Children's Geographies

Mobility, education and livelihood trajectories for young people in rural Ghana: a gender perspective

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This paper examines the gendered implications of Africa's transport gap (the lack of cheap, regular and reliable transport) for young people in rural Ghana, with particular reference to the linkages between restricted mobility, household work demands, access to education and livelihood potential. Our aim is to show how mobility constraints, especially as these interact with household labour demands, restrict young people's access to education and livelihood opportunities. Firstly, the paper considers the implications of the direct constraints on young people's mobility potential as they travel to school. Then it examines young people's (mostly unpaid) labour contributions, which are commonly crucial to family household production and reproduction, including those associated with the transport gap. This has especially important implications for girls, on whom the principal onus lies to help adult women carry the heavy burden of water, firewood, and agricultural products required for household use. Such work can impact significantly on their educational attendance and performance in school and thus has potential knock-on impacts for livelihoods. Distance from school, when coupled with a heavy workload at home will affect attendance, punctuality and performance at school: it may ultimately represent the tipping point resulting in a decision to withdraw from formal education. Moreover, the heavy burden of work and restricted mobility contributes to young people's negative attitudes to agriculture and rural life and encourages urban migration. Drawing on research from rural case study sites in two regions of Ghana, we discuss ethnographic material from recent interviews with children and young people, their parents, teachers and other key informants, supported by information from an associated survey with children ca. 9–18 years.

Keywords: school distance; child labour; transport gap; load-carrying; educational access

Introduction

This paper focuses on the implications of Africa's transport gap (the absence of cheap, regular and reliable transport, especially in rural areas) for young people. The term 'transport gap' is used to draw attention to two important dimensions of the transport deficiency widely evident across rural Africa: firstly, impact on personal travel and secondly impact on the transport of goods, which must be head-loaded where transport is unavailable or expensive, with significant implications for household labour patterns (Porter 2002, 2007, 2011). We pursue these two themes with reference to rural Ghana, where both dimensions of the transport gap are strongly

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in evidence and, we argue, can have profound influence on the course of young people's – especially girls' – lives.

The paper is aimed at showing how, in the context of work demands, limited educational opportunities and constrained mobility, the potential to build livelihoods in rural Ghana is limited and highly gendered. The transport gap has especially important implications for girls, since it is on them that the principal onus lies to help adult women carry the heavy burden of water, firewood and agricultural products required for household use (Porter *et al.* 2011). As a consequence, school attendance may be substantially delayed, impeded and cur-tailed: this inevitably has potential knock-on implications for their livelihood trajectories, i.e. the emerging pathways which will help shape their life chances. At the same time, the heavy burden of work and restricted mobility contributes to young people's negative attitudes towards agriculture and rural life and encourages urban migration.

While there is a substantial literature on the linkages between (gendered) child work and edu-cational access and attainment in Africa (e.g. Andvig 2001, Bass 2004, Ersado 2005, Bourdillon 2006, Keilland and Tovo 2006, Ansell 2008, Serra 2009, Shimamura and Lastarria-Cornhiel 2010) and on young people's migration and livelihoods (e.g. Young and Ansell 2003, van Blerk and Ansell 2006, Evans 2006, Thorsen 2006, Abebe 2007, Ansell and van Blerk 2007), the significance of *daily* mobility as a factor influencing the work-education nexus in rural set-tings has not been sufficiently highlighted. Work on children's (gendered) daily mobility pat-terns in rural Africa is surprisingly sparse (Porter 2010): notable exceptions are Katz on rural Sudan (1991, 1993, 2004) and Robson on northern Nigeria (2004), but these studies are focused on daily mobility associated with work activities, not formal education. Abebe's (2007) examination of children's work, education and changing livelihoods in rural Ethiopia usefully explores the (gendered) spatiality and temporality of children's livelihoods, taking into account the linkages between school and work, but is not specifically focused on daily mobility.

We explore the linkages between restricted mobility, access to education, family work demands and livelihood potential in Ghana through field research conducted in two rural areas between 2006 and 2009. Following a discussion of our research methodology and the four main rural study sites, the paper firstly considers the linkages between gendered mobility constraints, distance to school and educational attainment in the villages. It then moves on to explore the implications of young people's household labour contributions, including those associated with the transport gap, and the way these also link back to school attendance and per-formance. The combination of limited educational opportunities and family pressures for work contributions often encourages older children to search for potential escape routes from the village, whether through secondary education, apprenticeships or employment: this forms the focus of the third main section of the paper. In the conclusion we reflect particularly on gender patterns, which form a significant thread throughout.

Methodology

This paper draws on material from a much larger, three-country study of children's mobility and transport in Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa, encompassing both urban and rural research sites in each country (i.e. 24 sites in total; see http://www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility/). The study uti-lised a two-strand approach, in which a more conventional adult academic research study was complemented by a young researcher strand.[1] The young researchers' detailed findings are not discussed in this paper. However, it is important to acknowledge their contribution since their work has fed into the themes and questions pursued by the adult researchers, including those which we report here. Adult researchers conducted intensive qualitative research (in-depth individual interviews, life histories, focus group discussions, ethnographic diaries,

accompanied walks) with children, their parents and key informants. In the Ghana rural sites this comprised 150 interviews/group discussions in total, covering in- and out-of-school children, mothers, fathers and settlement leaders in each site, plus teachers, health workers and transport operators wherever present. Mobile ethnographies were a key method in interviews with children (Porter *et al.* 2010b). The qualitative research is central to our analysis in this paper: we cite extensively from interviews to support the argument presented. However, we also draw occasionally on data from a questionnaire survey of child respondents, aged ca. 9–18 years (approximately 125 per site, 1000 per country), which was designed subsequent to, and with reference to, the preliminary qualitative research: this allows us to give some indication of broader patterns such as the proportion of children walking to school.

The adult researcher qualitative and quantitative studies took place in four specific rural sites in each country; two classified as rural with services (usually a primary school, sometimes a clinic) and two classified as remote rural (no services). They were located in two contrasting agro-ecological zones per country for comparative purposes – in Ghana, the forest zone and the coastal savanna zone The field research in Ghana was conducted (mostly in appropriate local languages, except with teachers who sometimes preferred to speak in English) by staff and postgraduate students from the University of Cape Coast, following a pilot study led by the first author.[2]

The Ghana rural case study sites

The main rural research sites in Ghana are as follows: Trebasia[3] (rural with services, henceforth RS) and Bessia hamlets (remote rural no services, henceforth RR) in the Sunyani region of Ghana's forest zone; Ekwese (RS) and Assian hamlets (RR) in the Cape Coast region of the coastal savanna zone.

Ghana's forest zone: Trebasia village and Bessia hamlets

Trebasia (RS) is a village of about 1000 people located approximately 25 km outside Sunyani, capital of Brong Ahafo Region, on an unpaved road. It has only basic services: a primary school, a visiting nurse, a small market, and a grocery store. The Bessia hamlets (RR) are connected to Trebasia by a rough track which joins the main Sunyani-Trebasia route after 3–4 km. The hamlets consist essentially of dispersed farmsteads without any services. Many children from Bessia attend the primary school in Trebasia, a journey of up to 10 km. Farming (maize, cassava, rice) is the dominant activity in all the settlements and there is a very substantial settler population from northern Ghana. The nearest clinic, Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS) are all located in Sunyani, at distances of approximately 23–25 km from the villages. Primary school enrollment is around 60–70%. Vehicles pass through Trebasia but transport costs to Sunyani are high because the road is unpaved and taxis charge a premium on the route. The Bessia hamlets can be reached by motorised vehicle only with difficulty and there are no public transport services.

Ghana's coastal savanna zone: Ekwese village and Assian hamlets

Ekwese (RS) is a village of around 500 people located in coastal savanna along a poor, once-graded road, about 27 km from Cape Coast, capital of Central Region. The road is motorable all year round but transport fares are high due to its poor quality. Like Trebasia it has a small market and grocery store but it has better education services than Trebasia, in that there is a Junior High school and a private preparatory school, in addition to the government primary school. However, primary school enrollment, as in the Trebasia area, is estimated by teachers

to be only around 60–70%. There are no health facilities apart from a spiritual healer and there is no electricity. The main Assian hamlet (RR) is located about 3 km from Ekwese, along the road between Ekwese and a major paved trunk road (about 11 km distant). Other Assian hamlets are connected to Ekwese by narrow, mostly unmotorable paths. Farming is the dominant activity in this area of fertile ochrosols: almost every adult has a farm for production of foodstuffs such as cassava, plantain and maize. Some also grow cash crops, including cocoa and oil palm. The settlements have substantial Ewe populations (i.e. settlers from the Volta region), in addition to Fante indigenes and other settler groups. The nearest Senior High School and hospital are located about 27 km away.

Mobility, distance to school and educational attainment

Statistics currently available show increasing enrolment in primary education across most sub-Saharan countries, including Ghana. As a result of efforts to reach the MDGs, primary completion rates increased in Ghana from 61% in 1991 to 71% in 2006 (World Development Report 2009). However, lower *attendance* patterns, especially among girls, still prevail widely. This is commonly explained by reference to work demands on children (discussed in detail in a subsequent section), but there are also important linkages between education, distance from school, and mobility constraints which need to be considered.

The impact of distance from school on learning achievement has received limited specific attention in the literature on access to education in Africa, though Huisman and Smits (2009) include distance in their 30-country study of factors affecting school enrolment in developing countries. One of the most important sources for information on the impact of distance to school in Ghana remains the fourth Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 4, 1998/1999) produced by the Ghana Statistical Service.[4] This examined some of the reasons why children were not in school: 7.4% of children referred to distance, while other factors included working at home or family enterprise 33.8%; expensiveness of education 28.6%; school not being interesting 9.1%; failing of examination 4.5%; marriage 4%; pregnancy 3%; and illness 2.3% (see Sackey 2007). A detailed study of primary schooling in Ghana by Avotri *et al.* (1999), with field studies in Upper West and Eastern region, provides important additional information: they found not only that truancy, 'over-age' enrolment, especially of girls, and early drop out could be linked to distance travelled to school, but also that the closer to secondary school a child lived, the more likely s/he would be sent to primary school, because continuity of education was feasible. The importance of distance is reiterated in some subsequent studies of education in Ghana (notably Akyeampong 2007 for northern Ghana; Sackey 2007) and our data below shows that this remains a substantive issue. While formal boarding or lodging with a family close to school might seem an obvious solution to the distance problem for older children, it is often prohibitively expensive for poor rural families, because of boarding costs and loss of household labour. Moreover, in the vicinity of our study settlements there are no primary-level boarding facilities.

There is an important gender dimension to the interaction between education and distance to school. Avotri *et al.* (1999) observed that parents are reluctant to allow girls, in particular, to walk long distances, cross rivers, walk on major roads or unsafe paths to get to school. More recently, Glick (2008) found that greater distance to school or the absence of a nearby school has stronger negative impacts on girls' enrolment than boys', both in Ghana (citing Lavy 1996) and Senegal. He also notes, more generally, that in many cases girls' schooling responds more strongly than boys' to changes in school distance or availability, while the opposite is very rarely found. The data we present below suggest that, despite Ghana's recent achievements in primary school enrolment, distance to school continues to impact strongly on attendance,

educational attainment and, in particular, on girls' educational prospects, with continuing implications for truancy and drop-out.

In Ghana (as in all three countries of our larger study), the vast majority of children surveyed in our study said they had walked to school on their last school day: 98.6% of girls and 97.4% of boys across all sites in Ghana ($N = 1005$). Parents and carers do not have the funds to pay transport fares for children in the context of more pressing demands on their meagre resources. In the rural study sites every child had walked to school, with the exception of one boy in one of the Assian hamlets (coastal RR) who had travelled as motorbike passenger and one girl in Trebasia (forest RS) who had arrived at school on a bicycle. For many children in our remote rural settlements without a primary school this walk is substantial: up to 10 km in the forest zone remote rural hamlets, up to 5 km in the coastal zone remote rural hamlets. Even children classified as living within the rural with service settlements may actually travel up to 3 km or so to primary school because they live near the boundaries of the village area.

The following observations come from a young 14-year-old girl, Patience, who lives in a hamlet within the village area of our coastal zone rural with services (RS) study settlement and attends the government primary school. The original conversation took place in Fante; the English translation below was made by the interviewer (also a native Fante speaker). It is cited at length because it encapsulates a common story and, although it concentrates on the theme of distance to school and associated travel hazards, in passing it alludes to other themes (competing work and negative perceptions of farm work) that we pursue later in the paper:

> It takes me about 1 hr 30 minutes when I run to school. But when I walk it takes me about two hours... my school has no boarding facilities so I stay with my parents... [this school] is the nearest to my village... because of the distance and the rough nature of the road we get to school tired and our feet our dirty. Sometimes, we collect some water from the nearby house to wash our feet before going to the class. Especially during the rainy season like this time, walking to school is not comfortable at all. ... There are no commercial vehicles plying the road apart from one KIA pick-up that carries loads [i.e. agricultural produce for farmers]. When you are lucky and the KIA is going to the village empty then we join it to the house after school... fortunately I am not alone. Those of us coming from Sampa are nine in number. As we walk... from school we play and converse on the road. Other times because we are feeling so thirsty and [there is] nowhere to get water to drink we have to hurry. ... During the rains sometimes you have to remove your sandals to prevent it from getting soaked in the mud. The rainy season is our major problem. Anytime that it starts raining whilst we are in the house we don't come to school. Seeing snake on the way home is a common thing. But because they always clear both sides of the road we usually see them first. For example, about two weeks ago we saw a big snake crossing. We threw stones at it and waited till it crossed before we continued our journey... walking in [a] group is far better than walking alone to school. The only problem I have with walking with others to and from school is that you cannot walk at the pace you prefer. I always want to walk faster but often the pace at which you walk is determined by the group. When you walk alone [it] is not the best because the journey is long and is fearful. And also the conversation and play that go on when you are in group is missing. So I prefer walking in group... Coming to school during the rainy season is not interesting... our distance to school is far so you can only attend school here when you are six or seven years or more. I come to school every day. I only absent myself from school when I am sick... but there are some people who do not come to school regularly. Some work for their parents during market days and for that matter can't come to school at times because of the distance. But the distance to be travelled is the main reason for some of the children not coming to school... because of our distance to school, we sometimes come to school late. You are punished [lashed[5]] for not coming to school early enough. Some children absent themselves from school when they realise that they will be late. ... I don't want to go to the farm and weed so I better come to school.

Patience (who aspires to become a nurse) is clearly concerned about some aspects of her journey: the distance, the nature of the walk, and the particular difficulties associated with the rainy season. If it is already raining, unsurprisingly she – like many others – prefers to stay at home: if she reaches school during a heavy rainstorm it is likely she will have to sit all day in damp, steaming clothes unless she takes spare clothes with her. A male teacher at Ekwese government JHS observed the difficulties of teaching children in this condition: '*psychologically, these children are not in any good frame of mind to sit in the classroom and learn*'.

Routes which involve a stream crossing tend to be particularly hazardous for children in the rains, in both the coastal and forest zones, but especially for girls who are commonly much less likely to know how to swim:

> During the rainy season when the river is full, only those who can swim come to school... female children usually absent themselves... because most of them cannot swim. (Father of 3, Trebasia, RS forest zone)

A 14-year-old girl from the coastal zone who attends a private primary school similarly observed:

> During the rainy season sometimes you have to wait at the banks of the stream to get an adult to carry you across the stream. When the stream is full to the banks we have to stay in the house till the water subsides. (RR coastal zone)

In Trebasia, according to teachers, 70% of children miss school in the rains because they must cross a river to reach school. Seasonal drops in school attendance are usual, albeit not only because of travel hazards, but also because of family work demands such as planting at the start of the rains (discussed later).

Patience talks about journeys being 'fearful'. Killers, robbers and other unspecified horrors are a common concern, especially among younger children:

> The most frightening problem is when we walk and meet vehicles that are unfamiliar to us plying this route. We usually run into the bush because we are afraid such vehicles may be used by serial killers who behead children. (Boy 11 years, private primary school, RR coastal zone)

Attention among older children and their parents tends to focus on dangers like snakes and rivers which rise rapidly in the wet season, rather than on the fear of rape (which was much more prominent in our South African interviews, see Porter *et al.* 2010b, 2010c). Over 50% of boys and girls surveyed in the remote rural settlements in Ghana reported dangerous animals (usually snakes) on the journey to school (as did over a quarter of boys and girls in the rural settlements with services). Perhaps surprisingly, there is not a great deal of difference in boys' and girls' reported fear of risk of attack from people: 25% of girls and 18% of boys reported this risk in our remote rural settlements and 13% girls and 21% of boys in rural settlements with services. Moreover, not one child in the remote rural settlements and under 1% in rural with service settlements reported a specific risk of rape. Nonetheless, a number of children – boys and girls of diverse ages – who have to walk alone because they live in isolated farmsteads observed that they did not enjoy this, a fact which they relate to the solitude of the journey.

Patience favours travelling to school in a group, a strategy strongly supported by parents, who rarely accompany their children:

> We encourage that they walk in groups... the journey is fearful. Sometimes the children complain of seeing snakes on the way to school.... I insist that my daughter walks with other children to school every day. I think that is what other parents do. (Mother of 14-year-old girl, RS forest zone)

Groups offer the safety of numbers and the companionship of friends, but also, as Patience observed, the disadvantage of a slower pace of travel and the possibility of late arrival, which can result in corporal punishment. Many children report their fear of being 'lashed' [caned] if they arrive late for classes, though other punishments may apply either instead or in addition: sweeping or weeding the compound, cleaning lavatories, carrying building materials for the school etc., often with consequent loss of time in class. Many children said they simply prefer to avoid the punishments associated with arriving late:

> on market days I don't usually like coming to school because I come to school often late. This is because after finishing my usual household chores, I have to carry my mother's wares to the market by which time I will be late to school. So I don't usually come because when you are late you are lashed.... Weeding and lashing at

the school as punishment is worrying. Sometimes you weed throughout the day because you are late to school. I think this is too much. (Boy 14 years, government primary, RS coastal zone)

In this case the boy concerned lives only 15 minutes from school, so his lateness is not directly related to the distance between home from school, but his story gives a flavour of the scale of punishment and its likely impact in terms of truancy. Other boys talked about hiding themselves away till school has closed if they are late, in order to avoid punishment, while girls we interviewed – especially younger girls – seem to be more inclined to face the punishment meted out:

sometimes I get to school late and get punished. I hate being caned. (Girl 12 years, RR forest zone).

Nonetheless, truancy and early drop-out appear to be an inevitable result of the harsh punishments regularly imposed for lateness (see Avotri *et al.* 1999, pp. 94–95, 165).[6]

Patience also refers to delayed school enrolment in remote areas where journey length is an issue. It is common for parents to delay children's school entry in the remote hamlets where we worked in Ghana, because of the journey length, especially where young girls are concerned. A father with daughters aged six and ten in the coastal zone observed of the elder child:

When she started schooling we had to work hard to keep her going to school because of the distance. [now she is more used to it] however, on some days she absents herself when she feels she is too tired to go to school. [p] …I will prefer she stays at home rather than pay such high transport fares.

His 6-year-old is not yet at school – they are waiting for her '*to grow enough for her to walk to school*'. In the forest zone parents talked about delaying children's enrolment even later, until they are 8 or 9 years old, because of the distance to the nearest school. Competency to walk long distances is perceived by parents to be, in part, a reflection of children's body size and age, but gender and the availability of other children to accompany a young child are also clearly commonly part of the equation.

Patience attends her local state primary school, but one final issue which requires comment in this section is the surprisingly high numbers of children (both boys and girls) we interviewed who attend private schools in the coastal zone villages. Here, private schools offer a viable alternative for many rural families: there is a private preparatory school in Ekwese and others in neighbouring towns which are patronised by both Ekwese and Assian villagers. Even poor families may consider such expenditure worthwhile, sometimes reportedly because the private school is closer to home than the nearest relevant government school, but there is often also a parental view that the education is better:

My parents sent me to the private school because the teachers teach very well. Though it is closer to me [only about 2km from home as opposed to 3 + km to the government school] it is expensive. We pay school fees [80,000 c; about £4.00 sterling] and examination fees [10,000c; about 50p sterling]. (Boy 14 years, Assian, RR coastal zone)

A number of boys and girls reported that, although their parents paid for them to attend private primary school, the additional cost of transport fares to school could not be met (so they walked). Private basic education is not available within our forest zone study settlements but educational quality in government schools is a concern among parents there too. References were made to teacher shortages and teacher truancy (as in the coastal zone) and a view presented that most children there do not qualify for the nearest JHS (in town), because students

cannot stand up to the challenge from pupils from the city due to their poor foundation. [Father, RS forest zone]

However, in many cases it is by no means a certainty that education is significantly better in the private sector. Education quality in many rural areas does not auger well for children's future livelihood trajectories.

Linking mobility, labour contributions and education

Mobility and education are linked not only through the journey to school, but also through the broader context of Africa's rural transport gap and the need for young people's labour which this produces. This brings to the fore a strong gender dimension (which we pursue further below), since women and girls are culturally expected to carry loads whenever motorised transport is unavailable, insufficient, or too costly to be employed (Porter *et al.* 2011). Boys up to their mid teens may help with this work, but the burden falls principally on girls. These and other household work contributions, whether performed by girls or boys, are perceived to be part of the process of socialisation, learning tasks in preparation for adult life, but they impinge on young people's attendance and performance at school.

It is often difficult to distinguish children's transport work from their other household work obligations; collecting firewood, washing dishes, cleaning the compound, bringing water from the borehole or well, taking produce to market, are all part of the round of household chores, but many tasks, particularly girls' tasks, involve carrying.[7]

The majority of rural children in Ghana, as elsewhere in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa, are required to participate in domestic/family labour from ca. 6 to 7 years upwards, even when they are enrolled at school, whether they wish to do so or not. Children of both genders usually occupy a weak bargaining position within the Ghanaian household: they are commonly excluded from decision-making processes and tend to occupy the lowest rung of the social hierarchy (Twum-Danso 2009, 2011), as elsewhere in Africa (Punch *et al.* 2007, Evans 2010). Most of the work that children do is unpaid (Andvig 2001, pp. 6, 13). Where children earn a wage, it is low: in Ghana, on average, only about one sixth of an adult wage (Canagarajah and Coulombe 1997, p. 10). Unpaid work is simply a part of family life: consequently, when we asked rural children in the survey whether they had an occupation, over 90% in Ghana said they had none. Work, nonetheless, plays a significant role in the lives of most children and has important implications for their education. For many rural children we encountered, family work demands mean that education is delayed, curtailed or simply never possible. As Patience and many other children and teachers observed, for school-going children, household work requirements may limit attendance – whole days may be lost when work demands are particularly heavy.

Research by Heady (2003) in Ghana suggests that work outside the home has a substantial effect on learning achievement in reading and mathematics, either because of exhaustion or a diversion of interest away from academic concerns. This accords with our findings. In many cases children were simply withdrawn from school (whether government or private) for days at a time, because their work contribution at the market or in the fields must take precedence. In some cases, particularly among boys, the attractions of earning money for personal use seems to be an important element in this decision, but for many children the decision is clearly taken by parents who need their assistance. Even for government schooling, where education is theoretically free, children must often help their parents earn the money to meet essential contributions: uniform, books, Parent–Teacher Association, building development, soap, toilet paper, security, etc. (Canagarajah and Coulombe 1997, Jones and Chant 2009).

Reference to the gendered nature of young people's work responsibilities in rural areas was made at the start of this section regarding load carrying, but in Ghana, as elsewhere in rural Africa, gendered work patterns can be observed in most areas of activity (e.g. Katz 1991, 1993, 2004 in Sudan; Robson 2004 in northern Nigeria; Abebe 2007 in Ethiopia). Canagarajah and Coulombe (1997), working from Ghanaian national household survey data for the late 1980s and early 1990s, drew attention not only to the magnitude of child labour in rural areas but also to fact that girls typically work more hours than boys. Girls' position in family hierarchies often appears even lower than that of boy children and their vulnerability to severe punishment particularly high: a failure to fulfil the work required of them can be a trigger for violence

(Appiah and Cusack 1999, Andvig 2001, p. 61, Punch *et al.* 2007). The heavy burden of work faced by girls was observed in all our rural study settlements. A young male teacher interviewed (in English) at Ekwese government JHS was particularly clear about the links between the domestic transport gap, consequent demand for girls' labour and the impacts on education:

> Child porterage is an issue here. It is an issue where children have to help their parents to the market by carrying foodstuffs in the morning. This activity delays children and they get to school tired. This is a peculiar [sic.] problem with girls... this activity affects children's academic life significantly. For example, they come to school already late. They just join the day's lesson mid-way and they cannot catch up with their colleagues.

Other teachers at the same school, interviewed separately, also argued that boys are more punctual than girls because of the various demands on girls at home, including sibling care and market attendance:

> girl attendance is far below girl enrolment. A lot of them are enrolled but only [a] few of them are regular. [Woman primary teacher]

This perspective is backed up by direct conversations with young people, where the stress and exhaustion associated with daily toil coupled with schoolwork is particularly evident among girls, especially those who have reached adolescence. One young girl of 13, who has ambitions to be a doctor, has to perform many duties because her mother lives in a distant city. She recounted:

> I always cook every day so I get tired. I wake up at 5.30 am and sleep at 10 pm. I don't get enough sleep... just last week I was lashed. I was lashed because I was late for school. The key to the tap was missing so I did not get water early and as a result I was late. (RS coastal zone)

Another girl of 13, whose mother has died, has to support her stepmother's doughnut baking business. She is unhappy about this work and directly links it to her poor performance at school:

> my performance in school could have been better. Because of the selling of the doughnuts before I go to school every day it makes me always very tired by the time I get to school... and I am always punished for coming to school late. (RS coastal zone)

A change in family circumstances, such as a death or migration of a parent, as occurred in these cases, can substantially increase work pressures, particularly for teenage girls, with adverse effects on school attendance and performance. The care of chronically ill, disabled or elderly relatives also tends to fall on women and girls, who are assumed to be the 'natural' carers in Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa (Evans 2010). Thus, another girl of 16 in the same village reports how (although she only lives 5 minutes from school) caring and other tasks impinge substantially on her school day:

> I usually fetch 8 buckets of water each morning after which I wash the plates used the previous evening. My elder sister has a son who is two yrs old so I bathe him and send him to a preparatory school... a distance of about 20 minutes walk, after which I return to the house, bath and also report for school.... I report late for school sometimes... my mother is old and sick and being the youngest child I attend to her and the other chores at home. (RS coastal zone)

However, it is necessary to recognise that many boys also face work pressures which impinge on their education, especially if there are no girls in the family (as reported also in Ethiopia by Abebe 2007). An 11-year-old boy who lives in Assian with his brothers attends school,

> regularly except on days we have to go and help out on the farm... [we] carry cassava home during the main harvest season. During that time, we seldom come to school.... It affects me because my colleagues are taught a lot of things by the time I return and I find it difficult to catch up with them. (RR coastal zone)

Children living within about a kilometre of their rural school are commonly unpunctual or absent from school either because of work demands or because they simply dawdle on the route (sometimes reflecting a lack of interest in school). In outlying hamlets and the remote villages without schools, however, the problem of work demands is compounded by distance from school. This

seems to affect girls even more than boys because of the number of early-morning tasks commonly required of them. As a 14-year-old girl at Trebasia observed disconsolately:

> The journey to school is too far for us so by the time we reach school lessons have already started... this makes us score very low marks.... Irrespective of the long distance we trek to and from school... we are asked to go to the farm and plant as soon as we arrive home... On other occasions they ask us not to go to school so that we can help on the farm. (RR forest zone)

In many cases it would seem that a long journey presents the tipping point in a context where school attendance is a constant process of inter-generational negotiation (as suggested by the statement above). As we have seen, heavy work demands on children in farming communities, when coupled with residence at some distance from school, leads very frequently to late enrolment, poor attendance and early withdrawal from basic education. This is strongest in effect on girls and may have substantial implications not only for girls' own education and livelihood trajectories, which we discuss in the next section, but also for the next generation, through effects on fertility rates, child-care practices, child health and the access of their own children to schooling (Porter *et al.* 2010b, p. 101).

Livelihood trajectories and rural youth transitions

The combination of limited educational opportunities and strong family pressures for heavy work contributions means that, over time, many young people we interviewed had developed very negative perceptions of agriculture and village life. This negativity may be deepened by the fact that, although they make a vital contribution to household production and reproduction, young people's voices are so rarely heard in the family or community. As John, a boy of 16 observed in Trebasia, he has no say in family or community affairs, '*because the community says I am a child*' (RS forest zone). This was repeated by many other adolescents and accords with the broader picture regarding youth rights in Ghana (Twum Danso 2009).

Girls, in particular, face many constraints, not only in terms of voice but also basic mobility. The perceived vulnerability of girls strongly affects their potential to travel out of the village, whether they walk or use public transport. Certainly, once girls reach adolescence, they are allowed much less freedom than their brothers:

> boys are sent [to town] more than often than the girls. I think it is because boys are hardier and more courageous... the boys can also not easily be seduced by anyone but with the girls it can happen. (Minibus driver, Trebasia, RS forest zone)

Girls' mobility is acceptable along specific routes in the village area and even beyond in daytime (especially in groups), as they go about household-directed duties, but mobility at night and living away from home is commonly associated with waywardness and promiscuity (Porter 2011):

> In the nights my parents do not permit me to go out because according to them I can become a bad girl if I go out in the nights. Whenever I return home late in the daytime, my mother... insults me. (Girl, 13 years, Trebasia, RS forest zone)

Negativity towards agriculture and village life, and impatience among older girls about constraints on their mobility, was especially evident in the forest zone villages. Here formal schooling is regularly presented by young people as an attractive alternative, offering an escape route out of drudgery and exploitation. A 13-year-old boy was emphatic about the merits of a non-agricultural career and the necessity for training outside the village:

> Farming is no more lucrative as it used to be. Sometimes when the rains fail you don't get enough produce... so you need a better job. Schooling will provide you the opportunity to get a better job. I prefer schooling to farming. I don't want anyone to cheat me in the future. At the end of the farming season other people determine how much

you will have to sell your produce. Or sometimes you don't get people to buy it. I would like to be a carpenter... for me to learn carpentry I need to move to Sunyani. (RS forest zone)

A 16-year-old girl in primary 6, from the same village was similarly outspoken,

I prefer schooling to farming. When you don't go to school you will have to weed in the sun and your palms will be thick. Even when you shake hands with your friends you are ashamed.

There was less evident antagonism towards agriculture in the coastal study villages, which are closer to the markets of Ghana's major population centres, though turning back to Patience, whom we cited at length earlier, it is clear that farming is not a popular activity: '*I don't want to go to the farm and weed so I better come to school*'. Many of the rural children we interviewed – boys and girls – aspire to be teachers, lawyers, doctors or nurses. The attraction of city training, city jobs and city life and the key role of education in achieving successful urban migration is, as in the forest zone, a common theme:

because this is a village to be a successful person you have to go to the city... because of the nature of the place a lot of people do not further their education after the JHS so there are no role models here. (JHS boy 15 years, RS coastal zone)

However, as we have seen, despite the positive discourse around education as a precursor to the development of alternative family livelihoods, this is very commonly outweighed by the negative reality of competing needs for survival at home. Moreover, it is clear to many that the basic education available in the villages is unlikely to be enough to secure the 'brighter future' to which young people aspire. As farming parents with children in private school at Ekwese observed, because of the lack of both jobs and Senior High School in the village, their children will have to move out '*in order to make it*'.

Given the negative perceptions of long-term prospects in the rural study settlements prevailing not only among many young people but also in some cases their parents too, it is not surprising that migration to the city, whether for schooling or for work, is considered as a potential escape route by older children. Across West Africa moving to urban centres is common practice among the younger generation, whether to obtain education, an apprenticeship, buy modern consumer goods, or raise money for school fees or other purposes (Thorsen 2006, Hashim 2007, Ungruhe 2010). Migration also provides the means whereby young men, in particular, can exercise agency and renegotiate their social position, working towards a transition to adulthood (Thorsen 2006, p. 102, Ungruhe 2010). Whether this will be achieved is another matter. Many young people (some of whom we met in urban interviews) stay on in the city after they have obtained some additional education, despite failure to find work, because they are reluctant to return home as failures (Ungruhe 2010, p. 267).

Migration for education, particularly at secondary school level, is widespread in Ghana, as in most of sub-Saharan Africa, because senior secondary education provision[8] is relatively restricted, mostly to urban settlements. In our rural Ghana study locations the difficulties of attending secondary school are very substantial. Regular motorised transport is not generally available to take school children to and from the villages to the nearest settlement with a secondary school (which in all the villages is over a 20-km distant), and where transport is available, regular payment of fares is usually beyond the reach of rural families, especially when added to fees and other ancillary costs of secondary education. The constraints on girls are especially great and reflect widespread experience across sub-Saharan Africa (as highlighted in DFID's recent review of girls' access to post-primary education, 2010[9]). The young male JHS teacher at Ekwese (cited earlier) observed:

in this settlement enrolment is very high at the primary level, but as they climb up a lot of girls drop out... sometimes as a result of teenage pregnancy or they just decide to stop school... some of the children here got admission to Senior Secondary Schools in and around Cape Coast – usually boys are more than girls... more often the

number that ends up in Senior Secondary [High] school is far less than the number that qualifies to go. The parents will tell you that they don't have enough funds to send their children...

This reflects findings in a summary report for the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS 5, 2008, p. 11) which notes that the difference in school attendance rates between males and females becomes more pronounced with increasing age: 'Thus, attendance rates for females at age 19–25 is much lower (77.3%) compared to that for males (87.8%). The difference in rates between males and females is even more pronounced for rural savannah, where attendance rates for age-group 19–25 for females is 37.2% compared to 62.1% for males'. As a clan leader in Ekwese village commented wryly, children mostly end up on the farm even when they have passed for secondary school.

Those rural children who have completed their primary/JHS education, and whose families have the funds to pay secondary school fees, are faced with either a long walk from home each day or temporary migration to a settlement which has a school at senior high school level. Here they may board at the school or with relatives nearby. Alternatively, some parents enter into a fostering arrangement which requires work contributions from the child; another option is so-called 'self-boarding' i.e. renting a room. However, even when parents have funds available for their children to attend secondary school or other training or work opportunities in town, this often presents difficulties, especially where girls are concerned. The tussle in Trebasia between 18-year-old Mary and her mother has been going on for some time:

> I want to become a hairdresser.... I will learn the job in Odumase. This implies my relocation from this village because I cannot get the money to be shuttling everyday. [Mother] said I should learn the trade from a woman in Trebasia [but] I do not think this is feasible [for acquiring the necessary skills].

Such argument is common, and may reflect a mix of parental concerns: loss of labour at home, loss of contact, the child's safety and well-being in town. In this latter respect, the following story is by no means unique:

> My parents hired a room for me and my siblings for us to attend school in Odumase.... Life was difficult for us. The four of us were only given 10,000 Cedis [i.e. old Cedis, worth about £0.50 at time of interview] for a week. I find it difficult to attend school. As a result I picked a boyfriend at the age of 16.... Even at my school there was one teacher who proposed to me but I refused but he kept worrying me... I got pregnant when I was in JHS 2. (Faustina, 20 years, Trebasia, RS forest zone)

This raises some important issues around mobility, migration and premarital relationships as a form of livelihood support among young girls in Ghana. Ankomah (2006, pp. 41, 42) notes that boyfriends are a common source of trading credit and urban room rent. She also cites Akuffo (1987), regarding a not uncommon pattern of mothers encouraging their daughters to have boyfriends to pay for clothes and other items. Intimate relationships are conventionally intertwined with money or gifts. When a daughter becomes pregnant she will hope to marry in order to turn herself into a 'respectable mother' (Langevang 2008), but otherwise, like Faustina, the only option may be to return to the village. While girls in our study villages dream of jobs in nursing, teaching, dressmaking and similar 'feminised' occupations, in the context of their limited education and parental constraints there is scant hope for most of achieving such occupational aspirations. A common parental view is that girls are likely to soon get pregnant and will not bring any clear benefit to the family. By contrast with young men, many young women experience a very rapid transition to adulthood, through pregnancy and motherhood.

Migration of sons appears to be viewed with greater equanimity by parents since this offers the prospect of future family wealth, improved social position and a better support network. Many of the parents we interviewed recognised that in order for their children to get on, they would have to get out (Jones and Chant 2009, p. 193), though further discussion tended to indicate that such views referred to more to sons than daughters. However, Hashim (2009, citing Fentiman *et al.*

1999 and Hashim 2004) suggests that because of the urban demand for female domestic labour in Ghana and girls interest in apprenticeships as a route to income-generation, more girls than boys are actually migrating from their home communities. Unfortunately, given the limited education available in the village, neither boys' nor girls' livelihood aspirations are likely to be met in town (Hashim 2007). Remoter rural areas, where educational attainment tends to be particularly low, are still often essentially labour reserves: investment in human capital through education is crucial if young people from these areas are to begin to compete effectively in national labour markets (Bird *et al.* 2002).

Conclusion: a gender perspective on mobility, education and livelihood potential

Gender has formed a significant thread in the preceding discussion. Both girl and boy children in basic education in Ghana may have to travel long distances to school from remote locations, and both boys and girls face substantial family demands on their labour. However, the interconnections between distance to school, work-loads and education have more negative implications for girls than for boys, since it tends to be girls whose school attendance is most affected by (heavier) household work burdens, not least those related to carrying (i.e. occasioned by the transport gap). This work frequently delays girls' arrival at school, especially when coupled with a long journey from home, resulting in punishments, including corporal punishment. Boys also suffer punishment if they are late, but boys' tasks before school tend to be fewer and less time-consuming than girls' tasks, so their likelihood of being late, even when living at a distance from school, is lower unless they delay by playing on the journey. The overall impact is that boys are more likely to complete primary school than girls. Moreover, boys who complete are also more likely than girls who complete to move into secondary education, in part because this involves a long daily journey or residence away from home: there is an association of female mobility with promiscuity and simple recognition of the fact that boys cannot become pregnant! Thus in Trebasia in the forest zone, among resident children we found only five boys and no girls currently attending the JHS located 23 km down the road. Pregnancy was reported in qualitative interviews with children and parents as a common cause of girls' withdrawal from education in our rural study sites. Construction of girls' bodies as sexual objects makes their lives particularly difficult. Moreover, harassment is not merely perpetrated by peers and in travel contexts some male teachers at both primary and secondary schools seem to regard sexual access to young girl pupils as their right, as a few of our life histories with young women in their twenties attest.

The input young people are expected to make into household production and reproduction suggests that investments in educational standards *per se* in Ghana will not be enough to bring substantial change, particularly where girls are concerned. A change in norms about what constitutes male and female tasks could be feasible in the long term, allowing some redistribution of workload (towards boys) which would improve efficiency as Andvig (2001, p. 46) suggests. However, in the shorter term it is clear that specific interventions which reduce girls' time poverty through attention to the domestic transport gap are likely to be particularly crucial: technological developments in the area of Intermediate Means of Transport, for instance, could encourage boys to take over some load carrying tasks. Support to girls living in town to attend secondary school is also urgently needed, ideally through more and better organised boarding provision, but in cases where self-boarding is the only option and there is no local family support, through some form of mentoring by older women in the community (Porter 2011).

It is also important to recognise that jobs in town generally depend on more than education: contacts and/or start up capital, are commonly vital (Jones and Chant 2009, p. 194, also see Thorsen 2006, Dorward *et al.* 2009, p. 242). The time poverty and high surveillance and mobility restrictions which rural girls experience impinge on their opportunities to benefit from formal

education and their development of the social networks which might allow them to develop livelihood opportunities with more potential. Livelihood potential is further constrained by strong social norms regarding 'appropriate' behaviour and livelihoods for girls. Inter-generational frictions focused around access to resources, youth sexuality and youth mobility are unsurprisingly evident in all our study sites. While parents look to sons to acquire a basic education, and are not averse to them finding new and more lucrative livelihoods in the city, daughters seem often to be expected to focus their efforts on supporting household reproduction at home until they marry. Both genders have great faith in the power of education to improve their life chances, but work pressures at home and resource failures at school – both of which militate against children being open to and receiving quality education, especially when coupled with mobility constraints – are likely to persist in Ghana as elsewhere in Africa, at least in the medium term.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. In the latter strand, seventy young people (mostly secondary school pupils aged between 11 and 19 when they started), received a basic, one-week training in a variety of research methods, selected research tools they preferred and conducted their own studies with their peers. A full description of the recruitment and methodology in this child researcher component is available elsewhere (Porter *et al.* 2010a). The young researchers selected sites convenient to them and these did not include the rural sites discussed in this paper.
2. The main field research assistants are included as authors.
3. Pseudonyms are used both for settlement names and for individuals, to preserve anonymity.
4. Information from the latest Ghana Living Standards Survey (2008) is not yet available. This also included a question about time to school and mode of transport.
5. The interviewer subsequently checked the punishment type with Patience and clarified that this referred to what he terms 'lashing' i.e. a common Ghanaian term for caning.
6. Of course, the constraints which affect children's travel to school, may also impact similarly on teachers, since few can afford their own vehicles.
7. Young children often start to carry tiny loads as they accompany their mothers from around three years old (Porter *et al.* 2011).
8. Schooling tends to take the following pattern in Ghana: six years of primary education, 3 years JHS/JHS, 4 years SHS/SHS.
9. According to this report (DFID 2010), in sub-Saharan Africa there are 79 girls for every 100 boys at lower and upper secondary school.

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