



Action on Children's Harmful  
Work in African Agriculture

## Working Paper 2

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# Forms, prevalence and drivers of children's work and children's harmful work in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula, south-eastern Ghana

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November 2020



## About ACHA:

The research informing this Working Paper as well as its publication was made possible thanks to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)-funded research on Action on Children's Harmful Work in African Agriculture (ACHA). 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 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
- Rainforest Alliance
- The Food Systems Planning and Healthy Communities Lab, University at Buffalo
- The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)
- The Sustainable Trade Initiative (IDH).

ACHA is directed by **Professor Rachel Sabates-Wheeler** (r.sabates-wheeler@ids.ac.uk) and **Dr James Sumberg**.

## About this report:

This paper synthesises the available literature on the forms, prevalence and drivers of children's work, and evidence of harm associated with children's work in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula, Ghana. What emerges is that children have historically played, and continue to play, a key role in this horticultural system and their work contribution is structured by both age and gender. Desires to support parents and earn income drive children's involvement, and children's work has potential negative effects on their education.

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# 1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, agriculture in Africa has moved towards the top of the development agenda. The Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was agreed in 2003, with a focus on improving food and nutrition security, and increasing incomes in Africa's largely farming-based economies. It aims to achieve this objective by raising agricultural productivity and increasing public investment in agriculture (New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) 2003). With new public commitments by African governments, and unprecedented investment by private actors and development partners, competing visions and models of African agricultural and rural transformation have emerged. In Ghana, the Food and Agriculture Sector Development Policy (FASDEP II) has been supported by various governments through four-year medium-term investment programmes (Ministry of Food and Agriculture Republic of Ghana 2007). The focus has been to use flagship projects to provide subsidies and technical information to enhance productivity (World Bank 2017). The current programme, Planting for Food and Jobs, singles out vegetables and major grain crops for closer support (Ministry of Food and Agriculture 2018; Nantui Mabe et al. 2018). What has not been given much attention is how much children's work will be needed to achieve the productivity and profitability goals of the programme.

Children's involvement in agricultural work in Ghana can be traced to the colonial period. The establishment of a typical export-oriented colonial economy that characterised the former Gold Coast led to the development of infrastructure including railways, roads, deep water harbours and the setting up of farm plantations. It is remarkable that the cocoa sector developed without state involvement, and initially involved African entrepreneurs selling their beans to European merchants (Hill 1963). The significant expansion in cocoa production from 536 tons in 1900 to 176,000 tons in 1920 led to heavy demand for

porters, particularly for head-loading cocoa, and children became central in meeting this demand (van Hear 1982). The number of children employed to undertake head carriage increased substantially in line with the booming cocoa industry, and by 1914, according to a report quoted by van Hear, 'a large number of the children in this colony are engaged daily in heavy weight carrying. It is in fact their daily occupation.' Warnings about the harmful effects of head carriage and of cultivation on children's health prompted no action on the part of the colonial authorities (*ibid.*).

In Ghana in 2014, an estimated 1.9 million children aged 5–17 years were engaged in one or more forms of work (Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) 2014a). Table 1 shows the age distribution of these working children, indicating that nearly half are aged 5–11 years. The GSS did not provide explanations for the decline in work participation with age. However, it is possible that the 12–14-year-olds and 15–17-year-olds spend more time in education.

Children's involvement in work varies by gender, residence and locations. Boys are more likely to participate in work than girls, but the GSS survey did not consider domestic work, an area dominated by girls. The incidence of children's involvement in work is higher in rural areas (30 per cent) than in urban locations (12 per cent). Table 2 shows that the vast majority of children's work takes place in the agricultural sector.

In terms of status in employment, children are found overwhelmingly in unpaid family work (97 per cent), either on the farm (82 per cent) or elsewhere (15 per cent) (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2016). Around 59 per cent of children's work that is classified as 'hazardous' is in the agricultural sector (*ibid.*). Children's work may be driven by socioeconomic, technical and institutional determinants. Factors such as age, gender, location (rural/urban), availability of social infrastructure, wealth status, and status of household head have been reported to be

**Table 1. Distribution of working children in Ghana by age, 2014**

Age distribution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
5–11 years	916,500	48
12–14 years	564,500	30
15–17 years	411,500	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,900,000</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: GSS (2014b).

**Table 2. Distribution of working children in Ghana by sector, 2014**

Sector of work	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	80
Manufacturing	4
Services	16

Source: GSS (2014b).

significant drivers of child labour in Ghana (Dachille, Guarcello and Lyon 2015; ILO 2016). Other factors may include children’s own desires to earn independent income and contribute to household production and reproduction and as part of their responsibility of growing up (Canagarajah and Coulombe 1999; Hashim and Thorsen 2011; Yeboah 2020). Children’s engagement in work may also be seen as a process of skills transfer (Hashim 2004; Mahati 2012).

There is a growing body of research and policy literature from Ghana that draws attention to the negative consequences of children’s involvement in work, especially in the context of family farming, small-scale fisheries and livestock husbandry (Abenyega and Gockowski 2003; Gbedemah, Jones and Perezniето 2010; Casely-Hayford 2004; Tulane University 2015).

A Tulane University study (2015) found that there were 957,398 children working in the Ghanaian cocoa economy in the 2013/14 cocoa growing season, of which 98.1 per cent were engaged in hazardous work.<sup>1</sup> It was further reported that 74.6 per cent had to carry heavy loads, 84.3 per cent handled sharp tools and 33.1 per cent handled agro-chemicals. This sheds light on some of the potential exposure of children to harm in cocoa production and provides the basis for contextualising the prevalence and drivers of children’s work and children’s harmful work (CHW) in shallot production.

The need to address children’s involvement in work that harms them – physically, mentally, socially or morally – was recognised in 1919 with the founding of the ILO (van Daalen and Hanson 2019). Since then there has been a proliferation of international frameworks and conventions geared toward addressing the problem of child labour. Ghana is

signatory to several of these, and has put in place legislation, policy and programmes to address CHW. For instance, Ghana became the first country in the world to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 1989), committing to adopt it into national law in 1991. In 2000, Ghana ratified ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, and has worked with international partners including the ILO to develop and implement a series of national plans of action to eliminate the worst forms of child labour (Government of Ghana 2017; 2009).<sup>2</sup> Many of these initiatives are directed specifically at the cocoa and fisheries sectors. For cocoa, the 2001 Harkin-Engel Protocol was particularly important. It was established with a \$10 million seed grant to end the ‘worst forms’ of child labour in West African (Ghana) cocoa production (United States (US) Department of Labor 2017).

Policies and programmes designed to address child labour in Ghana have, to date, had only limited success, and many of the initiatives have proven difficult to implement. The cocoa industry, for example, found it difficult to meet the 70 per cent target for reduction of the worst forms of child labour that was part of the Harkin-Engel Protocol by 2020. Commissioned research by the US Department of Labour reported that there were reductions, albeit small, in the percentage of children working in cocoa production in Ghana (*ibid.*). It is thus clear that without a detailed understanding of the economic and domestic circumstances driving children’s work, along with the broader social and cultural contexts within which it takes place, it is difficult to differentiate between ‘exploitative practices’ on the one hand, and acceptable ‘light work’ on the other (Bourdillon 2006; 2014). This is only made more difficult by the diversity of commodities, production systems and value chains, as well as social and cultural settings, which characterise family farming in the country.

Apart from cocoa, shallot (*Allium ascalonicum*) is another crop that is grown by small-scale producers and has also been closely linked to children’s work. Shallot is a perennial crop that is grown as an annual for its cluster of small bulbs or cloves. It has a delicate onion-like flavour and may be grown for the dry bulbs or used as green onions. Shallots are indeed valuable, not only as spices for flavouring dishes, but also for their medicinal properties (Sinnadurai 1973; Swamy and Veere Gowda 2006). As a vegetable it has received increasing

1 The Tulane 2015 study defined hazardous work using six variables: children (5–17 years) working in cocoa involved in land clearing (V1); carrying heavy loads (V2); exposed to agro-chemicals (V3); using sharp tools (V4); exposed to long working hours (V5); and exposed to night work (V6).

2 Examples of these initiatives include but are not limited to the **National Plan of Action (NPA 1) for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2009–2015)**, the **Strategy on Anti-Child Labour and Trafficking (CLaT) in Fisheries**, and the **Child Labour Monitoring System (GCLMS)**, Main Document, and the **National Plan of Action Phase II (NPA2) for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Ghana (2017–2021)**.

recognition as being essential for food and nutrition security and provides important sources of the vitamins and minerals needed for good health.

In Ghana, shallot is produced primarily on the Keta Peninsula using small-scale irrigation (Namara et al. 2010). Like all vegetables, the production, processing and marketing of shallots require significant involvement of labour. Indeed, the low levels of mechanisation of shallot production, and the need for careful handling of produce, often creates a demand for labour of all types, including that of young people and children (Patten and Nukunya 1982). While the prevalence and drivers of children's work in cocoa production have been widely reported – and contested – there appears to be very little academic, political or policy interest in the involvement of children in shallot production.

The aim of this background paper is to provide a synthesis of the research and policy literature on the involvement of children in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula. It does so by analysing the available research literature on the forms, prevalence and drivers of children's work, and CHW in shallot

production. Overall, what emerges is that children's work is central to shallot production and their engagement is structured by both age and gender. Despite increased awareness of child labour in public and policy discourse in Ghana, we find little evidence that speaks directly to the issue of harm or anything close to the so-called 'worst forms of child labour' associated with children's engagement in shallot production.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: the next section provides some background information on the geography and local economy of the Keta Peninsula, including an outline of its biophysical and socioeconomic characteristics. We then provide an historical overview of the development of shallot production and discuss the current situation of the economics of production, organisation and governance of the value chain. This is followed by a discussion of the forms, prevalence and drivers of children's work in shallot production. The penultimate section reviews the available evidence on CHW or the worst forms of child labour. The last part concludes by providing some questions to help orient future research.

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## 2 The geography and local economy of the Keta Peninsula

The unique biophysical and socioeconomic characteristics of the Keta Peninsula have been amply described (Addo et al. 2018; Folitse et al. 2017). Keta municipality, where the peninsula is located, is one of the 25 administrative districts in the old Volta region of Ghana.<sup>3</sup> The peninsula shares borders with Ketu North and South districts to the east, Akatsi South district to the north, South Tongu district to the west, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. It sits essentially on a very narrow stretch of sand bar, estimated to be about 2.5 kilometres (km) in width, which separates the Keta lagoon (to the north) from the sea (to the south). Its total surface area is 1086km<sup>2</sup>, of which 30 per cent is covered by water bodies and extensive swamps, interspersed with savannah woodland and short grassland mangrove (GSS 2014a).

The climatic conditions of the entire area are influenced by the twice yearly south-west monsoon winds, which give rise to a double maximum rainfall pattern; the major rainy season occurs between March and July and the minor season

between August and November. The average annual rainfall pattern varies significantly between 146 millimetres (mm) and 750mm (Addo et al. 2018). The combination of limited rainfall and high evapotranspiration means that vegetable production is severely limited without supplemental irrigation. The water available from the lagoon is too saline for agricultural purposes, so horticulture production depends on groundwater irrigation from the shallow fresh aquifer underneath the bar. Most of the peninsula is covered by sandy soils but closer to the lagoon edge there are heavy saline clays. The preparation of the sand beds for shallot production at the lagoon side is done through importation of sand from the sea side of the bar (Porter, Young and Dzietror 1997).

According to the GSS (2014b) the peninsula (Keta municipality) has a population of 147,168 inhabitants, with females (53.6 per cent) outnumbering the male population (46.4 per cent). The average household size is 3.8 persons, and children (aged 0–17 years) constitute the largest share (33.3 per cent) of the

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3 Following a referendum in 2018 the Volta Region was divided into the Volta and Oti regions.

household population. About 64 per cent of the population aged 15 years and older is economically active, with 55 per cent of the unemployed population seeking work for the first time.

The economy of the peninsula depends essentially on agriculture. Horticultural crops, particularly shallot, pepper and okra, constitute the largest share, followed by livestock (Addo et al. 2018). There are also small-scale agro-based activities including coconut oil extraction, cassava processing, sugar cane juice distilling, and fish processing, supplemented to a lesser extent by salt mining and sand winning, Kente weaving, carpentry, production of standing brooms, pottery, straw mat weaving, mechanics, masonry, tailoring and dressmaking. Much of the employed population is engaged in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sub-sectors (34.8 per cent), followed by craft and related trade (25.4 per cent) as well as sales and services (21.8 per cent) (GSS 2014a). The agricultural sector accounts for a larger share of female employment than male employment (Addo et al. 2018; GSS 2014a). Addo et al. (2018) note that increased temperatures combined with prolonged periods of drought and variability in rainfall affect the

agriculture sector, with obvious implications for people's social and economic lives.

The Keta Peninsula has a number of tourist attractions including sandy beaches and its extensive lagoon, creeks and mangroves. The lagoon has been designated as a site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention. There are also sites of historical and cultural significance, including the Anlo military headquarters, Fort Prinzenstein, Atorkor slave market, Cape Saint Paul lighthouse, Tsiame and various shrines (GSS 2014a).

The peninsula and surrounding areas are well served by economic and social infrastructure including transport and telecommunications, hospitals, piped water, electric power, schools, community centres and financial institutions (GSS 2014a). Within Volta Region, Keta municipal district, which includes the Peninsula, is among the relatively prosperous districts: the depth of poverty is estimated to be between 5.0 per cent and 9.9 per cent (GSS 2015) while a ranking of all 216 districts across Ghana by poverty incidence placed Keta municipal district as 54th, with incidence of 14.6 per cent compared to 94.2 per cent for the poorest district and 1.3 per cent for the least poor district.

### 3 Historical overview of shallot production on the Keta Peninsula

The Keta Peninsula has been a centre of intensive irrigated shallot and other vegetables production since at least the eighteenth century. However, historical records indicate that the crop is not indigenous to the peninsula and that the actual date of its introduction is unknown. One account suggests that Anlo farmers referred to some of the seed as *afeku* or *home-seed* brought to Anlo from Notsie in Togo by earlier settlers. This account contradicts a report by the Department of Agriculture in the 1950s, which traced the growth of the shallot industry at Agou, a town in Togo, to the German occupation in 1884. Ocloo (1996) notes that none of the aspects of shallot farming in Togo, from cultivation to marketing, suggest a common origin with the type grown in Anlo.

Another suggestion is that the shallot crop was brought to the Anlo area from Anecho in the Republic of Togo (Sinnadurai 1973). The Europeans (Germans, French and Portuguese) were thought to have first brought shallots into West Africa, specifically to Anecho in the Republic of Togo, around 1800 AD and gave the bulbs to the

then Chief of Anecho community. The said chief propagated these shallots in his home garden and thereafter multiplied them. Sinnadurai (1973) noted that a native from Anlo, who was the son of the Togbi Djisam of Anloga, worked for the Chief of Anecho as a farm labourer and it was this son who brought some shallot bulbs to the Anlo area. One of the wives of the Chief of Anecho was also thought to have originated from Anlo and had siblings who frequented Anlo and Anecho. They carried items to and from Anecho, and during such visits shallots were also taken to Anloga (*ibid.*). Whether the variety brought from Togo by Djisam's son was one of the superior strains adopted by farmers in Anlo is difficult to verify (Ocloo 1996).

Other accounts identify the Kwahu, Kpeze, and Nyonbor and Ho areas as playing important roles in the diffusion of shallot production before its arrival in Agou in Togo. In 1957, the Ghanaian Department of Agriculture enumerated 214 shallot beds in a cluster of villages around Saltpond's lower towns, including Kuntu, Ankafu, Abandzi and Kromantsi. In comparison to interior locations in the Gold Coast



(now Ghana), the use of shallots in stews or soup, or raw with pepper and fish, was more widespread along the coast. Ocloo (1996) is of the view that since the settlements in Saltpond had a longer European presence than any in Togo, they could have easily been the sources of diffusion of the shallot crop.

Despite the lack of consensus on its origin, it is well documented that shallot came to dominate the local economy of the Keta Peninsula by the mid-1930s (Patten and Nukunya 1982; Ocloo 1996). During the pre-colonial era, the economy of the peninsula was dominated by fishing and salt extraction, supplemented to a lesser extent by hunting, livestock production, crop farming and manufacturing. There was a high degree of organisation and regularisation of trade in salt, livestock and fish at the time (Ocloo 1996). The major crop grown was coconut on the sea side and near the marshes on the lagoon side, but a large acreage of coconut was affected by the Cape Saint Paul Wilt disease (a lethal yellowing disease affecting coconut), which led to a massive decline in coconut production (Addo et al. 2018; Sinnadurai 1973). This, combined with the perennial difficulties caused by low water levels in Keta Lagoon and the associated decline in fish stocks, spearheaded the interest in commercial shallot farming in and around the peninsula (Porter et al. 1997). The 1930s onwards saw massive and extensive re-filling and reclamation of the marshy land that had been left by the action of the sea and along the lagoon. These lands were converted into vegetable farms, specifically for the production of shallots. Individual farmers extended their activities from Anloga to neighbouring Tegbi, Woe and Vui in the east and to Anyanui, Wuti, Dzita and Atorkor in the west. All available depressions on the peninsula, totalling around 4,500 hectares of land, were reclaimed and utilised for the purpose of shallot production. Ocloo (1996) notes that a process of intensification aimed at increasing the yield of the land began in the 1960s, while in 1963, Hill (1986) described the shallot farming phenomenon on the peninsula as an 'astonishing industry' and 'among the most intensive in the world' based on a renting system that was 'unique in the West African context'. Ocloo (1996) cites Hill (1986), noting that the system itself was developed without any support from the Gold Coast Department of Agriculture, and by the

end of the 1960s, the peninsula had developed a truly 'practical monopoly of shallot production in Ghana' (Ocloo 1996: 1).

The cultivation of shallots was initially restricted to the lagoon side owing to the fact that the water table is relatively high there and the shallow wells of 1.5m to 2.0m are adequate to tap into the aquifer. Over time, due to the shortage of land, many farmers extended cultivation to the seaward side of the bar (Porter et al. 1997). The all-embracing character and speed with which the shallot industry developed led Ocloo (1996) to describe the process of intensified shallot production between 1930 and 1955 as a 'revolution'. Ocloo identified two immediate causes of this revolution. The first was urbanisation, particularly of Accra, which became and remains the main market for Anlo shallots, but also of nearby Lomé, the capital city of Togo. The second was the trade slump associated with the world economic crisis of the 1930s, and the Ghanaian government's response, which was to promote agricultural diversification including vegetable production. A precondition of the shallot revolution was the increased commodification of land, including privatisation and a system for leasing shallot beds.

Over the past two decades there has been a gradual introduction of overhead sprinkler irrigation, with electric pumps being used to extract water from deeper wells. This shift was facilitated in part by a World Bank-sponsored programme in the 1990s, which provided funds for well-sinking and electric pumps, and enabled the expansion of shallot cultivation from the lagoon side, where the water table is close to the surface, to other areas of the peninsula (Porter et al. 1997). Investment in pumps and overhead irrigation has enabled expansion of shallot and vegetable production from the low-lying coastal areas to the upland fields. Indeed, it is now common to see shallots being produced in many household compounds located in the central (i.e. slightly higher) part of the peninsula. Factors such as high market prices and consistent demand for vegetables in urban areas, together with the rising population and fragmentation of land holdings, have meant that many people on the Keta Peninsula continue to rely on commercial production of shallot, okra, pepper and other vegetables for their livelihoods and subsistence (Adzraku 2017; Porter et al. 1997).

## 4 Economics of shallot production and governance of the value chain

The calendar of activities as well as the organisation of land, labour and capital for shallot production and marketing are well structured. Generally, the first planting season is in December/January (possibly with maize intercropped), the second in April/May (generally with tomatoes) and the third in August/September (with tomatoes or peppers). Irrigation is essential for the first and third sowings. This pattern of shallot planting was established by farmers on the peninsula to prevent the spread of pests and diseases, particularly the insect pest 'thrips', and at least in the 1970s, was reported to have been strictly adhered to on the lagoon side (Sinnadurai 1973).

Shallots are often intercropped with other crops that may be planted about 45 days after the shallots have sprouted. Bulbs are planted on beds measuring about 1.5m by 12m. The production method is simple, involving the use of farm implements such as cutlasses and small-handled hoes, and the traditional seed varieties grown on mainly sandy soils must be irrigated regularly. The peninsula's sandy soils have low organic matter content and poor cation exchange capacity. Seeds germinate at a moderate temperature range of 10°C to 30°C and require specific day lengths for bulb initiation (Awadzi, Ahiabor and Breuning-Madsen 2008; Huang et al. 2013; Sinnadurai 1973).

The yield in the dry season is higher than in the wet season. The average yield is about 2.8 to 3 tons per hectare with fertilisers (10-10-10 mixture at 0.07 tons per hectare). Yields of 10 to 20 tons per hectare per year of dried shallots have been reported (Wills 1962). The Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (1994) suggested yields of 1,525 tons per hectare under good management but observed that average yields of 8–10 tons per hectare were more common.

The traditional importance accorded to the prevailing patrilineal system of inheritance makes access to land for farming skewed in favour of men. This is not to say that women may not be able to access land through the patrilineal system. A study by Ayivor (2001) found that 7 per cent of 209 beds surveyed in Torgome depression and 24 per cent of 142 beds surveyed in Tsinyui depression, both in Anloga, were acquired by women through the inheritance system. Under the Anlo patrilineal system of inheritance, both sons and daughters may inherit land from their fathers, although sons take precedence over daughters. This is made

possible because of men's traditional role as family breadwinners. Inter-clan land transfer, guided by four main principles, may facilitate female land acquisition. These include:

- instances where a landlord had daughters but no sons
- instances of outright land purchase by a female
- instances where a landlord decides to reward a good and 'serviceable' daughter with a plot of land
- instances where the sons of a deceased landlord decide to share the father's land with their sisters. In such cases, however, the proportion is always larger in favour of the sons. (Ayivor 2001)

Other tenure agreements – renting, pledging, share cropping and leasehold – exist and allow both men and women to access land for shallot production. Producers commonly work up to 0.4 hectare of self-owned or rented beds.<sup>4</sup> Folitse et al. (2017), in a study of the status of shallot farming on the peninsula, found that a large majority (67 per cent) of shallot farmers were male. Women shallot producers (33 per cent) mostly rely on hired labour for tasks such as weeding, watering and manuring. However, tasks such as harvesting, transportation, marketing and sale of shallot are performed by women producers themselves.

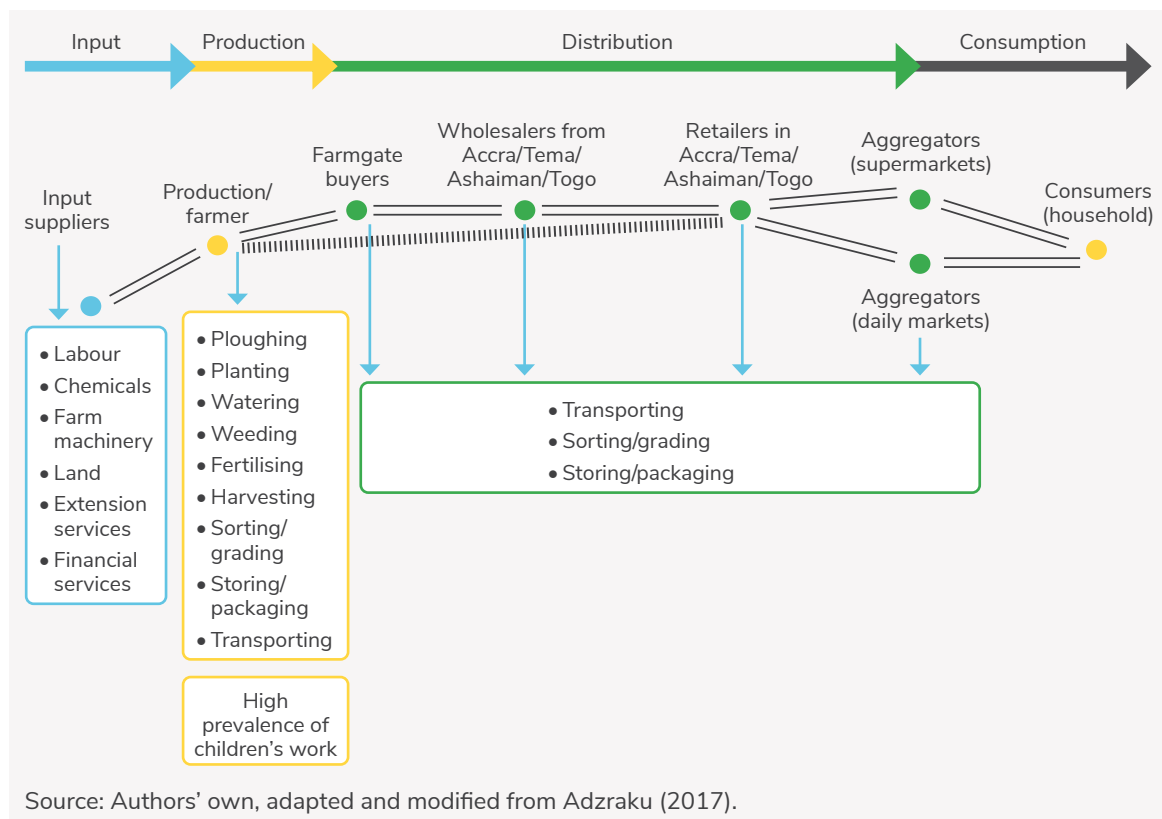
Shallot production requires substantial labour for controlling soil erosion, irrigation and post-harvest handling (Sinnadurai 1973). Labour is needed for organising cattle, chicken and bat droppings and fish waste for manure (Hill 1986), and also for propagating bulbs (a portion of the crop has to be saved each year for this purpose). Labour is also required for weeding, and may come from family and/or hired sources.

The production of shallot on the peninsula requires financial capital for purchasing new shallot bulbs from Togo, obtaining additional plots of land, purchasing fertiliser and insecticide, and also for hiring labour to assist with cultivation and preparation of shallots for the market (Porter et al. 1997). Key challenges faced by shallot and other vegetable producers on the peninsula include the incidence of pests and diseases, fluctuating prices, limited credit and product perishability, which

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4 It costs between \$350.00 and \$1,350.00 per 0.4 hectares per year to rent land suitable for shallots.

**Figure 1. The shallot value/marketing chain in Keta Peninsula**



sometimes compels farmers to transport vegetables to market over long distances (Huong et al. 2013).

Unlike cocoa, there is little or no involvement by state or international actors in shallot production or anywhere else in the shallot value chain. This is not surprising given that the shallot crop is produced and consumed locally with no export or international market (with the exception of long-established links with Togo). Figure 1 illustrates the shallot value chain. The primary actors are input suppliers, farmers, traders and consumers. Private business actors supply seeds, fertilisers, herbicides, pesticides, manure, and irrigation equipment (Adzraku 2017). Shallot producers perform ploughing, planting, irrigation (watering), weeding, pest and disease control, harvesting and post-harvest handling (sorting, grading, packaging, storing, transporting). Traders in the shallot value chain are made up of wholesalers and retailers. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, shallot trading became so lucrative that women from Accra, Kumasi, Koforidua, Ho and Hohoe visited Anloga and the Keta markets to purchase the crop (Porter

et al. 1997). Today, wholesalers mainly from Accra and Tema and, to a lesser extent, nearby Lomé (Togo) buy shallots from farmers in large quantities for onward supply to retailers or direct sales to consumers in the urban market. Anecdotes suggest that Ashaiman is increasingly becoming an important town for shallot trading owing to the growth in settlement of Anlo people in the area. Retailers buy shallots in smaller quantities either directly from producers or from wholesalers to sell in smaller quantities to consumers. Shallots are purchased both at the farm gate and at Anloga market. Prices of shallots are determined through negotiation between producers and traders. Adzraku (2017), in a study of the shallot value chain, found that there is no contractual agreement between producers and traders but the relationship between the two actors could be characterised as a spot market. For traders, prices are low in the rainy season when supply exceeds demand and high in the dry season when the reverse is true (*ibid.*). In the following sections, we synthesise the literature on the forms, prevalence and drivers of children's work in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula.

## 5 Forms and prevalence of children’s work

Within the Keta Peninsula’s highly commercialised and intensive horticulture system, labour is a critically important resource. Historically, the creation, maintenance and irrigation of shallot beds using shallow basins or wells were all very labour intensive. The topography and sandy soil of the peninsula, combined with the action of the sea on one side and flooding of the lagoon on the other, meant that much of the land on which shallots are produced was created and maintained through the concerted actions of local people (Nukunya 1975; Porter et al. 1997).

Historically, shallot farmers relied on household labour to help with these various tasks, and they continue to do so today. Household members who assist include the wife or wives as well as all children over eight years of age (Patten 1990). As shallots came to dominate the local economy, Patten and Nukunya (1982) noted that almost every farmer deemed it necessary to supplement family labour with hired labour. The need to use all available family labour resulted in increasing flexibility with regards to the gender division of labour within the family. Nevertheless, while gender divisions of labour within the household began to erode, the divisions between adult male and female hired labour remained very strict: men are hired to perform tasks that include hoeing, planting, cultivating, harvesting, and bundling for market, while women are hired for sorting of the harvest and head-loading manure or sand into the fields.

Children play a key role in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula. From the age of eight, they begin

to contribute to household agriculture, and many begin to enter the labour market aged about 12, whether they attend school or not (Patten 1990). According to Patten and Nukunya (1982), the increasing use of hired labour during the shallot revolution provided space for children to enter the labour market. The reliance on children to assist, particularly with watering, is linked to the sandy soils on which shallots are grown, which require regular watering. During the first cropping period, which coincides with the rainy season (usually from May to June), shallot farmers are concerned about too much rain and perhaps subsequent flooding of the shallot beds. During this period, there is little if any concern on the part of farmers for hiring labour to assist with watering. However, during the second (mid-July to mid-October) and third (late December to March) seasons, which coincide largely with the dry season, there is continual pressure to supply water to the crops. It is during these periods that school children’s involvement becomes critical. As part of her PhD research in the 1970s, Patten (1990) conducted a household survey and administered a short questionnaire in one primary and one middle school (450 respondents aged 12–20, comprising 199 girls and 251 boys). She also interviewed 20 boys and 20 girls from one of the primary schools that participated in the survey, and interviewed 45 girls and 85 boys in one of the middle schools. Table 3 gives a summary of the children’s participation in household agricultural work as well as household work and contract work by age group and gender based on these interviews and the questionnaire.

**Table 3. Distribution of school children’s involvement in shallot production, 1990**

School group	Age range	Female (no.)	Male (no.)	Total	Assist father, mother, other relative (unpaid work)		Assist with household agricultural work and contract work	
					Female (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (%)
Class 4	12–16	39	53	92	64	53	33	42
Class 5	13–16	38	46	84	61	74	50	65
Form 1	14–16	38	44	82	92	100	76	82
Form 2	15–17	38	37	75	92	86	61	65
Form 3	16–20	20	44	64	40	87	40	68
Form 4	16–20	26	27	53	58	85	38	85

Source: Patten (1990: 183).

It is evident from Table 3 that both boys and girls attending school contribute to both household agricultural production and paid (contract) work, but in most cases, boys are more likely to do such work than girls. For example, of the 92 school attenders in Class 4 (39 girls, 53 boys) aged 12–16 years, 64 per cent of the girls and 53 per cent of the boys assisted with household agriculture production and a further 33 per cent and 42 per cent of the females and males respectively assisted with paid household labour or engaged in contract labour. Likewise, 58 per cent of the girls/young women and 85 per cent of the boys/young men aged 16–20 years in Form 4 worked in household shallot production. Around 38 per cent of the girls/young women and 85 per cent of the boys/young men assisted with household agricultural work and paid agricultural work for other farmers. Notably, the involvement of young women in shallot production began to slacken somewhat as they approached ages 18, 19 and 20, by which time they were assisting their mothers and other female relatives with petty trading to increase household income. The involvement of children who work for other farmers for a wage was structured by gender; while males were hired for watering, fertilising, hoeing, ditching, sowing and harvesting, females who hired out their labour were involved in watering and head-loading. The money that the children earned was their own and they had the option to collect their wages either daily, weekly or at the end of the farming season.

Based on these findings, Patten (1990) concluded that 'without the paid labour of school children, the agricultural system would be unworkable'. She further noted that during her field research, four of six primary schools and all four middle schools operated split days, with a student attending either in the morning or the afternoon, and that this 'greatly enhanced' the feasibility of school children making such an important contribution to shallot production. Ocloo also recognises children's labour as 'essential' (1996: 147), particularly for watering – a task 'dominated by children' (*ibid.*).

In 2019, Yeboah and Sumberg (2020) re-examined Patten's central conclusion – that a well-established, intensive agricultural system was reliant on the paid labour of school children – in the light of three significant changes in context. These changes relate to: (1) investment in irrigation

technology (change from using buckets to draw water from shallow wells to using overhead sprinklers); (2) re-organisation of the school day so that all students attend for the whole day; and (3) increased awareness in both Ghanaian policy and public discourse that children's work may be problematic. Yeboah and Sumberg administered a short survey covering 440 students (aged 11–24 years, 255 males and 185 females, across five schools in Anloga); they also interviewed 20 male and 10 female students from the schools that participated in the survey, and interviewed 10 adult shallot producers. For students in basic school, 87 per cent of boys and 58 per cent of girls reported that they were 'sometimes' or 'often' involved in shallot or vegetable production; the figures for those in senior high school were 64 per cent and 60 per cent respectively. These results suggest that many school children are still frequently working in shallot and vegetable production.

The literature and current observations on children's involvement in shallot production on the peninsula suggest that the most common task performed by many children is watering (Ocloo 1996; Patten 1990; Patten and Nukunya 1982; Yeboah and Sumberg 2020). Watering is normally done in the mornings and the evenings, and children report waking up as early as 4am to go to the farm to water and return at about 6am to prepare for school. They then return to the farm again after school, normally between 4pm and 6pm, although some stay longer. Other common tasks performed by children include weeding (for males), harvesting and sowing. Children's involvement in shallot production is highly gendered, with boys engaged in weeding, sowing, watering and digging. Girls are mostly contracted to assist with grading of the bulbs after harvest and preparing them for the market. Children's engagement in activities such as spraying chemicals, ploughing, digging and fertiliser application is less widespread (Yeboah and Sumberg 2020). Children's involvement in shallot production is structured by both gender and age: boys are more likely to be involved than girls at all ages, and younger boys are more likely to be involved than older boys. Informal conversations revealed that some older boys embark on seasonal migration to nearby Ashaiman and Accra.

## 6 Drivers of children's work

While reliable data on the actual numbers of children engaged in both agriculture and domestic work in Ghana is unknown, there is some literature on the factors that drive children's participation in work, particularly in cocoa and fisheries (Adonteng-Kissi 2018; Agbenya 2009; Amoo 2008; Casely-Hayford 2004; Kapoor 2017). Income poverty, inadequate agricultural technology, limited access to quality education, insufficient adult labour, minimal regulations and enforcement, socialisation of the child, ingrained attitudes about the roles of children, lack of mechanisation, and family livelihood needs have all been noted to contribute to and shape children's participation in work. In comparison with cocoa or fishing, the literature on what drives children's participation in shallot production is less developed.

Patten's (1990) work demonstrated that children's sense of a need to contribute to household welfare was a significant driver for their participation in shallot production, and many parents understood this as 'culturally appropriate'. In addition to their farm work contribution being valuable to household production, the children saw their participation as appropriate because, as one child involved in her research stated, 'my father feeds me' (1990: 184). Similarly, Yeboah and Sumberg (2020) report that children who work on the shallot plots of relatives recognised their work as an opportunity to help parents or contribute to the welfare of the household. Many regarded their involvement in shallot production as part of their responsibility and there appears to be no sense of compulsion or coercion to get involved. For example, a 13-year-old female stated: 'working on the farm is an opportunity to help my father, and my father provides for all my needs through the farming business'.

The involvement of children in shallot production is also driven by hardships at the household level and children's desires to earn income that can be used to meet their needs. Patten and Nukunya (1982) note that children, and particularly young men, contract their labour to earn a wage, which they could invest in acquiring land to start their own farm. However, given that unclaimed land is now largely non-existent, the chances for children to invest their earnings to acquire land for shallot production depends on those who either failed in farming or have no further means for financing cultivation vacating their land. Patten (1990) notes that many children were also motivated by the

desire to earn income, and the monies they earned did not form part of the household budget. In most cases, earnings are (and were) spent on school items (e.g. textbooks, pens, pencils, and exercise books), and personal items including food and clothing (Patten and Nukunya 1982; Yeboah and Sumberg 2020).

Some literature suggests that children's involvement in shallot production is driven by kinship fosterage – a system whereby rural children are recruited to carry out age-specific work for other family members who may not have children of their own (Goody 1966; Ocloo 1996). Ocloo (1996) argues that the tradition of extensive migration during the pre-colonial era gave rise to the institutionalisation of fostering, and this system was used in different ways in the recruitment of children to assist with cultivation during the shallot revolution. In addition to the farmers' own children, many of the family workers on shallot farms are children of distant or close relatives who are deliberately recruited to assist with farm work. Records of 40 farming households in Setsinu-Anloga held by the Committee for Defence of the Revolution in 1992 showed that, of the total of 277 persons living in the household (other than the head of household) who assisted with shallot production, many were farmers' grandchildren (46.6 per cent), farmers' own children (41.5 per cent) or other relatives (11.9 per cent) (Ocloo 1996).

The recruitment of children of distant relatives to assist with shallot production appears to have one particular benefit for farmers. The practice of *fiabui* gives the first male son the chance to shift residence from the family house to start his own independent life, and he would be entitled to receive a parcel of land from his family to compensate for work already undertaken in household agriculture. According to Ocloo (1996), this practice not only makes the senior Anlo male child an unreliable source of labour for household production, but also a potential competitor in relation to family resources. In the early phases of development of the shallot industry, there was little or no difficulty for parents to practice *fiabui*, owing to the availability and under-utilisation of marshy lands. Today, this is no longer the case because of the scarcity of land. In this regard, farmers prefer to recruit distant child relatives to assist with farm work. In the case of a foster child, the farmer is not obliged to give a share of the family land when the foster child decides to shift residence after a period of work.

## 7 Evidence of children’s harmful work or ‘the worst forms of child labour’

There is a dearth of research, policy or media reports that provide direct or indirect evidence of harm associated with children’s work in shallot production. Our search led us to only two studies that specifically mention some potential negative consequences of children’s work in shallot production. What is interesting is that these studies were not designed specifically to investigate harm or exploitation of children working on shallot plots. We are not suggesting that some children working on shallot beds on the Keta Peninsula may not be exposed to hazards, or may not experience harm, but evidence substantiating this is scarce. While acknowledging the important role of children’s involvement in shallot production, Patten (1990) notes that ‘women chiefs and family elders who routinely hear domestic trouble cases indicated that the school attenders increasingly complain about the heavy demands they feel on three fronts: school, home and the wage labour market’ (1990: 186).

While Patten did not provide much information to substantiate this finding, we can infer that children’s engagement in the shallot labour market had implications for their education, and perhaps put them under undue stress. However, having access to cash from work made it more feasible for children to express their displeasures and, in some cases, shift their residence to live with other external family relatives (Patten 1990). Yeboah and Sumberg

(2020) report that some children working on shallot beds experienced fatigue and body pain, which had implications for the time available for their studies, lateness to school and even not attending school. Some children reported that they would perform better at school if they were not involved in shallot work. For example, a 21-year-old male student said:

The time I am supposed to wake up and learn, that is the time I will be going to farm and watering the plants and the crops. It is affecting my performance because I’m not getting enough time to learn what they teach us in class. Farming takes much of my time so I can’t get enough time to learn.  
(Yeboah and Sumberg 2020)

These findings provide insights into the argument that at least for some children, there is a potentially significant trade-off between working on the shallot beds and education. This deserves further careful analysis, recognising that such trade-offs greatly complicate any simple conclusions about harm associated with children’s work. For many children, their engagement in shallot production may help them defray the costs of their schooling, meet their own personal expenses, and contribute to household production – all of which greatly enhances their sense of self-worth and identity as a ‘good child’.

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## 8 Emerging research questions

We have established that children’s labour has historically played and continues to play a crucial role in shallot production on the Keta Peninsula. However, when one compares the volume of research relating to children’s engagement in cocoa (for example), the evidence on the forms, drivers and prevalence of children’s work in shallot production is much less developed. More research is needed to better understand the forms, prevalence and dynamics of children’s work on shallot beds in Keta. While there is some scant evidence of harm, particularly in relation to impacts on education and physical wellbeing, we find very little research directly investigating the trade-off between the benefits and negative effects of children’s involvement in this type of agricultural work.

The evidence presented here also begs some specific questions for future research. What we know currently about children’s work in shallot production is that much of it takes place on the farm (on-farm activities or production). However, and as shown in Figure 1, the shallot value chain goes well beyond on-farm activities. In this regard, future research could examine the governance of the value chain and the gendered nature of children’s involvement in shallot production, processing and trade along the entire value chain. Future research could also explore how indigenous social practices such as fostering and *fiabui* reinforce or mitigate against the involvement of children in shallot production, and levels of harm arising.

Finally, given that there has been no reporting of anything akin to the worst forms of child labour in cocoa production, for example, yet children's work in shallot production is pervasive, perhaps the key question to interrogate is, why? Is it because shallots are produced mainly for the domestic market? Is it that abusive practices (where these exist) have escaped the attention of the media, policymakers and researchers? Or are there aspects of the social, political or cultural landscape context that mitigate against child abuse and

harm? For example, van Hear (1982) reported how during the colonial era, collective actions such as boycotting work, violence for non-payment of agreed wages, spreading of messages about bad treatment to other workers, and solidarity among northern rural casual labourers (including children) were used to help prevent exploitation and harm meted out to child workers. Are similar actions also at play in the Keta Peninsula, and if so, what conditions have allowed them to emerge?

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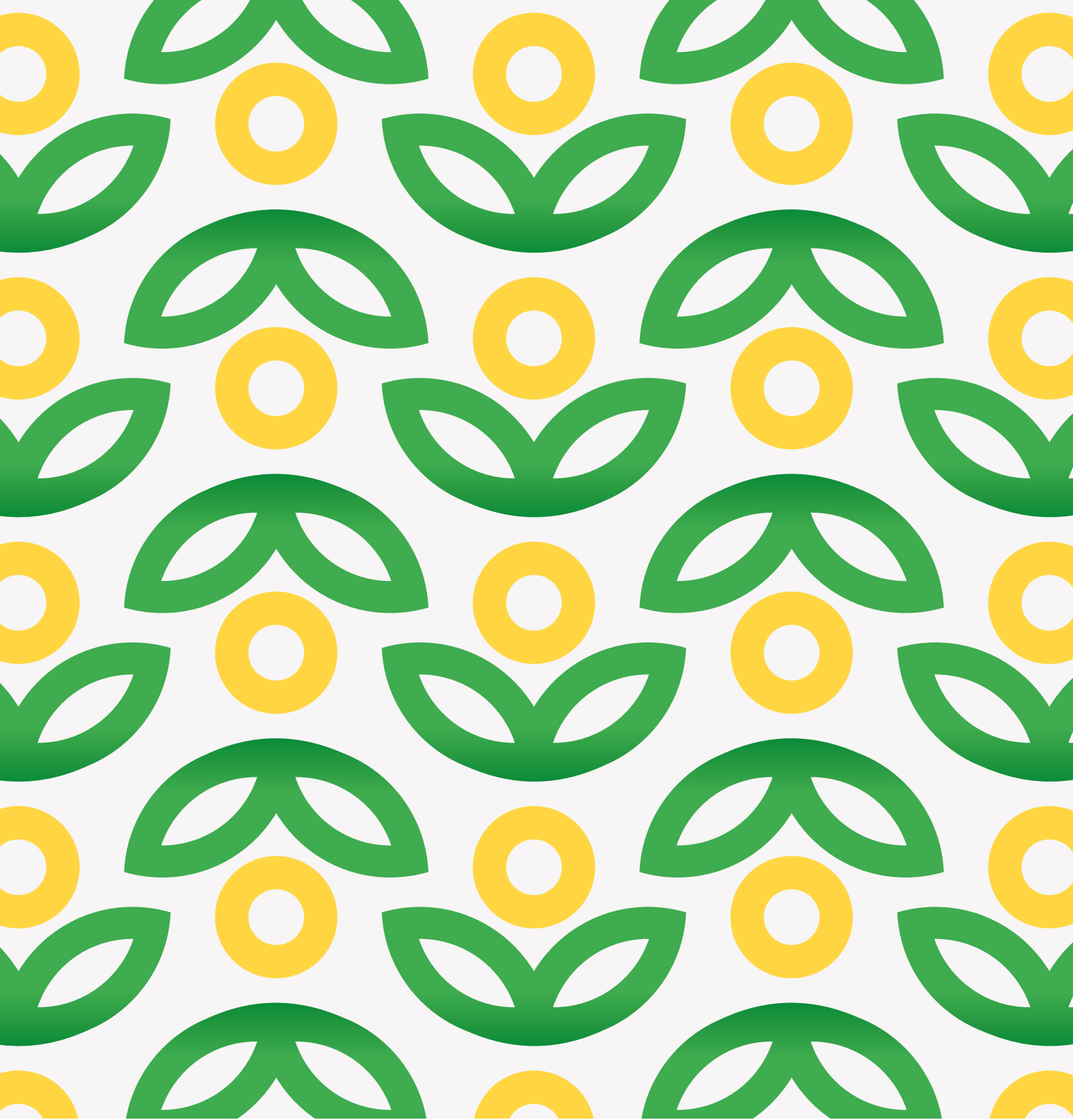
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