



Mobility of Children and Youth in West Africa: re-imagining West African societies

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Plan's WARO - Ongoing research on children and youth mobility (2007- today)

- Ethnographical study – Niger, Guinea Bissau
- AMWCY prevention of exodus with UNICEF, SAVE, ENDA – Burkina, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Niger
- Psychosocial impact of trafficking on Children in Togo
- With Tdh – Investigating mobility routes and spots in Togo- Benin
- Ongoing with IRD from West Africa to the North - DFID

Why mobility? Political reasons

- Because it is a widespread phenomenon
- Because it is all subsumed under trafficking which stigmatizes and does not reflect the actual experiences
- Because we need to recognise and respect children and youth endeavours
- Because development is about supporting people's initiatives
- Because it helps to re-imagine the actual experiences of young West-Africans

Why mobility? Conceptual reasons

- An enlarged lens, not migration, not trafficking,...
- Invites to consider the diversity of practices and to build typologies of mobility
- Enhances competence, children's agency and tactics, youth's strategies
- Associated notions: trajectories; itineraries, ...
- For a pragmatic and historical perspective
- Invitation to methodological innovation, mobile researchers with mobile children

Different kinds of mobility across the Region - examples

- Secular practice, seasonal and permanent from Niger towards coastal region – coping with climate, social pressure
- Recent adaptation of Bissau Guinean youth to a global economy, lack of resources from cashew nuts industry and proletariat in Cape Verde and Europe
- Distribution of responsibility by entrusting children to others – fosterage – based on kinship and religion- social protection
- Facing monetized economies, getting resources to enter adult life and knowing the world in Mali



Images/ issues of young West Africans conveyed by mobile children and youth

- Monetization – Fetching resources outside of the usual community space (disqualified)
- Demonstrating one's capacity to provide (coming to age)- rite de passage
- Acquiring knowledge, Knowing the world
- Necessity to build up new alliances, larger social networks
- Coping with disasters

Re-imagining rural “Childhood”

- Rural life cycle (0-2 / 3-6 / 7 / 11-12 / 14)

Vs. Childhood (0-18) – early sense of responsibility

- The body is an essential resource
- Violence as a daily experience
- Consciousness of being poor – one has to suffer
- The weaknesses of the school system

Re-imagining time and available resources

- A future to build, one is responsible for his/her own well-being, isolation, lack of institutional support
- Suffer now to get a better life after (evolutionary acquisition of status and identity)
- Time / ageing does not guarantee valorized social identity anymore
- Dreamed future? : family, house, employment (resources), friends and freedom (citizenship)
- Miracle makers (football, dance, wrestlers, musician)

Re-imagining space

- Human specific space
- Stigmatization of the rural, of the bush
- Borders are passage points not limits
- Territories as trajectories
- Geography based on social capital rooted in age set solidarity, kinship, language, and origin
- Informed by secular explorations and resettlings (new niches, new riches)

Determining the experiences of mobility

- Age and gender
- Governance practices impinging on perceptions of the world and time (hypothesis)
- Re-configuration of social relations
- Violence in all life settings of children whether they are on the move or in the community of origin (girls)
- Lack of institutional support (judicial, education, ...)
- Importance and effectiveness of peer groups and peer solidarities (e.g. AMWCY)





Hints of practical Recommendations

- Listen and start from the immediate practical experiences of children and youth, and support their endeavours
- Their life cycle does not correspond to the “universal” definition of children
- Defend the right to movement
- Sensitization against forms of mobility is counterproductive
- Develop support offer at destination and for returnees

Hints of practical Recommendations (2)

- Development of economic perspectives
- Development and support to peer groups (cultural activities, youth movements, ...)
- More intergenerational dialogues –open spaces of expression
- Develop institutional responses to the drive to discover the outside world – visits, explorations.

Hints of Recommendations (3)

- Develop offers of practical training (languages, reading, economy, history,...) to develop relevant skills
- Wider collaboration between significant actors (government, NGOs, Social Movements, religious networks)
- Elaborating policies together and orientating resources

Thank you

