

# Deliberative disobedience as a strategy for representation by Accra's street children

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## **Abstract**

Representation, a cornerstone of liberal democracy, enables representatives to speak on behalf of others, to articulate their views and defend their interest when necessary. Children's representation is challenging both in public matters because children do not have voting rights or enforcement capacity to hold those who represent them accountable, as well as in private matters where they depend on their legal representatives. In the family, parents are commonly seen as the legitimate representatives of their children because of a natural affiliation and their propensity to speak for and defend their children's interests. In recent times, broader social and economic transformations in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, especially social change, neoliberalism and globalization and their myriad consequences, have incapacitated some parents, while motivating their children to defy and deliberately disengage with their representation. Increasing children's space in decision-making transforms the notions of rights and representation. This paper will discuss these transformations by looking at the migration of children to the major cities of Ghana, especially Accra. It will build further on a programme of qualitative studies that were undertaken in Accra in the 2000s and involved 102 boys and girls, aged between 8 and 17 years, who were interviewed, observed and encouraged to participate in photo-elicitation exercises. We found that young people, in spite of protestations from their parents, decided to move to the city to earn incomes for themselves and sometimes the family and in the process claimed rights that enable them to chart their own courses of life. The findings point at changes from traditional acquiescence/obedience towards children's self-representations that elevates their agency but subverts the authority of parents/adults, thus disrupting the traditional distribution of power.

## **Presenter - Bio**

Yaw Ofosu-Kusi is a Professor of Social Studies and currently the Dean of the School of Arts and Social Studies of the University of Energy and Natural Resources, Sunyani, Ghana. His research has primarily focused on the informal economy; children's mobility, labour, and street life. He recently co-edited *The Challenge of African Potentials: Conviviality, Informality and Futurity*, with Motoji M., (2020), published by Langaa RPCIG in association with the Centre for African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Japan.