

Photographs
by **Larry C. Price**

Barefoot and shirtless, Karim Sawadogo, 9, works with his uncle at a gold mine. He has been to school, but only for a while. "My dream," he says, "is to make enough money so I don't have to do this anymore."

Karim works without shoes, and with thickly callused feet. But he is young and new enough to the mines to be somewhat optimistic.



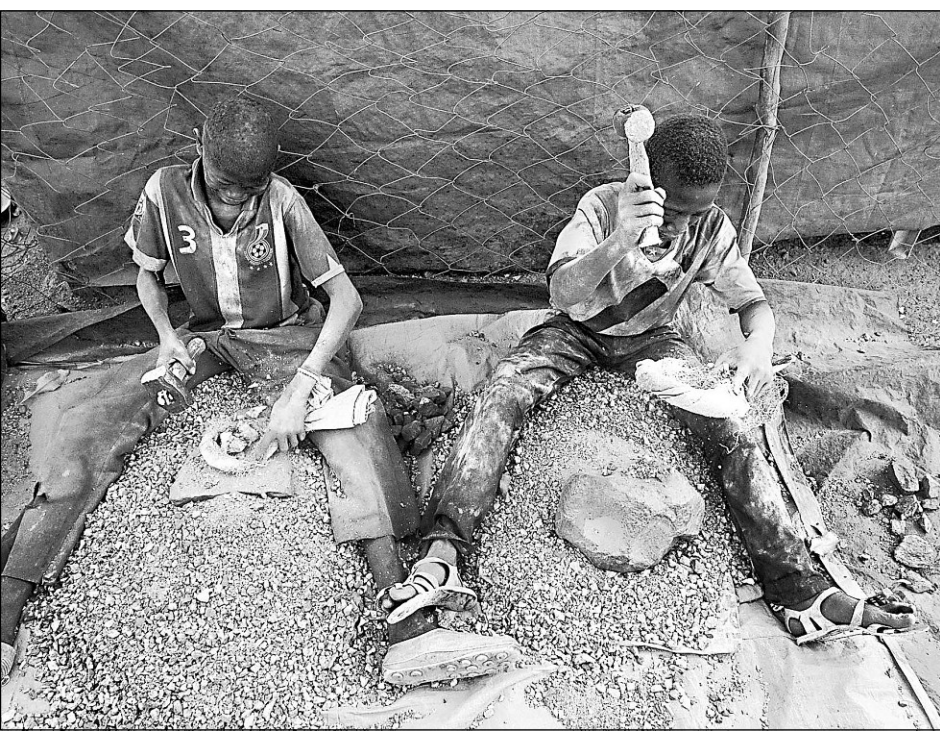
Gbar Media, 7, her face smudged from collecting dirt, works alongside her mother at the new mining site in Burkina Faso. After the ground is cleared of trees and grass, digging begins at a frantic pace for bits of gold.



At a new mining site, about 200 people show up. Of about 50 children in the crowd, even the youngest will work.



A miner displays his day's work — a few grains of gold panned from the earth near a mining area in southwestern Burkina Faso.



Young boys break gold ore into smaller pieces. They work for little or no pay up to 10 hours a day. The U.S. is funding a \$5 million project to reduce child labor in Burkina Faso.

ty. A claim is worked and then abandoned and the miners move on. The government collects taxes on miners who work or prospect on public land and has made efforts to regulate the small mines, but with an estimated 200 mining sites, most of them very remote, the task is overwhelming, authorities say.

At a new mining site in the Bilbalé region 12 miles west of Diébougou, about 200 people show up overnight, drawn by the rumor of gold. About 50 children are in the crowd and even the tiniest will work. In hours, the men and older boys have cleared the ground of scrub trees and the digging begins at a frantic pace.

Little children, some naked, squat on the ground to claw dirt and rocks into shallow bowls. The families fill as many vessels with raw dirt and rock as possible. This rock and dirt is weighed and becomes the share of the "take" from the mine. If gold is found, all the miners will get a little money. If there is no gold at this site, the miners move to the next place where gold is rumored to be.

Miners earn little for their work — children even less. ILO surveys found children often were paid no more than \$2 a day or only received food for filling buckets with gravel, Soho said. An entire family might make \$5 at an undeveloped site. At established mines, such as Kollo, workers say they can earn about \$40 a day.

If the yield at a field is good, word gets out and a boomtown springs up with shanties, supply huts, and cafes among the plastic-covered huts where miners live. Such is the case at Kollo, now home to 3,000 people.

With the established mines and villages also come the ore-processing centers where miners take large sacks or rocks and pebbles to be ground into powder. This powder will be processed, usually with mercury, and further refined into gold nuggets at another location.

The ore-crushing machines are makeshift contraptions cobbled together with pulleys, belts, grinding plates, and smoke-belching diesel engines. And while it takes the strength of a man to empty the bags of rock into the crushers, children do most of the other work. They sharpen metal grinding wheels without eye protection; scoop and bag fine powder without dust masks; and fetch and carry just inches

es from pulleys, belts, and spinning motors with the power to rip and shred anything caught in their works.

The pounding and clanking of the crushers are deafening. The machines spew constant 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. When the children are not working, they lie down near the machines and sleep, oblivious to the noise. Their coughing is constant.

At the Kouékowéra camp near Gaoua, Karim Sawadogo works with his uncle. The boy says he thinks he is 9 years old, but he isn't sure. He has been to school, but only a little. Before the gold field, he was a goat-



The mud-caked face of a teenage worker at a small mine in Burkina Faso. While one of the world's poorest countries, it ranks fourth in Africa in gold production.

herd near his home in northern Burkina Faso. In the camp, he cooks, fetches water. In the mine, Karim works barefoot and shirtless, his feet thickly callused, his muscles flexing as he chips ore and fills buckets.

Speaking in his native dialect, Karim smiles when he is asked what he wants to do with his life. "I came here to make money," he says. "My dream is to make enough money so I don't have to do this anymore."

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Editor's note: Larry C. Price, an Inquirer photographer from 1983 to 1989, is documenting child labor in developing countries as part of a long-term project funded by grants from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting in Washington (www.pulitzercenter.org). Price has won two Pulitzer Prizes, the second for his Inquirer photographs from Angola and El Salvador.

CHILD LABOR from A18

Persaud. "It's quite easy to move across borders like that."

Juliane Kippenberg, a senior researcher for Human Rights Watch, said the group's 2011 report on child labor at small-scale mines persuaded one gold refiner to suspend purchases from Mali.

"We are not calling upon companies to boycott gold that has been mined by children," Kippenberg said, "but to remediate the situation if they find child labor in their supply chain — by engaging the relevant government, their suppliers, and demanding progress to get these children out of the mines and into school."

Gold production in Burkina Faso has more than doubled in recent years, reaching 32 metric tons in 2012, according to the World Bank. (Unlike its neighbors Mali and Ghana, ancient gold kingdoms and major producers today, Burkina Faso is a relative newcomer to the market.) The return of international mining companies, banned for a time in the 1990s, has boosted production. Still, much of the gold comes from small-scale mines.

Small-scale gold mining began here in earnest in the 1980s as droughts and famines forced families from farms and into mines to eke out a living. It remains a family affair. "You cannot eliminate child labor in a community when the income of the family

is so low," said Alexandre Soho, senior program officer for the International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor of the ILO. "You need to tackle the issue of the livelihoods for the parents."

The U.S. Labor Department and the ILO consider mining one of the worst forms of child labor because of the risks of injury and death and the long-term health consequences from constant exposure to dust, toxic chemicals, and heavy manual labor. The list of documented ills includes permanent lung damage caused by inhaling pulverized minerals, muscular and skeletal injuries, hearing loss, accidental blinding, and mercury poisoning with its attendant neurological damage. And then there is the fact that when children are working, they are not in school.

In Tiébélé, near the Kollo mine, Daouda Ganno, general secretary of the mayor's office, says local communities are trying to establish a prefect near each village to enforce school attendance. When a child is absent, he said, "the prefect will go out and find the parent and ask, 'Where is your child?' and then they will find the child and bring him to school." This is Ganno's plan, but for now, he says, it is still only a plan.

The nature of the mining makes enforcement difficult. Often the mines are illegal and hastily dug on private proper-