

Briefing paper No. 2

**Children Working in  
Commercial Agriculture** *Evidence from  
West and Central  
Africa*

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ANPPCAN	African Network for the Prevention and Protection Against Child Abuse and Neglect
CFA	Communauté Financière Africaine (African Financial Community)
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ENDA	Environnement et Développement du Tiers Monde
ICI	International Cocoa Initiative
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILO-IPEC	ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
LUTRENA	Lutte contre le Trafic des Enfants en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre
MAEJT	Mouvement Africain des Enfants et Jeunes Travailleurs
UCW	Understanding Children's Work
WACAP	West Africa Cocoa Agriculture Project

## Preface

A third of all children in West and Central Africa are estimated to work full- or part-time, paid or unpaid. Many of children are involved in hazardous and harmful economic activities, such as working in mines. Some are also exploited for sex and trafficked. Even if the work itself is not hazardous, many working children do not have access to education or drop out of school due to the opportunity costs for parents of keeping children in school and out of work. However, some children do combine work and school and earning an income may enable children to continue their schooling. Where the quality of education is poor or children are exposed to violence in schools, some children may prefer work to school. In some contexts, children derive a sense of meaning and responsibility from their work and the contributions they make to the family. To take them away from work without replacing the meaning and status they may receive can result in worse outcomes.

The prevention and response to child labour and exploitation in the region has fallen short in terms of quality, impact and scale. Over the past decade, much has been learned about what works and what doesn't in relation to child labour, exploitation and trafficking. Internationally, Understanding Children's Work (UCW) has done much to strengthen the evidence base. Many other organizations and researchers from different academic perspectives have contributed to a more differentiated analysis of children's work and of prevention and response efforts (e.g. Bourdillon, Myers, White, Boyden, Liebel, Woodhead).

Reviews and evaluations of anti-trafficking efforts have highlighted the need to distinguish between child migration and child trafficking and to avoid labelling all forms of child movement as child trafficking. These evaluations also emphasise the need for a better understanding of child mobility and the cultural, social and economic foundations of children's work in a broader context of social and economic mobility. A regional child mobility initiative was launched in 2008 to improve understanding of the cultural foundations of 'child labour', 'child migration' and 'child trafficking' and the role children's work and mobility plays in children's socialisation. The work done by the child mobility initiative is an important effort to rethink and redevelop prevention and responses to child labour that take social and cultural concepts of child development and education, social mobility and social protection into account. From this perspective, children and migration are linked to transitions within the life course and to rites of passage, whereby migration is part of becoming an adult, to earn cash and to get married. This perspective complements, and to some extent challenges, other approaches to child labour that focus more narrowly on poverty reduction, human resource development, or the application of international labour standards.

Five thematic briefing papers have been developed for types of child labour that have particular relevance for children in West and Central Africa. The focus is on the most pressing forms of child labour in the region, types of work that are receiving the greatest level of attention and have seen most resistance to change: Children in artisanal quarries and mines; Talibé children (Qur'ānic school pupils who are begging) in Sahelian countries; Children in commercial agriculture; Children in the informal urban sector; and Child domestic workers.

The purpose of the child labour briefing papers is to synthesise the empirical evidence of effective approaches to child labour and exploitation and identify approaches that have not worked or are unlikely to work with the current levels of human and financial resources. The briefing papers are aimed towards professionals working on child protection, education and social policy in countries in West and Central Africa. Each briefing paper presents evidence on the following aspects: description of the phenomenon, situation, trends, scale, impact on children; effective approaches to preventing child labour and exploitation.

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## Introduction

This paper focuses on children working in commercial agriculture, whether they do so as unpaid family labour or as paid workers, part-time or full-time. Two different perspectives inform research and policy-making on children's work in cash crops. One has trafficking in persons and new forms of slavery at its core and is closely linked to work on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In the late 1990s images in international media of poorly-clad children working with machetes or carrying heavy loads of cocoa pods sparked moral concern internationally and generated a number of interventions to rescue suffering children. Generally, children were seen as victims of deceitful traffickers and unscrupulous cocoa farmers who exploited and mistreated child workers and, in some cases, even locked them up to prevent their escape.<sup>[cf. 4, 28, 32, 85]</sup>

The second perspective is child-centred and focuses on children's work on the family farm;<sup>[7, 12, 57, 58]</sup> the actual work carried out on cocoa farms by children of different ages;<sup>[8, 29, 57, 58, 69]</sup> children's labour migration and the importance of social networks;<sup>[18, 21]</sup> and children's views on work in cash crops.<sup>[12, 21, 76]</sup> The documentation emerging from these studies contests allegations of trafficking and in particular, of any form of slavery being commonplace in cocoa farms.

The two perspectives represent counter arguments in the debate about children's work in commercial agriculture: a debate that has helped to refine how we think about exploitation. **In the current discourse on working children's rights, exploitation refers to situations in which a recruiter or an employer takes advantage of the child worker in a way that is unfair or causes the exploited child harm.**<sup>[25]</sup> This is a shift away from blanket accusations of intent to do harm if adults either travel with children other than their own or employ children.

This briefing paper aims to unpack the circumstances in which children work in commercial agriculture. Child protection advocacy has had a strong focus on the chocolate industry, on cocoa production and on a certification process for child labour-free chocolate to ensure that children do not carry out harmful work on cocoa farms. As a result of this emphasis, resources for research have been concentrated on the cocoa sector at the expense of documenting children's work in other cash crops across West and Central Africa, whether on commercial farms producing primarily for export or on small family farms (e.g. rice, cotton and yams). Drawing on the available studies, **the briefing paper analyses children's work in cocoa and, to a certain extent, cotton, and explores the ramifications that the dynamics surrounding children's work in these crops may have for children's work in commercial agriculture in general.** This includes paying attention to **the work carried out by boys and girls, young children and older children, as well as to the aspirations that motivate children to engage in paid farm work or to help in cash crops on the family farm.**

## Situating Children's Work in Commercial Agriculture in the 2000s

Research on the involvement of children in commercial agriculture has concentrated especially on cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, the producers of almost 60 per cent of the world's cocoa. Nigeria and Cameroon produce less but are also among the leading

**Côte d'Ivoire.** 87 per cent of the permanent labour comes from the farm family. 64 per cent of the children working in cocoa activities are below 14 years.<sup>[44]</sup>

**Ghana.** 14 per cent of the labour in cocoa is done by children (below 18 years) of the farm household. 84.1 per cent of the children live with a least one of their birth parents, 13.5 per cent with another relative and 2.4 per cent with non-relatives.<sup>[57]</sup>

46.7 per cent of the parents refrain from engaging children in cocoa activities because they are concerned about the impact of such work on children's health, and 20.7 per cent because of children's lack of know-how and experience.<sup>[58, p. 61-62]</sup>

Boys work slightly more than girls in agricultural activities but the difference is not pronounced: 51.8 per cent of the boys and 44.5 per cent of the girls do work on cocoa farms, and 37.5 per cent of the boys and 34.6 per cent of the girls do other farm work.<sup>[58, p. 122]</sup>

cocoa exporters.<sup>[11]</sup> The majority of cocoa farmers are smallholders whose cocoa farms are 2-4 hectares. Smallholders commonly rely on family labour for both food and cocoa cultivation but hire additional labour and participate in communal labour parties in periods of peak labour demand.<sup>[14, 57, 58, 84]</sup>

A small number of studies and anecdotal information also draw attention to crops like pineapple, banana, mango, sugarcane, rubber, palm oil, cashew nuts, rice and cotton.<sup>[5, 68, 85]</sup> These crops are cultivated either by large commercial farms producing uniquely for export, or by out-growers<sup>1</sup> and smallholders who organise the production in similar ways to what is found in cocoa.

In Ghana, for example, pineapples for export are produced by out-growers who rely on family labour; by large farms leased by non-resident farmers who employ a farm manager and farm workers to do the work; and by large-scale producer-exporters who employ farm workers in their own core production but also rely on buying produce from smaller farms.<sup>[10, 72]</sup> Children of all ages may be involved in pineapple activities on the family farm and between 45 and 60 per cent of the farm workers were aged 14-29 years (a survey carried out in 2006-07 did not find farm workers below 14 years). Furthermore, the study found that three-quarters of the workers were male and one-quarter females<sup>[10]</sup>, indicating that both boys and girls in their late teens may work in pineapple farms.

Cotton in Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali is primarily produced on small farms relying on family labour, community labour parties and contract farm labour. While much of the information related to children's work documents boys' migration to work as farm hands,<sup>[21, 52]</sup> anecdotal information reveals that girls also migrate to work in cotton<sup>2</sup>.

### Reasons Why Children Work in Commercial Agriculture

Poverty is an important reason for children to work in cash crops but an argument based uniquely on economic concerns cannot be made. **Looking at the demand-side** in cocoa production reveals that many farmers seek to make up for a general decline in cocoa yields<sup>[57]</sup> and stagnating farm-gate prices.<sup>[4, 5, 48]</sup> Protagonists of banning children's work to protect them against trafficking and slavery explain the employment of child workers with the inability of poor farmers to pay adult wages and thus their inability to attract young men over the age of 18 to work on the farms.<sup>[5, 47]</sup> **According to this argument, there is an increasing demand for child workers because more and more farmers cannot afford to employ older, physically stronger and skilled workers.**

Proponents of a child- and family-centred perspective emphasise the use of family labour and argue that farmers who lack money to hire workers, need to balance the desire to increase production with the desire for their children to concentrate on schooling<sup>[9, 57]</sup>, and for their out-of-school children to engage in their own economic activities.<sup>[34, 74, 87]</sup> **According to this argument, the demand for children's work on the family farm is kept in check by social and cultural values regarding how best to prepare children's future.**<sup>[88]</sup> Moreover, farmers do not rely solely on their children's labour. A

**Ghana.** 63 per cent of the parents explained that they asked their children to work to ensure their training and 33 per cent because they wanted their children to contribute to the household.<sup>[58, p. 127]</sup>

**Ghana.** School children were required to do farm work for the school at least once a week when they farmed crops such as yams and plantain that could be sold to generate revenue for the school.<sup>[12, p. 142]</sup>

In the 2006-07 farming season, 13.3 per cent of the surveyed school children participated in farming for teachers and 11.5 per cent for a school contract farm.<sup>[58, p. 119]</sup>

**Cameroon.** Teachers often require their students to work on their cocoa farm or hire out children to local farmers during school time. The teachers earn money for this work. One school director threatened to retire if authorities prohibited the practice.<sup>[47, p. 19]</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Out-growers are smallholders who have formal or informal buying arrangements with exporting companies, often also involving credit schemes for fertilizers and pesticides. When the demand is high out-growers may gain higher prices for their produce but when the demand is low the large companies may not honour all promises.<sup>[10]</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Emerging from an article focusing on trafficking in Burkina Faso, the story of how a trafficker was discovered by vigilant civil servants also reveals that a large number of girls were on their way to work in the cotton fields in the Sourou Valley.<sup>[32]</sup>

significant part of the labour demand is met by adult women and men.<sup>[cf. 31, 38, 54, 56, 66]</sup> **One weakness in this line of argument is that it offers little explanation of why some farmers employ children from the extended family or outside the network of kin.**

**Concern for children's practical training is another important reason** for parents to ask children to work on the family farm, whether in cash or food crops. Given the difficulties for rural children to find paid employment, parents are keen to provide their children with the necessary skills to become good farmers.<sup>[57, 69]</sup>

Children in public and Qur'anic schools may also work as part of their education. Teachers from both types of schools make demands on children's labour, to produce food or cash crops or to hire out farm-hands during school time.<sup>[12, 19, 47, 58, 62, 64]</sup>

The demand for child labour may be reduced by the fact that cocoa activities require physical strength and considerable knowledge.<sup>[58, 59]</sup> Children may damage pods that are not yet ripe and thereby decrease the future harvest.<sup>[58]</sup>

**Looking at the supply-side** reveals that, when analysed through the lens of trafficking and the worst forms of child labour, children's work, and especially migrant children's work, is explained as an outcome of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, high fertility rates, broken families, HIV/AIDS, the death of parents and, what is often labelled as, "harmful cultural practices". How these factors concretely affect children's propensity to migrate and to work as farm workers is not elaborated.<sup>[cf. 4, 57]</sup> From this perspective, children are seen as victims of parents who send them off to work without having their well-being and best interests in mind. Alternatively, the children themselves are assumed to be ignorant and oblivious to the risks they run when trying to meet their needs.<sup>[4, 5]</sup> **Although poverty is seen as a motivation for children's participation in commercial farming, social and cultural explanations are privileged over economic ones.** Occasionally, structural issues, such as the failure of governments to provide schools and teachers in remote rural communities, are mentioned.<sup>[4]</sup>

**Ghana.** It is a normal occurrence for children to visit relatives and then choose to stay permanently. In such cases, children seek the consent of their parents/guardian and their host after making up their mind. However, in 85 per cent of cases the decision for a child to live in another community was taken by parents, in 11.4 per cent by relatives and only in 3.4 per cent by the children.<sup>[57, p. 73]</sup>

From a child- and family-centred perspective, attention is drawn to the range of locally grounded motives children have for working outside the family, and for their parents letting them do so. Economic reasons highlight a number of consequences of poverty, namely the need of school-going children to contribute to their own school fees<sup>[9, 15, 35]</sup> and children's wish to earn an income to purchase commodities that enhance their social position at home,<sup>[1, 15, 21, 34, 52, 61, 74, 75, 76]</sup> to contribute to the household budget,<sup>[15, 35, 74, 75, 76]</sup> or to migrate to destinations further away and with higher earning potentials.<sup>[1, 52, 76]</sup> **In this light, economic rationality and the constraints imposed by chronic poverty are emphasised but attention is also paid to social and cultural norms that underline the importance of work as an integral part of childhood and of socialisation into adult responsibilities.**

Another reason for children to migrate to work in cash crops is related to networks of kin. Children follow a well-established flow of people from the savannah region to cocoa producing areas,<sup>[4, 14]</sup> and migrant children often work for an older brother or an uncle. **Whether such children are remunerated for their work and whether they feel they should be paid needs to be questioned, especially because adults and children may have different views on the issue.**<sup>[77]</sup> Furthermore, if children and youth feel that their long-term claims to land are enhanced by working for their uncle or older brother, it is important to assess actual inheritance practices within the extended family.<sup>[13]</sup> Here gender differences exist: more young men aspire to inherit a

farm from a male relative than young women from a female relative. This may be because there are more examples of successful male farmers than of successful female farmers<sup>3, [9]</sup>.

Importantly, mobility within the network of kin can be linked with both the demand and the supply-side. **Farmers may recruit children from their extended family for reasons ranging from seeing these children as cheap labour to seeing it as their duty to help the children become migrants.** Children and their parents may also see this mobility as advantageous: **children because relatives may pay for their bus fare or facilitate access to land; parents in the hope that relatives are a guarantee for minimizing the risks for children because they are expected to treat the children well and can be held accountable by the network of kin.**

### Ways in Which Children Become Paid Farm Workers

As documented across the cocoa producing countries, many children work on the family farm.<sup>[43, 57, 58]</sup> The central role of unpaid family labour for cocoa farmers *and* cultural notions in rural areas of household membership, which oblige all able-bodied members to work for the household head, means that children cannot easily take paid work on neighbouring farms unless with the household head's permission. This is one reason why the majority of paid farm workers are migrants.

While some children migrate for work without their parents' permission, many migrate with the explicit acceptance and encouragement of their parents.<sup>[3, 8, 21, 34, 36, 74, 78]</sup> The degree to which children, and especially older children, have a say in decisions about where they should live and work, should not be underestimated. **The long history of migration plays an important role. Firstly, parents acknowledge that children may run away from home if they are not given some freedom to pursue their own aspirations. Secondly, many parents have been migrants themselves and relatives live at many migration destinations.**<sup>[34, 57, 74, 77, 78, 88]</sup> Thirdly, different family members may disagree on the subject of a child's best interests, hence the power relations and negotiations among adults shape a child's migration trajectory.

**Côte d'Ivoire.** One farmer explained how he recruited labourers from his old village back in Burkina Faso: "When I need workers I go back to my village in Burkina Faso and tell my relatives that I want people to help me on my cocoa farm. If they have children who are still in the village, they will send them with me. I settle on a price with their fathers for each child and on the number of years they will stay. The father then sends them to my farm or, if they are too small to find their way, my brother goes to get them. I pay about 100,000 CFA francs [US\$ 210] when the child is older, and 70,000 CFA francs [US\$ 147] when the child is small".<sup>[4, p. 49-50]</sup>

Rapid assessments across the cocoa producing countries document incidents of child trafficking but in small numbers.<sup>[47, 70]</sup> This may be because trafficked children are hidden and difficult for strangers to recruit for interviews<sup>[47]</sup>, or because trafficking is not a widespread issue. When children's migration without their birth parents is analysed through the lens of trafficking and the worst forms of child labour, the recruitment is often described as having been done through deception. Some suggest that parents send their children with relatives or traffickers and mention prices paid for children.<sup>[4, 85]</sup> **The language used alludes to slavery and the buying of child workers but, firstly, farmers are unlikely to risk paying out money upfront in case a child or youth runs away, gets sick or turns out not to be an ineffective worker.** Hence, the money mentioned by a Burkinabé farmer (see textbox above) is more likely to be an oral employment contract setting out the annual payment. **Secondly, when farmers recruit the children of relatives, there is no indication of the children's actual age. 'Children' may be in their teens or in their twenties but if cocoa farmers are respectful they discuss the employment arrangement with the household head who manages the pool of labour within the household.** However, it is important to bear in mind that for cocoa activities family members provide most of the labour and that those hiring farm workers in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon and Nigeria primarily hire

<sup>3</sup> Both men and women have cocoa farms. Some have secure land rights because they originate from the region (mostly men who traditionally inherit land from the father through the patrilineage or from the mother's brother through the matrilineage) or have bought land or negotiated long-term access from local village elders and chiefs.<sup>[2, 41]</sup> Women may claim access to land through marriage, clearing land and inheriting from their mother, as has also been documented in rice-growing areas of the Gambia.<sup>[16, 17]</sup>



adult workers. Only a minority of producers (less than one per cent of small farms) hired teenaged workers in 2001-02, mainly from Burkina Faso.<sup>[29, 84]</sup>

Research from a child- and family-centred perspective reveals more about recruiters and suggests that some operate on a professional level where they earn a living or an additional income from facilitating employment for children, while others work within their social network of kin and friends.<sup>[20, 22, 41, 52]</sup> **Socially related intermediaries may be established migrants recruiting workers for their own farm or for other farmers but they may also be young return migrants who wish to help their friends and siblings onto a prospective migrant path, shield them from being cheated by introducing them to good employers and, not least, to strengthen their social ties and status through facilitating opportunities for other children and youth and recruiting good workers for their employer.**<sup>[20, 22, 36, 52, 78]</sup> In Benin, for example, peer facilitation of farm work among teenaged children<sup>4</sup> is becoming increasingly common, as is the pool of migrant workers willing to look for low-paid employment in the declining cotton sector.<sup>[52, p. 25]</sup>

**Child migrants also become hired farm workers in a much more haphazard way when they run out of money on their way to a destination far away.** Young people from south-eastern Burkina Faso, for example, sometimes embark on the journey to Abidjan without sufficient money for the entire journey. Some of them are surprised by the amount of money required to be paid at road blocks in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, others are aware of such demands but optimistically believe they will pass through without paying much. Once stuck, they phone relatives in Abidjan or elsewhere in Côte d'Ivoire to ask for help, expecting their relatives to come and pick them up or arrange with a bus driver to pay for the ticket on arrival. However, as such arrangements usually double or triple the fare, not all relatives are willing, or able, to help out independent-minded children who have set out on a journey without the necessary means and they may advise the children to find work where they are.<sup>[36]</sup> These young migrants often find work with established migrants from their home regions or, at least, from their countries in the places they run out of money.<sup>[18, 27, 77]</sup>

An 18-year-old migrant in Abidjan described how he became a farm worker: "When I was 14 years old, I left for Abidjan with 10,000 CFA francs [US\$9] in my pocket and got stuck on the way [as a ticket all the way cost 25,000–28,000 CFA francs, equivalent to US\$48-53].

At first, I worked on the cocoa farm of a Mossi [from Burkina Faso] I met on the road and explained that I'd arrived from Burkina and didn't know anybody in this area. He promised to find work for me where I'd earn 50,000 CFA francs [US\$95] in one year. Meanwhile I worked on his farm. After two months, I asked about the job that he was going to find for me, but he wanted me to stay with him for another three months. I couldn't stay with him that long; he always insulted me and wanted me to work harder. He wanted me to stay on, so in the end I fled without having had a penny for my work!<sup>[36, p. 65]</sup>

### Terms of Employment and Working Conditions

**The conditions under which children work in cash crops range from working after school, during weekends and school holidays to working full-time as hired farm workers.**<sup>[21, 48, 57, 58, 63]</sup> The work children do depends on the type of crop. In perennial crops like cocoa, rubber and palm oil, much of the work on established farms consists of weeding, crop maintenance, harvest and post-harvest processes,<sup>[57, 58, 85]</sup> while work in annual crops, such as cotton and rice, also includes tilling and sowing and, on rare occasions where the land has been left fallow, clearing land of scrubs. Work in dry-season vegetable gardens usually requires hand irrigation several times a day. Children's schooling may limit the tasks in which they are involved; e.g. in Guinea, children participated more in land clearing and preparation than in harvesting because the former tasks coincided with the school holidays.<sup>[48]</sup>

The farm tasks allocated to children and the associated workload differ according to age and sex.<sup>[58]</sup> On cocoa farms, all tasks related to transportation within the farm are considered children's work. Children aged 15-17

<sup>4</sup> Many rural children have birth certificates and identity papers made years after they were born, e.g. when they are enrolled in school, when they begin to migrate or when they wish to migrate to neighbouring countries. Researchers who acknowledge the arbitrariness of dates of birth on such documents often use less rigid age categories.

years generally do heavier work than young children, e.g. they take part in land preparation, harvesting and the breaking of cocoa pods whereas younger children mostly weed, gather harvested pods and carry pods and water between places within the farm. Finally, the studies show that boys provide most of the child labour on cocoa farms, while girls are involved in other farm work and domestic chores.<sup>[5, 6, 8, 41, 48, 57, 58, 59, 71]</sup> However, girls may also be involved in fetching water and transporting seedlings, cocoa pods and beans.

The majority of children on Ghanaian cocoa farms are given acceptable workloads that do not interfere with their schooling – in 2007, they worked less than 16 hours per week.<sup>[8, 58]</sup> On average, children in Côte d'Ivoire work more (in 2004, they worked 22.9 hours per week on average), but **some interesting variations were found that make an average irrelevant**. Children from neighbouring countries worked more than Ivorian children; children who had left school worked more than children in school but also more than children who never went to school. Children who were paid worked most hours and children who worked for their parents worked more hours than those working for a distant relative.<sup>[48]</sup> **It is thus important to examine the dynamics surrounding children's work in order to design appropriate protection interventions.**

**Ghana.** Children aged 5-12 years mainly engage in weeding, gathering and carrying pods to pod-breaking points, carrying water for on-farm spraying, and carting fermented cocoa beans to drying points. Older children (15-17 years) are involved in additional tasks of harvesting pods, pod breaking and mistletoe cutting. These activities, the communities agreed, are within the capabilities of the children.<sup>[58, p. xxv]</sup>

The activities in which children participate are mostly non-hazardous, and those that are deemed dangerous are mostly done by older children.<sup>[58, p. 131]</sup>

For children working on the family farm or as casual farm labour, seasonality regulates their labour input, as they often work more in periods of peak labour requirements, especially during sowing, weeding and harvest. Children employed on a longer contract, generally work harder. They are put to work in different crops and dry season vegetable gardens. They are also given less time off compared to children who work for their father or mother.<sup>[21, 57, 63]</sup>

Most children work on small farms for relatives. Often their work is rooted in implicit intergenerational contracts, which broadly sketch the responsibilities and obligations of different groups of household members. In such cases, work in cash crops is considered household work and incomes are regarded as part of the household budget that supports the entire family.<sup>[58]</sup> Nevertheless, children may receive gifts, money, school or apprenticeship fees after the harvest as reward for their work.<sup>[35, 39]</sup> Children may be treated as paid employees when working for distant relatives.

On small farms written employment contracts rarely are used to define the relationship between the owner and the farm worker but children's work is nevertheless regulated by oral agreements. **Three types of contracts are common for work in cash crops on small farms: annual contracts; short-term contracts; and by-day or by-piece contracts.** Annual contracts are common and imply that workers are paid once a year after the owner has received money for his crop, i.e., sometime after the harvest. Short-term contracts are often related to labour intensive work and, in particular, the harvesting. Children are engaged on such short-term contracts when migrating during school holidays to harvest cotton<sup>[21]</sup>, yams<sup>[40]</sup> or other crops. Lastly, casual work by day or by piece is common in some areas and is usually paid immediately. Casual work is common when children's ability to work for themselves is irregular and depends on permission given by their father or another relative for whom they normally work. It may thus take place close to their usual dwelling.

**Côte d'Ivoire.** While adult workers on average earned 86,400-108,000 CFA francs [US\$ 164-205] annually in 2006, children under 18 years only earned 50,000 CFA francs [US\$ 95] per year. This is because it is easier to keep young farm workers' salaries low and they are easier to control.<sup>[71, p. 28]</sup>

**Annual payments or payments at the end of a short contract can be in cash and/or in kind. The payment frequently includes a bus ticket home, thereby reiterating the social fabric of working relationships in kinship terms** where senior or better-off relatives are expected to pay their return journey of their 'visitor'. Payments in kind may include a bicycle, clothing or something else that is valued highly among working children.<sup>[21]</sup> **The advantage of lump sum payments is that it is easier to save up money<sup>[21]</sup> and also is a way of minimising theft.** Many employees on annual and short-term contracts live and eat on the farm: some are given food cooked by the women in the household; others are given grain and sauce ingredients that they must cook themselves; and yet others are given a small piece of land on which they can grow yams and cassava.<sup>[5]</sup> Whether or not calculations of expenditures on food are made in a transparent manner, it results in a lowering of the wage.

### Risks and Abuses

Children face a number of **physical risks when working in cash crops**. Work overload, children's use of machetes<sup>5</sup>, their role in transporting cocoa pods and other crops, and their participation in spraying pesticides and other agro-chemicals are the health hazards frequently discussed.<sup>[47, 59, 71]</sup> Children working in cocoa consistently complain about pain in the neck, back, shoulders and arms.<sup>[47, 89]</sup> In Ghana, one per cent of the children did high intensity work and spent four or more hours doing farm work after school on a daily basis<sup>[8]</sup> and in Guinea, 28 per cent of the children who worked in farming, carried loads heavier than 30 kilos.<sup>[48]</sup> Some reports argue that children may suffer long-term injuries to their skeleton and muscles<sup>[71]</sup>, others that scientific evidence documenting the long-term consequences of doing heavy physical work at an early age is lacking.<sup>[60]</sup> It is thus difficult to assess the physiological implications of such work.

**Côte d'Ivoire.** Less than 16 per cent of the children who had sustained an injury during work used a health centre despite the fact that ten out of twelve villages had one.

**Ghana.** In the event of serious injury, around one-third of the children went to a health centre or a hospital.<sup>[48, p. 17]</sup>

More attention has been paid to the **negative impact of high intensity work on children's schooling**.<sup>[58]</sup> Children may work on the farm full-time because their parents are too poor to enrol them in school, the school may be too far away from their community, the school teachers are absent frequently or, indeed, their parents need their work.<sup>[29, 44, 47]</sup> The link between cocoa production and schooling is not a negative one *per se*: money earned from cocoa may provide the means to send children to school that parents would otherwise not have.<sup>[29]</sup>

Regarding the much mediatised use of machetes by children, it is important to note the variation emerging from different studies. Rapid assessments in Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana and Nigeria in 2004 revealed that the most common physical injuries were cuts from machetes or from contact with sharp sticks and twigs on the farm and the sharp edges of harvesting tools.<sup>[47]</sup> Surveys in Côte d'Ivoire document that 9 per cent of children aged 6-12 years had experienced machete cuts, as had 15 per cent of the 13-14-year-olds and 23 per cent of the 15-17-year olds.<sup>[37]</sup> The proportion of children sustaining injuries while using a machete thus increases with age in step with the gradual introduction to heavier and more difficult tasks. It is important to remember that **children in rural households are socialised into a variety of tasks on the farm and in the domestic sphere that require the use of machetes. Both boys and girls therefore become skilled in using machetes from a relatively young age.**<sup>[12]</sup>

A contrasting impression comes from a survey in Ghana where none of the 610 children working on cocoa farms complained about injuries from using machetes. **Such variations may depend on how questions are posed, to whom, and whether the focus is on minor injuries or on those with a lasting effect.** This is not to say that children do not get injured in the course of work; they experienced a number of injuries ranging from machete wounds, tree stump injuries, slips and falls, fingernail pricks, thorn pricks, snake bites, leg/neck pains,

<sup>5</sup> In Ghana, a machete may also be called a cutlass.

small objects entering the eyes, skin rashes, and itchy backs but they do not judge these to have long-term effects on their health and well-being.<sup>[57, 58]</sup> In remote rural communities, the most common treatment of minor injuries is self-treatment combining a mix of traditional herbs and modern medicaments.<sup>[48]</sup>

Protective clothing can protect farm workers against a number of minor injuries and, indeed, **of the children working in cocoa activities in Ghana in 2007, 69 per cent used some form of footwear and nearly 95 per cent used some body covering, such as trousers, long sleeve shirts and long dresses,<sup>[59]</sup> whereas 95 per cent of the children working on farms in Guinea did not wear any protective clothing.<sup>[48]</sup>** Although footwear like flip-flops, slippers and canvas shoes give inadequate protection, they are still better than bare feet. Furthermore, professional protective equipment known from formal industrial sites is neither affordable nor easy to get hold of for poor farmers in remote rural communities.<sup>[48, 58, 59]</sup> Some of the protective clothing is also inappropriate for hot climates where its use can increase the risk of heat-stress.<sup>[48]</sup>

**Children's participation in spraying varies between countries. Older children are more likely to do this type of work than young children.** In Ghana children are primarily involved in fetching water for spraying, but almost one-fifth of the children remain in the area during spraying either to fetch more water or just to watch.<sup>[58]</sup> Moreover, children may handle empty pesticide containers and the spraying equipment.<sup>[85]</sup> Due to their smaller body size and their neurological and physiological development, children are often at greater risk than adults of poisoning when exposed orally or through skin contact to the same levels of pesticide vapours.<sup>[48, 85]</sup> **Many farm owners are unaware of risks associated with the fumes drifting in the air during and after spraying and also of children's greater susceptibility to damage.<sup>[8, 48, 85]</sup>**

Apart from the physical risks linked directly to farm work, children – and especially children who are employed as farm workers – are subject to different types of abuse. The most frequent is non-payment of wages. Reasons vary from the intent to exploit to the inability to pay the promised wage due to unpredictable fluctuations in production and pricing, delays in receiving payment from buyers or unforeseen expenses. Whatever the reasons, non-payment undermines children's ability to meet the goals which drove them to migrate for work in commercial agriculture in the first place.<sup>[6, 18, 21, 52]</sup>

**Short-term contracts and casual work are becoming increasingly common among migrant workers as a means to secure payment.**

This may be among migrants – children and youth – who have experienced that an employer has defaulted on their wages one or more times, or it may be a broader shift in a particular setting. Although shorter contracts and day labour may increase the risk of not gaining work every day, it can also increase child workers' negotiating power and protect against exploitation since children are less dependent on one employer and discover more quickly if they risk not being paid.<sup>[6, 21, 52, 61]</sup> These changes are in response to employers defaulting but also due to the difficulty of filing a complaint with the authorities in many of the remote farming communities. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the distance from cocoa farming communities to the nearest police station is usually more than 22 km.<sup>[7]</sup>

**Ghana.** 9 per cent of the farm workers involved in spraying on commercial pineapple farms were between the ages 14-20.<sup>[9]</sup>

Only 1.2 per cent of the children are actively involved in spraying pesticides and fungicides on cocoa farms and 4.1 per cent in applying fertilizer.<sup>[58, p. 90]</sup>

**Cameroon.** 10 per cent of the children aged 5-7 years are involved in spraying activities but it is more common for older children to spray.<sup>[48, p. 16]</sup>

**Nigeria.** Around 3 per cent of the boys were involved in spraying while 18 per cent helped mixing pesticides and water and 20 per cent helped carrying the sprayer after mixing. The trend for girls was similar.<sup>[48, p. 16]</sup>

## Long-term Implications of Work in Commercial Agriculture for Children

The lack of longitudinal studies of children who work or have worked in commercial agriculture makes it difficult to know what the longer term implications of such work are.

**It is thus important to explore what the children themselves think about possible occupations and alternatives to working as hired farm hands, potential earnings and, most importantly, what kind of trade-offs children of poor families have to make over the course of years.** Qualitative interviews provide snapshots of how the children feel about their work; what they expect of employment or of contributing to the family's productive activities; and what they hope to do and be in the future. Such accounts may be influenced by a particular incident that makes them happy, sad, fed up or satisfied. They do not capture changes over time in children's – or adults' – views on what children should do; what should satisfy them; what opportunities they should pursue; and how they should deal with various constraints. The hazards to which children working in cocoa, cotton, rice and other cash crops are exposed should not be ignored but the failure to see children as social persons who navigate their circumstances as they best can, for example by working to pay school fees, to build other skills or to save money to start a business, hinders identifying how best to protect and support these children and their families.

### Child Development, Education and Learning

It is important to look at local practices of child rearing to understand the underlying ideologies among adults for the expectations they have of boys and girls of different ages, but also for understanding the expectations children and young people have of their parents. **For children of poor families work is a key element in their upbringing and thus in a locally constituted notion of childhood.** Insufficient knowledge about rural communities and the ways in which poverty affect their lives has resulted in assumptions about poor and/or illiterate parents being ignorant of what is in the best interests of their children. For the many children who work in cash crops on the family farm or who migrate to work as farm hands, work appropriate to the child's age and stature is important in order for children to learn practical skills and to acquiring the social status associated with life course transitions.<sup>[6, 8, 34, 36]</sup>

Many children are given land to farm their own crops from the age of twelve or fourteen, older children may begin to manage a cocoa farm for a relative and some engage in trade and other income-generating activities on their own account. Parents are aware of children's desires to earn money and may compensate the children for work in cash crops. This is a manner of imparting **social and economic skills to children by gradually incorporating them in the female and male economic spheres and encouraging them to take the responsibilities appropriate to their age.**<sup>[34, 36, 74, 88]</sup>

Many children working as hired farm workers find the work hard because they often are required to work more than on the family farm. Those migrating to other agro-climatic regions also learn new farming techniques,<sup>[5]</sup> which in the case of cocoa require more work with the machete than children from the savannah region are used to. Nevertheless, most say they are prepared to 'suffer' – to work hard – to earn a wage in cash or in kind, and only six per cent of the children interviewed in a study in Côte d'Ivoire declared dissatisfaction with their work.<sup>[6]</sup>

**Côte d'Ivoire.** Most child migrants from Mali and Burkina Faso working on cocoa farms stayed two to three years. They reported being told that they had not worked enough to pay for their transport when asking to be paid after the first year, and that farmers found other excuses not to pay the following years. Some child workers manage to negotiate an annual payment of 50,000 CFA francs [US\$ 95], which is about half the amount they had expected.<sup>[5, p. 3-4]</sup>

**Benin.** Repeated conflicts due to employers' failure to meet their responsibilities have resulted in an increase in written contracts and a general drift towards more formalised relations between workers and their employer. The failure to respect contracts has also led to a preference for shorter contract periods among workers.<sup>[52]</sup>

The priority given to schooling varies from one country to another, among others due to differences in the provision of educational opportunities by governments in terms of providing school buildings, training teachers and developing an appropriate curriculum. However, even in countries with relatively good provision, the maintenance of school buildings and an organisation of teacher placements that reduces teachers' absence and regulates their behaviour may be lacking in remote rural communities.<sup>[9, 12, 42, 47, 50, 78]</sup>

Finally, the value ascribed to formal education among adults and children vary, as does the ability of parents, other relatives or children themselves to afford extra-curricular expenses for pupils in primary school and school fees for secondary school students. Consequently, **school enrolment rates reflect a range of issues, of which the need for children's labour on the farm may also be one. An important point, though, is that enrolment rates alone do not provide information about the reasons why children go, or do not go, to school. A causal link can therefore not be made between children's work in cocoa activities and statistics of low enrolment rates.**

Children's migration to work in commercial agriculture or elsewhere is often seen by parents and young people as a process of learning the value of work, how to work, to respect people of higher social status and the importance of economising to have money for food, healthcare and investments of a symbolic or material nature, e.g. the offering of gifts, contributions to funerals and other important ceremonies, investing in animals, housing, productive resources, etc.<sup>[74]</sup> Furthermore, child migrants quickly become skilled in the economy of 'débrouillardise', of finding ways to navigate economic constraints and very limited possibilities to make the most of little. Such skills are important in both rural and urban economies.<sup>[6, 21, 36, 55, 61, 86]</sup>

### Work Trajectories and Upward Social Mobility

Work in cash crops may be part of working for the family or it may be paid work, in which case children often are labour migrants. When working for the family, children rarely experience much change in their status within the family when they gradually contribute more labour to cash crops. However, they may be rewarded with gifts, schooling or technical training to acknowledge their good behaviour.<sup>[36]</sup> Those parents and children who emphasise schooling and/or technical training often do so despite difficulties in finding formal employment with a secure wage. This is because they evaluate the future prospects of earning a decent living from commercial agriculture to be limited; especially with declining farm gate prices for both cocoa and cotton.<sup>[9, 21, 52, 57]</sup> **The hope that schooling can lead to off-farm work of some kind is likely to restrain parents' demands on children's labour not to hamper their school education.**

In many households labour is a bottleneck to maintain and increase production, so household heads generally cannot afford to let their children take paid work at the expense of working on the family farm. Hence children often migrate if they want to work as farm hands and earn an income for themselves. With the exception of very poor households in which remittances from children below the age of 18 years may help pay for food, medical bills or school fees for younger siblings, migrant children are often expected to buy their own clothes and other necessities, and they are encouraged to save up money to invest in productive activities, such as rearing livestock, engaging in trade, doing an apprenticeship, etc. Behind poor parents' motives for permitting

**Ghana.** The majority of children from cocoa farm households combine work and education; in 2007, 87.9 per cent of the children aged 5 to 12 years were enrolled in school, as were 95.5 per cent of those aged 13 to 14 years and 83.9 per cent aged 15 to 17 years.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Côte d'Ivoire.** Children's access to formal education is limited; 9 per cent of the cocoa growing communities do not have a primary school and the pupils often walk 3 km to get to school. None of the communities have a secondary school, the nearest is often more than ten km away.<sup>[7]</sup>

A survey undertaken in 2002 showed that 42 per cent of school age children living in cocoa-producing households were enrolled compared to 36 per cent in non-cocoa-producing households.<sup>[53, cited in 9]</sup>

**Mali.** A number of girls who attended school in Kolondièba migrated to Tengrela in Côte d'Ivoire to process rice during the summer holidays and appeared to successfully combine labour migration and schooling.<sup>[18, p. 52]</sup>

older children to work away from the family farm is thus an acknowledgement of their inability to provide everything for their children.<sup>[6, 36, 88]</sup> But the decision is also motivated by the hope that in the long-term the children will eventually be able to support aging parents.

**Migrant work in commercial agriculture provides good prospects for improving children and young people's social position** compared to petty trade and independent farming which only can be undertaken once work has finished on the family farm. Children returning from migrant work arrive with cash, new clothes and/or a bicycle and earn social recognition as 'successful migrants'. This does not imply automatically that they become independent but the demonstration of their ability to endure migrant life and save money accords them a different position within the family.<sup>[74]</sup> Working children become part of the interdependencies within the household: they can be called upon in situations of need,<sup>[88]</sup> they work more diligently and by taking up more social and economic responsibilities children are seen as 'good children'.<sup>[33]</sup> In south-eastern Burkina Faso, household heads sometimes find a wife for their migrant sons who are in their late teens or early twenties to keep them socially tied to the household.<sup>[90]</sup>

Even those who come home empty-handed may be acknowledged if they have suffered the blow of not being paid after working for one, two or three years. **Exploitative situations are common enough for people in the home community to empathise with the child and often also try to mediate a payment** with the farm owner if he or his relatives are known or, on rare occasions, file a complaint with the appropriate authorities.<sup>[90]</sup> Young people are increasingly also making use of public authorities to claim their dues.<sup>[6, 52]</sup> Another mechanism to avoid deception is to migrate to urban areas where wages more commonly are paid on a monthly basis or per day. Work in commercial agriculture may help pay for travels to urban areas further away.<sup>[90]</sup>

## Policy and Programme Initiatives

This paper examines the work implemented to protect children working in commercial agriculture from hazards impacting negatively on their human capital and assesses the effectiveness of programme initiatives. Given the paucity in statistical data on children's work, effectiveness cannot be measured in numbers of working children or children doing hazardous work. Instead a more qualitative assessment is needed of whether policies and programmes are based on a nuanced understanding of the circumstances in which children work in cash crops, of local notions of childhood and of alternatives to work on the family farm or as farm hands.

International policies in the late 1990s and early 2000s were based on the assumption that most children working in commercial agriculture are employed farm hands doing hazardous work and victims of trafficking.<sup>[23, 49, 82]</sup> This perspective on children's work is informed by the negative experiences of children who have been trafficked or exploited. It does not take into consideration the many children who work on the family farm or migrate to work without being deceived by recruiters or exploited by farm owners.<sup>[25]</sup> As a consequence, policy and programme responses have been preoccupied with discouraging or preventing children from moving away from their home communities and with the repatriation of children living and working elsewhere.<sup>[18, 24, 25]</sup> The idea that children will suffer if they are away from their parents sits well with a globalised notion of childhood as a time when children are protected at the heart of the family, go to school and are free of responsibilities.<sup>[36]</sup>

National policy environments have been more ambiguous. On the one hand, international standards are reflected in national labour legislation across the region where the minimum age for admission to employment ranges from 14 to 16 years and hazardous work is prohibited for anyone below 18 years. **Only Ghana's**

legislation concerning compulsory education predates the Harkin-Engels Protocol<sup>6</sup>, so the impact of international advocacy on national legislation is remarkable. On the other hand, enforcement of child protection legislation tends to be relaxed and inhibited by lack of resources allocated to the services that should raise awareness about the existence of such laws among the rural population and oversee farmers' adherence to them.<sup>[47, 48, 50]</sup>

### Preventing Children's Hazardous Work: prohibition, awareness-raising and education

International conventions aim to eliminate children's work in agriculture that is perceived to be hazardous or deprive them of their rights. Prohibition is supported by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the ILO Convention No. 138 stipulating the minimum age for admission to paid employment and the ILO convention No. 182 calling for the elimination of the worst forms of child labour for all children below the age of 18 years. Calls in the early 2000s for interventions to eliminate child labour in cocoa have resulted in processes where programme responses sometimes preceded in-depth knowledge of the problem. In recent years, interventions have shifted from focusing primarily on children's migration, to focusing on the prevention of children's participation in hazardous work by ensuring their schooling and by supporting poverty alleviation in rural areas more broadly.<sup>[45, 47, 50]</sup>

Under the auspice of ILO, UNICEF, bilateral donors and large NGOs, **early programmes aimed to eliminate trafficking, exploitation, and children's participation in hazardous work through international treaties but with some adaptation to the local contexts.**<sup>[47, 49, 57]</sup> Ghana and Sierra Leone passed a human trafficking act in 2005, while Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and Nigeria have created national committees against the trafficking and exploitation of children. Moreover, bilateral (Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, and Benin and Nigeria) and multilateral (between Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Mali and Togo) agreements have been made within ECOWAS to target cross-border trafficking and facilitate repatriation of children and retribution for traffickers.<sup>[32, 69]</sup>

**Ghana.** Legislation from the mid-1990s stipulates compulsory education; labour legislation allows children to be engaged in light work from the age of 13 as long as it does not interfere with their schooling; 15 years is the general minimum age for employment and 18 years delimits the minimum age at which participation in hazardous work is permitted.<sup>[58]</sup>

**Côte d'Ivoire.** Education is not compulsory; the minimum age for admission into paid employment is 14 years, though this is increased to 18 years for hazardous work. Ivorian legislation stipulates dangerous work in agriculture to include felling trees, burning fields, applying agro-chemicals of any kind and transporting heavy loads.<sup>[37, 69]</sup>

The push for legislative measures involved **'upstream actions' of creating awareness** of the problem at the level of district and central governments and build institutional capacities to address the problems and prepare the ground for developing child labour monitoring systems as part of the certification of cocoa.<sup>[9, 49, 57, 70, 80]</sup> The establishment of local vigilance committees to enforce anti-trafficking legislation was supported by the 'Lutte contre le Trafic des Enfants en Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre' (LUTRENA<sup>7</sup>) programme. The committees included security forces, magistrates, labour inspectors, road transporters, religious leaders and/or community leaders who were tasked with intercepting children about to leave with traffickers.<sup>[46]</sup>

However, in reality the vigilance committees often transformed into agencies that tried to hinder all young people in travelling, were corrupt, ineffective and mistrusted by the local population because they were imposed by the government without prior dialogue about children's mobility.<sup>[18, 25, 52]</sup> The committees were premised on the idea that rural children and parents were unaware of the plight of children relocating to work.

<sup>6</sup> The Harkin-Engel Protocol was signed by the Chocolate Manufacturers Association and the World Cocoa Foundation on 19 September 2001 in Washington with signatories and witnesses from industry groups, the United States, Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire governments, the ILO, trade unions, and activist groups.<sup>[49, p. 14]</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The LUTRENA programme was launched in 2001 and initiated projects five months later in twelve countries in West and Central Africa focusing on institutional development; direct action; research, documentation and monitoring; and cooperation and joint action within the region.<sup>[45]</sup>



This, in turn, facilitated **indiscriminate interception, often also of older children above the minimum age of admission to employment. The approach failed to take into account children's own views on how their lives should unfold.**<sup>[26]</sup> Indeed, intercepted children regularly set off again a few days after returning home.<sup>[18]</sup>

Upstream awareness-raising of what kind of work is hazardous to children has resulted in changing attitudes at governmental level in some countries but not in all. The advocacy and expertise of ILO-IPEC has been important in this process. For example the West Africa *Cocoa/Agriculture* Project (WACAP)<sup>8</sup> was a key player in the early development of a child labour monitoring system in Ghana and in motivating the creation of a child labour unit in the Ministry of Labour in Côte d'Ivoire. **The process of establishing child labour monitoring systems involved rigorous fact-finding schemes, which have been very effective in mapping the use of child labour in the cocoa production.** This approach could be extended to other cash crops like cotton, rice, fruits, vegetables and flowers for which there is a market inside and outside Africa. WACAP has also worked with child labour monitoring systems in Cameroon, Nigeria and Guinea but at the end of the programme, the three countries were still in the process of establishing a monitoring system.<sup>[50]</sup>

Reports on the process post-2006 have not been identified in the review of literature for this briefing paper. This may indicate that pilot monitoring systems have not been scaled up or that the process is not transparent. ILO acknowledges that programme cycles of five to six years are insufficient to change attitudes fully and points to the difficulties of implementing upstream institutional changes: **Even if attitudes to children's work and hazardous activities change, monitoring and child protection systems that assist in withdrawing children from hazardous work and providing alternatives for them require long-term commitment and resource allocation.** This is most likely to happen if there are compelling reasons for putting in place such systems, as there have been in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana where the cocoa and chocolate industry has pushed for a certification process.<sup>[50]</sup>

**'Downstream actions' of creating awareness about hazardous work in cocoa** have been initiated by WACAP, the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)<sup>9</sup> and other international organisations. WACAP established community child labour committees among others, whose members received training and were actively involved in sensitisation activities at the local level.<sup>[49]</sup> Although the approach was framed in terms of discussions or consultations with various stakeholders, due to time constraints and the need to start interventions before a change in attitudes had happened<sup>[50]</sup>, the process was one of sensitising the stakeholders about universalised notions of what was right and wrong for children. ICI worked to raise awareness among radio and television broadcasters, which in turn stimulated discussions on air with participation of radio listeners.<sup>[47, 58]</sup>

The social mobilisation of villagers to monitor children's work and help disseminate information is perceived by programme leaders

**WACAP awareness-raising.** A wide range of information on child labour in agriculture, particularly in the cocoa sector was provided to parents, individuals, trade unions, non-governmental agencies, students, the media, employers' associations, other UN agencies and so on.<sup>[49, p. 28]</sup>

Clear messages about the difference between child labour and acceptable work for children of legal working age were passed on through:

- house-to-house sensitization
- drama/theatre that the communities could relate to
- advocacy by role models (including former child labourers)
- production and distribution of flyers and posters.
- radio, television and newspaper broadcasts

"Sensitization is not a one-time, but an on-going activity. WACAP Ghana and Cameroon noted the importance of continuous and aggressive public relations sensitization for the general public on child labour. All countries noted that considerable time is required for the messages to be absorbed for impact".<sup>[49, p. 28]</sup>

<sup>8</sup> WACAP was launched by the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 2002 and implemented in Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria between 2002 and 2006.<sup>[47]</sup>

<sup>9</sup> ICI is a non-profit organisation established in 2002 by an equal number of cocoa industry and civil society (NGO) representatives. It works for a sustainable solution to the worst forms of child labour and forced labour in the cocoa supply chain.

to signal a change in attitudes among rural populations, and to be an effective and sustainable approach because of the wider outreach.<sup>[49]</sup> **While such interventions can facilitate broad participation of civil society in discussions about common norms and practices of child rearing and attempts to influence them, they also raise the issue of *who* participates.** It is therefore important to think about whether dwellers in rural towns and larger villages are more likely to take part in the discussion than farmers working on a cocoa farm and whether all age groups and both women and men take part. Moreover, the fact that members of the community committees sometimes request compensation<sup>[50]</sup> suggests that they see it as a job, not as a voluntary, community-driven activity. This is hardly surprising in settings with few alternative income-generating opportunities. If such initiatives are to be effective they need to give more space for communities to identify problematic issues and design appropriate approaches.

Furthermore, **on-air discussions as well as participatory approaches involving community groups in dialogue raise the issue of *who* listens.** It is important to be clear about whether awareness-raising campaigns and capacity-building are perceived as channels for one-way messages aimed at sensitising a target group or as consultation processes where implementing agencies and funders also listen to what people think about children's work in order to work out adaptations to the initial programme objectives and without necessarily thinking that local people are ill-informed. It is thus a question of the degree to which programmes are participatory.<sup>[cf. 5, 42, 49]</sup>

**Sensitisation programmes in Ghana have resulted in a situation where 76 per cent of the people interviewed in six cocoa producing regions were aware of the prohibition of the worst forms of child labour,** although awareness was generally higher concerning the application of agro-chemicals and the dangers of transporting heavy loads.<sup>[58]</sup> **To enforce the legislation stipulating the national minimum age for children's participation in light work, in full-time work and in hazardous work has proven much more difficult,** either because children's work is needed, parents lack knowledge of "the harmful effects of child labour on the physical and emotional development of young children"<sup>[49]</sup> or they wish to transfer the skills of a good farmer to their children.

Most programmes focus on **education or technical training as means to prevent children from being engaged in hazardous work** and as alternatives for children who have been removed from such work.<sup>[49, 57, 80, 81]</sup> However, an important lesson learned from early WACAP interventions is the need to map educational resources at the outset. Lack of access to formal education in rural areas, be it because of lacking infrastructure, absence of teachers, or the inability of parents to pay formal and informal fees, implies that education does not yet constitute an alternative to agricultural work.<sup>[25, 47, 50]</sup>

Consequently programmes have begun to invest in school buildings, school equipment, teacher training and bursaries.<sup>[47, 49, 57, 58]</sup> **Considering the views of Ghanaian cocoa farmers on the viability and prospects of cocoa farming for their children in the future, such initiatives are effective but more due to their provision of educational opportunities than to a shift in rural people's views on what children should do.** Indeed, the abolition of school fees in Ghana since 2005 has greatly increased school enrolment.<sup>[57, 81]</sup>

**Ghana.** About two-thirds of the focus groups undertaken during WACAP said improvement of school facilities through the posting and maintaining of good, trained teachers and the provision of teaching aids and learning materials would make school attractive and worthwhile in the eyes of parents and children.<sup>[47]</sup>

The farmers mentioned bad administration of the COCOBOD scholarship scheme as an obstacle to their children getting good education. The scholarships are supposed to go to cocoa-farming families, but the farmers believed that they were instead diverted to the private cocoa buyers and the children of influential people who had nothing to do with cocoa. They suggested that the programme should be better managed so that scholarships go to legitimate recipients, and so that their own children could also have the opportunity for a better life.<sup>[9]</sup>

School feeding programmes is another means to make formal education accessible for poor children.<sup>[81]</sup> Both school feeding programmes and bursary schemes can be sources of conflict; the former may be subject to corruption and conflicts between teachers and parents<sup>[90]</sup>, and the latter provoke feelings – rightly or wrongly – that bursaries are awarded to the wrong people. The conflicts demonstrate cocoa farmers' interest in sending their children to school.

The model of **earn-and-learn schools** has sometimes been suggested for children working in commercial agriculture.<sup>[65, 87]</sup> This model is premised on large-scale producers who run a boarding secondary school on their plantation for young workers of school-going age who combine working and schooling. In turn, the producer secures a reliable pool of labour since students remain to continue their schooling whereas farm hands may leave for better jobs. For children of poor families this may be one avenue for accessing formal education.<sup>[15]</sup> This model may work on large farms, such as the producer-exporters of pineapples, who employ some children aged 14 and above but it is important to bear in mind that children mostly work on small farms.

Alternative methods of learning in non-formal education are proposed to working children in their mid- or late teens who have been out of school for some time or never went to school and therefore are difficult to (re-)integrate in state schools. **The dispersed nature of rural communities and farmsteads affects what kind of initiatives are viable.** Often alphabetisation in the local language happens in farming communities while vocational training centres are set up in rural towns and thus require young people from the surrounding villages to commute on a daily basis or move to town. No reports on the viability of such training have been reviewed but the quality and sustainability of training centres in rural towns is often poor.<sup>[73]</sup> Moreover, **few of the training programmes mapped the local labour market to identify which trades to teach, and children were not offered guidance on the range of skills training available or on the opportunities they would provide in the future.**<sup>[81]</sup> While the approach resembles the way in which rural parents send their children through training<sup>[79]</sup> and therefore is unlikely to create much criticism locally, it is ineffective because few of the young people are able to put their training to good use and ameliorate their circumstances.

Important lessons learned from the LUTRENA, WACAP and ICI programmes are that children's work cannot be targeted in isolation but needs to be addressed in the broader context. There is a need to address poverty in communities where cash crops are part of livelihoods or from where child migrants originate. WACAP thus included the creation of alternative income-generation for parents, such as brick-making, batik-making, cane weaving, shop-keeping, catering, etc.<sup>[50]</sup> **Current policies address the bigger issues of family- and child poverty and seek to reduce the need for children to enter hazardous work** through the creation of social security systems and conditional and non-conditional cash transfers.<sup>[15, 81, 83]</sup> However, social protection based on cash transfers is still in its infancy in West and Central Africa and therefore has so far had limited impact on children of poor families, and especially on **children of poor farmers who may not be targeted in the programmes.**<sup>[67, 83]</sup>

### Child Protection Services Assisting Working Children

Programme responses are preoccupied with preventing children's participation in hazardous work and, although children have been withdrawn from work situations, few response services exist to which children can turn on their own initiative. This is in part due to the dispersed nature of cocoa-producing farmsteads: drop-in centres are only viable in urban areas with a larger population and children's use of telephone hotlines is severely hampered by lack of access to telephones, either because they do not have a phone themselves or they cannot afford paying for the use of a pay phone.<sup>[90]</sup> NGOs who remove children from exploitative or abusive employers usually provide accommodation, meals, clothing and schooling, non-formal education or technical training. Some offer assistance to return home.<sup>[25]</sup>

Despite good intentions of wanting to protect children and reduce the risks they face when migrating, it is important to bear in mind that some children, often in their mid or late teens, set off from home without sufficient means to complete the journey, knowing the price of the bus fare but counting on finding work along

the route or on the help of relatives. Deliberately, they refrain from phoning relatives at the destination to announce their impending journey to avoid being advised to stay home. They are vulnerable to exploitation when looking for work after running out of money but, **apart from having a regularised labour market and an infrastructure without barriers to the free movement of people, it will be very difficult to create protection systems that target children who shun the informal protection system embedded in migrant networks.**

### Regularisation of Children's Work in Commercial Agriculture

Because most children work on small farms as unpaid family labour, labour market regulations are difficult to enforce<sup>[30]</sup>, and even when children work as hired hands, the relationship between farm owners and their paid workers are embedded in a web of social expectations. Workers, for example, expect the employer to buy medicaments for them when they are sick rather than spending their own money, and employers expect their workers to understand and bear with them when unable to pay the promised salaries due to bad harvest, unexpected expenses or other issues that may have reduced the employer's cash-flow.<sup>[90]</sup>

Although most of the internationally-funded programmes ultimately aim to eradicate children's work, some of the components aiming to establish guidelines for what work is acceptable and what is not<sup>[51]</sup> contribute to a gradual regularisation of children's work in agriculture, e.g. definitions of an acceptable workload in terms of hours worked per week<sup>[8]</sup> and of acceptable loads to transport for children of different ages<sup>[59]</sup>. In other words, there is a fine line between prevention and regularisation, which may be drawn differently by the many stakeholders: from international organisations, to governments and national NGOs, and to local community groups.<sup>[23]</sup> There is however no attention paid to ensuring that children are paid a decent wage for their work and programmes tend to protect children against exploitation by removing them rather than putting pressure on employers to pay the wages they owe.

### Questions that Need Further Investigation

- Are children working for relatives remunerated for their work? Do they feel they should be, and if so, how do they negotiate with the adults they work for?
- Do children and youth feel that their long-term claims to land are enhanced by working for an uncle or older brother? How do actual inheritance practices in rural areas distribute resources between siblings? How does this impact on educational choices and on boys' and girls' aspirations for the future?
- What are the dynamics surrounding children who work more in cash crops than other children? E.g. why do Ivorian children who dropped out of school work more in cash crops than children who never went to school?
- What do rural children think are possible occupations for them in the future? What are the alternatives to working as hired farm hands? How much can they realistically expect to earn? What kind of trade-offs do children of poor families have to make over the course of years?

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90. Author's observations in Burkina Faso and/or Côte d'Ivoire.