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Working Paper 5

Children's harmful work in Ghana's Lake Volta Fisheries: research needed to move beyond discourses of child trafficking

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

About this report:

Children work throughout the Lake Volta fisheries value chain. It is commonly assumed most have been trafficked. Research and advocacy has focused on dangers to young boys harvesting fish, and poverty as a driver, precluding attention to harms experienced by non-trafficked children, girls' experiences and work-education dynamics. More work is needed on the proportions of children who fish and perform harmful work; structural, ecological and historical contexts; young people's agency in pursuing fishing work; and why attention to trafficking dominates.

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Author notes

Imogen Bellwood-Howard's research has focused on sustainable agriculture and food systems, largely in rural and urban West Africa. She has been at the Institute of Development Studies since 2017, where she has worked on projects concerned with agricultural resource use, commercialisation and research funding in Africa. In previous academic roles, she has focused on the social embeddedness of agricultural markets and city-region food systems, and sustainable soil management. Imogen's interdisciplinary and mixed methods research approach draws on environmental geography, with influences from agroecology, socioecological systems thinking, science and technology studies, political ecology and practice theory.

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1 Introduction

Children's work in Ghana's Lake Volta fisheries, as in agriculture and other productive and extractive activities, has a long history, takes various forms and provokes controversy. Such work can be helpful, harmful, or a mixture of both for a given child or household. Considering the history of children's work-related mobility in West Africa, some academic sources have problematised a discourse largely focused on trafficking. Nevertheless, this remains the dominant presentation of children's work in the Lake Volta fisheries among key local stakeholders, as well as in the popular media, academic and advocacy literature. This discourse may have diverted attention from other dimensions of children's work in Lake Volta's fisheries, including the exposure of autonomous and other migrant and home-working children to harm, and the relative advantages and trade-offs associated with children's work.

Contemporary children's work in the Lake Volta fisheries is part of longer-term patterns of mobility and is performed in diverse circumstances involving complex conditions. Some children have indeed been trafficked, but it is hard to say precisely what proportion, because others work with parents, neighbours, strangers or foster carers under a range of different terms and conditions. Some earn cash or in-kind benefits or opportunities through working. At the same time, they may be exposed to reversible or irreversible harms, from light injuries to psychological and emotional damage, and even risk of drowning. Some may have been obliged to work against their will, while others may themselves have decided to work. Alternatively, they may have been party to a difficult household decision that they should perform what they see as unpleasant work for a perceived greater good, such as the wellbeing of their family or better long- or short-term opportunities.

Some aspects of children's work in fisheries are clearer than others. For example, the gender associations of harvesting, processing and marketing tasks are established. Meanwhile, it is probable that the poverty of parents and fishers motivates their willingness to supply and use cheap labour. But many other details are less clear. The actual exposure of fostered, migrant, trafficked and home-working children to different forms of harm could be better quantified, as well as the proportion of working children who fall into each of these categories and the details of how far they contributed to decision-making about their working. There is also need for an assessment of the relative benefits of working in areas where different livelihood opportunities, including schooling, are differentially available.

Furthermore, there is a need to address the disconnect between the literature on children's work in fisheries and that in other sectors, where forms of work and migration other than trafficking seem to play a role: if trafficking dominates the sector to the extent suggested by the fisheries literature (e.g. Iversen 2006; Tengey and Oguaah 2002), why does this sector differ from others? If other forms of migration are in fact present in this sector, what are the reasons for, and effects of, a dominant focus on child trafficking: has this diverted attention from the harms that non-trafficked children are exposed to, and differences between migrant and local children? In all these investigations greater awareness of the historical and structural dimensions of child labour and its mobility would be helpful.

1.1 Working paper objective and methods

This is a scoping paper that explores the current state of knowledge and contemporary discourse to do with children's work in the fisheries value chain around Lake Volta. It will identify knowledge gaps and outline priority novel research questions that future programmes should address.

It starts with a general introduction to fishing on the lake. The paper covers what little is known about the prevalence of children's work, as well as trends, and historical and contemporary drivers. In terms of dynamics, interactions with schooling are considered, as well as ethno-professional aspects of the work, the relative harm caused by working in various contexts, and what proposed solutions say about how the problem is perceived. The conclusion outlines knowledge gaps and priority research questions, and proposes qualitative and quantitative work needed to be carried out to answer them.

The report is based largely on a literature review, augmented with a small amount of data collected in the course of visits made to three districts and several fishing communities along Lake Volta in March 2020. The districts were Pru East, with the capital town at Yeji; Krachi West, with the capital town at Kete Krachi; and Sene East, with the capital town at Kajaji. In addition to the towns of Yeji and Kete Krachi, smaller communities visited were Vutideke in Pru East district; and Lala, Ogache, Tomefa (New Jerusalem Tomefa), Wilikopei, Tokukopei and Aspachakopei, all in Sene East district (Figure 1). Table 1 shows stakeholders encountered in the field.

Table 1. Stakeholders encountered during reconnaissance visit

Role	Location	District
Workers at Department of Community Development and Social Welfare (two male)	Yeji	Pru East
District coordinating director (male)	Yeji	Pru East
Ghana Education Service officials (four male)	Yeji	Pru East
Boat maker (male)	Yeji	Pru East
Ex-child labourer and fisher (male)	Yeji	Pru East
Fishing association fisher and secretary (both male)	Yeji	Pru East
Chief and elder (both male)	Vutidike	Pru East
Assemblyman of Sofoline electoral area (male)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
District chief executive (male)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
District coordinating director (male)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
Ghana Police Service (one male)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
Department of Community Development and Social Welfare (one male)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
Fishmongers (five female)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
Market women (four female)	Kete Krachi	Krachi West
Opinion leader (male)	Lala	Sene East
Chief (one) and community leaders (five male)	Lala	Sene East
Chief (male)	Ogache	Sene East
Fishmongers (four female)	Ogache	Sene East
Fishers (six male)	Tomefa	Sene East
Youths (seven male and three female)	Wilikopei	Sene East
Assemblyman (male)	Tokukopei	Sene East
Fishers (six male)	Aspachakopei	Sene East
Source: Authors' own.		

Interactions with stakeholders were informal, taking the form of guided walk-rounds in communities, and conversations and meetings with key figures in their offices and communities. These conversations dealt largely with respondents' perceptions of the current state of affairs in relation to children's work in fisheries, and how they dealt with these issues in their own work. There was limited probing into the rationales for their professional stances and actions at this stage, as another function of the field trip was to establish cordial relations with field actors. Visits to communities lasted several hours, with conversations with key stakeholders lasting approximately an hour on average. Written notes were taken in English during the conversations and summarised after the interaction. Photographs and notes were taken while walking around communities.

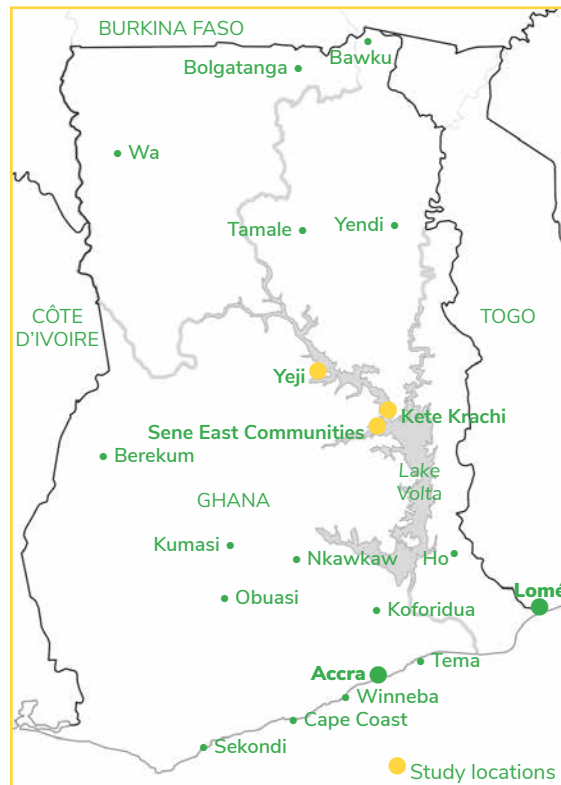## 1.2 Historical, economic and labour context of fishing around Lake Volta

At independence, most of Ghana's wealth came from the export of cocoa, gold and timber. The related industries had long shaped a pattern of labour migration from the north to the south of the country, and a corresponding policy of deliberate underdevelopment of the north by colonial governors to maintain a cheap labour supply (Plange 1979; Songsore and Denkabe 1995; Songsore et al. 2001). Independence leader Kwame Nkrumah instituted a programme of industrialisation as part of an effort to reduce reliance on imports and the export of raw materials.

The industrialisation programme included the construction of the Akosombo Hydroelectric Dam. Lake Volta was formed between 1962 and 1966 behind the dam. As the lake filled, 80,000 displaced people were forced to relocate and find new livelihoods (Raschid-Sally et al. 2008). Simultaneously, migrants, many with ethnic affiliations to fishing including the Ewe, Fante, Ga and their subtribes, came from other, primarily coastal, areas of Ghana to the shores of the new lake to fish. This created a largely artisanal industry, which the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated contained approximately 80,000 fishers and 20,000 processors and traders in 2004–05. Currently, the lake also provides irrigation, transportation and recreational services.

The construction of the Akosombo Dam was a factor contributing to Ghana's high external debt in the 1960s and was not perceived at the time to have contributed to a rise in living standards. Indeed, for those around the lake relocation damaged rather than improved their quality of life (Miescher 2014). Following Nkrumah's overthrow in 1966, national economic performance was variable and conditions did not improve notably for producers, such as the fisherfolk around Lake Volta, as Ghana went through a succession of military and civilian rulers and general macroeconomic decline (Fosu and Aryeetey 2008).

In the early 1980s, the administration of President Jerry Rawlings accepted a package of World Bank and International Monetary Fund structural adjustment measures and austerity policies. This acceptance, and the transition to democracy in 1992, led Ghana to be noted internationally as a development success, though inequality and poverty among farmers and fishers had improved little. Some people who had lost jobs in urban or formal sectors returned to fishing and farming to support their livelihoods.

Figure 1. Map of Lake Volta, Ghana, showing the three study locations

Source: Authors' own.

Though perceived as one of the more stable economies of West Africa, and certainly the most stable democracy, high inflation has continued into the twenty-first century. Since the turn of the century, governments have followed international development accords and trends, notably continent-wide calls for an 'African Green Revolution' comprising modernisation and commercialisation of the agriculture, livestock and fishing sectors (Kansanga et al. 2019). Ghana reached middle-income status in 2011, though the discovery of offshore oil in 2013 did not provide the economy with the upturn expected.

Despite political stability, continuing inequalities mean that people inhabiting less well-connected areas of the country, such as the shores of Lake Volta, continue with diversified, semi-subsistence livelihoods largely based on extraction of natural resources. The sometimes extreme poverty seen along the edge of Lake Volta and in other more remote areas of the country is underpinned by the longer-term, structural factors outlined above, including structural adjustment, historical labour migration and the legacy of the creation of the lake itself (ILO-IPEC 2013; Okyere 2017).

1.3 Fishing on Lake Volta, its governance and labour relations

Fishing as practised on Lake Volta is an arduous and time-intensive occupation. It is occasionally undertaken for subsistence purposes; but largely, fishing is at least partly integrated into local and national value chains. Fishers use a variety of gear and techniques, but fishing with various types of nets dominates. Gill nets are hung in the water; cast nets are thrown and immediately retrieved; and seine nets are cast in a circle from a canoe and pulled in from the shore. Traps are also used – including, more recently, bamboo traps – which several of our respondents were either using or interested in (Zdunnek et al. 2008).

Many of those currently engaged in fishing on the lakeshore still perceive themselves to be migrants, even though they or their parents may have been born on the lakeshore (ILO-IPEC 2013; Zdunnek et al. 2008). Members of such communities retain links to their 'hometowns', often in more southerly locations; for example, travelling 'home' for festivals and funerals (Singleton, Stone and Stricker 2016). Apparently, many of today's lakeside settlements started as seasonal fishing stations before the 1970s and have gradually become increasingly permanent, despite still not being conceptualised as permanent (Chisholm 1983).

In coastal and traditional fishing communities, semi-formal governance structures frequently exist, largely in the form of associations of fishers,[1] who are mainly men, and fishmongers, who are mainly women (Torell, Owusu and Okyere Nyako 2015). Chief fishermen and fishmongers traditionally played important governance roles in Ghanaian fishing communities; for example, enforcing taboo days on which fishing or fish sales were prohibited, to support restocking. Some of these organisations and structures are replicated and persist today in the lakeside communities, including those we visited.

However, in the twenty-first century, these associations are more likely to be involved in political or advocacy activities; for example, advocating on the part of fishers for subsidised premixed fuel. Some are linked to organisations at a national level, such as the Ghana National Fish Processors and Traders Association (Torell et al. 2015). By no means are all workers connected to these organisations: employees and fishing crew members, for example, are poorly organised, and there is no major representative body for minors working in the fishing sector. Fishers, whether in an association or not, tend to operate as independent businesses (ILO-IPEC 2013). Golo (2005) points out that the ethnic orientation of many fishing organisations means migrant fishers who have arrived more recently, including those displaced by conflicts elsewhere in West Africa, may not have access to them or may operate outside their jurisdiction and rules.

2 Children's work in fisheries

2.1 Tasks children perform

Fishers and local government workers we met on the shore confirmed some of the general descriptions given in the literature relating to how children are involved in fishing. It is important to preface this discussion with the observation that, although children are defined as people under the age of 18 in Ghana's 1998 Children's Act, many people do not know their precise age, and may be performing an adult socioeconomic role before reaching their eighteenth birthday; for example, if they start an independent household or family.

Children work at all lake and lakeside stages of the value chain. They produce and maintain equipment and gear including boats, traps and nets. They set and collect traps, and go out onto the lake in boats, rowing, bailing water, and reeling and casting nets. They are often obliged to dive to the bottom of the lake to free trapped nets, which is frequently cited as the most dangerous task they perform, with a high risk of drowning (Adeborna and Johnson 2014; Harrison 2010). They carry fish to shore, process them (cleaning, salting, drying, frying etc.), and sell them. These tasks may be performed in the company of adults, but sometimes are carried out by unaccompanied groups of children, often with older children acting as supervisors.

Based on the survey of Zdunnek et al. (2008), this is the case across the whole lake, from north to south. Some tasks are perceived as especially

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1   The following terms will be used: fishers = people who fish. Fisherfolk = people in fishing communities, including inhabitants ethnically associated with fishing, fishers and fishmongers.

well-suited to children. For example, bearing in mind that a crew of younger children is lighter than a crew of adults, they are seen as better suited for menial tasks in the boat, such as stringing out nets, bailing water and sitting in the prow to direct. Although adults and older youths are more likely to perform physically harder tasks such as drawing in nets, younger children are not entirely exempt from participating in these tasks.

2.2 Prevalence of children's work and harmful work

There are limited data on the prevalence of children of different ages working in the ways described above, and the prevalence of harmful work. Although it is very likely that a majority of fishers and fishmongers have children helping them in some capacity, it is currently impossible to know: (1) what proportion of the labour force is composed of children; (2) what proportion of children are involved; (3) the age and other characteristics of the children involved; and (4) under what terms and conditions they are working, including their migration status. Nevertheless, in line with the preoccupation with trafficking, a few studies have attempted to estimate the proportion of children working who have been trafficked or are working away from their parents.

In 2013, an ILO-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) survey of 350 children working in fishing across ten districts found that 52 per cent were in their home communities, whereas the remainder were from elsewhere in Ghana (ILO-IPEC 2013). This latter group included children who had moved with one or both parents to the fishing community; 75 per cent of children lived with one or both parents, 17 per cent with other family members, and 8 per cent with their employer or another non-family member. The same study surveyed 90 fishers who employed children, 350 parents and 264 community members. Perhaps by combining these responses with those from the 350 working children mentioned above, they reported that 65 per cent of working children were working in communities other than their parental community,[2] but most of these children lived with family members.

Singleton et al. (2016) surveyed the southern portion of the lake by approaching every fishing boat seen on the lake and interviewing each child on board. A total of 768 boys and three girls from 982 boats were surveyed, and the study reported that nearly 60 per cent of the children had been trafficked. This study has been cited by others since, but several critiques can be made of the methodology. Their definition of trafficking was that the child had moved from their birthplace without their parents for work purposes: this can cover many types of child and youth labour relocation described in the literature on West Africa, including some forms of placement with relatives and autonomous migration by young people (Thorsen 2006, 2009, 2014).[3]

This highlights the contentious nature of this definition and its interpretation. It conflates very different categories: 20 per cent of children encountered confirmed that this definition described their situation; a further 37 per cent were classed as 'suspected trafficked' by the researchers. In these cases, they were unable to interview the boat occupants fully. But, problematically, they decided that children who appeared scared, shy, unkempt or deferential to adults were likely to have been trafficked. Nearly 75 per cent of the children were confirmed or estimated to be aged 12 or under.

It is important to note that both these studies sampled children working in fish harvesting rather than across the value chain, and therefore ultimately described the situation of boys, skating over processing and trading activities where girls are represented in greater numbers. There is hardly any information available on the prevalence of girls' work along the fish value chain, and little detailed qualitative information on the nature of it.

When the Ghana Statistical Service, with ILO-IPEC, carried out the 2003 Ghana Child Labour Survey, they found about 25 per cent of children in the fishing industry across the whole of Ghana were aged between five and nine years, while 40 per cent were aged between nine and 14, and 34 per cent were aged between 15 and 17 (GSS 2003: 64); 87 per cent were boys. But, in this survey, wholesale and retail trade is a separate category, and fishmongering, with the girls engaged in it, would therefore fall into this category. This highlights the different implications of taking a value chain and sectoral approach. Further quantitative work would help gain clarity about the

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2   This assumption that all data sources were combined to give the latter sets of results seems the easiest way to reconcile the finding that 65 per cent of children were working in communities other than their parental community, while 52 per cent were in their home communities. Another apparent discrepancy is that 75 per cent of children were reported as living with parents, but also 65 per cent as working outside their parental community. It may be that the study defined 'parental' and 'home' communities differently. In general, this points to a still unfulfilled need to be more explicit about such terms.
3   Nor does this definition refer to the notion of exploitation, central to most understandings of trafficking. Although a definition referring to a unique set of legislation may be overly rigid, there is at least a need to understand what constitutes trafficking in relation to who sees which type of labour as exploitative.

proportions of children of different ages, migration status and gender currently engaged in different nodes of the fishing value chain, and the conditions under which they work.

2.3 Trends in demand and availability of child workers

Traditional leaders and government workers we met in the field repeated the perception of some authors that fish populations and catches have reduced in recent years (Zdunnek et a*l*. 2008), which they linked to the decline in traditional governance mechanisms such as taboo days. Associated with this is the increasing use of unsustainable fishing methods. In visited communities, it was described how very closely woven nets were prohibited by traditional authorities and fishing associations, as they did not allow fingerlings to escape. Yet, use of such nets, along with fishing with lights at night, was apparently becoming more common.

In the medium term, these practices result in declining fish stocks, yields and incomes, cited as a motivation for seeking cheaper labour, a demand ultimately fulfilled by children. At the same time, some respondents suggested that child trafficking was diminishing, as awareness of the importance of schooling rose. Along similar lines, Singleton et a*l*. (2016) describe how, as child labour is declining, reduced availability is increasing the cost of labour.

The timing of work may also be changing as a result of the changing perception of the importance of schooling. Singleton et a*l*. (2016) note that as the perception of schooling becomes more positive, children may be more likely to work only during school holidays. Conversely, local government workers we met had the opinion that, in an attempt to balance children's schooling with the need to survive with an ever-diminishing fish stock, some fishers and fishmongers have resorted to using children at night and sometimes early morning. Children who fish in the early morning often return from fishing and collecting fish from the lake between the hours of 8:30am and 9:00am to prepare for school. They are reported to arrive at school late and leave before the end of the school day to return to the lake.

An increase in the use of motorised boats rather than rowing boats was reported by respondents to have opened the door to greater participation by children and women in fishing. Propelling the boat no longer requires the power of adult men, who demand higher wages. Motorised boats are also able to travel further, possibly contributing to the problem of overfishing and declining fish stocks.

One media report reflects on possible longer-term drivers of change. Boyle (2013) reports that the apprentices originally recruited into family fishing businesses in the decades after the formation of Lake Volta were adolescents who had already finished middle school. As youth perceptions of attractive adult occupations changed, conceivably along with the opportunities open to them and their increasing autonomy, adult fishers found that adolescent labour was less available, and recruitment of younger, more obedient children was necessary to fill the labour gap. Thorsen (2014) has described linked changes elsewhere, as the nature of young West African migrants' conspicuous consumption changes with the globalised context they sit within. Migration away from the fisheries can therefore also play a role. Further qualitative research could help clarify the drivers of change and the contemporary relationship of children's fishing work to schooling.

2.4 Children's work and harm

Children are potentially exposed to various forms of harm during their work, some physical, some emotional and psychological, and some that may be characterised as opportunity costs. In Ghana's 1998 Children's Act, the kind of work that is likely to interfere with a child's education, endanger their health, expose them to physical harm, or negatively affect them mentally, spiritually, morally or socially is considered 'child labour', a term which has a negative connotation, unlike the more ambiguous 'children's work' (Adeborna and Johnson 2014). These categories of potential harm are summarised in Table 2.

The framework set out in Table 2 should not be taken at face value; it is rather a starting point for further consideration of how harm interacts with other aspects of children's work. Some of these harms are encountered by children working in fishing but are not necessarily caused by their work.

The interaction of these forms of harm with children's work and the circumstances under which they work are complex. For example, some children migrate to work in fishing communities to avoid harms such as malnutrition, neglect, violence or a malicious atmosphere in their home communities. Being separated from parents is not experienced equally by all children but depends on the dominant cultural norms about childhood and parenthood and the reasons for their mobility. For many, it is normal not to grow up with their biological parents and it is common in Ghana to move between sets of relatives (Thorsen and Hashim 2011). Some working children miss all or some of school, but the reasons for this may differ. For some, excessive

Table 2. Forms of harm experienced by children working in fisheries

	Specific harm for children	General harm for adults and children
Never reversible	• Opportunity costs of missing school at a young age • Stunting	• Drowning • Malnutrition • Lack of adequate sleep – though what is 'adequate' varies for adults and children
Could be reversible in some instances	• Physical abuse from masters, supervisors and other children • Psychological and emotional distress at being separated from parents • Psychological and emotional distress from hard work • Wasting	• Accidental physical injuries (e.g. cuts, broken limbs, stings from fish, burns from processing fish) • Exposure to the elements (e.g. sun or cold) • Noise-induced hearing problems • Psychological and emotional distress from seeing friends suffer or die

Sources: ILO-IPEC (2013); Singleton et *al.* (2016); Zdunnek et al. (2008)

hours working prevent them from attending their local school, while for others, there may be no school in their community. And children's work provides many more obvious and short-term advantages. It may provide income or sustenance, or be an opportunity to work as an apprentice towards a future vocation.

The study by ILO-IPEC (2013) examined the perception and occurrence of physical injuries and ill health, and stated the proportion of people surveyed who perceived various physical harms to be risks of fishing. When parents, employers, children and community members were surveyed about injuries and sicknesses that had occurred over a six-month period, the most frequently mentioned injury was bruising, but the data do not show the prevalence of injuries by type. Rather, these data, based on perception and recall, demonstrate how hard it is to define and quantify 'harmful' work and point to the need for in-depth qualitative work preceding a quantitative survey of working children themselves.

2.5 Organisation and terms of children's work

Children may work in a variety of situations:

- *They may live and work with one or both parents.*

- *They may work with a family or community member while living with their parent(s).*

- *They may live with a foster carer, usually in a different community from their parents, and work with that foster carer or with another person. Such fostering arrangements are expected to bring benefits to the child, such as access to school or apprenticeship, or better living conditions (Serra 2009).*

- *They may live and work with a fisher who is a stranger to them, in a community outside their parents' community.*

Children may arrive in each of the situations above in a variety of ways:

- *Some children may autonomously decide to migrate to a new location to work, as head porters have been recorded doing in Ghana for decades. This could take the form of seasonal, step or chain migration.*

- *Their movement from their parents' home to a foster home may have taken place to facilitate work, but it may also have been to teach the child to 'struggle', relieve the parent of the responsibility of caring for them, or to access school or vocational training. The move would generally have happened through an agreement between parents and foster carers – although one parent or carer may not have agreed with a decision taken by another (Anarfi and Kwankye 2009; Frempong-Ainguah, Badasu and Codjoe 2009; Singleton et al. 2016). The move may also have been initiated by the child, especially in adolescence when children increasingly engage in economic activities of their own (Hashim and Thorsen 2011).*

- *Orphans and children who have lost a parent may have been sent to live with relatives or have moved on their own volition; for example, to help their mother after the death of their father.*

- *Movement to work with a stranger may be facilitated by that fisher or another person. In this case, the child's movement would have taken place to facilitate work, but the primary motivation for their parent(s) may again have been to be relieved of caring responsibilities. At least one parent would usually have been in favour of this. In some cases, parents may have paid an agent to facilitate the child's movement. This is what is termed 'trafficking' in much advocacy literature (e.g. the aforementioned study by Singleton et al. 2016, which does not distinguish effectively between trafficking and other migration) with the assumption that an element of exploitation is involved. Academic literature points to the complexity of these situations – there may be some agency of the child involved, or an assumption on the part of the facilitator or employer that they are helping rather than exploiting the child and/or parents; for example, by providing access to an apprenticeship (Thorsen 2019).*

- *A move to work with a stranger may have been facilitated by a family member.*

- *Some children may have been kidnapped and taken to work with strangers.*

Once in a work situation, children work under a variety of (potentially overlapping) terms and conditions (ILO-IPEC 2013; Kielland 2008; Sackey and Johannesen 2015):

- *They may work for free, for a parent, foster carer or master.*

- *Their work may be perceived as an apprenticeship.*

- *They may receive a more or less regular payment from their parent or the fisher for whom they work. The payment may be related to the catch, or only start after a period of time – maybe years.*

- *Their parent(s) may receive a regular payment from the child's master.*

- *Their parents may receive a one-off payment, which in some cases may be considered as the child having been 'sold' for a period of time or permanently.*

- *The child may have an option after a given period to continue or cease work.*

Additional considerations are that a child may be working to repay a debt incurred by their parents, and that the child or their parents may have been defrauded, erroneously believing that one of the above arrangements has been made.

ILO-IPEC (2013) recorded that 78 per cent of working children surveyed worked more than four hours a day, with 44 per cent working seven or more hours. Of the 350 working children surveyed, 51 per cent said they were not paid, but 64 per cent were fed. Children and young people have been recorded to work for up to ten years with a certain master, though Singleton et al. (2016) found apprenticeships of 2–3 years to be the commonest form of employment. Adeborna and Johnson (2014) note that parents keen for their children to inherit the family business may be particularly eager for them to train as apprentices, whether with themselves or another fisher.

The parents of fostered, migrant and trafficked children may not be aware of their child's living or working conditions, or any associated risks. In a study of parents in communities from which children were trafficked to work in the fishery, 33 per cent of parents indicated that they did not know the conditions under which their children were living and working (*ibid.*).

The above lists highlight how children's work and children's harmful work may take place in a variety of complex situations, within each of which an array of divergent motivations and expectations may be at play. Most of the literature on child labour in fisheries does not acknowledge the blurred boundaries between these categories, or the social context within which children's work fits.

The general literature on child mobility in West Africa shows how child placement and fostering, as well as autonomous child migration, take place in a context of extended family and ethnic relations, where a young person's upbringing can be translocal, and mobility between different branches of the family or even clan or ethnic group may be perceived to have advantages (Boyden and Howard 2013; Thorsen and Hashim 2011). Beyond material gain, these include the development of social and occupational skills. Across ethnic groups, sending a child from one arm of the family to another performs various functions: alleviating the burden on biological parents; reinforcing bonds between different branches of the family; giving the child access to resources that are unavailable in the parents' community, such as school; and providing labour to foster carers. This may redistribute the gender balance in either household and thus the gender of labour available within them.

Mobile children and youth also mobilise claims upon kin and peers as they negotiate entry into work; for example, by seeking accommodation, work experience or introductions to employers. Though

there is recognition of fostering, the discourse on child labour and trafficking employed in the fisheries-specific literature is largely incognisant of these factors. So, it is necessary to preface quantitative research with a set of qualitative work, aiming to understand the interrelations of these situations in the context of fisheries, while drawing on the rich understandings from the anthropological literature on the nature of children's mobility in West Africa.

2.6 Gender and social difference

The association of fishing with certain ethnic groups is outlined above. Ga, Ewe and Fanti people may pursue fishing as part of a diversified livelihood (Béné and Russell 2007), although not all people in these groups are fishers, nor is fishing their exclusive domain. Simultaneously, poverty is characterised as a major driver of children's work, and thus children's harmful work, and the dynamics of this are highlighted below. An important intersection to explore will therefore be that of ethnicity and socioeconomic or poverty status with harmful children's work.

Although it is very difficult to ascertain numerical trends in relation to children's work in fishing, the gender distribution of tasks is marked. Over 90 per cent of children engaged in the actual fishing are boys, although girls and women do occasionally fish in some communities, generally closer to the shore (ILO-IPEC 2013). As far back as 2003, the Ghana Child Labour Survey reported a similar pattern in the national fishing industry, including coastal as well as inland waters: of the more than 49,000 children engaged in fish harvesting, 87 per cent were boys (GSS 2003: 64). Processing and marketing, on the other hand, are dominated by women and girls, although, again, there are exceptions (Singleton et al. 2016; Zdunnek et al. 2008).

The literature on children's migration into work across West Africa shows that gender patterns vary between context and sector (Kielland 2008; Kielland and Sanogo 2002; Van de Glind 2010). Locally specific norms define the tasks deemed appropriate for girls and boys of different ages, but agricultural tasks have generally been perceived as

the domain of boys, and girls are more likely to work in domestic settings.

There are several further layers of gendered power relations in the fishing industry, as in other areas of production in Ghana. Market traders and fishers may have reciprocal trading relationships that function in part to manage seasonal fluctuations in supply, and to provide rapid routes to market. When wives and husbands have reciprocal trading relationships, resources are retained within households in such a way as to cushion individual market losses at household level.

A further household management strategy operates when children work in either arm of these family businesses. Market traders may on occasion have a large degree of control over fishers. They may fuel the boat and offer credit. Sometimes they may own the fishing equipment, even the boats. In matrilineal systems, they may have inherited this equipment from a female lineage member (Torell et al. 2015).

There is scant detail on how these dynamics relate to those of girls' work in fisheries. Field visits confirmed that there are cases where girls work in jobs traditionally allocated to boys; for example, when a family lacks sons. Informants reinforced the understanding in the literature that girls mainly engage in fish processing and sales, which have the same ethnic links as fishing. Also, girls who are recruited into fishing jobs or communities may perform much household work (Singleton et al. 2016).

Largely, girls' involvement in fish marketing is not problematised in the literature nor by field informants. There may be a perception that this is an appropriate, less harmful, formative activity for girls; or that opportunity costs for girls are lower anyway, so their activity deserves less attention. Alternatively, it may be that 'boys' work' harvesting fish attracts more attention due to its physical and obviously dangerous nature.

Whatever the reason for this omission, there is certainly scope to better understand the nature and implications of girls' work in fisheries. Important questions relate to the extent to which boys and girls perform domestic chores in addition to or instead of productive work, whether boys' and girls' mobility patterns are similar, and the function of ethnic tropes in the social construction of gendered work roles.

3 Drivers of children's work and harm in fisheries

3.1 Poverty and its historical components

In the field we were repeatedly told that fishing is, by its nature, a team activity; it cannot be done by a single person. Each of the several crew members in a boat performs an essential function, such as bailing water and untangling and casting nets, and these must be performed simultaneously. The only form of fishing that can be performed by a sole operator is trapping, and even this is more successful when done in a team. But why should the members of the team be children? Critically, their labour is cheaper.

Authors commonly characterise demand for cheap labour as being driven by general 'poverty' in fishing communities (Moreto et al. 2019). It is claimed that fishers cannot make a living if they pay full wages to adult crew members; this was also the perception of field respondents. This interacts with, and may even partly be driven by, the aforementioned decline in fish yields; apparently, even though prices have risen as fish become scarcer, this is insufficient to overcome declines in catch (Teh et al. 2019). Fishing is therefore only economically viable if labour is almost free.

Béné and Russell (2007) describe some of the wider drivers of poverty, specifically for fishing communities around the lake edge, including lack of access to farmland for those seen as 'migrants'. These interact with the same structural factors Okyere (2017) cites as contributing to fishers' poverty more generally, including inadequate investment in infrastructure; the poor skills base of many fishers, which prevents them gaining access to alternative employment; and poor access to credit and finance facilities that could allow them to develop their businesses. At the same time, Béné and Russell's work suggests that an oversimplified narrative of fishers' poverty should be avoided. They characterise fishing as the most important activity in a diversified livelihood for all income groups and ethnicities living around Lake Volta. Their work also cautions against a perspective that all fishers are poor or very poor. Indeed, key informants explained how some fishers were able to send their children to school in Kete Krachi and pay for their accommodation in school hostels.

In the case of children who migrate to work in fishing, poverty in source communities is also cited as a driver (Adeborna and Johnson 2014). Parents' inability to provide adequate food, shelter or other care is cited as contributing to their or the child's own decision that a child should move elsewhere

(Béné and Russell 2007; Singleton et al. 2016; Tengey and Oguaah 2002; Zdunnek et al. 2008). Work itself is therefore not always the primary motivation for a move that results in children working. For some employers, accepting a child worker is a favour to the parents; they are relieving the family of a burden and offering an opportunity to earn money (ILO-IPEC 2013; Zdunnek et al. 2008).

Many children feel a responsibility to contribute to their parental household in these ways. Children have agency in decisions regarding work, and whether to leave their parental community to work or stay in their community (Thorsen 2006). Norms to do with household responsibilities and community expectations play a role in shaping that agency. Similar ideas of responsibility may motivate children's work in their parents' fishing operations, as was the case for subsistence child fishers we met in the field. Children appear to understand and appreciate the potential advantages of work, and even studies that are highly critical of children working and child trafficking show that many children working outside their home communities do not wish to return (Tengey and Oguaah 2002).

The work of Béné and Russell (2007) and Okyere (2017), along with some of the observations made in the study by ILO-IPEC (2013), begin to draw attention to the wider historical context of the drivers of children's work in fisheries. The colonial and postcolonial context of north to south labour migration, the displacement of households during the creation of Lake Volta and structural adjustment policies all form part of the background to the impoverishment of fishing communities (ILO-IPEC 2013; Okyere 2017). Golo (2005) proposes that these drivers interact with the mismanagement of fishing as a natural resource-based economic sector. Repeated economic downturns since the 1960s have pushed many people into primary productive labour, raising pressure on fisheries and reducing yields, as recognised by many of our respondents. The failure of formal and traditional governance structures to manage these trends has strengthened the dynamic between diminishing resources, poverty and demand for cheap labour.

Some of the literature has cast child trafficking as a recent subversion of traditional fostering into an increasingly prevalent, harmful, undesirable practice (Iversen 2006) and thus a new driver of children's harmful work. Texts and informants encountered in the field connected this with an increase in breakdown of parental relationships, single parenthood, unwanted children and the

decline of family values (ILO-IPEC 2013; Torell et *al.* 2015). Yet, as hinted at above, the relation between children's work, migration and fostering is much more nuanced (Golo 2005). Further qualitative and then quantitative work is needed to understand whether the practices branded as 'trafficking' differ from more long-standing forms of child mobility, and what their relation is to children's harmful work.

4 Discourses and policy

4.1 Discourses

Here, 'discourse' refers to how the issue of children's work is treated in media and policy. Though the lists above describe several modes of children's engagement in the fisheries, media, public, academic and policy discourse on children's work in the Lake Volta fisheries largely focuses on trafficking. 'Child rescue operations' are therefore often presented as an important solution to the most pressing problems of children's work in fishing. Field informants described how 'rescued' children can be sent to children's homes or refuges before being returned to their community. Some refuges are run by the government and others by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Children may be in such homes for several years and, in instances of child rescue, adults accused of using a child's labour may be prosecuted and even fined or jailed.

These discourses on trafficking and rescuing were very evident during our field visits. Okyere's (2017) paper, like that of Huijsmans and Baker (2012), describes how NGOs in particular have an interest in promoting these discourses, as opposed to foregrounding structural and historical drivers of labour migration. Fundamentally, financial support for their activities depends on the proposition that child trafficking is a widespread and recurrent problem. Although all actors on the ground agreed that trafficking was a problem, it is hard to know how far the discourse had actually worked to the advantage of each. Although some NGOs had received resources to carry out sensitisation activities or rescues, government bodies responsible for social welfare in their district experienced a degree of reputational damage from this narrative.

Counter and complementary solutions to that of child rescue to a small degree are evident on the ground. In some cases, less drastic approaches are used alongside rescue operations to address the involvement of parents, suspected child traffickers and children in trafficking, and to manage the potential harm of children's work in fishing. For example, the Ghana Child Labour Strategic Initiative was a three-year project funded from 2007 to 2010 by the Legatum Foundation, a philanthropic organisation, to deal with child labour and trafficking in the fishing communities of Lake Volta. While the project focused partly on rescues, it also undertook initiatives to introduce parents to alternative income-generating activities (Adeborna and Johnson 2014). The Social Welfare Department in Yeji also advocated community education on the disadvantages of and laws against child labour as an alternative to rescues. The opinion of department staff was that while they would perform rescues as a last resort, the rescues tended to damage relations between adults within a given family.

Despite recognition that rescue is only part of the solution, both the literature and especially stakeholders on the ground seem to present a less nuanced view of the problems associated with children's work in fishing. The dominant focus on trafficking has excluded consideration of other forms of mobility. Also, it has precluded an explicit problematisation of harmful work in itself, beyond its association with trafficking. Situations where children are obliged to perform hazardous work by their parents or kin were either ignored or seen as necessary and unavoidable, although regrettable.

There was no explicit recognition that children's engagement in hard, hazardous and harmful work is an unfortunate precursor to their adult working lives. As the major problem is perceived to be trafficking, notions of rescue, rehabilitation and return to 'home' dominate the proposed responses. This takes the focus off economic aspects of the fisheries such as labour costs, livelihood characteristics in general, or the exposure of children to harmful work in their parental communities. Another point frequently made in the literature is that such work is often carried out without personal protective equipment (ILO-IPEC 2013). This suggests that there is some acceptance that eradication of children's work is not so realistic, feasible or desirable; rather its amelioration is probably more realistic in the short term.

In the literature and discourse on the ground, children's work in fishing is rarely framed in terms of labour mobility. Its intersection with seasonal, chain, step, short- and long-term migration requires elucidation. The 2003 Ghana Child Labour Survey provides a useful starting point. Table 3 shows data

Table 3. Data on reasons for moving, from a 2003 survey of working migrant children

Reason for moving	Volta (%)	Eastern (%)	Brong Ahafo (%)	Northern (%)
		Region*		
Attending school/training	33.8	29.8	44.4	7.7
Sent by parents	29.1	36.8	27.3	65.8
Other	18.5	10.3	10.2	10.3
Came with parents	10.1	9	4.8	2.6
Lost parents	5.3	9.8	4.8	9.4
Marriage	1.6	0.4	0	0.9
Job transfer	1.1	0.9	1.1	1.7
Looking for job	0.5	1.3	5.9	0
Found job	0	1.7	1.6	1.7
Total	**189**	**234**	**187**	**117**

* In 2003, Ghana had ten regions rather than the current 16. The 2003 Volta region is now split into Volta and Oti regions.
Source: based on GSS (2003: 47)

collected from migrant working children in 2003, for regions adjoining Lake Volta only. A deeper look into a contemporary version of these data would help understand forms of migration in more depth. It would be useful to understand whether young people 'sent here by parents' were sent to work, and whether working on a fishing boat was perceived as 'training'. Otherwise, these data would be hard to reconcile with the narrative of trafficking.

Work on children's migration elsewhere in West Africa shows that older children and youths often migrate alone or in groups for work, with or without the consent or assistance of their parents. In Ghana, children's autonomous seasonal migration has been reported for decades, particularly from north to south to work as head porters (Giese and Thiel 2015; Huijsmans 2012). While child placement and fostering are referred to in the fisheries literature (sometimes framed as an unfortunate historical precedent for trafficking), the prevalence of similar autonomous migration in fishing is not reported in the literature. As far as the fisheries are concerned, the discourse on child trafficking has filled this gap in understanding the relationship between child mobility and work.

If a framing of 'migration' or 'mobility' rather than 'trafficking' is considered appropriate, the significance of multiple forms of migration can

be considered. Families, including children, still occasionally migrate to take up fishing in lakeside locations, and children may migrate with their families, as well as individually or in groups with other children, for the reasons outlined above (e.g. to gain access to work or schooling, or because they are being fostered or have been orphaned). This may not have hitherto been sufficiently appreciated. The funders' reporting on the aforementioned Ghana Child Labour Strategic Initiative notes that implementing agencies could not always tell the difference between children who had migrated with parents and those who had been 'trafficked', leading to erroneous attempts to 'rescue' children from their own parents.

This also highlights that the discourse of 'rescue', as commonly employed, potentially conflates movement and harm, and may not address situations where children experience harm at the hands of their parents. Nor does it deal with the issue of classificatory parents – a biological uncle described as a 'little father', for example – and whether they treat biological and classificatory children differently. The differential experiences of migrants show that although migration can be a strategy by which people gain access to better livelihood opportunities, some migrants may have access to a more limited range of opportunities than indigenes, even when placed with kin (Golo 2005).

Besides discourses of trafficking and rescue, policy-focused work, such as that carried out by ILO-IPEC (2013), has also advocated market-based or value chain approaches, which may be informed by the contemporary dominant agricultural development frameworks that promote marketisation and commercialisation. These approaches focus on giving fishers business training to improve their profits and reduce demand for cheap child labour.

In academic work, human rights approaches have been used to address harmful children's work in fisheries, though they have been far more widely used to examine access to resources such as fishing grounds (Ratner, Asgard and Allison 2014). In such frameworks, children's rights would be situated in the context of workers' rights in general (*ibid*.). Authors such as Teh et *al*. (2019) suggest that human rights frameworks can only be instituted in a setting where legal pluralism is recognised. Also, ideas about human rights may not be shared by advocacy organisations and fishing communities.

The multiple opinions about the drivers and forms of children's work are as worthy of research as the work itself. So, there is a rationale for proposing qualitative and historical research on the development of different interpretations of children's work in fisheries. Combined with a more nuanced understanding of the forms of children's work, this could lead to real insight into the development of policy processes and their influences on children's work in fisheries.

4.2 Policy, practice and key stakeholders

Ghana has formally recognised child trafficking and child labour as problematic through ratification of international accords and specific legislation (Table 4), and this sympathetic policy environment may be a contributing factor to the prevalence of the anti-trafficking discourse. Nevertheless, the

Table 4. Policy actions relevant to children working in Ghanaian fisheries

Date	Policy action and commentary
1990	Ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
1998	The Children's Act (Act 560) brought into law the recommendations of the 1973 ILO Minimum Age Convention for Admission to Employment (Convention No. 138) – people aged 13 years can legally perform light work that does not threaten their health, safety or education; those aged 15 may do other non-hazardous work; and those 18 and over hazardous work.
2000	Ghana ratified the 1999 ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (182)
2002	Fisheries Act (Act 625) – this contains no mention of children's work
2003	Labour Act (Act 651) – Section 58 prohibits employment of people under 18 in hazardous work
2005	Human Trafficking Act (Act 694)
2007	Domestic Violence Act (Act 732)
2008	National Fisheries and Aquaculture Strategy – contains no mention of children's work
2009	Human Trafficking Act (Act 694) amended
2010	National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour in Ghana (2009–2015)
2015	Child and Family Welfare Policy
2015	National Social Protection Policy
2016	National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labour in Ghana (2016–2020)
2018	Strategy on Anti-Child Labour and Trafficking in Fisheries formalised
Source: based on MOFAD (2014) and authors' own research	

Table 5. Key actors, stakeholder groups and organisations

Government	Industry bodies	Community actors	Advocacy NGOs	International organisations
Ministry of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development	Ghana Canoe Fishermen Council	Chief fishermen and market women	Free the Slaves	ILO
Fisheries Commission	General Agricultural Workers' Union of the Trades Union Congress-Ghana	Chiefs	Parent and Child Foundation	UNICEF
Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations	Ghana Employers' Association	Religious bodies	Challenging Heights	SNV
Ministry of Education/Ghana Education Service	National Fisheries Association of Ghana	Parents	International Needs	USAID
Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	Ghana National Inshore Fisheries Association	Children	Engage Now Africa	University of Rhode Island, under the Sustainable Fisheries Management Partnership
Labour Unit	National Inland Canoe Fishermen Council	Youths	Friends of the Nation	
Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service	Local fishery associations		Partners in Community Development Programme	
Local District Councils	National Fish Processors and Traders Association		Savana Signatures	
Ghana Navy				
Department of Community Development and Social Welfare				
Members of Parliament				
Assembly members				
Unit committee members				
Source: based on ILO-IPEC (2013)				

specific manifestation of children's harmful work in the fishing industry is not recognised: neither the Fisheries Act nor the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Strategy specifically mention it.

One significant implication of this suite of legislation is that it legally defines children as people aged under 18 years, which does not always correspond to local understandings of social age and childhood (Golo 2005). Certainly, some people aged between 15 and 18 may need to perform potentially hazardous work to support their own children. An additional practicality is that not all children currently know their age, despite birth certificates having been mandatory since 1965.

Despite the array of relevant legislation, implementation of the various laws related to children's work is claimed to be weak (MOFAD 2014). So, in 2015 USAID, SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation) and the Fisheries Commission, with the input of the Ghana Agricultural Workers' Union, instigated the process of developing the Strategy on Anti-Child Labour and Trafficking in Fisheries. The strategy emphasises the 'Torkor Model', where community structures and informal labour groups are asked to take ownership of and responsibility for solving a problem, rather than relying on external agencies (MOFAD 2014). So, the interconnections between multiple stakeholders are increasingly recognised by donors and government as well as NGOs and academic and media analysis. The relevant groups of such actors are listed in Table 5.

5 Dynamics of children's work and harm in fisheries

5.1 Work and school

Negative impacts on schooling were a major component of the discourse in the field, and are referred to in several publications (Sackey and Johannesen 2015; Singleton et al. 2016; Zdunnek et al. 2008). The complicated relationship between work and school has been hinted at above. The survey by ILO-IPEC (2013) of 90 employers reported that 75 per cent said their working children also attended school. From the sample of 350 parents, 53 per cent said their children had dropped out of school, with 34 per cent of those citing fishing-related reasons (ILO-IPEC 2013).

We critiqued above the binary perspective of Singleton et al. (2016), who divide working children into trafficked children and those working with parents, excluding consideration of other forms of migration. Singleton et al. (2016) suppose that trafficked children are less likely to attend school than those who are living with parents, and this perspective was repeated by actors we met in the field. It was claimed that when trafficked children do attend school, attendance is late or partial, or they fall asleep in the classroom, due to their participation in early morning fishing. By 2pm, some are leaving the classroom again to return to the lake.

These observations show that when any child – trafficked, fostered or living with parents – works very hard, their school attendance and learning are likely to be affected. However, corroborating the propositions of Singleton et al. (2016) that these effects are more likely to be seen among trafficked children (perceiving 'trafficked' to be synonymous with 'working'), some field sources said that fishers may send their own children to school while denying the same opportunity to other children who work for them. At Yeji and Kete Krachi, for instance, there are hostel facilities for students in basic schools, which are partly occupied by children of wealthier rural fishers.[4]

Nevertheless, some actors in the field, as well as authors, recognise that the picture is often more complex. For example, the trade-off between schooling and working may not be so easy to interpret. Schools are often weak or absent from fishing communities. Teachers are not well supported; there may be no accommodation for them and some new recruits, especially those trained in urban areas, are ill equipped to stay for extended periods in remote locations that lack infrastructure. Systemic failure to ensure the quality of learning at schools means that working is often a more reasonable choice for children, with more tangible, immediate rewards (Iversen 2006).

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4   Those who cannot afford hostel fees arrange with friends and relatives in towns for their children to stay with them and attend school.

When school opportunities are lacking in a child's home community, it may make sense for them to travel to another location to work and gain access to school in the process, albeit limited access (Singleton et a*l*. 2016; Zdunnek et a*l*. 2008). The literature also shows that there is often a positive interaction between work and school when school fees are met by children through their own work. School feeding programmes play an important role in many of these communities. Key informants mentioned that provision of school meals can act as an incentive for parents and fishers to send children under their care to school, and possibly even for parents to send their children to live in a community where they know there is a school feeding programme (Awojobi 2019; Ofei-Aboagye 2013).

5.2 Ethno-professional and migrant identities

The continued tendency of different ethnic groups with ethno-professional fishing identities to perceive themselves as migrants means that some lakeshore communities have maintained fairly temporary structures in their settlements, even when those communities have existed for several generations. For example, houses may continue to be constructed from grass and wood rather than adobe and tin. In addition, the necessity to relocate when the lake floods makes more permanent structures a risky investment. The temporary appearance of those communities was cited in the field as having discouraged local governments from building permanent facilities and infrastructure such as schools or community centres, or installing electricity (ILO-IPEC 2013). This interacts with the prevalence of poverty as a driver of children's work, and links directly to the relationship between school and work.

Another implication of this self-perception as migrants is that individuals maintain close links with communities that are geographically distant; those living as far north as Yeji may refer to coastal communities such as Big Ada as 'home', and continue to visit 'home' for festivals and social visits. This can be the route by which fostered and trafficked children are sourced (Singleton et a*l*. 2016) and voluntary migrants come to hear of working opportunities elsewhere, possibly participating in chain migration. Labour practices are intergenerational. Singleton et a*l*. (2016) point out that trafficked children can then become traffickers themselves or fishers who go on to use trafficked children or their own children. The same applies to migrants. Indeed, we encountered such cases in the field.

It was mentioned that migrants may have limited access to farmland around their settlements, meaning that they rely on fishing to a great extent.

For example, the headmen or village chiefs in the Ewe communities we visited around Yeji emphasised that they were not the indigenes of the area, and therefore had to refer to the Nchumuru 'land custodians' or indigenous chiefs in some matters. Some perceived that limited access to farming could accentuate the reliance on fishing labour and inability to pay high wages, and thus the reliance on children. This perception has also been reported in the popular media and grey literature (Béné and Russell 2007; Boyle 2013). It is important, therefore, that future research includes an ethno-professional dimension.

5.3 Relative harm when working with parents, family and strangers at home and away

This paper has suggested that not only trafficked children are exposed to harm. While some of the emotional and psychological harms involved in working relate to being displaced from their parental home, all working children risk being exposed to potential hazards such as arduous work and inclement weather conditions. Yet, evidence has been presented that trafficked children are less likely to attend school, are fed more poorly and have worse clothing than other children (Singleton et a*l*. 2016).

Actors in the field suggested that fishers may feel that they own the children for whose services they may have paid and are therefore entitled to beat them or work them as hard as possible. A contrasting opinion was that some masters, under some conditions of service, may consider borrowed or fostered children as still belonging to someone else, and so they cannot beat or work them as hard as their biological children. Violence is not only meted out by masters, however; it happens between child workers, and between child workers and their supervisors, who may also be children.

These considerations, and the previous discussion about school and opportunity costs, make it clear that it is hard to make generalisations about the relative harm experienced by children working at 'home' or as fostered, employed or trafficked children in a new community. For example, Singleton et a*l*. (2016) asked children working away from their parental community why they did not return home. Although some were prevented from leaving, or lacked the resources or knowledge to do so, others considered their situation to be better than in their parental community, largely because of the greater availability of food.

This issue of relative harm is worthy of further attention. It seems important to organise the factors that must be considered when thinking about the

harm each working child experiences, and whether their experience is relatively worse than any alternative situation they may be exposed to. Such considerations include:

- *The type of work boys and girls are obliged to do at different ages or take on to earn an income.*

- *The hours of work, both in total and in terms of whether they interfere with schooling, sleeping or other activities the child may value, such as play, sports or church attendance.*

- *Non-structural factors such as the disposition of their master and/or supervisor(s).*

- *Any protective equipment they are provided with.*

- *The norms associated with bringing up children in the source communities, including family systems and social values perceived as conventional.*

- *The availability of alternative livelihood activities, food and healthcare facilities and quality schooling either in the community where they are working, or in the home or source community from where they may have come.*

5.4 Children's own motivations and agency

It is possible that some children appreciate the opportunity to develop their ethno-professional identity as an adult through fishing and fishmongering roles. Some children exercise their agency in the decision to work, perceiving immediate advantages such as earnings, greater availability of food or the opportunity to attend school (Anarfi and Kwankye 2009; Frempong-Ainguah et al. 2009; Thorsen 2006). Longer-term benefits they may consider include developing skills for future work, including leadership and decision-making skills they may not have the chance to develop at school (Sackey and Johannesen 2015). The general literature on migration in West Africa has considered the role of migration in providing young people with opportunities to develop their reproductive identities as spouses and parents and that, for some ethnic groups, opportunities for girls and boys vary widely in this regard (Thorsen 2010). This is an unexplored area in relation to the ethnic groups who dominate the Lake Volta fisheries.

There is little understanding of how these motivations affect decisions about working, migrating to the lake, leaving the lake or working in other locations. So to what extent do children really have a choice in what work they do and who they work with? Evidence from the literature and our field respondents suggests that trafficked children frequently have to perform tasks they do not wish to do that can be dangerous, notably diving into deep water to free nets. It is unclear whether the same applies to other child migrants. Conversely, some young people we met were willingly carrying out very low-volume subsistence fishing to support their family's food and nutritional security. There is therefore a need for participatory research that takes young people's own perspectives as a starting point.

5.5 Seasonality and the nature of fishing

Some of the relatively immutable practicalities of fishing shape the nature of children's work. Fish are more abundant in certain seasons, and though fishing can be carried out throughout the year, children are often drafted in to deal with large catches or in anticipation of larger catches at specific times of year (Iversen 2006).

Also, the hunting-gathering nature of lake fishing is such that income is more directly related to the daily labour input than in activities such as farming, animal rearing or aquaculture, where there is a set sequence of tasks to be performed over time to bring a crop to harvest (Béné and Russell 2007). More labour input has the potential to lead to larger catches; without putting in more labour there is no chance of further gain, even if the returns are incrementally less for each unit of labour added. The cheaper labour is, the greater the potential profit. And, the way that fishing can be practised on a daily rather than seasonal basis means that it can play a role as a supplemental activity in a diversified livelihood, or even a way to gain cash for inputs into longer-term enterprises such as business, farming or livestock rearing. These realities promote the ad hoc involvement of all children in fishing, not just those who may be brought to a community specifically in order to fish.

5.6 Proposed solutions to different problems – rescues and market structures

The dominant focus is currently on trafficking as the perceived problem and child rescue as the preferred solution, alongside an emerging preference among

professionals for softer approaches based on community education and monitoring. However, during our field visit, there were some signs that children's harmful work was being recognised as a problem not always linked to trafficking, thus requiring a different type of solution.

Raising willingness to pay for fish has been mentioned in the literature as a solution to the demand for cheap labour. The willingness to pay for other desirable attributes such as sustainability has been mobilised in sustainable value chains around the world; for example, the Fairtrade system (McClenachan, Dissanayake and Chen 2016). Still, it has to be borne in mind that the fish value chains in question are largely domestic; any changes in price therefore have food and nutrition security implications, particularly for the poor.

In a national-scale analysis of Ghana's fisheries, Failler, Beyens and Asiedu (2014) proposed aquaculture of tilapia, in particular, as a way to change the relationship between labour inputs and profits considered to feed demand for cheap child labour. Trapping rather than net fishing was mentioned to have a similar effect. A similar value chain-based solution is business training, thought to reduce demand for cheaper labour by raising profits. Smoking fish for export is seen by some as another way to raise the value of fish products and thus, supposedly, the amount that can be spent on adult rather than child labour, even though the regulatory requirements are currently beyond most fishers (*ibid*.).

Perhaps reflecting a recognition that elimination of children's work may not be realistic, or even desirable, informants suggested that changes in the nature of conflicting activities could be as useful, in some regards, as changes to children's work. For example, the conflict with schooling for the boys and the few girls who do early-morning fishing could be tackled by changing school hours or term dates in fishing communities to enable children to fish in the morning and evening. School holidays could similarly be organised around the fishing season (ILO-IPEC 2013). At Lala, community members revealed that when school lateness and absenteeism were too high due to early-morning fishing by children, the community leaders together with Ghana Education Service officials and teachers decided to start classes at 11am and finish at 5.30pm. However, this strategy did not work because the same children were leaving school by 2pm to go back to fish. A compromise is likely to be necessary.

Poverty more generally was blamed in the literature and in the field as a driver of children's work. Tackling the wider structural drivers of poverty cannot be framed simply as a mechanism for reducing children's work. Yet, recognising these interactions shows that attempts to focus on drivers of harmful children's work as a specific issue have to be undertaken alongside initiatives to improve wellbeing and labour conditions generally. Widening the scope further, these efforts will only be meaningful when considered in the context of structural and historical drivers.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Research questions

Some of the issues associated with children's work in fisheries are fairly well understood, such as the gender disaggregation of tasks. Areas where further research is required include the relative experiences of children working with their parents and with other adults at multiple nodes of the value chain; and trends linked to changing governance structures, availability of ecological resources and infrastructural development. This is a dynamic situation of change in economic, social and ecological contexts, and the characteristics of children's work seem to be changing along with these phenomena. Four research questions warrant further attention.

RQ1: What is the prevalence of children's work, children's harmful work and different forms of migration in the Lake Volta fisheries? In particular,

quantitative data are lacking on the prevalence of phenomena outside trafficking, and even on certain aspects of trafficking. It is not currently possible to speak with any certainty about the proportion of businesses that use children; the proportion of working children who are with parents, relatives or strangers; or the proportion of different groups of working children who are harmed. Gender- and age-disaggregated data would fill a gap in the understanding, as precise data on girls' exposure to harmful work and the allocation of work among children of different ages are currently very limited.

RQ2: What contributes to the preoccupation with child trafficking in the Lake Volta fisheries? There has been little explicit exploration of the construction of discourses in this domain. These include perceptions of childhood, work, harm and of who is at risk of harm. Perceptions of whether work comprises exploitation or training for arduous

adult occupations are partly conditional on the nature of the work performed, but also partly shaped by dominant media and policy discourses, and institutional agendas. It will be important to understand why the discourse of trafficking dominates; why the hazardous nature of work is not seen as a problem for children or for labourers in general; who is defined as a child in different contexts; and what is seen as hazardous or harmful work, and for whom. A linked question relates to why there has been a focus on lake fishing as opposed to fish processing and marketing.

RQ3: How do structural, ecological and historical contexts shape children's work, what is considered to be hazardous work and children's experience of harm? The wider structural context also merits further attention. This includes the intricacies of the interactions between fishing work and schooling, and historical motivations for labour mobility more broadly. The role in children's work of poverty – and more importantly, its drivers and intergenerational transmission – also needs unpacking, along with value chain and pricing considerations. All this is nested in a particular ecological context. Factors such as the seasonality of fishing and current trends (e.g. declines in catches) interact with the aforementioned labour costs and migration patterns to characterise contemporary fishing. How these structural realities affect the hazards that different children are exposed to and the harm that some of them experience also need to be considered.

RQ4: How does children's own agency shape their work in fisheries? There is room for a deeper understanding of how much children with different characteristics (e.g. age, gender, ability) make choices to work, and about what work to do, and in some cases to migrate to work in fisheries. This agency interacts with other forces and these interactions also require further research.

6.2 Suggested fieldwork

A package of qualitative and quantitative work could address the research questions above. It may be appropriate to conduct a set of qualitative work first in fishing communities, to understand existing types of children's work and workers. Quantitative work would follow. The final task would involve qualitative work in source and destination communities, examining drivers and experiences of children's work.

Interviewees in source communities may be relatives of those encountered in fishing communities. Historical and media analysis, and key stakeholder interviews, could proceed throughout. Links should be made with local NGOs, but also

government and traditional authority stakeholders, who should be gatekeepers. These include chiefs, 'chairmen' of local community groups, fishers' and fishmongers' trade associations, and local departments of social welfare and community development. Representatives from local municipal assemblies and Ghana Education Service may also be helpful as facilitators, as well as informants in some locations.

6.2.1 Qualitative

1 Interviews with adult fishers and children in source and fishing communities, addressing the motivations for and understanding of the recruitment of child workers, the relationship between unpaid work and employment, the experience of hazardous work and harm in family businesses and other situations beyond 'trafficking', and motivations for migrating or working.

2 Interviews with adult fishers and children in source and fishing communities, focusing on understandings of children and of harm. Though we define a child as a person under 18 years old, we will use this work to understand local meanings of 'child' and 'childhood', and thus what local people understand as appropriate categories of younger and older children, and how they may differ between girls and boys. This will be used to understand perceptions of appropriate work for those categories of people.

3 Research activities with children exploring their options, needs, opportunities and preferences, and the relative advantages of different work roles and tasks.

4 Interviews with service managers to understand structural issues related to provision of services such as education, health and infrastructure.

5 Interviews with adults in fishing communities, focusing on histories of fishing in an ecological context, and their understanding of the interactions between environmental, technological and economic change, and resource and labour use and availability.

6 Expert interviews and literature review on the same issues as in (2).

7 Interviews with key discourse managers including media representatives.

8 A review of historical media items and reports.

The initial qualitative work could take place in communities that were named in the field and in

Table 6. Proposed communities for initial qualitative data collection

Fishing communities	Labour source communities
Agbezuge	Elmina
Kortokorpe	Moree
Donkorkrom	Apam
Kajaji	Winneba
Kpando	Senya-Beraku
Kete-Krachi	Ada
Dambai	Anglo
Atimpoku	
Senchi	

the literature as notorious for being sources of and destinations for child workers (listed in Table 6). But, simultaneously, there should be investigations in an equal number of lesser-known communities around the lakeshore. These could be sampled on a spatial basis, selecting villages on a map that are equidistant from those listed in column 1 of Table 6. Selection of lesser-known source communities will be more difficult. It could be done based on those which are mentioned only once as sources in the fishing communities. These would therefore be sampled last.

6.2.2 Quantitative

This might involve a randomly sampled survey in 12–20 fishing communities around the whole lake, the aim of which would be to quantify:

1. The proportion of children in those communities living with (one or both) parents, or categorised as fostered, migrant or trafficked children, and the ways fostering arrangements, migration and trafficking are organised. This would draw on the insights gained from qualitative task (2) above, on local understandings of categories of children.

2. The proportion of each group that is working and the arrangements under which they work.

3. The nature, frequency and duration of the work they carry out.

4. The proportion of each group that is harmed through work and how often. Again, this must be preceded by the above qualitative work to understand what is considered as harm, including emotional, psychological and physical aspects, and considering how 'reversible' these harms may be.

5. The proportion of each group attending school full-time or part-time and carrying out other livelihood activities.

6. Perceptions of those children about the work they perform.

7. The proportion of fishing businesses that use children for labour.

8. The proportion of fishing businesses that use children who experience harm.

9. The proportion of fishers who use children under different types of arrangements.

10. The demographic details of child workers (e.g. age, ethnicity).

The quantitative work should take place in communities randomly selected from a map. Lead gatekeepers have already been identified and major institutions contacted, as in Table 1.

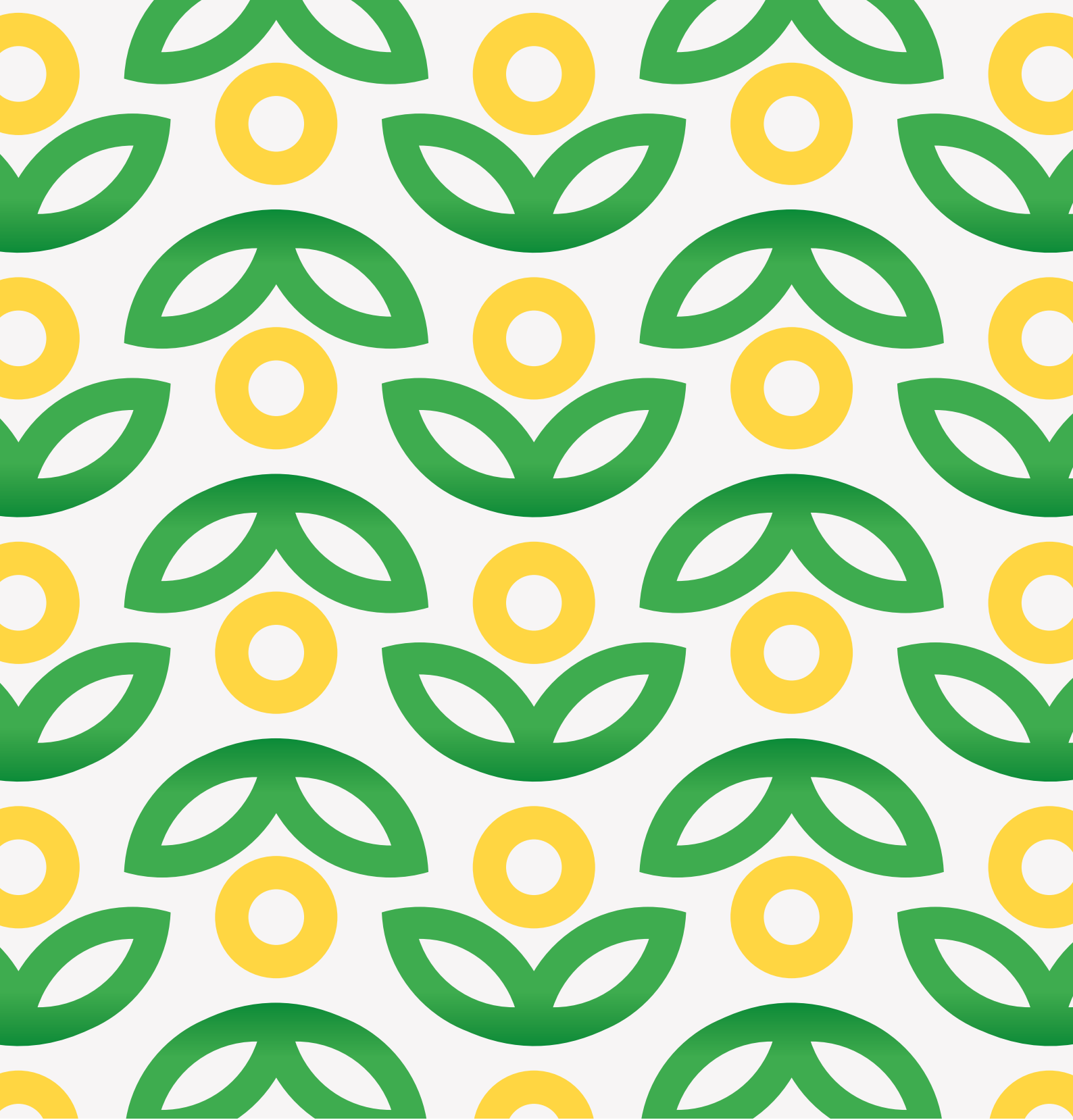## 6.2.3 Contingency plans due to coronavirus movement restrictions

- *Current guidance in Ghana is that fieldwork can still be conducted outside major cities (Accra, Kumai, Obuasi) provided social-distancing protocols are observed. Meeting respondents in groups of less than 25 people is allowed. For the foreseeable future, this work would have to be performed by team members already in Ghana, as foreign nationals can no longer travel there.*

- *Phone interviews with key informants could be performed if movement restrictions were to extend to the study area.*

- *A media review could be conducted remotely.*

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