

Hazardous child labour in Côte d'Ivoire's cocoa communities during COVID-19

Rapid analysis of data collected during partial lockdown, July 2020

**This analysis was first published on 1 July 2020 and revised on 17 July to improve clarity. The results remain unchanged.*

Summary

To assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on child labour, the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI) analysed data from 263 communities in Côte d'Ivoire. In these communities, 1,443 cocoa-growing households were visited under ICI's Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS)¹ between 17 March and 15 May 2020 to identify cases of child labour. ICI's findings show that the percentage of children identified in child labour was higher during this two month period, at 19.4%, compared to 16% in the same months in the same communities in previous years. This corresponds to a 21.5% increase in child labour identification.

Statistical tests support the hypothesis that the increase in child labour identification during 17 March to 15 May 2020 is related to the shock of COVID-19 and not due to a general trend. Further research will be needed to better understand the mechanisms at work.

This analysis compares the situation in 263 cocoa communities prior to, and during the partial lockdown, to understand the effects of this shock on child labour. This study was not designed to analyse – and should not be used to draw conclusions about – broader trends in relation to child labour prevalence.

This document presents details of the methodology used to capture the situation at this unique point in time, the results of the analysis, and their implications for stakeholders within the cocoa sector.

The findings highlight the need to mobilise further international support to reinforce efforts currently being made by the government, industry and civil society partners to tackle child labour and improve children's access to fundamental rights, such as quality education. There is a growing body of evidence that such efforts are having a positive impact on children's lives: net primary school enrolment increased from 67% in 2013 to 90% in 2018;² community development programmes have been effective in reducing child labour by 20-30%;³ and Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation Systems have been found to reduce hazardous child labour by around 50% amongst children identified.⁴

¹ A CLMRS is a structure embedded in the supply chain of chocolate and cocoa companies, which aims to identify, prevent and remediate cases of child labour. The system is based on the presence of facilitators within cocoa-growing communities who raise awareness on child labour, identify cases, request prevention and remediation support for children, and monitor their progress over time.

² UNESCO Institute for Statistics (available via [World Bank](#))

³ ICI (2020) Annual Report

⁴ Nestlé (2019) Tackling Child Labour

During partial lockdown, the percentage of children identified in child labour by ICI's systems increased from 16% to 19.4%, corresponding to a 21.5% increase.

Context

On 16 March 2020, in response to the first reported cases of COVID-19 in the country, the government of Côte d'Ivoire, like many governments around the world, introduced a set of measures to prevent the spread of the virus. They included closure of all pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, prohibition of gatherings of more than 50 people, partial closure of international borders and quarantine of new arrivals. A week later, curfews and restrictions on movement came into effect, regulating transport within and between towns and cities and prohibiting unauthorized travel between Abidjan and the interior of the country.⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic and related measures, in combination with the international economic downturn and collapsing commodity prices, have already had tangible consequences on all sectors of the country's economy and on various aspects of social wellbeing. The more vulnerable members of Ivorian society are likely to be negatively affected, including cocoa growing households and their children.

Unicef and ILO, among other organisations, have warned that one possible consequence of the global COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken in response could be an increase in child labour in many countries.⁶ To test this hypothesis, we analyse data collected during the partial lockdown to examine whether changes in child labour have been observed in cocoa communities.

Evidence on the root causes of child labour and from past pandemics suggests that there could be several possible drivers. First, as schools had to be closed, parents might have taken their children with them to the farm, where they could be supervised and might have been called on to help with the work. Previous analysis has shown that child labour prevalence is higher in communities where schools are not present,⁷ and higher during school holidays compared to term

time.⁸ Second, restrictions on movement within the country and across borders may have limited the availability of adult labour, increasing pressure on families to call on their children to make up the shortfall. Third, with the overall economic downturn, cocoa farmers may be experiencing increased pressure on their household budgets, including through decreases in income from various sources (although cocoa prices remained stable) or through surges in prices for essential goods. In an ICI telephone survey of certified cocoa producers in Côte d'Ivoire, over half of respondents reported a drop in household income, due to a combination of decreased earnings and increased pressure on household budgets, since schools closed in March.⁹ Literature on income shocks shows that when household incomes decrease, child labour tends to increase.¹⁰ Finally, some programmes run by the government, civil society and industry to support vulnerable cocoa-growing households and promote child protection were necessarily disrupted during the partial lockdown, reducing access to these services.

This briefing uses data collected during the partial lockdown to examine how child labour in cocoa-growing households in Côte d'Ivoire has been affected by COVID-19 and measures taken to contain the virus at this point in time.

Data on child labour identification

The restrictions on movement have posed challenges for the generation of empirical evidence about how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected child labour in rural communities. However, ICI's Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System (CLMRS) provides a valuable source of data to fill this gap.

The set-up of ICI's CLMRS means that data is being collected continuously throughout the year by agents living in cocoa-growing communities who are tasked to identify and assist children at-risk. These agents visit

⁵ Gouvernement de la Côte d'Ivoire, [Message à la nation de SEM le président de la république](#), 23 March 2020

⁶ Unicef & ILO (2020) [COVID-19 and Child Labour: A time of crisis a time to act](#)

⁷ ICI (2019) [Education quality and child labour: Evidence from cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana](#).

⁸ ICI (2020) [How will the COVID-19 crisis affect children in cocoa-growing communities?](#)

⁹ Based on data collected by telephone from 515 cocoa producers between 2-9 July 2020. This data is part of an ongoing survey by ICI to understand more about the impact of COVID-19 on cocoa farming households.

¹⁰ ICI (2020) [The effects of income changes on child labour: A review of evidence from smallholder agriculture](#)

Figure 1: Means comparison (t-test) of child labour identification rates among children visited prior to vs. during partial lockdown

	Observations (# of children)	Mean child labour identification rate	Standard error
Prior to partial lockdown: (Mar-Apr-May in years 2015-2019)	2171	16.0%	0.0079
During partial lockdown: (17 March-15 May 2020)	2910	19.4%	0.0073
Difference:		3.4%	0.0109

t = -3.1334; Degrees of freedom = 5080; H0: difference > 0; Pr(T > t) = 0.9991

cocoa-growing households in certified cooperatives to monitor child labour. Interview data is recorded using a mobile phone or tablet, allowing results to be synchronised with a central database as soon as connectivity allows. Therefore, even with travel restrictions in place, ICI continued to receive data on child labour from many communities, since agents continued visits, while respecting precautionary guidelines, and maintained data collection within their own communities.

The set-up of ICI's CLMRS means that data is collected continuously throughout the year. During partial lockdown, data collection could continue in communities where facilitators lived, while respecting precautionary measures.

During the partial lockdown, monitoring visits continued in 263 communities in Côte d'Ivoire, representing approximately 40% of all communities in which monitoring visits took place over the last 6 months. A total of 1,443 households from 40 different cooperatives were visited between 17 March and 15 May 2020 to identify cases of child labour. A total of 3,223 children were interviewed. It is important to note that this analysis is limited to the 263 communities in which data was available. The results are not representative of all cocoa-growing areas in Côte d'Ivoire and cannot be generalised to other areas.

To understand to what extent the situation in this sample of 263 cocoa-growing communities changed, we compare data collected during the partial lockdown (from 17 March to 15 May 2020) with historical data collected prior to lockdown, in the same communities, from February 2015 to March 2020.

We analysed results from visits to identify child labour. During these home visits, community facilitators assess whether any of the children aged 5-17 living in a household engage in hazardous child labour, through interviews with parents and children.

Method and Results

We analyse how child labour identification within the CLMRS evolved during the partial lockdown, by comparing results from home visits from 17 March to 15 May, with those from previous years.

For such a comparison to be meaningful, first we need to take into account that child labour identification rates vary across communities, between monitoring agents, and over time. For example, if we look at all data collected before 17 March, average child labour identification rates are lower in those communities where data collection continued after 17 March, compared to those communities where it stopped (21% against 24%). For this reason, we include in the analysis only children from the 263 communities where data collection continued.

Second, due to the seasonal nature of work on the cocoa farms, child labour identification rates fluctuate over the course of the year: analysis of CLMRS data over several years shows that rates of child labour

identification are lower on average in the months of March, April and May compared to the rest of the year (18% against 25%).

Using a simple means comparison of child labour identification rates, we see that the percentage of children identified in child labour increased from 16% to 19.4% when we compare the period of partial lockdown to the same months in previous years in the same communities. This represents a 21.5% increase in child labour identification and the difference is statistically significant.

To rule out that this difference is driven by a longer-term trend, we test a “placebo lockdown” effect, ie. a hypothetical lockdown period during the months Jan-March 2020, rather than the true lockdown period; this placebo lockdown period is not marked by higher child labour identification in comparison to the same season in previous years. This supports our interpretation that the increase in child labour identification during 17 March to 15 May 2020 is indeed related to the partial lockdown in response to COVID-19, and not a due to a general trend.

Statistical tests support that the increase in child labour identification during 17 March to 15 May 2020 is related to the partial lockdown, and not a due to a general trend.

To account for additional factors which may be driving these numbers, we use multiple regression analysis to separate out the effects of seasons, communities and monitoring agents.¹¹ Regression analysis also allows to account for potential differences in the composition of our samples before and after lockdown. The unusual circumstances of lockdown – notably school closures – may have implied that the set of farmers and children

¹¹ Specifically, we estimate a linear probability model on a sample of children interviewed, where the outcome variable is a binary indicator of whether the child is doing hazardous tasks on the cocoa farm; and the explanatory variables are whether the interview was held during the partial lockdown period; fixed effects for the month of the year of the interview, for the community where the child lives, and for the community facilitator holding the interview; the child's age and sex; and the household head's age and level of education.

available for interviews was different from the longer-term average in the data base. To avoid this, we include in the regression analysis controls for key household and child characteristics that are correlated with child labour risk, such as the child's age and sex, and the household head's age and level of education.

The regression analysis confirms that the share of children identified in hazardous child labour increased by approximately 3 percentage points on average, taking into account all the additional factors mentioned above.¹² In other words, we see this difference when comparing outcomes during lockdown with outcomes from the same month of a previous year, within each community and for the same community facilitator, for the same profile of child and household (see supplementary results tables here).

The exact magnitude of the effect varies depending on the data we include in the analysis. For example, when alternatively, we extend the control group to all communities rather than only the 263 communities where data collection continued, we find an increase in child labour identification of approximately 6 percentage points during the partial lockdown (results available upon request).

Conclusion

Data collected through ICI's Child Labour Monitoring and Remediation System during the partial lockdown in Côte d'Ivoire provides a valuable source of information to help us understand how child labour in some cocoa communities was affected during the partial lockdown period.

It is important to note that the increase in child labour may be partly due to other factors, which we cannot account for in this analysis. These may include the constantly evolving economic environment (cocoa price, labour markets, etc.), project cycles of the monitoring systems, and the evolving qualification and motivation of community facilitators, all of which drive child labour identification rates up and down over the course of time.

In the coming months it will be important to use longer time series data, including from after the lifting of the partial lockdown, as well as more refined econometric

¹² Full results are available here: [Supplementary Results: Hazardous child labour in cocoa communities in Côte d'Ivoire during COVID-19](#).

These findings underline the vulnerability of cocoa-growing households and show how quickly progress in addressing child labour can potentially be reversed.

tools, to better understand the mechanism behind this change.

Whatever the mix of reasons behind it, the recorded rise in hazardous child labour during COVID-19 is concerning.

By the time of writing in June 2020, schools in Côte d'Ivoire have already re-opened, some movement restrictions have been eased, and many interventions to improve child protection in cocoa-growing communities have resumed. These include activities by the government, industry and civil society to raise awareness, mobilise communities and support children's access to education.

While these changes may help to reverse the trend observed, the economic impacts of the pandemic are likely to continue to be felt.

The findings presented here suggest that stakeholders in the cocoa sector should:

- Intensify activities to prevent and address child labour in cocoa growing communities, either directly, where such activities can be resumed safely, without undue risk to communities, farming households, workers and staff; or remotely, through local community structures, where the risk of COVID-19 still requires operational restrictions to be maintained
- Closely monitor the situation of children in cocoa growing communities over the coming months, including their engagement in hazardous work and school participation
- Collect additional data to try to understand how cocoa growing households have been – and may continue to be – affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and use this to inform the design of appropriate response measures
- Based on priority needs and challenges identified, provide additional support to households and children that have been negatively affected, for

example helping out-of-school children to restart their studies; supporting household incomes where these have suffered; and assisting households to access adult labour, where this is unavailable or unaffordable.

The changes observed during COVID-19 underline the vulnerability of cocoa-growing households and show how quickly progress in addressing child labour can potentially be reversed by external shocks.

The findings highlight the need to mobilise further support to reinforce child protection efforts currently being made by the government, industry and civil society partners which have been shown to be effective in reducing child labour and improving children's access to fundamental rights.

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Further efforts are clearly needed to support the ability of cocoa households to cope with future shocks – be they related to income, labour supply, health or climate. Such efforts should include interventions which have been proven to boost resilience and reduce child labour. Systems to prevent, identify and remediate child labour should also be strengthened so that they remain active and can support farming households at times when they need it most.