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FOSTER CARE AND SCHOOLING IN WEST AFRICA: THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 4

1. LE PHÉNOMÈNE DES ENFANTS « CONFIÉS » EN AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST 6

1.1. Generalités ..... ***Erreur ! Signet non défini.***

1.2. La mesure du phénomène *7*

2. CONFIAGE AND SCOLARISATION: UNE RELATION AMBIVALENTE… 15

2.1. Confiage and « migrations scolaires » *16*

2.2. Confiage and travail des enfants: le cas spécifique des filles confiées en ville *18*

2.3. Des effets de la crise économique *23*

2.4. Les orphelins du VIH/sida *24*

2.5. Le travail des enfants « confiés »: risques croissants d'exploitation and de trafficking.… *26*

ENSEIGNEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES 28

BIBLIOGRAPHIE 30

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. THE "FOSTER" CHILDREN PHENOMENON IN WEST AFRICA

1.1 General observations

1.2 Measuring the phenomenon

2. FOSTER CARE AND SCHOOLING: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

2.1 Fostering and "school migration"

2.2 Fostering and child labor: the special case of girls sent to cities

2.3 Effects of the economic crisis

2.4 HIV/AIDS orphans

2.5 "Foster" child labor: the growing risk of exploitation and trafficking

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS

BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

Education statistics usually compiled on the national as well as international (by UNESCO) levels are mostly based on school statistics. "Education demand" is taken into account only through the school-age population's demographic weight. Government officials calculate the male and female enrolment rate by taking the number of boys and girls in the appropriate age class who are actually enrolled into consideration in the numerator and the total number of children of each sex in the same age group in the denominator. In doing so, they implicitly, but arbitrarily, consider the two populations — boys and girls — to be independent of one another. In concrete terms, that method of calculating official rates fails to measure variations in the chances that a boy or a girl has to attend school depending on the household to which he or she belongs. Insofar as school enrolment largely depends on demand, it is indispensable to identify factors that act positively and negatively on enrolment, especially that of girls. The domestic processes underlying the decision to send a boy or a girl living in a household to school must still be determined. Schooling is still "subject to conditions" for girls more often than boys (Lange, 1998). The processes vary from one culture to another. As E. Goody observed 20 years ago (1982), they vary especially because fostering may serve purposes that are distinct depending on the cultural context and different depending on the child's sex (Clignet and Pilon, 2000). On one hand, enrolling a child in school may be why some parents place their children in foster care; on the other, fostering may actually prevent enrolment. As Rémi Clignet noted (1994: 115), "by underscoring the impact of the overall economic or sociocultural environment on education demand, intra-familial variations are unduly overlooked... Enrolment, then, depends on children's family status, sex and residence at the same time."

Existing scientific literature reveals that fostering is common in Africa, especially West Africa. However, little research has focused on the relationship between fostering and schooling.

By their nature, school statistics make it possible neither to study the factors influencing family schooling practices, nor to shed light on that relationship. Aside from the pupils' age and sex, they provide no information on the children's individual and family characteristics, place of birth, family status, residence or not with their parents; on the age, marital status, ethnicity, religion, education level, economic activity, etc. of the head of the household, of the father and mother; on the size and make-up of the household in which the children live, etc.

And of course, school statistics say nothing about whether school-age children are still enrolled.

In the absence of specific studies, general population censuses and most demographic and socio-economic surveys can offer a rich analytical potential (CEPED-UEPA-UNESCO, 1999), if the data are appropriately used. Information-gathering operations using the household as the unit of observation almost systematically collect data on education (school attendance of the moment, educational level, etc.), as well as on the other demographic and socio-economic features of the household's other resident members.

Based on existing data sources and available findings from West Africa, this study aims to present the state of knowledge involving the phenomenon of foster children on one hand, and the relationship between foster care and schooling on the other, making a point to shed light specifically on the situation of girls.

1. THE "FOSTER" CHILDREN PHENOMENON IN WEST AFRICA

1.1. General observations

Parents' placement of children in another family is an old phenomenon in many societies worldwide. Though the practice has not spread to every African society, all existing studies concur to indicate that it is especially common in West Africa (Page, 1989; Isiugo-Ibanihe, 1985). Researchers have only recently started looking into the practice (Silk, 1987; Lallemand, 1993). Anthropologists and sociologists blazed the trail, followed by demographers, who, initially motivated by the relationship between fostering practices and fertility behavior, have taken a growing interest in the phenomenon.

English-speaking Africans use terms such as fosterage, fostering, adoption, child relocation and transfer, child circulation, child migration, child rearing delegation (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1985, 1991) and exchange of children (Harpending and Pennington, 1993). Fostering is by far the most commonly used word. The diversity of all these terms and their definitions (which moreover are not always explicit) leads to a certain amount of confusion (Vandeermersch, 2000). They reflect very different situations and dimensions, whose explanatory factors vary depending on the children's age and sex, living environment, circumstances, time periods and, of course, societies.

The traditional causes observed vary widely. They include illness, death, divorce, the parents' separation, mutual help among family members, socialization/education (in the general meaning of the term) and strengthening of family ties (by blood or marriage). For the societies involved, child circulation is a characteristic of family systems, fitting in with patterns of family solidarity and the system of rights and obligations. In addition to reinforcing social bonds, this practice also appears to help maintain high fertility rates by more evenly spreading out the economic burden of child-rearing. Whatever the reasons, fostering is a component in family structure and dynamics.

Since the institution of school appeared, enrolment has been a reason for child fostering and residential mobility.

1.2. Measuring the phenomenon

The extent and the respective weight of the causes behind the foster children phenomenon are still very poorly documented. Demographers consider definitions that generally refer to residency status in relation to the (biological) parents. The examples below illustrate the diversity of definitions which, moreover, involve various age groups, as well as their vagueness due to lack of information about motives:

Page (1989): children from 0 to 14 years old, other than those of the household head, not living with their mother;

Isiugo-Abanihe (1985): children from 0 to 10, other than those of the household head, not living with their parents;

Vimard and Guillaume (1991): children from 0 to 19, other than those of the household head (even if one of the two parents is present);

Ainsworth (1990): children from 7 to 14, other than those of the household head, not living with their parents but not orphans;

Bledsoe and Brandon (1989): children from 1 to 12 not living with their mother;

Blanc and Lloyd (1994): children from 0 to 14 not living with their parents.

Can children living with their father, a situation falling into the category "not living with the mother", be considered in foster care? It must be kept in mind that the data sources demographers use do not provide information on the reasons underlying family situations that can be considered akin to foster care. That is why the English expression *children's living arrangements* seems to be the most accurate way of describing the situation. The definitions listed above help above all to identify children's residence status in relation to their parents (father and mother). That said, it can be argued that children living with neither parent (if at least one is alive) are indeed in a foster-care situation, but the reason is unknown.

In the absence of information on the biological parents' survival and residence, studies resort to modalities of the child's family ties within the residence household to understand foster-care situations. For example, they distinguish between the following categories of children in a given age group: child of the household head, other relative, non-relative. But that approach is obviously less precise and more uncertain.

Right now, Demographic and Health Surveys are the richest source of demographic data, with most of the household surveys containing questions about the survival and residence of

parents of all the children under 15. Children's' residence status is broken down into nine categories:

Living with both parents	
Living with the mother	Father alive (non-resident) Father deceased
Living with the father	Mother alive (non-resident) Mother deceased
Not living with either parent.	Father and mother alive (non-residents) Father alive (non-resident), mother deceased Mother alive (non-resident), father deceased Father and mother deceased

This classification of children has several advantages. First, it is based on straightforward and therefore fairly reliable questions: are the father and mother alive? Do the father and mother live in the same household? Second, the combination of answers to those two questions help distinguish between all the types of the children's family and residential situations in relation to their parents. The various cases of orphaned children (father deceased, mother deceased, both parents deceased) can be ascertained. What's more, this classification of children can be analyzed based on their sex, age and family ties within the household. All that information is valuable for studying the relationships between foster care and schooling.

The surveys' individual questionnaires also include specific questions for mothers on the hosting and placement of children, but they only involve mothers between 15 and 49 years old (called "eligible"). Recent research on foster children in Senegal illustrates the potential for analyzing this type of survey (Vandeermersch, 2000).

Today, Demographic and Health Survey findings provide the most complete statistical information, and offer the possibility of comparative analyses for a growing number of countries over time. The published findings usually provide an indicator concerning the households ("the percentage of households with children without parents"), given according

to the place of residence, and a table breaking children down into groups according to their parents' survival and residence depending on their age, sex and residence environment.

For the ten countries listed (table 1), the percentage of households with one or more children under 15 living without (biological) parents is at least 15%. It exceeds 20% (one in five households) in seven countries and reaches almost one-third in Senegal. The differences observed according to the residence environment reflect a very wide variety of situations depending on the country. The values for half of them are higher in the countryside. The opposite is true for the other countries.

Table 1: Percentage of households with children under 15 living without their parents (Source: EDS).

Country	Rural	Urban	Total	Year
Benin	19.6	23.7	21.1	2000-01
Burkina Faso	19.7	26.8	21.1	1992-93
Côte d'Ivoire	26.4	25.7	26.1	1994
Ghana	16.1	14.9	15.7	1998
Guinea	26.5	35.5	29.1	1999
Mali	14.9	22.8	16.9	2000-01
Niger	23.2	22.2	23.0	1998
Nigeria	17.9	17.4	17.7	1999
Senegal	35.0	28.1	32.1	1992-93
Togo	23.1	26.9	24.4	1998

Demographic and Health Survey reports provide more accurate information about parents' survival and residence based on the children's age group, especially for children between 6 and 9 and 10 and 14, which is also the school enrolment age.

By considering children living with neither parent (whether or not they are alive) as being in "foster care", it can be observed that (table 2):

- the percentage of foster children ranges between 10 and 20% in the 6-9 age bracket, and between 13 and 25% in the 10-14 age group;

- in the overwhelming majority of cases, both parents are alive but do not live with their child(ren).

These figures demonstrate the extent of the foster-child phenomenon among school-age children in West Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, approximately one child in four between the ages of 10 and 14 lives with neither parent; for almost one child in five, both parents are alive but reside elsewhere.

An interpretation on the regional level reveals clear differences between coastal and Sahelian countries. Except for Nigeria, the practice of fostering in the 6-14 age bracket seems much more common in the coastal countries, especially for children between 10 and 14 years old.

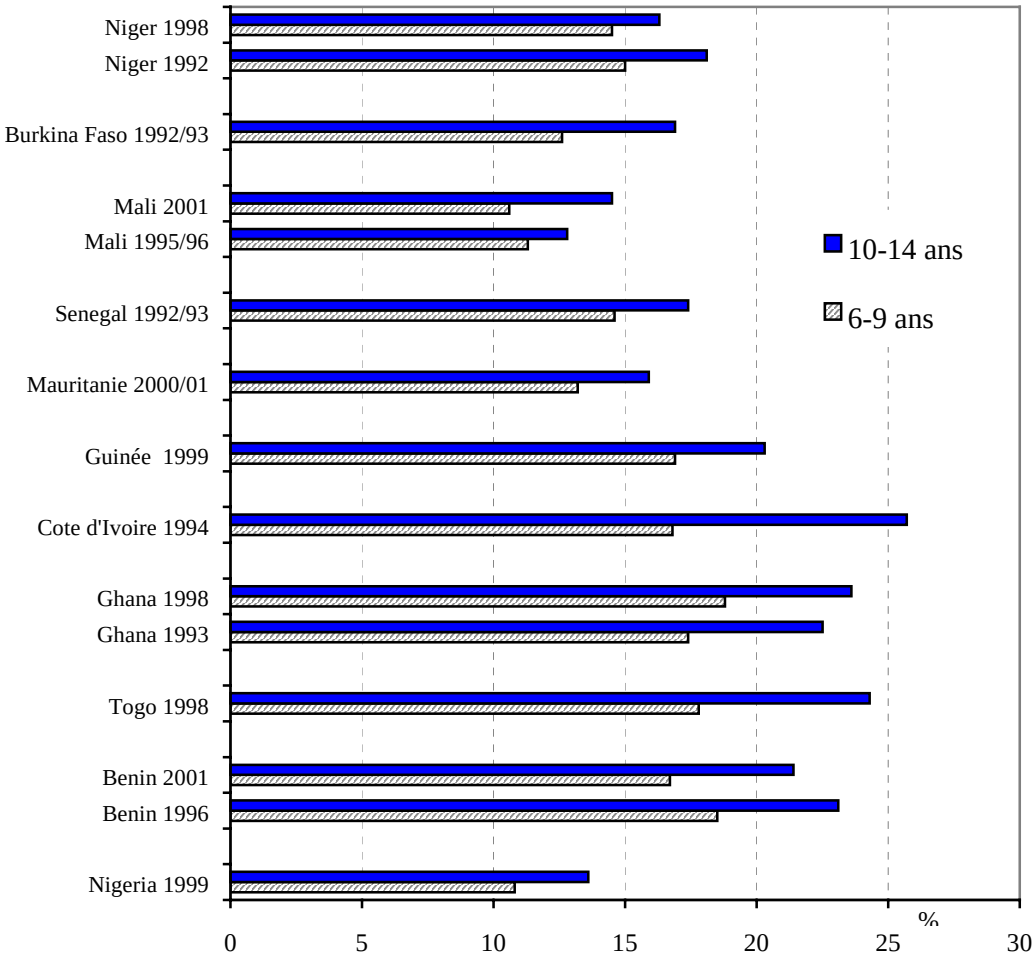
Unfortunately, the national survey reports' findings do not make is possible to take the analysis further, especially when it comes to the children's sex, and these studies provide no information on the reasons for the children's residential situation.

Table 2: Percentage (%) of 6- to 9- and 10- to 14-year-old children residing with neither parent, by state of parents' survival and residence with the parents (sources: EDS)

Country	**6-9** Living with neither parent					Liv	
	Both parents alive	Father alive Mother deceased	Mother alive Father deceased	Both parents deceased	**Total**	Both parents alive	Father al Mothe decease
Benin 2001	13.5	0.6	2.0	0.6	**16.7**	16.4	1.1
Burkina Faso 1992/93	9.2	0.7	1.6	1.1	**12.6**	11.5	1.1
Côte d'Ivoire 1994	13.8	0.9	1.7	0.4	**16.8**	20.8	1
Ghana 1998	16.0	1.0	1.4	0.4	**18.8**	19.2	1.5
Guinea 1999	13.2	0.8	2.0	0.9	**16.9**	15	1
Mali 2001	8.5	0.5	0.9	0.7	**10.6**	11	1
Mauritania 2000/01	10.2	1.3	0.9	0.8	**13.2**	11.7	1.6
Niger 1998	11.8	1.0	1.5	0.2	**14.5**	11.8	1.3
Nigeria 1999	8.2	0.5	1.0	1.1	**10.8**	9.8	1.1

Senegal 1992/93	12.6	0.6	1.1	0.3	**14.6**	13.7	1.4
Togo 1998	14.1	1.1	1.9	0.7	**17.8**	17.6	1.2

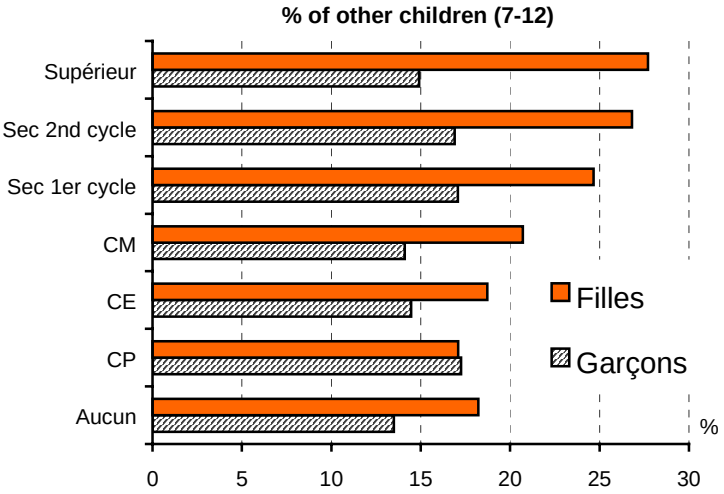
Chart 1: Percentage (%) of 6- to 9- and 10- to 14-year-old children residing with neither parent (sources: EDS)



Few studies provide findings on the profile of households hosting these children. A secondary analysis of general population census data from 1996 in Burkina Faso shows that, in the capital, the higher the household head's educational level, the greater the presence of girls other than those of the household head[1] (chart 2). It is highest in the most economically privileged socio-professional categories (middle or senior-level managers, the liberal professions) (chart 3).

[1] Considering the census's restrictive definition of household (it cannot include more than one family core), the children who are not declared as those of the household head have a high probability of being children not residing with their parents, and can therefore be considered in a foster care situation.

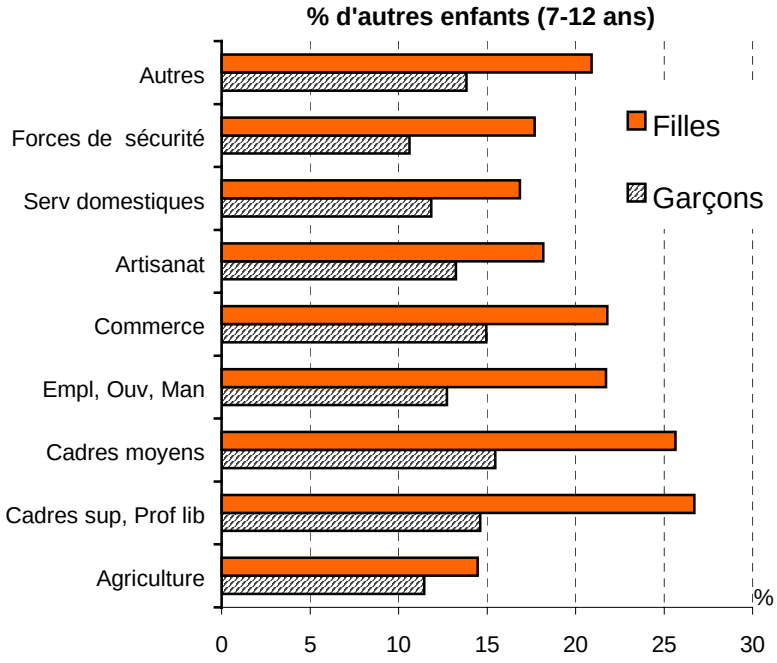
Chart 2: Percentage of "other children" among the 7-12 year-olds according to the household head's sex and education level; Ouagadougou, 1996 census.



Girls

Boys

Chart 3: Percentage of "other children" among the 7-12 year-olds according to the household head's sex and socio-professional category; Ouagadougou, 1996 census.



Other

Security forces
Domestic servants
Craftworkers
Commerce
Employee, Worker, Laborer
Middle manager
Senior manager, professional
Farmer

Urban households take foster children into their care in order to socialize and enroll them in school (especially boys), but their strong inclination to host young girls raises the problem of the need for labor, especially for domestic purposes. The relationship between the custody of very young children and housework raises problems particularly in households where both spouses work outside the home.

A previous study based on Togo's 1981 census data revealed that female-headed households were more likely to host children, "with the proportion of foster children nearly twice as high as that observed in male-headed households (29.5% and 15.8%). It is precisely those urban female household heads who host the most girls: 40% of the children are foster girls. The ratio of foster girls to boys is 273:1!" (Pilon, 1995: 713).

Deeper and more comparative analyses (in time and space) based on various available data sources are necessary to better document the phenomenon of foster children, especially those of school age.

What do we now know about the relationship between foster care and schooling?

2. FOSTER CARE AND SCHOOLING: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

The relationship between foster care and schooling is fundamentally ambivalent. On one hand, some children are placed in foster care (sent to a guardian) so that they may attend school. On the other, some leave their households of origin for reasons (socialization, to help the family, etc.) that keep them out of school.

For six countries that participated in the Network of Surveys on Migration and Urbanisation in West Africa (NESMUA)[2] in 1993, calculation of the gross enrolment rate for 7- to 14-year-old children depending on their sex, family status and residence environment (urban/rural) illustrates that ambivalence (chart 4)[3].

The fact that in several countries the enrolment rate in the countryside for children residing without their parents at the time of the survey was higher than that of the household heads' own children suggests that in these families the purpose of fostering is to enroll children in school, a situation that can involve boys as well as girls. The lack of a school in some villages or a great distance to the nearest one often leads parents to place their child(ren) with families (teachers if possible) living in a village with a school.

The situation is quite different in cities. Except for boys in Côte d'Ivoire, in all the other countries children living without their parents seem to have lower enrolment rates than the household heads' own offspring, with underenrolment affecting girls more than boys.

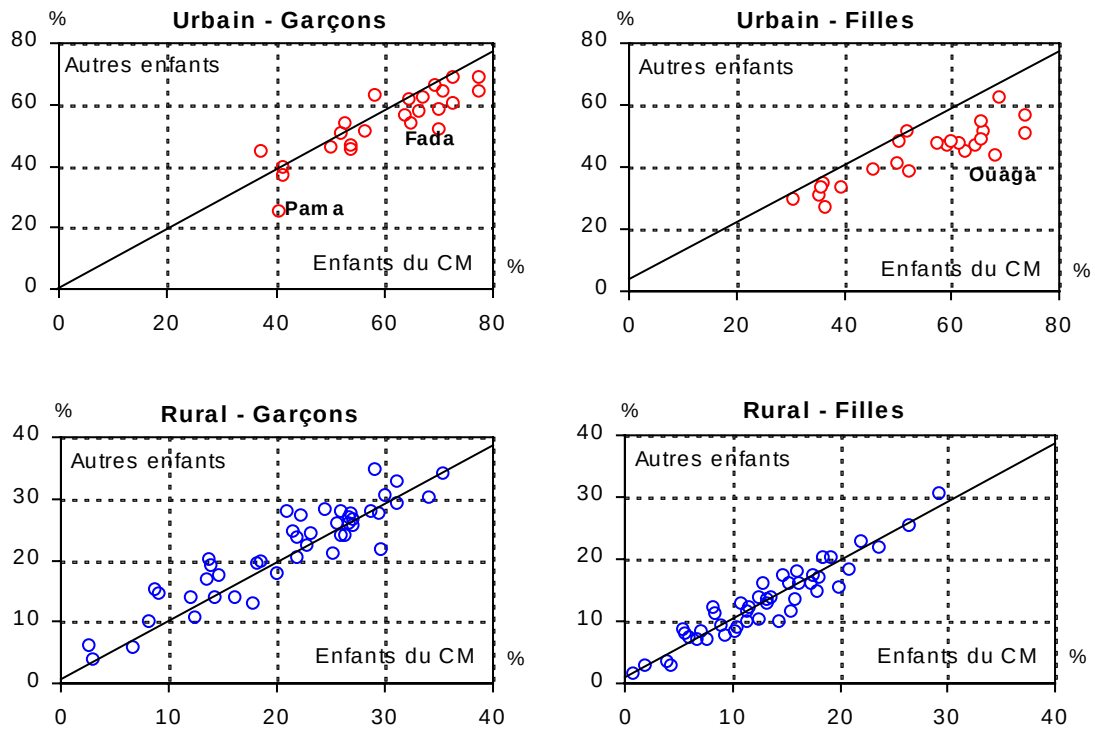
A secondary analysis on the province level of data from Burkina Faso's 1996 general population census, which distinguishes between the "household head's children" and "other children", leads to the same conclusions (chart 5).

Chart 4: Gross enrolment rate (7-14 years old) according to children's family status and sex by residence environments (sources: NESMUA surveys, 1993) (HH: Household Head)

[2]- Under the coordination of the CERPOD, a similar type of survey was simultaneously conducted in seven countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal. In all, approximately 500,000 people were surveyed. Although the study's focus was internal migrations, these surveys gathered education information from "household" questionnaires about all individuals over the age of six.

[3]- The findings were compiled during an analysis workshop co-organized by the CERPOD, the FASAF Network and Montreal University in Bamako in December 2001. The data on Burkina Faso do not make it possible to draw the same distinctions between family status, so that country is not included in chart 4.

Chart 5: Gross enrolment rate (7-12 years old) according to family status familial and children's sex by residence environment (1996 census, Burkina Faso)



Other studies have led to the same findings for Togo (Pilon, 1995), Senegal (Vandermeersch, 2000), Mali (Marcoux, 1994), Ghana (Lloyd and Gage-Brandon, 1993), and Côte d'Ivoire (Ainsworth, 1992; Antoine and Guillaume, 1986).

It should be specified that for situations of non-attendence at the time of the survey, none of the findings distinguish between enrolled and unenrolled children. Among the children unenrolled at any given time, it would be useful to distinguish between those who were "never enrolled" and those who were "formerly enrolled".

2.1. Fostering and "school migration"

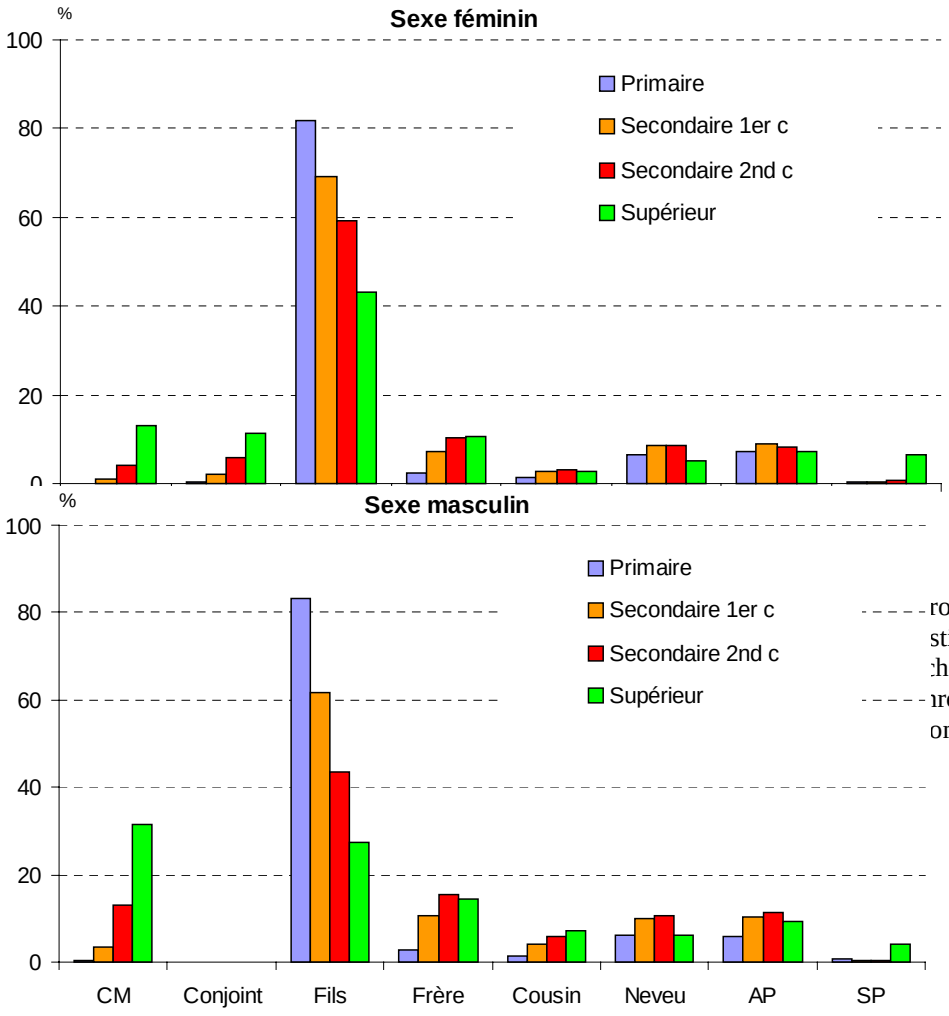
Breaking pupils and students down into groups based on their family relationship to the household head and education level (primary, secondary, post-secondary) helps shed light on the extent of "school migration". Findings from a secondary analysis of Burkina Faso's 1996 general population census show that the higher the education level, the higher the level of

school migration (chart 6): for both sexes, slightly over 80% of primary school pupils are children of household heads, whereas the percentage drops to 65% for the first cycle of secondary school, 48% for the second cycle and 31% at the post-secondary level. From the secondary level, the location of schools in urban centers forces pupils and students from the countryside to attend boarding schools, when their parents can afford it, to live with families residing in cities or to have their own housing (slightly over one in four students is head of a household).

The decline observed is sharper for males, especially in the 2nd secondary cycle and on the post-secondary level. The percentages are 43% and 27%, respecively, compared to 59% and 43% for females. In parallèl with the decline in the ratio of the female school population to the education level, these figures show that female underenrolment, which increases as the level in the school system rises, primarily affects rural families[4].

Chart 6: Breakdown (%) of the school population based on educational level and family relationship to the household head, 1996 census, Burkina Faso.
(HH: Head of Household; OR: Other Relatives; NR: No Family Relationship)

Female



[4]- It is useful ronment or standard c stimate the enrolment chools and universitie rolment of children fi ome of the children c

Primary
1st secondary cycle
2nd secondary cycle
Post-secondary
HH
Spouse
Daughter
Sister
Cousin
Niece
OR
NR

Male
Primary
1st secondary cycle
2nd secondary cycle
Post-secondary
HH
Spouse
Son
Brother
Cousin
Nephew
OR
NR

That nearly one in five pupils on the primary-school level is not the household head's child demonstrates the extent of child mobility, though the reasons they do not live with their parents are unknown. Many children would probably never have access to school without fostering, a family solidarity practice. Moreover, it is likely that the chances of scholastic success will rise for children from illiterate rural families entrusted to an educated household head living in a city and working in a well-paying profession.

2.2 Fostering and child labor: the special case of girls sent to cities

The underenrolment of girls in urban families living without their parents, a situation mentioned above (charts 4 and 5), might reflect various situations. Some young girls are sent to cities to attend school but had to drop out, primarily because of the household chores they are assigned to perform. Other young girls may be hosted not to attend school but to "help out", although they may have gone to school earlier.

The reality of fostering situations enabling children to attend school is not always what it seems. Problems may arise afterwards. Everything actually depends on the nature of the relationship between the family of origin and the host family, and between the child and the host family. Who pays for the children's tuition fees, supplies, clothes, food, etc.? What is the extent of the guardian's responsibility towards the child? What is the authority relationship like? Is there an affectionate relationship? What is the foster child's place in the host family? Actual situations are highly diverse. It is likely that the lower family of origin's involvement, especially financially (or in kind), the higher the risk that the foster child will suffer mistreatment in the host family.

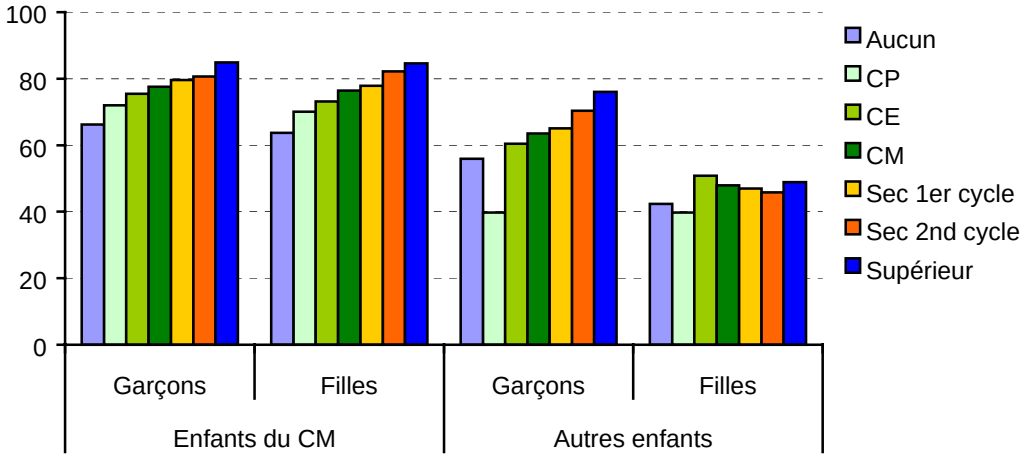
An analysis of data from a survey on the "social dimensions of adjustment" in Côte d'Ivoire reveals that education expenses earmarked for foster children are lower than those allotted to the household head's own children (De Vreyer, 1994). By and large, the host family expects the foster child to perform a certain number of domestic tasks (washing dishes and clothes, carrying water, helping out with the cooking and shopping.), or even to contribute to certain productive or commercial activities. Considered as a kind of payment, those chores might of course fit in with a socialization and upbringing process in the broadest sense. But studies also reveal that "sometimes these children are less well-fed and work more than the others in the household, under the pretext of giving them a good upbringing… These children are practically thought of as domestic servants, and that can only have a negative influence on their scholastic performance" (Vandermeersch, 2000: 431). Their chances of repeating, failing and dropping out are higher. This reality involves boys as well as girls, but the problem is assuredly more acute for girls, who are requested to perform more domestic chores. Moreover, fostering also carries the risk of "psychological suffering" for the child (Savané, 1994). Everything depends on the emotional relationship with the host family's various members and the personality of each person involved. By and large, fostering for purposes of school enrolment does not protect children from abuse, mistreatment and forms of exploitation that might led them to fail in and drop out of school.

Fostering can also be the main obstacle to enrolment. That seems to be especially the case for children from the countryside, particularly girls sent to urban families to work as "household aids" or '"maids". Due to a lack of adequate information, existing data sources make it

impossible to determine the actual percentage of this type of fostering, but analyses based on that data and other studies confirm the phenomenon's extent.

We have previously seen that in urban environments, the more educated the household heads and the higher their professional status, putting them *a priori* among the most economically-privileged (middle and senior managers) members of the population, the greater the likelihood that they will host a foster child. But at the same time it has been observed that the same households have a poor record of enrolling young girls other than those of the household head. The rate is no better than households that are less well-off. A secondary analysis of the 1996 census of Burkina Faso's capital, Ouagadougou, illustrates this situation very well (charts 7 and 8)[5].

Chart 7: Percentage of 7- to 12-year-old children enrolled according to the children's sex and household head's educational level, Ouagadougou, 1996 census.



Boys

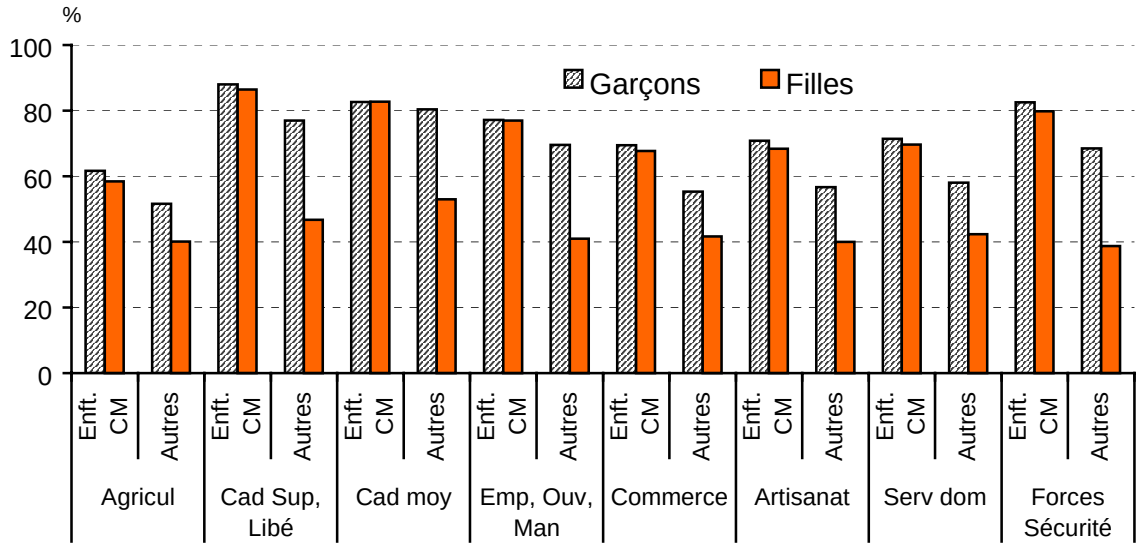
Girls

HH's children

Other children

Chart 8: Percentage of 7- to 12-year-old children enrolled according to the children's sex and the household head's socio-professional class; Ouagadougou, 1996 census.

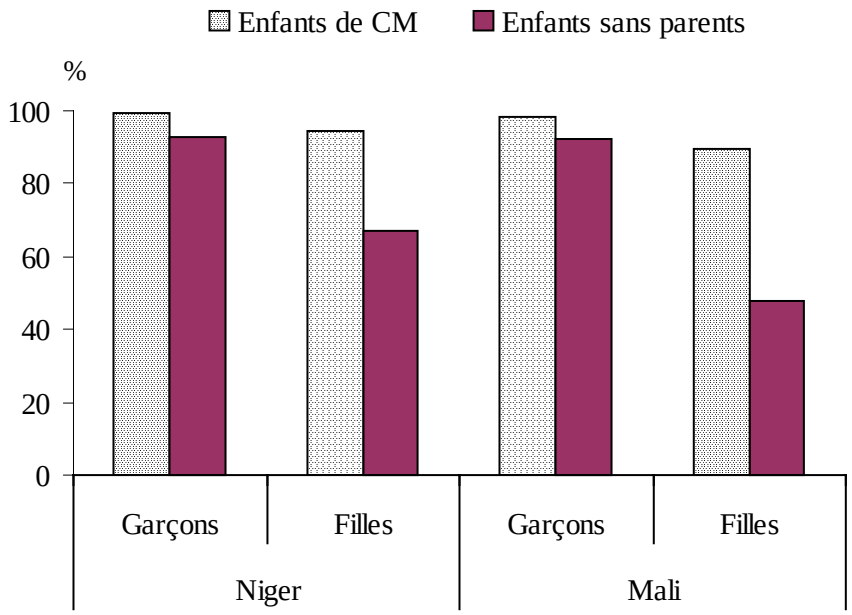
[5]- These figures were also found in the study on enrolment disparities in Ouagadougou.



Boys
Girls
HH's child
Other
Farmer
Senior manager/prof.
Middle manager
Worker, Employee, Laborer
Commerce
Craftworker
Dom. servant
Security forces

The same observation prevails in other countries, for example Mali and Niger (chart 9). If the case of young girls without any family relationship to the household head is taken into account, the enrolment rate falls to 12% in Niger and 6% in Mali.

Figure 9: Enrolment rate of 7- to 14-year-olds, according to their sex, who are the children of household heads, and of children living without parents in urban households led by a higher level household head (source: NESMUA surveys, 1993).



HH's children

Children without parents

Existing data reveal a strong tendency of female heads of households in cities to host foster children, especially girls (Pilon, 1995). But "as paradoxical as it might seem, today it would appear that the 'liberation' of a generation of women, who have access to education and work outside the home, is jeopardizing the chances of a certain class of young girls to follow in their footsteps. In view of the cost of adult labor, compared to wage levels of women on the labor market, women's access to employment seems strongly correlated to the exploitation of docile, inexpensive child labor to replace them in performing household chores" (Boursin, 2002: 9).

As Jean-François Kobiané noted (1999), girls' underenrolment "is also caused by the demands of the modern economy, in an overall context where sex-role representations still hold sway and family solidarity allowing the circulation of many children in the wealthiest classes, both spouses' employment outside the home and their children's enrolment lead to a strong demand for labor to perform domestic tasks. The issue is far from simple because in some cases, hosting those children is part of the household of origin's survival strategy and strengthens the bonds of solidarity between urban and rural households. That demonstrates the complexity of the relationship between poverty, family structures and educational demand."

2.3. Effects of the economic crisis

The relationship between school, work and fostering, especially of girls, is a key element in Africa's schooling processes, on which the economic crisis has had and continues having a major impact. As Jean-Pierre Lachaud (1995) indicated, "the many dimensions of social exclusion in Africa — vulnerability on the labor market, poverty, exclusion from the education system, non-access to basic needs — brings to light just how weak the social integration of many households really is. The economic crisis that has beleaguered the continent for over a decade has probably worsened the deteriorating social situation, which is unprecedented in the course of its history." Straining from the crisis, various forms of solidarity are being put to the test objectively by declining household income concomitant with stronger demand for assistance, and subjectively by occasional malfunctioning leading both providers (who cannot meet often unlimited demand) and potential beneficiaries (who do not receive all the help they expected) to call principles of solidarity into question (Pilon and Vimard, 1998). Studies in urban environments reveal that strains on widened and community forms of solidarity are accompanied by a consolidation and reassessment of solidarity between closely-related individuals based on affectionate, close relationships. "Rationally defined principles of reciprocity, conditionality, finiteness and contractuality" increasingly seem to be replacing the principle of endless "debt" and obligation (Marie, 1997: 297; Marie,). Economic studies show how deflation combined with structural adjustment have shaken Africa's system of rights and obligations and rocked the social edifice (Mahieu, 1991). As Jean-Marc Ela noted (1997: X), "In any case, the family in Africa is standing before a crossroads. Beyond ritualistic incantations on African communitarianism, the endlessly worsening economic crisis is refocusing attention on insecure households. Western-style individualism is not yet here, but the primacy of family ties over individuals is being called into question."

In West Africa, increasing education and health costs arising from the State's disengagement from the social sectors, the urban housing shortage and the disappearance of many salaried jobs have dealt a serious blow to the child circulation system (Pilon and Vignikin, 1996). Since the 1980s, several studies have documented a downward trend in the practice of fostering, especially in the incidence of children sent to live in big cities. In 1990s Abidjan for example, studies showed that "host families are becoming scarce, because only 14% of

children lived in them in 1993 compared to 18% in 1991" (Guillaume *et al*., 1997). Surveys conducted in Benin's major cities and towns in 1990 and 1992 have shown that the proportion of households taking in people (especially children) from the countryside plummeted from 24.1% in 1990 to just 6.5% in 1992 (INSAE, 1993). The same observation was made for Ghana and Nigeria in the 1980s (Lloyd and Blanc, 1995). The findings of demographic and health surveys in the 1990s bore out this trend for Ghana, Benin and Niger. However, in Mali the trend is moving in the opposite direction (the percentage of households with at least one child without parents rose from 15.4% to 16.9% between 1995 and 2000).

The economic crisis seems to have spawned two types of foster care and schooling behavior. First, as might be expected, foster children's schooling is more vulnerable. For example, studies in Cotonou in the early 1990s showed that the children most vulnerable to disenrolment were foster children, especially girls (Charmes, 1993). Second, whereas objective economic hardship forces urban households to be more reluctant to take in newcomers, at the same time, for example in Côte d'Ivoire, flows, especially educational flows, are being redirected towards inland cities and villages, where life is less expensive (Guillaume and *al.*, 1997).

The effects of the economic crisis have been worsened by the impact of HIV/AIDS.

2.2. HIV/AIDS orphans

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has claimed more lives in sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else in the world. According to the available statistics, 70% of HIV/AIDS patients, 85% of the deaths and over 90% of the orphans (approximately 12 million people) live in that part of the globe. One of the major social consequences is that "exponential growth in the number of orphans in Africa is inexorably following the spread of the AIDS pandemic" (Yaro and Dougnon, 2003: 2).

West Africa's hardest-hit countries are Côte d'Ivoire (at least one in ten women between 15 and 49 is HIV-infected), Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Chad and Togo (between 5% and 10%). The estimated number of HIV/AIDS orphans in Côte d'Ivoire is put at over 300,000.

Traditionally the family, in the first place grandparents, uncles and aunts, take care of orphaned children (both parents deceased), confirming the findings of the few existing studies

on the topic (Delcroix and Guillaume, 1998). The soaring number of orphans means that their proportion is also growing among children hosted in households. A survey of 1,200 rural households commissioned by the NGO Plan/Burkina revealed that nearly 40% of the children taken in by another household are because they became orphans, whereas 29% are hosted to perform domestic chores and 26% to attend school (Yaro and Dougnon, 2002). But "this kind of response [placing children in foster care] will quickly become ineffective for several reasons. First, the potential demand for child transfer during the HIV epidemic could considerably outstrip the system's capacities. Search costs are rising and the whole operation will become more difficult and more expensive for the sending family… Given that placement presupposes reciprocity, the partial or total handicap affecting the sending family due to the disease could make the exchange less attractive for the receiving family and might eventually turn out to be impossible" (Palloni and Lee, 1992: 101-102).

Orphans are usually in extremely vulnerable situations, especially since social change and the economic crisis are putting family solidarity to the test. The fact that orphans declare they can take care of themselves (5% of the cases in the Plan/Burkina survey) attests to the challenges facing family solidarity.

In this context, the school situation of orphaned children is becoming especially critical. It is difficult for them to have access to and remain in school. Studies in Côté d'Ivoire show that "when children have been placed in foster care so that they may attend school, the host households do always keep the agreements made with their parents" (Tinel and Guichaoua, 2002: 439). There is a strong likelihood that the financial issue, that is to say the ability to pay tuition fees, will arise increasingly often for foster children who are an additional expense for households that might themselves be finding it difficult to afford their own children's schooling. Psychological problems only make matters worse. In addition to the emotional trauma caused by losing their parents, these children might be discriminated against. "Many accounts reveal that children with a parent who died of AIDS are quite strongly stigmatized. Generally speaking, they suffer unspoken discrimination from other children. Children in focus groups in Burkina have said that their best friends shunned them after their parents died. When they tried to move towards them, their playmates ran away because they said they could catch the disease since they had been in contact with their sick parents. These discriminatory attitudes, fueled by the pupils' ignorance, are often encouraged by the parents themselves" (Yaro and Dougnon, 2003: 12). The situation is obviously worse when the orphans themselves have HIV/AIDS.

In recent documentary research, Céline Vandermeersch (2003: 13) noted that "increasing numbers of children, especially AIDS orphans, [are] placed in foster care to assist their host household with domestic chores or farm work, which helps them meet their own needs. The reasons for fostering are distorted: households must develop strategies to find new sources of income. The practice of placing children in foster care is turning into the provision of a source of young, submissive, cheap labor." "Girls are the main victims of this trend" (Tinel and Guichaoua, 2002: 440; Mahieu, 1990).

The economic crisis and HIV/AIDS have undoubtedly helped change the foundation and nature of the practice of child circulation. In a growing number of cases, the practice of fostering appears more akin to the transfer of labor than a socialization method. The issue of child labor, especially when foster children are involved, arises with renewed intensity today.

2.3. "Foster" child labor: the growing risk of exploitation and trafficking

The interrelationship between schooling and child labor is obviously not new; it is as old as school itself. As B. Schlemmer rightly recalls (1996: 21), "the schooling issue is of course inseparable from the child labor issue". "Scholastic activity does not exclude children from the working world, but the working world might exclude children from school" (Fukui, 1996). That exclusion can involve enrolling as well as well as keeping children in school.

In every human society and period, work has been part of children's upbringing and socialization processes, especially in rural societies. The problem here is the nature of the labor performed and how compatible it is with school. "Child labor in Africa is certainly not a new phenomenon. What is new are the forms that child labor is currently taking, particularly situations of child exploitation and trafficking for economic and/or sexual ends" (Boursin, 2002: 2).

For 15 years, the fight against child exploitation and trafficking has had a new impetus. Launched by the ILO in 1992, the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) today involves approximately 30 countries, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal in West Africa (Niger, Chad and Togo are in the preparatory stages). In addition, the ILO, UNICEF and the World Bank have set up an interagency program entitled

Understanding Children Work (UCW). Many NGOs are campaigning for the rights of "child workers".

Statistical information about child labor is still problematic and patchy, especially since the lack of an internationally recognized definition of "child labor" makes it impossible to clearly identify cases of exploitation and trafficking (Schlemmer, 1996; Bahri and Gendreau, 2002; Pilon, 2002). However, studies specifically focusing on these issues confirm that the problem is quite real and spreading. Two categories of foster children appear increasingly vulnerable to situations of exploitation and trafficking: young "maids" in cities and *garibous*. With regard to the first group, the few studies that have been conducted reveal the existence of organized networks with profit-seeking middlemen. For example, in Burkina Faso "the times and places of young girls' arrival are well-known by employers, who come to choose their future domestic servant in return for remunerating the *tantie*. The employer hands the child's wages over to the *tantie* at the end of each month" (Boursin, 2002: 13). Developing outside the family relationship framework, this practice clears the way for abuse and forms of exploitation. Entrusting a child to a Koranic teacher is an old practice in Muslim culture. Originally the purpose was to provide the child with a religious education, but " impoverishment, the search for survival strategies and the greed of some adults have led to abuse of these traditional practices, and children are the primary victims. The most tangible illustration is provided by children begging for a Koranic teacher, whose guardianship has more to do with economic than educational motives" (Boursin, 2002: 9) And, the studies conducted in Burkina Faso reveal a close link between these begging children and the street children phenomenon. "Exploitation and mistreatment lead many *garibous* to run away and beg in the streets for themselves" (Boursin, 2002: 10). A 2002 census focusing on street children revealed that nearly 41% are from a Koranic school. It is obvious that being abusively put to work has reduced their chances of attending school to almost zero for both these categories of children.

LESSONS AND PROSPECTS

Child circulation within family networks is a traditional feature of African family systems. Based on existing data sources, this study shows that placing children in "foster" care, especially when they are of school age, is still a widespread practice in West Africa. The available findings reveal the ambivalent character of its relationship to schooling. On one hand, children are placed in foster care so that they can attend school. On the other, children, especially girls, are entrusted to other households above all to work. The economic crisis and HIV/AIDS undoubtedly contribute to changing both the nature and practice of child circulation, which is often more akin to the transfer of labor than a socialization practice. In every case, the situation of girls is more critical.

All the findings show that the educational system has major needs:

- An expansion of education offer is necessary, especially in rural areas with a shortfall, in order to locate schools as close to families as possible, therefore curtailing the practice of placing children in foster care for "educational" purposes. But it is important to stress that this expansion must absolutely be accompanied by schooling conditions adapted to the environment and better-quality teaching, which is all too often lacking today.

- A special effort must be made in cities to increase the hosting capacity for young children and make it financially accessible. The domestic labor of young foster girls raises several problems, including the issue of the custody of very young children with the growth of the female work force.

- Education solutions geared towards their situation must be found for unenrolled foster children in cities who left school early. A study on night classes under way in Ouagadougou shows that they are the only alternative for these children, but that they have trouble keeping up their attendance.

At the same time, the situation of foster children still largely depends on the families' living conditions. The pauperization process will only worsen the plight of these children. Non-socializing labor is an infringement of the idea of human development and a major obstacle to universal education. But the abolition of child labor is a complex issue because one of its

main causes is still *poverty*. Without an overall policy to change the socio-economic conditions underpinning child labor, it will be difficult in many cases to remove children from the workforce in order to enroll them in school.

AIDS is an extremely urgent problem because of its extent and specific impact on education. It requires more research, adequate policies and the consequent means from both national and international players.

The present study may have been able to cast light on a certain number of findings, but it also underscores the lack of satisfactory and adequate statistical data. Despite their drawbacks, censuses and socio-demographic surveys (especially the DHS and surveys on households' living conditions) have a strong analytical potential. But these sources remain under-utilized[6]. In addition to using them better, specific quantitative and qualitative research is necessary. Psycho-sociological approaches are indispensable for refining knowledge of the problems besetting foster children. More research is necessary to better enlighten decision-makers.

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[66] Some of the work presented here involves that approach, in the framework of FASAF, the international research network Family and Schooling in Africa. By promoting the secondary analysis of data from censuses and surveys that have already been conducted, the FASAF network seeks to renew the scientific approach to the demand for education, improve the gathering of education information, boost national research capacities and work for closer cooperation between research institutions and national statistics and education services.

The network currently includes researchers, statisticians and education planners from 10 African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameron, Congo Brazzaville, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo), as well as researchers from the North (France, Canada, United States) and cooperates with UNESCO's Statistics Institute. It has published a *Guide d'exploitation and d'analyse des données de recensement and d'enquêtes en matière de scolarisation* (CEPED/UEPA/UNESCO, 1999), and a summary work on education demand in Africa (Pion and Yaro, 2001).

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