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Working Paper 1

Understanding children's harmful work in African agriculture: points of departure

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About ACHA:

Action on Children's Harmful Work in African Agriculture (ACHA) is a seven-year, DFID-funded research programme that started in January 2020. The aim of the programme is to build evidence on:

- *The forms, drivers, and experiences of children's harmful work in African agriculture; and*
- *Interventions that are effective in preventing harm that arises in the course of children's work.*

It is currently assumed that the majority of children's work in Africa is within the agricultural sector. However, the evidence base is very poor in regard to the prevalence of children's harmful work in African agriculture; the distribution of children's harmful work across different agricultural value chains, farming systems and agro-ecologies; the effects of different types of value chains and models of value chain coordination on the prevalence of harmful children's work; and the efficacy of different interventions to address harmful children's work. These are the areas that ACHA will address.

ACHA will initially work in Ghana with a focus on cocoa, inland fisheries, and vegetables. Work will then expand to include other countries and commodities.

ACHA is a collaborative programme led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Brighton, UK. Partners include:

- *University of Ghana, Legon*
- *University of Development Studies, Tamale*
- *African Rights Initiative International (ARII)*
- *University of Sussex*
- *University of Bath*
- *University of Bristol*
- *Fairtrade Foundation*
- *ISEAL Alliance*
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- *The Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, University at Buffalo*
- *The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)*
- *The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH)*

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About this report:

This paper steps back from dominant discourses around child labour, and examines how a reframing of children's involvement in African agriculture, from child labour to children's work, might enhance understanding of the forms, prevalence, drivers, and dynamics of their involvement, and particularly in work that is harmful. Our aim is to open space for new discourses, strategies, and interventions with which children's harmful work in agriculture might be addressed.

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1 Introduction

Cocoa is produced for export by small-scale family farmers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) on 8 million hectares (ha) of land, of which 87 per cent is located in just three countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria).[1] Much has been claimed and contested about the use of child labour in West Africa's cocoa production, including reference to widespread exploitation, slavery and trafficking (e.g. Sustainable Tree Crops Programme, 2002; Ould et al., 2004; Romano and Mistrati, 2010; School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, 2015). There have been and continue to be numerous high-profile initiatives to address – indeed eliminate – child labour in West African cocoa production, including the Harkin–Engel Protocol (Bertrand and de Buhr, 2015), and moves by governments (Amoo, 2008), international agencies (Khan and Murray, 2007), firms (Nestlé Cocoa Plan and ICI, 2017), certification bodies (Ingram et al., 2017) and NGOs.

In contrast, maize, which is grown on 39.5 million ha across the length and breadth of SSA[1] (including cocoa-producing countries), is an example of a crop produced predominately by small-scale farmers for home consumption and domestic markets. However, there has been very little discussion of child labour specifically in relation to maize production, little research that interrogates its existence or prevalence (e.g. see Carter, 2017), and consequently few if any remediation initiatives.

The obvious question is: Why is it that child labour is a cause célèbre in the cocoa sector, but is never mentioned in relation to maize? Two possible explanations present themselves. The first is that there is something fundamentally different about the ways, or the contexts within which, cocoa and maize are produced, or the poverty level of cocoa producers compared to maize producers, that result in real differences in the prevalence and forms of child labour. Perhaps the tasks in cocoa production are particularly suited to children (the classic 'nimble fingers' argument, see Grootaert and Kanbur, 1995); or at particular times in the cocoa-farming calendar only children's labour is available to complete time-critical tasks; or that cocoa farmers are so poor and desperate they have no choice but to put children to work. Unfortunately,

we know of no evidence that would support this explanation: indeed, if anything, at least in the case of Ghana, there is relatively less poverty in cocoa-growing areas (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015); and more broadly, children seem to work to varying degrees, doing a wide variety of tasks, in the production of many if not all crops grown on Africa's family farms (Dachille et al., 2015).

The second possible explanation is that the prevalence and forms of children's involvement may actually be very similar, but differences in the product (a luxury good vs a staple food), the market (international–northern vs domestic–regional), the role of international agribusiness (significant vs non-significant), and the spatial concentration of production (high vs low) result in much greater attention being paid to children's involvement in cocoa compared to maize. Here the argument is that the particular configuration of the West African cocoa sector, the international chocolate industry, associated policy coalitions, and political and consumer interests in the north (including around human rights due diligence legislation), brings children's work on cocoa farms into the discursive and highly formalised international regulatory world of child labour. This is not the case for the work done by children on maize farms.

If this second explanation is correct it does not necessarily follow that intervention is now needed to eradicate child labour from maize production. Rather, it more fundamentally calls into question the framing of so much of children's involvement in cocoa production as child labour, with all its negative connotations. Of course, this is not simply a story about cocoa and maize. Other smallholder export-oriented commodities including coffee and tea are also increasingly viewed through the lens of the 'worst forms of child labour',[2] which unhelpfully puts slavery in the same box as children using a machete on their parents' farm, while, as with maize, the work that children do on cassava, rice or other food crop farms receives little attention.[3]

In this paper we explore some implications of efforts to reframe understandings of and debates around 'child labour' as 'children's work'

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1 FAOStat, data for 2017.

2 Article 3 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention C182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention defines the term 'the worst forms of child labour' as comprising: '(a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children'.

3 Van Hear (1982) provides a fascinating glance into children's involvement in commercial rice production in northern Ghana during the 1960s and 1970s.

(Boyden and Ling, 1998; Bourdillon et *al*., 2010) for understandings of children's involvement in African agriculture.[4] In so doing we are particularly interested in work that children undertake on farms which results in harm (children's *harmful* work); and whether a new framing can enhance understanding of the drivers and dynamics of children's harmful work, and open space for new discourses, strategies and interventions with which it might be addressed.

The paper proceeds as follows. The next section explores the rationale that underpins the interest in reframing the problem of child labour as children's work. In Section 3 a simple lexicon is developed that covers a number of terms and concepts that are central to our emerging understanding of children's work and children's harmful work. This understanding is presented in Section 4. Section 5 identifies and explores several issues for further investigation and Section 6 concludes.

2 Reframing child labour: a work in progress

Over the last two decades there have been moves to reframe the problem of, and debates around, 'child labour' as 'children's work' and situate child labour within a broader understanding of children's work (Boyden and Ling, 1998; Bourdillon et *al*., 2010). The motivation is not to deny or diminish the exploitation and harm that some children experience while working, but to understand it as part of a much larger canvass of children's economic and social activity. The critical point is that much of children's economic activity is experienced as positive and empowering, or at least necessary, by the children themselves, their families and communities.

The developing interest in children's work is underpinned by an alternative, and more grounded understanding of children and their experiences of childhood (Brannen and O'Brian, 1995; Holloway and Valentine, 2005; Jenks and Prout, 1998). The suggestion is that the discourse around child labour is rooted in a particular imaginary where children are innocent, vulnerable, and in need of adult protection, and childhood *should be* all about family, play, school and learning. In contrast, children's lives throughout the world, even in the northern/western contexts from which this imaginary originated in the relatively recent past, are very different. In fact, children are often social and economic actors in their own right, exercising varying degrees of agency and choice over the opportunities and constraints that define their lives and livelihoods. In many cases they engage in work willingly and exercise their agency in relation to the work they undertake and the terms of their engagement.

In other scenarios, children constitute part of a family strategy, either to improve living conditions or to guard against destitution and to assure food and income security, with the expectation that they take on certain responsibilities, including work and even migration (Ansell and Van Blerk, 2004; Orellana et *al*., 2001).

Clearly the way in which these different scenarios of children's work play out in terms of impacts on the child and the family in the current period, and in the future, will depend on a myriad of factors. For example, age and age-specific vulnerabilities related to physiological and psychosocial development will be critical – a five-year-old child has capabilities and vulnerabilities that are distinctly different to those of a 15- or 17-year-old.

Notwithstanding the obvious child-specific vulnerabilities that are differentiated by age and gender, our general argument here is that agricultural work by children is, on balance, beneficial – for the child, for her/his family, and for society. It represents a positive experience for the children involved and does not directly correlate with harmful work or any of the grievous outcomes associated with the (imagined) consequences of child labour. We argue that children working constitutes the norm and their experiences are generally positive. Work carried out by children that causes them harm is the exception. Recognising that the majority of the work children do is not harmful to them – in fact, it likely benefits them – is a critical and necessary step to opening up policy dialogue in the otherwise closed 'child labour'

4 The ILO, the key global player in debates around, and efforts to eliminate, child labour recognises that 'Not all work done by children should be classified as child labour that is to be targeted for elimination' and that 'Children's or adolescents' participation in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling, is generally regarded as being something positive' (www.ilo.org/ipec/facts/lang--en/index.htm) (also see ILO, 2018). Nevertheless, these positive aspects of children's work are most often forgotten in the dominant child labour discourse.

space. This discursive shift in policy dialogue should enable the design and implementation of more child-sensitive livelihood initiatives and interventions in the agricultural sector.

Of course, this is not to deny that some children are systematically exploited and harmed through their work. This can be due either to the labour relations that they become trapped within, or because of the hazardous tasks or environments related to the crop or sector. Furthermore, excessive hours of work, even that which is considered 'light' and age-appropriate, may interfere with educational access and outcomes to the extent that there is harm to a child's intellectual development, future livelihood and earnings (Ray and Lancaster, 2005; Singh and Khan, 2016; Woldehanna and Gebremedhin, 2015). In fact, it is precisely these types of harmful work that we are interested to identify, measure and understand so that steps can be taken to address them.

3 Children's work: an alternative lexicon

Various international agreements (e.g. ILO Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour), pieces of national legislation, and national/sector frameworks (Amoo, 2008) provide detailed definitions of the key terms around which debates, policy and action plans to address child labour are constructed. In addition, some of these specify, for example, 'permissible' types, hours and conditions of work for relatively narrowly drawn age cohorts (e.g. 13–14 years, 15–17 years, 18+ years, Government of Ghana, 1998; 13–16 years, Republique de Côte d'Ivoire, 2017).

Given our interest in exploring the implications of the shift from a child labour to a children's work framing, we propose in the first instance to step back from the detail and prescriptive intent of these approaches. Instead, this section provides more open descriptions of a number of concepts that are central to our emerging understanding of children's work and children's harmful work in agriculture.

Children's work covers a wide range of activities, including household chores and paid and unpaid economic activity, but excluding schoolwork. Children's work may be:

- *At home, on farms and in businesses, in markets, in mines, in school (e.g. working in a school garden or cleaning a school dormitory);*

- *Done individually or in groups;*

- *Full-time, part-time, seasonal, during the school year and/or during school holidays.*

Children work for many different reasons. It may be expected of them, entered into willingly, or forced upon them (e.g. by an adult or by another individual, or by family circumstances). Most children work at some point, and in many cultures a 'good' child is one who works (Pankhurst et *al*., 2016). Many children experience their work as positive and empowering (Aufseeser et *al*., 2018). Work can help children build their confidence and self-esteem, and provide them with new experience and opportunities for learning, accessing money, and to contributing to the household.

A hazard refers to a danger that is inherent to a task or job, or an aspect or feature of a work environment. For example, the mere presence of pesticides on a farm represents a hazard, as would machinery or sharp tools. A workplace bully and sexual predator also represent hazards. Excessive work hours may pose a hazard in relation to health but also in relation to the opportunities foregone (such as education). Exposure to a hazard creates the potential for an individual to experience harm. It is important to remember that exposure to a variety of hazards is a fact of life; there are hazards in every work and social environment.

Hazard management refers to efforts by society at large, the state, local institutions, employers, parents, and working children themselves[5] that are meant to reduce children's exposure to workplace hazards, and/or help them navigate exposure to a hazard without being harmed. Examples of hazard management include: social norms, formal regulations (e.g. labour standards), training, provision of appropriately sized equipment, worker's rights, monitoring schemes and work-based social protection. Effective hazard management can:

5   For example, Van Hear (1982) describes resistance and different forms of collective action by young people and children – including 'go-slows, sabotage, stealing rice, arson, blocking irrigation Channels' (p.511) – as they sought to protect themselves against exploitation and harm while working on commercial rice farms in northern Ghana.

- *Eliminate a hazard altogether;*

- *Change the nature of a hazard;*

- *Reduce exposure to a hazard;*

- *Reduce the likelihood that a hazard will result in harm;*

- *Reduce the severity, time frame of manifestation and/or reversibility of any resulting harm;*

- *Increase an individual's or a household's ability to survive or thrive when harm is experienced.*[6]

In the example cited above, if the mere presence of pesticides on a farm represents a hazard, their storage in a secure space, and the clear labelling of storage containers, are two ways that the hazard can be managed. With the exception of some certification schemes, we would expect that on smallholder farms in rural Africa formal hazard management measures are currently of little day-to-day relevance.

The notion of **hazardous work** is rooted in an acknowledgement that every work task and work environment expose workers to one or more hazards. However, because the nature of these hazards varies significantly, as does the level and effectiveness of hazard management, jobs and work environments can be considered to sit along a continuum from marginally hazardous to extremely hazardous. For example, working around a piece of farm machinery without training or protective clothing might be very hazardous but would be considerably less hazardous after the worker is trained and provided with protective equipment.

Harm refers to an identifiable negative impact on an individual or household arising from a specific workplace hazard. Harm might be in the overlapping domains of physical, psycho-social (including stress and anxiety), harm to development (e.g. lost opportunities for schooling) and/or financial (i.e. lost income). Important dimensions of work-related harm include its severity, reversibility, and the time period between exposure and evidence of harm. The severity and reversibility of harm reflect both the initial harm as well as any mitigating effect of, for example, prompt medical care.

Exposure to a hazard does not always or necessarily result in harm: it is a necessary but not a sufficient condition.

Children's harmful work refers to any work that children undertake that actually results in harm to the child and/or their household. The emphasis here is on the actual experience of harm resulting from work, as opposed to the potential to be harmed or the risk of being harmed.

Here we draw a distinction between children's harmful work on the one hand, and child trafficking and child slavery on the other. While these fall under the definition of 'the worst forms of child labour' we find it useful to separate, at least conceptually, harmful work from the range of possible explanations for how the child came to engage with the harmful work. For example, children might engage in extremely hazardous or harmful work voluntarily or involuntarily – because they want to, or in order to help their parents, or because they were trafficked or find themselves in slave-like conditions. The point is that while trafficking and slavery are clearly and always abhorrent, they are different from and should not be confounded with harmful work. At the same time, however, having been trafficked or working in slave-like conditions might well increase the likelihood of harm arising.

Vulnerability[7] refers to the inability to withstand the effects of a hostile environment. Being vulnerable increases the likelihood that a child will be doing more hazardous work, the likelihood that s/he will be harmed through work, and the likelihood that the harm s/he experiences will be severe and/ or irreversible. Vulnerability is affected by the 'resources' available to a child or her/his household including both hard assets (income and other physical assets) and soft assets such as education, labour, social networks and political capital.

Vulnerability is best understood in relation to specific hazards. But in general, vulnerability to harm from exposure to any hazard is associated with poverty, poor health, disability, and identity markers like age, gender or ethnicity. Also, with exposure to any given hazard, children are more likely than adults to experience harm because they are biologically and physically immature, and socially dependent (i.e. they have less scope to exercise agency), particularly at the younger end of the 5–18 age range, for example.

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6   In developing this point we will draw on the extensive literature on coping and resilience (Davies et al., 2013; Béné et al., 2014)

7   In developing ideas around vulnerability we will draw on the extensive vulnerability literature (Barrientos and Hulme, 2009; Malik, 2014).

4 Hazardous work and harmful work
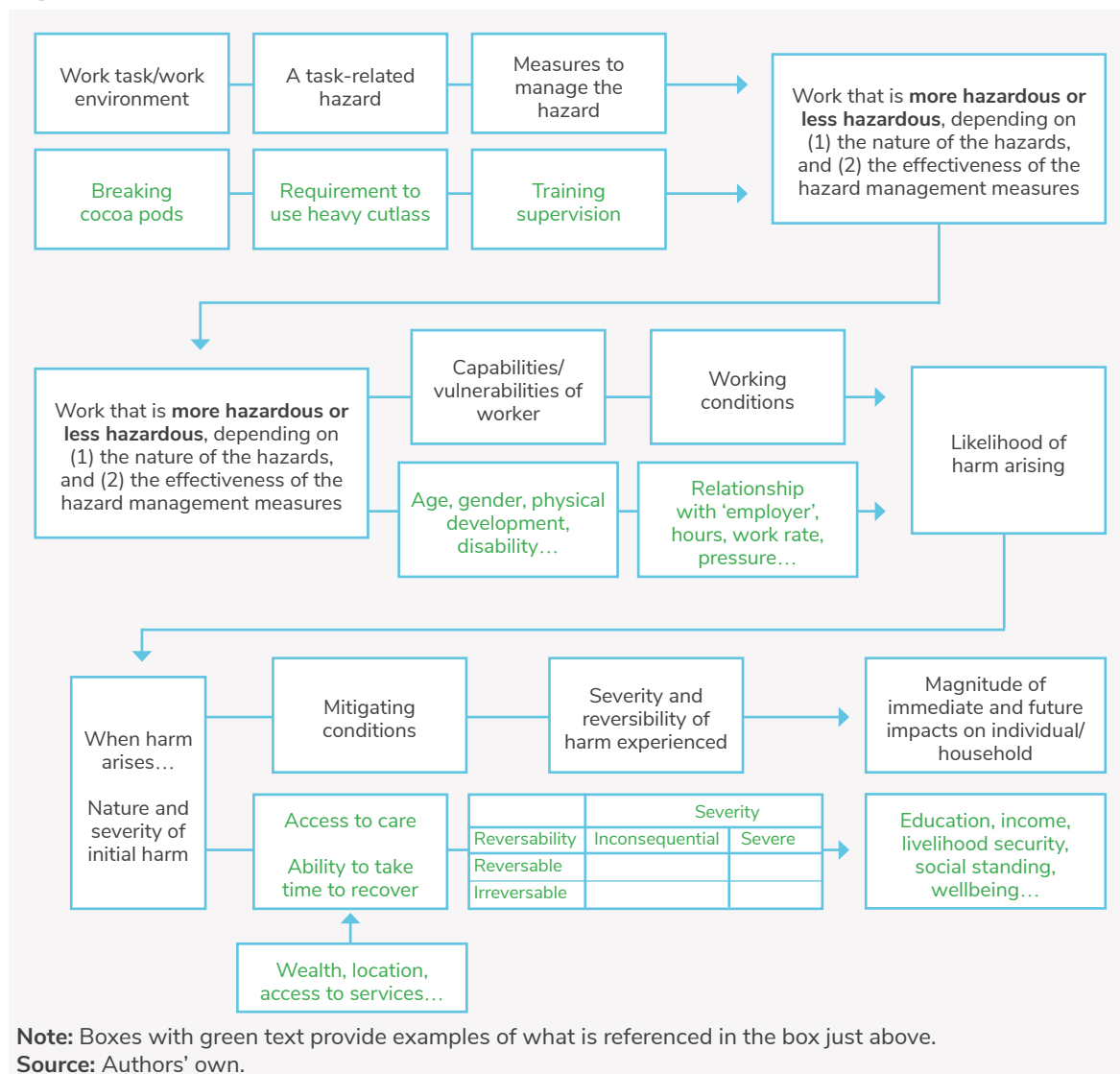
4.1 Putting the lexicon to work

Drawing on the lexicon presented above, in this section we develop a framework for exploring children's harmful work in agriculture (Figure 1).

Hazards of one sort or another are associated with all work tasks and every work environment. Some arise unpredictably and without warning, such as a lightning strike that might injure agricultural workers caught unaware. Others may be known in advance and predictable. For hazards in this latter category, informal and/or formal hazard management strategies can be put in place to migrate, reduce or eliminate exposure to the hazard. Depending on the nature of the hazard and the effectiveness of any hazard management measures, the work can be considered to fall along a continuum from less hazardous to more hazardous. It is possible to do hazardous work over extended periods without being harmed.

The shift from hazardous work to harmful work is mediated by the capabilities and vulnerabilities of the child worker, and the working conditions. For example, a child who is not healthy but who is expected to work long hours, is more likely to be harmed than one who is healthy and well-rested.

Figure 1. From hazards to harm

Note: Boxes with green text provide examples of what is referenced in the box just above.
Source: Authors' own.

More broadly, both the exposure to hazardous work as well as the experience of harm and its subsequent effects will intersect with a range of identity markers, such as ethnicity, age, gender and religion, which, for example, may constrain an individual's actions.

When harm does arise, its severity and reversibility will reflect both the nature of the harm and any mitigating conditions associated with the support system surrounding the child. This system might include a range of provisions including local knowledge about how to respond to harm, access to health services, availability of social protection and insurance systems, child protection services, etc. In the absence of appropriate interventions to mitigate the harm, even a simple wound may lead to long-term irreversible harm through severe infection. Poverty exacerbates the experience of harm: we expect poor and more vulnerable individuals, in more isolated rural areas, to benefit less from mitigating conditions.

The nature, severity and reversibility of the harm will determine the magnitude on the immediate and future impacts on the individual and her/his family.

4.2 A state-and-transition model

Here we introduce a series of formal hypotheses:

1 Most children in rural Africa work, but the majority are not harmed through their work.

2 Children work for many different reasons, but poverty is the main driver of children's engagement in hazardous and harmful work.

3 The more vulnerable the child (due to poverty, gender, disability, etc.), the more likely s/he is to be in hazardous work.

4 At all points on the continuum from marginally hazardous work to extremely hazardous work, the more vulnerable the child the more likely s/he is to be harmed.

5 The more vulnerable the child who is harmed, the more likely the harm will be severe and/or irreversible.

To explore these hypotheses, we propose a simple state-and-transition model to help capture the dynamics of children's harmful work. Setting aside for the moment harm that is at the inconsequential end of the severity continuum, this model suggests that any child's current situation can be described by one of six possible 'states' (Table 1), with each state characterised by:

- *Whether or not the child is living with residual harm from previous harmful work;*

- *Whether or not the child is currently working;*

- *Whether, through the work the child is currently doing, s/he is experiencing new harm.*

States 1 and 2 are benign, and our expectation is that overall in rural Africa most children will be in one of these two states. In State 3, children do not carry the burden of residual harm from previous harmful work, but they are currently involved in work that results in harm.

All children in States 4–6 carry the burden of residual harm from previous harmful work. In addition, in State 4 children are in work that does not result in additional harm; in State 5 they are in work that does result in harm; while children in State 6 are not currently working.

Children can transition between some of these states. In principle, there are three bi-directional (or reversible) transitions and eight possible

Table 1. Children and harmful work – six possible states

State	Living with residual harm?	Currently working?	Experiencing new harm?
1	No	No	-–
2	No	Yes	No
3	No	Yes	Yes
4	Yes	Yes	No
5	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	Yes	No	-–

Source: Authors' own.

Figure 2. The state-and-transition model
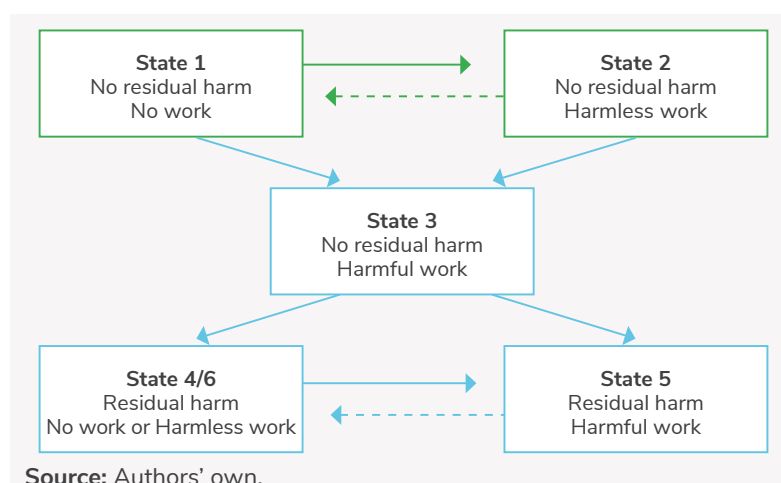
Source: Authors' own.

Table 2. Transition drivers

Transition(s)	Hypothesised driver
No work → Work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work	Desire on part of child to earn money, contribute to household, etc.
No work or Harmless work → Harmful work	High level of individual or household vulnerability related to poverty, disability, and/or identity markers such as ethnicity, age, gender, religion
No work → Work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work	Idiosyncratic (i.e. individual or household level) stress or shock that threatens food or livelihood security
Work → No work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Reduction of stress or shock situation
No work → Work Work → No work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Change in child's or household's perceptions of opportunity costs and trade-offs
No work → Work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work	Common or system-level shock or stress that threatens food or livelihood security
Work → No work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Reduction of stress or shock situation
No work → Work Work → No work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Change within key agricultural value chain (e.g. introduction of new production process, imposition of new standards, etc.) that changes demand for labour (quantity, type and/or timing)
Work → No work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Change in legislation or regulations
No work → Work No work or Harmless work → Harmful work	Social or cultural norms
Work → No work Harmful work → Harmless work or No work	Change in social or cultural norms

Source: Authors' own.

unidirectional (i.e. non-reversible) transitions. The unidirectional transitions are based on the idea that once harm is experienced it becomes part of the experience of life. While irreversibility is one thing, the type and severity of the (irreversible) harm will greatly influence the psychological and livelihood impacts of this transition. Figure 2 illustrates how these states and transitions can be conceived.

Hypothesised drivers of the transitions are shown in Table 2. Those in the top part of the table operate at the level of the child and her/his household, while those in the bottom part of the table operate at the level of the community, value chain or society. It is immediately obvious that there are multiple possible drivers for each transition, and it seems likely that in at least some cases drivers will interact across levels.

5 Discussion and research agenda

5.1 Children's harmful work is part of a larger story of exploitative labour relations

Our perspective on children's harmful work is rooted in the understanding that throughout the world, people of all ages, not only children, are exposed to hazards, and are harmed through work. Further, hazardous and harmful work are as much a part of small-scale, family farming as work in factories, sweatshops, artisanal mines or plantations. Small-scale farmers can be harmed through their engagement with commodity or value chains that involve dangerous practices or are simply not remunerative.

It is reasonable to expect that children's harmful work will generally be co-incident (i.e. in the same sectors, commodities, value chains, locations, seasons and firms) with harmful work generally; or will be found where engagement in harmful work is associated with gender or religious norms. Conversely, one is unlikely to find children engaged in harmful work in situations where labour conditions for other workers are unproblematic. Nevertheless, children may be of special interest simply because (i) they have specific vulnerabilities that adults do not have; (ii) they may be over-represented (as a share of all workers) in a specific sector or industry, due for example to weak or missing labour legislation and regulation (and associated lack of voice and representation); or (iii) children are seen as having a comparative advantage over adults in performing the same tasks. In certain jobs, work environments or work regimes there may also be child-specific vulnerabilities that increase the likelihood of harm from particular hazards.

It follows from this that a political economy perspective will be important in allowing children's harmful work to be appreciated and analysed as part of a broader set of rural labour relations and the asymmetric power relations that underpin them. The literature on changing labour relations in and around African agriculture should help ground this analysis (e.g. Phiri, 2016; Webb, 2017).

5.2 Trading off hazardous and harmful work against benefits

We have already made the case that the majority of people across the globe engage in some form of work during childhood, and that often this is a positive and formative experience. This does not mean that work can or should be a substitute for participation in quality education, play-based socialisation or other critical experiences and opportunities that children need to lead healthy, satisfying and productive lives. However, global aspirations for the realisation of the right to education for all are tempered by the fact that most children do not experience that right due to inadequate and poor quality provision.

Furthermore, there is general acceptance of the position that appropriate work by children around the home, in support of a family enterprise, or for others, is acceptable as long as it does not impinge on or crowd out educational opportunities. Here the gendered division of domestic labour, and its differential effects on access to education, deserves special attention. Of course, underlying this view is an assumption that adequate, quality education is available. If not – as is the case in many poorer

agricultural communities – then the question arises as to the net effect of prioritising school attendance over participation in farm work, and the associated opportunities for learning and contributing to the household economy. There is a small amount of evidence that primary school attendance, even without learning, may have beneficial effects for girls (Kaffenberger et a*l*., 2018). But are these benefits sufficient?

Moreover, what of the hazardous school environments that children, especially girls, must navigate (Schwandt and Underwood, 2016; Bhana and Mayeza, 2019). Would hazardous work on the family farm be preferable to a hazardous school environment? As discussed above, this will depend on vulnerabilities related to identity markers, hazards related to getting to school and being at school, and the quality of safeguarding at school. In cases where the school system is weak and severely under-resourced there appears to be no ethical high ground for insisting on sending children to school.

This argument is even stronger in the case where the likelihood of harm from a work-related hazard is low, and the training gained 'on the job' provides more value added in terms of future income and work opportunities than a very low-quality education. If there is an insistence on children being in school – as there is under the various UN Conventions[8] and the vast majority of national education policies – then a potentially valuable way to think about the trade-offs (or synergies) between work and education is to use the lens of a minimum acceptable provision of wellbeing and opportunities for children. This shifts the onus of responsibility from the immediate environment of the child – i.e. the parent, the household, the workplace, the employer – to the state, and its responsibility for the provision of basic services.

Much of the literature on the elimination of child labour places the responsibility with the primary caregivers (parents and families) or with commercial operators (some of whom promote models of community-based child labour monitoring that essentially pass the responsibility to the families). Yet, we also know that in the context of communities where poverty is widespread and where access to quality health, education and alternative income sources is limited, the burden of that responsibility is too high, indeed if it is recognised as a responsibility at all. In these contexts, the state has the responsibility to provide essential services like quality education and social protection, and to facilitate local economic development. Action to address children's harmful work must surely be framed in this light, which poses important questions about appropriate strategies in conflict-affected areas or more generally where the state is weak or ineffective.

5.3 Multiple perspectives on harm

From an outsider's perspective, any harm arising from work might be analysed in terms of type, severity, reversibility, and time frame of manifestation. It should be clear that harm is a multi-dimensional concept – all potential or actual harm is not equally bad (or harmful), or necessarily even deserving of policy attention.

The situation gets more problematic when the trade-offs between the various benefits ('goods') and harms ('bads') associated with children's work are both brought into the equation. At the extreme end, a child may be so poor that s/he will not survive unless s/he engages in work that causes harm (in the eyes of our outside observer). However, on balance, s/he is, without question, better off having engaged in the harmful work. This example illustrates the need to understand and address harmful work in a nuanced and context-appropriate way – an absolutist approach that all hazardous work, or even all harmful work, must be stamped out might contribute to even greater harm to this child.

For most children and families, the trade-offs are probably not so stark. Rather than the 'bad' in the equation being actual harm, it is more likely to be a greater likelihood of harm. These trade-offs can only really be understood when the perspectives of children and their households are brought in, and particularly in relation to how hazards and harm are actually experienced (understood, managed, navigated, lived with).

But, taking the perspectives of children and their families seriously will likely highlight the fact that in many situations, their views on hazards, vulnerability and harm do not align well with those of experts, regulators or advocacy groups. While the really hazardous or exploitative aspects of children's work may be relatively unambiguous, this will not be the case in less extreme situations. Here we must anticipate that children's perspectives on what is acceptable may be quite different from those of their parents, to say nothing of the experts.

Different perspectives on hazards and harm reflect different views on what is acceptable or unacceptable, necessary or unnecessary. These arise because of different interests: a child may work because s/he wants to pay school fees or establish a level of independence; a household may push her/him to work in order to help address its acute food insecurity; a government or industry may want her/him to stop working, or to do only some particular kinds of work, in order to comply with national or regional human rights due

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8   Including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

diligence legislation, or protect their position in a competitive global market; and a UN agency may want to strictly define what work is acceptable or permissible for the child in order to fulfil its mandate to establish international, cross-sectoral norms. They also arise through differential access to information (e.g. of hard to observe, long-term negative effects of pesticide exposure), differential access to (or appreciation of) years of accumulated local knowledge and experience, and differential cultural frames.

Thus, the key question: Harm according to whom? Whose analysis of the balance between benefits and harms counts (or should count)? Should the analysis be framed around net harm – accounting for the trade-offs in outcomes for both the child and the family – or is it overly academic, if not oxymoronic, to talk of the benefits of harmful work? Is it right to always privilege perspectives of children (or experts) over others? If not, how can this tension be resolved?

These questions become particularly important in relation to invisible or hidden harms. For example, it is conceivable that children may not consider inhalation of certain fumes, or exposure to pesticides, to be harmful, while medical evidence suggests they pose a real threat to (future) health. The temporal (lag) aspect of harm strengthens the case for a longitudinal perspective to understand (a) the cumulative impacts of invisible harm, and (b) how the harm/benefit balance shifts due to changing conditions over time. It may also be helpful in resolving the potential tension between the perspectives of children and experts on hazards and harm. Children are more likely to frame something as harmful when it has an immediate negative impact (e.g. carrying heavy loads) compared to when it manifests itself over a longer period of time (e.g. developing respiratory problems due to bad air). In other words, do we need to give greater 'weight' to children's perspectives on harm in considering immediate effects, and possibly more 'weight' to what we know through other research about long-term effects?

5.4 Vulnerable children, vulnerable families

We have already noted that exposure to hazards as well as the severity and reversibility of harm incurred will, in general, be intensified for children who are more vulnerable than others. Literature has identified three distinct types of vulnerability, which are useful when considering the implications and remedies for hazardous work vulnerability (Sabates-Wheeler and Roelen, 2011; Jones and Holmes, 2010). Physical/biological vulnerability

refers to the fact that children, in particular pre-teens, have different physical and biological needs from adults, and are harder-hit, both in the short and long term, when these needs are not met. There is sound evidence that malnutrition, lack of health care, and low levels of education, during infancy and childhood, have far-reaching and long-lasting detrimental consequences (Haverman and Wolfe, 1995). In other words, children who start life in a disadvantaged position are more likely to remain disadvantaged, so that exposure to hazard and the likelihood of harm will be higher for them.

Dependency-related vulnerability refers to the fact that children (especially pre-teens) are by necessity dependent on adults or older siblings for their wellbeing and provision of basic needs. As children grow older, they become more economically and socially independent and are able to exercise agency, but nevertheless, on the whole, young children have limited freedom to make decisions about their own wellbeing. As such, children's relationship with adults are obviously open to abuse, and this reinforces children's vulnerability. As is well documented in the literature on girls working as domestics or pushed into sex work, their dependence on adults other than their parents for the provision of basic needs makes them particularly vulnerable to verbal, physical and sexual abuse (Jacquemin, 2006; Bourdillon, 2009). Young boys are more likely to be exposed to hazards through working in agriculture.

Lastly, vulnerability arising from institutionalised disadvantage, or what some sociologists refer to as 'cultural devaluation disadvantage' (Kabeer, 2005) is rooted in the devaluation of certain groups in society based on perceptions of who they are perceived to be. It is not only about the behaviour of the poor themselves, but also about how those in power act in relation to them. Identity markers that are characteristic of cultural devaluation include gender, ethnicity and religion, as they are thought to denote persons of lesser worth following the dominant beliefs, perceptions and attitudes in a given society (ibid.). So if, for instance, society at large places little value on children, the vulnerabilities associated with this type of disadvantage present themselves as children's lack of voice, lack of recognition, lack of representation and often entrenched inequalities that can provide fertile grounds for deliberate abuse and exclusion. For example, children, on account of their age, are practically and legally constrained to claim their rights and hold duty-bearers to account (Sabates-Wheeler et al., 2009). Unlike the other vulnerabilities where the children's limited degree of autonomy is inherent to the fact of being a child for biological and physical reasons, this third vulnerability can be considered a social and cultural artefact that is put in place and reinforced by institutional structures.

It is clear that in general, children, depending on their age, are more vulnerable to hazards and more likely to be harmed than their adult counterparts doing the same task. Yet, taken on its own, this statement detracts from the broader context – in particular, the social context – within which children are situated and dependent upon social networks. In other words, children are most often part of a family and its enterprises, and contribute to and make claims on the family resources. It is within a network of social and familial relations that children engage with various work activities – activities that are frequently seen as appropriate to the culture and context in which they live.

In contexts of widespread poverty where vulnerability to food insecurity is high due to the negative outcomes of climate- or conflict-related shocks, the likelihood of exposure to hazardous work and harm from that work is compounded. In other words, children's vulnerability in relation to harmful work must be seen, analysed and addressed within broader contextual or 'structural' vulnerabilities. As encouraged by Jones and Holmes (2010), child-sensitive interventions need to be informed by '[…] an understanding of the multiple and often intersecting vulnerabilities and risks that children and their care-givers face' (p.1).

While children have and exercise agency, particularly as they get older, their engagement in work, including work that is hazardous and harmful, must be understood through the lens of social relations and networks, and particularly family and intergenerational relations. Obligations, expectations, gender norms and tradition are important aspects of these social relations. We would expect that all the different kinds of factors that make families more vulnerable – single parent, limited assets, migrant, disability – will increase the likelihood of children within those families engaging in hazardous work and harmful work.

In summary, whether they are in child-headed households, or communities affected by environmental or social shocks, children's vulnerabilities are intimately tied to those of their carers, households and communities. Their practical needs are those which stem from their physical/biological vulnerabilities, while their strategic needs relate to their limited autonomy and relative invisibility within the population at large. This socio-political understanding of vulnerability implies that any intervention to affect change 'must be interrogated for the extent to which it enables those whose lives are affected to articulate their priorities and claim genuine accountability' from different implementing and 'provisioning' stakeholders (Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall, 2004).

5.5 The conception of childhood

We have deliberately been vague about how we define a child, as the construction of childhood within rural areas of Africa cannot easily be constrained by an upper age limit. It is quite common for some girls from rural areas to marry and give birth to one or more children before the age of 18. A strict view that 18 establishes the boundary between childhood and adulthood, as proposed by the UN, will have complicated implications for such teenage mothers. For instance, imagine the case of a 16-year-old girl with a two-year-old child. This girl left school after some years in primary school and has since worked on her parents' cocoa farm. Her work is critical for maintaining the food and income security of her family. Furthermore, she has responsibility for her child and her child's wellbeing. This girl also supports her younger siblings. To treat her as a child in relation, for example, to Ghana's hazardous activity framework for the cocoa sector (Amoo, 2008) would very likely penalise her, her child and her family. Insisting that she carry out only child-appropriate tasks would severely restrict her income opportunities and those of her dependants.

On the other hand, where childbirth or marriage moves children into social adults, they may no longer be counted or protected as child workers. This simple yet common case shows that notions of 'child' and 'childhood' are culturally and socially specific. Proposed punitive action (or remediation action, for that matter) on work tasks that older teenagers become involved in needs to be carefully thought through to ensure that westernised imaginings of what constitutes an acceptable childhood do not force people in different cultures to lose their livelihoods, which in many cases are already in the balance.

5.6 Value chain coordination and scrutiny of children's work

We introduced this paper by noting the prominence of West African cocoa compared to staple food crops in public and policy discourse around child labour. It is an open question whether this reflects:

- *Real differences in prevalence, forms and drivers of children's harmful work;*

- *The special qualities of chocolate as a consumer good, combined with the highly political nature of the cocoa sector in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, feeding a self-fulfilling moral panic around cocoa that results in inflated estimates of children in hazardous labour; or*

- *Simply persistent neglect of an equally large problem of harmful children's work in staple crops (or farm work per se).*

In the cocoa-to-chocolate value chain, the concentration of power in a relatively small number of very large international commodity and manufacturing firms, the legal and regulatory frameworks in which they function, and the importance of brands in the marketing of chocolate, contribute to a relatively high level of coordination within the chain. In this sense cocoa shares some important characteristics with the 'global value chains' described and analysed by Gereffi et a*l.* (2005). The contrast with the major West African food crops could not be more stark: international capital, formal firms, export markets and branding, are insignificant. Mishra and Dey (2018) studied coordination within six commodity-specific agricultural sub-sectors in India that 'consisted of relatively informal markets and were non-retailer-trader-driven' and concluded that 'governance of these value chains is often riddled with overlapping and contradictory roles of actors' (p.135). To a significant degree this also describes Africa's staple food marketing chains (Sitko and Jayne, 2014), although there is some evidence that these are also changing (Minten et a*l.*, 2016).

The question is whether the nature of the value chains, and in particular the location of the market and level of coordination, drives fundamental differences in forms and prevalence of harmful children's work. Or alternatively, do these value chain differences act to narrowly focus the gaze of the media, civil society, policymakers and consumers in a way that exaggerates any problem there may be in cocoa and/or minimises it in staple grains?

The critical role of cocoa in the economies of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire means there is a heightened political dimension to the cocoa sector: cocoa is the African 'political crop' *par excellence*. But significantly, these politics play out far beyond the national sphere. Fundamentally, they revolve around the extraordinary contradiction of chocolate being a symbol of luxury and indulgence for the western consumer, while, at least according to some observers, the beans themselves carry the deep stain of child labour. This contradiction, and its articulation and mediatisation in terms of ethical consumption, drives much of the international politics around cocoa. It may also act to significantly exaggerate the extent of children's hazardous and harmful work in cocoa production.

6 Conclusion

In this paper we deliberately adopt and interrogate the language of 'children's work' as opposed to child labour. Child labour, as a term, evokes imaginings of harm, abusive bonded relationships, slavery and trafficking. It is an emotive term tied to the illegal and exploitative employment of children, particularly in industry or business. By unpacking what is meant by hazardous work, harm and vulnerability, we have shown that 'child labour' is not usefully transferrable to the vast majority of situations and contexts in which rural African children work. Children typically work within family agricultural enterprises where poor families negotiate and navigate their livelihoods in a context of uncertainty and limited access to quality social services, including education and health, and to dynamic labour markets. Children combine work and school in most, if not all corners of rural SSA. Their work is very important to them, and their families.

Of course, children's work can sometimes result in harm – both in the immediate term, and in the longer term including lost opportunities from education or lost earnings. To the extent that this harm is caused by the type and nature of work that

children engage in, then action needs to be taken to reduce the potential for harm by managing and reducing the hazards of the work and workplace.

Despite the fact that some types of work and work environments are especially hazardous for children, most attention to this within African agriculture has been focused on a small number of export crops (such as cocoa, coffee and tea), leaving unexamined the much greater part of children's work on smallholder farms. This latter work is associated with food crops, livestock and vegetables that are often destined for own consumption and local markets. One must ask why such disproportionate attention is given to children's work on some crops and not others? The most likely answer, proffered above, relates to the very particular multi-layered political economy around crops like cocoa – combining their economic centrality to the producing countries' economies, highly coordinated global value chains, imperatives around transparency, reputational risk and 'brand image', human rights due diligence legislation in the global North and the awakening ethical interests of consumers, and high media visibility.

Unfortunately, this bias in attention significantly distorts understandings of children's work. Specifically, despite some nuancing at the margins, the discourse around child labour, and associated approaches to tackling it tend to assume that all children's work is child labour, while exaggerating the 'wrongs' and devaluing the significant 'rights' associated with much children's work.

This paper provides a framework for appreciating better the nature and severity of harm that children can experience in hazardous work environments. The ambition will be to apply this framework to different contexts in which children work and to empirically estimate the forms, the prevalence and the drivers of children's harmful work. Our hope is that this more granular understanding will better inform policy, legislation and M&E design such that children are not prohibited from participating in appropriate, beneficial and often enjoyable work within the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated.

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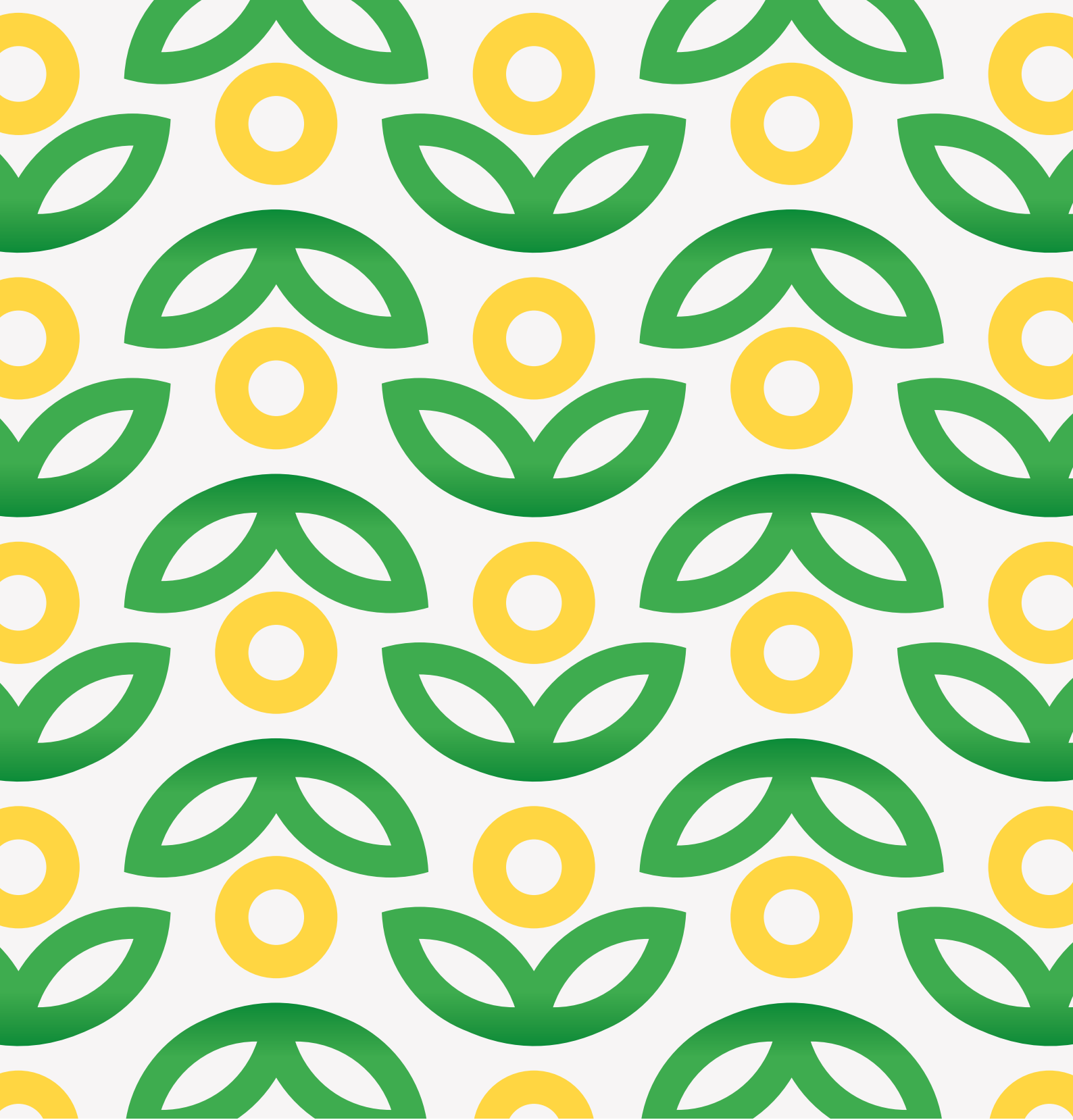
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