

European Cocoa Association Conference

Amsterdam, September 24-25, 2010.

## **The Sahel and West Africa Club (OCDE), West African Development and Cocoa production.**

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### **1. Introduction**

The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) was created thirty five years ago, in the framework of the OCDE, in the wake of the great drought and famine which struck West Africa in the middle of the seventies.

The United States, Canada and several important donor countries of Western Europe created the SWAC in order to better coordinate their cooperation policies in the Sahel area. Initially, they focused on the policies needed to prevent and manage future food crises and droughts in the region, with a special emphasis on the development and promotion of regional approaches and policies in all the relevant dimensions of food security and agriculture. Later the area covered by the SWAC was enlarged to cover all the countries of Sub-Saharan West Africa and its scope was widened to other regional problems and strategies. As of January 2011, the ECOWAS, the UEMOA and the CILSS (Comité Inter-Etat de lute contre la sécheresse au Sahel) will join the SWAC as full members, transforming the Club into a fully fledged North-South and South-South organization.

Food security and the development of agriculture remain however a top priority in the core business of the SWAC.

Agriculture and food security have over the last three years made a spectacular come back on the top of the international development agenda, although it has always been an engine of growth, the major employer and income earner for the population in West Africa. But given the risks related to climate variability and possible climate change impacts, a lot remains to be done to provide the adequate environment for improving yields, increasing production and improving the remuneration and work conditions of laborers.

National policies anchored in global development strategies are still at the center of providing an appropriate policy framework. However given the large complementarities between production areas, the intense regional trade of

agricultural products and the fact that many large production basins are cross-border underlines the necessity of developing regional policies and increasing cooperation at the regional level. Contributing to this strategy is one of the main goals of the SWAC.

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## **2. The SWAC regional initiative to combat the worst forms of child labor on West African Cocoa farms**

West Africa amounts for more than 70 % of world cocoa production (Côte d'Ivoire 38%, Ghana 21%, Cameroon 5% and Nigeria 5%). Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana are the world's two largest producers, representing 80% of total West African production. Cocoa is also produced in Togo, Sierra Leone and Liberia albeit in much smaller quantities. Today the main production basins are located between Ghana-Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon-Nigeria, overlapping national borders. Cocoa is the region's main agricultural export, accounting for nearly half of total earnings. Ninety percent of West African cocoa is produced by small family holdings.

The issue of Child labor in West Africa is a complex and widespread phenomenon which should be viewed within the general context of economic development, poverty and demography. The analysis carried out within the cocoa sector confirm that child labor is not specific to that sector. Children are engaged in many agricultural activities, such as pineapple, banana and cotton farming as well as in fisheries, in industry and services. The socio-economic context that encourage the use and abuse of children are very similar across sectors. They range from social factors (poverty, low incomes, failures in educational systems, inadequate youth policies, prevailing customs and attitudes, legal aspects) to purely economic factors.

Not all child labor is of course illegal or condemnable. But it must be combated when it amounts to forms of slavery or prevents children to attend school or professional training programs.

Upon the request of the Belgian Government, the SWAC has taken an initiative to combat the worst forms of child labor on cocoa farms, considering the need for complementary action at the regional level to achieve efficiency.

Child labor in West Africa is a regional problem. Hence, a regional approach is essential to complement efforts undertaken at national level. The region will benefit from lessons learnt in countries which have made most progress in solving the problem.

Regional institutions, in particular ECOWAS (and ECCAS), UEMOA and CILSS, have a key role to play in developing, promoting and implementing initiatives addressing in particular the regional dimensions of combating the worst forms of child labor and child trafficking. A joint initiative, bringing together all stakeholders from the local level to the regional, will encourage co-ordination and collaboration. It will also allow for better integration of the existing regional and cross-border dimensions in designing and implementing programs.

To effectively co-ordinate and lead an initiative at regional level, regional institutional leadership is essential. ECOWAS' institutional mandate and policy objectives provide a framework for national governments and their partners to collaborate in jointly developing regional policies to combat the worst forms of child labor and child trafficking. In addition, its membership consisting of both labor exporting and importing countries is an important aspect in effective policy formulation.

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West African countries, as well as regional institutions have over the years developed and adopted a significant amount of laws and conventions to combat child labor and all other forms of exploitation. However the reality on the ground shows that often problems persist in terms of harmonization, implementation and enforcement.

### **3. Activities of the project coordinated by the SWAC**

The project coordinated by the SWAC currently aims at producing a "guidebook of best practices in combating the worst forms of child labor in West African cocoa growing communities". This work, carried out by the International Cocoa Initiative, aims to:

- Promote emerging good practices and lessons learnt from a wide range of initiatives;
- Facilitate progress in countries and sectors that are less advanced;
- Support capacity building at local, national and regional/international level, through learning of best practices and facilitating exchanges of experiences;
- Facilitate and promote dialogue between actors;
- Improve synergy of interventions and effectiveness of programs;
- Create an ongoing process for developing good practices through the creation of a platform for new ideas and concepts.

The SWAC also decided to involve the parliamentarians of the concerned West African countries in the combat against illegal child exploitation in cocoa

production. Parliamentarians should and can play a key role in protecting the most vulnerable members of their societies, drive forward the adoption of relevant laws and ensure and control their effective implementation by governments.

The SWAC asked the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) to develop the parliamentary dimension of the project. This collaboration between the SWAC and the IPU was made possible by a grant of the Belgian Ministry of Development Cooperation.

The SWAC-IPU project aims at encouraging and supporting parliamentarians, in West Africa and in the North, in their efforts to combat child trafficking and the worst forms of child labor. Through activities aimed at raising awareness, allowing parliamentarians to acquire capacities and in-depth knowledge of international legal instruments, existing conventions and national laws, the project aims to :

- Promote appropriate legal instruments;
- Strengthen cooperation at the national (in particular with the civil society), regional and international level;
- Improve monitoring of governments efforts in fighting human trafficking, protection and reinsertion of victims;
- Strengthen regional parliamentary cooperation leading to concerted actions in combating human trafficking and child exploitation;
- Harmonize national legislations in accordance with regional and international instruments.

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I would like to mention that this project's strength lies in its collaborative approach, bringing together a wide variety of stakeholders: private sector actors, NGO's, parliamentarians, governments, regional organizations, bi-lateral and international partners.

The cocoa industry, at the local and international level, has of course a major role to play in promoting and enhancing more ethical practices, as far as child labor is concerned, in all cocoa producing countries in West Africa and elsewhere in the world.

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