

• FEATURE

A monthly features service on scientific, technical, and educational subjects pertinent to development.

Approx. 950 words

TOGO MAPS ITS DEVELOPMENT

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At once overpopulated and uninhabited, rich and poor, overexploited and underexploited, Togo's coastal zone, like most of the country or even Africa and the Third World in general, has been struggling with its fair share of contradictions, encumbrances hindering its development.

But its burden will now be eased by new data that will be taken into account in future development planning. Without fanfare, a small, hopeful revolution has just unfolded in the unlikely form of a land use and planning mapping project of the coastal zone which has just been successfully completed. It is a promising event for this region certainly, but also for the country as a whole since the coastal zone includes Togo's capital city, Lomé, and is the country's nerve centre.

Although covering only 11 percent of Togo's territory, the region mapped through the 18-month project — which was partially funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre — is one of the most important in the country. Its population of 704,000 inhabitants represents 36.4 percent of the country's total. Population density is very high at 116 people per square kilometre, compared to the national average of 35. Moreover, the population is unevenly distributed within the region. Overpopulated zones border on unpopulated expanses, resulting in a population density that can reach 200 people per square kilometre in some areas.

All of the demographic characteristics of developing countries are to be found in Togo's coastal zone: the population is young (57 percent are under the age of 20); it is rapidly growing (three percent a year); and it is subject to large migratory movements, destined largely for Lomé.

With three of the country's seven cities within its borders, the coastal zone is the most highly urbanized in the country. Its economy is nevertheless predominantly agricultural. Patterns of soil utilization reveal serious imbalances. Some lands are severely overexploited and the traditional system of shifting cultivation has almost disappeared, particularly on the plateaus where population density is the highest. A critical threshold has been reached.

The reverse is true, however, in the uncultivated alluvial plains, the valleys, and on the coastline. The soils in these areas, rich in organic matter from alluvial deposits are not to blame, it is rather the type of agriculture: the conventional crops, maize and cassava, still take precedence. All evidence points to an agricultural underutilization of an area that could play a large part in solving the problem of local and national food shortages if it was better exploited.

The great number of industrial establishments in the coastal zone, compared to the country's other regions, further illustrates its economic importance. Togo having entered the industrial age only recently, however, industrial activity provides employment for only 10 percent of the labour force. In fact, it was only after independence in 1960, that the first factories opened their doors. Ninety percent of them are in Lomé.

These industries are to some extent cut off from the population. Even those processing local foodstuffs have little contact with the rural population that supplies them with raw materials.

These development factors and others are inventoried in the project's 11 thematic maps. According to Mr E.Y. Gu-Konu, project leader, each thematic map deals with a particular aspect of the region, detailing inadequacies as well as potential. This is particularly the case for the maps dealing with population distribution, commercial equipment and services, industries, and communications infrastructure.

The maps on land use, agricultural potential, possible cropping patterns, water resources, and soil utilization go beyond being simple inventories to

suggest how agriculture could be modified. The map on the environment presents the state and interaction of various factors to enable users to predict how different areas would be affected by the programs proposed in the land use map.

A report accompanies each map, stressing certain points that the maps themselves do not cover or can only hint at, and pointing to relationships that must be taken into account in order to understand the overall state of the coastal zone.

Two synthesis maps, regrouping all of these elements, offer a global view, an analysis, and are also accompanied by specific recommendations. Guidelines for future action have thus been established. For example, it is recommended that planning and land use programs give priority to agriculture without neglecting the non-agricultural sector. Cooperative organizations are also recommended to stimulate small family enterprises more concerned with survival than commercial production.

It is also suggested that the coastal zone should be subdivided into relatively uniform areas called "intervention zones", for which definite actions are recommended in keeping with the particular characteristics of each and with the need for optimal development of the region of the whole. Thus, a solution is being offered to all problems considered.

The work was far from easy to carry out. Many documents do not exist, or if they do, they are often not reliable. To draw up the map on population, for example, the researchers had to undertake another painstaking analysis of the census. And this second analysis yielded results quite different than the first. The Togolese Geographers' Association had to play a pioneering role in order to obtain the necessary assistance from often reluctant public authorities. But this situation improved steadily as the work progressed and its usefulness became evident.

No one can now doubt the usefulness of the maps and report. Full support is now forthcoming from government authorities through the Ministry of National Education that ensured that the final document was distributed to all concerned, including State technical services, research organizations, and universities, and through the Ministry of Scientific Research from which the geographers' association has now obtained offices.

A scientific conference presided over by the Minister of National Education enabled the geographers' work to be made better known. The minister clearly outlined to the participants the benefits that the country could expect from the study, carried out in Togo, by Togolese researchers in the best of scientific traditions.

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January 1981

IDRC-F153e