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Conflict chocolate: Your role in Cote d'Ivoire's war

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Cote d'Ivoire gained its independence in 1960 and thereafter enjoyed three decades of stability under President Felix Houphouët-Boigny.(2) The country's relative political success was linked to its position as a leading cocoa exporter, which offered the country reasonable economic stability in West Africa.(3) When President Houphouët-Boigny died in 1993, it became clear that he had constructed a political system in which he was indispensable and the procedure for selecting his successor had intentionally been rendered confusing.(4) What followed was a chaotic succession battle, a series of coup attempts, a civil war (2002- 2003) and the division of Cote d'Ivoire into the Government-controlled South and rebel-controlled North.(5) Human rights abuses by both the Government and the rebel forces have been substantial, including incidents of torture, rape,(6) extrajudicial killing and politically motivated disappearances.(7) Elections have been set to take place in 2010, but it remains unclear whether these will actually occur: the country has a history of postponing elections and Cote d'Ivoire's leadership have indicated unwillingness to participate in democratic processes.(8)

The continued political instability and associated human rights abuses in Cote d'Ivoire are directly funded by the cocoa industry.(9) This brief explores the cocoa trade's connection to the conflict and argues that consumers should pressure chocolate producers to reveal their cocoa sources.

Historical roots

Cote d'Ivoire is the largest cocoa exporter in the world.(10) The cocoa industry was developed under French colonialism, but the country has already started growing cocoa before it was colonised in 1893.(11) The real strength of the industry developed due to the migrant worker system, which came into existence directly after the country gained independence and increased in scale over time. By the 1980s, over 40% of cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire were migrants from other countries.(12) Immigrants traditionally enjoyed similar political rights to citizens of Cote d'Ivoire, including the right to vote.(13) These rights quickly dissolved when the succession battle ensued and many of the upcoming politicians ran their campaigns according to identity politics, particularly around the rhetoric of *Ivoirité*.(14) In 1995, President Bédié (15) altered the Constitution to exclude his opponent, Alassane Outtara, a Muslim from the Northern regions of Cote d'Ivoire, and by doing so he set in motion the current crisis. In September 2002, the MPC (Mouvement Patriotique de Côte d'Ivoire)(16) attempted a coup in order to restore rights to Northern Cote D'Ivoirians. Although the coup was unsuccessful in the capital, the MPC gained control of the North and were quickly joined by other rebel groups, forming the FN (*Forces Nouvelles*). Northern Cote D'Ivoire remains under the control of the FN.(17)

Cocoa, contemporary conflict and chocolate consumers

During 2008 and 2009, Cote d'Ivoire accounted for 34% of cocoa available on the international market (see Figure 1).(18) This represents 65% of Cote d'Ivoire's agricultural exports (see Figure 2) and 35% of Cote d'Ivoire's overall export income.(19) Although most cocoa farming is undertaken by small-scale farmers using traditional methods,(20) a substantial portion of the profits from cocoa trading end up in the coffers of the Government and the FN through institutional levies (Government) and taxes (Government and FN).(21) The chocolate dollars accumulated by the Government and FN are then used to fund the country's conflict. A report released by Global Witness in 2007 estimated that the Cote d'Ivoirian Government had used US\$ 38.5m of their cocoa revenue to fund the conflict and that the FN had accumulated US\$ 30m through cocoa taxes.(22) Not only does cocoa revenue fund the conflict, it also constitutes a disincentive for the Government

and the FN to cooperate. Under present structures and the associated culture of impunity, both groups are able to accrue large sums of money from the cocoa trade and it is unlikely that such accumulation would persist in a unified democratic state.(23)

Figure 1: International Cocoa Production 2008/2009 (24)

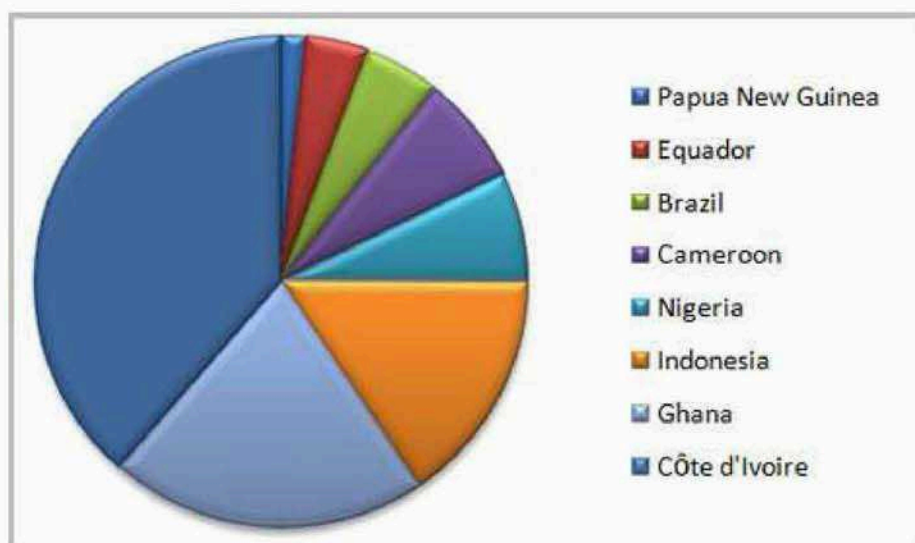
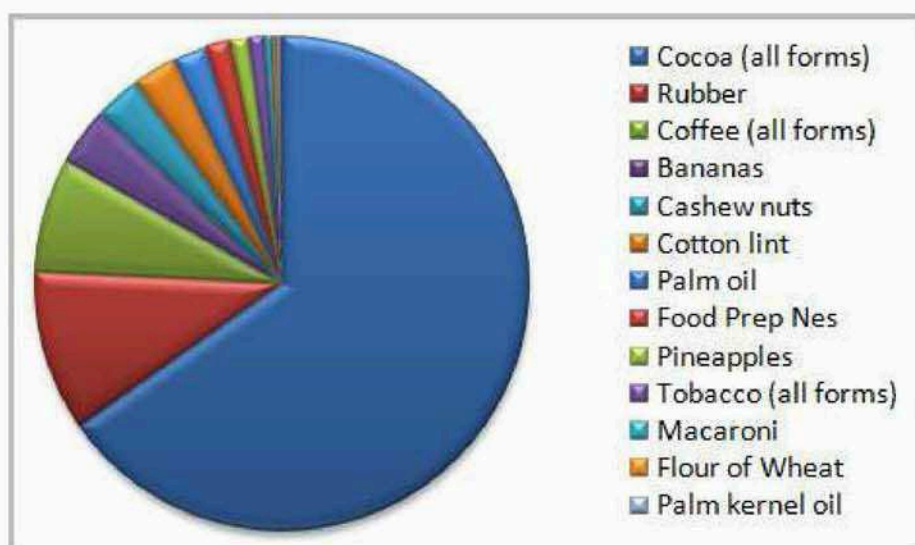


Figure 2: Cote d'Ivoire's Agricultural Exports (2007)(25)



This situation is problematic for the ethical consumer, who does not want the money from their chocolate purchases to support continued instability in Cote d'Ivoire and human rights abuses against its citizens. By purchasing chocolate that contains cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire, consumers are financially supporting the divided leadership and associated human rights abuses. Due to the fact that most cocoa products are made from blends and because so much of the cocoa on the international market is from Cote d'Ivoire, it is extremely difficult to avoid purchasing cocoa from the country. This is especially the case because so many transnational corporations, such as Unilever, purchase their cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire.(26)

What should the ethical consumer do?

It should be noted that some trade related action has already been taken against Cote d'Ivoire. The

United Nations (UN) renewed the arms embargo and the diamond trade ban against the country in 2009,(27) but so far nothing has been done about the issue of 'conflict chocolate.' It seems unlikely that international organisations or individual external states can be relied on to implement cocoa trade bans against Cote d'Ivoire, and so far cocoa has been an absent issue in all of the peace negotiations in Cote d'Ivoire.(28) It is therefore recommended that chocolate consumers follow the example of early Fair Trade activists and pressure chocolate companies to state where their cocoa comes from and to ensure that that cocoa used in the production of their chocolate is 'conflict-free.' Consumers should put pressure on chocolate companies to declare the sources of cocoa used in their products and to declare that their chocolate is 'conflict free.'

NOTES:

- (1) Contact Katherine Furman through Consultancy Africa Intelligence's Eyes on Africa Unit (eyesonafrica@consultancyafrica.com).
- (2) Human Rights Watch. 2008. *The Best School: Student violence, impunity, and the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire*. <http://www.hrw.org>, p. 15.
- (3) *Ibid.*; FAO.2002. *Côte d'Ivoire: Country Report*. <http://www.fao.org>.
- (4) Collier, P. 2009. *Wars, guns and votes: Democracy in dangerous places*. London: Bodley Head, p. 157.
- (5) Human Rights Watch, 2007. *My Heart is Cut: Sexual violence by rebels and pro-Government forces in Côte d'Ivoire*. <http://www.hrw.org>, p. 16.
- (6) The 2007 Human Rights Watch report cited above documents 180 incidents of politically linked rape.
- (7) Human Rights Watch. 2008. *The Best School: Student violence, impunity, and the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire*. <http://www.hrw.org>, p. 18.
- (8) In February 2010 President Laurent Gbagbo dissolved the Independent Electoral Commission, which resulted in violence breaking out in Cote d'Ivoire's Western regions; IRIN. 2010. *More peacekeepers needed, say analysts*. <http://www.irinnews.org>
- (9) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 3.
- (10) UNEP, 2009. *From Conflict to Peacebuilding: The role of natural resources and the environment*. <http://www.unep.org>, p. 14.
- (11) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 17.
- (12) Collier, P. 2009. *Wars, guns and votes: Democracy in dangerous places*. London: Bodley Head, p. 157.
- (13) Woods, D. 2003. "The tragedy of the cocoa pod: Rent-seeking, land and ethnic conflict in Ivory Coast." in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 41 (4), p. 648.
- (14) Collier, P. 2009. *Wars, guns and votes: Democracy in dangerous places*. London: Bodley Head, p. 158; Human Rights Watch. 2008. *The Best School: Student violence, impunity, and the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire*. <http://www.hrw.org>, p. 16.
- (15) The first successor to President Houphouët-Boigny.
- (16) MPCJ is a rebel group whose membership was predominantly composed of Muslims from Northern Cote d'Ivoire.
- (17) Human Rights Watch. 2008. *The Best School: Student violence, impunity, and the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire*. <http://www.hrw.org>, p. 18-19.
- (18) ICCO, 2010. <http://www.icco.org>
- (19) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>; FOASTAT, 2007, <http://www.icco.org>.
- (20) FAO.2002. *Côte d'Ivoire: Country Report*. <http://www.fao.org>.
- (21) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 22-23.
- (22) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 3-4.

- (23) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 59.
- (24) Generated using data from the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO), available at <http://www.icco.org>.
- (25) Generated using data from FAOSTAT available at: <http://www.icco.org>
- (26) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 19.
- (27) United Nations Security Council. 2009. <http://www.un.org>.
- (28) Global Witness. 2007. *Hot Chocolate: How cocoa fuelled the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire*. <http://www.globalwitness.org>, p. 19.

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