Child Trafficking in Agriculture: The Exploitation of Children as Workers in Cocoa Production in West Africa

Assoumane Alhassane Maiga
Department of Agricultural Education, Communications & Leadership
College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources
Oklahoma State University
448 Agricultural Hall, OK 74078-6032
Tel#: 405.744.8143
Fax#: 405.744.5176
maiga@okstate.edu

M. Craig Edwards, Ph.D.
Department of Agricultural Education, Communications & Leadership
College of Agricultural Sciences & Natural Resources
craig.edwards@okstate.edu

Abstract

Child trafficking is a very serious issue in sub Saharan Africa. It is particularly egregious in the cocoa industry in west Africa, including Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana. National governments and anti-slavery organizations are aiming at combating child trafficking in the cocoa industry by implementing advocacy policies and undertaking activities to tackle the problem’s root causes.

The United Nations Protocol (2000) to prevent, suppress, and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children, supplementing the United Nations Conventions against Transnational Organized Crime, defines trafficking in persons and provides provisions to combat trafficking. Moreover, the protocol seeks to protect and assist victims of trafficking with full respect to their human rights and promote cooperation among nations. Even though protocols and conventions have been signed to protect children, more actions are needed so that all actors in the production and consumption of chocolate - from farmers to consumers - understand the phenomenon, its’ root causes, and possible solutions. If the issue is understood better, more appropriate policies could be developed and implemented leading to a reduction in child trafficking.

Thousands of children, including boys and girls, in West Africa, from Mali and Burkina Faso particularly, are victims of trafficking due to economic conditions in these countries. Although little precise data on the number of victims exist, as recent as 2009, 63 children, who came from all over Africa, were rescued from cocoa farms in Cote d’Ivoire; so, the issue persists. Children are forced to work under harsh conditions without payment or access to adequate healthcare, food, or education. Their human rights are being violated without question.

Through the poster presentation, the lead author will share his personal experiences regarding what he observed as a field interpreter and consultant (i.e., a “participant observer”; Creswell, 2008) while working with staff of Save the Children Canada and a film crew of Bastard Films Denmark. The group filmed a documentary about incidents of child trafficking on cocoa farms in Cote d’Ivoire during 2009. The lead author’s interpretation of select key informant interviews (Creswell) of child victims, farmers, border guards, bus drivers, and others will also inform the poster presentation.
If not eliminated, the problem of child trafficking in agriculture could be reduced if countries supplying child laborers implemented more appropriate education policies. To that end, agricultural extension educators, school teachers, and other community leaders should be trained on children’s rights and ways to prevent child trafficking. Accordingly, they would be better prepared to advise parents and children with the hope of preventing them from becoming victims. In addition, strong poverty reduction and capacity building programs targeting rural women are needed (Jivetti & Edwards, 2008). Cocoa producing countries also need to raise the awareness of farmers regarding children’s rights generally and continue to struggle to get fairer prices on the world market for their cocoa producers.

Keywords: Child trafficking; Cocoa; West Africa