

Following the Trails of Children and youth in West Africa.

Ethnography of the Benin-Togo-Ghana-Nigeria axis Brighton, University of Sussex

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Introduction

Project Period: January – June 2008

Participants :

- Plan West Africa Regional Office (Dakar),
- Plan Country Offices of Benin and Togo,
- Terre des Hommes (Regional Technical Assistance Unit Togo),
- Terre des Hommes Country Delegations Togo and Benin, and
- LASDEL Benin.

Research countries: Benin, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria

Funding: Plan UK/DFID

Research manager: Abdou Ndao

Scientific coordinator: Guy Massart
Plan West Africa.



A Region under ongoing Mobility (Data from OECD)

- Over the last 45 years, the population in West Africa increased from 88 to 290 million (a multiplier of 3.3)
- Urban population increased from 13 to 28 million (a multiplier of 2.1).
- During the same period, an estimated 80 million West Africans migrated from rural areas to the cities.



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- Countries within the subregion are currently receiving an influx of aprox. 7.5 million migrants from other West African countries, which represents aprox. 3% of the regional population.
- This rate, on the rise since 1990, is superior to the African average (2%) and that of the European Union (0.5%).
- Despite the lack of reliable statistics, it clearly appears that West Africa is a dense area where a growing number of people are crossing local national, and

Research Objectives

- **Overall Research Objective**

Understand the diversity of mobility of children and youth in West Africa, focusing on the trajectory of Benin-Togo-Ghana-Nigeria

- **Specific Research Objectives: Ethnographic documentation of the following areas of mobility:**

- Cotton growing areas (North-West/North-East)
- children from the Dantokpa ironworks (Cotonou-Benin) and influx from the districts of Misserete, Oueme
- Influx from weekly markets (Centrale in Togo near the Dantokpa market and towards Lagos)
- Influx of children from the Zou region (District of Zakpota in Benin) to the Rocky Areas and the plantations of Abeokouta (Ogun State in Nigeria)
- Influx of children from the district of Vogan (Coastal Region, Togo) to Lomé (female street sellers or temporary workers)



Institutional activities

- Initial training in research methodology (14th – 18th January 2008, Parakou, Benin)
- Setting-up of national research steering committees involving Plan WARO and country offices, UNICEF, Save the Children, ILO, Aide et Action, Ministries, national NGOs working on children trafficking



Profile of Sample Respondent Children



- Children about to go to nearby countries (Nigeria, Benin, Togo, etc.)
- Children who have been at least once to a neighbouring country (Togo, Nigeria, Guinea, Cameroun)
- Children under the custody of a third party
- Children workers (street-sellers, assistants...)
- Children who left their family, household at least once
- Children who sheltered at reception centres

Research tools

- Collective interviews
- One-on-one interviews
- Focus groups discussions
- « newspaper of the future »
- Ray of hope
- Life line
- Photographs
- Participant Observations: on all sites (available ethnographic data)
- Other tools: informal discussions, use of resource persons, etc.



Mobilities : A Transversal and Transnational Concept

- Geographical mobilities of children: moving « without migrating »
- Circularity # linearity : complexity of the mobility processes



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- **Deconstruction of borders (physical, symbolic and psychological)**
 - Social mobilities (acquisition of status, networking, strengthening of the sense of citizenship...)
 - Economic mobilities (material and financial empowerment, wealth and income generating activities, ...)
 - Cultural mobilities (acquisition of new values, new perceptions and new mindset, representations, norms, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, cultural practices, overcome degrading situations, ...)



The « Positives » of Mobility

« When I saw the others come back to the village, with their nice dresses, their hairbraids I immediately felt like going to Lomé. »

- Pride resulting from the successes achieved where peers were not able to « make it »
- Acquisition of new skills and lifestyle: *Njumekoko* « civilized », children come back from the cities with new behaviours, etc.
- Accumulation of economic and social capital



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- Mostly, a well-thought lifetime project: strategy / tactics
- Strengthening of resilience / endurance
- Maturity and citizenship
- Good knowledge of the social and geographic cartography of the coastal countries



Virtual Borders

- Historical and cultural proximity between countries
- Political turmoil
- Process of familiarizing oneself with the business world and early acquisition of business sense by children
- The limits of the administrative control system
- Family and communal networks are transnational, etc.
- Construction of old diasporas and nationalist reconstructions



Reasons for mobility : several types of explanations

- Mobility and climate change (Poverty, hunger, lack of fertile lands, drought)
- Social intercourse based on one's money worth
- Less and less family, re-configuration based on birth and land availability: conflicts between heirs
- Single parent families or death of parents
- Mobilities and age-old traditions: the Ouatchi (South east Togo) and the Berbas (North Benin)
- Historical trajectories of mobility : From Bohicon (Benin) to Abéokouta (Nigeria)



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- The markets: wealth creators, stimulators and mapping out mobilities
- Strategy for the placement of children: Learning process and complexity of systems of kinship
- Self-funding of rites of passage
- Armed conflicts
- Institutional limits in terms of intervention
- Witchcraft
- Age-old practices to be done before departure for mobility
- The diasporas as transversal props in the mobility process

Logics behind mobility decisions

- **Reinvent the notion of parenthood against a background of mobilities:** fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters, cousins and children and the youth themselves: beyond limited kinship
- **logics behind mobility decisions both individual and collective: allies, go-betweens, mentors**



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- **Autonomy in decision making according to gender** (Psychosocial Study, AWARE, Plan)
- **Mobility decision based on one's own free will:** a successful model to be imitated
- A central part of the variable of social and economic well-being



Future Perspectives for the Research Study

- Expansion of Research Partners: UNICEF, Save The Children (Sweden), Terre des Hommes, ENDA, ILO, African Movement of Working Children and Youth
- Geographic extension: Guinea, Ivory Coast, Gabon
- Development of a joint paper on mobility in West Africa and of a Policy and programme guide.

