



Cocoa-nomics: Who benefits? Who pays?

Introduction to Cocoa-nomics

Today, about 14 million people in over 30 developing countries depend on cocoa production for their livelihoods. Cocoa is the building block of all chocolate products. The top four cocoa producing countries—Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Nigeria, Ghana and Indonesia—are all in the bottom half of nations by per-capita GDP. By contrast, the top ten countries in terms of chocolate consumption are all in the top 15 percent. Only about 5% of the cost of your chocolate bar goes to the producer. As a result, the farm workers who harvest cocoa are generally extremely poor and many have never tasted chocolate.

Cocoa is a psychoactive plant that grew wild in the Gulf Coast of Mexico thousands of years ago. The Olmec, Aztecs, Mayans and others who lived there learned how to cultivate the plant. Like other psychoactive plants (e.g., tobacco or coca) cocoa played a key role in traditional spiritual practices, medicine and commerce. Cocoa seeds were even used as coins. Cocoa was first brought to Europe by the Spanish in the 16th Century. European demand for cocoa led the Spanish to plant cocoa in their colonies. Soon, the French, English, Dutch and other colonial powers were following suit.

Today the cocoa market involves a triangle of interested parties. Producers want high prices. Chocolate makers and consumers want low prices. Investors and traders don't care so long as the price is always changing. The traders seem to win because cocoa prices are relatively volatile compared to commodities like corn or wheat. This is because a lot of the world's production of cocoa is concentrated in a small part of the world so that local forces, such as the outbreak of Ebola, extreme weather patterns or political instability, can have a global impact on prices.

Particularly in West Africa, where over 70% of the cocoa comes from, the pressure to keep production costs low has led to the widespread use of child labour and even to child slavery described in the excerpts below from [Child Labor and Slavery in the Chocolate Industry](#).

The children of Western Africa are surrounded by intense poverty, and most begin working at a young age to help support their families. Some children end up on the cocoa farms because they need work and traffickers tell them that the job pays well. Other children are "sold" to traffickers or farm owners by their own relatives, who are unaware of the dangerous work environment and the lack of any provisions for an education. ... Once they have been taken to the cocoa farms, the children may not see their families for years, if ever.

Most of the children laboring on cocoa farms are between the ages of 12 and 16, but reporters have found children as young as 5. In addition, 40% of these children are girls, and some stay for a few months, while others end up working on the cocoa farms through adulthood.

A child's workday typically begins at six in the morning and ends in the evening. Some of the children use chainsaws to clear the forests. Other children climb the cocoa trees to cut bean pods using a machete. ... Once they cut the bean pods from the trees, the children pack the pods into sacks that weigh more than 100 pounds when full and drag them through the forest. Aly Diabate, a former cocoa slave, said, "Some of the bags were taller than me. It took two people to put the bag on my head. And when you didn't hurry, you were beaten." ...

In addition to the hazards of using machetes, children are also exposed to agricultural chemicals ... without wearing protective clothing. ... The farm owners using child labor usually provide the children

with the cheapest food available, such as corn paste and bananas. In some cases, the children sleep on wooden planks in small windowless buildings with no access to clean water or sanitary bathrooms. ... Without an education, the children of the cocoa farms have little hope of ever breaking the cycle of poverty.

To date, relatively little progress has been made to reduce or eliminate child labor and slavery in the cocoa industry of Western Africa. ... Approximately 1.8 million children in the Ivory Coast and Ghana may be exposed to the worst forms of child labor on cocoa farms.

Recently, investigators have discovered children trafficked into Western African cocoa farms and coerced to work without pay. ... Cases often involve acts of physical violence, such as being whipped for working slowly or trying to escape. Reporters have also documented cases where children and adults were locked in at night to prevent them from escaping. ... Drissa, a recently freed slave who had never even tasted chocolate, ... [w]hen asked what he would tell people who eat chocolate made from slave labor, he replied ... "When people eat chocolate, they are eating my flesh."

Instructional strategies

1. Invite students to read and reflect on the [Cocoa-nomics handout](#). Suggest each student write a question they would like to ask and then have the students discuss the questions as a class or in small groups. Or use questions such as:
 - a. Why is there such a huge demand for cocoa (chocolate) today?
 - b. Who benefits the most from the way the cocoa industry currently operates? Who pays the highest price?
 - c. How do Canadians benefit? What would happen if the market was more "fair"? What does fairness mean in this context?
 - d. What difference would it make if West African children working on cocoa farms went to school instead of working long days on the farms?
2. Watch and discuss a [short video](#) (5:56, English subtitles) featuring Côte d'Ivoire cocoa farmers tasting chocolate for the first time.
3. Invite students to explore cocoa's relationship to nationalism in either Ghana or Côte d'Ivoire and write a short paper on the topic. Suggest they consider the country's political and economic relationship with the plant as well as cocoa's role in popular thought.
4. The *motto* of Ghana is "freedom and justice" and the third part of the national shield shows a cocoa tree to represent the agricultural wealth of the country. Discuss how cocoa may contribute to freedom and justice and in what ways the association may be ironic. Compare this with our situation in Canada with the motto "from sea to sea" and the maple leaf on our shield and flag.



Drug literacy

Big ideas

- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other

Competencies

- Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and well-being of individuals, communities and societies
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

For a complete look at the drug literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-pp-drug-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story

Social Studies 10

Big ideas

- The development of political institutions is influenced by economic, social, ideological, and geographic factors
- Historical and contemporary injustices challenge the narrative and identity of Canada as an inclusive, multicultural society

Competencies

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to: ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their significance at particular times and places, and from group to group (significance)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups during this period (continuity and change)
- Assess how prevailing conditions and the actions of individuals or groups influence events, decisions, or developments (cause and consequence)
- Explain and infer different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events by considering prevailing norms, values, worldviews, and beliefs (perspective)
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond (ethical judgment)

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