

Introduction

I'm Lison Gueguen, living in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.
I'm currently studying design.

I'm also a big chocolate consumer. On april 27th I discovered, through a chocolate packaging, that chocolate production was tarnished by huge ethical issues.

I decided to investigate to fully understand the consequences of my consumption. Then maybe, to find ways to act, with my consumer and designer tools, for more fairness and sustainability.

Here you will find this story.

The discovery

how could I miss ethical issues ?

traceable beans
Right now there is slavery in cocoa farms in West the unequally divided cocoa chain. Tony's Chocolonely

SHARE OUR CHOCOLATE, SI
Right now there is slavery in cocoa farms in West the unequally divided cocoa chain. Tony's Chocolonely

Wol just on chocolate, I all chocolate worldwide.

With incredibly tasty chocolate we lead by example and show the world that chocolate can be made differently in taste, packaging and the way we do business with cocoa farmers.

Alone we make slave-free chocolate but together we'll make all chocolate 100% slave free. So we ask you to join us.

TONY'S CHOCOLONELY

CRAZY ABOUT CHOCOLATE, SERIOUS ABOUT PEOPLE

strong farmers
We know it is the responsibility we work with and want to make them stronger. We facilitate the strengthening of the producers and independence in our cocoa origin. We have the financial resources offer strong results for farmers. For instance, they can negotiate a better price when buying products. However, sometimes, farmers who are not members of a...

27th April

While talking with friends about chocolate bar they start to speak about ethical issues and I was looking about my Tony's bar. Then I saw it: first, the open chain link, then the slogan «Crazy about chocolate, serious about people».

After few searches on internet I understand that the chocolate I'm eating for more than 6 month speak explicitly about slavery issues.

As I don't know Dutch, I don't really read packaging anymore. But do this excuse the fact that I didn't get the information that : **THEY'RE SPEAKING ABOUT SLAVERY?**

Images analysis

Disconnection from the field

30th April

I decided to go to Jumbo (= typical dutch supermarket) to check on another chocolate bars, what other essential information about production places I missed.

As I started with dark Tony's chocolate. I first check the others dark chocolate bar. Unfortunately I didn't find any words about production origin.

I thought I was too ambitious and that maybe I have to search for hector/visual more than specific location.

I find something a word about cocoa origin - which is the essential ingredient - but a lot European symbol especially through Mountains.

Action

Adress a list of concerns to UN

Problem 1 : Disconnexion product & ingredient
On packaging and people mind chocolate is too often associated to European countries such as Belgium and Switzerland and not enough to cocoa producer places which is the necessary ingredient.

Why it's a problem ?
While buying a chocolate bar we have in mind dealing with european realities we know but we forget that we are also dealing with outside-Europa production realities, wich sometimes are ethically problematic.

What we ask for ?
More transparency about ethical consequences of our consumption.

3rd May

The discoveries of last week was difficult to digest : Without knowing I was accpome to slavery.
I start to tell to my friends, my family in order that they know too, what they was part of. Then I try to understand, what can I do ? To share this essential information to the consumer, and maybe to help this system to change too.

My first thought was : I have to address this concerns to authorities : I have to tell them, that us too we disagree with this unfair system.
As we were making this project for 2021 UN food summit, in my Design School, I thought it was the perfect occasion to address them this list of concerns.
I wanted to do it in a very simple/direct way. See above.

Action

Share information to the consumer

4th May

With my decision of yesterday, I had the feeling that it wasn't enough. I wasn't sure that they will take my concerns seriously. Alone, I don't have a lot of weight.

My second concern was : there is still billions of chocolate consumer ignoring their role in slavery/illegal children work... I thought that maybe they will want to know too.

Therefore I start to design visual communication to share this essential informations.

Economical issue

Problem 1 : Power balance

In 2017, 3 companies bought 65% cocoa to 5 5M producers.
These three companies are registered in Switzerland, England and Singapore while producers are mainly situated in South America, South Asia and Middle Africa with Ghana and Ivory Coast.

Why it's a problem ?
As power between cocoa producers and cocoa transformers are totally unbalanced it's super hard for producers to argue for more work security/decency.

idea for later

Is peaceful poster enough or trash packaging as for cigarettes could make more sense ?

Interview

8th May

Sharing information is amazing. But I can't tell to people : This is bad. Stop eating chocolate. I think it will make more sense to share this troublesome issues while sharing alternatives, starting point for solutions.

I remembered a logo «Les Chocolatiers engages» («Engaged chocolate makers») which is a association of Chocolate maker & Camerounian producers for fairness and sustainability of chocolate production. I thought an interview with one of the founding member could be a good starting point for my searches of alternatives.

This is how I was fortunate enough to interview Christophe Bertrand, chocolate maker and founder member of «Les Chocolatiers engages» on may 14th, by phone. You can find below the transcript of this interview.

14th May

Premises

The project started 10 years ago. French government proposed a program to calculate your carbon print and he say : Why not ? Unfortunately after one month they decided to stop the project. It was too complex. Calculating the print carbon of chocolate production wasn't possible.

However, it was the occasion to tackle environmental and ethical issues, and from when, Christophe Bertrand buy only organic and fair trade cocoa. But only cocoa, he told me. For the sugar for instance, He is using local one which is not organic and fair trade. Finally he sum up : he is trying to make a compromise between what makes sense and marketing issues.

Starting point

Concerning the association, the adventure start when Aristide, a Cameroun producer contact him.

She was searching to go away from traditional production chain by contacting directly her future clients.

Suspicious, he accepts that she send him 200€ of cocoa. He insists : "We agreed for me to pay after receiving the cocoa. It costs her 700€ for transportation. It was a super huge risk for her".

He finally received the cocoa, and was happy about it. Then he traveled to Cameroon, to visit them. Seeing the hard reality, he decided to try to help them, saying with all humility "there is so much to do that, the more little we do could be useful".

Cooperative creation

The first thing he did was to help them to organize themselves in cooperatives. Indeed isolation make them very vulnerable.

Therefore the first benefit will be having more power in transaction. They will be able to have their own balance to control themselves too the amount of cocoa they're selling. Then

they will be more easily aware about the real cocoa rate.

He also enable the creation of cooperation not only for marketing but also for fermentation. Indeed Christophe Bertrand feel that fermentation make 70% of chocolate taste but it's rarely done in a correct way.

The last point very important is that they were able to organize their proper transportation ways.

Creating value

What I personally found super interesting is how, focusing on fermentation improve the value for all actors of the chain. Indeed it gives more taste to chocolate so more value to chocolate maker but it also give more value to producer. They can sell it for more, and increase their recognition in the global market.

Association creation

Christophe Bertrand is now in direct link with producers. As part of the "Confederation des chocolatiers et confiseurs de France" the french national organisation of chocolate makers, he decide to give the possibility to others chocolate maker to gain his new way of cocoa production. Thus, they create, "Les Chocolatiers engages".

Price setting

Cocoa rate is around 1€/kg. A Cameroun producer had generally around 3hectare and sell generally 1T by year which means he earn generally 1000€ by year. It's really super low for Cameroon.

In more the reality show that

producer (especially the more isolated) often sale it under this rate and are earn more around 800€ year.

Therefore to set the prices, Les Chocolatiers engages, meet with government authorities, producers cooperative and decide a price that enable producers to live decently and produce high quality cocoa.

Thus, in Cameroon they decided to buy 1kg cocoa for 2,50€.

Finally Les Chocolatiers engages start their collaboration with producers by giving them access to proofer tools such as shears which contribute to improve yield and work deceny.

Interesting point is that even if chocolate maker buy double usual price cocoa, it's still super interesting for them as there is very less intermediaries.

Social project

Les Chocolatiers engages want to stay working with small producers and small buyers. They refuse any collaboration with big cocoa farm and address their cocoa only to chocolate maker and now to glacier, pastry maker...

Chocolate makers and producers show their adhesion to the project through a logo – and not a label. They're independent, self-financing.

Starting in Cameroon they're now developing similar project in Colombia and Togo. The way of fixing price is the same, according to the need of producer.

In more than buying cocoa for a fair price they also assume a chocolate without children work and deforestation.

Furthermore they try to contribute to children education by imposing income saving to producer cooperatives.

Then their impose one woman at least by administration council, as they are the principal actors of cocoa production.

Finally they're currently starting another project to help woman to be owner of the production field. Christophe Bertrand precises "it's still very little. It will be only 1/3 hectare/ woman that means 250€ year, but at least they will be owner". But I heard that it's only a starting point.

*traduce from french

interview Christophe Bertrand by Lison Gueguen on 14/05/2021

transcription by Lison Gueguen