

Child labour on a cocoa plantation

Report from a 16-year old boy from Mali:

We slept on the floor of a hut out of mud and straw. We were only allowed to leave the hut to work in the fields. The working hours were very hard, from dusk till dawn, and sometimes, when there was a full moon, even until 10 p.m. We were promised wages, but they said that we had to pay back the cost of travel first.

I toiled there for two years without ever getting any money. Children who refused to work were beaten with the motor belt of the tractor or burned with cigarette stubs. We got very little to eat: two bananas for lunch, which we ate without interrupting our work, and a corn meal soup for dinner. Some children broke down from exhaustion. Those who got ill were taken away. We have never seen them again.

We had to harvest the cocoa fruits with machetes, but not everybody knew how to handle them, so there were often serious injuries. There was no doctor for us. We had to look after ourselves.

What happened to the harvested cocoa? I have no idea. I didn't realize they make chocolate out of it. I have never eaten chocolate in my life."

(From a TV report: "Schmutzige Schokolade" (= dirty chocolate), channel: NDR, Germany)