ESCAPING FROM 'SUFFERING' AND 'SUBMISSION':

SOCIAL NORMS, CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CHILD MIGRATION IN SELECTED WEST AFRICAN CONTEXTS.

A Discussion Document for the West Africa Child Mobility Platform

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"When you arrive in Ghana you shout 'Freedom!' 'I am free!', 'Freedom!!'. When you come back you get nothing but trouble – it's obvious - I mean would you rather drink warm water or cold water? Would you rather walk on charcoal or hot coals?"

Young Nigerien male migrant to Ghana

Executive summary

This review was undertaken for the West Africa Child Mobility Platform which seeks to understand the *process* and *experience* of migration which children may undertake with their families, with peers or indeed alone. In recent years there have been a number of emotive discourses pertaining to child trafficking and child exploitation which failed to understand the context of migrant decision-making. Many of these early debates did not recognize that migration can be occur freely and have positive benefits.

This review examines the tension between international conventions and national laws designed to project mobile children and culturally-bound norms which dictate a child's 'place' in his/her family or community. Qualitative data from the *'Listening to children and youth experiences: agents within our contemporary world'*– a multi-country, longitudinal, ethnographic research project coordinated from 2005-2006 by Plan WARO is used to explore the gap between the rhetoric found in legal texts and children's realities. It discusses how a number of international declarations such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Convention on Migrant Rights and the Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children are often at odds with local perceptions of children's roles, responsibilities and rights.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular encourages the participation of children in decisions affecting them and presupposes a sense of agency among children. In fact, the data presented here show that children were said to be 'molded' to subsume their own needs to those of the family. They were valued for their household labor skills which are learnt via imitation or apprenticeship. The tasks they undertook were often arduous and repetitive and expose them to hazards such as fire or hot water – all contrary to their texts comprising the ILO's 'Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour'. Parents required that these tasks were done efficiently and freely admitted that they 'corrected' their children by beating them or by depriving them of food. The need for conformity and submission was foremost in children's upbringing and both parents and children saw corporal punishment as inevitable and justifiable. School-based violence was also the norm and again conflicts with international discourses and national laws pertaining to the quality of the school environment and to a child's right to education free from corporal punishment or sexual harassment. Pupils described extremely harsh and frequent discipline which is likely to be associated with school drop-out. In addition, parents of girls were often unwilling to enroll their daughters due to a fear of unwanted pregnancy. Non-enrolment in school, for either of these reasons, is likely to lead to an increase migration by young people. Understanding child mobility needs to take into account the important catalysts of school-based and family-based violence that can push children to leave their home communities. To date, these factors have been under-

researched and yet comprise important issues in child rights and protection and are directly linked to the propensity to migrate among many young people.

Many interviewees articulated that experiencing 'suffering' in the home villages was almost a rite of passage which preceded migration and would prepare them for the hardships they were to experience abroad. Upon their return however, the migrants recounted (real or fabricated) stories about the relative comfort of their lives abroad and this seemed to serve to aggravate those who remained behind.

The decision to migrate was undertaken as a joint exercise with peers and many migrants relying on friends or relatives already established in their destination areas to act as brokers for their journey. Migrants had very negative interactions with the police who sought to bribe them for not having appropriate travel documents. The lack of these documents was often due to the fact that their parents had not registered their births. It is possible that for many children from rural areas, this hostile reaction from the police constituted their first contact with any representative from the State. This may make them reticent to contact other State representatives, such as health care providers or social workers, if they were ever in trouble or danger and thus increase their marginalization and risk in their destination areas.

There was little data pertaining to the actual migrant experience in the destination areas though it seemed most young men appeared to have worked as hawkers or manual laborers and many girls were in domestic service. The former were often trying to earn money for bridewealth payments while the latter wanted to accumulate their wedding trousseaux. Weddings constituted an extremely expensive transaction in many cases even though local laws placed limits on the value of bridewealth payments.

The main sense that migrants felt once they were away from their villages was one of liberation from the constraints of family duty and obligation. Interestingly, the Nigerien migrants who had been to Ghana expressed this in English as 'Freedom!' They also gained a sexual freedom as they were no longer under the watchful eyes of their families although this may expose them to unwanted pregnancy as well as to STIs and HIV.

Many migrants have multiple identities which they experience sequentially or concurrently (for example, migrant, student, family member, sexual partner, consumer, beggar etc) and move in and out of migrant status throughout their lives. Upon their return to their home villages, there appeared to be tensions between those who had migrated and those who had remained behind. In the Nigerien context the word 'Freedom' became a derogatory insult used by those who had stayed as the returnees flaunted their new found wealth. This ostentation contravened norms about prioritizing communal good over individual gain. Those who had stayed talked constantly of their 'suffering' and seemed to use the barrenness of the land as a metaphor representing the bleakness of opportunities and potential in their home villages. The returning migrants did not

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bring much for the communal development of their home communities but rather preferred to buy ostentatious material goods which would visually confirm to others that they had undergone the migration experience. A disturbing trend in the Niger data was that many families accepted large sums of money from returning migrants in exchange for their daughter's hand in marriage, regardless of whether she was of the age to marry or willing to do so. Adults interviewed said that since migration had taken hold in their villages, the number of incidents of forced and early marriage had actually increased, even though both are outlawed by Niger's Marriage Code and by the various human and child rights declarations.

The report concludes that there is indeed a substantial gap between the rhetoric of international declarations and national laws and the realities of mobile children's experiences which are shaped by conflicting norms in the sending and receiving communities. The *process* of migration is poorly understood and more research is needed on the context of migrant decision-making together with the impact of migration on community development.

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1.0 Background

This document was prepared for the West Africa Mobility Platform which comprises Plan (WARO), UNICEF (WACRO), Save the Children (Sweden), Terres des Hommes (Suisse), MAEJT, Enda Tiers Monde, International Organization for Migration and the International Labour Organization The platform seeks to better understand migration among children and young people in the region taking into account the cultural context of the causes and consequences of the phenomenon in order to ensure that young migrants have access to protection and security.

The report builds upon an important body of work addressing the theme of child mobility in West Africa. The subject has recently been the focus of much programmatic activity and policy making, which in many cases was followed by, rather than preceded by research to understand local migrant experiences. Thus, at least in the early years, many actors failed to take into account the cultural context of child migration and the local norms pertaining to the decision-making surrounding it. This resulted in a number of interventions which 'a posteriori' can now be seen as not recognizing local, normative constructions of child mobility. For example, in a number of countries, 'village surveillance committees' were established which sought to stop migration. However, their effect was to actually encourage clandestine departures and thus increase the danger to which young migrants were exposed (Busza, Castle and Diarra 2005). As dialogue and participatory research on the subject developed, recent consensus has been that interventions and policy makers cannot seek to stop to child mobility which is driven as much by young people's desire for socio-cultural conformity as well as economic need. Rather, actors need to ensure that children move in situations where they are protected from exploitation and violence (Massart 2009). Interventions addressing young migrants therefore need to understand the social and cultural norms which surround them both in their places of origin and destination. These may be shared by the potentially protective networks as well as potentially exploitative ones in which they are embedded.

It will be discussed below how measures to protect mobile children range from international and national legal frameworks essentially devised by external actors, to local initiatives rooted in culturally-bound indigenous frameworks within which migrants can potentially provide mutual support and protection. This report aims to address the gap or broken continuum between high-level, often internationally conceived legal discourses and local realities. In particular, it will demonstrate, using the testimonies of children themselves, how social norms regarding children's migration, identity and aspirations, may, in fact, conflict with internationally proscribed measures. It will be shown that this tension between legislative decrees and normative social perceptions of what is in young migrants' 'best interests' needs to be resolved if children are able to move in

circumstances where they can access protection and security from various State and non-State sources.

The main hypothesis behind the material presented here is that the lack of adherence to legal or institutional directives and regulations is due to the fact that they are not integrated into local cultural norms or 'world views' of the communities they are designed to protect. The gaps between the perceptions and perspectives of high level actors and those of local communities means that the rationale driving what defines desirable conditions for mobile children differs significantly at both ends of the spectrum.

2.0 Data

This review will use qualitative data from the '*A l'écoute des expériences des enfants et des jeunes : agents de notre monde contemporain' ('Listening to children and youth experiences: agents within our contemporary world')* - a multi-country, longitudinal, ethnographic research project coordinated from 2005-2006 by Plan WARO to ensure the cultural sensitivity of its programmes and interventions. The data used here come from three countries – Guinea (Conakry), Benin and Niger which have all ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The data comprise testimonies of young migrants and potential migrants[1], their families and entourage as well as community stakeholders such as village, elders, teachers and health workers. It should be noted that migration was only one of several principle themes that the local ethnographers addressed through group and individual interviews, role play, observations and photographs. Other themes included child socialization and labour, early and forced marriage, together with education. The interviews in Niger talked more about mobility and migration than those carried out in Guinea and Benin. The key informants were living in primarily rural areas (ie 'sending areas') in communities characterized by extreme poverty and food insecurity which were regularly countered by substantial short term and long term migration.

Between 2005 and 2006, the ethnographers carried out five to six months residential fieldwork in two communities in the areas to which they had been assigned. During this time they were involved in the daily lives of the villagers and gained their confidence and understanding. At the end of each stay they produced a summary of the data they had gathered and suggested further themes for qualitative exploration. The interviews and group discussions they carried out were transcribed and typed up in French. For the purposes of the research presented here, they were analyzed using a qualitative software package called 'The Ethnograph'.

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[1] The mobility platform considers children to be at stages of 'mobility', 'pre-mobility' and 'post mobility' and cases of children representing these three stages are presented in this report

3.0 Definitions and Discourses

This section seeks to provide an overview of some definitional issues which pertain to child mobility and the conventions and laws which relate to it. The subsequent discussion of norms relating to child migrants will then contextualize the social rules and cultural landmarks informing decision-making by child migrants themselves and by their entourage. It will show how their perspectives may conflict with those emanating from international and national legislation and indeed with those of non-migrants in their own communities.

This paper will primarily be concerned with looking at three approaches to the experiences young migrants undergo and the norms surrounding them. It will focus on i) The migration process and ii) Migrant participation in decision-making and iii) Migrant identity. International conventions, national legislative and judicial decrees and policy discourses will be compared with what the testimonies of the migrants interviewed in the three country settings reveal.

3.1 Norms within and outside communities

The discussion will examine international and national norms relating to child protection as embodied in Conventions, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and National codes such as the Family Code, Labour Code, Child Protection Code and Marriage Code. Many of the latter are often more or less standard across francophone Africa having been initially instigated during the Colonial period. This report will address the coherence or conflict of these international and national legislative measures with local social norms which serve to give a sense to a culture's existence and to justify or orientate attitudes, decisions, actions and choices. Unlike international or national jurisprudence, social norms are not designed or imposed by an exogenous authority. Rather, they emerge endogenously to create reference points for what is deemed socially acceptable with regard to personal relations between kin and community members. In many settings, norms shape cultural rewards for reciprocity, fairness and cooperation and, for migrants can be key to facilitating their travel and for obtaining shelter and food. However, norms can also be at the root of tensions within families and communities if an individual is perceived not to have adhered to culturally-bound standards of behaviour. Norms may transcend geographical spaces - for example, they may apply to those in the same family setting or shape their relations with those who, in the case of migrants, may be widely dispersed. Norms are not static but can evolve and adapt to outside influences and opportunities. The evidence presented below will examine testimonies regarding migrant decision-making vis-à-vis social norms and reveals a tension between norms associated with individual and collective gain. Thus, social norms themselves may be, as described above, in conflict with external, culturally-neutral values which shape national laws and international policy. They

may also lie at the heart of intra- and extra community discord which will be discussed below with regard to child mobility and migration

3.2 Rights of the Child: Resonance or resistance?

Some of the confusion and lack of coherence regarding both the understanding and application of legislation and conventions with regard to child mobility stem from the complexity, and to some degree lack of cultural resonance, of the definitions of key words and concepts.

The Convention defines a child as "*every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.*" (United Nations 1989). The African Charter of the Rights of the Child (African Union 1990) also defines a 'child' as anyone under 18. In reality, the terminology is not straightforward and universal definitions of children based on chronological age are problematic. For example, 'child' may also refer to both the biological life stage of an individual which can vary significantly depending on their growth, health and nutritional status. 'Child' can also, in legal terms, comprise the stage an individual is at before attaining the majority. In most cases, legally speaking, children and minors[2] are considered to be the same. However, in others, the notion of 'majority' may come after the biological period of childhood has ended. In the Nigerien Family Code (and indeed in other Family Codes in the region), the age of reaching of 'civil majority' is 21 and anyone below this age is considered a minor even though they may no longer be a 'child' either socially or biologically. For example, the Civil Code of Niger allows marriage at age 15 for girls and at age 18 for boys although, according to customary law in Niger, the legal age for marriage is set at 14 for girls and 16 for boys (CONAFE-Niger 2008). The Nigerien Labour Code permits child labour after the age of 14 years (Gouvernement du Niger 1996). Thus, the right to marry and form a family (which at 14-16 years old could entail health risks for young women) and the legal right to be economically productive are thus permitted below the age of 18 - that is to say, when the individual is still considered a child as defined with regard to its civil status in Niger and with regard to many of the international texts and conventions pertaining to child rights. These examples from Niger clearly illustrate the complexities of applying international, national and customary law to socio-cultural settings where, as will be shown below, 'so-called' children take on 'adult' roles of production and reproduction early on in their lives.

Thus, 'Western' experiences of childhood where social and financial independence are usually significantly delayed until late teens contrast with West African realities where children as young as four are productively contributing to household economies. The interviews below show children contemplating and undertaking migration in early adolescence and indicate how the migration

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[2] A minor is generally a person who has not attained the age fixed for entering in to a legal contract or for making himself legally liable for his actions.

experience itself shapes their psycho-social development and progression through 'childhood'. Thus, legal and policy interventions which assume that children have an innate vulnerability may be at odds with West African scenarios, whereby phenomenon such as migration may often help foster independence, individualism and self-esteem in young people much earlier than in Western settings. International law on children's rights is based on a perception that children are 'people in the process of becoming rather than being ' and that definitions of children as individuals under the age of 18 (as in the CRC) make youth appear as passive recipients of experience (De Boeck and Honwana 2005). In fact, as will be shown below, many mobile children are active agents in changing their own lives as well as those of their sending and receiving communities. The laws which seek to protect them do not recognize that, although some may be vulnerable and exploited, many are surprisingly resilient and benefit from the migration experience socially, psychologically and economically.

In addition there is a tension between the notion among international actors that children's participation in decisions affecting them is desirable and local community norms with regard to children's 'place'. In reality, in many African settings, including the ones described here, children are expected to subjugate their opinions and desires to those of their elders. The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that in Article 12 that "*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*". It will be shown below that cultural norms regarding child socialization do not generally allow a child to actively advocate or propound his/her views. Children are expected to be passive and to acquiesce to the decisions made by their parents and relatives for the good of the extended family. Thus, the decision to migrate, which children do indeed often take on their own initiative, sometimes without the knowledge of their parents, runs counter to local cultural constructions pertaining to the role and place of children. However, child initiated migration does concur somewhat with the Convention's emphasis on a child's ability to express his/her views freely. This tension is at the heart of many programmatic difficulties when sensitizing communities as to the supposed value of children's rights and, in particular, their right to participate in decision-making pertaining to them.

3.3 Mobilities within social and geographic space

The choice of the word 'Mobility' by the members of the West Africa Mobility Platform denotes careful reflection as to the notion of movements of children and young people in geographical and social space. 'Mobility' has been chosen over migration, trafficking and displacement to accommodate, without bias or prejudgment, an exploration of the social dynamics of children's journeys (either

with their families, with peers or alone), the multiple motivations behind them, together with their social and economic causes and consequences.

The International Organisation of Migration (2004) defines a migrant as follows: "*Migrant is usually understood to cover all cases where the decision to migrate is taken freely by the individual concerned for reasons of 'personal convenience' and without intervention of an external compelling factor. This term therefore applies to persons, and family members, moving to another country or region to better their material or social conditions and improve the prospect for themselves or their family*".

The United Nations Convention on Migrants Rights (UNESCO 2003) is based on the fundamental premise that all migrants should have access to a minimal degree of protection. However, the Convention focuses entirely on international migration and not on within-country movements. In addition, although it seeks to protect the rights of migrant workers and their families, it does not acknowledge that children and young people may migrate independently, alone or with their peers, and of their own volition. Interestingly, and perhaps tellingly, the Convention has mostly been ratified by countries of the 'South' including the Governments of Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Mali and Senegal in West Africa. The northern 'receiving' countries' governments may be reticent to ratify it as it would require them to take steps to create national laws to protect immigrants which may run counter to their popularity with their electorate. This illustrates how social 'norms' in the 'North' have a direct impact on 'Southern' migrant experiences as receiving countries may accept, legislative rhetoric in principal but be unable or unwilling to apply it for fear for of a political backlash from their constituents who have their own 'norms' or culturally constructed perceptions vis-à-vis immigration.

The Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children (UNODC 2003), which supplements the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime says that (a) "*Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs*";

However previous research in West Africa has shown that this definition is extremely difficult to operationalise in the field (Castle and Diarra 2004). In this region, intermediaries are used for the majority of social and economic transactions, such as buying livestock, arranging a marriage and indeed

transporting and placing young migrants. Although there may be a degree of exploitation, as intermediaries tend to be more powerfully placed in social hierarchies than migrant children, there is also the possibility that children can receive a degree of protection and support from the intermediaries and their networks. The relationship between a migrant and his/her intermediary is not clear cut and indeed, as will be shown below, many migrants end up subsequently becoming intermediaries themselves paving the way for children and young people from their villages of origin to join them in the towns and cities. In doing so they may take a financial cut for helping their successors. However, it is debatable as to whether this amounts to exploitation in cultural settings where financial remuneration or a 'fee' for services rendered is the norm.

It will be argued using evidence presented below that international conventions do not take into account these cultural norms which relate to the *process* of migration. In particular, they are ill-adapted with regard to the fact that an individual can enter and leave a migratory career either seasonally or at other regular intervals. Moving in and out of migrant status in turn causes intermittent changes young people's social networks and social capital which can impact upon their own livelihoods and those of their families and communities. The *process* approach to migration, which the Mobilities Platform adopts, recognizes that it is a step-wise procedure as pioneer intermediaries and brokers prepare for others to follow in their footsteps. Migrants' social and economic experiences and contributions often fundamentally change their places of origin as well as their places of destination, both positively and negatively. Their movements may reflect the aspirations of others as well as their own, as family members or peer groups often club together to send one individual to make a better life in the hope that the benefits will filter down to all of them. Thus, the research presented here will therefore emphasize migration as a process in which children often actively participate.

The recognition of child mobility as a process also allows for an exploration of multiple migrant *identities* which are often linked to the reason(s) for migration. A migrant may possess several identities sequentially or concurrently all of which have their own normative perceptions and behaviors. It is shown below that young migrants may move for the following reasons: bereavement/becoming an orphan, family disruption, family breakup (parental divorce), family or regional conflict, in order to be fostered, for Koranic or formal schooling (especially secondary schooling), to learn a trade, or most commonly to 'seek their fortunes'. These practical reasons for child-shifting can be associated with the exploration of new identities, new economic and social spaces, new social networks and forms of support (or exploitation), new ambitions and aspirations (Ainsworth 1996, Gale 2008). All these themes come out very strongly in the testimonies presented below. In particular, the successful migrants seem to articulate a new form of self-reliance and sense of being the provider (and therefore important in terms of status) for those they left behind. In Niger, it will be shown how this

created substantial tensions between returning migrants and those who remained in their villages of origin.

It should also be noted that although the vast majority of migration is considered to involve geographic displacement, new norms and aspirations may come through young peoples 'virtual migration' via their exposure to the new technologies. Children and young people can access, at least visually, what other migrants have physically moved to encounter via television and the internet. It will be shown below how exposure to television in semi-rural Guinea has given girls new material aspirations which they seek to meet through transactional sex. Thus, social norms, even among those who do not move are not fixed, but can evolve via indirect contact with the outside world.

3.4 Vulnerability and exploitation

Another area where there is a tension between international and national legislation and local realities comprises the differing interpretations of vulnerability and exploitation of young migrants and of the 'acceptability' of the hardships they frequently experience. International documents such as the ILO's Convention concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (Convention 182) state that the worst forms of child labour comprise:

a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;

(b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;

(c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;

(d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

The Worst Form Hazards Faced by Children at Work are to be defined by each country but ILO suggests work which "Involves long hours, no breaks, carrying heavy loads, a rapid or slow tedious pace" .

Testimonies below present world views and child labor experiences that are in direct conflict with these directives. Children, whether resident in their own communities or on migration, are constantly, from an early age, carrying out work

that is 'involves long hours, no breaks, carrying heavy loads' or working at 'a rapid or slow tedious pace' as did their parents and grandparents before them. This is not to say that it is ethically correct, particularly if it may physically or psychologically harm children, or if, as shown below, it interferes with their schooling by leading to non-enrollment or drop out. Nevertheless, the interviews reveal that parents enforce, and indeed rely upon, child labour giving children tasks and responsibilities from an early age. Children's failure to comply with what is expected of them with regard to their work often results in corporal punishment. Thus, in contrast to the spirit of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, rather than participating in discussions as to their wellbeing, children are expected to submit themselves to the will of their elders, particularly with regard to the use of their labour. The 'norm' in this case involves the subjugation of individual gain for the common good of the extended family. In this context, it will be shown that migration comprises a means of resistance to this subjugation and a way in which migrants can (re)claim or (re)assert their identity as individuals. Testimonies below point to the fact that geographic separation from their families endows young migrants with a sense of freedom and new found liberty from the compliance expected of them in their villages. This is not to say that migration is easy as, of course, it still often involves hard manual labor over long hours for poor pay carried out by children or adolescents in the receiving areas. It does however challenge the family norms about 'children's place' as it creates new 'norms' orientated around individualism or collaboration among peers rather than family cooperation. In many cases, the migrant is free to shape his or her employment experience and to control access to his or her own labor and the financial remuneration gained from it.

One of the main narratives which emerge from this and other evidence is the notion of suffering and endurance before migration and among the members of sending communities who remain behind. Discourses pertaining to migrants' (probably exaggerated) stories of their success and achievements, together with the ostentatious material possessions they display upon their return, serve to create tensions with the community members who remained behind. The latter tell of food shortages and hunger which the migrants' purchases (motorbikes, radios etc) cannot remedy. Individual status is thus traded for community benefit. Within these norms, within which hardship and suffering seem greater among non-migrants than migrants (at least in the Nigerian setting), it is difficult and indeed illogical to separate the rights of migrant working children from those who remain behind.

4.0 Testimonies from the field: Social norms and realities pertaining to young migrants' experiences.

The following sections will draw upon the testimonies of children and young people, together with those of their entourages, with regard to migration and the mobility of children and young people. The analyses will explore how migration is situated within the social norms of the sending and receiving communities and

how migration itself may serve to change communities' 'world views' and values. The discussions will also focus upon how normative frameworks regarding families' expectations from children, and their methods for enforcing them, may conflict with language at the heart of international protocols and national legislation aimed at child protection. The analyses will also look at family structures and the inter-relations between migration and the out-fostering of children which, historically, have served to make non-maternal child rearing and important social norm. Finally, it is discussed how the testimonies show that the impact of returning migrants is not only (or not even) material, but rather results in profound changes in the social norms which govern the dynamics between mobile individuals and those who remain at home. Thus, on the one hand, the analysis will look at the macro-level at tensions between overall social norms and international decrees and national legislation. On the other, it will also show clearly, at the micro-level, how mobility causes norms to evolve and that this can lead to multiple, often conflicting, cultural points of reference causing intra-community discord.

4.1 Norms relating to family structures and dynamics

The preamble to the Convention on the Rights of the Child States that *"Convinced that the family, as the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children, should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community"*. It continues that *"Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding"*.

Parents interviewed during the research in the three country settings, did, in general, adhere to the same 'norms' as the Convention in that they aspired to do their best to nurture their children and afford them protection and security. Parental love for children is evident from the interviews but, as will be shown below, could perhaps be construed as 'tough love', but love none the same.

Thus, generally speaking, local normative views about the families' obligations to raising children in a positive environment and the Convention's perspective on this matter concur. The difference is how local constructions of 'positive environment' are played out in practical terms, how parents view what is 'best' for their children and how 'love and understanding' are exhibited. It has frequently been documented in Africa how family structures are often extended and hierarchical (Bledsoe and Banja 2002). Members may live closely together or may be separated by considerable geographical distances. Many families comprise fostered children and fictive kin (Madhavan 20004). All members show allegiance to the household head (usually male) who controls household economic production and consumption. Most importantly s/he and other older

household members inculcate to children from an early age, certain 'norms' about behavior and particularly about assisting and obeying parents and elders.

"He tells us not to do harm to anyone, not to insult anyone , not to hit anyone, to walk properly and to go to school every day, to help our parents with work in the fields and when we are asked to do something not to answer back".

Male interviewee, Guinea, high school student, 21 years old

You have to respect your elders, for example your grandfather if your father is away. You mustn't hurt anyone or look for a quarrel. You must be patient, do not steal. We must not make too much noise when we play with old tin cans. If a guest comes we have to offer them a seat and water to drink and greet them properly. I should add that a child needs to take all this on board before seven years of age.

Male interviewee, Benin, secondary school pupil, 18 years old

In each of the settings where the research took place, the overriding theme which came out of the testimonies pertaining to family dynamics was that of the necessity of children's 'submission'. Family norms dictate that it is desirable for a child to submit to the will of his parents and absorb ideals pertaining to behavior which will be for the common benefit of the family and wider society *in the future*. Children were not thought of as having views or opinions which were valid during their actual period of childhood. As remarked above, in concurrence with some of the international perspectives, a child was viewed as 'being in the process of becoming rather than being' (Ennew cited in De Boeck and Honwana 2005). Powerful local images, used by parents and children alike, indicated that a child was something to be molded to correspond with what the family and society aspire for him/her to become.

A child is someone who is about to become someone- he needs to be brought up to prepare his future. A child is someone who hasn't learnt to think properly. The child is the future of tomorrow. He is like a handful of clay that needs to be molded in order for him to be useful to society. He is like the core of society which needs to be educated to become a good adult. A child is a reflection of society.

Primary school teacher, Guinea

… a young girl is like clay that has to be molded so that she can later honor her natal family when she gets married.

Female interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 26 years old

The preamble CRC says also that "*that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society*" which, as shown by the testimonies above, jars with the notion expressed by many West African parents – namely, that individual will should be submitted to overall familial and societal gains.

Children's aspirations, and even their economic opportunities, came secondary to the notion of submission as illustrated by the case of this Beninese girl who wanted to become a tailor:

Interviewer: So you're mother doesn't have a job and she can't look after your needs ?

Interviewee: (lowers head) No, but it's me who wants to become a tailor, but if they refuse I'll just leave it. I can't insist upon it in case I bring shame to my parents. It's not good that children shame their parents. We need to submit to their will – after all they are our parents.

Female interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 10 years old

The interviews further explored this theme of submission by asking parents and children alike what would happen if a child disobeyed his or her parents or failed to listen to them. Almost universally the answer was that a child would be beaten with a hand, stick or belt 'for his own good' and to 'bring him back into line'.

Parent : Even though we are superior to our children, there are certain ones who don't listen and have to be brought back into line.

Interviewer: and how do you do this ?

Parent: We hit them hard

Interviewer: With what do you hit them ?

Parent (laughing) We hit them with a stick – if we do that the child will be put back in its place.

Male interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 49 years old

My father hit me with a piece of wood and then told me to stay on my knees for 10- 15 minutes. If you are asked to do something and you refuse, physical punishment is inevitable.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 20 years old

Other parents chose different methods of correction (which could be considered to comprise child negligence in international discourse) to make it clear to their children that they had to obey them.

If, for example, my daughter refuses to pound the rice, pull water or search for wood, I deny her food. So that she does not go and get food elsewhere I make her go to bed early.

Female interviewee, Guinea, no schooling, 40 years old

Thus, the relationship between international rhetoric and realities found at the grassroots is complex. Paradoxically, there is a concurrence regarding both the CRC terminology and parents' normative values in that both want the 'best' for the children but adopt different approaches as to how to bring that about. The CRC invokes affection and emotion for a child which there is no doubt that most West African parents possess. However it is expressed by parents emphasizing the importance of conformity. The widespread ideology encouraging submission, and enforcing this with physical violence, runs counter to most language pertaining to the Rights of the Child, especially that which talks of families offering children an environment for 'harmonious development'. Nevertheless, in such settings where compliance is an essential quality, and where children are socialized (or as the informants said 'molded'), for the good of the extended family and community, parents are, they would argue, acting in their child's best interests. Physical punishment is accepted by children as inevitable and justifiable and parents instigate it to indeed bring about the 'harmonious development' of which the CRC talks. The difference is that the CRC thinks of 'harmonious' as referring to the child as an individual and to its internal points of reference. By contrast, local realities seek to harmonize the child's ideals with those of the family or community, if necessary, in some cases, by force. Parental love for children is not so much exhibited by physical affection but rather by parental satisfaction with their offspring's conformity, containment of individualism and conformity to family and community norms.

Turning more specifically to child mobility, it is important to acknowledge that family norms pertain to a general preference for extended rather than nuclear families and, as stated above, comprise the presence of large numbers of fostered children. These kinds of family structures and the phenomenon of child shifting are also at odds with much of the international discourses which are based on notions of nuclear families as the 'norm' and which tend to, often erroneously, associate non-maternal care with sub-standard care (De Boeck and Honwana 2005).

Fostered children are usually defined as those living away from their biological parents, although research from elsewhere in West Africa found that there was a

significant amount of 'within-family fostering'[3]. The extensive literature on child fostering in West Africa shows that children may be fostered, for amongst other reasons, to go to school to learn a trade or to provide domestic labour (Castle 1996). What was clear from the qualitative data analyzed here is that many children were fostered because their own parents had migrated. Children of migrant parents, particularly absent fathers, were mostly left behind and possibly sent to other relatives if the other parent was deceased, divorced or themselves a migrant. Others were fostered out if both parents decided to migrate. Such children often ended up migrating themselves.

There are some children whose mothers and fathers are both absent and they are left behind in the village with a relative and they suffer. Sometimes they flee without telling anyone where they are going.

Male interviewee, Niger, no schooling, 17 years old

However, not all children living away from their biological parents were necessarily vulnerable, thus showing, counter to many international premises that non-maternal care is not necessarily of an inferior quality.

I took her in and bring her up as one of my own.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 38 years old

She (my foster mother) helped me. She gave me CFA5000 to buy red palm oil and other things needed to make soap. So I succeed in my soap making.

Female interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 17 years old

Nevertheless, even children who are fostered elsewhere are subject to the same norms of submission and discipline as those who remain within their natal families.

Even though I no longer live with my parents it is very difficult for me to go against their advice that my father gave me. If I do that my big sister will tell him and he will come and hit me.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 14 years old

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[3] In Mali, for example, a child may be fostered out within the family and brought up by someone other than the biological mother. In polygamous families for example, the husband may redistribute children among co-wives with the aim of creating harmony and unity (Castle 1995).

In some cases children did accompany migrant parents who often lived in unstable circumstances. This could have a negative effect on their child's own well being and future, for example, hindering their opportunities for schooling.

During the school year of 1984 my father let us to go to Boffa. There he had problems so he came back to join us in Macenta where I was living with my mother whom he had divorced. When he came back he insisted that I come with him to his village and we stayed there for a week before going back to N'zérékoré. Then we left for Liberia. It took us two and a half days on foot. In Liberia my father found a good family to house us – we were able to eat and wash. I stayed with them for a few months but then they became hostile towards me. I wasn't happy about this so I left them and followed a group of young delinquents and for two weeks noone knew where I was. Someone told my father and he left where he was to come back to look for me. After two days, having had nothing to eat I decided to return to the host family, My father beat me and sent me back to his village.

Male interviewee, Guinea, primary schooling, 31 years old

What was clear from the Niger data was that out migration was not a new phenomenon and had been occurring for centuries.

The first person to go on labour migration was someone from our grandfathers' generation. One of our grandfathers was from the village of Gatali. He was called Sagaydou and he was the first person to go on migration to Ghana.

Female interviewee, Niger, (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Thus, the inter-relations between parental migration, the separation of parents and children and the high prevalence of child fostering have not evolved recently but rather are rooted in historical responses to poverty and food insecurity. They therefore form 'normative' approaches to family function in these settings and are an instinctive response to hardship in these communities in which family forms and function have adapted to accommodate frequent parental absences.

4.2 Norms relating to child labor

As described above, international and national laws decree specific limits to child labor. In particular they seek to counter hard and repetitive labor for children and, above all, to ensure that children's schooling is not compromised by their work.

In reality, children's working life commences early on, encouraged by their parents who want them not only to become economically productive members of the household but to show that they have accepted to conform to norms of emphasizing individual contribution for overall family and community benefit.

In Benin, Article 166 of the Labour Code forbids the employment of any child under 14 years of age in a business. The code does not appear to recognize that social norms expect that children to provide labor in family settings which may be more physically strenuous and risky than in a commercial setting.

This Beninese boy describes his apprenticeship into field labour:

At six years old my family taught me how to weed. They made me a little hoe and gave me a portion of the field to do.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 18 years old

Girls similarly worked long hours carrying out tasks which exposed them to fire and heated water.

When my sister gets up she goes and asks what jobs there are to be done. She starts at around 6 am to sweep up , do the washing up, heat up last night's left overs and then we all eat before going to the field.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 18 years old

In Guinea, Article 5 of the Labour Code (1996) says that only after 12 years age can a child do 'light domestic work ' including being round a stove, acting as a kitchen help or looking after children. The reality, of course is very different. The ethnographer in one of the rural Guinean communities observed the following activities carried out by a 12 year old girl with no schooling who seems to be the prime contributor to the family's only daily meal.

Very early in the morning at 7am, the girl washes herself and repairs her shoes before going to the well with her little sister. Upon her return she takes the rest of the millet porridge her mother left in the pot. Then she get her bag and goes into the bush to look for kola nuts – it's now around 8.30am. These activities take three hours and she collects 3-6 kilos which will be sold that evening. With the money she earns she later buys a little atieke for herself and gives the rest to her mother to buy condiments. After finishing looking for the nuts she gets her fishing rod around 13h and goes off fishing. She comes back at around 18h. She puts water on the stove to heat up to wash herself and then pounds manioc leaves for the family's supper. At 20h she starts grilling the fish. At 20.30 her mother serves dinner and she then goes to bed.

Thus, the norms embedded in national codes designed to protect children do not take account of the amount and type of labor they contribute in family settings at an early age. Hazardous working conditions invariably increase as young people go on labour migration and work in the transport sector, mines, docks etc and this is discussed below. Back in their rural communities children again articulate

that the work is expected of them. Carrying out fieldwork or domestic duties efficiently is a sign of maturity as this young Beninese man explains:

From the age of 8 our work in the fields becomes quite efficient. I used to go to the field with my father he used to give us small pieces of work to do with the idea that we would get more and more used to cultivating. At the age of 10 my parents considered that I was mature so they gave me a big piece – around 400 m2 to cultivate myself.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 20 years old

The testimony above brings up an interesting social tension in that it underscores that through their work, children are valued and if they work successfully they are perceived to be mature in a productive sense. However as the comments above articulated, children are not considered socially mature or able to participate in decision-making until a much later age.

With this strong emphasis on child productivity facilitating a child's acceptance by his parents and the community generally, his/her ability or willingness to work thus also reflects on his/her own and entire families' reputation.

And he who just sits around and says he doesn't want to work, people say it is the child of this or that useless person and people will tease him. He doesn't do anything and he just sits around in the village. He doesn't look for firewood, he doesn't take the animals to drink - he does nothing. Sometimes people may even want to kill him …

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

In such a setting, children who sought to reclaim their right not to carry out heavy and arduous labour would, in all likelihood, not be listened to. Social norms require children's contribution to the economy as a sign of potential productivity, to ensure social acceptance and as a sign they have reached a significant life-marker or stage of maturity. Migrating for work purpose indicates that, as will be shown below, an individual has reached another life-marker where he can work independently of family instructions and accrues him/her a certain amount of status in the eyes of the family.

4.3 Norms relating to schooling

In all three settings, it became clear that there was a strong inter-relationship between migration and schooling. In some cases, children abandoned schooling because of opportunities to migrate. In other cases, children moved in order to go to school and, in particular, to pursue secondary education. The testimonies below indicate that broader social norms relating to child labour and child

discipline also come into play in children's villages of origin, and may influence school drop out and their subsequent migration elsewhere.

In Benin, Article 12 of the Constitution states that a child is guaranteed education and that s/he should be given the condition that will enable him/her to achieve this. Article 13 notes the obligation of the State to provide education in public schools and adds that primary schooling is obligatory and free.

In reality, the situation in Benin and indeed in much of West Africa, is rather different in that, for many reasons, including child mobility, educational opportunities are not available for all children. In addition, in many cases, the school environment comprises actual or threatened violence against children leading either to children dropping out or to parents being reluctant to enroll their offspring.

Children may benefit from schooling opportunities when their parents migrate which they would not have had at home. However, as described above, norms relating to the stigma associated with pre-marital pregnancy – a real risk in many school environments - may result in children abandoning their studies. This informant's testimony highlights three important norms relating to girl's schooling, marriage and submission.

When I was little, my father was a driver and we lived in Parakou and there I went to school up to grade 2. But then my mother died and us three children were sent back to the village. We should have gone back to school but the family said "No - a girl should not go to school – she might get pregnant". So my sister and I did not go back because we were left at the mercy of our family's wishes. Only my brother went back to school. My father was not around as by this time he had gone back to Parakou ..he couldn't do any more and as a result I got married to a close relative, had a tumultuous marriage and was never at peace. It really hurts me. If I had been consulted my life would not have turned out like this.

Female interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 35 years old

Other children were schooled in their home villages but were forced to abandon their studies as the family migrated. The testimony below shows again how children are not consulted about decisions pertaining to their schooling on indeed pertaining to most things that concern them.

I wasn't happy (about being taken out of school). My parents didn't tell me anything – we just left the village – me my parents and my brothers – to settle in Ghana and there we were not enrolled in school.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

This indicates that some parents may weigh up the relative benefits of staying in their home villages and educating their children versus going on labour migration and taking them out of school. Clearly, in the case above, the parents considered the benefit of migration to be more worthwhile than the benefits of schooling, perhaps became the gains are more immediate. In addition, children's labour is an important resource to support newly migrated families in their place of destination. It should be noted that, however, in this case, the children would have been moved from a Francophone education system to an Anglophone school and it may be difficult for parents (who are often not themselves educated) to negotiate the bureaucracies involved in school registration in a foreign country and different linguistic setting.

The norms relating to child labour seem to mean that many children are deliberately not enrolled in school by their parents. This is particularly true for girls who are needed by their mothers to carry out household tasks.

Concerning girls, mothers stop them going to school , because when they go, the mothers don't have anyone to send on errands, noone to go and get water and noone to pound cereals That's why mothers stop their daughters going to school.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Parent's out-migration can in some case mean that a child can go to school in the village of origin. In this case the child's mother was against schooling, but her migration meant that the child could resume her studies.

In this village there is a girl who only goes to school when her mother is away – the mother doesn't like the idea of school. When she comes back she stops her daughter going. But each time she goes away the girl start school again and today she is in class CM2

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

As described, many children are fostered elsewhere in order to pursue their schooling, particularly their secondary schooling. In pre-colonial times, and indeed today, fostering was a common practice in order to enable a child to pursue a trade or an apprenticeship or Koranic studies and this fostering for formal schooling is a natural extension of this norm.

My parents sent me to live with an aunt so I could go to school. That's why I live with my aunt- to go to school.

Male interviewee, Benin, adult male

There is no secondary school in Lanta so we have to go to Adjahome or Klouekanme if we want to continue. In Lanta the school stops at primary level and so that is why we have to go on 'educational migration'.

Male interviewee, Benin, secondary schooling, 18 years old

However, children who undertake educational migration often undergo severe hardship as their host families cannot support them and they do not have enough food, nor money to pay fees and school materials. This can cause many to abandon school but to remain in the place to which they migrated. Many are perhaps ashamed to tell their parents they have dropped out or perhaps see better economic opportunities in the larger towns where secondary schools are situated.

I dropped out of secondary school in 1994 due to a lack of support. During all my time at Fassankony, I didn't have a host family so I never had enough to eat.

Male interviewee, Guinea, secondary schooling, 26 years old

The fact that many young people migrate for secondary schooling means that they are sometimes exposed to risks which they would not have encountered at home . Research has shown that girls may be obliged to engage in sex work to gain money for food and to pay their school fees (Mbaye 2005). However, although some young women may take risks to their sexual health out of economic necessity, the norms around sexual behavior appear to change when young people are away from their parents, often for the first time. In these settings, others may engage in casual sexual behavior due ot a new found sense of freedom and autonomy.

Interviewee: So the migration I undertook was in order to pursue my studies.
Interviewer: Do you still respect what you parents tell you with regard as to how to behave when you are away from them ?
Interviewee: if we are near our parents we respect what they say rigorously . However, if we are out of the family environment, the norms seem ridiculous and we develop other attitudes .
Interviewer: Like what for example ?
Interviewee: For example, the girls stay out late at night ..

 Male interviewee, Benin, secondary schooling, 20 years old

This new found sexual freedom and creation of a new social norm that allow individual rather than communal interest, often means that the schooling that young people were sent off to pursue, is abandoned because of pregnancy or prostitution.

Once you start having sex at an early age, you abandon school – this happens really often here in Guinea. The ones that are beautiful prostitute themselves in the hotels and come back with infections that they give to all the boys in the neighborhood.

Male interviewee, Guinea, secondary schooling, 22 years old

4.3.1 School-based violence and child mobility

A key theme which emerged from both those in school in their home villages as well as among those who had undertaken educational migration, was the existence of norms within the classroom whereby corporal punishment and physical discipline were routine and widely accepted by parents, teachers and alike. All three countries have codes designed to protect children from violence. In Benin, decree number 100/MEN/CAB dating from 1952 makes corporal punishment illegal in schools. In Guinea, there are no measures to protect children specifically from violence in schools nor to forbid corporal punishment. However, in principle, those who inflict blows and injuries on children are punished under the Penal Code. In Niger, there are no laws specifically against violence in schools but there are three Articles which prohibit violence against a child. For example, Article 222 of the 1961 Penal Code says " any individual who, of his own volition, hurts or hits another individual or engages in any other form of violence will be punished". A decree from the Ministry of Education to all school inspectors in Niger in 1981 said that "corporal punishment is forbidden as is making them do things that humiliate them or harm their body as well as using school pupils as free manual labor for personal benefit. These practices will be severely sanctioned". All three countries have signed up to the CRC and to the African Charter for the Rights of the Child which specifically forbid violence against children both in and out of school. For example, Article 19 of the CRC envisages "*protecting the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury, and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has care of the child*".

In addition, in Article 28 States Parties are asked to "*take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates*" and to "*take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention*"

The testimonies presented here conflict directly with measures stipulated in the CRC and in many national laws. Children recounted how being hit by teachers at school was routine. As found elsewhere, violence had become institutionalized in educational establishments (Castle and Diallo 2008) and was often encouraged

by parents and teachers alike as both adhered to 'norms' or 'world views' that it was in the best interests of the child. School-based violence can act as a catalyst for children to abandon school an to subsequently migrate and is an extremely important factor in a an examination of child mobility in West Africa and one that, perhaps has been not been sufficiently explored to date.

Children had internalized violence and exploitation by teachers as part of their educational experience. In Guinea it was the principle theme to emerge when children were asked to put on a play about daily life at school. The opening scene was as follows:

It's Saturday, the teacher stops the lesson at 10am and asks the pupils to go and weed his field. Classes will start gain on Monday at 8.00am. The teacher reads out the list of those who will work for him – those who refuse are made to go down on their knees and are hit. They are told they have to bring back firewood. In the meantime two girls come in late. The teacher makes them go on their knees. The Headmistress comes in and says she will not tolerate late arrivals. She discharges them from their punishment and tells them to go back to their desks.

Some children resented being hit and also having to work for the teacher's personal benefit.

I usually never came late for school but one time I was late and the teacher told me to go on my knees. I refused but my friends advised me to do so saying it was nothing at all so to just do it. The teacher went and told the school director that I was refusing to get down on my knees so the director came and said that he should hit all of us four times. He then left us on our knees until 13h. I was really mad – I wanted to hit him and though that if he orders me to do some manual labor for him I won't do it. I won't help him – whatever he asks me to do.

Male interviewee, Benin (assume some schooling and under 20 years of age)

However, the majority of pupils and parents saw it as for being for the children's own good.

When I was in primary school the teachers hit us and hurt us. In my opinion it is good as that is how we make progress.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 14 years old

Some children refuse to go to school because they think that the teacher doesn't like them because he hits them – but he only does it so that they make progress. For me, if you don't, he will never be reasonable or intelligent in school.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Some parents requested that the teacher hit their children and as both are likely to share the same norms about the perceived benefits of corporal punishment, the child has no recourse to complain. In addition, physically enforcing submission in the classroom concurs with family norms where submission and conformity are also inflicted through corporal punishment if necessary.

I think parents are well aware of the physical punishment meted out in schools. Today there are fathers who will go and see the teacher to ask him to beat the child if he doesn't work in class and they know that the teacher will carry out this wish correctly.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

There is not doubt that a culture of violence in schools leads to drop out. Former pupils may then pursue employment opportunities away from home.

Many drop out of school and some become farmers, others become hairdressers, mechanics and welders.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 14 years old

There is thus a direct link between school based violence, family based violence and migration as all are situated within and guided by norms which enforce submission as the desired attribute in children. It is likely that if a child is subjected to repeated violence in school and his parents ally themselves with the teacher for the child's own good, then there is eventually a strong possibility that the child will drop out of school and eventually migrate. Thus interventions seeking to understand the context of child mobility need to comprehend the social norms which may catalyze children to move away from their families. It will be shown below that a key motivating factor for young people to migrate is to seek a sense of freedom they can not have in their home environments. In their natal villages they are required to submit to the will of elders in the family and figures of authority in the community such as teachers, whilst on migration they discover a new found sense of autonomy and agency. These may result in the creation of new norms which, whilst allowing them greater freedom, may also be associated with new risks such as exposure to HIV and STIs.

4.4 Norms relating to marriage and bridewealth payments.

This section will not address overall norms relating to marriage and marriage negotiations (which are too detailed to go into here) but rather specifically discuss two aspects of marriage that directly relate to child migration and child mobility - namely forced marriage and dowry/bridewealth transactions.

In all three settings, spouses are generally chosen by parents and relatives and young people have very little say with regard to who they will marry. Once the couple has been identified, negotiations take place between the two families, and the parents of the young woman accept a bridewealth payment. This represents the loss of her labor and economic contribution to her natal family and a social commitment that there will be a union between the two lineages. The Marriage and Family Codes of each country address bridewealth payments, and in some cases set limits to them, but the relevant laws are never enforced. In Niger for example, bridewealth cannot officially exceed CFA50,000 but, in reality, may cost the groom's family ten times this amount (cf Le coût d'amour à Niamey, Diallo 2003). In Benin, bridewealth is mentioned in an effort to integrate 'positive traditional values' into family law and Aticle 142 simply says that 'bridewealth is of a symbolic character'.

Migration has had several effects on the composition and value of bridewealth, the norms around which have changed considerably. This may be largely due to an expansion in people's 'world views' and an increase in materialism for which migration is largely responsible. In Benin, informants explain what the money is used for :

The father of the girl takes CFA120000, the mother takes CFA20,000 and the girl gets CFA40,000. This latter is not to be squandered but to be used to buy her a palm grove (to get palm oil).

Male interviewee, Benin

My husband paid CFA180,000 for my bridewealth plus he gave them a sheep. My father took CFA120,000, my mother got CFA20,000, and I got CFA40,000 to put my wedding trousseau together.

Female interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 26 years old

In Niger, getting married was even more expensive and seemed to have become more costly in recent years. This may well be to do with an expansion of young women's horizon's through migration or exposure to modern media meaning that they desire more expensive, modern goods they may have seen the larger towns and cities.

There is a big difference in the cost of marriage today when compared with years ago. Today you need at least CFA400,000

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

What came out clearly, particularly from the Niger testimonies, was that young male migrants often return home with quite substantial sums of money. Parents

of potential brides were tempted to give their daughters in marriage to these suitors whether the young woman was in agreement or not or whether or not she had been promised to somebody else. Informants saw migration, and the money it generated, as being at the root of forced and early marriage which they said was becoming increasingly common due to what they perceived to be parental greed.

Money is the principle cause of forced marriage in this village. The young men know that certain parents can't resist money so they tempt them and then they marry their granddaughter even if the parents know perfectly well that the girl is not old enough to be married.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

What happens very often is that the come back with a lot of money and the parents accept the offer of marriage and force the girl to marry the man even if she doesn't want to. As the girl is too young to carry out all the household chores required of her, she will crack up.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

By contrast, forced marriage was also perceived to be a catalyst for migration by some young women.

There is a young woman in this village who was asked for in marriage by a young man, but she said 'no'. But the young man went underhandedly to her parents and gave them a lot of money. Everything was sewn up without the girl's consent and they only told her at the last minute that her parents had accepted. To show she was not in agreement she left the village to go to another one very far away. Her parents went and got her and the marriage was celebrated.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

There is a young girl who was forced to marry a young migrant from Niamey. Right this minute she is in the bush crying her eyes out saying she doesn't like the man and that she already has a boyfriend. The parents are saying that the marriage will go ahead because they already took the bridewealth payment.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Thus, the norms of 'submission' collide with the effects of migration, as wealthy young men are able to convince parents that they should marry their daughters even if the girls in question are not willing. Money gained from migration

overrides the girls' rights and opinions and it could be argued, and indeed informants testify, that migration has, in fact, increased the likelihood of forced and early marriage in this setting.

Female migration may also occur because young women need to bring their dowries to their marital households. These comprise household equipment as this informant explains:

I bring wrap arounds, bowls and kitchen equipment

Female interviewee, Benin, no schooling, 26 years old

It has been well documented elsewhere how many young women in West Africa leave on migration to pay for such items to enable them to get married. However, brides-to-be are often seeking more modern and expensive items that it may take them longer to accumulate. During their period of migration they may be exposed to new norms and world views in urban settings which change their aspirations and attitudes when they go back to their villages. Upon their return after a significant period of independence away form home, adapting to a norm of submission may not be easy.

4.5 The *process* of migration:

The interviews from all three country sites clearly underscored migrants' (and others') perceptions of the benefits of the migrant lifestyle. Even though many young people see their peers returning with little or nothing at all, their aspirations and desires relating to the 'Other' that migration represents (autonomy, sexual freedom, wealth) drives them to leave their villages en masse. Their mobility is as much a response to peer pressure and response to ideation as it is economically driven (Castle and Diarra 2003).

..among them there are a lot of dreamers. Girls dream of finding a husband in the coastal countries who would get them out of the 'Calvary' of village life;Young men pray to God that they can tread upon foreign soil. Old men hope to join their offspring in the promised land. The outside world looks like 'El Dorado; for these people .

Ethnographer's journal, Niger

It is discussed below how those remaining behind were constantly speaking of the suffering they endured in their villages. The migrants rarely spoke of suffering in their destinations. Even if they had experienced hardship, they conveyed an idealized picture of their comfortable life abroad. However, it became clear that norms dictated that in order to migrate, an individual had to have experienced

physical suffering almost as a rite of passage which preceded migration. That way s/he would be prepared for the hardships of the journey and life away.

Interviewee 1: The person has to suffer some before going to Ghana
Interviewee 2: Because one they are there, they suffer to send money back to their mothers
Interviewee 3: Yes you have to suffer, to the point where you have scars on your back - if you don't have those you can't even think if gong to Ghana
Interviewee 4: You see to get work you have to have to have scars on your back already.

Female interviewees, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

4.5.1 Undertaking the journey

As shown above, some young migrants left their villages without informing their parents but most consulted their mothers and fathers. In many cases, the migration of a young family member was taken as a joint family decision and the family financed the initial journey, for example, by selling livestock or land.

One day I called a family meeting, and I said to my brothers, my mother and my uncles that I wanted to travel and they were in agreement. So a field which I had, which had given me a good harvest was sold and I got CFA20,000 which paid for my journey and gave me some pocket money.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 20 years old

My children sold straw and some millet stalks that the collected in the bush so they would be able to pay for their tickets. When they told me of their intention to go to Niamey, I sold a sheep so that gave them an extra CFA 10,000.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Some people save up to go to Niamey. Others are given money by their mothers to go to Ghana.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Thus, there appears to be some potential tension between the aim of young people's migration as perceived by those left behind in the sending communities and the realities migrants experience once they reach their destination. This will be discussed in more detail below. In short, migration as a communal family strategy to ensure economic   security through remittances may not reflect what actually occurs once a young person migrates. Migrants may enjoy new found

freedom in their destinations and frequently use the cash earned for purchases to reflect their individual status (bicycles, radios etc). They thus place greater value on individual standing rather than contributing to the family's well-being, despite the fact that the latter may have financed their journey.

4.5.2 The migrants' journeys

Once the young migrants had got together enough money to finance their journey, they started to look for transport. In most cases they took the advice of migrants who were already established in their places of destination.

Most journeys, at least for first time migrants, took place step by step. For example, in Niger, young men left their villages to go to Niamey and from there made their way to Benin or Abidjan.

They start to go on labour migration from the age of 14 years. They go first to Niamey and then on to Benin or Cote d'Ivoire. In my day we did not stay in Niamey.

Male interviewee, Niger, no schooling, 64 years old

They were guided and advised by relatives and peers along the way, usually for free. Sometimes migrants in destination areas sent money so their relatives could join them .

If you have a family member there he can send you money and bit by bit he can help you. It is in this way that we go on migration. It helps us alleviate our suffering,

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

It was my brothers in Nigeria who sent me money so I could join them.

Male interviewee, Niger, no schooling, 16 years old

Sometimes experienced migrants would accompany novices to help them negotiate the transport systems, police and new currencies.

We go into the big market and find a guy called Karidjo who is from our village, Molia. When there are a lot of people who want to go to Ghana they hire a vehicle to take them to Harobanda. If there are not many they hire taxies to take them to the bus station at Boko on the road to Ghana. At Harobanda you pay the fare to take you to your destination, say Togo, Nigeria or Ghana. If you want to go to Ghana you pay CFA75,000 as your transport and then you change your

CFA francs into Ghanaian Cedis. I have never been ripped off and I know Ghanaian currency well.

Male interviewee, Niger, no schooling, 16 years old

Thus, in the testimonies from the Niger data, where the iterative process of migration was most frequently discussed, paid intermediaries were not really involved in migrant journeys. Rather, new migrants relied on family members or fellow villages working in the transport industry or on migrants already living in the destination areas to guide them as to how to travel. The relations with them did not seem exploitative but rather assistive. Help and advice was given within a sense of solidarity with a view to helping peers seek new opportunities in their areas of destination. This runs somewhat counter to the portrayal of intermediaries as exploitative in the Palermo Protocol. By contrast, the norms infusing the migrant narratives presented here pertained to social support and cooperation.

Migrants were in need of particular support when negotiating police check and customs points. Virtually all migrants said that they were victims of bribery and corruption as they crossed national borders as they rarely had the right papers.

According to what I have found out, the main difficulties the migrants experience is when they do not have an identity card. They bribe the police officer and once they get to their destination they try and get one made.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Men in uniform really make us suffer. They ask us to give them CFA10000, CFA500 OR CFA250 – they really bug people. And when you come back from labour migration they make you take you bags out of the vehicle.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

They were asked to show identity cards which most did not possess as, in order to get an identity card, it is necessary to have a birth certificate. Most of the Nigerian migrants did not have birth certificates as their births had not been registered by the local authorities. This young man's lack of birth certificate was due to the fact that his father was away on labour migration and his mother said she could not afford it.

He (my father) did not arrange for me to have a birth certificate and when I asked my mother she said she could not afford it.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

If we refer to the Convention of the Rights of the Child, a particular emphasis is put on Article 7 on a child having a birth certificate as underscoring his/her right to an identity vis-à-vis the State.: *"The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and. as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents".* However, the evidence presented here suggests that the lack of a birth certificate has even wider implications in that, in later life, it prevents the free passage of migrants in search of a better future.

There is a broader issue at stake in that migrants' contact with policemen and law enforcement agents when on migration is probably the first time they have ever closely encountered uniformed representatives of the State. The Convention on the Rights of the Children places great weight on the State providing infrastructure, such as social services to enforce the rights of vulnerable children. For example, Article 3 states : *States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.* In most West African settings these services are non existent, under resourced or over-stretched.

If, as became clear from these testimonies, children were largely unaware of their rights or of the laws or figures of authority who could impose them, it may be because they have had little contact with State infrastructure, and when they have (such as with the police) it has been very negative. Thus, mobile children are unlikely to see the State as a resource for their protection but rather as something to be avoided as they perceive it will increase their likelihood of exploitation.

4.5.3 The migrant experience

As described above there is no one migrant experience but rather mobile young people may move in and out of multiple identities associated with their migration status. The newly arrived migrant in the place of destination is not the same as a long term established individual. New migrants tended to exhibit a naïveté having just arrived from rural areas which often had different cultural and linguistic points of reference. In general, new arrivals relied on established migrants (often relatives) for help in getting settled in and finding work.

Once you arrive you put yourself in the hands of those who have been there a while and they can advise you as to how to start hawking goods around town. When you first arrive it is difficult because you can't speak the language and you don't know where to go in order to be able to do business.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

However, sometimes they were duped and ended up losing large sums of money

To get to Conakry we put our bananas in a big lorry and did the trip with a relative from Toma who was used to trading bananas at Kossely. When we arrived, this guy realized that I didn't know the capital. He helped me sell my bananas and I got about FG200,000 for them. But then suddenly he made off with half the money and I had only FG100,000 left.

Male interviewee, Guinea, secondary schooling, 21 years old

Most young men ended up doing manual labour, often in organized structures, such as docks, which, in theory, should have internal rules about safety standards in the working environment. Others became vendors and hawkers.

Some of them go and work in the docks, others become ambulatory vendors. Others wash cars.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Once they arrive they did into their savings and buy secondhand clothes to resell in the town
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Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Previous research among similar groups has indicated that young women tended to work in domestic service or as cooks (Castle and Diarra 2003), although in the available data there were no testimonies of what young female migrants had done while away from home. However, others like this Nigerien respondent, had lived abroad in Ghana from an early age and had come back to the village to get married. Like most migrants she had a 'rose-tinted' view of what life was like on migration.

Interviewee: There are taps are inside the compounds and the climate is always cool. There is food there that you can have any moment you want to which you could never find here… and if your shoes are worn out you just throw them away and buy another pair !
Interviewer: So would you go back to the coast if you could ?
Interviewee: Right away !

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

4.5.3 Migrants' return

Some migrants came back every year either to cultivate agricultural land or to celebrate festivals with their families. Indeed, for part of the year, some individuals are not migrants at all, but return to their home communities, usually to help in the fields during the rainy season.

I have been back in the village for four days and I come back at least once a year. I have been living in Ghana since 1984. At the beginning I used to stay with the part of my family who lives there but now I come back to help with cultivation.

Male interviewee, Niger, primary schooling, 35 years old

There was a great emphasis on migrants returning with visibly ostentatious material possessions which perhaps served to symbolize the 'success' of their migration experience to those who had stayed.

At the end of one year I succeeded in buying a motorbike and a radio cassette player. At the end of each year I come back and celebrate local festivals with my mother, my brothers and my uncle.

Male interviewee, Benin, primary schooling, 20 years old

Thus, mobile young people's status may regularly change and their migrant identity is not fixed as they move between sending and receiving communities in structured and regular ways. In their destination zones they may perceive themselves to be (and indeed be perceived to be) comparatively weak and powerless as strangers in a foreign land. Upon their return, by contrast, they may be seen as successful and as 'owners' and 'providers' as they show evidence of their achievements abroad. This may explain the tendency for returnees to recount largely positive narratives of their time on migration as any allusion to 'suffering' while away from home would dampen the impact of the success they wish to convey to those who remained behind.

As described, there seemed to be an increasing emphasis on individual ostentation and assertion as a social norm among migrants who did come back and this conflicted directly with the historical norms of submission and collective good discussed in detail above. Older people, remarked that, whereas in the past returning migrants would bring money or food which could support everyone, in recent times they only returned with material items for individual use which were peripheral to actual survival in these very marginal areas of great food insecurity.

Before they used to bring CFA50,000 for their parents - there was a kind of competition among children to see who could bring the most … but that was before . Today the kids just seek to buy things for themselves (radios, shoes, jeans) to show off and to enhance their own personal well-being.

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Male interviewee, Niger, no schooling, 58 years old

Many felt that, unlike in former times, migration did nothing to improve village development. In fact, as will be shown below, it seemed to be harming the agricultural economy as infertile land was being left to go fallow as migrants were reluctant to cultivate.

Most of the village's young people go on labour migration after the period of 'soudure' (when the previous year's harvest has been consumed and the planting season is yet to begin). The young ones go to Niamey and the older ones go to Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, or Lagos in Nigeria. The hamlet turn out large numbers of very wealthy migrants but they do nothing to improve the conditions of the basic population.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Most returned migrants recounted positive experiences of their migration but it is difficult to tell how much is for the benefit of those who had remained. Migrants seek to assert their superior status in their villages of origin by recounting tales of all they have seen which are clearly outside the 'world views' of those who have never left these remote communities. However, it was not just the material gains which they mentioned but they also clearly articulated a new-found sense of freedom. Interestingly, the Nigerien interviews which were carried out in Hausa or Zerma with migrants to Ghana used the English word 'freedom' to describe the sense of autonomy and liberty they felt away from the constraints of their home villages.

In Ghana you don't suffer. You are free ! Freedom !

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

However, when they came back to their villages, this name was applied to returned migrants by their families and communities but to evoke a sense of disdain felt by those who had stayed behind.

When you come back they don't want anything to do with you. They say "hey you! 'freedom !'". You see, you have seen peace but now you come back into war !

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

This tension between those who had returned and those who had never left was constantly articulated in a discourse of the 'suffering' which those left behind

perceived they endure. It was noted above that experiencing suffering in the home villages was almost a rite of passage for those wanting to go on migration. Upon their return however, the migrants recounted (real or fabricated) stories about the relative comfort of their lives abroad and this seemed to serve to aggravate those who remained behind. Most of the notions of suffering were brought up in relation to the land which was perceived as infertile and barren and appeared to act as a metaphor reflecting the perceived lack of opportunities, resources and power of its inhabitants.

There is not enough rain and then you get the locusts and birds (which eat the crops). All this comprises the suffering with which we live. The rain is insufficient – there is no rain in Niger. The land is no longer fertile- it needs fertilizer.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

The inhabitants left behind perceived themselves to be weak from hunger.

Interviewer: Why do you suffer here ?
Interviewee: because of the famine. When you are hungry and you try and pound millet, you faint.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

In practical terms there seemed to be a vicious cycle in that those who returned from migration remarked that the land was very barren and that therefore they did not want to cultivate it. The fact it was not cultivated and perhaps fertilized or manured meant that it fell in to an even worse state. The result, according to this informant, was that eventually the migrants stopped coming back at all:

Now the children have become rebels and they no longer come back to Gaike. The land was fertile and if we could cultivate it, we would get millet and the children would come back. We will not allow them to stay on the coast. But now if they come back they say that there is no agricultural production and so they won't come back any more. That's what keeps them on the coast. They won't come back any more to our village. When these people see how the land has changed, they say they will never come back. They flee to Niamey to get some money and then move on.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

If the migrants come back from the coast they never want to come back to the village again. There is no point in suffering doing agricultural work if (because the state of the land) you are not going to get a harvest.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

By contrast, there was seen to be no suffering in Ghana or in the other migrant destinations but this perception may be more to do with the norms returning migrants wanted to propound rather than reflecting the reality of their time away.

They leave to go there because there is no suffering. As soon as the person earns something, he can buy himself a car.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

A commonly expressed notion was that those who had left for Ghana could no longer physically endure the 'suffering' which existed in the village. They were turned 'soft ' by their apparently comfortable existence on the coast so that they could not even help with cultivation when they returned.

Those from Ghana are not like those of us here. We can bear hunger and suffering .

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

When you come back, you come back in good health after a year but if you try hoeing even for one day you will pass out and someone will have to take you to the health centre but you may die en route.

Female interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

There seemed to be some resentment among those who had stayed behind and who perceived the returned migrants to have superior 'airs' about the quality of village food and life in general in what are essentially very poor sending communities.

Certain migrants come back and say there is no electricity, there's no food and that they can no longer eat our gruel They don't eat our food. They say that the food is the same every day. Even when they see how much it costs us to buy a sack if rice   - it's price makes us suffer. We can't afford it.

Male interviewee, Niger (assume no schooling and under 20 years of age)

Thus, these testimonies with regard to interactions between migrants and non-migrants in these Nigerien sending communities are loaded with images and

metaphors which summarize the unequal power and opportunity. The norms of submission and collective good characterizing the cultural frames of reference in the villages of origin seemed to have been replaced by the individualism and materialism which the returning migrants exhibit. The notion of 'Freedom' (which tellingly they express in English) sums up the liberation from the constraints of family and community obligations. They visualize this 'Otherness' by refusing the meager village diets and by resisting participation in agricultural production. The 'el Dorado' stories which the migrants recount and the images of comfort and ease they project, contrast sharply with the rhetoric of 'suffering' which characterizes norms and identities within the sending communities. This evidence suggests that migration, in some cases, can divide and disrupt communities as much as it can assist them.

5.0 Conclusions

This report focuses upon the gaps in the continuum between macro-level, exogenous decrees and declarations concerning the protection of mobile children and local discourses and 'norms' pertaining to children's 'place' in families and communities. International conventions and national legislation ascribe some sense of agency to children and assume that they can and do participate in debates about their own well-being. By contrast, in many West African realities, including those from Guinea, Benin and Niger presented here, children are socialized using norms which subjugate individual interest for the common good of the family and community. Children are valued from an early age for their labor and make significant contributions to family economies but the emphasis is on common good not individual interest. This contrasts sharply with Western notions of childhood where social and financial independence and indeed biological reproduction are generally significantly delayed and children have a greater individual identity.

In West African settings, at least in rural areas, children are generally brought up with norms which emphasize reciprocity and cooperation. These appear to increasingly being challenged by the phenomenon of migration which inculcates a sense of individualism in young people who are away from their families and communities.

The analyses of the transcribed interviews showed that, even for those left at home, social norms were, in many cases, at odds with national legislation and international doctrine. National codes proscribing 'appropriate' conditions for child labour, age at marriage and bridewealth obligations do not sit comfortably with parental expectations. When migration is added on to these discourses, new norms appear to come into play, at least in the extremely poor Niger setting where the research was carried out. Comparatively wealthy male migrants were returning from having worked in Ghana and were offering parents substantial amounts of bridewealth in order to marry young women who in many cases, were

either unwilling or who had been promised to someone else. Informants claimed that since widespread migration had occurred, under age marriage and forced marriage had increased in their communities. International legislation and national jurisprudence is unable to address this unless the extreme poverty, which is at the basis of these transactions, of these communities is taken into account. In such settings development could have far reaching impact on children's rights.

Another domain where international conventions and national laws clash with local norms is in the area of violence against children. As described children are generally socialized through their household labor skills which are learnt via imitation or apprenticeship. Parents freely admitted that they 'corrected' their children by beating them or by depriving them of food. The need for conformity and submission was foremost children's upbringing and both parents and children saw corporal punishment as inevitable and justifiable. School-based violence was also the norm and again conflicts with international discourse on school environments. Pupils described extremely harsh and frequent discipline which is likely to associated with school drop- out. In addition, parents of girls were often unwilling to enroll their daughters due to a fear of unwanted pregnancy. Non-enrolment in school, for either of these reasons, is likely to lead to an increase migration by young people. Understanding child mobility needs to take into account the important catalysts of school-based and family-based violence that can push children to leave their home communities. To date, these factors have been under-researched and yet comprise important issues in child rights and protection and are directly linked to the propensity to migrate among many young people.

Regarding the migrant experience, young mobile individuals often made their journeys in groups. They were often helped by relatives who were already established in the areas of destination relying less on formal, paid, intermediaries. This scenario conflicts with the perspective contained, for example, in the Palermo Protocol, which does not distinguish between exploitative and non-exploitative intermediaries. Nor does it acknowledge the fact that established migrants can often become intermediaries themselves and later act as brokers for young relatives from their villages of origin, even financing their trips.

Migrants tended to have very negative experiences with the police and law enforcement agents. Due to the fact that most lacked of birth certificates, many were unable to the necessary papers to travel such as a 'carte d'identité' or a 'titre de voyage'. International declarations such as the Declaration on the Rights of the Child sees the law as being bale to protect children but, in reality, law enforcement agents were increasing children's risk as they relied on intermediaries to negotiate bribes and fines. For many children, this was their first contact with representatives of the State and generally constituted a very negative experience. This means that any further contact with government

employees, even those such as social workers who may have children's best interests at heart may be viewed with great skepticism by young migrants. This pushes them further into the margins of society and makes them hesitant to contact formal authorities if they ever have problems or if they are in danger.

Once arrived in their destinations the migrants (who were interviewed in their villages of origin upon their return) spoke of the benefits of life away from home. This in turn appeared to have generated feelings of jealously and discontent among those who had remained behind. It should be noted however that norms around returning migrant identity mean that young men in particular play up to the images of 'El Dorado;' and minimize any reference to hardship. By contrast, those remaining in their villages spoke constantly of suffering due to infertile soil and crop failure. They resented the returning migrants' apparent new found individualism and their reluctance to value traditional of village life. Their discourses appeared to reflect their apparent powerlessness, submission and inability to change their situation. They resented the returnees and used the nickname 'freedom' to mock them disdainfully. These testimonies which may be specific to Niger, highlight the apparent tense inter-relationships between migrants and non-migrants.

In conclusion, social norms are complex and evolve with individuals' exposure to new social environments, such as migrant destinations, where mobile children can adopt multiple identities. International declarations and national laws assume a degree of agency among children that is contradicted by normative views about child-rearing and children's 'place'. The international rhetoric also assumes the existence of a State infrastructure which serves to enhance child protection, such as social services, which are very limited or simply not available in many countries. They also encourage a child's right to education but fail to recognize that schools many be brutal, violent places that, amongst other factors may cause children to leave their home communities. In environments of extreme poverty, children's rights may not be a priority as their subservience and submission allows parents and communities to capitalize on their labour and economic contributions. Although they may be able to experience significant (personal) economic gain, the 'freedom' migrants experience abroad thus appears to come with a cost in that, upon their return, norms which were instilled in them since childhood are destabilized and communities and households may become fractured and in conflict.

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