Forced Labor and Child Labor in the Cocoa Sector in Côte d'Ivoire

FREE THE SLAVES

Free the Slaves (FTS) was founded in 2000 and has since committed to the mission of ending modern slavery. Today, FTS is widely recognized as a leader and a pioneer in the modern abolitionist movement. Through its work, FTS has assisted individuals in slavery to regain their freedom, has helped officials to bring slaveholders to justice, and has supported survivors to rebuild their lives and reclaim their future. To advance its mission further, FTS has developed a multi-dimensional strategy: policy and advocacy, to advocate for the reform of laws and regulations; engagement of local communities, to provide training and resources to vulnerable communities; movement building, to encourage knowledge-sharing and collective action; continuous learning, to produce research that enhances understanding and guides responses.

Authored by Dr Marta Furlan, Free the Slaves' Senior Program Manager for Research

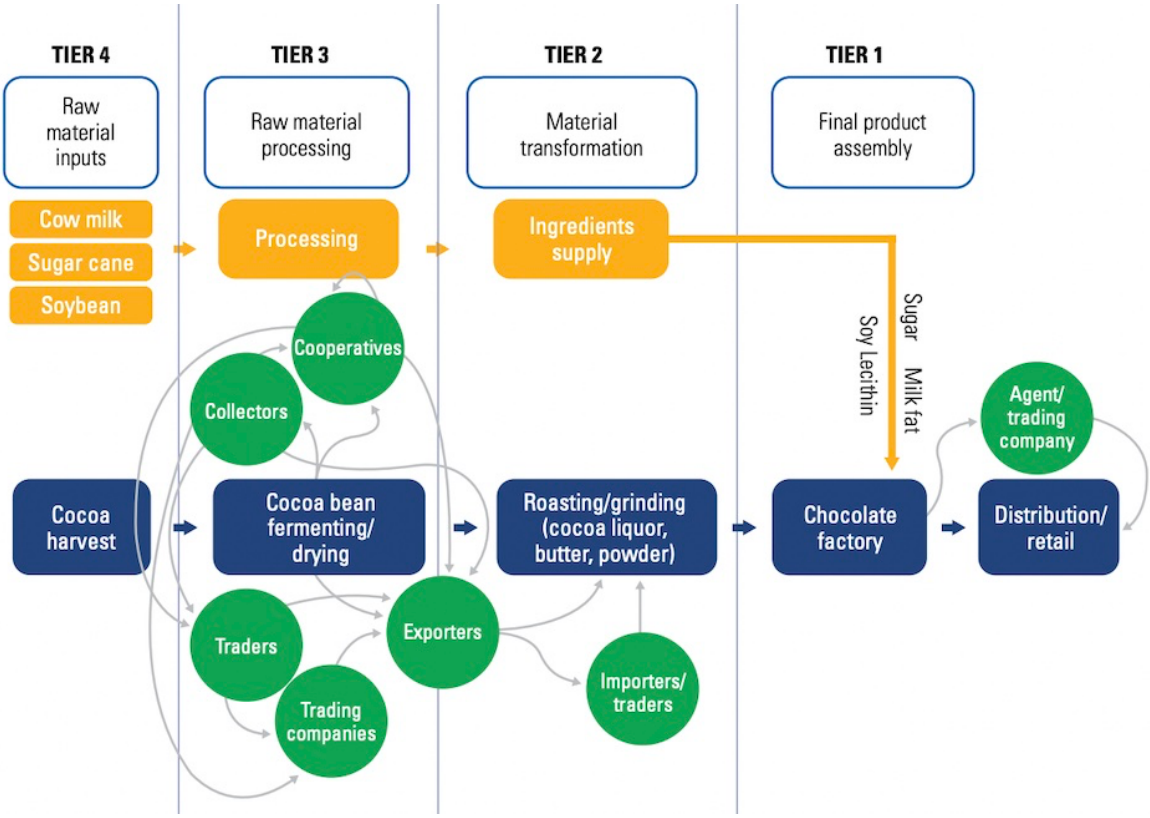
Table of Contents

Introduction: forced labor and child labor in cocoa production

Chocolate, one of the most popular products worldwide, comes from a long and labor-intensive process.

First, cocoa farmers must clear the land, plant seedlings, weed their plantations, prune trees, and apply pesticides and fertilizers. Once cocoa pods grow, farmers must harvest them by hand, using machetes or hooks. They then open the pods, so that the beans inside can be removed. They let the beans ferment for several days and later spread them to dry in the sun. After storing the beans in sacks, farmers can sell their cocoa down the supply chain, where it goes through collectors, transporters, traders, grinders, manufacturers, and retailers. Finally, it reaches consumers, pleasing them with a great variety of flavors and aromas.

Figure 1. The cocoa supply chain [1]



Legend

the different entities involved at different stages

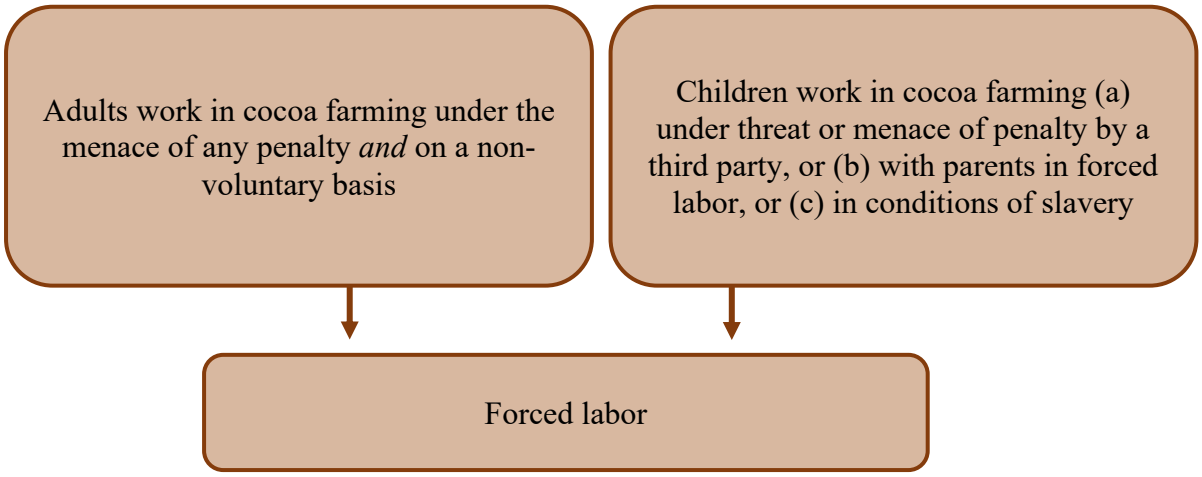
additional raw materials that will feed into the chocolate production

[1] UNICEF, Mapping Child Labor Risks in Global Supply Chains (Geneve: UNICEF, 2020).

However, the sweet taste and the pleasant smell of chocolate hide a bitter reality. In fact, the production of cocoa beans is particularly vulnerable to the exploitation of adults and children into human trafficking, forced labour, and child labor.

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No.29, forced labour is "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily". The menace of any penalty refers to the means of coercion used to impose work on someone. This may take place during the recruitment process to force someone to accept the job. It may also take place once the person is working to force him or her to do tasks that were not agreed upon or to prevent him or her from leaving. Involuntary work refers to work or services that take place without the worker's free and informed consent.[2]

Figure 2. Forced labor in cocoa production



Child labor, for its part, is referred to by the ILO as work that is mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful and/or interferes with the children's schooling. Permitted light work is up to 1 hour per week for children aged 5-11, 14 hours per week for children aged 12-14, and 43 hours per week for children aged 15-17.

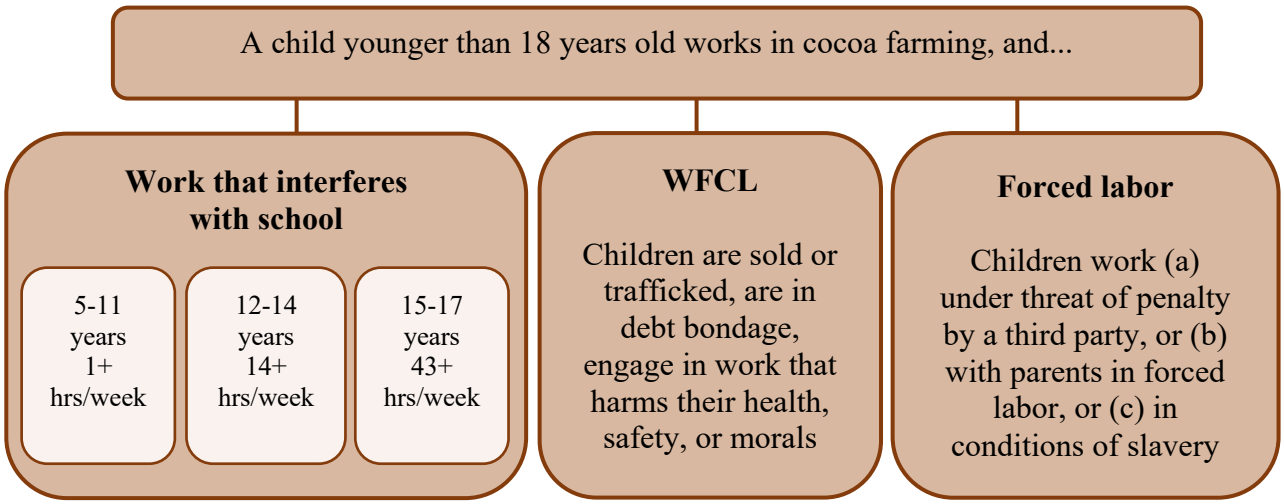
Within child labor, the worst forms of child labor (WFCL) are defined in ILO Convention No.182 as all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as "the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and serfdom; the use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution or pornography; the use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs; and work that, by its nature or circumstances, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of the child, which is known as hazardous child labor."

In the case of children, forced labor is work performed by a child for a third party, for the child's parents, or with the child's parents under a threat of penalty applied by a third party

[2] ILO Guidelines concerning the measurement of forced labor, Geneva October 2018.

either on the child directly or on the child's parents. It is also work performed alongside the child' parents when one or both parents are themselves in forced labor. Finally, forced child labor is work performed in any one of the following worst forms of child labor: forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery; the use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, the production of pornography, or pornographic performances; the use, procuring, or offering of a child for illicit activities.[3]

Figure 3. Child labor in cocoa production



While the past two decades have witnessed many promises to address forced labor and child labor in the cocoa industry, exploitation in cocoa farms continue to be widespread, representing a major source of concern when interrogating our capacity to meet SDG 8 and Target 8.7 by 2030. Oblivious to human rights, in fact, major cocoa companies continue to engage in exploitative practices and to unilaterally reap the benefits of an ever-expanding chocolate industry.

It is thus unsurprising that cocoa was listed in the latest 2023 Global Slavery Index as one of the products imported by G20 countries that is most at risk of modern slavery.[4] Also, in the 2022 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor released by the US Department of Labor, cocoa was listed as one of the goods produced by child labor and forced labor as well as one of the goods "with the most child labor listings by number of countries".[5]

Significantly, the reported risk of forced labor and child labor in cocoa is especially high in sub-Saharan Africa, which produces 70% of the world's cocoa.[6]

[3] ILO, Walk Free, IOM, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor and Forced Marriage* (Geneva: September 2022), p.14.
[4] Walk Free, *Global Slavery Index,* 2023.
[5] US Department of Labor, 2022 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor.
[6] OECD, *Business Handbook on Due Diligence in the Cocoa Sector,* April 2023.

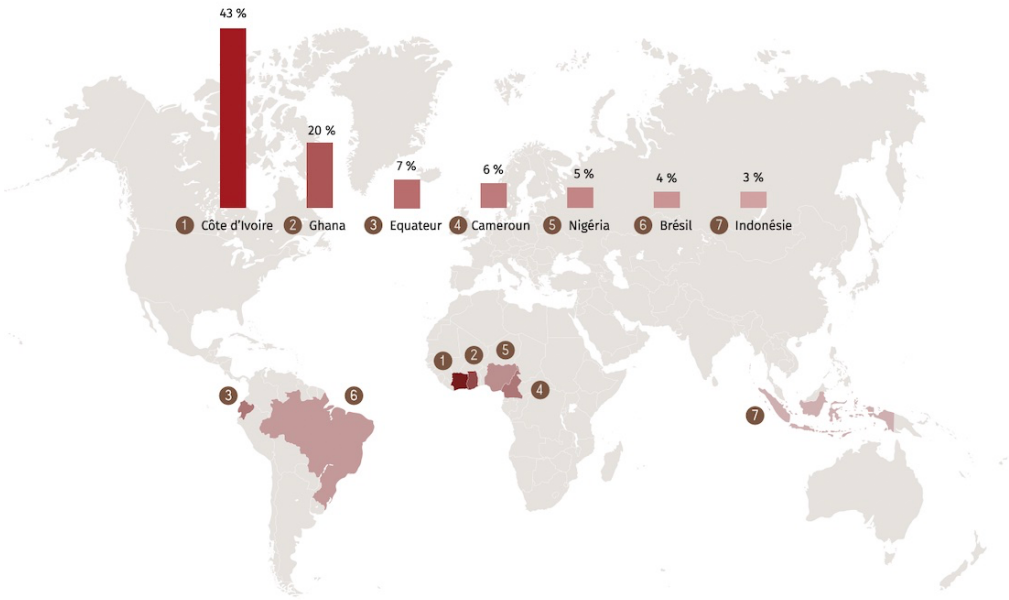
Forced labor and child labor in the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire

The cocoa tree is indigenous to South America. From there, it was introduced by European colonial powers to the rest of the world. In 1855, Portugal brought cocoa to the West African island of São Tomé, where the tropical climate seemed optimal for cocoa cultivation. From the island, cocoa production rapidly spread to the mainland, in today's Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Ghana. In Côte d'Ivoire, cocoa was grown on small-scale in the south-west early in the 20th century, but large-scale production of cocoa began in the 1930s in the east of the country, extending from neighboring areas across the border in Ghana.[7]

An overview of cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire

Today, Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest exporter of cocoa, producing around 32% of the world's cocoa. The Ivorian cocoa industry generates annual exports worth approximately $5 billion, accounting for 10% of Côte d'Ivoire's GDP. Cocoa makes up about half of the country's exports, with cocoa beans ($3.79 billion) and cocoa paste ($1.04 billion) in the country's top three export items.[8]

Figure 4. Production of cocoa by country [9]

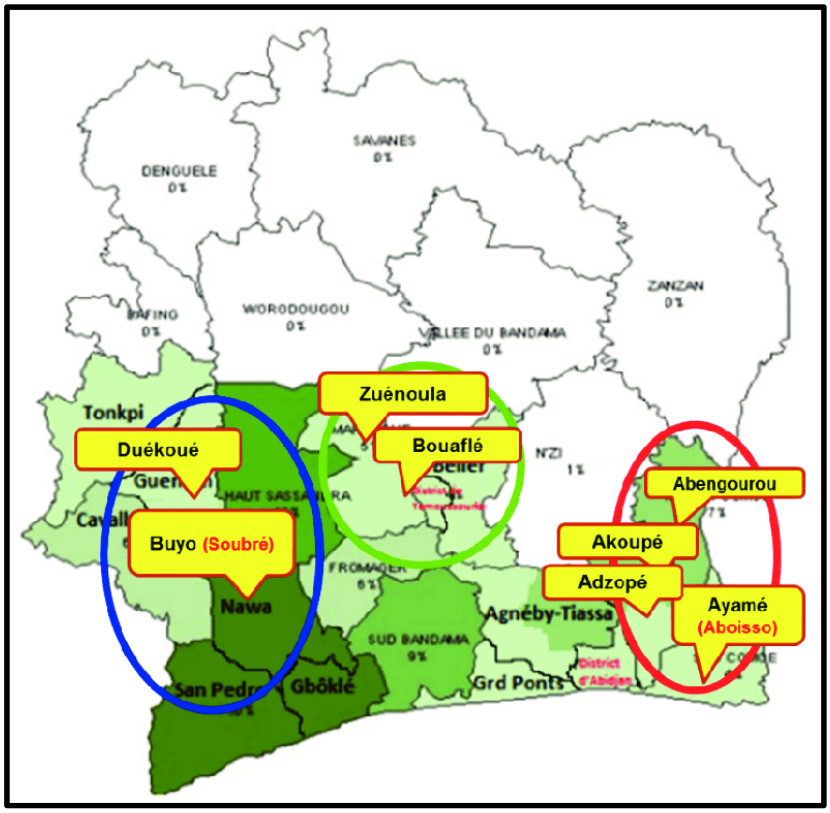


[7] P. Robson, *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa,* Anti-Slavery International, December 2010.
[8] Corporate Accountability Lab, *Empty promises: The Failure of Voluntary Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives to Improve Farmer Incomes in the Ivorian Cocoa Sector,* July 2019; NORC, *Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana*, 2020.
[9] ICCO 2022.

As in other West African countries, cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire increased by more than 6% per year in the 1960s and 1970s and even more into the 1980s. At independence in 1960, cocoa production was about 60 thousand tonnes per year and by the early 1990s production had reached 850 thousand tonnes. Ten years later it was 1.3 million tonnes.[10] However, it is noticeable that this growth has not been driven by increased yields. Rather, it has been driven by the expansion of cocoa farming land under the pressure of large cocoa companies, which has caused a rapid, dramatic, and irreversible deforestation across cocoa-producing countries.

Across West Africa, cocoa is produced on small family farms, with a typical farm size of 2-10 hectares.[11] In an environment dominated by poverty, informality, state neglect, and harmful cultural practices, cocoa production on those small farms is often associated with multiple forms of labor exploitation for the adults and children involved. According to the US Department of Labor, in fact, cocoa from West Africa is one of the goods at risk of being produced by child labor and forced labor.[12]

Figure 5. Cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire [13]



[10] P. Robson, *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa.*
[11] Fair Labor Association, *Mapping Working Conditions and Child Labor Risks.*
[12] US Department of Labor, 2022 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor.
[13] K. Kouakou et al., "Unexpected genome variability at multiple loci suggests cacao swollen shoot virus comprises multiple, divergent molecular variants", *Journal of Engineering Diseases and Virology,* Vol.3, No.1 (2017).

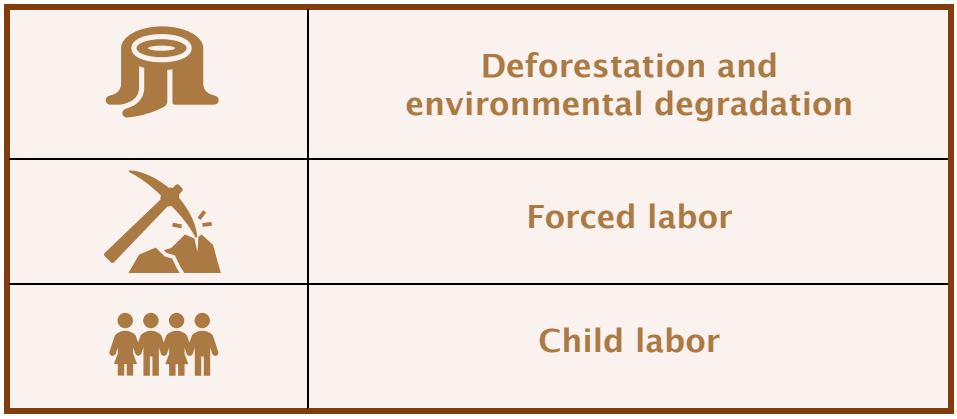
Cocoa production and slavery

The development of cocoa in West Africa has been linked to slavery and forced labor since the late 19th century. Slaves were transported from Angola to the islands of São Tome and Principe to work on the new cocoa estates, and reports of forced labor there continued until the 1950s. In 1955, a prominent observer wrote that "some unlucky Africans […] are deported to São Tomé and Principe […]. Here they do forced, or directed, labor on the cocoa fields in circumstances barely distinguishable from slavery."[14]

Cases of slavery and forced labour on cocoa plantations managed by local chiefs and colonial powers were also widely reported in Côte d'Ivoire up to the Second World War. In Côte d'Ivoire, the production of cocoa was initiated by the Europeans, who created the first cocoa plantations around Aboisso in the late 1880s. From there, cocoa plantations progressively expanded to areas immediately to the north and west of Abidjan. By the 1930s, about 200 European-owned cocoa plantations were concentrated in the central-west region, farmed in large part by Africans recruited as forced labor by the French colonial administration. In this regard, it is worth noting that France regarded the northern part of Côte d'Ivoire and its colony of Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso) as a forced labor reserve and even instituted a forced labor regime that lasted until March 1946. However, cocoa plantations in Côte d'Ivoire turned out to be only marginally profitable and were increasingly taken over by African small farmers, who relied on the labor of their family members, their children, and poor migrant workers to sustain the production of cocoa.[15]

Regrettably, the practices of labor exploitation that have historically characterized cocoa production in the country continue to be observed to this date.

Figure 6. Risks associated with cocoa production



[14] Anti-Slavery International, *The Cocoa Industry in West Africa: A History of Exploitation,* 2004.
[15] M. Bøås, A. Huser, *Child labor and cocoa production in West Africa: The case of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana* (Oslo: Fafo, 2006).

Adult forced labor

Forced labor in agriculture is a persistent global issue. According to the latest estimates, agriculture is the fourth sector worldwide for prevalence of adult forced labor, accounting for 12.3% of all instances of forced labor. It is also one of the sectors in which child forced labor is most commonly observed.[16] Among the agricultural products that the US Department of Labor reports as being at high risk of forced labor are peanuts from Bolivia, sugarcane from Brazil, sesame from Burma, tomatoes from Mexico, cotton from Pakistan and Uzbekistan, fish from Thailand, and cocoa from West Africa.[17]

On West African cocoa farms, forced labor has been reported among women and men alike. Women reported having been forced to work in cocoa farming by their husbands, while men reported having been forced to work on cocoa farms by their family members (e.g., siblings and in-laws) as well as by "masters", farm owners, and other non-relatives.[18] Interestingly, it has been noted that the risk of forced labor seems to be higher in areas where cocoa farms have taken over protected forests, due to the illicit nature of those farms.[19]

In Côte d'Ivoire, 9,600 adults (or 4.2 adult workers per 1,000 workers) were reported to be in forced labor in cocoa production between 2013 and 2017.[20] While accurate disaggregated statistics is missing, the phenomenon of forced labor seems to be especially prevalent in the case of migrant workers and, even more so, recently arrived migrant workers.[21]

Migrant workers may come from non-cocoa producing areas of Côte d'Ivoire's northern regions or from Burkina Faso and Mali. Once on the cocoa farms, migrant workers (either domestic or foreign) often find themselves in situations of forced labor. Work agreements are nearly exclusively verbal, though they may be referred to as "contrats" to convey a falsely formal image. In most cases, however, no agreement, either spoken or written, is made between the farm owner and the workers, exposing the latter to extreme vulnerability. There has also been some evidence that the retention of migrant workers' identity documents may be used as a means of binding workers to their employers and depriving them of freedom of movement.[22]

In terms of remuneration, new migrant workers are reportedly paid as little as CFA 75,000 ($121.44) for a year's work. Workers may receive food, housing, medicine, and some cash advances as needed. However, there is a high risk that the provision of these benefits, which

[16] ILO, Walk Free, IOM, *Forced Labor and Forced Marriage,* pp.31, 47.
[17] US Department of Labor, 2018 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor.
[18] Tulane University, Walk Free, Chocolonely, *Bitter Sweets: Prevalence of Forced Labor and Child Labor in the Cocoa Sectors of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana,* 2018.
[19] Corporate Accountability Lab, *Empty promises*.
[20] Tulane University, Walk Free, Chocolonely, *Bitter Sweets*
[21] US Department of Labor, Trafficking in Persons Report 2022, Côte d'Ivoire.
[22] Verité, *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Côte d'Ivoire*, 2019.

are often perceived by workers to be an advantage associated with cocoa farming, contributes to the cumulation of debt, which employers might then exploit to extract free labor.[23] Workers who find employment on Ivorian cocoa farms through third-party intermediaries may also incur debt related to their recruitment and transportation, which they must then work off. This can take nearly the entirety of the first year and, in some cases, workers may work for multiple years before they receive standard wages.[24]

As far as recruiters are concerned, it has been reported that there are recruiting networks that operate across Burkina Faso, Mali, and the northern regions of Côte d'Ivoire. Recruiters in sending regions recruit workers and facilitate connections with a broker at the point of arrival who in turn facilitates placement of the worker with a cocoa farmer.[25] While, obviously, not all individuals facilitating movement or transportation of migrants are necessarily involved in trafficking for forced labor, in many cases, this is sadly the case.

Child forced labor

Besides adults, forced labor on cocoa farms is also reported among children. Here, child trafficking is the most common pattern by which children find themselves in this situation of exploitation. Traffickers operating in regional countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Benin, Togo, and Burkina Faso pose as job recruiters or *locateurs.* They typically approach children from poor, uneducated rural families with promises of well-paid and legitimate job opportunities in Côte d'Ivoire (as well as Ghana and Cameroon).[26] In extreme yet rare cases, some traffickers even resort to kidnapping children.[27]

It has also been noted that Burkinabe cocoa farmers settled in Côte d'Ivoire would often look for child laborers in their home country, approaching their communities of origin to recruit children from poor families and bring them to Cote d'Ivoire under false promises.[28]

A child who was trafficked from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire reported that "I was nine years old when I went to Côte d'Ivoire. […] A man told me that if I went with him to work in Côte d'Ivoire, I could have a bicycle. I very much wanted to have a bicycle. I did not know this man. […] There were two middle-men who organised my journey to Côte d'Ivoire. There was one

[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Senator Engel, Congressional Record, June 28, 2001, pp. H3781, https://www.congress.gov/crec/2001/06/28/CREC-2001-06-28.pdf; ILO, UNICEF, World Bank, *Cameroun: Comprendre le travail des enfants et l'emploi des jeunes,* June 2012.
[27] Fair Labor Association, *Mapping Working Conditions and Child Labor Risks.*
[28] Programme pour le développement durable des cultures d'arbres fruitiers (STCP) Institut international d'agriculture tropicale (IITA), Sous les auspices de L'Agence des Etats -Unis pour le développement international, du Ministère américain du Travail et de l'Organisation internationale du Travail, *La main-d'oeuvre infantile dans le secteur cacaoyer en Afrique de l'Ouest: Synthèse des conclusions des études réalisées au Cameroun, en Côte d'Ivoire, au Ghana et au Nigeria,* July 2002.

who came to the village and spoke to me and said that I could get a bicycle if I went with him: I travelled with him to the border on a motorbike. The second met us at the border and went with me all the way to the farm. […]"[29] Another boy from Mali retold that "[…] I was poor, and my family were poor, [...]. I met a man called O. at the bus station who told me that he needed workers. I travelled on a large bus to Côte d'Ivoire […] I worked for O. for one month without payment on his cocoa farm. He said that this was to pay for the bus fare. He then handed me over to S. who was an older man."[30]

Besides, instances of child trafficking for forced labor exploitation in agriculture are also reported within Côte d'Ivoire, as parents often entrust their children to intermediaries who promise to take them to urban centers for education and/or employment, only to end up in situations of forced labor on cocoa farms.[31] In Côte d'Ivoire, this is especially the case for children of the Boulé ethnic group from the Yamassoukro-Bouaké region and children of the Senoufo and Lobi ethnic groups from the north of the country.[32]

After transporting children to cocoa-growing regions, traffickers sell them, or lend them, to cocoa farm owners. There, children find themselves forced to work in the cocoa production.[33] In some cases, the farmers hiring the children will not pay the children directly. Rather, they will pay the person who brough the children to the farm. As reported by a farmer in Côte d'Ivoire who employs children on his cocoa farm, he pays the "gran patron" who manages the boys a little less than $9 per child for a week of work. The "big boss" would, in turn, pay each of the boys about half of that.[34] If a sum was advanced by the trafficker to transport the child, the latter enters a situation of debt bondage, whereby he cannot leave the cocoa farm until the alleged debt is extinguished.[35]

In other cases, children are exclusively paid in kind. As noted by Burkinabe and Malian children brought into Côte d'Ivoire, they worked for years without being paid anything. They were only provided with food and a poor place where to sleep at night.[36] Deprived of any form of income, challenged by the language barrier, and often unaware of their whereabouts, those children find themselves in the position of being unable to leave the farm.[37]

---

[29] P. Robson, *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa.*
[30] Ibid.
[31] US Department of Labor, Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports, Cameroon.
[32] Programme pour le développement durable des cultures d'arbres fruitiers (STCP) Institut international d'agriculture tropicale (IITA), Sous les auspices de L'Agence des Etats -Unis pour le développement international, du Ministère américain du Travail et de l'Organisation internationale du Travail, *La main-d'oeuvre infantile dans le secteur cacaoyer en Afrique de l'Ouest: Synthèse des conclusions des études réalisées au Cameroun, en Côte d'Ivoire, au Ghana et au Nigeria,* July 2002.
[33] US State Department, 2023 Trafficking in Persons Report, Cameroon.
[34] P. Whoriskey, R. Siegel, S. Georges, "Cocoa's child laborers", *Washington Post*, June 5, 2019.
[35] Anti-Slavery International, *The Cocoa Industry in West Africa: A History of Exploitation* (London: 2004).
[36] Refer to: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5810dda3e3df28ce37b58357/t/5e4607e90bd7ed452a1c8c6e/1581647858374/FINAL+307+PETITION+WITH+EXHIBITS.pdf.
[37] Ibid.

Besides being unpaid or under-paid, children are also given very little food, work long hours every day, are whipped or beaten for working slowly or for trying to escape, and are locked up at night in small, windowless rooms.[38] In the words of a girl who was only 13 years old when her uncle dropped her off at a cocoa plantation in the middle of the rainforest in Côte d'Ivoire, "I slept on the floor every night, and in the morning I would pick cocoa. It was hard work and I felt completely alone."[39]

Another boy reported that on the Ivorian cocoa farm where he worked "there was a shelter covered with black plastic without a door. That is where we slept. My job was to carry sacks of cocoa on my head. Once I slipped in a hole when I was carrying cocoa and hurt my ankle. We ate only banana and yams."[40] A Malian boy working in Côte d'Ivoire also said that he and the other children working on the cocoa farm "slept in a small cabin on the farm. We had no contact with the family. We started work at 08.00 and worked until 17.00. […] The food was cassava and potato. […] We all worked for three years without being paid."[41]

Farmers also use psychological terror and physical violence to keep the children in a situation of subjugation and to prevent them from escaping the farm. A boy from Mali who was enslaved in a cocoa farm in Côte d'Ivoire said that those children who attempted to escape would be beaten brutally in front of everyone – stripped of their clothes, with their hands tied behind their backs, they would be viciously whipped for several days. Some did not survive, while those who did had to return immediately to farming. Denied medical care, their wounds would often become infected and expose the children to immense suffering.[42]

However, while certainly a cause for concern, forced labor is not a particularly widespread phenomenon in the Ivorian (and West African) cocoa sector.[43] In the case of children, this is consistent with several findings according to which in West African cocoa agriculture it is the parents who are most commonly responsible for children's engagement in labor on the family's cocoa farm.[44]

---

[38] Senator Engel, Congressional Record, June 28, 2001, pp. H3781.
[39] T. Collins, "Ivory Coast's crackdown on child labor clashes with the realities of cocoa farming", *Newsline Magazine,* July 6, 2023.
[40] P. Robson, *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa.*
[41] Ibid.
[42] Anti-Slavery International, *The Cocoa Industry in West Africa.*
[43] World Cocoa Foundation, https://www.worldcocoafoundation.org/blog/we-have-zero-tolerance-for-forced-labor-in-the-cocoa-supply-chain/#:~:text=The%20specific%20problem%20of%20forced,labor%20between%202013%20and%202017.
[44] Tulane University, Walk Free, Chocolonely, *Bitter Sweets;* Programme pour le développement durable des cultures d'arbres fruitiers (STCP) Institut international d'agriculture tropicale (IITA), Sous les auspices de L'Agence des Etats -Unis pour le développement international, du Ministère américain du Travail et de l'Organisation internationale du Travail, *La main-d'oeuvre infantile dans le secteur cacaoyer en Afrique de l'Ouest: Synthèse des conclusions des études réalisées au Cameroun, en Côte d'Ivoire, au Ghana et au Nigeria,* July 2002.

Child labor

Much more ubiquitous than forced labor is child labor within a child own's family.[45] As has been noted, "though the most sensational stories about child labor [in the cocoa sector] over the years have focused on boys and girls who've been held against their will and abused, the more common story is […] that of […] hundreds of thousands of children [who] are used as free labor by their own families and often asked to take on dangerous tasks like harvesting with machetes or hauling 100-pound bags of beans."[46]

To understand child labor within a child's own family, it is useful to consider the prevalent structure of production in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, as most sub-Saharan African countries are dominated by a rural economy based on familial agriculture where production is largely constructed on household performance, the labor of children is regarded as necessary to a household's economic survival.[47] Besides this, in West African countries child labor is considered positively, as a fundamental and necessary element of a child's socialization, whereby children learn to live as members of a certain societal group.[48]

In Côte d'Ivoire, moreover, child labor on cocoa farms not only takes place within a child's own nuclear family. It also takes places under the systems of *apprentisage*, whereby children go to live with extended family members and participate in the cocoa sector as "apprentices" to learn some skills, and under the system of *confiage*, whereby children live with extended family because the latter has more resources to care for the child, who in turn will contribute to the family's economic activities (e.g., cocoa farming).[49] Significantly, this reveals the extent to which in Côte d'Ivoire child labor is entwined not only with economic considerations but also with deeply rooted cultural practices and social norms.

Between 2008-09 and 2018-19, there was a 17% increase in the proportion of Ivorian children in agricultural households who were working in cocoa production (from 23% to 39%). More worryingly, the proportion of children engaged in child labor in cocoa production increased by 15% between 2008-09 and 2018-19 (from 23% to 37%) and the proportion of children engaged in hazardous work in cocoa production increased by 14% over the same period (from 23% to 35%). This means that 1,029,256 children (62% boys and 38% girls) are engaged in child labor in the Ivorian cocoa industry and that – of those – 991,870 children (63% boys and 37% girls) are in hazardous child labor.[50]

---

[45] ILO, "The challenge to make chocolate child labor free", *YouTube,* April 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRG6NMVKHDs.
[46] B. O'Keefe, "Bitter Sweets: A special on-the-ground report from West Africa", *Fortune,* Marhc 1, 2016, https://fortune.com/longform/big-chocolate-child-labor/.
[47] J. Andvig, S. Canagarajah, A. Kielland, Issues in Child Labor in Africa, Africa Region Human Development, The World Bank, Working Paper No. 26701, 2001.
[48] A. Babo, "Child labor in cocoa-growing communities in Cote d'Ivoire"; A. Kielland, M. Tovo, "Children At Work: Child Labor Practices In Africa", 58-61 (2006).
[49] Verité, *Assessment of Forced Labor Risk in the Cocoa Sector of Côte d'Ivoire*.
[50] NORC, *Final Report.*

Table 1. Child labor and hazardous child labor in cocoa production, Ivory Coast [51]

Children in all agricultural households		All children	Children working in cocoa production		Children in child labor in cocoa production		Children in hazardous child labor in cocoa production	
		Number	Num	%	Num	%	Num	%
Cote d'Ivoire	2008/2009	3,550,449	820,106	23%	817,079	23%	805,482	23%
	2018/2019	2,813,249	1,084,306	39%	1,029,256	37%	991,870	35%

Concerningly, the use of child labor in the production of cocoa is part of a bigger trend that sees 152 million children engaged in labor worldwide, 70% of which (112 million) are exploited in agriculture.[52] The trend is even higher in sub-Saharan Africa, where 81.5% of children are employed in agriculture.[53]

As mentioned above, most children working on Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa farms do so alongside their parents. Most farmers, in fact, report relying on family labor, which includes spouses, children, and other family members, for cocoa production – especially during the harvest months.[54] This observation is in line with global findings, whereby 72% per cent of all child labour is reported to occur within families, primarily on family farms or in family micro-enterprises.[55] Within sub-Saharan Africa, 82.4% of child labor occurs within the family.[56]

Activities in which children working on Ivorian cocoa farms typically engage include the following:

- *land preparation* - land clearing, felling and chopping, burning, and stumping;
- *planting* - preparing seedlings, planting seedlings, and sowing at stake;
- *farm maintenance* - weeding, working with insecticides/herbicides/fungicides/other chemicals, and carrying water for spraying;
- *cocoa harvest* - plucking, gathering, or breaking cocoa pods;
- *post-harvest* - carting fermented cocoa beans, drying cocoa beans, and carting dry cocoa beans to shed.[57]

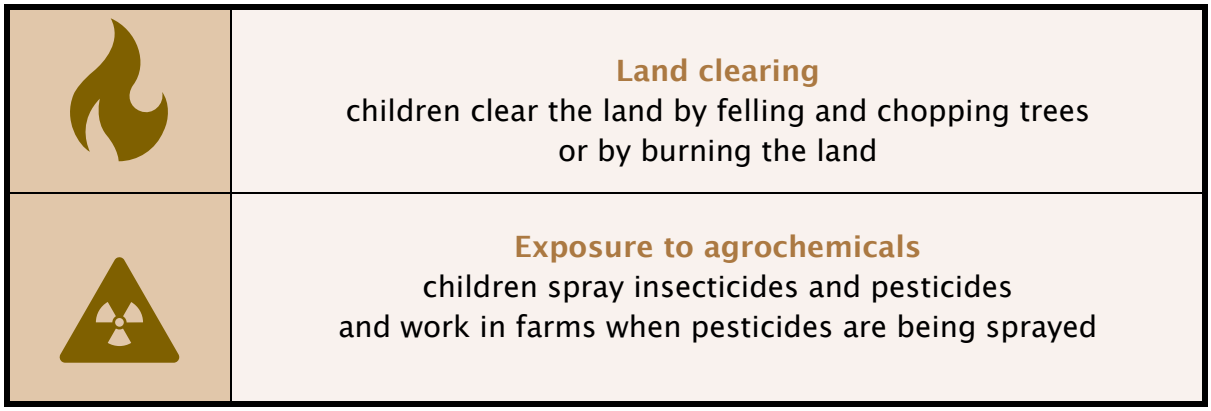
[51] Ibid.
[52] ILO, UNICEF, *Child Labor: Global Estimates 2020* (New York, 2021).
[53] Ibid.
[54] Fair Labor Association, *Mapping Working Conditions and Child Labor Risks.*
[55] ILO, UNICEF, *Child Labor: Global Estimates 2020.*
[56] ILO, UNICEF, *Child Labor: Global Estimates 2020.*
[57] NORC, University of Chicago, *Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana,* January 2020.

While not all instances of child work in cocoa production amount to child labor, in most cases they do, since working on cocoa farms harms a child's health and development, interferes with education, and exposes children to multiple hazards throughout all stages of the cocoa production process.[58] As noted in the US Department of Labor, the production of cocoa is one of the sectors most affected by the WFCL, as children engage in the production of cocoa "including burning and clearing fields; cutting down trees to expand cocoa plantations; exposure to agrochemicals; harvesting, drying, and fermenting cocoa beans; using sharp tools to break pods; and transporting heavy loads of cocoa pods and water."[59]

Children working on cocoa farms typically use chainsaws to clear the land.[60] They also climb the cocoa trees to cut bean pods using machetes, large, heavy, and dangerous knives that are the standard tools for children on the cocoa farms.[61]

In addition to the hazards of using machetes, children are also exposed to agricultural chemicals. Once they cut the bean pods from the trees, children slice them open, scoop out the beans, spread them in baskets or on mats, and cover them to ferment. Then they uncover the beans and put them in the sun to dry. Afterwards, they pack them into sacks that weigh more than 45 kilograms and load them onto trucks.[62] Throughout the cocoa production process, children are often forced to work in extreme heat, as midday temperatures can average 30-35° Celsius.[63]

Figure 7. Hazards faced by children on the cocoa farms [64]



[58] International Cocoa Initiative, "Child labor in cocoa", https://www.cocoainitiative.org/issues/child-labour-cocoa; US Department of Labor, Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports, Cameroon.
[59] US Department of Labor, Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports, Côte d'Ivoire.
[60] Tulane University, *2013/14 Survey Research on Child Labor in West African Cocoa Growing Areas*, July 30, 2015.
[61] ILO, UNICEF, *Child Labor: Global Estimates 2020.*
[62] P. Whoriskey, R. Siegel, "Cocoa's Child Laborers: Mars, Nestlé and Hershey Pledged Nearly Two Decades Ago to Stop Using Cocoa Harvested by Children. Yet Much of the Chocolate You Buy Still Starts With Child Labor", *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2019.
[63] World Vision, "Chocolate's bitter taste: forced, child, and trafficked labor in the cocoa industry", 2012.
[64] US Department of Labor, Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports, Cameroon.

	**Use of sharp tools** children use machetes and other sharp tools for weeding, harvesting cocoa pods, breaking cocoa pods
	**Carrying heavy loads** children carry wood during land clearing, cocoa pods after harvesting, and dry cocoa beans after fermentation and drying

As a result, children working in s cocoa production are susceptible to various kinds of injuries, such as back pains, muscle pains, burns, skin itchiness or scratches. [65] Exposure to pesticides, that are used widely in cocoa growing regions to control bugs and viruses that harm the cocoa plant has also been found to cause headaches, nausea, diarrhoea, liver and kidney complications, and even cancer. Significantly, exposure to these pains and injuries is higher among children working in the cocoa sector than those working in non-cocoa agriculture. [66]

In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, 85% of children in cocoa households reported wounds and cuts, 18% reported muscle pains and 16% back pains, and 17% reported skin itchiness and scratches.[67] A child who used to work in Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa farms reported that he cut himself with a machete shortly after joining the farm and got badly wounded.[68]

Drivers of exploitation in cocoa farms

Within cocoa-growing communities, forced labor and child labor are driven by a s series of intersecting factors:[69]

- **Poverty within rural cocoa-growing communities**.[70] Currently, almost no cocoa farmer in the main cocoa-producing regions of West Africa earns a living income (i.e., the net annual income required for a household to afford a decent standard of living for all its members, including food, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing, and other essential needs).[71] While the global chocolate industry is expected

[65] NORC, University of Chicago, *Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production.*
[66] Ibid.
[67] NORC, *Final Report.*
[68] *Ending Child Trafficking in West Africa.*
[69] Tulane University, Walk Free, Chocolonely, *Bitter Sweets*; Verité, *Commodity Report: Cocoa.*
[70] NORC, University of Chicago, *Final Report: Assessing Progress in Reducing Child Labor in Cocoa Production in Cocoa Growing Areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana,* October 2020.
[71] Cocoa Barometer 2020.

to reach an annual value of $263 billion by the end of the decade,[72] cocoa farmers often earn below the World Bank's poverty threshold.[73] In Côte d'Ivoire, especially, cocoa farmers are the lowest paid. The average daily income for a cocoa farmer in Côte d'Ivoire is less than what a consumer pays for a single chocolate bar.[74] As a consequence, almost all farmers rely on their family members, including children. Importantly, the poverty to which cocoa-producing communities are exposed is linked to two main factors:

- **Inequalities in value chain**. The cocoa value chain is one of those characterized by great inequalities, even more so than the coffee value chain. Fluctuating cocoa prices, combined with poor productivity, often mean that farmers struggle to make enough income to cover production costs. At best, farmers will get only a small profit margin. Farmers who do not own their land must even give high proportions of their profits to the land owner, so that little is left to afford basic necessities like food, housing, and healthcare. In remote areas, the purchase price practiced by some buyers who source directly from farmers may be even lower than the international market price.[75]

- **Price fluctuations of cocoa beans**. Cocoa prices are subject to great fluctuation.[76] When cocoa prices are low, farmers often have no savings to rely on, which exposes them to even greater poverty.[77] Because farmers bear the burden of market volatility, whether driven by commodity prices or by changes in demand, they are exposed to economic precarity and indebtedness.

Limited bargaining power of farmers. The inability of many farmers to arrange transportation for their beans means that they have limited marketing options and are forced to accept lower prices for cocoa set by local *pisteurs* (itinerant buyers) and transporters. Farmers who operate outside the cooperative system (for instance, in the main cocoa-growing regions of Cote d'Ivoire only 20-30% of farmers are part of a cooperative) are extremely vulnerable to receiving very low prices for their beans, which they often sell directly to the *pisteurs* or on an ad hoc basis to cooperatives. Selling to *pisteurs* may provide benefits including immediate payment as well as credit, if farmers are in need of urgent capital. However, the *pisteurs* typically take advantage of their position and buy at a price below the farmgate price.[78]

Lack of awareness on the reality and the harmful consequences of child labor. Uneducated on the reality and the risks of child labor, Ivorian farmers report that their

[72] A. Brudney, R. Taylor, *There Will Be No More Cocoa Here: How Companies Are Extracting the West African Cocoa Sector to Death,* Corporate Accountability Lab, September 2023, p.6.
[73] A. Brudney, R. Taylor, *There Will Be No More Cocoa Here.*
[74] Corporate Accountability Lab, *Empty promises.*
[75] Fair Labor Association, *Mapping Working Conditions and Child Labor Risks.*
[76] See here: https://www.foodcircle.com/magazine/cocoa-pricing-commodity-market.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Corporate Accountability Lab, *Empty promises.*

children engage in all types of tasks including hazardous activities, such as those that require the use of sharp tools and chemical application. The same is reported among farm owners who employ young workers for any task related to the cocoa production.[79] Similarly, many parents (both within and beyond Côte d'Ivoire) entrust their children to informal labor recruiters because they are unaware of the risk of trafficking that hides behind their appealing promises of job or education opportunities.

- **Lack of access to essential services and infrastructure** such as education, healthcare, and social protection. In many cocoa-growing communities, parents report taking their children to the farm because they cannot afford to enroll them in school or pay for costs of school materials. Parents residing in communities where the nearest school is far from home also report having no choice but to take their children with them to the farm.[80]

- **Gaps in law and weak law enforcement capacity**. Côte d'Ivoire has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (e.g., ILO Convention No.138, ILO Convention No.182, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child). It has also ratified the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons. On this same line, the government has established laws and regulations related to child labor and forced labor, such as Articles 3 and 23.2 of the Labor Code, Articles 4-11 of the Prohibitions of Hazardous Work List, Articles 4, 6-7, 11-14, 19-23 of the Prohibition of Trafficking and Worst Forms of Child Labor Law. However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of existing child labor and anti-trafficking laws, including insufficient human resource allocation.

- **Gaps in social programs.** Côte d'Ivoire signed the U.S.-Côte d'Ivoire Child Protection Compact Partnership, a non-binding multi-year plan to address child sex trafficking and forced child labor in Côte d'Ivoire. The government also opened new schools at primary, secondary, and preschool levels and increased its education budget and its social services program budget. Moreover, the government continued its national project to map the locations of cocoa farms throughout the country. Approximately 350,000 out of the estimated 993,000 cocoa farmers have registered. Finally, the government partnered with UNICEF to implement new birth registration mechanisms. However, the scope of existing programs, including in cocoa, is insufficient to fully address the extent of the child labor problem in Côte d'lvoire. Current programming is not expansive enough, evidenced by the fact the child labor prevalence rate has not declined.

[79] Fair Labor Association, *Mapping Working Conditions and Child Labor Risks.*
[80] NORC, University of Chicago, *Final Report.*

Conclusion & Recommendations

Over the past few decades, as the work of investigative journalists and human rights activists exposed the many violations of labor, children, and human rights taking place in cocoa-producing regions,[81] chocolate manufacturers and retailers have launched initiatives aimed at reversing the reported exploitation and abuses. These include Nestlé's Child Labor Monitoring and Remediation System, Mars' Protecting Children Action Plan, Hershey's Cocoa for Good, and Mondelez's Cocoa Life.

In 2001, major members of the cocoa industry, including big brands such as Nestlé, Mars, and Hershey, signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol,[82] an agreement aimed at eliminating the worst forms of child labor and adult forced labor on cocoa farms in West Africa by 2005. However, the deadlines for reaching the commitments contained in the Protocol have been repeatedly postponed, most recently to 2025.

Other mechanisms introduced to obviate the problem of labor exploitation on cocoa farms, such as fair-trade certifications and ethical certifications (e.g., Fairtrade International, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ Certified), have also had a limited impact on the ground. In fact, the third-party inspectors for these certifications typically visit fewer than 10% of cocoa farms. Those visits are also announced in advance, which enables farmers to hide evidence of human and labor rights violations.[83] As has been noted "these inspections have made child labor more hidden while remaining just as prevalent."[84]

Thus, child labor in cocoa-producing farms is actually on the rise, deforestation in protected forests continues, farmers are earning less now than they were years ago, and farmers continue to have little bargaining power vis-à-vis the other parties of the cocoa supply chain (buyers, manufacturers, and retailers).[85]

As we are approaching the 2025 deadline defined under the latest revision of the Harkin-Engel Protocol, as well as the 2030 deadline established in the framework of the SDGs, it seems that to reach the goal of ending forced labor, child labor, and the WFCL in cocoa-growing areas in Côte d'Ivoire (and in West African more broadly), a whole-of-society approach is urgently needed. Some of the actions that could be effectively taken are proposed below.

[81] CNN Freedom Project, Chocolate Child Slaves, https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2015/05/26/chocolate-child-slaves-ivory-coast-spc-cfp.cnn.
[82] Named after US Senator Tom Harkin and US Representative Eliot Engel, who negotiated the agreement.
[83] P. Whoriskey, "Chocolate Companies Sell 'Certified Cocoa.' But Some of Those Farms Use Child Labor, Harm Forests", *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2019.
[84] Cocoa Barometer 2020.
[85] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5C7jmrycf0

Companies that supply cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire

- Pay a **living income to cocoa farmers** and make sure that the full amount of the living income does reach farmers;

- Implement a **holistic human rights (and environmental) due diligence policy**. Embed responsible business conduct into policy and management systems; identify and assess adverse impacts in operations, supply chains, and business relations; cease, prevent, or mitigate adverse impacts; track implementation and results; communicate how impacts are addressed; provide for, or cooperate in, remediation when appropriate;

- Establish **long-term contracts at fixed prices with cocoa farmers** that distribute the risk of price fluctuations to supply chain actors who are better situated to absorb it, resulting in greater stability across the supply chain;

- Design and implement **child labor monitoring and remediation systems** (CLMRS). An effective CLMRS should raise awareness on child labor amongst farmers, children, and the wider community; identify children in child labor through an active monitoring process; provide prevention and remediation support to children in child labor; follow up with children in child labor to monitor their status;

- Pursue **partnerships with other companies, the government, and civil society organizations** to design and introduce credible, sustainable, and effective initiatives aimed at addressing forced labor and child labor in cocoa-producing regions (e.g., programs targeted at reducing vulnerability in parts of the supply chain identified as "hot spots" for forced labor risk) as well as to engage in collaboration, share experiences and good practices, and accelerate progress.

Government of Côte d'Ivoire

- Implement a better **regulatory system for companies sourcing cocoa** from the country. This includes ensuring that the cocoa that companies buy is not from deforested areas and that farmers are paid fairly for their cocoa;

- Implement an **income improvement program for farmers**, for instance by improving farmer techniques to increase production and yields (good agricultural practices), by supporting diversification of income-generating activities at the household-level, and by setting up Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs);

- Support cocoa farmers to establish and control **farmer cooperatives** to improve the bargaining power of cocoa producers;

- Invest more in **rural infrastructure** to ensure that children and their families in rural areas have access to school, healthcare, and other necessary services;

- Increase the number of **labor inspectors**, ensure that the labor inspectorate receives sufficient funding and adequate training on indicators of forced labor and child labor, and expand inspections to all sectors including informal sector workplaces such as cocoa farms;

- Pursue **cooperation with other regional countries on community sensitization** on the risks of cross-border illegal migration as well as on the risks of trafficking and exploitation that hide behind the recruiters' promises;

Civil Society Organizations

- Launch **awareness-raising campaigns** on forced labor, child trafficking, child labor, and WFCL among cocoa-producing communities aimed at addressing misconceptions about child labor and what constitutes light work and hazardous work and aimed at encouraging an enduring cultural change;

- Carry out **research to improve understanding** of the causes of child labour and forced labour in the cocoa sector and to identify effective mechanisms to address these phenomena;

- Provide **technical assistance to government and cocoa companies** to support the development of culturally appropriate and effective outreach programs, monitoring programs, and remediation systems;

- Initiate **forums, conferences, and workshops** aimed at encouraging a constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue on successes, challenges, and failures in addressing the risk of modern slavery in cocoa supply chains.

Countries where cocoa companies are registered

- Introduce **mandatory environmental and human rights due diligence** requiring companies to conduct due diligence to prevent, mitigate, and remedy modern slavery in their operations and cocoa supply chains, in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;

- Provide **access to remedy for victims**, including a robust liability regime and strong enforcement measures that ensure accountability for harm arising out of human rights abuses caused, or contributed to, by a cocoa company or by entities with which the cocoa company has a business relation;

- Initiate a **dialogue on how Côte d'Ivoire can be supported** in meeting its obligations under ILO conventions 138 and 182, to which the country is party.

Investors in cocoa companies

- Engage with cocoa companies to encourage them – and help them – to develop and implement **better processes to proactively search their supply chain** for modern slavery (on the assumption that it exists), ensure remedy for those affected, and take meaningful steps to ensure that the situation of abuse does not continue;

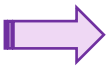
- Establish **clear standards for investment**. Investors' considerations on whom to include in their investment portfolios should focus on factors such as (i) whether a company has (and enforces) a supplier code of conduct that reflects international labour standards, (ii) whether a company works with suppliers at all levels to improve their practices in relation to child labour and forced labour (iii) whether a company has a process in place for assessing modern slavery risk;

- Launch a **shareholder action** against cocoa companies known to be oblivious to forced labour or child labor or those whose business models and tactics are associated with labour exploitation. If that does not yield results, consider responsibly divesting from those companies. In such cases, public disclosure of the divestment decision – and conditions for reinvestment, if applicable – will send a strong message about investors' human rights expectations.

Consumers

- Exert **pressure on their governments** to implement mandatory due diligence laws that hold cocoa companies to account for failing to prevent and address forced labor and child labor in their supply chains and that provide routes for remedies to adults and children who have been affected by labour rights and human rights violations;

- Strive to **learn about the issue of child labor and forced labor** in the cocoa industry and keep themselves constantly informed, so as to adjust their consuming practices accordingly;



Exert **pressure on cocoa companies** to take meaningful action to prevent, assess, and address forced labor and child labor in their operations and supply chains. When and as possible, buy cocoa-based products from companies that have shown to be responsible and proactive when it comes to the protection of human rights in their operations and supply chains.