

The Dark Side of Indulging Chocolate

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Abstract

We all love our chocolate and are quick to indulge in them without a hesitation. How much do we know about how chocolate is produced? This paper explores the widespread use of forced child labour on cocoa farms in West Africa. Cultivation of cocoa beans entails some sort of slavery in which many of us are unaware of. The cocoa industry is a complex system that entails various parties ranging from farmers, shipping companies, processors, buyers (multinational corporation), and distributors. 80% - 90% cocoa beans come from small family – run farms where less than 5% of the price of a chocolate goes back to cocoa farmers. This result in unethical labour practices including the use of child labour to meet the demands for cocoa beans while at the same time ensuring cocoa prices are cheaper. Sadly, these children are sold for as little as \$30 by their own parents to traffickers for the provision of better education. Yet they are enslaved on cocoa plantations picking cocoa beans to satisfy our indulgence for chocolate. As consumers, we have a great deal of power to fight against the use of child labour in the production of chocolate. We can start by purchasing fair trade chocolate.

Keywords

Child Slavery — Chocolate — Cocoa Beans

At special occasions, we celebrate by indulging in our favourite chocolate whether it comes in the form of cake or simply Ferrero Rocher. We all love our chocolate and are quick to indulge in them without a hesitation. The chocolate that we consume is derived from the cocoa bean. Interestingly, we consume more than 4.5 million tons of cocoa annually (World Cocoa Foundation, n.d.). However, the sad reality is that many of us are ignorant to the dark side of making chocolate. Oftentimes, in our consumer market, we are attached to the consumer good with a lack of consideration for where the goods were manufactured. Our sweet tooth and craving for chocolate can be traced back to the use of child labour (Rinehart, 2007). Thus, the cultivation of cocoa beans entails some sort of modern-day slavery in which many of us are unaware.

The cocoa bean is one of the most important crops around the world and thus a major export for producers and major import for consumer countries (Rinehart, 2007). Major importers of cocoa products are Europe and the United States (World Cocoa Foundation, 2014). West Africa mainly, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Cameroon are the largest producers of cocoa in the world (World Cocoa Foundation, 2014). As a result, West African leaders are reliant on the cultivation of cocoa for its economy (Latanikova, 2017). Côte d'Ivoire alone has over 600,000 cocoa farms and produces approximately 43% of the total world's cocoa cultivation (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). According to the World Cocoa Foundation, 68% of the world's cocoa beans are produced from West Africa (World Cocoa Foundation, 2014). Furthermore, the total production of cocoa has increased from 3.66 million metric tons in 2007 – 2008 to 3.98 million metric tons in 2011-2012

(World Cocoa Foundation, 2014).

The cocoa industry is a complex system that entails various parties ranging from farmers, shipping companies, processors, buyers (multinational corporation), and distributors (World Cocoa Foundation, 2014). Despite the vast complexity of cocoa production, 80% - 90% cocoa beans come from small family – run farms (World Cocoa Foundation, 2014). The Global Annual cocoa sales are approximately \$83 billion, yet cocoa farmers continue to live in extreme poverty (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). According to Oxfam, less than 5% of the price of a chocolate goes back to cocoa farmers (OXFAM, 2013). The International Labor Rights Forum discovered that farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire earn less than \$2 a day (Lambert, 2014). Because many of these small farmers are impoverished, they employ unethical labour practices including the use of child labour to meet the demands for cocoa beans and keep their cocoa prices cheaper. The use of child labour in cultivating and processing cocoa is endemic in the West African region (Rinehart, 2007). These farmers have little autonomy or power against these multinational corporations that control the cocoa supply chain (Lambert, 2014). Hence, as the demand for chocolate by the consumer world increases, the number of child labour exploitation increases. According to the International Labor Rights Forum, there are over 3 million children working in the cocoa fields of Western Africa (Lambert, 2014). Many are as young as 5 years old working alongside adult labourers (Latanikova, 2017). Many of these children come from impoverished households seeking work to help support their families in lieu of going to school (Lambert, 2014). Multinational corporations, which are not limited to Nestle, Hershey, Cargill, ADM, and Barry Callebaut,

rely heavily on these cocoa beans from West Africa (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). Thus, these multinational corporations should also be held responsible for the use of child labour in the chocolate industry.

Child Labour Conditions

Children in the cocoa industry are subjected to intensive labour consisting of ploughing fields, pumping well water, spraying pesticides, clearing brush, planting and picking cocoa beans (Rinehart, 2007). Sadly, they are also working in hazardous conditions leading to the high susceptibility to injuries and sickness (Latanikova, 2017). In the International Labour Organization assessment report, children interviewees in Ghana had cuts to their skin while using a machete to cultivate the cocoa farm and 65.8% had snakebites while clearing the bush (Rinehart, 2007). The children are exposed to pesticides and are forced to employ dangerous farming tools (Latanikova, 2017). Children aged between 12 and 15 years old work tirelessly and mostly performing a 12-hour shift, receiving fewer wages, and are denied basic education (Lambert, 2014). Also, children interviewed by the International Labour Organization complained about not having a day to rest (Rinehart, 2007). In addition to working poor conditions, many of these children are subject to violence and physical abuse (McKenzie, 2012).

This begs the question of how and why so many children are exploited. There are several contributory factors pertaining to the use of child labour in cocoa cultivation. One of the factors is poverty. Many of the children live in an impoverished society and they end up working on cocoa farms to support their family (Lambert, 2014). Another factor is that children are recruited and deceived by traffickers who promise them lucrative wealth and prosperity (Latanikova, 2017). For instance, in Cameroon alone, 43% children were trafficked according to the international Labor Force report (Rinehart, 2007). Sadly, some of these children are sold for as little as \$30 by their own parents or family members to traffickers for the provision of better education (Latanikova, 2017). Other children are abducted by traffickers in neighbouring West African countries like Mali and Burkina Faso where they are sent to cocoa farms to work (Sturn, 2014). These abducted children are smuggled to Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire where they do not see their family again (McKenzie, 2012). Children can hardly escape from their traffickers as the cocoa farms are far from villages (Sturn, 2014). This leaves many children without national identity or citizenship to the country they are enslaved (Sturn, 2014). Moreover, child labour regulation in these developing nations is not enforced enabling traffickers to abduct children (McKenzie, 2012).

What can we do?

More awareness has been brought to the consumer's attention about child labour in the chocolate industry by nonprofit organizations and journalists. Multinational corporations have promised to end the use of child labour in their supply yet nothing has been done to eliminate child labour (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). Organizations such as Slave Free Chocolate have worked along with INTERPOL's Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (HTCE) unit (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). This organization has successfully managed to rescue children and reprimanded traffickers (Slave Free Chocolate, 2017). As consumers, we have a great deal of power to fight against the use of child labour in the production of chocolate. We can start by purchasing fair trade chocolate. By purchasing fair trade chocolate, we are helping to support better equity for the farmer as well as equipping them to have a better trade agreement with a multinational corporation like Nestle and Hershey. Collectively we can help to reduce the use of child labour in cocoa farms.

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