

The Effects of Boycotting Chocolate: Good or Bad for Child Laborers in Cote d'Ivoire?

I am a serious chocoholic. In fact I'm a bit of a chocolate snob. From an early age I developed a unique taste for chocolate, unlike the ordinary, sugar-crazed child begging their parent for a chocolate bar to satisfy their sweet tooth. I treated chocolate as one of life's simple pleasures and grew to educate myself on everything there was to know about chocolate. I became not only a frequent consumer, but a chocolate connoisseur. I have tasted chocolate from all around the world, and found that some of the best (and worst) chocolate is made from cocoa beans grown in the farming sectors of Cote d'Ivoire.

Cote d'Ivoire is a small country on the southern coast of West Africa, and is in many ways, captivating to me, especially with its history of chocolate. I learned that over 40% of the world's total production of chocolate comes from the cocoa grown in Cote d'Ivoire. However I also learned that Cote d'Ivoire is home to over 200,000 child laborers. Many large corporation chocolate companies such as Nestle and Hershey, processes their chocolate using cocoa beans that are knowingly provided by farms using child labor practices. I have noticed that people living in privileged societies, such as the US, have little or no knowledge of the process that provides them with the luxury of chocolate. However some are involved and do wish to be a part of the change that solves this detrimental issue.

There has been a lot of discussion about potential solutions to end child labor, and many people who are active consumers of chocolate have decided that boycotting chocolate is an easy way to promote slave-free chocolate in their communities. The controversial issue has been whether boycotting chocolate is an appropriate and obtainable way for people living in privileged societies, to help child laborers who work on the cocoa farms of Cote d'Ivoire.

If I were a foreign news correspondent, I would cover the story of children living and working on the cocoa farms of Cote d'Ivoire and how our feeble attempts to boycott "slave chocolate" works against our intentions, and could actually be harmful, not helpful, to child laborers.

Despite the controversy and all of the research that has been done on the topic of child labor on cocoa farms in Cote d'Ivoire, the public is still clueless about the root causes of why child labor is so common. My study would primarily investigate how the drop in sales, because of boycotting, directly effects those who work in the different steps of the process in making chocolate. I would first locate a cocoa farm known to use child labor methods, and attempt to gather information from cocoa farm owners, families, and workers about how much they actually earn working and how they survive off of their little pay. I would find out how the child laborers (and other workers) pay on cocoa farms changes, if the company exporting the chocolate have had a significant drop in sales. This would give me information on just how much boycotting effects the lives of those on the cocoa farms.

The author of the article "Child Slaves Are Hurt –Not Helped- by Chocolate Boycotts", Jeremy Kahn, states "And, while it is true that country's cocoa farmers receive just a fraction of the price a consumer pays for a piece of chocolate (most of the money goes to marketing and processing costs), cocoa sales are still all many farmers have to live on.". Kahn explains how if people avoid buying the chocolate made from cocoa harvested by poor child workers, that money (even so small) is not supporting them. But how much do we actually know about how the money travels from our pockets, to the company, all the way back to the cocoa bean suppliers?

For my report I would also investigate how the cost of chocolate is determined, by following the route from cocoa beans to chocolate. I would gather information from the people I met and any financial statistics I could access about the people and companies who work to supply other companies with cocoa beans. I could then travel throughout Cote d'Ivoire, following a supply of cocoa to where it is sold to begin the chocolate process, to see why the price of chocolate is so cheap, and how the price of chocolate affects both consumers and suppliers.

I have made it my business not only as a chocolate consumer, but as a girl who is looking to make a positive change in the world, to report on this issue. This is one of many issues that is important to me and I think should be important to everyone. I believe that everyone, not only chocolate consumers, should be aware of the link between the chocolate they see in stores, and the children living in horrifying conditions on cocoa farms. However some ask, why should we worry ourselves with an issue that exists thousands of miles away? Well I think people should care. At least enough to investigate and support the people who are trying to improve the lives of those surrounded by the harsh labor conditions in the cocoa industry. And although we cannot physically see what is happening in Cote d'Ivoire and many other places around the world, doesn't mean it doesn't exist and it doesn't mean that we do not play a part in the issue. I still think we are a long way from completely abolishing these unethical labor practices around the world, but I do believe that the more people we are able to educate about the issue, the closer we progress to making a real difference in this world.

Works Cited

1. Kahn, Jeremy "Cote D'Ivoire's Child Slaves are Hurt -Not Helped- by Chocolate Boycotts." Slavery. Ed. Maria Tenaglia Webster. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2009 171-177. Global Viewpoints. Gale Virtual Reference Library. Web. 4 Mar. 2015.
2. Davis, Lennard. "12 Years A Slave Got You Thinking? Now Boycott Chocolate Harvested By Child Slaves." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 3 Mar. 2014. Web. 20 Mar. 2015.
3. Nkamleu, Guy B. "Determinants of Child Labor and Schooling in the Native Cocoa Households of Côte D'Ivoire." The African Economic Research Consortium (2009): 1-35. Africa Portal. Web. 9 Mar. 2015
4. Nkamleu, Guy B., and Anne Kielland. "Modeling Farmers' Decisions on Child Labor and Schooling in the Cocoa Sector: A Multinomial Logit Analysis in Côte D'Ivoire." *Agricultural Economics* 35 (2006): 319-33. International Association of Agricultural Economists. Web. 9 Mar. 2015.
5. Christie. "Nestlé Boycott: About the Chocolate." *DailyMomtra*. N.p., 4 July 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2015.
6. "Children in Cocoa Production." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, n.d. Web. 11 Mar. 2015.
7. "Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry." *Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry*. Food Empowerment Project, 2014. Web. 27 Mar. 2015.