



Sustainable Fisheries Livelihoods Programme

CHILDREN'S WORK IN FISHERIES: A CAUSE FOR ALARM ?

by

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, according to ILO's latest estimates, there has been a notable and welcome decline in child labour in general and hazardous child labour, in particular (ILO 2006). In 2004, 126 million individuals below the age of 18 were involved in such work, which is down 26 % from 2000. For the age group 5-14 the corresponding figure is 74 million, with a decline of 33 % since 2000 (ILO 2006). Geographically, the most dramatic reduction is reported for Latin-America, with Sub-Saharan Africa lagging conspicuously behind (ibid.).

ILO publications customarily present an aggregate estimate of child labour in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Globally, the latest estimates suggest, these primary sectors account for 69 % of all child labour, while services account for 22 % and industry 9 %. Moreover, surveys based on nationally representative samples place child labour in fisheries at 2.5 % of all child labour in Ghana, 2.8 % in Bangladesh and 5.2 % in El Salvador. Within each of these countries, these aggregate numbers conceal substantial regional variation, with fisheries accounting for 8.5 % of all child labour in Ghana's Volta region. In the same countries, child labour in fisheries is reported to be strongly male dominated with boys tending to represent roughly 85 % of all child labourers in the fisheries sector (see Table 2 below).¹

In 1999, member countries signed the ILO's Worst Form of Child Labour Convention, which made the eradication of such forms of child labour a priority for policy. ILO and UNICEF have committed themselves to the eradication of the worst forms of child labour by 2015. The following landmark international conventions commit signatory governments to the elimination of hazardous and non-hazardous child labour and the provision of free and widely available primary education:

- I. ILO Convention no. 138 (1973) on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment sets 14 years as age limit in developing countries and 15 years in other countries. For hazardous work, the age limit is set to 18 years.
- II. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly 20 November 1989 commits signatories to recognise children's human rights, including the right to free primary education available to all.
- III. The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention no. 182 (1999) unanimously adopted by member states, makes worst forms of child labour a policy priority and distinguishes between:
 - a) Unconditional Worst Forms of Child Labour – e.g. child prostitution, pornography, forced labour and child soldiers² - so fundamentally at odds with children's basic human rights that they are absolutely prohibited
 - b) Hazardous child labour - Work that may be conducted in legitimate sectors, but is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

¹ Through a variety of policy initiatives and by supporting the implementation of nationally representative sample surveys, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has made strategic investments in the development of a data-base on child labour that is readily accessible for social scientists and others with an interest in the nature and causes of child labour in low and middle-income countries. The data-base is accompanied by extensive and helpful documentation explaining key definitions and the methodologies adopted in the collection of data.

National data-sets for 35 countries (usually) along with National Summary Reports can be downloaded from <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/ipecc/simpoc/dataset.htm>.

² Or what Kanbur (2004) has described as obnoxious markets.

It is important to distinguish what ILO and the UN human rights conventions class as hazardous work, which is the employment (paid or not) of children in conditions detrimental to their health and social development, 'child labour' which is employment (including for hazardous work) that, through long hours, deprives children of their rights to education and time to play, and 'children's economic activity' or 'children's work', which can include helping with household chores, apprenticeships, casual work and so on.

So far, the importance of children's economic activities and child labour in fisheries has received what may best be described as selective and tentative attention, leaving the impression that fisheries-related work often is hazardous. In this paper, we show that some of the reports of the hazardous nature of children's work in fisheries-related work have been alarmist, suggesting that a more balanced representation is necessary to inform policies aiming to address the issue appropriately.

One important technical problem is that ILO's definition of child labour generates a biased picture of children's work in artisanal fishing communities. For instance, rather than being directly involved in fisheries-related operations off-shore or even on the beach, young girls may often substitute for their mother's work within households with fisheries dependent livelihoods thereby facilitating maternal participation in fish trading and other activities. Under the definition adopted by ILO/SIMPOC³ (ILO 2004; pp. 21-22), such domestic work does not classify as child labour, even though it may involve long hours and the denial of educational opportunity. One implication is that the ILO-definition and thus exclusive focus on direct child involvement in fisheries makes it hard to shed meaningful light on the work-related barriers to girls' school attendance in fishing communities. To gauge these barriers, it is necessary to develop a more profound understanding of the local and seasonal variation in the demand for girls' labour within such households. As noted by Grootaert and Kanbur (1995), this demand is likely to be closely associated with the seasonal pressure on and patterns in adult women's economic activities.

What, then, about hazardous work? In a rapid assessment in El Salvador, ILO (2002) expressed grave concerns about the health hazards to boys and girls from working in coastal fisheries, which involves exposure to risks of "*drowning, getting carried out by strong currents or lost at sea, sunstroke, attacks by sharks or other marine animals, bites and stings from insects and other sea and land animals, respiratory problems, blindness* (ILO 2002; 5)" etc. Likewise, in Bangladesh, the Philippines, Thailand and Indonesia, some of the most hazardous work involving children has been reported to be in the fisheries sector.⁴

Similarly, press-briefs and reports have also linked child trafficking to freshwater fisheries. Grave concerns have been expressed about young boys reported to have been sold by fishermen families on the northern shores of Lake Volta and hired by "slave masters" to perform underwater clearing of fishing nets from fishing vessels, at considerable risk to their health (International Organization of Migration, 2005). By April 2005, rescue operations involving 537 children had been implemented by local NGOs with support from IOM. While the official narrative is that these employers are unrelated to these boys, Riisøen et al (2004) found that two out of the three boys interviewed for their study had in fact been employed by close relatives, in one case the boy's father and in another a paternal uncle. An important factor that accentuates the vulnerability of these boys is their young age, well below the age of 10 when starting working on the lake. This low age and therefore susceptibility to manipulation

³ SIMPOC = Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labour.

⁴ See Apit (1997), and AusAID (1997). However, Zakir Hussain of the Department of Fisheries, Bangladesh, suggests that whereas small-scale surveys of child labour in Bangladesh conclude that child labour in fisheries is high risk, injury reports suggest that the incidence of work-related injuries are lower than in some other industries. There is also a high incidence of child labour in fish processing industries, where recent estimates suggest children to make up as much as 36 % of the labour force.

by employers may help to explain why these boys decided to stay put rather than attempting to run away. This is in fact a central theme in Mark Ramseyer's (1995) analysis of the history of labour market contracts in Japan where he shows that the rapid expansion in alternative employment opportunities prompted a reduction in the age of individuals in long term contracts, as employers became increasingly wary of the runaway risks associated with hiring more mature workers in long term contracts with advance payment. While the ugliness of the circumstances on Lake Volta indicates the urgent need for solutions, sustainable solutions that prevent new (and perhaps younger) kids from filling in for those who have been rescued, may require more than a deal with and the removal of children from an employer. The commitment of enforcement agencies and local Ministry of Labour officials would be one step in the right direction but needs to be combined with policies informed by the often intriguing incentive problems that are typical of labour arrangements of this kind.

For identifying policy interventions to eliminate hazardous child labour or to remedy hazardous working conditions, detailed information about the nature of the hazards involved are required and a mixed menu of interventions may be required. Is the hazard caused by a lack of knowledge about how bilharzia is contracted? Or that a substance being used for maintaining vessels is toxic? Or is the hazard, as the Volta case suggests, related to the use of a particular fishing technique or technology?

In spite the comprehensive and ambitious new ILO-database, evaluations of the incidence and gravity of hazardous child labour in fisheries and other sectors continue to represent a steep challenge. To illustrate how serious these data shortfalls are, consider the statistic on hazardous work which is provided by The National Child Labour Survey in Bangladesh (2002-03) and where hazardous child labour is interpreted exclusively in terms of hours of work, with 43 hours a week representing the present and one would have to add very arbitrary cut-off. The use of such a rough indicator of hazardous child labour, implies firstly that empirical analysis of the determinants of hazardous child labour would be subject to what economists would call very serious measurement errors, which in turn would pose a grave threat to the validity of research findings and results and the policy advice emanating from these findings. Similarly, it would be quite possible for a child to experience occupational hazards that could include a high risk of contracting infections, the exposure to hazardous substances that over time would lead to irreversible health damages or the use of machinery that over time could destroy eyesight or hearing without being classified as someone involved in hazardous child labour, simply because they don't work for 43 hours or more per week. This, to put it bluntly, is simply not good enough.

Furthermore, given the male-bias in child labour in fisheries, the absolute numbers of workers exposed to occupational risks would tend to be similarly male-dominated. Data on occupational injuries and illness provide somewhat better guidance about occupational hazards. If data from the 2001 survey on child labour in the Philippines are matched with data on children that suffered work-related injury and illness within fisheries (Llorin, 2002), the estimated injury and illness rate among boys would be about 44 % (there is no reference, though, to the time period over which these injuries or illnesses occurred), while the corresponding figure for girls was 57.8 % (there is no reference period here either), with boys representing 91.3 % of the fisheries child labour force. While this is a minor step in the right direction in terms of understanding the scale and characteristics of the issue, the collection of better data on the scale and nature of the hazards children in different types of work are exposed to should be a matter of high priority.

A perhaps unexpected but potentially useful indicator of risk and vulnerability is a child labourer's place of residence, given the likely contrast between the nature of work and exploitation within and beyond one's native community and household. In a

study of child trafficking in West Africa, UNICEF (2002) suggests that fisheries, more broadly, represents an important destination sector also for cross-border migration involving children. At the same time, the boundary between trafficking and other and more benign forms of child labour migration or what Riisøen et al (2004) denote as child relocation is increasingly blurred.

According to Kielland and Sanogo (2002;5), *“the West Africa branches of UNICEF and ILO have explicitly aimed to separate working children that have been “confided” as a form of cultural socialisation practice from children who have been “exported” for labor exploitation.”*

This has led to the following local definition of child trafficking (ibid):

“For the transfer of children to be qualified as child trafficking, there should be:

1. *The conclusion of a transaction*
2. *The intervention of an intermediary*
3. *The motive to exploit*

“The term “transaction” refers to “any institution or practice through which young people, below 18 years, are handed over by either or both parents, or by a guardian to a third person, whether for a fee or not, with the intention of exploiting the person or the work of the young person.”

However, this definition is sufficiently vague to capture most categories of migration of children for work, and well-intended interventions aimed to put an end to trafficking may as a result have the potential for causing more harm than good. In addition to this, UNICEF (2002; 8) notes that *“there is a grey zone between trafficking and the widespread practice of children being sent to live with relatives in other countries (a practice often perceived as a strategy, inside the extended family, to cope with poverty). This is an area that requires further research.”*

The latter may be seen to represent an international version of child fostering, a common practice in countries in West-Africa where there is a long tradition for children to spend parts of their childhoods away from their parental home.⁵ Table 1 is suggestive of the variation and overall incidence of children of different age groups who live away from their mothers in selected African countries:

Table 1: Percent of children living away from mother

Country/Age	0-4	5-9	10-14
Ghana	4.2	18.2	29.4
Senegal	5.7	16.3	11.4
Mali	3.6	13.5	17.8
Kenya	2.8	7.7	11.4

Source: Serra (1996)

Hence, while migration for fisheries-related and other work therefore has the potential for making children more vulnerable, there are a number of important circumstances that may mitigate this increase in vulnerability and exposure to risk. Kielland and Sanogo (2002) emphasise that there is a culture of migration in rural Burkina Faso and that children are thought to gain emancipation and maturity through migration (Whitehead et al., 2005).⁶ Moreover, traditional fostering arrangements may provide

⁵ Another interesting example of the contrast that may exist and the considerable flexibility in child rearing practices and the autonomy granted to even very young children is Reynolds (1991) study of children in the Zambesi- valley.

⁶ The Development Research Centre on Migration, Globalisation and Poverty at the University of Sussex, UK, has funded studies of independent child labour migration in Ghana, Burkina Faso, India,

important educational and occupational advantages to the children who move although more evidence is needed to evaluate the welfare effects of fostering on children of different gender and age (Serra 1996). As the following examples seek to illustrate, it is important to distinguish trafficking from child labour migration that may bring substantive benefits also to very young migrants.

2. Moral panics vs. research-based knowledge – child labour migration or trafficking ?

Having conducted in-depth studies of children working in Muslim fishing communities near Allepey, Kerala, the Dutch anthropologist Olga Nieuwenhuys was surprised to hear of media reports of the exploitation of girls from her study villages who had responded to employment opportunities in prawn-processing factories in distant Gujarat and Maharashtra. Nieuwenhuys revisited her study area to find that girls, of which some were as young as 12, had been attracted by stories of friends and neighbours whose earnings provided the means both to assist their families and to pay for their future dowries (Nieuwenhuys 1995). As noted above, children being on their own in an unfamiliar place, especially if very young, are likely to be vulnerable. However, a distinguishing characteristic of the migrant girls from Allepey was the sharing of workplace with many co-workers from their native place, providing a safe social environment at their destination.

Sometime back I read a newspaper article by a Western journalist, lambasting the practice of employing young boys as cleaners in small, South-Indian eating places. It should be a priority, she argued, to eliminate this visible form for child “exploitation.”⁷ Having extensively studied the work that children do in such workplaces, and the reasons and motives for why they are there and not with their parents, it is hard to endorse the journalist’s interpretation of what she observed.

For instance, in a recently completed study of the history of migration from Karnataka’s Coastal belt, we found that boys who started working in small South-Indian eating places in Mumbai often had better educational prospects than those who stayed behind, or those who moved to other destinations. The reasons for this educational advantage were subtle and not easy to detect: from 1918 and onwards owners of small South-Indian eating places, typically natives of the same Coastal belt, had contributed to the establishment of local Night Schools to support the education of child workers from their native region. School attendance was both encouraged and facilitated by the working hours flexibility granted to their child employees by many of these hoteliers. But this educational advantage was a unique feature of Mumbai and did not extend to child labour migrants in other destinations. Hence, any policy intervention aimed to eliminate child labour in these eateries in Mumbai would have been likely to reduce rather than improve the educational prospects of these young workers.

While village schools in the same source area are of better quality these days, current child labour migrants are often found to be educational misfits who either fail or do not perform well in school. As a result, they may suffer regular beatings from teachers and/or from their parents. Moreover, having to resit an exam is often associated with embarrassment and a serious loss of face vis-à-vis friends and peers and other than providing an alternative and often fulfilling career path, work in small South-Indian eating places also provide an often welcome opportunity to escape difficult domestic circumstances. Once more, an intervention to eliminate child labour would be likely to harm rather than improve the welfare of the intended beneficiaries.

⁷ As recently reported in the UK newspaper The Guardian. such a ban has now been implemented: “The Indian government is to ban the employment of children under 14 in hotels, restaurants and teashops and as domestic servants. | According to government figures, there are nearly 13 million child workers in India. A Labour Ministry committee said it had recommended the ban because child workers, particularly in the food industry, were often subjected to physical violence, mental trauma and sexual abuse. It said children in these industries were more vulnerable as they “come into contact with lots of people”. Violators of the ban could face up to two years imprisonment, a fine or both (The Guardian 03.08.06)”

In another case, having a hearing problem made it hard to follow teaching and was the cause of harassment from classmates in the village school. The loss to this migrant's self-esteem that this had caused was eventually repaired in his workplace where the young migrant never experienced anything but support from his colleagues. Notice that each of these examples focus only on the well-being outcomes of the child workers themselves. The positive side-effects accruing to other family members from an increase in household income (remittances) and fewer mouths to feed are thus not prerequisites for identifying harmful effects of policies aimed to eliminate the "exploitation" of children in the workplace.

Furthermore, in identifying the causes behind the autonomous migration of young boys in Central Karnataka in 1998, we found that domestic discord or conflicts, in particular between fathers and sons, was a principal reason for why young boys left home, often on their own initiative and even without informing their parents (Iversen 2002). The economic opportunities and the free food and shelter provided by small eating places in Bangalore led to the easy absorption of those arriving in the city unaccompanied by parents or guardians. Once more interventions aimed at removing the child from the workplace and force an artificial family reunification could easily be counter-productive.

Another key lesson from these studies is that the vulnerability of children who are migrants is intimately linked to the ready availability and knowledge about alternative workplaces and jobs and the access to social support systems. For instance, a boy working in one of these eateries in rapidly growing Bangalore, unhappy with his working conditions, would be able to find a new workplace within hours. But this presence of alternative opportunities is a feature of the sector of work rather than the destination environment. Girls working as domestic servants in Bangalore, in contrast, were not found to have such easy available exit options and were as a result more vulnerable. In contrast to boys working in the city's large number of eateries, girls working as domestic servants were reported to experience regular beatings from their employers.

The above narratives do not aim to suggest that all childrens' work is benign and helpful and that all child labour migration is voluntary. They do, however, suggest that alarmist generalisations are unhelpful, and they illustrate the dangers of well-meaning but misguided interventions.

3. Children's work and child labour – normative perspectives and a brief review of contemporary debates

Social scientists have been researching children's economic activities for a while. Cain (1977) presents data from a village study of time use in rural Bangladesh, while Nag et al (1978) present corresponding data from parallel time use studies in Nepal and Indonesia. Early studies of children's work contained a strong propensity to perceive markets and employers as exploitative, of child labour as primarily driven by household poverty, and the education provided by government schools as largely irrelevant to the needs of poor families (e.g. Elson 1981, White 1994).

Partly echoing such sentiments and clearly inspired by the often harrowing accounts of child labour during the Industrial Revolution, Basu and Van (1998) develop a model that links adult and child labour markets. Their analysis, in part, is based on the assumption that parents are altruistic and would send their children to work only when compelled to. This assumption, subsequently coined the Luxury Axiom, suggests a strong link between child labour and poverty.⁸

However, in an early empirical analysis using Indian data, Rosenzweig and Evenson (1977) cast some doubt on the validity of the poverty-hypothesis, by showing that an increase in household land holdings and thus household wealth would increase the work-hours for both boys and girls. Subsequently echoed in empirical work on India by Kanbargi (1991), in Ghana by Canagarajah and Coloumbe (1998), in Zambia by Jensen and Skyt-Nielsen (1997) and in its most comprehensive statement to date, the Wealth Paradox (Bhalotra and Heady, 2003), the suggestion is that as households become more prosperous and can afford to invest in livestock and more land, children's work is likely to initially increase before it starts to decline. This generates a relationship between children's work and household per capita wealth that takes the shape of an inverted U.⁹

A weakening of the link between poverty and child labour has important normative implications: It is common to think of school attendance as a more appropriate activity for children than work, paid or otherwise, and that child labour curtails educational opportunities. Indeed, the 1989 UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child affirms education as a fundamental human right. However, while it may be tempting to endorse a human rights perspective on education, the case for adopting such a policy will necessarily be qualified in a context of poverty, where children's work may contribute to satisfy other household members' basic needs. Hence, household poverty creates a conflict of interest between the rights and claims of different household members that makes it difficult to award children's education a lexicographic priority. However, as scarcity becomes less acute, the case for enforcing education as an absolute right becomes stronger.

For FAO to develop an informed policy on fisheries and child labour and the place of education in this policy, it is important to know more about the links between poverty, children's work and child labour within fishing communities. What has not been addressed in the above accounts is the fact that other household attributes and attributes of local schools exercise a strong impact on the likelihood that children will work (e.g. Basu 1999). A general and powerful relationship is usually found between the educational status of parents (especially maternal education) and the likelihood that children will attend school (Schultz 1993). In short, it seems that exposure to

⁸ See also the World Bank Economic Review's (2003) Special Issue on child labour.

⁹ Similarly, field studies appeared to cast considerable doubt on the strength of the poverty link (Bhatty 1998).

education has a transformative effect on parental valuation of the schooling of offspring. This transformative effect of schooling suggests that statements about the value of education made by illiterate parents, in fisheries communities and elsewhere, should be considered with a fair amount of scepticism.

It is also important to know more about the local, seasonal variation in the demand for adult and various types of labour by children in fisheries and related work. As noted by Maddox (2006) such variation accentuates the likelihood of erratic school attendance and eventually drop-outs. Policy measures aimed to match school schedules with the nature of seasonal fluctuations in the local demand for the labour of boys and girls may seem like a trivial argument, but experience shows that school schedules in developing country contexts often are quite at odds with the needs generated by distinctly seasonal activity patterns. In order to meet the educational needs of fishing communities it would therefore be necessary to think carefully about suitable scheduling of the school year.

4. Children's work and child labour in fishing communities

4.1. Ethnographic perspectives

There are relatively few anthropological studies of the work that children in fishing communities are involved in and most existing evidence is also dated. For the Coast of Kerala, which has been described as being inhabited by "marginalized blocks of producers" (Kurien and Mathew 1982, cited in Nieuwenhuys (1994)) to comprise 37 % Catholics, 30 % Muslims and 27 % Hindus and a social mosaic including a wide variety of caste groups. Importantly, and notably for understanding the role of girls' labour in artisanal fishing communities, these cultural differences impact rather starkly on the roles and responsibilities of women (ibid).

The Kerala Coast has also been roughly divided in terms of the fishing technologies used in artisanal fisheries: the southern part dominated by *catamarans* that usually belong to a small group of fishermen related through kin. Other areas rely on bigger boats with an owner and a crew of local fisherman, each typically receiving a share of the catch. Nieuwenhuys (1994) looks at Muslim fishermen households in Poomkara, where the latter technique and ownership structure dominates. She notes that households were impoverished and enter into what resembles labour-tying arrangements with local boat and gear owners. As within agriculture, tying of labour secures the owner adequate labour supply in the event of bumper fisheries while providing basic security for the members of the fishermen's households.

The fisheries-related work that children do may, according to Nieuwenhuys (1994) be classified into four broad categories: (a) Fishing and foraging for Subsistence, (b) Small-scale fish vending (c) Rendering services to a boss and its crew during operations on a beach and (d) Work in a shore-seine crew. With the exception of (a) whereby from the age of 7, boys and girls are encouraged to forage for fish during their spare-time, these tasks are distinctly gendered and contain a strong element of "apprenticeship" and the acquisition of what many observers researching children's work would describe as "critical survival skills" as well as providing preparation for a career as either a fish vendor or as crew of one of the local fishing vessels.

An entirely different logic underpins the labour contributions of girls within these households. With fisheries and fish-vending being male spheres (this is often not the case in non-Muslim households) and girls partly undertake domestic tasks such as the care for siblings or manufacturing of coir yarn. The latter involves girls aged 7 and upwards is a year-round "cottage" industry.

At the time of her fieldwork in 1978, Nieuwenhuys (1994) found the percentage of boys with no schooling to be 20 %, while the corresponding figure for girls was 51 %. This is well below the general levels of female and male literacy in Kerala, well known for being unusually high by Indian standards. While educational levels often are lower among Muslims compared to Hindus, the overall evidence on literacy levels in fishing communities is mixed (Maddox 2006).

It would appear that the outlook for boys and girls in Poomkara is quite different. While none of the work that children undertake would appear to classify as hazardous, the scope for attending school varies substantially by gender. Moreover, since much fisheries-related work is physically demanding and cannot therefore be learnt before a certain physical maturity is attained, there is a window of opportunity for utilising the chronological gap between the optimal time for cognitive development which, according to educational research, sets in early, thus creating room for the children of even poor fisherfolk to attend school. Moreover, while pressures on

children in industrial countries to start school as early as possible have intensified, the opportunity costs of schooling in developing countries may be reduced through similar reductions in the start-up age. For girls in Poomkara, it is more difficult to evaluate the importance of their contributions. In summarising her findings, Nieuwenhuys notes that much of the fisheries and other work that children do has very low returns, yet is still argued to be of critical importance. These are arguments frequently encountered in the child labour literature.

One way to test the value of children's labour to the afflicted households may be by offering incentives such as a mid-day meal in reward for school attendance. The experience with such incentives is that they often create a disproportionately strong response (see for instance Ramachandran (1990)), suggesting that child contributions may be of less critical importance to the households involved than what much social science research would appear to suggest. Similarly, in evaluating the impacts of infrastructure investments in Ghana, The World Bank (2004) found that improvements in school buildings had a substantive effect on school enrolments and attendance. If schools in fishing communities have been systematically neglected by governments, quality improvements provide an alternative avenue for testing the above hypothesis. In policy terms, the 'carrot' of providing better education may be much more effective in reducing children's work and increasing school attendance than the 'stick' provided by more draconian child labour laws.

The picture portrayed above may be subject to contextual variation. In other communities, women may be involved in fish trading and the demand for girls' (and boys) labour may be seasonal or even quite erratic in nature. What is important in fisheries (as in agriculture) is that work and the need for extra hands often, as noted above, will be distinctly seasonal. Having a firm grasp of the nature of this seasonality is crucial for designing effective interventions.

A final point on the distinction between trafficking and migration in Poomkara. The newspaper reports to which Nieuwenhuys (1995) reacted suggested that young girls from Poomkara were being exploited in distant prawn-processing factories. What she found when revisiting her study area was that many of the girls had to use considerable persuasive powers to convince their fathers to let them go. Compared to doing coir manufacturing locally, migration provided opportunities for higher earnings and for making more substantive contributions to their family incomes. In this particular example, it is not too hard to see why alarmist reports of exploitation and trafficking would be likely to do more harm than good. For policy makers the message would once again have to be to tread carefully.

4.2 Child labour in fishing communities – the broader picture

There are a number of methodological challenges associated with collecting reliable data on child labour due to its sensitivity and at times illegal character. For hazardous work and child labour migration (e.g. Iversen 2002) this problem is further accentuated. The data below, which covers selected African, Latin-American and Asian countries are based on summary reports produced by ILO local offices or by Offices for National Statistics. For illustration, consider the summary data (Table 2) from the Ghana Child Labour Survey provided by Ghana Statistical Bureau (2003):

Table 2: Number of children estimated to be involved in Child Labour (as defined by ILO) in the natural resources sector in different regions in Ghana

Region	Ag/Hunt/ Forest	Fishing
Western	162,600	1,851
Central	63,291	1,480
Gt. Accra	30,038	8,143
Volta	139,442	20,028
Eastern	212,668	15,833
Ashanti	131,632	0
Brong Ahafo	100,636	370
Northern	272,539	370
Upper East	82,050	370
Upper West	44,785	740

Several interesting points can be made. Firstly, child labour in fishing is estimated to contribute to 2.5 % of all child labour in Ghana. Moreover, further examination of the statistics reveals that 87.2 % of all children working in fishing are estimated to be male. There is, as noted in Table 2, considerable regional variation in the relative importance of child labour in fishing, with an estimated number of around 20,000 workers in the Volta region which is equivalent to 8.3 % of all child labour there. The other major areas are the Greater Accra region with an estimated 8,150 child workers and Eastern region with an estimated number of 15,833.

Table 3 presents a cross-country comparison of the relative importance of fisheries compared to other sectors where children work:

Table 3: Child labour by gender, in fisheries, selected cross-country comparisons

	Number of child labourers in fisheries	Fisheries contribution to overall child labour	% of boys among child labourers in fisheries
El Salvador	10,085	4.5 %	86.0 %
Ghana	49,185	2.5 %	87.2 %
Bangladesh	209,733	2.8 %	86.1 %
The Philippines	208,000	5.2 %	91.3 %

5. AIDS and child welfare within fishing households

Empirical studies from Kagera in Northwest Tanzania have shown that even large numbers of adult deaths may be compensated in ways that make observable differences between orphans and non-orphans much smaller than expected (Ainsworth and Semali 1998; Ainsworth and Semali 2000; Lundberg et al. 2000). These findings suggest that not only were extended family systems able to absorb a substantive number of orphans, they also provide orphans with approximately the same standard of living as other children. In sub-Saharan Africa extended family systems may thus provide extensive informal insurance to children who are victims of AIDS-related bereavement. Such a finding has crucial policy implications since attempts to target orphans through aid and other policy instruments become redundant and possibly counterproductive.¹⁰

Such non-alarmist empirical findings are, of course, largely at odds with popular perceptions about the devastation caused by the HIV/AIDS-pandemic and other research suggests far more pessimistic scenarios. A carefully crafted case study from the Siaya and Kisumu areas in Kenya captured more direct, first hand observations of afflicted families (Ayieko 1997). A large fraction of orphans in this area had to endure extensive hardship and were forced to leave school and move away from their local communities and relatives.

An extensive statistical study of all orphans in Uganda arrived at more mixed conclusions. Rather than focusing on the welfare consequences for children, Ntozi (1997) focused on decision-making processes within affected households and extended families: Who would decide where children should stay after a parental death; who was perceived to be the final caretaker? Was it grandparents, the child itself, other relatives or the remaining parent? It is evident that social norms and considerations that determine the answers to such questions may vary considerably across cultural contexts and therefore profoundly affect the predicaments of AIDS-orphans.

More recently, Case, Paxon and Ableidinger (2003) used Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) from a number of African countries, including Kenya and Uganda, and found that measured by school attendance orphans fare much worse than non-orphans. How much worse appeared to be explained by the proximity (degree of relatedness) of the orphan to the head of the household.

There is presently a considerable body of research suggesting a higher than average prevalence of HIV-infection in fishing communities in East Africa and it is an open empirical question whether children in fishing communities are more vulnerable to the impacts of HIV-shocks than children from other communities. As noted above, while some research from Tanzania has suggested that extended family systems have turned out to be remarkably resilient in terms of protecting the education of AIDS-orphans, evaluation of the predicaments of children in different fishing communities requires an in-depth understanding of whether fishing families respond to HIV/AIDS in ways that differ systematically from those of other communities. In short, are children (boys or girls) in fishing communities more or less vulnerable to HIV/AIDS shocks than others ?

¹⁰ A considerable theoretical and empirical literature examines the extent to which informal insurance mechanisms enable the poor to smoothen consumption and thus dampen the impacts of adverse shocks (e.g Morduch 1999; Dercon 2002).

6. Conclusions

This paper has presented reflections on child labour in and beyond the fisheries sector. The key issues identified were, firstly, that data availability is severely limited especially with regard to the incidence of hazardous and worst forms of child labour within the sector. Given the important shortfalls in ILOs child labour statistics, more evidence about the nature of children's work in fisheries based on a cross section of locations is required.

While it is important to highlight and urgently address instances of the worst forms of child labour such as the case of the young boys working on Lake Volta, it is also important to avoid stigmatising the fisheries related work that boys and girls in artisanal fishing communities are involved in and may learn and acquire important skills from.

Both with regard to the contractual terms and the mechanisms that surround the worst forms of child labour and the everyday tasks that children in artisanal fishing communities are involved, systematic knowledge is in short supply, providing a barrier to informed and effective policy interventions.

The paper paid attention to what appears to be an increasing tendency to conflate child trafficking with traditional fostering or relocation of children. The latter, especially in the context of West Africa, has a long tradition. As shown above, acting in the best interest of children who work or are migrants will often require quite detailed contextual understandings with stylised generalisations and generic labelling running a high risk of causing more harm than good.

There is a question of the effectiveness of legal and other regulations in combating child labour in the contexts under study. While agencies like the ILO place much emphasis on legal regulations and on collaboration with local trade unions, there is a legitimate question of whether the use of positive incentives, especially with regard to school attendance may provide a more effective route. This implies policies aimed to improve the quality of schooling (infrastructure as well as teaching materials) as well as a recognition of the need for adjusting school schedules to accommodate possible seasonal fluctuations in the local demand for boys and girls labour resources which are to be expected within fisheries displaying distinct seasonal patterns. There is also a legitimate question of whether it may not be worth experimenting with lowering the start up age in school. While we know that girls are more likely to be withdrawn because of the onset of puberty, the opportunity costs of schooling are likely to increase in child age. Starting and completing school earlier would thus reduce these opportunity costs.

Finally, given that the incidence of HIV/AIDS infections are comparatively higher in fishing communities, it is pertinent to ask what the implications for children from fishing communities are likely to be. While little is currently known about the resilience to such illness shocks of extended family systems within fishing communities, this is another issue to which future research will need to pay urgent attention.

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