

Morten Bøås and Anne Huser

# Child labour and cocoa production in West Africa

The case of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana



**Fafo**

Research Program on Trafficking and Child Labour



Morten Bøås and Anne Huser

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# Foreword

## **The Fafo Research Programme on Trafficking and Child Labour**

Over the past seven years, Fafo has developed a research profile on child labour and policies to combat it. Studies of work life are a core research area for Fafo, and our surveys of living conditions have targeted children and youth as a particularly important group to be examined. Fafo's origins in the trade union movement have resulted in a particular interest in developing institutional frameworks for regulating work and labour rights issues in the best interests of national economic development and the work force.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs drew upon Fafo's expertise to assist in preparing and hosting the International Conference on Child Labour in Oslo in 1997. Since then, Fafo has been commissioned by the International Labour Organisation, the World Bank, and others to provide applied research of interest to those combating child labour. The studies have been multifaceted and have addressed such issues as child labour and international trade, child relocation and domestic work, how to identify and measure child labour in national statistics, and how to identify and study child soldiers and the trafficking of children.

International efforts to combat child labour must be knowledge-based; that is, they require a good empirical understanding of its causes, forms, and extent. One challenge is to develop methodologies that can strengthen the planning and efficiency of national programs to counter child labour. It is Fafo's aim to contribute to this goal by providing knowledge and methods to map the challenges and measure results.

In 2002, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs generously agreed to finance a Fafo program on child labour, enabling us to collate and consolidate our research on the subject. The specific objectives of the program are to:

1. Help improve the empirical understanding of the variations of child labour, including their social and family contexts;
2. Improve and validate qualitative and quantitative methods to study and map child labour, with a particular focus on its worst forms;

3. Explore how an understanding of children as actors may help develop preventive measures aimed at improving living and working conditions for children and reducing the prevalence of child labour.

We are pleased to present, *Child Labour and Cocoa Production in West Africa: the Case of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana*, the fourth in a series of working papers from this program. This report attempts to understand the situation of children involved in cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, with a particular emphasis on how child labour in cocoa farming is a consequence of poverty and economic decline. Previous reports include *Achievements and Setbacks in the Fights Against Child Labour: Assessment of the Oslo Conference on Child Labour October 1997* by Lise Bjerkan and Christophe Gironde, *Travel to Uncertainty* by Kari Hauge Riisøen, Anne Hatløy and Lise Bjerkan, and *Identification of Street Children: Characteristics of Street Children in Bamako and Accra* by Anne Hatløy and Anne Huser. Forthcoming are the reports *Living in a Material World* and *After the 'Storm'* both by Morten Bøås and Anne Hatløy, which respectively analyse children in alluvial diamond mining in Sierra Leone and the economic activities of returning children in Liberia.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Anne Hatløy, who has ably coordinated our child labour program. The fieldwork on which this report is based was carried out in June 2004, in Côte d'Ivoire by Morten Bøås and in Ghana by Anne Huser. I would like to thank the authors of this report, Morten Bøås and Anne Huser, and Jon Pedersen, Fafo's Research Director, who provided valuable input during the work. Special thanks also to Professor Francis Akindès (University of Bouake) in Côte d'Ivoire and our colleagues at the University of Ghana, without whom the fieldwork would not have been possible. Special thanks also to all the children, youth, adults and organisations in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana who were willing to share their experiences and histories with us.

Finally, we are grateful to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway for its financial support, without which this report would not have been possible.

Mark Taylor  
Managing Director  
Fafo Institute for Applied International Studies

# 1 Introduction – the issues

Child labour has become an increasingly important topic in international policy-making. It is debated in multilateral fora such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the World Bank, the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU),<sup>1</sup> in national trade unions and national employers associations, and in the global community of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The voices in this debate are many. One of the most important cleavages are between those supportive of ‘a gradualist, step-by-step approach to regulation’ putting ‘the most intolerable forms of child labour on the political agenda’, versus those who argue ‘that focusing on the worst forms would not be followed by further elaboration of child labour norms and that there was an even greater risk that many forms of child labour would be neglected if the worst forms were defined too narrowly, too soon’ (Bjerkan and Gironde 2004:17).

Child labour is undoubtedly an important and controversial issue, but it is also underresearched and undertheorised. In most Africanist scholarships the issue of child labour is often neglected and its significance for economic, social and political relations ignored (Grier 2004a).<sup>2</sup> The current report attempts to contribute to addressing this neglect by focusing on the vulnerabilities of children involved in child labour, and the historical and socio-economic context in which the phenomenon of child labour is embedded. In particular, it seeks to improve the empirical understanding of child labour in West Africa, with a focus on social and family contexts. We believe that such an understanding can facilitate a more nuanced debate about children involved in child labour, about different production systems, and the various policy responses possible for the improvement of the living conditions of working children in the short term and the eradication of child labour in the long-term.

<sup>1</sup> The ICFTU was established in 1949 and has currently 234 affiliated trade union organisations in 152 countries and territories on all five continents, with a total membership of 148 million people.

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that the issue has not been researched or theorised. Important contributions from Africanist scholarship include Bass (2004), Grier (2004a, 2004b), Honwana and de Boeck (2005), from a more general perspective Grimsrud (2001a, 2001b) and a series of publications from ILO and UNICEF has improved our understanding of child labour both as a generic term and an empirical phenomena.

## Child labour and the Western world

We have chosen to focus on the cocoa sector in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana for two reasons. First, we wanted to study child labour within the context of the production of a commodity that was important for the economy in the country to be studied. Secondly, we wanted to focus on a commodity with a clear material and ideational connection to Norwegian and Western consumers.<sup>3</sup>

Child labour in the production of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana fulfills these two criteria. Côte d'Ivoire is the world's largest producer of cocoa beans. Its average percentage of world production in the period between 1994 and 2003 was 38 percent, and Ghana's production in the same period was 12 percent.<sup>4</sup> Cocoa is the main ingredient in chocolate, and the average Norwegian consumes 12 kilo of chocolate per year. There is therefore clearly a material link between Norwegian consumers and the Ivorian and Ghanaian cocoa producers. However, as shown by the debate that emerged in Norway after the publication of Simen Sætre's book about cocoa and chocolate production, there is also obviously an ideational relationship here as well.<sup>5</sup> The idea about chocolate as something good, pure and part of what it means to be Norwegian was suddenly challenged by the image of cocoa being produced by small children, severely exploited by cruel farmers and cocoa buyers.

Children had worked for decades on these plantations without much notice from the outside world. It was only after the *Miami Herald* and *New York Times* published a series of articles about 'bonded labour',<sup>6</sup> e.g. child slaves on cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire, that the issue came to the fore as a problem to be resolved. The Norwegian debate followed a similar course. It was only after the publication of Sætre's book that the issue of child labour made it from the offices of a few researchers, policy-makers in the trade unions and activists in the NGO-community, to becoming for a shortwhile a topic for general debate and household discussion. In this manner, the production of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana helps us to see the relationship

<sup>3</sup> See also Bass (2004:6) who argues: 'Generally, there must be a material connection that links consumers in rich countries with working children in poor countries. (...) Because of the material connection it has been difficult to ignore child labour'. In the case of cocoa we believe this connection to be both material and ideational.

<sup>4</sup> These figures were compiled from FAOStat (2004).

<sup>5</sup> See Sætre (2004), Bøås, Hatløy and Huser (2004), Bøås (2004a), and a good number of other op.ed.s. published in *Dagbladet* and *LO-Akutelt* in August and September 2004.

<sup>6</sup> These articles were written by Sudarsan Raghavan and Sumana Chatterjee and published in the *Miami Herald* and *New York Times* in 2001. For further details see Grier (2004a) and Bass (2004). Similar stories about child slaves and child slave markets were also published in *West Africa: A Survival Guide*, the popular backpacker book produced by Lonely Planet.

between the situation of children and farmers in West Africa and the consumers in rich countries such as Norway.

This report discusses the extent to which children work in cocoa production, and in what parts of the production process they are involved. We analyse the involvement of children in the production of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana with the aim of providing a basis for improved understanding of the situation for cocoa farmers and the children working in this sector. Our objective is to contribute to a description of the situation at the household level and the coping strategies applied by these households. The living conditions of and coping strategies applied by households involved in cocoa production must also be seen in relation to the world market, both with regard to actual price level and the structure of this market. Moreover, all such analyses should address the relationship between these households and the general economic conditions and level of human development in the country in question. This means that we contextualise child labour and embed our understanding of the present phenomena in the historical structures of cocoa production and localities.

## **Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana**

There are important differences as well as similarities between Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. They are adjacent states on the West African coast, Ghana is a former British colony, whereas Côte d'Ivoire used to be under French colonial administration. They are quite similar in geographical, economical and sociological terms. Nevertheless, their postcolonial paths have diverged significantly. Côte d'Ivoire experienced remarkable economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s, fuelled by an influx of foreign investments and an increase in the exports of cocoa and coffee. Ghana, on the other hand, experienced severe economic recession and political crisis in the same period. It lost control of its currency and its agricultural exports dropped to levels below those of the 1920s (see Crook 1991). Today, this picture has changed completely. Côte d'Ivoire currently finds itself in a state of a civil war and the economy has been in recession since the late 1980s (see ICG 2003; Bøås 2004b), whereas in Ghana the living conditions of the population have steadily improved over the past decades (see Green 1998; UNDP 2004). On the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index, Côte d'Ivoire is ranked number 163, with a GDP per capita of US\$ 1,520, a life expectancy at birth of 41 years, and an adult literacy rate of about 50 per cent. The corresponding figures for Ghana are as follows: its Human Development Index ranking is 131, a GDP per capita of US\$ 2,130, a life expectancy at birth of about 58 years, and an adult literacy rate of nearly 74 per cent (UNDP 2004).

These differences also had some important implications for the fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire. At the time of writing, a bitter conflict was being fought in the cocoa producing regions in Côte d'Ivoire. Due to the racial discourse on which this war was fought, it was not possible to conduct fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire to the same degree as we did in Ghana. This is of course a weakness for the study, but we believe that the material we have gathered and analysed contributes to increased understanding of child labour in West Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Another important dimension which we will take into consideration is the issue of labour migration and subsequent relocation of children. This is an ancient practice in West Africa although currently more common in Côte d'Ivoire than in Ghana. This is mainly due to the political system and corresponding production structure established first by the French colonial powers and later continued under the first Ivorian president Felix Houphouët-Boigny.

These differences and similarities will be used to structure our empirical presentations, analyses and arguments. However, we do not claim to conduct a formal comparison between these two countries. Our ambitions are more modest. This is a field in which not much systematic research has been conducted. Thus, this study is an explorative investigation into an underresearched field.

## **Child labour: what it is and what it is not**

Our starting point for establishing an understanding of child involvement in cocoa production in West Africa is the international definition of *child labour* of ILO's Convention 138, which states that child labour is any economic activity performed by a person under the age of 15 years. However, the Convention (Article 3) states that the minimum age should be 18 years for work which is likely to be harmful to children's health, safety or morals, whereas 13 or even 12 years may be an acceptable age for 'light work' which is not likely to be harmful to children's health and development, and does not prevent their school attendance (ILO 1973). Thus, not all work can be considered harmful to or exploitative of a child. Child labour is therefore defined as work that prevents children from attending and participating effectively in school or is performed by children under hazardous conditions which place their health and development physically, intellectually or morally at risk. In addition, ILO Convention 182 defines the *worst form of child labour* as the use of

<sup>7</sup> The current situation in Côte d'Ivoire is discussed in detail later in the report and its implications for child labour is analysed as well.

any individual under the age of 18 for the purpose of debt bondage, armed conflict, commercial sexual exploitation, drug trafficking and other types of work identified as hazardous to children by ratifying members (ILO 1999).<sup>8</sup>

As a point of departure, we define working children in the cocoa sector as those who carry out at least one of the following tasks/activities on the cocoa farm on a regular basis:

- clearing the ground,
- weeding,
- maintaining cocoa trees,
- applying pesticides,
- spreading fertilizers,
- harvesting,
- piling/gathering cocoa pods,
- pod breaking,
- fermenting, transporting,
- drying cocoa beans,
- and other farm related activities.

This also suggest that the tasks only to be performed by persons above the age of 18 years include work with pesticides and the part of cocoa-farming which includes working with machetes.

In West Africa, as elsewhere, children in rural households traditionally help out in the fields as part of the household. Not all this work is harmful to the child or prevent him or her from attending school. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana the involvement of children in production differs from region to region and from sector to sector. Different social practices based on complex historical trajectories may even provide for important differences between various groups of children working within the same area and in the same sector. Concerning cocoa production in West Africa, we distinguish between three different groups of labour (see IITA 2002).

1. Family labour, e.g. children of the farmer or children of close relatives of the farmer who live on the farm.
2. Foster labour, e.g. children with well-established kinship or communal ties to the household.
3. Salary labour, e.g. children who work for a salary without any kind of family, kinship or communal ties to the farm household in which they work.

<sup>8</sup> According to UNDP (2004) Côte d'Ivoire has ratified both ILO Convention 138 and 182, whereas Ghana only has ratified Convention 182.

This report is concerned with all these three categories. We assume that both the work conditions and the vulnerabilities of children vary between and across these three groups. In parts of the literature, a distinction is made between children working outside the family or kinship networks, e.g. as salary labour (see Grier (2004a)). One argument for making this distinction is that 'exploitation' is limited, in the two first categories mentioned, by kin obligations, but can be extreme in the latter (see Schildkrout 1981, Rodgers and Standing 1981). We do not assume that this is necessarily the case, but in the circumstances that we currently find in Côte d'Ivoire such a distinction can be useful for the identification of the most vulnerable group of child labourers.

Finally, we believe that it is important to understand child labour not only as a statistical definition and a firm categorisation. It is also a social construction that can vary with the mode of production, gender, class, race and other social structures. This suggests that we should not understand children who work only as passive and defenceless victims. We must also acknowledge child agency. Child labour is not only an outcome of social structures and processes, we must also acknowledge children as actors within these structures and processes. For example, the labour migration that we identify, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire, is more than just a system of production. It should also be recognised as a rite of passage for prepubescent boys. It is a form of resistance to fathers' labour appropriation and a tool for renegotiating, redefining, and reconstructing what it means to be a junior and a child (See Grier 2004a). Our point is that the interest of cocoa-farmers in cheap child labour may coincide with the interests of boys in challenging the authority of senior males in their home village, be it in Northern Côte d'Ivoire or in Mali or Burkina Faso.

In the following sections of this report, we first discuss the methods we have applied and the challenges of researching child labour in cocoa production in our two cases. Here, we also comment on the knowledge-base available. In the next section we introduce the cocoa tree and how cocoa is produced. Based on this, we contextualise child labour in historical and developmental terms, before we continue to discuss the current practice of child labour in contemporary Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. In the final parts of the report we sum up our findings, make our conclusions, and put forward suggestions for further research and policy interventions.

## 2 Child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana: the state of the art

Meaningful statistics about child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are rare. The few systematic studies that exist have been conducted by ILO, in collaboration with partners such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) and the Sustainable Tree Crops Programme (STCP).

In 2002 ILO/IPEC<sup>9</sup> initiated the West Africa Cocoa Agricultural Project for the Prevention and Elimination of Hazardous Child Labour (WACAP). This project is implemented in partnership with STCP and local research institutions in Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon, Ghana, Guinea, and Nigeria. To date, only the results from a rapid assessment in Ghana are available while reports from the other countries are not yet finalised. In 2003, the Ghana Child Labour Survey (GCLS) was published by Ghana Statistical Service. This was the first nationwide survey specifically designed to collect information on the various aspects of child labour. The findings from these studies, in combination with information received from studies conducted by Centre de Coopération Internationale en Recherche Agronomique pour le Développement (CIRAD) and the Laboratoire 'Economie et de Sociologie Rurale (LESOR, University of Bouaké) form the basis of the written material for this report. In order to broaden the knowledge base, fieldwork was conducted in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in June 2004. A series of interviews were carried out in Abidjan, Bingerville and Accra, and in Ghana we also conducted interviews and focus group discussions with farmers in four different cocoa producing regions.<sup>10</sup> The aim of these discussions was to explore what type of cocoa-farming activities children are involved in. In order to achieve this, the discussions were framed around the seasonal calendar of cocoa-farming and the socio-economic organisation of the production process.

Family labour is without doubt the most common type of labour in cocoa production in West Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire 87 percent of the permanent labour force used in cocoa farming comes from the family. Boys are more likely to be involved

<sup>9</sup> IPEC is the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour under ILO, established in 1992.

<sup>10</sup> The regions visited were Eastern, Central, Brong Ahafo and Ashanti,.

than girls. About 59 percent of children working on cocoa farms are boys whereas girls account for 41 percent (IITA 2002). This is mainly due to the whole set of other tasks that girls traditionally perform in rural households, such as caring for smaller children, making food and fetching water etc. In Côte d'Ivoire, the majority of children working on cocoa farms are believed to be below the age of 14.

With regard to the issue of relocation of children for work in this sector, the majority are supposed to come from Burkina Faso (about 60 percent). The remaining children are believed to be of mainly Baoulé origin, coming from the Yamassoukro-Bouaké region or from northern Ivorian ethnic groups such as the Senoufo and Lobi. The origins of farmers employing these children have been the subject of much discussion. The IITA study from 2002 indicates that 59 percent of the farmers employing children as salary labour were Ivorian, of whom 27 percent were of local origin and 32 percent were internal migrant settlers in the cocoa belt. The remaining 41 percent were immigrant farmers, mainly from Burkina Faso. Overall, the 2002 IITA study found that Burkinabe farmers accounted for an estimated 16 percent of the farm population, while those from another country, mainly Mali, accounted for an additional 3.5 percent. This suggests a higher propensity to employ children as salary workers among the immigrant community in Côte d'Ivoire. One reason for this could be the much higher level of uncertainty experienced by immigrant farmers than by 'indigenous farmers'.<sup>11</sup>

In the GCLS data, cocoa production is not a separate sector but is just one part of the broad agricultural sector in Ghana. Hence, the survey does not provide information on children's involvement in cocoa production specifically. This survey can therefore only be used to assess the extent of child labour in society at large. According to the survey, two in five children aged 5-17 years are engaged in economic activity. However, 64 percent of the children engaged in economic activity are also attending school (GCLS 2003). In Ghana as in Côte d'Ivoire and West Africa at large, it is an established socio-cultural practice that children work for the family in various ways, and children of cocoa farmers would naturally take part in the cocoa production. The WACAP project commissioned a rapid assessment of selected cocoa growing communities in Ghana. The study was carried out by the African Centre for Human Development (ACHD) and interviews were conducted in 42 cocoa growing communities. Of the children interviewed, 70 percent can be described as involved in child work rather than child labour (ACHD 2003). This means that their work does not harm the safety, health or moral of the child or prevent it from attending school. Full-time child labourers are usually between the age of 8 and 17, and the majority of them were migrants from the Upper East region of Ghana (ibid).

<sup>11</sup> This issue is further discussed in chapter 4.

One of the most difficult aspects of this field of study is to establish the actual number of children involved. National statistics are not well-developed and child labour is not a phenomena governments have been much interested in documenting. A few international studies have been conducted, but they are quite general and questions can be raised about their accuracy. The study commissioned by WACAP initially planned to estimate the number of child labourers on cocoa farms in Ghana, but this was abandoned due to the sensitive nature of the issue (ACHD 2003). Concerning the number of children in cocoa production much larger studies are needed if are to come up with exact figures. However, part of the problem is also definitional. For many farmers in West Africa the idea that their own sons and daughters, or foster children for that matter (e.g. category 1 and 2) that help out in the production should be categorised as 'child labour' may seem absurd. The children who work for a salary are quite easy to identify, the actual number of children in category 1 and 2 will be much harder to estimate.

### 3 About a tree

The cocoa tree is originally from Central America, where its seeds were highly valued by the Mayas and the Aztecs who not only ate the seeds, but also for a period used them as a currency for exchange.

The tree belongs to the *Theobroma cacao* type of the Steraculiaceae family. This type consists of about 15 different subspecies, all originally from Central America.<sup>12</sup> The *Theobroma*, when fully grown is a tree between five to eight meters in height. The trunk has the colour of cinnamon, and the wood of the tree is quite light and fragile. Its leaves are oval in form and shining dark green in colour. The leaves are from 20 to 25 centimetres long and seven to eight centimetres wide. Its flowers are yellow and grow on the tree in groups of two or three. The fruit of the tree (i.e. the *cacahoacentli*) is a pod. It is between 15 to 25 centimetres long and seven to ten centimetres in diameter. The pod is oval and furrowy. It usually contains 25 to 30 seeds, which are surrounded by a pulp that is mucous, white in colour and has a bittersweet taste. The beans are formed by a core constituted by two cotyledons narrowly surrounding the seed, which again is surrounded by a shell.

The cocoa-tree depends on a hot and humid climate for successful cultivation. It needs an annual average temperature of 25 degrees or more, and the altitude of cultivation should not be any higher than 500 meters above sea level. The tree has a life span of 25 to 30 years, and its prime period of production is when the tree is between seven and 20 years old. The cocoa tree yields a harvest twice a year. In Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana the main harvest is from September to December with an intermediate harvest from April to June.

The ripe pod is picked from the tree with the aid of a knife or machete, and then opened with a cut by a machete or a blow by a club in order to extract the beans from the white pulp. Once removed from the pod and cleaned from the pulp, the beans are covered with large leaves and left to ferment in baskets, piles or in boxes. In general, this operation lasts from two to eight days and the beans are mixed in order to ensure an even fermentation. The objective of this process is to allow the bean to develop the chemical process that gives it its aroma, while it simultaneously reduces its bitterness. Thereafter the beans must be dried as they still contain water.

<sup>12</sup> Linné was only aware of one of these 15 species and he called it *Theobroma*. This name is made from two Greek words meaning *meal of gods*.

The beans are therefore arranged on large mats or even on the ground and left in the sun to dry, for about ten to 20 hours. When this process is completed, the bean contains no more than six per cent water, and the drying facilitates the development of the aroma as well as keeps the bean from moulding. Finally, the beans are put into bags of jute (65 kilo in each bag) or sometimes also into containers with ventilation to avoid condensation.

The usual size of a West African cocoa farm is from five to ten hectares, and not all of it is devoted to the production of cocoa. A range of agricultural products will also be planted, some for sale, others for consumption by the household on the plantation. On an ordinary cocoa farm in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, 1 to 1.5 hectares of land is set aside for young cocoa trees. Here, the farmer will cultivate products such as yam, macabo, plantain, rice, maize and manioc.<sup>13</sup> Another 1 to 1.5 hectares is utilised for the cultivation of the youngest cocoa trees, e.g. the trees which yield no harvest. The remaining five to eight hectares is the fully dedicated to the cocoa farm. This suggests that understanding the seasonal calendar of a cocoa producer may also make it easier to understand the role that children play in the cocoa-producing household's economic activities.

## The seasonal calendar

In general, work on a cocoa farm is divided between the maintenance of the existing plantation and extension work. If a new plantation is to be established this work usually starts in January. Then the fields will be cleared. If the plantation is an established one, this is the period in which ordinary maintenance work takes place. This includes weeding, cutting of non-productive branches of the cocoa tree and in some cases, but not for all, the application of pesticides. In February, extension work will continue until its completed, and in the case of an established plantation, the cutting of branches and trees will continue. If the crowns of the trees are fully-grown, other trees that used to provide shade to the plantation will be cut down.

When the first rain showers begin in March the work on new fields are devoted to co-planting. It is in this period that rice and maize are sowed, and plantain trees are planted in order to provide protection and shade for the young cocoa trees. In a new plantation or in an older one where significant extension work is taking place, the entire available workforce will be engaged in this kind of work. In a well

<sup>13</sup> A Baoulé cocoa farmer will usually grow only yams, macabo and plantain together with his cocoa trees, a Bête farmer tends to favour rice, maize and manioc, whereas Burkinabé farmers prefer to grow rice and maize. See Ruf (1988a).

established plantation March is a much calmer month. Some clearing and cutting of nonproductive branches on the cocoa trees are done: and the maturity of the fruits on the cocoa trees are supervised.

In April new plantations are marked out. In the old ones, the clearing and cutting work mentioned above continues, and pesticides (if available or deemed necessary) are applied to the younger cocoa trees (i.e. those less than two years old). In April, we also find the first phase of what is known as the 'little harvest'. This means that all the materials needed for fermenting and drying the beans are prepared in this month. In addition, women and girls harvest manioc and plantain on the farms that co-plant these products. The late yam seeds (the dominant yam type in the forest zone), are also planted in April and May. This yam is harvested between December and January.

If it rains abundantly, the farmers who establish new plantations or extend existing ones, will start planting in May. Working household members (children may be included in this group) will take care of the agriculture products co-planted with the cocoa trees whereas the weeding of the young cocoa trees (less than two years) is primarily carried out by hired labour (i.e. salary labour, children may also be included in this group). On a well established plantation, some harvesting also starts in May, as some pods will have become ripe already by then.

June is in the middle of the rainy season. What is now taking place is weeding, cutting of dead or sick branches and applying fertilizer. Applying fertilizer usually takes place during the rain because it needs to be mixed with water. If plantain or manioc have been planted these products are also harvested in this period.

July is the month of heavy rain showers, sometimes followed by thunderstorms. The harvesting of the rice begins this month, and the general maintenance work on the plantation intensifies. Due to the rain, one of the most important tasks is to combat the effect of the weeds that will be invading the cocoa plantation in this period.

In August, the cocoa plantation must be cleared from trees and branches that fell down during the thunderstorms in July, and a new round of pesticide application is conducted while the rice is harvested. The cocoa harvest begins with the removal of rotten fruits. This is what is known as the 'sanitary harvest'.<sup>14</sup> August is also the month in which the tree nursery must be prepared for the following year.<sup>15</sup> Trees that

<sup>14</sup> This so-called 'sanitary harvest' must be carried out every second week until the harvest is totally completed

<sup>15</sup> In general, a new cocoa plantation or the extension of an established one is carried out in one of the two following ways: either the beans are placed in sachets of soil and planted directly or the new plants first grow in sachets and later the new tree is planted with its roots bare. In Côte d'Ivoire the majority of the farmers use the first method.

can provide shade for the new cocoa trees are also planted during this month. This may be plantain trees, but sometimes also wild trees are used for this purpose.

September, is the main month for harvesting cocoa, and the time-consuming work of cutting the pods and separating the beans takes place in this month as well. In October, the fermenting and drying takes place, and in addition, some general maintenance work on the plantation is also conducted. In addition, this is the month where new seeds are sewn into the sachets. In November, a third round of pesticides may be applied. The harvest will continue, although a lower level than the two previous months, and some weeding may also be necessary. December is the end of the season, and the farmer starts to prepare for the next year. Young trees are looked after, some weeding work takes place and the bush is cleared for the co-planting that will start again in January.

This is the general seasonal calendar of an Ivorian or Ghanaian cocoa farmer. However, as Ruf (1988, 2001) has pointed out, there are significant differences from farmer to farmer as well. Some only weed the cocoa fields in September, whereas other farmers start with this work already in June. There are also significant differences according to the size of the farm. In small and average size farms, September is the main month for harvesting, while in the largest units, the harvest goes on for nearly a ten month period, and there is little if any difference between the so-called 'little harvest' of the spring and the 'big harvest' of the autumn. The age of the farm and cocoa trees also matters: life cycles tend to interact with tree life cycles, and farmers and their trees tend to grow old together. The cocoa tree has a life span of 25 to 30 years, and when a plantation needs to be replanted completely, the original farmer may have grown old and lack an available labour force, in particular if he has sent his children to school. The older the trees, the higher the harvesting and maintenance costs, and this will also have important implications for the seasonal calendar of such farms (see Ruf (2001).

We will return to several of these issues in detail later in the report. Here it should suffice to say that cocoa production is labour intensive during the harvest and less so in the rest of the year. There are also significant variations between small to average farms and the large ones, and between new and old farms. This also has important implications for child labour in this sector. We now turn to the issue of contextualising child labour in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

## 4 The political economy of cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire

As a multiethnic society Côte d'Ivoire is constituted by about 60 ethnic groups, none of them in a position to dominate, at least demographically.<sup>16</sup> During the single-party period the many groups that constitute the Ivorian polity were successfully balanced and co-opted by the postcolonial state. This success owed much to the astute political strategies of Felix Houphouët-Boigny. From 1960 to 1993, the country was firmly under his rule as he used the spoils of the export crop economy to tie local elites to the state through the mediation of the Parti Démocratique de la Côte d'Ivoire (PDCI). This was effected in order to construct the widest possible elite consensus built on a distribution of resources to various elites and the marginalisation of those who refused to join in. Until the late 1980s this system of inclusive patrimonialism worked remarkably well. The country was a haven of political and economic stability in an unruly region. However, with hindsight, it can be said that,

Table 1 Cash crops and land cultivation in Côte d'Ivoire

| Cash crops       | Surface (ha) | Per centa |
|------------------|--------------|-----------|
| Cocoa            | 1.777.550    | 56,10     |
| Coffee           | 602.075      | 19,00     |
| Cotton           | 280.115      | 8,84      |
| Palm oil         | 194.790      | 6,15      |
| Mahogany         | 133.273      | 4,21      |
| Rubber           | 116.050      | 3,66      |
| Coconut          | 29.663       | 0,94      |
| Banana           | 7.204        | 0,23      |
| Other cash crops | 28.005       | 0,88      |
| Total            | 3.168.725    | 100,00    |

Source: Rencement National de l'Agriculture (2003)

<sup>16</sup> These groups are usually categorised into the following five cultural and linguistic clusters: Akan, Seoufo, Mande North and South, and Krou. Even the largest group, the Akan-speaking Baoulé, only account for approximately 20 per cent of the population.

during the 1980s, the Boigny system of inclusive patrimonialism was increasingly becoming dysfunctional (see Akindes 2004). Any serious study of child labour in Côte d'Ivoire must take this political economy into consideration.

Cocoa was the first source of wealth in the country and still remains the most important one. The economic miracle and later recession that Côte d'Ivoire has experienced is closely related to cocoa production. Cocoa is in many ways the *blood* of the economy. Of all cultivated land in Côte d'Ivoire, 56 percent of it is utilised for cocoa production. The second most important agricultural item is coffee, followed by cotton and palm oil (see table 1).

The Ivoirian economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, and in particular on cocoa and coffee. Together these two commodities contribute to nearly 20 per cent of GNP and little under 40 per cent of total export revenue. The climatic conditions in Côte d'Ivoire are almost perfect for cocoa production. As we have seen, the cocoa tree is fragile, and it depends upon a tropical climate where the soil is rich in organic material, an average temperature between 24 to 28 degrees and an annual rainfall of no less than 1600 millimetres. The tree also needs to find shelter from the wind, and it grows best if shade can be provided. This is precisely the kind of conditions that we find in the tropical forest belt in southern Côte d'Ivoire. Ivorian cocoa is by and large only produced in this area. This tropical forest zone is delimited in the north by an axis stretching from the Moyen-Comoe region (Abengourou) to the Montagnes region (Man), and to the south by the sea.

## **A double movement of transformation**

The contemporary political economy and geographical stratification of cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire are the outcomes of a double movement of transformation: labour migration from north to the cocoa-producing areas of the south, in combination with a relocation of production from southeast to southwest. The geographic area in which cocoa production first took place in Côte d'Ivoire was the Region de l'Agneby around Agboville and Adzope.<sup>17</sup> Involved in the production were both local people, internal labour migrants from the northern and central regions of Côte d'Ivoire and immigrants from Burkina Faso and Mali.<sup>18</sup> This is also evident in the

<sup>17</sup> The very first cocoa plantation was established in Elima (close to Aboisso) in 1888 by the two French colonisers Verdier and Bretignere.

<sup>18</sup> More precisely these migrants came from the areas under French colonial control in which we find present-day Burkina Faso and Mali.

imbalance between the northern part of the country where about 22 percent of the population lives on 53 percent of the total territory of the country, and the southern part where 78 percent of the population lives on 47 percent of the territory. This is neither a new development nor did it start with the introduction of cocoa. The tropical forest region along the coast has always constituted the centre for economic activity in this part of West Africa, and has therefore also always attracted migrants from the Ivorian savannah zones and from neighbouring countries as well. However, this tendency increased when cocoa plantations were established, and the influx of migrants to the regions of tropical forest zones seems to correspond to the expansion of cocoa production in this part of Côte d'Ivoire.

The majority of Ivorian cocoa is produced on small traditional farms. According to census carried out by the *Direction des Statistiques* in 1999, there exist nearly 500,000 such farms in the Ivorian forest belt. They are organised in different cooperative farmer organisations, from which formal and informal systems of credit are established. All of these farms practice diversification and co-planting as important coping strategies at the household level. This allows both for the mitigation of risk, but equally important, for increased revenue and the possibility to spread revenue throughout the year, as the harvesting season for cocoa is not the same as the one for instance, yams or manioc.

In the first decades after the introduction of cocoa, the social and economic relationship between migrants and those indigenous to the tropical forest zone was cordial. Land was abundant and most were able to carve out a relatively good living from their involvement in cocoa production. However, as pointed out by Ruf (2001), land ownership evolves around the growth cycle of the cocoa plantation. In most cases, when a boom begins, migrants find land cheap and can acquire it easily. 'Most booms can be interpreted as situations where local ethnic groups, who control land, or at least have a moral claim to it, meet up with migrants, who initially bring and control labour. In this meeting, migrants are often the winners, at least initially, when labour is scarce' (Ruf 2001:293-294). Some 20 to 25 years later when replanting becomes necessary, land can become scarce, and if relocation of production is not possible one may see increased conflicts between migrants and local ethnic groups. However, as long as relocation of production was possible major conflict between migrants and those who controlled the land could be avoided.

Thus, when the rate of return on marginal land became too low due to over-exploitation of the land, many of the farmers relocated their production to the fertile unused forest regions of the southwest. As production moved to the southwest, this area also came to experience labour migration from northern and central parts of Côte d'Ivoire and from Burkina Faso and Mali as well. This means that both the production pattern and the migration pattern of the southeast was recreated in the southwestern parts of Côte d'Ivoire. However, in the latter area, the consequences

were to become much more dramatic as it is this area that currently experiences the most intense conflicts over access to land and over land use rights. The dynamic relocation of production has come to its last frontier. The process can no longer recreate itself, as there is almost no land left for pioneer farming. The integrative capacity of the forest belt is rapidly diminishing and it can no longer sustain the traditional labour migration from north to south. This development has important implications for working children and thereby also for our understanding of child labour as an empirical phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire.

What we need to understand is that farming societies in the Ivorian cocoa belt have emerged from historical processes of precolonial settlement, colonial conquest and peasantisation. In combination, these factors worked against the concentration of power over people and land in the hands of indigenous authorities (Boone 2003). The southeast and central regions were settled over the course of the 17th and 18th centuries by Akan people fleeing from the domination and military might of Akan states in what is now Ghana (see Dian 1985). From these migratory movements arose the Baoulé and Agni ethnic groups of central and southeastern Côte d'Ivoire. These migrants brought with them the kind of pyramidal (lineage-based) political hierarchies and kingship institutions associated with Ghana's coastal Akan monarchies and the Asante empire. However, the Baoulé and Agni institutions never developed a high degree of centralisation or wide geographical scope (see Guyer 1970). The rest of southern Côte d'Ivoire was home to a great diversity of localised polities without administrative centralisation above the village level. The sparsely populated West was the domain of widely dispersed societies that under colonialism were classified as the Dida, Bété and Gouro ethnic groups (see Chappel 1989).

During the colonial period, the interest of France became centred almost exclusively on the production of tree crops, namely coffee and cocoa. The production of cocoa for export was initiated by the Europeans who brought the plant to Côte d'Ivoire. They were encouraged by the king of Anwi to create the first plantations around Aboisso in the 1880s. Already around the turn of the century many of these were abandoned, and it was African planters who carried forward the momentum of cocoa in the region, whereas the geographical locus of European investment in plantations moved further west, outside of Agni territory, and into areas immediately to the north and west of Abidjan. By the 1930s, about 200 European-owned plantations were concentrated in the central-west forest zone (mostly around Gagnoa and Oumé). These were huge by Ivorian standards, averaging 400-500 hectares, and were worked in large part by Africans recruited as forced labour by the colonial administration. However, these plantations were only marginally profitable and whatever prosperity they enjoyed turned out to be short-lived (Boone 2003). African smallholders, not the European planters, were responsible for the explosive growth of cocoa production in southern Côte d'Ivoire between 1920 and 1960.

After World War I, with logging and road building proceeding at a rapid pace in south-eastern Côte d'Ivoire, the Agni turned almost *en masse* to cocoa farming. However, as would be the case across virtually all the forest zone, the limiting factor of production in the Southeast in this period was labour. In order to expand their farm land beyond the limit of labour available within the household, the Agni of the Southeast had to rely on migrant labour from the poorer parts of the colony, mostly from Baouléland and the northern half of Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, in the oldest cocoa-producing regions of Côte d'Ivoire, land pioneering and labour influxes drove the extensive form of cocoa cultivation, which became the defining characteristics of the Ivorian *economie de planation*.

Before the implementation of the *economie de planation*, farming was based on rotating fields, carved out of the forest, planted for one or two years, then left fallow for a long period (sometimes up to 20 years), while other fields were cleared and planted. In such a system, the farmer often experienced labour shortages, particularly during periods of sowing, weeding and harvesting. The limiting factor of production was labour, and the rich farmer was the one with many children and many clients, and most social systems in this area placed a high value on welcoming and incorporating 'strangers'. In such systems, anyone not born in the village is *de facto* a stranger because land rights are shared within the lineage considered to be autochthonous to the village. Even if only moving some kilometres away to another village, the person moving would be required to find a host to sponsor and arrange for entry into the new local community. In the past, the mechanisms for incorporating a stranger were basically the same if the person in question just move a few kilometres or if the distance was many thousand kilometres. This has changed and in no part of Côte d'Ivoire is this more evident than in the western regions of the country.

## **Autochthonous and strangers in Western Côte d'Ivoire**

In the centre and western regions of Côte d'Ivoire, almost open land access and extreme labour mobility pushed the cocoa frontier westward, creating ethnically heterogeneous villages across most of the Ivorian south as hardwood forests were cleared to make room for small farms. Eventually, 'autochthonous-stranger' relations similar to those we identified in the southeast were created across the entire forest zone. Malinké traders from Mali and northern Côte d'Ivoire (called Dyula) had already established themselves in the western forest zones, constructing towns and trade centres across this zone. For the original inhabitants of this area the newcom-

ers were perceived just as much as invaders as the French (Person 1982). Already in the 1920s migrant farmers had received access to forest land from the indigenous Dida, Bété and Gouro and had begun to invest in export crop production. Baoulé farmers soon also began to arrive in the West. As this process evolved also indigenous groups took up cocoa farming, clearing small plantations of their own. The Dida of the Central West began to use non-kin labour to expand their cocoa holdings. First migrant workers were incorporated into households as 'adopted relatives', but outsiders also swiftly established land-use rights, and less personalised relations between 'indigenous' and 'outsiders' became the norm (see Chauveau and Dozon (1987). As a social practice, the relocation of children has its roots in the relationships developed in this process of land pioneering.

The period from 1946 to 1960 was marked by a huge influx of 'outsiders' into the Central West. Already in the mid-1950s this was perceived in many parts as a Baoulé invasion. Within a decade after independence the Dida and Gouro had become ethnic minorities in their original homeland (see Zolberg 1964). It soon became common to find household transacting *de facto* land sales to Baoulé, Malinke, and people from other parts of Côte d'Ivoire and beyond. Often these 'sales' were not acknowledged or respected by families and villages as such, creating a permanent environment of insecurity from immigrants and tensions in the relationship between 'indigenous' and 'outsiders' that would become more and more intense over time. The roots of the current political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire can be traced to these processes, but this permanent environment of insecurity for immigrants that this created can also help us understand why children belonging to migrant households involved in cocoa farming is less likely to go to school than children from 'indigenous' households.

## **The nationalist era and the rise of the Boigny state**

The pattern of migration that developed was clearly based on economic incentives. However, it was also facilitated by the French forced labour regime. In general, the French regarded the northern half of Côte d'Ivoire and their entire colony of Upper Volta (currently Burkina Faso) as a vast labour reserve. In 1932, the French authorities fused the colonies of Upper Volta and Côte d'Ivoire in order to perfect the forced-labour regime. Redefining the colony's boundaries had the effect of doubling the supply of labour to the *économie de plantation*.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the nationalist era began in 1944, when African cocoa and coffee growers organised to protest the colonial regime's discriminatory policies that favoured European plantation owners. It is also in this process we find the

background for Felix Houphouët-Boigny's rise to power. In 1945, he was elected as the Ivorian representative to the French Constituent Assembly.<sup>19</sup> Here he forged an alliance with the French Communist Party for his campaign against forced labour in the French colonies in Africa, and in a stunning victory for a deputy from Côte d'Ivoire, France abolished the forced-labour regime in a law in March 1946 that bore Boigny's name. As a consequence, most Europeans abandoned or sold their cocoa farms. A direct result of the *lex-Boigny* was that those suddenly freed from forced labour could set up plantations themselves (see Dian 1985). The outcome was decades of an anarchic land rush in the forest zone. This has been described as a Baoulé colonisation of the Ivorian West (see Chappel 1989; Nguessan-Zoukou 1999). Labour to fuel this post-war boom was supplied by migrant labour. They came by tens of thousands to the forest zone from the savannah regions of northern Côte d'Ivoire and from Upper Volta.<sup>20</sup> In what became known as the policy of *mise en valeur* the government of Boigny granted land user rights to anyone who put unused land to use. This was at first unproblematic, but the spectre of all the unsolved questions of user rights vs. lineage-based right to land would later come back to haunt Côte d'Ivoire when land became scarce.

In promoting smallholder cocoa production, the regime of Boigny avoided the aggressively interventionist development strategies pursued by many of its neighbouring states. Producers' prices were set by the state, input prices were subsidised and extension agents passed out cuttings to plant new cocoa trees. Yet, the postcolonial state did not build a heavy institutional apparatus or resort to intensive bureaucratic regulation to structure the labour process, investment, land access or the dissemination of new technologies. Even without much of an institutional apparatus to promote rural development, Côte d'Ivoire was able to triple its cocoa output between 1955 and 1970. This increase was almost entirely due to the replication of the smallholder production unit on an ever-widening geographical scale. The downside to this process was, however, low and stagnant yields, soil depletion and erosion, and low quality output. The result was a permanent search for new land in the forest zone, which led to a constant relocation of production from East to West, and a permanent search for cheap labour. It is here we find the economic incentive for the use of child labour as farms embarked on a search for cost control. One option available was to utilise the already existing labour migration patterns for the recruitment of children, both taken into the household through kinship networks as foster children

<sup>19</sup> Boigny served for 13 years in the shifting coalition cabinets of the Fourth French Republic, usually in the Ministry of Health.

<sup>20</sup> In February 1948, the French authorities reconstituted the colony of Upper Volta.

(e.g. 'adopted relatives') or as salary workers. This became even more necessary as world cocoa prices plummeted in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The regime of Boigny was clearly supported by rents extracted from the cocoa economy. The slush fund established and controlled by the presidency in this period was connected to the cocoa marketing board and its associated structures (*filière*) and operated through a network of complex financial transactions. This established a sort of labyrinthine cocoa *filière*, sort of 'Enron'-type establishment of front companies, secret bank accounts, and transfer of funds with a multitude of layers of protection between the criminal acts and their beneficiaries. It has been estimated that for most of the period 1960 to the 1980s, the peasant farmer was actually only paid about 25 percent of the world market price of cocoa, about 10 to 12 percent went to the commercial intermediaries, whereas the rest went to the *filière* system (see Boone 2003). This system was initially meant to be to the benefit of the Ivorian farmer, through various schemes to support the price offered to the farmer. However, more than US\$ 100 million have disappeared from this system, some of it placed into 'accounts' in phantom banks and later used to buy weapons in deals managed by off-shore companies (see ICG 2004). Ivorians or people living there who have tried to investigate this system in more detail have either had to go into hiding or are currently missing. Francois Kouadio, an inspector in *L'Inspection Générale d'Etat*, who undertook a study of the *filière* system in March 2002, literally had to run for his life, and is still hiding somewhere in West Africa. The French-Canadian journalist and researcher Guy-André Kieffer disappeared 16 April 2004 after having published a series of articles about corruption in the cocoa administrative system in *La Lettre du Continent*. It is widely believed that people in the cocoa sector with close ties to President Laurent Gbagbo are responsible for Kieffer's disappearance.<sup>21</sup> Research into all aspects of cocoa in Côte d'Ivoire is currently both highly controversial and potentially dangerous. One of the authors' of this report was told quite bluntly in a meeting with representatives from *Reseau des Organisations Professionnelles des Producteurs Agricoles de Côte d'Ivoire* that any attempts to research the cocoa sector would only bring the researcher into trouble. This statement came immediately after remarks had been made about the disappearance of Kieffer.

This should not come as a surprise as in the current situation in Côte d'Ivoire, cocoa remains one of the few economic foundations left at the regime and its supporters' disposal. All issues concerning cocoa have therefore become an integral part of the security concerns of the regime in power, and the issue of child labour is no

<sup>21</sup> Kieffer was last seen being driven away by uniformed men after telling his friends he had received death threats. It has been alleged that Michel Legre, the brother-in-law of President Laurent Gbagbo's wife was connected to Kieffer's disappearance, see BBC (15.06.2004).

exception. In fact, due to the recent international focus on child labour in Côte d'Ivoire this issue have become extremely sensitive.<sup>22</sup> The government and producer associations are clearly concerned that research on this matter will put them in a bad light and influence both on the price of cocoa and the willingness of international chocolate producers to buy cocoa from Côte d'Ivoire.

## **The end of the Ivorian miracle and the 'Ivoirité' discourse**

In the fiscal year 1989/90 the Ivorian government was forced to cut the producer price by half. Many farmers felt betrayed by the government, but their room for manoeuvre was very small. One of the few options they had available was to cut costs, and herein employment of child labour was one possibility. Another was to increase the workload placed on children belonging to the household, either in form of the farmer's own children or his 'adopted relatives'.

The Ivorian 'miracle' had been based on cheap migrant labour and free access to land. When the economic downturn started in the late 1980s, the fight for diminishing resources became bitter, and anti-migrant rhetoric among those who consider themselves 'true' Ivoirans gained momentum (see ICG 2004).

It was within this context of economic recession that Côte d'Ivoire was supposed to embark on a process of democratisation after the death of Boigny in 1993. The answer to the challenges that now emerged was the adoption a policy of Ivorian nationalism. Under the slogan of the promotion of *l'Ivoirité*, Boigny's successor, Henri Konan Bédié, formulated a new electoral code, which in practice created two types of citizens: (1) the pure-blooded of Ivorian origin, and (2) those of mixed heritage. The idea was first and foremost to prohibit prominent figures in the opposition from contesting the elections by questioning their nationality (Nwokedi 1999). In this manner Bédié was able to engineer landslide victories in both the presidential and legislative elections of 1995 (e.g. October 22 and November 26 respectively) (see Bratton and Posner 1999). The decision of the opposition parties – with the exception of the marginal Ivorian Labour Party (PTI) – to boycott the elections, the first in the post-Houphouët era, was a serious blow to the legitimacy of Bédié's vic-

<sup>22</sup> One example is the controversy around child labour, which surfaced at a seminar organised by the Ivorian prime minister. Present at this seminar were cocoa producers, sellers and buyers, and it tried to address the issue of new certificates on cocoa demanded by the United States. In the Ivorian press, this was presented as an international campaign to 'demonise' Côte d'Ivoire, 'victime d'une campagne de diabolisation' (*Soir Info*, 28.05.04, p. 3). See also *Fraternité Matin* (29.05-31.05.04).

tory. This did not, however, prevent Bédié from employing a similar strategy in the 1999 elections as well. The concept of 'Ivoirité' soon came to dominate the political landscape. Northerners were removed from posts in government and the army, and 'foreigners' were blamed for the economic crisis. They faced daily harassment and marginalisation as power was concentrated in the hands of a southern elite. This policy would later have devastating consequences in the cocoa producing parts of western Côte d'Ivoire.

It was in this climate of discrimination and xenophobia that General Robert Guei removed Bédié from power in a coup in December 1999. Initially Guei tried to broaden his support base by including parts of the political opposition in his new government. However, Guei soon returned to the same political discourse as his predecessor. The election in October 2000 became a contest between Robert Guei and Laurent Gbagbo of the *Front Populaire Ivoirien* (FPI). The election campaign was extremely violent, and for a time Guei tried to prevent the votes being counted so that he could continue to stay in power. However, in the end he was forced to resign and Gbagbo took over the presidency. Just like previous presidents, as soon as he was voted into power Gbagbo started to manipulate the 'Ivoirité'-discourse. The only difference between Gbagbo and his predecessors was that the group now being promoted, particularly in the security forces, was Gbagbo's own group the Bété (Hara and Ero 2002). It is the totality of these events that provides the background for the civil war that started 19 September 2002.

## The 'chocolate' war

Since September 2002 the country has effectively been divided into a northern part controlled by the rebels, the *Mouvement Patriotique de la Côte d'Ivoire*,<sup>23</sup> and the southern part controlled by Gbagbo's government, the army and a multitude of militia groups, most controlled by the president or close allies to the president. Officially there is now a cease-fire,<sup>24</sup> but the situation is chaotic in most of the country and particularly so in the Western regions. This is the area where the double movement of North-South labour migration in combination with East-West relocation of production met its final frontier, and it is currently known by local as well as

<sup>23</sup> The northern based rebels, together with two smaller rebel movements from the West are known as *Forces Nouvelles*.

<sup>24</sup> The most serious challenge to the cease-fire so far was the government air attack on the rebel-held north in early November 2004, in which nine French peacekeepers were killed.

international observers as Côte d'Ivoire's 'Wild West' (see ICG 2004). The tension in the cocoa producing areas is extremely high between those who see themselves as autochthonous and those defined as strangers (e.g. migrants). Here hundreds are dying in a cocoa feud. The autochthonous Bété people of the area, encouraged by the government and local strongmen, found in the civil war and the 'Ivoirité' discourse a pretext to ethnically cleanse their neighbours and harvest their neighbours' cocoa. The bumper harvest of 2003 fetched record prices and many got rich through the double harvest they were able to obtain. Some of the displaced cocoa farmers have fled into IDP camps in the area,<sup>25</sup> but many more are either in hiding in the bush or in larger cities like Abidjan (e.g. in Adjame and Trechville). A considerable number have also either fled over the border to Liberia and Guinea, or to the parts of the country controlled by the rebels (e.g. the North). Very little is known about the fate of the children who worked on these farms. If the family has not been separated due to the war, the children of the farmers are probably still with their fathers and mothers. Those foster children who could have most likely tried to make it back to their home communities whereas the children who worked for salaries in this area are even more vulnerable now than they used to be. Their situation has gone from bad to worse. So far, the war and the social conflict has not dented Côte d'Ivoire's output of Cocoa, in 2003 it harvested 1.4 million of the world's total harvest of 3 million tonnes. This may however change as the farmers who have taken over the plantations from those chased away has not been able to replace the workers who fled. According to the Director of the Cocoa Co-operative in Gagnoa, yields are down because indigenous farmers were unable or unwilling to replace the arduous labour of those expelled (Carroll 2004). Many of the young men who have not succeeded in Abidjan did not have any other option, but to return to their villages. On their return they often experienced that their old fathers were poor while those they perceived as strangers on their lineage's soil were rich. Returning educated youth have played a key role in encouraging and, even demanding that their lineage reclaimed their land (see ICG 2004).<sup>26</sup> As nearly always in such situations, the children are the ultimate losers.

<sup>25</sup> There are at least two Temporary Displaced Persons Camps (CATD) in Guiglo. About 8,000 persons are said to live in these camps (see Carroll 2004; ICG 2004).

<sup>26</sup> This observation was confirmed in meetings with agricultural experts at the cacao research centre in Bingerville, Côte d'Ivoire 06.06.04.

## 5 The political economy of cocoa production in Ghana

Just as in Côte d'Ivoire, the history of modern Ghana is linked to the shifting fortunes of cocoa production and trade. At independence in 1957, Ghana was a country rich in mineral resources, endowed with a well-functioning civil service and a good educational system. Since the early 1900s, cocoa growing had been developed into a prosperous industry that generated large funds for the government. Despite this, corruption and mismanagement became endemic, and by the 1960s the original visionary leadership of Kwame Nkrumah had deteriorated into authoritarianism, ending in 1966 with what was to constitute the first of Ghana's many coups. The Second Republic attempted built in the aftermath of the 1966 coup was stopped by another coup in 1972, and the 1970s became a 'lost decade' of corruption, mismanagement and general economic decline. However, since the crisis of the late-1970s, Ghana has slowly been rebuilding itself: overhauling its political system, rearranging relationships between state and society, and liberalising the economy. This process started under the leadership of Jerry Rawlings who first seized power first a coup on 4 June 1979 and then once more on 31 December 1981.<sup>27</sup> Rawlings later won multiparty elections in 1992 and 1996. In 2000 Rawlings stepped down and in the December 2000 election the flag bearer for Rawling's party was beaten by the liberal candidate, John Kufuor. Kufuor won a second term in December 2004, in a Presidential and Parliamentary election praised for being well-run and orderly.

The process of small, but comparably speaking steady progress that started under Rawlings has continued under the presidency of John Kufuor. The government of Ghana faces many challenges in its development efforts, but compared to the immense deterioration of human security that has taken place in Côte d'Ivoire over the last decade, Ghana is experiencing relative economic and political stability.<sup>28</sup> The

<sup>27</sup> Rawlings first handed over power to a civilian government in September 1979, before he once more took power in the December 1981 coup. See Green (1998).

<sup>28</sup> Ethnic clashes between tribes in Northern Ghana have been a recurrent problem. In 1994 one thousand people were killed and more than 150,000 people displaced following a land dispute between the Konkomba and the Nanumba tribes. In 2002 the king of the Dagombas and another 30 people were killed in an internal rivalry leading to the deployment of troops in Tamale, the principle city of the Northern region (BBC 28.03 2002).

difference in political climate and economic prospects between these two countries certainly affects the way small peasants in cocoa production think about trade-offs concerning education and work for their children.

## **Social structures**

There are more than 80 different ethnic groups in Ghana. Each group has a distinctive language or dialect, although some dialects bear close resemblance to others. Historically, each ethnic group originates from a particular geographical area, but a high degree of mobility in pursuit of economic gains has resulted in members of all the various groups being found in any part of the country. Inter-marriage between people from different ethnic groups has contributed to mobility and interaction. The various groups have sought to preserve their cultural practices, and today Ghana is a country where a myriad of cultures coexist in a society marked by rapid social change (Osei 1998).

The Akan form the largest ethnic group in Ghana, amounting to about 40 percent of the population.<sup>29</sup> The Akans originated from the central parts of the country, and were ardent cocoa migrants and a driving force for the expansion of cocoa growing to new areas (Hill 1970). Today the Akans inhabit all the regions in southern Ghana, and dominate the cocoa production. The Akan social system is characterised by matrilineal succession to political office and inheritance of property (Okali 1998). The social organisation of the Akan is built on the clan, which is believed to originate from an unknown female ancestor. In the process of procreation, the Akans believe that the child gets its blood from the mother and its spirit from the father. Since the blood is perceived to be of paramount importance, an Akan is supposed to have stronger links to his or her mother than to his or her father. This partially explains why the Akans practice matrilineal inheritance (Osei 1998). The matrilineal inheritance implies that children belong to their mothers clan and do not inherit their fathers property. Rather, the children inherit the property of their mother's brother.<sup>30</sup>

Citizens' right to land became of critical importance as the cultivation of cocoa spread throughout Southern Ghana. Every Akan is member of a clan and a citizen of a local chiefdom. The Akan make a clear distinction between the soil and its

<sup>29</sup> The Akan people is composed of about fourteen sub-groups, see Osei (1998).

<sup>30</sup> It should, however, be noted that social change has modified the inheritance system in Ghana and that the modern trend is to make a will to distribute property (Osei 1998).

use. The land owned by the clan should not be sold because it is said to belong to the clan members; the living, the dead and the unborn (Osei 1998). No individual can privately own this land, but members of the clan have long-term usufructuary rights. This usufructuary right can be defined as the right of the individual citizen to cultivate the land and even to transmit this right by gift, will or inheritance to others (ibid). A citizen may cultivate the land owned by the clan without paying any purchase price, rent or tribute to either individuals or the community (Okali 1998:13). A non-citizen can purchase a usufructuary right or ask the local chief for permission to cultivate land in return for a part of the output. This system, called the 'abusa system', became prevalent in the cocoa producing areas in the 1930s (Boone 2003:149). Under the abusa system, Akan Chiefs in Southern Ghana demanded one-third of the cocoa crop as tribute from stranger farmers. The land pioneering was thereby a social process that fuelled the power of the chiefs (Boone 2003).

The development and spread of cocoa production in Ghana was largely farmer initiated. Cocoa growing started in the Eastern region and spread westward. Land scarcity in the Eastern and Ashanti regions made it necessary to relocate production to more inaccessible places to acquire new land. The production of cocoa, although not the sale, was largely unregulated until the spread of disease and pest made government involvement inevitable (Okali 1998:16). The swollen shoot virus disease emerged in Ghana in 1936 and spread throughout the West African cocoa producing region over the next two decades. The virus attacked thousands of cocoa trees and led the government to intervene to assist farmers and to intensify research to prevent the spread of the virus. From the 1940s the major government policy was to encourage reinvestment of profits in cocoa and to rehabilitate farms devastated by the swollen shoot virus disease. Since there was little replanting of trees, but rather establishment of new farms, the area under cocoa cultivation steadily increased, and in 1970 it covered 70 per cent of the cultivated land in Southern Ghana (ibid:17). As we shall see below, the institutional set up of cocoa cultivation in Ghana was fairly successful and served to encourage increased production without erosion of the soil.

## **Cocoa production in Ghana**

Ghana's economy is mainly rural with cocoa, timber, and pineapples as the main export crops and gold as another major source of foreign exchange. The emerging industrial sector's products include cassava, fruits, and cocoa by-products.

Cocoa has been produced in Ghana for more than one hundred years. Available records indicate that Dutch missionaries planted cocoa trees in the coastal areas of Ghana as early as 1815. However, the cultivation of cocoa did not spread until the

Ghanian Tetteh Quarshie brought cocoa pods from Equatorial Guinea and established a farm at Akwapim in the Eastern region in 1879. Just as in Côte d'Ivoire, the tropical coastal forest belt of Ghana offers very favourable climatic conditions for cultivation of cocoa. Currently, cocoa is grown in the following six regions; Western, Brong Ahafo, Ashanti, Central, Eastern and Volta.

For many years cocoa has been Ghana's main source of foreign currency, but the cultivation of cocoa has also been exposed to several shocks. In the late 1970s the world market prices for agricultural products including cocoa beans fell, leading to economic hardship for exporters of raw materials in most developing countries. In 1982, there was a severe drought in Ghana that ruined the harvest in many areas and led to a considerable decline in exports. A third shock came in 1984 when an uncontrollable bushfire destroyed a large number of cocoa farms setting cultivation back by decades. In addition to this, pest and disease on the cocoa trees is a constant threat. Despite these setbacks, there has been a steady increase in the cultivation of cocoa in Ghana over the past decades. With minor exemptions for world market price fluctuations, the cocoa sector in Ghana has experienced economic progress and rising yields.<sup>31</sup>

The economic importance of the cocoa sector led the government to take active part in the expansion of cocoa growing. This has resulted in a, for the most part, a well-functioning collaboration between the government and the farmers. Although the production was in the hands of numerous small-scale farmers, the government wished to regulate the sale and marketing.<sup>32</sup> In 1947, the government set up an official marketing board responsible for regulating the prices to farmers and exporting cocoa abroad. The official mandate of the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) is 'to encourage the production of cocoa, coffee and sheanuts, to regulate the internal marketing of these products and to purchase, market and export cocoa' ([www.cocobod.gh](http://www.cocobod.gh)). The rationale for establishing the marketing board was to stabilize the price on cocoa. The amount of cocoa that was put on the market at any time was the result of uncoordinated decisions by many farmers. The board would instead buy the cocoa from all the farmers and carefully control when it was marketed in order to obtain a stable price. This mechanism did function fairly well in the first years, although the farmers were not content with the fact that the price given to them was substantially lower than the world market price.

After other countries increased their production of cocoa and Ghana lost market shares the ability of COCOBOD to influence the world price diminished, and

<sup>31</sup> In the latter half of 1999, Ghana suffered a trade shock, with prices for Ghana's two main exports, gold and cocoa, falling and prices for petroleum imports rising.

<sup>32</sup> Cocoa production in Ghana is regulated by the Cocoa Industry Decree (1968, NLCD 278).

today this is no longer part of the board's responsibilities. The buying monopoly that was exercised by the board was lifted in the mid 1990s, and today a dozen private buyers operate in addition to the government controlled Produce Buying Company. COCOBOD still determines the producer price of cocoa and other related fees and rates.

The world market price of cocoa beans fluctuates, depending on the supply and demand.<sup>33</sup> In order to reduce income insecurity for the cocoa farmers, the government guarantees a minimum price. Each year a percentage of the world price given to the farmers is set. For 2003/2004 this is 69 percent. For one 64 kilo bag of cocoa beans, the farmer gets approximately 600,000 cedis, or 67 USD. The farmers are organised in the 'Cocoa, coffee, and sheanut farmers association'. The association protects the interests of the farmers in negotiations with the government, COCOBOD and the private buying companies over the minimum price, and has broad participation and representatives at both district and regional level.

Another aspect of the institutional set up of cocoa cultivation is the well established 'Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG)'. CRIG was set up in 1938 when Ghana was called The Gold Coast and still under British colonial rule. For a period the institute served as a West African Cocoa Research Institute, but at independence in 1966 it was split into national institutes. Today it is a large and modern institute that conducts advanced research on pest and diseases, soil fertility and agricultural practices.<sup>34</sup> CRIG also provides information and advice on all matters related to the production of cocoa and carries out extensive training of farmers.

A lot of resources have been poured into plant breeding in order to develop a tree that is more resistant to drought and disease and that provides an early yield. The result is the new hybrid tree that yields within a year and a half if maintained properly. An increasing number of farmers are planting the hybrid tree. Seeds for the hybrid tree can be purchased at the same price as the traditional seeds and little extra equipment is necessary. The plant can be nursed in poly bags; small plastic bags used to contain drinking water. Of great importance to the farmers is also the research on diseases and pesticides. Diseases are separated into three categories; pest, swollen shoot, and black pod. Pest is a disease carried by insects, swollen shoot is a virus disease while black pod is a fungus.<sup>35</sup> There is no cure for swollen shoot and

<sup>33</sup> After years of decline in the market price of cocoa in the 1990s, prices have gone up the past four years. For the year 2003/2004 the world market price of cocoa beans is 9,000,000 cedis per ton, that is approximately 1011 USD, based on the exchange rate from 04.01.05.

<sup>34</sup> The mandate has been widened to include coffee, kola, sheanut and cashew.

<sup>35</sup> For more information on diseases on cocoa trees, see New Agriculturist ([www.new-agri.co.uk](http://www.new-agri.co.uk)) or World Cocoa Foundation ([www.chocolateandcocoa.org](http://www.chocolateandcocoa.org)).

trees have to be cut down to prevent the virus from spreading. Today black pod is the main problem for cocoa farmers in Ghana, especially in Brong Ahafo. Pesticides are effective against pest and black pod, and it is recommended to spray the trees two times a year for each of these.

It is a political objective for the government of Ghana to increase the output of cocoa by more efficient production. Today the average output is 300 kilos per hectare (CRIG 2004). By comparison, in Malaysia the average output of cocoa beans is 1000 kilos per hectare. The total cocoa production in Ghana has increased since 2000. For the year 2000/2001 total production was 390,000 tonnes. By the year 2003/2004 the total production had increased to 700,000 tonnes and anticipated output for 2004/2005 is even higher.<sup>36</sup>

The government has developed special measures to help increase the productivity in cocoa production. The Agricultural Extension Programme is a cocoa swollen shoot virus control programme handled by Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD). The major objective is to execute a countrywide control of the diseased cocoa trees by cutting and burning them as well as replanting with hybrid seedlings to replace the cut trees. In this programme, the participating farmers are compensated financially based on the number of trees cut.

The Mass Spraying Programme (CODAPED) was launched in 2001. The programme provides spraying two times a year in the case of insecticides and two to three times a year in the case of fungicides free of charge for the farmers. The farmers are expected to assist the spraying team by clearing the farm to ensure easy movement and also to provide water for the mixing of the chemicals. Cocoa farmers in Ghana today are optimistic about the future. The hardship in the 1980s and the relatively low prices in the early 1990s made many farmers leave cocoa production and young people were unwilling to take over farms. Today prices are higher, the hybrid three yields much earlier, and farmers can afford to plant new trees.

<sup>36</sup> Please note that the figures from different sources vary. CRIG and WCF have the same figures for 2002 onwards while FAO figures are lower.

## **Childhood education and labour in contemporary Ghana**

Ghana has a young population; 49.7 percent of the population is under 18 years and can be considered children (GCLS 2003). Child labour has been an issue of concern to the government for some years. Ghana has ratified ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (182), but not ILO's Minimum Age Convention (138) (ILO 2004). The government has however, passed a law to strengthen the rights of children and protect them from exploitation. The 1998 Children's Act has a separate chapter on employment of children and stipulates what constitutes exploitative child labour. Labour is exploitative if it deprives the child of its health, education or development. The minimum age for employment is 15 years old, but from the age of 13 years old children can do light work. The minimum age for hazardous employment is 18 years old (The 1998 Children's Act Part V).

The Ghana Child Labour Survey from 2003 was the first nationwide survey specifically designed to collect information about this issue. The survey identified poverty as the underlying cause for child labour, and recognised the importance of legislation and access to education in the fight against child labour. According to the parents of 93 percent of the children engaged in economic activity, child work is basically to contribute to the economic welfare of the household. If parents had the choice they would prefer their children to be either in school or in training. The children themselves would also prefer to go to school and complete their education before starting to work (GCLS 2003).

Ghana has got nine years of compulsory basic education, that is education mandated by constitutional or legislative law. These laws require that children within a certain age range are enrolled in school, even though the laws are not always strictly enforced. Ghana has high enrolment in primary school compared to other countries in West Africa. The net primary school enrolment rate in Ghana was 60 per cent for boys and 57 per cent for girls in the period 1997-2000, whereas in Côte d'Ivoire the similar figures are 73 and 55 per cent (UNICEF 2004).<sup>37</sup> The net enrolment rate is an indicator showing the number of children enrolled in primary school who belong to the age group that officially corresponds to primary schooling. However, not all children that are enrolled in school actually attend school. The net primary school attendance in Ghana for the period 1992-2002 was 74 per cent for both boys and girls (UNICEF 2004). Whereas the net enrolment rates are approximately

<sup>37</sup> In the same period, the enrolment rate in Burkina Faso and Mali, was respectively 42 per cent for boys and 29 per cent for girls, and 51 per cent for boys and 36 per cent for girls (UNICEF 2004). Due to the war the figures given for Côte d'Ivoire are highly uncertain.

the same for Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire, the school attendance rates are higher for Ghana; 74 per cent in Ghana, and 62 per cent for boys and 52 per cent for girls in Côte d'Ivoire.

In 1995 education was made free through the implementation of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education programme. Although primary and junior secondary schools are formally not entitled to charge school fees from parents, most schools have designed fees attached to meals or other activities in order to supplement their tight budgets (UNICEF 2000). This adds to the costs of books and uniforms, and can make it difficult for some parents to keep their children in school.

Over the past two decades the government has strived to improve the educational system by increasing the number of teachers and the physical infrastructure of schools. Policies towards gender equality have been promoted and the gap between girls and boys has narrowed considerably compared to 1984 (Ghana Child Labour Survey 2003). However there is still a high level of illiteracy in Ghana. The Child Labour Survey has estimated that 46.7 percent of the adult population are illiterate (GCLS 2003), whereas UNICEF reports that 20 percent of men and 37 percent of women are illiterate (UNICEF 2004).

## 6 Cocoa production and the organisation of labour

Cocoa farms in Ghana are usually small and family-run. The average size of a farm is five hectares. Today the Western region along the coast and towards the border to Cote d'Ivoire produces the largest volume of cocoa per year. The Ashanti region is second and Brong Ahafo is third. In the Western and Brong Ahafo regions farms tend to be bigger than in other parts of the country, while in the Central region many farms are between one and two hectares.

The traditional type of cocoa tree grown in Ghana, the *Tetteh Quarshie*, takes six to eight years before they carry pods. During these years the farmer does not get any income from that cocoa tree, but he still has to pay for inputs like fertilizer, pesticides and labour. Intensive research has resulted in a new, hybrid tree which yields within a year and a half if nursed well. This makes planting new trees and expanding the farm easier, but waiting for the trees to yield is still a financial challenge for many farmers .

As in Côte d'Ivoire, cocoa trees are always planted together with other crops, mainly food crops like maize, cassava, coco yam, and plantain. The farmer usually plants food crops on separate fields in addition. This provides food for the family and some income while the farmer is waiting for the first cocoa harvest. The crops that are mixed with the cocoa trees provide shade for the young trees and helps to keep weed down. The food crops are phased out gradually in order to provide more space for the cocoa. Within two years most of these plants are gone. The plantain tree is kept longer because its large leaves provide shade. Once the cocoa tree gets taller, the crown spreads out leaving little light for other plants. Some farmers grow other cash crops on separate farms in addition to cocoa, like palm trees, coconuts and citrus fruits.

The season calendar is by and large the same as in Côte d'Ivoire. During a normal year, January to March is a time for weeding, removing parasites from the trees, and planting new trees if the farmer has the capacity to do so. Weeding and maintenance of the trees is done more or less continuously throughout the year, but it is particularly important in June and July when the rain has made the weed grow fast. Ideally, the cocoa farmer should apply pesticides several times a year. The Cocoa research institute of Ghana recommends to spray two times against black

pod and two times against pest during a year. Not all farmers can afford to do so, but it is common to apply pesticides once or twice a year. This is likely to take place in April and in August, while the pods are growing. Fertilizer should be applied in June when the rain is frequent and the water helps the fertilizer to blend with the soil. Not all farmers apply fertilizer every year because of the relatively high price of this input.

The main harvest starts in August and may last up to December. In a good year the cocoa farmer also have a small harvest in May. On large farms where the trees are very well maintained, it is possible to harvest some pods throughout the year. During harvest, the cocoa pods are cut off the trees with machetes tied to a long stick. This work is difficult and physically hard. It is important to cut at the exact right spot in order to avoid harming the tree. The pods are gathered in small piles and carried to an open space where workers are ready to split the pods with a machete and take out the soft seeds. In this process the worker must be careful not to damage the seeds.<sup>38</sup> The seeds are then covered with plantain leaves and left to ferment for five to six days. Cutting down the pods and splitting them should be done in the same day since the fermenting process of the seeds starts immediately. On a large farm this work would require a large number of workers.

The fermenting brings out the cocoa taste and if the seeds are not left to ferment properly, the beans might taste bitter. After fermenting the soft seeds have turned into beans which now will be dried on beds in the sun for another six days. During this time the beans must be cleared of any bad substances and constantly turned to dry evenly. In case of rain the beans must be covered up. After drying, the beans are ready for sale. They are packed in bags of 64 kilos and transported to a selling point nearby.

## **Labour**

During most of the year the cultivation of cocoa is not very labour intensive. The cocoa growing areas are situated in the fertile forest belt of southern Ghana, blessed with a warm and humid climate year round. The cocoa farmer will do some maintenance of the trees, like regular weeding and cutting down parasites, but most of the time the farmer is simply waiting for the pods to ripen. During the harvest and other labour intensive periods however, the entire family is involved and the farmer might also need to hire labour.

<sup>38</sup> The Cocoa Research Institute recommends smashing the pods open but farmers do not seem to observe this, probably because they do not have a concrete ground where this can be done easily.

On large farms it is common to have a caretaker working full-time throughout the year. The caretaker either gets paid an agreed amount or, more often, he gets one third of the crop by the end of the year. On smaller farms there is extensive use of family labour and the farmer might have to hire day workers in addition. The weeding after the rainy season in June and the main harvest from August to December are the most labour intensive periods.

Farmers say that they are most likely to hire labour for the harvest and to apply pesticides. A common recruitment procedure is simply to go to the nearby town or village and spread the rumour that you need workers on your farm. Sometimes the farmer has the same workers several years on a row, sometimes they are different. At harvest time labour can be scarce. People from the northern parts of Ghana used to come to the cocoa areas to seek work. Sometimes whole families would travel south for the harvest, and return once the job was completed. This kind of work migration has declined in recent years. One possible explanation is that educational levels are raising in the north and people can get other, better paid jobs.<sup>39</sup> In some districts the problem of scarce labour is solved by farmers taking turns in helping each other. In this way a group of cocoa farmers will work their way around the district. This is a kind of 'community work' where the workers do not receive a salary. The owner of the farm, however, provides the food and water needed for the day.

Most cocoa farmers hire specialised workers to apply pesticides. Spraying the trees requires a machine and a person with the skills to operate it. This is physically hard work because the machine is heavy and one needs to add large amounts of water. A spraying machine is expensive and very few farmers can afford to buy one. Typically, some people in a district have specialized in this type of work and travel around the district offering their services. The chemicals used are toxic and it is necessary to wear a mask, glasses, gloves and boots.

Due to the costs involved in hiring labour, the farmer will try to limit the need for this by engaging the entire household, relatives and friends. Women also work on the farms and take part in most of the tasks except for cutting down the pods from the trees. Cooking for the workers and fetching water are generally carried out by women. It is common that children of the family work on the farm when

<sup>39</sup> A researcher at CRIG Social Sciences and Statistics Division argued that the main reason why labour is scarce, is that people from the north of Ghana migrate to the cities. They prefer to find a job in trade because the salaries in cocoa are low. Migrant workers from neighbouring countries like Burkina Faso might come to Ghana because of the political unrest in Cote d'Ivoire, but because of the language barrier, it is unlikely that they will come in large numbers. People from the French speaking countries will find it difficult to integrate. Ghana has traditionally received more migrants from English speaking countries like Liberia. Even people from the north of Ghana who speak Hausa prefer to settle in big cities where they can find communities of northerners. These communities are called 'Zongos'.

needed, although most of them attend school. Children would normally work on the farm after school, on weekends and holidays and the parents might keep them out of school for some weeks during the harvest. However, the farmers we interviewed also argued that there are tasks in the production of cocoa that are not suitable for children. Young children, between the age of 6-12 can do easy work like gathering and carrying pods, planting new trees, drying the beans and bringing food and water to the workers. Young children, however, do not have the strength nor have acquired the skills to cut down pods from the trees or open pods without damaging the beans. If they take part in weeding they might have problems distinguishing between the weed and the young trees. Older children from the age of 12, might participate in most tasks on the farm including weeding and cutting pods open with a machete. Both boys and girls participate in this work. Although the machetes are very sharp, the farmers argued that children can learn how to do this, and that children even tend to be more careful than adults. From the age of 16 boys might also take part in cutting down pods, which is a task that require extra precision. Farmers explained that children do not apply pesticides because this work is too difficult and physically hard. The farmers engage specialised workers to do this work.

Fosterage is common in Ghana. Relatives that are well-off will often have children of other family members living in their house and care for them.<sup>40</sup> Among the Akan, one of the sons of the family might go to live with a maternal uncle since these family ties are particularly strong. Children might also live with their grandparents. The cocoa farmers we interviewed claimed that foster children normally are well treated and cared for, just like the other children in the household. In most cases they attend school and the foster parents cover costs of education. The children will help out in the house and at the farm like other children in the household. It could be argued that these children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation in the cocoa sector or other sectors for that matter, but the family ties to the farmer and the generally close ties between members of the extended Ghanaian family offer some control and protection. The practice of fosterage also offer opportunities for the children they might not otherwise get. In many cases the practice of fosterage functions as a social safety net because households that are well off take care of some of the children from households that are less privileged.

In Ghana, children seem to contribute more on small farms than on large farms. The reason for this could be that farmers who run a large farm generate higher income and are able to hire more workers. Children's participation in cocoa production is in most cases necessary for the economic welfare of the household,

<sup>40</sup> Fosterage is perhaps even more common in northern Ghana than in southern Ghana. In the three northern regions, girls very often live with a paternal aunt. This is however, not relevant when looking at child labour in cocoa production, which largely takes place in the south.

but cocoa farmers also stress that children's work on the farm is an important part of the upbringing. Cocoa farmers will start taking their children along to the farm from a very early age. The children will spend the day on the farm together with their parents, playing or doing easy tasks. As they grow older, they will gradually take part in the work. For the farmer this is a way of teaching the children about cocoa growing and it is an important part of the socialisation process. Farmers hope that one day, one of their children will take over the farm.

## **Challenges for cocoa farmers**

The main challenge for the cocoa farmers is the financial situation; the price the farmers get for the cocoa beans is too low and the price of necessary inputs is too high. For small-scale farmers in Ghana, hiring labour, buying fertilizer and pesticides is expensive. The lack of money to buy inputs may prevent the farmer from expanding the farm and thus maximising annual income. Disease is a constant threat to the cocoa trees and a challenge for the cocoa farmers. The price of the chemicals needed to spray is high, and hiring a machine and a man to do the work is expensive, and many farmers can not afford to apply pesticides the number of times recommended by CRIG. This is a paradox; the farmers's income is too low to cover the cost of pesticides, but if he does not apply pesticides the cocoa pods might be ruined by diseases and his income will be even further reduced.

Cocoa farmers experience particular hardship during the first 5-6 years after the establishment of a new farm. In Ghana, young farmers may get a piece of land from an uncle or another relative to cultivate cocoa. Once the farmer has planted the trees he must wait several years before he can harvest. During this time the farmer has expenses but no income. The farmer and his or her family must grow food crops and other cash crops in order to sustain their living. Young farmers say that it is difficult for them to provide for their families, in particular paying school fees for the children. Due to this, young people have been hesitant about investing in cocoa. In the long run, cocoa cultivation could be lucrative. After some years when the cocoa trees are carrying pods and the farmer gets a reasonable income, he will normally reinvest some of the income in planting new trees and gradually expand the farm. A larger farm means larger income, and many cocoa farmers are wealthy people. In the short term however, cocoa cultivation is very hard. Today, more and more farmers are planting hybrid seeds, which give trees that carry pods much faster. This will make the situation for young farmers easier, but it is still a challenge for a cocoa farmer to make a living from a newly established farm.

Another challenge for cocoa farmers in Ghana is that they do not get credit from

the banks. Agriculture is considered to be risky, hence the banks are reluctant to help farmers invest in production. Some farmers borrow money from family members and the limited access to credit was mentioned by cocoa farmers as a major obstacle to increased cocoa production in Ghana.

A researcher at the social science division at CRIG argued that one of the reasons why cocoa farmers face financial constraints, is that they are poor planners. Cocoa cultivation is seasonal work, and income is also seasonal. Many cocoa farmers have little education and do not always know how to keep books and set up a budget. After the harvest, when the farmers get the income, money should be set aside for expenses that will occur later. However, some farmers are tempted to spend a lot once they have sold the cocoa. During harvest, many new bars open in the cocoa regions, reflecting the fact that these are good times for the farmers. Although there might be some truth in this, many farmers we spoke with claimed that the income from a small farm is so limited that once school fees for their children are paid there is very little to set aside to pay for necessary inputs in the cocoa production like fertilizer, pesticides or labour.

## **Why is child labour not that common in Ghanaian cocoa production?**

Although it is common that children of cocoa farmers are involved in the production process, most of this is light work that takes place after school, during weekends and holidays and during harvest. The use of child labour, as defined by ILO Convention 138 and 182, is not extensive in cocoa production in Ghana. There may be several reasons for this.

First, the economic rationale for extensive use of child labour is not present in Ghana. Cocoa growing takes place on small, family-run farms. The production process is not very labour-intensive outside the peak seasons, and the regular maintenance of the trees can be handled by the farmer himself. During the more intensive periods, the farmer engages the entire household in addition to hired labourers. Some of the tasks, like cutting down and opening pods with a machete knife, do not involve young children because they are difficult and require precision. Other tasks, like applying pesticides, are carried out by hired labour because the farmers do not have their own spraying machine. Also, a skilled person is necessary in order to do the job correctly and reduce the waste of chemicals.

Second, cocoa growing takes place in the south of Ghana and is dominated by the Akan. This is the most privileged ethnic group in Ghana that has traditionally controlled the country's most valuable resources such as gold and cocoa. Although

cocoa growing is difficult during the first years, over time cocoa farmers make a reasonable living and can afford to send their children to school. We can see this when looking at welfare indicators like school enrolment. Primary school enrolment is higher in the southern, cocoa producing regions than in the regions of the north. In the regions of the south, primary school enrolment is over 70 percent, whereas in the Northern region, primary school enrolment is 40 percent (Ghana Statistical Service 2001).<sup>41</sup> In many countries, child labour is common in the agricultural sector, but in Ghana there are some clear socio-economic differences between export farmers and food farmers. Whereas most groups in Ghana have experienced a reduction of poverty over the 1990s, export farmers and wage employees in the private sector have enjoyed the greatest gains, while food farmers are among the poorest in the country, and have experienced the least gains. This might be one reason why child labour is not widespread in the cocoa sector (UNICEF 2001:32). Increased economic welfare on the household level make it easier for parents to keep their children at school. They still contributes to the production, but mostly at peak periods during the harvest.

Third, the government of Ghana has developed a policy to combat child labour. Ghana has ratified the Child Convention of 1989 and ILO Convention 182. Government efforts to achieve universal primary education include the 1995 Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education programme. The Children's Act of December 1998 defines exploitative child labour and states minimum ages for children involved in different types of work. Moreover, child labour and child trafficking have been debated in the media and added to the growing consciousness of child labour in the Ghanaian society.

<sup>41</sup> Primary school enrolment is highest in the Eastern region with 78.1 percent and lowest in the Upper West region with 36 percent (Ghana Statistical Service, Core Welfare Indicators, 2001).



## 7 Children and their vulnerabilities

The current practice of cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana is the outcome of a historical process. If we are to understand the involvement of children in the production process in these two countries we need to acknowledge both the traditional pattern of labour migration and the solutions applied by the postcolonial state to secure and enlarge its resource base. These have given the farmers incentives to embark on certain strategies of cost control. For a cocoa farmer in West Africa, cost control is always important, but particularly during bad times.

For a cocoa farmer the number of variables it is possible to manipulate are limited. In order to continue this type of farming, the only thing he realistically can do something about is the cost of labour. This suggests that during a difficult economic period he will be less inclined to send his children to school. In both Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana children work to contribute to the economic welfare of the household. If these parents had a choice, there is little reason to think that they would not send their children to school. The evidence from Ghana supports this conclusion. In Ghana cocoa farmers are doing relatively well compared to other parts of the rural population, and there is a higher school enrolment in cocoa growing areas than elsewhere in Ghana. Poverty is therefore a main factor in child labour in the two countries.

However, in order to be more specific about how children work in cocoa production and the various vulnerabilities connected both to various types of work and to various groups of children we must also take into consideration the production system. As we have seen cocoa production is labour intensive, but not equally intense throughout the year. Some local differences apart, the seasonal calendars are by and large the same in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Weeding of the plantation and maintenance of the trees is conducted during the whole year, but particularly important in June. The main harvest starts in August, and may last up to December, but it is most labour intensive in September and sometimes also October. On large farms the harvesting season is much longer, starting already in April/May and continuing to the end of the year. However, as we have seen the overall majority of cocoa farms in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire are relatively small farms. This means that the most labour intensive period is quite short. It is mainly during the harvest that the farmer is in need of the labour of the children on the farm, and the more he needs to reduce costs, the more he will need their labour during this period. This should

therefore also have implications for the design of strategies that could minimize the damage this work does to children's education.

Equally important for a sober debate about child labour in cocoa production is to consider what kind of work various age groups of children and youth are involved in. During the harvest, the cocoa pods are removed from the trees with a machete tied to a long stick. This work is both difficult and heavy. If the cut is not made at the right spot the tree will be damaged, and since this work is also physically hard it simply cannot be conducted by too small children. They will become tired and too often place the cut at the wrong spot and thereby accidentally hurt the tree. Too many cuts like this will reduce the ability of the tree to produce pods the next year and thereby also diminish the future profit of the farmer. Thus, using very young children in this type of work does not make sense, and there is little reason to believe that farmers do not know what they are doing. However, there may be exceptions to this type of long-term economic rationality, and they are most likely to occur in times of crisis. The civil war and the extreme uncertainty that has followed in its footsteps in Côte d'Ivoire may have led some farmers to maximise short term economic gains and thereby also led them to employ young children to do this work. If you are afraid that you are about to lose your land you will not be very concerned with whether the trees are damaged or not.

The next step in the harvesting process is also delicate. After the pods have been harvested from the trees they must be split with a machete so that the soft seeds can be taken out. If the worker is not careful he or she can easily damage the seeds during this operation. Young children are therefore not very suitable for this part of the work either. The first two steps in the process are therefore generally not carried out by boys (or girls) less than 14 to 16 years of age.<sup>42</sup> However, for the children that do are involved in the two first steps of the harvesting process their work can be potentially dangerous, as an accident with a machete can give a bad cut, which easily can get infected.

The involvement of children below the age of 14 tends to be connected to tasks such as covering the seeds during the period of fermentation, turning the seeds when they dry in the sun, covering them from occasional rain or collecting the beans in bags after they have finished drying

The other part of the production process that is dangerous is the application of pesticides. Not all farmers are able to afford this, but those who can try to apply it at least twice during the season. Most cocoa farmers claim that this is the kind of work that they hire special workers to conduct. It is difficult to be precise about this

<sup>42</sup> This is not only a matter of age, but also size and strength.

matter, but as the spraying machine is expensive it is clear that few farmers own such a machine themselves. Either they must hire the machine or the machine together with somebody to do the work. In Ghana, each district where cocoa is grown has some people who have specialised in this work and they travel around offering their services. In Côte d'Ivoire, it is more common that only the machine is rented out. However, this is hard physical work as the machine is heavy and needs a lot of water as well. A young boy or girl is simply not able to carry out this kind of work in an efficient manner. If children are involved in this work it is boys considered to be strong, usually above the age of 14 years. The chemicals involved are toxic, and if this work is carried out without sufficient protection such as masks, glasses, gloves and boots it can clearly be characterised as hazardous.

Children undoubtedly work on the farms of their parents and foster parents in both Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and there is also no doubt that we have a smaller group of children and youth below the age of 18 years who work for a salary as well without any kin or communal relationship to the farm where they work. This group is the most vulnerable one, and also it seems to be larger in Côte d'Ivoire than Ghana. This is most likely related to the general political and economic development in the two countries in question. Ghana also has a historical tradition of labour migration from the north to the south. People from northern Ghana traditionally came to the cocoa areas to seek work. Sometimes whole families would travel south for the harvest, and return home once the job was completed. This type of labour migration is reported to have declined during recent years. Apparently people from the north who migrate find the economic opportunities in the major cities in the south more promising than the rather low wages offered on the cocoa plantations. This may have increased the incentives to use children in the production, particularly during the harvest, but there is little evidence to suggest that this means that these children go less to school than other children in Ghana. Rather on the contrary: their school enrolment may be better as the economic situation of a Ghanaian cocoa farmer is relatively good compared to other rural populations in Ghana.

The situation for cocoa farmers in Côte d'Ivoire is currently not comparable to the situation in Ghana. This is due to the civil war. Nevertheless, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire also shows how the situation for children is dependent upon both political decisions and the establishment and strength of state institutions. As we have seen, the production system of cocoa is built on the same process in both countries. From the very beginning it has been based on similar small, family-based farms, taking advantage of the traditional labour migration from the dry inland areas in the north to the tropical forest zone along the coast in the south. Both countries also experienced similar relocation of production from eastern to western parts of countries. Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire maybe quite similar in many regards, but as we have seen their postcolonial paths have diverged remarkably. This shows that politics

and political choice do matter. The main reason why the children involved in cocoa production in Ghana are better off than their counterparts in Côte d'Ivoire is a result of the ability of the political class in Ghana to rebuild their country and create a stable environment for the farmers, whereas the situation in Côte d'Ivoire is the complete opposite. It is the complete failure of the political class and their inability to forge a new social contract and nation-wide consensus after the breakdown of the Houphouëtist state that have deteriorated the Ivorian cocoa farmers' livelihood.

In the 1960s and 1970s Côte d'Ivoire was a success story. It experienced substantial economic growth, people talked about the 'Ivorian miracle' and the country was generally regarded as a haven of stability in an unruly region. Between 1955 and 1970 Côte d'Ivoire was able to triple its output of cocoa. However, as this increase was almost completely based on the replication of smallholder production units on an ever-widening geographical scale, there was also a downside to this process. The result was low and stagnant yields, soil depletion and erosion, and low quality output. The consequence was a permanent search for new land in the forest zone, which entailed a constant relocation of production from eastern to western parts of the country, and also a permanent search for cheap labour and cost control. It is here we find the main economic incentive for the use of child labour in Côte d'Ivoire, as the options available for the farmer were to use his own children in the production and to utilise already existing labour migration patterns for the recruitment of new children as well, either taken into the household through kinship networks as foster children or recruiting children willing to work on his farm for a salary. The economic recession that followed in the 1990s is the immediate background for the civil war that broke out in 2002, but the roots of the crisis are certainly connected to the inability of the postcolonial state to re-institutionalise the social compromise that the 'Ivorian miracle' originally was founded on.

The story of Ghana is significantly different. When Côte d'Ivoire experienced stability and economic growth in the 1960 and 1970s, Ghana had become the 'sick man' of West Africa. By the 1960s, the originally visionary leadership of Kwame Nkrumah had deteriorated into despotism, ending in 1966 with what was to constitute the first of Ghana's many coups. One coup followed another, and the 1970s can with hindsight only be characterised as a 'lost decade' of corruption, mismanagement and economic decline. However, since the late 1970s Ghana has slowly dragged itself back to its feet's. The current government of Ghana is clearly facing many challenges today as well, but when compared to the situation in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana is today the success story, experiencing both some modest economic growth and, not the least, political stability. This obviously also affects the living conditions of the children. Whereas an Ivorian farmer, if he is able to farm at all, is operating under a spell of extreme uncertainty where few if any considerations about the future can be made, apart from the desperate need to harvest and sell what

has been produced, a Ghanaian farmer now has the luxury to consider trade-offs between using children as labour or investing in their education.

Overall, the children in Côte d'Ivoire are more vulnerable than similar groups of children in Ghana. However, the history of cocoa farming in both countries also suggests that even in similar situations, similar levels of vulnerability cannot be assumed across all three different groups of children involved in cocoa farming. The least vulnerable are the farmer's own children, the most vulnerable are the children working for the farmer for a salary without any kin or communal connection to the farmer for which they work. The foster children, on the other hand, tend to occupy a middle position between these two extremes. This suggests that those most in need of immediate assistance are children in Côte d'Ivoire and in particular those working for a salary. However, as the study has also shown, children with a family connection, extended or near, to the farmer, are also involved in the production process. Mainly during the harvest, and also more during times of economic hardship than in more affluent periods. This suggests that it may be wise to rethink the design of educational programming in rural areas dominated by cocoa production.



## 8 Conclusions and recommendations

Our approach to child labour is based on research aimed at identifying and understanding different degrees of vulnerability between different groups of children as we believe that scarce attention and resources should first be spent on those identified as most vulnerable from a humanitarian point of view. This means that we are currently more concerned about children involved in cocoa production in Côte d'Ivoire than in Ghana, and in particularly those working as salary labour without any family or kin connections to the farmer for which they work. This is relatively speaking the smallest group of children and those that still work on these farms can quite easily be identified. As their situation is rapidly deteriorating we suggest that these children should be the major concern for stakeholders and policy-makers in the short-run.

As is evident when we compare the two cases, the problem of child labour in cocoa production is a consequence of poverty and economic decline. In Ghana, where the situation for the cocoa farmers is relatively good cocoa producing districts have a higher school enrolment than other rural districts where cocoa is not produced. It is when times are bad that the farmer is most in need of children in the production process. However, even in Ghana, children on such farms work during the most intensive parts of the production process. This suggests that it maybe timely to revisit the programming of the school year in rural districts with many cocoa farmers. It should be relatively easy to rearrange the school year in such a way that children could take part in the most intensive parts of the harvest without having to miss out on their education.

With regard to the hazards involved in this production, it is the appliance of pesticides that should be the major concern. A programme aimed at service delivery to farmers of pesticides should be relatively easy to design and would remove any economic incentives to use children in this part of the production process. There are of course also other part of the production process that can be hazardous. Working with both machetes and smaller knives may cause accident that lead to infected cuts that are painful and even may be dangerous. However, children who grow up in a rural area in a tropical forest zone will always get such cuts. It is something that happens to children in this part of the world. The only answer to it is improved rural health services. Trying to prevent children from using knives in the rural countryside is simply just impossible.

Finally, we would like to point out that currently there is a clear knowledge gap concerning the situation for the children on the cocoa farms in Côte d'Ivoire. We have relatively good knowledge about the situation in Ghana, much less so with regard to the situation in Côte d'Ivoire. This is due to the civil war. We would therefore like to recommend that as soon as the situation allows a comprehensive study of the living conditions in the cocoa-producing areas, with a special focus on the situation for the children, should be implemented.

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# **Child labour and cocoa production in West Africa**

This report analyse to what degree children work in cocoa production in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, and in what part of the production process they are involved. The report gives an understanding of the situation for cocoa farmers and the children working in the cocoa sector. The report is the fifth report in a series of working papers from a Fafo research programme on child labour, generously financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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