



INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR
SAFETY AND HEALTH FACT SHEET
HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE
COCOA



BACKGROUND

Chocolate comes from the tropical cocoa tree, which thrives only in hot, rainy climates. It grows up to 7.5 metres tall and bears seedpods up to 30 centimetres long and 10 centimetres thick with a hard, leathery shell. Trees are often pruned back to approximately three metres in height to facilitate harvesting. Trees begin bearing fruit between 18 and 30 months after planting. The main products are cocoa butter, cocoa paste, chocolate liquor and cocoa powder.

World demand for cocoa products remains high with three corporations controlling 83% of the cocoa trade. Small family farms in Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria produce 70% of the world's supply. Other important producers include Brazil, Indonesia, Ecuador and Venezuela. The global price index dropped by half between 1998 and 2001. Such a large drop in the price of cocoa will inevitably increase pressure on producers to cut labour costs by using child labour.

Growing and harvesting cocoa is labour intensive, time consuming and physically demanding. The main operations are:

- Plucking the pods by hand as there are no machines for harvesting cocoa. Workers use short, hooked blades mounted on long poles to reach the highest pods. Experienced and well-trained workers are needed to recognize fully ripe pods and to cut them down without injuring the delicate bark.
- Opening the pods. The pods are collected in baskets and carried to the edge of the field. The thick shells are hacked open with a few precise blows from a long knife called a machete. The pulp-covered cocoa seeds are

then scooped out and the husks discarded.

- Fermenting the seeds. Workers scoop the seeds into boxes, or heap them into piles, and cover them with banana leaves. The seeds are left to ferment for three to nine days, and the process is complete when they turn a rich, deep brown.
- Drying the seeds. The fermented seeds are spread on matting or stackable trays and sun-dried. Some farmers use drying machines to speed up the process
- Packing the seeds into sacks that can weigh between 60 and 90 kilograms

In West Africa, children are engaged in using machetes to clear fields; applying pesticides, harvesting pods and slicing them open to remove the beans. There is also strong evidence in this region that trafficking and bondage have been used to supply children to the workforce.

MAJOR SAFETY AND HEALTH HAZARDS

- Musculoskeletal injuries from repetitive and forceful movements, and lifting and carrying heavy or awkward loads
- Heat exhaustion
- High levels of sun exposure, which can result in skin cancer
- Injuries from cutting tools, ranging from minor cuts to severing of body parts
- Skin abrasions
- Poisoning and long-term health problems from using or being exposed to pesticides
- Being hit by falling cocoa pods
- Snake and insect bites
- Long working hours
- Stress

THE SCALE OF THE CHILD LABOUR PROBLEM

The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture studied some 1500 farms in four countries (Cameroon, the Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria). They found that hundreds of thousands of children were engaged in hazardous tasks on cocoa farms. Their most significant statistical findings were:

- 284,000 children used machetes to clear fields;
- 153,000 children applied pesticides without protective equipment;
- Other children picked cocoa pods and sliced them open to remove the cocoa beans;
- 64% of children on cocoa farms were under the age of 14 and 40% of child labourers in cocoa farming were girls.

Many child labourers came from impoverished countries like Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo. Parents often sold their children in the belief they would find work and send earnings home. However, once removed from their families, the boys were forced to work in slave-like conditions. In the Ivory Coast alone, nearly 12,000 of the child labourers had no relatives in the area, suggesting they were trafficked as slaves.

Children often worked for more than 12 hours per day, beginning at 06:00, and were beaten regularly. Child labourers were less likely than other children to attend school: in the Ivory Coast, for example,

one-third of school-aged children living in cocoa-producing households had never attended school and only 34% of children working on cocoa farms attended school, compared with 64% of those not working on cocoa farms. Only one third of the children of immigrant cocoa farmers were enrolled in school, compared with 71% of children of local farmers.

In all cases, girls had lower enrolment and attendance rates than boys.

Many of these child labourers had never seen or tasted chocolate.

ACTION INITIATED

In December 2001, the global chocolate and cocoa industry signed a joint statement re-affirming the urgent need to end the worst forms of child labour and forced labour in cocoa cultivation and processing in West Africa. Other signatories include trade unions, non-governmental organizations, anti-slavery, human rights and consumer groups.

This led to the establishment in July 2002 of an industry-funded foundation called the International Cocoa Initiative: Working Towards Responsible Labour Standards for Cocoa Growing.

IPEC's West Africa Cocoa/Agriculture Project is working to help prevent and eliminate hazardous child labour in cocoa and other selected agricultural sub-sectors in the Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea and Nigeria.

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