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Guest Editorial: Children's Mobility in Ghana

Kate Hampshire¹ Gina Porter¹ Albert M. Abane²

¹Department of Anthropology, Durham University, United Kingdom ² Department of Geography and Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast, Ghana
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Children throughout Sub-Saharan Africa are extraordinarily mobile. Every day children travel to school, to markets, to fetch water and firewood, to work on farms and take farm produce to grinding mills, as well as to visit friends and family and to play. However, children's mobility is relatively invisible: most journeys that children undertake cover short distances and the vast majority are on foot. As such, very little research has been conducted into the extent of children's mobility and impacts on education, livelihoods, health and well-being. In this special issue, we make a contribution to this important gap, by presenting a series of papers on children's mobility in Ghana.

All of the papers in this special issue draw on data collected during a large-scale study on children's mobility and transport in Sub-Saharan Africa [www.durham.ac.uk/child.mobility/]. This work builds on earlier research by Gina Porter, Albert Abane and colleagues on gender and mobility in Ghana, which highlighted the need to look more closely at children's mobility as a topic of research in its own right (Porter 2009; Porter and Abane, 2008; Porter et al, this volume; 2003; 2007; 2011 and in press). The Child Mobility Study was undertaken among children aged between 8 and 18 years in Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. There were three strands to the methodology, which are presented in detail in the introductory paper, by Porter et al. Firstly, we used an innovative child-centred approach, in which 70 children (aged 11-19 when they started the project) received training and supervision to conduct research on mobility issues among their peers in their home communities (Porter et al, 2010a; Robson et al, 2009; Hampshire et al, 2012, forthcoming). Findings from this fed into a larger-scale qualitative study, undertaken by adult academic researchers in 24 study sites: eight in each country, comprising one urban, one peri-urban, one rural with basic services and two remote rural with no services (schools or health facilities) in each of two contrasting agro-ecological zones. The researchers used a range of

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qualitative research methods, including: individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and accompanied walks (see Porter et al, 2010b), with children, parents and community leaders. The interview and focus group questions centred on mobility in relation to four distinct themes: education, health, daily activities, and transport/migration. Finally, a survey was conducted with 1000 children per country (approximately 125 per study site) to test hypotheses generated by the qualitative phase of the research.

In this volume, we draw together papers from the Ghana study sites, to present a multi-faceted view of children's mobility in Ghana. The study sites spanned two of the principal agro-ecological zones in the country: the coastal savannah (around Cape Coast) and the forest belt (around Sunyani). In all of the study sites, children are very mobile, but the ways in which they move, the places where they go, and the ways in which they experience mobility vary between locations. The first paper, by Porter et al., gives an overview of the context, methods and key findings of the child mobility study in Ghana; the subsequent papers elaborate particular important themes in more detail.

The first two papers, by Esia-Donkoh and Mariwah consider children's mobility in relation to work and other activities that shape their daily lives. In all eight study sites, children are heavily implicated in domestic and extra-household tasks, both paid and unpaid, and many of these activities involve substantial journeys by foot, often carrying loads: water, firewood, maize, and assorted goods to trade. While much existing literature tends to be critical of children working, both of these papers try to understand the situation from the perspective both of the children involved and their parents. Thus, Esia-Donkoh and Mariwah explore children's lived experiences and emotional responses to the different tasks they undertake. While parents are the key figures directing children's household and extra-household work, they find that children also exercise varying degrees of agency, based on how they feel about the work they do. The following paper, by Mariwah and Esia-Donkoh, focuses specifically on children's paid work outside the home, specifically load-carrying work (carrying loads for payment or goods to trade, etc.) and considers the implications of this work within a child rights framework. Again, the situation is not straightforward. While children's work can interfere with their education and have negative potentially health implications (particularly for those carrying very heavy loads), the income generated from children's work can also provide resources necessary to facilitate schooling and healthcare expenditure. Moreover, many parents and children see work as a form of education or skills training.

While the two papers by Mariwah and Esia-Donkoh focus on children's daily mobility, the next two papers look at longer-term and often longer-distance movements of children. Temporary fostering of children is very common throughout Ghana; one in six children in our survey was living with neither of their biological parents, and only 11% of these children were orphans. Out-fostering of children may be done for a variety of reasons, including filling household labour gaps and improving educational opportunities for fostered children. Agblorti and Tanle consider the impacts on education opportunities and achievement of this form of mobility, and find a clear pattern of lower school enrolment and attendance among fostered children compared with biological children in the same household, coupled frequently with higher reported domestic workloads. Moreover, moving between households over extended distances can have a disruptive effect on education. However, fostering is not a uniformly negative experience, and in a few cases, children were fostered purposively to relatives in urban areas in order to facilitate access to education.

Tanle and Agblorti also focus on longer-term movements of children, but this time as their entire households move, and ask what the impact of this form of mobility might be on children's aspirations and on their ability to achieve these. Although the decisions to move households are almost entirely driven by adults, we see that children are able to exercise resistance to family migration in some cases, for example by electing to stay with relatives in the settlement of origin rather than moving with their parents, or staying in a boarding house in order not to disrupt their schooling. The mobility of households, and the children within those households, has important implications for children's aspirations and inter-generational transfers of knowledge and skills.

While the papers above underline how mobile children in Ghana are, both on a daily basis and undertaking longer-term movements, another key issue to emerge from the study was the limitations and constraints that children face in terms of mobility. Getting to schools, health centres, markets, and other places that they need or want to go, is often very difficult. The difficulties can be particularly acute for those living in remote rural areas, but even children living in urban and peri-urban settlements often struggle to travel around their communities easily and safely. Large distances, high costs of public transport, infrequent transport services to rural areas, and dangers experienced while traveling (such as the risks of traffic accidents, or encountering hazards along the way) mean that daily journeys to school, for example, could become a major ordeal, and even unfeasible for some children. Owusu and Amoaka-Sakyi consider the implications of children's constrained mobility in relation to access to health services. Their paper highlights some of the difficulties that both rural and

urban-dwelling children face in reaching health services and presents data on the impact of these difficulties on health-seeking practices.

One potential solution to mobility constraints is the use of Intermediate Means of Transport (IMTs), such as bicycles (Heyen-Perschon, 2001; Howe and Barwell, 1987; Howe and Dennis, 1993; Makapela, 2008). The final paper in this collection, by Amoaka-Sakyi and Owusu, explores the use of bicycles by children in Ghana, and the attitudes of children, parents and teachers to girls and boys cycling. While bicycle ownership is limited, many children cycle regularly, borrowing or hiring bicycles to run errands or for pleasure. However, children's bicycle use is strongly gendered, with many respondents (both children and adults) expressing disapproval about girls cycling; fears about road safety also constrain the use of bicycles by both girls and boys. The paper concludes by considering how various barriers to increased cycle use (cultural, economic, physical) might be overcome in order to improve children's access to schools, health services and other social amenities and opportunities.

Several key themes emerge from the papers as a whole. Firstly, it becomes clear that children's mobilities play a key role in relation to well-being, education and livelihoods. On the one hand, children are very mobile, but some forms of mobility (carrying heavy loads, walking long distances over difficult terrain) might be detrimental to educational opportunities, health and well-being. On the other hand, children experience serious constraints on their mobility, which means that access to schools, health services, markets and other places can be impeded, with potentially serious impacts on wellbeing and current and future livelihood opportunities. The constraints and associated impacts are most pronounced in rural and remote rural communities, where the distances that children need to cover to reach key services can be prohibitively long and difficult. However, even in more urban settings, there are important transport and mobility gaps, which impede children's access to services. We argue that addressing issues around children's mobility is crucial to the efforts of countries like Ghana in achieving the Millennium Development Goals with respect to education, health and poverty reduction.

A second theme to emerge is the complex and contingent nature of children's mobility in Ghana. For example, it is clear that many children experience high workloads from an early age, often carrying heavy loads of water, fuelwood and other goods, which can have very serious detrimental impacts on school attendance, health and wellbeing. However, as we have seen, for some children in some circumstances, engaging in this kind of paid work enables them to continue schooling and gain some measure of economic security. Similarly, while fostering is usually associated with negative impacts on schooling (a dominant

theme in much of the literature too: Case et al, 2004; Huisman and Smits, 2009), this is not always the case; indeed child fostering may have a variety of consequences for children, depending on the particular circumstances in each case. In other words, while the papers in this volume suggest some important emerging themes around young people's mobility and associated constraints and impacts, it is important to appreciate the heterogeneity of children's experiences. The complexities of local context must be properly understood in order to make sense of what is happening in practice, which often deviates from socially-prescribed norms and expectations (for a fuller discussion, see Hampshire et al, forthcoming, a).

A thirdly, related, point is that, despite the rhetoric suggesting that African children have limited agency with regard to mobility and activities, many of the children in our study were actively reflecting on their situations and are, in many cases, adopting creative strategies to overcome or mitigate some of the mobility difficulties they face. Agency and resistance can be expressed in more or less subtle or overt ways. While children rarely directly flout social convention or adults' instructions, there are myriad ways in which they can 'bend the rules' or tweak situations, with varying degrees of success (see Hampshire et al, forthcoming, b, for a fuller discussion of these issues in relation to health seeking). Thus, the papers in this volume add to the growing demand in the literature for us to take seriously children's agency (James et al, 1998; James and Prout, 1998; James 2007) even in situations where that agency may be severely constrained.

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