



Development Research Centre on
Migration,
Globalisation
& Poverty

Voices of Child Migrants

“A Better Understanding of How Life Is”

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The cover montage has been created to portray a range of typical scenes encountered during the research covered in the report. The photos of West African children may or may not include those whose stories are reported here, as they were taken during the course of the research. However no photos were available of children from the work in India and so we have chosen an image that represents a typical scene of child migrants in order to reflect the balance of stories told here

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'...when we walk around in search of customers, we see lots of things that we'd never seen in the village and we also get a better understanding of how life is. If you're hungry back home, you can make some tô [millet porridge] but here you'll need to get out your money, otherwise you won't eat. In my opinion, this is why migrant life in the city is a way to mature, because you'll know that without sweat you can't eat.'

Bakary, Burkina Faso

This document is an attempt to imaginatively engage policymakers, and others working in relevant fields with the lives and experiences of independent child migrants. Research carried out by the Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty (Migration DRC) has identified a significant gap between how children see their own experiences of migration and the way that child migrants are often represented. The important child protection work undertaken with child migrants in difficult circumstances emphasises their vulnerability and often dire situations. Their age and immaturity is a specific source of vulnerability which leads to representations of children as the passive victims of difficult circumstances, including not only exploitative employers and middlemen, but also parents. Family relations are assumed to be ones in which parents are the main decision makers, with children compelled or coerced to move away to work by parents who are either portrayed as inadequate, or as faced with unenviable decisions about their children's welfare because of poverty. Children are often assumed to be unduly attracted by the 'bright lights' of cities or other places and inevitably corrupted if they work in public places like markets or streets.

The story that has emerged from our research is not only more complex than this, but the part played by children in assessing their own opportunities and responsibilities within the family, in making decisions about their life trajectories and in negotiating difficult circumstances is much more independent and thoughtful. Here we present accounts from 16 children who were interviewed in the course of the Migration DRC research so as to highlight what children themselves think and say about their lives. Although we have provided some commentary on these children's voices, we have kept it to a minimum. There are many themes in the stories that readers can pull out for themselves but we have put them in a sequence which illustrates the following broad themes:

- Children's aspirations and motivations for migration and their negotiations with family members to do so
- How they migrate, often using kinship and social networks to find work and provide safety nets

- The difficulties and insecurities of working as child migrants and the efforts children make to survive and overcome these
- Their own perceptions of the costs and benefits of migrating.

The Migration DRC projects have concentrated on children who are independent migrants from one part of their countries to another. They tend to come from poor areas where there are and have been high rates of adult migration. They are 'independent' in so far as they move without their parents or guardians. Studies in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, India and Ghana investigated their experiences, focusing on how and why the decision was made to migrate; how they made the journeys; what were their work experiences and living conditions, and how migration was linked to schooling. The children's stories from these studies that are presented here move from those that show, in a simpler form how children can make decisions for themselves and their motives for migrating, through others which show the influence of gender on children's experiences and the variety of links with education. The final stories contain more nuanced accounts which show how complex the influences on the lives of child migrants are, including the relationships between family and working lives, and that the choices of work are rarely purely economic.

The independent child migrants in our research are not refugees and they are not trafficked; only a minority of them are street children. Autonomous child migrants like these constitute by far the most numerous category of independent child migrants and there is a general agreement in the literature that there is a substantial increase in their numbers. The needs of these children must have a much higher profile in policy discussions. Work at the Migration DRC over the coming 18 months will look at how the experiences of independent child migrants identified in our research can be taken into account to develop policies to positively affect their lives.

Children's Stories

The motives and reasons for children's migration are complex. They are linked with the economic status of the family and the child's understanding about this and influenced by shared cultural and social ideas about the kinds of work that are acceptable for children at different ages and about children's participation in economic activities. The motivation for a child's migration often includes the child's own desire to earn an income.

Ibrahim, working in a restaurant in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Ibrahim was 17 years old when he was interviewed in Ouagadougou. Both his parents were living in a compound shared by his father's younger brother and his wife and children, and by his grandmother, in a small village around 120 miles south-east of the capital. They were all farmers and return migrants. Both Ibrahim's father and uncle had been migrants to Côte d'Ivoire for 13-15 years and his mother had spent almost a decade abroad with his father. Ibrahim had never been to school. Before he went to Ouagadougou, he had worked in the rural town, Tenkodogo, about 12 miles from his village.

“ I was 14 years at the time and had found the job myself. I wanted to earn some money because back home I had to ask my father to buy things for me and he couldn't buy all the things I'd like to have. Both my mother and father knew that I wanted to find work in Tenkodogo and they didn't mind. At first, I worked in a bar where the owner had promised to pay 3,000 Fcfa¹ per month, but after two months I still hadn't been paid so I quit the job and found another one where I helped grilling meat and received 300 Fcfa per day. Even though this adds up to 9,000 Fcfa per month the wage wasn't that good because I had to buy my own food.² Nevertheless, I managed to save up some money which I asked Larba to keep for me. Larba is a distant uncle of mine and I lived in his compound.” ***Ibrahim laughed and then continued:***

“I shouldn't have trusted Larba, I've never seen the money again. Bad luck! But, as a matter of fact, he was always kind to me.

After that, an older [classificatory] brother asked me to work for him in Ouagadougou, and so I did. But I ended up working 11 months without any payment. My boss had told me that he would put aside my wages to help me save up but the day I wanted to leave, he started an argument with me to avoid paying me. I'd said that I wished to visit my parents and he'd just shrugged and said that it wasn't his problem, that I could just get up and leave. My brother used some of his savings to buy me a

small portable table from which I sold cigarettes, candies, paper towels and things like that, but one day when I tried to sell my things in 'Zone Une' [a neighbourhood in which many offices and small businesses are located interspersed by the homes of better-off civil servants], I was robbed of all my money by some young kids. Then I tried to stay put, sitting down with my table outside a bar but I could sit there the entire afternoon without earning one single franc. After two months, I gave up but was lucky to find this job.

Here I get 6,000 Fcfa per month but I hope my boss will increase my wage because I work 7 days a week and usually from when I get up in the morning, that is, from around 6 a.m. until 11 p.m., sometimes even until 3 a.m. I sweep the courtyard in the morning and wash the tables and chairs, then I take orders from the customers, serve their drinks and food and clear the tables afterwards. Since I started working here five months ago, I haven't had a day off because there's nobody to take over my work. The young woman who also works here is the cook and the youth is still at school. He is the boss' younger brother. In addition to my wage, my boss also buys soap for me and I eat here, so apart from buying a new pair of sandals, I don't need money for anything. Which is kind of lucky because I haven't received my wages the past two months. My boss works at the customs in Bittou and hasn't been in Ouagadougou for a while, but he came

¹ Early in 2005 the exchange rate was 951 Fcfa to £1.

² A meal of beans or rice and sauce could be bought for 75-150 Fcfa and it was difficult for an adolescent boy doing physical work not to spend 250-300 Fcfa on food per day, that is, 7,500-9,000 Fcfa per month.

back yesterday. I don't know whether he will pay me until I have the money in my hand. He hasn't paid the cook for six months, perhaps because she is his girlfriend."

Eventually, Ibrahim was paid 10,000 Fcfa instead of the 12,000 Fcfa that he ought to have received. About one month later, the restaurant closed but he continued to live in the restaurant.

"I've been out looking for another job but haven't had luck as yet. Since we last chatted, the boss' younger brother fell seriously ill and we had to spend much of the money in the restaurant to pay for the hospital. I think we spent about 75,000 Fcfa. On top of that, the cook also took some money and left, but she took less than 10,000 Fcfa. Nonetheless, with no money in the restaurant it'll be difficult to reopen, especially because the rent, electricity and water adds up to a lot, so we're waiting for the boss to come to Ouagadougou."

A few days later, when we again passed by the restaurant to see Ibrahim, two men were doing up the courtyard and whitewashing all the walls. Ibrahim told us:

"My boss has paid my wage of 6,000 Fcfa for March but he never paid that 2,000 Fcfa that he owed me for January and February. He hasn't got money to restart the restaurant but has turned it over to a relative of his who was born in Europe and is married with a Frenchman. She's promised that I can stay on and she'll increase my wage to 7,500 Fcfa if things work out. Right now she's looking for a new cook and she counts on restarting the restaurant by the end of the month."

With the change of ownership, things got more difficult for Ibrahim.

"You know, the former boss' younger brother is giving me troubles: he constantly talks to the new boss about how wicked we are, us, the young Bisa [ethnic group], and that one should pay attention when we're around. Because of all his talk, the new boss is now suspicious of me. The other day he and his friends sent me out to look for apples and meanwhile stole the fresh fish that the cook had purchased. When I came back, they accused me of having stolen the fish to bring them to my pugudba [father's sister] who lives in 'Zone Une'. I'm afraid that they'll steal a large amount of money, call the police and accuse me of the theft so I'll be imprisoned. I heard about another job and went to ask them to employ me, but as the boss wanted someone who could write the bills, I had no chance. Right now, I'm thinking of taking a break so I can search for another job but as the restaurant has only just started again, I'm waiting for my wage for April.

Please, could you write a letter for me, from my parents? If I can show a letter from my parents who ask me to come home because my mother is ill, I think my boss will pay me for the weeks I've worked here."

Ibrahim did indeed leave saying he had to return to his village because his mother was ill. The new boss gave him his wage and even added 500 Fcfa as a gift. Ibrahim stayed with his pugudba for a couple of days before starting a new job.

Children's Stories

Ibrahim's story introduces themes which are found in many of the lives of children who migrate to work. He presented his first decision to work in Tenkodogo as his own and then subsequently he moved around seeking jobs and better opportunities. His efforts to get work, to remain in work, to get his wages and to avoid being cheated or manipulated give some indication of the vulnerabilities of young migrant workers. They also give a strong sense that they are not passive victims of circumstances but actively seek out better opportunities.

Next, Wahabu's story shows that many children who migrate understand that it is the poverty of their home circumstances that drives them to earn money in this way; that they must seek to make the best of these difficult circumstances.

Wahabu, working on farms in the Ashanti Region in Southern Ghana.

Wahabu was 18 when he was interviewed in a village in the far east of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Both his parents were alive at the time of the interview, and living and farming in their home village in the Upper East Region. He had never attended school and had been a migrant since the age of 14, working always in rural areas in farming.

Wahabu was quite clear about his reasons for migration:

“It was poverty that made me come here. I wasn't in school and I was suffering there so my senior brother brought me here. I did not want to come, but poverty forced me out. ... No one influenced my decision. I decided myself to come to see if I could get work to support myself. ... I discussed this with my parents and with my senior uncles, and they were all happy and agreed that I should come. My brother paid my lorry fare and I travelled here with him.

I did not know what work I would be doing. When I first came my brother asked me to work for someone, but now I am working with my brother farming corn; and tomatoes too.... I used to do onions but I didn't get the money [to hire the land] to do that this year. ... When I first came I stayed one week with my brother before I went to work for an Ashanti man, in a nearby village ... For the Ashanti man I was doing the same farming (as I am with my brother) but also cocoa farming. ... He treated me well. I had no problem with food or where I stayed. ... I stayed with him for one year and at the end of the year he paid me ₵250,000.³ I sent ₵150,000 to my parents and kept the rest to buy my clothes and things. ... The contract finished and I came back here to my brother.”

When I asked him what his brother was paying him, Wahabu indicated that the money his brother gave him was not payment in the same way.

“My brother sometimes gives me ₵150,000. ... You can say here that the work with my brother is for us. ... I sometimes go by-day⁴ and get ₵10,000. Not frequently, maybe once a week or

every two weeks. ... I haven't saved any money. Whatever money I get I divide into two and send half to those at home and keep half for myself to buy my things.”

A variety of questions I posed to Wahabu regarding his preferred place of abode indicated that where he was currently living was far more conducive an environment but that despite this, overall he would prefer to be at home.

“Here I work from six in the morning to about one or two in the afternoon. ... Here it is good because here I am getting enough food to eat.⁵ And when I worked for the other man, I had never [before] had in my hand ₵250,000, so I was happy. ... Here you can farm without fertilizer and still you will get plenty.

I have no problems with food. In Bawku⁶ you can eat only once or twice a day but here you will always eat three times. ... I have no problem with my health, or where I stay or the people I stay with. ... I am treated the same as the house children.

My father did not put me in school or put me in handiwork [apprenticeship]. If my father was able to find work for me or if our place was like here, where you could farm all the time, then I would not have come.

If I get money I will go home for the next rainy season. ... Because of the poverty [up north] I am delaying here. ... I prefer home because I left my parents in the house. If I were to be there I would work to help [with the farming]. ... I have visited home once since I came. ... I would have to discuss it with my brother before I go home because he brought me here. ... I have to tell my

³ In Ghana the exchange rate averaged ₵16,000 to £1 in May and June 2004. The daily minimum wage was raised from ₵9,200 to ₵11,200 on 1 April 2004.

⁴ Paid daily labour.

⁵ Wahabu, like most rural workers gets his meals as part of his employment or work within a household. In 2005, the cost of a basic rice or banku bought on the street was about ₵1,000 and urban based children normally got about ₵2,500 per day for street meals.

⁶ Bawku is the capital of the district that Wahabu comes from and also the name of the district. Here it is used as a general reference for the area from which he originates.

Children's Stories **Wahabu**

brother anywhere I want to go; if not [then], no, I can't go. ... Because my brother brought me he has to buy me my lorry fare back. ... If I could get the route I would go home."

On querying Wahabu regarding what "the route" was he explained:

"Enough money! ... If I send money home I will take some and give it to my parents and the rest I will use to support myself to

do something that will not let me feel the poverty to influence me to do bad things. [Something] that will keep my heart cool and not influence me to do anything bad. ... I am hoping to do farming work and if I get money I will do business so that it will also help me. [Business] like onion trading or any petty, petty business.

If I get money I will send, but if not I will just take the lorry and go."

Children's Stories

The poverty that Wahabu referred to is not necessarily the specific poverty of his own family, so much as the general poverty of the area (Bawku) he came from, which, throughout the 1990s, had the highest rates of poverty in Ghana. His story shows how he learned from experience what the job opportunities were for boys like him. He weighed his experience of working on contract against what farming with an older brother offered him when deciding what was best for him and what he would prefer to do next. Many of the boys working in this area had one-year contracts of the kind Wahabu had.⁷ They were paid only at the end of the year and most stated that they preferred this to avoid the temptation of squandering the money; as one boy put it "It is my opinion that it is best that it is not in my hand because if it is I will misuse it". In addition to this payment, Wahabu had his accommodation and his food provided. To give an indication of the value of this payment it is worth noting that a bag of millet cost between ₵100,000 and ₵120,000 in 2001, and that roughly seven bags of millet are sufficient for a year for a family of ten. Reasons for not renewing with the employer could range from the child migrants' dissatisfaction with their treatment or pay, or simply because their employer no longer required them to work, or a family member required their labour.

Wahabu had the great benefit of having come to live with a brother, with whom he got along well. Generally, the child migrants who appear particularly vulnerable are those who arrive in the city alone and are unable to link up with kin or other migrants from the area of origin, like Sohel.

⁷ The practice of one-year contracts that are paid for at the end of the year, usually once the harvest of cocoa, rice or cotton is sold, appears to be common in West Africa; children working on cotton farms in eastern Burkina Faso also had these types of contracts (de Lange, pers.comm.), as did Burkinabè migrants working on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire.

Sohel, working in a bazaar in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Sohel, who was 14 years old at the time of the interview, worked in a bazaar [marketplace]. His father earned his living by painting bill boards and signboards in a village 60 miles from Dhaka. His mother worked as a part-time domestic help and part-time seamstress in the same village.

“ My father married twice. I am second amongst four children from his first marriage. My father spends all his earnings on my stepmother and his children through her. My mother lives separately from my father in the same village with my brothers and sister. She works part-time as a domestic help in people's homes. She sews clothes on order the rest of the time. She also runs a small poultry farm. My mother bears the sole responsibility of running the family. She gets no assistance from my father.

It may seem that my mother earns well but in reality she finds it difficult to cope with family conditions. My two brothers go to school. I want to study, but my mother cannot afford to send me to school. When I was home I had plenty of time on my hands. I soon got involved with a group of village teenagers who were engaged in bad activities. The villagers repeatedly complained to my parents about my involvement with petty crimes. My parents punished me for my actions.

One day, there was a theft in one of the houses of the village. Although I was not involved in the incident, I was accused along with others by the villagers. A shalish [arbitration] was convened to resolve the matter. My father advised me to leave the village. I agreed to his proposal. My father gave me some money. I headed for Dhaka.

My travel to Dhaka was not costly. I boarded a launch and arrived here. I spent the first night at the launch terminal at Sadarghat. I moved from place to place during the next few days. I slept under the open sky. The little money I had was dwindling. I was

anxiously looking for a job. I soon became friends with a group of boys who were engaged in loading/unloading/ bearing goods from trucks for the market in Kawran Bazaar. I joined them.

I received nominal wages for a whole day's work. Once I was so hungry that I stole a watermelon while unloading it from a supply truck. I ate that watermelon all by myself. I can never forget that experience. After that incident I began to steal other things to sell and use the money to buy food.

I am now much wiser. I have developed a good understanding of my work. I earn approximately Taka 60-100⁸ per day. I sleep during the day as I have to work at nights. I take my meals at the cheapest hotel⁹ in the bazaar. I try very hard to save some money for the future. I send whatever I save to my mother.

My life is not without problems. I am worried every time there is a hartal [general strike]; it means that there will be no truck to unload on that day. Local hoodlums extort money from us regularly—they do not spare even children when they are collecting tolls. If we put up a resistance we are beaten and tortured and threatened with eviction from the area.

Despite all these problems I am happy with my life here. I believe that if I can keep on working and earning at this rate, one day I will be able to study. I hope to educate my younger brothers and sister with my earnings. I don't mind the sacrifices I will have to make in the process. I dream of accumulating enough capital for setting up a store when I am older. I earnestly believe that had I not migrated when I did, my life would have been destroyed. I would have no future.”

⁸ The exchange rate at the time of the interviews was approximately taka 112 to £1.

⁹ Café, or eating place – see also footnote 20.

Sohel emerges as a resilient migrant who has come through difficult experiences. He explained carefully how the fact that his divorced mother could not afford to send him to school had turned him into something of a miscreant in his home village. The threat of community action led his father to suggest he should remove himself and his father paid for him to travel to Dhaka. He had no contacts or help from friends, villagers or relatives. He had to make his own way, sometimes by stealing. He had come through this dangerous period and had fashioned a life for himself on the street, in spite of threats and various dangers. Sohel's story shows different dimensions of child migrants' vulnerability than Ibrahim's endeavours in Ouagadougou, namely the day-to-day insecurity of casual work and of living and working in a setting where theft and extortion are common. While Sohel did not dispute the uncertain employment conditions, he pointed to moral misgivings when saying that the hoodlums did not even spare children. Although he could not do anything against them, he was very positive about being in the city and on his own, despite the difficulties and dangers. Faisal, who also worked on the streets in Dhaka had become quite tough from similar experiences.

Faisal, garbage collector in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Faisal, 11 years old, collected rubbish from city garbage spots at the time when he was interviewed in Dhaka. His father worked as a security guard and his mother as a housewife in a village in Mymensingh district. He came from a nuclear family comprising six members.

“ I migrated to the city with a relative. It was a sudden decision, taken on a whim. I was tired of rural life which was tedious and joyless. When I reached Dhaka I was afraid. I regretted leaving home. I began to cry and wished to go back. My relative explained that it was not possible for her to take me back right away or even in the immediate future. She had a job and she could not leave at will. I was stuck.

At the beginning I stayed with my relative. Subsequently, I started to roam the streets. I soon got involved with bad activities. I once wandered into an unknown area in Dhaka where I came across a few child sex workers. I joined the group and engaged in sex work. I also carried drugs like heroin. Initially, I did not get any work. I used to steal. I have given up stealing now. I lead a risky life. There is no way I can now return to my parents. So I have decided to stay on.

I did not complete my primary education. I don't like studying. I have no interest in it. I don't get enough to eat. The water is not safe to drink but I have no option. You can see my bones. I am also suffering from diseases.

I collect papers, plastics, bottles and raw vegetables from the market to sell. I earn an average of Taka 20-30 per week. I enjoy my freedom, I like what I do. Currently, I am staying with children like myself in a shelter provided by an NGO called Chinnomul Sishu Kishore Shanstha [CSKS] that works with street children. I am also receiving vocational training from another NGO.

I have had many confrontations with the police. I like films. My future goal is to become a mastan [*muscleman/hoodlum*] or a policeman. I have no regrets. I don't miss my parents. I can't tell whether they are dead or alive. I am not even bothered to find out.”

Faisal was one of the few child migrants amongst all those contacted through our research who had lost contact with his family. For many of the other child migrants contact with their families back home was irregular, although they got essential news through other migrants, and those who could afford to remitted cash or gifts. Faisal did not disclose much about his relationship with his family and his story was full of ambiguities. On the one hand, his reference to his physical condition and the risks he incurred show that he knew he was extremely vulnerable and felt his life was very far from the kind of behaviour that was acceptable in his society. On the other hand, there was bravado in his account and pride in his independence, and he asserted that he liked what he was doing.

Child migrants find themselves in a range of vulnerable situations that are not only linked with their working and living conditions at the destination but also with their individual characteristics, inclinations and choices. The children's stories show many gender differences in the experience of migration, of work and of working and living conditions. Gender shapes girls' experiences when they migrate to cities and find work in markets or as traders on the streets.

Habiba a market porter in Accra, Ghana

13 year old Habiba was working as a kayayoo¹⁰ at the Mallam Atta Market in Accra in 2004. She came from Tamale in the Northern Region of Ghana where she spent her childhood years until she was ten. She came from a household of seven, with her father as the head of the household. Other members included her mother, her siblings, one of whom was below 18, and a cousin. She had dropped out of school in primary class four, and when she migrated to Accra some 13 months earlier, she decided to be a kayayoo because this work did not require school exams.

“ I came to Accra with my Auntie’s [mother’s sister] daughter and with my parents’ consent more than a year ago. We came directly to Accra from Walewale in the Northern Region with three other girls who are also into the kayayoo business. I developed the desire to come to Accra after observing those who have returned to my home town from Accra. They have nice clothes, straightened hair and a lot of things like utensils and sewing machines. In our area also, when you are getting married and you have ever been to Accra to work, you are expected to have some things to show like three sets of utensils and basins. If you don’t have these, you will be a laughing stock. I realised that those who go to Accra get access to a lot of things, particularly money so I decided to come so that I can also get these things. My auntie’s daughter, who had already been to Accra and was back home then, said she would bring me here. So with my parents’ consent, I left for Accra with her. They even gave me the money for my transport. We came directly to Accra where we stayed for four months doing kayayoo business and later left for Kumasi where we spent about six months selling iced water for a certain woman. The money was not enough so we left for Accra again to do kayayoo which gave us much more than selling iced water.

My accommodation, it is not comfortable at all. I sleep with about 50 other girls in front of a chain of stores (about five of them) near the market. Some of us sleep on mats, others on cardboards and others sleep on the bare floor with just a piece of their cloth. Each person usually pays

¢1000 every evening with the exception of Sunday to the store owner before she closes the shop and it is in cash. One of the older ones among us will collect the money and hand it over to her. Our accommodation arrangement is not comfortable because we are too many and we are exposed to many things like thieves and murderers. The other time someone murdered a kayayoo’s baby when they were asleep. Some of us thought it was for ‘sikadro’¹¹.”

Habiba reports: “I eat 3 times a day and the foods I take are banku,¹² tuo zaafi¹³ and rice. I buy most of the food but I also cook sometimes. I have some cooking utensils and a coal pot which I use in the evenings when I decide to cook. I have a friend I eat with and she is the only person I will ask for food when I don’t have any. We are from the same place. So when I have and she hasn’t got, I give her and when she has, she gives me.”

She continues: “I bath twice a day and visit the toilet once a day. I use the public bathroom and toilet facility which we pay for. It costs me at least ¢2500¹⁴ a day (¢1000 per bath and ¢500 for toilet facilities). I also wash everyday using some of the bath water whereas back home it is more on a weekly basis. I buy soap on my own and use it for the washing. You can also buy some soap at the bath house before you enter.

I have been sick only once. I had chicken pox. I went to the polyclinic near the market and they gave me some medication and some lotion for my body. Apart from body pains, I sometimes also get locked at the waist and have to remain

¹⁰ A term made up of two words, ‘Kaya’ and ‘yoo’ originating from Hausa (a foreign dialect) and Ga (a local Ghanaian language for people from the Greater Accra Region) respectively for a female porter at lorry parks and market centres in the cities. Kayayee is the plural.

¹¹ Literally translated this means ‘medicine money’ and is a term used for a ritual murder for the purposes of acquiring wealth.

¹² A local food made from fermented corn dough and moulded in round or oval shapes. Mostly associated with people from the Volta Region of Ghana, it is eaten all over the country.

¹³ A local food made from milled millet and a staple for people mostly from the northern regions of Ghana.

¹⁴ On average, at the time of the interviews, the exchange rate was ¢16,800 to £1.

in that posture for some time before having some relief. As for getting pregnant, I cannot be pregnant now. It is not possible. I'm too young.”¹⁵

Habiba had developed ways of coping with some of the risks she faced

“Since we are sleeping outside, each of us keeps either a blade or a small knife under the cloth when we are going to sleep which will be used in the event of an attack. Because we sleep outside, I only keep small monies on me and save the rest with the susu man.¹⁶ On a good day, I can save about ₦20,000 and ₦5,000 on a bad day.

I don't belong to any association but we have a system of contributing towards someone's need. If for example, somebody is sick and is from my hometown, we'll all contribute some amount, maybe ₦2,000, to be used to send the person home. But personally, I only have one person I ask for food from, so if for a day or two I have not earned any income, I will get some food from her. We sometimes eat together so she will give me and when I also get, I will give her. As for the one in charge of the bathroom and toilet facilities, he will not allow me to bath if I don't have the money to pay. So I borrow from a friend to repay later. But now, I don't have any problem with food. Initially, I did but not anymore.

The main benefit of my move here is the money I get. But sometimes I get too tired. Feeding initially was a problem for me. Apart from paying for the accommodation, bath and toilet facilities, we also pay the man who looks after our washed clothes, ₦2,000 a month and ₦5,000 to the one who looks after our small property like clothes and other things.

Since I left home and came to Accra, I have remitted once to my parents. I sent ₦400,000 and a set of utensils to my mother and another for myself for safekeeping till I return. They also sent me some rice. This is not regular. I send them things when I have something and I get someone who knows them and I trust to send the things.

When you work as a kayayoo sometimes you get good people. Other times you get

bad people who will not even give you what you charge them. I have some good ones though – about ten regular customers. I have their phone numbers and so I call and find out their next market day and what time they would be around. I then wait for them. That day, I will not take anybody's load till I see them. I'll wait for them till they come and I will follow them to do the shopping. Later, I carry all the things to the vehicle for them and then they pay me. Some are very good. Sometimes, when you haven't even carried anything for them, they give you something. One day, I had a leg injury, one of my customers gave me ₦150,000 to get treatment. That day, I thanked her very much. I couldn't even finish thanking her. Last Christmas, one of my customers also gave me a dress and ₦200,000. This customer has travelled out of the country. I also sometimes allow them to pay me later. You might get someone who would say she has used up all the money to buy things and therefore has not got enough to pay me. So I allow her to pay on her next visit to the market.”

In response to a question as to whether she feared that the person would not pay because she may not come to the market again, she said she did not think so.

“I sometimes do some house chores like washing clothes and cleaning utensils and sweeping for other people. They sometimes pay very well. Even today, I did some and was paid ₦10,000.

As for my plans, I would like to go back with some things like utensils, pieces of cloth and basins, about three different sets, and some money. In fact, I intend going very soon. But I'll come back to work for more money. Life is difficult on the street but rewarding. I hear some even buy cars so if I can work hard and get one, I will do so. I would want to buy a 207 [i.e. a mini bus].

I think you asked a big question when you wanted to know whether I consider my life here better than back home. It is because things are difficult at our end. If we get what is in Accra at our end, we will stay.”

¹⁵ This response may connote her naivety about her sexuality or a perception of invincibility shared with other girls in her age group, 10 – 14 years. Habiba in fact had little idea about when and how she might become pregnant – a particular form of vulnerability given that she is not in the care of older women.

¹⁶ 'Susu man' is a person who acts as a local 'mobile bank' to whom people pay daily amounts of money which is paid to the individual at the end of the month less a day's savings as commission to the susu man.

Habiba is one of a number of Northern Ghanaian girls working in markets in Accra and Kumasi. They do their best to protect themselves and one another through a variety of different strategies: not keeping their savings on their persons, sleeping in large groups and coming together to provide financial support if one falls ill or simply does not earn sufficient money to eat that day. Their social networks are usually based on hometown relations and as such replicate the social practices of older migrants.

Whereas Sohel was harassed by thugs in Dhaka, one option for girl migrants in Accra is to pay a small sum to the shop owner who allows them to sleep in front of the shop after working hours. Although the living quarters in the streets are uncomfortable, they are affordable and preferable to being without protection.

Bad living conditions were not confined to work on the street, however. Also in Ghana a teenage girl, Emina, complained of her accommodation, though what she felt was most demanding was her workload. However, like the other Ghanaian girls, her aspirations made her willing to endure certain hardships.

In Emina's case, her aspirations were to continue her vocational training. The link between children's work as migrants and formal and vocational education is a complex one and varies from country to country according partly to the general level of educational enrolment and partly to parents' commitment to sending their children to school.

Emina, a shopkeeper and domestic worker in Kumasi, Ghana

Emina was 17 years old when she was interviewed in Kumasi, a large city that is the capital of the Asante Region in Central Ghana. She was originally from a small town on the border of Bawku East District and Bawku West District in the Upper East Region of Ghana, where her mother and brother still resided in the household of a paternal uncle, her father having died a few years previously. She had attended school but dropped out some years earlier in primary class four. Recently she had begun a tailoring apprenticeship in a small town close to her village. This was her first experience of migration. She had been there only four months and was planning to return to her home village at the end of the month. Emina began to cry at one point during the interview, because she said she was so tired.

Emina's reasons for migrating were mixed – she could not progress in tailoring in her home community and she was asked to help her brother.

“My father died, leaving me with my senior brother and mother. My brother completed [junior secondary] school¹⁷ and is now in senior secondary one and my mother let me join a tailoring apprenticeship. To find money for fees is very difficult so my mother asked me to come here to find money. ... It was my own decision to come. When I was learning the work I didn't have a [sewing] machine so I came for that and to find money for my brother's uniform. If I didn't get money to complete this training I would be in trouble because I haven't attended school...

I bought the lorry fare myself. When I was working I used to do some sewing for friends so they gathered some small, small monies, and from this I bought the lorry fare.”

Emina discussed her plans with friends and family.

“Me and my mother decided that I should come because there is a lot of poverty there. Although some of my family agreed for me to come here my senior uncle didn't agree because some girls come south and find work and when they get money they don't go back....

My senior uncle didn't agree but I told him that if I don't go I will suffer. [I said] “You can't get it for me, my mother can't get it for me, so I have to go; otherwise when I marry I will have nothing.” In the end he agreed.

A friend of mine influenced me that if I didn't find a good place it would be a problem for me. ... [When she came] she came to a relative and they didn't take care of her nicely so she had to rely on outsiders. She was helping to prepare food for sale and with fetching water and washing.”

Like others I spoke to Emina had travelled first to a relative before finding work.

“I travelled alone. ... When I first came to Kumasi I was staying with my aunt for one month helping her but then an elder came and said that there was a Kusasi¹⁸ who needed someone to work, so I came here. I got here before I knew the work. I am staying with one woman who is preparing beaufruits [a kind of doughnut] and I am selling for her in her shop.”

At this point Emina began to cry; complaining of tiredness. On trying to establish what we could do to help she informed us that she was planning to leave at the end of that month.

“I start work at four in the morning and

¹⁷ The education system in Ghana consists of nine-years of free and compulsory schooling; six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school. Following this, students who qualify can proceed into three years of senior secondary schools.

¹⁸ The ethnic group to which Emina belongs.

close at ten at night. ... Early in the morning I will get up and sweep the whole house and bring out the items, item by item. I will wash the children's school uniforms and there is a man who comes and brings his clothing for me to wash. I take out the refuse and fetch the water. Then when I close the shop I will bring the items back in.

They pay me 5,000 a day,¹⁹ and they normally give it to me at the end of the month. So far I have collected two months' money. I used some to buy sandals and I used some to buy my clothes. I sent some to my brother at home. One time I sent 20,000 and another time 30,000.

I have no problem with food, or my health or the people I am staying with, but where I am sleeping is not comfortable because the items they are selling are put in the same place so there's not enough room. The people are good to me."

¹⁹ The amount Emina is being paid is small by comparison with her rural counterparts who go *by-day* and may reflect either the fact that she is from a small town rather than village and therefore is not as accustomed to farming work, or that she prefers the regularity of a monthly wage to the insecurities of irregular *by-day* work.

A variety of comments made by Emina suggested that while on the whole she preferred her home environment, the opportunity to earn an income in the south in order to pursue her intended future livelihood made future migration a possibility.

[*The woman I am staying with*] treats me differently, because she thinks I am working for money. She gives me only 2,500 for food in the morning, and I won't eat until night, but for her own children she will give. ... It's different [*here*] because at home the yard is small, but here I have to sweep all. Any work they have in the house they will ask me to do. I work more here ... I prefer it at home, because if you are in your own house and you are staying with your mother you can ask her if you want something, and she can give you if she has and if she hasn't it won't disturb you. But if you are not at home anything you want you can't ask; it is only until that person thinks and gives.

At the end of this month they will give me 150,000 and I also have [*saved*] 100,000, so I will cut for my lorry fare and go. ... The apprenticeship place has sewing machines where you can buy in instalments, so I will use this money to start paying. Also the fee for the mistress is 200,000 so I will cut half and give her, and half will be for the machine.

If I could find money to learn my work [*training*] I would not have come. If I finish my apprenticeship I will come back and search for money to open a [*tailoring*] shop."

Emina's inability to earn the income necessary to continue her training in her hometown was a strong motivating factor for her migration for both herself and her mother. Her uncle's reservations give an indication of the different constraints girls and boys face prior to migration. Nevertheless, the way in which Emina negotiated his consent, by stressing the need to obtain skills and household goods that could enhance her prospects both for marriage and once she had married and the senior generation's inability to provide these things for her, shows how Ghanaian girls navigate such constraints.

The educational aspects of migration are not restricted to migrants' objectives of earning money for the fees to pursue formal schooling or vocational training. The two return migrants, Lamoussa and Solange, emphasised a different set of skills that they had learned through living away from their families.

Lamoussa and Solange, reflecting on helping female relatives as foster children

16-year-old Lamoussa and 15-year-old Solange were both return child migrants, who had been away in fostering arrangements, though for different reasons. At the time of the interview, which took place in their village in south-eastern Burkina Faso, they lived in the same compound with their mothers, Lamoussa's three younger sisters and Solange's older brother. Lamoussa's father worked in the gold mines in Côte d'Ivoire, her older sister had married and her younger brother was in Côte d'Ivoire with an uncle, while Solange's father had died seven or eight years earlier and her two oldest brothers were in Côte d'Ivoire. Neither of the girls had been to school.

Lamoussa had been in Côte d'Ivoire with her parents when, at the age of seven or eight, she began to help baby-sit the twins of her father's brother's wife, her na guta [older mother], who also lived in Côte d'Ivoire. Lamoussa explained:

“ I helped my na guta with her children for two years in Abidjan. As she'd given birth to twins, I helped carrying the children, so she was free to cook. After she'd had another child she left for Ghana and I went with her to help looking after her newborn baby. Sometimes I also did the laundry, collected water at the communal tap near our house and helped to cook, but mostly I looked after the children. I was with my na guta for two years in Ghana but once the children were a bit older, my pugudba [father's sister] brought me to her house, so I could help her sell food in a restaurant. I served the customers, did the dishes and in the mornings I helped cooking. I didn't get a proper wage but my pugudba always gave me small gifts such as clothes, shoes and all the things I needed. I really liked being there, but at one point my father asked his sister to send me back to Burkina because my family was moving back to the village. I was obliged to come back since my father asked me to, otherwise I would have loved to stay!”

Solange, on the other hand, had been in the village with her parents when her father fell ill and died. Her mother's younger sister, her na puure [younger mother], had come from Côte d'Ivoire to visit her mother and had offered to take care of the then 4-5 year-old for a couple of years. Solange talked about her stay in Côte d'Ivoire as follows:

“ My na puure brought me to Côte d'Ivoire because I was suffering at home. In the beginning I looked after her baby and when the child had grown a little older, I bought cooking oil and sold that in smaller quantities and I also sold eggs. As I was only small when I went to Côte d'Ivoire, I don't know exactly how many years I spent there but I often wanted to see my mother again. I came back home because she had problems with her foot and could barely get up to cook for my brothers. That's the reason why I came back. I was happy in Côte d'Ivoire but as it was a health problem that made my mother ask me to return, I can't say that I wasn't happy to return. It had become an obligation. Anyway, I would have come back sooner or later because I would return to get married here.”

Both of them had been used to handling money at the time they were with their classificatory mothers, and they spoke about the ways in which the things they had learned could help them now and in the future.

Lamoussa: "Even though I received the customers' payments when I worked in my pugudba's restaurant, it's a little difficult for me to start trading here because the money is different."

Solange: "For me it's easier, I still remember how to calculate and trade. Just after my return I always spoke Dioula, but my friends here told me that I offended them and often we didn't get along well."

Lamoussa: "Well, I didn't have that problem because nobody here spoke the language that I'd learned in Ghana, so I never spoke that language. I don't understand English because I never went to school but I learned some Hausa, some Asante and another language. Although none of us have forgotten what we've learned abroad, our friends no

longer find us strange because we've already been back in the village for a while."

Solange: "I'd love to migrate again and I think that if I found someone who would offer to take me along, my mother would allow me to leave."

Lamoussa: "I'd love to go to Ghana, to Bawku, or even to Bittou [*border town in Burkina*] because here in the village the sun is too fierce and the Harmattan²⁰ dries out totally one's skin!"

Solange: "Anywhere would be better than here!"

Lamoussa: "Yes, here, there's nothing to do. We are pretty bored: the only things to do at this time of the year is to go into the bush to collect wood and to walk down to the pump to collect water, I don't find that interesting."

Solange: "And to trade, we would have to walk to the market in Cuiella, which is far [*approx 3 miles*], so it's a bit difficult."

²⁰ A dry, dust-bearing wind that blows in west Africa, especially from November to March.

Children's Stories

Lamoussa and Solange were too young to have had much influence on their migrations, and had they lived with their mothers, they would probably have done the same sorts of domestic work, as they have done as foster daughters. It was not this that was central to how the girls presented their experiences. They saw the fostering arrangements as a means to obtain skills and status. Not only had they learned to trade and to trade goods that were not sold in the village, they also knew other languages and about life at common migration destinations. Their migration was for them a form of education.

The link between education and migration varies very much with the context, but most children spoke about it. Even children who do not migrate specifically for reasons related to education may have educational dreams for the future, as illustrated by Sohel above. However, formal education could work in other ways to encourage children to migrate, especially where parental aspirations are high. In rural Karnataka in India, where rural school enrolment is high and where parents are committed to sending their children to school, several child migrants are 'educational misfits'. Their underperformance in school is a contributing factor in their migration, as in the case below of Govinda.

Govinda, working in a bakery in Bangalore, southern India

Govinda was 17 years old when he was interviewed in Bangalore where he worked as an assistant in a bakery. He had left his home in Halthor village, Udupi district in coastal Karnataka at the age of 13. Govinda has three elder sisters and two brothers, one younger and one older.

“ While in school, I worked as a labourer in local cashew farms during school holidays. I failed my 7th standard – I had high hopes of passing and was shattered to receive my results. I felt humiliated and ashamed and did not want to attend school any more. My mother insisted that I should continue my education but for me it would be embarrassing to sit in a class with younger students. I also thought that my friends would taunt me [*for sitting with the younger students*]. I told my mother that I wanted to take up a hotel²¹ job in Mumbai where my elder brother Rama was already working in a hotel. I spoke to him over the phone, when he called mother as part of his weekend routine. He suggested that I work in a hotel near Halthor for about 4-5 months while awaiting his next visit to Halthor. Meanwhile, a local hotel owner, a Konkani Brahmin, approached my mother with a job offer for me, so I joined this hotel in Halthor as a cleaner and started living in my workplace. My brother had worked in the same hotel for nearly seven years.

After six months, I left this job: the owner had promised me a salary increase from Rs 300 to Rs 400 per month²², but didn't give it – he also failed to pay me for two-three months of work. My next job was in Shimoga, northeast of Udupi, where I moved to take up a job as an assistant in a hotel after a co-villager from the carpenter caste had approached my mother on behalf of a friend, who owned a hotel in Shimoga.

I worked in Shimoga for six months and was paid Rs 800 per month and the work was very intensive. Work hours were from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. with a 15 minute lunch break on all seven days of the

week. The working hours in the village hotel had been shorter, from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m., with work being moderately intensive. In Shimoga, I fell sick with fever and had to be taken to the local hospital. My employer covered the costs. When the owner closed down the hotel temporarily because his wife delivered a baby, he paid us one month's salary. I left the job because the work was heavy but also because I didn't like the food, the employees were always served cold leftovers that had been stored in the refrigerator and the owner would not even bother to know whether we had eaten or not. I then returned to Halthor.

My friend's maternal uncle from a neighbouring village approached my mother at the behest of a friend running a hotel in Bangalore's Magadi Road. My mother agreed and I joined this new workplace as cleaner come counter assistant for a salary of Rs 1,360 per month. I left six months later because of health problems [*severe and persistent headache*] and after someone had stolen my clean clothes. The work was moderately intensive (10 a.m. to 11 p.m.) with a 2 hour afternoon break. We were also given a bonus of Rs 200 for Diwali [*a festival*]. Before leaving, a customer, a driver from Halthor, suggested I join a dosa stall in Vijayanagar, owned by an acquaintance, for a month as an assistant. In this new workplace, work intensity was very high on all seven days of the week with a monthly salary of Rs 1,000.

Although the employer was willing to extend my contract, I refused to stay because of the poor pay and because my work tasks were not clearly defined (I had to do cleaning, packing, assisting the cook etc). I then approached a cousin

²¹ Hotel is the local word for a small, vegetarian South-Indian eating place; these do not take overnight guests.

²² In August 2000 the exchange rate was 68 rupees to £1.

who was working in another hotel in the same neighbourhood for help. My cousin talked to the hotel owner who, in turn, spoke to his distant relative, running a bakery in Maratahalli [Airport Road] and found me a job as an assistant for a salary of Rs 1200/month. This work is very intensive, from 7 a.m. to 9.30 p.m., on all seven days. The owner has promised me a salary hike."

Govinda had no plans to return to Halthor – he wanted to settle down in Bangalore, work with the same employer and save money for starting a small business enterprise maybe in 2-3 years where he could become an employer.

"I'm in the city to make a living and not to make friends. I don't keep in regular touch with other migrants from my native

place. The advantages of life as a migrant include good food, life in the city, increased income, business contacts and the opportunity to search for alternative options in the future. There are no disadvantages.

You migrate in search of a good future and you should always keep that in mind: friendships may even turn out to be counterproductive at workplaces. Even though I have a dream of establishing a good hotel in Bangalore in the future, I would prefer to start a pan beeda stall [chewing herbs/tobacco] and then think of the dream since I believe that even when dreams are big, one must start small. You must not try to lie down directly when you're standing – you should first sit down and then lie on the ground."

Govinda justified why he had wanted to quit school by emphasising his shame at failing his exams. In spite of his mother's ambitions he managed to get her sanction to take a job. Like Ibrahim, Wahabu and Habiba, Govinda was keen to earn money. This motivation prompted a search for better-paid jobs that reveals the ways in which child migrants negotiate wages and working conditions.

Govinda looked at both the salary paid in cash and food, expenses for healthcare met by the employer and bonuses such as gifts at special occasions. Where the level of the wage in cash and promises of future pay rises were decisive for his accepting a job, the way he felt treated at the workplace shaped his choice of remaining in the job. Ibrahim and Wahabu had made similar trade-offs between the types of work that would earn them the best remuneration and working conditions, while keeping down their everyday costs of living.

Boureima had similar reflections but, as a contrast to Govinda and Ibrahim, whose employment mobility was between small-scale food businesses, and Wahabu, who remained in the agricultural sector, Boureima tried out different types of work.

Boureima, a brick-maker in Ouagadougou

Boureima was 14-15 years old when he was interviewed on the outskirts of Ouagadougou where he worked for someone who made bricks. The mainstay of his work was to dig sand in one place, load it on a donkey cart and bring it to the place where he and two or three older youths made the bricks. Boureima was an orphan; he had lost his mother when he was only two-three years old and his father a few years ago. He had grown up with his maternal kin some 120 miles south-east of Ouagadougou. He had never been to school. During the interview he was about to cry several times, especially when he spoke about his parents and also the disappointment of having been cheated of his entire savings.

“ I came to Ouagadougou on my own about one year ago. Until then I'd lived with my maternal grandmother and helped my dayar [*mother's brother*] selling clothes in town and in the village markets. I ate with them and he also gave me some clothes for my work. When I first wanted to go to Ouagadougou, my dayar thought it was better if I stayed a little longer before going, so I helped him for a while and then left.

In the beginning I lived with my na puure [*mother's younger sister*] in a neighbourhood in central Ouagadougou, where I walked around to sell water. She sold water in a small shop, but in the evenings I took her place in the shop. Her children are still small, too small to work, so I was the one who worked while her children went to school. I came to Ouagadougou to work but my na puure didn't pay me. I didn't even ask for much, just that she would buy me some clothes, but she said she had no money for clothes, so for that reason I left her house.

I went to the Sankariaré Market [*one of the busiest markets in central Ouagadougou*] but the only kind of work that I could find was to sell iced water: if you sell water for 500 Fcfa you'll earn 100 Fcfa. Even though I slept and ate in my employer's household, I didn't even do this work for one month. In fact, my employer gave me sufficient food and if they didn't cook, they gave me money to

buy a meal somewhere. I could make 3,000 Fcfa or more in one month but I quit the job because a cousin told me that I could find work here in Zabtenga where I could earn 6,000 Fcfa per month for digging sand and making bricks. Here I also live and eat with my employer.

Compared to back home, I find that things are a little better, because back home I lived with my grandmother and when I farmed it was for her... What I find difficult here, is that my employer asks me to collect four carts of sand every day; that I find difficult and exhausting. I start between 6 and 7 a.m. and usually I dig enough sand to fill three carts before midday, then I break during the hottest hours of the day and start again in the afternoon where I'll fill the last cart. Usually I have two days off per month. Anyway, I'd earned 25,000 Fcfa and after having bought a pair of trousers, I asked my employer to keep 15,000 Fcfa in safe for me. Recently, I wanted to take my money and travel back home with my older brother, because we'd decided to go home to build three houses: one for my grandmother in my mother's village, one for my brother's mother and one for ourselves in our own village. But due to the fact that everything has slowed down this year [*because of a bad harvest countrywide and subsequently high prices on grains*] my employer had used the 15,000 Fcfa and asked me to wait until the economy picked up again and he

could give me my 15,000 Fcfa as well as the money I earned in the meanwhile. My brother left yesterday while I'll wait until I've got my money."

Boureima's grandmother, Boureima's older brother and Karim, a long-term migrant to Ouagadougou from his village (and his former employer) were also interviewed and gave a somewhat different view of his experience of migrating and working. His grandmother, for example, explained that Boureima had not travelled to Ouagadougou on his own:

"My daughter, Boureima's na puure, brought him to Ouagadougou to take some of the burden off my shoulders since I was looking after three orphans, and besides she needed someone to help her sell cakes. She has no idea as to why he ran off despite the fact that she paid his bus fare and took good care of him. In fact, she's rather angry with him for having absconded in that way, so if she finds him, she'll send him back home!"

Karim said that he did not know that Boureima had been with his mother's sister before, he only knew that the boy had sold cakes for someone.

"One day Boureima's older brother brought the boy to me and explained that the boy wanted to work but that he was still very young. Nevertheless, I accepted to take him on and we helped each other do the work; he drove the donkey cart and I did the heavy work myself. After two months, Boureima quit his job with me to work with one of the others in the area who make bricks. He told his brother that he'd quit his job because I talked too much. You know, he's someone who doesn't like to wash or to wash his clothes. If I gave him a shirt, he preferred to wear it all the time until it literally fell off his body, so I told him that he needed to take off the darn thing once in a while to wash it! Moreover, I'd given him a house where he could sleep and invited him to come to my house to watch TV but the boy went to the video clubs and stayed there until 11-12 p.m. I didn't agree to that because he needed

to get up early the next morning to start his work.

After he'd quit his job with me, his new employer came to ask if I minded that he employed the boy, but why should I mind? Boureima has worked with the other one for about six months but the past five months he hasn't received his wages: his employer owes him 25,000 Fcfa. Recently, his employer sold his donkey cart, so I told Boureima to go ask for his money but the employer said he'd sold his cart as a credit, so Boureima didn't get a penny.

Now he's changed job again. He still does the same kind of work but this time with someone who lives here in Zabtenga but works at the Wesin market near the airport. He found this job himself and just left without telling anyone. One day when I met him, I asked whether he'd told his new employer who his parents were, but he hadn't told anything to anybody. I plainly told him off! How can we help him if problems arise?"

His older brother felt that Boureima lacked the experience and maturity to deal with his life as a working migrant to his best advantage.

"Boureima has already had many jobs: between the time when he worked with Karim and the employer who spent all his money, he had another job. As he has no clue about saving up money, I'd taken the 5,000 Fcfa that he earned when working for Karim. I gave Boureima 500 Fcfa and put aside the rest in order to give it to him when we were ready to go back home. As I'm a bricklayer, I went to another town to work for a little while. On my return I discovered that Boureima had taken out his entire wage of 5,000 Fcfa and wasted it all on *dɛgɛgɛ*²³ and video clubs. While I was away, he'd also changed job and had started to work for the one who cheated him for money. I tried to put some sense into his head to make him understand that he needed to take into consideration his younger brothers. Then he finally started to save up, but with the employer who ate all his money!"

²³ A cold yoghurt drink with fermented millet.

Children's Stories

Although Boureima had not migrated entirely on his own but had been swept into a fostering arrangement by his maternal kin, clearly he had wanted to find work himself. He turned his back on being incorporated into a family where his work was not rewarded in a formalised manner. Similar to Faisal, he had his own ideas of what he wanted to do and explored the immediate neighbourhood to find work, shelter and food. Nonetheless, he remained in the network of kin. His older brother provided the way into a better-paid job that was commonly perceived as the beginning of the informal path to becoming a brick-layer, his older brother's trade.

The interviews with other family members and an older migrant from his home area give us additional insight into Boureima's choices. They are very concerned that he is rather immature and headstrong, but Boureima sees himself as striving to negotiate the difficulties and insecurities of informal sector jobs and to live something of a city life. When he chose again to change employers, like Govinda, he assessed the way he was treated, and left the employer who had cheated him of the saved wages.

Children's Stories

Ibrahim (above), too, had had similar experiences, although at the hands of relatives; first one distant uncle spent his meagre savings, then another distant uncle failed to pay his wages. He had found a new job, but was very anxious about getting paid. However, Boureima had only recently been cheated of his savings, so other criteria affected his decisions about whether to remain in his job or not. It may well be that he wanted to avoid relationships where the employer took on a parental role and expected that as a junior he should behave in particular ways.

Work can be very hard to find, as the stories of Sohel and Faisal also show and some of it provides very little in the way of income.

Bakary and other shoe-shiners in Ouagadougou

Bakary was about 18 years old when I interviewed him in Ouagadougou together with three younger brothers. Both his parents were living and farming in a remote village some 135 miles from the capital. Several of their elder brothers were migrants to Côte d'Ivoire. Like many other itinerant shoe-shiners, Bakary came to Ouagadougou a couple of months after the harvest. At this point in the annual cycle they had finished threshing the millet and they had also cut all the grasses that were needed to make new roofs. He had first migrated five years earlier when he was around 13 years old but each year he had returned home in time to help farm.²⁴ He had never been to school.

“ We grow a lot of cotton in my village but it isn't quite enough to satisfy our needs. The money isn't sufficient because they have only just collected the cotton so they won't pay for another one or two months, and at that time the prices on grains have already increased so if you need to buy food, you'll spend a lot of your cotton money on that. Moreover, you may have small credits to pay up for soap and the other things you've bought so once all those things have been paid, there isn't much left.” ***Bakary and his brothers giggled and he continued:*** “If only we get enough money for a bicycle, we'll go back to the village. And if we find a small job that allows us to save up a bit to bring back to the village, it'll be very good!

²⁴ While many of the itinerant shoe-shiners spoke of their annual return home to farm in early 2005, follow-up interviews in February 2006 revealed that they had remained in the capital throughout the farming season but were called home by fathers and older brothers to help construct houses and in a few cases to meet a possible fiancée. The 2004 farming season was exceptionally bad, most local crops failed due to lack of rain and infestation of larvae, and as locust swarms in the Sahel further destroyed crops, the grain markets slackened. In this situation it was better for the boys and for the food security at home that they continued to earn money for their own upkeep.

In the first years I came to Ouagadougou, we lived in the house of an older brother who had a small laundry service. Nowadays we stay in the house of a dayar [*mother's brother*] in Zabtenga. Every morning we get up early and set off on foot towards the city centre to find customers, who demand our services. Usually we walk on our own or with just one friend, but today we're four because Djibril and Bawaya have only just arrived in Ouagadougou.”

Jean-Paul, an 18 year old shoe-shiner from a neighbouring village who had dropped out of school after only three years, described how he started his work at 7 a.m. and finished at 5 p.m.

every day, and how he, during the day walked long distances to find his customers. He lived with relatives but never ate at home, instead he spent some of the money he earned on buying food. This was common among the young migrants - although they could make claims on accommodation with older kin, they were careful not to exploit the hospitality.

Bakary continued his story:

“Last year I had a job in a small bar in Dassago where I lived in, ate and earned 5,000 Fcfa per month. When I wanted to return home, I found a stand-in to take my place while I was away but as he stole some money the owner sent him away and found another youth to work for him. When I came back last week to take up my work again, my boss told me that he'd taken on someone else, so I'd have to search for another job but if I didn't find anything I could come back to see if he needed someone then. I hope I'll find another job but until then I'll shine shoes. If I work hard, I can earn up to 1,500 Fcfa in one day.”

A 15-year-old shoe-shiner explained:

“It doesn't take much to learn to shine shoes: it's sufficient to look at the colour of the shoes, find the same colour shoe polish and polish the shoes. When I came to Ouagadougou and saw that all my friends were shoe-shiners, I too bought the necessary things to do this work.”

"What is difficult about shoe-shining," **Bakary said**, "is the long distance that you walk every day."

"Yes," **added 18-year-old Dasmane**, "and even though you walk and walk, you still don't earn much!"

The other boys said that it was because he was new but they also talked about customers who did not want to pay the 50 Fcfa that was the accepted rate for a pair of shoes.

Dasmane, who had been in Qur'an school for a short while and had grown up with his dayar [mother's brother], the Imam of Kabri, explained in more detail:

"Some people are like that. You shine their shoes and now they'll say that you haven't done it properly and they leave without paying. Others, who are sitting in a bar somewhere, just take their shoes without a word and when after a little while you come back to get your money, they'll say that the shoe polish you used wasn't moist enough. All in order not to pay their 50 Fcfa! The most frustrating thing is that you're obliged not to say a thing, despite the fact that that you know you've done your best to shine their shoes, and now they won't pay. But if they don't pay, I'll leave them to the good God who will decide how they are going to pay because I, I've already used my shoe polish! If I was in the village, I would react because my parents were there, so if the other one would beat me, my parents would probably intervene, but here in Ouagadougou we are like orphans."

The shoe-shine boys' accounts of their earnings differed a great deal; the 1,500 Fcfa that Bakary had mentioned was probably somewhat of a record.

16-year-old Bawaya said:

"Some days you don't even have 1 franc to put aside once you've eaten but other days you can save up 2-300 Fcfa"

15-year-old Augustin noted:

"I still haven't reached 1,000 Fcfa in one day, but I've gotten 500 Fcfa."

18-year-old Jean-Paul, explained:

"Every so often you make 750 Fcfa in one day and every so often 600, but it still adds up to around 10,000 Fcfa a month once I've spent money on food. I hope to send some money home to my mother soon" [*he had lost his father*].

Bakary too had come to Ouagadougou to look for money.

"I'll save up to be able to buy some clothes, to be able to change my clothes, and when I'm ready to return to the village I'll try to have enough money to buy some clothes for my mother and my younger brothers. The time in Ouagadougou has also taught me and the other shoe-shiners other things: for example, when we walk around in search of customers, we see lots of things that we'd never seen in the village and we also get a better understanding of how life is. If you're hungry back home, you can make some tô [*millet porridge*] but here you'll need to get out your money, otherwise you won't eat. In my opinion, this is why migrant life in the city is a way to mature, because you'll know that without sweat you can't eat!"

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Despite not relying on kinship networks to secure work, boys' relations with family members had an impact on being able to work. On the one hand, the shoe-shiners might not rely on kin for food, but being able to secure housing was a positive outcome of kinship networks, enabling them to stay in the city while earning very little. At the same time obligations to parents might prevent them working - such as those which called Bakary to his home village and lost him a good job.

Frequent job changes and being cheated of wages are themes that run throughout many stories.²⁵ In the case of Zuera, they are linked with pursuing higher social status, as well as better wages.

²⁵ These are also often typical of adults' experiences, for both migrants and non-migrants.

Zuera, unemployed nanny and domestic worker in Accra, Ghana

Zuera came to Accra from Bawku in the Upper East Region of Ghana three years ago and was 19 years old at the time of the interview. She had completed the junior secondary school level of education and resided in the Ministries Area in Accra. She came from quite a large household. Her father, whose age she could not tell, was the head of the household and he lived in the household with three of his six wives, 24 children, two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren. Zuera was the last of the seven children of her mother who was the first wife. She was currently unemployed but had worked as a nanny and a house girl for various families. Until two months previously [December 2005], she was a telephone operator.

“ I came to Accra with my father's friend's nephew and his friend three years ago. They were both males. Before then, I did not have much knowledge about Accra. I only heard that there were good opportunities for education and jobs from my father's friend's nephew when he was coming for me. With the exception of my two older sisters who are married and living at Sunyani with their husbands, none of my father's children has left the house or travelled beyond Kumasi. I am the first to do so and to travel as far as Accra.

When I finished my JSS [*junior secondary school*] examinations in 2003, I was not doing much so my father's friend suggested to my father to let me help him with his drinking spot. After eight months, my father's friend's niece (who was then 24 years and married to a white man) came over and wanted a girl to help her with the house chores and I was suggested by the uncle. On her return to Accra, she sent her brother and friend to come for me from Bawku. My parents were told of the educational and job opportunities I would have when in Accra. My mother was against it but my father agreed because of the opportunities that he was told would be available to me. My father is someone who, despite our number, made sure that we all had education. Those before me were educated and those after me are in school. He used to say that none of his

children would leave Bawku so all my older siblings were educated in Bawku and so are the younger ones. But this time, since it is education, he agreed. So I was told of my trip to Accra and left with the men to Kumasi from where we used motorbikes to Donkorkrom [*in the Eastern Region*] to stay with the mother of the woman in Accra. We stayed there for a week before we left for Accra to stay at Lapaz where the woman lives. I also liked the idea of coming to Accra because of the hope of taking advantage of the opportunities that exist in Accra.

Though I'm unemployed now, I have worked as a nanny and house girl for about four different families for a minimum of three months each. On my arrival in Accra, I stayed for a month with this father's friend's niece at Lapaz. I was sacked from this house after one month because of a funny incident with a security guard at the house. From there, I had a temporary stay at Sarpeiman [*a suburb in Accra*] for four months before getting a three-month contract with a white family of seven members (parents and five children) at New Town. I was paid c250,000 a month then and was eating once a day in the evening. I left there because the work was too much and got another family of four (parents and two girls) at 'American House' [*East Legon*] who later moved to Lashibi [*another suburb in Accra*]. I stayed with this family for five months. They paid me

¢300,000 a month and treated me very well, like a member of the family. I had to leave when this family relocated to the United States of America and I went to stay with another family (a sister to the mother in the relocated family). She had three children (two girls and a boy) at the Spintex Road. I was to be there until she found another person. But then I had a 'spiritual attack'.²⁶ I did not understand why and so wanted to go home and find out why things were happening that way. My madam understood and even gave me some money for transport to go and cure 'my illness'. But I thought about it and decided I did not want to go back without any skills or job. I therefore decided to look for a job and got the chance to operate a 'space to space' telephone business for about four months until December 2005 when the owner took it away from me because he said the sister also needed a job. That's how come I got here.²⁷

²⁶ This term is used to refer to a belief in the fact that an attack on a person comes from external spiritual forces. In her case, after consulting a medicine man, she was of the view that her stepmother was behind an unexplainable change of character she experienced towards the person she was living with, in a bid to ruin her chances of making it in the city, since she is the only one who had come this far and she is the daughter of a rival (co-wife).

²⁷ At the time of interview, she was again staying with the family she had spent time with at Sarpeiman. They had relocated to the Ministries Area where the male head of the household worked as a security guard

²⁸ Self medication is common in Ghana, reflecting poor and costly health services. Public awareness needs to be raised about its dangers.

²⁹ Dagomba and Kusasi are two different ethnic groups in the Northern and Upper East regions respectively

As for my accommodation, it is not comfortable at all but I have to make do with it since I have no choice. I sleep with about six other persons on the veranda in front of the offices at the Ministries. We don't pay anything to anyone. My friend's uncle is the security man in charge of the block of offices there, so we don't pay. Sometimes when it rains, the veranda gets wet so we have to stand until it stops raining and even after that, the veranda is too wet for us to sleep on. Sometimes, if the key to the toilet is available, we go and wait there until the rains stop.

When I was staying with the families, I did not have any problem with feeding. I could eat three times a day in some of the homes. But now, I eat either once or twice a day. Sometimes, it is really difficult for me. I have a friend who is staying with the boyfriend, so sometimes, I go and visit her and we cook and I get something to eat. Otherwise, most of the few times I get food, I buy more than I

cook. I sometimes will buy banku, tuo zaafi and rice. When I don't have anything at all, I try to get some transport to my father's friend's niece who brought me to Accra and she will give me some money. I sometimes visit my friend to also eat at her end. I also met a cousin who is a Pastor but lives in Nima. I think I can call on him when in trouble.

I have been sick only once. I had a stomach ache after eating some kind of food late in the evening. My friend's uncle, the security man, gave me some medicine he said was given to his wife when she also had a stomach ache.²⁸ Life in Accra is much better than back home but it is difficult when you are not working. When I was working, I sent ¢100,000 to my parents once but now, I need to help myself. I think there is money if you can get a job. If not, life here can be difficult. I'm really feeling it because I am not working now and have to rely on other people who also have their own worries."

To a question on why she does not also get into the kayayoo business she replied: "I'm not a Dagomba but a Kusasi.²⁹ Some Kusasis do kayayoo but the Dagombas are more. And besides, I intend continuing my education! I would like to go back but not without any skills or a proper job here in Accra either in the computer business or sewing. Even if I get money now, I will not return until I have had some skills. If I return without any skills, I would have wasted my time here.

If I had known that things would turn out this way, I would not have come in the first place. I look back on my life here and I feel sad thinking that I could have been a better person if I had stayed home. I think it is better to stay back home and help there than to move to Accra and do nothing, especially if you don't know anybody and you don't have any aim for coming."

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Zuera's choices of work were embedded in her pre-existing level of education, as well as her sense of social status and her aspirations to a better future; she refused to engage in manual kayayoo work and only took work as a nanny with white or mixed couples, or work that resembled white-collar jobs. It had been much more difficult to get secure high status domestic work than she envisaged and her dreams of bettering herself have been bitterly disappointed. Up until this time, however, her motivation for migrating - the prospect of furthering her education or acquiring some training - remains and she is choosing to suffer on a minimum rather than give up her dreams. Her ability to call on a variety of social and kin networks to keep down living costs eased the hardships of holding out for her preferred work.

The wide diversity of types of work in the children's stories is not so different from the work that non-migrant children do in rural and urban areas. The differences lie in their living conditions, which also differ widely from one migrant child to another, and who children work for: whether for themselves, for a family member or for an employer.

Hawa, farm worker in Brong Ahafo, Ghana

Hawa was about 15 years old when she was interviewed working in a cassava field, where she was weeding with a group of other teenage girls, in a farming village on the border of the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Regions. Both her parents were alive and farming in a village in the Upper East Region. She had migrated south at the age of seven. She had been in the south an unusually long period since most of the children interviewed averaged only three years away from home. At home she had been attending school and was in primary one, but she had dropped out in order to migrate south.

Hawa's reasons for migrating were mixed. Initially there had been a dual purpose, but her mixed views probably also reflect the length of time she had been a migrant and her changing perceptions over that time.

“When I was there [at home], there was a lot of poverty. We were two, so it was decided my mother should take care of one and I should go with my brother for him to send me to school. ... My brother decided I should come; he asked me to come and take care of his wife's child. ... Because of the poverty I wasn't going to school well, so I decided to come with my brother. But when I came here he didn't put me into school. I was helping his wife while she was farming. After three years of being here they sent me to an Ashanti³⁰ lady and I was working for her for four years.

I was sitting with a woman from this village by the roadside selling vegetables and the Ashanti woman stopped and asked her, won't you give your sister to me. ... The woman used to come and buy from our village ... I didn't just go like that. At that time my brother wasn't there, but his wife agreed that I should go.

I was staying with the Ashanti woman in Kumasi and selling soap, milo [a malt drink] and that type of small thing from a table. ... I would open around seven in the morning and go home at three to prepare soup. On Sundays I wouldn't go to work but I would wash their clothes.

“Sometimes she would take up to one o'clock before she gave me chop³¹ money. And if nobody bought [anything from me] she wouldn't give me chop money. ... When I was sick, if you asked her for money to buy medicine, if she wanted she would give, if she didn't she wouldn't give. ... The place where I stayed [her accommodation] was fine. Some people were good and some people weren't.”

On trying to clarify who wasn't good to her and what they did, Hawa explained:

“When someone dashed [tipped] me the women's children would say I had stolen from their mother. ... She was not treating me the same as her children. ... They were going to school and I was not ... Now I am not with them anymore I am happy.

I decided myself to stop [working for her] and the Ashanti woman brought me back here. ... When I left there she bought me a sewing machine. ... Now I have entered into apprenticeship work.”

When I asked Hawa who she was working for that day, since it was a week day and she was not at her apprenticeship but farming, she explained:

“The work I am doing today is just a help. They asked me to help and tomorrow they will come and work on my brother's farm. ... I sometimes go by-day and collect my ₵10,000³² but I am only free on Saturdays and Sundays.

³⁰ The dominant ethnic group of the region.

³¹ This is a Ghana-wide term that refers (amongst other meanings) to the money to purchase food with when outside the house.

³² At the time of the fieldwork in May/July 2004, the exchange rate was ₵16,000 to £1. The daily minimum wage was raised from ₵9,200 to ₵11,200 on 1 April 2004.

I also help my brother's wife with her work ... like fetching water and cooking. I have no problems here. ... They are treating me fine. ... They are not treating me like their children [*because*] they may buy clothing for them but not for me. ... I haven't paid any apprenticeship fees yet, but I am hoping my brother will help me."

Possibly reflecting the long time Hawa had been in the south, she was among the few children interviewed who expressed a preference for the south rather than her originating village.

"Sometimes they [*my parents*] send messages that I should return home; but I have never visited. If I get a chance

I will go home, I just want to finish the apprenticeship. ... My brother will decide if I go home and he will buy me the ticket. If I finish my apprenticeship I will go home and use my sewing machine to work. ... If I go into the bush I will get money and send it home [*i.e. return home with money*]. ... Now when I get money it doesn't stay with me because I spend it.

I prefer here because if you get up and go into the bush you can get money by going by-day. ... Here is better because at home there is poverty."

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Although Hawa did appear displeased that her brother had not placed her in school, she did not appear put out about the fact that his wife purchased items for her children but not for Hawa, reflecting the fact that Hawa was of an age where children are expected to provide personal items for themselves such as clothing, soap, etc. However, there was a general expectation that when young people residing with family members return home, the relative with whom they had been living would give them some money or, in the case of girls, buy them items such as sewing machines or pots and bowls. As Hawa had already earned her sewing machine, she hoped that her brother would pay for her apprenticeship.

As with Ibrahim's and Boureima's experiences above, Hawa's story illustrates the ambiguous nature of kin relations, where working for a family member, as compared to an employer, does not necessarily guarantee that children will be better provided for. The children, perceiving themselves as workers, may have expectations of being

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remunerated in particular ways that are not discussed openly but are asserted in subtle claims for clothing, money or vocational training, while their kin feel they meet their obligations to the children by feeding and housing them.

At the same time, children living with their employer frequently describe their relationship with an employer in terms of being treated as a family member or not. Zuera, for example, was content when she felt treated like one of the family and Hawa expressed happiness to no longer be working for her employer who treated her differently from her own children. By contrast Fatima does not complain of any ill-treatment at the hands of her employer.

Fatima, a domestic worker in Dhaka

Fatima was 13 years old when she was interviewed in Dhaka where she worked as a domestic worker. Her father was disabled but was formerly a farmer. Her mother was a housewife.

“ I am the oldest in a family of six children. My father was afflicted by various diseases. He soon became disabled and could not support us. It was impossible for my mother to manage the family on her own. When I was ten years old, my mother sent me to Dhaka with a woman. This woman's business was to take women and children from the village and place them in people's homes in Dhaka as domestic help.

My family did not want me to work in a garment factory. They had heard many stories regarding factory jobs. I had no education, no skills. Consequently, my job options were limited. Moreover, my parents were convinced that domestic work was safer and more appropriate because I am a girl.

I was placed with a family in Rampura. There are five members in that family. I work from 6 a.m. in the morning until 11 p.m. at night. Sometimes I stay awake until midnight. My main chores include cooking, washing clothes and cleaning the house. The mistress of the house often helps me in the kitchen. I am allowed to watch TV in my leisure time. I am reprimanded for my mistakes

but I have never been beaten. Sometimes, I am scolded for no reason; nonetheless, I remain silent. I am afraid to protest.

I sleep on the floor in my mistress's room. I have no problem with that; rather I am happy as I am able to sleep under an electric fan. I wear clothes that are handed down to me by the daughter of the house who is only a few years older to me. Since we are of similar build, there is no shortage of clothing. I also receive new clothes during Eid. I am given sufficient food. I earn Taka 600 per month. I send the money to my mother through the woman who brought me here. My mistress takes care of me when I am ill.

The family I work for is generally kind to me. Nonetheless, I miss home and I am lonely. I feel I have no one to turn to, no one to share my feelings with. I feel particularly depressed on days when the whole family is out working or visiting. I have no idea how long I will be able to contain myself in this mechanical environment. I realise that my family's survival depends on my ability to continue with my job.”

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Like some of the other girls featured, Fatima's options for work were curtailed by adults' concerns about her safety. However, unlike, for instance Emina, who had been able to negotiate in her favour with those senior kin who did not wish her to migrate, Fatima's young age and reason for migration meant that she was far more constrained in the nature of the work available to her. Fatima's mother may well have been right in her rationale for choice of work for her daughter, since she did not complain of ill-treatment. Nonetheless, she was sad at being away from her family. Like many of the other child migrants, going home figures prominently in her hopes for the future. In contrast with Lamoussa and Solange who were of a similar age as Fatima when they lived with their classificatory mothers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire respectively, Fatima did not emphasise the skills she learned but the lack of warmth and the pressure of providing important income for her family. For her, migration was not an opportunity but a burden. Her story though, illustrates just how important some children's work can be for their families' survival.

Nataraj had also been sent off to work to supplement his family's income, but for him his workplace provided a kind of family.

Nataraj, a contract labourer in a tiles factory in Haladi village, Udupi district

At the time of the interview Nataraj was already 29 years of age but he had first migrated to Sircilla near Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh at the age of ten to work in a small, South-Indian eating place [hotel]. He is of schedule caste [Harijan] background and the eldest of three sons. He also has a younger sister.

“ My father was an alcoholic, a waste-body. My mother was working as an agricultural labourer during the monsoon and as a construction worker off-season and was the only breadwinner. Her daily wages, 1.5 kg of rice, were insufficient to provide square ganji³³ on a daily basis. I attended school only for one year and was not regular. Instead I spent my time playing with friends. Besides lack of interest in the pursuit of education on my part, my mother found it extremely difficult to arrange for a new slate and a schoolbag made of cloth. She decided to take me along to work for half-wages.

I worked as an assistant to my mother and earned half a kg of rice extra, which was still not enough to feed the household. After almost two years, my mother decided to send me for work as a cleaner in some hotel. The two major considerations were that there would be one mouth less to compete for food and that I would earn extra money that would help my mother to purchase groceries. My mother approached her employer Mr Shetty for whom she was doing construction work on his new house. Mr Shetty was also the owner of Udupi Bhavan, a vegetarian hotel in Sircilla. He agreed to take me along and I felt obliged to follow my mother's order.

I worked as a cleaner for two years. The daily work hours were from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with two hours of rest in the afternoon. The work was highly intensive for seven days a week. Initially I got Rs 250 per month but this increased to Rs 300 after one year.³⁴ Apart from free shelter and meals, the employer also provided free health care. He took me to a physician on two or three occasions when I was down with fever and cold.

The other perks included new clothes for Diwali and 15 days paid leave every year. This was my only job.

“For 15 days in June-July [during the transplanting of paddy saplings] I returned to Haladi and gave money to my mother. I also sent money through my employer when he visited. For the rest of the year I sent money through money orders equivalent to Rs 500 every two months.

My employer was kind and looked after me very well. Rama, a 29 year old of Billava caste, was the manager cum coffee/tea cook and my best friend and guardian in the hotel. There were altogether seven workers of which two were cooks, two suppliers and three cleaners. All my colleagues were from the coastal belt and life was harmonious. I knew the caste background of my other colleagues and also that I was the only Harijan in the workforce. However, apart from Rama none of my other colleagues had any clue about this. The owner had deliberately concealed my caste background and asked me to say that I am a Dev-Adiga if anyone asked about my caste. He had also told Rama about this 'agreement' and told me that at the personal level he did not believe in caste hierarchy and that such practices had lost their relevance.

In our discussions at work caste never featured as an important matter. Instead our discussions would revolve around the day to day experiences of the workplace and life back home. Many days we would also not find time to chat. Even after the hotel had closed for the evening, the other cleaners and I had to clean and wipe the floor, tables and the counter in preparation for the next day. After that I

³³ An amalgam of boiling water with cooked rice, salt and pickle.

³⁴ Nataraj's wage rates are not comparable with those of Govinda or Umesh, as aged 29 at the time of the interview, he is reporting on his work history which began in the 1980s.

would have a bath, eat the meal that had been freshly prepared and go to bed. Work pressures the following day would occupy my thoughts. My experience in Sircilla enabled me to overcome my shyness, my outlook towards life changed.

I believe that my future opportunities would have been better if I had stayed in the same job but I decided to return at the strong insistence of my mother, who wanted me to work in nearby places. She asked whether it was possible to make a living out of my earnings as a hotel worker once I grow up and whether I planned to marry. She also asked whether I, as a hotel worker, would be able to support my family in Haladi on such meagre earnings and reminded me of my responsibilities towards my siblings as the eldest son.

I am currently working as a contract labourer in the local tiles factory and earn Rs 442 per week with Sundays off. My present aspirations and plans for the future: firstly, to earn money to marry off

my sister and later buy a piece of land for cultivation and support the higher education of my younger brothers, if they are willing. One of my younger brothers has repeatedly threatened to leave Haladi to take up a hotel job somewhere. Both my mother and I have spent considerable energy trying to dissuade him from making such a move."

When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of working in Sircilla, Nataraj said:

"Exposure to city life, money for the household, no schooling and no caste-based restrictions at the workplace were the main advantages. The main disadvantage was that I had to stay away from my mother. The quality of the shelter in the workplace was much better than what we have in the village. Food adequacy and variety were also much better and I put on a lot of weight. In the workplace my employer behaved like a fatherly figure, while Rama treated me like a younger brother."

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As the eldest son of a poor scheduled caste woman solely responsible for her children's food and welfare, Nataraj had taken on many responsibilities in his family and had gone away to work at his mother's request. The benefits of being treated as a son, as a brother and as an equal, though a junior equal, with no mention of his caste and his family's poverty was key to Nataraj's positive experience of working away from home.

The caste issues are particularly important, first because in the hotel and restaurant industry where many children work in South India, prevailing norms restrict members of lower castes from preparing, handling and serving food to those of higher caste, and second because Nataraj himself had gained a kind of freedom from his low caste status by 'passing' as a Dev-Adiga.

Nataraj's mother had, as had Fatima's parents, been obliged because of poverty to send a child to work at an early age. They were however careful to do so through channels that protected their children. Although it is not always a safe bet, these cases show that non-kin employers may take good care of children.

Many of these stories raise questions about how to think about children's relationships within the family, especially in conditions of poverty and difficult access to schooling. The accounts suggest that age-related responsibilities

for children are flexibly negotiated, depending on family circumstances and children's own wishes. It is also clear that mostly children are not understood as social and economic dependents who can be protected from the harsh circumstances that their parents or responsible seniors face.

Young children generally move in response to requests from parents – as was the case for Hawa, Fatima and Nataraj, although none of them expressed a view that they did not wish to migrate. In some cases then, children may migrate as part of their obligations to their families. They respond to requests for their assistance by extended family members requiring their labour, such as in the case of Lamoussa and Solange, or the need to relieve their immediate households of the burden of responsibility for their care, as in the case of Hawa and Wahabu, or take up paid employment not available in their home villages to support their family, such as in the case of Fatima, and Nataraj.

The sense of responsibility that children have towards their parents and siblings is clearly seen in the frequency with which children remit a proportion of their meagre incomes home. A few children, nevertheless, appeared to be in severe or considerable conflict with their parents because of the life decisions they had made, among them were Faisal in Dhaka (above) and Umesh in Bangalore (below).

Umesh, working in a factory canteen in Bangalore.

Umesh is 15 years old and he left his home in Holihalli village, Mandya district at the age of 14. He has one elder sister and a twin brother. He is currently working in the canteen of SEG Clothing, a factory in Bangalore.

“ I was a regular student, but was occasionally beaten for lack of punctuality in completing homework. I was good in sports, but mathematics was a tough nut to crack and in my eighth standard I failed in this, my most feared subject. My parents insisted that I should resit the exam, but I refused because it would be humiliating to sit with younger students while my peers and friends would be studying in a higher standard. My father beat me and told me that if I refuse to heed their advice I would have to take care of my own life. This prompted me to run away. I was aware of hotel work and the opportunities in the hotel sector in Bangalore after listening to senior migrants from my village.

The same afternoon I had been beaten, I stole Rs 60 from my father's shirt and boarded a bus to Bangalore. This would be my first visit to Bangalore and throughout the journey I kept thinking about my future course of action when reaching the city.

I decided to approach hotels and ask for jobs and after getting out at Majestic [Bangalore's main bus station] I approached the owner of Hotel Raghavendra Krupa at the bus stand. I was hungry and food and finding shelter were my main concerns. The owner, an Udupi Brahmin, enquired about my background and I narrated everything – unedited. The owner took objection to the fact that I had committed the twin blunders of stealing money and running away without intimation, but appreciated my honesty. He told me not to resort to theft at any cost and sent me to the kitchen after asking his employees to give me some food. He spoke to me again and informed me that I would be working as a cleaner for a salary of Rs 500 per month³⁵. He also mentioned that

although he was against hiring child workers, it would be his moral duty to offer me a job in the larger interest since I otherwise may resort to anything to ensure food. The work hours were from 6 a.m. to 11.30 p.m. with 10-15 minute break for breakfast and lunch. The work was highly intensive. There was no leisure time at all. Continuous contact with water resulted in whitening of my skin and cracks appearing on my palms and feet. There were 20-25 workers, but very little to learn about anyone. Scoldings and beatings by the kitchen supervisor were to be expected if we [the cleaners] were reluctant to get up at 5 a.m. or failed to pay proper attention to our jobs.

After I absconded my parents arranged search parties – consisting of close relatives. While one party headed by my father went to Nagamangala [the taluk headquarters], the other went to Mandya [the district headquarters] and then to Mysore. Meanwhile, my brother-in-law, Venkatesha, working as an operator in a garment factory, was asked to search for me in Bangalore. Venkatesha enquired at many hotels in Peenya and Majestic and also in Bangalore Railway station using a photograph of me. The search ended when Venkatesha visited Raghavendra Krupa and the employer summoned me and offered to let me go. This was two months after I had absconded. I refused to return to Alisandra out of fear of beatings and humiliation. My brother-in-law offered to place me as a cleaner in the canteen of his factory and I agreed to accompany him there. The same day, we went to his house in Peenya and the next day approached the canteen owner who agreed to hire me as a cleaner with a salary of Rs 1,000.

There are about 350 workers in the factory, SEG Clothing and most workers

³⁵ The exchange rate for the approximate period Umesh is reporting on was 84 rupees to £1.

are women. In the canteen, the owner manages the cash counter, his brother works as a cook and a Lingayat from Mysore works as supplier. The work hours are from 7.30 to 10 a.m. and 11.30 a.m. to 3 p.m. and from 5 p.m. to 6.30 p.m. on six days a week with Sundays off. Our other perks include free food, shelter, uniforms and free clothes (leftovers in the factory). Besides, the employer has promised to hike my salary by a considerable amount every year. Further, I also get a month's salary as a bonus for Ayudha puja [during Dussehra, a festival].

At the first workplace, there was no time to learn about anyone – work, work and work was the mantra. I had no specific friends – “Good to all – and good with all” - was my policy. Vulgar language was very common among the cleaners. Other senior colleagues would discuss movies – life was very mechanical. You are in the central heart of the city, but in a cage called a hotel from where you could hardly get to go out, or get to know about what is going on outside. At SEG Clothing, I have ample spare time and all the 350 employees know me.” **He beams with pride when making this comment.** “They make it a point to greet me whenever they visit the canteen. I spend Sundays with my sister's family

watching TV and playing with the kids. Occasionally we all go out for a movie.”

On advantages and disadvantages to his migration, he said:

A main advantage of migration was to avoid the humiliation of having to do the resit. Other advantages include higher earnings, a sense of satisfaction, variety and adequacy of food, making contacts. The basic amenities and shelter are very good. Exposure to city life and learning of hotel work are other advantages. I have also learnt to be more patient. There are no disadvantages.

You should not leave home prematurely. If you do, you must not return prematurely.

I have yet to visit Holihalli but I am planning a visit during the coming Ugadi [major festival]. My parents have visited once after I started working for SEG.”

He explained his aspirations were to work with the same employer for some more time, earn confidence and through him secure a contract to run a similar canteen elsewhere. The owner had also promised him to be of help.

Children's Stories

Umesh's leaving home was a major rupture with his parents, brought about by conflict with his father. He was brought back into the family by a successful search by his brother, who had been asked by their father to look for the runaway.

Samson too was a 'runaway'.

Samson, a food-processor in Accra

Samson is a 14 year old boy from Bolgatanga in the Upper East Region who currently lives and works in Accra around the Mallam Atta Market. He has been in Accra for two years now and is working on wele.³⁶ His work involves scraping and cleaning the hide. Before he left his native region in the North he went to school and had completed class six. At the time he left home to come to Accra he was living with both parents and his stepmother. In total there were 13 people in the household that is headed by his father, nine children under the age of 18 years. Out of the nine children in the house, three were his biological full siblings.

“ I came here with my friend and his father. I first passed through Obuasi to visit my uncle and to ask him for some money for my travel down south. The friend I came with was about 15 years and the dad about 75. People who have been to Accra all say life is good here. Some friends also told me there is work here and this influenced my migration to Accra. My maternal uncle encouraged me when I told him of my intentions. I did not tell my parents I was going to Accra. I told them I was going to Obuasi to visit my uncle. I knew my parents would not approve of my decision. I spent five weeks in Obuasi helping my uncle to take his child to school. He even gave me ₵100,000 for my transport. I did not go to Kumasi because I did not know anybody there.

I sleep with nine other boys in front of a cold store which is not big enough. Some of us sleep on mats while others sleep on benches. I don't pay for where I sleep. Sometimes so many boys come to join us and this makes sleeping uncomfortable. Where we sleep is not big enough.

I eat three times a day when I have enough money. At times when I cannot afford three meals in one day I have to skip breakfast. I often eat 'omu tuo'³⁷ and buy most of the food I eat. It is sometimes difficult to get money to buy food and I depend on my brother during such times.

I bath twice a day, visit the toilet once a day and wash every week. We have a public bathroom and toilet facility, which we pay for. It costs me ₵1,000 for a bath, ₵1,000 for washing and ₵500 for toilet facilities. My personal hygiene has been affected by migration because back home, I do not have to pay for these facilities while over here, I have to pay ₵2,500 a day.

With respect to my health, I do not often get sick although I have body pains and stomach aches at times. Then I usually buy medicine from the pharmacy to treat my pains. I do not face any health threat considering my situation as a child migrant. One time I remember having a severe stomach upset and had worms in my stool. My friends took me to the pharmacy and bought me some drugs. My condition did not change. My friend advised me to drink petrol. According to him, he has suffered the same problem before and his father made him drink petrol and he became better. I heeded to his advice even though I was afraid but felt better when I took in the petrol. I have not made any girl pregnant and this will never happen because I do not like girls. Abortion is not good and so if by mistake this happens, I will keep the baby.

My security concern is the fear of our money being stolen by some 'junkies' from Nima. They cut our pockets with a blade while we are sleeping and steal our

³⁶ Wele is a delicacy prepared from the hide of the cattle to go with waakye, a locally prepared dish.

³⁷ Omotuo is the local name for a dish of rice balls.

money. I keep my money with my brother and belongings with a woman from my hometown. I belong to the Duame Group and this group assists members in times of need. My brother also assists me when I have no money. I remember one day when one of my friends stole another man's phone and the case was taken to a 'juju'³⁸ man. We were all rounded up and asked to pay ₵60,000 each and told that we will go mad if we do not pay. If for a day or two, I have not earned enough income, I will plead with the owner of the bathroom and toilet to use the facilities and pay next time.

I have not remitted any money home. As a migrant I have been able to earn about ₵300,000 and some few things for myself which I am happy for. However, my future plan is to go back home and continue my education or engage myself in skill training. I have come here to work to make some money to make these future plans a reality. I consider life better at home than in Accra and I miss the fun and entertainment back home. I would not advise anyone from home to come to Accra because life is difficult here. It is especially hard to find accommodation."

³⁸ A traditional medicine man or witch doctor.

Children's Stories

As Samson' and Umesh's stories illustrate, to run-away does not necessarily entail losing touch with one's family altogether. Moreover, even though Samson had not informed his parents of his intention to migrate, like many of the other children, he drew on family and other social networks to facilitate his migration. Which networks were available tended to influence where children ended up and consequently the nature of their work. Samson, for instance, as with the head-porters and other urban dwellers, experienced relatively harsh living conditions and had to spend valuable income on food.

In the course of their studies Migration DRC researchers spoke to several hundred children and young people who were either then working as migrants, or had worked as child migrants. These conversations are used to generate information which is mainly used in research reports, which draw together individual pieces of information to find commonalities. A large part of the process of research analysis consists in contextualising in various ways that body of data. The wider context can be information for example about school enrolment rates, or about the informal labour market or rural poverty and it can also be analysis and themes linking with the research literature. So, the findings in research come to look very different from any one child or young person's specific experiences. And so they need to. The researcher, however, has cumulatively had more direct access to these experiences through the individual conversations than is apparent in a research report. Researchers are trained to avoid letting any one story or conversation play a more significant role in their analyses than any other, but the specific stories and individual children are not thereby blanked out. In the best research these act as a sounding board and touchstone in the process of analysis.

This account attempts to share more widely the content of our conversations with individual children. It does so for two reasons. First because there are very few public fora in which children get to express their views, locally, nationally or internationally. Reproducing these conversations is no substitute for proper consideration of how children and young people's views might be heard, but at the very least the active, often thoughtful ways in which the children in this account negotiate the constraints and responsibilities of their lives is a powerful case for the need to address that lack of public voice.

Second and more specifically, addressing the policy needs of this category of child migrants should start from a much better understanding of the children's lives, including their own perceptions of these. There seems to us to be a gap between these lives and perceptions and much of the policy advocacy literature about child migrants. Partly this is because policy is largely concerned with children in more vulnerable abusive or exploitative conditions than the ones in our

studies. Partly it is because concern over this abuse and exploitation of children has led to the adoption of a series of international protocols and conventions which inevitably use age cut-off points to define who is a child and establish specific rights that children should have as a category of citizens. The treatment of all children as *one* category fails to acknowledge that the conceptualisation of childhood and of acceptable forms of work for children at different ages might vary over class and space, and it fails to distinguish between the different needs, capabilities and preferences of young children and of almost-adults.

International advocacy has focused much needed attention on exploited and abused child migrants, but has also made it difficult to address the very real needs of other child migrants. Improving the well being of and opportunities for child migrants requires measures in a number of broad policy areas:

- programmes that alleviate the regional and rural poverty that trigger high levels of adult and child migration.
- open and sensitive national and regional debates to establish what is locally acceptable and unacceptable child labour, and to mobilise discussions about young people's working conditions and rights.
- systems of support and recourse to be built for *all* working children in hardship, not simply those who have been trafficked.
- measures to ensure that education is a universal right for all children, regardless of work status and/or migrant status, and to institute measures to allow working/migrant children to access school, non-formal education and/or training.
- reassessment of international definitions of trafficking and the dominance of this category in the debates about and the interventions around children's migration, as studies indicate they can increase child migrants' risk of harm and exploitation.

The Migration DRC is embarking on a programme of engaging with policy makers in this area to refine its policy recommendations and further synthesise findings from its research culminating in a policy workshop to be held in 2007. See http://www.migrationdrc.org/news/drc_events.html for updates on this.

The Migration DRC research on independent child migrants consists of five separate projects undertaken in rural and urban Ghana, in rural and urban Burkina Faso, in rural and urban sites in Kanakata, India and in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. They were planned to be broadly comparative in the analytical framework adopted and in the themes pursued, although each has its own individual focus and range of methods. Several of the projects have arisen out of previous research carried out by the authors. Some details for each project are given below.

When comparing the children's accounts, differences between the research countries need to be borne in mind. The child migrants in India and Bangladesh leave from rural areas with marked economic inequality and significant landlessness, so that the rural poor are dependent on employment for income for food and most other requirements. The Burkina Faso and Northern Ghanaian rural areas are very poor with semi-subsistence farming the predominant form of livelihoods. Getting the cash for non-food requirements such as clothes and school fees is very difficult. India has very high rates of school enrolment, while those in other countries are significantly lower. School attendance in the Burkina Faso villages and in the Ghanaian Upper East villages is very low.

Here we outline details of each of the five research projects and identify further reading.

Whitehead, A., I. Hashim and V. Iversen (2005) Child migration, Child Agency and Inter-generational Relations in Africa and South-Asia, Paper presented at the Conference *Childhoods* in Oslo in June 2005

Iman Hashim: *Independent Child Migration in Ghana*

This research was carried out between May and July of 2004 and is based on interviews in a farming village in the north-east of Ghana with parents and returned child migrants and on interviews with boys and girls who had migrated to the cocoa-growing areas of southern and central Ghana. The Migration DRC project aimed to build on research conducted with children in 2000-2001 in the farming village in the North East. One of the findings of the earlier research was that 77 children (41 girls and 36 boys) from the village were living and/or working outside the village without their parents. This amounted to 15% of the child population and 50% of the 96 households in the village reported having a child currently away. However, the issue of migration was an unexpected finding of the initial fieldwork. As a result only some children who had migrated into the village and some of those who had returned were interviewed in 2000-2001.

The purpose of the 2004 research was to build on what was found then in two ways. Firstly, the aim was to

explore in greater detail the nature of the processes involved in migration. This means both the social networks that come into play in the movement of children and also the household negotiations that are involved in children's movements. The second purpose of the research was to broaden the scope of the children considered to include children who were at the time living as independent migrants. Thus, fieldwork was carried out in several sites; in the village in which the initial fieldwork was carried out in 2000-2001 and in the places where children had migrated to and were currently living as independent child migrants. In the sending village a total of twenty parents (ten mothers and ten fathers) were interviewed regarding their children's migration. In addition, ten interviews were carried out with return migrant children. Sixty interviews were carried out with thirty girls and thirty boys in rural and urban areas in the southern and central areas of Ghana.

Contact with the migrant children was established either by going through existing contacts made in earlier research, or through influential community members. Often this was done by visiting a town or village and finding the *Zongo* or 'Stranger Place', where most migrants were settled. There the chief of the Kusasi (the ethnic group the research focused on) would be sought out to explain the purpose of the research and to seek his permission and assistance; on occasion returning at a later date to conduct the interviews. Interviews were in the Kusasi' language, Kusaal and recorded verbatim as translated to the researcher by her translator. The interviews were semi-structured, children responding to open-ended questions posed throughout the course of the interviews.

The case studies from this project are those of Wahabu, Emina and Hawa. So as not to interrupt the flow of the children's narratives the questions put to the children have been removed.

Hashim, I. (2005) *Exploring the Inter-linkages between Children's Independent Migration and Education: Evidence from Ghana*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex, UK (http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers/WP-T12.pdf).

Hashim, I. (2005) *Independent Child Migration in Ghana: A Research Report*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex, UK (http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/research_reports/ImanReport.pdf).

Whitehead, A. and Hashim, I. (2005) Children and Migration: Background Paper for DfID Migration Team, Department for International Development, UK.

Hashim, I. (2006) *The Positives and Negatives of Children's Independent Migration*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex, UK (http://www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working_papers/WP-T16.pdf).

Vegard Iversen: Child Migrant Workers in South India

The Migration DRC research on this migration flow of children builds on previous research in South India.

Historically, migrants from Karnataka's Coastal belt, of which Udupi district forms an important part, have established a large number of small, South-Indian eating places (popularly known as Udupi hotels) in Mumbai, Bangalore and in other cities and small towns. At present individuals from the Bunt-community, the predominant peasant caste of the Coast is believed to control as much as 70% of Mumbai's more than 12,000 eating places. The ownership structure in Bangalore's Udupi hotels is distinctly different, with Kota Brahmins from Kundapura in the northern part of Udupi dominating among owners. There is a long history of the migration of children for work in such eating places in Mumbai and Bangalore. In the 1950s for example the area known as Fort Mumbai in Bombay had five Kannada (the language of Karnataka) Night Schools that primarily catered for the educational needs of children from the Coastal belt working in the city's, by then numerous, South-Indian eating places.

In 1998 research was conducted in a dryland area around 130 kms west of Bangalore in Northern Mandya district in Karnataka state, South-India on child labour migrants (all below the age of 15) from 21 different villages. We interviewed the parental households of these migrants and most of the migrants themselves. There were 146 boys and 23 girls among these migrants – a large majority of the boys were working in small, South-Indian eating places in Bangalore, while the girls primarily worked as domestic servants. The study showed that entirely autonomous child labour migration (including running away from home) was confined to boys (Iversen 2002) and often was a response to conflicts and fights with their fathers. We also found that autonomous child labour migration was more likely for boys from the dominant Gowda community. Girls, working as domestic servants were found to be more vulnerable to abuse (beatings) from employers.

While providing original evidence that formed the basis for a critique of the existing economic literature on child labour, the 1998 study left a number of questions unanswered, which the new Migration DRC research was designed to answer. The 2004-5 study covered Udupi district in coastal Kanakata where most owners of small South Indian eating places are from. The motivation for this choice was the scope for making comparisons of central and coastal areas of the state and to examine whether the concentration of ownership of small, South-Indian eating places among natives from the Coastal belt translated into a higher incidence and different patterns of child labour migration from this area. Another aim of the study was to improve our

understanding of the role of caste and the nature of the use of social networks for gaining access to jobs in the South-Indian food industry. We also wanted to learn more about the experiences and career trajectories of these young migrants.

The data collection in the 2004-05 project covered four purposively selected villages in the Coastal belt and revisits to six of the villages from Mandy – from which households were randomly sampled – data from this survey sheds light on the relative importance of child and adult labour migration. The sample survey is complemented by in-depth interviews of 98 individuals who left home for work before the age of 15. Many of the interviewees from the Coastal belt are now adults, giving these interviews a useful, longitudinal dimension. Govinda, Nataraj and Umesh were 15, 17 and 29 years when they were interviewed, but all three left home for work before the age of 15. A striking finding from this last round of research is that recent child labour migrants often are educational misfits. Conflicts arise when they fail exams, or have a strong dislike for schooling, or a combination of the two, despite parental commitment to education. Our findings also suggest that many of our interviewees have had what they themselves describe as very interesting working lives with migration being a transformative and critical event.

Iversen, V. (2002) *Autonomy in Child Labour Migrants*, *World Development*, 30 (5): 817-34.

Iversen, V. (2005) *Segmentation, Social Network Multipliers and Spillovers: A Theory of Rural Urban Migration for a Traditional Economy*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex. http://www.migration_drc.org/publications/working_papers/WP-T9.pdf

Iversen, V. (forthcoming) *The Economics of Urban Migration in India*, Monograph, London: Routledge.

Iversen, V. and **P. S. Raghavendra** (forthcoming) *What the Signboard Hides: Food, Caste and Employability in Small, South-Indian Eating places*, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*.

Sumaiya Khair: Child Migrant Workers in the Informal Sector in Dhaka

This study has sought to understand independent child migration and related family dynamics through interviews with child migrants working in the informal sector in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. Interviews were also conducted in selected rural areas with parents/ guardians whose children migrated by themselves.

Dhaka is a favourite haunt for most migrants, whether children or adults, due to its centrality and importance as a manufacturing, administrative and commercial centre. When children migrate they are deemed to do so in the company of their families. This is not always

the case. There are numerous instances where children move through social networks of friends, relatives and neighbours or at times, entirely on their own, as when they run away from home. Although children constitute a significant proportion of the migrant population in Dhaka, their position in the migration paradigm is largely unacknowledged.

Following a review of existing literature on the subject, primary research was carried out in Dhaka, a major urban centre attracting child migrants, who were contacted purposively at bus, launch and train terminals, in places of their work and in their residences in the slums. Using a combination of formal and informal techniques, interviews were conducted with 105 children who had migrated from their homes by themselves, and with 50 parents whose children had migrated independently of their immediate families. Fifteen further in-depth case studies of child migrants were also undertaken to acquire a detailed understanding of the specificities of the position of child migrants and their chosen way of life.

During the qualitative interviews tape recorders were used to capture their stories. Permission was sought from the children before using the recorder; although it was initially thought that they would be uncomfortable speaking into a recorder, the children seemed unperturbed and at ease during the whole exercise. Important observations in terms of facial expressions, gestures, and overall body language were noted down. The conversations with Faisal, Sohel and Fatima were in Bangla, heavily supplemented by local dialects that were subsequently transcribed and converted into English.

While existing literature on child labour tends to single out economic factors as the principal determinant of child labour, there exist other dynamics that are often equally critical, which induce children to join a highly diversified labour market from an early age. Despite absence of adequate policy and legal protection and institutional support, the research finds considerable evidence of children having actual control over their lifeworlds. This is manifest in the various strategies devised by them for surviving the odds at the place of destination.

Khair, S. (2005) *Voluntary Autonomous Child Migration: Perspectives from Bangladesh*, Paper presented at the Conference *Childhoods* in Oslo in June 2005 (<http://www.migration-drc.org/news/reports/oslo/khair2005.pdf>).

Stephen Kwankye, John Anarfi, and Cynthia Tagoe: Independent North-South Child Migration to Ghanaian Cities

The case studies used here arise out of a Migration DRC project looking at the migration of children and young people to urban southern cities from Ghana's north. There is a long history of out-migration from the northern regions, particularly of men to work in rural and urban areas. Recently many more children and young people, especially girls, have been moving, usually to work in the informal economy in Kumasi and Accra. Typical of these migrants are female adolescents with little or no education and few employable skills who work as head porters popularly called *kayayee* at most of the transport stations and market centres.

The project collected data from a survey of 450 independent child migrants aged between 10-24 conducted in the first quarter of 2005 in Accra and Kumasi. In addition, in-depth interviews were held with parents of current migrants, opinion leaders and some returned migrants in the origin areas in the north. Some focus group discussions were also organized among potential child migrants and other adults on their views on migration. Other methods adopted to gather information included the use of key informants at the places of origin and destination of the migrants, based on a snowball approach to identify the child migrants from the northern regions. Children were initially contacted through key informants who introduced the research team to boys and girls aged below 18 years who had come down from the north to the cities, and to young people who had come before they were 18. Information was collected through in-depth interviews in the Twi, the Dagbani and Frafra languages, after which they were transcribed into English. Interviews not recorded on tape were written down very fully, taking care to record the statements and words used by the children and young people.

The case studies in this paper come from in-depth interviews with a small sample of the migrants who were aged 19 and under. The interviews were wide ranging in content, covering for example reasons for leaving and details of how the decision was arrived at, employment histories, information about current conditions of work and about living conditions. Although there was a focus on the coping strategies child migrants adopted to cope with their difficult living conditions, the research seeks to uncover the negative and positive aspects of the children's experience of migration and to explore the risks attached to these kinds of migration

Kwankye, S., J. Anarfi, and C. Tagoe (2005) *Costs and Benefits of Independent North-South Migration of Children in Ghana*, Paper presented at the Conference *Childhoods* in Oslo in June 2005.

Kwankye, S., J. Anarfi, and C. Tagoe (forthcoming) *Coping Strategies of Independent Child Migrants from Northern Ghana to Southern Cities*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex, UK.

Kwankye, S., J. Anarfi, and C. Tagoe (forthcoming) *Independent North-South Child Migration In Ghana: The Decision Making Process*, Migration DRC, University of Sussex, UK.

Dorte Thorsen: Child Migration, Poverty and Livelihoods in Burkina Faso

This research was carried out during the four months January - May 2005 where material about children's migration from the Bisa region in south-eastern Burkina Faso was produced in semi-structured interviews, through a series of visits and informal chats with 60 child migrants in Ouagadougou and two rural towns in the south-east and with their parents (n=45) in fourteen different villages. The Migration DRC project built on detailed knowledge about the rural social setting and the pervasiveness of migration in rural livelihoods and, more importantly, on a network of personal relationships created in a total of 18 months' fieldwork in the region since 1997 and having lived in one village in 2001-02.

The purpose of the research was to explore how the normality of departures and homecomings linked with high mobility and the importance given to migration in local discourses influenced both children's and parents' ideas of the benefits and disadvantages of migration. Its aim was to increase our understanding of the complexities underlying rural children's migration and work. This involved unpacking the incentives for children to migrate, for their parents/families to allow them to leave or to send them to kin elsewhere, and the household negotiations preceding children's migration. Furthermore, the research aimed to explore the actual experiences of independent child migrants, their strategies to improve their situation and the links between child migrants, their families in the village, and kin based at the destination.

People were generally careful not to disclose detailed information to strangers, hence contact with child migrants in rural towns and the first contacts in Ouagadougou were made through my existing social network. The number of contacts in Ouagadougou was systematically built on by meeting the friends of the first migrants interviewed. Moreover, adult migrants from the region were traced in marketplaces and the neighbourhoods where many of the Bisa migrants live

and after thorough introductions and explanations of the research they were asked to mediate contact with the children they knew. Finally, a similar approach was applied in a screening of marketplaces, restaurants and bars for young itinerant traders speaking Bisa. With the permission of the migrant children in Ouagadougou, visits to their village of origin were made to interview their parents. Interviews were semi-structured and most were conducted with the help of an interpreter who translated between French and Bisa, though some were entirely in French. While the first interview was recorded, subsequent conversations were informal and documented in a research journal every night.

The case studies from this project are those of Ibrahim, Lamoussa and Solange, Boureima, Bakary and other shoe-shiners. The children's stories are a mix of what they said in the first interview and the information and details they added in subsequent conversations, and in Boureima's case his story is contextualised by information given by rural and urban relatives.

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