

DRAFT: PLEASE DO NOT QUOTE

'Youthscapes' and escapes in rural Africa: education, mobility and livelihood trajectories for young people in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa

Gina Porter, Kate Hampshire, Albert Abane, Alister Munthali, Elsbeth Robson,
Mac Mashiri, Augustine Tanle and Goodhope Maponya
[Universities of Durham (UK), Cape Coast (Ghana) and Malawi and CSIR (South Africa)]

Abstract

This paper focuses on the linkages between education, mobility and livelihood potential for young people in rural areas of three sub-Saharan countries: Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. Young people's lives in rural locations are commonly shaped by both economic and political exclusions: poverty and lack of voice. Their labour contributions are usually crucial to family farm production from an early age, but the work is mostly unpaid and controlled by other household members. Moreover, the work contributions required of young people affect their educational attainment: school attendance is regularly delayed, impeded and curtailed by work demands. In the context of limited educational opportunities in rural areas and often very negative perceptions of agriculture among today's youth, the competing attractions offered by escape to the city are enormous. However, as our case studies illustrate, in the context of work demands, restricted basic education and poverty, the potential for escape, whether to secondary education or city jobs, is limited and usually highly gendered. We draw principally on rich ethnographic material from recent interviews with children and young people, their parents, teachers and other key informants.

Introduction

There is now a substantial body of research on young people's livelihoods in urban contexts, from street children to taxi entrepreneurs and on street culture, often linked to unease with and concerns about the potential dangers posed by disaffected and unruly urban youth (for example, Langevang 2008, Gough 2008). By contrast there has been relatively little recent work on youth livelihoods and livelihood transitions in contemporary rural society in Africa, except in war and post-conflict contexts and to a lesser extent with reference to child labour exploitation in commercial agriculture. This paper aims to help redress the research gap through an exploration of the linkages between mobility and livelihood opportunities for young people living in rural areas of three sub-Saharan countries, Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. Our conclusions are based on a three-year study focused on the daily mobility of 9-18 year olds¹.

Young people's lives in rural Africa are commonly shaped by both economic and political exclusions: poverty and lack of voice. Their labour contributions usually commence at an early age and are often crucial to family farm production, but such work is mostly unpaid and controlled by other household members: it does not bring autonomy, at least in the short term. Moreover, the work contributions required of young people impact on their educational attainment: school attendance is regularly delayed, impeded

¹ This is a three-year ESRC/DFID-funded study: full details are available at our website: www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility

and curtailed by work demands. In the context of limited educational opportunities in rural areas and often very negative perceptions of agriculture among today's youth, the competing attractions for aspiring youth offered by escape to the city are enormous. However, as our case studies illustrate, in the context of work demands, restricted basic education and poverty, the potential for escape, whether to secondary education or city jobs, is limited and usually highly gendered.

Our paper shows how mobility and associated access to regular, affordable transport can be a key factor shaping young people's potential to escape village drudgery. It has direct implications for access to work opportunities, since non-agricultural work or multiplex livelihoods seem likely to offer the surest route out of poverty (Bryceson 1999; Yaro 2006), but these options are often very limited in the village context. The potential to make a daily journey to the nearest town, whether to trade, to learn or to undertake service work such as sewing, taxi driving, machinery repair or hairdressing, may be crucial in accessing the larger market which will enable a young man or woman to accrue a modest profit and build a business. Mobility also has other more indirect implications for livelihoods in terms of access to health services, education and the social networks which are often crucial for future livelihood independence.

Following a short review of methodology we set the context for each of our rural case study sites. We then examine the economic and political exclusions faced by young people in these sites and the implications for livelihoods, explore youth experiences of and attitudes to agriculture and other rural work and consider the potential of formal education as an escape route out of rural drudgery. The particular constraints on rural girls' mobility and autonomy form an important strand in the discussion. This final section of the paper also considers permanent migration to urban areas.

Methodology

The three-country child mobility study on which this paper is based utilised a two-strand approach, in which a more conventional adult academic research study was complemented by a child researcher strand in which seventy 'child' researchers participated. These young people, aged between 11 and 19, 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. They selected diverse methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, diaries, life histories, a photographic journal of children's travel to school and at work (using disposable cameras), and accompanied walks. A full description of the recruitment and methodology in this child researcher component is available elsewhere (Porter et al. in press). The child researchers' findings have fed into and complement the adult research strand, which includes intensive qualitative research (in depth interviews, life histories, focus group discussions, ethnographic diaries, accompanied walks) with children, their parents and key informants. This forms the focus of our analysis, but we also draw on a questionnaire survey (approximately 125 children per site) among child respondents aged 7-18 years which was designed subsequent to, and with reference to, preliminary qualitative research. The child researchers were school-going children (mostly secondary school) and selected research sites convenient to them, but the adult researcher qualitative and

quantitative studies took place in four specific rural sites per country; two classified as rural with services (usually a primary school, sometimes a clinic) and two classified as remote rural (no services).

In the case of both the adult and child researcher strands, the research locations included two contrasting agro-ecological zones per country. However, we draw principally on detailed qualitative case study material from just one region in each country. This is necessary for reasons of brevity, since each case study requires adequate contextualization. The selected sites are as follows: Tainso (rural with services) and Boam hamlets (remote rural no services) in the Sunyani region of Ghana's forest zone; Namende (rural with services) and Kanyola (remote rural no services) in Malawi's Blantyre Shire Hills region, and Mtambalala (rural with services) and Bolani (remote rural no services) in Eastern Cape, South Africa.

Mobile ethnographies² have been a key method in our study (both for adult and child researchers, Porter et al. 2007). These have consisted principally of accompanied walks in which the adult or child researcher accompanied a young respondent, from school to home, or from home to a water point, fuelwood supply, grinding mill, market or other place to which they traveled regularly. The researcher would make brief notes as they walked or on occasional stops, then write fuller notes on the journey immediately following completion of the walk. We found these walks an ideal approach to interviewing children and young people, allowing us to experience their mobility with them, while at the same time avoiding some of the uncomfortable silences which can occur in a face-to-face stationary interview, especially in circumstances of unequal power relations (as is particularly the case with adult-to-child interviews). Conversation during a walk is often more comfortable, since the young respondent can avoid eye contact and any silences which occur are more easily accommodated as the exertion of walking makes silence a normal, natural component of interchange. Conversation and unsolicited observation replace a more formal question and answer routine.

Rural case study sites

1. Ghana's forest zone: Tainso village and Boam hamlets

Tainso is a village located approximately 25 kms south of Sunyani, capital of Brong Ahafo Region, on an unpaved road. It has only basic services in the form of a primary school, a visiting nurse, a small market and a grocery store. The Boam hamlets are connected to Tainso by a rough track which joins the main Sunyani-Tainso route after three to four kilometers. The hamlets consist essentially of dispersed farmsteads without any services. Many children from Boam attend the primary school in Tainso, a journey of up to 10 kms. 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 Secondary School (JSS) and Senior Secondary School are all located in Sunyani, at distances of approximately 23 to 25 kms from the villages. Primary school enrollment is around 60 to 70 per cent. Vehicles pass through Tainso but transport costs between Tainso and Sunyani are high because the road is unpaved and

² We use the term 'mobile ethnography' here as specific acknowledgment of the physical mobility of the participants involved in making and recording the narrative, and the centrality of mobility to that narrative.

taxis charge a premium to travel the route. The Boam hamlets can be reached by motorized vehicle only with difficulty and there are no public transport services.

2. Blantyre region, Malawi: Namende and Kanyola villages

Namende village is located west of Blantyre city (the country's main commercial centre). It has a primary school but no clinic and is accessible only with difficulty by motorized transport which has to negotiate a steep unpaved track, along a rugged route dissected by many streams. A further 3 kilometres along the road, across more streams and rugged topography, lies the remote dispersed village of Kanyola, which has no school. There is no public transport serving this area and few private vehicles reach Namende and Kanyola. In both settlements people engage in smallholder maize production, grow some vegetables and keep cattle. The nearest clinic and secondary school are over 5km distant; the nearest hospital is approximately 24 km away. HIV/AIDS prevalence is high in this area and there are many orphans living with grandparents and other family members, a few on their own in child-headed households.

3. Eastern Cape, South Africa: Mtambalala and Bolani villages

Mtambalala village is located west of Port St John, about 5 kms along an unpaved but motorable road off the main highway connecting Port St John with the Eastern Cape capital, Mthatha. Mtambalala is relatively well off in terms of services since it has two Primary/JSS schools, a clinic (closed at weekends) and a store selling a basic range of groceries and household goods. Transport services between Mtambalala and the highway are relatively frequent. Bolani is accessible only on foot along a narrow footpath which crosses a hill which stands around 120 metres above the surrounding land. It has no services. Farm production is limited across the region (formerly part of the homeland of Transkei), but includes vegetables, maize and cattle. Out-migration to urban areas is a characteristic feature of the region: many fathers and sometimes both parents are absent and children live with grandparents or other family members. There are also many AIDS orphans living with older family members. Many families are dependent mainly on social grants. The nearest hospital lies more than 18 kms away, and the nearest senior secondary school is about 15kms distant.

Youth exclusions in the village: implications of economic and political exclusion for livelihoods

By contrast with Africa's urban areas where youth have often managed to carve out niches where they can be seen and heard (e.g. Langevang 2008), the literature suggests that both economic and political exclusions are widespread in rural areas (de Boeck and Honwana 2005). The majority of work required of young people or available to them is unpaid and occurs within the household (Andvig 2001:6, 13). Where children earn a wage, it is low: in Ghana, on average, only about one sixth of an adult wage (Canagarajah and Coulombe n.d. p. 10).

The widespread development of women's microfinance enterprises across Africa may have actually increased requirements for children's labour, especially girls (see Arku and Arku 2009 re Wassa district, Ghana). Any lucrative NGO incentives, by contrast, are commonly appropriated by adults: young people, especially girls, are expected to

volunteer and NGOs rarely work with rural youth except in relation to HIV/AIDS (see Campbell et al 2009 on AIDS programmes in South Africa). There is no specific evidence of microfinance initiatives increasing girls' work or of NGO incentives being appropriated by adults in any of our rural studies, but there is ample evidence of the way children and young people are expected to contribute to family support. Rural children were found to be participating significantly in domestic/family labour in all our research locations from c. 6-7 years upwards, though when we asked rural children in the survey whether they had an occupation, over 70% in Malawi and over 90% in Ghana said they had none!

In all sites water carrying, firewood collection and cleaning in the homestead are basic tasks that girls are required to undertake, though young boys also assist. This is seen, particularly for girls, as part of the process of socialisation, learning tasks in preparation for adult life. In Eastern Cape, South Africa, for example,

'the 9 year old [girl] goes to the forest to pick firewood ... she uses a 10 litre bucket to fetch water [on her head]. ...it is important for kids to work because it teaches them to be responsible and know how to take care of things in the house and also when they are grown up [they] can teach their own kids how to do things [mother of two, Mtambalala, South Africa]

'it is a norm among almost every household that a girl child has the responsibility of collecting water and firewood before she come to school...for girls it starts at the age of five. In winter when the nearby streams are dry they are compelled to travel some kms to the river to collect water which on top of that makes them ill'. [woman schoolteacher, Mtambalala, SA]

However, if there are no girls in the house, or the girls are very young, then boys must participate more fully:

-they fetch water, collect firewood and clean. I send them to sell the vegetables at Gembale. They only sell on the holidays and on weekends. This is the only way we can survive. They sell maize on the tarmac road. ... the money they get they bring it to me but I give them pocket money. The distance is about 2 hours to get to the tarmac road. If I could afford paying for the taxi they wouldn't walk on foot. ... the little money I get is very little and I use it to buy school fees, uniform and small things.... It is important for the children to be taught to work. It teaches them respect. It will help them in future'.

[mother of two boys aged 9 and 6 & no girls in this house, Bolani, SA]

Young people in this region are also commonly expected to work on the family farm to contribute to household funds and school fees:

During the wet season the whole family is expected to work in the field, ploughing. We all help. My father says this is the only way... if we don't work we'll starve and we won't have money to go to school. [17 year old girl, with siblings aged 15 and 8, Bolani, SA]

In our Malawi sites many children, both boys and girls, undertake farm work and carry goods for money, in addition to their other household duties: casual labour (-ganyu) is a

widespread key source of family income, essential in some cases to keep the family from starvation:

'we even force them to do ganyu sometimes, especially when on holidays so that they are able to earn some money and meet some of their needs.

[mothers' focus group, Namende].

The young charcoal carriers at Kanyola are generally aged about 9 years and above and take substantial loads (size varying with age) over 7 kms along an uphill route to market: in many cases the work is essential to cover soap for washing clothes and school lunch. In Namende, children can earn 100kwacha in 2 days for work as agricultural labourers (i.e. significantly lower than rates for women who may earn 200k and adult men for whom 700k is considered a reasonable rate).

The Ghana sites present a similar story: most boys and girls spend much time helping their parents to farm, scaring birds, carrying produce etc. Boys in particular, reportedly miss school regularly because of the competing demands of the farm. In the dry season, when the river dries up, girls spend much time searching for water.

In all the study sites, girls' work burdens reflect, in part, the transport gap in sub-Saharan Africa: females are culturally expected to carry loads wherever motorised transport is unavailable, insufficient or too costly to be employed. Boys up to their mid teens may help with this work, but girls bear the brunt of the burden. In areas with high HIV/AIDS prevalence like South Africa and Malawi girls may also have substantial caring duties (see Wodon and Beagle in Blackden and Wodon ed. 2006 re Malawi). In all sites, girls tend to be further utilised as domestic anchors, left at home to care for siblings when their mother/carer goes to market or to the fields. As a father with 4 daughters and two sons observed in Malawi,

'boys have more freedom than girls [why?] they are just boys... girls work hard more than boys, hence boys have more time to move around.... Girls ought to stay home and look after the house and cook.. There is little for the boys to do [just] harvesting and cultivating' [Kanyola, Malawi]

Girls consequently face considerable time poverty which restricts their opportunities for formal education and their livelihood options and opportunities.

Issues of voice

Clearly, the work demanded of young people is substantial and perhaps inevitably encourages resentment, very clearly expressed by Joyce³, a young woman of 17 in Tainso (Ghana) who lamented,

'my main problem is being asked to go to the farm compulsorily by my father and brother, when on the other hand they refuse to raise the money for my apprenticeship [as a hairdresser]'

Most young people are reticent about expressing such views to their elders, however. When we asked young people whether they are able to have a voice in family and community affairs (in view of their substantial contributions to family production and reproduction), the majority in all countries could not recall any instance where they had been able to have a say in family or community decision making. As John, a boy of 16

³ Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper.

observed in Tainso (Ghana), only his father attends community meetings *-because the community says I am a child*'. In Mtambalala (South Africa) an 18 year old boy with a child of his own (living elsewhere) observed *'sometimes they [parents] don't understand that I am old and they want to treat me like the young children in the house'*.

When we raised the same question with adults, the concept of child contributions to family decision-making was generally dismissed and occasionally caused offence:

All children in this area work hard.... Are you here to find out if we are abusing our children. It's all about children's rights, rights, rights. We also have a responsibility to groom them to become better people.

[grandmother age 53 with care of 12 year old grandson, Bolani, RSA].

This accords with references to youth rights issues in all three countries (e.g. Campbell et al. 2009 re South Africa, UNFPA 2006 and Twum Danso 2009 re Ghana, Bryceson 2006 re Malawi).

Turning away from agriculture

It was in the Ghana research sites that we encountered the strongest expression of negative attitudes towards agriculture among young people. One young man, 21 years old, visiting his village (Tainso) from the regional technical institute observed how he was going to be an engineer:

I cannot stay here to achieve my dream because there are no facilities here for such purposes. The environment in this village will always push somebody into farming so I have to migrate'.

Obeng, a 13 year-old boy in the same village, was emphatic about the merits of a non-agricultural career:

-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.'

Gloria, a 16 year old in primary 6, 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'

In our study sites in Malawi and South Africa, for many, agriculture appears to be simply off the agenda: no longer considered a viable occupation either by young people or their carers. This sentiment was expressed particularly strongly in Eastern Cape, where agricultural opportunities are limited and migration is a long-established response to difficult rural conditions:

'I am not happy about the quality of life.... The future for children here is very bleak. The only way they can prosper is to get an education and move out of this place otherwise things will remain the same.'

[mother of 4, traditional healer, Mtambalala, RSA]

the children when they grow up they run away from Bolani because they can see that there is nothing for them here.... Even myself I wouldn't mind moving with them because there is a better life in the cities.' [mother of 3, Bolani]
'although I would want them to live here [in the future] but there is no future. As you can see most young people leave us old people to suffer here and they don't support us leaving us to raise their children'. [grandmother carer of two, Bolani]

In both Malawi and South Africa it seems it is not simply that an urban career is considered vital to success, but that to succeed in the village brings a risk of envy and witchcraft. This is an issue which came up in a number of interviews:

÷I want to go somewhere so that I can lead a comfortable life. Here people are bad and they can bewitch you if they see that you are becoming well to do 'if you finish your school and stay here people don't want to give you respect unless if you go somewhere and you just come here to visit.
[Namende, group interview with primary school boys]

'I don't see any future prospects for children in this settlement because there is nothing. Many young people are running away because they can see there is no development. Since we voted nothing has happened... even me, I wouldn't encourage them to stay because there is no future here. Even if they succeed people might become jealous of them and then bewitch them' [mother of 4, Bolani, RSA]

By contrast, formal education is perceived as a key route out of rural stagnation:

'There is nothing good that can be an advantage to my children here. ... I hope they finish school and get jobs and live a good life in town'
[very poor mother with two boys, Kanyola, Malawi].

÷School is very important because a child gets to learn a lot.. I have a son who stays in town. He went as far as form 4 at Madziabango and now he is working in town and he sends us money and buys us certain things like the phone I have. ... farming without school is nothing [grandfather 70, Kanyola, Malawi].

Older villagers have blamed formal education for youth disenchantment with agriculture and migration to the city in many contexts (e.g. Bolten 2009: 72 re Sierra Leone) but, in all our sites, the emphasis in adult as well as youth discourse was on education as a route to family success (albeit with a focus on boys' education). However, the Kanyola grandfather's positive account cited above is rare: the real potential for Western formal education to transform lives implied by so many of our interviewees in all three countries is often more imagined than real, as we discuss below.

Formal education as an escape route?

1. Mobility, transport and basic education

Statistics currently available show increasing enrolment in primary education across most sub-Saharan countries (including our case study countries)⁴, but lower *attendance* patterns, especially among girls, still prevail widely. In part this can be explained by children's heavy work demands, including those necessitated by the transport gap (discussed above), but there are further linkages between education, mobility and distance from school which need to be considered. The impact of residential distance from school on learning achievement, in particular, has received little specific attention in the literature.

Only basic primary or, at most, Junior Secondary School (JSS) education is available in the majority of rural locations in our three study countries. In many more remote villages and hamlets there is no school at all and children must thus walk long distances even for primary schooling. Victoria, a girl of twelve, who lives with her elderly grandparents and now carries charcoal for a living, told a story very common in her remote village, Kanyola (Malawi): *'I dropped out of [primary] school because of the [4km] distance. [my siblings] all complain about the distance. I'm sure therefore they are also going to stop'*. In the same vein, a grandmother with two children in her care who lives in remote rural Bolani (RSA) observed, *'most children in this settlement have dropped out of school. They can't handle the distance they travel to school.'* As one 22-year old JSS pupil reflected, as we walked home with him, scrambling over the steep, scree slopes to Bolani from his school in Mtambalala, *'When I think about school my heart becomes bitter for the distance I travel to school is very long for me. At times I think about dropping out of school like other children in my location ...'* Andrew's school career had only started at the age of 12 because of the distance and the difficult journey from this remote rural village in the Eastern Cape uplands. It is common for parents to delay children's school entry in all the remote villages where we worked, because of the journey length. However, the delay in starting school can also lead to embarrassment when a child is placed in a class with much younger pupils:

'I was also very old to be doing standard 3, most of the children in my class were too young, so I stopped....it's very difficult for me to get jobs because I didn't go to school, so the fact that I didn't finish [primary] school will [affect my chances]' [boy 20 yrs, Kanyola, Malawi].

Attendance at school varies seasonally, not only according to family work demands, but also with reference to access. Routes tend to be particularly hazardous for children in the rains: *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, Tainso, Ghana]. In Tainso 70% of children reportedly miss school in the rains because most must cross a river to reach school. As we walked with pupils from school we heard many stories about children being delayed reaching school because of

⁴ As a result of efforts to reach the MDGs primary completion rates increased as follows: Ghana, 1991, 61%; 2006, 71%. Malawi, 1991, 29%; 2006, 55%. South Africa, 1991, 76%; 2006, 100%. (World Development Report 2009).

problems and necessary diversions en route, as a result of having to cross overflowing streams and rivers. Late arrival usually results in punishment (sweeping the compound, cleaning lavatories, beatings etc.), but in some cases children who had endeavoured to reach school were then simply ordered home by the teacher: a remarkably disheartening conclusion to a 5 or more km walk. Long walks to school due to lack of or high cost of transport and attendant problems of lateness encourage late -over-age-enrolment (especially of girls), truancy and early drop out (see Avotri et al. 1999: 94-5, 165 re Ghana).⁵

A long walk to school, especially when coupled with a heavy work load out of school, is also likely to contribute to poor performance, because children are exhausted before they even start their school day. As Heady (2003) has observed (in Ghana), 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. In many cases we found children simply withdrawn from school for days at a time, because their work contribution at the market or in the fields must take precedence. In many cases they must help their parents earn the money to meet essential contributions to [theoretically free] schooling: uniform, books, Parent-Teacher Association, building development, soap, toilet paper, security etc. (Canagarajah and Coulombe n.d.; Jones and Chant 2009). In this context it is unsurprising that many parents maintain such an ambiguous attitude to education. There is, on the one hand, as we have seen, a positive discourse around education as a precursor to the development of alternative family livelihoods, but this is very commonly outweighed by the negative reality of competing needs for survival at home: *-at least one day in they week they have to miss school to help me with the ploughing otherwise if they don't do it there will be no food for them to eat*. [mother of 4, Bolani, RSA]

Vivian and Sipiwe's stories sum up the difficulties that girls, in particular, commonly face:

'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' [Vivian, 14 years, primary 5, Teinso]

-during school days I make sure I do all my work prior to going to school otherwise I will be late. ... they punish us at school or they close the gate and we end up missing morning classes. I didn't do most of these activities [fetching water and firewood, cooking, cleaning the house, laundering at the river] I would probably have time to do my school work and study my books but by the time I start doing my homework I'm already tired and I want to sleep [Sipiwe, age 17, Bolani, RSA]

⁵ Of course, the constraints which affect children's travel to school, may also impact similarly on teachers, since few can afford their own vehicles.

Girls, in general, face more pressures to withdraw from school than boys⁶. However, many boys, particularly in Malawi, faced substantial competing demands on their time, especially where there are no girls living in the household: *'sometimes I don't go to school if I have to take the cattle to the dipping tank or else I will arrive late to school [and be punished] [boy 16 years, Bolani, RSA].*

In Namende (Malawi) the maize mill figures in many boys stories:

-I dropped out of school because I was constantly being sent to the maize mill and whenever I came back my legs were sore. It was therefore hard for me to go back to school. Another thing that I was uncomfortable with was that every time I went back to school I could find my [mates] well ahead of me. They had covered lots of topics and it was not easy for me to catch up'.

[17 year old in boys group, Namende, Malawi]

-maybe I can just abscond classes once a week [prompt] ... to do chores at home [p] ... fetching water and going to the maize mill. ... sometimes I get to school late ... because sometimes I have to go to the maize field before going to school. [primary school boy, 10 years, Namende].

Another group of boys in the same village, also primary school pupils, recounted how farming makes them late for school and, if don't do it, they don't get food.

Heavy work demands on children, when coupled with residence at some distance from school, leads very frequently to late enrolment, poor attendance and early withdrawal from basic education. A long journey appears in many cases to present the tipping point in a context where school attendance is a constant process of inter-generational negotiation.

Formal education as an escape route?

2. Mobility, transport and secondary education

Migration for education is common in sub-Saharan Africa, especially at secondary school level, because senior secondary education provision⁷, in particular, is relatively restricted, mostly to urban settlements (see Lewin and Sayed, 2006, for instance, on Malawi). The options open to children who have completed their primary/JSS education, and have the funds to pay secondary school fees, but whose families reside in rural and remote rural settlements are usually two: either a) temporary migration to a settlement which has a school at senior secondary level (residence at the school; with relatives nearby, possibly in a fostering arrangement which requires work contributions from the child; or so-called 'self-boarding' i.e. renting a room) or b) a long daily walk from home.

Motorised transport may be available from the village to a settlement with a secondary school, but regular payment of school fares are usually beyond the reach of rural families, especially when added to fees and other ancillary costs of secondary education. In both

⁶ Including, in Namende, pressures to get married so they will no longer be a burden on the family.

⁷ Schooling tends to take the following patterns: Ghana: six years of primary education, three years JSS, four years SSS; Malawi: eight years primary, four years secondary. In South Africa there are regional variations in pattern.

rural and remote rural settlements in our study locations, the difficulties of attending secondary school are very substantial. Only a few children in any of our rural study settlements (almost wholly boys) had access to a bicycle for use to travel to school. In Ghana a link between distance to secondary school and primary school attendance has been observed in that children are more likely to be sent to primary school if there is a nearby secondary, as continuity of the child's education is feasible (Avotri et al. 1999 citing Boakye 1997).

In remote rural Bolani, in Eastern Cape, many children do not even complete primary school because of the distances travel involved in acquiring a basic education. They are consequently ineligible for secondary education. Even those who complete primary are unlikely to move on to secondary education, as one mother of six lamented:

‘children in this settlement are reluctant to go to school because of the distance they have to walk. Even when they have finished primary school they can't continue to high school because there are no schools [near]....within my neighbourhood. I only know of one child who is in secondary school. Many children usually drop out at standard 7.’

Others suggested that this still resulted in children migrating out of Bolani:

Our community is very isolated here, there are no schools and our children have to travel and walk long distances. This has resulted in many of the young people in our community losing hope and leaving Bolani because when they finish primary school they can't afford to go to high school because there is no transport... and they end up roaming around and others turning into stealing to survive.ø [mother of 4]

In nearby, more accessible Mtambala, there is transport available and a contract taxi picks up children of families who can afford to pay (c. 100 Rand per month) and takes them to Ntafufu SSS. However the taxi breaks down on occasions, making the pupils late. The taxi costs are also too high for some children who must walk. One boy, now 18, recalls:

‘I got tired of schooling. I was schooling at Ntafufu SSS and doing grade 10. I used to travel from home to Ntafufu every day. I walked to school. I would have to wake up at 3- o'clock in the morning to prepare for school. The distance I used to travel made me drop out of school because waking up early every day was difficult. On the rainy days it used to be very difficult.’

The majority of parents we interviewed on this topic in remoter Mtambalala observed that they did not have money either for renting accommodation at Ntafufu or for school transport, despite the fact that this was available.

In Namende, Malawi, it is two hours walk to the nearest [Community Day⁸] secondary school. As one of the primary school teachers in the village observed children leave school because they have no relatives to stay with at the CDSS neighbourhood. There are 12 boys who are attending secondary school, but only one girl. A few of the boys [no

⁸ Community Day Secondary Schools are the lowest tier of Secondary School in Malawi i.e. established by communities and funded by government largely from the primary budget. They have high pupil:teacher ratios and very few resources (see Lewin and Sayed 2005:72).

girls] possess bicycles which enable them to make the journey more quickly. One boy reported how he leaves home at 5 am to walk to Madziabango school every day because he can't afford to (self) board. If he is late he is forced to cut grass or carry stones, dig rubbish pits etc. when the other children are learning in class & teachers don't understand. In order to pay his fees he burns and sells charcoal and works as a house servant in the school holidays in Blantyre.

Moreover, there are broader issues concerning educational quality. One mother raised the question of the quality of education at Ntafufu school (SA), though it was unclear whether this was a genuine complaint or merely the explanation she adopted for not educating her 5 children beyond primary:

'There are no high schools here and the ones that are close don't provide quality education because most of the children fail their matric. If I want my children to get the best education I will have to send them to boarding school and this requires a lot of money.'

The question of school quality was also raised by a number of parents in Tainso (Ghana), where although many children attend the village primary school, most students do not qualify for senior school in Sunyani. *'This is because the student cannot stand up to the challenge from pupils from the city due to their poor foundation'* [male parent, Tainso, Ghana].

Having visited all the schools concerned in the study areas, it is certainly clear that quality is likely to be a significant issue when we look at potential linkages between access to education and subsequent livelihood opportunities. In all cases facilities and infrastructure are very limited and pupil-staff ratios very high; in some there were considerable complaints from parents and children about staff absences. It is all the more remarkable (and arguably depressing) that some children make long, arduous and possibly dangerous journeys to attend schools which offer rather little in the way of quality education.

Mobility and autonomy: a gender perspective

It tends to be boys who manage to complete primary school and mostly boys who attend secondary school in all our rural survey settlements⁹. Mobility and mobility potential is substantially implicated in this pattern, though this is rarely reported in any detail in the literature. Both fathers and mothers showed considerable concern that girls' mobility could leave them open to attack from men. A fathers' group in Kanyola, Malawi, for instance, observed how much they fear their girls will be 'cheated on or get raped on the way to school'. Girls are perceived to be vulnerable whether they walk or travel around on public transport:

'when people detect that she cannot find her way to wherever she came from, she may be raped by other people' [non-resident taxi driver, Tainso, Ghana]

⁹ In Tainso, for instance, among resident children we found only 5 boys and no girls currently attending the JSS (which is 23 kms distant), and no children of either sex enrolled in secondary school (survey data 2008).

'these days children, especially girls, are being abducted. There are people who abduct children and then cut their body parts to use it as muti [traditional medicine]letting girl children travel alone on public transport is not safe again these days [because of this]'. [grandmother, carer of 2 children, Bolani, RSA]

Consequently, girls are allowed much less freedom than their brothers. In Bolani, where many people ó both adults and children- expressed fear of girls being raped, a mother of two girls talked about her specific concerns for her daughters:

'The dangers that children face on the road is being raped by strangers and being stopped by boys who want to propose to girls. ...The elder girl knows what to do. She is used to the situation... it is the younger ones who are mostly at danger because people take advantage of them because they can't defend for themselves.... Boys can handle anything because they know what is happening around the settlement when they go hunting and cattle herding so they have nothing to worry about except fights from their peers. With girls it is different because they are vulnerable; they can't defend themselves sometimes when they are being harassed by boys. It is not safe for a girl to walk alone to go fetch firewood in the forest because of the boys who hide ... and take advantage of them.'

Another mother in Bolani contrasted her son's freedom to travel with the concerns she had were her daughter to make similar journeys:

'my eldest boy started travelling alone when he was 13 yrs old because I had to send him to town to buy thingsit is not safe for a girl as young as 14 years and below to travel alone on public transport because some people might steal their money...in town there are people who are naughty and I am afraid that they might do something bad to [my] young daughter if she were to travel alone...Especially at the taxi rank, the drivers are very rude... and there are boys who steal.'

In Kanyola (Malawi), however, in a focus group discussion with mothers, where all agreed that they limited girls' movement more than boys, there was an implication not only of girls' vulnerability but also perhaps that girls may bring their troubles on themselves ó a subtext of promiscuity:

'because as parents we are always afraid that girls can end up getting pregnant and thus bring other responsibilities to us. Those above 13 yrs of age have [more] restrictions than those below 13 years... because we fear pregnancies ... we feel boys are more responsible and less susceptible to bad company. And also girls can get pregnant if not carefully monitored, boys don't get pregnant. ...Many boy children here think they have the right to do anything especially those above 16 years of age.'

In Tainso and Boam hamlets (Ghana) we heard more from parents concerning girls' mobility at night, though there are still references to girls' vulnerability, and potential promiscuity associated with day time travel:

'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' [tro-tro driver, Tainso, Ghana]

'My mother sent me to Sunyani to go and sell some grasscutters. I boarded a taxi from TainsoI always go out in the daytime without asking permission from my parents 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.' [Sandra, 13 years, Tainso, Ghana].

In all the study sites, girls' mobility is acceptable along specific routes in daytime for trade etc. [especially in groups] but mobility at night and living away from home is commonly associated with waywardness and promiscuity. Consequently, there is considerable reluctance to allow girls to board away from home, which when coupled with concerns about walking alone, greatly limits their opportunities for secondary school attendance. The quandaries in these circumstances were summed up by a grandmother caring for four children in Mtambalala (RSA):

'the future of children here is very bleak. There is no high school and our children have to go to Ntafufu and then they come back pregnant'.

A few mothers and a few daughters related their specific [negative] experiences when the daughter did venture to reside away from home to attend secondary school:

There is a cell phone that my daughter has. I don't know who bought it for her because I don't have money to buy a cell. ... [she] is schooling at Ntafufu SSS ... she is renting in someone's home at Ntafufu. I decided to let her stay because in our village if it's raining children don't go to school [rivers too dangerous]..... Since she has been going to secondary school her behaviour has changed and she doesn't listen to me any more because she thinks she is clever now' [mother of 3, Bolani, RSA]

-My parents hired a room for me and my siblings for us to attend school in Odumase, the nearby big town to Tainso.. Life was difficult for us. The four of us were only given 10,000 Cedis 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 JSS 2'. [Esther, 20 years, Tainso, Ghana]

Both quotations raise some key issues around migration and premarital relationships as a form of livelihood support among young girls. With particular reference to Ghana, Ankomah (1996: 41, 42) notes that boyfriends are a common source of rent and trading credit. When a daughter become pregnant she will hope to marry in order to turn herself into a respectable mother (Langevang 2008) but otherwise, like Esther, the only option may be to return to the village. In South Africa, we found many references to schoolgirls using so-called sugar daddies (older men) to acquire key artifacts like smart mobile phones. In Malawi (and elsewhere), where the pattern of girls having older sexual partners has been linked to HIV/AIDS risks, intimate relationships are

conventionally intertwined with money or gifts (Bryceson and Fonseca 2006; Poulin 2007; also Leach et al. 2000 re Zimbabwe).

Migration appears to be perceived as the ultimate escape from rural drudgery, both for girls and for boys, but for girls such opportunities are rarer and often more problematic. Many young girls are keen to move to town, not just for work but for all that the city might offer:

I'd like a job as a nurse....I'd rather be somewhere else and not here, just to see how life is in those areas. I can just stay here at the moment but I would need to move for nurse training. [Melinda, 18, 2ndry school girl +occasional charcoal porter, Kanyola, Malawi]

Here in Bolani there are no schools, no roads and no transport and clinics. We don't have all these things so I don't see myself staying for long [Zodwa, secondary school girl, 16, Bolani, RSA]

Rural parents, however, are perhaps inevitably often particularly reluctant to see their daughters move to town, whether because of loss of labour, contact with the child, or concerns for their safety and well-being in town.

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 Tainso [but] I do not think this is feasible [for acquiring the necessary] skills'. [Mariam, 18 years, Tainso, Ghana]

While girls in Tainso and our other study villages dream of jobs in nursing, teaching, dressmaking and similar (generally -femaleø) occupations, given their restricted education and parental constraints, there is scant hope for most of achieving their occupational aspirations, especially in rural areas.

Three quotations below, all from Bolani, in remote rural Eastern Cape sum up the particular difficulties so many young girls face:

I want to be a lawyer... I will have to go and live with my relatives in Mthatha if my mother agrees. ...[the main obstacle is] if I get pregnant I know no one will be willing to support me, and if there is no money at home I will have to find a job and fund myself.' [girl 16 years, Bolani]

I used to have a dream of becoming a teacher. I no longer have that dream any more. The father of my baby is supporting his child...[he] is married so he cannot marry me as well'. [girl 19 years, Bolani]

Returning to school after the birth of a child is now encouraged in government policy across much of Africa, but childcare and associated costs may help bring girlsøschooling to a premature close:

I would have liked by daughter to become a nurse but she got pregnant and now she can't go to school because she has to take care of her baby'. [Bolani mother of 4]

Parents are more often more welcoming of sons' migration: whereas girls are perceived as likely to get pregnant and return to the village with another burden to be supported, boys (it is hoped) may accumulate assets, renegotiate their social position, becoming wealthy adults and a better support network for the family in future. But if getting on means getting out (Jones and Chant 2009:193), as Bird et al. (n.d. 2002?) comment, remoter rural areas in particular are still often *de facto* labour reserves. Bird et al. suggest that investment in human capital through education is crucial if young people from these areas are to even begin to compete in national labour markets.

Unfortunately, given the input young people are expected to make into household production and reproduction (especially girls- educational improvements *per se* will not be enough. Ersado's (2005) suggestion (based on Zimbabwean data) that improved access to credit could enhance rural school enrolment and alleviate child labour could be effective in some regions, but there appears to be a danger that maternal access to credit would increase rather than reduce requirements for girls' labour in our study sites, so long as the current strongly gendered work patterns persist. Recent work in rural Malawi certainly supports the contention that household access to microcredit raises the probability of child work in some households (Hazarika and Sarangi 2008). Andvig (2001: 46) argues that a change in norms about male and female tasks could be feasible, allowing a redistribution of workload (towards boys) which would improve efficiency (and possibly make injections of credit more effective in terms of impact on girls' education). More specific interventions aimed at reducing girls' time poverty through attention to the domestic transport gap will probably 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 (Porter, Blaufuss and Acheampong 2007). Support to girls at secondary school through better boarding provision is also urgently needed. Nonetheless, 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: 194, also see Thorsen 2006, Dorward et al. 2009:242).

Conclusion: rural youthscales and escapes

This paper has emphasised the paradox that rural young people, often perceived by elders to be strong, resilient and a prime source of parental wealth and security, are commonly among the village's poorest occupants. They lead liminal lives in which they are considered to be old enough to work from an early age, but excluded from the benefits of participation in adult deliberations (in essence, neither cultural child nor cultural adult).

Controlled (pedestrian) youth mobility, especially of girls, is key to family survival in all our rural and remote rural sites. Consequently, particular efforts are made to socialise girls from an early age. Andvig's observation (2001: 61 citing Elster 1989) that in societies where women's tasks includes sanctioning children, girls (who they find more easily observed and sanctioned than boys) will be made to work more because this reduces the monitoring costs for women, appears relevant to this discussion. The time poverty and high surveillance and mobility restrictions which rural girls experience impinges 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. Transport constraints at household level (the need to carry water etc.) clearly impact severely on girls' school access and performance. Livelihood potential is further constrained by strong social norms regarding 'appropriate' behaviour and livelihoods for females. Abduction and rape may be a real threat in some locations, but fear of attack may also be encouraged by elders, in efforts to confine young girls to 'safe' spaces. Pregnancy and the threat of pregnancy have formed a strong sub-theme in the gender discussions above, and while pregnancy may sometimes initially appear to offer escape, unplanned teen pregnancy and early marriage clearly further reduces girls' mobility and occupational options.

The frustrations generated among young people by heavy workloads, surveillance, youth exclusions and immobility are inevitably great. Inter-generational frictions focused around access to resources, youth sexuality and youth mobility are not surprisingly evident in all our study sites, though the way these play out in practice varies to some degree depending on family and local context. In the Malawian and South African rural study sites, in particular, adults perceive that rural life offers little opportunity and for some even an explicitly expressed fear that success in the village would bring dangers of envy and associated sorcery. However, while they look to sons to acquire a basic education, and then find new and more lucrative livelihoods in the city, daughters are commonly expected to focus their efforts on the (often de facto female-headed) home and to support household reproduction until they marry. The extent to which adults and young people in all rural sites express faith in the transformative power of Western education and its potential value as a route to better livelihoods (albeit at the same time in some cases recognising the inadequacies of local schools) is sadly unrealistic. Work pressures at home and resource failures at school, both of which militate against children – especially girls – being open to and receiving quality education are likely to persist at least in the medium term. The long distances which many children from remote rural locations still travel (not infrequently, at all sites, on an empty stomach) to access a poorly resourced school, in a context of heavy work loads outside school hours, poverty, and other family pressures are remarkable.

Rural youth's frustrations contrast with mobility as opportunity, opening up interstitial spaces beyond adult surveillance. Physical mobility is also attached in young people's perceptions to social mobility: migration to a distant (urban) place is perceived to offer the ultimate escape from rural poverty. In the complex interconnections between young people's work, education and livelihood trajectories, mobility represents an intrinsic component of generational negotiation in all our study sites: a key yet potentially hazardous route in the transition to livelihood independence and adulthood.

References

Andvig, J.C. 2001 Family-controlled child labour in sub-Saharan Africa. A survey of research. Washington: World Bank, Social Protection Unit, October 2001.

Ankomah, A. 2006 Premarital relationships and livelihoods in Ghana. *Focus on Gender* 4, 3: 39-47.

Ansell, N. and van Blerk, L. 2003 Fluid households, complex families: the impacts of children's migration as a response to HIV/AIDS in southern Africa. *Professional Geographer* 55,4: 464-476.

Arku, C. and Arku, F.S. 2009 More money, new household cultural dynamics: women in micro-finance in Ghana. *Development in Practice* 19,2: 200-213.

Avotri, R., L. Owusu-Darko, H. Eghan, S. Ocansey 1999 Gender and primary schooling in Ghana. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.

Bird, K, Hulme D, Moore K. and Shepherd A: n.d. Chronic poverty and remote rural areas. CPRC Working Paper no. 13.

Bolten, C. 2009 The agricultural impasse: creating 'normal' post-war development in northern Sierra Leone. *Journal of Political Ecology* 16: 70-86

Bryceson D. 1999 Sub-Saharan Africa betwixt and between: rural livelihood practices and policies. Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden. ASC Working Paper 43.

Bryceson, D. 2006 Ganyu casual labour, famine and HIV/AIDS in rural Malawi: causality and casualty. *J. of Modern African Studies* 44,2: 173-202.

Bryceson D. and Fonseca 2006 Risking death for survival: peasant responses to hunger and HIV/AIDS in Malawi. *World Development* 34,8: 1654-1666.

Campbell, C., Gibbs, A. Maimane, S., Nair Y, and Sibiya, Z. 2009 Youth participation in the fight against AIDS in South Africa: from policy to practice. *Journal of Youth Studies* 12, 1.

Canagarajah, S. and Coulombe, H. n.d. Child labor and schooling in Ghana. Unpublished background paper: World Bank Economic and Sector Work on Ghana: labour markets and poverty.

Chant, S and Jones, G. 2005 Youth, gender and livelihoods in West Africa: perspectives from Ghana and the Gambia. *Children's Geographies* 3,2:185-199.

De Boeck, F. and Honwana, A. 2005. Introduction, in A. Honwana and F. de Boeck (eds) *Makers and Breakers: children and youth in postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Dorward, A., Anderson, S., Bernal, Y. N., Vera E.S. Rushton, J., Pattison, J. and Paz, R. Hanging in, stepping up and stepping out: livelihood aspirations and strategies of the poor. *Development in Practice* 19, 2: 240-247.

- Ersado, L. 2005 Child labor and schooling decisions in urban and rural areas. *World Development* 33, 3: 455-480.
- Gough, K. 2008 Moving around the social and spatial mobility of youth in Lusaka. *Geografiska Annaler* 90,3: 243-257.
- Grieco, M., Apt, N. and Turner J. 1996 At Christmas and on rainy days: transport, travel and the female traders of Accra. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Hazarika, G. and Sarangi, S. 2008 Household access to microcredit and child work in rural Malawi. *World Development* 36, 5: 843-859.
- Heady, C. 2003 The effect of child labor on learning achievement. *World Development* 31,2: 385-398.
- Jones, G.A. and Chant, S. 2009 Globalising initiatives for gender equality and poverty reduction: exploring failure with reference to education and work among urban youth in The Gambia and Ghana. *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 184-196.
- Langevang, T. 2008 Claiming place: the production of young men's street meeting places in Accra, Ghana. *Geografiska Annaler*, 90,3: 227-242.
- Leach, F. and Machakanja P with J Mandoga 2000 Preliminary investigation of the abuse of girls in Zimbabwean Junior Secondary Schools. London: DFID. Education research no. 39.
- Lewin KM and Sayed Y 2005 Non-government secondary schooling in sub-Saharan Africa. Exploring the evidence in South Africa and Malawi. Department for International Development, Educational Papers www.sussex.ac.uk/education/1-4-7.html
- Porter, G., Blaufuss, K. and Owusu Acheampong F. 2007 Youth, mobility and rural livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa: perspectives from Ghana and Nigeria. *Africa Insight* 37(3), 420-431.
- Porter, G., K. Hampshire, M Bourdillon, E Robson, A Munthali, A Abane, M Mashiri: (2009 in press) Children as research collaborators: issues and reflections from a mobility study in sub-Saharan Africa. *American Journal of Community Psychology*
- Poulin, M. 2007 Sex, money and premarital partnerships in southern Malawi. *Social Science and Medicine* 65: 2383-2393.
- Robson, E. 1996 Working girls and boys: children's contributions to household survival in West Africa. *Geography* 81,4: 43-47.
- Schildkraut, E. 1981 The employment of children in Kano. In G. Rodgers and G. Standing (eds) *Child work, poverty and underdevelopment*. Geneva: ILO, pp. 81-112.

Twum-Danso, A. (forthcoming 2009) Reciprocity, respect and responsibility: the 3 rs underlying parent-child relations in Ghana and the implications for children's rights. *International Journal of Children's Rights*.

UNFPA 2006 Youth participation in poverty reduction strategies. E-consultation with young people on their experiences. December 2006.

Van Blerk, L. 2005 Negotiating spatial identities: mobile perspectives on street life in Uganda. *Children's Geographies* 3,1: 5-21.
World Bank 2009 World Development Report. Washington.

Yaro, J.A. 2006 Is deagrarianisation real? A study of livelihood activities in rural northern Ghana. *J of Modern African Studies* 44,1: 125-156.

Young, L. and Barrett, H. 2001 Adapting visual methods: action research with Kampala street children. *Area* 33,2, 141-152.