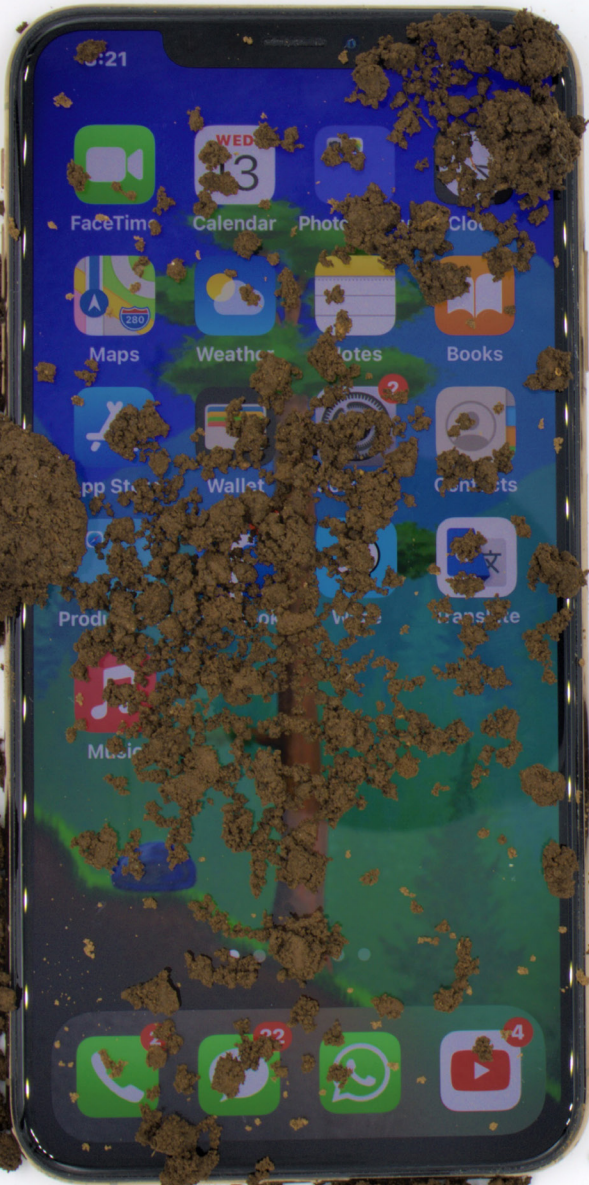


Mikaela Bruntsch & Ferdinand Chen

iExploit Children

Did you know your phone is made by
exploiting Congolese children?



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The very first iPhone was released by Apple Inc. in 2007 and would change how society viewed mobile devices. Smartphone technology soon became an integral part of human society and transformed from a luxury good to a product used by people of all ages and economic status. Nowadays, very few people do not own a smartphone; whether it be an iPhone, Android phone or Huawei smartphone.

However, the creation of the smartphone did not come without a cost, namely the exploitation of the vulnerable and the poor. In 2020, there were approximately 40,000 children who worked in the cobalt mines, or as the Congolese like to call them; “artisanal” or informal miners, which is another way to make child labour exploitation more palatable for our refined tastes. Much like how we ignore the cruelty humans inflict on animals destined for the slaughterhouse in order to make the meat we eat more palatable, so too do we ignore the forgotten youth of the Congolese to sate our appetite for the latest gadgets and smartphones.



Top 5 exporters of cobalt
(2019-2020)

Regardless of whether you, personally, find this acceptable or not, history has shown that when the public is aware of major human rights violations, there is a greater tendency for the intervention of larger powers. Such was the way of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia and India's intervention in securing Bangladesh's independence. While these two examples were much more devastating and on a larger scale, they are not too dissimilar to the current problem in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In a country where the average household size is approximately five individuals, the required income to feed such a family is \$303.75USD/month and the fact that the average Congolese adult can only earn about \$102.3USD/month, the average cobalt miner earns \$2.7-3.3USD/day meaning that to survive in such an environment forces both parents to work as well as at least one child to work on the assumption that the child could earn as much as an adult. However, since the amount paid to a miner is based on the mass of cobalt ore mined, it would be

unlikely that a child would earn as much as an adult.

Apple is one of several immense companies who are contributing in the act of child labour, to acquire their lithium-ion batteries. This is very concerning as smartphones are a luxury good that have become highly intertwined within our lives and society that they have essentially become essential to many of our lives. In saying so, these artisanal children who are mining everyday are struggling and it's taking a toll on their lives. Quoting from the Amnesty campaign, Dany, a 15 year old cobalt miner in the DRC says, "There is lots of dust, it is very easy to catch colds, and we hurt all over". These jobs are tiring out these children's bodies and making them sick, but we can't ignore the rights of these people whose labour powers our phones? While not only damaging these poor Congolese children, cobalt mining is damaging our environment. The blasting and electricity consumption is affecting global warming and eutrophication drastically, and is only getting worse. Research suggests that the carbon dioxide

and nitrogen dioxide emission rates are at their peak due to cobalt mining. Therefore, the mining of cobalt is highly unsustainable to our environment causing damaging effects. Currently, more than half of the world's cobalt mine produce comes from the Katanga Copperbelt in DR Congo, estimated at 15-20% of this mining being extracted by the artisanal miners.

We can only speculate what big companies such as Apple will do with the lack of supply, but we can see how the mining of cobalt is not only unsustainable for the environment but also the unfortunate youth of the Congolese people.

**"There is lots of dust,
it is very easy to catch
colds, and we hurt all
over"**

~ Dany, 15 years old

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