

RESEARCH TOWARDS A
BENEFICIAL PARTICIPATION
OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN COUNTRIES
IN GLOBALIZATION

**ADJUSTING SUPPORT FOR SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
TO THE REALITIES OF WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA:
RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE REGIONAL ADVISORS OF WARO**

CHOSEN FOR THEIR BROAD VISION OF DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ISSUES IN AFRICA, THE TEN ADVISORS OF THE REGIONAL OFFICE OF IDRC FOR WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA (WARO) SUPPORT THE CENTRE IN ITS REFLECTION ON NEW RESEARCH PROBLEMS. THEY HELP IT DEFINE RELEVANT RESEARCH TOPICS THAT CORRESPOND TO THE REALITIES OF THE WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICAN REGION IN KEEPING WITH THE GENERAL GUIDELINES LAID OUT BY IDRC IN ITS 2005-2010 PROGRAMME FRAMEWORK : (www.idrc.ca/fr/ev-10509-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).

THE TOPICS DEBATED BY THE REGIONAL ADVISORS CONCERN EVERY IDRC PROGRAMME, WITH A VIEW TO ACHIEVING A BETTER GRASP OF THE NEEDS OF THE REGION THROUGH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY VISION.

THE ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETS TWICE A YEAR ON DIFFERENT SUBJECTS DURING NATIONAL WORKSHOPS: THE RECOMMENDATIONS THAT FOLLOW ARE THE PRODUCT OF DISCUSSIONS THAT TOOK PLACE IN YAOUNDE, CAMEROON, ON 23 JUNE 2006.

New challenges, new opportunities. The impact of globalization does not exclude the West and Central African region. To ensure it is an asset rather than a liability, the countries of the subregion would do well to unite and react quickly to economic, political, social and cultural change. Research has a vital role to play in this adaptation. Indeed, knowledge has been shown to be the single most useful tool to help decision-makers and the populations seize the new opportunities offered by globalization, and act concertedly with their neighbouring countries to ensure that the subregion takes its rightful place in international exchanges. The following 11 research avenues were submitted to the Centre by the Regional Advisors during the meeting of 23 June 2006 in Yaoundé.

1 International Trade Negotiations

- › What strategies would enable the countries of the subregion to better take advantage of the interplay of world trade?
- › How can we facilitate stronger dialog between the countries to establish common negotiating positions?

In trade negotiations, West and Central African countries often lack significant weight to tip the scales in their favour, despite the special provisions laid forth by the World Trade Organization for economically weaker countries.

Experience has shown that the failures of African countries in this area have been chiefly due to poor definition of their negotiating positions and weak negotiating teams. However, a few examples of successful talks led by certain countries were raised: we would do well to improve documentation of such cases with a view to improving practices.

Faced with the pressing demand from developed countries to open up the markets of economically weaker countries, the countries of the subregion could gain by establishing common multilateral and plurilateral negotiating positions. Thus, it would be useful to study the development strategies that would enable the countries to benefit more fully from the interplay of global trade. Another priority research avenue is the identification of factors that could facilitate stronger concertation between the countries on trade negotiation issues.

2 Economic Integration and the Subregion's Industries

- › Which sectors offer the greatest export potential?
- › For each sector, which countries are best endowed in terms of production factors?

Over the last two decades, West and Central African countries have lost sizeable market shares to more competitive zones such as Asia and Mauritius.

While insufficient integration of the economies of the subregion is clearly a factor that slows the latter's entry into the international market and causes a loss of competitiveness, it is still not easy to identify the sectors that offer the greatest export potential.

An in-depth analysis aimed at identifying, for each of these sectors, the countries that are best endowed with production factors is also an indispensable information base that will support the formulation of common industrial policies and the creation of subregional industries that are competitive on the global market.

3 Land Security and the Right of Access to the Land

- › What are the conditions for access to land and the degree of land security for displaced populations?
- › What new land issues are emerging due to the arrival of the multinationals?

The existence of open or latent conflicts leads to massive population displacements within the subregion, particularly from enclosed countries in the Sahelian zone towards coastal countries. Since the land and natural resources are the chief source of income for rural populations, the situation raises issues that include the right of access to land and land security for displaced populations.

In light of the fact that the subregion does not have an integrated land policy, it is vital to find out more about the conditions for access to land and the degree of land security for displaced populations both upon arrival in

their host countries, and upon return to their native countries.

Other land issues also emerge from the fact that African countries are opening up to multinationals. Among other issues, it has been observed that the installation of these companies may lead to land expropriations and general jeopardization of family operations. Consequently, in addition to identifying the new land issues linked to globalization, it is important to better define the scope and consequences of the phenomenon of rural land insecurity.

4 Reconfiguration of Urban and Rural Spaces

- › How can we think about globalization in relation to urban and rural spaces?

Globalization, its impacts and its opportunities, is often conceived along the lines of a dichotomy between urban and rural areas. However, in West and Central Africa, there are several indications that globalization is one of the factors that blurs this distinction by creating bridges between the cities and the countryside.

The emergence of highly populated secondary cities, growing inequalities in urban areas, and unemployment that is no longer confined to migrants from the country, are phenomena that bear witness to the departitioning of urban and rural spaces.

These reconfigurations cannot be without consequences,

particularly in relation to certain issues associated with globalization, such as access to resources. The exploration of those consequences is a research theme of note. Reciprocally, certain aspects of globalization, such as the dissemination of new communication technologies, also

contribute to reducing the differences between urban and rural zones. It is important to arrive at a better understanding of how globalization acts on the configuration of spaces and, in so doing, on ways of life.

Relocation and Development of the Subregion

- › What are the needs of the new teleservices sector?
- › What are the economic and social spin-off effects in the subregion's countries?
- › How can we attract international relocations and retain them in the subregion?

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In recent years, West and Central African countries have witnessed the creation of a large number of teleservice organizations, particularly in fields such as call centres, software development and teaching.

This has meant a significant change in the service sector, which is taking on a growing share in the GDP of the countries in the subregion. In light of its implications in the area of human resources, training and poverty reduction, for both men and women, this change calls for better knowledge of the needs of this emerging sector and its economic and social spin-off.

Furthermore, even though teleservices are increasingly provided between countries in the subregion, it remains that the majority of services respond to the demand from major firms that have chosen to relocate specific departments in order to improve productivity. Thus, to help the countries of the subregion fully seize the opportunities offered by globalization, it is important to identify factors that can make the area even more attractive for international relocations, and conditions that promote the perpetuation of these activities.

ICTs and Settling of Skilled Workers

- › What are the obstacles to the development of distance education in the subregion?
- › To what extent can telecommuting constitute a solution to the loss of skilled workers?

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In addition to direct job creation, two other aspects linked to the development of teleservices in the subregion warrant particular attention.

First of all, the technologies used demonstrate considerable potential in the area of training. However, it would seem that this application is still underexploited if we consider the number of young West and Central African men and women who go abroad to study in hopes of finding employment. Generally speaking, an analysis of the

obstacles to the development of a distance education that would be profitable for the countries in the subregion is required. More specifically, there is a need to identify the types of programmes that provide African workers with access to skilled jobs.

In addition, telecommuting is a theme that research has yet to sufficiently address. And yet, there is reason to think that this possibility may, in certain instances, constitute a solution to the loss of skilled workers.

Role of the Diaspora in the Emergence of the Subregion

- › How can the diaspora be integrated into development strategies?
- › What is the impact of the diaspora on the development of the countries of the subregion?

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India and China have been able to integrate their diaspora into their development strategy, culminating in spectacular growth in certain sectors. However, in West and Central Africa, despite a growing awareness and a few attempts in which certain countries have entrusted a ministry with the management of the relationship, the diasporas remain largely excluded from official national economic and social development strategies.

Despite this, a large number of African expatriates remain committed to their country of origin and participate through funding, technology transfers, capacity building

or direct foreign investments. An in-depth state of the art study should be conducted on the impact of these contributions on the development of their native countries. In order to facilitate and accelerate full recognition of the role of the diasporas in the emergence of the subregion, it is critical to better understand the political choices that have enabled other countries to successfully ally themselves with their diaspora. The role of the latter in the promotion of exports to the major world markets is another research theme that should be earmarked for future study.

8 Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies and Reforms

- › What have been the results of the major initiatives in which the countries of the subregion have taken part?
- › What measures should be envisaged to obtain more concrete results?

Since the 1980s, the countries in the subregion have undertaken economic reforms, such as Structural Adjustment Plans or Strategic Poverty Reduction Plans, and have ratified a certain number of international conventions and agreements in the areas of environment, health and education.

Similarly, on the continental scale, the Lagos Plan, NEPAD and other, more specific initiatives, such as the Industrial Development Decade for Africa, have been inaugurated with hopes of a brighter future and genuine

African integration.

These major economic, social and environmental initiatives provide for a series of commitments on the part of the countries. In order to achieve an integration of the subregion that is beneficial for globalization, it is indispensable to know the outcomes of the measures undertaken by the countries and what remains to be achieved to meet the objectives set. Through evaluations of this kind, corrective action may be taken to promote the achievement of tangible and more consistent results.

9 Development of Transportation

- › What are the obstacles to the development of transportation infrastructures in the subregion?

West and Central African countries are experiencing difficult years in terms of transportation. Railways, which are an effective and economical means of trade, have practically disappeared from the subregion. The highway system, which could have taken over in part from the African railway network, suffers from structural insufficiencies. Even the African skies are considered among the least safe in the world and have suffered from the

recent disappearance of Air Afrique and other airlines. Genuine subregional integration cannot be achieved without railway, highway, maritime and air networks. For that reason, it is primordial to improve our understanding of the factors hindering the development of transportation in the subregion, by lending particular attention to management issues.

10 Health

- › How can we improve access to healthcare and the quality of care?
- › How can we develop quality, competitive healthcare in the subregion?

Poverty, socio-political upheaval and also disease continue to have a profound impact on the lives of the populations of West and Central Africa. However, a healthy population in full possession of its production capacities is essential for countries in the subregion to be successfully integrated into the global economy.

Issues of access to health care and quality of care in the subregion should therefore remain priority research themes. However, in the context of globalization, it is even more urgent to reflect on the means that would make it possible to offer quality, competitive care on the subregional scale.

11 Cultural Integration

- › How to promote greater cultural integration in the subregion?

Faced with globalization, isolated cultural initiatives - the FESPACO film festival in Ouagadougou, African fashion in Niger, Music in Abidjan - are not enough to preserve and showcase the cultures of West and Central Africa. Today, there is a need to examine the conditions that would promote greater cultural integration in the subregion.

The role of African media and the use of new technologies in the dissemination of the culture of the subregion are therefore two more research themes that merit further study. There is also a need to better document issues linked to cultural tourism, which could certainly represent a powerful vector of growth.