

**CHILD LABOUR IN FISHERIES AND
AQUACULTURE, A GHANAIAN
PERSPECTIVE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses child labour in fisheries in Ghana. The analysis made covers both the marine and Volta Lake inland fisheries and is derived from triangulation of commonalities in findings of studies from both subsectors of the Ghanaian fisheries (see Annex one for list of references). Where there are peculiarities these have been indicated.

The paper begins with an introduction that delves into broad aspects of child labour; proceeds to discuss the Ghanaian context; and then centres on the substantive issues of the paper comprising: the nature, incidence, and causes of child labour in fisheries; the different forms and types of children's work and labour in artisanal fisheries operations; the health and safety hazards for children and child labourers; and ends with efforts and good practice examples in the progressive elimination of child labour.

A child is a person below the age of 18 years (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Ghana's 1992 Constitution). Childhood is the early formative part of a person's life after birth; the period when the individual learns fundamental values and basic skills of life; and when the foundations of physical, mental, emotional and cultural growth and development of the child are laid. Childhood experiences therefore influence and determine the adulthood of the individual.

Engaging children in work, is not perceived as harmful if it does not endanger the child's physical, mental, or moral health and development. Rather, it is considered that such work is socially necessary, as the child acquires basic knowledge, skills, and sense of responsibility, which could prove beneficial in later life.

Child work begins to be described as child labour, when the work is likely to interfere with the child's education, health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development; or expose the child to an environment not conducive to his/her development. In particular, this occurs, as the child is pushed into paid, often risky activities outside the household; making him/her vulnerable to verbal, physical or sexual abuse.

When the causal factors of child labour degenerate to a point where the child is pushed to operate in a fragile working environment that exposes him/her to different forms of danger including excessive hazards of injuries, toxic substances, sexual abuse, violence and death; the situation is described as a worst form of child labour. An essential element in child labour and its worst forms is exploitation. Children engaged in fishing, is one of the types of child work that is described as a Worst form of Child Labour in Ghana.

When children are recruited and transported elsewhere to engage in labour that is exploitative and is likely to interfere with the child's education or expose him or her to

abuse, hazard or danger, the child is said to have been trafficked. Concerns about child trafficking in Ghana, have been on the increase in recent years.

In 1999, the General Assembly of the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, known as Convention 182, which proclaims protection from child labour and its worst forms as a human rights and a development issue. The ILO, in its Convention (No 182) of 1999 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, described the worst forms of child labour as including all forms of slavery and similar practices including sale and trafficking of children; debt bondage and serfdom; forced or compulsory labour-including recruitment of children in armed conflict; use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution or pornography; use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities like production and trafficking of drugs. The worst Forms of Child Labour also include work that is likely to jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of children examples- work, which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; work underground, under water, at dangerous heights, or in confined spaces; work with dangerous machines, equipment and tools; or work that involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads; work in an unhealthy environment, which may expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes, or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health; work under particularly difficult conditions, such as work for long hours, or during the night, or where the child is unreasonably confined to the employer's premises.

1. THE GHANAIN CONTEXT

Ghanaian policy makers attach prime importance to the formation of its human capital from childhood to adulthood and perceive child labour issues both from developmental and human rights perspectives. As regards human capital formation, childhood in Ghana is structured to be spent with the family and the school, for a proper foundation of socialization-the process of moral and social integration into society, to be laid. With respect to human rights, Ghana has been part of the global effort to elaborate, ratify and implement the relevant UN Conventions on child rights and development. More significantly, the nation has gone beyond legislation to establish institutions that would facilitate the actualization of child rights and development. Nevertheless the practice of child labour and its worst forms persist in Ghana.

Some of the Worst Forms of Child Labour that can be found in Ghanaian fisheries are, forms of slavery and similar practices including sale and trafficking of children; debt bondage; work that is likely to jeopardize the health, safety, or morals of children; work, which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse; children working under water, or engaged in carrying heavy loads; work in an unhealthy environment; work under particularly difficult conditions, such as work for long hours, or during the night, or where the child is unreasonably confined to the employer's premises.

1.1. The Family

Studies (Afenyadu, 2008 a; Afenyadu 2008b) have shown that progressive break-down in family support structures is an important contributing factor to child labour and its worst forms. Traditionally, extended families provide child care support systems in looking after the family's children according to traditional customs. Increasingly however, extended families have become more difficult to sustain and are being steadily replaced by nuclear families.

Another worrying trend is the fact that even the nuclear families are under threat of collapse as the number of female-headed households has been increasing dramatically in recent years. According to the 2000 housing and population census, 54% of female household heads in Ghana were unmarried as against 41% in 1960. As would be seen later in this paper, these trends have tended to impact adversely on children, forcing many of them into labour, with the worst forms of these occurring in the fishing sector.

1.2. Education

Education in all forms particularly of the girl child, formal and informal, is a critical determinant of the well-being of future generations and a universal human right. Much of the available literature suggests that education impacts on health, infant mortality, economic growth, maternal mortality and political participation (Jabry, 2002, GDHS, 2003; GDHS, 2009).

Ghanaian policy makers attach prime importance to the formation of the nation's human capital from childhood to adulthood. Based on the requirements of the nation's constitution and observed challenges faced by children in gaining access to formal education, the Government of Ghana has institutionalized a program of free compulsory universal basic education (fCUBE), supported by a national school feeding program. Under its current educational reforms, the government requires that all children receive 2 years of pre-school education starting from age 4; and receive basic education from Primary One through Junior Secondary School (JSS). As would be seen later, child labour and its worst forms, particularly in the fisheries sector, does affect children's education and therefore their future prospects in life.

1.3. Child Rights

Ghana was the first country to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Ghana ratified Convention 182 in 2000. The nation has also ratified Convention 29 on forced labour and Convention 138 on minimum age in employment. Beyond having ratified international laws, the nation has also come up with its national legal responses to issues of child labour, its worst forms as well as child trafficking in the context of child rights. Section 28 of Ghana's 1992 constitution states that, 'every child has the right to be protected from work that constitutes a threat to his health, education or development. The Parliament of Ghana has also passed the Children's Act (Act 560 of 1998), which is the current law for child rights and protection in the country. Beyond these, the nation's

parliament also passed Act 694, Human Trafficking Act 2005, which among others prohibits child trafficking.

The Department of Social Welfare, the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAG), and Ministry of Women and Children are national institutions responsible for facilitating the actualization of child rights including those associated with their economic, social, economic, and cultural development. It needs however to be admitted that public institutions in Ghana, generally lack the requisite levels of resources as well as the skills of working with people especially at community level, where their services are most crucially needed. Partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations that are strong in community work could therefore prove invaluable.

Despite much national commitment to child rights, many children in Ghana are still engaged in a variety of occupations including fishing to the extent that can be called child labour or a worst form of this phenomenon.

1.4. Child Labour

The Child Labour Survey of 2001 revealed that child labour was prevalent in all the 10 administrative regions, and that 2.47 million children 5-17 years, representing 40% of the estimated 6.36 million children were in that age group were economically-active with some engaged in the worst forms of child labour. Further, the data revealed that 1.59 million children (25%) were economically active while in school.

Thus, many Ghanaian children work from an early age, rural children more than urban children, and both children in school and children out of school. But children's work activities and their social and economic context vary greatly between ethnic groups and between different social classes. Many of these children are also subjected to a variety of abuses including severe forms of child labour often involving child trafficking. It is within this context that the phenomenon of child labour in fishing and fish processing is located. As would be seen later, the peculiarities of artisanal fishery-based communities and livelihoods make children there vulnerable to child labour and trafficking.

2. THE NATURE OF CHILD LABOUR IN FISHING AND FISH PROCESSING

Fishing and fish processing in Ghana have become socio-cultural. For example the Ewes especially the Tongus and Anlos; the Gas; Adas, Fantes and Nzemas are notable fishing ethnicities in Ghana.

Studies on child labour in fisheries in the Volta Region of Ghana (Afenyadu, 2008a) reveal that the Tongus who mostly fish along the Volta Lake for example regard fishing as an integral aspect of their cultural identity and therefore insist that their children assimilate the fishing-fish processing occupation, no matter the circumstances. Consistent with this orientation, Tongu households no matter their social class would ensure that

their citizens assimilate the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and values associated with fishing and fish processing in their childhood. Thus children are trained from a very tender age, to acquire skills in swimming, handling the fishing net, and diving, through apprenticeship. Some of the training methods are risky. Children may be asked to dive deep into the Volta Lake. If they return too quickly according to the estimation of their masters, they are beaten to return. For children who are very young however, a rope is tied around their waist while on fishing expeditions or training so that they can be easily rescued by pulling the rope. There is evidence however that some children get drowned during training. Their females would also acquire skills in fish processing. The study (ibid) however revealed that some females of the Tongu ethnicity also acquire fishing skills from childhood. Thus children of this ethnicity would whether in school or not, have to contribute to fishing effort of the household.

Kufogbe, Awadey and Appenteng (2003) also report that fisher entrepreneurs in the marine sector would insist that at least one or more of their children familiarize enough with the practice and management of fishing and related activities to be able to inherit their parents assets, and thereby take over and sustain the family business in future, hence their insistence on engaging their children in the industry. Child labour in fishing and fish processing therefore becomes the socio-cultural mechanism by which the fisher-culture is transferred from one generation to the next.

An immediate consequence of fishing and related skill acquisition in childhood is migration of children into supposedly more thriving fishing areas to sell their skills. By early adolescence, some of the children who acquire enough technological confidence and skills in fishing do migrate to other communities to engage in fishing and related labour. It is common for children of the Tongu ethnicity to travel during school vacation, to thriving fishing communities to engage in fishing and return when school re-opens (Afenyadu, 2008a). Kufogbe, Awadey and Appenteng (2003) also reported more permanent migration of children from elsewhere in Ghana, to pursue fishery livelihoods in other communities.

A related phenomenon to child migration in pursuit of fishery livelihoods has been child trafficking. This phenomenon involves the practice whereby, fisher-entrepreneurs actively seek children that can be engaged in fishing and fish processing operations elsewhere. With the consent of parents, these children, be they male or female, are taken away under a verbal agreement that lasts for periods up to 5 years, after which they may be rewarded in cash or kind (ibid). Boys would most probably be rewarded with a cow, whilst girls may be rewarded with a sewing machine or cash. This transaction may or may not be facilitated by an intermediary.

Though not thoroughly studied, Kufogbe, Awadey and Appenteng (2003) reported another cultural practice in which parents that are financially indebted to boat owners, release their children to work for the creditor, thus placing their children in debt bondage.

4. CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR IN FISHERIES

The evidence from studies in Ghana indicate that the culture of child labour in fishing and fish processing is caused by an intricate interaction between a set of institutional, demographic, cultural, economic, environmental and technological factors. Common features of fishing communities which explain the phenomenon of child labour in fishing be they marine or inland, are high fertility, migration of male household heads, and single, foster parenthood, high illiteracy rates poverty, and use of labour-intensive. T

Open or uncontrolled access to the nation's fisheries both inland and marine has caused population pressure on the nation's fishery resources, resulting in over exploitation of the fish stocks over the years. Over-exploitation has in turn resulted in falling catch per unit effort as well as the profitability of the fishery, causing fisher households to sink deeper and deeper into poverty. Deepening poverty is exacerbated by large household sizes, as dwindling incomes have to be spread over a large number of people, translating into very low per capita incomes. It must be added that the collapse of the lower Volta basin fishery due to the ecological shock resulting from the creation of the Akosombo dam has also worsened the negative trends and propelled migration into the Volta lake fishery upstream, worsening the pressure created by the fishing socio-culture and open access.

Desperation associated with falling fortunes of particular fisheries results first in a set of adaptive responses. Adaptive responses under these circumstances comprise increased effort and gear intensification, including the use of illegal gears that are known to harm the sustainable regeneration of fish stocks, causing further depression in catch per unit effort and profitability. Under the dire circumstances, use of exploitable children also becomes an economically prudent adaptive response, as a means of reducing cost.

As the fortunes of particular fisheries are depressed, an escape response also becomes imminent and male fisher household heads tend to migrate to explore other fisheries. Migration by male household heads then leads to the creation of single parent households headed by women. The enormous challenges of managing relatively large households by single women parents make children, the weakest members of such households vulnerable to exploitation. Many of these children are thus subjected to child labour to contribute to the survival of the household; given out to grandmothers or other foster parents; or trafficked to other locations, to serve masters under unpredictable conditions. Given the dire situation of their own broken homes, some children also migrate by themselves often under peer pressure, to other fishing areas where demand exists for their services. Those in school would do so during vacation, while some combine fishing with schooling during the school term.

The dynamics described thus finally creates demand and supply for child labour, resulting in a child labour market in the fishing sector. As this happens, fisher entrepreneurs or their agents actively travel to recruit children in support of their fishing enterprises, or take advantage of annual festivals to do so.

3. THE DIFFERENT FORMS AND TYPES OF CHILDREN'S WORK AND LABOUR IN ARTISANAL FISHERIES AND FISH PROCESSING OPERATIONS

For both marine and Volta Lake fisheries, boys paddle the canoe, pull fishing nets; drain the canoe of water when the boat leaks; carry loads and also run errands and cook for adult fishers. Beyond these, boys involved in Volta Lake fisheries dive into deep waters to remove entangled fishing nets and to observe fish movement while their counterparts in the marine sector lay nets.

Girls in both marine and Volta Lake fisheries engage in fish picking, sorting, packing, transporting, as well as smoking and selling. They also cook, do farm work; and run errands for adult fishers. Some girls in the Volta Lake fisheries also go on fishing expeditions and dive into deep waters to remove entangled nets and also pull fishing nets.

Working hours vary very much in Lake-fishing, depending on the season, the target fish sought and the fishing technology being used. Moreover one crew of fishers could hunt for different types of fishes, using different technologies the same day, on different days of the week, between day and night or between seasons in a form of flexible specialization. Child labourers under these circumstances have to work in the different permutations and combinations of working hours. Thus, both boys and girls work mostly 6-7 days a week and at least 12 hours a day. The modal working hours for boys are 6.00a.m-6.00p.m; and 5.00a.m.-7.30a.m.and 4.p.m.-5.30.p.m. For the marine artisanal fishery, fishery expeditions of children could last for days.

In cases where girls also go on fishing expeditions, this does not exclude them from the traditional fish processing activities reserved for girls and women. These girls therefore tend to have longer working hours than boys as they have to continue to process fish on return from fishing expeditions and get ready to proceed on fishing expeditions whenever boys and men have to.

The diving role, working days and working hours are frighteningly exploitative and outrageous for a growing child. Moreover, the children tend to have minimal rest and have almost no time for recreation.

4. THE HEALTH AND SAFETY HAZARDS OF FISHING WORK FOR CHILDREN AND CHILD LABOURERS

Children involved in fishing and related work along the Volta-Lake are exposed to a variety of hazards and abuses. Consistently, data from the different sources reveal that these children suffer frequently suffer verbal abuse as well as physical abuse inflicted through beating. In a study along the Volta Lake (Afenyadu, 2008a) in which 40 trafficked boys were interviewed, (35%) of them had sores or scars from injuries resulting from battering they had received from their employers. Girls are also frequently injured by fins of fish during handling and processing. Further, injured trafficked children rarely receive any decent medical treatment. A study along the Volta Lake (ibid) revealed that only 6% of injured children were likely to be treated in a formal health facility, others received hot water, herbal or no treatment (ibid).

Apart from injuries suffered from battering, many children in fishing are exposed to the elements of the weather (sun, rain, rain storms, and very cold weather); mosquito bites; attack by snakes, and the risk of drowning. In addition the girls also experience the hazards of exposure to excess heat from fire and smoke during fish smoking.

Of these hazards, drowning is the most terrible because it is the one that is the most frequently mentioned as resulting in the death of children. Drowning results from a variety of causes-when the boat capsizes due to wind storms or when it runs over a tree a stump in the Lake; when the children are forced to dive into the lake to disentangle nets or observe fish distribution; when the children are swimming or learning to swim; and when the children get entangled in a net. While some of those who get drowned are fortunate to be rescued, others are not. Most children are not provided with any protective instruments, as they engage in their risky fishing and fish processing operations. For the very few (less than 20%), who are provided with any form of protective gear, this is usually in the form of warm clothes; life jacket; knife and spear.

Trafficked girls also suffer sexual harassment. Such sexual overtures mainly come from 2 sources- the boat/gear owner himself or boys also similarly engaged in fishing work within the same household. It was reported that some of these girls end-up getting impregnated by and/or marrying either of the two.

Beyond the hazards from abuse and accidents are health hazards in the form of sickness and disability. The most common of these are headaches; stomach aches; fever; bodily pains; Bilharzia in the case of Volta Lake fisheries; and ear problems or partial deafness. There is evidence also that many children resort to self-medication by taking pain killers, procuring off the counter drugs, or do not carry out any treatment at all, when ill.

Some children die on the job, due mainly to drowning and snake bites. It was also reported that some boat/gear owners end up killing some of the children through battery,

which may be termed murder or manslaughter, whichever legal experts would judge it to be.

There is evidence that parents involved in trafficking children elsewhere to be engaged in fishing and related activities have low perception of the risks associated with the practice. In a study on parents in origin communities of trafficked children operating along the Volta Lake (ibid), 33% of parents in origin communities indicated that they did not know the conditions under which their children were living and operating, 35% thought their children were operating under good conditions, 7% under very good conditions, with only 15% affirming the knowledge that their trafficked children were operating under bad conditions. Sensitizing parents of origin communities about the risks associated with child trafficking could and does help their willingness to let their children go.

5. GOOD PRACTICE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR IN FISHING AND FISH PROCESSING

Broadly, 2 types of approaches are being applied in Ghana for the progressive elimination of child labour in fisheries - the rights based approach and the participatory approach.

The rights based approach, as it has been variously applied has sought to educate communities about the nation's laws concerning child labour; encourage individual members of communities to obey these laws; or be sanctioned for not doing so.

The participatory approach empowers individuals, families and communities through a process of conscientization about child protection, mobilization, and capacity building, to take informed and voluntary decisions and actions, towards the progressive elimination of different forms of child labour in fisheries.

Overall, the participatory approach has shown more promise than the rights-based approach, as the latter tends to intimidate communities into denial and non-cooperation, while the former causes communities to open up to the issues and enables them to take ownership and charge of ensuring child protection at the individual, family and community level. Further, the participatory approach helps in facilitating voluntary withdrawal of children from exploitative child labour including those trafficked for such purposes. The effectiveness of this approach, is driven and sustained by conviction, as well as community and peer pressure on families who subject children to exploitative labour, or traffick them for such purposes.

However, an eclectic combination of the 2 approaches seems to be evolving, more so when certain individuals tend to defy both peer and community pressure, in which case, it takes only a threat or actual enforcement of legal sanctions for them to comply. Under these circumstances, communities are willing to resort to legality only as a last resort for ensuring compliance.

It must be added that conscientizing individuals, families and communities to opt against child labour is facilitated very much by complementary programs of support for

susceptible children and families. Counselling, sponsorship, withdrawal and placement services for education and vocational skill training for victims or susceptible children have proved worthwhile. Counselling of parents who traffick their children has also proved useful.

In the final analysis, it is the socio-cultural dimension of child labour in fisheries that has proved difficult to deal with. Ethnicities with fishery-based livelihood cultures fear that fishery livelihoods would disappear if future generations were not allowed to acquire the relevant knowledge, values and skills. Since there are no educational institutions in Ghana that teach fishing, similar fears arise at national level because soon we would have no fishers or fishing industry due to lack of fishing skills, if we effectively prevent children from engaging in or supporting their households in pursuing fishery livelihoods. The need for formal vocational education and training in fishing that improves upon the traditional techniques, technologies, ethics and safety practices in fishing is therefore also evident. Managing national fisheries in a manner that assures profitability of the industry may also help to curtail the demand for child labour for the reason of its exploitability. Facilitating and promoting safety consciousness as well as a safety gear industry in Ghana could also prove beneficial for fishers in general and children in particular.

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