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HOW DO SOME BENINESE OF BANGOLO BUILD THEIR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE AROUND CHILD MIGRATION?

Raphael Kouadio Oura

Alassane Ouattara University of Bouaké
04 BP 01 Bouaké 04,
Côte d'Ivoire
ouranien@yahoo.fr

Abou Kouamé N'dri

Péléforo Gon Coulibaly University of Korhogo
BP 1328 Korhogo,
Côte d'Ivoire
agircontrelafaim@yahoo.fr

ABSTRACT

In Côte d'Ivoire, farmers are not the sole individuals who employ children in the practice of their activity as suggested by the public and political opinion. The activity of the construction of traditional houses or "Dahomey houses" also exposes "the little workers" from a Beninese child trafficking to several types of risks, no doubt, in all ignorance of the original parents. In the agricultural area of Bangolo, farmers seek after Beninese for the construction of Dahomey housings or "Atakora swa" in Akan language. This activity which they hold the monopoly has enabled them to economically integrate this new living space. But this integration is probably at the expense of children whose involvement in the construction of these housings has grown.

Keywords: Child Trafficking; traditional housing; child labour

1. INTRODUCTION

Child migration in developing countries interest more and more researchers. Described by some of them as child trafficking, the phenomenon has grown with the accentuation of poverty (Thanh-Dam, 2007; Adihou 2000). Traffickers take advantage of the situation of household insecurity to achieve their goals. In many cases, it is with the complicity of the parents they manage to bypass the administrative provisions (Adihou 2000). In fact, when they can no longer cope with the needs of the family, the heads of household are persuaded that the future of their children lies abroad (Adihou 2000). The inability to cope with family responsibilities leads them to approve their children's departure without taking into account the risks the latter are running away from their family. Generally speaking, the migration of child labour tends to increase with the households poverty (Ouensavi and ki Elland, 2000). However, ignorance partially accounts for the behaviour of the parents; they can not understand that cross-border migration is not quite as easy as they think. In fact, once they are separated from their parents, these young migrants' fate is closely linked to the role of their guardians (Forum Report, 2007). Thus, the risks are enormous, ranging from mistreatment to death. The trips are often in unacceptable conditions. And despite such risks and suffering endured in the host country, there is no guarantee of a better future for the migrant. Yet, they are the main labour force in the plantations of Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria (Adihou 2000).

Côte d'Ivoire, the world top cocoa producer country with 40% of production, is an obvious example. In this country, nearly 4,630 farmers employ wage-earning children (IITA, 2006). The report states that "approximately 5,120 children are employed as permanent or full-time workers in Côte d'Ivoire (against 61,600 adults)." Because of this child labour, Côte d'Ivoire was threatened with not being able to sell its cocoa on some international markets. The fight against this scourge seems now to be working. However, one can observe in Bangolo, in western Côte d'Ivoire, that child labour also involves other categories of children especially those from Benin, used in the construction of traditional housings. In the minds of the parents who entrust their children to employers, the principle of employing children partly aims to socializing them. In fact, the teens come from this with a job all the same that allows them to earn their livings and contribute to the welfare of their respective families. As for employers, they rely on child labour to consolidate their



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economic and social integration in the Bangolo's region. This integration built by the Beninese adults is made to the detriment of the young people who should bear, against their will, and over a long period, the diktat of the latter. But, beyond the observable disadvantages from the perspective of ill-treatment, it is also a very interesting phenomenon, if we decide as researchers, to understand how the Beninese child migration contributes to the socio-economic integration of Beninese in the construction of traditional housings.

Answering to this major concern comes down to answering to the following sub-questions:

- What is the process in which the Beninese children are conveyed from their original country to Bangolo?
- Under what conditions do these children participate in the construction of traditional housings?
- What are the economic and social benefits of employing children in this region?

The main objective of this study is to analyze the close relationship that has been developed between the practice of traditional housings construction and the employment of children from Benin.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research which focused on the involvement of Beninese children in the building of traditional houses is a purely qualitative study with comprehensive aims. We used as a tool, the individual interview guides. Thus, the sample was built from the technique of "snowball". In practice, we began with a peasant benefited from the services in the construction of traditional housing to establish contact with the builder of his house, that is to say, the Beninese children's guardian, their escort and the teens themselves. This was rendered possible by our integration in their daily life. It was only after that trust had been established that we requested assistance from the farmer to contact the stakeholders we wanted. In the order of meetings, it was first necessary to get in touch with the guardians, then the youth and finally the escorts. After this process, 15 peasants, 7 guardians, 4 escorts and 18 teenagers were interviewed over a period of one month against two weeks as originally planned. The number of the interviewed was obtained on the basis of saturation. All these steps were possible thanks to the discretion and confidentiality. Nevertheless, we faced difficulties especially the refusal of some children to answer questions, for fear of suffering the punishment of their "masters". One should also add the refusal of some escorts who often justify their behaviour by the lack of time. Another difficulty which could probably be one of the major weaknesses of this study was the impossibility for us to conduct our investigations beyond the Ivorian borders. The search for information for this job requires in fact that the interviews should be made with the parents in the Beninese regions affected by this child migration. But, without being entirely a motive, the financial difficulties and time constraints did not allow us to integrate this space whose exploration would have certainly added a plus-value to this work. We did with the local stakeholders' remarks. As for the theory, Lebesgue's theory of integration enabled to identify the strategies mobilized by the actors, here the builders of traditional housings for their socio-economic integration in Côte d'Ivoire.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

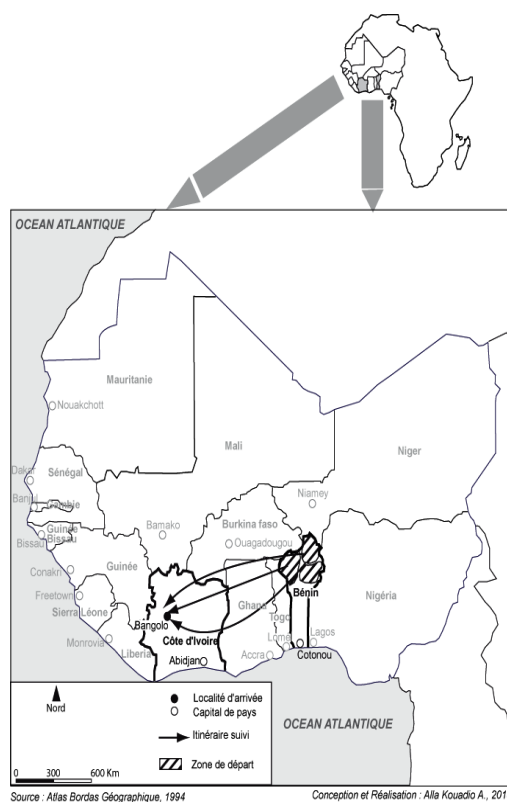
In a country where agriculture is the main source of development, migration to Côte d'Ivoire is essentially agricultural. In the agricultural region of Bangolo, this migration is accompanied by another one, that of migrant children coming from northern Benin. Involved in the construction of traditional housings, their arrival in this locality, obeys a whole process designed from Benin.

3.1 Process of Beninese child migration to Bangolo

The migration of Beninese children to Côte d'Ivoire does not involve all the regions of the country of departure. Northern Benin, namely the Northwest is the departure area.

3.1.1 *Departure regions and causes of infantile migration*

The areas characterized by environmental degradation and poverty of the population are mainly the areas favourable to emigration (Adihou 2000). Northern Benin, especially Atacora, the northwest region of Benin is the pipeline of juvenile migration to Côte d'Ivoire (see Map 1).



Map n°1: **Route of trafficked children involved in the building of housings**

The departments of Alibori, Atacora and Borgou are the emigration departments. These departments have low population density. The ages of the children range from 6 to 16 and come mainly from the country. In 2000, 49,000 children were registered as migrants from rural areas of Benin (Ouensavi and ki Elland, 2000). According to our interviews, teenagers mainly come from these regions of Benin considered to be the emigration beds. In these areas, agricultural operating conditions are rendered precarious by the chain of Atacora with an operating rate oscillating between 40 and 50% and an available area situated between 0.3 and 0.7 hectares per capita (UEMOA, 2010). The influence of the chain extends to the Donga region, a little further southern to the region of Atacora.

These areas are characterized by low soil fertility, yet subject to significant erosion. To all these facts, one should add low rainfall and erratic seasons; the rainfall in this locality hardly exceeds 1,000 mm of rain per year. Ultimately, the agricultural productivity is low. This drives people to migrate to the south in search of urban jobs but also to the northeast, as for agricultural migration into cotton farms. However, the situation is not quite as brilliant for the people of this agricultural area who do not escape so to speak to the emigration of its labour force particularly its infantile population. This is also a population in search of better living conditions in other regions or countries. But the migratory movement of children would not have been so significant if it was not supported by a local culture, highly permissive for migration.

Although the research of economic goods is the best shared, the child socialization is a major concern for the heads of household, especially in Atacora. In this part of the country, the search for a safe and sustainable social integration of children is of paramount concern among the inhabitants. Employers know it; they insist on it as mentioned by one of them: "We give them the guarantee of well training their children and inserting them into life." Indeed, in this region where the economic problems are decades old, children must be early prepared to "earn their living", even outside the regional boundaries. But in this migration, children who have never been to school are at higher risk than those who attend school (and Ouensavi ki Elland, 2000). This is confirmed by the words of this youth: "I never attended school. My age, I do not know." This is especially all the more true that children who migrate have generally never attended school or are out of school as confirmed by this sentence: "I'm 11 years old. I stopped going to school because my parents did not have money to pay for my books." Another one, responds: "I wanted to work in Côte d'Ivoire that is why I refused to go to school. They sent me here when I was 9 years old." In such cases where going in adventure, is the wish of the majority, parents can imagine that children can experience difficulties, provided they return home with a new acquired knowledge, the job. But what level of suffering can they really imagine? Generally, the heads of household cannot withstand the promises addressed to them in particular on



the issue of material gain and the idea that the children shall return with an expertise, that is how to build traditional housings. For these reasons, parents and their children will easily be persuaded by promises of any kind especially the promise of material goods for children.

3.1.2 Promises of material goods as the teenagers' main lure

The infantile migration concerning the practice of building traditional houses is the result of intense consultations between the various stakeholders. In fact, as put forward by Anyidoho and Ainsworth (2009), "The family has a role in this choice." If it happens that migration is imposed on the child, the fact remains that in many cases, the stakeholders at issue generally agree on their common will to establish the departure contract. In the children's migration process to Côte d'Ivoire, some Beninese (escorts) arrive from Côte d'Ivoire and negotiate their departure to areas favourable to this migration. As in any negotiation, each actor will seek to defend his own interests. If usually the parents and their offspring think about defending theirs, they are in many cases influenced by the promises of the escorts. Although worthy and coinciding with the interests of the local stakeholders, it is not surprising to note that these promises have rather a trivial value, compared to the tasks that children accomplish. As a proof, it will be more than a mere socializing training, but rather a work to earn money for his employer. In this context of quasi-ignorance of the environment and the realities of working in Côte d'Ivoire, the influence trafficking will take an important place in the development of contracts. It is the material gains such as bicycles and motorcycles which take precedence over the original motivations (Anyidoho and Ainsworth, 2009). In addition, children shall come back with a salary that complements the income of their households. If initially the contract did not provide a salary, a substantial amount is now at the heart of the negotiations. One employer explains: "Before, we were given children just to train them. But today, things have changed. We sign contracts with the parents. The amounts vary between 150,000 and 200,000 FCAF per year." This is what will also change the children treatment mode. Once the contract is signed, the escorts use varying routes to avoid road harassment.

The child's placement is more and more meant to make profit to the detriment of their education (Adihou, 2000). Contrary to what might be imagined, we were informed that the passage through Abidjan is generally avoided for the same reason.

3.2 Children in the housing building process

The contract does not clearly state that children should act as key stakeholders in the construction of traditional housings. However, they get in touch with their guardian (or boss), children are directly tested concerning the construction.

3.2.1 Children's place in the construction of the "atacora swa"

The *atacora swa* is the name of the traditional housing in the Baoule and Agni's language. This name reflects the term of this type of house (photo n°1) whose first directors came from the Atacora region in the northwest of Benin, originally called Dahomey.

Photo 1: An example of *atacora swa*



Source: **Our survey, 2015**

The construction of the *atacora swa* is achieved by superimposing the layers. The layers are formed at intervals of time to let each of them dry. On this image, the layer in construction was initiated after the previous one has been sufficiently dry to bear it. The *atacora swa* is the essence of the traditional houses built by the Baoule and Agni (Surroca, 1970). With the Burkinabe, the Baoule and Agni, represent the majority of cocoa and coffee. Concerning the housing, the Burkinabe aliens generally adapt to local cultural realities when the Baoule migrants prefer the "Dahomey housing" or *atacora swa*. With the migration in this cocoa-producing region, the



demand is strong while the labour to support the builders becomes rare. So the few children they employ are subject to severe tests to meet this demand. They do not intervene as mere apprentices, but key links in the practice of this activity.

In practice, it is the children who dig, mix the soil and make balls, and then they throw them to the boss (photo n°2 and 3).

Photo 2 and 3: The first two stages of child labour



Source: **Our survey, 2015**

These steps of the work done by children entail in digging large holes and then making balls of earth. In the absence of the guardian, the latter is replaced in its work by children that are a little more aged (14 and 15). In short, the absence of the boss must be filled by child labour, forced to do more than the original tasks. The absence of the boss occurs when, for example, he himself decides to go to his homeland in search of labour. In fact, some guardians are also escorts who themselves look for labour. As for the younger ones (photo 4), they need to work harder to meet the expectations of the employers.

Photo 4: An active child



Source: **Nos enquêtes, 2015**

This child, after having wet the earth, is ready make alone, earth balls needed to install the next layer. He was alone here because their "master" had got another contract in another encampment where he had to send a second team. Children are forced to work and continue during his absence. The boss said he was compelled to do so to achieve his primary objective which is profitability. For he must have enough profit at the end of year. He resorts to a variety of methods, provided they meet the the objective he set, that is to say, to achieve good results. This is the moment when the economic exploitation of children comes into play in the practice of their activity.

3.2.2 Constraints related to the practice of their activity

For a long time, parents have been leading their children to migration for the purpose of learning. That is to say, they should be able once back home, to have the skills to build houses. In this case, no amount was required to the guardian. So that the guardian firmly commits himself to teach his protégé the craft "free of charge" without necessarily resorting to violence. This is no longer the case now



that an amount is required, so that the children are subject to any form of pressure and abuse: "My boss scolds me when the work is badly executed. Even when we are tired, we must work. As long as there is something to do, we are not meant to rest. If you make a mistake, he will beat you." The use of violence and all other forms of abuse observable today in the construction of the *atacora swa* have stepped in in response to the financial requirements imposed by parents. The guardians feel that these amounts are a kind of additional investment imposed on them. Sometimes the boss may go and negotiate the arrival of the children. In such a case where he stands as the escort, he is exempt from the additional costs related to the transfer he should have paid to the escort. All in all, the bosses lie in a logic to refund their investment through additional efforts required from children. From then on they shall suffer harsher treatment they had not suffered in the past. "My boss is complicated. He make us work like slaves. But what can we say? We have no relatives here. Often you're tired but you're afraid to tell the boss you're going to rest. So you lie that you're ill." One employer explains their attitude: "When you are working with children, we do not have fun. What binds us is the work. We train them to be someone tomorrow. They must not take for a walk nor refuse to work. When they are sick, I look after them. But they have to work! ". Another one added: "They came here to work. Why playing with someone who is playing with his work? That is why we are a little hard. " Today, it is more frequent for employers to submit children to physical abuse, food deprivation, or long periods of work, etc. They do not benefit from rest. This is consistent with the results of a study by Anyidoho and Ainsworth (2009), when they assert that "everywhere and in all jobs, children claim that they work too much compared to what they had to do at home. " And children are unanimous on the issue of starvation, "They deprives us of food when the job is badly done. And as we have nobody here, we have to work well." Moreover, children do not have the right to communicate with their relatives in Benin, despite the existence of current telecommunications means. "No relationship with my parents. Here, it is work. We work every day. During my training (5 years), my parents shall not come here. Only our boss is entitled to give my news. Sometimes, I feel like seeing my dad, my mom and my brothers but I cannot." The children are rather exposed to threats from the bosses. When they feel they are not satisfied with the work of a child, they threaten to send him home. This return would bring a dishonour on the family and a financial loss in case of expatriation. To avoid the stigma, and for fear of returning empty-handed, after several months or years of effort, the children are condemned to redouble their efforts if they want to keep their places in the system. It is in the psychosis that children practise the activity as put by one of the children: "My age, I do not know. It's my boss who keeps my paper. But I'm afraid to ask him." Faced with such situations, Adihou (2000) advocates "the awareness, education and training of people, parents and children about the consequences of traffic in general and especially its disadvantages, to allow children to know their rights and to have recourse to the law." But beyond the suffering, each of the stakeholders certainly benefits from the business.

3.3 The construction of socio-economic integration through the economic activity in Bangolo

The activity of building held by the Beninese adults is being developed in Bangolo with a considerable support of children. The bosses are building a special relationship with the children to achieve the dual objective of both integrating the Beninese community and the socialization of the children they employ.

3.3.1 The rapport between child and boss in the learning process in Bangolo

Held in the discretion and confidentiality, these Beninese children receive daily work program defined by their master, the one to decide of their fate and future. Rest periods are chosen by the boss and depend on the evolution of the work and the objective set by the latter. Despite the difficulties faced by children, they sometimes find a real pleasure in the practice of the job. This idea is backed up by the words of one of them: "Our boss organizes the work and so we must not play. We should work well. Tomorrow we shall also become bosses." It is indeed this will to become bosses later that accounts for the children's attachment to their boss. Moreover, these relations are evidenced by the fact that it is a line work. In fact, while some children fetch water, some dig the earth whereas others make balls of earth to throw to the boss.

In this process of social construction of actors (bosses and children), the relationship with their original country are maintained. The bosses, through this activity are able to participate in the family expenditures in the original country, Benin. This helps them enjoy power of decision and consideration in their social environment. This led an informant to say: "Thanks to what I do, I have become someone here and in my country as well. I feed my children and all those around me. When I was learning, it was difficult. But today I do not regret. The only problem is that I need labour. Sincerely, it is these children who make us. They are everything to us." Through these last sentences, we realize the importance of these children who are the main labour in the socioeconomic construction of the Beninese established in Bangolo. This is a system in which each actor has a role to play. It is a work without interruption and requires the clear participation of each actor. That is the reason why the bosses continue to ensure the smooth running of the work. The efficiency of the work determines the possibility of obtaining or not the markets, and hence financial gain for the builder.



3.3.2 A rewarding and socializing job

Child migration has advantages as well as consequences (Forum Report, 2007). Anyidoho and Ainsworth (2009) pointed out that "It allows to acquire knowledges and savoir-faire, social and financial capital and personal qualities required in their present and future lives." Despite the significant investments imposed on builders today, the activity continues to provide good income to the bosses.

3.3.2.1 The stakeholders' financial and social profits

If the activity continues in the town of Bangolo, it is indeed because employers of children manage to make income that allow them to cover all the expenses necessary to build and make profits. It is still a profitable business as suggested by this 15 years old: "I came alone with the consent of my parents. At first, I used to sell drinks. As it did not work, I came to seek a contract with my boss to have some money and return home. Here at least, things are going well." The employers note: "We earn our livings and we are respected for that. And it's an honor because it is us who are building houses for others." In the framework of this study we have clearly identified the average real income of the various people involved in the construction. Moreover, the socialistic nature of the activity has not yet disappeared.

The forum Report (2007) states that "socialization is the process through which individuals learn the ways of acting and thinking of their environment, internalize them by integrating them to their personalities and become members of the group where they acquire a specific status." There are many children who manage to become themselves builders and thus will employ other children in their turn. "I am working with my boss until I know the job. And I too will employ children." Thus, the activity continues. It allows small Beninese to learn a job that will guarantee their future: "I came to learn how to build houses. My parents are deceased. It is my uncle who sent me here." Another speaker went further, saying: "I was in my homeland, doing nothing. So my entrust me to my boss to learn a job." The bosses also teach children social values including respect for others as indicated by one of the children: "We listen to our boss. Here, he is our father. So whatever he asks, we did. When we are sick, he treat us. In addition, when you end the training, he pays us 180,000 CFAF". The bosses put in the advantages of child labour including the training they give to children: "I only train children. Those who do not do anything at home. This is my way to fight against unemployment in my country." However, it is an activity which is being undermined by the significant reduction in the labour.

3.3.2.2 An activity threatened with disappearance

This activity which has long been practised in the country especially in Bangolo, now shows signs of weakening. Bosses say they are faced with the growing requirement of their employees' parents. To this fact, one should add the gradual reduction of this child labour. And yet, this is a very important labour in this job as confirmed by one of the bosses "a labour is necessarily needed. And it is the children who make us. They help us in our activities. You see, this is a line work. So you understand the importance of these children we train. Now we no longer find them. We are compelled to work with our own children at times. Otherwise we could no longer live in Côte d'Ivoire." In fact, there is a kind of complementarity between these two actors. Unfortunately, the migration of Beninese children have abated while a small part of these migrants towards Côte d'Ivoire prefer to work in the fields. In addition, parents are now refusing the arrival of their children. To cope with the prevailing situation in Bangolo, the guardians are resorting to temporary workers who are very costly. And despite the demand, the management of this activity becomes difficult for both stakeholders. And children who are currently employed are not convinced that this is a job with prospects. Even their employers do not really believe in the future of this job and fear that the construction of this type of houses shall no longer find seekers. Furthermore, the constructs of the *atacora swa* tends to be reduced in the villages. "It has become more and more difficult for us. In the villages, everyone built permanent houses. So, we are left in the encampments where people propose low wages." In anticipation, the builders are already converting: "Later, we do not know what we will become. No more labour, very few markets because of the new building styles. We seek to convert into strong drink seller, the *koutoucou*". The *koutoucou* is a traditionally made drink in most Ivorian country.

4. CONCLUSION

Beninese children are the main labour force in the construction of the *Atocora swa*. Working conditions come within the framework in the worst form of child labour. But this work is developing here in Bangolo, without it drawing the attention of whatsoever, neither the authorities nor the researchers. As a matter of fact, children generally leave their country with the consent of their parents concerned about their children learning how to build. But once out of sight of their parents, they are subject to hard labour, under strong pressure of the guardians. They suffer ill-treatments (beatings, food deprivation, lack of rest, etc.). However, children still learn some social values such as the joy of well-done job, courage, discretion, confidentiality and respect for the hierarchy. A kind of socialization that meets the expectations of the parents. This professional space unconventional to the standards of school education allows these teenagers to build their personality. This is how they too will become trainers in the continuity of the cycle of socialization. However, is this socialization aspect sufficient enough for the practice to persist in some Ivorian country without those involved in the practice



being sued? Whatever may be the answer to this question, we must remember that this practice intensifies the suffering of Beninese children. The fight against child labour in cocoa plantations should therefore not be done while ignoring at the same time other practices which nevertheless develop on the same living space of the farmers of Côte d'Ivoire.

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