



Is the BBC Fair to Fair Trade?

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A recent program on the BBC revealed the continued use of child labor and trafficking in West Africa's cocoa industry.

Since 2001, major chocolate companies like Hershey, Mars and Nestlé have said that they would eliminate trafficking, forced labor and abusive child labor from their cocoa supply chains and yet, we know that thousands of children are still working under these conditions to produce the primary ingredient in these companies' chocolate. Yet, somehow the BBC failed to expose any of these companies in their investigation. Instead they focused on the few actors that have been transparent about the challenges of ending child labor: the Fair Trade Certified cooperatives.

For years, the world's major chocolate brands have hid behind "studies" and "monitoring" that claim that NO forced or trafficked labor is occurring in West Africa. As we have learned over the years, if the monitoring does not reveal problems then it is not working. BBC reporters should have realized that companies claiming a clean bill of health were probably the worst exploiters. Ironically, the fact that Fair Trade cooperatives and certifiers identified abuses is a signal that they are making a serious effort to monitor and address labor conditions among cocoa farmers.

No certification program can offer a 100% guarantee that these labor rights abuses do not occur in certified facilities. A critical component of a strong certification program is that a reliable system is in place to identify violations when they occur and that there is an appropriate process to remediate violations. *(For more information, please see ILRF's "Roadmap for Ethical Product Certification and Standard Setting Initiatives: <http://www.laborrights.org/creating-a-sweatfree-world/resources/10807>)*

Kuapa Kokoo and Kavokiva, Fair Trade Certified cocoa cooperatives in Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire respectively, have taken the elimination of child labor and other labor rights abuses seriously for many years. Both cooperatives have internal policies and practices related to child labor in addition to those required under Fairtrade Labelling Organization standards. These cooperatives have been leaders in their sector in instituting supply chain transparency and empowering smallholder farmers. In order for these cooperatives to better ensure that all workers are protected from abuses and that farmers improve their livelihoods, they would benefit from additional international support for their efforts, and for their honesty in revealing their failings.

All certification programs in the cocoa sector have room for improvement in eliminating the worst forms of child labor, but it is important to give credit to programs that are working to identify these abuses and developing solutions to remove children from hazardous conditions and help farmers to comply with labor rights protections and improve their livelihoods.