



Social Support Foundation



Child Slavery, Child Labor and Exploitation of Children in Mining Communities Obuasi, Ghana | January 2013 Summary of Findings

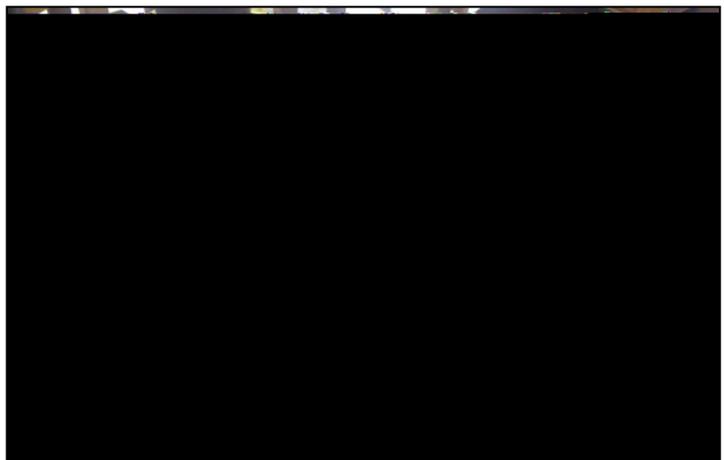
Free the Slaves, Participatory Development Associates, and Social Support Foundation

Introduction

In 2012, a partnership of Free the Slaves (FTS), Participatory Development Associates (PDA), and Social Support Foundation (SSF) conducted qualitative, participatory research into modern forms of slavery, including child sex trafficking and the related and overlapping problem of hazardous child labor. The research aimed to document the dynamics of exploitation and abuse of children in and around Obuasi, Ghana, where informal small-scale and artisanal gold mining occurs. While Ghanaian human rights groups have been concerned for many years about the enslavement and exploitation of children linked with so-called “*galamsey*” mining sites, which are sites where unlicensed informal mining takes place, very little research has been carried out in this area.

The FTS/PDA/SSF research was designed primarily to understand the narratives of exploited and enslaved children in order to guide programs that strengthen community-based protection and prevention. Local perspectives on the causes and consequences of this abuse were also gathered. These narratives and perspectives were used to prepare illustrated booklets to mobilize local communities around the protection of children, which are currently in use within the same communities.

A secondary objective of the research was to inform government agencies and civil society about the issues of child slavery, sexual abuse and other forms of hazardous child labor.



Children participate in a community mapping exercise, as part of the research. Photo: Ghana Child Rights Team

Methodology

PDA trained local residents in methods of participatory research, and in February and March 2012 these trainees conducted qualitative research in 10 communities. Data was collected through 49 focus groups at schools, mines, and local government offices, as well as through 61 individual interviews with miners, children, district officials, opinion leaders and other community members. (The 10 communities were located in the districts of Adansi North, Amansie Central and Obuasi Municipal in the Ashanti Region of Ghana.)

Findings

Informal mining is an important part of a broader livelihood strategy for poor and very poor Ghanaians. For farmers, it supplements income during the “off” farming season. Nevertheless, families often do not have the financial resources to weather economic and environmental shocks. To supplement family incomes or to earn enough to cover their own basic and educational needs, children (especially boys) between the ages of 10 to 18, and even reportedly as young as 6, become involved with mining activities.

Some of these children work to help meet their families’ basic needs, but others want to earn income to help cover the costs of staying in school. Once they are working, there is a greater likelihood they will drop out of school. If children drop out of school to work in the mines, this tends to reinforce their reliance on *galamsey* mining as a future income source, as well, presumably because they are not gaining other skills through schooling.

While grassroots groups working in these mining areas believe many children end up working in the mines because they have been coerced by parents or relatives through explicit or implicit mental or physical threat, and thus would be classified as child labor slavery, such cases were not documented through this pilot research phase. FTS’ research partners have indicated that obtaining such sensitive case details was difficult during this research process; they were unable to access many of the mining areas that may have had child laborers present, and much care was taken in asking children sensitive questions that may have revealed coercion by a child’s parents but carried the risk of re-traumatizing the child. FTS’ experience has shown that the Worst Forms of Child Labor often occurs simultaneously with child labor slavery. Further engagement with these communities will help reveal whether child labor slavery is indeed a systematic problem.

Engagement of children in informal mining has health and wellbeing consequences for children of poor and very poor households. Boys work at the informal mines where there is no enforcement of safety protections. Their health is severely affected, including as a result of handling toxic chemicals.

Primarily men and boys are engaged in direct mining work. Women and girls have limited access to opportunities in the mining process apart from carrying loads and supplying food and drink, and many rely on the income secured through that work. The income for those jobs is generally lower than for some of the other more skilled jobs carried out by men.

It is common for girls as young as 10, pressured by economic necessity, to be exploited sexually by the male mine workers, who would provide financial support in exchange for sex, effectively turning the girls into sex slaves because of their lack of legal and psychological capacity to consent. Respondents suggested that family members often turn a blind eye to such abuse. Those who exchange financial support for sex with girls may be guilty of sex trafficking under international legal definitions. In cases where their parents – responsible for protecting their own children – are complicit as a means of reducing their own financial burden in caring for a child, they may also be guilty of the crime of sex trafficking, depending on the specific facts of each case. Respondents described incidents where girls suffered pressure or violence from men in their community and then, because they lacked support and assistance to cope with these incidents, girls would become more

regularly exploited for sex. (While this research cannot rule out the presence of third party sex traffickers profiting from the prostitution of girls, that phenomenon was not uncovered in this research.)

Once girls become sexually exploited, they face social stigmatization if the situation becomes known. Dropping out of school is common. Reported health consequences include high rates of attempted abortion, including through over-the-counter drugs or other chemicals, with attendant health risks. Despite the physical and emotional risks, research respondents said that many girls feel pressured to stay in exploitative relationships because of financial reasons. With limited use of contraceptives, early childbirth also carries health risks for these girls.

Many respondents also suggested that girls and boys are developing a culture of early sexual activity, and that they feel increasing pressure, either from male and female peers or from *galamsey* workers, to have sex at an early age.

Research highlighted that traditional social systems of protection are currently weakened or rarely in use in and around *galamsey* gold mining communities (presumably in part because these are more transient communities). Members of these communities were also unaware of legal protections for children under Ghanaian law. At the same time, local district governments have little will or capacity to provide entitlements to vulnerable families or to prosecute offenders. Interviewees reported having limited trust in government systems. As a result, cases of sexual violence against girls are often “resolved” through informal mediation between the parties, rather than legal action. Community leaders expressed a sense of helplessness in the face of their desire to address the issues of child sex trafficking, hazardous child labor and related forms of exploitation in *galamsey* communities.

Recommendations arising from the research

These recommendations are intended to guide local facilitators as they assist community groups in demanding adequate child protection responses. They provide a reference point for community advocacy with local officials to demand that they meet their obligations to curtail sex trafficking, child labor slavery, hazardous child labor and other forms of child exploitation in Ghana’s informal mining communities.

1. **Training**. Build the capacity of state institutions responsible for child protection, such as Department of Social Welfare, at the local level, as well as traditional and religious leaders, by providing comprehensive trainings on how to identify and respond to sex trafficking, sex abuse and child slavery, and hazardous child labor.
2. **Resources**. Provide adequate resources to state institutions, including vehicles and motorbikes for the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU), Department of Social Welfare (DSW), Commission on Human Right and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), and the National Commission of Civic Education (N.C.C.E), to help them quickly respond to abuse cases. Provide resources to implement educational programs to prevent the exploitation of children.
3. **Community Action Planning**. Enable community groups within the mining areas to develop Community Action Plans (CAPs) through which local residents identify steps that they and the relevant local authorities including schools can take to address sexual abuse and exploitation of children.
4. **Child Protection Groups**. Form active and well-trained child protection groups in each community to help identify local risks to children and act to protect them, including through monitoring victims of exploitation and abuse, to ensure they receive the appropriate services and follow-up care.
5. **Procedures**. Clarify procedures for reporting cases of sexual abuse and exploitation.

6. Law Enforcement. Ensure the effective enforcement of criminal laws against child slavery, sex trafficking and sexual abuse, worst forms of child labor and other forms of child exploitation. Review and curtail the use of the arbitral (in-house) resolution of rape cases between perpetrators and guardians of victims, which tend to undermine justice and secure impunity for perpetrators.
7. Public Awareness. Use community information centers with speakerphones and radios, such as the Community Public Address Systems (COMPAS), to disseminate regular messages to local residents about children’s rights, child slavery and sex trafficking, hazardous child labor, child labor slavery and sexual violence.



[28] He worked in the Chanfan site as a danka boy. [29-31] Koduah did all the work the ghetto owner asked him to do, like washing and extracting of gold with mercury, pounding stones and shanking.



Koduah washing and extracting gold with mercury, pounding stones and shanking.

A section from one of the Child Rights learning groups booklets focusing on child labor, for use in informal mining communities. The booklet was prepared based on the narratives arising from the research (English version).