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Ivory Coast, Factor 15: Human Rights

### **Ivory Coast: The effect of the chocolate industry on human rights for children**

Do you know how many people eat chocolate in the world? On average, about one billion people consume chocolate every day (Chocolate & the World, 2013). European countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Belgium are the leading sellers of chocolate in the world. In addition to those countries, big name chocolate manufacturers such as Hershey, Mars, and Nestle are big name chocolate companies that produce about 1 billion pounds of chocolate to sell to stores internationally, (Ofori, 2012). In order to continue to produce chocolate, these companies have various partnerships with West African countries that grow cocoa beans. The biggest producer of cocoa beans is the Ivory Coast. The high demand of cocoa beans has been able to boost the economy of the Ivory Coast, yet it remains one of the poorest countries in Africa.

The Ivory Coast is a country in West Africa that lies on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. The country mainly consists of plateau land that includes savannahs in the north and forests in the southern parts of the country. The landforms have been a benefit to the nation's production of natural resources including their number one leading export being the cocoa beans. About 70% of the Ivory Coast's export is cocoa beans, (Project, 2016). Due to the high demand in cocoa beans for the thriving chocolate industry, the Ivory Coast is dominated by agriculture. Many landowners have dedicated their lives to growing cocoa beans for a living. As the years progress, the need of cocoa beans increased rapidly. As a result, the demand for cocoa beans goes up, thus the demand of labor workers increases at the same time.

What is it like to live in an Ivory Coast family? In this household, all members must follow all customs and traditions. Each family member has a job that they must fulfill. One of the customs that Ivoirians heavily believe in is the households is that the women are expected remain at home to prepare the meals for the family. Unlike men, it is not likely that they perform work outside the house. Many of the meals include dried fish, cassava root and rice. As for young children, they are expected to attend school and to get an education. Although that is the expectation, not all children are able to attend school due to their families' financial situations. Sadly, many of the families in the Ivory Coast are unable to send their children to school. Since 2000, the literacy rate has remained to be about 48.7 %. ("Statistics," 2013) "Our-Africa.org" stated that healthcare services have improved over the years for citizens in the Ivory Coast. Free services are given to women and children under the age of 6 years old. The rural areas of the country tend to stick to traditional remedies when it comes to health care coverage.

Since its 2002 Civil War, the Ivory Coast is still recuperating to build up its' economy. Due to the downfall in the economy, many of the communities in the rural areas are suffering from intense poverty. This had an impact on the standard of living for a plethora of families. Many people turned to farming hoping they could make a decent way of living. A majority of the farmers grow cocoa beans knowing it is a high producing crop. Small land owners grow their products on 1-3 hectares which is an estimated 2.5 acres of land. (O'Keefe, n.d.)

Although many of the farmers grow this crop, the majority of it is sold to cocoa bean distributors. Unfortunately small scale farmers are not able to reap the harvest by keeping many of the crops they produce for themselves as well as their families. Another disadvantage in farm ownership or working on a farm is earned wages. On the average, a farmer on the Ivory Coast earns approximately \$2 per day (0.00017 USD) which is about \$14 in a week (Reporter, 2016). Sadly, this is not adequate income to support a complete family household, let alone a single person household. Thus, many of the farm

families continue to struggle on a daily basis to make a quality way of living. As a result, many farmers have turned to an alternate way in paying and saving more for workers by turning to child labor to produce crops and offset cost.

A UNICEF report states that about 200,000 children are being sold to local farm owners in the Ivory Coast and neighboring countries such as Ghana. Youth ranging in the ages of 12-16, are particularly targeted because they are easier to manipulate and vulnerable. Most of the smugglers come from Mali and Burkina Faso, which are ranked as some of the poorest countries in Africa. Smugglers normally lure kids into going to farms by promising money and prizes. Thus, the children believe they will return back home with money for their families and a gift for their outstanding work on the farm. Sadly, these kids are gone for long months and even long years. However, there are many cases where families are so desperate for money, they sale their children to farm smugglers. Those kids are very young and unaware of what they are being used for. Many victims are males, but females are sold in the black market. Cocoa farmers usually prefer young males because of their strength ability.

The life on a cocoa farm is very harsh for the children. The children begin their work day as early as 6am; they work until night fall which is around 6pm. According to United Nations Assembly, many farmers in the Ivory Coast violate child labor laws. The United Nations has threatened to dismiss the Ivory Coast from the assembly if action has not been taken to end child labor. The UN Assembly has established the international convention on child labor laws. In this agreement, different countries are able to incorporate different laws to enforce that child labor is not possible. For many years, the Ivory Coast government has been denying these allegations. One of the reasons why Ivory Coast officials believe that the child trafficking assumptions are false is due to the seasons of which the cocoa beans are grown in. They say cocoa beans are normally planted in the dry season in the country which is between the months of November and April. Accruing to the country's official's children do not normally arrive to their country during the time cocoa beans are being grown and harvested. Not only is the government denying being aware about the enslavement of children, big named candy companies such as Nestlé, Hershey, Cargill, ADM, and Barry Call have admitted accountability and promised to solve this situation. All of these companies signed the Harkin-Engel Protocol agreement which also states if children are being forced to work, they will no longer buy from them. Unfortunately, more than a decade has passed since this agreement and little has changed. Changes should have occurred by now. Young children are still being exposed to many harsh chemicals that cause upper respiratory problems. Not only do kids get diagnosed with health problems, they also increase their liability. Children as young as the age of five use dangerous knives called machetes. These are so sharp that they are able to slice through a cocoa bean pod into a child's hand. Due to the lack of experience with the knives, often kids suffer from serious injuries. The United Nations has strict laws on children being at safety risk that farmers in the Ivory Coast should follow. Instead of allowing small children handle this risky task, farmers should allow experienced and older people to use the knives.

Ger Duany once said, "Humanity is recognizing that assisting refugees is not a choice; it is a responsibility." The children that are desperately working have no hopes of pursuing a great future. Instead they will spend their lives in harsh working conditions working on cocoa farms due to the high demands of it around the world. They will always struggle to provide for themselves in the best way possible. Over the years, many people worldwide constantly grew concerned for the safety and wellbeing of these victims. Various non-profit organizations around the world are partnering up and dedicated to solving this ongoing problem. One of the biggest organizations that is trying to stop this problem is the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor, or IPEC. This organization was established in 1992 and at this time is the largest program that is working towards policies to make a change. The ultimate goal is to try to eliminate child labor internationally. Thus far has helped up to 88 countries try to stop this problem. According to the United Nations they have set up several methods have been implemented to reduce the chances of young children getting involved in child labor. They have passed a law stating that children

under 18 are able to do “Light Work”. This is where a child can work as long as the work area does not put the child at health nor safety risk. In 2014, the ten largest chocolate factories came up with the Cocoa Action Plan. This plan was put in place to help raise \$500 million to aide about 300,000 cocoa farmers in the Ivory Coast. They also have worked to create various training programs to help the farmers find effective ways to enhance their productivity and hopefully alleviate the harsh condition for children.

According to the US Department of Labor, the Ivory Coast became independent in August 7, 1960. Since then, foreign aid has been provided by the United States and other countries. France remains the largest country to donate to the Ivory Coast. The money given to the country goes to different projects to help develop education, healthcare and governance. Foreign aid has helped small communities; churches have begun setting up free small public schools and enrichment programs to keep children active and focused. Another way to start trying to solve this problem locally in the Ivory Coast is by allowing kids to work willingly on farms through paid internships. This opportunity can be giving to students of age after the school year is completed. The minimum wage in the Ivory Coast is SLL 500,000(\$115). Children that are working age can get this amount or even a percentage of it. Although they won't be making a big killing, they will still be able to collect something out of the deal. In order to keep moving forward in making a difference to the communities and the children in the Ivory Coast, they must continue to seek efficient solution to put a halt in this illegal business.

In conclusion, I strongly think this problem is not taken seriously enough. Even though there has been many ways to solve this situation, little action has occurred over the years. No child should go through life being forced to do things they are not willing to do. Children should be able to be carefree and enjoy life to the fullest. In order to put a complete halt to this problem, the government and chocolate companies should work even harder to help the children on the cocoa farms. In order to keep moving forward in making a difference to the communities and the children in the Ivory Coast, they must continue to seek efficient solutions to put a halt in this illegal business.

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