

Employability and Professional Integration: Analysis of the Constraints Linked to the Contribution of the Youth Employment Agency of Yopougon

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ABSTRACT :

Purpose- This article examines the state of affairs in regard to the contribution of the Youth Employment Agency (AEJ) of Yopougon to the professional integration of young people. It raises the question of professional integration and employment in one of the largest suburbs of Abidjan the capital city of the Ivory Coast. Like in most countries of the world, the history of professional integration in the Ivory Coast naturally begins with the history of education and training. De François Syngly (2000) observed that "social integration is considered as a prerequisite for professional integration" and "integration must also be viewed in a multidimensional way. This view was effectively shared by Stone Madeleine (1999).

Design/Methodology/Approach –The approach taken is a combination of textual analysis and field study. Indeed the empirical research has weight significantly in this research as the personnel of the Agency and other stakeholders have been contacted for their input.

Findings –This research found that despite the apparent willingness of the state to provide for training and employment of the youth through the AEJ there are inadequacies in terms of the tax burden on companies, unfair competition and significant lack of employment for the youth.

Originality/ Values -The value of this paper rest on the idea that the Ivorian government, through the Ministry of Youth[promotion and Youth ployment, has not been able to achieve its goals in terms of tackling the alarming youth unemployment. This is appealing in that it demands a strategic approach to the whole question of training, integration and youth unemployment in the Ivory Coast.

Keywords: Professional Integration, Youth Unemployment, Employability

I. INTRODUCTION

Education and training form the basis of all development in all its parameters. They condition the future of individuals, their integration into society and their personal development(Heise and Meyer, 2004).Education and training, therefore, contribute directly to the achievement of several objectives. They are key to both individual and collective promotion. Indeed, education and training contribute to training men and women to make them craftsmen, to make them acquire the know-how and interpersonal skills. Education and training contribute to making the citizen able to participate actively in the economic and social development of his country, and they make him very competitive in the job market. This development policy, the backbone of which remains education and training, essentially targets youth in all its components. In this regard, the Ivory Coast since its independence on the 7th of August 1960, has prioritised the education and training of young people to face the challenges of building the new nation. In this dynamic, the rural world, due to its double quality as a source of labourers and provider of food for cities and the entire population has not been neglected by the authorities. However, it should be recalled that following its accession to national sovereignty and the Rapid

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growth of urban areas the performance of the rural environment began to decline. A significant rural exodus occurred, which has become a serious challenge for the authorities who did not anticipate such a situation. In order to curb the rural exodus, a civic service was created for rural youth who had dropped out and had no schooling. However, after more than four decades of State involvement in the supervision and socio-professional integration of young people as a whole, it is clear that this segment of the population is still in precariousness and total dependence. This already alarming social situation will be exacerbated by the social, political and military crisis that the Ivory Coast has experienced from the 19th of September 2002 until the electoral conflict of 2011. The environment of recurring socio-political crisis has not favoured any major development activities for the youth. Instead, it has darkened their prospect for personal and professional development as well as their participation in the economic growth of the country.

In view of a better response to the issue of youth unemployment and lack of training and professional integration, the Ivorian Government on the 8th of April 2015, created by Ordinance No. 2015-228 of April 8, 2015, the National Agency for the Integration and Employment of Young People, called "Youth Employment Agency".

From the perspective of lasting and definitive peace, the Ivorian authorities have deemed it useful to set up a Service Platform, with the backdrop of the moral, social and economic support of the youth. It was operational in seven experimental areas of the country (Gagnoa, Issia, Bouaflé, Sikensi, Songon, Attécoubé, and Bingerville), and aimed at the socio-economic integration of young people through the Youth integration project and territorial management (public utility works, support for activity and employment, apprenticeship training, creation of income-generating activities). In addition, the Service Platform has the mission of educating and preparing citizens for republican values, civic culture and a high sense of responsibility, and above all engaging them in the post-crisis reconstruction of the country. Its objective was to enable young people to make themselves useful to the Nation by exercising a remunerative professional activity. Certainly, the initiative was noble, but it did not achieve the expected result until 2015. The Ivorian Government then created the National Agency for the Integration and Employment of Young People. Despite all these enthusiasms, the professional integration of young people in the Ivory Coast remains a particularly challenging endeavour. The Deputy Managing Director of the African Development Bank (AfDB) in the report released on Monday the 12th of March 2018, at the institution's headquarters in Abidjan during the launch of the 2018 edition of "African Economic Outlook", announced that "the combined share of vulnerable jobless and unemployed in the active population in the Ivory Coast is in the range between 70 and 90%. On the same question, the World Bank (2019) stated that "poverty is in the sharp decline in the Ivory Coast, falling from 46.3% in 2015 to 39.4%. However, The Bank reiterated that unemployment naturally generates poverty, and it spares no one. Thus, researchers and decision-makers alike must become more preoccupied with the question by constantly drawing up several programs to reduce unemployment. This work, therefore, aims to analyse the explanatory factors that hinder the actions of the Youth Employment Agency in its mechanism for the professional integration of young people. That said, our work is structured around three essential parts. The first part concerns the definition of the methodological framework. The second part relates to the results obtained, i.e. the difficulties encountered by the AEJ in the execution of its objectives. As for the third and last part, we will focus on the analysis of the constraints linked to the professional integration of young people by the Agence Emploi Jeune (AEJ).

II. METHODOLOGY

This part of the study includes four sampling techniques and two methodological approaches to analysis. The techniques we used in the specific case of this study to arrive at the results relate to documentary research, observation, sampling, questionnaire and interview. Regarding the documentary research, we had resorted to general works relating to the Ivorian civic service on the one hand, and to works which approached the situation of the precariousness of the young people in the context of the social crisis with the specific case of national political strategies for mitigating

As part of our work, we opted for the semi-directive interview. Our interview guide, therefore, allowed us to have interviews with the people in charge of the Agence Emploi Jeune (AEJ) with the officials of the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth, and the managers of the structures for young beneficiaries. Such guides have indeed enabled them to express themselves on the subject. It is found that 150 young people have benefited from internships without being integrated into the professional fabric, and 100 young people have benefited from funding which they find insufficient. The survey took place from May 16 to July 16, 2022, i.e. a duration of two months. The survey has permitted the discovery of dysfunction due to the lack of monitoring and evaluation of projects. The case of Charles Kougnon, owner of the KCLASS'C company, is instructive. A manager revealed that there has been situations of non-repayment of funds allocated to some young entrepreneurs.

The comprehensive method and the dialectical method were also used during the research. These two approaches have enabled us to detect the contradictory problems linked to the professional integration of young people, such as the mismatch between training and employment. This method enables to highlighting of the interactions between the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ (structures in charge of the professional integration of young people in the municipality of Yopougon) and the institutions in charge of financing the projects.

2- Findings

2-1- Constraints Related to the Professional Integration of Young People by the Youth Employment Agency of Yopougon (YEA)

It should be reminded that the Agence Emploi Jeune is a professional integration agency set in 2015 from the already existing integration structures. It is therefore immersed in a taxation system that is several years old and confronted with unfair competition and the mismatch between training and employment. This state of affairs constitutes a disturbance of its operation articulated around the following points: tax harassment, unfair competition and mismatch between training and employment.

2-1-1. Corporate tax harassment

The question of tax harassment in the Ivory Coast took a significant turn when Ecofinance echoed the report of the Council of French Investors in Africa (Cian) (*Jeune Afrique* n°2454, 2008). In this report, Ivory Coast was ranked among the countries where companies undergo up to four tax audits per year. However, the Regional Tax Department denied this information in the same review and the same year. It was noted that "the seriousness of the conclusions of the Cian report – which are not based, as far as my country is concerned, on any serious study – calls for a strong protest from the Directorate General of Taxes, as well as a formal denial. The management went on to say that since 2000, important reforms have been undertaken, which have reduced the tax burden on the productive sector thanks to significant reductions in the rates or the base. The rate of income tax has thus been reduced from 35% to 25% and that of VAT from 25% to 18%. From 2001 to 2007, these measures cost the Ivorian public treasury more than 1 billion euros. However, during our investigation period, Mr KK was very formal on the issue. Without hesitation, he provided answers related to the constraints linked to the professional integration of young people by the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ. He clearly indicated that "tax harassment first. ". After holding himself back for a few seconds, he added: "Companies, especially feel permanently in conflict with the state reason is that the stress of taxation, sometimes leads them to categorically refuse to open their hands to the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ. Obviously, this suggests that it is the revenge of some private companies against the state. In addition, Mrs AG indicates that "because of the tax administration, some companies make it clear that there is no possibility of hiring, yet sometime later, we learn that they have recruited"(Young Africa n°2454).

2-1-2 Unfair Competition

It is worth noting that ".according to Mrs K.A.F, a coordinator of the Agence Emploi Jeune (AEJ), thenational institution which intends to integrate several young people into the professional fabric is engaged in heavy competition outside the law. There is evidence of abuse of commercial practice by foreign companies in relation to the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ. The Relation Main D'oeuvre, (RMO Group)one of the oldest recruitment agencies in the Ivory Coast has been blamed for unfair competition detrimental to the Agence Emploi Jeune. The RMO Group, since 1985 has been recruiting human resources for various companies. Indeed there is a general perception that with the setting of the AEJ, which is a state enterprise responsible for the professional integration of young people, the activities of RMO are unfair. The AEJ being a young structure, has difficulty gaining ground against the RMO group. Indeed, the notoriety of the RMO Group on the ground is a serious barrier for the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ which until now has no concrete solution to remedy this competition

2-1-3 The mismatch between training and employment

The 5th edition of "Afriq durable", a platform for exchanges and reflections of sustainable development professionals in the Ivory Coast was held on the 20th of August 2021 at the Casino of the Sofitel Abidjan Hotel Ivoire in Abidjan. At this gathering, the speaker intervened on the theme "Entrepreneurial education and the employability of young people in Africa: Challenges and prospects". Traoré Bamoudien the Director of AGEFO announced that for more than a decade, the mismatch between training and employment is one of the main causes of graduate unemployment in the Ivory Coast. There representative of the Ministry of National Education in his turn pointed out that the fact many initiatives have been taken by the government in order to remedy this with the creation of the Agence Emploi Jeune-AEJ. However, he recognises that these measures are insufficient.

During our investigation at the Agency Emploi Jeune-AEJ of Yopougon, we have indeed noted the great insufficiency of the measures taken by the State in this direction. Answering the question about the difficulties related to the professional integration of young people by the Youth Employment Agency-AEJ, Mr AY came up with an enticing proposal. According to him, "Private companies need to be involved in the design of training modules because the mismatch between training and employment that we encounter with companies is really exaggerated. It is as if we were not in the same country. It is often difficult to understand that a student who has done anthropology applies for a position that is far from his training"

III. DISCUSSION

Any socio-professional integration starts with education and training. Because any individual before his insertion into the professional fabric must acquire a certain level of knowledge, and a certain type of responsibility in order to be able to behave as a good citizen. This is why Stoner(1999) asserts that "insertion must also be considered in a multidimensional way". In this analysis of the constraints linked to the professional integration of young people, we naturally started from education to integration, passing through training. The first obstacle that disturbs the Youth Employment Agency in achieving its objectives is the mismatch between training and available employment. Bomisso(2008) in a study conducted on the socio-professional integration graduates from Abidjan found that "only graduates from engineering schools or from a few postgraduate courses obtain stable employments. furthermore, graduates from less selective and less professionalized courses experience real difficulties in terms of their integration.

The phenomenon of downgrading" at the time of hiring is frequent in the Ivory Coast. Indeed many young graduates of higher education do not, three years after the end of their studies, have a job at the level for which their diploma theoretically prepared them"(Bomisso,2008).

Antoine N'Gratier(2007) in his DEA at the University of Abidjan whci was titled "Employability of young people in Côte d'Ivoire. " Had also approached the problem in the same way as this reseach did. "The mismatch between the different systems (education and training, productive) results in a low level of human capital interms of professional experience (required by employers); poor reporting by job seekers; by discrimination in hiring and various job search methods. However, the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth, Professional Integration and Civic Service (MPJIPSC) has a different perspective on the difficulties related to professionalism. For that government department, the problem of professional integration is dependent on galloping demography. In its action matrix published on the 20th of September2021 and titled "National Strategy for the Professional Integration and Employment of Young People (SNIEJ) 2021-2025. » it indicates that «. The strong economic growth experienced by the Ivory Coast over the past decade has had a limited impact on employment in general and that of young people in particular. » The second disruption of the actions of the Youth Employment Agency of Yopougon in the professional integration of young people that we highlight in this research is the unfair competition from private companies. The third issue is tax harassment and the fourth is the lack of monitoring and evaluation of Youth Employment Agency programs. Despite the denunciation of the private company RMO Group as an unfair competitor by the AEJ of Yopougon, the Ministry for the Promotion of Youth, Professional Integration and Civic Service (MPJIPSC) in its same action matrix published on the 20thSeptember2021 underlines the difficulties of the professional integration of young people by a shortage state funding. Moreover, the investments made by the State are insufficient .only a small part of the fund is allocated to investment in job creation.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Ivory Coast's crisis from the 19th of September2002 through 2010 has created a particular context that worsens the management of young people in the post-conflict period. In order to provide appropriate responses, the definition of a strategic and operational framework as well as the definition of development objectives in line with the aspirations and needs of young people are essential. It is these strategic objectives that guided the initiators of the Agence Emploi Jeune. In this period of post-crisis reconstruction, there is no need to recall the importance of this policy of integration of young people whose social situation has been seriously precarious. In view of the results obtained, it is noted that the creation of the Youth Employment Agency, which brought hope for the socio-economic promotion of young people, and their integration into the social and economic fabric, has not yielded the expected results. This failure is essentially due to the mismatch between training and employment, unfair competition, tax harassment of companies, as well as the lack of political will which is characterised by laxity in the face of the corrective measures. Proper assessment of the labour environment has become a matter of urgency. This assessment and decisive measure in the taxation of private companies need to be effective so that remedial measures could be identified and applied.

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