

# SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY, THE EMERGENCE OF ARMED GROUPS AND JIHADIST GROUPS

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**Abstract:** Education is a reality as old as society. It is an element of the culture of a people. As a result, it becomes an essential and undeniable element in the development process of a country. Thus, access to education and to quality teaching in an adequate framework are part of the fundamental rights of human beings. States therefore have an obligation to take all necessary measures (legislative, administrative, budgetary, etc.) to realize these rights.

However, the degradation of the security environment that currently prevails in many countries in Africa not only has harmful consequences for the civilian populations but also spares no sector of the social life of the populations, such as schools. Today the education sector pays a high price for the insecurity maintained by armed groups and political instability.

In this article, we try to show the interest of carrying out an analysis on the management of the school in the countries in situation of crisis of insecurity in Africa. We rely on the existing literature, both theoretical and empirical, using the databases produced by the school administrations of the targeted countries or those resulting from the rare scientific research carried out on this theme.

**Key Words:** School management, political instability, insecurity, violence, Africa.

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

School management in the face of political instability and the emergence of armed groups is a major problem in Africa, especially in countries in crisis. Indeed, the question of education in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations raises many questions about the educational strategies of displaced and migrant populations (repatriates and refugees), about the education policies to be offered as well as on recent developments and the future of deeply disrupted or even completely destroyed education systems.

Political crises, armed conflicts and violence orchestrated by attacks by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Islamic State (IS), Jihadist and rebel groups have had negative effects on both the education system of the countries concerned and those of neighbouring countries, in particular. Several African countries find themselves in this crisis situation of the education systems as a result of political violence and armed conflicts. These include countries such as Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Niger, Benin in recent years, etc.

Why do education systems become war aims, both targets and conquests of the belligerents? What are the consequences of armed conflicts and political violence on education systems. It is with the aim of answering these questions that this article is written, which is also a response to a need for the production of scientific knowledge.



Indeed, the article intends to take stock of the functioning of education systems in conflict and crisis situations, to highlight the consequences of this situation through a review of the literature on the question in order to help to better specify the orientations for more in-depth studies as part of an in situ investigation of the problem.

### **1.1. Methodological materials of the study**

The article is based on the existing literature, both theoretical and empirical, using the databases produced by the school administrations of the targeted countries or those resulting from the rare scientific research carried out on this theme. It is a collection of data through documentary information, newspaper articles, audio visual sources. This requires a critical assessment of available data (school statistics, specific data, survey data, etc.); an analysis of the information contained in existing studies and the press.

## **2. Inventory of school management in Sub-Saharan Africa in the context of political instability and the emergence of armed groups**

The serious recurrent military and socio-political crises experienced by certain countries in Africa since the beginning of the 1990s and especially in recent years have been the main motives for strike movements, military uprisings, rebellion, attempted coups and various demonstrations of the population such as protest marches, the erection of barricades etc.

These crises have led to the partial or total destruction of schools in some countries. Why do education systems become war aims, both targets and conquests of the belligerents?

### **2.1. Schools targeted by jihadist and rebel groups**

Ordinary war aims, for example the control of diamond-bearing or natural resource-rich areas and not military victory, include, in some cases, the planned destruction of reputable educational institutions, as was the case in Sierra Leone of the Teacher's Bunumbu College and the University College of Njala (Wright, 1997: 26-27). Following what paths, child soldiers, school dropouts or non-schoolers, participate in diamond trafficking? And again: why, without having been attacked, unlike the two Sierra Leonean institutions mentioned, Fourah Bay College, in Freetown, a prestigious constituent school of the National University, was threatened of destruction by the rebellion? Data from reliable surveys are lacking for the Sierra Leonean case. In Côte d'Ivoire, at the height of the November 2004 crisis, the "young patriots", pro-government militiamen looted and set fire to French high schools and schools in Abidjan and other cities in the South. Was it to put an end to French interests and symbols in Côte d'Ivoire, in the name of denouncing cultural imperialism? Can we not detect in this destruction a sign of deep disagreement that social cadets send in reaction to the extroversion of the Ivorian and binational school elite?

In other countries in crisis or in conflict, hostage-taking of schools and students has been observed. The case of Boko Haram in Nigeria concerning the two hundred girl students is a convincing example. Other cases of hostage-taking and massacres of learners have always followed in Nigeria in several regions and in other countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, etc. by jihadist groups. In 2020 and 2021, several cases were revealed by the press in Nigeria in several northern states where Boko Haram is permanently active.

### **2.2. Education in emergencies**

"Education in emergency situations" took shape, as a humanitarian action of immediate response to conflicts, at the beginning of the 1990s. It corresponds to specific educational programs first established in Bosnia, Rwanda, Somalia and Sudan. These assistance programs for children in refugee camps, in Dadaab (Northern Kenya) for example (Cooper, 2004) or for child soldiers in the Congo, Sierra Leone and Liberia aim to re-school victims of war, sometimes with the means at hand, sometimes with the help of the host countries.

The main initiators of "education in emergency situations", the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNESCO, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations, quickly realized the extent of the disasters caused by the effects of these wars on the education systems of the countries concerned, mainly for people displaced inside or outside the borders of their country. From then on, the notion of "educational emergency" was extended to dealing with the consequences of conflicts, over a relatively long term, "several years, even several decades" (Sinclair, 2003 : 25), at the risk of losing, diluted over time, fully effective. Because the emergency continues, as the writings of donors remind us, to the extent of the stakes produced by these "complex emergency situations" (Tawil, Harley, 2003) which range from educational aid to populations victims of conflicts rebuilding school infrastructure.

Where do these difficulties come from in grasping the temporal limits of "education in emergencies"? They are due to the nature of the conflicts, precisely to the complex politico-military configurations, both local and international, at the origin of their stalemate and their slow resolution (Davies, 2004). Faced with these difficulties, international organizations such as Unesco or Unicef brandish the banner of humanist values "peace and tolerance" or even the "right



of children to be educated". Yet the invocation of values and the reminder of a right, however laudable they may be, are not enough for the political settlement of a conflict; at most they exert pressure, limited by force of arms, or attenuate the sufferings of populations victims of conflict. Thus, education in emergencies is confronted with the question of its own term and therefore of its own effectiveness. The mandates at the origin of aid agency interventions abroad cannot exceed a prescribed time, nor include populations other than those targeted. That of the UNHCR, for example, lasts from three to six months and concerns refugee populations. However, as we have said, the notion of urgency being a paradox, goes beyond the short time of the punctual intervention.

### **2.3. School management in times of crisis and conflict**

The management of schools in times of crisis is a fundamental issue for education actors in Africa. A critical look at the situation highlights several countries affected by the situation. These are Nigeria, especially in the north and the states under the control of BOKO Haram, Mali, Congo in the war zones, Burundi, the Central African Republic with the Barakas, Somalia, Niger, Burkina Faso, and d so and so. The difficulties engendered by this form of education call for a start from the actors. In fact, the persistence of the socio-educational dynamic in times of war (Lanoue, 2003; Zongo, 2003; Mohammed-Abdi, 2003), a characteristic trait of the irrelevance of conflicts, so far removed from "events" (Godineau, 2003), provides an additional argument for educational emergency relief. The care of learners in a context of war is a fundamental question and a concern of the actors involved. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the populations affected by the war are mobilizing resources to support the schooling of their children, both in the government zone and in the zone under the control of the new forces. These resources are social, political and institutional (Lanoue, 2003). In addition, still in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, it was noted the importance that populations in a situation of forced mobility attach to the school education of their children, without being able to express their needs in this area, either with NGOs or with international organizations (including UNCEF, or the Ivorian government, which is officially in charge of assisting displaced persons).

The success of the mobilization of the populations in favor of schooling and the reopening of schools after crises and conflicts depends heavily on the games of local and international actors, particularly in the portions of the territory under the control of the rebel forces. The State, in particular the Ministries of National Education, no longer holds the reins of a de facto territorialized education policy following the sometimes partition of these countries at war. Far from being ethnicized, which does not mean that others were or are in Africa or on other continents, the Ivorian, Congolese, Somali, Malian school institution, etc. strongly disrupted because of multiple arrivals, continues to live on its routines, in conflict zones, where the teaching program remains not identical to that of other parts of the territory of these States at war. Conflicts in these countries give rise to forced population displacements. These learners on trips back to their so-called country of origin after a lifelong stay, face difficulties integrating into the education system. This is the case of Ivorian "diaspos" returning from Burkina Faso. The return of these learners to their country of origin is not easy because they face difficulties integrating into an education system that now seems strange to them. For example, more than 158,114 "Ivorian" repatriated from Burkina Faso have to deal with a new education system. The differentiated levels of education of diaspos and their impact on the forms of collective mobilization are the subject of research (Pilon, Yaro, Lanoue, 2004).

In a country like Somalia, from where hundreds of inhabitants have fled the fighting and found refuge outside the borders, the maintenance of a Koranic educational network, the Dugsi schools, shows the efforts of civil society in view of "not interrupting the relationship between the generations contained in education" (Mohammed-Abdi, 2003: 351)". In the very heart of the fighting and under the bombs, teachers taught children learning the Koran. The initiatives to maintain an educational link have, in fact, been much more diverse than the simple "return to the Dugsi": NGOs and aid agencies have created educational disparities, by introducing, without order or coherence, different textbooks from town to town, from region to region.

The forms of constrained mobility, observable on a regional scale on the African continent, encourage us to rethink the demands for education, as these mobilities appear, in volume and in meaning, to be decisive. On January 1, 2003, the African continent had 15 million displaced persons and refugees. UNHCR assists 4.6 million of them (UNHCR, 2003). The actors of these migrations, "refugees", "displaced" and "clandestine" are designated according to categories with defined outlines from the point of view of international jurisdiction but much more vague on the ground (Lasailly-Jacob, Cambrézy, 2001). These populations are associated with particular modalities of forced migration - exodus, exile, deportation, return, repatriation, diaspora, resettlement, integration with regard to which educational relief policies determine their programs. intervention. Each of its modalities should therefore influence, by virtue of its uniqueness, both the action of aid agencies in terms of educational provision. However, the expectations of these populations in terms of education, unknown, are deduced from several distorting mirrors: firstly that of the education offer of the country of origin, supposed to be that expected, to be recovered; then, that of the host country, supposed to be coveted; finally, that of aid agencies provided urgently and made permanent for lack of anything better.

There are here, in terms of education policies and demands, in these renewed relationships with States, in these links forged with aid agencies and in these changes in the relationship to oneself (Agier, 2003), as many fields of investigation to be explored for future specific surveys and studies. We then fully grasp the stakes of these surveys to be regionalized: in Central and East Africa, according to the UNHCR's Annual Statistical Report 2002 (UNHCR: 2003), the total number of refugees received (2,089,300) and exported (2,099,300), are similar, to within a few tens of thousands, as confirmed by the data by country (Guichaoua, 2004: 157-158).

The intensity of these crossed flows raises direct questions for States of origin and host countries, and for international aid agencies on the nature of the educational assistance to be provided to wandering populations. Despite "good reasons" for existing, the persistence of a socio-educational dynamic and the torments of populations in exile, "education in emergency situations" is subject to substantive and systematic criticism.

Where there was an urgent need to intervene with a view, at best, to restoring a destroyed or damaged school offer, its proponents denounce the determination to maintain the school institution. They put forward the following: acting on education in a situation of conflict amounts to acting downstream, on the effects, and not to reflecting, upstream, on the role, potential or proven, of education systems in the production of conflicts. Therefore, invoking the responsibility of the educational institution - element of the genesis of a conflict - amounts to taking a kind of "step backwards": victim of conflicts and rebel groups, education then constitutes a source of conflict.

Educational aid is considered an urgent necessity, in the name of school universalism, even if differences exist from one country to another. Despite their differences and their divergences, educational relief policies are the signs of antagonistic positions occupied by individual actors, groups or institutions within the international space of educational aid, one synonymous with humanitarian aid, the another turned towards the interpretation of schooling in sub-Saharan Africa. Do these two policies oppose only the time of the intervention? It seems not. Their fundamental divergence concerns the nature of the action to be taken in the face of conflicts and not the action. Emergency humanitarian action versus preventive action, such is the dilemma of organizations involved in educational relief. This dilemma clearly shows the non-existence of "a general policy of relief organizations" (Le Pape, 2002: 67) supposed to be responsible for an aggravation of educational disasters in the eyes of detractors of any form of aid to African countries.

### **3. The effects of school management in the context of crisis and armed conflict**

School management in a context of crisis or conflict has a very remarkable impact on the performance of the education systems of the countries concerned. Indeed, in a document entitled "Education in Situations of Emergency, Crisis and reconstruction. Unesco strategy" (Unesco, 2002), Unesco criticizes the heterogeneity of the contents of the programs derived from "Education in emergency situations" and those in favor of "education for peace". The UN agency attributes the suspension of these programs to underfunding of humanitarian operations. These programs are therefore based on fragile foundations. Coordination efforts between competing UN agencies have been made, giving rise to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between UNHCR and UNICEF in 1996, more recently to the creation, in 2000, of the Unesco, a strong International Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE).

In this way, aid agencies, Unesco first, would like to fight against the heterogeneity of "recommendations and standards" at the source of an "unsatisfactory situation due to the confusion caused both among donors funds and on the ground when education standards are employed differently in adjacent localities". Since 2000, Unesco has been working in this direction with the help of the INEE to develop various standards relating to the protection and safety of children and teaching staff in difficulty, standards for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure schools, school equipment and the procedures for evaluating and certifying diplomas in time of war. The situations of countries under the influence of rebel and jihadist groups must be taken seriously. These include Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and to a lesser extent northern Benin and Togo, especially in recent years.

The scale of the tasks on such subjects could hamper this initiative to standardize the actions to be taken in an emergency situation. The failures of intervention programs are not only due to the heterogeneity of the responses given to the demands for education of populations who are victims of a conflict. There is also the competition of mandates attributed to aid agencies, which is suggested by this declaration by Unesco which arrogates to itself the exclusivity of the mandate "to advocate for system wide and value-based renewal in post-crisis situations" (Unesco, 2002: 12).

In addition, refugees resist forms of educational relief. As an example of their resistance, let us point out the refusal of Eritrean refugees in the east of Sudan to join the schools founded by the UNHCR and the successes they have encountered in organizing themselves, in a way that is as voluntary as it is unexpected, a parallel school education system in the mother tongue. In other situations, when refugees accept the language of instruction of the host country, for example English for Mozambicans educated in Swaziland, Zambia or Tanzania, the relearning of the mother tongue, Portuguese in this case, is necessary. The UN aid agencies provide school administration logistics inside the camps, with a set of standards to be respected. In reality, these norms are transgressed or turn out, in practice, to be impossible to observe. Thus the age of the children (6-8 years): Unesco recommends, if the reception capacity of the school proves

to be insufficient, to proceed with a selection of eligible pupils, without further indication as to the criteria Selection. Thus, the revision of school textbooks: Unesco recommends that photographs and texts detrimental to the host country be torn out. Thus again the negotiation of the recognition of studies and certifications with the Ministry of National Education of the country of origin. Thus, finally, the exemption from registration fees for refugees, forced to present themselves at the doors of the University as “foreigners”: university asylum is little practiced.

The involvement of aid agencies and NGOs in “education in emergencies” varies considerably. The recognition of education as a “basic need”, in the same way as water, food and security, is slow in coming. Donors choose to invest their emergency funds in other areas, thus judging that the educational issue is part of programs to be carried out over the longer term. Moreover, some donors, sometimes the most active, are constrained by their mandate to work exclusively with refugees, leaving it to others to take care of displaced populations, who are also vulnerable.

As for the involvement of aid agencies and NGOs in the field of “peace education”, it depends on endogenous conflict dynamics whose evolution is difficult to predict.

Thus, the halting of programs is often necessary, in the face of the warring parties' refusal to cooperate, the resumption of fighting and the incessant recruitment of child soldiers. All these reasons explain why Unicef ended its aid program for child soldiers in the Congo in 1997, why also ended its peace education program, launched in Liberia in 1992 with the support of the Christian Health Association of Liberia (CHAL). Examples of abrupt interruption of programs due to a deterioration of the situation abound. This constant threat does not spare the reintegration camps for child soldiers taken over by the rebels for recruitment purposes. In this sense, there is, among the supporters of “education in emergency situations”, a kind of relentlessness in maintaining educational continuity, until their decision to withdraw. The trajectories of child soldiers undergoing social and school reintegration interrupted by the departure of aid agencies are not known, but their post-war trajectories have been the subject of pioneering research devoted to become girl soldiers (Shepler, 2002).

Finally, the last element of appreciation of the programs in times of crisis and conflict, we do not know how the victims of war react to the messages transmitted during the sessions. However, the identification of the roots of the conflict certainly differs from one social group to another or within the same group. This variation in the modes of perception of the programs is not the subject of any study. Moreover, the results of programs based on a participatory method do not reverse the decisions made in favor of school hyper-selection inside the camps (Cooper, 2004).

In Nigeria, the serious impact of Boko Haram attacks on the education system is noted. Amnesty International returns in a report on the manifest violations of the right to education suffered by the Nigerian populations, Christians as Muslims, trapped in the spiral of deadly violence of Boko Haram. The destruction and closure of schools, the flight of teachers and students, and fear are paralyzing the education system in northeastern Nigeria. Catastrophic in the short term, these consequences will probably also be in the long term, impacting the development of these regions. Supported by testimonies collected on the ground, the twenty-page report details the crimes committed by the sect and pleads for a more prompt and effective reaction from the authorities, always in compliance with the law. According to Amnesty, since 2012, at least 70 teachers and more than 100 students have been killed or injured in Nigeria.

Conflicts lead learners and populations to live in a precarious situation. Several groups of Christians from North-East Nigeria gathered in Jos to draw attention to their precarious fate: persecuted by Boko Haram and condemned to flee, they expressed their suffering and their feeling of abandonment in the face of national authorities deemed ineffective and an international community presented as absent.

According to the newspaper *le monde* of November 1, 2014, the territorial conquests of Boko Haram continue. The black flag of the movement now flies over Mubi, a town of 200,000 inhabitants in the state of Adamawa. The civilian populations fled, accompanied by regular army soldiers, who offered little resistance to the advances of the insurgents. If the hypothetical ceasefire agreement seems far away, the suffering of the local populations, Christians as well as Muslims, remains very close.

According to Human Rights Watch, in an article of October 27, 2014, In mid-April 2014, more than 200 female students were abducted by Boko Haram in Chibok. Six months later, Human Rights Watch analyzes and documents, from a broader perspective, this strategy of kidnappings that has been expanding for more than a year.

Through the testimonies of victims (Christians, students, often both), the NGO examines the enslavement and abuses that captives face. The report also dwells on the insufficient government response

Fides, the Vatican's press agency, paints a grim picture of the violence that has shaken the diocese of Maiduguri in the past two months. According to the director of social communications for the diocese, Father Gideon Obasogie, 185 churches were burnt down by Boko Haram, while 190,000 people fled the hostilities.

In Mali, the situation is very critical. Indeed, the Malian education system bears the full brunt of the consequences of the insecurity which reigns permanently in certain regions of the country. Hundreds of schools have been closed since the outbreak of the Malian crisis. And the number of closed schools is on the rise. While in 2015, we had 280 schools closed, more than 900 schools are silent today in Mali. More than half of these closed schools are found

in the Mopti region in the center of the country. This region is considered the most dangerous in the country. Indeed, in this region alone, 525 schools are closed, which means that two out of three children are deprived of schooling in Mali, coming from Mopti. This region is considered the riskiest in the country due to inter-community violence added to terrorist attacks (Sagbo, 2019).

Observations made and reports in some countries in crisis, particularly of conflict or political instability, have shown that these types of unrest events have had a negative impact on the development of their education systems. In short, the last fifteen years have been disrupted by events that have paralyzed almost all sectors of socio-economic activity in many countries in Africa. With regard to education in particular, this whole troubled period has only further increased the difficulties already faced by schools in Africa. These are the decline in schooling, the quality of education and the total dysfunction of the system has accelerated. The effects of crises and conflicts on the education system in Africa are considerable and seriously disrupt the academic performance of learners because in these countries, education services and schools are severely affected by the events of unrest.

If even today, priority is still given to education in Africa, political instability, violence by jihadist groups and social unrest now make it uncertain whether the educational objectives that countries have set themselves will be achieved, including those recommended under the Education for All (EFA) initiative. Because the children of many countries in crisis will not be able to be educated in good conditions and some in refugee situations will not even have access to basic education, especially in the portions of territory of countries under the control of rebel movements and jihadist groups.

#### **4. CONCLUSION:**

All in all, it is easy to see that the education systems of countries in crisis, in conflict or under the control of jihadist groups in Africa are greatly disrupted or even destroyed. There are seeds of violence contained in the education systems of countries that have entered or have been in conflict. The logics of education in times of war do not obey the same logics in times of war and in times of peace.

Faced with the triptych "education, violence and conflict", the world of research finds itself confronted with several general questions raised at the end of this article which are still too little or not at all addressed.

First of all, the question of violence in the school environment in countries in crisis or in conflict, in its physical and symbolic forms, leads to questioning the nature of the institution that legitimizes it, the school, and its links with the external social and political worlds. Avenues of research are thus opened up from the forms of violence identified in the school environment both in terms of social relations between its main actors and in terms of the relationship to knowledge and school textbooks.

Secondly, the question of conflicts, with their particularities in sub-Saharan Africa, leads us to reflect on the social and political issues of a persistent educational dynamic in times of war and the violence of jihadist groups, particularly in connection with the principles of the Education Plan for all, its quantitative excesses and the realities of schooling in these new territories which are the camps for refugees or displaced persons and the portions of territory under the control of rebel movements and jihadist groups.

Finally, a last question concerns the link between education as a source of violence and education as a factor of conflict. The seeds of violence, the attitudes of teachers, textbooks, exclusion, content within education systems undisturbed by war situations, are just waiting for the outbreak of conflicts to hatch and bear fruit. Of course, on their own, these germs cannot cause conflicts since they easily come into conjunction with contexts and factors outside the school universe. Depending on the African societies considered, the changing contexts of schooling, in particular the levels reached: primary, secondary and higher, offer research many possible variations to better understand the roots of the contestation of political regimes and armed violence, 90s to the present day.

At the heart of the triptych "education, violence and conflict" thus reappear the major challenges faced with which, with unequal resources, the educated youth of African societies has been confronted since the end of the 1980s: access to employment and political responsibilities. Overall, the management of schools in times of conflict and violence by jihadist groups highlights in Africa:

- the state of advanced decay of the education system of these countries at war and violence;
- the country's permanent crisis situation;
- the serious financial difficulties of the State;
- the limits of public policies in education;
- the excessive centralization of the administration of education;
- the low involvement of local partners (municipalities, NGOs, parents, private individuals) in educational activities, especially in times of conflict;
- the lack of international aid.



The article recommends that all political actors seek to immediately remedy the consequences of events of unrest on the education system of countries in crisis. At the same time, public actors should work to revamp programs, over the long term, with a view to education for peace and sustainable development. This will make it possible to take into account the immediate needs of reconstruction, and the identification of the real roots of social events and armed conflicts in order to stop them and thus avoid reproducing the excesses and dysfunctions of the education system.

However, it is essential to improve the socio-economic framework and obtain rapid results to consolidate peace and thus restore confidence in the possibilities of development in these countries.

It is also important to mobilize national and external partners and to have the assurance of their strong participation in the reconstruction of the education system of these States.

To do this, strong political will and better donor coordination are needed. This requires strong leadership, that is to say political leaders capable of having a clear vision of things, in order to ensure the cohesion of the reconstruction of the education system of these States at a reasonable pace, after the hard events of unrest, conflict, rebellion and jihadist groups.

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