



Agriculture

Related Commodity Reports

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- Coffee
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- Livestock
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Summary of Key Documented Trafficking in Persons Risks

- ✓ Structural Supply Chain Features Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability
- ✓ Undesirable and Hazardous Work
- ✓ Vulnerable Workforce
- ✓ Presence of Labor Intermediaries
- ✓ Associated Contextual Factors Contributing to TIP Vulnerability

Agricultural Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa Overview

According to the World Bank, “agriculture accounts for 30 to 40 percent of Africa’s total gross domestic product (GDP), and almost 60 percent of its total export earnings.”¹ Value is dominated by crop production.² While total agricultural value in the region has grown by over 120 percent since 1990,³ the sector overall is considered to be underperforming in terms of economic growth. In addition to contribution to GDP and



livelihoods, agriculture is critical to food security and the livelihoods of more than 70 million people in Africa.⁴ An estimated 80 percent of farms in sub-Saharan Africa are smallholder.⁵

International investment in agriculture and agribusiness in Africa has grown rapidly,⁶ but agriculture still only accounts for about 5 percent of foreign direct investment,⁷ and the sector is widely viewed as a potential driver of future economic growth. By 2030, the sector could be worth nearly USD 1 trillion according to World Bank estimates.⁸

Currently, the sector is constrained by low productivity when compared to Latin American farms. High value add processing tends to happen post-export, limiting the net economic gain.⁹ The majority of agricultural production is for subsistence or local markets, but there are a number of high-value export crops including cotton, cocoa, coffee, tea, tobacco, vanilla, sugar, palm oil, and some kinds of fruits and vegetables.

Trafficking in Persons Risk in the Agriculture Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa

Structural Supply Chain Features Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability

There are many permutations of agricultural supply chains. Most of Africa's agricultural commodity supply chains require significant processing, requiring longer supply chains with more middlemen. Materials from many different suppliers are likely to be combined at the processing level. Actors involved in the supply chain from agricultural raw material to food or beverage product include farmers, brokers, manufacturers, agents, distributors and repackers.¹⁰ The involvement of each type of actor can further obscure an ingredient's origins, leaving the end-user with little visibility into working conditions.

The crop cycle timeline inherent to agricultural work – particularly in the African context where most farms are rainfed instead of irrigated – can increase the vulnerability of workers. Many crops require a sharp increase in labor intensity at harvest time, and some farms may utilize migrant workers to fill this need. Farmers who hire migrant workers, whether international or domestic migrants, may not have the resources to pay workers until their crops are sold at harvest. This delayed payment limits workers' ability to leave the worksite or job if the working conditions deteriorate.



Undesirable and Hazardous Work

According to the ILO, agriculture is one of the most hazardous sectors in the world, accounting for approximately half of all fatal accidents. The ILO notes that rates of accidents have stayed relatively steady in agriculture, even as they have fallen in other fields. Further, because of the casual nature of much of the agricultural sector, actual rates are likely to be much higher due to a lack of monitoring and the fact that many accidents go unreported.¹¹ Although specific risks vary depending on the crop or sector, general risks include physically demanding work, exposure to extreme weather, carrying heavy loads, repetitive motions, use of dangerous tools and equipment, exposure to pesticides and agrochemicals, animal attacks, and working at heights. Because of the hazardous nature of some of the work in the agricultural sector, child labor in the sector sometimes falls under the worst forms of child labor.

Heatstroke is a leading cause of farmworker death. Farmworkers are at great risk for heatstroke and other heat-related illnesses because of the amount of time they spend in the direct sun, particularly during warmer months. Heavy clothing required for some jobs can exacerbate the problem. Further, many workers do not have access to potable water and are not afforded breaks or shade.¹²

Some risks are crop-specific, such as green tobacco sickness (GTS) in tobacco harvesting. GTS is a result of nicotine absorbed through the skin and can cause nausea, vomiting, headaches, muscle weakness, and dizziness.¹³

Agricultural worksites are often geographically remote, leading to the isolation of workers, limiting their ability to leave the worksite or even to communicate with the outside world.

Vulnerable Workforce

The importance of agriculture as a contributor to GDP and livelihoods, particularly given the dominance of crop production, makes many African economies – and farmers themselves – vulnerable to price volatility tied to fluctuations in global agricultural commodity prices, variable weather patterns, disease, and overall productivity levels. This volatility can cause farmers to operate on extremely slim, or even negative profit margins.¹⁴ Some farmers may face increasing debt as they take out loans – possibly with disadvantageous terms – to finance their operations.¹⁵ These livelihood insecurities for farmers can drive a reliance on unpaid or underpaid labor. These workers might include child and family labor, migrant workers, or casual hired workers, all of whom



have characteristics making them vulnerable to potential exploitation. The use of vulnerable workers was identified as a trafficking risk factor in all agricultural commodities researched. Vulnerable labor was identified in every commodity profiled, and child labor specifically was nearly as common.

Most children working in agriculture are unpaid family members working on family farms, although some also work alongside their parents in waged agricultural jobs or independently. There is a relatively low age of entry for child labor in agriculture, with some children starting as young as five- to seven-years-old. “Push” factors for child labor in agriculture include poverty, limited access to education, and “traditional attitudes towards children’s participation in agricultural activities.”¹⁶ Children may be more likely to work on farms during peak labor periods, such as planting and harvesting.¹⁷ When harvests overlap with the school year, children are likely to leave school at least temporarily. Children of migrant farmworkers, who are likely to work on farms themselves, may also be more likely to abandon their education early. Particularly when migrant families move following crop cycles, children do not have an opportunity to stay enrolled in school.¹⁸ Farm labor may be culturally viewed as a positive social and economic opportunity for children.¹⁹

Much of agricultural production has gendered dynamics. Although women are deeply involved in agricultural production in Africa – with women totaling half of the agricultural labor force in some countries²⁰ – most women lack access to credit, inputs, markets, training, and tools, and most women’s labor is unpaid.²¹ In the case of family labor, even when a woman is responsible for most of the planning and labor, she may be required to cede control of the profits to her husband. As hired wage labor on larger farms, women may work towards their husbands’ quotas or piece-rates, never receiving their own pay. Further, women in agriculture often face high levels of sexual abuse and harassment.

Agriculture accounts for approximately 59 percent of employment in Sub-Saharan Africa.²² There are two primary groups of farm workers: subsistence farmers and their families who work on their own land, and waged workers. Agricultural employment arrangements include “permanent agricultural workers; temporary agricultural workers; seasonal/casual agricultural workers; migrant agricultural workers; piece rate workers; or workers receiving some kind of in-kind payment.” Small-scale farmers may also work seasonally or part-time as waged agricultural workers to supplement their incomes from subsistence agriculture.²³ Agricultural workers generally earn low wages and earn less than workers in industrial settings. The wide variety of employment arrangements and the high levels of informal agreements lead to low levels of organization and unionization. Further, agricultural workers are often excluded from legal protections, including on wages, hours, and working conditions.



There is a high degree of migrant labor in agriculture. In economically developed countries, the migrant worker population tends to be composed of transnational migrants from poorer countries.²⁴ For example, the majority of migrant workers in the United States are from Latin American countries, and migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture in European countries.²⁵ In developing economy countries with higher rates of subsistence agriculture, there are lower rates of transnational migrants, but there are large numbers of internal migrants in the agricultural sector. Migrants may settle near a particular farm, “shuttle” between their home and worksite, or follow crop harvesting cycles from farm to farm.²⁶ In some cases, migrant workers may work in subsistence agriculture on their own land during part of the year, and migrate to larger farms or plantations during labor intensive harvesting seasons.

Migration of entire families in the agricultural sector can also increase the risk of worst forms of child labor. Child labor often occurs when children accompany their parents to plantations to supplement family income.²⁷ Migrant children may accompany their parents to the fields because they lack access to education. In West Africa, juveniles who migrate both independently and through brokers are engaged in trafficking in the cocoa and cotton sectors. In some cases, these children migrate within well-established family or community “kinship” systems. Although the migration may be voluntary initially, juveniles may be exploited upon arrival, including in forced labor.

Presence of Labor Intermediaries

Where labor intermediaries exist in the African agricultural sector, they tend to be highly informal, in contrast to the registered entities that more commonly recruit transnational migrant workers for manufacturing jobs in Asia. Workers may find jobs through third parties other than their employers, but these third parties may be individuals already within the potential workers’ social or familial networks. For example, a study of child workers in the cocoa sector found that of children recruited by an intermediary, 94 percent in Côte d’Ivoire knew the recruiting intermediary personally, as the intermediary often has connections to the child’s home village.²⁸

Associated Contextual Factors Contributing to TIP Vulnerability

The agriculture sector – including livestock – is bound with the status and availability of land. There is a perception that arable land is widely available in Africa, and to some



extent this is true. However, the vast majority of arable land is concentrated in fewer than ten African countries. Further, much of the land perceived as unused or “available” may in fact be already owned or otherwise occupied.²⁹ Land that has historically been used for agricultural cultivation has degraded due to unsustainable continuous planting strategies that leave soils depleted. In reality, alongside “large swaths of apparently unutilized land” there are “acute localized land pressures being experienced by many rural Africans.”³⁰ In actuality, the trends in smallholder agriculture in Africa are to even smaller farm plots and use of increasingly marginalized land.³¹ Analyses of land pressures for farmers in the region have concluded that “much of the region’s potentially available cropland is either economically unviable or effectively out of reach for the majority of smallholder farmer[s].”³²

This shortage of viable agricultural land coincides with a rush to acquire land by foreign companies.³³ Over 70 percent of large-scale land acquisitions are by companies based outside of Africa.³⁴ In many cases, these companies work with governments to make large-scale acquisitions of land traditionally been used by local people, in order to create large scale plantations. Marginalized farmers working increasingly small plots of land may be more vulnerable to land consolidation efforts on the part of governments and businesses. For example, in Mozambique, the government leased 25,000 acres of “unutilized land” to a Portuguese company for agricultural development; the land was actually used by thousands of families for subsistence agriculture, and adequate compensation was never provided.³⁵

Women are at particular risk of displacement as their legal right to their property may not be recognized by traditional ruling bodies negotiating with companies. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, these land deals “can lead to corruption, unsustainable land use (land degradation, soil mining etc.), water shortages and negatively affect food security in affected regions.”³⁶ The increased expansion of agricultural areas – both by large and small producers – is also linked to a potential increase in deforestation,³⁷ particularly because the majority of Africa’s remaining agriculturally-viable land is currently forested.³⁸ Cocoa in particular has been linked to deforestation risk in West Africa.³⁹

These combined forces of land pressure can create a displaced workforce without other livelihood options – a population vulnerable to trafficking into agriculture or other sectors.



Examples of Company Actions Related to Trafficking in Persons in the Agriculture Sector

Individual Company Actions

Companies acquiring land from national governments for agricultural usage often include promises of infrastructure development, jobs, and national investment. There is often a lack of transparency and accountability however, and these commitments may go unfulfilled or may be implemented in a way that does not distribute benefits equally across the population.⁴⁰

Individual companies may also make efforts to remediate labor abuses within their own agricultural supply chains. For example, Philip Morris International (PMI) engaged Verité, a labor rights NGO, in a strategic partnership to improve conditions for tobacco workers and to eliminate child labor in its global supply chain.⁴¹ Some companies, including British American Tobacco and Philip Morris International, have stated that they are moving increasingly towards direct contracting arrangements with farmers, in part because it will give them better leverage to control labor abuses in their supply chains.⁴² Where the dispersed nature of smallholder agricultural supply chains makes contracting with individual farmers difficult, companies in other sectors may move toward increased sourcing via cooperatives or other producer organizations. For example, Nestlé's Nescafé Plan for responsible coffee sourcing draws from a network of 14 cooperatives in Kenya. Farmers in those cooperatives are assessed against Nestlé's internal standards and receive a premium for their beans.⁴³

Similarly, in the cocoa sector, in addition to the joint actions described below, individual companies including Mars, Nestlé, and Mondelez have created programming meant to decrease worker vulnerability.⁴⁴ Some companies have also begun working towards stopping deforestation associated with the cocoa sector. For example, in 2015, Mondelez announced that it was working with the government of Côte d'Ivoire in CDI and the United Nations Development Program in Ghana to combat deforestation via mapping, farmer training efforts and support for tree-planting initiatives.⁴⁵

Individual companies with agricultural supply chains can also participate in joint company actions, Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives, or voluntary certification programs as described below.



Joint Company Actions

World Cocoa Foundation – CocoaAction

The World Cocoa Foundation, a cocoa industry group, convenes CocoaAction, a voluntary multi-brand strategy for coordinating sustainability – including child labor focused – efforts in cocoa supply chains. Cocoa Action includes programming specifically targeted at child labor, including the implementation of child labor monitoring and remediation systems (CLMRS) in their supply chains and promotion of child labor awareness and protection capacity within local communities.⁴⁶ In 2017, some WCF member companies also released a statement of intent around mitigating deforestation linked to cocoa.⁴⁷

Ethical Tea Partnership

The Ethical Tea Partnership (ETP) was founded in 1997 as a not-for-profit membership organization with more than 40 [international members](#) from large brands, retailers, as well as many small independent labels. It is open to any company involved in the sourcing, trading, packing, and retailing of tea.

ETP works with producers and smallholder farmers to improve the sustainability of the tea sector, the lives and livelihoods of tea workers and farmers, and the environment in which tea is produced. The ETP works with members by checking that suppliers - plantations and smallholders - meet social and environmental standards.⁴⁸ For this, the ETP supports independent monitoring, audits, certification, and provides expert training in key areas: health and safety, good human resource management, fair and equal opportunities, and good environmental management practices. Monitoring is free of charge to producers. Continuous improvement is expected. If a supplier/producer does not take steps to improve it is suspended and no ETP members will buy from it.⁴⁹ ETP focuses on four key areas: raising standards, tea workers, smallholder tea farmers, and climate and environment.⁵⁰

ETP also runs the Malawi 2020 Tea Revitalization Program together with the Tea Association of Malawi, Oxfam, IDH (the Sustainable Trade Initiative), and German Development Agency, to create a competitive Malawian tea industry where workers earn a living wage and smallholders are thriving. Malawi Tea 2020 includes a commitment to significant improvement in wages and benefits for workers, a living wage by 2020, and an improved wage-setting process with greater worker representation.⁵¹ The 2020 Roadmap is monitored and reported on with particular attention to wages by



an independent wages committee.⁵² The ETP has an explicit focus on workers, although trafficking is not an explicit focus.⁵³

Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives

Better Cotton Initiative

The Better Cotton Initiative is an MSI addressing environmental and social issues in cotton production globally. The BCI has 718 members, the majority of which are brands, suppliers and manufacturers, but membership also includes producer organizations and civil society.

The Better Cotton Standard System consists of a set of production principles and criteria,⁵⁴ a capacity building program for farmers in collaboration with International Resources for Fairer Trade (IRFT), regular assessment of small, medium, and large farms against eight key indicators,⁵⁵ supply chain of custody,⁵⁶ and continuous monitoring of member performance. There are six principles which cover safe work and minimizing harmful crop protection practices, efficient water use, soil health, conservation of natural habitats, quality fiber, and decent work.⁵⁷ There are two standards specific to trafficking risk: the Forced Labour standard and the Employment conditions standard.⁵⁸ Full traceability is not a component of the BCI system given the complexity of the supply chain. Fair pay and premiums are also not emphasized. As BCI notes, “instead of premiums, Better Cotton focuses on lowering costs to the farmer through reduced inputs of pesticides and inappropriate use of synthetic fertilizers, and improved yields through better agricultural practices.”⁵⁹

In August 2013, BCI launched the Better Cotton Tracer (BCT). The volume of Better Cotton sourced by a Retailer/Brand is tracked and verified by BCI using an online platform. It is used by thousands of suppliers globally throughout the entire value chain and is audited by BCI to ensure accurate claims about procurement. The volumes are important as contributions to BCI are related.

BCI partners with national/regional cotton producers’ organizations, governmental bodies, and similar initiatives. In Africa, Aid by Trade Foundation is a strategic partner of BCI working in 12 African countries on the Cotton Made in Africa Initiative.⁶⁰ CMIA supported about 700,000 farmers in Africa in 2015 to grow cotton that meets CMIA standards.⁶¹ CMIA then partners with apparel/textile companies and retailers/brands to purchase cotton. These company partners pay license fees.⁶² The sustainability standards have environmental, economic, and social components.⁶³ CMIA’s primary



strategy for combatting child labor is via supporting livelihoods of smallholder cotton farmers.⁶⁴ CMIA lists child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking as exclusion criteria for participation, but it is unclear how these would be verified.⁶⁵

Bonsucro

Bonsucro is a multi-stakeholder group which seeks to improve social and environmental standards in sugar production. The required standards for membership include prohibition of forced and child labor. Bonsucro certifies mills, rather than farms, although as part of certification, supplying farms are required to meet sustainability standards.⁶⁶ Although Bonsucro (formerly known as the Better Sugar Initiative) is perhaps the most recognized MSI in the sugar sector, it has a very limited presence in Africa; members include three sugar companies in Sudan, Uganda, and Mauritius; two sugar producers in South Africa and Mauritius; and a civil society organization from Malawi.⁶⁷

International Cocoa Initiative (ICI)

The International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) is an industry-funded multi-stakeholder initiative that focuses on the elimination of child labor in cocoa in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Under this goal, the ICI works to mobilize community child labor protection committees and provides awareness raising around child labor and child-protection issues, as well as working to improve access to education and other social services in cocoa growing communities.⁶⁸

Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco (ECLT)

The Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT) is a multi-brand funded non-profit organization that works to withdraw children from child labor in the tobacco sector, provide educational opportunities, raise awareness about child labor, and provide livelihood opportunities for tobacco growing communities. In addition to programs in other regions, in sub-Saharan Africa, ECLT runs programs in Mozambique, Malawi, Uganda, and Zambia.⁶⁹

Voluntary Certification and Fair Trade Programs

Product certification is a consumer-facing tool that provides economic, social, and environmental standards for producers and producer groups. The major sustainability standards with a labor component in African agricultural production are Fair Trade and



Rainforest Alliance (UTZ and Rainforest Alliance announced their merger in 2017, and the newly combined entity is known as Rainforest Alliance). In addition to the social and environmental standards, Rainforest Alliance focuses on increasing producer productivity and product quality. Fair Trade focuses on increasing profit shares earned by producers and co-ops by having Fair Trade buyers pay premiums to cooperatives and pay farmers a minimum price, which exceeds the market price.

Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance both offer certification for vanilla from Africa.⁷⁰ In Uganda, for example, a farmers' association comprised of separate cooperatives helps smallholder vanilla farmers find markets for their Fair Trade vanilla, the majority of which is also certified organic. In addition to using the Fair Trade premium to support education and other development goals, members have pursued a pilot beekeeping program to assist with pollination and decrease manual labor needs.⁷¹

Certified cocoa makes up a significant percentage of the African cocoa market; most of the world's largest cocoa companies have made commitments to source entirely certified cocoa in the near future. Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana both produce Fair Trade Certified cocoa: Côte d'Ivoire sold approximately 12,500 tons of Fair Trade cocoa in 2011 and Ghana sold 21,800 tons.⁷² Côte d'Ivoire produced 246,246 tons of Rainforest Alliance Certified Cocoa in 2011, Ghana produced 66,563 tons, and Nigeria produced 7,892 tons. Côte d'Ivoire produced 288,483 tons of cocoa certified by UTZ, Ghana produced 85,936, Nigeria produced 18,039, and Cameroon produced 2,799.⁷³

In the coffee sector, Fair Trade has not developed at the rate it has in Latin American producing countries, but there are active Fair Trade coffee segments in countries including Uganda and Tanzania.⁷⁴ The premium offered by Fair Trade can be particularly helpful for farmer livelihoods in the coffee sector because prices are likely to be otherwise highly volatile due to coffee's sensitivities to disease and weather changes.⁷⁵

External Resources for Business Good Practice

- OECD; UN FAO. *Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains*. <http://mneguidelines.oecd.org/oecd-fao-guidance.pdf>
- UNEP Finance Initiative. *Human Rights Issues by Sector: Agriculture and Fishing*. <http://www.unepfi.org/humanrightstoolkit/agriculture.php>
- International Finance Corporation. *Sustainable Agribusiness in Africa*. <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/ac16238043fe9e938f7ebf869243d457/Sustainable+Agribusiness+in+Africa.pdf?MOD=AJPERES>



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