

Sub-Saharan Africa

Demography, urbanisation, employment and poverty: the vital necessity of re-establishing agricultural and rural training.

It is important not to forget that in almost all Sub-Saharan countries, the number of farms has never declined, and has actually increased. Each year, approximately 15,000 to 50,000 farms, depending on the country, change hands, while new farms are established without any external support.

By necessity, it is up to the new generations to take up the challenges of fighting poverty as well as those faced in rural areas; in the coming decades they will either, in most cases, progressively take over ownership of their parents' farms, or they will settle in frontier- or peri-urban areas.

The weight of demography and urbanisation

The demographic transition started in Northern Europe in 1815 and progressively spread to North Africa some time in the 1920's and to Sub-Saharan Africa at the end of the Second World War. These countries are experiencing "intense" demographic growth of 2.3 to 3% after having reached a 3 to 4%¹ increase in earlier decades.

This demographic transition went hand in hand with a particularly sustained trend of urbanisation. With current urbanisation rates of 5 to 7%, the urban population doubles every 10 to 15 years without necessarily generating a population decline in rural areas, where it continues to grow at a slower rate. The 50% urban population threshold is currently only exceeded in some States, but will be exceeded in most of the countries over the next 20 years.

Owing to its very young population,² with 37% under the age of 14 in North Africa and 46% in Sub-Saharan Africa, the continent is faced with serious difficulties in achieving literacy among the new generations and guaranteeing employment or self-employment of working-age populations. The high rates of illiteracy and chronic unemployment lead to poverty and a growing under-utilisation of human capital.

An agricultural and rural sector finding it harder and harder to execute its national missions.

(i) Feeding urban and rural populations: The generalised increase in "per capita" cereal imports³ since 1960 is proof of the sector's inability to feed the cities' populations. Consequently, food safety has become compromised in those States that are forced see more and more foreign currency leave their hands.

(ii) Generating foreign currency through export: With the emergence of the urban market, offering producers new alternatives in terms of financial resources, and with heightened and often unequal competition between producing countries due to globalisation, traditional export products tend to reach a ceiling and even lose ground⁴.

(iii) Protecting and improving natural resources: demographic growth brings about higher rural population densities, which have significantly increased since 1930 (a fourfold increase) and this trend should continue over the next 20 years (a sixfold increase from 1930 to 2020). The more densely

¹ The escalation that underlies these rates is: 4%: 17 years of age, 3%: 28 years of age, 2.3%: 30 years of age.

² Children under 14 currently represent 30% of the world's population, 17% in Western Europe, 25% in Oceania, 31% in South America, 32% in South-East Asia, 36% in Central America and 37% in South Asia.

³ These imports are not proportional to the increase of the total population!

⁴ Take the example of cocoa: countries whose ecosystem favours the development of phytophthora palmivora saw their production stagnate and in many cases decline whereas production increased in countries whose ecosystem is less favourable to the development of this disease. This is the case of cotton, available on the world market from industrialised countries (in particular the USA) and developing countries; the latter countries have been enjoying State subsidies since the industry started making a loss. And thus, we have seen the emergence a new farming product, fresh produce, that is exported to the North, which is based on the implementation of agro-