# Effects of Transnational Child Raising Arrangements on Life-Chances of Children, Migrant Parents and Caregivers between Africa and the Netherlands
# TCRA

The TCRA programme is coordinated by Maastricht University (V. Mazzucato (PI); D. Schans; M. Poeze) and is formed, additionally by University of Ghana (T. Manuh; M. Awumbila; E. Appiah; E. Dankyi).

## *Summary of the research programme*

Migration from the global South to the global North is on the rise, yet restrictive migration policies in the North make it difficult for families to travel together. This leads to families the world over living apart-together with new or adapted arrangements being sought for raising children. The little information that exists on these transnational child-raising arrangements (TCRAs) based on small-scale and partial evidence (only few of the actors) indicates that there are negative consequences for children's upbringing and emotional costs on parents and children. These negative aspects may offset the positive effects of remittances, which are the focus of migration and development literature and debates.

The main research question is: How do TCRAs affect life-chances of children who remain in the country of origin, their migrant parents and their caregivers in Ghana and The Netherlands? The programme proposes to answer this question through 4 projects (2 PhD and 2 post-doc) based in the two countries and focuses on TCRA actors and the institutions that affect or are affected by TCRAs. The projects are linked by a common analytical framework and research results from each project provide parts of the answer so that in combination they give a more complete picture of the effects of TCRAs.

This five-year programme aims to a) conduct a systematic, large-scale study of TCRAs between Ghana and the Netherlands, b) use a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, c) use a matched sample of respondents so that *all* actors involved in TCRAs (children, parents and caregivers) are studied. The inter-disciplinary character of the programme is ensured by having a team of researchers from different disciplines work together to form a common analytical framework, field visits to each sites, and yearly seminars in which researchers develop a common and integrate others' 'language' their results. Furthermore, PhDs and post-docs are supervised by staff members from different disciplines, all with previous experience working in inter-disciplinary teams. Most of the planned publications are co-authored between researchers from different disciplines.

The results of the programme will be brought to bear on current migration and development debates though close cooperation with civil society advocacy groups, schools, youth media and theatre groups and government agencies at local and national levels. A first workshop has been held in which representatives from each of these organizations has pledged their support and a role for them has been defined in the programme.

*Description of the programme*

Rationale and background

Many parents go overseas to earn a living, in part, so they can ensure a better future for their children. In many of these cases, such children are left in the country of origin to be raised by a caregiver (Parrenas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004). There is widespread concern that current emigration of parents is a serious threat to the well-being of a generation of children. Unicef (2006) has identified children who are left behind by one or both of their parents as one of their key concerns relating to migration. Yet there are no quantitative data on this phenomenon available, and there is little systematic evidence on the effects of transnational child-raising arrangements (TCRAs) on children and parents. Moreover, hardly ever are the effects on caregivers taken into account (Mazzucato and Schans, 2008).

The research programme aims to contribute to the debates on migration and development by integrating the perspectives of immigrant parents, children left behind and their caregivers in the context of migration from Ghana to the Netherlands. Questions to be answered include: How widespread is the phenomenon of transnational child-raising? How do migrants from Ghana practice parenting from a distance? How are care arrangements for children organized? How do children of migrants experience the separation from their mother and/or father? How are relations between biological parents and those who care for the children negotiated? What is the role of gender in TCRAs? How do institutions in both Ghana and the Netherlands influence transnational child- raising arrangements or how are institutions influenced by TCRAs? Four projects in Ghana and the Netherlands will answer these questions by using an interdisciplinary framework and a mixed method methodology.

This is an innovative area of research since so far migration and development studies have focused on the impact of remittances and the brain drain on economic growth and poverty alleviation (Adams and Page, 2005; Ratha 2003) without considering non-economic effects such as what migration does to the life-chances defined as psychological, educational and health outcomes for spouses, children and elderly who stay behind. Family sociological studies, on the other hand, emphasize proximity as a prerequisite for interaction and exchange within families, thereby ignoring family ties that cross borders (Schans, 2007). As a result, transnational family practices are ignored or assumed unfeasible (Baldassar and Baldock, 1999; Zontini, 2004). The few scholars who recently have focused on the consequences of a transnational lifestyle for children who are left behind by migrant parents (Dreby, 2007; Parrenas, 2005; Carling 2007) do not analyze in a systematic way the effects of TCRAs on children's or life-chances and rarely include a parents' focus on caregivers. Theoretical transnationalism studies finally, have been fundamental for drawing attention to the need to study linkages that connect people and ideas spanning various national borders (Glick Schiller et al., 1992; Levitt, 2001; Levitt and Jaworsky, 2008) yet empirical studies have remained primarily focused on migrants in developed countries. Seldom are two countries studied and never in a simultaneous fashion (Mazzucato, 2008).

This research programme aims to fill these gaps by using methodological innovations developed in the GhanaTransNet[1] programme. These emphasize the need to include migrants as well as non-migrants in samples, to consider the multiple sites and levels of transnational social fields, and to use qualitative as well as quantitative data collection methods and analyses (Mazzucato, 2008). A special focus will be on the effects of gender in TCRAs. Previous research from Asia and Latin-America has indicated it is especially mothers who are missed by children, especially girls who are affected by the absence of parents and especially grandmothers who are the best

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[1]www.ghanatransnet.org (NWO-MAGW grant 410-13-010P), an inter-university collaborative program (UvA, VU, Leiden University and University of Ghana).

caregivers (Parrenas, 2005; Schmalzbauer, 2004). Nevertheless, these results stem from small qualitative samples in which fathers have been more or less ignored.

Moreover, the research programme will add a perspective from Africa to debates on transnational child-raising. Studies from Latin America and Asia indicate that there are some negative consequences to these transnational child-raising arrangements for children and parents such as conflicts and depressive symptoms (Dreby 2007; Levitt, 2001; Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002; Parrenas, 2005; Smith, 2006; Fog Olwig, 2007). In Eastern Europe, the SOROS foundation (2007) concluded that social services need to be developed and provided to children who stay behind while their parents migrate. However, there is reason to believe that TCRAs in Africa may not have the same effects as in other parts of the world because child fosterage is a longstanding institution in many parts of this continent (Bledsoe and Isingo- Abanike, 1989; Goody, 1982; Page, 1989). At the same time, results from the Ghana TransNet research programme indicate that all actors involved in TCRAs are affected in various ways. Migrant parents worry their children are not getting quality care, yet they feel limited in what they can do about it from The Netherlands; caregivers in Ghana may feel overburdened with childcare responsibilities yet enjoy regular remittances from abroad, and while some children fare well, others feel unhappy in their TCRAs. Additionally, studies on child fosterage arrangements conducted by anthropologists pertain predominantly to migration *within* countries rather than across national borders.

Finally, the research programme includes an institutional analysis. Various institutions[2] in migrant sending and receiving countries influence TCRAs in setting limits or facilitating care. First, changes in child fosterage norms make rights and responsibilities of biological parents and caregivers more subject to negotiation (Alber, 2003) yet exactly what these changes are and how they relate to transnational migration remains to be investigated. Second, schools are confronted with high proportions of children raised in TCRAs, which might lead them to take on parenting tasks. The preliminary workshop revealed that children of migrants often require specialized attention and some schools had developed training programmes for teachers to cater to the particular needs of this student population. Finally, legal systems in migrant-receiving countries affect the necessity and form of TCRAs (Cornelius, 2004). For example, increasingly rigid income requirements have made family reunification more problematic in The Netherlands. Furthermore, until 2006 parents who wanted their children to join them had to prove the child effectively belonged to the family ('feitelijke band').This legal definition excluded children in TCRAs from having a bond with their biological parent if the TCRA lasted too many years and thus several parents have had their plea for family reunification rejected based on TCRA arrangements (van Walsum, 2006).

Programme outline, including methodology

TCRAs between Ghana and the Netherlands are of special interest. First, the Ghanaian Diaspora is one of the largest from Sub-Saharan Africa (Khoser, 2003). The Netherlands is one of the top four destinations in Europe. Second, although figures on the extent of the phenomenon do not exist, there is reason to believe that TCRAs are an important phenomenon. Results from Ghana TransNet programme show that more than half of Ghanaian parents have children living in Ghana. The main aim of the current programme is to develop an inter-disciplinary model of factors influencing actors in TCRAs, and present an analysis of the impacts of institutions on TCRAs using a mixed method approach. The main guiding research questions are:

*How do transnational child-raising arrangements affect life-chances of children who remain in the country of origin, their migrant parents and their caregivers? How do institutions in both Africa and The Netherlands influence TCRAs and in turn how are they affected by TCRAs?*

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[2] Institutions are defined similarly to North (1990) as those commonly held categories such as rules, laws, or norms of conduct that guide people's actions and govern social arrangements. Institutions can be formal such as organizations or state laws or informal such as child fostering arrangements.

This question is answered through sub-questions addressed in 4 projects.

Project (1) studies the effects of TCRAs on the life chances of children in Ghana and the effects TCRAs have on schools in Ghana. Project (2) focuses on the effects on caregivers and investigates if and how negotiations within TCRA's are affected by changing child-fostering norms. Project (3) looks at the other end of TCRAs by focusing on the effects on Ghanaian parents in the Netherlands and how decisions are parents' affected by migration policies. Project (4) studies the effect of TCRAs on integration and wellbeing in parents' the Netherlands.

The research design is guided by a transnational approach and a mixed-method methodology. Transnational families, as all transnational phenomena, encompass different national contexts and thus present a methodological challenge. As Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) explain, most research has a national bias, in which units of analysis are located in one nation-state. This they call methodological nationalism. One way to get beyond methodological nationalism is to adopt a transnational research design by following various family members to where they are located: in the case of TCRAs, the children, migrant parents and caregivers. Mazzucato (2008) headed a project with such a design in which a team of researchers was employed to study a matched sample of people at the same time. This methodology will be further developed in the current project by simultaneously studying all actors involved in TCRA's in both Ghana and the Netherlands.

A mixed-methods methodology will be employed. First, we will conduct a large-scale survey amongst primary and secondary school children in rural and urban Ghana (project 1). Students from the Center of Migration Studies at the University of Ghana will be employed to conduct the survey. This survey will be the base-survey from which the samples can be selected for the other three projects. These will include respondents for the in-depth case studies of immigrant parents and caregivers (projects 2-3) and to select the sample for the smaller survey of Ghanaian migrant parents in the Netherlands (project 4). The survey and case studies will be used to identify different types of TCRAs and to measure the effects of TCRAs on the life-actors' chances. Projects 1, 2 and 3 will additionally perform analyses of the institutions involved in TCRAs.

Results of the programme can be used to include the effects of TCRAs in international and national 'migration and policy debates and raise awareness among NGO's and local authorities of the costs and development' benefits of TCRAs. The institutional analyses will promote knowledge on the role of institutions and the ways in which they can be included in policies addressing the needs of the various actors in TCRAs in both Ghana and the Netherlands. The programme will ensure equal participation of the University of Amsterdam and the University of Ghana by employing one PhD and one Post-doc at each institute. They will write joint publications with senior team members. Team meetings are planned both in Ghana and the Netherlands and joint teaching modules and lectures will be developed to include the topic of TCRAs in courses on migration at both universities and their respective research schools.

Innovative aspects

*Theoretical*

*Transnational families*: a new area of research is defined by studying transnational families in a systematic way using a network approach. Current studies on migrant families either assume proximity amongst family members or are small-scale and non-systematic. The programme thus contributes to theory formation in family sociology, and adds empirical evidence on the effects of transnational families.

*Migration–development nexus:* The aim of this programme is to devise a methodology and produce findings that will help better assess the effects of migration on both sending and receiving countries. If migration helps families, despite the distance of their members, to construct

better futures for their children, then this contributes to a positive outcome for inhabitants of developing countries. If, on the other hand, migration leads to difficult upbringings for children leading to unproductive or less productive lives for them, this implies social costs for a society.

*Methodological*

The programme uses the simultaneous matched sample (SMS) design to overcome methodological nationalism. The mixed-method, multi-actor perspective captured by the SMS design incorporates the analysis of different viewpoints of actors in transnational networks; allows triangulation of data; and the collection of daily actions often lost when collecting data on recall. This programme proposes the use this methodology for the first time in the study of TCRAs.

*Interdisciplinary*

The programme combines insights from disciplines that have as yet worked separately on the topic of migrant families. It combines systematic analysis used in family sociology, with a transnational perspective highlighted in transnational studies, with in-depth knowledge of African cultural norms from anthropology to develop an interdisciplinary model on the effects of TCRAs on the different actors involved. It further makes use of experts from education studies to include the effects TCRAs have on schools as well as experts on African child fostering systems and legal studies to include the effects of African child fostering norms and Dutch migration laws on TCRAs.

*Stakeholder involve*

Knowledge about the effects of TCRAs is made available to migrant communities, associations for children of migrants and their caregivers as well as to policy makers in Ghana and The Netherlands by involving local stakeholders in programme development, implementation and dissemination of results. A Ghanaian migrant theatre group will conduct radio and television talk-shows in Ghana and The Netherlands on topics surrounding TCRAs. These talk-shows serve three purposes: 1) a source of preliminary data on TCRAs as seen from an emic perspective; 2) communicate research results to stakeholders via talk-shows, a form widely used amongst Ghanaians, and; 3) provide video material for MA training programmes in The Netherlands and Ghana.

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