



# Cotton

## Summary of Key Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cotton Production

- ✓ Structural Supply Chain Features Contributing to Trafficking in Persons Vulnerability
  - Long, Complex, and/or Non-Transparent Supply Chains
  - Seasonal Surges in Labor Demand
- ✓ Undesirable and Hazardous Work
- ✓ Vulnerable Workforce
  - Child Labor
  - Migrant Labor
  - Casual Labor
  - Gendered Dynamics of Production
- ✓ Presence of Labor Intermediaries

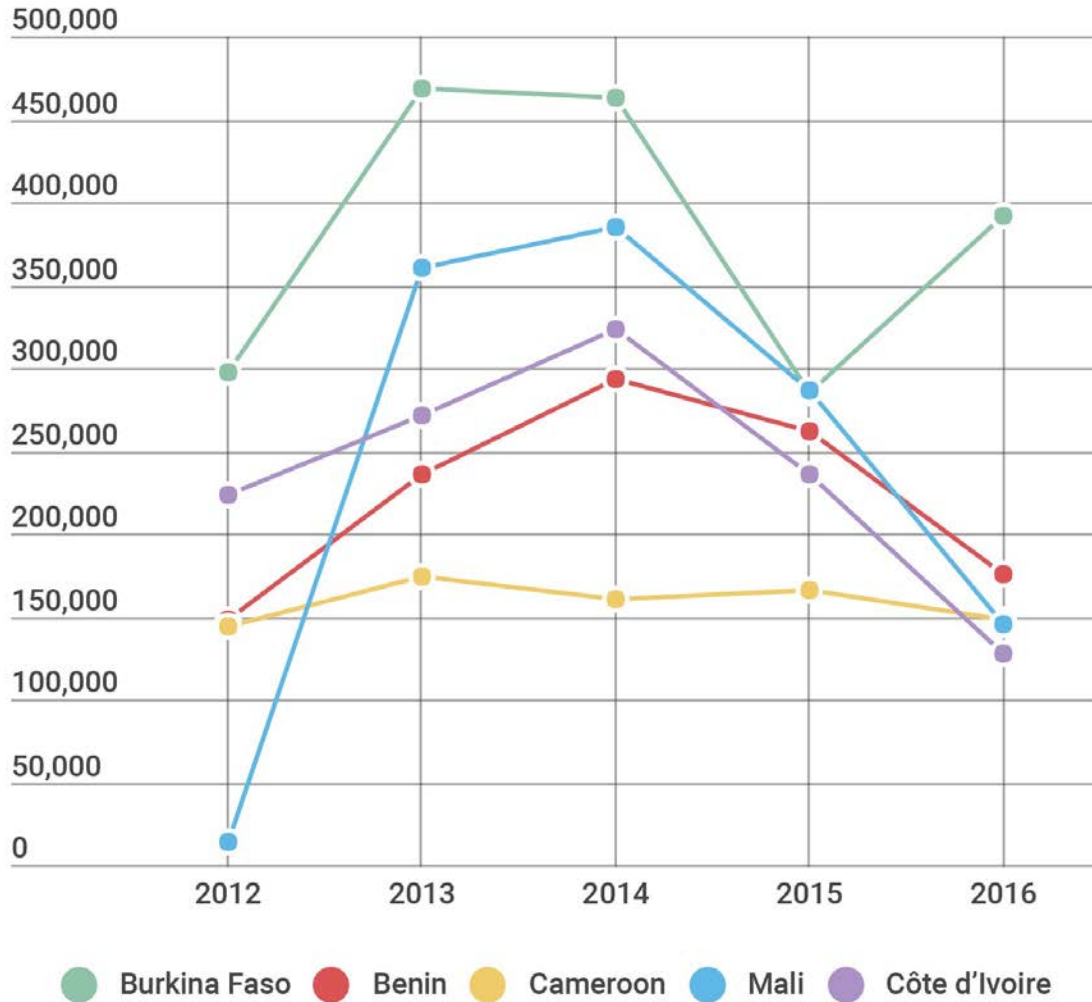
## Overview of Cotton Production in sub-Saharan Africa

### Trade

The top exporters of cotton (neither carded nor combed) from sub-Saharan Africa in 2016 were Burkina Faso, Benin, Cameroon, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>1</sup>



## Top Exporters of Cotton (Value USD/Thousands)



Although no individual country represents a significant percentage of global exports, as a region, West African exporters are the second largest regional exporting group of cotton.<sup>2</sup>

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the top producers of cotton lint for 2014 (the last year for which data was available) were Burkina Faso, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Benin.<sup>3</sup>



The top importers of cotton from Africa were India, Switzerland, Singapore, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.<sup>4</sup> Although Turkey was not in the top five importers, its imports have grown rapidly in recent years.

## Features of Production and Supply Chain

In sub-Saharan Africa, cotton is grown almost exclusively in a small-holder context, although it is more typically grown on larger commercial plantations in other parts of the world. The typical size of cotton farms in West Africa is under three hectares.<sup>5</sup> Employment in cotton is significant for top-producing countries; in Benin, some estimates put employment in the cotton sector at nearly 30 percent of total employment. Cotton is estimated to provide seven percent of total employment in Burkina Faso and 17 percent of employment in Mali.<sup>6</sup> Cotton is often alternated with subsistence agricultural crops. Irrigation systems used on plantations elsewhere are not available in the sub-Saharan African context, so cotton growth in the region relies on rainfall. Sub-Saharan African cotton is harvested by hand, which is time and labor intensive, but efficient in terms of reducing waste.<sup>7</sup> African cotton farmers may use manual or ox-drawn implements, but little other technological intervention or inputs. It is estimated that cotton farming in West Africa requires about 150 person/work days per hectare.<sup>8</sup>

After harvesting, raw cotton is transported to gins – generally located relatively near farms in West Africa – where it is processed into lint. Secondary processing, or turning the lint into yarn, thread and fabrics, tends to be done outside African producing countries. Cotton yarn is then woven into textiles, which are made into garments and home goods. This production also predominantly happens outside of Africa, although the potential for integrated supply chains (where cotton is grown and consumer products are manufactured within the same country or region) in Africa has been noted as a potential advantage of the developing African apparel/textile manufacturing sector.

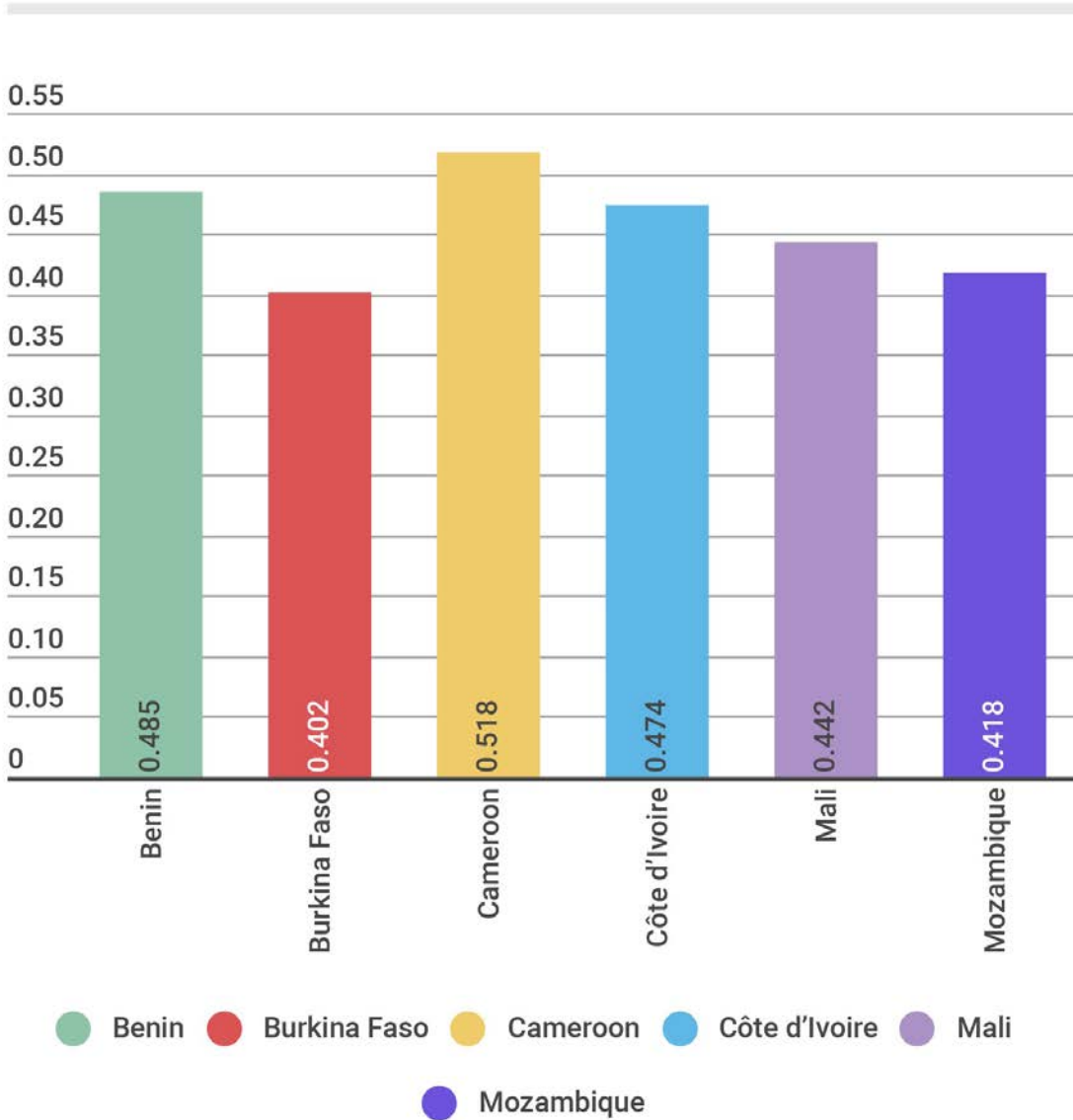
Because production stages happen across different countries and continents, it can be difficult to determine where the cotton fibers in consumer items come from. There is a lack of direct communication between ginning mills and textile and spinning mills, as well as ginning mills and farms, as most mills purchase from agents. It is therefore extremely difficult to trace cotton from farming to manufacturing.<sup>9</sup> For example, fibers from Egypt, Mali, Tajikistan, and the United States may all be combined into one garment at a textile mill in Indonesia.

In the years after West African countries achieved independence, cotton production was been controlled by parastatal institutions that acted as buyers and ginners and provided inputs to growers, until the International Monetary Fund and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs imposed a process of privatization and other sector reforms.<sup>10</sup> The actual pace of reform has been slow, with the state retaining partial ownership of cotton gins in Burkina Faso and Mali.<sup>11</sup>

Cotton is a dominant cash crop for many West and Central African countries – it contributes over 60 percent of crop revenue in Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Chad – so price shocks can have significant impacts. Cotton prices have been volatile and trending downward, putting pressure on farmers.<sup>12</sup>



## United Nations Human Development Index Score in Cotton Exporting Countries



13

Cotton prices in Africa are further depressed in part because of U.S. cotton subsidies; some estimates note that withdrawal of these subsidies could raise cotton prices in Africa by as much as 26 percent.<sup>14</sup> Further, because so much of the value addition happens further down the supply chain, the farm gate price for cotton represents only a small percentage of the price a consumer pays for a finished cotton product. Some analysis has noted that when farm gate cotton prices have fallen in countries such as Burkina Faso, youth migration into more hazardous sectors, such as mining, has increased.<sup>15</sup>

## Key Documented Trafficking in Persons Risk Factors in Cotton Production

According to the U.S. Department of State's 2017 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, cotton is produced with forced labor or forced child labor in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo.<sup>16</sup>

The U.S. Department of Labor's 2016 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* notes forced labor in Benin and Burkina Faso.<sup>17</sup>

## Undesirable and Hazardous Work

Cotton work can be hazardous, particularly for children (see below). Workers can face exhaustion and heat stroke. Workers can also be exposed to harsh chemicals as cotton uses more insecticide than any other crop, making up 16 percent of global use. Exposure to these chemicals can cause tremors, nausea, weakness, blurred vision, extreme dizziness, headaches, depression, and even paralysis or death. In ginning, children work without protective equipment, inhaling contaminated air, which leads to respiratory problems.<sup>18</sup>

## Vulnerable Workforce

### Child Labor

The U.S. Department of Labor's 2016 *List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor* notes child labor in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Zambia.<sup>19</sup>

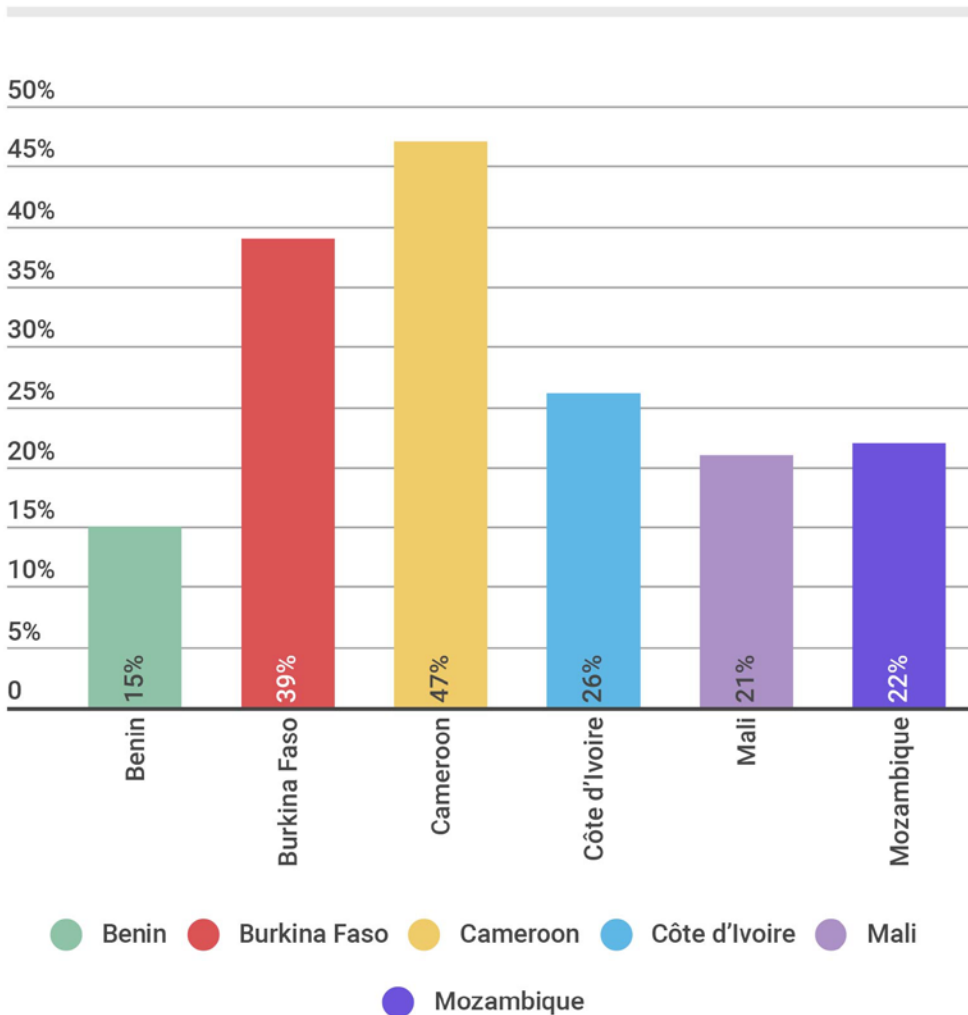
Child labor is typically not prevalent in countries with mechanized cotton production, but, due to the smallholder nature of cotton farming in Africa in countries such as Zambia, Benin, Burkina Faso, and Mali, children often work on their family's plot. Some children may be involved in worst forms of child labor if they are exposed to dangerous conditions including long hours, heat, and pesticides, and forego their education. Benin, for example, reportedly has low rates of school attendance in cotton growing



regions.<sup>20</sup> In other cases, children perform age-appropriate light tasks and continue to participate in schooling, which does not necessarily constitute a worst form of child labor. Some children also migrate to work (see below).

## Percent of Children Engaged in Child Labor in Cotton

### Exporting Countries



## Gendered Dynamics of Production

Women are responsible for an estimated 70 percent of subsistence food crops, which can hinder participation in some cash crops including cotton.<sup>22</sup> In several African countries, cotton shifted from a “female” crop to a male-dominated crop when it became a cash export crops. Women contribute household labor at high rates but often do not have access to household cash income earned from cotton production.<sup>23</sup> Cotton picking by hand is generally considered a female task because of the need for small fingers. In some countries, including Burkina Faso, women hire themselves as casual labor for cotton harvesting.<sup>24</sup>

## Casual Labor

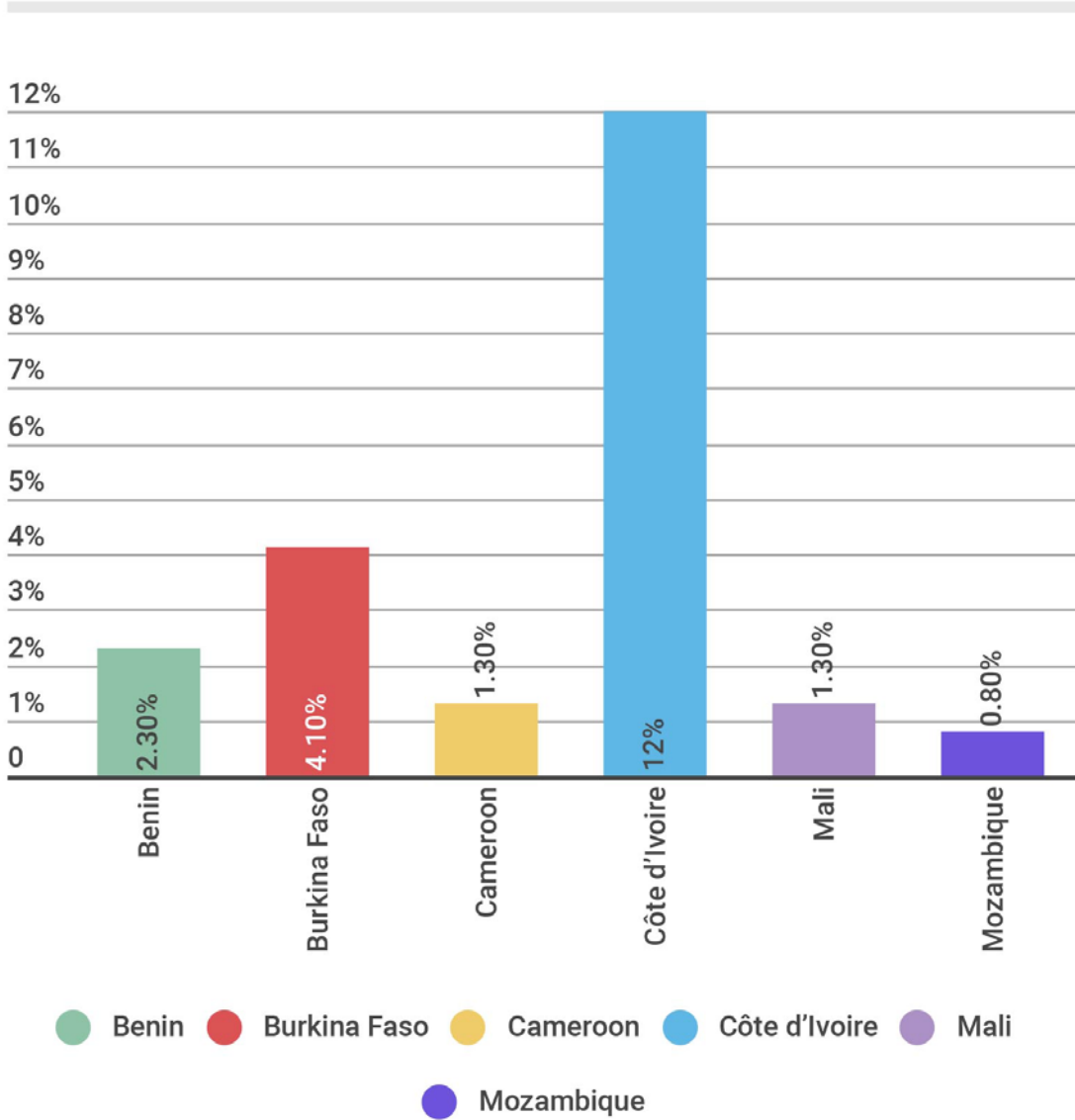
While the majority of labor on smallholder cotton farms in West Africa appears to be family or other kinship labor, other forms of casual labor, including hired labor or labor exchanges may be used, particularly during peak harvest seasons.<sup>25</sup> A study in Burkina Faso found that cotton production used about 20 percent more hired labor per hectare than other smallholder crops.<sup>26</sup>

## Migrant Labor

Child migration in West African countries, such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Benin, is relatively common. Boys aged 10 and older migrate from their rural homes to work on farms in other regions of the country, most often traveling to cotton-producing regions to assist in the cotton harvest. In some cases, these children migrate within well-established family or community “kinship” systems.



## Percentage of Migrant Population in Cotton Exporting Countries



27

Research has primarily focused on migration of boys for work in cotton in West Africa, but anecdotal evidence shows that girls migrate as well.<sup>28</sup>





## Presence of Labor Intermediaries

The migration described above is not always voluntary and/or may have elements of coercion, particularly when labor recruiters are present. Labor recruiters have been noted particularly in Burkina Faso. A 2006 study found that recruiters visited villages in Burkina Faso promising boys cash or goods (such as bicycles or clothing) for following them to employment in cotton producing regions either domestically within Burkina Faso or internationally to Benin. Some of these recruiters were farmers looking for labor on their own (or neighbors') farms, but others were independent recruiters. Some children working for farmers may not be paid until the end of the harvest cycle, which may compel them to remain in their jobs, even if they are being mistreated or want to go home. Payment is sometimes deferred even longer, potentially beyond the first year, and wages are often much less than promised.<sup>29</sup> In some cases, workers are not paid at all.<sup>30</sup>

In 2012, Interpol rescued over 400 child trafficking victims from Burkina Faso, some of whom were reportedly working on cotton farms.<sup>31</sup>

The 2017 U.S. Department of State Trafficking in Persons report noted a pending investigation in Burkina Faso of unregistered marabouts transporting children from Burkina Faso to Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, "allegedly for forced labor in cotton fields."<sup>32</sup>



Gift of the United States Government

This report was funded by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.



## Endnotes

---

- <sup>1</sup> International Trade Centre. Trade Map. [www.trademap.org](http://www.trademap.org).
- <sup>2</sup> Abbott, Philip. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations. *Rebuilding West Africa's Food Potential: Policies and market incentives for smallholder-inclusive food value chains*. "Cocoa and cotton commodity chains in West Africa: Policy and institutional roles for smallholder market participation." 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3222e/i3222e00.htm>.
- <sup>3</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. FAOSTAT. May 17, 2017. <http://www.fao.org/faostat/en/#data/QC>.
- <sup>4</sup> International Trade Center. Trade Map. [www.trademap.org](http://www.trademap.org).  
This aggregated data includes exports from northern African countries.
- <sup>5</sup> Abbott, Philip. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations (FAO). *Rebuilding West Africa's Food Potential: Policies and market incentives for smallholder-inclusive food value chains*. "Cocoa and cotton commodity chains in West Africa: Policy and institutional roles for smallholder market participation." 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3222e/i3222e00.htm>.
- <sup>6</sup> Poonyth, D., A. Sarris, R. Sharma, and S. Shui. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations (FAO). *The Impact of Domestic and Trade Policies on the World Cotton Market: Commodity and Trade Policy Research Working Paper*. 2004. <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/static/media/files/paying-the-price.pdf>.
- <sup>7</sup> Cotton Made in Africa. *African Cotton*. <http://www.cottonmadeinafrica.org/en/about-us/african-cotton>.
- <sup>8</sup> Ergon Associates. Literature Review and Research Evaluation relating to Social Impacts of Global Cotton Production for ICAC Expert Panel on Social, Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton (SEEP). 2008. [https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature\\_review\\_july\\_2008.pdf](https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature_review_july_2008.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> Fair Labor Association. *Child Labor in Cotton Supply Chains: Action-based Collaborative Project to Address Human Rights Issues in Turkey*. June 2017. <http://www.fairlabor.org/report/child-labor-cotton-supply-chains-collaborative-project-human-rights-turkey>.
- <sup>10</sup> Abbott, Philip. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations (FAO). *Rebuilding West Africa's Food Potential: Policies and market incentives for smallholder-inclusive food value chains*. *Cocoa and cotton commodity chains in West Africa: Policy and institutional roles for smallholder market participation* 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3222e/i3222e00.htm>.
- <sup>11</sup> Abbott, Philip. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations (FAO). *Rebuilding West Africa's Food Potential: Policies and market incentives for smallholder-inclusive food value chains*. *Cocoa and cotton commodity chains in West Africa: Policy and institutional roles for smallholder market participation*. 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3222e/i3222e00.htm>.
- <sup>12</sup> Abbott, Philip. Food and Agriculture Administration of the United Nations (FAO). *Rebuilding West Africa's Food Potential: Policies and market incentives for smallholder-inclusive food value chains*. *Cocoa and cotton commodity chains in West Africa: Policy and institutional roles for smallholder market participation*. 2013. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/018/i3222e/i3222e00.htm>.
- <sup>13</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Human Development Index. 2016. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-index-hdi>.
- <sup>14</sup> Watkins, Kevin. Oxfam. *Cultivating Poverty: The Impact of US Cotton Subsidies on Africa*. 2002. <https://www.oxfam.org.nz/sites/default/files/reports/cottonFINAL.pdf>.
- <sup>15</sup> P. Howard, Neil. European University Institute. *Protecting 'Children' in Southern Benin? Anti-Trafficking Policy in Need of Politics and Participation*. March 30, 2015. <https://me.eui.eu/neil-philip-howard/blog/rightswork-re-post-2-protecting-children-in-southern-benin-anti-trafficking-policy-in-need-of-politics-and-participation/>.
- <sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of State. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. *Trafficking in Persons Report*. 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271339.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. *2016 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*. 2016. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/TVPRA\\_Report2016.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/TVPRA_Report2016.pdf).
- <sup>18</sup> World Vision. *Forced and Child Labour in the Cotton Industry*. March 2012. <http://campaign.worldvision.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Forced-and-child-labour-in-the-cotton-industry-fact-sheet.pdf>.
- <sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. *2016 List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*. 2016. [https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/TVPRA\\_Report2016.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ilab/reports/child-labor/findings/TVPRA_Report2016.pdf).
- <sup>20</sup> Afrol News. "Labour Standards violated in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali." June 30, 2015. <http://www.afrol.com/articles/13491>.



- 
- <sup>21</sup> United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF.) *Child Protection Data*. <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-labour/>
- <sup>22</sup> Schneider, Kate; Gugerty, Mary Kay. *Gender & Cash Cropping: Cotton in Sub-Saharan Africa*. January 18, 2010. [https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW\\_Request%2055\\_Cotton%20%26%20Gender\\_18%20January%202010.pdf](https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW_Request%2055_Cotton%20%26%20Gender_18%20January%202010.pdf).
- <sup>23</sup> Schneider, Kate; Gugerty, Mary Kay. *Gender & Cash Cropping: Cotton in Sub-Saharan Africa*. January 18, 2010. [https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW\\_Request%2055\\_Cotton%20%26%20Gender\\_18%20January%202010.pdf](https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW_Request%2055_Cotton%20%26%20Gender_18%20January%202010.pdf).
- <sup>24</sup> Schneider, Kate; Gugerty, Mary Kay. *Gender & Cash Cropping: Cotton in Sub-Saharan Africa*. January 18, 2010. [https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW\\_Request%2055\\_Cotton%20%26%20Gender\\_18%20January%202010.pdf](https://evans.uw.edu/sites/default/files/Evans%20UW_Request%2055_Cotton%20%26%20Gender_18%20January%202010.pdf).
- <sup>25</sup> Ergon Associates. Literature Review and Research Evaluation relating to Social Impacts of Global Cotton Production for ICAC Expert Panel on Social, Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton (SEEP). 2008. [https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature\\_review\\_july\\_2008.pdf](https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature_review_july_2008.pdf).
- <sup>26</sup> Minot, N. and Daniels, L. *Impact of Global Cotton Markets on Rural Poverty in Benin*. International Food Policy Research Institute. 2002; as cited in Ergon Associates. Literature Review and Research Evaluation relating to Social Impacts of Global Cotton Production for ICAC Expert Panel on Social, Environmental and Economic Performance of Cotton (SEEP). 2008. [https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature\\_review\\_july\\_2008.pdf](https://www.icac.org/seep/documents/reports/literature_review_july_2008.pdf).
- <sup>27</sup> United Nations. International migrant stock: Total. <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatestotal.shtml>.
- <sup>28</sup> Thorsen, Dorte. UNICEF. *Children Working in Commercial Agriculture: Evidence from West and Central Africa*. April 2012. [https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/english/Briefing\\_paper\\_No\\_2\\_-\\_children\\_working\\_in\\_commercial\\_agriculture.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/wcaro/english/Briefing_paper_No_2_-_children_working_in_commercial_agriculture.pdf).
- <sup>29</sup> de Lange, Albertine. *“Going to Komienga.” A Study of Child Labour Migration and Trafficking in Burkina Faso’s South-Eastern Cotton Sector*. Amsterdam: International Research on Working Children (IREWOC). August 2006. [http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lange\\_d\\_alb06gtkomienga\\_061106.pdf](http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lange_d_alb06gtkomienga_061106.pdf).
- <sup>30</sup> de Lange, Albertine. *Going to Komienga.” A Study of Child Labour Migration and Trafficking in Burkina Faso’s South-Eastern Cotton Sector*. Amsterdam: International Research on Working Children (IREWOC). August 2006. [http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lange\\_d\\_alb06gtkomienga\\_061106.pdf](http://www.childtrafficking.com/Docs/lange_d_alb06gtkomienga_061106.pdf).
- <sup>31</sup> Interpol. “Nearly 400 victims of child trafficking rescued across Burkina Faso in INTERPOL-led operation.” November 22, 2012. <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2012/PR096>.
- <sup>32</sup> U.S. Department of State. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. *Trafficking in Persons Report*. 2017. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271339.pdf>.

