

## *The Bitter Side of Sweet*

by Tara Sullivan

**Chocolate is one of the most popular and widely consumed confectioneries in the world.** Chocolate is a product of the cacao bean, which grows primarily in the tropical climates of Western Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Western Africa countries, mostly Ghana and the Ivory Coast, supply more than 70% of the world's cocoa.

**Cocoa cultivation is highly dependent on intensive manual labor.** On average, cocoa farmers earn less than \$2 per day, an income below the poverty line. As a result, they often resort to the use of child labor to keep prices competitive.



The children of western Africa are surrounded by intense poverty, and **most begin working at a young age to support their families.** Some children end up on the cocoa farms because they need work and traffickers tell them that the job pays well. Other children are “sold” to traffickers or farm owners by their own relatives, who are unaware of the dangerous work environment and lack of any provisions for an education.

**Often, traffickers abduct young children from small villages in the countries, such as Burkina Faso and Mali, two of the poorest countries in the world.** Once they are taken to the cocoa farms, children may not see their families for years, if ever.



***The Bitter Side of Sweet*** is a young adult novel about the use of child labor and child trafficking in West Africa. **Written from the point of view of one of these victims of child labor**, this book will awaken the social conscience of young people to the dark side of a treat taken for granted in the United States, Canada and Europe.

**In the novel, Amadou and his eight year old brother Seydou, harvest cacao pods all day every day.** The more they harvest, the more they earn towards paying a debt to the camp leaders.

They have no idea how much money they owe the farmers and **have no idea that cacao seeds are used to make chocolate treats for people in richer countries.** When a new girl comes to camp, Khadija, Amadou remembers what it feels like to be free and yearns for the courage to fight as she does.

Despite the terrible experiences that these children go through, **the novel does end on a hopeful note.** The exciting conclusion demonstrates the risks some have taken to expose the truth about cacao and its harvest.

This is an unforgettable story of courage and compassion that sheds light on how the chocolate we eat is made.

**Consumers play an essential role in diminishing the food industry's injustices.** What you end up choosing to do about the chocolate you eat, is up to you. Despite their role in contributing to child labor, slavery, and human trafficking, the chocolate industry has not taken significant steps to remedy the problem. **Fair trade certifications can guarantee that the chocolate was made without the use of exploitive labor.** Just Fare Market carries fair trade chocolate.

