small, small. I was crying when I was coming with the woman but she told me not to cry because Accra is a better place and that I will be happy when I get there. Like I said earlier, I am happy here but I miss my mother, two brothers and sister back in our home town (Interview with Atipoka in Accra, December 7, 2011).

This narration suggests some form of consultation between the parents of Atipoka and the woman (a distant relative resident in their hometown) to apparently impose the decision on Atipoka as she had no option but to follow the woman to Accra. This is similar to level 1 of Bushin's (2008) classification where parents make the decision but allow other people to communicate it to the child. In this instance, although the decision by her parents was premised on genuine family circumstances, the concerns of Atipoka appear not to have played any role in the decision making process. It was more a matter of the distant relative convincing her that life at the destination was better and that her economic circumstances could improve with the migration. Of course, the views of children in many African families are often ignored when making decisions about the family, and in a patriarchal family setting, as it pertains in northern Ghana, children are often expected to be submissive and their views often subdued. This is a cherished virtue and such children are considered good children and well behaved (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011). Atipoka can only hope to return to her mother once she earns some money for transport or when she grows older.

Concluding Remarks

This paper explored the actors and processes involved in child migration decision making, which is crucial and integral in the phenomenon of child migration. Not only is decision making the first step in the process of migration, but it is also a complex process involving an intricate mix of actors and processes. Using the children-in-family migration decision making framework by Naomi Bushin (2008), this study identified unilateral, consultative and imposed decision making involving children, parents and community members as the key actors in the decision making process.

Contrary to the view that children have no agency or role in their migration decision making, this study observed that migration decisions were imposed on only 3 out of the 35 child migrants. The decisions were made by parents and distant relatives and as observed by Bushin (2008), they were only informed after the decision was made. Although in Bushin's (2008) study the entire family migrated, only the children concerned migrated in this case. This category of children appeared weak and without agency in their migration decision making (Schmidt-Kallert, 2009). They only complied with the decisions of their parents and other people in their communities.

On the other hand, the majority of the children were very active and were the initiators of their migration decisions which they then convinced their parents/households and members of their communities to approve. This is slightly different from the children-in-family framework since the initiators of the decision are not parents, as observed by Bushin (2008), but the children themselves who then try to convince parents to accept their proposals. This may appear unrealistic in a patriarchal system where the views of children and other vulnerable groups seem suppressed. However, children in this study were active and employed tactful means of initiating and convincing other actors involved in the tripartite arrangement in their migration decision making. Although some children made unilateral decisions, the majority (20 out of 35) consulted or informed their parents and people living in their origin communities in deciding to migrate.

Therefore, underestimating the crucial role children play in this process has the tendency to obscure the process and can only make it more difficult to control and to enhance the benefits of child migration.

Child migration decision making involves a sequence of unilateral, consultative and imposed, decisions, often interwoven and dovetailed into one another. Although this sequence is possible in the theoretical discourse (Bushin, 2008), decisions are often made with components of the process reinforcing one another. However, this process is often catalysed by raptures in the family, gradual break down of family support systems and poverty (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013), which weaken the position of parents and thus compromise their negotiation positions.

It is worth noting, however, that although the respective phases of decision making have been isolated and discussed, migration decisions are made within the context and interplay of all three groups of actors, with each reinforcing the other in the sequence. It is therefore imperative for parents and policy makers to understand these processes, as the benefits of child migration can be controlled and/or enhanced if adequate attention is given to the decision making, which is usually the first step in the process of migration.

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