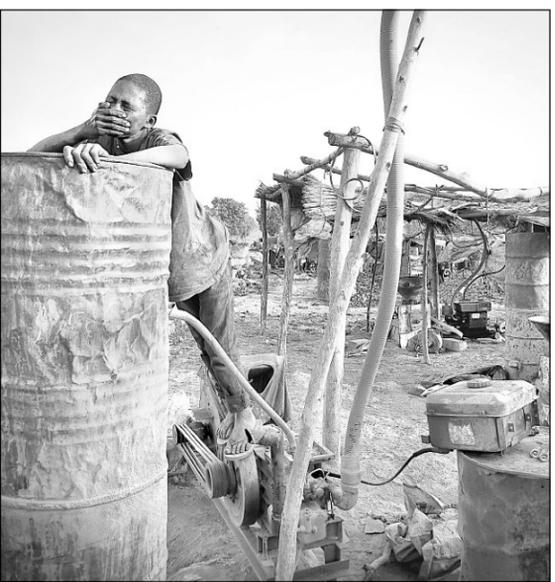




Gripping knotted ropes, Joseph, 15, and Germain, 12, work their way down a hand-dug, 150-foot-deep mine shaft near Kollo, a mining village near Tiébélé, Burkina Faso.



A child reacts to one of the makeshift, ore-crushing machines that frequently spew clouds of dust, which coats the children from their heads to their bare feet. Water is scarce, so the children use the bilge water from the machines to wash their faces and brush their teeth.



Children fetch water from the bottom of a 25-foot well. At the surface, they use the water to pan for gold. When not working, they sleep, oblivious to deafening noises around them.



The rock-grinding machines are ramshackle contraptions put together with pulleys, belts, and spinning motors with the power to rip and shred anything caught in their works.

Amidou Zuretnaba, 3, rests his head on the thigh of his father, a miner at the Fandjora mining area. Child labor is against the law in Burkina Faso, but enforcement is lacking.



**Burkina Faso**

Population: 17,812,961 (July 2013 est.)

Pop. below poverty line: 46.7% (2009 est.)

Labor force: 90% agriculture

SOURCE: CIA World Factbook

# The ills are many. Children who work are not in school.

**CHILD LABOR** from A1

The shaft ends in a cramped, pitch-dark pit. The bottom widens a bit to reveal a tiny, wedge-shaped crevice. In the darkness, sitting cross-legged with a flashlight strapped to his head, is a small boy. He chinks at the rock walls with a handmade pickaxe and scoops the shards into a large green bucket. His hands never stop moving — scooping and chipping, chipping and scooping. The older boys call him Théophile. They say he is 7 years old.

The United Nations' International Labor Organization estimates that as many as a million children between ages 5 and 17 work in the small-scale gold mines of Africa for as little as \$2 a day. In the African Sahel, a semiarid region that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea across parts of Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and Niger, 30 percent to 50 percent of small-scale mine workers are children, according to ILO estimates. Child labor is against the law in Burkina Faso, where last year the government announced a plan to significantly reduce the numbers of exploited children by 2015. But enforcement is lacking.

The U.S. Department of Labor also is funding a four-year, \$5 million project in Burkina Faso, one of the world's poorest nations, to reduce child labor in cotton farming and gold mining. The grant will be used to help raise awareness about child labor laws and build government capacity to monitor and enforce the laws, said Eric Biel, acting associate deputy undersecretary for the Bureau of International Labor Affairs.

The project aims to help 1,000 households and 10,000 children avoid “exploitative child labor” by offering schooling, financing, and alternative employment.

Child labor in the gold mines here is so prevalent — and so obvious — that the U.S. government prohibits its agencies and contractors from buying the gold directly from Burkina Faso. The prohibition, however, does not extend to private dealers.

Observers say porous borders, which facilitate black-market trades, and the very nature of the world gold supply chain make tracking gold mined in Burkina Faso almost impossible. Furthermore, federal purchases of gold from legitimate international sellers do not necessarily preclude some of the gold originating here.

The Canada-based Artisanal Gold Council, which is working to implement tracking systems and promote fair-trade policies, says there are no hard data to pinpoint whether gold mined by children in Burkina Faso reaches the United States or ends up in jewelry purchased by Americans. Anthony Persaud, a policy and field operations coordinator for the council, says it is “unlikely” but not out of the question.

Burkina Faso does not refine its gold and sell it through exporters to refiners in Dubai and Europe, he says. From there the gold enters the world supply chain.

“The thing about gold, you can fit \$50,000 of it in your pocket without anybody noticing,” says See **CHILD LABOR** on A19