

Children's Independent Migration in Ghana: what *are* the costs and benefits?

**Workshop on Independent Child Migrants:
Policy Debates and Dilemmas**

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Objective

- To draw on research with children in Ghana to explore the costs and benefits of migration.
- To show it is important:
 - a) to listen to and take into account children's own perspectives when assessing costs and benefits; **but**
 - b) to situate children's own evaluation in the broader context in order to understand the constraints on children's choices.

Sending Area

- Farming villages in Upper East Region of Ghana.
- Lack of technology and infrastructure means farming and reproductive work time-consuming and arduous.
- Input of *all* able-bodied household members required for household's subsistence.
- Claims on individuals' labour organised hierarchically along gender and age lines.
- Household members also farm for themselves to earn an independent income.
- Extremely poor area with little infrastructure, low educational enrolment and literacy rates, and poor health and nutrition.

Children's Work

Age-Group	Girls	Boys
>6	caring for younger siblings, guarding crops and running errands	caring for younger siblings, guarding crops and running errands
7-13	fetching water and firewood, cooking, looking after siblings, beginning to carry out female farming tasks, going to market to buy and sell, and experimenting with own farming.	looking after livestock, beginning to carry out male farming tasks, watering dry season gardens, going to market to buy and sell, and experimenting with own farming
<14	All adult female tasks	All adult male tasks

Local View of Childhood

Work is seen as an *age-appropriate* behaviour for children.

Importance of children's work related to:

- a) necessity of children's labour for subsistence,
- b) teaching children the skills required to secure their livelihoods as adults,
- c) the process of enculturation into their roles in the domestic economy and wider community;
- d) and the adoption of a sense of self-reliance.

Child Migrants' Activities

Activity	Female	Male	All
Farm-work	11	20	31
Working in a small enterprise	6	5	11
Only household work	9	1	10
Apprenticeship	3	4	7
Attending school	3	1	4
Attending school and farm-work	1	3	4
Attending school and small enterprise	1	-	1
Apprenticeship and farm-work	1	-	1
Loading buses	-	1	1
Total	35	35	70

Children's Experiences of Migration

- 67 of the 70 children chose to migrate.
- Those in the younger age category (7-13) often did so at the request of an adult.
- Those in the older category more likely to choose to migrate themselves, often having to negotiate permission.
- Six boys and eight girls reported bad experiences (two girls twice) comprising of overwork (5), insufficient food (6), verbal abuse (4) and being beaten (5).
- A further seven children reported that they were not treated as well as the household children or as well as they would expect to be treated at home.

Children's Remuneration

- All girls and boys in the younger age category working for a relative were not paid.
- They were often given gifts of money, clothing and other items.
- Some had school and/or apprenticeship fees paid.
- Boys in the older age category were often given a share of the proceeds for the crops grown.
- Almost all children working for non-relatives were paid, although the amount could be derisory.

The levels of remuneration a child could expect to receive is closely linked to a child's age and gender, and reflects:

- a) the hierarchically organised system of control and command over labour, and*
- b) the rates of return for the types of work in which children are engaged.*

Benefits of Migration

- More able to reap the benefits of their own labour
- Independent income
- Educational opportunities
- Gifts from relatives
- New/exciting environment
- Less harsh climate
- More abundant food
- Longer farming season
- Fulfilling role as good child
- Helping family back home

Costs of Migration

- Hard work
- Poor pay
- No pay
- Inability to find work
- Missing family
- Being cheated
- Being verbally abused
- Being physically abused
- Insufficient food to eat
- Inability to carry out independent farming

Constraints on Choice

- Inter-generational contract obliges children to move at their elders' request.
- Children need to work in order that their and their families' livelihoods are secured.
- Normative judgements regarding the distribution of resources and the command over labour result in children receiving rewards that are incommensurate with their labour input.
- Low value of girls' work means they in particular are constrained in their choice of work and the rewards they receive for it.
- Rural under-development and the absolute or relative poverty that accompany it constitute a primary constraint for both children *and* adults.

Conclusion

- The majority of children were positive about their migratory experience.
- Only three were compelled to migrate, the vast majority choosing to undertake migration, either fulfilling their obligations to their elders in doing so or attracted by the educational and work possibilities in the central and southern areas of Ghana.
- Children's "choice" to migrate needs to be set in the context of the extreme poverty and limited opportunities of their home environment, and in the manner in which their identities as a 'good child' are tied up with fulfilling their working roles.