Background paper on Young Migrants in Urban Ghana, focusing particularly on young female head porters (*kayayei*)

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Introduction

In much of the developing world, migration is part and parcel of people's lives (see for example: McDowell /De Haan 1997: 3). This is also the case in Ghana where people move for numerous reasons. Yet, work is probably the main reason why people migrate. As the case elsewhere in the developing world, also in Ghana 'labour migration is usually by young able-bodied people' (De Haan 2006: 4). This includes young men *and* young women, and also young people below the age of 18 who according to international and Ghanaian regulations are considered 'children'. Migrants younger than 18 are sometimes referred to as 'child migrants', and in other instances considered victims of 'child trafficking'.[2] In an urban context occasionally these young migrants may also be lumped under the label 'streetchildren'. Whatever the term used, children and youth migrating without their parents is an issue of considerable current concern, attracting much attention from government, international and local NGOs and in the media.

This paper presents a brief overview of the issue of young migrants in urban Ghana. It focuses particularly on a specific group of migrants: young female head porters. Head porters make a living by carrying loads on their head, for example, in market areas and lorry stations. These young migrants come predominantly from the northern regions to work in the cities of the South.[3] This paper is based on three main sources:

- the 2005 survey of independent child migrants in Accra and Kumasi reported in Kwankye et al (2007) and Kwankye (2012)

- Iman Hashim's research on child migration in Ghana reported in Hashim (2004), Hashim (2007), and Hashim and Thorsen (2011)

- and Denekamp's (2011) research on young female head porters in Ghana.

A main finding emerging from research on young migrants in Ghana is that in most cases the young people themselves were the ones deciding to migrate, at times without their parents' knowledge or against their parents' wishes. Appreciating young migrants' active role in such important life choices complicates thinking about migration. The question why people move can no longer be reduced to a simple

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[2] In relation to 'children' the definition of what qualifies as a case of human trafficking is considerably wider than is the case for adults. This means that in relation to 'children' the term 'human trafficking' may refer to a wide range of very different scenarios. For this reason there is considerable debate among scholars about the usage and implications of the terms 'trafficking' and 'migration' in relation to young people specifically (see for example: Bastia 2005; Goździak 2008; Huijsmans /Baker 2012).

[3] In this paper the phrase 'northern regions' refers to the Upper East Region, Upper West Region, and Northern Region of Ghana (see map in Annex 1).

distinction between factors that make people want to leave their current locality and factors that attracts them to go elsewhere (so-called 'push & pull factors'). Talking about young people like they are being 'pushed and pulled' into migration by a certain set of factors falsely suggests that young people are a uniform social group which is affected in similar ways by these factors. In fact, young people are highly diverse as a social group and actively making choices even in contexts of limited options. Some important differences between young people include household conditions (e.g. poverty, number of people in the household, dysfunctional households, etc). In addition, within the same household children also differ in important ways, based on age, sex, birth order and so on. Appreciating these differences means that so-called 'push and pull factors' affect young people in the different ways, and that different young people tend to deal with such factors and constraints in diverse ways. One such 'difference' that receives particular attention in this paper is the role of gender. Gender refers to the social meaning that is attached to sex differences. For example, the idea that boys are better at sports simply because they are male and that girls are better at care work because they are female. The term gender highlights that such ideas about being male and being female are socially constructed and not naturally given. Yet, gender shapes people's lives in important ways. However, appreciating that our ideas about, attitudes towards, and practices with boys and girls are gendered, means that there is also scope to change it.

In the following sections, the paper first presents some figures on young migrants in Ghana and situates the phenomenon of North-South migration in Ghana historically. Next, the paper presents some relevant information on growing up in northern Ghana in order to gain a better understanding of where these young migrants have come from. This is followed by a discussion of the main problems experienced by young migrants and the role of the Ghanaian government and NGOs.

Young migrants in urban Ghana: Who are they, where do they come from?

To be sure, not all young people migrate. And, among those who do migrate not all are girls. Neither do all migrating girls end up working as head porters. To get a better idea of who migrates, what young migrants end up doing and where they have migrated from we first turn to some figures.

Official facts and figures on migration are notoriously unreliable because much migration goes undocumented. Yet official statistics frequently rely on documented migration. This statistical problem is only larger when it comes to young migrants as they are even more likely to migrate in ways that are not recorded by officials producing data on migration.

Most of our current knowledge on young migrants stems from small(er) scale research. One such study is the 2005 survey of Independent Child Migrants which was conducted in Accra and Kumasi. The study targeted 641 young migrants aged 10-24 years from Ghana's three northern regions. These young respondents were recruited in transport stations and markets. This means that the survey was limited to young migrants who are highly visible to the general public and that less visible young migrants (like those working in private homes as domestic workers) are excluded from the survey.

On closer inspection the study found that the survey included a total of 191 young persons who migrated when they were already 18 years or older. As the study was interested in 'independent *child* migrants' these 'overage' records were excluded from

further analysis. Of the 450 remaining child migrants, most were found in Accra (304, vs. 146 in Kumasi). Table 1 below shows the break-down of the study population by age, sex and region of origin at the time of the survey.

Table 1: Young migrants by sex, age, and region of origin in Accra and Kumasi (n=450)

	Accra			Kumasi			Both Cities		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Age (yrs)									
10-14	9.2	33.6	26.7	21.2	33.3	27.4	14.6	33.6	26.9
15-19	56.3	59.0	58.2	39.4	53.4	46.6	48.7	57.5	54.4
20-24	34.5	7.4	15.1	39.4	13.3	26.0	36.7	8.9	18.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	87	217	304	71	75	146	158	292	450
Region of origin									
Northern	25.3	83.4	66.8	21.1	69.3	45.9	23.4	79.8	60.0
Upper East	57.5	5.1	20.1	74.7	24.0	48.6	65.2	9.9	29.3
Upper West	17.2	11.5	13.1	4.2	6.7	5.5	11.4	10.3	10.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	87	217	304	71	75	146	158	292	450

Source: Kwankye et al (2007: 11)

The figures in Table 1 show that overall more girls than boys from the Northern regions migrate to Accra and Kumasi. As Kwankye et al (2007: 10) observe, this finding contrasts with studies on general migration patterns in Ghana, which show that men predominate among long distance migrants. Closer reading of the figures in Table 1 suggests that girls outnumber boys because girls seem to become involved in migration at a much younger age than boys. This corresponds with findings elsewhere (see for example: Huijsmans /Baker 2012).

The age difference between boys and girls in becoming involved in migration is also reflected in differences in educational attainment between young male and female migrants. Sixty percent of the girls had not received any education at all. This figure is much lower for young male migrants. In addition, the share of young migrants with Middle/JSS level education[4] is higher among boys than girls. Lastly, the figures on educational attainment show that the majority of child migrants surveyed here have received little or no education. However, the figures also show that reasonable educational attainments (Middle/JSS (Junior Secondary School) or even Sec./SSS(Senior Secondary School)) do not necessarily prevent children from migrating. The latter means that more education will not necessarily keep young people from migrating.

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[4] Secondary level education.

Table 2: Educational attainment of independent child migrants

Education	Accra			Kumasi			Both Cities		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
No Education	21.8	60.4	49.3	38.0	60.0	49.3	29.1	60.3	49.3
Religious	1.2	2.8	2.3	1.4	8.0	4.8	1.3	4.1	3.1
Primary	43.7	32.7	35.9	43.7	22.7	32.9	43.7	30.1	34.9
Middle/JSS	29.9	4.1	11.5	12.7	5.3	8.9	22.1	4.5	10.7
Sec./SSS	3.4	0.0	1.0	4.2	4.0	4.1	3.8	1.0	2.0
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	87	217	304	71	75	146	158	292	450

Adapted from Kwankye et al (2007: 12, table 2)

A final noteworthy observation is that, among the surveyed independent child migrants, the girls tend to come predominantly from the Northern region. The boys stem mostly from the more distant Upper East region. Only a minority of boys and girls originate from the Upper West region.[5]

A Short History of Migration from the North of Ghana

The issue of young people as migrants may be a pressing current concern. However, in order to fully appreciate such present-day issues it is useful to situate them historically. A first observation that then emerges is that in Ghana it is historically not uncommon that children grow up away from their biological parents. For example, there is a long history of fostering of children among various ethnic groups in Ghana (Twum-Danso Imoh; Goody 1972). In fostering arrangements children are placed with relatives (kin relations), but at times also with people who are not related. This may be done for social reasons, like ensuring better education and tightening kinship relations. It may, however, also be informed by economic motivations, such as debt, poverty, and labour. Present-day forms of child domestic labour, in which children hope to receive better education (and sometimes do) whilst working in the house of urban relatives or others, reflect some elements of the historical practice of fostering.

Secondly, explaining current migration patterns, which are to a great extent movements from the North to the major cities in the Central and South like Kumasi and Accra, in a-historical 'push & pull factors', misses how current migration patterns are situated historically. Van Hear (1982: 499) explains how British colonial rule shaped Gold Coast (now Ghana) into 'a typical colonial economy' in which the export production (cocoa and gold) was located in the coastal South and the savannah ecological zones in the North were subject to a colonial policy of 'under-development' and turned into a 'labour reserve' (Van Hear 1982: 500; Hashim 2007: 913). The colonial administration did little to develop agriculture in the northern regions whilst peasant agriculture was already degenerating. At the same time, through the colonial project these impoverished areas became part of the monetized world and were penetrated by consumption goods such as European cloth, which further amplified the need for cash. These structural factors turned these northern areas into a 'labour reserve'; a pool of labour that could be easily mobilized when the export economies in Southern Ghana required this.

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[5] Note that this is not more than indicative. The young interviewees were accessed through 'group leaders' of young migrants. This is likely to produce a sampling bias as such groups are often based on ethnicity and place of origin.

Colonial reports show that these migrations often included young people, sometimes as young as ten. These young migrants moved to the cocoa plantations in the South. Some with, and some without their families (Van Hear 1982). Migration research has pointed out the importance of such histories of migration. Each act of migration makes subsequent migrations more likely because migration networks are formed, the economy is transformed and because a culture of migration may take shape.

Ghana's era of independence (since 1957) has not undone the colonial legacy of unevenness in levels of development between the North and the South. In fact, Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen (2012: 280) argue that an uneven distribution of resources between rural and urban communities is today still a key characteristic of development in Ghana. This 'promotes migration to the cities as people pursue dreams of wealth, education, adventure and glamour'. The quote refers to the fact that although poverty has persisted in the northern regions, the integration of the rural areas into the wider Ghanaian and global social imaginary has deepened due to expansion of mobile phone networks, coverage by a range of television and radio stations, etc. These factors have increased the exposure of rural youth to supposedly modern (and urban) ways of living. In addition, the expansion of the road network has made travel from the north to the south and to urban areas easier and cheaper.

The most up-to-date Human Development Report on Ghana (UNDP Ghana 2007: 151) provides further evidence of uneven development in Ghana. It concludes that 'most of the indicators related to access to key social services are lowest in the three northern regions. These regions harbour the poorest of the poor in Ghana.' The latter is illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1: Incidence of poverty by administrative regions in Ghana
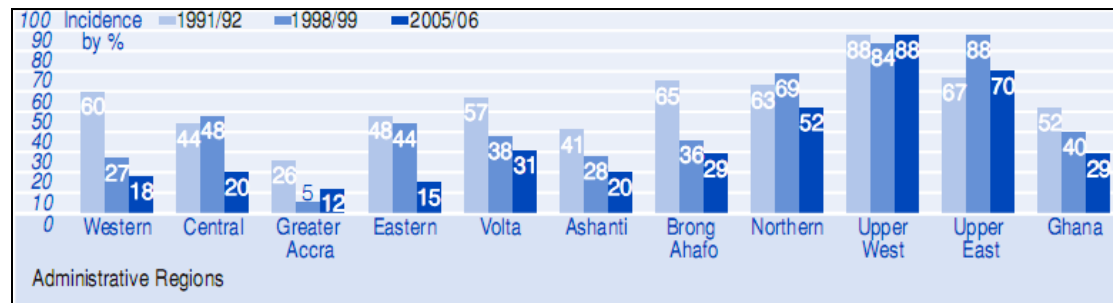
Data from Ghana Statistical Service (2007) presented in UNDP Ghana (2007: 25, figure 2.1).

This situation of uneven development is likely to persist as the Human Development Report observes pessimistically that the prospects for development in the northern regions 'remain grim' (UNDP Ghana 2007: 151).[6] Children's choice to migrate and leave their households behind should according to Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen (2012: 289) be understood as a refusal on the part of these children to be 'dependent on their poverty-ridden parent and the virtually non-existent state institutions'. Under such conditions, even the harsh reality of migrant life may constitute a more attractive option than a life of rural poverty.

Being young in the northern regions of Ghana

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[6] These regions face serious agricultural constraints such as a single and short rainy season and increasing soil infertility. Further, the relative inaccessibility of many parts of these regions also hinders development.

Since many, though not all, young migrants found in Accra originate from the northern regions it is worth sketching a brief overview on being young in these regions and how this may relate to migration. Some important gender aspects need to be discussed here too.

Farming constitutes the main livelihood in the northern regions and children are encouraged and expected to contribute to the household's subsistence from an early age:

> From when they are first able to toddle around, children are helping with tasks such as caring for their siblings and running errands. From age seven onwards their activities begin to make a contribution to the running of the household and to its livelihood activities. By the age of fourteen, they are carrying out all those tasks that adults of their gender are able and expected to do (Hashim /Thorsen 2011: 24).

Although parents do not compel their children to work, in many of these rural communities a high value is place on 'hard work'. And children often take significant pride in their participation in work and the rewards of their work (Hashim /Thorsen 2011: 126). Furthermore, children are encouraged and expected to 'provide for themselves by engaging in economic activities', which traditionally (and in many places still) took the form of allocating to children (boys and girls) a small field to farm independently (Hashim /Thorsen 2011: 127).

Next to working, school also plays a role in children's lives in Ghana. Formally, Ghana has a nine years compulsory and free basic education programme. However, particularly in the three northern regions both access to school (defined as having an educational facility within 1 km radius from one's place of residence) and enrolment rates are fairly low, the latter particularly so for girls (see Table 3).

Table 3: Access and enrolment by region and gender

	Total	Western Region	Central Region	Greater Accra	Volta Region	Eastern Region	Ashanti Region	Brong Ahafo	Northern Region	Upper East	Upper West
Primary School	85.4	85.3	90.9	90.2	83.9	88.4	92.7	83.7	80.1	61.9	67.1
Access to school	69.9	74.9	72.6	80.9	64.7	75.6	78.9	69.3	49.9	56	51
Primary Enrolment	69.9	75.2	73	80.4	65	74.9	78.9	68.7	52.2	55.3	47.3
Male	70	74.5	72.2	81.4	64.3	76.4	78.9	70	47.6	56.9	55.4
Female	69.1	68	75.7	88.3	55.7	65.4	79	70.3	45.3	47.6	49.8
Satisfaction											
Secondary School											
Access to school	43.3	35.1	52.1	63.4	39.4	47.1	56.1	34.2	21.5	7.9	17.2
Primary Enrolment	38	39.5	40.9	54.6	33.8	40.3	44.9	33.3	16.2	19.5	21.4
Male	37.8	41.3	40.6	54.7	34.3	40.2	45.1	34.7	16.9	18.6	21.9
Female	38.3	37.5	41.3	54.5	33.3	40.3	44.7	31.9	15.3	20.8	20.7
Satisfaction	75.8	73.4	76.1	89.7	61.5	71.4	79.2	77	59.5	53.7	56.7

2003 data presented in UNDP Ghana (2007: 29)

It is well known that 'free education' often still comes with a cost to most households. Schools may charge levies for a range of activities. Costs are associated with school uniforms and stationary, or items cooked up by (head) teachers and parent-teacher associations, and the opportunity costs of the children's labour as children's could have been earning money instead of attending school. For poor households, supporting all children through nine years of compulsory education may therefore be a serious challenge. In addition, the poor quality of education, due to poor facilities, lack of (qualified) teachers and so on is a further rationale for parental disinvestment in education.

In addition, Hashim (2007: 917) noted that children may also decide themselves to terminate schooling prematurely due to negative experience with the school system's poor facilities, teacher absenteeism or abuse by teachers. Research by Ofosu-Kusi and

Mizen gives insight into some of the problems experienced by young people in school in Ghana:

> The government school there is bad, the teachers don't teach us well and we are made to work all the time. Today, they will say go and carry this load from this place to another, the next day, they will ask us to fetch water for the brick maker or to weed somebody's farm. We work instead of studying… (Boy, 15 years old in p295, in: Ofosu-Kusi /Mizen 2012).

Out-of-school children are more prone to become involved in migration. However, Hashim's research demonstrated that migration and education are not mutually exclusive. In fact, she found that in a sample of 70 child migrants from a village in Bawku East District in Upper East Region, almost one quarter (7 girls, 9 boys) migrated with the specific objective of furthering their education (which is deemed of low quality in the Upper East Region). In addition, Hashim (2007: 919) identified three further positive linkages between migration and education:

- children may enter fostering arrangements in order to ensure continued access to education, or access to better quality education;

- through migration children seek access to apprenticeship opportunities;[7]

- through migration children seek to secure resources to continue or complete their education.

From a gender perspective it is important to note that the ethnic groups found in the three northern regions are mainly patrilineal in terms of kinship affiliation. This means that descent runs through the male line. Moreover, patrilocal residence patterns mean that young women move into their husband's household whilst young men tend to continue residing in the natal household after marriage. Sons are thus considered permanent members of their households whilst Hashim (2004: 91) found that in her study village in the Upper East Region (mostly of Kusasi ethnicity) the position of daughters was often commented on in terms of 'girls do not belong to the household'. This very different position between sons and daughters vis-à-vis the household translates into highly gendered motivations for becoming involved in migration. For example, Kwankye (2012) argues that sons, more so than daughters, are expected to support the household. This is primarily through their labour for the household, but may also take the form of migration and the sending home of remittances. Daughters, on the other hand, become in their teenage years increasingly oriented away from the natal household. This is captured in the following comment reported by Hashim: 'A girl will reach the age of marriage when her attitude changes, as she knows this is no longer her house'. At this age, girls have an incentive to withdraw their labour from the household and instead concentrate on their private endeavours particularly since it is expected that 'women should bring something to the marriage' (Hashim 2004: 93). This means that adolescent girls have to generate their own income in order to buy the various items they need to set up their own household. Due to the legacy of uneven development, opportunities to generate an income tend to be bigger in south and in the cities than in the rural North. This motivates young girls to migrate, something which was clearly captured by Denekamp (2011: 23) in her interviews with girls who had migrated from the North to work as a head-porters in Accra:

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[7] Note that Ghana has a long tradition of informal apprenticeships. It is estimated that these informal arrangements account for around 80 to 90% of all skills development in Ghana. In contrast, in 2006 there were only a total of 7,211 students (mostly males) in formal vocational training programmes (UNDP Ghana 2007: 32).

'In the North there's nothing. If you sit you cannot get what you want…When I came here, my first time of coming here [at age 14], what was on my mind is that I wanted to come and look for something and for people to know that my mother has also given birth to a hard working lady.' (Salena, 16 year old girl from Upper East Region)

'There is only farming there (in the North) no other work' (Bashira, 13 year old Maprusi girl from the Northern Region)

In contrast with adolescent girls, among the Kusasi in the Upper East Region adolescent boys rely on their seniors to provide them with their bride-price (cattle). Hence, boys have a much greater interest in staying in the Upper East Region and provide their labour to the household in the years prior to getting married than is the case for girls (Hashim /Thorsen 2011: 60-61).

Working in the city: A gendered experience

This section focuses on the destination setting and highlights some of the main issues experienced by young migrants and how this differs for boys and girls. This section shows that female migrants are not necessarily more vulnerable *because* they are girls, but rather due to the gendered working of the migrant labour market.

The 2005 survey of independent child migrants in Accra and Kumasi suggests there is a strongly gender segregated labour market for young migrants. Girls are predominantly working as head porters (*kayayei*)[8], whilst boys' work is more diverse, including head porting, working in workshops and petty trade (see Table 4).

Table 4: Type of work by independent child migrants in percentages (n=451)[9]

	Accra		Kumasi		Both cities	
Type of work	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*	*Male*	*Female*
No work	2.3	0.5	2.8	4.0	2.5	1.4
Head porter	26.4	94.9	43.7	76.0	34.2	90.1
Technician/mechanic	42.5	1.4	11.3	10.7	28.5	3.9
Selling	23	1.3	42.2	8	31.7	3.2
Other	5.8	1.9	0	1.3	3.1	1.4

Adapted from Kwankye (2012: 539)

It is worth noting that for boys who are working as a technician or mechanic this work may constitute an informal apprenticeship arrangement and may thus be a form of skill development, whereas this is far less the case for working as a head porter; the

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[8] Kwankye et al (2007: 8) explain that head porterage used to be a male occupation in Ghana and predominantly carried out by male migrants from the Sahelian countries. It is only in the last decades that it has become a predominantly female occupation. Note further that the term *kayayoo* (plural: *kayayei*) is composed of the Hausa word for 'load' (*kaya*) and the Ga word for female (*yoo*). At present head porters are mostly of Dagomba ethnicity and originate primarily from the Northern parts of the country. Furthermore, head porters are self-employed. They have either bought their own head pan for porterage or hire one on a daily basis (especially newcomers to the trade).
[9] This Table does not include domestic work. This omission is due to sampling. The study Kwankye bases his analysis on found its young migrants in the main lorry stations and market places of Accra and Kumasi.

destiny of many young female migrants. The gender segregated labour market also translates into gender differences in earnings. Kwankye (2012: 542) noted that 'about one in five of the male migrants in both cities earned GH¢5.00 or higher, compared with about one in 10 for the female migrants'.[10] In addition, major problems reported by independent child migrants also display a gender pattern, since a number of these problems are specific to the job of head portering which is done by girls mostly. Such problems include: 'too heavy loads for less pay', 'no load to carry/no job', and 'disturbance from City Guards'.[11] The latter refers to the fact that head porters are meant to buy a day permit from local authorities which allows them to operate in their jurisdiction (Kwankye/ Anarfi/ Tagoe /Castaldo 2007: 15). Some head porters refuse this which brings them in trouble with authorities. However, Denekamp (personal communication) observed that even those who have paid such 'toll' may still be chased away by police or other law enforcers.

Table 5: Major problems faced by child migrants

Problem	Accra			Kumasi		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Business gone down	5.1	2.3	3.1	-	-	-
Cheap prices for migrant services	2.6	5.6	4.8	6.6	11.4	9.2
Disturbance from City Guards	3.8	14.0	11.3	9.8	1.4	5.3
Financial problems	6.4	1.9	3.1	-	1.4	0.8
Too heavy loads for less pay	2.6	4.2	3.8	9.8	14.3	12.2
Work is too difficult	1.3	1.9	1.7	9.8	20.0	15.3
No load to carry/No job	19.2	20.1	19.9	9.8	5.7	7.6
No proper place to sleep	15.4	15.9	15.8	9.8	7.1	8.4
Too high taxes	3.8	2.3	2.7	-	-	-
Other minor problems	27.0	19.2	21.1	24.7	23.0	23.6
No problem	12.8	12.6	12.7	19.7	15.7	17.6
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	78	214	292	61	70	131

Source: Data from Independent Child Migration Survey in Accra and Kumasi presented in Kwankye et al (2007: 14)

'No proper place to sleep' appears a problem for young migrants of both sexes. Only a minority of the young migrants surveyed spend their nights at a 'home' (17% in Accra, 40% in Kumasi). The majority spend their nights at the market or transport station or inside of, or on the pavement in front of, so-called 'kiosks'.[12] Spending nights under such conditions exposes young migrants to a range of risks. Some of these risks are of a general nature such as health related issues due to a lack of hygiene and safety risks (e.g. fire). Other risks are more gender specific, such as sexual violence (e.g. rape) but also theft, as it is often believed that head porters (who are mostly girls) carry money with them, which makes them a target for theft.

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[10] To put things into perspective, Denekamp (2011: 35) estimated that female head porters in Accra require about GH¢2.65 a day for covering basic expenses (two meals a day, drinking water, water for washing, bathroom fees and rent for night accommodation).

[11] In the Kumasi part of the sample nearly half of the boys were involved in head portering (43.7%), hence they share many of these problems with the young female migrants.

[12] This may be free or paid (e.g. night security men may charge a fee to young migrants to let them sleep on a shop pavement). Further, a 'kiosk' is a basic plywood structure which is used for trading during the day and offers accommodation to young migrants at night.

Dealing with vulnerability

It is important to recognize that young migrants are exposed to a series of hazards. Yet, they also actively try to reduce their own vulnerability. Moreover, despite the many hardships young migrants face the survey of independent child migrants shows that more young migrants *not* regretted having come to Accra or Kumasi than those who did (Kwankye/ Anarfi/ Tagoe /Castaldo 2007: 543).

Young migrants deal at two levels with vulnerability, at a group level and at an individual level. Group level strategies are to a large extent ethnicity and/or origin based and may, for example, take the form of organizing sleeping and eating collectively as the following quote illustrates:

> 'I sleep with the Tamale group – all the girls I sleep with are from Tamale and we protect ourselves from outsiders by teaming up.' (Simao, 19 years old female who came from Tamale, Northern Region at age 17; Kwankye et al 22).

Whilst group arrangements may be beneficial to young migrants, we should not overly romanticize such 'groups' as young migrants also complain about the stealing of personal items (including money), at times by the peers they sleep together with (Denekamp 2011: 28-29). In addition, Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen (2012: 298) argue that older children often abuse younger children in the stiff competition for resources and jobs.

Young migrants also employ a series of more individualized strategies to improve their fate. *Kayayei*, for example, may try to build up relations with customers so that they become 'regular customers'. Regular customers may not pay the highest fees for the porting servicing, but having regular customers ensures regularity in their income. Other young migrants would combine one job (e.g. head porting) with another, or change jobs if brighter opportunities emerge. Lastly, some young *kayayei* may resort to challenging customers in order to get more money: 'No matter what you say, I say you're a bighead!...If I insult a person I get more money' (Faiza, 9 year old female *kayayoo* in Accra in Denekamp p 37-38), or be pushed into stealing (Ofosu-Kusi /Mizen 2012: 297). These latter two responses feed into the already very negative discourses around child migrants in urban Ghana, who are often seen as 'thieves, truants and misfits' (Ofosu-Kusi /Mizen 2012: 297). Due to this negative spiral *kayayei* and other child migrants receive even less empathy of the general public, which creates conditions in which abusing these young workers becomes nearly accepted practice.

Ghanaian government, local authorities and NGO intervention

The connection between the Ghanaian government and *kayayei* and other forms of child migration is firstly found at the level of education. The dismal state of most government schools in the northern regions takes away one factor that could keep children in the village: good quality education. High levels of poverty combined with a very poor provisioning of social services by the state turns migration at a young age into a relatively attractive option.

Once young migrants have reached the cities of the south the Ghanaian state keeps on affecting their lives. This time in the form of local authorities who extract money from *kayayei* and other young street workers. For this reason, local officials who are meant to improve public security are, in fact, a contributing factor to the vulnerability of young migrants. It is for this reason that young street working migrants listed local authorities as one of the main problems in their migrant lives.

The negative attitude of the Ghanaian government towards young street working migrants, including *kayayei*, also transpires from an intervention launched by the Ghanaian Ministry of Women and Children in 2008 entitled 'Operation Send Them Home', through which more than 2,000 *kayayei* were registered and sent back to their places of origin in order to 'protect them from the harsh conditions they face in Accra' (Denekamp 2011: 45). Whilst it is true that many young *kayayei* and other street working migrants live under very harsh conditions in the city, such sweeping interventions are often in conflict with children's own plans as the following excerpt illustrates:

> Emma: I had better food to eat there [village in the north], but I came here with a purpose so I can't spend all my money on eating good food.
>
> Interviewer: OK, what is this purpose you are talking about?
>
> Emma: I want to save about GH¢100,000 so that I can go back home and continue my education.
>
> (Emma is a 15 year old boy working in Accra. (Quote from: Ofosu-Kusi /Mizen 2012: 299))

A number of different local NGOs (often financially supported by international NGOs) are concerned about young migrants, however, their approaches to the issue differ greatly. Different responses stem from different ways in viewing the problem of young migrants. For some organisations, migration at a young age is the key problem. They argue that because of migration young people have ended up in exploitative and abusive situations. Based on this view, these organisations follow the Ghanaian government programme described above and turn to 'rescuing' young migrants and sending them back to the North. One such example is the organization Swift Aid which was discussed by Denekamp (2011). This organization aims at reducing the number of children working as *kayayei* by offering vocational training (in Accra and the north) and encouraging them to return to the northern regions from where they have come. In addition, Swift Aid also instigated a 'Network Against Child *Kayayei*' (Denekamp 2011: 44).

The *Kayayei Association* which was established in 2008 by Michael Alongyah and the American student Rachel Jackson is more ambiguous in its approach to *kayayei*. On the one hand it follows the philosophy of Swift Aid and the Ghanaian government since it aims to 'stop migration of women and children from the north to the south who are coming to look for jobs and end up in the streets and end up being raped'. However, at the same time it also works on improving the well-being of *kayayei* in Accra by, for example, providing *kayayei* with national health insurance cards which entitles these girls to 'free treatment and free medicines in the hospital when they need medical help' (Denekamp 2011: 44).

For yet other organisations the main problem is not so much the fact that young people migrate, but the abuse and exploitation faced by young migrants. Interventions from this perspective aim addressing exploitation without deciding for the children concerned whether they should be in Accra or in the rural north. The African Movement for Working Children and Youth (AMWCY)[13] represents this position. The AMWCY is a network with nearly 450,000 members and supporters in 25 African countries. It is a rights-based organization committed to improving children's lives through building on a series of rights-based principles and actively involving working children themselves. One of these principles includes the 'right to remain in

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[13] For details see: http://maejt.org/page%20anglais/indexanglais.htm

the village', and from this perspective the organization organizes 'prevention activities' at village level. However, it recognizes that migration is often unavoidable, which leads them to also support children who do migrate in order 'to make such children less isolated and therefore less vulnerable to abuse'. Successful initiatives include the setting up of a mobile 'protection phone network' in Benin in partnership with a local phone company that agreed to a flat fee subscription rate to all phones that are part of the network. This network connects destination and departure cities about children's migrations with the aim of safeguarding them. Another initiative is the issuing of AMWCY membership cards to young migrants in Niger (who frequently have to identity card), which has improved the attitude of authorities (such as police) towards young migrants holding such cards.

Conclusion

This background paper has contextualised the phenomenon of girls from the Ghanaian North who have come to work in the cities of the South as head porters (*kayayei*). The paper has first made the point that although *kayayei* are highly visible, as holds for the harsh conditions of their young working lives, this is just one group of young migrants. Migration from the northern regions to the South is widespread and involves both boys and girls. In addition, exploitation is not limited to *kayayei*. Street working boys (e.g. petty traders) or girls working as domestic workers often suffer from exploitative and abusive conditions as well. Moreover, *kayayei* may combine head porting with other jobs, or may change jobs. For this reason the paper has not focused on *kayayei* solely but situated it as one particular form of migrant work at a young age.

A second point the paper has made is that despite much current attention to *kayayei* migration by young people from the North to the South is not something new. It is rooted in a long history of migration related to deep-seated inequalities within Ghana. This pattern of uneven development continues to persist. High levels of poverty and very poor provisioning of social services (like education) in the North, combined with exposure by young people to images of affluence associated with the urban areas in the South means that many young people *choose* to migrate, thereby escaping the state of dependence on their poverty incapacitated parents and taking their fate into their own hands. Given such conditions, it is unlikely that migration from the North will stop at any point soon.

However, this 'choice' is made in the context of a highly gendered social terrain. Importantly, the paper has argued that the patrilineal social system among many ethnic groups in the North creates the conditions in which girls are more likely to 'choose' to migrate before marriage than boys. This gender relation probably explains why girls tend to migrate at a younger age than boys.

Gender also plays an important role in young migrants' lives in the city. Head porting has become a female profession carried out predominantly by migrant girls from the North. Head porting offers young migrants little in terms of skill development (as is the case with boys working as mechanics in workshops) and exposes young migrants to a range of problems, including low or no pay for their services, carrying heavy loads, poor sanitation and night accommodation, etc.

In addition, the public perception in urban Ghana of migrant street working children, including *kayayei*, is rather negative. These young workers are often seen as thieves and as a nuisance. This creates an environment conducive to interventions by

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Ghanaian authorities and NGOs that are, arguably, against the best interest of the children concerned. More appropriate interventions should, minimally, be informed by *kayayei's* own perspectives and opinions, which probably means addressing the exploitation and abuse experienced by young migrants, without taking away their right to migrate, and addressing the structural problem of uneven development underpinning the phenomenon of *kayayei* and other forms of child migration.

Annex 1: Map of Ghana

Map retrieved from: http://www.ghanareview.com/ghanamap.html
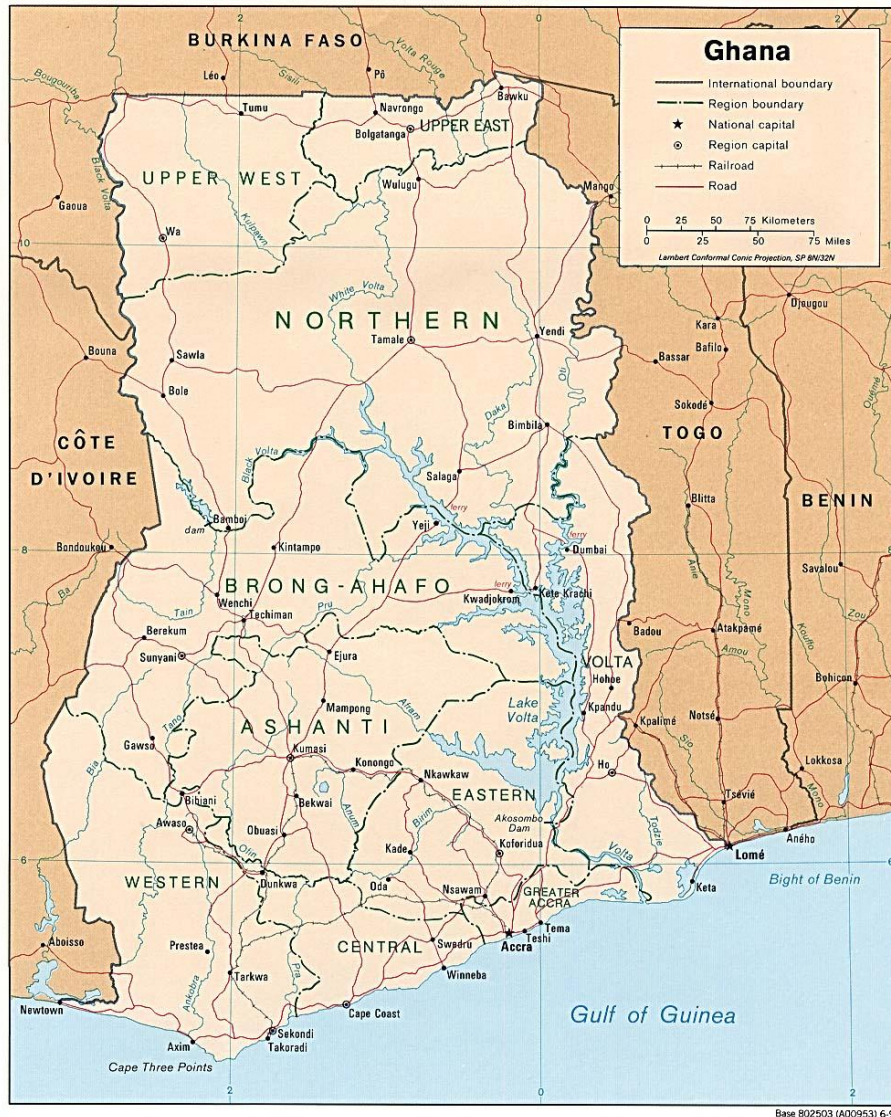
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