

Full Length Research Paper

Use of children and the issue of child labour in Ghanaian cocoa farm activities

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Cocoa cultivation is vital to the livelihood of thousands of farm families and their dependents in Ghana. The Government of Ghana has been concerned about recent media reports of the use of child labour in cocoa production in Ghana. It consequently set up the national programme for the elimination of worst forms of child labour in cocoa (NPECLC) at the ministry of manpower youth and employment. This paper presents part of the outcome of a national study on the incidence of child labour in Ghana under the auspices of the NPECLC. Using questionnaires, the study interviewed 3,449 children from 1,749 cocoa-farming households in 15 districts in Ghana's six cocoa farming regions. It was found that children do participate in cocoa activities depending on their age and the nature of the activity. Eighty-eight and a half percent of the children are enrolled in schools with an attendance rate of 92.6% indicating that though the children help on the farms, they do so mainly on weekends and during school holidays. However, some children were found engaged in hazardous work. It is concluded that there was no evidence to support the claim that children are bound on cocoa farms to the detriment of their education.

Key words: Cocoa, child labour, livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Cocoa is vital to the Ghanaian economy. In 2006, it contributed 13% to gross domestic product and accounted for 40% of agricultural exports (ISSER, 2006). The sector also supports the livelihood of over 300,000 farm-families and their dependents. Given its strategic importance, the swift reaction of the government to recent media reports of the use of child labour in cocoa production systems in Ghana is understandable. The reaction took the form of making the international press in particular to understand that cocoa cultivation is a household level activity involving all members including children who undertake tasks that the household and often the community deem appropriate. Children participation in cocoa activities is seen as learning the trade of their parents as in many cultures around the world, a critical aspect of their socialisation (Baah, 2006).

CHILD LABOUR DEFINED

The definition of child labour is derived from the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, ILO convention 138 and 182, and the Ghana children's act

1998 (Act 560). Child labour is defined as all work that is harmful and hazardous to a child's health, safety and development; taking into consideration the age of the child, the conditions under which the work takes place and the time at which the work is done (MMYE, 2007). The import of this definition is that the mere involvement of a child (a child in this study refers to anyone below the age of 18 years) in cocoa activities does not necessarily constitute child labour. It is the nature of the activity or task the child is undertaking, his or her age and the conditions under which the task is undertaken and the time in which it is done that provides indications of whether there is the incidence of child labour or not.

Indeed the ILO (2002) further clarifies that child labour is not the participation of a child in work that does not affect his/her health and personal development or interferes with his/her schooling. Such work includes helping their parents care for the home and the family, assisting in a family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during school holidays.

The ILO also makes a distinction between child labour and what it calls, worst forms of child labour (WFCL) defined as:

1. All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and selfdom, as well as forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.
2. The use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or pornographic performance.
3. The use, procurement or offering of a child for prostitution or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in relevant international treaties and
4. Work which by its nature or circumstances in which when it is carried out is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, so harmful to be determined by national authorities.

Two types of WFCL may be identified:

- a. Unconditional worst forms. These are often illegal and also unacceptable for adults; and include all those activities whose status as worst forms cannot be altered no matter what is done to improve conditions of work (example, commercial sexual exploitation of children); and
- b. Hazardous work. The list of tasks that may be considered hazardous is left to national governments to determine. In response, Ghana has developed a hazardous framework (MMYE, 2008) for the cocoa sector.

It is apparent from the above definitions that the ILO working in conjunction with national governments has develop frameworks within which the activities of children in the agricultural sector including the Ghanaian cocoa sector could be evaluated for evidence of child labour. It is against this background that the government of Ghana through the national programme for the elimination of worst forms of child labour in cocoa (NPCLC) at the ministry of manpower youth and employment carried out a national cocoa labour survey in 2007 with the objective of identifying the main activities in cocoa cultivation and the roles played by members of the cocoa-farming households including children. In addition, the study hoped to provide insights into the nature of children involvement in cocoa activities, the conditions under which they participate and the influence that such involvement has on development indicators such as schooling and hence identify incidence of WFCL. This paper presents highlights of the findings of the study that bothers on the role of children in cocoa production activities and the implications for the issue of child labour.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The study employed survey research as its methodology using focus group discussions (FGDs) to unearth issues involved in cocoa production practices. The findings from the FGDs were fed into a

questionnaire survey to determine the extent to which the issues that emerged from the FGDs permeate the population of cocoa-farming households.

Fifteen administrative districts representing 32% of 46 administrative districts in six cocoa cultivating administrative regions of Ghana were selected for the study using a multistage stratified sampling procedure (Casley and Kumar, 1988). The number of districts selected in each region was proportional to the regional cocoa production level for the year 2003/2004 (Table 1).

Procedures for determining the sample size of children to be interviewed followed that suggested by Casley and Kumar (1988) moderated by expediency such that 120 enumeration areas (EAs) were selected with 15 households per EA. All children aged 5 to 17 years were interviewed one-on-one with structured questionnaires in each selected household (3,452 children in all). The data was entered into a data screen using CSPRO, cleaned and transferred to SPSS (version 13) for analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cocoa production level in study area

The selected study areas represent areas of intensive cocoa cultivation in Ghana such that the probability of finding children engaged in unacceptable work was high. The Western region for instance produces more than 63% of the national output hence it had more selected districts.

The nature of the cocoa households

The study confirmed the knowledge (MASDAR, 1998; Baah, 2006) that cocoa farming is largely a family enterprise in Ghana. Table 2 provides information on the composition of a cocoa-farming household. The households operate small holdings (average 2.4 ha) using mainly household labour including children.

Relatives include cousins, uncles, brothers and sisters and grandparents who collectively play critical roles in the socialisation of children. It must be noted that within most Ghanaian communities and households, the upbringing of children is a collective social responsibility that involves all members of the household and even community members. It is not uncommon for children from one household to be sent to live in another household within the same community or elsewhere. Whilst it may be true that children not living with their biological parents may be more prone to abuse including engagement in hazardous labour, it is often the choice of parents that their children live elsewhere perhaps to benefit from a new environment especially access to better education or apprenticeship (MMYE, 2007).

Children involvement in cocoa activities

The involvement of children in cocoa activities is not universal. Not every child in a cocoa household is

Table 1. Cocoa Production levels in study areas.

Region	District	Production levels (Metric tonnes)
Ashanti	Adansi South	25,937
	Amansie Central	6,334
	Ashanti Akim North	6,826
Eastern	Birim South	17,543
	Kwaebibirem	7,883
Central	Asikuma-Odoben Brakwa	5,782
Brong Ahafo	Asutifi	5,284
	Dormaa	13,945
Volta	Hohoe	1,909
Western	Wassa Amenfi West	25,729
	Aowin Suaman	69,539
	Bia	86,861
	Bibiani-Anhwiaso Bekwai	35,523
	Sefwi Wiawso	46,423
	Juabeso	86,861
Total		442,370

Source: MMYE (2008).

Table 2. Composition of cocoa households*

Respondent	Frequency	Percent
Head	1749	19.65
Spouse	1481	16.63
Child	4796	53.87
Relative	723	8.12
Non-relative	154	1.73
Total	8903	100.00

necessarily engaged in cocoa farming. The study found that for many children the major engagement is schooling (Table 3). Of those aged 5 to 12 years, it was 87.9%; rising to 95.5% in the 13 to 14 age group and dropping to 83.9% in the 15 to 17 age group. The lower proportion of the 5 to 12 age group compared to the next could be attributed to the fact that children in rural communities tend to start schooling late. In addition, it appears that some of the children drop out of school after age fourteen due to financial constraints of the parents to further their education, and the attraction of the cities in search for jobs.

An appreciation of the main activities in cocoa cultivation and labour expenditure associated with them provides insights into the reasons for engaging the services of children in cocoa activities. Table 4 provides information on the main cocoa activities and person-

days¹ expended, and it is evident that land clearing, holing/planting of suckers, pruning, mistletoe control, weeding and sowing at stake are the activities that relatively require more person days of household labour. Consistent with expectations, these are also the activities that children participated in during the 2006-2007 cocoa season (Table 5).

Children participated in all the cocoa farm activities as detailed in Table 5 though at varying rates. Land preparation had minimum child involvement (2.7 to 8.1%), followed by planting (7.5 to 30.6%), farm maintenance (1.2 to 80.8%), harvesting (12.5 to 82.9%), post-harvest (10.9 to 45.1%) and other activities (11.5 to 88.3%). The differing participation of children is explained by the fact that task allocations are developmentally determined; a task considered suitable for a child is based not only on age but also on physical and psychological maturity.

Children involvement in hazardous work

It is not helpful to just tag an enterprise such as cocoa hazardous in the eyes of both the law and perhaps more

¹ One person-day is equal to five hours of work

Table 3. Primary occupation of cocoa households in Ghana.

Age	5 - 12		13 - 14		15 - 17		18 - 24		25 - 49		Above 50		Count	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Schooling	2622	87.9	514	95.5	594	83.9	257	34.3	35	1.4	7	0.7	4029	46.9
Cocoa	30	1.0	7	1.3	34	4.8	215	28.7	1913	73.9	901	87.6	3100	36.1
Cocoa farmhand	18	0.6	7	1.3	22	3.1	82	10.9	318	12.3	46	4.5	494	5.7
None	283	9.5	3	0.6	20	2.8	33	4.4	11	0.4	8	0.8	358	4.2
Trading	4	0.1	0	0.0	6	0.8	26	3.5	107	4.1	18	1.8	161	1.9
Apprentice	4	0.1	4	0.7	21	3.0	74	9.9	15	0.6	1	0.1	119	1.4
Other crop farming	4	0.1	0	0.0	5	0.7	10	1.3	45	1.7	20	1.9	84	1.0
Housewife	0	0.2	1	0.2	0	0.0	8	1.1	51	2.0	8	0.8	74	0.9
Artisan	4	0.1	0	0.0	2	0.3	22	2.9	40	1.5	2	0.2	70	0.8
Others	11	0.4	1	0.2	3	0.4	9	1.2	27	1.0	6	0.6	51	0.6
Teaching	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	1.2	14	0.5	9	0.9	33	0.4
Other crop farmhand	2	0.1	1	0.2	1	0.1	5	0.7	14	0.5	2	0.2	25	0.3
	2983	100	538		708		750		2590		1028	100.0	8598	100.0

Source: MMYE (2007). Note that for all tables percentages may not add up to 100 because of non-response.

importantly the community in which the activity is placed. Potentially, every activity in cocoa cultivation or agriculture in general for that matter may be considered hazardous with respect to the involvement of children if they are not trained or supervised or as discussed earlier, they use tools and equipment not suitable for them. According to ILO convention 182, hazardous child labour is work which by nature or circumstances under which when it is done is likely to harm the health, safety, morals and or development of a child. Some activities in cocoa cultivation have been described as hazardous by nature. This may be due to the laborious nature of the activities, the skill and maturity of mind and body that the task demands, the use of tools that are likely to cause harm or the danger that the environment under which the task is performed poses. Some earlier studies on child labour in cocoa in Ghana identified some of these activities such as mistletoes removal and application of pesticides (GAWU, 2006; MOWAC, 2005).

Table 6 shows the involvement of children in cocoa farm activities or conditions of work which are likely to harm the health, safety and development of the child and thus may be considered hazardous child labour. It shows that working without adequate basic protective clothing is the main hazardous condition of work, whilst using cutlass (of the kind not suitable for children) for weeding is the main hazardous activity. Whilst the health, safety and development of every child in Ghana is critical and must be safeguarded, the data does not support the assertion in the international press that children of Ghanaian cocoa households are literarily bound to cocoa trees and work under bondage in hazardous circumstances. It is regrettable that ignorance on the part of a few households endangers the lives of children. But even this is relatively small compared to the health

hazards children are exposed to activities such as building construction, mining, fishing and quarrying. Children in cocoa and other farming tend to learn skills which are vital for the attainment of household needs including food security.

However, it was observed that majority (81%) are engaged in acceptable work which does not interfere with their schooling. When and how long children work is important in determining whether or not work interferes with schooling. This study found that 23% of all children living on cocoa farms do some type of farm work or other work after school hours every school day, with 1% of them working for four or more hours every school day. Acceptable work intensity² levels as defined by the national programme for the elimination of worst forms of child labour in Ghanaian cocoa (NPECLC). Hazardous child labour activity framework is work done in 1-3 h daily for 1 to 5 days per week, or 4 to 6 h daily for 1 to 2 days per week. Using this frame work, 5% of the reported cocoa farm activities during the 2006-2007 cocoa seasons were done at high intensity, which could be described as hazardous cocoa work for children.

The study found that for most households that engage children in activities that are hazardous, the underlying factors are economic and ignorance. Household whose

² As part of the study, 998 children reported the number of hours and days they worked per week on specific cocoa farm activities during the 2007-2008 seasons. This was used to identify acceptable, medium and high work intensity:

Acceptable work intensity: Working 1-3 h daily for 1-5 days per week, or 4-6 h daily for 1-2 days per week. Medium work intensity: Working 1-3 h daily for 6-7 days per week or working 4-6 h daily for 3-5 days per week. High work intensity: Working 4-6 h daily for 6-7 days per week, or 7 or more hours per day for any number of days.

Table 4. Cocoa farm activities and labour requirement.

Activity	Mean person days expended
Pre-planting	
Land clearing	6.19
Tree felling and chopping	3.81
Burning	1.42
Stumping	4.26
Pegs cutting	2.22
Lining and pegging	2.13
Planting	
Holing / planting of suckers	5.46
Preparation of seedlings	2.69
Carrying of seedlings	2.46
Holing for seedlings	2.84
Planting of seedlings	3.54
Sowing at stake	5.01
Farm maintenance	
Weeding and thinning	8.08
Carrying water for spraying	2.30
Spraying of insecticides	2.70
Applying fungicide / other chemicals	3.08
Applying fertilizer	2.43
Sanitation pruning	5.16
Mistletoe control	5.37
Harvesting	
Plucking of pods	3.53
Gathering of pods	3.30
Heaping of pods	2.89
Pod breaking and fermentation	2.69
Scooping of cocoa beans from pod	2.57
Post harvest	
Fermentation of beans	3.53
Cutting of fermented beans to drying area	2.34
Drying and sorting of beans	5.83
Carrying of dry beans for sale	2.23

Source: MMYE, 2008.

output of cocoa is low because of the low use of inputs or aged farms tend not to have money to engage labour for cocoa operations and hence fall on the services of children. In addition, it was revealed that the use of children in hazardous work though conditioned by economic or financial dictates is done out of ignorance. This was clearly the case in the use of children in pesticides application. Whilst as indicated in Table 5 the

main role of children is the fetching of water for the sprayers, ignorance of the potential drift of fumes during spraying means that some children remain in the vicinity of the spraying operations. Again, heads of households claim they are not aware of the potential dangers when children use inappropriate tools such as newly purchased cutlass. It is evident therefore that intensifying sensitization of cocoa households on the issues of child

Table 5. Children involvement in cocoa activities in the 2006-2007 cocoa seasons.

Activity	Frequency	%	Activity	Frequency	%
Land preparation			Planting		
Clearing of land	82	8.1	Holing and planting of suckers	310	30.6
Felling and chopping	46	4.5	Preparation of seedlings	94	9.3
Burning	53	5.2	Carrying seedlings	180	17.8
Stumping	73	7.2	Holing for seedlings	76	7.5
Pegs cutting	27	2.7	Planting of seedlings	136	13.4
Lining and pegging	30	3	Sowing at stake	282	27.8
Farm maintenance			Harvesting		
Weeding and thinning	398	39.3	Plucking of pods	127	12.5
Spraying insecticide	15	1.5	Gathering and heaping pods	840	82.9
Applying fertilizers	53	5.2	Breaking of pods	249	24.6
Applying fungicide	14	1.4	Scooping of beans	519	51.2
Apply herbicides and arboricide	12	1.2	Other activities		
Fetching water for spraying	819	80.8	Domestic chores	894	88.3
Sanitation and pruning	57	5.6	Work on school farm	116	11.5
Mistletoe control	43	4.2	Work on teachers farm	135	13.3
			Work on non-cocoa farm	610	60.2
Post harvesting					
Fermentation of beans	110	10.9			
Carting fermented beans	457	45.1			
Drying beans	230	22.7			
Carting of beans for sale	263	26			

Source: MMYE (2008); N = 1,013.

Table 6. Involvement of children in hazardous work in cocoa cultivation, Ghana.

Hazardous activity or adverse conditions of work	No. of participants*	%
Working with agrochemicals (mixing, loading and spraying or applying).	14	1.5
Present in the vicinity during spraying or re-entered sprayed farm in less 24 h.	93	9.8
Clearing of virgin forest or thick bush or felling trees.	24	2.5
Harvesting overhead cocoa pods with harvesting hooks.	46	4.8
Carrying/lifting/handling heavy weights above age and size (that is, more than 30% of the person's body weight for more than 2 km).	67	7.0
Working with noisy or dangerous equipments (motorised spraying machine or chainsaw).	13	1.4
Working on the farm for more than 6 h per day or more than 43 h per week.	20	2.1
Working without adequate basic protective clothing.	273	28.7
Working full time on the farm and not attending school.	15	1.6
Working before 6:00 am or after 8:00 pm.	1	0.1
Using adult cutlass for weeding.	126	13.2
Breaking cocoa pods.	76	8.0
Burning bush.	24	2.5
Climbing and working on trees higher than 9 feet in height.	16	1.7
A child working in isolation.	36	3.8

Source: MMYE (2008). *Total number of respondents (N) = 950 and multiple responses.

labour could play a key in restricting the use of children in activities that are likely to compromise their development.

Conclusions

Cocoa cultivation remains vital to the livelihood of thousands of households in Ghana. The involvement of children in cocoa activities is necessary to ensure continuity of the enterprise. However, this should not be at the expense of children's health, education and general development. This study has shown that whilst some children are involved in work that is hazardous, the proportion is far from what is often portrayed in the international press. Nevertheless, the development of every child in a cocoa household counts and efforts to combat the menace of child labour must continue. At the heart of this must be efforts to raise farm-level productivity and hence income so that households can hire adult labour from the cocoa communities and depend less on children labour.

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