COCOA AND CHILD LABOUR

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Category: Observations

For six years we lived and worked in an isolated village in Ivory Coast, we lived alongside the people, learned their language and gained immense respect for their hard work and perseveranceÂ in a tough situation. Men and women would spend hours working in the cocoa fields under the hot sun and as often as not, their children would work alongside them.

When Kouya children work in the cocoa fields, its not because they are slaves or being controlled by some evil master, it's becauseÂ a whole load of factors line up against them. Cocoa growing is highly labour intensive, but doesn't bring in a lot of money, so all of the family has to get involved. There are no child care programmes in the villages and many families are too poor to send their children to school; going to the fields with their parents is the only option. And so it goes on.

Tamasin Ford has just written an excellent article which captures the complexities of this issue very well.

> *It is a bleak outlook on the lives of these farmers who get, on average, just three percent of the money we hand over at the checkout for our chocolate bar. The average Brit eats about four kilograms of cocoa a year, according to the International Cocoa Organization, slightly less than the Belgians and Swiss who lead the world at around six kilograms â€" and nearly double the average Canadian, who eats closer to 2.5 kilograms each year. Ivorians, despite living in the worldâ€™s top cocoa-producing country, eat less than 500 grams a year...*
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> *... I think back to the communities I have visited across Ivory Coast: the farmers in the west sharing up their land to avoid further violence; the farmers in the east switching to rubber because of low cocoa prices; and the community of Broukro, joining together to build its own school by hand. The families have few choices. Poverty rules, along with culture and tradition. If there is no school, the parents take their children to the farms. If there is no money, everyone must pitch in to build the familyâ€™s income. How can girls and boys like Nayaria and Bacely ever have a chance of going to school beyond the age of 12 if there isnâ€™t a school to go to?*
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> *The cocoa sector is possibly one of the most complex industries Iâ€™ve ever delved into; entangled with politics and corruption, wrought with poverty and, of course, dogged by allegations of child labour. But the chocolate industry and the government lawmakers are the ones with the power, not the farmers. They are the ones deciding how much these farmers are worth. They all know the conditions these families live in, how few choices they have. So the question is: why donâ€™t they do more?Â*

Please note, preferably before commenting, that I am not saying that there is no child trafficking in Ivory Coast. However, I am saying that the situation regarding child labour in the country has far deeper roots, multiple causes and various manifestations. The bottom line is that my friends and

their children work far too long and far too hard for far too little money. Where this sort of poverty and injustice is allowed to continue, other injustices will follow.