

## The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Child Rights Promotion in Ghana

Benson, G.H<sup>1</sup>, Achanso, A. S<sup>2</sup>, Mohammed, A-R<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, University of Education, Winneba-Ghana

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer Tamale-Ghana

<sup>3</sup>Senior Lecturer, Tamale-Ghana

### Abstract

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is so far, the most relevant and comprehensive global legal international instrument on the rights of Children. The effectiveness of its implementation within the jurisdiction of Ghana (first country in the world to ratify the Convention, as a reflection of the country's original commitment to the course of the rights and welfare of the child), was critically examined in this modest study. Background issues on the UNCRC, the government of Ghana's action plans towards the realization of the goals and objectives of the Convention, successes chalked, challenges encountered, and the way forward, were systematically explored. In terms of research methodology, the paper mainly draws on content analyses of existing literature regarding the implementation of the UNCRC in Ghana. Additionally, interview guides were applied to gather relevant information from 20 stakeholders made up of state institutions, government officials, civil society organizations (NGOs), children and parents, *inter alia*. It was found out that, whilst the government of Ghana has instituted legal and institutional reforms towards the realization of the objectives of the Convention in the country, lack of political-will remains a key challenge in that regard. Moreover, even though the UNCRC instrument has promoted Children's rights in Ghana, gaps still exist within the implementation processes, usually emanating from the minimal commitment of stakeholders and the abysmal funding of implementing agencies by government. To this end, the paper suggests that, government backs its reforms with political-will by providing needful financial, technical and human resources towards the realization of Convention's goals in Ghana.

**Key Words:** constitution; funding; government; implementation; and stakeholders.

## Introduction

The evolution of Child rights on the global scale within the human rights discourse, has been nothing but one of regrets. Occasioned not only from the position of gross cruelty and the selfish attitude of parents (who regarded them as part of their properties without separate rights and status of their own), but also from the display of ineptitude and injustice from the adult world. Moreover, the wheel on which this evolution journeyed through was regrettably on a piecemeal fashion in most cases.

Indeed, documented evidence and undisputed records indicate that children those days were also not any better treated in the western world (Hart, 1991). In Europe and parts of the Americas, children were subjects of exploitation and violence in the pre-industrial period, characterized by a widespread phenomenon of child labor, that at the time, involved even four and five-year old children (Alaimo, 2002). Much so, the idea of formal child education and the protection of children from harm and exploitation by the adult world where children are accorded special rights were non-existent during this period in question (Hart, 1991). Elsewhere in Asia and Africa, the plight of children were worse off as children were not only abused and exploited, but were also traded off as slaves to work far away in plantations from dawn to dusk. Most of them eventually lost their human identity and dignity (Meadow, Mok and Rosenburg, 2007). In addition, in many African and Asian households and schools until date, it remains an all too common phenomenon to see children being subjected to harsh physical corporal punishments at the least of provocations (UNICEF, 2012). At the same time, there is a dearth of reliable information in these areas on issues of child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation of children by adults, child ‘streetism’ and the prevalence of harmful sociocultural practices that have negative consequences on future generations (Audu, Geidman & Jarna, 2009). This narrative does not preclude Ghana where child trafficking and child labor cases are on the increase, despite efforts made by government to manage cases of child abuse within the country (UNICEF, 2014).

Nevertheless, beginning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, the conceptualization of childhood emerged, following the phenomenon of socio-political-economic advancement amongst countries of the world (Audu, Geidman & Jarna, 2009). It was at this stage that international organizations and civilized states gave children status and protected them from undesirable behavior and threats within the society, with the attendant emergence of the idea of protecting children and providing them rights (Hart, 1991; Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman, 2016). Several international and national legal documents including the famous UNCRC came to be enacted, that gave children vast rights that cater for their health, educational, growing needs, amongst others. This paper understudies the implementation of this all-time important legal document on Children’s Rights within the Ghanaian jurisdiction, the first country to ratify the Convention in 1990.

## **PART I: An Introductory Note to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989**

### **I. 1: Historical Journey of Child Rights**

Child's rights within human rights discourse are comparatively without depth in history. The discussion of child's rights only gained attention in recent years, following Hart's (1991) prepositions of the concept of childhood and child. According to Alaimo (2002), changing economic, social, cultural and political circumstances from the pre-industrial period through to the mid-twentieth century to the present, are key factors that have shaped Child's rights. Before the sixteenth century, there was no main grasp of the conception of childhood as a distinct period of life (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). Children beyond six years of age were considered as *small adults* and were therefore not separated from adulthood (Aries 1962; Hart 1991). At best, children during the pre-industrial period were regarded as the property of their parents who had no separate rights and status of their own (Hart 1991; Stier 1978). As a result, child labour was a widespread phenomenon in the pre-industrial period, involving even four and five-year-old children (Alaimo 2002; Aries 1962). Much so, the concept of education, schools, protection from harm and special rights were rare or non-existent during this same period (Hart 1991).

Starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century, the phenomenon of technological and socio-economic advancement resulted in the conceptualization of childhood. It was at this stage that children were considered as being endangered by the conditions of immigration, industrialization and urbanization; in a manner that would predispose them to undesirable behavior and threats within the society (Hart 1991). These developments shifted the agenda about children's status and resulted in the emergence of the idea of protecting children and providing them rights in relation to parents, and employers (Alaimo 2002; Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). From then on and with time, society started regarding children, not as properties, but as a unique group that it has the responsibility to maintain and protect from parental and governmental neglect (Hart 1991). For these reasons, France and Britain passed Laws against child endangerment, where the state-guaranteed children's rights through several provisions such as healthcare, acceptable housing, recreational facilities, freedom from work and granting of access to public schools, amongst others (Alaimo 2002).

Nevertheless, it was during the 20<sup>th</sup> century that many countries came to formulate legislation on child labor and education, in particular, granting legal recognition to children as *persons* (Cohen 2002). Hallett and Prout (2003) have said that this widespread recognition of a child's right was premised on the view that children are weak and vulnerable creatures that need protection. The emerging *personhood* status of children began the justification for the child's right to protection and self-determination (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). Besides, the increasing awareness of children's right to participation according to Ruck and Horn (2008), gave rise to a global shift towards granting children legal personality and also giving them a greater measure of autonomy regarding decisions that affect their lives and development (Chemy & Shing 2008; Perterson-Badali & Ruck 2008).

Increasingly, global attention skewed towards the development of a lasting framework that would allow the active participation of children within the civil society (Cohen, 2002). That explains why today, we witness the essence of all these historical efforts by international

organizations, states and individuals, as child rights find place in legal documents that are being implemented by governments across the globe within an adult world space. Indeed, it was in response to the global dynamics that various international treaties and conventions on the right of the child emerged in the aftermath of the First World War and subsequently the post-2<sup>nd</sup> World War eras. For example, in 1924, the League of Nations adopted the Declaration of Geneva on children's right, within which a concise list of what society 'owed the child' were provided, establishing the idea of child rights (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). Then followed the United Nations General Assembly endorsement of the Declaration of the Right of the Child in 1959. The Declaration reiterated the fact that every child has a right to a happy childhood. In 1979, the United Nations (UN) slated the International Year of the Child to celebrate the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 1959 Declaration, where a new treaty for children's rights was proposed (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). This proposal culminated in the enactment of the Convention on the Right of the Child (CRC). Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1959, the most comprehensive International Convention outlined a wide range of child rights including political, social, economic and civil rights, which provisions we have discussed below (Ben-Arieh 2005; Ruck & Horn 2008).

## **I.2: Justification for CRC**

Many scholars have emphasized the significance of the child's rights instrument. Perterson-Badali and Ruck (2008) have argued that, for obvious reasons and for some conditions, which children find themselves in, it will not be right if they enjoy the same rights as adults. A situation that calls for the enactment of a special instrument as CRC that seeks to address the challenges and concerns about children in the adult world. As opined by Bell (2008), children's rights are entitlements (rights) that afford special consideration to children based on their unique and vulnerable status. Foremost, the state of the physical and mental immaturity of children justifies the enactment of a human rights document that, would address the growth and developmental needs of children. This underpins the provisions of the declaration on the rights of the child in 1959 (Para. 4), and subsequently the convention on the Rights of the Child which recognizes the vulnerability of the child who due to their mental and physical state need special care including appropriate legal protection. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) gives similar reasons. It asserts in paragraph 5 of the preamble thus: "...the child, due to the needs of his physical and mental development requires particular care with regard to health, physical, mental, moral and social development, and requires legal protection in conditions of freedom, dignity and security." Paragraph three of the Preamble of ACRWC, lists these needs as the socio-economic cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger, as considerations that informed the adoption of the document. On this same basis, Article 25 (2) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) has also affirmed that Childhood status in all forms are entitled to special care and assistance, which every country is urged to provide. Earlier, the 1924 Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child, in paragraph 2 state, "The child that is hungry must be fed; the child



that is sick must be nursed; the child that is backward must be helped; the delinquent child must be reclaimed; and the orphaned and the waif must be sheltered and assisted”.

Second, the exclusion and discrimination of children the world over suffer justify a special human rights instrument for them. Against this backdrop, Article 2 of the UDHR states as follows: “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. The ACRWC instrument also reinforces the principles of non-exclusion, all inclusion, and non-discrimination (Article 3).

### **I.3: The Main Provisions of the CRC**

The CRC has three main sections. The first section consisting of the preamble sets out the major underlying principles of the Convention. The second section consists of substantive UNCRC articles that sets out the perimeters of child rights as well as obligations of governments (Part I, Articles 1-41). This section is also referred to as the ‘three Ps’, regarding their overlapping nature (Alderson 2008). In addition, section spelt out the implementation provisions which define how compliance with the CRC by governments and international organizations is to be monitored and fostered (Part II, Articles 42-45). The final section deals with the conditions under which the CRC comes into effect (Part III, Articles 46-54). In addition to the 54-articled legal document, two Optional Protocols are adopted by the General Assembly in May 2000, applicable to those states that have signed and ratified them. These are the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention of the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography.

The Preamble of the CRC recognises the family as the fundamental societal platform within which the growth and harmonious well-being of children may be guaranteed. As such, families are enjoined to protect and assist children. Under Articles 4, 5, 11, 18 and 19, children are to be accorded parental guidance, parental responsibilities, and protection from abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, the definition of who is a child is left to geographical, historical, and cultural determinations and social peculiarities across the world; whereby, there is no universally accepted definition of who a child is. However, Article 1 of CRC defines and set the age of a child as every human being below the age of eighteen years.

#### **I.3.1: Principles and Rights under the CRC**

Barring a set of theoretical principles justifying the protection of children’s rights in the CRC document, any assertions or legislation on child’s rights may remain unpersuasive. It was in respect of this that the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child meeting in 1991 for the very first time, drafted guidelines on how governments should write and structure their initial reports on the implementation of the CRC. The formulation of the principles, which draw from Articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the Convention, include the following: the principle of equality and non-discrimination; the best interest of the child; the right to life, survival and development; and participation rights. First, the ‘equality principle’ calls on state parties to respect and ensure compliance to the rights set forth under the present Convention within their respective jurisdictions. To be devoid of discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status

(Article 2). Second, Article 3 (1) which is on the ‘best interest of the child principle’, stipulates that when taking actions concerning children, public and private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, should do so within the tenets of the best interests of the child. Third, the ‘life, survival, and development principle’ give children rights to resources, skills and contributions that are necessary for their survival and full development —rights to adequate food, shelter, clean water, formal education, primary health care, leisure and recreation, cultural activities and information about their rights. Nowak (2005) acknowledges the element of development as a cornerstone of children’s rights.

Finally, the ‘principle of participation’ as spelt out in Article 12 (1), charges states which have ratified the Convention to grant 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. Article 12 of the CRC has been identified as one of the most radical and far-reaching aspects of the Convention (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). The participation of children principle recognizes the dignified child who has specific abilities and needs, as an active and influential subject, whose right to participation is a major sign of the transition towards a conception of rights suited to children and their evolving capacities (Freeman 2000; Lansdown 2001; CRC 2004).

In the words of Lansdown (1994) and Troope (1996), another important typology apart from the principles within the contemporary literature on child’s rights is the “three Ps” — Protection, Provision and Participation rights. The CRC legal document was framed as well to cover this typology. Under the Provision right, the CRC outlines the child’s right to adequate provision of services, resources, health, an adequate standard of living, education, cultural life amongst others, that will enable the child to develop his or her potentials (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016; Ruck & Horn 2008). Protection rights grant the child rights to protection from neglect, abuse, exploitation, violence, cruel and degrading treatment, discrimination, invasion of privacy, hazardous work, and armed conflict (Barnes 2009; Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016). Lastly, Participation rights grant children the right to be respected as active members and contributors to the affairs of the family and society (Alderson 2008). Other sets of rights captured in the CRC document are the nurturance and self-determination rights. These rights grant children a measure of control over their circumstances such as freedom of religion, association and of expression; and also, are rights that are based on the child’s decision of what is within his/her own best interest and personal prerogative (Bradshaw et al. 2011; Ruck & Horn 2008; Rogers & Wrightsman 1979).

It is understood that, the First, Second, and Third Generational Rights are imbedded in the CRC document. Articles 2, 12, 13 14, 15, 16, 17 cover the First Generational Rights of Civil and Political Rights that include non-discrimination, opinion of the child, freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of association, right to privacy and access to information. Articles 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31 capture the Social, Economic and Cultural rights under Second Generation Rights that include sound health and health services, social security and adequate standard of living, education and leisure, recreation and cultural needs of the child. Articles 8 and 30 of CRC recognizes minority or indigenous children rights on the preservation of identity and children of minorities/indigenous groups under Third Generational Rights.

**I.3.2: State Responsibilities under the CRC**

States, which have signed and ratified the Convention, come under obligations classified as such: to respect, to protect and to fulfil. Under the obligation to fulfil, states are required under the CRC to take positive actions that ensure that human rights are exercisable. The state obligation to respect the rights of children, enjoins the state to allow the child his/her right to enjoy rights stipulated under the Convention without let or hindrance. At the same time, states should not directly or indirectly facilitate aid or abet any infringement of children's rights and should ensure that all actors respect children rights (Article 2). Finally, to protect the rights of the child, states are required to protect the child against abuses by non-state actors at all times (Article 2). Articles 22, 23 and 38 in particular, grant special rights and protection to children with special needs, such as those with disabilities, refugee children and children in armed conflict. Articles 43-54 that are on the implementation and monitoring, measures require that governments and international organizations work harmoniously to ensure the protection and implementation of children's rights under the Convention.

**I.3.3: Strengths and Weaknesses of the CRC**

The first strength of the CRC instrument is that it reflects or mirrors the realities of the lives of children worldwide and has significance and trustworthiness in several contexts. For instance, it challenges socio-cultural views that conflict with the rights of the child, such as attitudes concerning children with disabilities, parental rights and obligations towards their children and the definition of a child. CRC has changed the way children were viewed, reinforcing the status of children as human beings with a distinct set of rights, instead of being seen as passive objects of care and charity. Second, the CRC is, without doubt, the first international legally binding child rights instrument that binds ratifying states that include the full range of human rights for children through appropriate legislative, administrative and other measures within respective state jurisdictions (Article 4). In view of this, many member states have committed themselves to protecting the rights of children through legislations or Acts. For example, in Ghana, the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560) is evidence of the state's commitment to promoting and protecting the rights of children as enshrined in the CRC. By this Ghana, the first country to ratify the CRC instrument holds itself answerable for this obligation before the international Community. Third, CRC serves as a Guiding Document for Children in particular and for every human being in every nation in general, when dealing with children. Last but not the least, the CRC sets international standards within which children should be protected, such as the right to life, survival and development of the child.

That said, the CRC has many identifiable weaknesses as well. First, the legal document is not universally applicable as the rights based on Western assumptions, which do not take into account, local cultural practices, beliefs, and social and economic differences (Children Bureau, 2016). For instance, in China, the individual is viewed as subordinated to the family, whilst in the Western world; children are seen as autonomous individuals. In other societies, children simply do not exist, whilst within many African societies, the Child is held as part of a wider network but not an individual as such (Bradshaw et al. 2011). Second, there are not enough checks and sanctions put in place by framers of the document to ensure adherence to the basic provisions of the document. Third, the Convention failed to make provisions that will cover all children and cover all aspects of the children's welfare and special needs, such as children who are orphaned due to HIV. The creation of Optional Protocols is a clear

indication that the Convention as a world document did not capture all the special needs of all manner of children. Finally, the issue of implementation by ratifying countries is hugely problematic, as many of them do not even submit reports to the committee as obliged; perhaps a portrayal of a lukewarm commitment to adherence of Convention provisions (Fottrell 1999). Even where 191 countries have signed up to the Convention, a significant number of governments have failed to implement provisions of the legal document that binds such countries.

These shortfalls and challenges of the CRC notwithstanding, it is one of the best binding International Conventions, which implementation has brought great light and hope for children of the world today and for future generations. The paper suggests a few things that will improve the implementation of the Convention by member-states and also improve a system that gives the essence of living to our children. First, a call for the review of the UNCRC legal document to address issues bothering on the universal character of the Convention and its implementation. Second, the call for the enactment of ‘biting’ sanctions against violators of provisions. Lastly, the call for the strict adherence to provisions once a country ratifies the Convention.

## **PART II: Implementation of the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child in Ghana: Successes and Challenges**

Following the ratification, the country has implemented various policies and programmes towards achieving the goals and objectives of the Convention. These cut across civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights that are discussed below.

### **II.1: Definitions**

#### ***The Definition of a Child in Ghanaian Context***

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Children’s Act (Act 560) define a child as a person below 18 years of age. This definition is in line with the definition provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

#### ***Criminal Responsibility of a Child***

The minimum age of criminal responsibility of a child in Ghana is set at 12 years. Before then, children are assumed not to have the capacity to infringe the penal law.

#### ***Legal Marriage Age in Ghana***

The legal minimum age for marriage in Ghana is 18 years for both males and females (Section 14 of the Children’s Act 560). Section 14 of the Children’s Act (Act 560) is also applicable to customary marriage and marriage under CAP 129 (Mohammedan Marriage). However, for marriages under Ordinance (CAP 127), provisions are to the effect that a valid marriage is contracted where the essential validity and procedural requirements are met, with the minimum age being 21 years. In addition, Section 59 of the Marriages Act provides that the minimum age for Ordinance Marriage is 21. However, where a person is below 21 years and there is evidence to the effect that no parental or necessary consent was obtained, the purported marriage shall be void.



## **II.2: Policies and Acts of Parliament**

### ***The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Policy***

The age for the completion of compulsory education in Ghana (that is, the basic level of education) is 16 years. To ensure that children enroll and complete this level of education, the government introduced the Capitation Grant and the School Feeding Programme under the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy. Regarding the Capitation Grant, the government absorbs school fees that were previously paid by parents of schoolchildren. This has been a relief to many parents allowing children from poor backgrounds to access formal education. Similarly, the School Feeding Programme provides one hot meal daily for schoolchildren especially in schools in rural areas where poverty has been a barrier to many children from attending school.

### ***Education Act, 2008 (Act 778)***

The Education Act, 2008 (Act 778) provides for an educational system in Ghana that produces individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, aptitudes and attitudes to become functional and productive citizens for the total development of the nation. The Act, therefore, resulted in the inclusion of Early Childhood Education (2-4 years of age) to the formal education system in the country.

### ***The Ghana National Commission on Children***

The Ghana National Commission on Children (Repeal) Act, 2006 (Act 701) repealed the Ghana National Commission on Children Decree 1979 (AFRCD 66), converting the Ghana National Commission on Children to a Department of Children under the Ministry of Gender, Women, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP). The Department is responsible for implementing child-related policies, programmes and strategies of the Ministry. It also carries out research, co-ordinates the implementation of child rights, and monitors the operations of relevant child-focused agencies through the compilation of periodic status reports on child rights implementation, which is submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

### ***The Domestic Violence Act***

The Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732) was enacted to address violence against women and children at the domestic level. Domestic violence has deep social roots as it interrelates with child poverty; health concerns especially sexually transmitted diseases, *et cetera*. The Act was passed and a National Policy and Plan of Action developed to cover a ten-year period from 2009 to 2019 (NGOCRC, 2014).

As part of the implementation strategy, a secretariat has been established within the office of the Minister Gender and Social Protection to address domestic violence-related issues in line with the Domestic Violence Act. Similarly, the Domestic Violence Management Board has been set up to work towards the establishment of shelters for victims of domestic violence; rescue and rehabilitation of victims; effective prosecution of perpetrators; increased sensitization of the effects of domestic violence.

In addition, a Domestic Violence Fund has been established to assist victims of domestic violence with skills training, medical bills, etc. There is also the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit within the Ghana Police Service with the mandate to speedily

investigate, mediate and prosecute domestic violence-related cases against all persons, especially women and children.

### *Outlaw of Female Circumcision*

The Criminal Code (Amendment) Act, 2007 (741) amends the Criminal Code, 1960 (Act 29) to change the reference "female circumcision" to "female genital mutilation" to reflect the actual nature of the offence regarding female circumcision in Ghana. The Act widens the scope of responsibility in relation to the offence, as well provides for related matters. The amendment of the Act in this regard aims to curb incidences of female genital mutilation and its consequences on the health and sexual rights of women.

### *The Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694)*

The Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694) was passed for the prevention, reduction and punishment of human trafficking, the rehabilitation and reintegration of trafficked persons, etc. Media reports indicate that most victims of human trafficking are women and children. A Human Trafficking Secretariat and a Management Board have been established at MoGCSP. The Secretariat is to manage the day-to-day functions of the Management Board, whilst the Management Board plays its advisory role to combat human trafficking in the country strategically.

Furthermore, an Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of the Ghana Police Service has been established with the mandate to rescue victims of human trafficking, including children, investigate and prosecute perpetrators. The establishment of the Unit has broadened the outlook of the Police on human trafficking, leading to arrest and prosecution of perpetrators and the rescue of victims.

### *Persons with Disability Act*

The Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) came into force on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2006. The Act emphasizes the rights of children with disabilities to equal treatment as regards every facility, amenity and protective measures that an abled child would ordinarily enjoy. The right of the child with disabilities is further recognized by the fact that Act 715 makes a contravention of sections 1, 2, 4 and 6 an offence punishable by a term of imprisonment or a fine.

## **II.3: Implementation of Child Rights in Ghana: Some Contextual Challenges**

As already highlighted, Ghana was the first country to ratify the 1989 CRC — perhaps reflecting the country's initial commitment towards the realization of children's rights and overall welfare. Following the ratification of the 1989 CRC, various attempts, mainly through legislation and public policies (as discussed above), have been made by the Government of Ghana to ensure children's rights are protected. In the previous section of this paper, some landmark child-centered policies and programmes in furtherance of the cause of child rights have been emphasized. From the discussion thus far, the overall sense one can make of the Ghana context is a country that has made significant strides towards the formalization of the protection of children's rights.

While the country has certainly made significant progress in recognizing children's rights, the real state of children's welfare in Ghana is much more nuanced. The plethora of

child rights legislation, together with the few child-centered programmes have done very little in practical terms to prevent child rights violation. Whereas there exists a robust legislative framework in the country, the enforcement and implementation of child rights legislation and programmes have lagged behind. Put in another way, the main challenge with ensuring that child rights are respected in Ghana is the lack of implementation of the plethora of child rights legislation in Ghana.

Although several reasons can be held accountable for this state of affairs, two of them stand out; (i) impact of socio-cultural values and (ii) the lack of a strong political will.

*i. Socio-Cultural Values*

Issues about child rights and child rights violations are the subject of the ‘universality’ and ‘relativity’ debates. The concept of child rights, according to relativists, is rooted in Western notions of childhood (which advocates a work-free childhood for instance) (Bourdillon, 2006). Therefore, non-Western societies and contexts view children, and their capabilities and responsibilities differently. Thus, incidents that qualify as abuses in Western societies are not necessarily seen as abuses in non-Western societies (due to cultural beliefs and expectations). For example, corporal punishment in many respects is seen as a means of ‘correcting’ erring children, and thus a critical part of the socialization process in non-Western contexts, while all forms of corporal punishment in Western societies are frowned upon. In the same vein, some cultural norms about child upbringing view corporal punishment as part of the socialization process in Ghana (Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection/UNICEF Ghana, 2018). It is not seen as child abuse *per se*, but an important aspect of socialization.

Accordingly, a natural resistance arises when western notions of child rights *viz-a-viz* corporal punishment are seen to be imposed onto non-Western contexts. Socio-cultural norms that encourage and endorse child rights violations are not limited to corporal punishment. Another example worthy of mention is child labor. While child labor is frowned upon in Western contexts, economic contexts of some Ghanaian households dictates that all members of the household contribute to the sustenance of the family, particularly in the context of limited or non-available social protection systems. Children’s labor in this context is not seen as child rights violations, but a critical means of survival for families. Therefore, socio-cultural norms of child upbringing limits and undermines progress towards a state of realizing child’s rights in Ghana.

*ii. Lack of Political Will and Commitment towards Prioritizing Child Rights Issues.*

This is the second major obstacle to the implementation of Ghana’s child rights legislation. The lack of political will and commitment in implementing child rights legislation is manifested in the non-committal of adequate resources to state agencies. Nonetheless, studies have shown that the existence of a strong political will is a non-negotiable requirement needed if countries are to prioritize child rights issues and commit resources to state agencies responsible for child rights (Pillay, 2014).

Due to the lack of political will in addressing child rights issues in Ghana, as found by Afenyo (2019), the Department of Social Welfare (as well as the Local Government System in general) has a weak capacity in dealing with child rights violations. Similarly, other studies (see Laird, 2002) have also highlighted how the main government department in charge of

enforcing and monitoring child rights abuse issues — the Department of Social Welfare — is either chronically understaffed without the requisite personnel or they simply lack the resources needed to enforce the child rights laws as well as protect vulnerable children. Accordingly, the personnel needed, as well as the effective agency in dealing with are virtually non-existent.

In sum, due to the twin challenges of a socio-cultural context that permits child rights violations and the lack of political will and commitment, the approach to dealing with child rights and issues of child welfare has been mainly through legislation and enactment of laws. But laws themselves mean nothing if they are not vigorously enforced. Accordingly, the government of Ghana's focus ought to significantly, shift from a position of enacting legislation proscribing child rights abuses, to a position of vigorous enforcement of the plethora of legislation already in existence.

### **PART III: Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Discussions of Findings**

#### **III.1: Theoretical Framework**

The 'Interest Theory' that pushes forward the idea of children having a plethora of interests, which must be provided, by the adult world underpins this work. Some of the interests the theory explains are included within national legislations such as national constitutions, as legally qualified rights; whereas other interests are regarded as rights in as much as people are under obligation to promote and protect the interests of the child (Archard, 2004; Sund & Vackermo, 2015). The theory, however, faults the explanation that the leading guide for this theory stems from the principle of 'the best interest of the child' as stipulated in Article 3 of the UNCRC. The provisions of this international legal document would *via* court cases and legal writings, eventually give accuracy on the scope of children's rights and the responsibility of state and parents alike (Sund & Vackermo, 2015; UNCRC, 1989).

Sund & Vackermo (2015) further argue that, the principle fails to provide the necessary analytical tools for the enhancement of the legal rights of children. They argue that, the application of the elements of the interest theory as imbedded in a chain of children's interests, and the obligations of state and parents as well as the corresponding sanctions against breaches of the rules as based within the tenets of the explanatory power model, is a more acceptable approach. Within this context, rights may have different strengths based on the role those in socio-political authority choose to play in respect to rights of children formulation and implementation (Fortin, 2003).

To the extent that an incoherent mix of legal principles and government policies underpins the lives of children. This study is also guided by a rights-based approach that aims at addressing the weaknesses inherent in these legal principles and governmental policies (Archard, 2004; Eekelaar, 2006). Overall, however, the rights of children should be broad-based within a context that spreads to include not only legal rights but medical and



educational-based rights as well (Archard, 2004; Held, 2006). Indeed, the time is now to institute a broad-based right approach in addressing children rights and interests.

### III.2: Methodology of the Study

This study draws its research methodology mainly on content analyses of existing literature from books, journal articles, reports, newspapers and electronic media publications; that described, explained and predicted the phenomenon under study. The study as well focused on a systematic collection and analysis of data using the qualitative approach (Maarouf, 2019; Rajasekar, Philominaathan & Chinnathambi, 2013). Regarding the usage of the qualitative approach, in-depth interview guides were applied to 20 participants that were purposively and randomly drawn from within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, who are not only primary stakeholders but also imbued with knowledge on the subject area of the study (Creswell, 2014; Lodico, & Voegtler, 2010). The category of the 20 interviewees as shown in Table 1 below consists of the following:

- i. One representative each from 5 State Institutions and Agencies namely, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), Ghana Education Service (GES), the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit-Ghana Police Service (DOVVSU), Ghana Commission on Children (CRIN) and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSW);
- ii. Government officials including the Minister in charge of MoGCSP and two members of the Parliament of Ghana;
- iii. One representative from the civil society organizations working in the area of children and women;
- iv. One traditional ruler represented by a queen mother;
- v. Two representatives of Christian and Muslim women organizations; and,
- vi. Two parents and three children.

In ensuring high-quality research work, the data collection process was conducted under appropriate ethical codes to solicit the cooperation and confidence of respondents (Habib, 2014; Saunders & Thornhill, 2012; Showkat & Parveen, 2017; Stevens, 2013). In the same vein, the validity and reliability of the data were guaranteed using appropriate evaluation items within the instruments, which repeatedly reflected the content with precision and consistency (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005; Huck, 2007). Finally, the qualitative data was transcribed verbatim and coded using Nvivo 12 to generate themes and patterns; at the same time both inductive and deductive analysis were conducted for thematic content analysis (Anderson, 2007).

**Table 1: Categories of participants**

Category	Number interviewed	Gender	
		Male	Female
State Institutions Reps.	5(25%)	2	3
Government officials	3 (15%)	1	2
Civil society organizations	1 (5%)	-	1
Parents	2 (10%)	1	1
Children	3(15%)	1	2
Academia	1 (5%)	1	-
Media	2 (10%)	1	1
Religious Women Organizations	2(10%)	-	2
Traditional rulers	1 (5%)	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>20 (100%)</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

*Source: Fieldwork, 2021*

**Figure 1**



*Source: Fieldwork, 2021*

### Socio-demographic Characteristics of Participants

The ages of participants were classified into four categories as follows: 10-18, 19-40, 41-60 and 60 years and above (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Socio-demographic characteristics of participants**

Age	Frequency (N=20)	Percentage
10-18	3	15
19-40	10	50
41-60	5	25
Above 60	2	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

<b>Education</b>		
No formal education	1	5
Basic	2	10
Secondary	5	25
Tertiary	12	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 2021

### III.3: Discussion of Findings/Results

Three major questions among many were put to the 20 respondents who were purposefully and randomly sampled, in line with the objectives of this study. First, how effective and satisfactory has been the implementation of the provisions of the UNCRC in Ghana since its ratification by the country? Second, to what extent has the implementation of the UNCRC provisions promoted the rights and welfare of the Ghanaian child? Third, what factors still hinder the realization of child rights in Ghana within the context of the goals and objectives of UNCRC and what is the way forward?

To that end, the following responses were gathered from the respondents, which, corroborated findings from secondary and tertiary sources discussed above under Part II.

First, all respondents (100%) that the implementation process of the UNCRC provisions in Ghana has been very effective and satisfactory generally agreed it. They stated that many of the provisions have found space in legal enactments (including the 1992 Ghana Constitution), the establishment of agencies and institutions that promote child rights, and the formulation of major policy formulations by successive governments aimed at promoting child welfare. These implementation efforts are in line with Article 3 (1) of UNCRC, carved on the ‘best interest of the child principle’ that emphasizes on the life, survival, and development of children by member-states. During the interview, the following implementations put in place by the state were discussed:

- i. The enactment of the Education Act, 2008 (Act 778) that seeks to provide individuals, especially children with requisite knowledge, skills, values, aptitudes and attitudes in relation to UNCRC provisions on the development of children *via* education; thus corroborating the assertion of Nowak (2005) that acknowledges the element of development as a cornerstone of children’s rights.
- ii. The passing of the Human Trafficking Act, 2005 (Act 694) to prevent, reduce and punish human traffickers, as well as rehabilitate and reintegrate trafficked persons-- most of whom are usually women and children (Kosher, Ben-Arieh & Hendelsman 2016);
- iii. The Domestic Violence Act, 2007 (Act 732) which was enacted to address violence against women and children at the domestic level (NGOCRC, 2014);



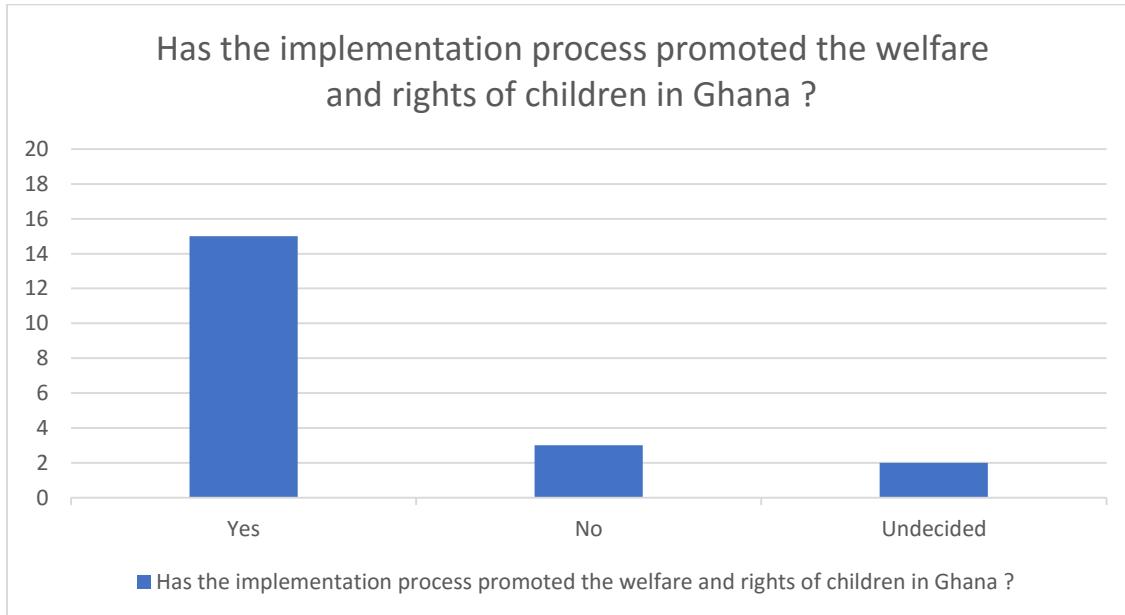
- iv. The Persons with Disability Act, 2006 (Act 715) which enacted on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2006 to emphasize the rights of children with disabilities, providing them with equal treatment as regards to facilities, amenities and protective measures that an abled child would ordinarily enjoy (Bradshaw et al. 2011; Ruck & Horn 2008);
- v. The implementation of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Policy as enshrined in the 1992 Ghana Constitution, through several government policy interventions including the Capitation Grant and the School Feeding Programme (Benson & Ngaaso, 2021);
- vi. The creation of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Social Welfare Department and the Ghana National Commission on Children, amongst others, to champion the welfare and social development of children and implement child-related policies and programmes in line with Articles 43-54 of the UNCRC.

Furthermore, regarding how effective and satisfactory the implementation of UNCRC provisions by the Ghanaian government are, an official said, *“I have been to many countries not only within the sub-region but also in the Western World, and I am proud to announce that, our country has done comparatively well with regard to the implementation of Convention provisions. I will give us 7 out of 10 if I were to give a mark for our accomplishment. That said, however, I would still concede that as a country that is so committed to the goals and objectives of a Convention we were the first to ratify, we can still do better.”* In that regard, Ghanaians are satisfied with the level of implementation of Convention provisions by state authorities.

Regarding the second major question as to whether the implementation process has promoted the welfare and rights of children in Ghana, fifteen (15) of the respondents representing 75 percent, emphatically said yes to the question; three (3) representing 15 percent said no while two (2) representing 10 percent were undecided. This is represented in Figure 2 below. The 15 percent representation has argued that Ghana still has a long way to go regarding gains made from the implementation of UNCRC, citing the surge of Child trafficking and streetism as examples.

From the overall picture, however, it can be deduced that, most Ghanaians acknowledge that, children’s welfare and development have transformed since the ratification and subsequent implementation of Convention provisions in Ghana. Thus, emphasizing the significance of the child’s rights instrument globally, in tandem with Perterson-Badali & Ruck (2008), who have argued that the ABC of child’s rights are represented fully in the UNCRC.

Figure 2



Source: *Fieldwork, 2021*

Respondents were quick to cite the educational rights accorded the Ghanaian children following ratification, as evidence to their mental, social and economic development. Correspondingly, there has been a surge in the literacy rate of Ghanaians by over 30 percentage points since the 1990s, per Ghana Statistical Service report in 2021. Per the same report, today, the average literacy rate in Ghana stands at 60 percent. Secondly, parents and the public at large have not only come to know and accept the rights of children, but also strive to uphold child rights as stated under UNCRC. To that extent, children are no longer regarded as properties of parents and society, but those who hold the future in terms of socio-economic development of nations (Chemy & Shing 2008). Thirdly, the creation of agencies and institutions such as DOVVSU and the Social Welfare Department by government in response to UNCRC stipulations, have enhanced child rights in Ghana and therefore their growth and development. Fourthly, the state has enacted laws that promote child rights and liberate victims, whilst breakers of child rights are punished so as to deter potential law breakers.

One of the respondents in affirmation to child rights promotion in Ghana since the inception of UNCRC had this to say, “*Now our children are no longer regarded as those pieces of property but a group with rights since the ratification of the Convention in our country. For instance children are given the best of education that has improved the lot of children in their overall development. When children are wronged, the state takes action against perpetrators of the crimes. Thanks to UNCRC*”.

The third question dealt with the challenges encountered so far and the way forward. Respondents were unanimous in recounting the challenges befuddling the implementation of UNCRC in Ghana. Respondents listed the following challenging heights:

- i. Lack of political will to implement UNCRC provisions to the latter (Pillay, 2014);
- ii. Lack of commitment towards the prioritization of child rights within the Ghanaian society as indicated above;
- iii. Inadequate resource allocation for implementing institutions and agencies that are set up to promote and protect child rights (Afenyo, 2019);
- iv. Socio-cultural norms in respect of bringing up children in Africa are at variance with the western-rooted concept of child rights (Bourdillon, 2006);
- v. Governmental agencies charged with the promotion, implementation and protection of child rights have weak capacities in dealing with child rights violations (Laird, 2002);
- vi. Gaps still exist within the implementation processes, usually emanating from the minimal commitment of stakeholders; and,
- vii. The education of child rights across board the Ghanaian society, is found ‘wanting’, amongst others.

To this end, respondents suggested that, government backs its reforms with political-will by providing adequate financial, technical and human resources towards the realization of the goals and objectives of the Convention. Furthermore, there is the need for the appropriate education of the Ghanaian population in respect of child rights by institutions of state, such as the Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the Commission for Civic Education. Moreover, respondents concluded that, enforcement agencies of child rights must stand up to the task at all times, as one respondent said, *“The police and the courts of the land must be seen to be making it extremely unpalatable for people to indulge in child abuse”*.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The paper has highlighted important policies that the Government of Ghana has over the course of three decades has enacted in furtherance of the cause of children’s rights and welfare. Although commendable, the entire picture on the state of children’s welfare and rights is one of incompleteness, as enacting public policies (without a commensurate commitment towards implementation) that proscribe child rights violations will not solve the challenges children face. Despite the enactment of laws outlawing child rights violations, the practice continues. An enabling socio-cultural environment, together with the lack of a strong political will in dealing with child rights violations means that the state of child rights in Ghana is far from desirable. Too many efforts have been spent on legislation. The time for the government of Ghana, especially, to take the tough decisions, in implementing these legislations is now, close to three decades after the ratification of the 1989 UN CRC. Otherwise, there is the real danger of reducing child rights issues to a matter of public discourses only, with no real effect on the lives of children. Thus, the Ghanaian government should, as a matter of urgency create a fiscal space solely dedicated to facilitating the work of the social welfare department and other analogous agencies. Furthermore, the government, particularly in conservative rural communities which violations of child rights are not considered as abuses per se, should champion intensive public education efforts.

Finally, governments of member-states should provide opportunities for the early identification of child abuse as well as the prioritization of research into preventive strategies

that combat child abuses within society; while the establishment of not just strong institutions but those that tackle child abuses headlong, must be encouraged.

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