

# Progress through crisis?

Labour migration, primarily to Côte d'Ivoire, masked the high rate of natural population growth in Burkina Faso for many years. However, since a political crisis began in this neighbouring country in late 1999, many Burkinabe have returned home. This posed major challenges, especially for rural areas. In the south of the country, shrewd population policy and appropriate rural development programmes have been effective in meeting these challenges.

Between 1960 and 2000, half of all Burkinabe had some history of migration – this was usually cross-border labour migration, primarily to neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire (see box), but could also be due to permanent resettlement within the country. This internal migration from one rural area to another only made a minimal impact on the population structure, as it normally involved whole family units leaving overpopulated areas to settle in regions where conditions were more favourable. Due to strong outward cross-border migration flows, the population grew relatively slowly overall, despite very high natural population growth (in the 1990s, the rate was 3.4 percent).

## ■ The hiatus

Due to the political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, the migration flow from Burkina Faso stopped abruptly. Around 400,000 Burkinabe living in Côte d'Ivoire

### Werner Heuler-Neuhaus

Sociologist, Independent Consultant  
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso  
neuhaus@fasonet.bf

### Florent Dirk Thies

Programme Manager  
Agricultural Development Programme  
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische  
Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)  
Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso  
Florent-Dirk.Thies@gtz.de

returned to their native country. The population of some regions increased suddenly by up to a fifth. As the rural regions rapidly reached the limits of the population they could accept, a wave of internal rural to urban and town to city migration developed. The population of the capital, Ouagadougou, doubled between 1996 and 2006 to almost 1.5 million; annual growth lay at 7.1 percent. Most towns and small cities attracted fewer people (annual growth rate: 3.6 %). In the capital, the flow of returnees joined some of the young men who had originally planned to seek employment in Côte d'Ivoire.

Agricultural production did grow faster than the population during this period (average annual popula-

tion growth 3.1 %, cereal production 4.2 %). However, this was only made possible by an expansion of some 48 percent in the area under cultivation – a move which is rapidly reaching its natural resource limitations.

## ■ Self-sufficiency under threat

As with cross-border migration, the majority of rural to urban migrants are young adults, mainly men. In some regions, such migration has reduced the already low proportion of men of working age so far that self-sufficiency in cereals is under threat, and maintaining natural resources is almost impossible, especially given the highly labour intensive measures required to protect

### Labour migration in Burkina Faso

Between 1960 and 2010, around a third of the population in the region was involved in the process of circular labour migration from Burkina Faso and back, predominantly to Côte d'Ivoire. In this process, the migrant not only moves between geographical areas, but also between social sub-systems and a wide variety of economic spheres. One individual route might lead from a village in Burkina Faso to a town in Côte d'Ivoire, then a village in Côte d'Ivoire, then the economic capital Abidjan, back to the village in Burkina Faso and finally, after a spell in a town in Burkina Faso, to Ouagadougou. Equally, the route may pass from subsistence level economic activity to retailing, the plantation economy, a food factory, then back to subsistence farming, and finally to the informal sector in Ouagadougou. Migration between religions may also feature in this circular movement.

Overall, this 50 year period has seen around 3.2 million labour emigrants to Côte d'Ivoire, mainly men. Around 3 million people returned to Burkina Faso. The majority of returnees were children of emigrants, born in Côte d'Ivoire. The number of female returnees was more than three times higher than the number of female emigrants. There are currently around 3.7 million Burkinabe living abroad, two thirds of them in Côte d'Ivoire.

against erosion and maintain soil fertility. For example, while there were 83 women for every 100 men among 20 to 35-year-olds in the capital city, in the province of Kourwéogo in the central Moose plateau there were 208 women to 100 men(!).

The Centre-Nord region only achieved self-sufficiency once in ten years, although the rains were comparatively good and evenly distributed throughout that period. During the short phase of the growing season when as many fields must be prepared and seed planted over as large an area as possible, there were regular labour shortages. This can rapidly become a vicious circle. Due to rapid population growth, self-sufficiency in cereals can now only be guaranteed by converting from the former, almost exclusively extensive, cultivation methods to intensive procedures. This presupposes that sufficient labour is available and that farmers have enough produce to sell, over and above self-sufficiency level, to earn the money needed to finance agricultural inputs. Yet without access to markets, this additional income cannot be generated. In view of the high transport costs – Burkina Faso is a landlocked country – and the weak national demand, which is due to a lack of purchasing power, producers have little opportunity to market their products independently.

A key position in overcoming these structural deficits could be occupied by small and medium-sized businesses in regional centres which focus on commercialisation and processing agricultural products. They create jobs, improve conditions for local markets and generate a climate conducive

*Three quarters of Burkina Faso's population live in rural areas. Thanks to an innovative population and agricultural policy, Burkina Faso is gradually succeeding in lowering mortality and birth rates and increasing agricultural production.*



to investment. Thus young adults, especially returnees in possession of capital, could find new ways to make their living. However, such initiatives will remain piecemeal unless the current trend towards slower population growth can be reinforced.

### ■ A positive exception: the Sud-Ouest region

The Sud-Ouest region was the rural area worst affected by the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. The population grew by 20 percent more than expected, to 620,000 within ten years rather than to the predicted 520,000 (most returnees arrived in 2002/2003). The region coped with

this challenge relatively well. How did it manage? On the one hand, the farming population proved astonishingly open and ready to accept the returnees, and the returnees in turn were prepared for a great deal of innovation. On the other hand, successful foundations had already been laid for population policy, and these could be built on in the crisis. The work of the “sexual health – human rights” programme (PROSAD) had already ensured that the proportion of people employing modern family planning methods in the region was the highest of all rural areas in the country. The “Project for the reintegration of returnees from Côte d'Ivoire” was exemplary, successfully integrating 3,500 returnees into 11 villages (one returnee to every two residents) between



Photo: F. D. Thies

### Population development and child labour

Burkina Faso is currently undergoing a phase of demographic development during which both mortality and the birth rate are falling. However, both indicators tend to remain comparatively high. Children and young people form the majority of the population: 53.3 percent of the population are under 18. This trend is most pronounced in rural areas. In some provinces (such as Tapoa in the east and Nounbiel in the south-west), over 60 percent of the male population is under 18. Young men aged between 20 and 35 years old are the most under-represented. A lack of adult labour intensifies the problem of child labour: four out of every ten children are economically active.

PROSAD (Programme on Sexual Health and Human Rights) works together with the KfW children's fund to combat child trafficking and the worst forms of child labour. For example, it distributes grants for attending school and vocational training, implements infrastructure measures to create jobs and helps with victim prevention and reintegration.

2003 and 2006. Outmoded traditions rules were overruled more easily in this exceptional situation than they could have been under normal circumstances. Due to joint intervention by returnees, German development assistance programmes and projects, and state-run programmes, women who had thus far been denied access to arable land were allocated fields. The position of young men began to change – traditionally they have no claim to their fathers' inheritance as the main inheritor is the oldest son of the father's oldest sister. Migrants often returned with valuable experience, and sometimes also financial resources earned in Côte d'Ivoire. In such cases, the programme for rural development (PDA) achieved success through its approach of helping agricultural products through

the value chain, from cultivation to processing and sales.

### ■ Population policy and agricultural policy are intertwined

During the crisis, population policy and agricultural policy were closely linked. Positive trends in population dynamics were reinforced: natural population growth is now falling. The proportion of children under 15 is reducing, and the proportion of men of working age is increasing again. The numerical imbalance between men and women is starting to normalise. Thus in the province of Poni there are now 131 women to every 100 men in the 20 to

35 age group (10 years ago there were 162; in Ioba and Bougouriba there are 121). Each year, the region exceeds the amount of cereals required for self-sufficiency. Cultivation of cash crops is on the rise. This is not considered to be an alternative to self-sufficiency in cereals, but a supplement. Those farmers who have been able to generate a monetary income have therefore been able to make cultivation in their cereal fields more intensive. Construction of a processing factory for cashew nuts in the region, in the town of Kampti, demonstrates how rural population centres can promote and stabilise rural development.

### ■ On the right path

In future, the right path will be determined by the successful interplay of rural development planning and population policy as part of a comprehensive vision aimed at reinforcing the position of women and young people in society. Only thus can the country emerge from the vicious circle of population growth and resource scarcity. Development cooperation can provide support on the ground for these processes. It is crucial to take better account of population development and migration in order to achieve greater effectiveness and sustainability.

### Zusammenfassung

In den ersten vierzig Jahren nach der Unabhängigkeit gehörte die grenzüberschreitende Arbeitsemigration – vor allem in die Elfenbeinküste – oder die dauerhafte Umsiedlung innerhalb des Landes zur Lebensgeschichte jedes zweiten Burkinabè. Aufgrund des Umfangs der Emigration schien die Bevölkerung trotz des sehr hohen natürlichen Wachstums nur relativ langsam zu wachsen. Auch konnte die Agrarproduktion mit dem demografischen Wachstum Schritt halten. Die politische Krise in der Elfenbeinküste hat diesem positiven Zustand ein Ende gesetzt; etwa 400.000 Burkinabè kehrten in ihr Land zurück. Zwar wuchs die Agrarproduktion auch danach schneller als die Bevölkerung, doch wurden hierfür die Anbauflächen stark ausgedehnt. Nur in

wenigen ländlichen Regionen wurden gute Lösungen für diese Problematik gefunden. Ein Beispiel ist die Region Süd-West. Hier wurde durch das Zusammenwirken von kluger Bevölkerungspolitik und Programmen zur ländlichen Entwicklung aus den kurzfristigen Reaktionen auf die Krise eine langfristige Perspektive entwickelt.

### Resumen

En los primeros cuarenta años después de la independencia, la migración laboral transfronteriza – sobre todo a Costa de Marfil – o el traslado permanente dentro del país formaban parte de la historia de vida de cada segundo burkinés. Debido a las dimensiones de la emigración, la población parecía aumentar con relativa lentitud, a pesar de las altísimas tasas de crecimiento

demográfico natural. La producción agrícola también pudo mantener el paso del crecimiento demográfico. La crisis política de Costa de Marfil llevó al retorno de unos 400.000 migrantes. De este modo, la situación positiva llegó a su fin. Si bien la producción agrícola siguió creciendo más rápidamente que la población en el último decenio, esto fue posible gracias a que las superficies bajo cultivo fueron incrementadas en 48 por ciento. Sólo en unas pocas áreas de la región rural, se hallaron buenas respuestas a estos desafíos. Un ejemplo es la región suroccidental. Allí se produjo la acción combinada de una inteligente política poblacional y programas de desarrollo rural, que logró transformar las respuestas cortoplacistas ante la crisis en una perspectiva de largo plazo.