**The Burkina Faso - Côte d’Ivoire corridor**

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**Introduction[[1]](#endnote-2)**

Côte d’Ivoire is the main destination for migrants from Burkina Faso and likewise, Burkinabè are the largest migrant group in Côte d’Ivoire. Owing to the often circular and temporary nature of these migrations and to different ways of classifying who is a migrant, estimates vary from 1.5 million to 3.5 million out of a population of over 19 million (Zanou and Lougue 2009, 1; ICMPD and IOM 2016, 92). The Burkina Faso - Côte d’Ivoire migration corridor is an almost century-old exchange that originated in a policy from the French colonial administration to use the Burkinabè territory (then Upper Volta) as a labour reservoir to supply Ivoirian agriculture and major transport projects. France did not only administer people within the landlocked territory of Upper Volta, but also, as this chapter will show, adjusted its borders to keep labour power under control. Nearly sixty years on from independence, labour migration continues to be the primary focus of the corridor, and the majority of the migrant population works in the informal sector, largely in agriculture (IOM 2009; ICMPD and IOM 2016).

Both former colonies belong to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), a group of countries whose currency, the CFA franc, is pegged to the euro (previously the French franc) and that are mainly classified as ‘least developed countries’. The numerous migration systems in this region have been squeezed by austerity and associated economic and political crises, especially since the CFA franc was dramatically devalued in 1994. Migration is a household survival strategy in Burkina Faso, where almost half of the country lives below the poverty line and more than seventy percent of the population lives in rural areas, their livelihoods being based on peasant farming, animal husbandry, and artisanal mining. All regions participate but the Mossi in the central part and the north of the country are the largest ethnic group and the main one to face environmental and economic pressures to migrate (Loada 2006, 345). Côte d’Ivoire is WAEMU’s largest economy and the world’s largest producer of cocoa beans, for which it relies on a significant migrant labour force. Yet it has experienced persistent economic problems and is unable to recapture the growth experienced from independence up to the mid-1980s (Sylla 2016, 165-166). The rest of this chapter will firstly outline the historical development of the migration corridor; and second, will examine its impact on development both between and within the two countries. This includes analysis of the patterns of dependency that are associated with migrant labour in West Africa and the role of migrant workers in the development process.

**Historical origins - from forced labour to migration dependence**

In 1923, the French Colonial Minister Albert Sarrault argued that France had yet to profit from its entry to West Africa, so he would assign to each region between two and four products for export. The pattern of development would be orientated around commercial crop zones in the coastal areas, using migrant labour from the interior that would be coerced -through the use of a head tax system and various regimes of forced labour including *prestations* (6-10 days of free labour for public works) and military conscriptions (Cooper 1996, 32; Courtin et al. 2010, 14; Cordell and Gregory 1982, 209). These attempts to extract labour contrasted with the needs of the rural economy, hindering food crop production and creating famine in Upper Volta and Niger by 1931. After people began to flee the colonial regime, mainly going to Gold Coast (now Ghana), the colonial administration dissolved Upper Volta in 1933 into Côte d’Ivoire, Soudan (now Mali) and Niger with the aim of sending the Mossi population to work on major development projects and industrial plantations where they were taken as directly exploitable labour for the expansion of cocoa and coffee production. The railway to Bobo-Dioulasso, launched in 1934, opened up more of the Voltaic labour force for Côte d’Ivoire (Cordell and Gregory 1982, 213; Zanou and Lougue 2009; Blion and Bredeloup 1997, 711; Kabbanji 2007, 1).

Félix Houphouët-Boigny, who would be the first Ivoirian president after independence, led the abolition of forced labour in 1946 amidst major labour struggles and strikes around francophone West Africa and in a mass-movement alliance between African planters, peasants and workers. Colonial authorities soon re-established the territory of Upper Volta to prevent the influence of ‘communism’ from Côte d’Ivoire, though Houphouët-Boigny in reality promoted capitalist economic relations (Cooper 1996, 188; Amin 1971, 13-15). He encouraged the recruitment of migrant labour after independence and the country experienced a ‘growth miracle’ by the mid-1970s that brought male, largely Mossi migrants to work on road and rail projects or in agricultural production in conditions of rapid urbanisation and commercialisation of the rural economy. Increasing numbers of migrants could start their own plantations and use family labour under exemption from taxes, in the south-west where land had not been exploited (Blion and Bredeloup 1997, 719-720; Cordell and Gregory 1982, 218). It ultimately amounted to a form of ‘growth without development’, also found in Ghana and Senegal, by which large tracts of land were dominated by agribusiness and multinationals that profited from low wages (Amin, 1971, 10; Blion and Bredeloup 1997, 712; Cross 2013, 40-41; Adepoju 1995, 91; Arthur 1991, 70).

This growth would be reversed by the world economic upheaval that, by the early 1980s, created serious balance of payment problems and a decline in terms of trade for countries that had specialised their economies for the export of primary products. Like many other former colonies, Côte d’Ivoire plunged into indebtedness and international financial institutions gained increasing power over its deteriorating economic and financial situation (Losch 2000, 7-8). In a restructured, brutally competitive world economy, the price of cacao plunged in 1989 to less than 60 percent of its 1984 nominal dollar price. Houphouët-Boigny appointed Alassane Ouattara as Prime Minister in 1991, a US-educated economist who would oversee a programme of neoliberal austerity (ODI 1990, 1; Cagnolari 2011). Ouattara was also a major proponent of the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, which despite mitigating measures from the International Monetary Fund and France, left people half as rich while the cost of imported goods, on which people were dependent, shot up.

In this economic setting, Henri Konan Bédié, President after Houphouët-Boigny’s death in 1993, established the nationalist conception of ‘Ivoirité’ (Ivorianness), which interrupted the process of naturalisation for immigrants and deprived them of the right to vote. Burkinabè workers, even if they belonged to the million people who were born in Côte d’Ivoire, were not Ivoirian in law: both parents had to be born in the country. This legislation excluded Ouattara from standing for election, though he eventually became President in 2010 under highly contested circumstances. While the previous principle had been that the land belonged to those who develop it; as of 1998, only the state, local public authorities and Ivorians could be owners (ICPMD and IOM 2016, 132; Courtin et al. 2010, 15-16; Zongo 2003, 116).

By the 1990s, the forest was already becoming exhausted in Côte d’Ivoire, bringing diminishing returns from the land, continuous reliance on cheap labour from migrants and the expansion of trafficked child labour. Methods of labour and land exploitation became more intense in response to land pressures and low commodity prices (Woods 2003; Odijie 2016). Towards the end of 1999, locals in Tabou to the south-west of the country started a movement against ’foreign’ workers who had been there for more than a decade, which led to mass flight. More provocations to leave followed the 2000 election of Laurent Gbagbo and the attempted *coup d’état* in 2002, which started a civil war. Though the war itself lasted less than a year, the country was divided by a buffer zone, ‘secured’ by French and UN troops, between the rebel-held north and the south controlled by Gbagbo and his loyalist forces (Galy 2008). At this time, around 500,000 Burkinabè were displaced to Burkina Faso (Loada 2006, 354). The Burkinabè government avoided the establishment of refugee camps, instead channelling *repatriés* to their villages of origin, but on return many were no longer considered to belong there, had never lived there, or they were unable to access quality land. Many settled elsewhere in the country, and high numbers appear to have re-emigrated to Côte d’Ivoire, sustaining their social links with the country, although it has become more difficult to travel. The military buffer zone was successively dismantled after a peace accord was signed in March 2007. In 2011, however, it faced further political crisis and, more recently, economic shocks of a sharp decline in cocoa prices and higher oil prices.

**Migrant labour and development**

This section considers the extent to which migration from Burkina Faso to Côte d’Ivoire encourages development and promotes socio-economic mobility for migrant workers and their communities. In 1975, the average length of migration was 4.5 years, and for the over-30s, 6.5 years, while the number of women migrating doubled to one-third. Individual labour migrations of unmarried men shifted and cascaded towards family migration, while the collective solidarity of diaspora and community associations expanded as Côte d’Ivoire had taken an integrationist approach towards Burkinabè (Blion and Bredeloup 1997, 714). Villages and urban quarters in Côte d’Ivoire gained Burkinabè names including Koudougou in the Bouaflé region and ‘petit Ouaga’ in a neighbourhood of Abidjan. Most Burkinabè worked in plantations but there were also records of their type of employment changing after five years towards industry, artisanal work and the service sector, yet the change in Côte d’Ivoire’s fortune a decade later reversed many of these gains. As men dominated these migration flows, salaried employment for women in Burkina Faso was relatively high, constituting one-third of civil service personnel, but women also faced restricted land rights, disproportionately higher levels of poverty and higher risks to health (Harsch 1998, 632). Women have since migrated to work in cities as well as for family reasons, and migrations for education have also advanced, with representation for Burkinabè students found in Tocsin, an association that focuses on the concerns of the diaspora.

While these indicators suggest some positive impacts on development, the overwhelming evidence shows the centrality of such a labour regime to underdevelopment and dependence. One reflection on Burkina Faso’s century of labour migration finds that is ‘approved’ in society only because it is a household survival strategy (Piché 2015, 14). It has had profound effects on poverty since transfers of remittances, affecting most families, have been unstable, local economic and subsistence activities are abandoned and there is a reliance on imported products whose prices are determined by financial speculators. Although Côte d’Ivoire is the better-off country in this relationship, it is best understood as an international class relation because it benefits a small capitalist elite under the dominance of the international financial institutions. Agricultural production is submitted to world prices and societies in both countries are held back from substantive development.

SamirAmin argues that West Africa’s colonial trade economy persists, challenging the mainstream conception of migration patterns as a process of accelerated industrialisation, by which short-term migration by lone males would eventually give way to a settled urban working class (Amin and Bush 2014). While some settlement patterns developed in Côte d’Ivoire, the broader linearity of migrations has been proven a myth because chronic dependence on migration, under unstable conditions, continues in Burkina Faso. This reflects continuing patterns of circulatory movement and evidence of counter-urbanising trends in Africa’s regions (Potts 2010, 20-21; Piché 2015, 9). Alternative destinations are highly restricted, with some diversification of routes to Ghana, Togo and Benin, while attempts to go further afield, towards the United States or Europe, are confronted with the closure of safe routes and the destabilisation of North African transit zones: one indicator of the scale of the regional crisis of migration was revealed in 2012, when 1661 Burkinabè returnees had fled the Libyan civil war (ICMPD and IOM 2016, 93; Loada 2006, 354). Dependence on labour migration has kept West Africa in a peripheral position in the global economy and has sustained an economic geography by which the coastal countries of Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia have higher urban populations and net immigration, and relatively higher gains in GDP and social development; while the interior countries, especially Burkina Faso and Mali, continue to have ‘traditional’ economic sectors with a surplus of labour, marking the interdependence rather than dualism between these countries (Amin 1995, 37; Sylla 2016; Devillard, Bacchi, and Noack 2015, 25; Cross and Cliffe 2017, 3-4; Arthur 1991, 71).

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