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“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Can private companies in the EU reduce child labour in west Africa cocoa through mandatory regulations?

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Abstract

A global investigation in the year 2000 shed light on the harsh realities of child labour in cocoa production in West Africa, particularly, Cote d'Ivoire. As a result, many private companies (incl. cocoa processing and chocolate manufacturing companies in the Global North) in the early 2000s, participated in voluntary regulations in the form of multi-stakeholder initiatives and corporate sustainability initiatives to improve child labour of their suppliers' activities globally, particularly, West Africa. Despite the efforts of private companies over the past two decades to address child labour in West Africa cocoa production through voluntary regulations, the issue of child labour continues to persist.

Recognising the impact limitations of these voluntary measures, new mandatory regulations in the form of corporate due diligence have emerged strongly, particularly, in the European Union (EU) member states in recent times to guide private companies in the EU to reduce child labour along their supply chain. Drawing from private company's sustainability reports, researchers' observations and experiences, we review the effectiveness of voluntary regulations in reducing child labour in West Africa cocoa supply chains through impact dimensions: output and outcome. We then use a similar structure to investigate the potential effectiveness of mandatory regulations, particularly, focusing on the controversial Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) of the EU for child labour reduction in West Africa cocoa.

We argue that the measures proposed in mandatory regulations, emphasising the new CSDDD are unlikely to help private companies in the EU to address child labour in West Africa cocoa due to existing implementation challenges related to voluntary regulations. For example, we find that mandatory regulations or CSDDD will systematically build on the diffusion paths of voluntary governance given the existence of the same production structure. We unpack these challenges and identify recommendations to increase the effectiveness of CSDDD in promoting more child labour reduction in West Africa cocoa if the rules start to apply fully in 2029.

Keywords: Child labour, cocoa, mandatory governance, outcome, output, voluntary governance