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The Problem of Cattle as the Apparent Sole Means of...

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Appendix: Report on West African Migrant Labor in France.

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THE PROBLEM OF CATTLE AS THE APPARENT SOLE MEANS
OF SAVINGS AND INVESTMENT IN THE RURAL SAHEL

An AFR/CWR Technical Staff Paper

It is estimated that the Sahel region went into the current drought with about 21 million AU (animal units) and that the drought has probably reduced the number to about 18 million AU. The World Bank estimates that the carrying capacity with considerable grass fire control and grazing control will be 15 million AU¹. This means that to arrest and reverse the deterioration of the range, there must be a further 15 to 20 percent reduction in the Sahel herd.

We believe we have sufficient evidence to conclude that Sahel people keep cattle² for the following major reasons:

1. to provide milk for consumption of the herdsman and owners and to barter for food grain -- about half of the total value of annual production;
2. to provide cash when needed;
3. as a means of savings and investment³.

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1. An animal unit (AU) is defined as a bovine, camel or horse over one year of age, or eight sheep, or eight goats over one year of age.
 2. Other classes of livestock are excluded. Goats and sheep, which are kept in settled villages, constitute a serious ecological problem which must be analyzed as soon as possible.
 3. Republic of Niger, Ministry of Rural Economy, Office of Animal Production, Program of Action Against (The Drought) Regarding Cattle (Niamey 1973).

Approximately 50 percent of a random range herd making from 4 to 8 percent annual growth, which we believe to be typical of the Sahel, is surplus from the standpoint of milk production and marketable gain. In fact, with minimal supplemental inputs (mineral nutrients, vaccines and parasite control), herd production in terms of milk and marketable animals could be about doubled by removing the surplus cattle -- shy-breeding and barren cows, over-aged bulls and over-aged steers. This is easily demonstrable, and we would anticipate very little resistance to such a program, provided that ^{there existed} a reasonable alternative to cattle as a means of saving and investment. Without an effective alternative, any major effort to reduce the stocking rate on the Sahel range must be carefully examined for validity.

^{save in}
To/the form of cattle is logical to the herdsman, for in this form his wealth is mobile and ever-present in a nomadic system. The savings and investment motive is seen in herd-to-herd transfers as bride payments. This accounts for 7 percent of the cattle transfers in Mali⁴, and the practice is reported throughout the region.

There is the practice (reported among the Feloni Tribe) of keeping bulls and steers to growth climax (about 12 years), then selling them and buying heifers with the money, at which stage the income from a bull would buy three heifers. This practice would tend to push the area stocking rate upward.

4. J. Dirk Stryker: Livestock Production and Distribution in the Malian Economy. Medford, Mass.: Tufts University, August 20, 1973, AID Contract.

Sedentary farmers with cash crop incomes tend to invest in cattle. This causes serious overgrazing in radii of approximately 20 kilometers of sedentary villages.

European

Sedentary farmers in the Senegal River who have income from/employment invest in cattle. This was confirmed among the Soninke ethnic group in the vicinity of Bakel, Senegal. While the extent of this practice in other parts of the Sahel region is not known, it is estimated that the Soninke group, which extends roughly from Bakel to Kidiri, receive 10 to 15 billion CFA (\$50 to \$75 million) a year from employment in France⁵. These people do not even have access to a bank. They appear to be buying all the cattle they can find and hiring Feloni herders to tend them. The range in that valley is in serious jeopardy.

Alternatives

Investment Banks - Unbiased logic would dictate one or more types of investment banks. One type, or one window of a general investment bank, should be a cattle bank.

This is how the host country contributions to capital range and livestock projects should be financed.

The other window should underwrite geological and industrial development projects.

5. R. L. Perkins: West African Migrant Labor in France. A-58 (Dakar: Amembassy, July 23, 1973)

Why shouldn't the ADB and IBRD be interested in this resource?

The crucial questions:

1. How do these people, predominantly Muslims, feel about money interest? Is there a way around "usury"?
2. Can "rainy-day" savings be made available to the saver whenever he wants it, wherever he is?

Credit and Savings Unions - On a more modest plane, the CUNA-type rural credit and savings union could have a place. It has the advantage of being closer to the client than the bank, and it infers the ready availability of cash. A credit and savings union could invest its surplus in a development bank. So both are conceivable.

Farm Cooperative - Not very appealing, insomuch as it does not respond to a defined need and it does not necessarily address saving and investment.

Government Bonds - Government bonds are commonly used in expropriation settlements. The problems to be studied are:

1. Could interest rates be fixed high enough to show a profit over inflation?
2. Given the distance from the seat of government, to what extent could government bonds be considered negotiable?

Proposal

The Senegal River observations are firm enough to demand immediate action.

We have a rural social study under way in the Assale-Serbewel area south of Lake Chad which should shed some light on why those people keep and depart with cattle.

AIRGRAM

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ANALYSIS - FRCH

FROM : Amembassy DAKAR

DATE: July 25, 1973

SUBJECT: West African Migrant Labor in France

REF : None

Summary

This airgram is a resume of a series of articles in Le Monde concerning immigration to France of large numbers of migrant workers from the Soninke ethnic group of the upper Senegal River valley, including parts of Senegal, Mali and Mauritania. The entire economy of the region is based on such emigration which, on the other hand, supplies 70 to 80% of the black African laborers in France. The routes to France, the living conditions there, and the net effect of the process are discussed.

Le Monde of May 18, 19, 20-21, and 22 carried a series of four articles entitled "From the Bush to the Urban Slums" (De la Brousse aux Bidonvilles) by Jean-Claude Guillebaud, articles which throw an interesting light on the migration of large numbers from the Soninke peoples of the upper Senegal River Valley of Mali, Mauritania and Senegal, who become, for a time, unskilled laborers in France. In the thought that the pattern of such migration, its causes and effects, will have a certain interest to those who may not have the occasion to read the original articles, a summary is presented here. Incidentally, Guillebaud is described by a colleague from Le Monde as having no special knowledge of the area in Africa (although he obviously visited it in preparing the articles), but rather as a specialist in social welfare matters in France, who is a keen observer of the immigrant milieu there.

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Dakar's A-

There are, according to Guillebaud, some 70,000 black Africans in France, especially in the period since 1960, most of whom are from the same ethnic group, located in the upper Senegal river valley of Senegal, Mauritania and Mali. These people are the Soninke, who are also known as the Sarakolle, and they furnish 70 to 80% of the black workers in France. The entire ethnic group numbers some 600,000, so it can be seen that at a given moment perhaps 10% of their total are to be found in France.

Guillebaud takes as typical the small Senegalese village of Golmy, located west of the river and south of the departement capital of Bakel. This village of 2,000 normally has about 300 emigres in France, who replace each other in relays. The bulk of the emigres are to be found at one address in Paris: 156 rue Leon-Maurice-Nordman, in the 13th Arondissement, a location which constitutes the Parisian "annex" of the village of Golmy. Every week these emigrants send postal money orders (mandats) to the post office at Bakel, at the rate of some 40 million francs CFA (\$200,000) per month. Fifty-eight percent of the active male population of Golmy are in France, and each worker sends an average of 17,223 francs CFA (\$86.14) to his family monthly. There are a number of similar villages following the same pattern in an area reaching from Matam in Senegal, to Kayes in Mali and Selibaby in Mauritania.

He touches briefly on the history of the Soninke people. Bakel was at one point a jumping off point for the French in their penetration toward the interior of the old AOF, but as the French became preoccupied with the peanut trade, they turned their attention westwards toward the Sine Saloum area of Senegal, leaving the Soninke with less employment. They began emigrating, either as soldiers (the tirailleurs Senegalais), as merchant seamen on French ships, or just as seasonal agricultural labor in other areas -- St. Louis, for example. They became traders in such items as kola nuts and gold, and smugglers into Gambia and Guinea. A number of them settled in Zaire and went in for trade in diamonds, until President Mobutu expelled them in the 1968 to 1971 period. The first group began in France around 1959-60, with perhaps 40 emigres, who tended to stay 2 to 3 years, and to be replaced. At this point, the French began looking for manual labor to replace the supply temporarily cut off from Algeria during its troubled times.

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Among incentives to emigration, aside from the normal desire to support one's family, were those of the "captifs" or slaves, who seek to earn money to buy their freedom from the nobles of the village (more than 60% of the current emigrants are "captifs"), or the "talibes", who must repay the marabouts for their long periods of Koranic studies. Nor is the emigration only between the Soninke country and France. There is second degree emigration of workers from Mali (Bambara or Kassonke), who come to till the fields and tend the cattle of the absent Soninke. Thus around Golmy there are some 30 of these Malians living in shacks, being paid 250 francs a day (\$1.25) as day laborers. They in turn leave their families in Mali and send their mandats to them. The Toucouleurs of farther downstream along the Senegal River tend to keep the cattle, while the Moors transport wood, make bricks, and harvest the fruit of the baobab tree.

The Road to Paris

The emigration from the Soninke country begins with a stop in Dakar, where the emigrant may remain for several months to a year. Here each bush village has its own quarter, which contains not only the travelers to and from France, but children going to lycees and other persons in transit. The emigrant must accumulate the money he needs to move on -- not by working, because there is too much unemployment in Dakar itself -- but by receiving his mandats from those already in France. And he must make the arrangements for his travel to France. Ninety percent of the emigrants travel by clandestine channels, which cost them several times the price of a one-way air ticket to Paris (65,000 francs, or \$325). Why? Because they lack the documentation which would allow legal travel from Senegal to Paris.

There are other possibilities, such as false passports. Guinean and Gambian passports, containing Moroccan, Mauritanian and Spanish visas, are "rented" and circulate back and forth between Dakar and Paris. Guillebaud cites the case of one passport that made 16 trips back and forth in a two-month period in 1964, with the bearer's picture being changed each time. There is also a trade in work contracts, required by the French immigration authorities for legal immigration. But there are problems with false documents. One must assume a false identity en route, and in this fashion one cannot cash mandats sent along the way in one's real name. On the whole, it is better to stick to the clandestine routes.

Here Guillebaud digresses to say that his informants have asked him not to be too specific about the various clandestine channels, which are always changing, so as not to jeopardize the future of the practice. In brief, here are some: 1) From Morocco across to Spain, where Spanish transit visas are obtained valid either for 8 days or 1 month. The traveler makes his way to Irun, from where Basque peasants lead him across the mountains. 2) Marseille by ship, jumping off on arrival there. The recent sale of the liner Ancerville and resulting decline in Dakar-Marseille passenger traffic has put a crimp in this one. 3) Through Italy to Rome or Milan, and thence by taxi to the border. 4) The Eastern bloc is getting popular now - Yugoslavia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, by air, but there are many who pass by Amsterdam, Brussels or Geneva, all served by air from Dakar. Other tricks are false pilgrimages to Mecca (you change planes in Paris; only you don't), being part of a phony dance or other troupe and falling off along the way, and so on. At every step along the way, the traveler is victimized and exploited. Many horror stories have been told over the years of deaths by exposure, drownings, asphyxiations, and the like. But sooner or later all roads lead to 156 rue Leon-Maurice-Nordmann.

The Life in Paris

The first task on arrival is to try to find work. This is not easy for the first timer, who possesses no legal work permit, and may take him up to a year, even with the help of friends. When he finds an employer, the latter must fill out the famous "green card" for the Office National d'Immigration (ONI), which costs 75 French francs. In theory this is to be paid by the employer, but the latter usually just takes it out of the employee's paycheck. He must also have a medical examination by ONI - France is not going to have unhealthy clandestine immigrants! If he fails the test, he is deported home. Many pay for their own private medical examination first, so as to have a backup from which to argue with the findings of the ONI examination, if need be. One can imagine a certain trafficking in health certificates as well.

The outstanding contrast between life at "number 156" and that of the surrounding western environment is the individualism and every-man-for-himself spirit of the latter, which tends to shock the socially oriented new African arrival. He continues to live in Paris as he has along the Senegal River, or en route in Dakar, in the middle of a community in which he is never alone, except perhaps in time of prayer. He chips in for a common mess, prepared by a couple of African wives

imported for the purpose, which consists as nearly as possible of African-style food, and which is eaten in common, and is open to all who come and go. On the first Monday of each month a meeting is held, not only among the group in Paris, but at the same time among the group at Rouen, to whom "delegates" are often sent from the Paris main flock. All important decisions are taken in common at these meetings, not only in regard to community affairs in France, but also to those back home in the village. Since the emigres in France send the money home, they correspond with the village elders and have a vote in matters affecting life in Golmy, not excluding, to some extent, how their remittances are to be spent. In short, the Paris group is simply an extension of the village leadership in Golmy. The distinction between the "nobles" and the "captifs" is maintained. The latter do the menial tasks - cooking, dishwashing, cleaning. All know their place in the hierarchy.

Number 156 is an African island in Paris. Its inhabitants put on the boubou when they come home from work, sit around in endless palaver on village events as they would if home in Golmy. Some engage in handicrafts, making boubous (Paris-made boubous are said to be the rage at home in Golmy), leatherwork, jewelry. There is a prayer room set aside, the cleanest and fanciest in the place, and a marabout is often present. The religious holidays are observed, and dietary rules are followed, group pressure sufficing to keep all but a few in line in religious matters. There is no break with Africa, no individual emancipation, as in the strong discouragement of anyone who might wish to seek outside educational opportunities, either academic or technical.

There have been occasional brushes with French authorities concerning the propriety of some of these African communal living arrangements, which obviously leave much to be desired by western standards of sanitation and safety. There have been problems of phony landlords collecting rents on properties they do not own and then fading away when discovered. There have been attempted evictions by the French authorities, who have tried to resettle some of the Africans in normal, small-unit lodgings. These are fiercely resisted by the Africans, since they tend to break up the social cohesion which is such a notable feature of their life away from home as well as in Africa.

The Balance in This Migration of Labor

Guillebaud suggests that the utility to France of this recurring supply of unskilled labor is reasonably obvious. But what do the Africans get out of it?

Mali, Mauritania and Senegal receive 10 to 15 billion francs CFA per year in mandats (\$50 to \$75 million), coming from Paris, Lille, Dunkerque and Bordeaux. In the month of September 1972, the Dakar post office distributed 60 million CFA (\$300,000) from France, while the post office in Bakel along the river handled 40 million CFA (\$200,000). As a practical matter, these funds are what keep the people of the upper Senegal River valley alive. But how are the funds employed, and what do they accomplish?

In the village of Diaguili, east of the river in Mauritania, with its 7,000 inhabitants, there are two concrete buildings, both the indirect product of overseas remittances. The first is a mosque, with its concrete minarets and its lovely crenelated walled enclosure, which costs several tens of millions of francs CFA. Every emigrant chipped in slightly over one month's salary for this. The village possesses no well (the inhabitants drink water from the river), no proper dispensary or stock of medication, its school is a rickety shack, and its inhabitants know periods of hunger. Yet the village already had nine mosques, this being the tenth! As a matter of fact, many of the emigres had wished to spend the money for more useful projects, especially a dispensary, for which a number of them had already deposited 4,275,000 francs in a bank in Nouakchott towards its construction. But they were overruled by the elders of the village, steeped in the conservatism of their feudal society.

The other permanent building in Diaguili belongs to a Mr. D., the village capitalist. A two story house, neocolonial style, with balconies. In 1960 he was nothing but a small shopkeeper, like many others in the village. But his fortune was made by the emigration - of others. After six months in Marseille he conceived the idea of returning to be the "banker" for the other emigrants who, while they are in France have a problem as to the recipient of their mandats. The family? They would just parcel it out among the numerous members of the extended family and let it dribble away. To a bank? Few of the emigrants have any experience with such an institution. So they send it to someone like D., who does them the favor (for a price) of accepting the heavy responsibility of managing their funds for them. He will perform certain services, such as keeping the families supplied with rice (for a price). D. quickly obtained a near monopoly of all the finances of the village, and it was in his interest to put the money to work - in trade, usurious loans, dealing in gold in connection with trips to Mecca, and other various commodities. Today he is the master of the village, has the prettiest four wives, and is the most consulted by the village elders in all matters.

What does the individual emigrant bring back from Paris? Some 600,000 to 700,000 francs CFA (\$3,000 - \$3,500), with which he buys roofing, a transistor radio, pays the price of a bride, and generally provides the maintenance of his family - for a time. After a few months to a year, he is broke again, and the temptation is strong to go back to Paris. Many do this four or five times.

Guillebaud concludes that both the feudal structures of Soninke society and the very different conditions of the industrialized countries combine together, in effect, to prevent the emigrant from bringing anything back from among the more useful features that the west has to offer: literacy, technical training, an emancipated outlook. During his stay in Paris, the emigrant lives in a sort of trance, a state of sleepwalking with respect to the environment around him, with almost no chance for individual progress or training. The process does not serve to train and form the Soninke youth. He does, however, bring home a certain appetite for French products, which helps to reenforce French mercantilist hegemony in his country.

On the other hand, what if he were to learn a trade in France? He could not practice it any place near the agricultural-pastoral economy of his river valley. So he quickly sinks back into the local peasant society, bound by all the familiar contradictions of under development. In short, the solution to this dilemma lies as much in Africa as it does in France.

Comment: There is another side to the picture overlooked by Guillebaud, whose experience in Africa is apparently rather limited, so as not to give him the broadest basis for comparison between the soninke area and others with similar home economies. An A.I.D. employee in Dakar, with extensive experience in livestock projects and practices in a number of countries of West Africa from Chad to Senegal, has spent some time in the Upper Senegal River valley that is the Soninke homeland. He has remarked the extent to which their livestock-farming economy is a great deal ahead of most other areas with which he is familiar - in their development of local cooperatives, in their mixed farming-pasture practices, and in their acceptance of changed techniques. So much so, that he has tentatively selected this area as the most promising for an AID-financed regional livestock project, long in the discussion and preparation stage. Perhaps the Soninke emigrants bring back more from France than Guillebaud realizes. Certainly their daily work experiences, even in unskilled, menial tasks, must at least change their outlook toward work habits and attitudes toward how a chore may be most effectively performed. This is, perhaps, the one side of the equation which is ignored in the Guillebaud analysis, which otherwise presents a

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fascinating picture of the interface between two such vastly different cultures.

CLARK

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