



Working Paper drafted for the workshop:
*Child and Youth Migration in West Africa:
Research Progress and Implications for Policy*
Organised by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty
University of Sussex and Centre for Migration Studies, University of Ghana
9th-10th June 2009, Hotel Alisa, Accra

CHILD RURAL-RURAL MIGRATION In West Africa

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July 2009

With additional funding from:



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Introduction

This paper reviews available empirical studies on children's mobility within rural areas in the West African region. Whitehead and Hashim (2005) note that while there is evidence that the number of children migrating is high and growing, there are no reliable estimates on child migration globally, regionally and even within national contexts. This is because, as with adult migration, patterns and flows of child migration are diverse and complicated, and attempts to capture them are fraught with methodological challenges, including the absence of standardised definitions of migrants and migration; variation in data collection methods and the kinds of data gathered; and the difficulty of capturing incidences of undocumented forms of migration. Additionally, research into child migration has peculiar problems. Children's movements are often hidden within figures for adults and families. Even when child migration is the subject of research, focus is often on specific categories of child migrants, such as refugees and trafficked children or on particular destinations, such as urban market centres, or cocoa plantations.¹ All this means that we lack comprehensive information on all varieties of child migration and in forms that are comparable across the region (ibid.)

This review paper attempts to document what we do and do not know about rural-rural child migration in the West African region, in order to identify gaps in our knowledge and to map out areas of priority for research. The paper brings together evidence on the volume, directions and contexts of child migration in the West African region. We focus on independent child migration² because this is the most common form of migration among children and yet those in this category have received scant attention in policy or research work (Anarfi *et al.* n.d, Thorsen 2007). We are especially interested in the participation of child migrants in the agricultural sector, the main site of employment and livelihoods on the continent. Many children migrate to work on small farms and yet rural agriculture has been relatively neglected by migration studies (de Lange 2005, cited in Thorsen 2007).

Basis for the Review Paper

There is a lack of detailed empirical work looking at the routes, practices and experiences of children migrating from rural to rural areas. The bulk of the empirical material used in this paper is drawn from three key studies: Albertine de Lange's study of young and adolescent boys

¹ In this paper, we follow the convention of defining a child as a person under 18. When we use the term 'child migrant' in reference to an empirical study, we are referring to persons under 18 at the time they study was conducted as well as older youth over 18 who were children when they first migrated.

² Independent migration is used here to refer to children migrating without their parents.

migrating from the northeastern province of Gnagna to the southeastern areas of Kompienga and Tapoa, mainly to work on small to medium scale cotton farms (2006); Iman Hashim's work with children who had migrated from a village in the northeastern Ghana, either independently or with family members, towards the southern cocoa-growing regions (2005); and Abu-Bakari Imorou's study of young people's migration out of northwest Benin to various destinations including the cotton fields in the northeast of the country (2008). We have focused on these studies because they all offer information specifically on migration to undertake agricultural labour, and because all 3 engaged in in-depth interviews with child migrants, parents and other actors on the ground over several weeks or months. All three studies also start with a complex understanding of child migration practices, recognizing the diversity of routes and seeking to go beyond the tendency to pathologise child migration and focus only on its negative and harmful impacts. These studies, though looking at different routes in three different countries, raise a number of cross-cutting issues: in all three cases the children themselves are actively involved in negotiations and decisions around migration; in all three the tension between communal good and personal aspiration is evident; all three situate their analysis of child mobility within macro economic, social and political processes; and in all three we see that even when following identical migration paths outcomes at destination are varied and often difficult to predict. Each of the three studies provides details of cases that demonstrate how the context shapes migration practices and experiences.

In addition to these studies we will refer to a number of other reports and studies which offer additional insights into child migration in the region more generally.

Rural Child Mobility in Context

McDowell and de Haan (1997) inform us that migration is the natural condition of human beings; this statement should also inform our perspectives on children's migration. The phenomenon of children migrating is not new (van Hear 1982). Neither is it an anomaly or a definite indication of social breakdown or other crises (Hashim 2005, Thorsen, 2007). In the studies we review, migration is an expected, often accepted, part of children's lives.

Moreover, children are found to participate willingly in migration. Huijsmans (2006) draws a comparison between women and children as subjects of migration research and observes that while increasing recognition of migration as a gendered experience and the heightened focus on women's independent mobility has granted women 'conceptual autonomy' (p. 2). Children,

however, continue to be treated as completely passive entities in much migration literature and policy. The studies under review show that the majority of children are involved to different degrees in the various stages of decisions around migration, from the decision to migrate at all, to the choice of destination and of living and working arrangements.

Naturally, children do not act in an unconstrained manner. This paper adopts the perspective that children's migration occurs within multiple influences and contexts, some more immediate and observable, and others further removed in their impact. To begin with, children's migration is connected to children's lives within the family and in rural areas (Anarfi *et al.*, 2003). Research on rural child migration must ask questions about children's experience of their lives and about the structures of opportunities and constraints in their home areas and elsewhere.

Child mobility is also influenced by social norms, which include ideas about children's roles and relationships within the family and in the rural community. Social norms influence the extent to which the experiences and outcomes of migration may be considered to be desirable for children. Hashim's (2005) study of children in north-eastern rural Ghana found that children at the age of four were helping with household tasks and by age fourteen were 'carrying out all those tasks that adults of their gender are able and expected to do' (p. 6). Age-appropriate work was not only a contribution to household livelihood but was also part of the process of enculturation into the wider social and economic community. However, chronological age was a lesser consideration than physical capability, and children at all ages were encouraged by adults to engage in adult activities to the extent that they were willing and able to do so (de Lange 2006, Thorsen 2007). Children's migration in these settings, especially to engage in work, was understood by parents and children as part of a socially acceptable pathway to the acquisition of relevant skills, values, independent income, and material goods. The Plan Waro study in Benin observes that the general acceptance of child migration from northwest Benin to the cotton fields in the northeast is linked to the fact that children in the sending ethnic groups experience greater freedom and adopt certain responsibilities and behaviours at an earlier age than might be true in other groups (Imorou 2008).

Child migration must also be placed in historical context. Children in areas with a tradition of migration may emulate grandparents, parents and peers. In some areas, migration has become a rite of passage for children such that *not* migrating is considered shameful (de Lange 2006).

Not only do child migrants frequently follow the example of adults in choosing to migrate, but they also follow historical routes into particular sending areas. Continuity does not imply, however, that there are no changes in the incidence or experience of migration. De Lange's (2006) study of children migrating from the impoverished provinces of Burkina Faso to the cotton fields in the southeast of the country suggests that while labour migration has been common historically, the migration of boys as young as 10 years and for such lengths of time is a recent phenomenon tied to the expansion of the cotton sector. There is also indication that in some cases the motivations behind a child's migration may have shifted from communal concerns to more individual interests and consumerism (Imorou 2008).

The shifts and variations in migration patterns and experiences indicate how child migration is influenced by the economic, social and political macro-environments in which they occur. Economic conditions affect child migration by opening up opportunities for employment. On the other side of the labour equation, child migration is fuelled by the use of family labour on smallholdings which form the bedrock of agricultural activity and outputs (Andvig, Canagarajah and Kielland n.d.), and the increasing demand for children's labour because of the scarcity and cost of adult labour (Hashim 2005). For instance, the migration of people to undertake export crop production is not new, but as land and soil quality becomes depleted, centres of production move and child migrants are travelling increasingly longer distances to these farms (Anarfi *et al*, 2003, Whitehead and Hashim 2005). The movement of cocoa cultivation across the forest belt of Cote D'Ivoire over the last 30 years, is a case in point (Bøås and Huser 2006). Again, the flow of children specifically into cotton fields in eastern Burkina Faso has only emerged since the 1990s with the growth of the cotton industry, a process that was actively encouraged by the Burkinabe government (de Lange 2006). Global economic systems form an even wider context for child migration, particularly into cash and export crop production. The prices of cocoa and cotton on the world market, for instance, are determinants of demand for labour, income and wage levels, social and physical infrastructure, and a host of other variables that affect migrant labour. A global recession, for instance, could lead to the failure of the smallholder farmer to make profits and to their consequent inability to pay or to care for the children living and working on their farms (Imorou 2008).³

³ This underscores the importance of studies that take a global value chain approach to investigating the circumstances and prospects of migrant labour (e.g. Barrientos *et al*. 2007, Barrientos *et al*, n.d.)

The macro-environment subsumes social dynamics such as the theorised process of de-agrarianisation in rural settings and the consequent breakdown of extended family relations with their bonds of interdependence and reciprocity (Amanor 2001, Bryceson 2000). Another change is the availability of technology and other facilities within rural settings – such as better roads and access to telecommunication – that make migration easier to undertake. Increasing migration has a cumulative effect as the existence of a Diaspora attracts newer migrants (Imorou 2008). Increasing monetisation of society was also mentioned in some studies as a general contextual factor for migration:

'Les gens ne connaissaient pas l'argent jusqu'à un moment donné. Ils ont connu l'argent mais il n'y avait pas les habits ici. Ils se sont dit qu'il faut qu'ils sortent hors de Matéri pour voir s'ils vont ramener de la fortune.... et des vêtements'

'People did not know money up until a certain point. Then they learnt about money but there were no clothes here. They said to themselves they must leave Materi to see if they can bring back some wealth.... and some clothes.'
(interviewee quoted in Imorou 2008, 9, our translation)

The political macro-context exerts its own influence on child migration. Civil or inter-state conflicts clearly severely restrict or render dangerous movement (see Bóâs and Huser 2006 for a description of the impacts of the civil war in Cote D'Ivoire on cocoa production). The extent of this impact is not always known because internal rural migration is often undocumented, and even when children do cross national borders, they are often not subject to the same checks as adults (see Ndao 2008). The political atmosphere affects rural-rural child migration more subtly through political discourse around child migration and the policies and laws which emerge from this. These discourses are often influenced by shifts in interests and priorities of national and international agencies and governments. Recently, for instance, there has been more political and policy rhetoric about child trafficking, which has led to a number of countries introducing anti-trafficking laws. While there is little research about the effect of these policy changes on child migration, it is possible that this framing of child mobility will affect the probability that children will migrate, the nature of their experiences at destination areas, and the outcomes of their journeys. One immediate impact has been a change in the way children move – now increasingly in small groups, and without an intermediary ('goutte a goutte') (Imorou 2008).

These broader contexts form a backdrop against which we discuss children's mobility.

What reasons do children give for undertaking rural to rural migration?

An important question in migration studies is why people migrate. What makes migration an available, viable and even preferred option in the rural areas of West Africa?

From the perspective of the children interviewed in our core studies, migration offers prospects for acquiring skills and knowledge, financial and social capital, and personal qualities necessary for their present and future life. These goals reflect children's individual preferences and desires. They are also based in part on the expectations that family and society place on children (what is means to be a 'good' child (Hashim 2005)), and the opportunities that are available to children in their home settings and in destination areas.

The reason children most frequently cited in our three main studies for their migration was to find work. Children reported being constrained in their ability to earn income. This might be because of a lack of access to land or to poor soil fertility which limited their income from farming (Ndao 2008) or because of the unavailability of non-farming employment. Alternatively, it might be because of the social organisation and practices around labour which restrict children's control over their labour and its rewards. In the area of Burkina Faso studied by de Lange (2006), young people were expected to work their family farms; working for a neighbour for wages instead was considered shameful.⁴ Both Hashim (2005) in Ghana and de Lange (2006) in Burkina Faso note that while children are encouraged to cultivate personal fields and generate income for themselves within the family farmstead, parents often exerted some influence and control over how this income was spent. Migration offered children the freedom to pursue their personal interests and to receive and spend compensation for their labour without hindrance or censure (de Lange 2006, Hashim 2005).

Another rationale children frequently gave for moving from home was to assist kin with domestic and farm work. The motives and interests surrounding a move to kin varied. Occasionally it represented an attempt by the sending households to reduce the burden on its resources, or to derive income through remittances. These incidences might be part of 'established patterns of spatially dislocated expectations and activities' (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2002) between children and their families. In other words, by migrating in order to

⁴ It is interesting to note that this area had child migrants from elsewhere who did provide wage labour.

'help a relative' families and children could be fulfilling normal obligations albeit across distances created by migration, and in doing so deepen kinship bonds in expectation of reciprocal help (Hashim 2005). We should not assume, however, that children are bartered between households at the whim of adult relatives; it has been observed that children often have a say in decision-making (Andvig 2000, Hashim 2005). In Hashim's (2005) study, children in this situation were as likely as those living with non-kin to state that their migration was their choice (Hashim 2005). Given that children who stayed with relatives had expectations of monetary and other personal benefits from these arrangements, as we will discuss, it can be argued that these kinds of inter-household movements form part of children's individual strategies to enhance their personal welfare and advance their aspirations.

Education-related motives for migration were also mentioned; children wanted to earn money for their own or their siblings' school fees or to take advantage of an opportunity to further their education or training, typically through apprenticeships. Children sometimes migrated into the households of relatives in order to learn a trade.

A minority of children across the studies stated that they were compelled to move, either because they were asked to do so by an older relative or because they experienced neglect and abuse. Another minority said they migrated in order to support the family by providing health care, or other forms of resources (Hashim 2005).

The benefits children desire or expect from migration depend in part on the situation they expect to enter. Children who were going to work in environments where labour was commoditized were more likely to expect monetary remuneration and were more confident that these would accrue to them, while children entering homes of kin might be less likely to receive a verbalised contract and were less certain of remuneration. Speaking generally the aspiration of child migrants across the various studies was to acquire material goods or cash with which to acquire certain material goods, such as a bicycle or motorbike or, in the case of girls, items for their *trousseau* (de Lange 2006, Hashim 2005, Imorou 2008, Ndao 2008).⁵

⁵ Note that these material acquisitions may reflect both personal desire as well as cultural or peer expectations about acquisition and self-reliance (de Lange 2006).

The decision to migrate is also related to longer term aspirations. Work on farms is regarded as a form of apprenticeship, as children acquire skills which prepare them for setting up their own farm (Anyidoho forthcoming, Barrientos *et al.* 2007, Hashim 2005). A study of child cattle herders suggest that their work can be a step towards becoming cattle farmers by teaching them important skills and giving them the possibility of earning animals (International Needs Network Ghana [INNG,] n.d.). In some studies, the migration experience was said by respondents to provide children with endurance, self-reliance, and other qualities that would stand them in good stead in their future (de Lange, 2006; Ndao, 2008). These perspectives are in line with literature that treats migration as a form of socialisation; some parents of children going to work in the cotton fields in Burkina Faso, for instance, would return having learned the value of hard work, obedience and therefore able to be more productive on their own and on their family's farms (de Lange 2006).

Children also considered the gain in status through migration as an important benefit. In some places, migration is so much the norm for children that there is shame or discontent associated with not migrating, as the following quote by a child migrant in Burkina Faso illustrates:

'If you have not been away, other boys will bully you. In discussions they will say: what do you know? Have you not seen Kompienga? What have you seen?'
(Honore, 16 years, quoted in de Lange 2006: 43)

Success in migration - defined mainly in terms of material gain - can potentially lead to increase in social status (de Lange 2006, Imorou 2008, Ndao 2008).

Finally, migration offered children intrinsic rewards such as the sense of adventure or a broader outlook on life (Imorou 2008, Ndao 2008, Hashim 2005).

From the studies discussed above it appears that many children's motivations for migration were largely related to personal welfare or gain, and occasionally to helping their families. However, as we discuss in the following section, there is a negotiation, and overlaps, between individual and communal (or family) interests. It is important to note, however, that the rationales that children offer to researchers may be partial because they are unwilling or unable to articulate the multiple and complex influences on them. The insights gained into why children migrate may be even more limited or superficial where researchers go into the field areas for

short periods of time to ask survey questions. There is a need to delve deeper and carefully contextualise motives and reasons for migration. We need to ask how these vary over demographic characteristics (age, gender, educational level) and over location (geographic, social, economic and cultural).

In the next section, we reflect on the available evidence about the factors that influence child migration beyond those directly reported by children, and which constrain and shape children's motives and decisions.

Household negotiations around migration

The empirical studies we looked at suggest that many children regard migration as their own choice. However, children do not make that choice in a vacuum. The most immediate influence is that of the family. Here, we look at the effect of the relationships between children and other members of the family, and the family's or household's economic circumstances.

The studies indicate that adult family members were generally sympathetic to and even encouraging of children's desire to earn independent income, especially if they were not in the position to fulfil the child's expectations of personal items. They might even see migration as a way in which to support their children, by allowing them various kinds of opportunities for material gain and personal growth (Hashim 2005, Imorou 2008). Relatively few numbers of parents in the studies reviewed were unequivocally opposed to the migration of their children. Overall, adult family members displayed an ambivalent attitude to children's migration.

Hashim (2005) analyses the ambivalence of adult family members in the context of competing individual and communal needs. On the one hand, there are the household's or family's needs for the child's labour, and the desire for children to remain at home; on the other, the need to allow the child to develop independence, and fulfil their own personal aspirations. All the studies touch on this tension; some parents accepted that since they cannot provide their children with the material goods they desire, they cannot forbid them or punish them for migrating (de Lange 2006). Children's desire to migrate was sometimes framed as a way in which young people resisted the roles and burdens placed upon them by their elders (Imorou 2008). However at the same time, the advantages of reducing the number of dependents or the necessity of meeting familial obligations to other kin in different spaces through releasing children to them make some parents amenable to the idea of their children migrating, and the

migration a fulfilment of the duties of a child, rather than a rebellion. Hashim suggests that children's migration could be regarded by the family, and by the child, either as a fulfilment or a breach of a 'contract' (Hashim 2005).⁶ Using this lens, it is possible to explore why there are variations in the attitudes of parents in different locations – a research question which might yield fruitful information about why and how different child migrations occur.

Beyond the need for labour, there were other, non-instrumental reasons that informed negotiations between children and adults on the subject of migration. Parents were sometimes wary about the dangers that children could be exposed to or simply wished to keep their children with them at home (Thorsen 2007). Sometimes the decision was not so much about whether children *should* migrate, but rather *when* they would do so; in this case the negotiation would be about whether children were mature enough for the experience, a point on which adult relatives and children could differ (ibid.).

There is also some evidence that children's migration is related to family economic situation, such that poorer children and families might be more predisposed towards migration. We have already noted that a minority of children reported neglect, hunger and poverty as a reason to move and this suggests that poorer households would have larger numbers of emigrating children. However, an interesting finding by de Lange (2006) on migrant children in rural Burkina Faso was that poverty or household income levels was not a good predictor of migration; in other words, poverty was not the main driver of migration (also de Lange 2007).⁷

We should also note the role age and gender play in the dynamics of decision-making at the individual and family levels. The Ghanaian children in Hashim's (2005) study migrated at an average age of 12 years, although girls tended to migrate at an earlier age than boys. She found that younger children were more likely to migrate in response to promptings by an adult relation and out of a desire to be a 'good' child. In the same study, younger children tended to mention monetary gain while older children articulated motives that made reference to their own future. This reflects the view that as children grow older, they become more deliberate

⁶ The idea of 'contracts' as used by Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen (2007) is helpful for our understanding of the family dynamics within which decisions about children's migration is taken. Drawing on Kabeer's (2000) idea of 'inter-generational contracts', they explain that the concept of a contract 'is less the idea of a fixed and binding set of exchanges...than the many different kinds of interactions, and the values and processes which affect the everyday relationships between parents and children' (p. 5). They further explain that 'using this term...emphasises that both child and parent have agency, objectives and interests' (p. 5-6).

⁷ Given that her respondents all came from a rural area that could be considered poor, one wonders if there is sufficient variation in her sample of child migrants to show up differences in migration behaviour.

about adopting 'welfare-maximising' strategies in relation to their own needs and to their family obligations (ibid.). Literature on child migration usually defines children as anyone under the age of 18, and does not always differentiate between motives, strategies and experiences of younger and older children.

Gender also impacts migration decisions. Hashim (2005) notes that in the village she studied more value is placed on boys' role in the family, and specifically on their labour, and that they are more embedded in the long-term prosperity of extended household. This means they are in a better position to negotiate whether and how migration happens. It also means that they may be called back home to take up family responsibilities (Anarfi *et al.* 2003, Hashim 2005). Girls, on the other hand, are considered an easier loss to the family because their (reproductive) work is less valued within households and as economic good, and because they are considered 'temporary' household members until marriage when they would leave their parents household anyway.⁸ This may explain why girls' migration is often under-reported, even where girls migrate in greater numbers and at a younger age than boys (ibid.)⁹ At the same time, there are social strictures around the idea that girls are more susceptible to moral and social dangers such as illicit relationships, pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease (Hashim 2005). As a result of more restrictions on their movement, girls might be less likely than boys to travel without their parents' knowledge (Thorsen 2007).

In the studies, these restrictions seemed to be especially strong in terms of girls' migration into urban centres with its perceived dangers and temptations (e.g. Thorsen 2007) but perhaps are lessened in relation to rural-rural migration. In any case, there is the suggestion that girls' movements between households, and within rural areas, may not be met with as much disapproval (ibid.).

In sum, children's migration decisions are influenced by personal preferences, family negotiations, and by the cues and pressures about migration in their general environments. The decisions that lead to a child moving are part of the wider negotiations around communal interests and personal aspirations, affective concerns and livelihood needs, and the process of

⁸ Hashim (2005) points out that decisions about girls' migration is the subject of tension between adult males and females who have separate income and who bear an unequal share of child care costs. Girls' labour is of greater importance to adult females than to males, and its absence could affect other women's livelihood activities. For men, girls may merely represent a burden on them in terms of child care costs. Men and women may therefore arrive at different conclusions about the relative value of girls staying in or leaving the household.

⁹ This observation leads Ndao (2008) to declare that children are the new 'citoyen transnationaux'.

enabling a child to prepare themselves for adulthood in constrained and challenging contexts; we need to be more sophisticated in exploring how this variety of influences operate, both within and outside the family.

Where do children migrate?

Children's migration often follows historical routes that adult migrants have used, some of which have been open for decades or even centuries. Empirical studies offer several instances of children mentioning that they are following routes that their parents and grandparents had travelled (Imorou 2008, Hashim 2005). Children therefore draw on cultural knowledge when making these journeys.

Rural to rural routes traced by empirical studies include children moving from northeast to southern Burkina Faso to work on cotton farms (de Lange 2006); children from northeast Ghana moving to farming areas into southern Ghana (Hashim 2004, 2005) and moving within northwest Ghana to work as cattle herders (INNG n.d.); and young people travelling from the northwest of Benin to the cotton farms in the northeast (Imorou 2008). Other studies capture the presence of children from diverse national backgrounds in cocoa growing areas in Ghana, Cameroun and Cote d'Ivoire (Asuming-Brempong *et al.* 2007, IITA 2002, Bóås and Huser, 2006) and highlighted the issue of young boys being taken to work in the fisheries industry.¹⁰ Children have also been documented migrating from northern Benin to Nigeria to work in quarries (Ndao 2008) or to various locations to attend koranic schools in Burkina Faso and Mali (Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004).

The studies indicate that most of the children in our three cores studies are migrating, not to large scale commercial plantations, but rather to smaller farmsteads, whose owners are themselves impoverished and struggling. Most of these farms cultivate a mixture of cash and subsistence crops, and the child might be assisting on the cultivation of either. While most of the children interviewed in Burkina Faso, for example, were employed to cultivate cotton a few cited their main occupation as tending small vegetable plots or gardens. While some of the children in these studies found themselves working with several other child and adult labourers, others were the only live-in labourer on a small family-run farm. The experiences of these children are often invisible, or poorly documented.

¹⁰ The case of young boys being taken to undertake extremely hazardous work in the fisheries industry (Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan, 2004) has received substantial media attention.

It should be remarked the studies capture rural-rural migration both within and across national borders. While the distinction between internal/domestic and international migration might be important from a legal and policy perspective, there is little suggestion from our studies that it makes a practical difference to the experience of migrant children. Children may travel further within a country than across national borders and can find themselves in culturally unfamiliar places in their own country (de Lange 2006). Additionally, borders may not place restriction on children's movements, as Ndao (2008) observed in the case of the Togo and Benin border where children passed easily through the checkpoints at which adults are routinely stopped (see Bonnet 2008). Living and working conditions do not seem to be affected by the distinction between domestic and international movement. Thus, de Lange (2006) finds in the case of Burkinabe children migrating to cotton farms that there was little difference in the conditions of children who migrated within Burkina Faso and those who went into Benin.

We must also note the ways in which different groups and types of migration are interlinked. For instance, the migration of adult farmers from Burkina Faso into Cote d'Ivoire resulted in children from the sending area being brought onto the farms to work. Similarly, young couples who migrate and establish farms elsewhere, far from their social and familial support networks, might go back to their villages for young girls to help them with domestic work (Imorou 2008).

How do children undertake the journey?

We have discussed the negotiations within the family that lead to children being encouraged, allowed or compelled to migrate with the knowledge and approval of their families. In addition, there are accounts of children 'running away' in all three studies. De Lange (2006) found that although parents she interviewed expressed worry about their children's whereabouts, only a few parents had chased a child after realising he or she had left, and none of them had punished the child for 'running away'. The ambivalence expressed by parents arose from a sense that the migration was the child's choice - *'if we tell them not to go they will still go, in secret. So we cannot stop them from running away'...*; a recognition of the potential material gain - *'Really, we are poor! We have a bicycle now. It is because of that I am also happy that my children left to Komienga'*; the realisation that the boys return after a year; and an acknowledgement that the experience can teach the boys the importance of hard work and obedience, and the value of developing their home farms - *'The experience has improved him.*

He has seen that life is more difficult over there. He will stay here now for a while' (de Lange 2006).

Some parents were indulgent, knowing that they themselves acted similarly when they were younger and recognising the good that might eventually come out of their child's migration, however initiated:

However, parents were not always too troubled by this behaviour if it was a boy. As one father told me of his son, '*He didn't discuss it at first, he just dodged to Kumasi as he knew I wouldn't give permission because, look at me now, farming alone*'. He added, '*We did it ourselves*'. When I asked him what he meant by this, he told me, '*I myself dodged. I went there for five years, came home, married and went back for ten years. I came back because my father was old*'. His son too had eventually returned home with some monies before migrating again to undertake a vehicle fitting apprenticeship, paying for this by selling the cow his father had bought for him with the money he had earned when he first migrated." [Hashim 2005:37].

The study in Benin noted that some parents would give a disobedient child up to do what they wanted - '*Bon, si l'enfant refuse de me suivre au champ, moi je le libere, il est libre dans ses mouvements*' (Imorou 2008), however the attitude of these parents were often frowned upon by others in the area.

During the actual journey, children rely, like adults, on social networks to provide information about life and prospects in destination areas, for money to travel, for guidance during the journey, for accommodation and care at destination area and for help with finding work (Hashim 2005, Imorou 2008, Ndao 2008, cf. Anyidoho, forthcoming).

The majority of child migrants in our reviewed studies travelled in the company of others. Hashim (2005) interviewed 60 migrant children from northern Ghana (most of whom were living in rural areas or with relatives); out of this number 44 reported having travelled with another person - 32 of those instances were with relatives and 5 with 'employers'.¹¹

¹¹ A study of children working in cocoa growing areas in the West African Region found that children half of children working in cocoa in Cote d'Ivoire and about a third of those same category of children in Nigeria were

The role of 'tuteurs' in the migration of children to cotton fields in Benin present an interesting case (Ndao 2008, Imorou 2008). These are young persons, sometimes former child migrants themselves, who recruit, facilitate the journey and help children settle into work, sometimes employing the child migrants themselves. Children sometimes negotiate with tuteurs (or other kinds of intermediaries) without their family's knowledge. Sometimes parents are approached directly by a tuteur (who might be a friend or relative) and the parents might acquiesce or may oppose their children leaving. In the latter case, the child might attempt to persuade the parents or might leave in secret (Imorou 2008). In Benin, the tuteurs are central to the experience of children working in agriculture: --'...arrivés là-bas s'ils ne trouvent pas un bon tuteur, ils souffrent' (interviewee, Imorou 2008: 20). Tuteurs are interesting because they also represent a progressive career path for the child migrants. Children who work hard, have a good relationship with their employers and have a successful migration experience, returning home with resources, can easily make the transition into being a 'tuteur'. Tuteurs perform a similar function to the 'sponsors' referred to in other studies. These are often people that the child knows, such as friend or a relative, who recruit the child and accompany them on the journey. The sponsor is also responsible for finding employers for and generally looking after the children entrusted to them (Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004, also IITA 2002). The presence of these sponsors is intended to provide some protection and guidance for the child migrant in settling into work in the destination. However, the relationship is potentially exploitative and the sponsor might bond the child to work off the cost of the trip (Imorou 2008). In many ways the child's experiences in the journey and subsequently in the destination areas is dependant on the character and conduct of the individual sponsors (IITA 2002, Imorou 2008).

Some children do leave independently, but usually with a name of a relative or employer to whom they are to go (Hashim 2005, de Lange 2006). De Lange (2006) has noted that in her study, travelling alone, or travelling with an intermediary does not seem to affect the experience and outcomes of the migration.

'recruited' by 'intermediaries' who were familiar to the child in a majority of cases (IITA 2002). The study does not provide adequate information on the migrant status of these children but one can assume that these children travelled with the recruiters onto the farms.

What arrangements do child migrants enter into?

The child migration literature makes frequent references to the tradition of 'fostering' in the African context. Often the term is used loosely to refer to the practice of children moving into the household of relatives other than their parents. The reasons or causes are myriad and include 'illness, death, divorce, parents' separation, socialization, education, mutual help among family members and the strengthening of family ties' (Whitehead, Hashim and Iversen 2007). However, because defined simply in terms of whom children live with, fostering lacks analytical utility because it subsumes many different experiences and possible outcomes for the child migrant. It does not tell us precisely what children do and how they fare.

Riisoe, Hatloey and Bjerkan (2004) attempt to distinguish between migrant children who enter into the work place (including farms), those who enter households, and those who enter koranic institutions. They further break down children who live in households ('fostered' children) into those fostered for education and those fostered for domestic work. They find that the former category of children is in the majority.

These distinctions are useful in pointing to the fact that the different arrangements into which children enter are important for outcomes. However, the categories themselves are problematic. Firstly, children are generally expected to do some amount of work regardless of 'type' of fostering, as Riisoe, Hatloey and Bjerkan (2004) acknowledge. Secondly, the settings (household, workplace and school) are not mutually exclusive spaces (for example, child migrants may live in the household and work on the household's farm and again, children in koranic schools may spend more time doing work for the clerics than studying). In fact, the majority of children across the studies lived with relatives, regardless of their original motivation for travelling. These would include those who are in school or training, those doing domestic or farm work, and those who work for themselves but reside with relatives.

Thus, a clear delineation cannot be drawn between children who migrate to work and those who are described as 'fostered' in terms of living arrangements, provisioning and protection, and responsibilities. We can illustrate with the cocoa sector where immigrant farmers have a higher tendency to use child labour on their farms (IITA 2002), some of whom are children from their families back home (see de Lange 2006). Such children may be included in the category of 'fostered' children. On these same farms there may also be child migrants who are not related to the farmer. In the cocoa regions, such labourers often stay in the employers compound, with the employer taking responsibility for housing, feeding, clothing and health care for their labourers (Anyidoho, forthcoming, Takane 2002). The point then is that labels--fostered child and child labourer---are not as important as the specific agreements under which

migrant children live and work. We need to unpack the data to see if there are differences in experiences and outcomes for children under different arrangements.

Children who had migrated or been sent by family to live with relatives working as family labour have varying expectations about the benefits of the arrangement beyond general upkeep. Hashim (2005) shows that some children did not expect to be paid for their work in the households of relatives and felt they were fulfilling a social or family obligation, while some did expect cash payment. All expected some reward or benefit, such as a gift or support for an apprenticeship, at the end of their service. These expectations are not necessarily communicated and there is the risk that one or both sides will be disappointed (Hashim 2005, 2006).

Children also entered contracts as farm labourers which vary in their length and form. De Lange (2006) notes that in southwest Burkina Faso, children often work in the cotton fields for just a few months at a stretch, often during school holidays. These short term contracts that are often dependent on yield are risky since crop failure means that children will earn nothing, (children tend to see this risk as an occupational hazard). At the same time short term contracts can give child labourers more negotiating power, and more protection against exploitation since they can leave more easily and are less dependent on one employer (de Lange 2006, see also Ndao 2008 and Imorou 2008). In contrast, the child migrants interviewed in Eastern Burkina, tended to enter into longer contracts often up to a year with employers who feed and lodge them, and are paid a lump sum after the cotton is sold. This payment might be in cash or in kind (e.g. a bicycle, clothing, or, in some cases only a bus ticket home) or both. The advantage for the children of delaying payment is that cash payment is received in bulk, which is preferred because it is a way of saving the money (de Lange 2006). The risk of not being paid at all or of being paid less than promised, however, increased in these cases. This was something which a significant number of de Lange's interviewees had experienced. There are other examples of even longer term contracts such as in the cocoa sector where adolescents may acquire contracts in order to earn rights over land (Anyidoho, forthcoming) although because of the level of skill, time and energy required this was not usually an option for children. Children in the quarries of Nigeria can sometimes work for as long as ten years to accumulate capital (Ndao 2008). Hashim (2005) notes that older children in farms in southern Ghana are sometimes given a share of farm proceeds or land to work on under sharecropping arrangements (Hashim 2005).

Another important difference is whether agreements are made verbally or through written contracts. The children in de Lange's (2006) study had predominantly worked under verbal contracts. Imorou notes however that in Benin there has been a shift from verbal to written contracts. This seems to have been accompanied by an increase in complaint actions being taken by labourers (including children) when they are not paid what they are owed. Increasing numbers of farmers are being summoned by the police to pay up (Imorou 2008).

What work do children do?

The work children engage in varies by location and by the agreement entered into. Many children perform domestic work in the household. The children are involved in all stages of agricultural work, from clearing the land to harvesting. Some children are also employed to tend irrigated vegetable plots or manufacture bricks for houses; others are used for cultivating food crops, guarding animals or pulling carts.

There are differences in the reported work that boys and girls do; boys primarily work on farms and girls were more likely to do domestic work. It is important to note that in the case of the latter, helping the household may include helping with economic activities including farming and trade.

Studies on child labour give some insight into what children do, but the findings are sometimes difficult to interpret in terms of migrant children. Two studies on the cocoa sectors in Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, and Nigeria found that the majority of children in the cocoa sector work alongside their families on farms owned by immediate or extended relatives (Asuming-Brempong *et al.* 2007, IITA 2002). However, the studies did not differentiate between the children, some of whom may have been born in the destination areas, others of whom may have migrated with the parents as children, and still others of whom would have been brought in alone to supplement labour. Again, we know the majority of children are not wage labourers but rather engaged in household labour (Andvig, Canagarajah and Kielland, n.d.) but studies on child labour do not reliably differentiate between children under different types of contracts and expectations of remuneration.

What are the conditions under which rural child migrants live and work?

A study into child migration within Ghana, Mali and Burkina Faso concluded that ‘the conditions for children working in the agricultural sector in the region vary dramatically from easy work together with the family on weekends to slave-like conditions on plantations’ (Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004: 31). The authors suggest, however, that some arenas and employers are more exploitative than others, for example the fishing industry has a particularly bad record of abuse of children (ibid.)

However, the evidence is that children in these particularly exploitative and abusive situations are in the minority. Let us take the example of the cocoa sector, which is a major sector in the region and within which a number of significant researches have been done on the presence of children. A study in Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, Cameroon and Nigeria found that most children were engaged in work in households of parents or relatives, rather than as hired labour (IITA, 2002). A study of the cocoa sector in Ghana did not find support for the idea that conditions on cocoa farms met the ILO (1998) criteria of the ‘worst forms of child labour’ (Asuming-Brempong *et. al.* 2007). In an investigation involving children working on cocoa farms in Cote d’Ivoire, only 6% reported that they were ‘not satisfied’ with their employment, mainly citing an overload of work. While the children’s own reports may not constitute an ‘objective’ evaluation of their circumstances, it is important to factor in the views of the primary subject of both research and policy discussions about the nature of children’s work.

A major factor determining children’s experiences – whether positive or negative – was the kind of guardian or employer the child ended up with, and the work situation in which they found themselves. This was usually less of a choice on the part of the child than a matter of luck or coincidence.

It is sometimes assumed that children who are situated within kin relations should be more protected than children working independently or for non-kin. However, the situation of ‘fostered’ children is not uniformly positive (see Hashim 2005, Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004). Hashim has found that the reason for fostering seems to impact the child migrant’s experience; children who are sent to help with the host family may receive better treatment than those who are sent because they cannot be looked after in their homes (Hashim 2005, 2006). There is much variation in the situation of ‘fostered’ children. In addition, there does not

appear to be clear differences between the treatment of fostered and non-fostered children by adults under whose authority they live (Hashim 2005).

The same applies to children sent for training, either as apprentices or under the tutelage of Muslim clerics who, alongside their studies, are sent out to wash dishes in restaurants or work in agricultural fields and to return a portion or all of the money they earn to their teacher (Hashim 2005, Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004). Here again, the 'living and working conditions...among the [children were] variable and at the discretion of the marabout, as they are to the employer of the head of family in the household arena' (Riisoen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004: 21).

Across location and employment, children reported that they were overworked compared to their workloads and schedules at home. De Lange (2006) found, for instance, that some children in the cotton farms in Burkina Faso often worked 12 hours a day, every day of the week and all year around. Though not as wide spread as overwork, children on farms were exposed to poisonous pesticides and chemicals (Asuming-Brempong *et al.*, 2007; de Lange, 2006; IITA, 2002).

Many child migrant labourers experience non-payment and under payment. This can lead to children staying longer than planned (in cases cited by de Lange, some stay an additional year) in order to claim their money, or leaving the employment either for home or for another work situation. There may be different reasons for non-payment. In some cases, there might have been the intent to exploit but it must be remembered that these employers are frequently small and impoverished farmers whose profits are at the mercy of unpredictable macro factors, such as the weather, the global price of cotton (Imorou 2008). Whatever the reasons, non-payment of children had negative effects on children's welfare, and sometimes meant that they could not return home (either because of lack of bus fare or because of the shame of failure).

In some contexts children could go to the authorities and demand payment from their employers. Several of the children in Burkina Faso and Ghana had complained to their families of underpayment or non-payment; some were supported and action was taken, others told to give up their claims. The Benin study records instances of children making complaints to the police in order to force employers to pay their wage. The cases of minors in this context are apparently strengthened by the existence of anti-trafficking laws that make employers wary of

law enforcement. However, it was noted that minors complained less than adult migrants and cases were not always decided in favour of the child (Imorou 2008). This study also pointed to another important and potentially protective factor - employers who did not respect contracts were discredited in the sending villages, and therefore find it more difficult to find workers in the future (ibid.).

Children seem most vulnerable where they are most dependent on their employers or guardians. In Burkina Faso a number reported that they could not leave their employer either because they did not have the resources to move on or because they did not have permission from their guardian or employer. The control leveraged over them made child migrants vulnerable to verbal and physical abuse from employers (de Lange 2006). However, some children, notably in Benin, did report leaving their employers if they were dissatisfied with their wages or with their treatment.

The question of conditions of life and work for child migrants is crucial but deciding on what basis such these should be evaluated is complicated. Many of the children interviewed by our three core studies accepted their experience and situation even while complaining about their vulnerabilities. Non-payment and mistreatment were risks many were aware of but felt worth taking. In Benin it was noted that surviving suffering and endurance were highly valued traits that conferred respect and status (Imorou 2008). In addition, most children and parents weigh up these risks in the light of poverty, food shortages and lack of opportunity in their home areas. Whose views do we privilege - those of children, parents, guardians and employers, social workers, international observers, the state? On what basis or dimension of experience do we assess whether children are better off as migrants? They may have more food but work harder; or be overworked but earn more money. Again, such an evaluation must also put child migrants' work and life conditions in context. Riisøen, Hatloey and Bjerkan (2004) found that the descriptions of living and working conditions of migrant children were similar to those of non-migrant children working in similar areas and argue for a more comprehensive policy approach that addresses child labour conditions more generally. It is useful to ask if these conditions are unique or peculiar to migrants or to children, or whether they indicate a systemic problem best addressed by broader laws and policies rather than those specifically targeting (migrant) children (cf. Castle and Diarra 2003, Riisøen, Hatloey and Bjerkan 2004, Thorsen 2007).

What happens to child migrants in the long term?

Another question, to which studies do not provide a satisfactory answer, is what happens to child migrants in the long term, whether they remain in the destination areas or return home.

The studies do not give us adequate insights into which children return home and which do not, and what factors make it more likely that children will return home. However, as with adult migration, one can speculate that the decision to return home is related to the reasons why children leave in the first place (Arowolo 2002); children whose motivations for leaving were connected to their future welfare in their villages are more likely to return. For instance, children whose goal was to earn material goods to enhance their welfare or status in the home area tended to return. Also, children who were in school in rural areas, and who may have migrated to earn money for school fees, were also likely to return home (de Lange 2006, Hashim 2005). Those who left because of neglect or to make a better life in other spaces, and who were therefore more likely to get into longer term arrangements (e.g. sharecropping, or apprenticeships) might be less likely to return.¹²

Return is connected to societal values - that is, the occupation and life trajectories which are valued in the sending communities and the relative probability of entering those trajectories in the home setting or in migration. In the sending communities studied in Benin there is higher social value attached to agricultural work than to being an apprentice or a student: 'Quand bien meme tu vas a l'ecole on trouve que tu ne fais rien. Il faut rejoindre la terre' ('when you go to school people think you are doing nothing. You must return to the land.' (Imorou 2008:13, author's translation). Social status is bound up in hard work in agriculture and the ability to look after one's self and to take on responsibility for the family's needs. Children are therefore encouraged to leave to acquire skills and work ethics elsewhere. Although the study does not make this explicit, it is possible that such children will return home since their migration will give them the ability to create better lives for themselves and their families at home, unless they cannot gain access to land. Conversely, in places where education or non-farming work are valued but unavailable in their home contexts, children may stay in destination areas.

Some children return home when asked to by adult family members; in the Ghanaian study, boys were more likely than girls to receive such summons because they are more reliant on

¹² Most of the agricultural migration discussed in our three core studies were temporary, though there were occasions of migrants establishing farmsteads elsewhere.

their agnatic kin for future prosperity and more likely to be needed in their homes (Hashim 2005). Children might also return if they fall ill or become tired of being away from home (ibid.). Child migrants were generally well received on their return. Even if children had left home without their parents' knowledge or consent, parents rarely punished them when they came back (de Lange 2006, also Imorou 2008). In fact, parents considered the children's experiences in migration to be sufficient punishment because the child would learn through the hardship.

In retrospect, some children were satisfied with their migration experience, even when they have faced hardship. The boys in de Lange's (2006) study, however (including those who have been 'successful') said they would try and stop younger siblings and peers from going into the cotton fields. They said they might have been lucky, but that the risk of maltreatment and underpayment were too high (also de Lange, 2007). Yet, some of these children would migrate again. This included both those who had not been particularly successful in their previous migration as well as those who have.

Conclusions and Implications for research

There is significant variation in the experiences of child migrants and available studies document both positive and negative outcomes. More research into the factors that make positive experiences more likely is needed; while studies do well cataloging the risks and vulnerabilities of child migrants, we have less information about factors which might mitigate these risks and allow children to take advantage of the opportunities that they expect migration should offer them. The studies do suggest a number of factors which are important when it comes to outcomes and experiences of migration. 'Luck' is a common explanation for a successful migration experience. Without strong legal and institutional frameworks, children's wellbeing is largely dependent on the work or living arrangements in which they find themselves, and the character, integrity and circumstances of their adult sponsors, guardians and employers. Linked to this is the role of social networks; for instance the protective roles that sponsors or 'tuteurs' play for children on some migration routes and at destination areas. Further, we have said that there is variation in the circumstances of children who live with relatives, and being fostered is no guarantee of good treatment (Hashim, 2005), however another study of children working in cocoa finds that children with relatives are generally are treated better than those who have no relationship with the adults for whom they work (IITA, 2002). We need more systematic research into the range of protective factors, and the ways in which they work in different contexts to make positive outcomes more likely.

Another under-researched and challenging aspect of child migration is the long term impact. How does the decision to or not to migrate, and the specific experiences after migration, affect different children's life trajectories and welfare in the long term?

In addition to these broad statements a number of specific questions and issues emerged from our discussions, which warrant further thought and study. These include:

- The question of age: Hashim's study in particular differentiated between the motives and migration experiences of younger and older children, and several parents interviewed by de Lange suggested that while they were not against the migration of people under the age of 18 *per se* they were concerned at the young age (10 or 11) at which some boys were migrating. It is worth noting that while Ghana has ratified ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (182) and introduced new laws to strengthen the rights of children, it has not ratified the ILO's Minimum Age Convention. The 1998 Children's Act puts the minimum age for employment at 15 years, with children from 13 allowed to do light work (Bóás and Huser, 2006). This is in line with Hashim's suggestion that by the age of 14 children in rural northern Ghana are expected to take on the same work as an adult of their gender. Ideas of maturity, capacity to work and notions of childhood need to be understood in context.
- Migration to small farms: how can we a) capture and b) make safer the experiences of children who are working alone or in small numbers on family small-holdings, often living within the household compound? Understanding and regulating this kind of child labour is challenging. It also requires research and policy that does not focus exclusively on the child, but understands the full context of why and how farmers make decisions about labour, and how policies from different spheres (notably economics) might affect the lives of these farmers, and the children working for them. Imorou (2008) has noted that some small farmers in Benin have sold all of their assets and ruined themselves in order to meet labour costs after a failed harvest or as a result of low global cotton prices. More research, such as de Lange's exploration of the demand side of labour, would be useful.

- Views of the parents: an important set of questions raised by the studies is that around parents' motives for allowing or choosing not to prevent children's migration. The studies emphasized a) the ambivalence of parents towards their child moving away and b) the fact that these parents are making extremely difficult decisions under very constrained circumstances.
- Contracts: how can contractual arrangements be made and supported in such a way that the migrants receive the rewards expected from the migration? A closer look at the operation of complaints mechanisms would be fruitful. The case of Benin, where there is a shift to written contracts and a seemingly functional process for making complaints about non-payment is very interesting. What factors have led to the development of this? Are there similar mechanisms elsewhere? How can these be refined to be more effective in supporting and protecting child migrants who work?

Research must put child migration in context; it should not be treated as an isolated event, nor as an anomalous or deviant strategy but as an activity and decision that is related to the child's life in the rural area, and related to their families' and their own envisioned and possible futures. We should aim to go beyond a description of children's lives and undertake a deeper analysis of the social, cultural, historical, political and economic dynamics that shape these experiences. This will require us doing more in depth studies over longer periods of time in order to deepen our understandings of children's lives in micro and macro contexts. Longitudinal and comparative studies are particularly appropriate here.

Finally, in order to carry out research that gives us an overview of the situation in the region, it is imperative that we resolve the methodological obstacles to child migration research, especially those that challenge comparative research. One is the adoption of standard definitions of what constitutes child migration; this definition should allow us to capture child mobility that has often been hidden. We will need also standardized methods of data collection so that the information thus garnered can be comparable across countries in the region.

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