EDUCATION AND ECONOMICS IN WEST AFRICA: FROM UNWRITTEN LANGUAGES TO THE INTERNET

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Global distribution of West African goods—coffee, chocolate, gold, diamonds (and at one time, ivory)—has linked this region to the outside world for centuries, yet its development remains slow. Not simply the ancestral home of humankind, Africa's western legacies include colonization, partition, and loss of untold millions to slavery and wars of conquest. Geologically, the continent of Africa is mineral and resource rich, yet capital poor. With its impenetrable rainforests, harsh desert regions, and sheer immensity (three times the size of the United States), Africa keeps humans humble within their environment. With no east-to-west transportation routes, language, culture, economy, and education in Africa tend to develop regionally.[1]

The economic factors inhibiting development become more visible through lessons and databased resources available through the Internet's digital bridges. Economic conflicts in the region of West Africa revolve around political control of diamond and other mining deposits. Agricultural products such as coffee and chocolate are stable cash crops, but development depends upon literacy and education. In this article, we review central multicultural themes of West African nations and discuss major similarities and differences in cultural and economic traditions and challenges. Our review will also highlight current population and demographic issues through use of international digital bridges to West Africa.

History of Western Education in Sierra Leone

Europeans began trading along the West African coast as early as 1500, but Western education did not arrive in West Africa until the 1780s, with the resettlement of freed slaves. Portuguese sailor Pedro Da Cintra discovered Sierra Leone in 1462, but it took another 300 years before Sierra Leone became the birthplace of Western education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The colony of Freetown, established for freed slaves in the 1780s, was inhabited by three groups of black settlers: Nova Scotians, the Maroons, and the Recaptives. Black Loyalists who fought on the British side in the American Revolution were sent to Nova Scotia after the British lost the American Revolution. Thomas Peters, a freed black from North Carolina, led the group called the Nova Scotians that settled in Freetown. In the 1800s, the Maroons from Jamaica settled in the colony. The third group to arrive in the colony, the Recaptives, were slaves bound for the New World who were intercepted by the British Navy and resettled in the colony of Freetown.[2]

Birth of Western Education in West Africa (Sub-Saharan Africa)

The first two groups that settled in Freetown adopted Christianity and established churches that were supported by different missionary groups. With Christianity, came one-room church schools and common-day schools, whose objective was to teach sound discipline and solid Christian foundations. These one-room and common-day schools spread throughout the colony and expanded Christianity to other areas. The following were factors that promoted the expansion of western education in Sierra Leone:

- High mortality rates among English missionary leaders, teachers, and priests in the colony caused by malaria and yellow fever. As a result, the Anglican Christian Missionary Society decided to train local settlers as priests, teachers, and leaders.
- The need to provide middle- and lower-level manpower to support the British colonial administration of West Africa based in Sierra Leone.
- Concern within the British administration after the 1800 rebellion that if freed individuals were not provided with some form of education, chaos and rebellion would ensue. Therefore, education was used as a means to "tame" an otherwise perceived rebellious population.

As education expanded, the church-based curriculum expanded beyond religious instruction to include basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Based on church denominations such as Anglican, Methodist and African Methodist churches, the schools were organized as exclusive private, one-class units. Regardless of age and gender, all students were taught the same subjects and participated in the same activities. The first organized school structure in the colony was primary school. There was no identifiable secondary structure before 1845. The one-room schools and common-day schools served as both the primary and secondary school and were characterized by the following:

- All were church-sponsored schools.
- The curriculum was heavily theological and classical in nature.
- Children attended schools if their parents could afford it, i.e., schoolchildren came from wealthy Creole families. Indigenous children did not start attending schools until the late 1900s. The first secondary school for girls, The Hartford School, was established in 1900. The first all-boys school was The Bo School for Boys, established in 1906.
- Very few teachers had professional preparation.
- Schools were not organized by grade; children of all grades were huddled together in one room.

First Institution of Higher Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa

Prior to 1827, schools were taught by British expatriates and "settler teachers," both of whom were considered intellectual because they could read and write. In 1827, Edward Jones, the first black graduate of Amherst College in Massachusetts, in conjunction with the Anglican Church Missionary Society established the first institution of higher learning in Sub-Saharan Africa, Fourah Bay College. Fourah Bay College was established to train teachers and priests for the Anglican ministry and schools. In 1876, Fourah Bay College was affiliated with Durham University, England. In January 1965, it became the University of Sierra Leone.[3]

Abiding Influence of Fourah Bay College

Fourah Bay College is still in existence today as part of the University of Sierra Leone. The impact of Fourah College extended across West Africa. For almost 140 years, Fourah College produced most of the graduate manpower for Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone. Nicknamed the "Athens of West Africa" because of its significance, Fourah Bay College became the ivory tower of learning in West Africa, and Sierra Leone. The curriculum was both theological and classical, with emphasis on Greek and Roman culture and language and on the prowess of the British Empire.

Birth of Formal Secondary Education in West Africa

The establishment of Fourah Bay College stimulated the need to establish a structured school system that would educate more students. In 1845, the British-based Church Missionary Society established the CMS Grammar School, an all-boys secondary school. The curriculum was heavily biased toward

theology and classics; emphasizing reading, writing and arithmetic, Greek and Roman history, Latin, Greek, English literature, Bible studies, literature, English grammar, and science.[4]

The move by the Anglicans to set up all-boys and all-girls schools, respectively, was followed by the Methodist church establishing an all-boys high school in 1874, the Methodist Boys High School, and all girls high school in 1880, the Methodist Girls High School. These schools set the pace and standard for high schools that sprouted across West Africa. It is interesting to note that all four schools continue to play a significant role in the economy of present-day Sierra Leone. At all educational levels, emphasis was placed on a classical curriculum that emphasized mental discipline. The mind was considered a muscle whose development depended upon simple but repeated exercises.[5] This mental-discipline philosophy of education continued into the 1970s.

Sierra Leone became a magnet to students desiring higher education all along Anglophone (English-speaking) West Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, and The Gambia. Fourah Bay College graduates, from 1827 to the 1960s, were instrumental in promoting Western education across Anglophone West Africa and assumed top administrative and leadership positions in churches and schools across the region.

Sierra Leone, therefore, became the seat of Christianity, Western education and culture, and English language in British West Africa. Freetown served as the intellectual center of Sub-Saharan Africa during the nineteenth century.

Language and Culture

A patchwork of Western language influences created similar patterns in other West Africa's Anglophone and Francophone (French-speaking) nations. With the "Partition of Africa" by European leaders in 1914, colonized African regions experienced varying imperialistic legacies. Anglophone and Francophone African civil societies remain both fragile and volatile, embroiled as they are in internecine wars.

Sandwiched between Anglophone Sierra Leone and Liberia to the west and Ghana to the east, today's Cote d'Ivoirians are multilingual, with French as the 'official' language. By their mother's tongue, children are raised in their first language, and often hear and learn the language of their fathers as well. Large language groups such as the Akan (also Ashanti), Dioula, Baoule, and many others often inter-marry. While the language of instruction and commerce is French, many Ivoirians study English and other languages as well.

Patterns of Life in Cote d'Ivoire

West Africa's multiculturalism and social structures are based in the extended family. These structures endure and are maintained by constant contact and reinforcement of connections. Extended family life in Cote d'Ivoire means reinforcing family ties through social and economic activities. Socially, frequent gatherings, rites of passage, celebrations, and long-term stays augment family visits, which occur most evenings after dinner. Children spend time in the homes of relatives; for city dwellers, a summer on the ancestral village farm and for farm dwellers, vice versa. This arrangement strengthens family bonds so that all members of a certain generation are known as "Papa/Mama," while the next group is *"grand-frere or grande-souer"* (big brother, big sister), and so on. Time spent in the various households of the network builds allegiance, intimacy, and reciprocity, along with caring, love, and work; thereby embodying the phrase, "It takes a village to raise a child." Most business is conducted through family members, whereby one accesses the nuclear family's needs through relatives in various businesses. The extended family is the default resource network for any kind of good or service. The larger and more diversified the extended family network, the more combined prosperity.

Another key aspect of Cote d'Ivoire culture is the fact that it is multidenominational. During the twenty-three-year presidency of Felix Houphouet-Boigny, massive architectural edifices of the Catholic religion were built. In the commercial capital city, Abidjan, a modern cathedral dominates and overlooks

the city's lagoon. Built to resemble an elephant, the cathedral attracts tourists and the faithful, commanding a sweeping view of the harbor and city.[6]

Only some 30 percent of Cote d'Ivoirians, however, are Catholic. More of the population follows either traditional beliefs (25-40 percent) or Islam (25-40 percent). Increasing numbers of Muslim workers from the Islamic Diaspora have migrated to Cote d'Ivoire. Muslims from central cities such as Bouake include working women active in women's organizations, descendants of repatriated African Americans from Liberia, and many from different indigenous cultural groups. Also evident, therefore, are many pastel and whitewashed mosques throughout the cities and towns of Cote d'Ivoire.

Women in the Marketplace

The Akan or Ashanti, a large ethnic group that spans Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Bourkina Faso, and Mali, is a matrilineal group. Across West Africa, market systems (referred to in Western terms as part of the "informal economy") are run predominantly by women. While traditional open city markets in Africa do not resemble the Western-styled multinational marketplaces of franchises requiring large malls and acres of parking, these independent markets predated Western merchandizing by centuries. Within these vibrant centers of activity, goods as well as services are offered for sale. Leather work, tailoring and seamstress work, jewelry, watch and mechanical repairs, and other services are available.

International markets are increasingly dominated by multinational products and chain- or franchise-marketing techniques. As the Internet increasingly connects markets with customers, however, the need for either network or wireless connectivity will prove to be a critical element that African marketers cannot afford to ignore. With satellite technology available, the need for cabled telephones must compete with wireless communication in the developing world.

The Future: Bridging the Divide?

The Internet, Education, Youth Culture and Economics in West Africa

The median age in Cote d'Ivoire is just over seventeen years and life expectancy is forty-two years. About 10 percent of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS. In many ways, the outlook for Ivoirian youth could be considered bleak. With the economy still largely based in agriculture, and political instability arising due to refugees from neighboring conflicts, it is impressive that 70,000 residents are estimated to have Internet connectivity.[7] With 263,700 main line telephones in 2000 and almost double that using cellular telephones (450,000 in 2000), only a small percentage of the population is connected to the Internet (.043 percent, according to the United Nations Development Program estimate). Telephone connectivity must be coupled with literacy for one to become an Internet user, and there must be ample income available for such a non-necessity.[8]

Traditional West African values concerning art, music and dance means that technical schools are rare and magnet schools for the arts are more likely. Opportunities for twenty-first century job training for the vast and growing numbers of African youth bears little resemblance to the opportunities found in Europe, Asia, and North America. Some of the interpretive data that can be used to compare the economic activities of nations are gathered by various sources and posted on the Web by the United Nations Human Development Council.[9] The data listed in the following section come from that source, with the exception of the Liberian data because it did not even appear among the 175 nations ranked by the Human Development Council's Human Development Index (HDI). The Liberian data below, therefore, were derived from the *CIA World Factbook.*[10]

Table 1
Comparison Charts for Selected Statistics

	US	Cote d'Ivoire	Liberia	Sierra Leone	Ghana
Telephones (per capita)	66.7	.018	.2	.05	.012

Cellphones (per capita)	45.1	4.5	NA	.05	.09
Internet (per 1,000)	50.1	.043	.015	.014	.019
Adult Literacy	NA	49.7	NA	NA	72.7
Human Development Ranking (1-175)	7	161	Not listed	175 (lowest)	129

Learning how societies select their development strategies can become clearer when viewed in the context of population and economic growth. In the West, consumers and their consumption choices drive global economics. Ultimately, it is the global market, not just the multinational corporations, which will drive growth (e.g., coffee, chocolate, diamonds, and tanker-borne oil from Cote d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Liberia).

Understanding how data are gathered, analyzed, and reported further explains national development strategies. Population pyramids are useful for comparing nations' most critical resource, their people. Population pyramids derived from the International Data Base (IDB)—the most useful of which are the 2000 pyramids (actual data)—are available from the Bureau of the Census Web site.[11]

Interpreting a population pyramid is relatively simple. The best pyramids list the birth year (e.g., 1985-90, 1991-95, etc.) alongside the age cohorts. The IDB pyramids don't provide the annual birth rates by year, so the reader must interpret the birth years from the date of the chart. In general, the deeper the chart (vertical listing), the more distributed the age groups, the better the human development criteria, vis-a-vis life expectancy. Conversely, the wider the chart bands, indicating population in thousands, the larger the population of the nation (consider the cohorts of India and China, which are shown in millions) and more fragile the HDI. Generally, the bottom of the pyramid also shows the child-bearing segment of the population. These are the people for whom the nation must plan its resources: education, jobs, and infrastructure.

Comparing the population pyramids for France and Cote d'Ivoire, one sees a decrease in France's youngest population groups, with ages ranging up to 100+, indicating a higher life expectancy. Compare the Cote d'Ivoirian pyramid, which ends at age 80+, with some two-thirds of the population in its childbearing years. These factors help explain the United Nation's placement of Sierra Leone at the very bottom (175th) of its Human Development Index list.

Implications

Social education cannot be limited to only studying history; understanding the world's current status and its future problems are critical. With the advent of the new millennium and unrest around the globe, we must reach a new horizon in our understanding of social studies. Interpreting the current state of the world is not only essential, it is the mandate of the past. New technologies can help us to interpret and understand these data. The Web sites listed in Appendix A are some digital bridges to interpreting current economic and social trends toward more equitable production and consumption. From lesson plans to a database of Web resources, students can better understand the complex issues behind their production and consumption activities and the powers that influence them. Our imperative is to use this contextual data to recognize how the world is changing; how to anticipate, plan for, and remediate global issues; and, to move forward not just nation by nation, but as a human species, a family of man, on a finite planet whose limitations we must more deeply learn, teach, and understand.

NOTES

1. To access maps go to http://www.africaaction.org/members/regions.pdf.
2. Sierra Leone Web, "History of Sierra Leone," http://www.sierra-leone.org/heroes11.html.
3. University of Sierra Leone, "Fourah Bay College," http://fbcusl.8k.com/history.htm.
4. Daniel J. Paracka, *The Athens Of West Africa: A History of International Education at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
5. William Pinar, W. Reynolds, P. Slattery, and P.M. Taubman, *Understanding Curriculum* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

6. More information is available at http://abidjan.net/cotedivoire/diapositives/plateau/theme1/Plateau _cathedral.JPG.

7. L. Press, "Wireless Internet Connectivity for Developing Nations," *First Monday* 8, no. 9, http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue8_9/press/index.html.

8. Ben Soltane and Karima Bounemra, eds., *Africa Networking: Development Information ICTs and Governance* (The Netherlands: International Books, 2004).

9. UNDP information available at http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/indicator/indic_103_1_1.html

10. Available at the CIA Web site at http://www.cia.gov.

11. Available at http://www.census.gov/ipe/www/idbpyr.html.

APPENDIX A

Internet-based Resources for Teaching

Fair Trade 1: Going Global
http://www.learn.co.uk/glearning/primary/lessons/ks2/Fairtrade1/teachers.asp

Fair Trade Chocolate—From Bean to Bar
http://www.divinechocolate.com/bean_lng.htm#grow

World Cocoa Foundation
http://www.chocolateandcocoa.org/

"AD-ing" to Geography" (National Geographic Activity on Economic Geography)
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/lessons/11/g68/adding.html

Unit Plan for World Trade (Michigan Public Schools)
http://www.michigan.gov/scope/0,1607,7-155-13515_13526_13530-38166--,00.html

USAID TradeMap Quick Tour
http://www.trademap-usaid.org/quicktour.php

Maps of Africa (Columbia University)
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/cuvl/maps.html

Africa Policy Information Center (APIC) Regions of Africa
http://www.africaaction.org/members/regions.pdf

UN Human Development Reports
http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/indicator/index.html

UN Human Development Index on global Internet use by Country
http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2003/indicator/indic_103_1_1.html

General Source for Studying World Topics
http://www.outreachworld.org/index.asp

Economic Community of West African States
http://ecowas.info/index.htm

International Telecommunications Union Report on (Asian) Internet Connectivity
http://www.itu.int/itunews/issue/2002/10/indicators.html

Poor Connections: Trouble on the Internet Frontiers, Rand Review
http://www.rand.org/publications/randreview/issues/rr.12.02/connections.html

NUA Resource for Internet Trends and Statistics
http://www.nua.ie/surveys/index.cgi?f=FS&loc_id=1

Statistical Resources on the Web
www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/stforeig.html

Who Should Tell The Story of Africa?
http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/1chapter1.shtml

African Timelines—Table of Contents
http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum211/timelines/htimelinetoc.htm

African Network of Young Peacemakers
http://www.unoy.org/African%20network%20index.htm