

Where are Structures & Systems? Bitter Chocolate

Amadou and Aminata Diallo live in a village near Segou, in a West African country. They work as laborers on a cotton farm since they do not own any land of their own. When the rains are good and cotton prices high, there is plenty of work for them. Lately, however, a glut of cotton on the international market (due to increased US subsidies to American farmers) has caused low prices.

The national government recently abolished primary school fees, but even the cost of uniforms and shoes is beyond the family's reach for all their children. The Diallos decided to pull their eldest daughter out of school, because at any rate, she will be married soon. The eldest son, Moussa, completed primary school but could not find employment. To make money, he sold phone cards on the streets of a nearby large city, but then disappeared. Unbeknownst to his parents, he was lured to Cote d'Ivoire with the promise of work with good pay. Once there, he was sold to cocoa farmers in need of cheap labor and is working day and night under inhumane conditions to harvest cocoa beans.

Cocoa farmers in Cote d'Ivoire sell beans to a government parastatal. Farmers often wait months to be paid and have to pay bribes to intermediaries. The parastatal sells the beans through an international commodity market where they are purchased by multi-national companies and processed into chocolate products, bought by consumers around the world who enjoy sweet chocolate.

In 2002, conflict broke out between the north and the south in Cote d'Ivoire. Many foreigners from Sahelian countries who had worked on cocoa farms or migrated to the cities to work in the informal sector were forced to flee when they became targets of mob violence. Corrupt politicians exploited the fears of being overwhelmed by foreigners, many of whom happened to be Muslim.

* Adapted from TED Case Studies #664. Chocolate and Slavery: Child Labor in Cote d'Ivoire. Samlanchith Chantavong, 2002.

<http://www.american.edu/ted/chocolate-slave.htm>

Discussion Questions

1. What Structures & Systems affect the Diallo family?
2. Where are these Structures & Systems located?
3. What are the linkages between the Structures & Systems at the different levels?
4. How have these Structures & Systems affected the Diallos' Assets and livelihood Strategies and Outcomes?
5. In order for a development project to have a sustainable, positive impact in the Diallos' lives, where would changes in Structures & Systems need to take place?