RUNNING AS FAST AS THEY CAN:
CHILDREN'S SEARCH FOR WORK ON WEST AFRICAN
COCOA FARMS AND THE U.S. BASED
PROTOCOL THAT ATTEMPTS TO PROTECT THEM

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Abstract
West Africa produces 70% of the world global supply of cocoa – the main ingredient in chocolate. Eight years ago the story of migrating West African children who were trafficked from Mali, Burkina Faso and Togo to work in exploitative conditions on Ivorian cocoa farms broke across North America and Europe. The question of trafficked child labor in cocoa production is, however, not new. Contrary to the recently commonly-held view that child trafficking for labor purposes is a relatively new phenomenon, the first reports of migrant children involved in adverse working conditions in the production of this West African commodity publicly appeared as early as in 1901.³ While serious attempts have been made and tens of millions of dollars have been spent in the last few years to map and then address the problem of the worst forms of child labor, including trafficking for labor purposes, through the US based “Protocol for the Growing and Processing of Cocoa Beans and their Derivative Products,” also known as the Harkin-Engel Cocoa Protocol, success is still difficult to measure.

Very little is known about why children in the West African region undertake risky migration to work in trafficked labor situations on Ivorian and Ghanaian cocoa farms. This paper addresses this gap by focusing on children’s constructions of how they arrived at the decision to run across borders in search of a better life, the journey encountered, the work conditions experienced, the realization that they had been “trafficked” and their journey back “home.” Careful attention is paid to the critiques offered by some experts who suggest that the child
trafficking discourse for labor purposes relies on the assumption that it is better for children to stay at home rather than leave it and get into trouble. Within this backdrop, the paper assesses these children’s struggle to leave “home” in search of “a better life.” It shows how West African children are risking their lives to gain access to income to support their basic need and consumer desires. It concludes by suggesting that efforts to ensure the protection of working children, via the Harkin-Engel Protocol, must factor what children themselves understand as their increased well-being. Working children contribute significantly to a multi-billion dollar economic engine of growth both for West African governments that derive export tax from cocoa beans and the global chocolate industry that depends on it to manufacture their product for world sale. As such working children not only have the right to be heard, but also have the right to have their views factored into any equation that attempts to ensure their development and depends on them to secure sustainable sources of the world most cherished beans.

Introduction

There are many children from here [Po, Burkina Faso] working in Côte d’Ivoire, even Ghana...just the other day two more left...followed just today by another two.... They are going to work on cocoa farms...I asked them not to go but they did not listen to me...I too used to think working on cocoa farms in Côte d’Ivoire was like ripping gold from trees....Now I know this is not true....I have seen many traffickers in this village and many around here....You can tell who the trafficker is because you see a man travelling with five or six children and then the next day you hear that five or six children have left the village.

– Interview, 16 year old Male, Po, Burkina Faso, February 2008

In September 2000, British Television aired a documentary made by True Vision revealing that “hundreds and thousands of children in Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo were being sold as slaves to cocoa farmers in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire.” It further claimed that “slavery existed on as many as 90% of cocoa farms in Côte d’Ivoire.” Following this documentary, other media reports claimed that “children as young as six years old were forced to work 80-100 hours a week without pay, suffered malnutrition and were subjected to beating and other abuses.”
In 2001, the U.S. newspaper chain Knight Rider ran a 4 part series of investigative pieces on young boys who were tricked, sold or trafficked into Ivorian cocoa farms. It profiled what it identified as, "cocoa farm slaves between the ages of 12 and 16," and reported that "one Côte d'Ivoire farmer had been prosecuted in Côte d'Ivoire for mistreating 19 boys from Mali and holding them in abysmal conditions." Knight Rider began its first story this way,

Aly Diabate was almost 12 when a slave trader promised him a bicycle and $150 a year to help support his poor parents in Mali. He worked for a year and a half for a cocoa farmer who is known as “Le Gros” (“the Big Man”), but he said his only rewards were the rare days when Le Gros'... didn’t flog him with a bicycle chain or branches from a cacao tree...

Aly Diabate and 18 other boys labored on a 494-acre farm, very large by Ivory Coast [Sic] standards, in the southwestern part of the country. Their days began when the sun rose, which at this time of the year in Ivory Coast [Sic] is a few minutes after 6 am. They finished work about 6:30 in the evening, just before nightfall, when fireflies were beginning to illuminate the velvety night like Christmas lights. They trudged home to a dinner of burned bananas. If they were lucky, they were treated to yams seasoned with saltwater "gravy."

After dinner, the boys were ordered into a 24-by-20-foot room, where they slept on wooden planks without mattresses...

"Once we entered the room, nobody was allowed to go out," said Mamadou Traore, a thin, frail youth with serious brown eyes who is 19 now...

"We didn’t cry, we didn’t scream," said Aly... "We thought we had been sold, but we weren’t sure."

The boys became sure one day when Le Gros walked up to Mamadou and ordered him to work harder. "I bought each of you for 25,000 francs (about $35)," the farmer said, according to Mamadou..."So you have to work harder to reimburse me."

A few months later, major international media carried a gripping story of a ship, MV Etireno, off the coast of Benin, suspected of carrying 43 child workers destined to labor in unacceptable conditions in West Africa; 13 of these children were from Benin, eight from Togo, 17 from Mali, one from Senegal and one from Guinea." While this story which was covered
in several news papers did not report that these children were destined for work on Ivorian cocoa farms, the incident introduced some of the key players and organizations who would become critical in defining trafficking in children for unacceptable labor purposes on Ivorian cocoa farms.\textsuperscript{13} Kevin Bales, a global advocate against slavery, gave several interviews to the press explaining how children were exploited in Ivorian cocoa farms. He noted, “hundreds if not thousands of young boys are smuggled from Mali and sold into agricultural slavery in the Ivory Coast every year.”\textsuperscript{14} “We know this works because one of the things we actually did there was to send a local journalist to the market and he bought 2 young men for us in about 30 minutes spending about $40 dollars each.”\textsuperscript{15} These children were sent “to remote cocoa farms and spent three, four, five years there in very tough conditions raising the cocoa that supplies the world cocoa market and goes into the chocolate that we eat.”\textsuperscript{16}

If there was any doubt that children were being bought and sold to be exploited on cocoa farms, a 2001 UN Security Council Report of the Inter-Agency Mission to West Africa finally put this to rest. This report carried details on how children were being moved across borders to labor on Ivorian cocoa farms and called on chocolate companies to work with non-governmental organizations and United Nation officials to resolve the problem.\textsuperscript{15} Both the Economic Community of West African States and the International Organization of Migration (IOM) understood the Security Council’s concerns, but recognized that the promotion of open borders for free trade within the West African regions could inadvertently spark, and encourage, cross-border movement of children for cheap labor purposes. The International Labor Organization issued its own reports in 2001 on child trafficking for forced labor purposes in the West African region.\textsuperscript{16}

These media claims and UN reports had a powerful effect on audiences – particularly chocolate consumers – worldwide as they told the story of child labor trafficking on Ivorian cocoa farms. Côte d’Ivoire produced roughly $40\%$ of the world’s cocoa supply. Government officials from various European countries and the European Union issued statements condemning all acts of child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour on West African cocoa farms. They raised the possibility of a consumer boycott if chocolate companies did not move to eliminate abuses in the industry. Brian Wilson, the then-U.K. Foreign Office Minister, went to the West African region in 2001 and set up a task force that brought together governments of the U.K., Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, the cocoa industry, and non-governmental organizations
working for the elimination of forced child labour to examine the issue. He noted that the U.K. wanted West Africa to sign a treaty establishing a legal framework for combating slavery, trafficking and forced labour. In reaction to Wilson’s call to action, Pascal Affi N’Guessan, Côte d’Ivoire’s then-Prime Minister, noted that, “multinational chocolate companies were at the heart of the problem of child trafficking because they keep prices so low driving farmers into poverty and use of forced labour.” He then called for “a tenfold increase in the price of cocoa.” The Government of Côte d’Ivoire further explained that cocoa undertakings involved thousands of remote small family farms where immigrants sometime work and that these were difficult to monitor stating, “these [immigrant workers] have ultimately established their own undertakings and had brought from their countries relatives and children whom they declare as family, which has aggravated the practice of using child labor in the country.”

On the U.S. front, reaction to the news reports of the abusive and slave-like conditions in the growing and harvesting of cocoa led Senator Tom Harkin to say that, “most consumers in America and around the world don’t want to buy chocolate made from cocoa beans harvested by child slaves.” Eliot Engel, the House Representative, also reacted to the media reports and indicated that, “when I learned of children being sold into slavery to work in the cocoa fields of the Ivory Coast, I was horrified.” Both Harkin and Engel took action and called upon the U.S. chocolate industry to design clear and identifiable ways for the removal of “child slaves” on cocoa farms. Representative Engel drafted a bill that called on the U.S Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to create a “no forced labor” certification that could be stamped on chocolate by manufacturers who could prove that their supply chains did not use slave labor. He drafted a rider to a fiscal 2002 agricultural appropriations bill that US$250,000 be set aside to institute a system of labelling chocolate and cocoa, as “No child slave labor.” The bill passed the House of Representatives by a margin of 291-115 in June 2001 and was aimed at looking into the labelling possibility.

The Chocolate Manufacturers Association (CMA), which represented all of the U.S’s cocoa producers and major chocolate companies, was taken by surprise by the legislation and realized that it was moving ahead quickly. They mobilized to block the labelling effort by issuing statements which claimed that had their chocolate products to issue the label it would mean that all other chocolate products were made by child slave labor. They saw this as the wrong move arguing that
it would lead consumers to boycott chocolate and this would have the crushing impact on both the chocolate companies which constituted 50% of the world cocoa consumption and the West African countries that produced over 70% of the beans. Rather than supporting a FDA supervised label on chocolate, the chocolate industry indicated that they instead would be open to an international protocol that would involve groups in industry, national governments and international non-governmental organizations in improving labor conditions and standards on the ground, and work towards a cocoa certification and verification system that reported on the amounts of child labor use in the West African region. Senator Harkin and Representative Engel accepted this offer and insisted on a four year development which would identify and correct abusive child labor and trafficking practices on cocoa farms. The compromise deal, known as the Harkin-Engel Cocoa Protocol, was signed in September 2001 with members of CMA and the World Cocoa Foundation agreeing to work with other stakeholders to establish global standards for child labor in cocoa production. As it would turn out, however, through the various extensions of the Harkin-Engel Protocol, children still continue to toil in hazardous conditions and trafficked labor situations in West African cocoa farms. As one Malian child who had returned from being trafficked to Ivorian cocoa farms in 2008 put it,

> When I was young I heard about the trafficking business in my village... Everyone here talks about it... my parents... grandparents... friends... and people in the market garden where I now work... I met my trafficker in Farahara [Mali] and he knew I wanted a cycle very badly and I had been trying for years to save enough money to buy one... but could never come up with it... A cycle costs CFA 60,000 [or about $140 USD]... I wanted it for my pleasure to move around wherever I wanted... I still don’t have the money to buy a cycle after all I went through and how hard I worked... My trafficker approached me one day in my village and told me if I went with him and worked on a cocoa farm for two years I would have enough money to buy a cycle... radio... clothes and have money left over... At the time I did not know he was thinking of trafficking me as he knew me... he was Malian and known in my village.24

The story of human beings, including children, being traded and forced to work in “slave-like” conditions on West African cocoa farms is not
new. Carol Off in her book, Bitter Chocolate, carefully researches archival material to look for links between slavery and chocolate dating as far back as the early 18th century to the current times and unravels a prominent trade in West Africans for European and American wealth extraction in the confectionary business. She notes, "...while the great thinkers debated equality, fraternity, and liberty and championed the rights of man, they were sipping sugar-sweetened chocolate...produced by the sweat and blood of slaves...and Africans, subjected to the most extreme abuse, struggled to survive the brutality...." Jeremy Seabrook provides archival specifics, he notes, that before 1800 fewer than 20% slaves were children. However, by the 19th century when the centre of the trade was West-Central Africa there was a dramatic increase in the number of young slaves, mostly boys, shipped out of or moved within the region. Seabrook states that "between 1811 and 1867 more than 41 percent of slaves were children." With reference to Côte d'Ivoire, Off reports, "despite worldwide condemnation of slavery, and laws against it," by the end of the millennium, "Côte d'Ivoire was one of the most indebted nations on earth, even as it supplied almost half of the world's cocoa to the multi-billion-dollar industry and helped satisfy the world's addiction to chocolate. Cocoa farmers slid deeper and deeper into poverty, and they began to look for cheaper ways to produce their beans." 

Before this paper presents data collected in 2008 from interviewing trafficked children who have worked on Ivorian cocoa farms, it takes a detour to examine the research literature on human trafficking. The aim of this examination, however, is not to provide an assessment of the UN anti-trafficking instruments, the NGO and government anti-trafficking efforts or the scholarship that has developed on this form of labour. Instead, the aim is to highlight the key paradigms that have emerged thus far from the study of human trafficking and to delineate the fault lines that have influenced this work. Furthermore, it is to show how research on this issue has generated more questions than answers, offered limited findings and casted doubt on the role of powerlessness in decisions made by those who move from one area to another in search of a better life. The following section captures the complex clashes of theories and practises in the study of human trafficking, and elaborates the ground on which to listen anew to what self-identified trafficked subjects are saying about their sometimes self-determined decisions to run as fast as they can across borders in search of a better life on West African cocoa farms and their return back.
Trafficking for Labor Purposes: The Research

The allure among nations to jump into the globalization arena as a means to prosperity has made human beings more tangled and intertwined with each other...boosting human trafficking. Globalization allows greater and easier access to an overabundance of products and services never seen before, including those intangible goods such as a better life...and the promise of work.51

Even though trafficking in humans has taken place for centuries, the degree of awareness of this form of exploitation has been extremely limited. Research on trafficking has tended to focus on trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation, neglecting all other forms of trafficking, including child trafficking for forced labor purposes.52 Andrees and van der Linden have noted that, "trafficking for labor exploitation is significant and under-researched."53 According to them, "research on this form of trafficking is in its early stages and though much has been done, even more must be done."54 They note that while the research pool on trafficking for exploitative labor purposes is small, two things can already be known. Firstly, most of the data is anecdotal evidence obtained from secondary sources such as policy analysis, media reports and NGO accounts and reflect the institutional perceptions of a victim. Secondly, in the rare case of primary data, there too a bias exists of the view of the victim which is generated due to a skewed selection process.55 Surtees lists some of the factors contributing to this bias. She suggests that trafficking subjects are drawn from cases of identified victims and are not representative of all trafficked persons, and access to trafficking subjects are usually obtained through NGO service providers who have already classified the subjects into victims and select the type of victims researchers can have access to in the research process.56 As a result, no random sampling data exists; only that which targets a particular population and is generated from data banks of assistance organizations, shelters and/or detention centers.

This tendency to see trafficked subjects exclusively as victims has emerged out of what Howard and Lalani have described as a long historical tradition that dates back to the late nineteenth century Europe and North America. At that time unaccompanied white women living in poverty were "forced" to move to the "New World" exchanging sex for survival.57 These women were part of the so called, "White Slave Trade," and both the state and civil society worked hard to find solutions
to put an end to what was regarded as the forced movement (abduction and transport) of women for the trade. Kempadoo, among others, have mapped how the first international instrument to suppress such a trade — The International Agreement for the Suppression of the White Slave Trade, constructed the dominant frames by which trafficked subjects were regarded as victims.\textsuperscript{38} Surtees suggests that this agreement gave rise to the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitutions of Others (1949) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punishing Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the Convention on Transorganizational Crime (2000, Palermo Protocol) both of which are rooted in a paradigm that regards trafficking in persons (women and children essentially) as victims, coerced into unacceptable forms of work (sex work mostly) and in need of rescuing by the state and/or civil society.\textsuperscript{39} O’Neil is of the similar opinion, he notes, “in some ways, today’s trafficking hysteria is similar to the ‘white slavery’ scare of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”\textsuperscript{40}

These early readings on trafficking subjects have produced, as some experts suggest, two major consequences in the current day study of human trafficking. Firstly, it has produced a gendering of trafficking subjects as female and with it a focus, on what Kleinman and Kleinman refer to as the “commercialization of suffering.”\textsuperscript{41} This consequence has prevented the possibilities of theorizing the agency, however limited, that some women feel in risking their lives and moving in the hope of gaining economic autonomy.\textsuperscript{42} Relatedly, it has also had the consequence of preventing analysis of other populations who maybe trafficked for other purposes.\textsuperscript{43} Surtees explains, “the failure to expand the application and understanding of anti-trafficking efforts beyond those of prostitution and sexual exploitation has had the effect of denying harm done to persons who suffer similar abuses but who are trafficked for other purposes.”\textsuperscript{44} Here Surtees is referring specifically to men and boys. Others have argued that in the age of the global movement of capital, people are often trafficked to provide cheap or free labor in sectors that have little to do with the sex trade and everything to do with agriculture, mineral extraction and/or manufacturing.\textsuperscript{45} Regarding trafficked subjects in essentially victimized terms has promoted what Sharma describes as the “false image of human trafficking…that draws attention away from the dependence of big capital on the cheap and malleable workers that populate the unregulated and unprotected labor markets.”\textsuperscript{46} Bertone confirms this view and offers
an explanation, "demand for cheap labor in which the labor becomes extremely exploitative is probably the most difficult aspect of trafficking to address, because it is wrapped in discussions of globalization and the mainstream capitalist market."\

Little is known about the demand side or the driving forces behind trafficking for labor exploitation. Some researchers have called for the analysis of trafficking to be conducted in the broader context of the global political economy have suggested that wealth inequalities and different opportunities between countries of origin and destinations have facilitated movements of people like never before.\(^6\) It is therefore no coincidence, as Kaye et al note that, "the growth in trafficking has taken place during a period in which there has been an increasing international demand for migrant workers," who provide low or no-wage labor in a competitive and globalized market economy.\(^6\) Tyldum and Brunovskis term these migrants as "hidden populations"\(^6\) from where trafficking for labor purposes draws its numbers. Nagle suggests a possible explanation for the need of hidden populations of labor. She notes:

> "The ability of many businesses to stay competitive in a globalizing economy depends on the capacity to assemble and retain a labor force for the least amount of investment. A minimal investment in labor will cushion the impact on profits in unpredictable markets where the cost of raw materials, the transportation of goods, and the price of the finished products can fluctuate wildly."\(^5\)

In fact, she suggests that big business intentionally select countries in the developing world with weak or non-existent labor laws and policies protecting workers. Nagle asks rhetorically, "one wonders if the same corporations would even conceive of 'investing' in the same nations if globalized legislation, policies, and institutions protecting fair wages and human working conditions existed and had been implemented in those nations."\(^5\)

The second consequence of reading trafficking subjects as victims has allowed for the framing of the trafficking issue as a problem of boundaries and state sovereignty and less about human rights. Howard and Lalani, illustrates this point, "although trafficked persons are recognized by law as 'victims,' survivors of human trafficking are often only assisted by authorities if they 'cooperate with law enforcement officials and agree to testify.' Otherwise, they are often treated as illegal immigrants in need of deportation."\(^3\) This, despite the fact, as Dotridge
asserts that Principle 8 of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' Recommended Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Human Trafficking emphasizes (2002) that "...protection and care shall not be made conditional upon the capacity or willingness of the trafficked person to cooperate in legal proceedings." Furthermore, other experts have argued, that anti-trafficking efforts directed to increasing border controls rationalized on the grounds of providing protection to victims have actually operated as repressive measures to limit or stop the flow of undocumented workers in finding opportunities for employment. In line with this thinking, they suggest that when borders are tightened presumably to prevent the free movement of people, trafficking subjects are moved through more dangerous and hidden routes and are thus exposed to increased, not decreased, levels of threat. Dottridge also exposes the limits in anti-trafficking policies in working for the best interest of individuals. He demonstrates that his research on anti-trafficking efforts by NGOs and governments has found that repatriation efforts of trafficked subjects take place in the "absence of risk and security assessments...leaving some people...at risk of being re-trafficked." Thus as a number of writers argue that by "prioritizing crime, punishment and immigration control" current anti-trafficking measures fail to acknowledge or address social injustice, and is more likely to result in the violation of rather than in the protection of the rights of individuals.

Perhaps more than any other author, Laura Agustín’s work on non-white migrants has shown how gendered readings of trafficking subjects have influenced current day understanding of this phenomenon. She notes, "women are sometimes called ‘boundary markers’: When States feel threatened, women’s bodies become symbols of home and the nation…they should stay home and be home.” The collective fantasy says home is always a lovely place, but many people have a contrary experience.” Agustín’s troubling of home as a “lovely place” is not new. Feminist scholars throughout the mid to late 1990s have produced research to re-think home as a lovely, or more appropriately, safe place. The research has shown how people, women particularly, experience home as both safe and dangerous. The reification of female victimhood in anti-trafficking thinking is a familiar procedure. In referring specifically to NGO anti-trafficking efforts towards non-white trafficked victims, Doezema notes, "western NGOs construct the ‘third world woman’ as a ‘damaged other’ to justify their “own interventionist impulses” and Agustín adds, “women are infantilized in the name of protecting and
‘saving’ them, which takes away their power and agency.” according to Agustín, “the U.N. protocols on trafficking...of human beings...mentions women and children, and mentions sexual exploitation, but doesn’t say anything about voluntary leaving.” She explains,

The ‘trafficking’ discourse relies on the assumption that it is better for...[people] to stay at home rather than leave it and get into trouble; ‘trouble’ is seen as something that will irreparably damage...[them].... But if one of our goals is to find a vision of globalisation in which poorer people are not constructed solely as victims, we need to recognise that strategies which seem less gratifying to some people may be successfully utilised by others....

After interviewing hundreds of people who risk their lives to leave home, Agustín concludes her analysis by suggesting that people who leave home have mixed motives. “They may be poor and without many choices, but they also are human beings who have desires and fantasies. They daydream about all the same pleasurable things that richer people do. The human ability to imagine that things can be better, that getting ahead is possible, is in play. These motivations mix together in the project of leaving home – legally or not – to go somewhere else.” She, however, qualifies this sense of wanting to leave home as she notes, “and it’s not the most desperate, like famine sufferers, who manage to move. In order to go abroad you have to be healthy and you have to have social capital, including a network that will get you information on how to travel and work.” Furthermore, she adds, “frightening or even tragic moments of people’s migrations to work need not forever mark them nor define their whole life experience. Relative powerlessness at one stage of migration need not be permanent; poor people also enjoy ‘multiple identities’ that change over life-courses composed of different stages, needs and projects.” She suggest that “even the poorest and even the partially ‘trafficked’ or ‘deceived’ look for and find spaces to be themselves in, run away, change jobs, learn to utilize friends, clients, employers and petty criminals.” For Agustín media images or stories handed down on the streets that depict travel to elsewhere as essential for education and pleasure are also the motivating factors as to why some people uproot themselves and risk everything to find a place in the world.

Agustín’s call for preserving the agency of the subject who decides to travel, even those who are forced to move, is directed at recasting the dominant representation of the helpless victim in the study of human
trafficking, and with it to preserve the right of work and the search for a better life for people living in poverty. However, she is careful to ensure that the existence of the worst experiences is not to be negated. She writes, “the abuses of agents who sell ways to enter the first world extend to migrants who work as domestic servants and in sweatshops, maquiladoras, mines, agriculture, sex or other industries, whether they are women, men…. But these most tragic stories are fortunately not the reality for most migrants.” O’Neill agrees with Agustín’s assessment,

Migration remains an inspiring expression of human agency and desire, as people take great risks and travel great distances to improve their lives. In labelling such movement as ‘trafficking’ and ‘slavery,’ and demanding tougher border restrictions and police-led ‘rescues’ of trafficking’s alleged victims, the anti-trafficking lobby has grossly betrayed the very people it is claiming to help.

The question to now consider in the context of unraveling the dominant anti-trafficking paradigms is the particular place “children” take in this discourse. If the trafficked subject is feminized as victim, then what can we say about the literature examining the trafficked child? The UN protocol against trafficking makes it clear that children cannot consent to work in exploitative conditions (e.g., trafficked labor situations). In other words, it is not possible for children to experience agency (personal autonomy) or make self-determined decisions to move across or within borders in the hope of finding work and find themselves in exploitative situations. The UN protocol is specific on this subject. The element requiring “threat or [the] use of force or other forms of coercion... of deception, of the abuse of power... to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person,” is not necessary when it comes to children, as the protocol explicitly assumes that no child can consent to migration for the purpose of labor under exploitative conditions. When it comes to proving that children have been trafficked, the convention requires that “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or reception of persons” is found and that “exploitation” has taken place. Based on ILO Convention 182, the definition of trafficking is broader for children. So a situation may be trafficking if it is a child but if it were an adult it would not be trafficking. Children cannot consent to migrate under exploitative conditions without this being labeled as child trafficking and against the law. Who defines exploitative? It is not the intent of the paper to trouble this definition of child trafficking. It is,
however, the aim of the paper to expose dominant paradigms that frame the study of trafficked children, especially in the West African context.

**Child Trafficking for Labor Purposes: The West African Research**

On the bus back to Mali we met three other young boys who were also returning from working on Ivorian cocoa farms...they all had terrible experiences and some of them got paid...but not one of them was paid what they were promised....They were frightened to talk about this on the journey back home like we were....I felt horrible and sorry for myself as I was returning home without my cycle and with no money....When I arrived home...my mother cried for a whole day...she told me how she was looking for me and how worried she was that a trafficker got me...I told my father that I did not want to work on his farm and so my parents let me live with my grandparents in Sikasso...I work in a market garden making some money...but it is still not enough...If I don't get enough money to buy my cycle in the next four months I will go back again to Côte d'Ivoire...but I will work in a corn field closer to here at the border.71

The study of child trafficking for labor purposes is also a relatively new phenomenon. The UNICEF Innocenti Center research on child trafficking was first initiated in 1998 in Western Africa in collaboration with its West and Central African Regional offices, two years before the UN adopted a new definition of "trafficking in person" and the U.S. adopted its own national law; and one year before the ratification of the ILO Convention 182, banning the worst forms of child labor, including slavery, forced labor and child trafficking. During this period West African countries of Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin all reported some efforts to detect, intercept and repatriate children who have been identified as "trafficked" for labor purposes across borders and detain suspected individuals of trafficking in the region.74 These events were reported in the local press, with the earliest report appearing in Mali in 1995 and in Côte d'Ivoire in 1998, inspiring UNICEF (in Abidjan) to investigate and report later that same year that 10,000 to 15,000 Malian children were found working in unacceptable conditions in Côte d'Ivoire.75 A few international NGOs operating in West Africa were quoted heavily in these early local reports identifying children who had been moved across borders through deception and force for exploitative labor purposes. West African government
officials, mostly from embassies in the region, were also quoted along with these international NGOs. For example, working with UNICEF, Anti-Slavery International and Save the Children Canada in 1995, the Government of Mali issued a public statement against Malian children being used for child labor purposes in the Côte d’Ivoire and officially informed the Government of Côte d’Ivoire of the problem. In 1996, a workshop on child trafficking was held in Sikasso, Mali, and a regional response to address the problem was designed. In 1998, Mali established a Consultative National Commission on Child Trafficking. It also created the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family, who was tasked, among other things, to handle the repatriation of trafficked children returning from agricultural farms in Côte d’Ivoire. Agricultural is named as the sector in which these children were recruited and transacted to work in hazardous conditions. West Africa thus became the world’s focal point in the generation of data, albeit experimental, on child trafficking for forced labor purposes. As Dottridge and Feneyrol in 2007 note, “in West Africa, nine years’ experience of efforts to stop child trafficking can now be reviewed.”

Just as the “white slave trade” was transformed into “trafficking in woman” with the focus on women in the developing countries, the stereotypical view of the trafficked child is that he or she too is from non-western countries who is seduced or kidnapped, passive and poor, and moved across borders into situations of forced slavery. The trafficked child is also gendered and in need of rescuing by the state and/or civil society groups and returned “home.” Some authors have suggested that this gendering is generated from the western paradigm of the so-called “best interest of the child” and idealized notions of Western families “as the basis for the protection of children.” Seabrook’s explains, “the predominant development philosophy on children...comes from a totally ‘Western’ perspective in what constituted ‘childhood.’ The assumption is that the ‘best interest’ of the child would mean that children should be free to enjoy their childhood in caring, protective ‘families’ and in schooling and developmentally sound play.” However, as he further states, the version of Western families through which the image of the child is promoted is “already in an advanced state of dissolution.” Myers asks, “but who gets to define children’s ‘best interests’, and according to what criterion?” Thorsen suggests that wholesale adoption of a globalised notion of childhood in the anti-child trafficking literature is problematic. “Apart from failing to acknowledge that the conceptualisation of childhood...[varies] over class and space, the treatment of all
children as one category fails to distinguish between the different needs, capabilities and preferences of young children and of almost-adults. 78

Despite these problems in conceptualizing children in general, and the trafficked child in particular, Dessy and Pallage found that the “data” on trafficking of children for labor purposes is so horrific and disturbing that there is an intense pressure from governments and civil society groups to apply economic sanctions against states that are allowing the practice to continue with little or no consequences to perpetrators. They note, “why wait? What argument can possibly be put forward to hinder action? The legislative strategy is very understandable. It is based on the presumption that, even if perfect enforcement of a law against child trafficking is utopian, any improvement in enforcement must be synonymous with an improvement in the fate of the children.”79 However, their research has shown that “this intuition may be wrong…if enforcement is not perfect, the well-intentioned ban on child trafficking may have the adverse effect to increase the number of victims.”80 Dottridge and Fenevrol analysis of the West African literature on anti-child trafficking efforts also produce the same conclusion. They suggest that the evidence shows that anti-trafficking efforts have stopped children on the move in search of work and they have not been effective in distinguishing between migrant children in general and trafficked children in particular.

Both teenagers and younger children leave home in huge numbers throughout West Africa to seek work away from home. The least fortunate end up in situations which amount to ‘exploitation’ as it is defined by the UN Trafficking Protocol…Yet other children migrate to seek work voluntarily, without being trafficked, but are unfortunate enough to end up in these same forms of exploitation. Others end up in different ‘worst forms of child labour’; for example working…on farms where the pesticides being used are significantly more dangerous to growing adolescents than they are to adults. Although under the definitions used in the UN Trafficking Protocol such children are not considered to be ‘trafficked,’ nevertheless many commentators have used the term ‘trafficking’ indiscriminately to refer to situations in which young people migrate to seek work voluntarily, whether or not they not end up in situations defined as ‘exploitation’ by the Protocol. By failing to focus exclusively on children being trafficked...‘anti-trafficking committees’ and other police measures to stop young people migrating have become a source of abuse rather than protection.81
Dottridge and Feneyrol emphasize that there is a "disastrous confusion in many parts of West Africa between the process of migration, on the one hand, and the abusive outcomes of migration experienced by just some of the young people who migrate, on the other." They explain, "a significant proportion of the children who have been returned to their homes after being intercepted or withdrawn from abusive employment (usually to homes in rural areas) have opted to leave home again within a matter of days or weeks."  

Castle and Diarra's assessment of interviews of child victims of trafficking in Mali have found similar findings. They indicate that "children were unhappy about being brought back to their villages; their parents were unclear as to why they had been returned." They found that "despite the considerable expenditures incurred by NGOs and government authorities in order to finance their return, such children often left their villages just several days later to try once again to seek their fortunes in Côte d'Ivoire." Thorsen study on child migration researched against the background of exploitation and trafficking in Burkina Faso shows, what he terms as "the international and national agencies' tendency to view this migration through the lens of crisis." According to him child trafficking research in the West African context illustrates "the dilemma of distinguishing between the need for protective regulation and youngsters' own view on their opportunities." Young people, he tells us, are not passive victims, they have their "own rationales, choices and strategies to pursue their quest for money and...intergenerational expectations." But researchers like Hashim note that when child migration is studied we tend to regard children's decisions to migrate in negative terms. She notes, "For the most part the independent migration of children tends to be presented in the policy literature as pathological, since it is often assumed to be the outcome of disastrous situations (such as war or famine) that lead to the breakdown of family relations, or result in the increasing vulnerability of children to economic exploitation, dangers working conditions or abuse." Felsmann adds, "we tend to regard the...runaway child as troubled, even emotionally disturbed. In the case of these particular children, however, leaving home may be a positive, adaptive move towards physical and psychological health." Thorsen agrees with these views but suggests that even if migrating children are found in exploitative work conditions this need not amount to trafficking. He notes "before judging whether...[youth workers] are being exploited through having the most dangerous work...we need to examine the working conditions
for adult employees...to assess whether the problem is a much broader one of security and health measures...generally." With reference to work that relates to slavery and practices similar to slavery, Thorsen asks, "when they [young people] do not receive a wage for their work but are free to leave, are they then working under slavery-like conditions?"

While these researchers are also critical of government and civil society responses in addressing the child trafficking issue and concerned about the impact anti-trafficking policies are having on children's mobility, they are careful to point out that child trafficking for exploitative labor purposes does occur, but suggest that the numbers of trafficked children are small compared to the high volume of children migrating in search of better life experiences. It is not the purpose of this paper to attest to these discoveries. However, it is perhaps relevant to state here that the chocolate-industry supported West African certification studies undertaken in various stages from 2002 to 2008 and exclusively in the cocoa growing areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana also found similar results. They found no evidence of child trafficking; the few suspected cases turned out to be through further investigation cases of either parents in Burkina Faso or Mali sending children to live with "relatives" in Côte d'Ivoire to learn farming skills in a fostering type situations, or immigrant farmers from these areas who were now farming in Côte d'Ivoire requesting relatives to come and work on their farms due to heavy labor shortages in the cocoa growing areas. In fact, when charges were laid against Ivorian cocoa farmers for employing trafficked child labor for the harvesting and growing of cocoa, the Government of Côte d'Ivoire, noted to the ILO that, "these [immigrant workers] have ultimately established their own undertakings and had brought from their countries relatives and children whom they declare as family." Seasonal migration of adults and children is a common practice in cocoa production, the Government argued and noted that while some types of ILO forms of hazardous labor were found in cocoa production, no cases of child trafficking were discovered.

Trafficking in humans for forced labor purposes is determined not at the start of the journey of movement but at its end point (i.e., destination). That is to say, rather than defining a single unitary and stand alone act, trafficking is used to define a process where three elements are required, namely recruitment, transportation and the exploitative and forced control of the worker. These three aspects are essential, and the defining moment is exploitation at the end point of movement. It is for this reason alone that investigation on trafficking and trafficked
subjects must occur by carefully considering the complex and perhaps still disconnected relations between migrations, forced labor, "family" arrangements of household incomes and human rights. Furthermore, it must also give specific attention to where interviews of potential trafficked subjects are conducted (i.e., source, transit, destinations and/or return sites) and the methods used to interview them. Trafficking is clandestine and involves illegal behavior. People are often stigmatized and thus they either refuse to consent to being interviewed or if they do speak they often give inaccurate answers to protect themselves and/or their perpetrators because they fear for their or their families lives. If some of the children had been in a trafficking situation at the time of the interviews or focus groups, they would have been residing "illegally" in the country; would have limited or no knowledge of their rights; would have limited personal freedoms; and would have been susceptible to violence by employers if they were to speak up. Research on trafficking victims has shown that "the factors affecting the security and well-being of a...[child] who has been trafficked are the same factors that affect disclosure." This needs to be kept in mind when interpreting the trafficking results of the industry supported West African certification studies undertaken exclusively in the cocoa growing areas of Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Had the study interviewed children in the source countries of Mali and Burkina Faso who had returned from working on Ivorian cocoa farms, they might have reported different results on trafficking as the risk to disclose may have been far less than granting interviews when currently working on cocoa farms? Often trafficked subjects are more open to discussing their experiences and/or constructions of how they arrived at the decision to run across borders in search of a better life, the journey encountered, the work conditions experienced, the realization that they had been "trafficked" and their journey back "home" after they have gone through the entire process.

While interviewing only former trafficked subjects has limits too because trafficked subjects also include those at risk of being trafficked and currently in trafficked situations, the pilot study reported on below follows the various suggestions made by researchers like Thorsen, Castle and Diarra, Dottridge, Agustin, Surtees and Kempadoo, among others, namely to avoid reading migrants as trafficked victims, and avoid interviewing trafficked subjects who previously or currently have received support services from NGOs or governments agencies that have identified them as such. The presentation of pilot study findings is not concerned about the scale of the problem of child trafficking; neither is
it concerned about the effectiveness of government and civil society anti-trafficking interventions or conceptual definitions used to mark children as trafficked. The focus of the pilot is to explore what children are saying about their experiences of moving across borders to find work on Ivorian cocoa farms, the work they experienced and the return back. Ten children were interviewed and eight of them self-identified as trafficked subjects, one of them was not sure and the other indicated that he did not think he was trafficked.

**Methodology**

The data presented in the following sections were collected by the authors in February 2008 in Banfora, Burkina Faso, and Sikasso, Mali. Both Banfora and Sikasso are located in proximity – less than 100 miles – of the border to Côte d’Ivoire and along one of the major trading routes between Côte d’Ivoire and the two neighboring countries. In Banfora and Sikasso, we interviewed five children each, a total of ten children, eight boys and two girls, in a structured interview format. All of the interviewed children had worked on cocoa farms in Côte d’Ivoire and since then returned to their countries of origins. Most of the children self-identified as trafficked children and some of them referred to the person recruiting them as their “trafficker” even naming them by their first name. All children agreed that that they had experienced abuse and exploitation while working on the cocoa farms.

While all interviewed children were identified with the help of local NGOs working in the border area, these identified children had not been in any previous contact with local NGOs, international groups or government agencies working on issues of child trafficking or providing support to trafficked children. All interviews were carried out in local languages with the help of interpreters. The research findings presented in this paper are based on a descriptive analysis of the interviews with these ten children.

**Research Findings**

The interviewed children were between 15 and 17 years at the time of the interview. When moving to Côte d’Ivoire and starting to work on the cocoa farm, most children were between the ages of 10 and 12. The oldest child, a boy from Mali, was 14 years old at the time and the youngest child, a girl from Burkina Faso, was 7 years old. All of the children interviewed in Mali were male. In Burkina Faso, 3 boys and 2 girls were interviewed. Three of the Burkinabe children were born in Burkina
Faso, while two were born in Côte d’Ivoire to Burkinabe families. All of the children interviewed in Mali were born locally and were Malian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID#</th>
<th>Country of Residence</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Length of Stay on Cocoa Farm</th>
<th>Year of Return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Burkina-Faso</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Burkina-Faso</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Burkina-Faso</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4</td>
<td>Burkina-Faso</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5</td>
<td>Burkina-Faso</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
<td>Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M1</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the time of the interview, only two of the children lived with their biological fathers, while all but three lived with their biological mothers. Three of the children reported that their father had died; in the other cases the father or the child had left the family. Half of the children named neither “mother” nor “father” as their current primary caregiver. Two children named an uncle, one a grandmother and one an unspecified guardian. One child reported currently taking care of himself. The children have in common that none of them attended formal schooling at any point of time in their lives. Only one child from Mali had taken an adult literacy course.

Decision to Move Across Borders

The children reported first hearing about working on a cocoa farm from a variety of sources including relatives, community members, and the traffickers themselves. One child from Burkina Faso reported looking for work at that time, and three of the children from Mali were also looking for work. The remaining children did not look for work at the time.

The Burkinabe children were recruited for work in cocoa agriculture by either a family member or another person known to their caregivers. None of these children spoke directly with a recruiter; family members made the decision to send the child to work on the farm. A 16-year-old boy reported: “My father agreed to let me go with one of his friends, so I went. He told me that if I go, he will give me a bicycle. At first, I did not want to,
but my father and his friend told me I would get a bicycle." A 17-year old boy recalled: "My father passed me to someone that brought me to Cote d'Ivoire." A 17-year old girl said: "When I lost my father, my uncle talked to my mother, but I was young, and do not remember how it happened....My uncle told me nothing. He just said I had to go with him and find work. He spoke to my mother." Another 17-year old girl remembered: "A man regularly came to see my dad. One day my father told me to pack some bags to go with him."

All of the Malian children, on the other hand, reported that a "trafficker" approached and recruited them for the work in Côte d'Ivoire and they decided to go. All but one reported speaking with the recruiter, and in none of these cases did family members play a role in the child's decision to leave. A 15-year old boy said: "I met my trafficker, Ibharam, in my village....When I met Ibharam, he knew I wanted a bicycle, so he told me to come and work. He told me that when I come back, he would buy me a bicycle and radio. He had no contact with my parents. I did not know he was going to traffic me. I believed him fully." According to a 17-year old boy: "There is a village close to my village. I met a man in this village, and he took me and other children." A 16-year old boy reported: "I met the trafficker in Sikasso. He told us he would take us to his farm in Cote d'Ivoire. He said he would pay us every month, so we went with him. We got in a bus. There were five of us. We did not know each other, but we were from the same village."

Most of the children said they either were not told or did not understand what exactly they would be doing in Côte d'Ivoire, and some thought the work would entail familiar farm work, such as weeding. All children had worked previously in agriculture in their home countries but they had no experience working on a cocoa farm. The children from Mali were promised money, sometimes in exact amounts ranging from 75,000 CFA (about $150 USD) to 125,000 CFA (about $250 USD). While no specific promises were made to several of the Burkinabé children, others were promised various consumer items such as a bike, a radio and/or clothing. Family members of the Burkinabé children were also promised money and/or clothes in return for sending their children to work in Côte d'Ivoire.

The motivation to earn money for themselves and to support their family were critical factors in the decision of several children to leave. A 16-year old boy from Mali described these expectations while travelling to the cocoa-growing areas together with the trafficker and several other children: "We slept in the bus. There was one adult and five children. We did not realize anything was wrong. To us we were going to make money on the farm. I was going to give money to my mother and father." Another
16-year old male from Mali reported: "I wanted to make myself some money and to buy a bicycle and a radio." Half of the children indicated that they did not inform their family before leaving for Côte d’Ivoire or that they left against the wishes of their caregivers.

The Journey Encountered
All of the interviewed children were trafficked without any other family members, except for one child from Burkina Faso, who reported leaving together with several cousins. All children except one said that the person who arranged the travel also traveled with the child. Only one child spoke of carrying the papers required to legally cross the border to Côte d’Ivoire, the other children crossed the borders without documentation.

The traffickers sometimes used informal border crossings or, when travel documents were asked for, they talked to the border guards and afterwards were given permission to cross the border together with the child. A 17-year old male from Mali recalled: "We went by bus. We saw the police. We did not speak with the police but the trafficker did. We did not hear a word." A 16-year old boy from Mali reported: "At the border, we met the police. They asked us if we had papers. The trafficker left us and went to the police. They talked for a while after which the policeman got into his car and left. We did not hear him [the trafficker] talk to the police."

Several of the children were trafficked in a group together with other children to the cocoa-growing areas. Most often, the children traveled by bus and they did not have to pay for their transportation. However, one child was asked to work to pay off the cost of his transportation after arriving at the cocoa farm. Most of the children were brought directly to their final destination, and they were left with the farmer, most often a person previously unknown to the child.

Work Conditions Experienced
All of the children described the work that they had to perform on the cocoa farm as "very hard," "very bad" or "too difficult." All children reported working long hours, with the shortest said to be a nine-hour day. Most children described working from sun up until sun down, and only one child was given one free day per week. A few children were allowed a half hour or hour-long lunch break, but most worked all day without regular breaks. Only two of the ten children said they were allowed to rest when they were sick. All the children expect for one reported being sick while on the cocoa farm, from headaches to con-
tracting malaria, and most did not receive medical treatment. A few children received herbal medicine.

Once on the cocoa farm, all of the interviewed children reported restrictions in their freedom of movement. They described constant supervision, threats, and beatings for taking breaks or leaving the farm. Most cocoa farms were small, around five to seven hectares, and included between two to ten other workers including the owner and his family. All of the children were involved in cocoa harvest activities including the picking and carrying of cocoa pods, and cocoa pod breaking and drying activities. Most of the children performed other agricultural activities in addition to cocoa farming. Three children reported fetching firewood or water, and one reported doing household chores.

A 17-year old boy from Burkina-Faso had the following duties: “Clean the farm; picking cocoa pods; drying and preparation; and carrying cocoa to dry storage. I also worked on the coffee farm at night. It was essential work that I had to do. There were many difficulties. I did not cope well. The transport of the load all the way to the truck was bad on the back and the head. This was harsh. The coffee culture is also difficult, because of the work at night and the insects.” A 17-year old Burkinabe girl gave this account of her work: “Since childhood I was the dishwasher and the cook. In the field, one paddled the cocoa for drying in the sun. Once dry, we cracked open the nuts for another drying. Once dried, the cocoa was able to be sold by the farmer. Afterwards, we weeded the rice. If there was a lot of work, we returned to the cocoa farm to weed the field.”

The children listed working with cocoa and especially carrying it as the most difficult part of the work that they had to perform in Côte d’Ivoire. Only three of the ten children were provided with protective equipment, such as boots, to wear while working. All children reported working together with other trafficked children and/or knowing of other trafficked children on farms nearby.

The children stayed with the family of the farmer and slept in a room in the farmer’s house together with many other occupants. One child from Mali reported having to pay for his housing while all other children said that housing was provided by the farmer without charge. Most children completely lost contact with their family while working in Côte d’Ivoire. Only two children from Burkina Faso reported maintaining some contact with their parents in this period of time.

Realization of having been “trafficked”

All of the interviewed children had heard of and understood the concept of child trafficking at the time of the interview. The children reported
having learnt about child trafficking from various sources including parents, family, friends, radio and television, and the their own experience. Most of the children thought that they had themselves been trafficked, however, one child was not sure about having been trafficked, and one boy did not think he experienced trafficking. All of the children however report experiences of exploitation on the cocoa farms.

Every single child reported being verbally and/or physically abused while working on the cocoa farm with either insults, threats of physical violence or both. Four of the five children from both countries experienced physical violence. Of these, all were beaten repeatedly. Any child that tried to run away was beaten, including one Malian who said he was “beaten on the back until bleeding.” All children but one from Burkina Faso observed other children being beaten as well. Mental abuse was reported by four children, including being called a “parasite” and “cursed.” One Malian child reported being sexually abused by the farmer’s wife and another Malian child said that he saw aggressive sexual activity, although he never experienced it himself. A 17-year old girl from Burkina-Faso reported: “Often, if I said that I wouldn’t do the work, I was injured and beaten by the farmer, his wife, and, often, the children. What was done to me was bad. It was the insults and beating me that was bad.”

While many children were promised money or material goods in return for their work, only two of the children reported receiving anything other than food and shelter. One child from Burkina Faso received a total of 70,000 CFA (or about $140 USD) for his work, while a second one from the same country received 60,000 CFA (or about $120 USD) after two years of work. None of the other children received any compensation for their work. The Malian, who was asked to repay the cost of transportation to the farm, had to work for three years to pay off the debt.

All of the children report deception and broken promises. They agree that the agreement that they had with the recruiter about their work changed after they arrived on the cocoa farm. A 17-year old male from Mali described an experience that he shared with several other trafficked children on the farm: “We worked for the farmer for a month. At the end of the month, we asked the farmer for our payment. The farmer said that we would not be paid by month but at the end of the year, or when we want to leave he would pay us. He said he would pay us CFA 75,000 per year and that we would have to wait. He said he will give us the money after he sold his cocoa. We worked for a year but we were not paid. We worked for another year, and we still were not paid.” A 15-year old boy from Mali recalled: “The
trafficker used to visit us once a week for a year…. He used to collect our money from the farmer. When we asked for pay, he told us not to worry, he had it. After a year, he disappeared. We never saw him again. We asked the farmer for our pay, he said he gave it to the trafficker. We never saw him again.”

Journey Back “Home”
The interviewed children share the experience of eventually leaving the cocoa farm and returning to Burkina Faso and Mali. Several children reported running off to escape the long working hours, the violence, and because they realized that the farmer was not ever going to pay them. One child returned home after learning of the death of a family member, and another child left because of the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire.

Most children returned by bus and some paid for their transportation. Some of the children returned home accompanied by other trafficked children. All of the children reported that they were “very happy” and felt “joy and satisfaction” after reuniting with their family. However, one child, a 17-year old male from Mali, said that he “was content to rejoin my family, but unsatisfied.” Another 17-year old Malian boy summarized: “My family was pleased and upset. They had been looking for me.”

It is noteworthy that none of the interviewed children reported any contact with the police at any point of time while in Côte d’Ivoire or after returning to Burkina Faso and Mali. The children also indicated that none of their parents or caregivers had contacted the police even though their family had been searching for them after their departure.

Income and Consumption
Most of the interviewed children were promised consumer goods, such as a bike, a radio, clothing and/or money, in return for their work. The children repeatedly mentioned the promise of these desirable items, especially bikes, as motivation behind their decision to leave with the trafficker. During the interview, the children continued to stress their desire for jobs and income. Several children mentioned the need to earn a “sufficient” income or “a lot of money.” From their perspective, the lack of opportunity in their home countries may be the single most important factor contributing to the trafficking of children: “Give them a fund to start a business or do an apprenticeship in sewing, hair or selling in order to get an income.” “We need jobs. We went there to make money for bikes, radios, clothes, and take money home.” “If children are given good jobs, they won’t go to Côte d’Ivoire. A job is most important for children, boys and girls alike.” “Need to create jobs for children in Mali, so they will stay here.”
Education and Vocational Training
Each of the interviewed children expressed ideas and plans for their individual future including becoming a mechanic, carpenter, dressmaker, chauffeur or civil servant, engaging in "roadside sales and market gardening to prepare for marriage" and "agricultural work in my village." None of the children considered returning to cocoa farming in Côte d'Ivoire nor would they recommend this occupation to another child. Four out of ten children considered work in agriculture in Burkina-Faso or Mali a future option. When being asked how they plan to achieve their professional goals, many children mention study and training, however, they often indicate that they consider income more important than schooling, and they express an interest in receiving training in specific job skills rather than formal education: "More schools are needed to teach us skills to earn our living." "I want to study, but today I want a bicycle."

Awareness Raising and Information
Several children stressed the importance of awareness raising and information about child trafficking to provide children with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions and avoid abuse: "Children need awareness that they should not go to Côte d'Ivoire. It is not good." "Tell children not to go to the cocoa farm." "A campaign needs to tell the children the truth about work in Côte d'Ivoire. Children from here should not go there ever again. No child should suffer like I did." "I think that Malians need to speak to one another and regularly concern themselves with the phenomenon, and not allow the children to leave." "I think we can set up projects, activities everywhere and to speak about the situation." "Organize the population to sensitize the children." "Parents should not send their children. Children are talking to their parents about this issue."

Law Enforcement and Social Intervention
In order to prevent children from being trafficked, the children suggested to empower as well as to protect: "Children need to be protected, and informed so that they are not able to be trafficked." Several children stressed the need for more effective law enforcement: "We need more police on the road. If a bus wants to cross, police must check with all the passengers, ask questions to all, and not allow small children to leave without the parents." "I don't know about laws and penalties for trafficking. If there are, I want to know." "I think that the laws have impact, but have to be enforced." When asked about what should happen to their traffickers, most of children said that "they need to be arrested and sent to jail." Only one child said: "I
do not want anything bad to happen to him [the trafficker], even though he treated me badly." Some children argued for government intervention to satisfy children's needs: "We need to be supported by the government. We need to have our needs met. We go to Côte d'Ivoire because they are not being met." "We need to identify needs of children and give it to them." "Shelter each and every one against the bad." Two children expressed the desire for more "respect for children" and "respecting their rights."

Conclusions

If you ask me was I trafficked by my uncle I would say yes as I was mistreated, worked hard and earned nothing. For me this is what I understand as trafficking.

– Interview, 17-year old Female, Burkina Faso, 2008

Young peoples' descriptions of their consumer desires to move across borders for employment, the decision-making preceding their journeys and the strategies used by them to make sense of their disappointments contradict the assumption that trafficked children are simply passive victims of parental authority or household poverty.

Most of interviewed children understood their experiences on Ivorian cocoa farms as trafficking by connecting the unacceptable labor conditions they faced with the abusive treatment they received and the lack of payment for years of work they had provided. They did view trafficking as an outcome of a lack of employment opportunities in their countries of origin and not as a factor of migration as such. The children indicated that had their countries of origin provided them with decently paid jobs, none of them would have left to work on Ivorian cocoa farms.

Half of the interviewed children left their families based on their own decisions and even though they feel deceived by traffickers and employers, upon returning back several of them chose not to return to the household that they had left when going to Côte d'Ivoire. In fact, one child reported that he might even consider going back to Côte d'Ivoire in case he was not able to earn enough money for his bicycle in his home country. At the same time, while most of the children were aware of having been trafficked, none of them reported any contact with police or government agencies while they traveled to and from the cocoa farms or after their return to Burkina Faso and Mali. They also did not receive any support by non-governmental and private sector interventions upon returning back.
Despite the findings reported by several household surveys undertaken in 2006 and 2007 under the Harkin-Engel Protocol that found little or no evidence of child trafficking in the cocoa producing areas of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana, this pilot study conducted in the border towns of Mali and Burkina Faso with self-identified trafficked children suggests that trafficking of children for forced labor purposes does exist and may be not uncommon. In fact, the interviewed children all reported other cases of trafficked children in the cocoa-growing areas on the same farm and/or other farms nearby. They also frequently report having been trafficked to the cocoa-growing areas together with other children.

While evidence of child trafficking as a phenomenon is overwhelming, the extent of the problem has remained controversial. Only representative research in the areas or origin as well as the areas of destination may be able to provide certainty about the number of child trafficking cases and the success of prevention and intervention efforts. To achieve this, the Harkin-Engel Protocol may need to extend its reach beyond the cocoa growing areas. Furthermore, it may want to not only research working children, but also factor into the assessments the recommendation made by them. After all, what could be more effective and sustainable than children, previously exposed to the worst forms of child labor, speaking for themselves about their increased well-being?

NOTES

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2. Assistant Professor, Payson Center for International Development, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.
4. Excerpts from interviews conducted by Anita Sheth on a Save the Children Canada trip organized in February 2008 to Mali and Burkina Faso. The name of the interviewee has not been given to protect their identity.
6. Id.
7. Id.
9. Id.
13. Id.
14. Id.
18. Id.
21. Id.
26. Id. at 41.
28. Id. at 3.
29. Off, at 71.
30. Id. at 118.
33. Id. at 56. (Interviews with trafficked subjects upon return to their countries of citizenships)
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35. Id. at 57. (Data obtained from interviews with former trafficking subjects)
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64. Id.
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66. Id.
67. Id.
69. Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women
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70. Id.
71. Interview by Anita Sheth, 15 year old Male, Sikasso, Mali, February 2008).
72. Sarah Castle and Aisse Diarra, The International Migration of Young Malians: Tradition,
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73. Id.
74. Mike Dottridge & Olivier Feneyrol, Action to strengthen indigenous child protection
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76. Id. at 65


80. Id.


82. Id.

83. Id.


85. Id.


87. Id.

88. Id.


92. Id.

94. "Immigrants come from other regions of Côte d’Ivoire (in 15 villages), Burkina Faso (15), Mali (18) and elsewhere (5). Immigrants who settle in the villages are from the same countries as those who migrate on a seasonal basis, a result that would indicate an existing relationship between these two groups. Those who come on a seasonal basis may come at the request of relatives who have settled in these villages. 12 departments in 10 regions have experienced permanent immigration. Moreover, 86.1% of villages believe that the population has increased in the last ten years, while 6.3% believe it has fallen. Young people emigrate from 69.5% of localities. The nature of their emigration varies, but most is tied to looking for work. Young people are more mobile than adults (69.5% of localities, versus 52.8%). Generally there are a number of reasons for this, such as the limited burden represented by dependents, the need to free oneself from family supervision and the weight of tradition and the need of young people to express their economic independence. 93% indicated that leave because there is no opportunities to learn a trade in their home countries." The Government of Côte d’Ivoire Steering Committee For The Child Labour Monitoring System Within The Framework Of Certification Of The Cocoa Production Process, “Diagnostic Survey in Aogniblekrou, Tiassale And Sou,” November 2007, http://www.cocoaverification.net/Docs/ CdL_pilot_survey_report.pdf.

