

In children's words

Well-being and futures in Ghana

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Introduction

This report presents findings from a study conducted in Ghana to explore children's views on two interconnected concepts: well-being and futures. The study takes a child-centred approach, seeking to understand how children define and experience well-being in their own contexts, and how they imagine their futures, particularly in settings marked by social, economic or environmental disadvantages. This work addresses important gaps in existing research, where children's voices are often underrepresented.

Although well-being¹ has become a prominent topic in both academic and policy spaces over the past few decades,² much of the existing research focuses on adults. Where children's well-being has been studied, this has often relied on externally defined indicators and objective measures, rather than listening to children themselves giving their own views or perspectives and their conceptualizations of well-being in specific contexts. The concept of children's futures has been explored mostly through the lens of individual aspirations, particularly in terms of education and employment, but with less attention given to how children perceive their future lives more broadly, including their hopes and concerns and the vision they have of the world they will inhabit as adults.

Recent research in Ghana is no exception. Most studies on well-being undertaken in the country use quantitative methodologies, based on analysis of surveys to explore predefined topics of interest.^{3,4,5,6}

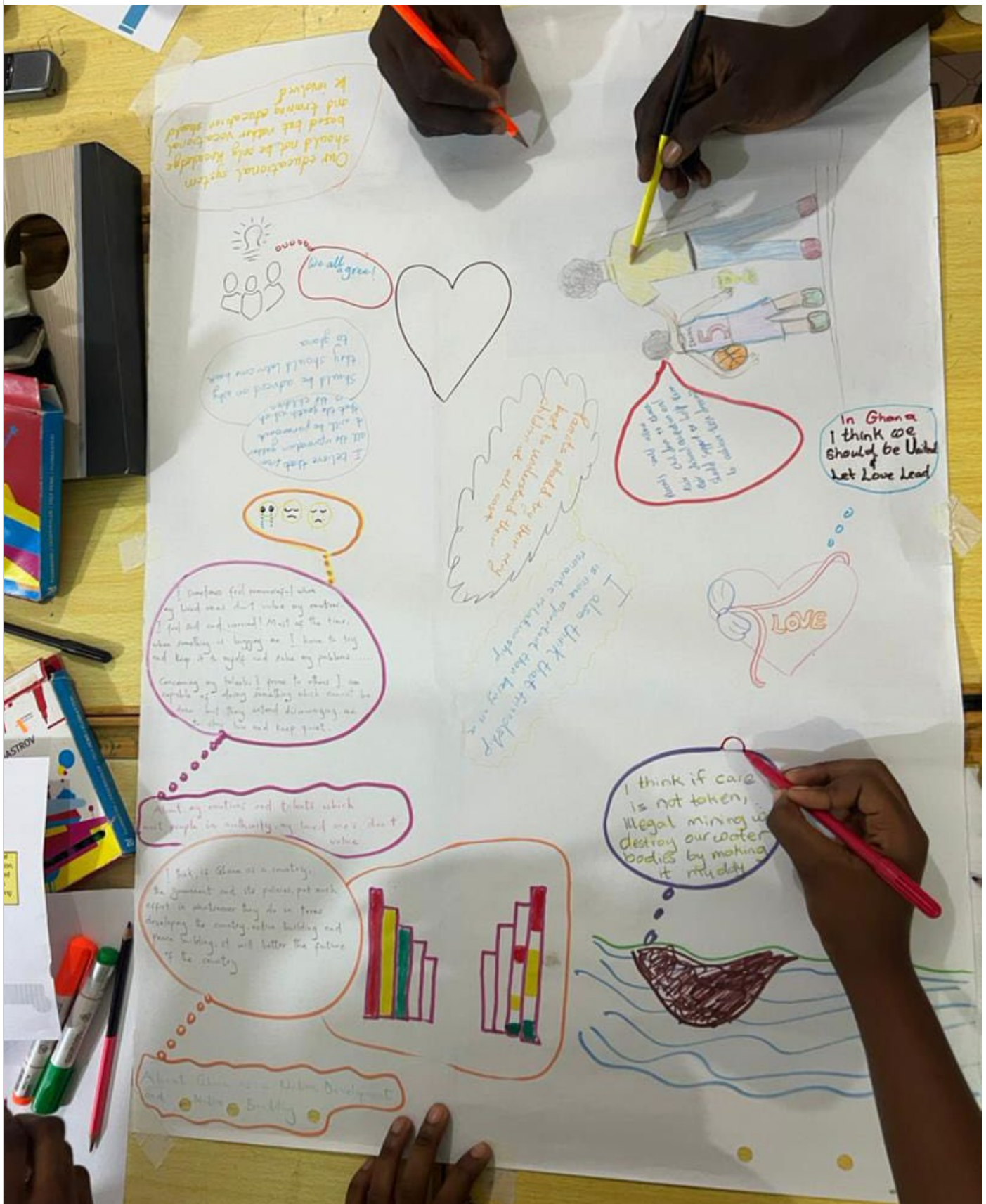
One quantitative study presented the results of a validation of the World Health Organization Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) among adolescents in Ghana,⁷ while only two quantitative studies researched specific subgroups: transnational families⁸ and children in residential care.⁹ Both these studies point to the importance of focusing on well-being within specific contexts – as this research report intentionally does.

Qualitative or mixed-method scholarly literature on children's well-being in Ghana is less dense but it covers both the general population of adolescents and specific subgroups. Glozah (2015) interviewed 11 high school students about the meaning of health and well-being from a psychosocial perspective,¹⁰ while Wilson and Somhlaba (2016) explored issues of hope and life satisfaction among 18 school-going adolescents in northern Ghana.¹¹ Four studies set an especially valuable precedent for this report because they focused on groups of children in specific situations: poor urban contexts in James Town, Accra;¹² married girls aged 12–19 years;¹³ child labour contexts;¹⁴ and independent child migrants.¹⁵

In continuity with these studies, this report uses qualitative methods to explore children's lived experiences and views, adopting an intersectional and context-sensitive perspective. It recognizes that childhood is not a uniform life stage, and that children's lives are shaped by, and continuously interact with, the specific social, cultural and economic environments surrounding them.

The sample investigated, made up of children and young people aged 12–17 years, deliberately moves beyond national-level generalizations to focus on particular groups of children in particular places, while also contributing to a broader understanding that may inform global comparisons.

Data were collected in two contrasting locations – a rural area with a high incidence of child labour and an urban area¹⁶ where children are exposed to specific risks related to, among other things, their engagement with the digital environment.¹⁷ Across these settings, eight groups of children participated in structured focus group discussions (FGDs) held on two separate occasions. The study aimed to elicit their perspectives on what contributes to and undermines well-being, what they believe can be improved and how they imagine the future.



The findings of this report aim to inform the strategic planning, programme prioritization and advocacy efforts of the Government of Ghana and UNICEF Ghana, suggesting new ways to engage with children. It is also hoped that the findings of the study will enrich the global literature on child well-being and forward-looking policy central to the work of UNICEF worldwide.

Methodology and ethics

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore children's perspectives on well-being and their envisioned futures in two regions of Ghana: Greater Accra and Western North. The research engaged children within their specific sociocultural contexts through in-depth FGDs, providing a platform for them to express their thoughts, concerns and aspirations. The discussion focused on two central themes:

1. Current well-being:

- a. What are the positive and negative aspects of life for children in these contexts?
- b. What are children's views on how child well-being can be improved in their communities?

2. The future:

- a. How do children imagine their future growing up in these particular environments?
- b. What ideas do children have for improving these future prospects?

The research was guided by the principle of openness, employing a child-centred and flexible methodological approach. Rather than imposing predefined categories or topics, the study allowed children to articulate their own priorities and concerns in their own words, thanks to the methods and activities that were used during data collection, which are outlined below. This approach ensured that the data captured were grounded in children's lived realities and reflected the issues they consider most relevant.

When, where and with whom was the data collection conducted?

A total of 16 FGDs were conducted as part of this study, involving eight distinct groups of children. Each group participated in two sessions, resulting in the engagement of 72 children aged 12¹⁸–17 years. Participants were purposively selected to reflect a diversity of socioeconomic and environmental backgrounds. The sample included:

- four groups of children attending school with access to digital technology (aged 12–14 and 15–17 years);
- two groups of children engaged in various forms of work (aged 12–14 and 15–17 years); and
- two groups of children residing in informal settlements (aged 12–14 and 15–17 years).¹⁹

This purposive sampling approach was designed to ensure the inclusion of children whose experiences are shaped by varying degrees of vulnerability, including poverty, limited access to education and precarious living conditions. The diversity within the participant groups enriched the data and provided a broad spectrum of perspectives on children's well-being and their visions of the future. The groups were divided by age (12–14 and 15–17 years) to create a comfortable environment in which participants could express themselves among peers at a similar stage of development. For out-of-school participants, it ensured consistency in the methodological approach across all focus groups.

The methodological design included multiple interactions with the same group of participants over the course of the study to foster trust, build rapport and promote richer, more authentic dialogue, both between the children and the research team and among the children themselves.

The research design included two planned sessions with each group:

- **Session 1 – FGDA:** This session focused on children's current experiences of well-being. Art-based methods were used to facilitate creative expression and reflection.
- **Session 2 – FGDB:** This session explored the children's imagined futures. Art-based methods were complemented by a walking tour to deepen the contextual understanding of children's lived environments.

Some groups of children also took part in Session 3, a validation workshop conducted at the end of the analysis phase. This session aimed to present preliminary findings to the children and solicit their feedback. It also provided an opportunity to gather participants' direct recommendations for action by adults and policymakers.

Sessions 1 and 2 were carried out during the data collection phase in May and June 2024, while the final validation workshops took place in Accra and Bibiani in October 2024.²⁰ The research team observed that, as the sessions progressed and participants became more familiar with the purpose of the study and with the researchers, they grew more confident and expressive, resulting in deeper and more nuanced insights.

Which methods were used for data collection?

This qualitative research study employed a range of arts-based participatory methods to facilitate open, reflective and meaningful engagement with children. The approach was grounded in a child-centred philosophy, prioritizing children's own ideas, experiences and voices. FGDs were designed as a blend of individual and group-based activities, allowing participants to engage in both personal reflection and collective dialogue. Three core participatory methods were used within the FGDs:

A. Individual collage creation

Children were invited to create individual collages as a means of reflecting on their current life experiences and their personal interpretations of the concept of the 'future'. This visual method allowed children to express abstract and nuanced ideas in a creative and accessible format, offering insights into how they see their lives now and how they envision the years ahead.

B. Collective storytelling

Participants collaborated in creating a fictional characters whose life context mirrored their own. This projective technique enabled children to explore and articulate complex thoughts, feelings and challenges indirectly. The lens of a fictional character helped to reduce social desirability bias²¹ and fostered a more open and authentic discussion of sensitive or difficult topics. Throughout the Findings section, references to the fictional characters created by the children have been included to illustrate and contextualize their perspectives. It is important to note that during the creation of each fictional character's story the researchers asked children direct questions about: (1) the character's engagement with digital media; and (2) the character's working activities (only to out-of-school children).





C. Walking tours

Children led researchers on guided tours of their local neighbourhood or their school complex, identifying and discussing key landmarks and spaces that hold meaning for them. This activity provided valuable context for their lived experiences and enabled the research team to understand children's perceptions of well-being, both in the present and in relation to their imagined futures, situating their narratives within the physical and social environments of their communities.

The above-mentioned participatory methods collectively supported the creation of a safe and inclusive research space where children could express themselves freely, while also generating rich and contextually grounded data for the study.

How was the data analysis carried out?

The data collected, including verbatim transcripts of FGDs, field notes and the visual materials produced by participants, were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, based on Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework.^{22,23} This involved: (1) familiarization with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) identifying preliminary themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) refining and naming themes; and (6) producing the final analysis and report. This analytical approach enabled the researchers to identify patterns of meaning across the data while remaining grounded in the participants' lived realities.

The categorization of response frequency (e.g., 'few', 'some', 'many', 'most') was informed by a context-specific classification adapted from van der Velden (2021),²⁴ rather than formal statistical measures. In this framework, 'few' refers to fewer than 10 participants, 'some' to 10–20, 'many' to 21–40 and 'most' to nearly all participants across all groups, or within a particular focus group if specified.

This methodological approach was designed to foreground children's voices and experiences, while recognizing the complexities and limitations of capturing such perspectives in diverse and often challenging contexts.

What ethical approach was followed?

The research was conducted in full alignment with UNICEF's ethical principles for evidence generation involving children and adolescents. These principles include: minimizing potential risks to participants; securing informed consent from both children/adolescents and their parents or guardians; upholding confidentiality, privacy and anonymity; respecting diversity and inclusion; and ensuring robust data protection and security measures.

Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Ethics Committee for Humanities at the University of Ghana. The approved research protocol guided all stages of the study and was strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process. All researchers involved received comprehensive training on ethical research practices with children and adolescents from vulnerable populations. This included instruction on how to manage distress, respond to protection concerns and provide appropriate support in cases of trauma or psychosocial risk.

A core guiding principle of the research was to 'do no harm'. All efforts were made to ensure the safe, respectful and meaningful participation of every child and adolescent involved. Each participant received clear and age-appropriate information about the study, including its objectives, their rights and responsibilities, the voluntary nature of their involvement and the measures taken to ensure the security and confidentiality of their data. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians as well as from all participating children and adolescents.

All personal identifiers were removed during data processing to protect participants' anonymity. Direct quotations presented in this report are accompanied only by the initial of the participant's nickname, decided during data collection, to further safeguard confidentiality.

Finally, a referral protocol was developed to guide the research team if a participant disclosed experiences of harm or exhibited signs of significant psychological distress.

What are the limitations of this research project?

A few methodological limitations should be noted. First, while the use of fictional characters helped mitigate the potential for bias, some risk remained that participants might interpret concepts such as 'well-being' or 'child work' in ways shaped by adult influence, particularly in the early stages of engagement. Nonetheless, the iterative nature of the sessions and the focus on collective rather than individual experiences helped reduce this risk.

Second, groupings of participants – such as distinctions between 'low' and 'very low' socioeconomic backgrounds – were based on researcher observation and contextual interpretation rather than fixed metrics. For example, some working children were still attending school, while others were not, yet were grouped together due to shared characteristics related to their work status and living conditions.

Third, considering the heterogeneity of the relatively small sample (working children and children in middle-class families, in urban and rural areas), the researchers were not able to elicit and further elaborate on the experiences and opinions of other subgroups (e.g., younger and older participants, children working in mining, female and male participants, children living in urban informal settlements, etc.) in a comprehensive manner during the analysis. It is highly recommended that further qualitative research in Ghana investigates these particular groups and their nuanced definitions of well-being and visions of the future.

Finally, it is important to note that the findings of this report cannot be generalized beyond the specific contexts studied because of the very methodological choices at the core of the research rationale. The sample included in the study is purposive rather than representative. The focus group guidelines were based on an open approach to leave the children the possibility of talking about the topics they preferred rather than elaborating on what the facilitators put forward. Methods of data collection such as the walking tour, taken from the field of ethnography, aim to trigger discussions that are relating to spaces and hence context-based. Nonetheless, the findings outlined below can surely guide further investigations and complement more general statistics where the voices of children, especially the most vulnerable ones, can disappear.

Findings

The study employed reflexive thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework to interpret and synthesize the data collected across all FGDs.^{25,26} This approach allowed for a systematic yet flexible engagement with the data, enabling the identification of rich, nuanced themes grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of the participating children.

Five overarching themes were developed, offering a comprehensive understanding of how children across different socioeconomic and environmental contexts in Ghana perceive their well-being and futures. These themes reflect both shared experiences and context-specific insights, which are further detailed throughout the report.

The five key themes identified are presented below.

<i>THEME 1</i> Learning matters: How access to quality education shapes children’s well-being	<i>THEME 2</i> The importance of lifelong harmonious and supportive relationships	<i>THEME 3</i> Dissatisfaction with Ghana’s current economic and political situation: Demanding a better future	<i>THEME 4</i> Degraded environments negatively affecting children’s daily lives and their well-being	<i>THEME 5</i> Well-being or well-becoming? Negotiating present lives with future aspirations
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In addition to the core thematic analysis, the report includes three focus areas that cover topics of particular interest for UNICEF Ghana future programmes centred on child labour, online safety and digital well-being, and parenting. The investigation of these topics was triggered by specific questions asked by researchers during discussion on the fictional characters’ lives, resulting in the following focus areas:

- **Focus area 1:** The well-being and future perspectives of working children;
- **Focus area 2:** Children’s digital experiences and their implications for well-being; and
- **Focus area 3:** Children’s conceptualizations and visions of the future of the world.

These insights offer further depth and contextual grounding to the broader themes, reinforcing the value of a child-centred approach.

Learning matters: How access to quality education shapes children's well-being

A collage of various items including a laptop, a backpack, a calendar, a mouse, a remote, a coffee cup, a mask, a keychain, a lanyard, and a small figurine, all arranged on a white background. The items are scattered across the frame, with a central laptop and a backpack on the right. A calendar is on the left, and a coffee cup is at the bottom left. A mask and a keychain are at the top right. A lanyard and a small figurine are at the bottom left.

– P., girl, 14 years

- R., boy, 15 years

Demanding better school facilities and educational materials

Children attending boarding schools particularly lamented poor services and facilities. Lack of running water, taps and showers means that they have to fetch the water, a very tiring activity. C. (girl, 15 years) said: "I think using pipe holes and bringing showers would help." M. (girl, 16 years), from the same group, suggested "the installation of more fans and more windows so that there will be ventilation in the dining hall because the place is usually hot and because there are a lot of us, it is crowded." N. (boy, 16 years) explained: "It will be better to see more tables and chairs in the dining hall because we don't have a lot of benches, so most people stand during dining and some people even leave because there are no chairs." Another participant asked for workers

to be employed for the weeding, while P. (girl, 16 years) suggested that “they [school authorities] buy spray so that it will reduce the [bedbugs] in the dormitory.” In another focus group, F. (girl, 16 years) demanded roof repairs “because there are some animals which destroy the food we keep here. Some of the mice, they always eat the food they bring.” Other children asked for security, since they are afraid their items will be stolen.

The general situation described by research participants in boarding schools seems to be quite unpleasant and not an ideal space in which to spend the entire day. Therefore, M. (girl, 16 years) suggested: “The school should make the boarding house very less stressful for us. So that we will be able to learn properly.”

In addition to better facilities, several children asked for the provision of more learning materials: “They should provide more dictionaries and textbooks for government schools” (G., boy, 13 years). In one focus group, children explained that they very much appreciate their school library as a place where they can study and meet, but they would like to have more books available as well as an internet connection. Along the same lines, in another focus group, P. (girl, 14 years) said: “I want the president to provide the schools with enough teaching and learning materials so that the practical aspect of the learning can be easier.”

‘Practical knowledge’ as a doorway to future jobs

A lot of research participants highlighted the need for what they often defined as ‘practical learning’. They lamented that having to learn ‘theory’ and memorizing concepts makes studying a stressful and difficult process, while they would like “the school [to] be made more fun, practical, and everyone should have freedom of speech in school that makes the class interacting and fun” (C., girl, 15 years). According to many children, different teaching methods and materials would enable them to learn easily and engage with the various subjects taught in class. As J. (girl, 16 years) explained: “I think that we should make school something that should be more practical, especially in Ghana, where most things are something that you have to get into your head, you have to memorize. You should make it more practical, so you can be able to learn. Else school will be so tiresome.”

One participant also reflected on the fact that “more practical” teaching methods should be accompanied by enhanced school facilities, such as laboratories, which could facilitate direct engagement by the students. G. (boy, 17 years) said: “We in the education sector must have practical knowledge ... Because those [subjects] in the technical block are always being taught of the theory aspect, meanwhile, had the practical been in place, they [students] would have understood what they [teachers, books] mean. We do not have a place where the experiments will take place.”

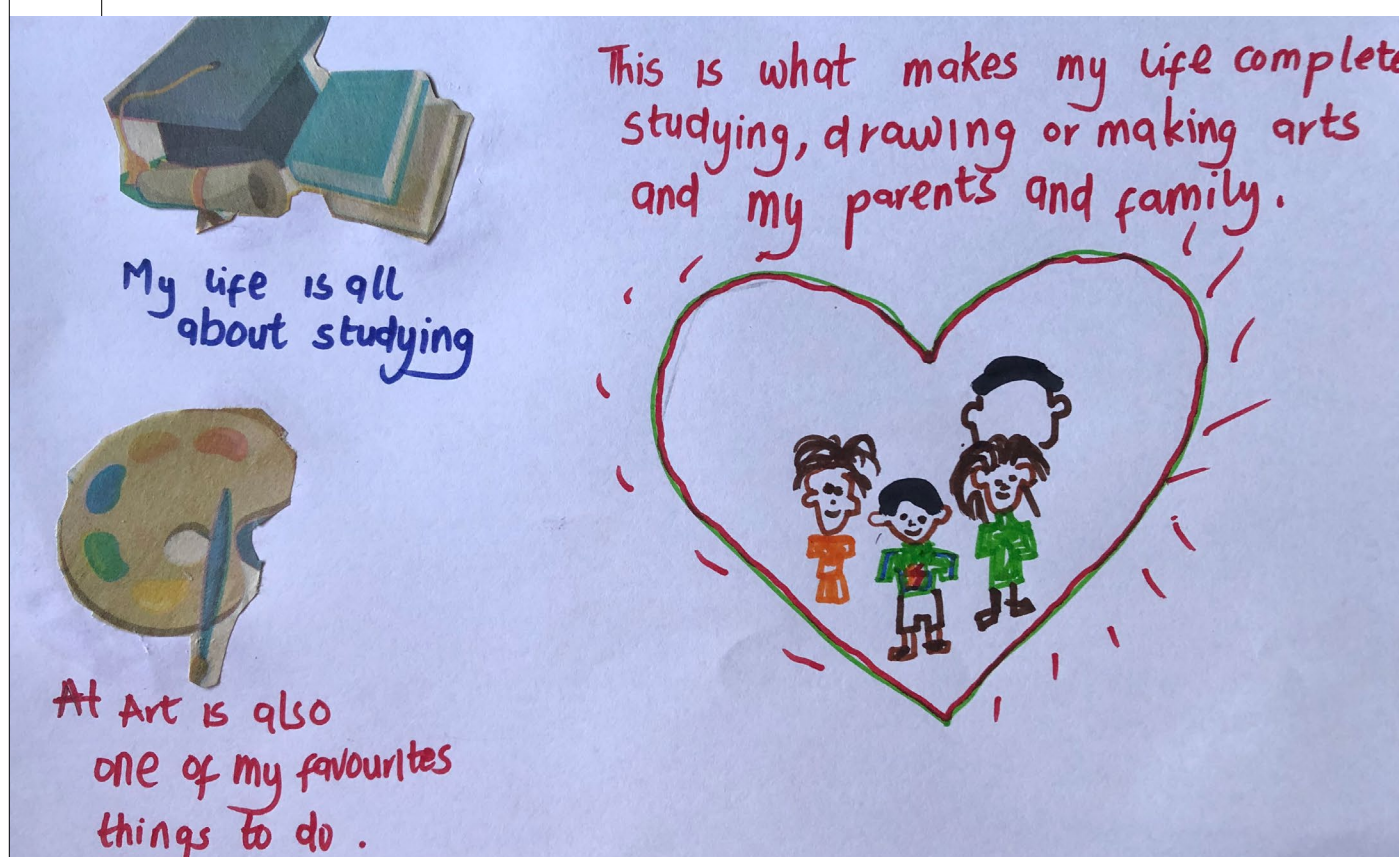
The attitudes outlined above highlight a discourse in which many children asked to learn what they think is easily applicable in everyday life and valued in the job market, drawing a distinct line between ‘practical’ and ‘theoretical’ knowledge. They feel the educational model they are currently part of does not support them in becoming the adults they would like to be – economically independent and ‘successful’ – to the extent that a couple of older participants rejected what they call ‘basic education’, suggesting instead an educational model exclusively aiming to transform good students into good workers.

“I wish to see a change in the education system ... Sometimes you are being taught what you will not need in the future. For example, some of us who want to do medicine are forced to learn physics and math but we will not really need physics because we are not dealing with mechanics ... Sometimes, if you’re not able to pass some of the subjects that you don’t really need, it will affect your grades ... and you can be delayed a lot.”

– M., girl, 16 years

"I think all adults and government people should know that things are not the same as it was during their time. Now basic education is important but when you reach a particular level, it's not so important anymore to become successful in life, because a lot of people have become successful without going to SHSh or the university. As long as they understand basic mathematics, and how to speak, they are okay for the rest of their lives. They can make it in life and live their best life. So I think they should reduce the stress on us by having to learn by force ... My field may be in basketball, so they should help us ... become expert players to get money, rather than forcing us to be something we don't like and are not comfortable with."

– J., girl, 16 years



The quotes above, beyond highlighting an understanding of education exclusively as a means of future income provision, also outline another issue put forward by some children attending school: the desire for a school environment that gives them the possibility of showing and enhancing their talents and attitudes (e.g., basketball). A few research participants said that they feel they are not valued enough at school. For example, those living in rural areas especially said that they would like to participate in national competitions, as children living in the capital do. Other participants would like to have the possibility of choosing some of the subjects they have to learn, including vocational training, sport and art-based activities, in line with their interests.²⁷

The importance of education, training and learning in general is also clear from listening to the words of working children. For them, as well as those in school, learning means being able to get a good job and improving their income, realizing a stable economic situation for themselves and their families in the future. Working children see access to vocational training as key to improving their status. As M. (girl, 16 years) clearly put it when talking about the adult fictional character's regrets: "If she had been educated, her life would have been better ... Because she was doing all the house chores, and if you are not educated, the only thing you could do is the house chores."

Children who work as apprentices underlined that the work itself is important for them, not only to generate immediate income, but because while working they learn new skills that they will be able to use to give themselves and their loved ones a better future. The following exchange in an FGD discussion explains their point of view.

- S. (girl, 14 years): *"She [fictional character] is eager to learn the trade and acquire skills that will [give her the possibility to] earn money in future."*
- K. (girl, 10 years): *"She is doing it for her future."*
- E. (girl, 12 years): *"She is doing it to safeguard her future. As a skill, she will use it to earn a living, to cater for her children's education."*
- R. (girl, 12 years): *"When she is working, her parents are also happy. Her mother often encourages her to continue, adding that this skill will be a great source of income for her in the future when she is fully independent."*

In light of the above, working children value their employers, especially those who teach them new skills while working. The same is true for children in school, who value their teachers as role models to the extent that a few advocate for a raise in their salaries: "Teachers are the foundation of every occupation and all learnt doctors, engineers, pilots, all these people, were taught by teachers. So I think they [government] should increase their pay" (P., girl, 14 years).

Recognizing inequities and inequalities in accessing quality education

From the FGDs, it emerged that when research participants believe they are getting quality education, they feel good. They expressed happiness and, in their own words, 'confidence', because they feel their future is in their own hands. The following excerpt highlights the value children give to quality education as a life-changing opportunity, almost as in a fairy tale – one that many research participants build for themselves – made of hard work, travel abroad and the ability to support their family back in Ghana, providing them with the prestige of having a successful child.

"Morgan's [fictional character] life changed through hard work in education. The ways he learns, answers questions ... I can say they got visitors [at school], they came to take him for a school quiz, to represent the school ... So, through that quiz, Morgan got the opportunity to go and study abroad and when he got there, he did not say to himself 'I am in a high state so I'm going to stop education because some people are taking good care of me'. He still has confidence and learned hard. And the more he is learning, [the more] he is gaining people's [trust] out there ... Through that way, years and years over he was getting more money ... And one thing I like best about Morgan is, the more they are paying him [the more] he remembers mother Ghana, which is the place where his parents are. So, he sends money, then he started giving money for them to build a house ... the more Morgan is learning hard in that place, the more many people are hearing many things about him here. The family was getting a good name because of that little boy trying and learning hard. Yes, so, you have to learn hard."

– E., girl, 15 years

Being able to work hard and having access to quality education gives our research participants the feeling of agency, hence of power. It positively affects their present well-being because it provides them with the dream of a diverse, better future. As C. (girl, 15 years) explained while describing the drawing she made visualizing her own future: "I have a picture of a graduate proudly smiling ... I see myself as a graduate getting my master's degree and PhD through education, and I feel this will help me achieve my dreams in the near future."

In contrast, being denied access to educational opportunities affects children's well-being negatively. Even if all the research participants have dreams for their future similar to the picture described above, not all of them perceive these as feasible. Working children's wishes for their own future are much more realistic, and the adult fictional characters they created live with the consequences of their lack of access to school and training. C. (girl, 16 years), a working child, explained: "She [fictional character] wishes that someone could put her in school again so that when she gets older and starts earning, she will then travel abroad." When asked how this situation makes the fictional character feel, the rest of the focus group agreed: "It makes her feel very bad." In another focus group of working children, the fictional character they created has the same feeling of sadness because he would like to be properly trained and learn skills to get a good job but his family does not have the means to help him, as recognized by the following quotes.

"He will like to learn a job but his parents are not having money to support him ... He feels sad anytime he sees his friends going to work."

– K., boy, 15 years

"His father also feels bad about it because he wants his son to go to school or learn a skill."

– M., girl, 16 years

Inequities and inequalities within the education system, especially in terms of access, were highlighted by working children but also by those attending school. All the research participants were very clear about what adults in positions of power should do to improve their well-being in the present and in the future, as highlighted by the following selected quotes.

"They should send the ones who wants to go to school to school and the ones who want to acquire skills to skills' learning centre."

– A., boy, 14 years

"My family said they don't have money for me to further my education ... What we need most is the school."

– B., boy, 16 years

Several children underlined that there are families within their communities who cannot fulfil their children's right to education because they cannot afford it. S. (girl, 14 years), a working child, suggested: "For children who are poor and homeless, as well as those who have dropped out of school, they [adults in positions of power] have to take the children to school and provide shelter for them. That way, they can have a good life and a proper future." Other research participants highlighted that schools can be far away from where some children live, preventing them from attending.

Apart from enabling and facilitating enrolment, some children also advocated support for those who already attend school. J. (girl, 16 years) stated: "They [politicians] should make scholarships more available for Eva [fictional character]." O. (girl, 13 years) explained: "Our parents can't provide textbooks so the government must provide textbooks for us. They have to provide our needs for us ... Like our school bag, our uniforms and items that we send to school."

L. (girl, 15 years) went a step further when asked for suggestions for policymakers, community leaders and parents, implying that providing children with quality education is key for the well-being of the whole society: "We would tell them [adults in positions of power] to keep an eye on us and that when we become successful, we will not abandon them."

THEME 2

The importance of lifelong harmonious and supportive relationships

During all FGDs, children talked about their extended family members – parents, siblings, grandparents, uncles and aunts – and greatly valued relationships with them in the present and in the future. In the words of N. (boy, 16 years): "There's no place like home and every time Eva [fictional character] is at home, she feels happy. And every time she's in her family, she's able to socialize and tell them everything that is going on." When asked about a fictional character, "Why do you think the family is the most important thing in his life?", P. (girl, 13 years) answered: "Because his family helps him in everything."

Many of the fictional characters' everyday activities are carried out within their nuclear family, such as playing videogames, doing household chores, going to church or the cinema, singing, doing grocery shopping and farming. As M. (girl, 16) said, doing things together with the family makes the fictional character "very happy because it serves as a bonding time with all her family members." The research participants value harmonious relationships with their nuclear family members in the present (the fictional character's parents and siblings), but also in the future. The fictional characters developed by the research participants all aim to marry and have children when they grow up, creating their own family.

The provision of care in parent-child relationships

The role of parents emerged as particularly remarkable across all focus groups. Parents are considered the primary caretakers, who have a duty to support their children, both economically and emotionally, while protecting and advising them. The following selected quotes show how much research participants believe their own well-being is strongly connected to the care provided by their parents.

"They [parents] should pay for our expense and everything we need in our schooling, they should do it for us."

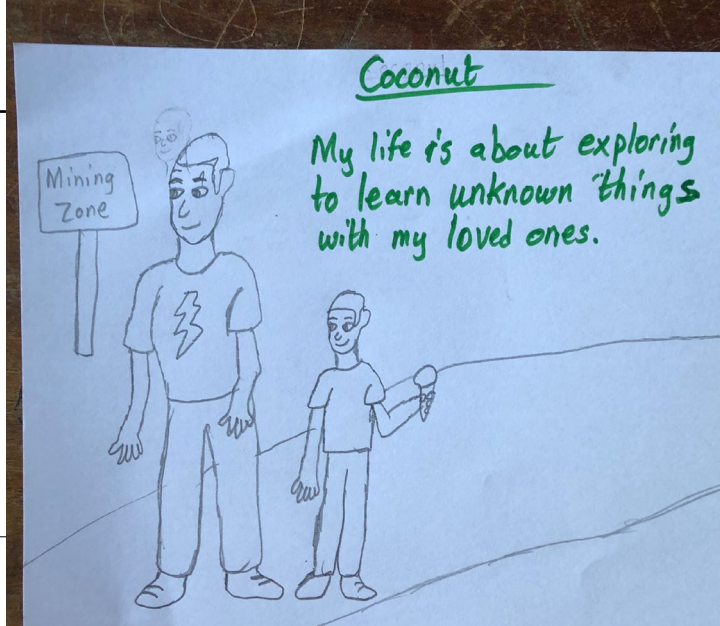
– O., boy, 12 years

"She [fictional character] feels very happy when she's around her parents, because all she needs, they are able to provide it. Even when there is no money or they're having financial problems, they try their best to provide it for her so that she'll be able to focus on her education ... She feels very happy and she feels like they are the only people in this world that make her comfortable."

– N., boy, 16 years

"Morgan [fictional character] mostly shares his secrets with his mother ... He feels secured when he is telling his secrets to his mother because he knows definitely that his mother is not going to tell his secrets to anybody else ... Morgan feels supported by his mother because the advice his mother will give to him is even more helpful to him than the advices his friends will give to him, so he feels supported."

– J., girl, 15 years



The importance of nurturing the parent-child relationship with care and love, in different circumstances, was also a recurrent topic in the stories of the adult fictional characters. All the children imagine taking care of their parents when they grow older, and would be very happy to do so. M. (girl, 16 years), explained: "In my life, I want to grow up in becoming somebody in my family, and take my family to places. Just for them to know that they made no mistake giving birth to me. Also, I am someone who takes delight in taking my family out to places for fun. I want to take them out for fun when I grow up. After an outing, we will go to many places. That's all."

Emotional and material care go hand in hand. The research participants – and the adult fictional characters they created – are willing to support their parents economically in the future, to build a house for them to live in and to take care of all their financial needs, as explained by R. (boy, 12 years) who talked about the relationship of adult Awale (fictional character) with his mother and siblings: "The relationship ... is good because they know Awale is a good man and he can provide for them when they don't have. When the mother is 80 years, Awale can provide for her some place comfortable to sleep so that she won't worry herself about anything, she will always be relaxed and relieved of stress." The same is true for working children. N. (girl, 17 years) explained that the fictional character "wishes to build a house for his parents" and D. (boy, 16 years), told the group, when talking about himself, that: "I want to be a carpenter. I want to learn and be able to provide for my parents." Describing the drawing depicting the vision for her own future, H. (girl, 12 years) said: "I want to travel overseas and make some money to look after my parents."

The research participants felt that when the fictional characters become adults they are also expected to provide for their own children, as shown by the following excerpt from an FGD discussion.

O. (boy, 16 years): **"His children are the most important people to him."**

B. (boy, 16 years): **"His children are his future so he doesn't joke about them. Whatever they request, he provides."**

However, parents are not always able to support children's needs. The parents of working children can struggle to provide their families with a stable income and, in such cases, children step in, leaving school and finding a job. The research participants described the fictional characters who are working as proudly shouldering the responsibility for both their parents and their siblings, no matter what. R. (girl, 12 years) explained that the fictional character's parents are very proud of her because "whenever she makes money from work, she takes it home to support her parents. Normally, she uses the money she makes to take care of her parents and grandmother. She also uses it to cook for them." S. (girl, 14 years) added that, even if the employer does not let her, the fictional character will leave the workplace and support her parents if they need her: "Should either of her [fictional character's] parents get sick, she wants to be the one to attend to them. And also buy medicine for them or take them to the hospital. But she has to inform her madam, prior. Even if she doesn't permit it, Safura has to go and attend to her parents because they brought her into this world. She has to take care of them till they fully recover."

The importance of quality time and dialogue with parents

One recurrent topic within the children's descriptions of the parent-child relationship was the importance of parents spending enough time with their children and listening to them, which is not always the case because several parents were described as very busy with work. In the words of A. (boy, 12 years), parents should "make themselves available to us." He continued to explain: "Sometimes, when we go home and, let's say, you are having a problem in school ... let's say someone is bullying you or someone is harassing you, and you want to speak with them [parents], they sometimes tell you 'can't you see that we are busy' or 'you are grown enough'. [They] silence the problem so it's better they socialize themselves with us." F. (girl, 16 years) also thought that "the adults should have time for their children ... because they do not have to always focus on their work. They need to get time and advise their children."

The research participants also put forward the issue of parents not spending enough quality time with their children in the narratives they created about adult fictional characters who might face similar challenges in the future, as described in the following FGD exchange.

- D. (boy, 16 years): *"She [fictional character] has got a lot of stuff to do so she doesn't spend much time with her children. She feels bad about that but there is nothing she can do about it."*
- P. (girl, 16 years): *"Because of her work, she always gets stressed, and she doesn't get much time to rest, and she sometimes gets depressed ... I think having time with the family will better Eva's [fictional character] future because when she doesn't have time for the family, her children won't get to know her much and when they grow, they can say that's not their mother because she wasn't having time for them."*

The same scenario was put forward in another focus group, where the fictional character is so stressed because of work that she does not pay attention to her children's needs and also turns on them out of frustration. B. (boy, 13 years) said: "She [fictional character] is spending much of her time at her work ... She would be very stressful because in all that she goes through at her job and when she comes home too, the children would be making a lot of noise; mummy, today this, this, and at a point she would feel that she should slap one."

FGDs with children in boarding school also included the importance of a constant and serene dialogue with parents. N. (boy, 16 years) suggested that it would make their fictional character feel better to allow her "to bring her cell phone to school, so that she'll be able to socialize with her parents, even though they are far from her." However, other research participants in the same group underlined that it is not always easy to build a transparent dialogue with parents because sometimes they are afraid of being judged or punished for their actions, as explained in the following excerpt.

- J. (girl, 16 years): *"Sometimes, once her parents are strict, sometimes she cannot tell them about those things."*
- P. (girl, 16 years): *"When it comes to the parents, they must give us space, so that we can get closer to them so that any issue or any problem that we have, we can discuss it with them."*

Besides a strict and stressful work routine, some research participants also explained that poverty or financial issues exacerbate family tensions, making it difficult to create a harmonious living environment. H. (girl, 12 years), a working child, told the group that she often cries because her mother beats her any time she does something bad: "An example is when my mother has asked me to watch over the food but I end up eating the food because I am hungry. So she finds out and beats me."

Economic problems as sources of tension within family relationships were also envisaged by some participants in the future of the fictional character, as shown by the following exchange in an FGD discussion.

- Facilitator: "Why do you think he spends most of his time at the cinema?"
- B. (boy, 14 years): "Because sometimes he uses to argue with his wife and be depressed so he'll go to the cinema to think."
- R. (boy, 12 years): "Why will you argue with your wife? What happened?"
- B. (boy, 14 years): "Maybe some difficulties."
- R. (boy, 12 years): "Can you give me an example?"
- P. (girl, 13 years): "If the job is yours but the job money is low so: what are you going to do now?"

Considering the central role parents play, children who have lost their parents, and are therefore in kinship care, suffer their absence a great deal. In several focus groups, the research participants created fictional characters who live with their uncles, aunts or stepmothers because their parents have died. Their situation is miserable, since their guardians do not take care of them properly, forcing the children to live in unstable economic and emotional situations. As M. (girl, 16 years) explained: "Because her mother is not present, the stepmother doesn't consider her needs. She treats her badly."

From the research participants' narratives, it is clear that very often it is those children who are orphans and live in kinship care who end up leaving school and working, experiencing situations where both their physical and emotional needs are neglected and their well-being is negatively affected.

Friends and romantic partners

Peer relationships, friends and, for some participants, romantic partners are also an important source of emotional well-being, not always as openly valued as family but clearly present in children's narratives. In particular, one focus group with working children discussed how important the fictional character's boyfriend is to her. He has a comforting role from an emotional perspective, but he also supports her from a material perspective, bringing her food and giving her some pocket money. Romantic partners, wives and husbands also play a key role in the well-being of the adult fictional characters. R. (boy, 12 years) explained: "The wife encourages Awale to work hard and be active whenever they have a conversation between the head of the ... when they have a board meeting, he should be confident to say whatever he has to say. That's all."

The research participants also often mentioned friends as important people with whom they play sports, go to church and party. Friends are usually sources of emotional support. J. (girl, 16 years) said: "Eva [fictional character] can count on her friends to encourage and comfort her. And occasionally help her escape from some things." Friends are generally connected with pleasant feelings, as illustrated by this excerpt from an FGD discussion.

- Facilitator: "How does he feel among his friends?"
- G. (girl, 14 years): "He feels as happy as if he is in heaven ... He would love their friendships to last forever."

THEME 3

Dissatisfaction with Ghana's current economic and political situation: Demanding a better future

Children across all focus groups talked extensively about money. The importance of having enough money to do the things they like – such as “going to dance class” (C., girl, 15 years), “affording the price of a skateboard” (L., boy, 17 years) or “buying a car” (D., boy, 16 years) – was tangible in their discussions on both the present and the future. The necessity of increasing one's income was also part of conversations regarding digital media, with the fictional characters often using social media with the purpose of monetizing video making and posting.

Money is an even more striking subject in the words of working children who face everyday poverty. The fictional characters they created lack primary items: “She wants shoes but she can't buy them” (H., girl, 12 years). They are preoccupied with basic needs: “He won't get food to eat if he doesn't go to the farm” (A., boy, 14 years). They have to save money to buy working tools, which are fundamental for them, representing their source of income.

The majority of research participants consider economic stability a priority for their and their families' well-being, to the extent that some children discussed the importance of the mining sector in providing employment and improving community services, even if they openly recognize mining activities as detrimental to the health of the workers and the environment. It is, however, worth noting that the following quotes do not come from any child working in the mining sector, but rather from children attending school in an area where mining constitutes an important part of the local economy.

F. (girl, 16 years): “[Mining] is bringing good jobs to the youth.”

B. (boy, 17 years): “Yes, and it serves as a source of employment for the government.”

J. (girl, 15 years): “I have also heard that their salary is very good, like they pay huge sums of money to the workers.”

“Without the mining in [name of the district] we wouldn't have become the [name of the district] we are now. Because of the mining, we have gotten a lot of equipment like water bowser to make the road moist and the rest, and then we also have the mine to create the road and help us to pave the road, so that when other cars are coming in from other places, they can get a free way to pass ... So I think that we should stop complaining and rather appreciate what we have got from the mine, because the mine tries its best to give us whatever we want.”

– P., boy, 12 years

Worrying about Ghana's economic performance

The participants' focus on their and their families' economic situation is often linked with their worries about the general status of the economy in Ghana. They are preoccupied about unemployment rates and the consequences of a lack of jobs within their communities, wishing that in the future “many jobs will be created so that students who attend school may have hope that, when they are graduates, there is job opportunity for them” (G., boy, 17 years).

Almost all children engaged in discussions regarding Ghana's economy and they proposed potential solutions to ameliorate what they perceive as a bad financial situation. Some of them highlighted the need for a decrease in population. Some talked about the need to stabilize the currency, while others claimed a reduction in imports would help the country reinvigorate its internal production. These thoughts are well explained through the words of K. (girl, 14 years): "In Ghana now, we're exporting every food that we eat. So, I don't want us to export any food again, I want us to create ... sorry import. We import food now, so I don't want us to import food again. I want us to grow our own food so that we can develop the country. I say this because of our currency ... The value of the currency is so low so I want it to be heavy like the dollar."

One participant would stop borrowing money from the International Monetary Fund: "I will feel good when the country stops borrowing money from other countries. They go for loans from the International Monetary Fund and the Americans show them how to use the money. And that's not a good thing so I will feel good if we stop borrowing money from other countries" (J., girl, 15 years).

Besides the content of the participants' suggestions, it is remarkable that they are quite engaged when talking about Ghana's economic stability, which they directly connect to their own well-being as individuals in the present and in the future.

Critique of public institutions

Discussions about Ghana's economy were also often intertwined with a sharp critique of policy interventions and public institutions, perceived by participants as corrupt, lacking foresight and interest regarding future generations, and not engaged enough in responding to children's and young people's needs.

For A. (boy, 12 years), "corruption is one of the main reasons why Ghana is not improving." R. (boy, 15 years) lamented: "Nowadays in Ghana, our mother land, anytime you finish [school] and you want to go and apply for a job, it is just bribery and corruption. They don't look at your certificate or they don't look at your results before employing you. It's just bribery and corruption."

P. (girl, 14 years) thinks that "the leaders of this country ... just plan for today, they don't plan for a long term ... When they are doing something, they should take a look at the future." M. (girl, 16 years) suggested: "Instead of the government building, excuse me to say, unnecessary things, they should focus on renovating the senior high institutions because that is where the future leaders are going to be raised. Instead of wasting government funds on things that will not be needed, they should focus on renovating schools and making the lives of the children in the school better and more comfortable."

Some children also highlighted their lack of faith in public institutions pursuing a narrative of alleged meritocracy in the private sector, as shown in the following excerpts from an FGD discussion.

E. (girl, 15 years): **"I know I am young but ... I don't like the government. The role of the government is not better [good], but your own practice is better than the role of the government."**

Y. (boy, 18 years): **"In Ghana we have private hospitals and government hospitals. In the government hospital ... if you work or you don't work, every month you will be paid but as for the private hospitals, if you don't go to work, no pay."**

In one focus group of children aged 12–14 years, who were attending school in an urban area, critiques of corruption in public institutions extended to the whole of society. While the participants discussed the types of job they want to do when they become adults, it is evident that they believe they will have to negotiate with a society in which behaving unethically is the norm. One child said that he would like to become a pastor, and the

group discussed whether he might use the church money for himself. Another child suggested that she would like to build houses for poor families, but the other participants quickly put forward the possibility that people would take advantage of her kindness.

Besides corruption – which they believe is widespread in society – several children, especially those in work, lamented the high cost of living. E. (girl, 12 years) said: “I would tell him [the president] to help our country and bring down the prices of commodities ... If the commodities we sell are cheap, we sell them quickly and get our money’s worth. But when the prices are high, people say they are expensive. So, they do not buy.” B. (boy, 14 years) suggested that “the government should decrease the high prices of foodstuff and petrol and other food, and textbooks.” L. (boy, 14 years) hopes that in the future prices will be lower: “Things are expensive right now so I wish things would be affordable by then.”

Furthermore, in all FGDs, when talking about healthcare, transport and sanitation, the children criticized the poor quality of existing infrastructure and services or demanded the construction and improvement of new ones, as shown by the following selected quotes.

“I feel bad because the town itself is bad. ... The leaders of the town are selfish. They are not mindful of the people of the town. ... The roads are [so] narrow that you don’t have the comfort you need to walk [on them], and cars cannot drive on them as well. The toilet facilities are bad too ... They have cracked floors and the manholes get full. It could collapse at any time.”

– B., boy, 16 years

“The road and the bin ... I want the government to do something about it ... The street lights are damaged. They’ve not fixed them. When the street light is damaged, it’s impossible to see clearly.”

– C., boy, 14 years

“I want the government to provide more hospital buildings and schools, job and employment, and places where we can put our head to sleep at night.”

– R., boy, 12 years

“We would like the creation of more taps ... and they should flow faster than they already do so that fetching water will be much faster so that we can do things more quickly at the dormitory because sometimes the water doesn’t flow, and we spend more time standing and waiting.”

– J., girl, 16 years

Many of the children engaged in this research project feel they live at the margins, in disadvantaged city neighbourhoods or rural villages, where state intervention is perceived as even further away. B. (boy, 14 years) explicitly asked for the “government to provide hospitals, schools and police station to the rural areas.” M. (girl, 16 years) explained the different standards that she thinks people in rural areas are subjected to: “When you come to the city and build, the building is well built, but in the village when you build, you don’t build well, then water comes into the building.” E. (girl, 17 years) declared “I don’t like anything” when asked about the town she lives in, because “there are no jobs in the town. You cannot make a living there ... People go to the city to work.” B. (boy, 13 years) suggested: “Most of the rural areas in our country do not have that much revenue. So, if the factories and these tourist sites come in, it would generate money for these rural areas to develop themselves ... We know most of the urban areas have these, so they should give the rural areas the chance to also have these things.”

Hoping for, demanding and acting for a more prosperous future

In light of the above, it is perhaps not surprising that almost all the fictional characters that research participants developed during the focus groups migrate to the Global North, especially to the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, when they are adults. Being rich countries, these are perceived as places where everybody, if they work hard enough, can fulfil their well-being, primarily represented by a remunerative and stable job. As F. (girl, 16 years) put it: "In this world, the US is a country which we know to be rich in money. Yes, there is money there. And people love to be there." When asked why the fictional character wishes to travel out of Ghana, she further elaborated: "Because he thinks there is inflation here and there are no jobs. The jobs here are so few so he cannot get jobs to do." In another focus group, G. (boy, 13 years) gave a similar answer: "Because in United Kingdom, their economy is better than Ghana's economy. Their economy is good [better] than Ghana's economy. They have more ways of bringing money to the country and foodstuff are not really expensive there." K. (girl, 14 years) declared: "If we [children] are going [abroad], we are not coming back to Ghana. I am not coming back to Ghana again. This place is too hard. So, I will stay there."

Almost all the children interviewed dream of a future abroad, but many of them still demand that adults in positions of power provide support to those in need and believe in the role of the public sector as guarantor of the well-being of its citizens, as the following selected quotes explain.

"[We need] financial assistance. Most of us, [people in] our age group, they have the aim of becoming someone in future but because they don't have those resources, they will hang around and engage in so many activities which is not going to help them."

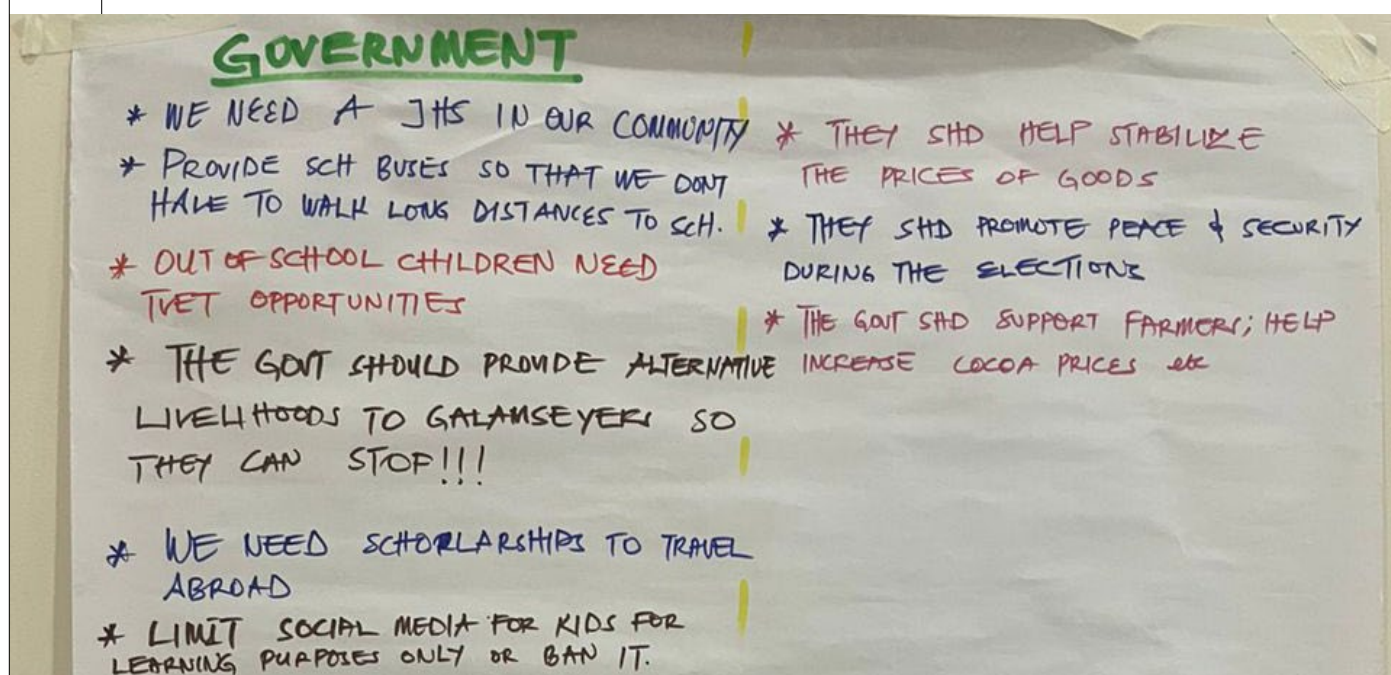
– B., boy, 17 years

"They [the government] need to build for the homeless people."

– P., boy, 16 years

"The government is not the one providing us with the food, it is the farmers and they are also suffering. Because lands are dried and the rain is not falling so it is spoiling their plants so they have to be helped. The government should help the farmers more than us."

– P., girl, 13 years



Notwithstanding their criticism of the present, the participants are quite hopeful overall that the current situation – theirs and that of their country – will improve in the future. In general, most of the children believe in an economic growth model, so they imagine that the future will be better because Ghana will ‘develop’. They have faith that the country’s economic growth will have a positive impact on their generation as adults.

A few of them think that the future will also see an end to corruption in the country because those leaders who “are greedy and lust after money meanwhile they [will] already have a lot” (R., boy, 14 years) and “everybody will stop accepting bribes” (C., boy, 14 years).

Some participants are determined to be part of the changes they foresee and demand, helping those who are disadvantaged. One fictional character they created “enjoys doing robotics because she thinks this can be an opportunity to help so many people” (J., girl, 16 years). N. (boy, 16 years) described a drawing he made about his future, explaining: “I see myself becoming the greatest surgeon ever known. The next one [drawing] is an image of a farm, I see myself owning a farm where I can produce more yields to help the world. And the last one is to help eradicate poverty.” R. (boy, 12 years) would like to own a company in the future so that he “can provide something for those who can’t provide for themselves.” B. (girl, 12 years) talks about having her own NGO when she is older: “That is, a non-governmental organization to help people, girls, not only girls, but people in need.”

Working children also expressed a wish to support children like them in the future, either by becoming trainers for young people in work or by ensuring that children without parents do not live in poverty in their communities.

A few older children revealed that they were ready to accept the challenges they might face in directly engaging with social change, as shown by the following powerful FGD exchange on corruption, sexual harassment and the willingness to improve the status quo.

- F. (girl, 16 years): *“I just want to help this country. There are many corruption and bribery going on and some people will say when you become a police officer you will become part of that bribery and corruption. Which I disagree with them. Not all the police officers or police ladies are corrupted or being bribed always.”*
- G. (boy, 17 years): *“But here is the case that in Ghana, when you want to be employed in an institution ... they may tell you that, you must have affairs with him or her before you will be accepted, how are you going to manage that problem? You are going to lose your job so how are you going to manage it?”*
- E. (girl, 15 years): *“Report them to the police. Because, if you report them to the police we are helping the whole country. You are helping the whole mother Ghana.”*

THEME 4

Degraded environments negatively affecting children's daily lives and their well-being

Most children in the study frequently spoke about the natural environments they engage with in their daily lives, around their homes, schools and communities as well as in places they visit, and they talked about how these environments are directly linked to their health and well-being. Exposure to nature and outdoor spaces is something the research participants clearly value. This came up in almost all FGDs²⁸ – involving both working children and children in school, and in both rural and urban environments – as the following extracts from different contexts and locations show.

“Mostly when she [fictional character] visits nature, she feels at peace because she can get rid of all the stress she is going through.”

– V., boy, 17 years

“Because there is a tree that gives shade there, so he [fictional character] likes to sit under the tree. When his friends come, then they will go and swim. ... He feels so happy.”

– G., girl, 14 years

“Please they should not cut this tree because it serves as habitat for organisms like birds and other organisms. The tree makes this place attractive.”

– O., boy, 12 years

However, not all the children in the study have easy access to clean environments and nature. For this reason, they voiced strong concerns about environmental degradation, with a particular emphasis on poor waste management practices and unsanitary conditions, and their impact on children's and people's health and well-being. Most children, across FGDs in both urban and rural areas, extensively discussed the issues of land, water and air pollution. They raised several critical concerns, including about inadequate waste management, environmental pollution and, in relevant locations, the impact of mining activities.

The interviewed children's narratives reveal a deep awareness of the environmental challenges in their communities, as well as a clear desire for sustainable solutions. Children also offered critical reflections on intergenerational differences, often expressing the view that older generations are less informed, less concerned and less engaged with environmental issues compared with the younger generation.

Widespread concern: Poor waste management and environmental pollution

Most of the interviewed children expressed deep concern about the poor state of waste management and its impact on their communities. Many highlighted the lack of dustbins, the choking of gutters with plastic waste and the improper disposal of refuse as critical threats to both the environment and public health. As M. (girl, 16 years), who lives in an urban area, pointed out: “Our gutters are choked for plastic waste that is frequently put there. As a result, the waters in the gutters are choked breeding mosquitoes and causing outbreaks of malaria.”

Children residing in environmentally degraded areas articulated clear connections between waste mismanagement and health issues. They frequently cited problems such as the spread of malaria due to mosquitoes breeding in blocked gutters, respiratory distress caused by the burning of waste and an overall lack of community hygiene. For instance, H. (girl, 14 years) described the discomfort caused by air pollution: "When they burn something, the smoke that emits makes us feel uncomfortable ... I expect that they stop burning those bushes because it pollutes the air and the air protects us." C. (girl, 15 years) emphasized the importance of good hygiene: "Most of our surroundings are filthy, and we have slum areas so clearing them and creating a lot more sanitation around us might help ... Because it will help improve our health."

Beyond waste management, children raised additional concerns about water pollution, deforestation and poor sanitation. They also reflected on the broader implications of environmental degradation for mental health. J. (girl, 16 years), who lives in an urban area, expressed anxiety about future disease outbreaks and made a link between environmental degradation and mental health issues, remarking: "In the year 2050 there will be much more spread of disease because right now nature is deteriorating and there will be more outbreaks. Scientists are saying that there may be high chances of outbreaks of disease that are deadlier than Coronavirus which may lead to a lot of death and not only physical disease, but also most children will be mentally ill."

These young participants demonstrated a striking level of environmental awareness, often contrasting their own knowledge with the perceived negligence or ignorance of older generations. They were critical of current practices and proposed actionable solutions, including enhanced civic education and enforcement measures, as exemplified in the following selected extracts from an FGD discussion.

M. (boy, 13 years): **"Many people in our communities aren't learning like this generation, so most of the people do not know anything about this public education ... we should go house to house and then educate the older generation for us to organize these cleaning exercises in a new way."**

O. (boy, 12 years): **"We should add more members to the cleaning department."**

Some children suggested stricter enforcement of hygiene practices, with S. (girl, 14 years) advocating for punitive measures against those failing to uphold cleanliness standards: "A meeting should be held with the town leaders to arrest all those who do not practise good hygiene."

Research participants across the focus groups discussed practical measures to mitigate these issues, such as reclaiming unused spaces, providing adequate toilet facilities and preserving natural environments. M. (boy, 14 years) proposed logistical improvements, recommending: "They should look for a car to drag all the rubbish away and then find a container like this and place it there. When it is full then a car will come and take it away." A few participants emphasized the importance of taking individual responsibility, as the following extracts exemplify.

"We must stop littering so that the environment would be good and hygienic."

– B., boy, 14 years

"I expect that the people would stop disposing excrement and other forms of waste into the gutters so that everywhere will be clean."

– H., girl, 12 years



Other children proposed regular communal clean-up exercises as solutions to clear bushes and clean gutters, thereby reducing the risk of flooding and spreading diseases. R. (boy, 12 years) suggested “doing cleanup exercise on weekends ... In choked gutters, sweeping of the compound, weeding the environment ... Because some places in Ghana have choked gutters and they are not good for the community. So, they need to. Because some places in Ghana experienced flood.”

The children’s appeals for improvement extended beyond community-level efforts, urging governmental bodies and community leaders to invest in sanitation infrastructure, promote environmental education and enforce hygiene practices to ensure preservation of the natural environment. As J. (girl, 16 years) asserted: “I think the government should do more to help preserve nature and plants because it can help us more than they think, and it can reduce so many sicknesses.”

Locally rooted, deeply damaging: The environmental impact of mining activities

The unchecked environmental damage from mining activities, particularly illegal mining activities, is a major concern for the research participants. Across all FGDs carried out in a location characterized by the presence of mining activities, children demonstrated remarkable knowledge and concern about the extensive environmental and social impacts of mining – especially illegal mining practices, often referred to as *galamsey*.²⁹ Their discussions reveal an acute understanding of the connections between mining and land degradation, deforestation, water pollution, air quality issues, climate change and serious public health consequences. The following extract from an FGD discussion shows an exchange between two participants about the deforestation caused by mining, and the related environmental risks.

Y. (boy, 18 years): **"It [mining] also leads to deforestation. ... Trees serve as wind breaks so when they are cut down ..."**

F. R. (girl, 16 years): **"So, if the trees are being destroyed there would be no rainfall."**

The participants' preoccupation with the environmental impact of mining on their communities affects their current well-being, and they also foresee its potential damage in the future. The research participants talked about mining limiting opportunities for future development and creating a society where resources are scarce, particularly due to poor law enforcement and lack of accountability in environmental matters. Pointing out some of the negative implications of mining activities, F. R. (girl, 16 years) explained: "The blasting. The blasting is also affecting our houses. When they blast sometimes, especially the old towns are forced down. Many people were dead last year. ... And they planned, they came and announced to us that they are going to build new houses and hospitals and now they have not built any houses, but they are still doing the blasting and causing damages to the land so you cannot get anything in the land." Similarly, E. (girl, 17 years) said: "Illegal mining is a bad practice. ... Because it destroys the waterbodies."

While the participants believe mining provides economic opportunities, they are aware of its significant risks to health, safety and the environment. Therefore, they emphasized the importance of regulating mining activities and enforcing environmental protection laws. They also suggested educating the community on the environmental consequences of illegal mining to reduce its prevalence.

Imagining the environmental future: Children's hopes and fears for 2050

Children across the focus groups shared nuanced and emotionally resonant visions of the future in relation to the environments where they live. Their projections are shaped by lived realities, educational exposure and a clear awareness of ongoing environmental challenges, such as pollution, deforestation and poor waste management. Their visions are split between optimistic expectations of environmental transformation and deep concern about escalating degradation if harmful practices continue.

Many children expressed a strong belief that many improvements will take place by the year 2050 in terms of environmental sustainability. Their aspirations centred around cleaner communities, the end of indiscriminate littering, improved waste disposal and restored ecosystems. This hope was often underpinned by a belief in education, government intervention and community cooperation, as indicated by these excerpts from an FGD discussion.

R. (girl, 12 years): **"Everything is going to change. Good roads will be constructed and all gutters are going to be clean and the surroundings will be tidy. All old houses are going to demolished and rebuilt."**

E. (girl, 12 years): **"All littering of waste will stop."**

K. (girl, 10 years): **"Ghana will change. People will stop dumping rubbish anywhere."**

The interviewed children envisioned structural transformations, such as the construction of modern houses and roads, as well as behavioural changes that will lead to more hygienic environments, as mentioned by K. (girl, 14 years): "I don't think that the situation would get worse because people are being educated about those things, about open defecation and dumping of refuse everywhere."

Children also articulated visions of a future less dependent on fossil fuels and more committed to clean energy and environmental sustainability. Some of the most detailed conversations came during one focus group, where participants engaged in thoughtful discussions about oil extraction, emissions and the role of renewable technologies. The following extract provides an illustrative example.

"In 2050, the uses of greenhouse gases would decrease and then things like electricity would've used in most of the transport so that in 2050, the amount of littering on Central and Eastern Africa would decrease."

– A., boy, 12 years

These insights show how children are connecting energy sources, pollution and climate change. Their words often suggest alternatives, such as solar panels and electric vehicles, as environmentally responsible replacements for the use of fossil fuels. For example, O. (boy, 12 years) explained: "In the future I want the leaders to preserve the environment and to let us use non petrol using machines"; and recommended as a solution for aeroplanes that they "would get some solar panels." Moreover, children envision a future with ecological regeneration and "afforestation ... replanting of trees" (P., girl, 13 years).

Despite the hope expressed by some, a few interviewed children envision a deeply troubling environmental future should current trends continue. In these narratives, illegal mining, air and water pollution, deforestation and poor waste management are projected to escalate, leading to severe environmental, health and social consequences. Imagining what will happen in 2050, B. (boy, 14 years) said: "I've seen that they are burning rubbish to spoil the ozone layer. ... I have seen that the government have low income of money. ... The business is going badly and the cocoa is dying. ... Because they have spoil the ozone layer so it [the heat] will burn us. ... When we are burning rubbish all over Ghana, it would bring fault to the ozone layer."

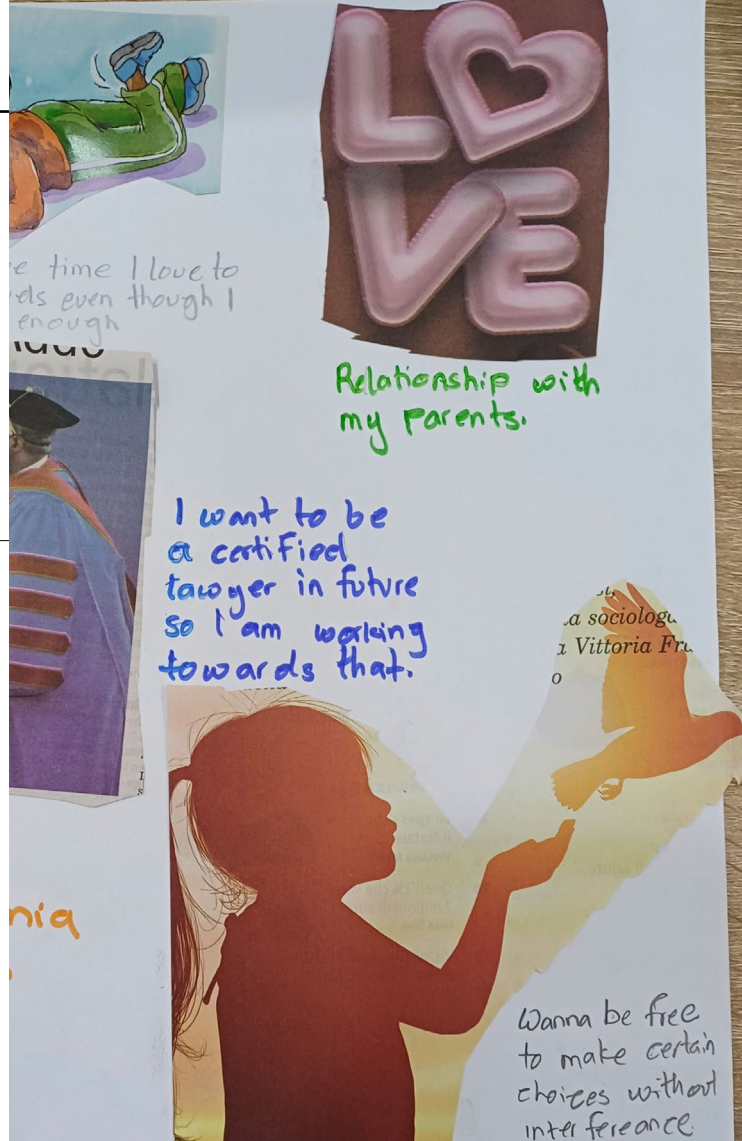
Similarly, governance failure, rising inequality and resource depletion were mentioned as primary causes of lack of safety in communities in the future. The participants' concerns about water pollution and land contamination are particularly stark. Some of the interviewed children fear they would lose access to clean drinking water due to mining-related contamination, as B. (boy, 16 years) explained: "In 2050, illegal miners would have destroyed the land and there will be no jobs. As a result, mothers will suffer to cater for their children. We will not get access to good drinking water and a land to cultivate crops to feed on or sell to earn an income. It can also make the town unsafe to live in because they forget to cover the pits after digging, leaving it to be filled with rains that breeds mosquitoes. The chemicals also destroy the roofing making it unsafe to our health."

The children's projections for 2050 reflect a generation grappling with two parallel futures; one shaped by environmental action and transformation facilitated by technological developments, the other by continued degradation, irresponsible production and consumerism, and neglect. What is striking is their emotional investment in the environment, not only as a physical space but as a determinant of public health and social justice. Whether hopeful or anxious, the children consistently link human actions today to health, well-being and environmental outcomes in the future.

THEMES

Well-being or well-becoming? Negotiating present lives with future aspirations

Across focus groups, the data analysis revealed a certain tension between the way the research participants live their daily lives and respond to their present needs, and the aspirations they hold for the future. The children interviewed seem willing to partly sacrifice present satisfaction and happiness in pursuit of a better future. At the same time, many of them also voiced a desire for self-expression and autonomy, and indicated that they feel frustrated when their personal and present goals clash with adult-imposed expectations, especially in areas such as career choices, social relationships and leisure activities.



In the children's narratives there is a strong focus on what could be defined as 'well-becoming' – meaning all those efforts implemented in preparation for a successful and pleasant future as adults – at the expense of actions to enhance well-being here and now. The research participants often discussed the importance of behaving and acting in a certain way in the present, in order to acquire all the moral, social and financial tools to become a 'respectable' person and have a good life in the future. They continuously negotiate between conforming to adult expectations, which they have partially internalized and made theirs, and asserting their own independent and different identities. This emphasis on future success over present fulfilment can be attributed to several interconnected factors, including cultural values, family dynamics, social norms and economic insecurity, and these are explored here.

Discipline and responsibilities: A path to be a good person and have a stable future

By analysing the children's accounts, it seems clear that the cultural milieu in which they have grown up places significant emphasis on discipline, hard work and moral conduct as the foundations for future success. These societal expectations are reinforced by cultural values that emphasize respect for elders, religious adherence and conformity to established moral codes.

"Running errands for elderly people also attracts blessings from God. So, he [fictional character] is a humble child, obedient, and is always respected by people in the society."

– F., girl, 16 years

"For a good well-being, you need to respect everyone and that they will make good prayers on your behalf."

– L., girl, 15 years

"If you respect the elderly, sometimes they put you to test, so if you are respectful of them, especially the rich ones, they could help you in attaining a good well-being."

– O., boy, 16 years

These quotes reflect an internalized belief that obedience, humility and service in the present are essential traits and prerequisites for social acceptance and to become good and successful people in the future, to gain a 'well-becoming'. Parents, caregivers, religious leaders and teachers play a pivotal role in shaping these children's orientations, emphasizing the importance of education and proper conduct as pathways to success, even if this emphasis sometimes comes at the expense of children's present well-being.

In many focus groups, the children engaged in conversations about how their parents' expectations influence their behaviours as well as their own goals and aspirations.

"He [fictional character] always does what the family wants and he always tells them the truth and that is what they like. And he avoids the behaviours they hate."

– E., girl, 15 years

"His mother helps him in decision-making ... To study very well, and to get good grades."

– B., boy, 14 years

"Okay, she [fictional character] feels as if she feels that they [teachers] show her what is good and what is bad."

– M., girl, 16 years

Some of the children also emphasized the important role of parents in disciplining them to teach them life lessons for the future. B. (girl, 12 years) noted that parents should discipline us when we make mistakes" and G. (girl, 14 years), talking about the fictional character, mentioned that "the dad disciplines him when he does something wrong" in a conversation related to the importance of respecting adults. Similarly, another participant (P., boy, 12 years) reflected on parenting practices in broader terms and said that he valued the role of parents who discipline children over parents who are not strict because "they don't care." These extracts illustrate the extent to which children have internalized adults' expectations and view discipline as a necessary tool for achieving future success. In fact, the interviewed children are aware that their current sacrifices are part of a larger narrative about success and fulfilment in adulthood. They recognize that their efforts are directed towards attaining a stable life characterized by material wealth, family and social recognition.

This preoccupation with future success is closely linked to the broader socioeconomic context in which the research participants live. For many children, the prioritization of well-becoming is shaped by economic insecurity and the desire to escape poverty – this is particularly true for participants who work and are out of school. These children's narratives reveal a keen awareness of the challenges associated with limited economic opportunities and the necessity of working hard to secure financial stability in adulthood. As A. (boy, 14 years) explained: "The reason why he [fictional character] has achieved all these is that he gathered a little money the time he was farming. He used that money to learn skills that's why he has achieved all this."

Some of the working children interviewed articulated aspirations to achieve financial security not only for themselves but also for their families. As H. (girl, 14 years) put it: "In my life, I wish that when I become rich, I help those who don't have like homeless people on the street. Not only that; I will help everyone who needs help. I also want to be a chef. I want my parents and my family to feel honoured as their successful children and also benefit from my success." This sense of responsibility is often translated into a willingness to sacrifice present pleasures for future stability, as S. (girl, 14 years) explained: "Even if there are any bad effects of her occupation, she still has to learn the job because it is important to her. She is learning it for her future and will surely graduate. So whatever the sickness may be, she is learning this for herself in the future." In this way, adulthood is conceptualized as a reward for sacrifices made during childhood: "He is happy because he lives in his own house, has cars, a wife and children" (E., girl, 17 years).

Overall, the children's accounts reflect an understanding that childhood is a preparatory phase for adulthood, during which they must acquire the skills, knowledge and discipline needed to succeed. In this light, they also view adulthood as a phase of life free from certain constraints and from adult control. The following quotes illustrate the children's belief that adulthood offers opportunities for self-determination and autonomy that are not currently available to them.

"At the age of 15 when Morgan's sister [fictional characters] used to see him walking with his friends, his sister would be like he should stay away from them but now, at the age of 41 Morgan likes to move with anybody he wants to walk with freely."

– E., girl, 15 years

"She [fictional character] enjoys her life in 2050 because her parents are not around to tell her what to do and she can do whatever she wants."

– V., boy, 17 years

"When Awale was fourteen years, he didn't have his own phone but now that he is grown he has his own phone to go to anywhere he wants. ... Like TikTok, YouTube, he can spends a lot of his time there."

– G., boy, 13 years

"When he [fictional character] was 17, it was compulsory to go to the farm but he can now decide not to go because he is old enough to do whatever he pleases."

– O., boy, 16 years

The children's emphasis on well-becoming over well-being reflects a belief that present sacrifices are necessary to secure future rewards. While this perspective may provide motivation and direction, it also raises concerns about the extent to which children's present well-being is being compromised in the pursuit of success through actions, patterns and values defined by older generations and that the research participants seem to have internalized.

Negotiating adult expectations and personal desires

This emphasis on discipline, sacrifice and responsibility may also have adverse effects on children's well-being. Many children interviewed expressed a sense of stress and discontent about being prevented from engaging in the activities they enjoy, either because of direct adult intervention or because they feel compelled to sacrifice these activities for their future achievements.

"She [fictional character] is always at the house doing chores and other stuff so she doesn't get time to go out and play."

– B., boy, 13 years

"I also placed one [sad smiley]^k at the church because sometimes on Sunday he [fictional character] wants to rest because for the whole week he has been attending school. On Sundays, he has to rest but he has to also go to church so he does not like going to church."

– F. R., girl, 16 years

Some children are also concerned about the long-term impact of the constant pressure to perform well academically or adhere to strict behavioural expectations. They expressed feelings of sadness or a sense of missing out on social experiences due to these pressures and fear of repercussions.³⁰

"He feels nervous because if he can't get good grades, the mother would talk, they can beat him."

– P., girl, 13 years

"This boyfriend thing ... They [parents] don't allow you to go out, so how can she spend time with her boyfriend? ... when her parents find out that she has a boyfriend, she will be in a very big trouble."

– K., girl, 14 years

Furthermore, several children feel that their parents' concern for their well-being and future success often translates into rigid expectations about their behaviour, lifestyle and social interactions. This tension was particularly apparent when discussing topics related to personal desires, such as friendships, leisure activities or romantic relationships. There is constant negotiation between what they would like and what they understand is the 'right thing to do'.

"Morgan's father [fictional characters] told him that when you start to date at such a tender age, you cannot focus on your studies and you will be academically weak. And Morgan too will want to be a great person in future so he does not want to date so that his education will become weak."

– J., girl, 15 years

"Eva [fictional character] would like to have a boyfriend, but she feels like having a boyfriend now is going to distract her studies and it's going to bring a lot of setbacks. ... She feels sad at times, but she knows it's for the good."

– N. Y., boy, 16 years

"Eva [fictional characters] parted with a few of her friends because they weren't influencing her positively and she moved on with the good ones. ... Some were dragging her down while some didn't support her dreams."

– C., girl, 15 years

"Some were also advising her to get a boyfriend while she was young and in school. ... She feels okay leaving them because she has left the bad influence, so her life has become very successful."

– M., girl, 16 years

These narratives within broader conversations in the groups highlight the children's awareness of their own desires and how these have to constantly be weighed against choices regarding a better future. A few of the participants expressed dissatisfaction with the rigidity of these expectations, arguing that: "Enjoying your life doesn't mean that you are getting spoiled" (A., boy, 12 years). Furthermore, some children exhibit moments of resistance and frustration when their own desires clash with what they think is expected of them. Despite their acknowledgment of adults' guidance and restrictions, many children actively seek opportunities to assert their independence. This negotiation between conformity and autonomy is evident in their creative pursuits, aspirations for the future and efforts to resist being overly controlled by adults.

"When I was coming to school, my dad told me to come to school and become a newscaster but as for me I want to become a gynaecologist or a surgeon. Because of the pressure (my father is one of six children and the only male) I went to my father's elder sister and narrated everything as well as my wishes to her. She then called my father and told him to allow me to take the career of my choice. And now they told me to learn and become a surgeon so now I am free. I am happy so I want people to be free. That's what I want."

– E., girl, 15 years

"She [fictional character] likes doing the robotics to ease her stress because of the chore she has at home that she doesn't like. So, she tries to create machines to help release that stress."

– M., girl, 16 years

Similarly, some children expressed frustration with adults' unwillingness to recognize their capacity for decision-making and creativity and affirmed their desire for parents and adults in general to see children as autonomous beings who can make their own decisions as shown in this discussion.

O. (boy, 12 years): *"The adults should motivate us."*

K. (girl, 14 years): *"They should allow us to take decisions ourselves sometimes."*

P. (boy, 12 years): *"The parents should make their children be able to express their feelings without the parents scolding them."*

B. (boy, 13 years): *"The parents should allow their children to come to them freely and give them advice."*

"They [adults] should understand our decisions. They should help us to make our own decisions but not their own because they will think that, maybe we want to decide for ourselves but it will not be like that. What we want to do, they should help us to decide it by ourselves."

– J., girl, 15 years

A quest to express themselves and be taken seriously

Throughout the focus groups it is possible to observe the interviewed children's reflections about the broader societal structures influencing their lives, and their quest to be given more freedom, to have safe spaces to express themselves and to be consulted and taken seriously, as the following extracts clearly show.

"I think that when it comes to the government, they should try and give more attention to us the youth. And they should have more youth involved in the government. Because most of the government coming up are old people so they won't understand what we are going through or what we are facing when they are all old and they are enjoying their lives, they should come to the boarding house and see how we are struggling, so that they can see what's going on. ... I think the authorities should not tell teenagers that they are too young to talk. Or you see most authorities when they're about to say something, they'll be like 'keep quiet, you're a child, you don't know anything'. Sometimes our opinions really matter and can be actually very influential to them. So, I think authorities should listen more to the youth and try and develop on what we are saying."

– J., girl, 16 years

"And I also think that this thing of politicians always sitting in their office, they should try moving out and then having a look at the schools and then trying to find out the problems from the people in the school."

– M., girl, 16 years

The quotes reveal a desire among children to be heard and respected as capable individuals with valuable insights and aspirations. While they often comply with adult expectations, there is a recurring sense of frustration with being constantly guided or restricted, rather than being allowed to exercise agency over their own lives.

Ultimately, children's desire to express themselves reflects the broader aspiration to shape their own identities and futures, free from undue adult control. It is evident that, while many children have internalized the expectations placed upon them by adults, they also seek opportunities to articulate their own desires and assert their agency.

"I also feel that teachers and parents should be less strict and listen more because most kids are going through depression and they don't have a listening ear, and they don't have anyone to talk to. So, if parents and teachers become more attentive, it will help release the mental stress of some kids."

– M., girl, 16 years

"I think adults should pay more attention to us because we are the future leaders. We are the ones that will make the future bright one day."

– V., boy, 17 years

FOCUS AREA 1

The well-being and future perspectives of working children

The data analysis highlights the challenges faced by out-of-school and working children, as well as their attempts to reconcile their difficult realities with hopes for a better future. This section illustrates their struggle for survival, desire for education and efforts to achieve a sense of self-worth despite adverse circumstances.

The study covers working children from Ashaiman and Bibiani aged 12–17 years. They were recruited from different parts of Ashaiman, including a light industrial area known to be highly lead-polluted, whereas working children in Bibiani live in a fairly rural setting, with most parts degraded due to high rates of large- and small-scale mining within the district. Most of these children are out of school for various reasons and engage in different economic activities, including hawking, mechanical work, tiling, farming and mining.

Lives under pressure

The working children interviewed frequently referred to the economic pressures that drove them to work from a young age.³¹ Many of the fictional characters created by them during the focus groups are motivated by economic necessity, particularly in situations where parental support is lacking due to premature death, separation or unemployment. Often children described scenarios where their characters work not only to meet their own basic needs but also to support their families. Although this brings them fulfilment and pride, it also creates a dual burden of meeting their personal needs while supporting their families, as the following exchange from an FGD discussion shows.

- R. (girl, 12 years): **"They are happy because, whenever she makes money from work, she takes it home to support her parents."**
- E. (girl, 12 years): **"Normally, she uses the money she makes to take care of her parents and grandmother. She also uses it to cook for them."**

In some cases, the research participants engaged in multiple work activities. The following extracts from an FGD discussion exemplify a situation in which the fictional character works multiple jobs to gather enough money for themselves and the whole household.

- P. (girl, 16 years): **"He goes to the estate to do the carpentry work."**
- K. (boy, 15 years): **"He goes to the farm."**
- K. E. (boy, 15 years): **"He changes the work he does if it is not going well."**

This illustrates how some children are driven by a sense of duty and responsibility to their families, sometimes at the expense of their personal well-being or educational opportunities. Early exposure to income-generating activities, such as hawking or assisting in family businesses, shapes their mindsets and compels them to leave school to pursue work. While this provides immediate income, it also perpetuates a cycle where financial demands hinder educational attainment, limiting long-term career prospects.

However, lack of economic resources is not the only reason these research participants are kept out of school. Children interviewed in Bibiani explained that there is no junior high school within their community, which forced them to drop out of education after primary school. Even in areas where schools are accessible, some parents struggle to provide additional resources, such as books, uniforms and transportation, which are necessary for their children to attend and thrive in school. These challenges pushed many research participants out of formal

education, leaving them to engage in economic activities to support their families or themselves. The excerpt from an FGD discussion below shows how the fictional character's desire to continue schooling contrasts with his parents' inability to provide basic necessities, which deters him from achieving his aspirations.

- G. (girl, 14 years): "He would like to continue schooling."
 B. (boy, 14 years): "He would have liked to learn a skill."
 Facilitator: "How does he feel about not schooling?"
 U. (girl, 13 years): "He doesn't feel good."
 G. (girl, 14 years): "He feels unhappy because when you're in school, you learn everything"

When it comes to children's perceptions of their well-being at work, the research participants revealed mixed feelings. While some acknowledged positive aspects of working, such as earning money and developing social connections, the overall sentiment was often one of struggle and exhaustion. In one focus group, participants expressed conflicting views about the fictional character selling at the market.

- Facilitator: "How does she feel about selling at the market?"
 C. (girl, 16 years): "She feels sad ... She sees it as a suffering. ... She has to commute by foot back and forth, every day, from the market to her house so it tires her."
 Rabbit: "She feels very happy because she knows that at the end of her sales, she will have some money on her to take care of her basic needs."

Several children also noted the physical strain associated with work, particularly when engaging in activities that require heavy labour. Some participants mentioned work-related injuries and exhaustion, as illustrated in the following examples.

- P. (girl, 16 years): "Working on the farm is difficult so he doesn't feel happy. ... The wheelbarrow, because when he pushes is tiring and he gets hurt."
 O. C. (boy, 16 years): "Going to the farm is difficult and he ends up carrying heavy loads. The second one is on the wheelbarrow because it can cause waist pain."

"When she first started, she used to fall sick and her boyfriend would take her to the hospital. He even asked her to stop selling at the market but she couldn't because it is what gives her money to take care of herself. But she falls sick though not too serious. ... Because she sells under the hot sun every day and only retires in the evening. If she closes before her usual time, she will receive scolding so she has to retire in the evening, every day."

– M., girl, 16 years

The children interviewed often identified health challenges as a direct result of their work, including mental health issues related to stress, anxiety and fatigue. Whether through handling heavy loads, working in the sun or performing monotonous tasks, the cumulative effect of work on their bodies and minds is evident. Furthermore, the children's recognition of pain and fatigue was often paired with a sense of inevitability, as if these burdens are natural consequences of their social and economic conditions. Therefore, even if for most of the children work offers a means of financial independence and a sense of achievement, these positive aspects are often overshadowed by the physical and emotional toll of their labour.

Notably, the research participants also highlighted how work, though necessary, limits their opportunities for leisure, socialization and rest. Some of them underlined that the only moments of relief they experience are those spent with friends or engaging in play, emphasizing the sacrifices they make to meet their immediate needs.

Factors promoting the well-being of working children

Based on the children's narratives, family and community play crucial roles in enhancing their well-being. Notwithstanding the challenges faced, working children's caregivers and relatives often make efforts to provide financial and material support (such as food, shelter and clothing). In some cases, the same is true of members of the extended family, religious leaders, godparents and master craft persons,³² who mentor some of the children in various trades.

Working children also highlighted the importance of the emotional support provided by adults close to them, who try to make them feel comfortable, appreciated and free to pursue their interests and dreams, such as learning a vocation, with some children already practising and earning an income from this.

The research participants underlined how engagement in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes is key for their well-being since it enables them to gain practical skills that are directly applicable to the job market.³³ By working as informal apprentices in trades like tailoring, farming and mechanical work, the children not only acquire expertise but also earn an income, which contributes to their sense of independence. Many interviewees among working children aim to complete their apprenticeships and establish their own businesses and progress in their careers, envisioning themselves also as employers who can train and mentor other children like them in the future. They view training and education as essential not only for job preparedness but also for their mental and emotional growth, aiding their maturity and psychological readiness for adulthood.

Perceptions and views of the future

When it comes to the future, out-of-school and working children seem to be less able to reflect on and imagine their own futures and the future of the world compared with the other children in the study. Unlike their peers who attend school, working children often imagine futures that are



more immediate, short-term and constrained by their current circumstances, hence less 'dreamy'.

In general, the children spoke about a future that is very close by, about 2–6 years from the time of the focus group. Their futures are very personal and related to their own lives and those of their families, and they do not engage much in imagining the collective futures of their generation and the future of the world. This stands in contrast to children from middle-class backgrounds, who are more likely to envisage broader and longer-term futures.

The working children's repeated emphasis on material goals, like earning money or building a house, reflects the pressing nature of their economic struggles. Their dreams, often limited by their current realities, are largely practical and rooted in immediate survival rather than abstract ambitions. In the descriptions of their futures, many interviewees said that they aim to complete their apprenticeships and establish their own businesses, envisioning themselves as employers who can train and mentor other children like them. This ambition reflects a desire to achieve not only financial independence but also a sense of purpose and community contribution. For example, some children aspired to open tailoring shops and hire staff, demonstrating their long-term commitment to their chosen vocations, as S. (girl, 14 years) mentioned when talking about the fictional character: "She sews the attires with her madam. So that when she is done, she can also open up her shop and hire her staff to assist her."



FOCUS AREA 2

Children's digital experiences and their implications for well-being

Children in the study talked about their relationships with digital media, which vary on the basis of their socioeconomic backgrounds and access to information and communication technology (ICT) tools. Children from middle to high economic backgrounds, particularly those in school, have greater access to devices like smartphones and personal computers. Conversely, children from low economic backgrounds rely on community internet cafés or borrow devices, such as their parents' mobile phones, to access the internet.

For children in school, digital media often forms an integral part of their academic and personal development. They use the internet to connect with friends, enhance their learning and develop new skills. Working children, however, have a more recreational relationship with digital media. With limited access to devices, they use internet cafés to chat with friends, watch videos and find relief from their daily struggles. For example, one child described how watching videos helped her fictional character escape a difficult home environment: "The reason why she likes the videos is because it is what entertains her when her godmother, godfather and boyfriend are not around; ... allowing her to escape her stepmother's insults" (M., girl, 16 years).

Engagement with digital media

The children interviewed frequently described using the internet and digital devices to enhance their learning experiences. Mobile phones, tablets and laptops were commonly mentioned as essential tools for academic support, research and collaboration. As R. B. (boy, 15 years) mentioned: "Morgan [fictional character] is always online by joining some groups, for example Joy Learning platform, then they will be solving some questions and answering some questions." Children also highlighted how digital media can help them overcome knowledge gaps and improve their skills. For instance, J. (girl, 16 years) noted: "Sometimes she [fictional character] also goes to YouTube to watch tutorials to help improve on her robotic skills"; and G. (boy, 17 years) stated: "He [fictional character] feels he is happy when he is online because there are things he does not know." This perspective is reinforced by others who mentioned using devices for learning vocabulary, concepts or even music creation.

A few of the children acknowledged that digital engagement is not always productive because when used excessively it may distract them from other tasks, including academic tasks. According to J. (girl, 16 years): "Sometimes she [fictional character] tries to connect maybe four to three hours a day but then, due to how interesting the content of the social media is, she ends up taking more time." Another child emphasized the risks of excessive screen time and the risk of developing an addiction to digital media, and consequent negative outcomes for one's mental health.

"He [fictional character] is addicted. He can't leave the phone because of the online browsing and things. He's addicted, anytime that the phone gets spoilt then like his body will be itching or something like then he will start looking for phone to go online."

– B., boy, 14 years

The social aspect of digital engagement was central in the interviewed children's narratives. Many participants described using social media platforms to communicate with friends and family, maintain connections over long distances and even build new friendships. For instance, M. (girl, 16 years) stated: "She [fictional character] comes online in order to interact with her friends"; R. (boy, 12 years) mentioned the ability to meet new people online: "He [fictional character] likes to go to TikTok and chat with other persons he doesn't know"; and J. (girl, 16 years) described how online interactions serve as a substitute for face-to-face interactions, noting: "She [fictional

character] feels the fact that she's not around, she doesn't really get to see them a lot. So interacting with them online helps her to know how her parents are feeling and how their life is."

For many children, the internet is not only a place of consumption but also of creativity and self-expression. They engage in creating videos, sharing skills and exploring opportunities for financial gain through content creation. P. (boy, 12 years) described how content creation can be a fulfilling activity, noting: "It is good, and she [fictional character] can get money from it because as a content creator, you can also get money from the viewers you get and the number of followers you have."

However, the research participants also identified challenges related to content creation, including negative feedback and feelings of inadequacy. V. (boy, 17 years) illustrated this by stating: "She [fictional character] can also feel sad sometimes. Because if she sees her friends gaining more followers like 10k, she will be like oh wow, you're really developing, you're posting videos, nice videos and it's coming out. If she sees her friends developing, she feels like she is not among those kinds of people, and she feels sad."

Risks, negative experiences and online safety measures

According to the interviewed children, while digital platforms offer numerous benefits, they also provide harmful content and enable negative interactions. These include exposure to pornography, cyberbullying and the psychological toll of constant connectivity. For example, J. (girl, 16 years) recounted: "Eva [fictional character] once in a while, while being on the internet, came up with pornography advertisement which she really did not like. She found it disgusting." The research participants seemed familiar with the dangers of cyberfraud and identity theft. As B. (boy, 14 years) explained: "Cyber fraud. Maybe he [fictional character] was chatting with someone and then like the person was a male and like his profile picture was a female and he was sending messages like a female and voice call like a female then has been taking money"

When it comes to knowledge of online safety measures, many children in the study demonstrated awareness of strategies that could enhance their safety while using digital platforms, although this is not true for out-of-school and working children, who are overall much less familiar with ways to protect themselves (due to their lower digital literacy).

Practical measures such as using strong passwords, blocking inappropriate content, reporting harmful materials, maintaining anonymity and adjusting privacy settings are acknowledged by children in school who use digital platforms on a daily basis. As P. (boy, 12 years) and O. (boy, 12 years) respectively suggested in an FGD discussion, "a strong password" and "face ID" are essential for safety online. Children also emphasized the importance of avoiding inappropriate websites and content. For example, B. (boy, 13 years) reflected: "She [fictional character] gets to know the variation of these websites because since she's been seeing the nasty videos and others, she now knows not to do this and not to do that." In addition, participants stressed the importance of limiting their own exposure to potentially harmful content through proactive measures, such as making accounts private and blocking harmful comments, as C. (boy, 12 years) explained: "She [fictional character] can block comments on her social media platforms so that she can't see the comments, she can make her account private so that the public won't see; when she informs people about that particular thing, there are others who can give her a different website or a different social media that will not have those kinds of things." P. (boy, 12 years) also showed a knowledge of age limit options, but explicitly mentioned that children tend to ignore them: "Since people who are old play video games, at times when you buy a video game, they show you the age you have to be to play that game. But if you are not that age you can't play but children of these days they don't care about that age. We play any game we want like GT5." The following exchange from FGD provides another example of the lively discussions children had on online safety measures.

- B. (boy, 14 years): "He [fictional character] must not share his pictures online."
 R. (boy, 12 years): "You must not share your private information to someone online."
 P. (girl, 13 years): "You must not share your pin code with someone you saw on the internet unless they are your secret."

Another child also emphasized the importance of deleting and reporting harmful content (pornographic content in this case) to an adult, and to seek appropriate support.

"The first help Morgan [fictional character] sought from himself was trying to delete those videos from the phone. And second approach to the mother. Yes, so when he approaches, he knows that the mother will advise him to stay away from those videos because he is not old enough to be looking on those videos so he should try and avoid them."

– E., girl, 15 years

In fact, support networks, particularly parents and caregivers, were considered vital in helping children navigate the online environment safely – but only if they could open up to these adults.³⁴

- P. (girl, 16 years): "Eva [fictional character] has been talking about this to her parents, and they've been advising her on it."
 N.Y. (boy, 16 years): "She also talks to her grandparent about such situations."
 C. (girl, 15 years): "When she talked to her parents about it, her family control certain setup on her device, blocking such content."
 J. (girl, 16 years): "Sometimes, once her parents are strict, sometimes she cannot tell them about those things."
- R. (boy, 15 years): "His parents. He [fictional character] sought support from his parents to show him what has happened to him."
 Facilitator 1: "Okay, and what did the parents do specifically to help?"
 R.: "They went to the MTNⁿ or mobile company to check if this was a hacking or not."

Some children in the study expressed hope for a safer internet shaped by improved laws and technological safeguards, and for a future where "there may be a law that will enforce people when they post those bad videos like the pornographic and other social vices" (G., boy, 17 years).

FOCUS AREA 3

Children's conceptualizations and visions of the future of the world

The perspectives of research participants on the future of the world are shaped by a mix of optimism, concern and curiosity.³⁵ During a few FGDs, the children shared varied and nuanced visions of what the future might look like, reflecting both their hopes and fears. Their insights encompassed a broad range of topics, including technological advancements, societal changes, environmental issues and global conflicts.

A future between chaos and harmony

Some children imagine a future marked by chaos and danger: "In the future I think corruption and all those other things would increase. The world would be dangerous" (A., boy, 12 years). This sentiment was echoed by others who foresee increased conflict and disruption: "Around 2050, the world would be a lot of chaos because as technology increases there would be like manufacturing of weapons like the nuclear bombs ... there would be a lot of disturbance" (P., girl, 14 years). J. (girl, 16 years) also noted the potential for social discord: "There's going to be a lot of civil war and conflict in the future."

When it comes to technological progress, and in particular robots and artificial intelligence (AI), the interviewees have contrasting ideas. Some look at technological developments as an opportunity for humans to live better lives and for societal advancement. For example, V. (boy, 17 years) said that, in his opinion: "Technology will hopefully develop the world ... I believe that in the future, researchers and technicians will decide to make robots that could help reduce stress and help humans build and develop the world together. ... So I think in the future, scientists will discover a way to make robots which exactly look like us to come together to develop the country." For others, the proliferation of robots and AI raises ethical and practical concerns. J. (girl, 16 years) pointed out the risks of AI to influence human behaviour, warning: "What would happen if it became too much, like robots doing everything for us and becoming more like humans than us or they trying to overcome us? Don't you think it's a bad thing? What do you think about that?" And M. (girl, 16 years) expressed concern that automation could lead to a widespread lack of motivation and engagement: "In the year 2050 there's a very high chance of addiction to technology because kids will become lazy and anytime they want something they will either send the AI to do it or they will just leave it and always be on their phones. So, I think if the world becomes too futuristic we all have lazy kids and inactive children."

Despite their concerns about technology and conflict, many children also expressed hopes for a more peaceful and harmonious world. A. (boy, 12 years) emphasized the importance of social cohesion, arguing that "if we accept each other's religion and if any family or any community doesn't hold a grudge against another ... there would be peace in this world and that would make the near future better for us." Similarly, M. (girl, 16 years) envisioned a united world, explaining that she wished "that in the future, the world can be united like this, and we will have a place without wars, grudges and enmity."

Children's visions of the future also include reflections on social and environmental challenges. J. (girl, 16 years) warned that, if issues such as pollution, war and racism continue unchecked, the future might not be as bright as hoped: "In general, I feel like people have to really think about the future because some signs are showing now that the future might be not so bright as we think it may be but if we keep paying attention to what's going on, the pollution, the war, the racism, the future can be very promising." Following the idea that the future can be bright, some of the working children in focus group FGD had an exchange where they shared their views on Ghana, characterized by technological and economic improvement in the future. This kind of optimism was not uncommon, particularly when children considered the possibility of societal and technological progress working in harmony.

- U. (girl, 13 years): *"I have seen that Ghana have changed ... All galamsey activities have stopped."*
- G. (girl, 14 years): *"I've seen that, they have stopped cutting down trees and also stopped parking cars by the roadside."*
- T. (girl, 15 years): *"The rate of crime has stopped."*
- G. (boy, 14 years): *"Ghana will be developed by then."*

Imaginary high-tech futures

The children also showed remarkable creativity when imagining high-tech futures where everyday life is transformed by technological advancements. P. (boy, 12 years) predicted that, by 2050, today's advanced phones would be considered outdated: "Most of the phones we use now that we called the latest phones would later be called the yam phones³⁶ ... The phones we are going to use, you can even see through." B. (boy, 13 years) imagined technological developments enhancing education and daily experiences, describing systems where "education would be improved through virtual reality." V. (boy, 17 years) visualized technological integration into society, where robots could assist with household chores and heavy-duty work, ultimately helping to "build and develop the world together." Yet, these futuristic visions are not free from concerns. O. (boy, 12 years) believed that the increased reliance on robots could result in diminished human health and productivity, asserting that: "People would be lazy because there would be robots that would be working for us so people would be lazy. And our health would be poor." Such views reflect the children's awareness of how technological advancements can shape both opportunities and challenges in their imagined futures.

For many children, technological improvements are linked to educational advancement, making knowledge more accessible and valuable. A. (boy, 12 years) expressed the desire for a future where more people attain higher education, noting that: "So, in the future I hope for a lot of university graduates. If there are university graduates, that would boost the form of education." Thanks to technology and exploration, J. (girl, 16 years) imagines cities and towns becoming highly developed and industrialized: "The future is going to be very industrialized, and we would want to explore more in space. I believe that most cities and towns will be developed and that's one thing I also want to help with. To create more cities and towns where people can live to avoid more overcrowding, and they will be more developed." The idea that technology and education would work hand in hand to create better living conditions is shared by others, like V. (boy, 17 years), who remarked: "I believe in the future technology will partially have an impact on the system of living. Technology will hopefully develop the world because now, technology is taking over the world. We use phones and laptops to search for information and other things. So, I believe technology will have an impact on our lives in the next future."

Meanwhile, for some of the research participants this vision is also tinged with a sense of nostalgia for simpler times. J. (girl, 16 years), thinking about the fictional character's future, reflected: "Sometimes when she is at home and watches pictures, she remembers how things were simple before all the development and technology."

Conclusions and recommendations

This study elucidates the multifaceted dimensions of children's perceptions of well-being in specific contexts within Ghana, as well as highlighting those experiences that characterize their daily lives and shape their visions of the future. The findings indicate that children's perceptions of well-being are deeply intertwined with their physical, emotional and social experiences, at times characterized by generational conflict. The research participants emphasized specific aspects of their lives, including access to quality education delivery, close relationships with family and friends, and their desire for better social and economic growth and management of public life, as well as environmental sustainability. These factors not only shape the research participants' present thoughts but also the way they see their individual and, at times, collective futures, underscoring the complexities of their aspirations in navigating the opportunities and challenges they experience.

Some key lessons learned and recommendations for policy and programmes have emerged from the themes and focus areas outlined in this report.

High-quality and practical education for all

All the children interviewed in this research project see great value in learning, whether at school, in vocational training or during apprenticeships and work. Access to quality education is important for them as a means of becoming independent adults and building their own future. For this reason, they are very vocal in expressing their demands. Echoing the requests of the research participants, and reflecting the picture provided by the data, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Provide better educational facilities, especially in boarding schools, while maintaining the principles of inclusion, family-based care and safeguarding.
- Facilitate the use of a variety of teaching methods that are more practical and participatory, less based on traditional classroom teaching methods ('frontal lessons') and memorization, and take into consideration children's different talents and attitudes.
- Find strategies to reduce children's stress and anxiety related to potential future unemployment, and provide career orientation services and scholarships, including to out-of-school children and children living in rural areas.
- Ensure all children have access to free, quality education, in particular by supporting parents and guardians in economic difficulty, introducing flexible educational models for older children who might have to help within the household, and generally strengthening the public school system.
- Strengthen the link between child protection and education services to support working children and out-of-school children in accessing various social services.

Harmonious and supportive relationships are key

This research report underlines the importance that children across focus groups give to harmonious family relations, both in their present and future lives. Parents in particular are key to the research participants' well-being since they are considered the primary caregivers, and have a duty to support their children, both economically and emotionally, while protecting and advising them. Friends and romantic partners were also often mentioned by the interviewees for their comforting role. Echoing the requests of the research participants, and reflecting the picture provided by the data, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Enhance social protection programmes for households in economic difficulty to alleviate children's responsibility for taking care of family members, which often means renouncing their rights to education and play, and being at risk of hazardous labour.
- Guarantee fair job conditions that enable parents to spend less time at work and more quality time with their children.
- Organize courses for parents/caregivers aimed at improving their communication skills and provide them with helpful financial information using participatory approaches.
- Include in the school curriculum adolescent reproductive health and socioemotional learning courses, which will help children cultivate healthy relationships with their partners, caregivers, family members and friends.

Demanding a better economic and political future

The majority of research participants consider economic stability a priority for their and their families' well-being. This was especially striking during conversations among working children who live in poverty and struggle to meet their own needs. For this reason, children interviewed said that they are also worried about the general status of the economy in Ghana. They are concerned about unemployment rates and the consequences of a lack of jobs within their communities, and they criticized policy interventions and public institutions, perceiving these as corrupt, lacking foresight and not considering the interests of future generations. Echoing the requests of the research participants, and reflecting the picture provided by the data, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Support working children through social welfare interventions that offer them free education or vocational training, as well as emergency shelter when needed, family-based care, food and healthcare for both them and their caregivers and family members.
- Provide financial literature and training for all family members, including children, adopting participatory approaches. These enhance their capacity to manage the economic resources of the household and respond to the needs of all individuals.
- Put in place long-term economic strategies for the country, with the needs of the most vulnerable socioeconomic classes as a priority.
- Fight corruption within the public sector and find strategies to increase meritocracy in public institutions, while enhancing children's and young people's regular participation in public life through institutionalized programmes (e.g., national civil service).

The importance of clean and sustainable environments

The voices of children in this study reveal a profound awareness of the environmental challenges their communities face, from inadequate waste management and pollution to the detrimental effects of mining activities. Their observations are not only rooted in lived experiences but also in a genuine desire for change and a better future. They want political and community leaders to join forces to ensure a safe, developed and clean environment. They hope for better infrastructure, well-maintained roads, quality health facilities, access to potable water and clean, organized communities. By collaborating with children, investing in education and implementing policies that prioritize environmental justice and sustainability, UNICEF and policymakers can help build a healthier, cleaner and more equitable present and future. In line with the above, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Recognize and highlight the role of children as vital stakeholders in environmental advocacy, whose insights can inform impactful, sustainable policies.
- Address the concerns raised by the research participants, developing inclusive and accessible educational frameworks that emphasize environmental literacy and promote sustainable practices from a young age.
- Prioritize investing in improved waste management infrastructure, enhancing sanitation systems and regulating harmful industrial activities such as illegal mining.
- Promote community-led initiatives, particularly in underserved areas, and amplify children's voices to ensure that their perspectives are integrated into local, national and international environmental policies.
- Strengthen enforcement mechanisms to ensure accountability and sustainability, particularly in areas where economic activities such as mining pose significant environmental risks.

Children's present well-being and participation matters

The children's accounts reveal that their understanding of adulthood is deeply shaped by societal norms and neoliberal ideals emphasizing self-discipline, individual responsibility and productivity. While many participants expressed strong aspirations to become 'successful adults' – an expression they often used to indicate adults who are economically independent and able to act as breadwinners for their own families – they are acutely aware of the personal sacrifices and emotional costs that often accompany these ambitions. These findings reflect a dominant societal discourse in which childhood is conceptualized primarily as a preparatory stage for adulthood, rather than as a meaningful life phase with its own intrinsic value. Consequently, children often experience pressure to conform to adult expectations, whether in terms of academic achievement, religious observance or moral behaviour, which can lead to stress, anxiety and feelings of restriction. The emphasis on 'well-becoming' – that is, focusing on future-oriented success – frequently overshadows the importance of well-being in the present. The children's voices illustrate a tension between striving to meet external expectations and nurturing their current emotional, social and psychological needs. This research highlights the importance of recognizing childhood as a life stage with intrinsic value, not merely a pathway to adulthood. Therefore, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Advocate for approaches that prioritize children's present well-being alongside children's future development.
- Engage children in orientation activities to guide them towards the futures they wish to achieve, including adopting: (1) peer-to-peer approaches, for sharing experiences among peers; and (2) mental health modules aimed at releasing some of the stresses and the pressures children feel.
- Create safe and age-appropriate spaces for child participation within communities and schools, and at the broader societal level.
- Engage caregivers in parenting practices that promote non-conflictual dialogue within the family and children's rights education, to enable them to see children and adolescents as subjects who are autonomous and rights holders.

Additional support for out-of-school and working children is needed

The accounts of working children in the study reflect a tension between economic survival and personal aspirations. While work provides some of them with a sense of achievement and financial autonomy, the overwhelming narrative is one of struggle and limited opportunities. The FGDs also highlighted the importance of familial support, social connections and the desire for education as crucial factors shaping these children's experiences and outlooks. Additionally, the conflicting emotions surrounding work, where children value it for its economic benefits and at the same time resent it for its toll on their health and happiness, demonstrate the complexity of their lived experiences. These findings highlight the need for interventions that address the root causes of child work, such as poverty and lack of access to education, while also considering the children's own perceptions and desires. Some key recommendations to enhance the well-being of working children are:

- Expand access to junior high schools in underserved areas.
- Provide additional material and financial support to vulnerable families to enable children to remain in school.
- Expand access to TVET programmes and mentorship opportunities with master craft persons to support skills development based on the needs and wishes of working children.
- Integrate financial literacy and entrepreneurship training into vocational education.
- Strengthen family support systems through community-based initiatives that promote children's education, protection and well-being, and include family income generation activities for parents and caregivers.
- Target families with out-of-school and working children for social assistance, including child and social protection.
- Ensure access to menstrual hygiene products for adolescent girls from economically vulnerable households and promote sustainable solutions, such as training on how to produce reusable sanitary pads, to reduce school absenteeism and support their overall well-being.

Positive and safe experiences online are important

Children's narratives reveal a complex and nuanced engagement with digital media, shaped by their socioeconomic contexts, access to technology and daily realities. For some, especially those in school and with reliable access to devices, digital platforms serve as vital tools for learning, creativity and social connection. For others, particularly working children with limited access, digital media can offer moments of escape, entertainment and informal social interaction. Across all groups, children demonstrated awareness of both the opportunities and the risks associated with their digital lives. They express agency in navigating online spaces, but also point to the need for greater support, digital literacy and protective measures. Ensuring equitable access and comprehensive education on online risks is crucial for safeguarding all children, particularly working children with limited digital literacy. Therefore, this report makes the following recommendations:

- Promote awareness of both the benefits and risks of internet use.
- Increase access to affordable digital tools for learning and social interactions (especially for children with lower economic backgrounds).
- Educate children across contexts on digital literacy and online safety measures, as knowledge of these remains within the hands of only the most educated children.
- Equip parents and caregivers, especially those from poorer households, with knowledge and skills on how to support children to keep themselves safe online.

Endnotes

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- 16 According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Ghana's urban population rose from 50.9 per cent in 2010 to 56.7 per cent in 2021, with nearly half of this growth concentrated in the Greater Accra and Ashanti regions. This shift reflects a continuing trend of rural-to-urban migration and urban expansion, driven by economic opportunities and infrastructure development (source: Ghana Statistical Service).
- 17 Recent research highlights that Ghana's digital transformation is accelerating, with mobile connectivity contributing 8 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP) and offering potential gains of GHS 41 billion across agriculture, manufacturing and government services by 2030.
- 18 In one focus group, two children aged respectively 10 and 11 years old were included because there were not enough participants in the target age group within the community who met the necessary criteria.
- 19 For more details on the sample, see Appendix 1: Research participants.
- 20 Due to resource limitations, the validation workshops were conducted with only half of the sample (children in schools in Accra and working children in Bibiani).
- 21 Social desirability bias refers to the tendency of research participants to respond in ways they perceive as socially acceptable or favorable to others, rather than providing genuine or accurate accounts of their thoughts and behaviors.
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- 27 Senior high school.
- 28 This was probably also due to the walking tours (see the Methodology and ethics section for further information) that enabled children to reflect on their well-being and futures vis-à-vis the communities and neighbourhoods they inhabit.
- 29 Galamsey refers to illegal small-scale gold mining in Ghana. The term is derived from the English phrase 'gather them and sell'. Historically, galamsey referred to traditional small-scale mining practices in Ghana, where local communities would gather and search for gold in rivers and streams. However, over time, the term has taken on a broader meaning, encompassing both legal and artisanal small-scale mining.
- 30 As part of the methodology, interviewed children were asked to place happy or sad smiley stickers on specific elements mentioned during the storytelling exercise, allowing them to express their emotional responses.
- 31 Most of the children interviewed had dropped out of school and begun working after completing the sixth year of primary school, which, in the Ghanaian education system, marks the transition to junior high school. While not strictly uniform, children at this stage are typically aged 11–12 years.
- 32 Master craft persons in Ghana are highly skilled and experienced tradespeople formally recognized for their expertise in a specific vocational trade. Certified to train apprentices within both traditional and formal apprenticeship systems, they play a central role in delivering practical, competency-based training. They are instrumental in transferring occupational skills, mentoring learners and contributing to the development of a skilled workforce.
- 33 Commission for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, 'National Apprenticeship Policy', CTNET, Accra, 2020, <<https://ctvet.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Apprenticeship-Policy.pdf>>, accessed 15 October 2025.
- 34 MTN is a large mobile telecommunications provider in Africa.
- 35 It is important to note that it was only in three out of eight FGDs where the research participants talked about the future with a more collective perspective, as during the majority of FGDs the focus was mostly on their futures as individuals.
- 36 The term yam phone is sometimes used informally in Ghana to describe a basic or outdated mobile phone.

Appendix 1

Research participants

FGD	Age	Location	Composition	Disability (Y/N)	Walking tour (Y/N)
1 A	12–14	Junior high school, urban area, Greater Accra	4 boys, 4 girls	N	Y
1 B	12–14	Junior high school, urban area, Greater Accra	4 boys, 4 girls	N	
2 A	15–17	Senior high school, urban area, Greater Accra	4 boys, 4 girls	N	Y
2 B	15–17	Senior high school, urban area, Greater Accra	4 boys, 4 girls	N	
3 A	12–14	Junior high school, rural area, Western North	5 boys, 4 girls	N	Y
3 B	12–14	Junior high school, rural area, Western North	5 boys, 4 girls	N	
4 A	15–17	Senior high school, rural area, Western North	4 boys, 4 girls	Y	Y
4 B	15–17	Senior high school, rural area, Western North	4 boys, 4 girls	Y	
5 A	12–14	Working children, rural area, Western North	5 boys, 4 girls	Y	N
5 B	12–14	Working children, rural area, Western North	4 boys, 3 girls	N	
6 A	15–17	Working children, rural area, Western North	7 boys, 5 girls	N	N
6 B	15–17	Working children, rural area, Western North	4 boys, 3 girls	N	
7 A	12–14	Working children, urban area (informal settlement), Greater Accra	8 girls	N	N
7 B	12–14	Working children, urban area (informal settlement), Greater Accra	8 girls	N	
8 A	15–17	Working children, urban area (informal settlement), Greater Accra	7 boys, 3 girls	N	N
8 B	15–17	Working children, urban area (informal settlement), Greater Accra	6 boys, 3 girls	N	

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About us

UNICEF, the United Nations agency for children, works to protect the rights of every child, everywhere, especially the most disadvantaged children and in the toughest places to reach. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive, and fulfil their potential.

UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti accelerates progress for children by working to ensure that policies and programming are informed by high-quality evidence. As the global custodian of child-related official statistics, it works closely with governments and partners to strengthen national statistical systems. Through world-leading data, research and foresight, it underpins UNICEF's global leadership on children's rights and serves as the organization's hub for setting strategy and monitoring programmes. With the active engagement of young people and other partners, it supports advocacy and dialogue aimed at improving the lives of children everywhere.

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