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The politics of migration policy implementation in Ghana

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Abstract

This article dives into the complex web of actors and processes of migration policy implementation in Ghana, revealing political tensions as they play out in this field. The analysis is based on semi-structured interviews with bureaucrats and practitioners involved in migration governance initiatives in Ghana. The study reveals how institutional power hierarchies and funding structures affect execution processes on the ground. Mapping out observations concerning implementation as it is experienced across the vertical scale of involved actors, the study reveals that politics are engrained in Ghanaian migration policy implementation through experiences of (1) incoherent narratives on policy and migration; (2) local-level exclusion from policy design; and (3) mismatch between policy targets and local realities. The article concludes by contemplating theoretical needs and proposing avenues for future research.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Ghanaian Ministry of Interior unveiled its new National Migration Policy (NMP), a comprehensive policy addressing issues related to internal migration, immigration, and emigration. Despite its initial acclaim, the realization of the policy stumbled as the implementing body, the Ghana National Commission on Migration (GNMC), never was established. At the time of writing, the NMP and its offshoots—the National Diaspora Engagement Policy and the National

Labor Migration Policy—remains yet to be implemented (Kandilige et al., 2023; Mouthaan, 2019). Despite these setbacks, various migration governance instruments have been applied, with and without reference to the national agenda. This has led to a fragmented implementation landscape, in what otherwise may be seen as a coherent national policy framework for migration governance.

This article probes into this landscape, unraveling the intricate politics of migration policy implementation in Ghana. Drawing on interviews with bureaucrats and practitioners, the analysis addresses the pivotal question of which, and how, political tensions within institutional structures influence migration policy implementation processes. The article examines the impact of international actors and funding on policy narratives, practices, and outcomes, finding that the presence of multiple agendas strongly influence the practical realization of policy instruments on the ground. Doing this, the article responds to empirical and theoretical gaps in implementation research (see e.g., Sager & Gofen, 2022), and addresses a theoretical deficiency by illustrating how geopolitical power hierarchies prominently impact migration policy implementation in the African context.

To contextualize migration governance in Ghana, this article draws on empirical studies of migration governance in Africa and theoretical works on governance and implementation. After outlining the research design and data collection, the analysis introduces current migration governance processes in Ghana. It emphasizes the role of financial hierarchies in shaping implementation, and then explores the practical experiences of implementation by investigating three areas where political tensions are evident: local-level translation of policy narratives; the exclusion of executors from decision-making; and mismatches between policy design and on-the-ground realities. Insights are discussed by highlighting local-level consequences, and the article concludes by contemplating theoretical needs and proposing avenues for future research.

2 | THE POLITICS OF MIGRATION GOVERNANCE

Ghana's migration governance indexes longstanding, multidirectional, and mixed migration flows. In practice, the distinction between regular and irregular migration is not always clear-cut in West Africa, where borders are known to be porous (Agbedahin, 2014). The Ghanaian government nevertheless continues to govern international migration flows proactively, though its focus has changed over time. In the first half-century after independence in 1957, Ghanaian politics was shaped by winds of pro-nationalism and later Pan-Africanism. At the time, migration governance primarily focused on regional mobility and integration challenges (Olaniyi, 2008). The country introduced tough regulations on immigration, deportation, and immigrant employment to protect the domestic labor market while also actively engaging in establishing the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Free Movement Protocol in the 1970s (Awumbila et al., 2014; Teye et al., 2015). This dual approach reflected a governance paradox, balancing national interests with regional integration ambitions. While the last mass expulsions from Ghana (and of Ghanaians from Nigeria) occurred decades ago, this paradox continues to impact current migration policy dialogs, with the implementation of the ECOWAS free movement zone being undermined by national interests (Arhin-Sam et al., 2022).

This period was followed by a steady diversification of Ghanaian emigration patterns and the growing salience of, and reliance on, remittances. As such, migration governance actors started to concentrate on the economic potential of emigration, also by focusing on Ghanaians in the overseas diaspora. Since the 2000s, migration as a governance field became tightly linked to

external funding and international agendas. The government and Ghanaian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have over the last decades received increasing amounts of aid from highly developed economies, particularly in Europe, directly targeted at migration governance and policy (see e.g., Kandilige et al., 2023).

Many of the first projects funded and operated by external actors sought to support Ghana and other ECOWAS countries' internal affairs, for example, on enhancing the framework and practices of free regional mobility. Amidst growing calls from African governments to enable legal pathways of migration, some policies also included legal migration programs to highly developed countries. Funding was also directed at interventions to strengthening the government's diaspora engagement (Kandilige et al., 2023). Seen through the lens of the "migration-development nexus," these policies can be said to form part of the "positive" turn, wherein migration was hailed as beneficial for development in origin countries (de Haas, 2010).

Yet, following the securitization and economic downturns of the early 2000s as well as accompanying political ambitions to thwart irregular migration to Europe from the 2010s onwards, policy collaboration between Europe and Africa on migration and development has been coopted by the security agenda. An example par excellence is the European Union Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF for Africa), established to circumvent mobility through improved migration management and preventive measures, such as the approach of addressing "root causes" (Carling & Talleraas, 2016; Zanker, 2019). In Ghana, migration governance related funding and policy mechanisms deriving from Europe are now primarily focusing on individuals who migrate irregularly; irregular migrants' return to Ghana; and increased capacity-building on migration management and border control (Kandilige et al., 2023). These scenarios are not unique to Ghana, being only one of several African countries in recent years to receive funding and international pressure to elevate their migration governance standards.

2.1 | A theoretical position on migration governance

This article's theoretical point of departure lies at the intersection of migration politics and governance as put forward by Carmel et al. (2022). In their take, the political is interwoven in governance processes since the knowledge foundation and definition of issues at stake in migration governance are, inherently, political. In this formula, governance is understood as "regimes of governance processes," thereby highlighting context-specific conceptual *and* material elements. Politics here refers to "practices of power/authority" (Carmel et al., 2022, pp. 5–8). As such, political elements surface in both conceptual migration governance framings and material expressions on the ground. Closely linked, the conceptualization of international migration governance by Geddes et al. (2019, p. 8) highlights not just the actors involved, but their "roles and actions." Emphasizing both conceptualizing and steering mechanisms, the view sees migration governance as an organizational process.

These understandings of migration governance may be considered particularly appropriate in the African context, where specific policy instruments are implemented by actors on the ground though not necessarily overtly linked to a national agenda. As Koechlin (2015) points to in relation to governance conceptualization in Africa, numerous ways of doing governance co-exists, meaning that in some cases it may be more fruitful to examine how local, not national, actors comprehend and practice governance. Indeed, scholarship on African migration governance, such as that on European and African migration partnerships (see e.g., Paoletti, 2011), has found that the individuals involved in policymaking are constantly transforming and reshaping

the conditions to which they are subject (Jessop, 2016). To understand the relationship between existing structures and unequal international power relations as well as local material mechanisms of migration governance (see. e.g., Lenner, 2020), it is crucial to adapt a multi-scalar perspective on governance. Doing so can reveal how global geopolitical structures, local policy processes, and individual's everyday decision-making constantly interact and develop in parallel processes (see Carmel, 2019). In this view, quotidian actions of street-level practitioners and officials "doing" implementation are as important as international or national policy processes to understand (the inherently political) migration governance (see e.g., Brachet, 2016; Lipsky, 2010).

To this end, this analysis seeks to bring the migration governance implementation process to the forefront. The research-based call for decentering migration governance discourses (Triandafyllidou, 2020) is relevant in this regard, as many of the Ghanaian migration governance actors operate at subnational levels—and distant from the capital of Accra. This study's conceptualization of governance therefore includes, and highlights, practices from non-state actors, including in rural areas. In addition, as raised by Carmel (2019), it is crucial to examine both political contestation and daily administrative procedures, particularly at the ground level. Therefore, foregrounding decentered implementation processes can reveal contradictory mechanisms and effects in what may be conceptualized otherwise as a coherent field of governance (see also Mosse, 2004).

2.2 | Unanswered puzzles on migration policy implementation in Africa

More and more scholarship on migration governance in Africa has examined international collaborative mechanisms, finding a convergence of migration policy strategies primarily in line with European or "global" agendas (see e.g., Lavenex, 2016; Teye, 2022). This has led to a growing discourse on European externalization policies in Africa, which may be categorized as covering two main research areas. The first strand delves into policymaking processes, agendas, and narratives surrounding migration governance, including European and African perspectives and incentives for partnerships (see e.g., Adam et al., 2020; Lixi, 2019; Norman, 2020; Triandafyllidou, 2020). The second strand endeavors to evaluate the effectiveness of policies, often highlighting lack of local impact (see e.g., Stutz & Trauner, 2022; Zanker, 2019). Recent research has also focused on other, including potentially unintended, consequences affecting everyday migration dynamics (Deridder & Pelckmans, 2020; Gazzotti et al., 2022; Vammen et al., 2022).

The present study accepts policymaking and implementation as an inherent part of any regime of migration governance processes. Treating governance as practices highlights not only meaning and discourse, but also action and artifacts, which constitute central aspects of the implementation itself (Carmel, 2019). Yet, in research on migration governance in Africa, little attention has gone to the details of implementation processes. Research on the effectiveness of EU external policy in non-EU countries is a notable exemption, which highlights the relevance of the macro-context, including rule adoption and domestic conditions in implementing countries (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009), as well as the relevance of local contexts, for example, the feeling of ownership, organizational structures and interests of implementing actors (Wünderlich, 2012).

In governance research, calls have long demanded more attention for policy implementation rather than mere content (see e.g., Brinkerhoff, 1996). Sager and Gofen (2022) underscore that while the implementation phase determines the effect of policy, recent research tends to

disregard the political aspects of implementation. To this end, it is useful to see implementation at the intersection of policy, politics, and the public (Pressman & Wildavvsky, 1973). Indeed, implementation is technical, but perhaps also equally political (Hill & Hupe, 2002). As found by Lutz (2021), for instance, electoral incentives can affect, or prevent, the implementation of formal migration policy. To understand implementation, an inherently political and multi-scalar process, the relevance of both macro (top-down) and local (bottom-up) contexts, including actors and their preferences, must be acknowledged (Hill & Hupe, 2002).

Taking on such an analytical endeavor in the Ghanaian context, seeking to fill an empirical research gap, specific attention is given to scope out structural arrangements and institutional power hierarchies impact the actualities of the implementation process (Sager & Gofen, 2022). As echoing concerns voice the challenges of implementing migration-related policies in Ghana (Adam et al., 2020; Arhin-Sam et al., 2021; Mouthaan, 2019), it is particularly fruitful to move below the governance surface to scrutinize the role of local stakeholders and policy interventions as they are executed on the ground.

3 | RESEARCH DESIGN

This study's fieldwork was conducted in Ghana in October and November 2022. Two researchers and two research assistants carried out fifty-two semi-structured interviews with individuals engaged in Ghanaian migration governance, from top-level policymakers to local-level practitioners working on issues such as labor migration, return and reintegration, forced migration, border management, diaspora affairs and more. In addition to interviews, the data includes informal conversations and ethnographic observations in numerous organizations and offices.

The recruitment process was designed to include a range of perspectives and policy areas. Potential interviewees were identified with the aim of establishing a rigorous policy understanding, gaining expert insights, and filling gaps in existing literature. Interviewees were contacted initially through professional networks and official organization entry points, and then via snowballing techniques. In some cases, potential interviewees requested organizational approval from their superiors. In other cases, such as with state units and large organizations, consent to contact staff was sought during initial interviews with top-level administrators.

This recruitment strategy deployed a broad range of perspectives among the interviewees while also considering practicalities of accessibility. Nonetheless this study has a few potential sources of bias. One is linked to the top-down selection as leaders sometimes selected subsequent interviewees within their units, which in addition to raising ethical questions around consent, also means that the viewpoints represented may be skewed. Another is that one of the researchers involved in data collection has been involved as a consultant in the migration governance field, with pre-established professional links to some key interviewees. This may have influenced their positionality on issues discussed, as they may have felt they had to provide answers aligning with what they believed the researchers wanted to hear. However, it is also possible that this dynamic improved the richness of the interviews. First, in terms of scope since this enabled the recruitment of individuals in elite positions which otherwise may not have been interested in partaking. Second, in terms of depth since most of the top-level interviews were carried out by a pair of two researchers, where one represented the "insider" with exclusive insights on the Ghanaian migration policy realm, while the author represented the "outsider" who could pose questions from theoretical, and oblivious, perspectives (see also Carling et al., 2014). Although both researchers interweaved between insider and outsider perspectives, both are experts but not

omniscient in the field, working in a dyad facilitated requests for explanations of closed-door policy processes and what otherwise might have seemed like questions with obvious answers, for example, concerning well-known policy processes.[1]

While the study draws on the totality of data material, the principal findings are based on the author's targeted analysis of the interviews with individuals engaged in local-level implementation processes. This subsegment of 32 individuals includes local assembly people, local unit leaders, and street-level staff in 20 governmental and non-governmental Ghanaian organizations as well as four international or foreign organizations. They work in geographically dispersed areas covering places with different migratory dynamics including Sunyani (the capital of the Bono Region, in the east), Tamale (the capital of the Northern Region), Aflao (a town on the Ghana-Togo border), Elubo (a town on the Ghana-Ivory Coast border), Tema (a port city in the Greater Accra Region), and Accra. To maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, small and place-specific units and organizations are described rather than named and job titles have been removed where necessary.

4 | CURRENT MIGRATION GOVERNANCE IN GHANA

Research on migration governance in Ghana has included manifold efforts to map relevant actors, processes, and policies (see e.g., Adam et al., 2020; Arhin-Sam et al., 2021; Awumbila et al., 2014; Devillard et al., 2015; Kandilige et al., 2023; Mouthaan, 2019). The field's major players have stayed largely unchanged over the past 20 years, although some areas of responsibility that have shifted, for example, between the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In contrast, the formal policy sphere has undergone major transformations—much of it in response to international agendas.

Migration governance in Ghana includes multiple actors and links of collaboration. Key Ghanaian actors include nine ministries, with the Ministry of the Interior having a major role as it houses the Ghana Refugee Board and the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS). Within the Presidency, two offices are engaged in diaspora affairs and investment promotion. In addition, three Ghanaian autonomous bodies—the National Population Council, the Ghana Statistical Service, and the University of Ghana-based Center for Migration Studies—are in varying degrees involved in migration governance, often in collaboration with ministerial units. Despite the presence of numerous performers specializing across areas, the division of responsibilities is not always clear-cut. Therefore, many actors continue to call for the establishment of the GNMC, the body meant to coordinate the implementation of the NMP.

Ghana's two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress and the New Patriotic Party, have both been influential in shaping the country's approach to migration. The current migration policy landscape has been strategically formed by these two parties, and the bipartisan approach may have enabled what has become a general sense of ownership of migration policy processes (Kandilige et al., 2023). Likewise, a whole-of-society approach has resulted in more invitations for input from non-state actors such as academic institutions, local chiefs, and NGOs. After being included in the drafting process of the three national migration policies (the NMP, the National Labor Migration Policy and the National Diaspora Engagement Policy) some non-state actors have remained active, while others have remained at the outskirts of the migration governance arena.

As for international actors, both policy-development and day-to-day management are carried out in close collaboration with traditional stakeholders such as the International Organization

for Migration (IOM), the International Labor Organization, and other United Nations agencies. Furthermore, the International Center for Migration Policy and Development (ICMPD) and the German development agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) have become increasingly involved in migration governance processes. Since 2014, ICMPD has played a critical role in providing technical assistance to the government and GIS, while GIZ primarily has focused on increasing employment chances, and income-generating opportunities for returnees or prospective migrants (GIZ, 2022; Walker, 2021).

However, the intricate roles and on-the-ground actions of organizations like ICMPD and GIZ are scarcely delineated in research on Ghana. As cooperation with and reliance on international organizations, such as ICMPD, may reinforce asymmetrical and postcolonial nature of migration governance, prompting European interests on African governments (Strange & Martins, 2019) there is a need to examine these actors influence in Ghanaian migration governance. Similarly, the prevalent role played by other non-state actors in Ghana, such as academic consultants, is also left unexplored. As Ghanaian academics have been involved as consultants in policy drafting processes and in project evaluations, it is appropriate to critically assess how European financing arrangements may have impacted the consultants' opinions. Yet, as asserted by Kandilige et al. (2023) Ghanaian academics have also "pushed back against European preference" in policy drafting processes.

In sum, migration governance in Ghana is clearly a cross-cutting and multiplayer phenomenon. While much time passed between the initial inception and official launch of all the three migration-related policies, these are—in combination with the pre-existing legal frameworks on migration[2]—the official backdrop of Ghana's current priories on migration. Of equal relevance, especially to implementation as this analysis reveals, is the scope of and relations between governance actors that, taken together, play a crucial role in current Ghanaian migration governance.

5 | THE FUNDING HIERARCHY OF IMPLEMENTATION

Discussions with interviewees across Ghanaian migration governance confirm that the many units included form part of a complex web. Partners were seen to hold unique positions of power in terms of their financial, including managerial, control. This mirrors the argument by Geddes et al. (2019), highlighting the importance of examining actors' specific roles and actions vis-à-vis one other to understand the steering mechanisms in migration governance. In the current study, interview insights show a diversity of relationships between partners, often linked to financial flows: some units collaborated closely in more equal power relationships, such as when both had managerial powers and their own financial assets; others collaborated across larger power gaps, for example, when one actor made all decisions while another was executing actions on demand and reliant on the partners' financial assets.

The possibilities and challenges of implementation were tightly linked to the hierarchies of financial power. While this largely mirrored the international, national, and local scales, funding issues were also cross-cutting as some organizations' local-level units had large financial assets, while others depended on internal organizational funds (often earmarked) or external funds (requiring, e.g., responses to calls for tenders). Indeed, in most interviews with individuals partaking in executing roles, the power of funding loomed large, which this analysis therefore identifies as a core element affecting the politics of implementation. In different guises, funding (in)dependency came up as an element shaping not only relationships between actors in the field, but also as a crucial aspect of implementation processes. It was seen as affecting local project strategies and priorities, and thus also face-to-face encounters and impact on the ground.
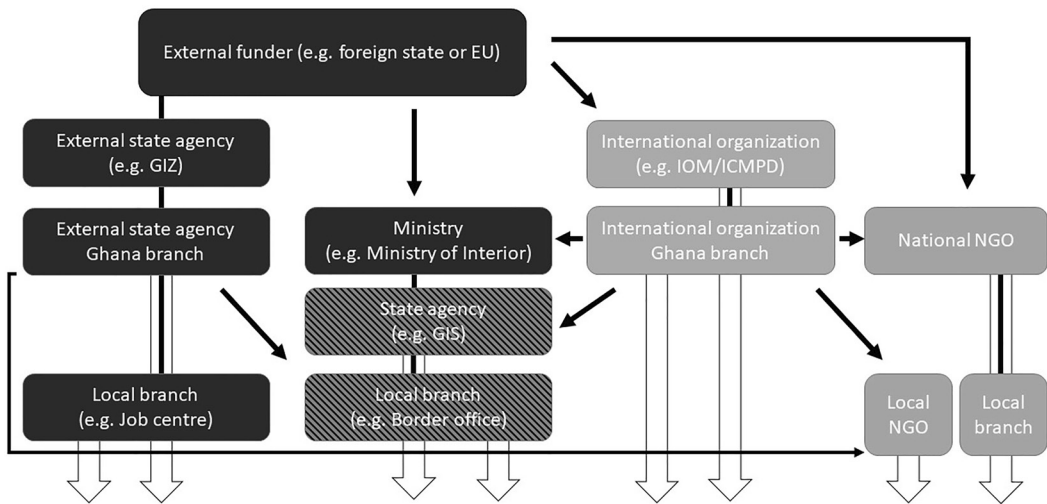
FIGURE 1 The funding hierarchy of implementation. Black boxes indicate units with their own funding, gray boxes indicate units dependent on external funding, and striped boxes indicate units that are internally and externally funded. Black arrows represent funding direction. White arrows represent on-the-ground execution, which illustrates that external states, international organizations, Ghanaian national government units, and Ghanaian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are all involved as migration policy implementing actors (author's own illustration).

Figure 1 illustrates the key funding streams for the implementation processes included in this study. Most of the projects stemmed from external states, although the Government of Ghana was a primary funder of the GIS. The figure convey what many interviews made clear, namely that funding and decision-making powers often—but not always—were intertwined. External states (including the EU) funded projects they executed themselves (such as projects executed by GIZ), but they also provided funds to Ghanaian partners directly (such as GIS or local NGOs) or indirectly through international organizations (such as via IOM), yet often with clearly targeted objectives. In instances via international organization, funds were at times spent on projects implemented by the organization itself or, again, redistributed to governmental or non-governmental Ghanaian partners.

As many interviewees conveyed, funding streams and collaboration were not always clear-cut and transparent, but at times rather opaque. Yet, the funding architecture surrounding a given implementation process was seen to affect the actions carried out on the ground, be it information provision to potential migrants or document checks at a border crossing. Some also mentioned the link between funding and monitoring. For instance, the leader of one NGO explained that international organizations, like the IOM, would monitor projects more closely than those funded directly from an external donor, for example, through an embassy. Also, in local branches of international and foreign organizations, there was seemingly more freedom in terms of expenditure than for local Ghanaian organizations. This is not surprising, but still noteworthy, as the international organizations reportedly had more internal funds, and were less dependent on external donors, calls for tenders and subsequent close monitoring of projects.

The funding hierarchy does not only mirror institutional power hierarchies, it also illuminate the striking fact that all Ghanaian local-level implementing actors included in this study receive some form of foreign state funding. As many interviewees in the NGO sector highlighted, there was a tendency toward funding dependency. Some attributed this to unequal and geopolitical

power structures. Others expressed frustration with a lack of efficient bureaucratic structures or stability in government units working on migration, which in their belief would have improved not only the execution of specific policy mechanisms, but also led to greater independence—from external actors, in particular.

Some local NGOs signaled another funding architecture side effect. They explained that the last decade's boom in international funds for migration governance projects led to greater competition in the field. As opportunities for funding had increased, local NGOs competing for migration-related funds mushroomed. The leader of a large local NGO with longstanding ties to external funders observed a resulting decrease in professionalism.

> The idea about setting up these organizations is something that keeps baffling me. Some of [the NGO leaders] tend to think their organization is a source of livelihood and so they regard it as a business venture. But it is not supposed to be so. [...] This is something that should be considered with passion so that [the NGOs] can work for the interest of the people and try to help them be better off.

He argued that some of the new actors copied what established actors, like himself, did even though they had no previous experience of working with migrants or migration. A related concern was that funding was now spread across more and more actors. This aggravated the economic situation of NGOs, specifically at times when international funds decreased. Several interviewees shared how they feared, and in fact experienced, new funding challenges, as the global economic downturn—in their view—appeared to affect the EU and European states' prioritization of migration governance in Africa.

6 | SPACES OF TENSION IN IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES

Numerous success stories and challenges concerning migration policy implementation were mentioned during interviews. Yet, when mapping these experiences, three distinct areas of dissent can be discerned along the, primarily, vertical scale of collaboration, that is, between the top level policymakers and the bottom level policy-implementers. These are conceptualized in the study as key areas in which the politics of migration policy implementation becomes visible. The first concentrates on the co-existence of different narratives concerning migration dynamics and migration-related challenges. The second highlights scalar variance of inclusion in decision-making processes. The third deals with the potential lack of groundedness. Analyzed separately and together, these political tensions do not only affect local level experiences of implementation processes, but also final policy outcomes.

As the ensuing elaborations illustrate, these three areas are linked to the overall political power hierarchy in implementation processes and are also, to varying extents, interrelated. Further, these more specific spheres of ambiguity manifest how the political becomes observable in both conceptual *and* the material parts of Ghanaian migration policy implementation.

6.1 | Narratives: Local-level translation of policy concepts

When talking about their day-to-day work—including aims and practices of local-level implementation—stakeholders showed great variation in how they related to policy agendas.

Some had strong insights into governmental work, such as on the national migration policies and, albeit to a lesser extent, national legal frameworks of relevance. Others, primarily low-level implementers, were completely unaware of national, or international, policy frameworks. As a general trend, most could specify the targets of the specific projects they worked on, but only some reflected on them in relation to the Ghanaian government or other state agendas and policies on migration.

In the absence of distinct patterns within the group of interviewees, the migration narratives were at times coherent with overarching policy agendas, while other times far from it. Specific understandings, such as on what type of migration a policy targeted, could align with the formal aims of a project among leaders, but still translate differently on the ground, such as among the street-level practitioners who decided which individuals to target in outreach activities. This reveals a tension concerning the translation of key concepts from the policy drawing board to the space where they are put in practice, for example, when it comes to informing the selection of participants or activities to be carried out.

A telling example comes from a local NGO working on return, reintegration, and irregular migration reduction projects in a medium-sized city. The practitioners often referred to the importance of decreasing irregular migration. At the time of the interviews, they were funded by multiple agencies and focused primarily on sensitization and vocational training provision to potential migrants. Within this work they also included a mix of potential *international* and *internal* migrants in their activities. Thus, they applied the conceptualization of irregular migration to signify some types of internal migration. Included in their group of beneficiaries were young women who considered and/or had returned after moving to Accra to work as head porters—a practice locally called *kayayei*. While considered an ordinary line of work, *kayayei* can also be dangerous, as both NGO workers and local community residents pointed out. Therefore, the inclusion of these workers under the "irregular migrants" category may be logical. Still, for those whom the policy targeted, labeling a regular practice irregular added the burden of being perceived as doing something illicit. On the other hand, it also led to the opportunity to receive training, which would not have been possible if they were not categorized as "irregular migrants."

This example illustrates how narratives may translate across implementation scales. The extent to which the involved actors were aware of this difference remains unclear. The international organizations overseeing the activities at this specific NGO were at times visiting, and it is thus likely they knew that the actual migrants included were not in line with their funder's strict target of those aiming for Libya or Europe. Still, the practice remained. For the NGO, reliant on support and legitimacy among local community leaders, it may have been beneficial to include internal migration in activities, as this was a more salient issue in the area than international migration.

6.2 | Inclusion: Executors are not involved in decision-making

As mentioned earlier, the whole-of-society approach has ensured that some local stakeholders were invited to provide input in the drafting of the three national migration-related policies in Ghana (Kandilige et al., 2023; Mouthaan, 2019). Despite this, the extent of ownership and agreement with the final policy agendas among different stakeholders varied. Some local-level actors also emphasized that they were not invited to participate, while others were even unaware of the national policies or their drafting process. Those who were included acknowledged being

included as highly important even though some disapproved of the outcome. In their view, participating in the drafting stage bore no results for their everyday work nor impact on the priorities of their projects. Those who were happy with their participation attributed the lack of results and impact to the stalled finalization of the national policies, while others saw this as a signal of lacking recognition of local-level actors' expertise.

When discussing collaboration with local stakeholders during the execution of specific projects or aspects of policy, some reflected on the feeling that they, as low-level implementers, had to contend with preconceived strategies and activities that failed to reflect the nuances of their work. In instances where the migration project did not correspond to local realities, the local partners reported they were not given sufficient opportunity to redraft project plans nor participate in designing them in the first place. A GIS regional commander did not express frustration by the lack of inclusion, but rather treated it as a matter of fact.

> You know, for me, I am at the implementation end and I don't have any idea about what goes on at the negotiation table [...]. All I get to know is that [...] they are coming with a package. Therefore, staff need to undergo training. So what goes into policy negotiation... I haven't been on that front.

A quite different perspective was underscored by the leader of a local NGO working on various issues primarily linked to irregular migration.

> [Funders] always make use of the top-down approach in anything they do because it is what they think is, or will be, good for them. We sometimes come up with very laudable suggestions which get ignored [...]. Honestly, most of the suggestions they bring up are cooked-up and so they never work.

As these excerpts illustrate, there appeared great variation in how organizations and individuals were invited to the drawing table, which part of the governance process they were included in (e.g., at the drafting stage, but not the decision stage) and how they felt it affected their work To some extent, this mirrors findings on different ways non-state actors have been included in regional migration governance processes (Bisong, 2022). A distinct pattern in Ghana, could be traced between units working on projects funded by institutional funds (such as GIS) versus on externally funded projects. There was more scalar collaboration in terms of specifying activities in the former group, but also more understanding and agreement when they were not included in drafting and discussions. Among the latter, funders mostly included in their dialogs top and mid-level staff, such as unit leaders and other intermediators, but rarely included street-level staff or their insights on local contexts and needs.

6.3 | Groundedness: Mismatch between policy design and local realities

Strongly linked to the lack of inclusion in strategic and implementation decision-making, was the mismatch between the design of specific projects and their local fit and appropriateness. Many anecdotes showcased how this resulted in programs being implemented without producing meaningful results. For instance, the bulk of practitioners working on migration information provision highlighted the need for employment opportunities rather than simply risk awareness. Moreover, those working with vocational training, such as for returnees, emphasized the need

for post-training support, such as providing premises and materials. Offering initial training or even a business set-up "starter kit" for migrants did not necessarily work in practice. This was most apparent for people who received employment training where actual job offers were scarce. One interviewee who had collaborated with IOM as a local executing partner brought this up when discussing a recent project.

> This project carried out training of about 1,000 people, and they are supposed to have some support in terms of starting their own businesses, like a small capital. However, much less than 100 of the people who were trained, out of the 1,000, received the support they thought they were going to get! So, in the end, they become more frustrated than they [initially] were before the training.

A few of the interviewees had the impression that such a mismatch between project designs and realities on the ground could leave beneficiaries worse off. These arguments were brought up when reporting on the execution of larger-scale projects rather than smaller ones that would include closer contact between practitioners and migrants or potential migrants. The leader of a smaller NGO was particularly frustrated with the lack of interest in local realities among funders or external project managers, and gave a concrete example thereof.

> There was this project we did [...] and it was a community irrigation project which was supposed to benefit about 20 returnees. The consultant in charge of the project did not listen to anybody on the ground here although we gave him very laudable advice. At the end of the day, the farming project did not work because he refused to take advice from those of us here in order to have good knowledge about the terrains. So, that lack of cohesion is one of the things killing the projects here.

Similar to others local implementers, he also felt frustrated with partners' disengaged focus on project fulfillment, rather than outcomes. He stated: "What I have observed over the years is that most of these international organizations and donors are much more interested in report writing than the practical thing. So, it is as if before they start the implementation of the project, a report is already ready."

Accounts were also given of a different type of lacking in groundedness: instances where low-level implementation was hindered, or rendered more difficult, due to insufficient funds for material elements. This was particularly relevant when resources needed to carry out core functions were scarce, such as minibuses or motorbikes. Material needs varied according to the type of activity the organizations carried out, but included fuel, water, occupational attire, and agricultural equipment. Analyzing these statements as a whole reveals that local realities—including electricity availability, weather conditions, road infrastructure, and local staff needs—were not appropriately considered in implementation budgets. Likewise, implementation issues would emerge when running costs, such as for fuel, were budgeted but not provided upfront. This would lead to delays in project implementation and logistical challenges.

7 | LOCAL-LEVEL CONSEQUENCES AND THE POLITICAL SALIENCE OF MIGRATION

There are several spaces of potential political contestation in migration policy implementation processes (Carmel, 2019), which in Ghana manifest according to which actors are involved. As

such, implementation may be linear and straightforward or bumpy and challenging. The latter appears to be the result if scalar collaborative processes are nested within the politics of financial dependency, narrative incoherence, disagreements concerning decision-making inclusion, or mismatches between design and local realities. Such issues create longer distances between the stages of policy formulation and implementation phases, whereby mechanisms are put into practice in line with managerial decisions. As such, in line with Carmel et al. (2022), political tensions become visible through both conceptual and material elements in the Ghanaian policy implementation process, and this will have significant implications for targeted populations.

Moreover, conceptual elements, such as narratives of migration, are crucial to outcomes since they steer the street-level work. Although ownership to some extent is constructed and varying interpretations get brought forward—for instance, the inclusion of internal migration in the conceptualization of irregular migration—most actions still largely align with the aims of the policy frameworks within which project funding is sought. This means that from the outside, migration policy implementation in Ghana may be perceived as a coherent, successful field even though local-level implementation can deviate from the reality depicted on paper. This corresponds to findings from the policy area of development, where official tales of coherent implementation remain, despite necessarily being reflected in on-the-ground experiences (Mosse, 2004).

Thus, an implementation space marked by political tensions, such as scalar incoherence or disagreement concerning priorities, can lead to poor outcomes, as detailed by many local-level interviewees. One example concerns local practitioners experiencing a lack of focus on follow-up activities within migrant training programs. Some explained these types of projects as a zero-sum game since they led to no positive change for the migrants while their results pleased the external project funder, correctly concluding that the project was implemented according to plan.

Likewise, the material manifestations of on-the-ground implementation are more observable because they shape how projects are executed more concretely, leading to visual local-level consequences. Broken vehicles and other material needs constitute one dimension, and many reports noted how such deficiencies limited the potential impact of ongoing projects. Practitioners working on information provision and border control, for instance, described that shortage of material necessities was limiting the geographical reach of their activities. Another physical aspect of the politics of implementation was exemplified through the assumptions concerning local territorial and climatic dynamics, leading to a failed IOM-led irrigation project.

To coordinate migration-related projects in Ghana, a constellation of primarily international bodies has, according to interviewees, recently established a network platform. As GNMC, the commission to oversee the implementation of the NMP, has not yet been set up by the government, this alternative platform enables international organizations, such as ICMPD and IOM, to oversee projects and enable collaboration. Local actors, including government agencies and Ghanaian NGOs, were not included in these discussions, as reported at the time of data collection. Nevertheless, as this study's analyses reveal—pointing to the diversity of narratives, lacking groundedness, and a mismatch between aims and local realities—there is a need for greater dialog between international actors and local implementers. While the government, with its work on national policies, has signaled an ambition to play a leading role in this space, this has not yet taken place in terms of coordinating implementation. This has left local actors and international actors as the key players in the field, while the national government's anchoring effects on migration policy remains more fragile.

Absence of the government from these processes may signal the Ghanaian government's lack of interest in ground-level project execution. This absence could illustrate a profound discrepancy

in political priorities, perhaps reflecting a governmental focus on fostering free mobility within the ECOWAS region and tackling inherent migration concerns over conforming to externally driven project goals. This phenomenon is not isolated, as instances highlighted by Mouthaan (2019) reveal how political actors have leveraged the influx of donor-funding for migration to advance their sectorial or structural preferences. As noted by an international NGO practitioner engaged as a coordinator of several projects, it had been difficult to engage the Ministry of the Interior and other governmental actors on decision-making processes around project local-level execution and collaboration. Indeed, other interviewees also noted that foreign funding is important, but external policy aims concerning migration may not resonate sufficiently with governmental priorities to warrant engagement as coordinators in implementation processes.

Local-level consequences of the political tensions in implementation processes must thus also be seen in light of the political salience of migration. Relatedly, this may be part of the explanation of the apparent lack of groundedness in implementation processes. The diversity among partner aims, however, may also affect outcomes differently if local implementers had more power to shape the final execution. As reported by on-the-ground workers in both GIS and NGOs, some projects targeted external funder aims on paper but, in practice, played out to also correspond with local priorities.

8 | CONCLUSIONS

The intricate relationship between politics and governance, as conceptualized by Carmel et al. (2022), becomes evident when examining migration policy implementation in Ghana. Unpacking execution processes as they evolve, this article has illustrated that, where decision-making and financial resources are being vied for, the political is strongly interrelated with hierarchies of power among the involved actors. The high level of external funds affects which national and local actors are involved—and how. While efforts have been made to include governmental actors in implementation processes, they have not always been successful, thus impacting the collaboration between external funders and local-level implementers. Moreover, efforts to include broad Ghanaian actors may have increased the number of actors working on migration-related issues, leading to more competition among existing actors in the local space of migration governance.

As this study has revealed, three areas stand out as illustrations of scalar political tensions in migration policy implementation processes. They show how politics is indeed part of everyday actions when executing migration policy on the ground, which, again, influences local-level policy outcomes. This is unsurprising, as it is consistent with research on the power of street-level bureaucracies (see e.g., Brachet, 2016; Lipsky, 2010), yet it has not previously been pointed to in this particular context.

First, political manifestations surfaced with the finding of multiple, coexisting narratives in implementation processes. Indeed, the local narratives surrounding migration governance display a lack of coherence with narratives as they prevail in the overarching policy agendas. Local-level actors often struggle to align policy objectives and narratives concerning migration dynamics with the lived experiences of the communities they serve. This disconnect may be attributed to the influence of external donors, who shape policy priorities and strategies through their funding allocation choices. Consequently, local actors may translate the narratives on migration to fit the local context, although their interpretations may not necessarily impact the final execution of projects.

Second, and clearly linked to the first point, the issue of inclusion arises as a particular area of conflict as local-level executors find themselves excluded from decision-making processes. This is not always the case, as many actors have experiences of being included in national processes, such as during the NMP's formulation. Yet, in terms of specific mechanisms implemented on the ground, local partners' input was most often disregarded, such as when larger projects or policy instruments were put into practice. Again, experiences varied among partners and, for local-level actors relying on their own organizations' funds, as was the case with GIS, there was more acceptance of the general organization of implementation processes and less discussion of inclusion (or lack thereof) in design processes.

Third, the many arguments about the disconnect between design and on-the-ground realities display a clear point of tension. This was particularly evident among actors, primarily from local NGOs, who were implementing specific projects on behalf of other organizations. Nuances in experiences prevailed, but the general trend shows a lack of approval among local partners, as projects were seemingly successfully executed but without strong local impact or sustainable results.

Taken together, it is apparent that the politics intrinsic to institutional and funding frameworks significantly impact the experiences and outcomes of migration policy implementation in Ghana, revealing profound mismatches between overarching policies and localized realities. These findings, therefore, advocates for a continued unpacking of the politics of migration policy implementation to gain further empirical evidence and nuanced understandings of specific implementation processes in Ghana, and in other contexts marked by external migration governance intervention.

However, to this end, there is also a need to expand the theoretical work on migration policy implementation. While migration governance research to some extent acknowledges the significance of context (see e.g., Gazzotti et al., 2022; Triandafyllidou, 2020; Zanker, 2023), there are, to the author's knowledge, next to no theoretical positions on implementation that account for the importance of geopolitical power hierarchies. Due to the colonial legacy, this is particularly relevant to fully understand migration governance in Africa. Given the insights from a context heavily funded by external donors to improve its migration governance, this analysis thus signals the need to expand migration governance theory. Drawing on empirical evidence, such theorization should emphasize how an externally framed and funded governance landscape influences not only domestic policymaking and priorities (see e.g., Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020; Zanker, 2023 for recent work in this regard), but also include decentered and local implementation processes and policy outcomes—beyond policy effectiveness. Local level policy implications have been pointed to in recent empirical work (see e.g., Deridder & Pelckmans, 2020; Gazzotti et al., 2022; Vammen et al., 2022), but general theorization of governance has yet to fully incorporate these findings. This could for instance be done if theories and analytical frameworks did not only focus on how policies affect migrants or migration patterns, but broadened the understanding of policy impact to encapsulate other sociopolitical issues and institutional relations.

This article examines the dynamics between politics and governance in Ghana as they surface in the sphere of migration policy implementation. While migration governance cooperation deepens between European and African states, African migration policy agendas and implementation processes on migration are developed under stark influence of external actors—as has been the case in Ghana. While this article has provided an overview of these issues as they are arising in Ghana, future research should focus on more specific fields within the migration policy sphere. It would do well to highlight nuances that enable a comparison of policy implementation within fields and across country contexts.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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ENDNOTES

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[2] The legal framework used to govern migration-related includes specific regulations on immigration, emigration, citizenship, representation, refugee, labor, and human trafficking. The full list includes the: Refugee Law of 1992; Constitution of Ghana of 1992—guarantees the rights of Ghanaians to emigrate and the right of all persons to circulate freely within Ghana; Constitution of Ghana (Amendment) Act 1996—enables dual citizenship; Immigration Act of 2000; Citizenship Act 2000; Immigration Regulations 2001; Citizenship Regulations 2001; Labor Act of 2003; Human Trafficking Act of 2005; Representation of People's (Amendment) Act 2006; Labor Regulations of 2007; Human Trafficking (Amendment) Act 2009; Immigration (Amendment) Act 2012; Immigration Service Act 2016, and; Labor (Domestic Workers') Regulations of 2020.

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