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Children in Decision-making Mechanism to Migrate for work: Theoretical Analysis Applied to West Africa

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Introduction

Child labour in the West African sub-region is of serious policy concern that transcends the square of mainstream social science. Indeed, most theories of child labour have affirmed that several factors do motivate children to migrate to identifiable agricultural and economic units. Since economic incentives usually draw the children, such unhealthy development for the children could be linked directly to the parents. As Diallo (2000) has suggested, many factors routinely engender the phenomenon of child labour. Among such are the socio-cultural, environmental (social norms), dysfunctional credit markets, household poverty, the weaknesses of the education system and legislative factors. Nevertheless, very negligible research works have addressed the reasons for children migrating to work in other countries in Africa. Such gap in knowledge is considered a potent theoretical issue that deserves a detailed epistemological explanation. Interestingly, the scope of the CODESRIA's Institute for Children (2011) has included issues bordering on how decisions are made in the process of children entering into related transnational practice. However, its transnational connotation in a globalized environment and implications for the regional integration process in West Africa, albeit Africa, deserves better attention than is being focused on in this chapter.

Contextualizing the African Child

A child in most legal definitions is any individual under the age of 18 years. Another broad category inevitably raises the Child and Adolescent classification, in measures of their needs and abilities (Hashim & Dorte 2011). This is essentially indicative of

the fact that childhood entails a dynamic transformation of a child, in the aspects of physical, psychological and environmental composites. Erny (1987) in his analysis of the 'African child' also incorporates the spiritual dimension in his conceptualization of the child. This initiatory dimension plunges African children in the shelter of socialization within the community and allows them to live with these realities as adults. Thus, as the African child grows, he/she is subjected to the laws which govern the whole society. Hence, the child is prone to involvement in specific functions (Erny 1987:122). The African child in the Africanist design can then be required early to perform social or economic functions within the household or societal frameworks. This viewpoint has been captured by Kenyatta (1960:107): 'far from being a burden, the (African) child is a valuable aid, benefit, a necessity. Thus, the role of the child as a producer is more important than the productivity of farmers, and it is necessary to multiply planting operations, to maintain performance' (Lacoste 1968:30).

Children and Work in the African Context

Bonnet (1993:411) asks, 'what work, at what age children?' he answers thus: that the legislation in each African country, prohibits child labour and submits to strict protection. Also, Bonnet (1993) has been insistent on the fact that such legislation does not favour the industrial sector while children in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in West Africa, do business in countries where so-called family or domestic work, and agriculture are very popular.

As a whole, the work of the child in the African context may be defined as any activity in different occupations other than the child's school work and all that the child could consider as play or games (Bonnet 1993). In 1998, the International Labour Conference, at its 86th Session, adopted the International Labour Organization (ILO) 'Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work', which confirms that effective abolition of child labour is one of the fundamental principles that must be respected by all member-states of the ILO. While most of the countries in the West African sub-region function as members of the ILO, they have unduly allowed child labour to continue to thrive within their respective jurisdictions. Two dimensions in the definition of children have been strongly advocated by various international organizations, such as The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the ILO; that is life in rural areas and the number of hours spent in a field. This second definition focuses on the variable of rural child labour.

In West Africa, the phenomenon of child labour could be empirically situated within four contexts depending on the quality of work: domestic work, work in career of begging, sex work and active participant in armed conflict. But Bonnet (1993) assures that the concept of 'work' in itself cannot be universalized because ethnographic approaches rely heavily on those who define it. But in all cases, Hashim & Dorte (2011) show a myriad of tasks performed by children around the world, and in West Africa in particular. Boys and girls are involved in agricultural and domestic work (Abede 2007; Katz 2004; Reynolds, Nieuwenhuys & Hanson 2006).

Regions of Strong Attraction for Child Labourers in West Africa

In the West African sub-region, the issue of child labour is economically built around the agricultural production areas and the urban centres. Most agricultural regions saw the emergence of children cross-border labour migrants during the boom period of the 1930s (that is, when the production of coffee and cocoa became unusually lucrative). Thus, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire assumed the position of concentration for migrant children, who either moved with their parents or alone. As the economic boom advanced both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana began experiencing the influx of child labourers from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger Republic. It is worth noting that regional differentials were significant within the countries releasing child labourers. For instance, in Burkina Faso, Bisa Province in Boulgou Region has recorded the highest number of child labour migrants. This province has the lowest income level in the country – 82.7 FCFA per day (National Institute of Statistics and Demography of Burkina Faso 2008). In Ghana, the North-East has been heavily involved in the provision of child migrants in search of work. It is also the region with very low income level in the country (Porter and Canagarajah 2002).

The receiving areas are usually the rural centres in the destination countries where agricultural production is done on a mechanized scale. It is important to note that the migratory behaviour of children in West Africa has been following the established colonial tradition. Thus, despite the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire from 2002 to 2011, the country continued to receive migrants (including under-age ward labourers) from Burkina Faso in search of work in the cocoa producing regions of the country, such as Soubré, Daloa and Abengourou. The flow of migrant children, alone or accompanied, has strongly increased in the years following the devaluation of the CFA franc. Farmers from most Sahel countries were forced to migrate southward in search of a better living with their offspring. It is in this context that the individual decision to migrate becomes problematic because various factors that cut across political, social, cultural and economic are involved.

At another realm, if the history of migration in West Africa has been indicative of an increased monetized process and sustained financial exchanges between various actors in the migration system (Cordell & Al 1996), the system has been largely facilitated by cross-border intermediaries who have made the operation of the network a profession. Indeed, the development of agricultural areas related to coffee-cocoa has for decades sustained a migration pattern of individuals who have been seeking for better life (Grootaert & Kanbur 1995). The issue of concern now is: what is the appropriate age for an individual to decide to migrate for work across the border? Various scholars on migration research have suggested that the age at first migration for economic activity has been dwindling over the years, sometimes reaching infancy. Although, the decision by child labourers to migrate, in the West African sub-region, has in most cases been made by the parents or the family members, the ability to contribute to household sustenance at the point of origin of the migration has sustained the migratory process (Lambert 2007). Also, the social model that emphasizes the prominence of the family and the community in children

migration has affirmed inexorably the capability of all age groups to contribute economically to the development of the society (Agarwal & Al 1997). It has also indicated that in some cases the decision to migrate has structurally been constructed around an economic logic which is now maintained by social intermediaries ranging from the near (relatives) to commission (Beauchemin 1999). The migration trajectory of children is then constructed from instruments developed by economic agents who observe the movement of children; hence, a cost-effective economic system perpetuates this child migration (Hasnat 1995).

Trajectory of Motivation and of Decision by Child Labourers to Migrate for Work

Although some children are driven to work due to neglect and family debt bondage, most of them do enter into it on their own volition (King 2002). Oftentimes, most children do take the decision to work for all sorts of reasons: to ensure the survival of the family; or when they are orphaned or living on the street, for their own survival; to escape the boredom of school, because they did not want to go there or because they are mistreated; to escape unbearable family situations; to have the money to buy anything from branded clothes to drugs; or simply to feel independent (Sheller & Urry 2006).

Table 1: Child labour – level causal

Immediate causes	Underlying causes	Structural causes
Little or no money or food reserve	Disintegration of the extended family and informal social protection systems	Low national income
Family debt	Lack of parental education, high fertility rate	Inequality between countries and regions, unfavorable terms of trade
Increased prices of first necessity	Social aspiration for children, work and education	Incidence of crisis, war, financial or economic shocks, transition, HIV-AIDS
Non-existent school, poor or inappropriate facilities	Discrimination based on sex, caste, ethnicity, nationality etc.	Insufficient financial and political commitment to education, basic services and social protection (i.e. "bad governance")
Demand for cheap labor in the informal micro-enterprises	Consciousness of being poor: the desire to access consumption and a better standard of living	Social exclusion of the marginalized groups
The business or the family farm does not have the means to hire a employees	Children feel responsible for the family, and the "rich" for the poor	Lack of decent work for adults

Source: ILO (2002, p. 54)

Meanwhile, various models of parental choice, based on the idea that parents or other adults do decide for children to enter into the world of work rather than attend school, have assumed that such decisions are routinely motivated by rational economic criteria, selfish reasons or by outright ignorance (Elson 1982).

Thus, the term 'voluntary mobility' means that the child decides to move, sometimes against the will and without the consent of his parents. Between the voluntary act expressing an autonomous decision and submission to coercion or being forced to leave (forced mobility), several situations may arise (Terre des Hommes 2011). They are particularly influenced by the consent that reflects the spontaneous proposal from other children. In such case, the child grows up to give the consent. The idea did not come to him/her at first, but it eventually belongs to him/her.

Integration Implications of Child Labour Migration in West Africa

The West African sub-region comprises various countries, which are constituted by numerous ethnic groups. As such, the social, political, cultural and economic compositions of various countries differ. This means that the interpretation of the phenomenon of child labour in Nigeria differs from that of Senegal. Even within a given country, the realities of the communities are not always identical. It is therefore important to devise and support processes that enable communities to analyse and consider the best interests of their children in terms of their work, the education they receive, which will essentially structure their future and the choices and resources that will be available to them (Hashim 2007).

Various researches conducted by the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) on migration, trafficking, exploitation and abuse of children in the communities of West Africa focus on the difficulties in transcribing commonly used terms in international conventions into local languages and emphasizes the need to better understand the communities (Terre des Hommes 2011).

The United Nations has indicated that if the mobility of children cannot be tackled in its entirety, it must be accompanied by a protective collaboration between different states of West Africa. However, such collaboration has been near impossible across time and space due to differing laws and representations relating to child labour in different communities in West Africa. Hence, awareness of areas of origin, transit and destination according to the UNICEF may have more leverage in the fight against child labour (Whitehead, Hashim & Iverson 2007).

Concluding Comments

This chapter has specifically interrogated the process of decision-making in the entrance of children into the labour market in West Africa. It has observed that child labour is built economically around various production areas in the agricultural and urban centres in West Africa. Various agricultural regions saw the emergence of child labourers during the boom period of the 1930s (that is the production of coffee and cocoa). It has identified both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire as the major countries of concentration of migrant child labourers within the sub-region. Such

migrant child labourers either come with their parents or on their own volition for work. A specific multiplier effect of this development is that courtesy of related intermingling of migrant children and the indigenous children, over time and space, cultural boundaries are becoming obliterated. As such, regional integration is being enhanced within the sub-region.

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