

# Child Labour in Ghana: Ecological Perspective

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## Abstract

One of the major socio-economic problem that have engaged the attention of world leaders and researchers presently is child labour. The phenomenon persists in spite of the effort made by International Labour Organization and other reputable organizations to eliminate it. This paper examines this phenomenon in African context, with specific reference to Ghana. It draws on the ecological approach in Community Psychology which claims that, in both research and intervention planning, the notion of context must be placed front and centre. International conventions that seek to eliminate child labour, as well as Ghana's Children's Act, are examined in relation to the Ghanaian culture. Besides, several studies and articles in the area of child labour are also examined. It is argued that, for interventions to be successful, it should take into account the culture of the people. Thus, child labour and its related light work should be given contextual definitions.

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Ecological Perspective, Ghana, Culture, Context.

## 1. Introduction

One of the major socioeconomic problems being battled with globally is child labour. It is widespread, affecting the wellbeing of millions of children worldwide. "Empirical studies reveal that children contribute as high as one third of household income at times and their income source cannot be treated as insignificant by poor families" (Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997, p. 3). International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 168 million children are in child labour globally, with 85 million in hazardous work (International Labour Organization, 2013). Child labour not only denies children education but also exposes them to health hazards (Canagarajah & Coulombe, 1997). No wonder the phenomenon has engaged the attention of major world organizations like International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Education, Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank. This paper takes ecological look at child labour in African context, with specific reference to Ghana.

In response to the increasing rate of child labour, the Minimum Age Convention (ILO Convention 138) adopted by ILO in 1973 enjoins member states to pursue national policies "designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labour and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment to a level consistent with the fullest physical and mental development of young persons" (ILO, 1973, Article 1). In 1992, the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) was created to ensure "the removal of children from hazardous working conditions and the ultimate elimination of child labour" (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2011). The Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, meant to prohibit and eliminate worst forms of child labour, was also adopted by the ILO in 1999 (ILO, 1999). This convention calls for time-bound measures to eliminate worst forms of child labour in countries ratifying it. In 2002, the ILO instituted June 12 as World Day Against Child Labour to serve as a catalyst for the growing worldwide movement against child labour (ILO, 2011a). The Domestic Workers Convention (ILO Convention No. 189) and Domestic Workers Recommendation (ILO Recommendation No. 201), which were adopted in 2011 to protect and improve working and living conditions of domestic workers worldwide, also highlight the need to abolish child labour in domestic work (ILO, 2011d; ILO, 2011e). Other organizations like the United States Department of Labour (USDOL), World Cocoa Foundation (WCF), International Cocoa Initiative (ICI), and European Cocoa Association (ECA), among others, are also supporting cocoa growing countries to formulate and implement programmes to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in the cocoa sub-sector (Asuming-Brempong, Sarpong, Asenso-Okyere & Amoo, 2007). Even though these conventions, programmes, and policies have chalked some successes, they still leave much to be desired. Perhaps, this can be attributed to the fact that the issue of culture has been relegated to the background for too long as far as research into the phenomenon and intervention planning are concerned.

As a pressing socio-economic phenomenon, a lot of research has gone into child labour. Unfortunately, however, little attention seems to have been given to culture in most cases. As a result, the interventions that follow these researches often do not take the issue of culture, which in fact might be the root cause, into consideration. Recently, however, some researchers such as Asuming-Brempong et al, (2007), Blunch and Verner (2000), Canagarajah and Coulombe (1997), Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999), and Twum-Danso (2009) have drawn attention to the influence of culture on child labour, even though some of them just do so in passing. This paper

will examine cultural norms, values, traditions and practices that seem to promote child labour in Ghana, but which have almost eluded many researchers. The paper focuses on children who perform agricultural and domestic activities while living with their parents or other relatives. The paper draws on the ecological perspective in Community Psychology which claims that in both research and intervention planning the context must be placed front and centre (Tricket, 2009).

## 2. Conceptual Framework

“Conceptually, the ecological perspective provides a framework for understanding people in community context and the community context itself” (Tricket, 2009, p. 396). As Tricket maintains, ecological perspective draws attention to how individuals with varied cultural histories, skills, experiences, and resources respond to personal predicaments, opportunities, and constraints of the social contexts of relevance to them. It “adopts an historical perspective on the community context, emphasizing the formative role of cultural and community history in understanding current community functioning” (p. 396). This approach is, no doubt, plausible because, as Goffman (cited in Kral, Garcí’a, Masood, Dutta & Todd, 2010) said, “Our ideas and behaviours are guided by learned cultural scripts” (p. 46). Therefore, “from an ecological perspective, knowledge about the local community is prerequisite and prelude to decisions about what kinds of actions serve community goals and interests, and what individuals, groups, and social settings are most central to the action goal” (Tricket, 2009, p. 397). Ecological perspective, thus, assesses how community traditions, resources, social structures and norms affect individual and group life (Tricket, 2009). In dealing with a complex socio-economic issue like child labour, therefore, it is very important to understand and address human behaviour and problems in context.

Riger (2001), Tricket (2009) and Kral et al (2010) all agree on one point that many social interventions make little impact, or fail entirely, due to failure on the part of planners to appreciate the cultural and community contexts. This is so because, as Mankowski et al, (cited in Kral et al, 2010) argued; the community is “where the experts are” (p. 51). Interventions that are planned independent of culture normally tend to be ameliorative instead of transformative, and therefore tackle secondary causes rather than primary causes of a problem. As Rappaport, (cited in Jim, 1992) argued, any intervention of a problem at an inappropriate level is likely to ignore the most important causes of the problem. Accordingly, Kral et al (2010) said, interventions that fail to appreciate culture often have limited impact or fail because they do not change “the rules of the game,” when they focus on first rather than second order change.

In view of the above, this paper attempts to examine some aspects of Ghanaian culture that tend to, directly or indirectly, promote child labour. This is done by reviewing some previous studies in the area, as well as some international and national laws and policies relating to child labour. The paper does not claim to challenge the credibility of these studies or policies but, rather, tries to draw attention to certain issues that seem to have gained little attention; especially as far as intervention planning is concerned.

## 3. Child Labour Situation in Ghana

Child labour is a widespread phenomenon in the developing world (Canagarajah & Coumbe, 1997). It is estimated that, 16 per cent of all children 5 to 14 years old in developing countries is involved in child labour (Childinfo, 2009). Ghana is not an exception to this. According to the Ghana Living Standards Survey report of the Fifth Round (GLSS 5), an estimated 13 percent of Ghanaian children aged 5 to 14 years are economically active (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). “The phenomenon is prevalent in all regions of the country” (Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007, p. 6). Asuming-Brempong et al identified some worst forms of child labour prevalent in Ghana as *kayaye* (head porters), child domestic labour, the *Trokosi* system (ritual servitude), commercial sexual exploitation, quarrying and *galamsey* (small scale mining), fishing, and cash-crop agriculture.

According to Ghana Statistical Service (2008), 89.3% of the economically active children in Ghana are engaged in agriculture. A pilot labour survey spearheaded by Ghana’s Ministry of Manpower, Youth and Employment (MMYE) in 2006 in six cocoa districts, and conducted by Asuming-Brempong et al (2007), indicated that children in all age groupings are involved in the various cocoa activities. Such activities include weeding, carrying water for spraying, pod plucking, pod gathering and heaping, scooping of cocoa beans, carting of fermented beans, drying of beans, and carting of dry beans to sale centres. The study also supported the findings of previous studies that children involved in cocoa production are exposed to hazardous farm work and subsequent health problems.

Another area of work that is worth mentioning as far as child labour in Ghana is concerned is domestic work. According to Canagarajah and Coloumbe (1997), approximately 90 per cent of all children aged 7 to 14 years in Ghana are involved in some forms of household chores. A report on child labour situation in Ghana issued by ILO in 2006 also revealed that 61.9 per cent of males and 69.8 per cent of females aged 5 participated in

household chores of a minimum of 1 hour per day, and that by age 14 years, 86 per cent of males and 90.9 per cent of females undertook house chores of a minimum of 1 hour per day (ILO, 2006). However, due to its hidden nature, there is no reliable statistics to show what percentage of this can be regarded as child labour.

### 3.1 Government Interventions

In order to combat child labour and other child right related problems in Ghana, the government has embraced a number of programmes, policies and conventions. Ghana ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on 5th February 1990, only three months after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, making her the first country to ratify the Convention (Twum-Danso, 2009; United Nations, 1989). To harmonize the national laws with the standards of the convention, the Children's Act of Ghana (Act 560) was enacted in 1998 to promote and protect the rights of children in the country (Government of Ghana, 1998). In 2000, Ghana ratified the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, and as a requirement signed "a Memorandum of Understanding with ILO to put in place policies, programmes and projects to eliminate worst forms of child labour and child trafficking in Ghana" (Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007, p. 8).

Some of the programmes put in place by the government of Ghana as outlined by Asuming-Brempong et al (2007) are listed below:

1. The Ghana Country Programme supported by ILO/IPEC started off projects for the elimination process. It built a large partnership among government ministries, departments and agencies, employers' organizations, trades unions, NGOs and donor organizations that have continued to work together and expand with time. The Country Programme also created a forum for sensitization and awareness creation on the issue, capacity building, withdrawal and establishment of a Tracking Database for children withdrawn from work, and projects to withdraw children from ritual servitude (Trokosi), porters (Kayayee) and children in sex tourism, as well as inclusion of child labour in existing curricula for sensitizing school children as a means of cutting down drop-out rates. This programme was supported by ILO/IPEC and US Department of Labour (USDOL). The programme withdrew and enrolled in school 2200 children caught up in child labour or at risk of entering child labour.
2. In 2002, the government launched a programme to eliminate child trafficking in Ghana and set up a Task Force to work on this. Through this programme, awareness on child trafficking has been intensified. There has been a training of security officers including police, immigration and customs officers at border posts towards the identification, interception of child traffickers and rescue of child victims for support. The Capacity Building Project which started in 2003 was able to withdraw a further 2000 children and enrol them in school.
3. The West Africa Cocoa and Commercial Agriculture Programme (WACAP) which was specifically designed to eliminate the worst forms of child labour in selected cocoa and rice growing communities was carried out with support by ILO/IPEC and USDOL.
4. The Time-Bound Programme for eliminating worst forms of child labour from other sectors including agriculture is also currently being implemented, with support from ILO/IPEC and the USDOL. Almost all the projects linked with ILO/IPEC support to Ghana received funding from USDOL.

In spite of all these interventions, among others, the country, like many other developing countries, is still battling with child labour. The question that follows naturally is "why"? Many researchers have attempted to answer this question. To most of them the root cause of child labour is poverty (Canagarajah & Coulumbe, 1997; Blunch & Verner, 2000; Ray, 2003). There is a widespread view among social scientists that households in developing countries put their children into paid employment if they slip into poverty (Ray, 2003). However, while poverty cannot be ruled out as a major cause of child labour, viewing it as the root cause in all situations becomes problematic. According to Blunch and Verner (2000), "the often hypothesized relationship between poverty and child labour seems not to be well grounded in empirical studies" (p.6), and that recent research "has questioned the validity of this link, claiming that poverty is not a main determinant of child labour" (p. 1). Canagarajah and Coulumbe (1997), for instance, found that, "unlike Asia, the majority of child labour in Africa, and especially in Ghana, is unpaid work and takes place in family agricultural enterprise" (p. 1). A similar finding was made by Ghana Statistical Service (2008), which found that 97.8% of all economically active children in Ghana were unpaid family workers. This defies the widespread belief that children in Ghana work in order to support their families with their income. Canagarajah and Coulumbe (1997) also found that "girls do more household chores, while boys are in labour force" (p. 1), which seems to reflect the gender roles as prescribed by Ghanaian culture. The authors therefore concluded that their "data does not convincingly show, as

most literature claim, that poverty is the main culprit of child labour” (p.1). Blunch and Verner (2000) also found a gender gap in child labour which they attributed to cultural norms. Even though they found a positive correlation between poverty and child labour, they also found that, considering children within the same financial class, boys were more likely to go to school while girls were more likely to work. All these findings seem to imply that child labour in Ghana is more of a cultural phenomenon.

### *3.2 The Role of Socialization in Child Labour*

A key construct that tends to sustain child labour in Ghana despite several attempts to curb it is socialization. Socialization, according to Bronfenbrenner (1994), is “the process through which individuals acquire the knowledge, skills and dispositions that enable them to participate as more or less effective members of groups and society”. In simple terms, socialization can be described as training up a child to become a responsible adult. In the Ghanaian context, a responsible adult is the one who is able to assume all adult responsibilities. Some of the basic adult responsibilities in the Ghanaian context include working to sustain one’s family and the ability to perform household chores perfectly. Basically, a responsible man should be able to work hard to cater for his family, while a responsible woman should be a complete housekeeper. A parent whose children grow up to possess these qualities is thus regarded as a responsible and successful parent. It is, therefore, the desire of every Ghanaian parent to inculcate in their children the value of work (especially the male ones) as well as provide them with domestic training (especially the females). In fact, Nukunya (2003) mentioned “economic activities” among the main activities that Ghanaian parents teach their children in the socialization process (p. 51).

It is often said that the best way to learn is to practice; hence, children are made to participate in almost all occupational and domestic activities carried out by their parents. Thus, “traditionally, working on family farms and with family enterprises is seen as part of the process by which children are trained towards adulthood” (Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007, p. 6). It is no wonder, then, that researchers have found that a greater portion of Ghanaian child workers are engaged in agriculture (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008; United States Department of Labour, 2008) which is, in fact, the mainstay of the economy. Canagarajah and Coulumbe’s (1997) observation that girls do more household chores, while boys are in labour force also seems to reflect this cultural phenomenon.

Some researchers and other important personalities acknowledge the importance of occupational and domestic training in the socialization process of Ghana and other developing countries. According to Asuming-Brempong et al (2007) , “except in the case of hazardous work or the unconditional worst forms of child labour, the activities children are involved in such as house chores and light work on the farm are considered normal and indeed healthy to the proper upbringing of the child” (P. 6). Blunch and Verner (2000) made a similar assertion that “some levels of child labour may even stimulate the children in their personal development as well as generate a natural attachment to the labour market already at an early stage” (p. 2). Asuming-Brempong et al (2007), therefore add that, “Children’s involvement in the production of cocoa is an age-old tradition which, besides the immediate labour value, constitutes a traditional way of imparting cocoa farming skills to them and equipping them to take over from ageing parents and relatives” (P. xiv). Parviz Koohafkan, former director of Food and Agricultural Organization’s (FAO) Rural Development Division, as quoted by FAO Newsroom (2006) in the following excerpt also shares a similar sentiment: “When it comes to subsistence and family agriculture, children’s participation in family farm activities helps them learn valuable skills, build self-esteem and contribute to the generation of household income, which has a positive impact on their own livelihoods.”

It then becomes clear that child work forms an important part of the socialization process in Ghana and, perhaps, other African countries. However, as Asuming-Brempong et al (2007) observed, “Despite the benefits of the practice, there could be some abuse in certain cases” (p. xiv). Some parents and guardians may hide behind socialization to introduce their children to conditions that are worthy to be called child labour, in some cases the worst forms. In view of this, Asuming-Brempong et al (2007) attributed child labour in Ghana not only to poverty, but also socio-cultural practices which, of course, include socialization. In fact, they seem to conclude that culture plays a more significant role in child labour, particularly in the cocoa sector, than poverty as is evident in the following statement: “In conclusion, we state that the case of child labour in Ghana’s cocoa sector seems to be more of a socio-cultural phenomenon” (p. xviii).

### *3.3 The Elusive Nature of Child Labour in the Ghanaian Context*

Considering the inherent nature of child work in Ghanaian culture, the question that comes to mind is whether Ghanaian parents and guardians are able to differentiate what is abuse from what is not when it comes to child work: *Will parents or guardians intentionally put their children in hazardous labour?* It may be fruitful to discuss this question in the light of a description of African child as given by a former Deputy Director of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Lambo, as quoted by Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999). According to

Lambo, African child is “the child who finds himself or herself being born in a very welcoming and accepting culture. Everybody is ready for his or her arrival and his or her basic needs are even met before it happens” (p. 109). This elicits a further question: *Will such a treasured child be abused, neglected and exploited?* In a presentation at a workshop on child abuse in Nairobi, Diaz, cited by Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999), quoted a confidential comment by an influential woman participant that might help in an attempt to answer this question. According to the woman, “No African mother will abuse and neglect her own child!” (p. 112). In the face of glaring issues of child labour in Africa, such a comment may sound absurd. However, “it is important in the sense that it reveals the sincerity in the affection African mothers [or generally, parents] have toward their children” (Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah, 1999, p.112). This seems to suggest that, what ILO and other human right organisations regard as child labour may not, at all, be regarded as such in Africa, and for that matter, Ghana. It may rather be seen as an act of love through which parents wholeheartedly shape their children to fit into the society. “The implication is that different cultures interpret child abuse, [and for that matter child labour], in different ways” (Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah, 1999, p. 112).

There is an adage in Ghana that, “Hard work never kills; it only makes an individual resilient”. From this perspective, doing a hard work might be seen as being in the child’s own interest. With this background, a Ghanaian parent or guardian introducing a child to hazardous labour might think that he is, directly or indirectly, fulfilling the provision of Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Section 2 of Ghana’s Children’s Act, both of which require that the interest of the child shall be paramount in any matter concerning a child. Indeed, as Roger (2001) said in relation to violence within the family, parents who put their children in hazardous labour may not be acting alone but are being used as weapons by cultures in their effort to control and respond to their ecologies.

#### **4. The Need for Culturally Relevant Definitions**

Fighting a menace that is so culturally ingrained is not an easy task. The best way, perhaps, is to redefine the concept to suit the culture as suggested by some researchers. As Parviz Koochafkan said, the issue of child labour is very complex and “should be looked into case by case to avoid generalization” (FAO, 2006). Since different cultures perceive child labour differently, there is the need for culturally relevant definitions to suit different cultures. This is because, as Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999) said, “Complications in definition tend to arise when one approaches the definition from one-dimensional or one cultural viewpoint, without giving much consideration to the multicultural or multiracial realities in the meanings attached to the various approaches to child upbringing” (p. 112). A culturally relevant definition will help to identify clearly, in context, what is child labour and what is not. Based on such distinction, appropriate intervention programmes can be developed for education and prevention purposes. As Kral et al (2010) indicated, many of our interventions fail because they do not change “the rules of the game” (p. 52). In this regard, I agree with Ike and Twumasi-Ankrah (1999) on their assessment below:

Since definition pre-empts the nature of preventive paradigm for any form of child abuse, an operational definition would minimise the difficulties of a global definition, as well as reduce the negative impact of ambitious holistic preventive measures which is a sine qua non for such definition (Ike & Twumasi-Ankrah, 1999, p. 112).

This need for a culturally relevant definition becomes even more apparent when we examine the definitions of the “child”, “child labour”, and the related “child light work” in international laws and the national laws of Ghana. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, and the Children’s Act of the Republic of Ghana, all define a child as any person below the age of eighteen years. In terms of work, the Convention on the Rights of the Child has this to say:

States Parties recognize the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child’s education, or to be harmful to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development (Article 32, 1).

This provision seems to imply that certain jobs are permitted to be performed by children, provided the work does not impact negatively on their education, health and development. This becomes even clearer when we consider the Minimum Age Convention, 1973. Article 2 of this convention pegs the minimum age for employment at 15 years (paragraph 3) and 14 years in certain circumstances (paragraph 4). Article 7 goes further to permit the employment of children as young as 12 years on “light work” which is not harmful to their health or development, and does not interfere with their attendance at school or vocational training (para. 1 (a), (b) & para. 4). The Children’s Act of Ghana also sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years (Section 89) and 13 years for light work (Section 90). It can, thus, be said that neither international laws nor the national laws

of Ghana frown completely on child work. They rather frown on hazardous work or exploitative labour, otherwise known as child labour, especially its worst forms.

ILO (2002) defines child labour as any work that:

(i) is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to children; and (ii) interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, by obliging them to leave school prematurely, or by requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Article 3 of the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention goes further to define worst forms of child labour as:

- (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.

Article 4 (1) requires that the type of work referred to under Article 3(d) be determined by national laws or regulations or by the competent authority of the member state.

According to ILO, (cited in Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007), Worst Forms of Child Labour can be categorized into two – unconditional worst forms and hazardous work. The unconditional worst forms “are often illegal and also unacceptable for adults; and include all those activities whose status as worst forms cannot be altered no matter what is done to improve conditions of work” (p. 4). Hazardous work, on the other hand, “includes those forms that need to be determined on a national level by the competent authority after consultations with organizations of employers and workers; and some of the activities can be improved by changing the circumstances” (p. 4).

The definitions of child labour as well as its worst forms presented above also support the point that certain kinds of work are permitted for children. The bottom line is that children should not be employed to do any kind of work that can impact negatively on their health, development and education. Conversely, light work that does not affect their health, and personal development, or interfere with their education, such as helping their parents care for the home and the family, assisting in family business or earning pocket money outside school hours and during holidays are not classified as child labour (Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007; Government of Ghana, 1998; ILO, 2002; ILO, 1973). In fact, ILO (2002) acknowledges that some of these activities even contribute to children’s development, and provide them with skills, attitudes and experience, thereby helping to prepare them to be useful and productive members of society during their adult life.

The question about what constitute hazardous work and what constitute light work then becomes critical here. Whereas unconditional worst forms of child labour are easy to identify, the distinction between hazardous work and child light work is very hard to discern. ILO (2004) acknowledges the fact that in many cases this distinction is not clear, especially in rural agricultural situations where certain kinds of work form part of socio-cultural traditions. This is, no doubt, the case with agriculture and domestic work in Ghana. ILO’s explanation of light work seems to favour subsistence and family agriculture. According to ILO, some participation of children in family farming, small-scale fisheries and livestock husbandry should not be considered as child labour because they contribute to the inter-generational transfer of skills and children’s food security (ILO, 2011b). Thus, hazardous agriculture is often viewed in terms of plantations and commercial farming. In Ghana, however, agriculture is mostly on subsistence basis. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to identify a plantation or commercial farm in Ghana. In fact, Asuming-Brempong et al (2007), assert that there are “no cocoa farm plantations in Ghana” (p. xv). This implies that using plantations and commercial agriculture as yardstick for determining hazardous work in Ghana will pose a lot of challenges.

In terms of domestic work, the definition given by Domestic Workers Convention only covers the activities of persons engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship (Article 1). This definition does not suffice in the case of Ghana where most child domestic workers either work for their parents or other extended family relatives without pay. Even the definition of “child domestic work” given by ILO experts Martin Oelz and José M. Ramírez as referring to “domestic tasks performed by children in the home of a third party or employer” (ILO, 2011c) does not fit perfectly into the Ghanaian context. This is because, an extended family member for whom a Ghanaian child performs domestic work is accorded all but equal parental rights and responsibilities as the biological parent and will hardly be viewed as a third party. As Nukunya (2003) observed, in Ghana even though procreation is the responsibility of parents, the training of the children is not exclusively theirs. Rather, the parents’ roles are shared by the extended family members.

In view of this, it can be said that the ILO’s decision that hazardous work and light work should be determined at the national level is a step in the right direction. In order to design appropriate preventive intervention, “it is necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the position of children in their families and communities” (Twum-Danso, 2009, p. 415). This is attainable only at the local level since “the community is where the experts are” (Kral et al, 2010, p. 51).

Unfortunately, the Children’s Act of Ghana which was promulgated to domesticate international conventions that deal with child right issues, including child labour, does not seem to reflect the culture of the people. As Laird (2002) mentioned, “this legislation was imitative of Britain’s 1989 Children Act” making it difficult to be implemented in the “socio-economic and cultural context of Ghana” (p. 893). In fact, Part V, Sub-Part I of the Children’s Act of Ghana, which deals with child labour, is completely silent on agriculture and domestic work, which, perhaps, should have dominated this Sub-Part, considering the fact that agriculture alone accounts for about 89.3% percent of child work in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008), and that about 90 percent of all children 7 to 14 years in the country are involved in some forms of household chores (Canagarajah & Coloumbe, 1997). No wonder there is still “no agreement yet among the stakeholders as to what constitutes hazardous work in the cocoa sector” (Asuming-Brempong et al, 2007). This often leads to misconceptions about the phenomenon: while some people, especially child right activists, might consider almost every child work as tantamount to child labour, others, mainly parents, might see almost all levels of child work as being in the interest of the child. Thus, interventions may hardly be appreciated by the “perpetrators” who may consider the activists as cultural intruders who want to undermine their culture and “spoil” their children. It also leads to conflicting statistics in the area since what one researcher considers as child labour may be seen otherwise by another researcher.

## 5. Conclusion

Child labour is a long standing socio-economic problem that is threatening the rights of many children in the world today. The phenomenon lingers despite the efforts being made by world leaders to combat it. Many researchers attribute the persistence of child labour to poverty and, indeed, this cannot be disputed in many cases. However, some recent researches have revealed that culture plays a very important role in child labour. A thorough examination of such studies in the light of Ghanaian culture reveals that child labour persists because it has some cultural bases. Ghanaians cherish hard work and they always want to inculcate this spirit in their young ones. This is reflected in the fact that Ghanaians introduce their children to almost all their occupational and domestic activities. With this zeal, they hardly differentiate hazardous work from light work, especially when it comes to farming and domestic activities. Unfortunately, international conventions that seek to promote and protect children’s rights also do not draw a clear line between hazardous work and light work. This makes their implementation in Ghana very difficult. It is therefore suggested that, in order to eliminate child labour in Ghana, there is the need for a culturally relevant definition that will clearly differentiate child labour from child light work. This calls for thorough empirical research into the various activities that children are engaged in to determine which of them are harmful and which are not. Based on findings from such empirical studies, appropriate educational programmes can be drawn for preventive purposes. Besides, government, based on such findings, could come out with legislations that define vividly the kind of work that children can do and what they cannot do.

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