

Protecting children on the move

A multi-agency project in West Africa

Child mobility in West Africa

- A child who has left the habitual place of origin, either already in a new destination place or on his/her way
- Children on the move needs to be protected as well as other children but it can be more difficult to protect them :
 - if they are separated from their family, friends, own community
 - if they have not been tracked/detected/identified by institutions
 - if they are denied access to protection services (prevention and response) because they don't belong to the local community
- Many of them face high risks of being abused, neglected, mistreated, exploited.
- They also need protection of their other fundamental rights (health, education, family life, social protection, integration, participation, environment, adequate standing in criminal justice and... development)

Figures

- Data situation in child protection is always weak, especially regarding West Africa.
- Millions of children are on the move in WA, a lot of them illegally or without any institutional visibility, **so that makes it even harder to get data**
- Mainly are moving within the region or in central Africa
- Only 10% estimated to move towards Maghreb and Europe

Origin of the mobility project in WA

- 2007 : Regional Working Group Against Child Trafficking (RWOGAT, Dakar)
- How to further improve our work at the service of children victims or at risk of trafficking?
- How to enlarge our focus and protect these children regarding also different problematic and the complexity of their concrete situations (from a fragmented and labeling/reducing approach to a more holistic and systematic one) ?
- How to better distinguish between migrants and trafficked children and ensure that our responses are appropriate and durable?
- How to reduce the vulnerability of many groups of youth and children at risk of exploitation without fighting mobility *per se* ?

Participants to the project at regional level (2008-2010)

- **MAEJT** (African Movement of Working Children and Youth)
- 4 international NGOs (regional offices)
 - Terre des hommes (Lausanne)
 - Plan International
 - Save the children (Sweden)
 - Enda Jeunesse Action
- **3 International Agencies** (regional offices)
 - UNICEF, ILO + IOM

Design

- A regional platform and a regional committee
- 4 pilot countries
 - Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea and Togo
- 4 National committees with more than a 60 partners all over
- Including national State structures
- Research and analysis of joint work (lessons learned from experiences, practice analysis, information sharing on project life and operational results)
- Joint recommendations

Project aim

- Working together towards a better understanding of child mobility and what does it mean in terms of response in WA
- Develop protection mechanisms for children on the move, based on this joint understanding and taking into account the socio-economic and cultural realities in WA

Child participation in research and analysis of practices

At regional and national level (committees) and on the field, in the framework of research and analysis work

To better know/understand :

- Their motivations and reasons to move (actively, passively)
- Their true stories, conditions of living/moving
- Positive and negative effects on their lives/development
- How to take into account their points of view and their choices, goals, individual capacities and expectations
- How to better protect them wherever they are (before, during and after their mobility)

Different forms of mobility in WA

- **Fostering**
 - In a family, religious institution, as a domestic, traditional vocational training...
- **Migration**
 - For work or education
- **Adventure**
- **Trafficking**
- **Child soldiers**
- **Refugees**
- **IDPs**

Children on the move at work or in the streets

- Examples
 - Children from rural areas working in city markets (selling or apprenticeship)
 - Dockers in seaports, selling in the streets
 - Ending up in street situation in a transit place or after dramatic events
 - Talibe children (coranic students begging in the streets)
 - Domestic servants
 - Children working in careers or mines
 - Children working in plantations
 - ...

Crucial role of the large family, friends, communities and Diasporas

- Who ?

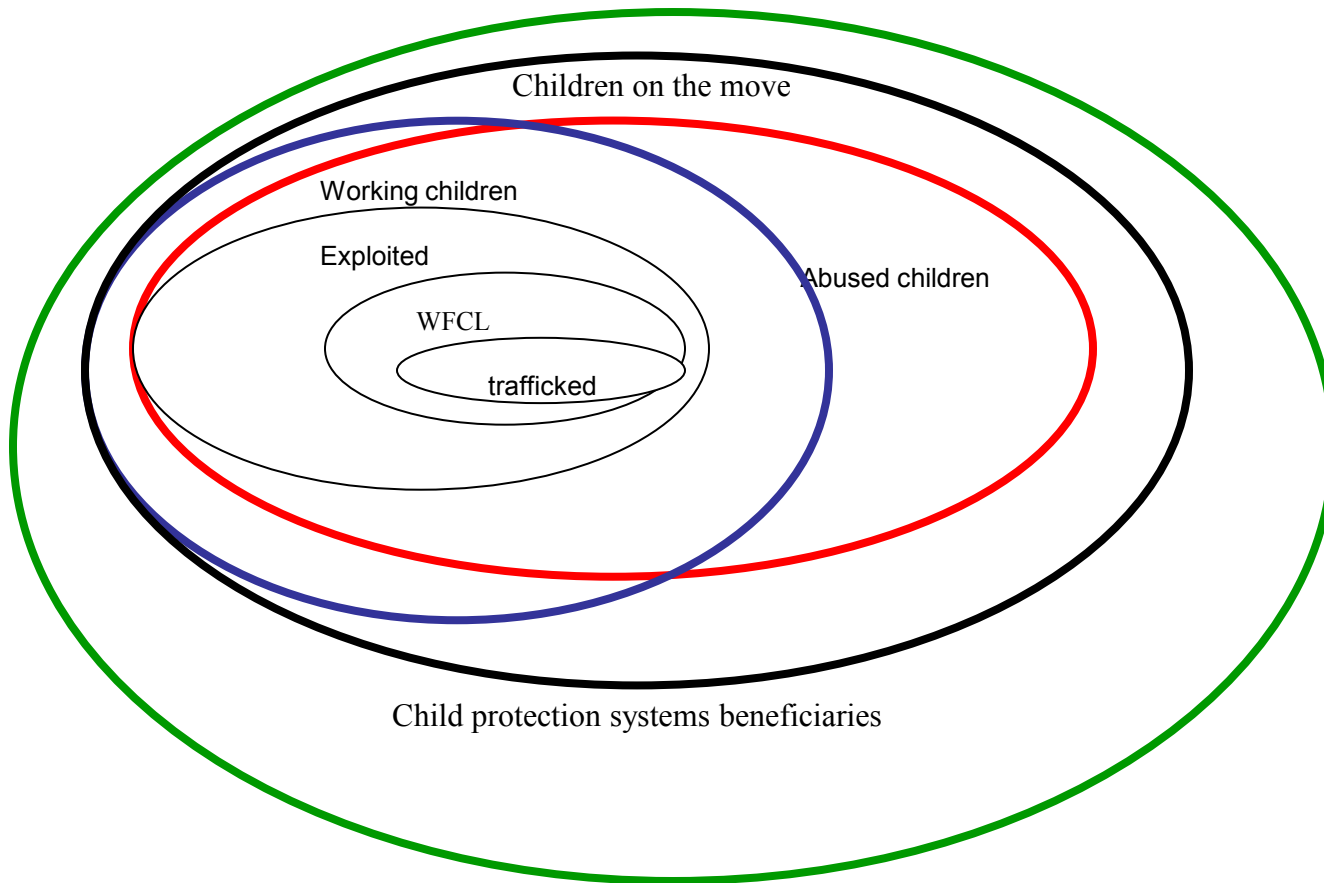
- **Parents** (closely or distantly related), siblings, kith & kin
- **Fostering people** (families, landlords, bosses, religious institutions...)
- **Social networks** covering/linking places of origin, transit and destination along main roads and corridors (traders, diasporas, ...)
- **People** on children way or at destination place

- What ?

- **Decision making**
- **Preparation and information** before moving, location tracking
- **Endogenous protection practices** (alongside children on the move, in place of transit or destination, when children are back)
- **Solidarity** (mutual aid, self-help)
- **Education** (formal, informal, vocational + life skills, individual building)
- **Employment** (risks of exploitation)

Results I

- 1) Movement means risks but also opportunities for children
- 2) Movement does not increase vulnerability *per se*, but the **conditions** under which the child moves can do so



Results II

- Links and collaboration need to be build or reinforced between institutions and communities, families and children (lack of confidence, cooperation and understanding)
- Children and youth are not only victims but also actors (choices, goals, solidarity, agency, opposition to adults and institutions, resilience, social age...) = provide positive alternatives, appropriate care and support to face necessity ; support children and youth to find solutions for a better life and decent conditions of moving/living away/working/learning...
- Life conditions, economic perspectives and access to social services have to be concretely improved in places of origin AND in places of destination
- Solutions (prevention and response) have to be found and developed with the beneficiaries and their close social and family environment in order to implement international norms in different cultural contexts (dialogue and case by case management, decision-making on actions and social norms)
- Constraints and limitative realities in different contexts of intervention (pragmatic approach) forces stakeholders to adapt/adjust their responses according to the best interests of the child (do compromises through a long process for social change)

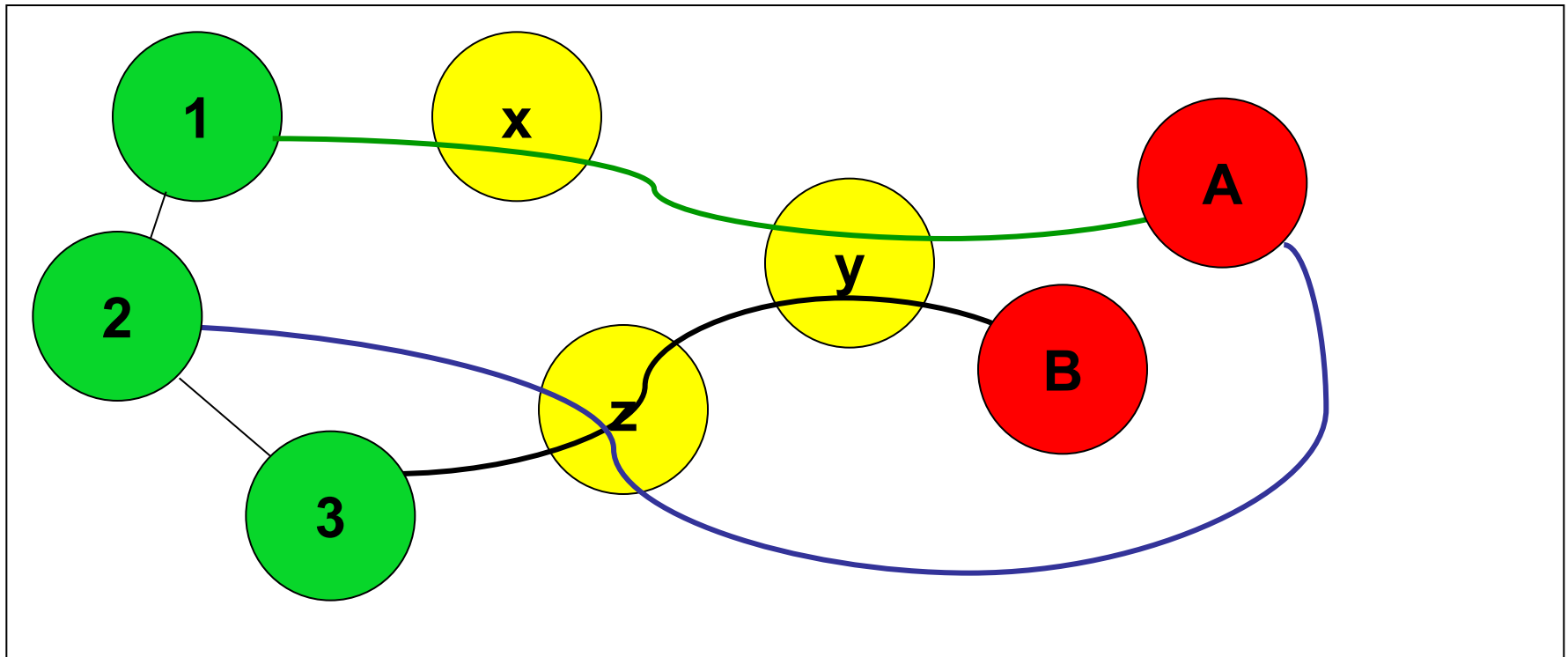
Result III

- We can try to ensure the continuum of a protective environment for children on the move...
 - ... along clearly identified corridors...
 - ... by developing protection mechanisms...
 - ... based on interrelated institutional services and endogenous practices
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- formal or informal networks,
 - regular bridges and punctual collaboration

Accompagnement protecteur

- French speaking concept, difficult to translate in English
- In the case of children who decide to move voluntarily or to get an education, supporting children by working alongside them, being able to trace them or track their movements and enabling them to survive, keep themselves safe, develop and be empowered.

Many practices and mechanisms are already functioning and can be put under the umbrella of this concept (Burkina, Nigeria)
To be developed in the framework of CPS and in link with social change/norms strategies



Recommendations (i)

- All children on the move are entitled to protective measures according to their **best interests**
- **Fighting child trafficking** doesn't mean that all children on the move are trafficked
- **Child protection systems** along the corridors where the children move (locally, nationally and across borders)

Recommendations (II)

- **The principle of ‘Accompagnement protecteur’** as basis of work with children on the move
- **Community protection practices** should be supported as inherent part of the protection system (social norms)
- **Child participation** as well as participation of child organizations and movements as a necessity in any protection measure undertaken

2011-2015 : Operational phase and advocacy

- **Operational cooperation** to support common projects on the field
- **Common advocacy efforts** at regional and national level (campaign, events)
- **Design and develop concrete protection mechanisms** based on this approach and common recommendations (laws, policies, services...)