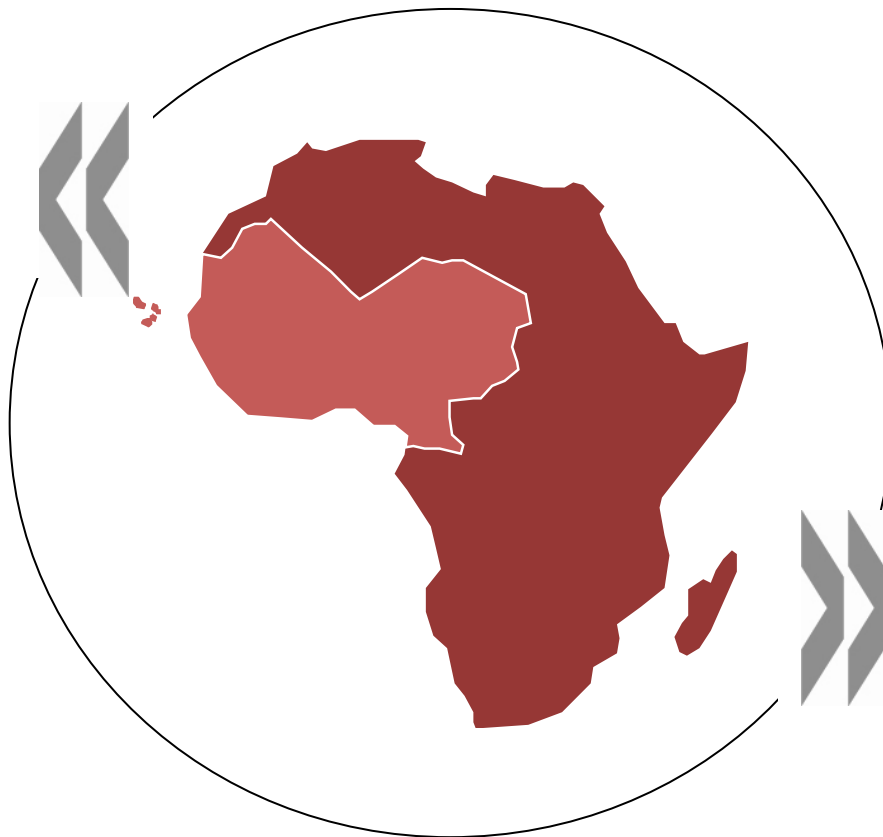


Child labour on West African cocoa plantations

→ *Conclusions of the Desk Study*



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CHILD LABOUR ON WEST AFRICAN COCOA PLANTATIONS

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February 2009

INTRODUCTION

This document presents the conclusions of a desk study on child labour on West African cocoa plantations. The complete desk study will be presented at the Task Force meeting, February 9 2009.

1. KEY INFORMATION

1.1. A “recent” issue, “rapid” progress

While the problem of child labour on cocoa plantations is not new (and laws countering abusive child labour in most West African countries already exist), it appears that the “Harkin-Engel” initiative triggered the international process that was set in motion in 2000. This brief desk study revealed that “much was achieved in a very short amount of time”. The progress made is summarised below:

- Creation of the first “alliance of industries” (World Cocoa Foundation - WCF) in 2000, followed by the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) in 2002 (the timeline set out in the Harkin/Engel Protocol respected to the very day)
- Ratification of Convention 138 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) by most West African countries at the outset in 2000/2001
- Multiplication of projects combating the worst forms of child labour, as from 2002/2003
- 2005: recognition of the progress achieved within the framework of the Harkin/Engel Protocol
- 2006/2007: first analysis reports within the certification process in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana
- 2008: first certification in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

Specialised institutions (ILO, UNICEF) should be able to assess whether or not the progress made in the area of child labour on cocoa plantations has been more rapid than in other areas, and why.

Subject to this confirmation, the prevailing sentiment at this stage is that, effectively, there has been more progress made with regard to this specific issue than with the overall child labour issue. Can the “child labour on cocoa plantations” experience be used in the more general child labour issue? The desk study shows that it was used as leverage to ratify the ILO Convention 138 as well as to improve national legislation. Ghana, the leading country, has recently drawn up a framework defining the type of work acceptable for children to undertake on cocoa plantations as well as the conditions by age group. Could such a framework be adapted to other forms of child labour?

1.2. Major actors, including multinationals

Harkin-Engel, ICI, ILO, UNICEF, and the WCF seem to be the major actors concerned with this issue. No doubt, a new initiative could not exist without them. This new initiative should however demonstrate its usefulness and its complementarity with existing initiatives.

At the national level, the governments of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana seem to be the forerunners (this would be expected considering the importance of cocoa in their economies). The government of Cameroon (another relatively important cocoa producer) as well as other producer countries in the region is not as advanced on this issue. Other countries could progress more rapidly by capitalising on Ghanaian and Ivorian achievements and experiences with regard to i) certification, and ii) the Ghanaian Government's development of a specific framework setting out the work which would be acceptable for children to carry out.

1.3. A West African problem; few regional responses

In 2006, the West African Network of Peasants and Producers¹ (ROPPA) drew up a daring proposal to create, at the initiative of ECOWAS, an "OPEC for sustainable cocoa"². Our intention is not to assess the relevance of this proposal, although it should be noted that ECOWAS produces two thirds of the world's cocoa. Also production zones, the types of farms and challenges have much in common and reveal in some cases cross-border i.e. transnational dynamics.

A review of available literature indicates that the issue of "child labour on cocoa plantations" is often presented at the West African regional level. However, for now, actions seem to be undertaken only at the national level (except for the ILO's West Africa Cocoa/Commercial Agriculture Project (WACAP) whose purely regional work is difficult to evaluate).

The desk study has highlighted the signing of an agreement between ECOWAS and the ECCAS in July 2006 on combating human trafficking, in particular children. At this stage, it is difficult to evaluate the operational follow-up to this agreement. The desk study found no significant evidence of the ECOWAS Commission's involvement in the WACAP.

Combating child labour in general and on cocoa plantations in particular does not appear in the ECOWAS Strategic Vision 2020 document. Likewise, it is not included in the Commission's 2007-2010 Strategic Plan.

Is there a West African regional dimension to this issue? If so, how can it effectively contribute?

The desk study shows that the sharing of experiences and best practices is probably a useful regional and complementary approach to what has been done up to now. It also stresses that the implementation of the regional and multilateral ECOWAS/ECCAS agreement (the joint ECOWAS/ECCAS action plan set out within this agreement) should be a priority. The desk study revealed a seven point ECOWAS action plan (2008-2011) regarding human trafficking although it did not have access to this document.

1.4. Already a tremendous wealth of experiences

At this point, it is impossible to list all of the programmes and projects underway or completed. Clearly, there are many. Furthermore, the desk study did not find evidence of a global/systematic approach capitalising on existing experiences. Of course, experiences completed or underway have been compiled. Notably, in 2007 the WFC produced an inventory of multinational-supported projects.

¹ Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles de l'Afrique de l'Ouest.

² ROPPA / Forum sur ma souveraineté alimentaire (*Forum on my food sovereignty*) – Niamey, 7 to 10 November 2006 / Working document « Souveraineté alimentaire et cultures d'exportation « La CEDEAO peut-elle créer un OPEP du cacao durable? » (*Food Sovereignty and Crop Exportation: Can ECOWAS Create an OPEC for sustainable cocoa?*)".

Would key actors find it useful to have a “handbook” that builds upon existing experiences and knowledge from field projects, their methods, methodological approaches used in the evaluation of child labour, etc. (see point 1.2)?

1.5. Coordination problems of programmes combating child labour

Interviews with practitioners in the field engaged in combating the worst forms of child labour on cocoa plantations in West Africa, seem to indicate that there are coordination problems among the multitude of stakeholders. The desk study is unable to make an assessment at this stage.

While this analysis is confirmed, the aforementioned building upon existing experiences and knowledge could help improve dialogue among actors.

1.6. Intra-regional migration and trafficking of children: putting things into perspective

The desk study indicates that:

- A relatively small proportion of children working on cocoa plantations have been victims of trafficking.
- The trafficking of children is not only transnational, some of these children are actually from the country in which they are exploited.

Furthermore, a quick review of press articles points towards a trend to liken “child labour” to “regional trafficking”. In the broader sense, often child labour on cocoa plantations is linked to the “porousness of the borders”. This term can seem ambiguous. By highlighting the drawbacks of combating the transnational trafficking of persons, it points to the ease of crossing border lines (which is not the same). In Europe, for example, the disappearance of border posts was accompanied by greater effort in combating transnational trafficking (notably of drugs).

From a political and strategic point of view, it would seem useful to debunk the myth that the “porousness of the borders” is responsible for the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa plantations.

While combating the trafficking of migrants is an integral part of the ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration as well as the Paris Action Plan³, the official political objective of ECOWAS member States is still to create a “borderless” region.

³ Defined at the second Euro-African Ministerial Conference on Migration and Development (Paris, 25 November 2008).

2. GUIDELINE PROPOSALS FOR THE NEXT STEPS

On the basis of the preceding and by drawing on the presentation note, some proposals have been outlined hereafter for the follow-up steps of the Child labour on West African cocoa plantations” initiative.

2.1. *Define a West African reference framework*

Ghana has led the way with the publication entitled “*Hazardous Child Activity Framework for the Cocoa Sector of Ghana*” (June 2008). We do not suggest that this reference framework be adopted by other West African countries, rather to:

- Confirm with concerned governments in West Africa (and Central to include Cameroon) if there is a shared willingness to define a common framework setting out specifically the work that would be acceptable by each age group. The advantages of this joint approach would be in particular:
 - be in line with cross-border realities (“Ghana –Côte d'Ivoire”, “Côte d'Ivoire – Liberia”, “Liberia – Sierra Leone”, “Togo-Ghana”, “Nigeria – Cameroon” basins); cross-border realities which are more often recognised as an underlying layer of ethno-linguistic groups that also cross borders;
 - accelerate the combating of worst forms of child labour in the countries which, for various reasons, are less advanced than others so as not to let children of a country fall by the wayside with the “excuse” that said country produces little cocoa;
 - prevent any stigmatising of a particular country;
 - contribute to developing West African solidarity in this regard; solidarity which could eventually open up the path to greater regional cooperation concerning cocoa.
- Begin a discussion among experts (under the auspices of ECOWAS and in partnership with the “major actors” – see point 1.2) based on the Ghanaian framework.
- Incorporate this activity into the process of defining the action plan foreseen by the agreement to combat human trafficking, in particular children, signed by ECOWAS and ECCAS in July 2006.

2.2. *Develop a regional manual for combating the worst forms of child labour on cocoa plantations*

Given the multitude of initiatives and projects completed and underway at country level, it may be useful to produce a *West African Manual* capitalising on the best practices in the field. This proposal to capitalise on *regional* experiences relies on the same arguments described in point 2.1 above. In addition, it seems:

- The advantages of capitalising on best practices draws on the capacity to incorporate a wide range of experiences.
- Such an exercise, carried out at the regional level, can eventually contribute to greater effectiveness of international aid for combating child labour on cocoa plantations (see below).

The creation of a manual could also be included in the definition of the above-mentioned action plan signed by ECOWAS and ECCAS in July 2006.

2.3. Create and provide information to a regional knowledge database on child labour in West Africa

While the proposals set out above are accepted, it seems important to compile, at the ECOWAS Commission level, all of the statistical data related to child labour in the region. This work that would rely on the ECOWAS Commission's Statistics Department could begin after producing the Manual. The creation of the database and its regular updating eventually should enable:

- Feed into regional debate over the long-term
- Undertake strategic thinking on coherency problems among statistics produced at the national level.

2.4. Strategic thinking on the regional effectiveness of combating the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa plantations

The two proposals set out in points 2.1 and 2.2 above should facilitate the launching of a regional coordination process and lead to a joint and united approach of all of the countries concerned. These two proposals furthermore provide potentially significant economies of scale, thus improving aid effectiveness in line with the Paris Declaration.

Moreover, creating a manual will require an exhaustive inventory of all the programmes and projects on the ground. On this basis, it should be possible to map out these programmes and projects as well as undertake a spatial analysis which should be particularly useful in cross-border basins such as that of Côte d'Ivoire – Ghana.

It should be noted that immediately following the start of the Ivoirian crisis in 2002, Ghana exported more cocoa than it produced. In addition to the ethno-linguistic continuums, this illustrates the reality of cross-border issues which are rarely taken into account today. If action at the national level is essential, and regional coordination by States useful, then a cross-border (local-regional) analysis of programmes seems to be an important additional component to take into account. It will in particular help assess interventions' spatial coherence (continuity or discontinuity) as well as the transnational coherence of approaches and methods.

2.5. West (and Central) African regional leadership issues

As set out above, it seems important to highlight that the agreement on combating human trafficking, in particular women and children, signed by ECOWAS and ECCAS in July 2006 is in fact a commitment to work on the topic of child labour on cocoa plantations (the treaty covers both human trafficking and exploitation).

The two organisations concerned seem to have the political backing needed for regional action in this regard. This backing is all the more solid with the July 2006 agreement foreseeing (requiring) the definition of an action plan.

The proposals set out above (as well as others to be defined) could be the first components of such an action plan. This idea should be further explored. In particular, it is important to verify with the ECOWAS Commission the implementation status (the content) of the ECOWAS seven-point action plan (2008-2011) to which this study did not have access.

Be that as it may, building this regional leadership seems to be a priority. In our view, the following conditions would need to be met in order to achieve this goal:

1. Confirm the willingness of the ECOWAS Commission and ECCAS to participate.
2. Define (in a presentation note) the issue's regional aspect (subsidiarity). This should be raised with States as well as major international actors (how can regional action be capitalised on and complement national actors?).
3. Ensure coherence between the initiative on child labour and the ECOWAS common approach on migration. Whereas, combating child trafficking calls for greater control at borders, the common approach on migration promotes free movement.

The ECOWAS Common Approach on Migration has been set out in an action plan that foresees (among others) the support for cross-border cooperation. Programmes in cross-border cocoa areas could be an opportunity to work at the same time on combating human trafficking and supporting regional mobility. The action plan is financed by the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (10 million Euros).

Finally, in 2005, the Conference of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government have transformed the Conference of ECOWAS Ministers of Youth and Sports into the ECOWAS Youth and Sports Development Centre (EYSDC), henceforth the ECOWAS specialised agency headquartered in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). The EYSDC's Founding Act sets out that it shall: *(i) provide a permanent institutional framework within the Community through which issues linked to youth as well as sport activities in the sub-region can be developed and promoted; and (ii) encourage young people to actively participate in the Community's integration process.* Furthermore it is set out that the EYSDC will be used by the Executive Secretariat (now the Commission) to initiate, develop, coordinate, monitor and implement programmes related to young people's development within the Community.

In 2007/2008, the EYSDC commissioned a study on the exclusion and vulnerability of young people in several West African countries. The desk study did not have access to this study which however showed the (potential) desire of the EYSDC to be involved in a regional issue such as the combating of the worst forms of child labour on cocoa plantations.

The EYSDC is a supporter of an ECOWAS volunteer programme.

This information, which should be further enhanced, shows the possibility of giving the EYSDC responsibility in the development of a West African initiative. As it is a specialized agency within ECOWAS, the EYSDC seems the ideal place to progressively take a wider stance on the issue of child labour in West Africa in general.

It must not be forgotten that in some countries, including cocoa producing countries, children work (too) hard in fisheries, mines, etc.

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