

CHILD LABOUR IN THE KOLOMINE AND KAMBELE MINING SITES IN EAST CAMEROON: COMBINED VIEWS ON THE WORST FORMS OF OPERATIONS

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Abstract: *Child labour is a worrying problem for two reasons: first, because of the number of children concerned, which remains very high, and secondly because of the negative consequences that premature labour has on the personal development of the child and on economic development. And social in East Cameroon. Our analysis shows that child labour in the Kolomine and Kambélé mining sites in East Cameroon, which is one of the worst forms of work under ILO Convention No. 182, is thankless, dangerous and repetitive and painful. Neither for children nor for their parents, has it resulted from choices influenced by positive social representations of child labour as a role of learning and socialization. This work compromises children's education, destroys their health, affects their personal development and impoverishes them. Engaged in this labour because of their family vulnerability, child labourers in Kolomine risk perpetuating the vicious circle of poverty indefinitely. In this forbidding environment where little girls and boys work, unequal gender relations are built and maintained. The organization of work, remuneration and the value conferred on various tasks are subject to discrimination. While they should be given attention and leisure, from the age of 5, little girls are busy between looking after the youngest and doing small chores. From an early age, they learn bitterly about all the segregations to which they will be victims as they grow up, and assume their share of family and social responsibilities which will only increase. Their active participation in mining and in the family economy does not seem to change the gender relations that are passed on from one generation to the next. Combating child labour means taking into account these gender inequalities that develop and reproduce, increasing the burden on girls and women.*

Keywords: *Work; Children; Mining; Kolomine; Kambélé; East Cameroon; Exploitation.*

1. Introduction

The fight against child labour is one of the major challenges accompanying Africa in this third millennium (National Institute of Statistics 2008: 16). The persistence of socio-economic crises, the insufficiency of basic services and socio-family changes constitute the main foundations of this phenomenon. In a social space marked by rapid changes, family survival strategies based on child labour are differentiated according to social gender relations, whether children or parents. It is therefore important to examine child labour from the perspective of gender inequalities (Manier, 1999: 11). Child labour takes on a harmful aspect in many of its forms. Those engaged in the mining sector run particular dangers, the conditions of their activity involve serious risks for their health and their well-being. According to estimates by the International Labour Office, there are more than 190 million economically employed children aged 5-14 around the world. These children are generally involved in agriculture, industry and services. In Africa, as in most developing countries, this phenomenon is also very preponderant. Nearly 50 million children aged 5-14 are economically employed in sub-Saharan Africa, according to ILO estimates in

2006. This early employment of children comes at the expense of their schooling. In the case of Cameroon, for example, we note that among young people (10-14 years), the highest activity rates are observed in regions where the Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) in primary education are the weakest. The statistics available also reveal the existence of a probable link between the phenomenon of child labour and poverty in eastern Cameroon. This is because the highest activity rates for children are found in localities with the highest incidence rates of poverty. This situation is said to be due to the economic crisis of the 1990s that Cameroon experienced and which was severely felt in the social sectors, in this case the education sector. In this context, the school can no longer play for households. Faced with such a situation, households in eastern Cameroon, especially the poorest, adopt a survival strategy by seeking an alternative to the education of their children. One of these alternatives is to solicit the contributions of children in the economic life of the household through their increasingly extensive involvement in the Kambélé and Kolomine mining sites, mainly in segments that do not require a particular qualification. Our analysis questions the types of work carried out by children in mining sites in Eastern Cameroon? What are their working and living conditions? What is the socio-economic situation of the girls and boys who work directly in the mines or in their environment? What gender relations are established or reproduced among child labourers? The envisaged analysis will form the backbone of our work.

2. The elements that characterize child labour in the Kolomine and Kambele mining sites in East Cameroon

Child labour in Kolomine and Kambele can in no way be defined as a means of socialization and education. The lack of qualification, the arduousness and the low technological level which characterize this type of child labour, lead to consider that it responds to other determinants, such as: poverty, non-schooling, competitive labour costs -children's work, and political and legislative factors.

2.1. Poverty in the villages: an impact on child labour in Kolomine and Kambele

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes both the deprivation of essential needs (employment, health, drinking water, food, etc.) and intangible needs such as vulnerability, the absence of social networks and exposure to risks (Adjiwanou, 2005: 5). The assumption that poverty is at the root of child labour in Africa is not unanimously accepted. Some studies conclude that in Africa the link between household poverty and child labour is not obvious; while others index poverty as the main cause of child labour (Adjiwanou, 2005: 6). Regarding Kolomine and Kambélé in East Cameroon, there is a close link between household poverty and child labour in the Kolomine and Kambélé sites. This relationship is largely explained by the fact that this kind of uneducated and particularly dangerous type of work is not seen by parents as a source of children's learning and socialization. Adults, parents and employers alike, stress that, if given the opportunity, children would do a different job. In this case, child labour responds more to a family survival strategy (Diallo, 2001: 21). For Lachaud, it is a risk management strategy that puts children to work to minimize the risk of disrupted resource flows. The new responsibilities granted to children justify their early employment in Kolomine and Kambele.

In the context of the economic precariousness of families, the data reveal that girls work more and earlier than boys. The sex of the child determines, in the context of our study, the propensity of children to work (Diallo, 2008: 15). It shows that the participation of girls in the labour force is significantly higher than that of boys; they constitute more than half of working children. Conversely, the propensity of boys to extricate themselves from this job is more evident. This massive presence of young girls on the sites, as well as their young age, can be explained by the social status vested in men and women in African communities. African children are socialized from an early age to imitate the respective roles of their mother and father. While boys receive an education focused on decision and action, girls learn respect, patience and submission early on (National Institute of Statistics, 2008: 22). They receive early training in domestic life and other reproductive tasks. Economic activity is not the only source of solicitation of children, who are also used for non-market domestic work. Household chores: dishes, laundry, fetching firewood and water, preparing meals, are primarily the responsibility of the girls, who are called upon to do most of them. From the age of five, little girls accompany their mothers to their workplace to provide care for the little ones. This presence leads them, little by little, to get involved in economic activities. This is accentuated in poor families where mothers cannot economize on the reproductive work of girls, especially that related to the care of very young children. The socialization of children, through values of submission and respect for the elder, has a greater impact on the enrollment of girls in work. Indeed, very young, they are economically empowered and take an active part in improving the living conditions of families. While boys use up more or less of their income, girls have no choice but to hand over all of their salary to their mother or guardian. The reorganization of functions within poor family units that accentuate the economic participation of all, including that of children, is also done on the basis of gender.

2.2. The non-schooling of children and the mining route of Kolomine and Kambele

The work of the Kolomine and Kambele children interferes with their schooling and makes the phenomenon particularly worrying (Coulombe, 1998: 17). Despite the efforts made by the State of Cameroon to improve the school system, access to education remains limited. The data collected by Kolomine and Kambélé, show that nearly half of the child labourers surveyed on the sites were educated in a formal school (Dumas, and Lambert, 2006: 8). Most of the work that children do in the Kolomine construction sites are usually manual and physical tasks, which do not require any special education or training. Also, not knowing how to write increases the possibilities of children to be at work in the long term. While some boys, to meet their needs, combine schooling and work at the same time, especially in mining sites, by working on rest days and during school holidays, this is not the case for any of the girls surveyed. At the sites studied, the causes of children dropping out of school are diverse. Among them, we can cite ignorance or refusal of parents and poverty. It goes without saying that working in the mines is also a reason for dropping out of school. The arduous nature of the work and the fatigue it causes in children make attendance difficult.

The difficulty of poor households to invest in building the human capital of their children is a ground of discrimination between girls and boys. In poor families,

education is expensive. In addition to the direct costs (books, school fees, uniforms, shoes, etc.), there is the additional cost resulting from forgoing the child's income when he is in school. In the context of girls' education, the indirect costs are greater. In addition to the value of the income, the family must give up its support in domestic chores. Domestic work by children, and more specifically by girls, is likely to hamper their school attendance. No girl, in Kolomine and Kambélé, links economic activity and schooling. Their early presence on the sites to ensure childcare and their participation in household chores make their presence in class irregular and exclude them from the school system. In eastern Cameroon, educational expenditure is a function of the degree of poverty of the families. The poorer the families, the more they will tend to withdraw children from school; and this withdrawal will primarily affect girls. Girls' education is often seen by families as a poor investment because they marry young and leave the family home, while boys are the guarantors of the family structure. This assertion is increasingly contradicted by the facts, girls even when they are in charge of a family are more predisposed, by their education, to support their parents. The postulate on the positive influence of the level of education of the head of household on the education of children, clearly demonstrated in existing studies, has been reaffirmed in the framework of the surveys. The majority of children who work in the Kolomine and Kambele mine sites come from illiterate families.

2.3. An adapted and profitable child labour force

Child labourers are paid less than adults. Their employment is explained by the financial gains enjoyed by employers. A working child, when paid, which is not always the case, costs less than an adult worker. For employers, this competitiveness in wages is coupled with a workforce that is submissive and less demanding than that of adults. Children ignoring their rights, they cannot claim them. In addition, there are so many small job seekers that the employer chooses the less demanding and, in the event of a dispute, sends the child away and takes another. This childish, inexpensive, submissive and hardworking workforce is viewed by the employer as a significant advantage. In Kolomine and Kambélé, child labour is done in an informal setting. Cheap child labour is used in precarious and unskilled activities that adults often dislike. Whether they work with their parent, directly for an employer, or on their own. Children are under intense pressure. Once a child's work is paid for, his or her personal needs and limitations take precedence over the expectations of the employer or the productivity goals of the family. The intensity of the work varies depending on the sex of the child. The majority of girls working with their mothers, or paying their wages to their parents, have to meet the demands of the family and the employer.

3. The worst forms of child labour in the Kolomine and Kambele mining sites

There are two types of worst forms of child labour: intrinsic worst forms, which by their nature are unacceptable work, and hazardous work which is also unacceptable under the conditions in which it is performed.

3.1. The intrinsic worst forms of child labour

The worst intrinsic forms are often illicit and also unacceptable to adults. These are all activities which, whatever we do to improve working conditions, will

remain classified as the worst forms (Diakit , 2009: 12). This is the case, for example, with the sexual exploitation of children for commercial purposes (prostitution) or the use of children for pornographic purposes, servitude and trafficking in children which, whatever may be said will remain unacceptable for a child despite any attempt to improve their lot (International Labour Office, 2006: 16). Convention No. 182 distinguishes three activities which fall under the rubric of "intrinsic worst forms of child labour". Those are:

- all forms of slavery or similar practices;
- the use or offer of a child for prostitution or pornography; and the use or offer of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs (Diakit , 2009: 14).

3.2. Hazardous work

Hazardous work refers to ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. Article 3 (d) of this Convention defines "hazardous work" for children as "work which, by its nature and the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to endanger health, safety or health. The morality of children (International Labour Office, 2002: 5). The harm could result from a number of dangers such as: The risk of accident which may result from working at height or at depth with the risk of fall, collapse, landslide or the danger of being struck by an object in suspension, or even by the simple fact that the individual is exposed to a cut or a burn; The biological dangers which are related to the presence of dangerous animals and insects, toxic or poisonous plants, risks of exposure to bacteria, parasites or viruses Chemical dangers associated with dangerous gases, liquids or solids (glues), agro-chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, insecticides), explosives or flammable material; Ergonomic hazards that affect poorly designed workplaces.

The work requires lifting, carrying or moving heavy loads, repetitive or powerful movements, or awkward working positions; Physical hazards related to temperature extremes, noise, poor posture at work, exposure to bad weather, vibration, or radiation; Psychosocial dangers due to stress, hard or monotonous work, lack of control or choice, insecurity, harassment, or sexual abuse or violence (International Labour Office (IPEC), 2005: 19). Dangerous working conditions highlighting long working hours, night work or working in isolation. Hazardous work is assessed here on the basis of the following variables: transport of heavy goods vehicles; exposure to the following hazards: dust, smoke, gas, noise, temperature, humidity, radiation, dangerous tools (knife, blade, etc.), underground work, low light, chemicals (glue, pesticides, etc.), sexual harassment; underground work and construction for girls of all ages and boys under 16; the number of working hours per day exceeding 8 hours. We will refer to the recommendations of the ILO (International Labour Organization) which prohibit the use and handling of explosives by children. Likewise, exposure to noise, gas, humidity, radiation, low light and chemicals has been considered extremely dangerous for children (International Labour Office (IPEC), 2005: 20).

4. The impact of child labour in the Kolomine and Kambele mining sites in East Cameroon

Child labour and its worst forms damage their health, compromise their education, and lead to forms of exploitation and abuse (Canagarajah, and Nielsen, 1999: 15). The consequences of child labour, often overwhelming for the children concerned, are also felt at the level of economic and social development in the longer term. Countries that do not guarantee universal access to education will lack the skills and knowledge base required to build a solid economic foundation for the future, says Guy Ryder: "One of the major consequences of child labour is to perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty". One in four children in the world is condemned to remain a poor and unskilled worker all their life. Child labour in Kolomine and Kambele, regardless of gender, has serious consequences for himself, his family and his community. This work, which offers children neither skills, nor socialization, nor self-esteem, condemns them to remain working poor all their lives. Whatever definition is given to child labour and the worst forms of child labour and its degree of vagueness, it robs children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and constitutes a danger to their physical development and mental. It also damages his education, health and safety. It is important to understand these negative consequences on the child's personal development from a gender perspective. Indeed, interventions aimed at reducing child labour must address its foundations and consider that its causes may vary by gender. A better understanding of the differential effects of child labour on girls and boys improves the targeting and effectiveness of actions (Songhai, 2009: 13)

4.1. Consequences of the worst forms of child labour in the Kolomine and Kambele mining site on the health of child labour

The place of work and the activities that children perform have an impact on their physical and psychological health. Illnesses developed by children are often related to the demands of work in Kolomine. It can be said, without risk of being mistaken, that none of the activities take place in a framework adequate for the good health, hygiene and safety of working children. In Kolomine as in Kambélé, from the age of five, many children are assigned to dangerous tasks which often end in injuries. Many of these small workers suffer from chronic illnesses and do not have access to health care. At these physical risks, psychological illnesses develop resulting from harsh working conditions, violence, recurrent lack of sleep, alcohol and drug use, STDs and HIV-AIDS.

One of the first general aspects of the health of child labourers relates to the unhealthy environment in which they operate (Tsala Dimbuene and Senda, 2005: 12). The unsanitary conditions of the sites characterized by the lack of sanitary infrastructure, the lack of drinking water, the lack of latrines and sanitation, negatively impact the physical health of workers. The diseases most present in the sites of the three countries are: malaria, diarrhea, stomach aches and dizziness. The words of parents: "they often fall ill, they do not develop normally compared to other children" lead us to suppose that so-called "deficiency" diseases, often associated with nutritional problems, are also very present. If the environment of the sites has an almost identical impact on the health status of girls and boys, the sexual division of labour will have different consequences on their health, depending on the activities

carried out. The exploitation of children in the Kolomine and Kambélé mining sites is coupled with gender discrimination. While adults are acutely aware of the health risks to boys, largely due to landslides, the dangers to which girls are exposed are little taken into account. Less visible, they develop over the long term and can be very disabling (low back pain, sciatica, herniated disc, etc.).

The total absence of protective equipment, such as: masks, boots, sheaths and gloves, on land extraction sites leads to injuries and respiratory diseases resulting from inhalation of dust from gravel sifting (Kobiané, 2006: 11). The boys, because of the excavation and mining activities, are in danger of falling victim to a cave-in.

4.2. Incidence of child labour in the Kolomine and Kambele mining sites on schooling

When the school system is failing, the school can be a determinant of child labour (Assaad, Levison, and Zibani, 2001: 15). The poor quality of education, high school fees, the distance to travel to get there are factors that lead families, especially poor families, to put children to work. A significant number of children drop out of school in Kolomine in favor of the gold yards. There are many reasons for dropping out or failing at school. The most significant relate to non-payment of school fees and school supplies, the death of parents, poverty and the need to earn an income. Girls bring up other causes based on gender disparities, including: parental refusal, housework and pregnancy. The impact of child labour in the Kolomine mines on their school attendance is of great concern. Indeed, the economic activities carried out by children are repetitive, arduous and heavy, use rudimentary tools and only require their physical skills. Working in the Kolomine and Kambélé mines is by no means a source of learning and know-how. It hinders the education of child labour without, in return, offering it knowledge and experience which it could use to exercise a profession and improve its living conditions (National Institute of Statistics and Demography, 2006: 26). Children don't like the activities they do in the mines. Many of them have social and professional ambitions and would like to be able to exercise a more fulfilling profession. The adults of the sites have a more nuanced perception. Some of them are in favor of child labour in mines, the rest of the majority are against it, but feel that they have no choice (Doumandji and Ziane, 2006: 14).

This dropping out of schooling for children through work, linked to gender discrimination, will have stronger repercussions for girls than for boys (International Labour Office 2004: 10). The literature on child labour finds that family servitudes, which are imposed on girls for economic reasons, keep them and enclose them in a space of more pervasive constraints and obligations, without significant openness to initiative and leadership individual autonomy as in boys. Locked in social and family constraints, they have increased difficulties in developing their potential and extricating themselves from their economic precariousness. In contrast, boys who have freedom of action are more likely to get out of the mines and, gradually, to build a better future (International Labour Office, 2005: 22). A World Bank note highlights the gender-differentiated impact of child labour on future labour market outcomes. She points out that "research on Mexico and Brazil has shown that the price to pay, in terms of wages, for engaging in economic activities early (whether or not in school) is higher for girls than for boys (Boyden, 1992: 13). In the context of our study, it has been observed that boys, by virtue of the autonomy and capacities offered to them

(continuing their education, saving part of their income, being mobile), will be able, when they become adults, to value themselves in other sectors of economic activity. This is not the case with girls, who less than boys will have the chance to learn a trade and improve their living conditions. Through the generational transmission of poverty, a whole deeply unequal society is perpetuated.

4.3. A reproduction of gender disparities

In Africa, the learning of socially constructed roles occurs from an early age (Marcoux, 1993: 10). Despite significant advances in gender equality and the promotion of women's rights, many forms of discrimination remain. In the majority of communities, the little girl is educated to become a docile wife and a good mother, despite her role as provider of resources to families. The socialization of children, differentiated according to whether one is a girl or a boy, contributes to the maintenance of gender inequalities. In a context of proximity, such as that of mining sites, the issue of gender relations between working girls and boys is of great importance in understanding how sexual discrimination is woven and perpetuated. Within the framework of the division of child labour in the Kolomine and Kambélé mining sites, sexist stereotypes lead to a distribution of tasks and a differentiation of the value accorded to them. They have the effect of underestimating and underutilizing the talents of women and placing less value on their functions and responsibilities. It is because it is agreed that boys are taller, stronger, and smarter that they are assigned the duties of digging and mining (Songhai, 2009: 29). In fact even prejudices, because they are the prerogative of the male sex, these activities will be considered complex, painful and arduous. They will, de facto, find themselves valued socially and economically. The girls, considered weaker and less available, are assigned to functions which recall the prolongation of domestic and family tasks: sifting, washing and transport. These activities, despite their importance in the ore production process, considered secondary, are less remunerated. They are so little valued by the communities that part of the transport that of rubble, is unpaid.

The unequal perception of the work of girls and boys will lead communities, adults and children, to consider that the activities carried out by boys are painful and dangerous, that they pose a significant health risk for them (Maitra and Ra, 2000: 6). The recurrent carrying of particularly heavy loads by girls is not given special attention. Few people on the sites make the connection between girls' back problems and babywearing. This is explained by the fact that in the majority of African societies it is women who support the transport activity. A study by the World Bank has shown that in rural Africa, the female population supports two-thirds of the time spent on transport. It shows that a woman can spend an average of 1 hour to 2 hours 40 minutes per day for her commute. The total load that women in African villages carry over a year is three to five times greater than that carried by men. The Kolomine and Kambélé mining sites are part of the social authorities that control the individuals they bring together. Along with the field of symbolic transmission of knowledge, the mine fulfills a function of socializing individuals, evaluating and judging their behavior according to its own standards. Information collected on the perception of miners shows that adults and children believe that boys and girls do not have the same freedom to choose their lifestyle and that girls' behavior should be different from those of boys.

In the relationship between the two sexes, the strong majority of parents and employers favor the idea of dominance of boys over girls. The same is true of children who consider that girls should submit to boys (Haspels Nelien and Suriyasarn Busakorn, 2005: 15). The justifications invoked for this rule of superiority (domination versus submission) are diverse. They result from the social, material and symbolic construction of gender relations in the communities studied. Among the reasons, we note: the natural (physical) difference in favor of the boy, who would be more able to assume certain jobs, his intelligence, the social order (it is the man who marries the woman) and religious (the wife owes submission to her husband). The competition, which may exist between girls and boys at work, does not call into question these relations of domination (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1998: 31). For working children, this ascendancy of boys over girls is linked to the profitability of activities and the division of labour.

While no society can be built on child labour, especially the worst forms, it cannot be deprived of female talents and maintain gender inequalities (Poirier, Baya, and Zoungrana, 1996: 15). It must be everyone's responsibility to take this reality into account. Thus, in the fight against child labour and the worst forms of child labour, it is urgent to generalize the gender analysis adopted by the member governments of the United Nations in 1997 and institutionalized by the ILO (International Organization of the United Nations). Gender must be recognized as a variable that affects the achievement of actions to combat child labour and the worst forms of child labour (Grootaert, 1998: 6). The removal of children from work in mines and quarries cannot do without the special situation of girls. It is not enough to include them in existing programs. It is necessary to structure the strategies and adapt the supports according to their specific constraints, needs and expectations. The main recommendations to strengthen the fight against child labour in the Kolomine and Kambélé mines are as follows: Make systematic the integration of gender issues in the analysis of the situation. Taking into account the inequalities between girls and boys, women and men in the intervention settings makes it possible to better identify the gender-specific needs that serve as the basis for the strategic planning of the project, to define specific actions for girls and boys according to their situation so as not to disadvantage any sex and adopt gender budgeting for an equitable allocation of resources; involve the ministry in charge of gender issues, the gender departments of employers 'and workers' organizations and women's associations in the formulation of programs to combat child labour. These institutions that are involved in the fight against girl child labour have a better knowledge of the gender disparities that affect their withdrawal from work, as well as their specific needs and expectations. The inclusion of child labourers and their families in consultations, essential to the success of actions, must ensure the active participation of girls and mothers. The social situation of girls, which is different from that of boys, has an impact on the activities of withdrawing children from work; Communicate adequately on the difficulties encountered by girls, their needs and expectations as well as the prejudices and stereotypes to which they are subject. An important measure, aimed at eliminating the worst forms of child labour with equal attention to working girls and boys, is to inform, raise awareness and mobilize society. In actions to combat child labour, sensitizing communities on the issue of gender relations makes it possible to take into account the vulnerabilities of

both girls and boys and to deconstruct representations that aim to normalize socioeconomic inequalities between girls and boys.

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