

COMMENT

Makoto Katsumata

(Assistant Professor, Meiji Gakuin University)

By reading Mr. Haraguchi's paper, I could find some common points which characterize the village in French speaking West Africa. This observation might allow me to make two small comments in general terms.

First, it is concerning the question of the unit of analysis. In his paper, the unit of analysis is a village with about 20000 inhabitants. We may ask to what extent this single-village approach is an appropriate unit of analysis for grasping the rural transformation in a country like the Ivory Coast as a whole.

But on the other hand, we may be able to consider that the village is still a valid unit of analysis for a rural Africa.

Mr. Belloncle, a French scholar and a specialist in rural development in Africa explains the reasons why the traditional village in West Africa can be studied usefully, as it might constitute the bases of national development. Mr. Belloncle points that the African villages have three characteristics which have great possibilities for promoting people-based development.

1. Concentrated habitation which facilitates inter-exchange and communication;
2. Generally speaking, the village enjoys democratic power structure;
3. Generally speaking also, the African village still has a great economic homogeneity.

Precisely, according to the description of Ahoué village by Mr. Haraguchi, this village seems to represent to a large extent these characteristics. The village as a whole seems to undergo slowly but certainly a positive transformation.

If I am allowed to use pictorial expression, this landscape is quite different from the Mozambican situation where the development effort in rural majority suffers from sabotage of banditry backed by the South African Apartheid regime. By reading his paper, I got an idea that, if all the rural area in Ivory Coast is formed of this type of village, why should we be really concerned with the so called the end of Miracle or the business recession people there call often in French "conjuncture".

Here, we can realize how important it is to set the unit of analysis for the village level at least in the West African context. Indeed, crisis at the State-level or in urban areas does not mean necessarily crisis in the village level.

It may look a banal remark, but if we agree that State in Africa remains relatively weak for historical reasons, we have to recognize that, with rains in time, the village remains a powerful autonomous area despite bad external conditions.

Second remark is on the environmental trouble of a quarry plant which has caused a deep split among the villagers according to Mr. Haraguchi's investigation. Here, we are able to see the opposite situation on the road to development in the village. Development for the town-based activities like this plant located in Ahoué village did not lead to the development for the overall village life.

A meeting of two worlds, say rural and industrial, is not carried out in harmony that this kind of articulation problems will probably worsen in the near future. As industrial activities are accelerated in this region, a short distance which separates the village from the capital may become a crucial factor.

As the author asks himself pertinently what is the real development for Ahoué, the environmental dimension is no longer the secondary or supplementary question of development, but is

the vital one in West Africa. Let me now formulate four questions from the point of rural transformation.

1. Although the impact of the debt crisis varies across the continent, its root causes seem to be the same: Africa's peripheral position in the world economy as a producer and exporter of raw materials and its dependence on an over-extended State. How these macro-level symptoms could be detected in the Ahoué village?

2. According to your investigation, which social category of village people assume historical role of capitalist who is expected to contribute to a nation-wide development through the process of social differentiation and accumulation?

3. Could you give us an approximate number of non-rural wage earners who maintain their rural household as a base and have communal land rights and common grazing land?

4. Could you explain us why you did proceed in a very rough and spontaneous investigation rather than in a systematic investigation based on well formulated questionnaire?