

Child labour in cocoa: Why it's so hard to combat and what we're doing about it **Simon Brayn-Smith, Global Head of Sustainability, Olam Cocoa**

60% of child labour is in the agricultural sector. That's a staggering fact made only more concerning when you learn that in West Africa, where 70% of the world's cocoa is sourced, 2.1 million children work in cocoa fields¹. This is an issue which agribusinesses like Olam - along with our peers, customers, NGOs, and international governments - should be thinking about 365 days a year. But today is the UN's World Day Against Child Labour and I want to take the opportunity to share with you some of the realities on the ground from my experience as Olam's Head of Cocoa Sustainability, and how we're playing our part to tackle the interlocking challenges faced by cocoa growing communities across West Africa.

You might be questioning why, despite the efforts of an entire industry, there could still be so many instances of cocoa related child labour in 2018? Unfortunately, I can't give you a simple answer because the hurdles to reach a child labour-free cocoa supply chain are far from easy. However, there is one issue at the heart of the problem: extreme poverty. The decision to send your child to work on a cocoa farm often comes from a place of necessity in the face of little or no income.

In the face of this kind of intractable situation, a joint effort across the supply chain is essential. In Olam Cocoa's role as the world's leading exporter of cocoa from Africa, we are focusing our efforts to eradicate child labour in our supply chain on three key areas.

Pulling smallholders out of poverty

It is an undeniable fact that helping smallholder cocoa farmers to increase their income will undoubtedly reduce the number of children relied upon to work on family farms. That is why Olam Cocoa provides a range of interventions that help farmers sustainably increase their productivity from coaching in Good Agricultural Practices to providing access to agricultural inputs and finance. Diversification of income is also key to improving total household income and Olam works with youth associations and women's groups in activities such as beekeeping, intercropping and the development of community pruning teams. Alongside this, we work with local farming cooperatives to not only pay sustainability premiums to farmers but also channel investment into social infrastructure projects that help prevent child labour, such as building local schools and hiring teachers. For example, in the Ivory Coast, our teams on the ground work to support 10 sustainability programmes, involving 85,000 farmers and paid over USD\$23 million in sustainable crop premiums to over 185 cooperatives across the country.

Identification and remediation

Shifting cultural attitudes around child labour is crucial and requires a hefty investment of time and resources. We have been active in developing the Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems (CLMRS), a system that involves each cocoa producing community or cooperative electing a representative body to ensure implementation and effectiveness of the identification and remediation focused programme. In partnership with the Fair Labor Association (FLA), the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) and manufacturer customers, 180 cooperatives in the Ivory Coast, have established CLMRS initiatives with our support. However, there is still a lot more work to be done to build community trust that they won't be punished for reporting an instance of child labour. Instead, it's about remediation in the form of helping parents obtain the birth certificates they need to send children to school, paying school fees and offering alternative income sources like soap making or rearing small livestock.

Harnessing data

Technology is a crucial tool for dealing with the myriad issues at play when it comes to child labour. The Olam Farmer Information System (OFIS) collects farm level data via a smartphone to identify where vital social infrastructure like schools are lacking alongside details of farmer families, like the number and age of children, if they are attending school or living within proximity of one. With this data, working with the cooperatives, we can identify any issues and find solutions. Currently, we have 100,000 cocoa farmers in Africa registered on the OFIS platform.

It's fair to say that companies such as Olam and our industry group partners like World Cocoa Foundation (WCF), CocoaAction, and ICI are making progress on the issue of child labour. But the problem is vast and it's simply not enough to reach all 2.1 million children. More needs to be done.

ⁱ Cocoa Barometer 2018, p6:

[http://www.cocoabarometer.org/Cocoa Barometer/Download files/2018%20Cocoa%20Barometer%20180420.pdf](http://www.cocoabarometer.org/Cocoa%20Barometer/Download%20files/2018%20Cocoa%20Barometer%20180420.pdf)