

Regional reorganisation in Ghana: Implication on spatial extent and proximity to equitable access to critical public services

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SUMMARY

Recently, the government of Ghana re-organised some administrative regions to ensure balanced development across the country. Six new regions were carved out of some existing regions, resulting in sixteen regions. Two of the critical issues that informed the reorganisation were spatial extent and access to government institutions or services, measured by the travel distances between communities or towns and the capital of a region. Therefore, reorganisation of the regions sought to inter-alia, reduce the travel distance to improve access to public services and facilitate effective monitoring and supervision. This study employed Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to evaluate the changes in travel distances after the 2018 regional restructuring exercise. We compared the linear distances between communities, towns and villages in the affected regions and municipalities or districts to their respective old and new regional capitals. The results indicate that the reorganisation significantly ($p < 0.01$) decreased the average travel distances in all the regions of interest by 62.4 km (50.2%), with reductions ranging from 8.6 km to 129.3 km (8.1% to 75.3%). Also, significant reductions in travel distance were observed at the district and municipality levels, which suggest a general improvement in accessibility to services and institutions. However, the average travel distance rose by 7.6% to 148.5% in 7 out of the 44 affected districts and municipalities. In terms of land size, the Greater Accra region remains the smallest region (3,721 km²), while the Savannah region (36,075 km²) has replaced the old Northern region (70,217 km²) as the largest. The present study reveals the impact of the recent restructuring in Ghana on the spatial extent and travel distances from the settlements or towns and district/municipalities in the affected regions to their respective regional capitals. It demonstrates further how GIS tools can aid future decision-making regarding the alteration of regional boundaries and the selection of capital towns.

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