

# Mechanisms for Integrating Migrants in Rural Areas: End of a Cycle, New Horizons

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## ABSTRACT

Tutoring has long been the primary mechanism for integrating migrants into rural communities in Côte d'Ivoire. Today, this mechanism faces major challenges that call its effectiveness into question. This paper analyses the decline of tutorship as a traditional mechanism of integration and examines the emergence of alternative institutional structures, through the lens of the socio-anthropology of migration and local governance. It draws on a qualitative approach utilising semi-structured interviews and field observations conducted in the sub-prefecture of Soubré. This study reveals that tutoring, once a pillar of migrants' social integration in rural areas, is undergoing a profound crisis linked to generational shifts and the commodification of land relations. In response, structures such as the COGES, the CVGFR and the CNRCT are emerging as alternative mechanisms, offering hope but facing challenges of legitimacy and governance.

**Keywords:** guardianship, integration, rural areas, alternative mechanisms, Côte d'Ivoire

## INTRODUCTION

With over 25% of its population comprised of migrants, Côte d'Ivoire is among the sub-Saharan African countries most affected by immigration issues (OECD/CIRES, 2017).

This demographic reality places the integration of migrants at the heart of development policies, particularly in rural areas where land pressure and social cohesion constitute the most acute challenges (IOM, 2009). The question, therefore, is how to manage the integration of these migrants more effectively into the host society, in order to amplify the positive effects of immigration and mitigate its negative ones. Faced with the arrival of migrants, communities have always organized themselves. Within each people, there are traditions and customs that govern the reception of migrants. While these traditions have certainly not escaped institutional evolution, they nevertheless retain their founding principles. (Dozon, 1997)

Among customary integration practices, interethnic marriage and access to land through mentorship have long been the two ancestral mechanisms allowing migrants to be accepted into the host community, even if these social ties did not guarantee equal rights between the migrant and the host. However, it is important to clarify a fundamental difference between these two mechanisms. Chauveau et al. (2006) define mentorship as a traditional rural institution that governs the emerging social relations surrounding the arrival of a migrant in a village community for an indefinite period. In this way, mentorship implies integration in both its motivations and its consequences: it

cannot exist without integration. Interethnic marriage, on the other hand, has integration as a possible consequence, but can also lead to the migrant spouse's departure to their community of origin (Yao, 2012). Therefore, the interethnic marriage cannot be used to discuss the mechanisms of integration in their causes and purpose entirely. Conversely, one cannot discuss tutoring without discussing integration. Indeed, tutoring and integration are closely intertwined because tutoring stems from a genuine desire on the part of the migrant to integrate. This distinction justifies focusing the present analysis solely on the tutoring mechanism.

Since the 1990s, the mentoring system has undergone profound transformation. Chauveau & Koffi (2005) demonstrate that the land crisis and the rural crisis in the forested region of Côte d'Ivoire are closely linked to tensions between local populations and migrants, highlighting the gradual erosion of customary reception mechanisms. Gaouli (2012) confirms that rural land conflicts in western Côte d'Ivoire are rooted in this same erosion. These transformations acutely raise the need to consider institutional alternatives to mentoring. Indeed, Costa-Lascoux (2004) reminds us that failures in integration constitute a breach of the social contract, the consequences of which can have lasting consequences for national cohesion.

It is from this perspective that the present contribution examines the emergence of alternative institutional structures capable of taking over from tutoring in the integration process of migrants in rural Côte d'Ivoire. It seeks to answer the following question: in a context of crisis in tutoring, what institutional structures can constitute alternative mechanisms for the integration of migrants in rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire?

## **MATERIALS & METHODS**

This study adopts a qualitative approach, prioritizing an understanding of the social and institutional dynamics at play in rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire. Data were collected

primarily in the sub-prefecture of Soubré, in southwestern Côte d'Ivoire. Soubré is an area of long-standing and dense immigration, characterized by the coexistence of the indigenous Bété population and West African migrants, mainly from Burkina Faso and Mali. Data collection relied on two complementary techniques. Firstly, semi-structured individual and group interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. These included the sub-prefect of the Soubré municipality, the honorary consul of the Republic of Burkina Faso in Soubré, leaders of migrant communities (community chief, youth leader, consular delegate), village chiefs (Yabayo, Obrouayo), individual migrants from Burkina Faso and Mali, as well as local elders and guardians. Furthermore, field observations were conducted during community meetings and operational sessions of the structures studied (COGES, CVGFR, ECOWAS associations). Sampling was carried out using the judged approach, allowing for the targeting of diverse profiles directly involved in migration and land dynamics. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then subjected to content analysis focused on the explicit meaning of the discourse.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Tutoring and integration in rural areas: the end of a paradigm?**

Tutoring is a widespread practice across most West African countries. Its content may vary slightly depending on local traditions. However, regardless of the region where tutoring exists, the underlying spirit and desire for integration remain the same. In Côte d'Ivoire, this instrument, long recognized as an effective tool for integration, is currently facing a crisis due to several structural factors.

### **Tutoring: an old tool for integration in rural areas**

In the aftermath of independence, the Ivorian state opted for rapid agricultural and economic development, based on a very open migration strategy that encouraged the

arrival of foreign workers (Atsain, 2015). Faced with the pressure to accommodate migrant farmers, host communities resorted to the practice of mentorship to maintain a minimum level of land control over the ceded lands. Mentorship thus always functioned as

a social mechanism to integrate the migrant into the host community and ensure that the newcomer respected local customs and traditions. It is in this context that the Yabayo Chiefdom asserted that:

*“The first migrants in search of land offered to work on the plantations for the natives. These natives, called tutors, allowed them to cultivate their land and in return the migrants received either money or a plot of land. The tutors housed the migrants in their homes until they could support themselves. At the end of the year, as a sign of gratitude, the migrants had to bring a gift to their tutors: a rooster, food, or money.”*

This verbatim account sheds light on the foundations of the land guardianship system. It was a structured relationship of welcome built on the principles of reciprocity, solidarity, and social recognition. Within this system, migrants benefited from access to land and accommodation provided by the local resident, known as the guardian (Bideba in the Bété language). In return, they entered into a relationship of social and symbolic dependence, marked by obligations of respect, loyalty, and gratitude toward their guardian. This system was based on social and cultural norms that regulated access to land resources and framed the relationships between local residents and migrants. Gifts offered during the end-of-year holidays, such as a rooster, food, or money, were symbolic gestures of gratitude that helped maintain and renew the social bond between the two parties. Beyond their material value, these gifts contributed to maintaining local social order and legitimizing the guardians' authority over the land. Guardianship thus appeared as a socio-institutional mechanism for integrating migrants, but also as a land regulation system. It allowed indigenous communities to retain symbolic and social control over their land while promoting its agricultural development. Tutoring then reveals itself as a social organization within which networks interact, and a high level of social trust, thus facilitating cooperation for mutual benefit (Thiebault, 2003).

This mechanism has long ensured social cohesion between host and migrant populations. Tutoring thus provided a legitimate customary framework for welcoming migrants by delegating rights of use or occupation of land (Chauveau et al., 2006). In its traditional conception, tutoring constituted a near-permanent link between hosts and migrants, giving rise to unwritten social rules, tacitly established and recognized by the entire community. For a long time, this network of ties reinforced the legitimacy of tutoring in the social integration of migrants in rural areas. However, it is clear that this network of ties is tending to dissolve due to current social challenges.

### **The tutoring crisis**

Several factors have contributed to transforming the local norms of the tutoring institution, as they previously prevailed. The first factor is the desire to preserve indigenous identity. Indeed, faced with the hard realities of globalization, which forces a redefinition of territories and peoples host populations cling to their indigenous identity to “preserve” their traditional cultural identities (Boucher, 2007). In the context of the ongoing reconstruction of collective identities brought about by the settlement of migrants, the ideology of “indigeneity” and indigenous identity become the primary symbolic resource for host population who find themselves in a demographic and

economic minority (Bayart and Geschiere, 2001).

Another factor is the generational shift among both tutors and migrants. Field data is consistent on this point: the death of the

original tutor systematically leads to a reassessment of previous commitments. The sub-prefect of Soubré confirms this unequivocally:

*“The major problems related to land acquisition stem from the descendants of the migrants' guardians. Indeed, the migrant obtains land from their guardian verbally and informally, meaning that no agreement is signed by both parties. Years later, the guardian's sons come to claim their fathers' land from the migrants, and this becomes a source of conflict”.*

The death of the migrant or the original guardian often provides an opportunity to question and renegotiate the original conditions of the transfer (Chauveau et al., 2006; Kone et al., 2005).

Indeed, the major economic crisis that Côte d'Ivoire experienced beginning in the 1980s, resulted in demographic pressure on land. Because of that, the young people of the host communities have the feeling. They find themselves in a situation of land scarcity for which they are not responsible. (Babo and Droz, 2008; Economic and Social Council of Côte d'Ivoire, 2000). The first guardian having died, his heirs intend to manage the relationship with the migrant according to their own understanding. These contracts between guardian and migrant are essentially verbal and based on trust, and therefore highly susceptible to being challenged. This situation has transformed the guardianship relationship into an ongoing negotiation.

In parallel, another form of contract has gradually emerged between migrants and their hosts: the "plant-share" agreement. This practice, known as "Atroukatra" in the local language, involves the migrant cultivating their host's land, and at harvest time, the two parties share the produce. While this contract does not formally sever the social bond, it is gradually emptied of its substance. The practice of planting and sharing entails a colossal amount of work for the migrant in terms of personal investment: the migrant must transform a forest into a cash crop plantation and share the harvest with the landowner who ceded the land. Certainly,

this contract does not sever the social bond between the migrant and the landowner; that is to say, the migrant remains connected to the landowner and has a duty to support them as needed, as a member of the family.

However, in the current understanding of the objective of the "plant-sharing" contract that binds the two parties, the "plant-sharing" agreement is a commercial contract stripped of all the social obligations that pre-existed in the original mentoring system. Yet, this system has not alleviated the burden on migrants, who continue to be compelled to provide social assistance to their mentors. This creates in them a weariness of being bombarded with demands from their guardians, while the monetary cost of land transfers becomes high. Thus, guardianship, which was once perceived as an instrument of social recognition, now becomes, in the mind of the migrant, an instrument of social domination. Indeed, the autonomy that the migrant desires is undermined by the guardianship relationship. However, any constraint on freedom and autonomy tends to deteriorate the social climate. These upheavals in the traditional practice of tutoring induce uncertainty as to the duration of the relationship established by tutoring. Today there is talk of a "tutoring crisis" in rural Ivory Coast.

From the above, it can be noted that the main and legitimate mechanism for integrating migrants in rural areas is experiencing a significant decline in its integrative capacity. Tutoring, long a cornerstone of migrant integration in rural Côte d'Ivoire is

undergoing profound change. The commodification of land relations, which strips tutoring of its original social dimension, confirms Gaouli Bi's (2012) observations that rural land conflicts in western Côte d'Ivoire stem from the erosion of customary reception mechanisms. Chauveau (2007) had anticipated these developments, demonstrating that land transfers through tutoring in West Africa were subject to deep tensions linked to generational issues and the increasing market value of land. In light of the socio-economic challenges, is tutoring, in its traditional and current form, still suited to the integration needs of migrants, which implies preserving the dignity and cultural integrity of the host population? These questions warrant in-depth reflection from social and scientific actors in the field of migration. However, rural Côte d'Ivoire continues to be subject to migration of all kinds. Thus, it is more than evident that it is necessary to move beyond the traditional tutoring system and to think about institutional alternatives adapted to contemporary social realities.

### **The emergence of new integration tools in rural areas: between hopes and challenges**

Several institutional structures present in rural areas are de facto playing an increasingly important role in integration processes, even though this was not their initial purpose. Field data identifies three structures whose integrative potential warrants further analysis: the Public-School Management Committee (COGES), the

Village Committee for Rural Land Management (CVGFR), and the National Chamber of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of Côte d'Ivoire (CNRCT).

### **The COGES: a legal instrument and an alternative integration mechanism**

Created in January 1995 and governed by Decree No. 2012-488 of June 7, 2012, the Committee for the Management of Public Schools (COGES) is an instrument of good governance in the hands of education stakeholders. The COGES is a permanent meeting framework between the actors and partners of the school in order to reflect on and implement appropriate guidelines for the proper functioning of the school. School management committees (COGES) are established in both urban and rural areas. According to articles 8 and 15 of the aforementioned decree, the General Assembly and the Executive Board of the COGES are composed of parents, teachers, and students of the said school. Thus, the only requirement for membership is to be the parent of a student enrolled at the school, without reference to ethnicity or origin. This formal neutrality makes it, in the multi-ethnic villages of rural Côte d'Ivoire, a potential meeting place between host populations and migrants. Field data collected in Soubré confirms that the COGES (School Management Committee) effectively functions as a space for integration in several villages. The sub-prefect of Soubré affirms this in these terms:

*“Structures that can be factors in integration within villages include the housing committee, the health COGES (Community Management Committee), and the education COGES. These structures are composed of all the communities living in the villages and are created with the aim of promoting village development by the inhabitants themselves. Thus, migrants participate in decision-making and activities related to the community life of the host villages.”*

Community Management Committees (COGES) have emerged as important forums for community dialogue in villages. Composed of representatives from the

various communities living within the village area, they are established to promote the collective management of social infrastructure and local development. In this



context, these organizations constitute spaces for inclusive local governance. Within these spaces, local residents and migrants are encouraged to collaborate around shared interests related to collective well-being.

COGES (Local Management Committees) are not fundamentally mechanisms created for integration. However, when deployed at the community level, they are effectively used as socio-community mechanisms integration. Thus, upon analysis of its deployment and operation, two main elements allow us to suggest that COGES is certainly an alternative integration mechanism.

Firstly, the COGES allows for community participation. Indeed, the COGES (School Management Committee) determines the conditions necessary for the development and well-being of the population. To this end, migrants and host communities jointly decide on the actions to be taken for the smooth operation of schools and public health centers in their communities. The COGES thus provides a platform for meetings and collaboration between migrant

and host community parents. Discussions about the school's needs and the implementation of joint projects foster social interaction and cohesion among group members. They allow migrant and host community parents to interact regularly, breaking down stereotypes and helping to build bonds of friendship and solidarity. The participation of migrants in meetings, decision-making processes, and community activities contributes to strengthening their social integration within host villages. Thus, beyond their administrative or technical functions, these structures also play a role in building social cohesion and consolidating community life in contexts marked by ethnic and cultural diversity. Community Management Committees (COGES) foster regular interactions between different segments of the population and thereby contribute to the emergence of a shared community identity, based on cooperation and the collective management of local affairs.

The chieftaincy of Obrouayo confirms the effectiveness of this inclusion in his village:

“There is the COGES school, COGES health. In the formation of the COGES school and health office, non-native speakers are part of it. The office decides on the operation and publishes the decisions taken by it. This reflects the integral inclusion of migrants.”

This verbatim account highlights the mechanism of social inclusion that is built through local community management bodies. The presence of migrants within the COGES (Community Management Committee) offices reflects a form of active participation by the various segments of the population in the management of the village's collective affairs. This participation demonstrates a growing recognition of migrants as legitimate actors in community life. Their integration into decision-making bodies is not limited to a symbolic presence, but contributes to building a space for shared governance where responsibilities and decisions are discussed collectively. Furthermore, the involvement of migrants in

these structures helps to reduce social barriers between local residents and those from elsewhere, by fostering cooperative relationships around common interests such as children's education or the improvement of healthcare services. These bodies thus become privileged spaces for social negotiation and the strengthening of community cohesion.

Secondly, COGES offers migrants equitable access to formal state structures and legitimacy within the community and with public authorities. Indeed, being a member of COGES through local elections or appointments gives migrants a legal voice, visibility, and legitimacy within the local institutional structure, as well as with state

authorities. This allows them to participate in important decision-making processes that directly affect their well-being and that of the community. COGES thus enables migrants to better understand the host country's education system while promoting the integration of their children. Education is, in fact, a key factor in successful community integration. We therefore endorse the view of Guehi & Kone (2015) that access to public education and healthcare services could be an alternative for building social integration because it does not reinforce any particular identity marker.

The COGES (School Management Committee) can therefore be considered an alternative way to build integration. However, this access must be equitable for all. Indeed, in several rural COGES areas, the situation is problematic. Migrants lament not being consulted regarding the establishment and management of the School Management Committees (COGES), even though they are parents of students. These migrants interpret this as a form of exclusion. However, even if the COGES regulations do not explicitly require the consideration of different social strata, the COGES, in its composition and operation, must include all parents of students, regardless of their ethnic or social background. Thus, migrants deplore the fact that these structures are being built and implemented without their input. They feel excluded from constructive discussions that could contribute to the effective implementation of these structures. These complaints echo the work of Houedin & Niava (2015), who concluded that since the revision of immigration laws, these migrants are prevented from engaging in the kind of reflective practice that could contribute to the development, legitimization, and formal recognition of a valued status. For migrants, the host community holds the advantage in decision-making within the COGES. Migrants are only involved when it comes to financial contributions for carrying out the agreed-upon projects. Thus, the migrants, although formally integrated into the COGES (School Management Committees),

their voices are not heard as they should be. Their participation and the consideration of their opinions must be a guarantee so that they feel truly listened to and integrated into the communities.

From the above, it is clear that COGES offers a formal integration platform recognized by all parties. Its participatory management model fosters social interaction, breaks down stereotypes, and builds solidarity between migrants and hosts. However, its integrative potential remains underutilized due to de facto unequal participation. COGES's participatory management model would benefit from being strengthened as a lever to support the shift away from mentoring in its traditional role of integrating migrants.

### **The Village Committee for Rural Land Management (CVGFR): a legal instrument for land management with poorly exploited integrative potential**

In the rural context of Côte d'Ivoire, land issues are central to the relations between indigenous and migrant populations. To regulate these relations and guide land management, the Ivorian government has established Village Committees for Rural Land Management (CVGFR). These local structures are tasked with contributing to securing land rights and preventing conflicts related to land access and use.

The CVGFR was established by Law No. 98-750 of December 23, 1998, relating to rural land ownership ivorian. It is governed by Decree No. 99-593 of October 13, 1999, concerning the organization and responsibilities of Rural Land Management Committees (CGFRs), as amended by Decree No. 2019-264 of March 27, 2019, concerning the organization and responsibilities of sub-prefectural committees, and by Order No. 041 MEMID/MINAGRA of June 12, 2001, relating to the establishment and operation of Rural Land Management Committees. According to the aforementioned article, the CVGFRs are created by decision of the Sub-Prefect. Article 8 of the March 27, 2019, states that the CVGFR comprises the village

chief or their representative, the land chief or their representative, the lineage chiefs or heads of extended families, two youth representatives, one women's representative, and any other persons useful for the proper execution of the committee's work. The CVGFR, the main body established by the 1998 land law, is competent to hear land disputes relating to the customary rights of an individual or group of individuals to a plot of land within the framework of the land certification process. Thus, the CVGFR is a committee that allows host and migrant

populations to reach agreements on issues related to land access and to land rights. In areas like the Soubré region, characterized by significant demographic diversity, the composition of these committees relies on the participation of representatives from the various communities living in the village. This organization aims to promote participatory and inclusive land management. In this regard, a local stakeholder (the Sub-Prefect of Soubré) stated:

*"The CVGFRs in the Soubré region are composed of representatives from all communities, including people with knowledge of land issues. The CVGFR, by its very composition, is a tool for integration; it facilitates coexistence between migrants and host populations."*

This verbatim transcript highlights the role that local institutions can play in regulating social relations. The presence of representatives from different communities within the CVGFR reflects a desire to establish a framework for collective consultation in which land issues are discussed and negotiated among the stakeholders. This diverse composition contributes to the social recognition of migrants in decision-making processes related to land resource management. It promotes dialogue between communities and can contribute to strengthening social cohesion and peaceful coexistence around land-related issues.

By integrating migrants into local governance mechanisms, the CVGFR becomes a space for mediation promoting dialogue and preventing tensions between host populations and populations from elsewhere. The joint participation of local people and migrants reflects a desire to involve all stakeholders in the village in land management. This illustrates a formal organization aimed at ensuring that all affected populations participate in land management and that their voices are heard in the decision-making process. However, while this mechanism has significant

potential for social integration and community cohesion, its effectiveness largely depends on how it is mobilized and applied at the local level.

In certain contexts, power dynamics, authority relations, or land interests can limit the full participation of all communities and thus reduce the integrative scope of this instrument. This assertion can be verified on several levels. First, while it is recommended that the committee respect the village's characteristics, the decree does not at any point require the CVGFR (Local Committee for Rural Development) to have a specific quota for the different social strata of the community. Consequently, in many villages, the CVGFR is typically composed primarily of host communities, to the detriment of migrants. Indeed, in the minds of these host communities, the CVGFR cannot include migrants because it deals with issues related to land, of which the host communities are the exclusive owners. As a result, these migrants feel excluded from the community's land-related affairs. Yet, they are predominantly found in rural areas. Land users are also consulted, particularly through their representatives, in the land security process. Land and any questions concerning land.



Furthermore, despite the presence of a few migrant representatives on the CVGFR, their level of participation in these committees remains very low. For example, they are not consulted on the committee's operations. village chiefs tend to make decisions alone without notifying the various community

leaders (for example, for land allocation, the sale of plots to Burkinabé migrants, the village chief does not notify the Burkinabé community leader). The ECOWAS community of Yabayo denounces a de facto exclusion from decision-making processes:

*"We have representatives in the CVGFR but we are not integrated into the committee's operations. The village chief makes decisions alone without informing the various community leaders. For the land allocation, the sale of plots to Burkinabe migrants, the village chief does not inform the head of the Burkinabe community."*

This verbatim account highlights a gap between formal representation and actual participation. Although migrants have representatives on the CVGFR (Committee for the Coordination of Rural Development), they are not truly involved in decision-making, and the village chief acts unilaterally on important issues such as land allocation

and sales. This illustrates that official presence on the committee does not automatically guarantee effective inclusion in the CVGFR's operations and decisions. Burkinabé immigrant leaders corroborate this observation, pointing to a structural dysfunction:

*"For land sales, it is the indigenous people, that is to say the chief and his notables, who sell the land to the migrant without involving his community leader, which calls into question the functioning of the CVGFR. The committee is not functional or is not operating according to the established rules."*

Indeed, there is no accountability system in place for them, yet they are asked to contribute to all the membership fees. Thus, it can be concluded that the migrants on this committee are only invited to informational meetings and not to decision-making sessions. Indeed article 5 of the decree establishing the CVGFR (Committee for the Coordination of Migration and Refugees) introduces the issue of integration within this committee by requiring a mixed team composition. It is understood that the mixed nature of the group encompasses the integration of all segments of society, including migrants. However, beyond simply integrating migrants into the committee, it would be desirable for the regulations governing the CVGFR's operations to consider their contribution to the committee's activities.

While integrating migrants into the structure is a good start, it is not sufficient on its own to guarantee not only their effective participation in the structure's activities, but also to ensure that the Committee takes their contribution into account. However, the CVGFR could be an undeniable asset for integration because it brings together migrants and host populations around a theme important to both parties. Indeed, land is the main factor in migration to rural areas in Côte d'Ivoire. Thus, the CVGFR, beyond a committee created specifically for securing rural land, tends to become a truly competent body for resolving land disputes intra- and inter-community and establish a continuous dialogue between the different communities. In short, the CVGFR's integrative potential is real, but depends closely on local governance practices. Fully integrating migrants into the

committee's effective operation would guarantee a better integration process within host communities.

The National Chamber of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of Côte d'Ivoire (CNRCT): a traditional legitimacy that can significantly support the integration of migrants

The National Chamber of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of Ivory Coast (CNRCT) was institutionalized by the Ivorian Constitution of 2016. This institutionalization enshrines the official recognition of traditional chieftaincy, after several decades of marginalization by the post-colonial state.

The first mention of the Association of Traditional Chieftaincy appears as early as 1997, under the presidency by Konan Bédié. The newspaper *Fraternité-Matin* reported on August 16, 1997, that the first assembly of the Union of Kings of Côte d'Ivoire was held in Abengourou on August 13 and 14, 1997. The newspaper specified that its objectives were "the preservation of numerous achievements, namely: political stability, national unity, economic prosperity, and peace." In 2000, the Association expanded and took on a new direction. Under the leadership of General Robert Gueï, the Association of Kings and Traditional Chiefs of Côte d'Ivoire was formed. Essentially, the aim was to unite all local authorities operating outside the state sphere, following the model of Ghana. Indeed, in neighboring Ghana, the Houses of Chiefs are officially recognized and subsidized by the state. At the beginning of 2003, the Association was received by the President of the Republic, Laurent Gbagbo. The Association requested to intervene in resolving the crisis tearing the country apart, arguing, firstly, that "we are used to settling disputes, we know how to do it," and secondly, that "disputes in Africa are resolved by means other than weapons." The Association's representatives asked the President to allow them to carry out this mediation. The Association then pursued several international initiatives to find a solution to the crisis, but was ultimately

unsuccessful. It was only in 2016 that the newly adopted Ivorian constitution enshrined the recognition of traditional chieftaincy. Following Ghana's example, Côte d'Ivoire established a National Chamber of Kings and Traditional Chiefs (CNRCT). This institutionalization of traditional chieftaincy within the Ivorian democratic system also signifies the failure of the policy of marginalizing traditional chiefs, a policy that had been favored after independence. This institutionalization reflects the desire to take advantage of the experience of traditional leaders in community management. Therefore, how can the CNRCT be used as a mechanism for integrating migrants in rural areas?

The history of traditional chieftaincy contains within itself the keys to establishing integrative mechanisms. Indeed, before the advent of modern administration, traditional chieftaincy exclusively managed the people, which allowed it to increase its importance in Africa. However, after independence, traditional chiefs were relegated to the background by the modern state in the name of development. In Côte d'Ivoire, before 2014, the desire to better consolidate its authority led the state to impose limits on local power. The responsibilities of traditional chiefs essentially consisted of serving as intermediaries between the modern administration and the rural population (Wohi et al., 2021). The newly independent state strengthened itself through the progressive development of its administration. The creation of municipalities saw the emergence of local elected officials (mayors and members of parliament), who are chosen by the people and are responsible for defending the interests of their constituents. In addition to these local elected officials, there are also representatives of the administration. Faced with this proliferation of local power centers, it is clear that the power of the traditional chief has been significantly diminished. Beyond the loss of several prerogatives to the modern administration, traditional chiefs no longer function as political decision-makers,

but rather as executors, auxiliaries, and subordinates of this new administration (Guehi & Kone, 2015).

However, villagers continue to favor consulting traditional chiefs in many situations. This is precisely why government officials and local elected representatives regularly seek the help of traditional chiefs to convey certain messages. Furthermore, successive political crises and the resulting social divide have also led to a resurgence of traditional leadership institutions. Traditional chiefs manage the political, social, and financial life of the community on

a micro level. The plurality of roles they play contributes to increasing their credibility and influence within the communities. This influence is also recognized by local authorities in the modern administration. Indeed, in most villages, the population's willingness to heed national directives depends on the degree of involvement of the traditional chief. Moreover, on the ground, the data collected in Soubré attest to the centrality of the chieftaincy in local dynamics. The honorary consul of Burkina Faso in Soubré emphasizes the conciliatory role played by the traditional authorities:

*"The chieftaincy is now led by intellectuals, which makes governance simpler and more thoughtful. Several examples of conflict resolution by the chieftaincy have been noted. In Facobly, the canton chief calls the Burkinabè consul to resolve conflicts."*

This verbatim account demonstrates that the chieftaincy plays a central role in regulating social relations and integrating migrants. The mention of intellectuals at the head of the chieftaincy underscores that governance is now structured and deliberate, facilitating decision-making and conflict management. The example of Facobly, where the canton chief requests the Burkinabè consul to

resolve a dispute, illustrates the mediating and conciliatory nature of the customary authorities, as well as their ability to involve external actors when the situation demands it, thereby strengthening stability and cooperation between communities.

In Yabayo, the chieftaincy has developed an original territorial system to promote the inclusion of migrant communities:

*"The chieftaincy has established provincial chiefs for better management. The term 'province' was used to allow the Burkinabè community to feel at home, given its majority representation in the area."*

This demonstrates that the Yabayo chiefdom is adapting its administrative structure to reflect the village's demographic reality. The introduction of provincial chiefs and the symbolic choice of the term "province" aim to acknowledge the majority presence of the Burkinabè community and strengthen its sense of belonging. This initiative reflects institutional flexibility and an effort to facilitate the integration and participation of migrants in local life. The chiefdom's role is not limited to mere symbolism or administration, but acts as a mediator,

ensuring fairness and recognition for all communities. This approach contributes to social stability and harmonious coexistence within a multi-ethnic village context.

From the above, it is clear that traditional leaders occupy a prominent place in the social dynamics of migrant integration. However, today, we are witnessing a crisis of confidence within the Ivorian traditional leadership, which is challenging the influence of traditional chiefs. Indeed, several Rural communities in Côte d'Ivoire are plagued by enormous power struggles

within villages. It is no longer uncommon to find two legitimately recognized chiefs in the same village. Upon closer examination, these two chiefs very often represent two different social groups. And the management of communal land is one of the root causes of intense intercommunal tensions. Chiefs are accused of ceding vast tracts of land to migrants, without regard for the host populations or the preservation of the community's heritage. As a result, chieftaincies very often see their power challenged. (Mahier Bah M. & al, 2018). This situation has created a profound crisis of confidence between rural communities and their chieftaincies, and between the Ivorian population as a whole and traditional chieftaincies. These tensions tend to deeply divide communities in their way of life and call into question the very process of integration. The CNRCT should make this crisis of confidence its primary focus and work to regain the trust of the population. The sanctity of chiefs, stemming from their appointment, must be addressed so that the chieftaincy can reclaim its noble power. This step is essential before implementing a migrant integration process that will be legitimate for all.

Furthermore, the CNRCT brings together the chieftaincies of all regions. It could therefore take up the mentoring mechanism and revisit it in light of current challenges and the cultural differences of each region. The CNRCT's objective in revisiting mentoring would be to foster a participatory framework for ongoing consultation with migrants. Indeed, following the gradual erosion of mentoring in rural areas, the CNRCT is one of the organizations still capable of meeting the challenge of a successful migrant integration process in rural communities. Indeed, its ability to draw on traditional legitimacy makes it a key player in the integration of migrants into host communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In short, this contribution has highlighted the decline of mentorship as a traditional

mechanism for integrating migrants in rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire. This decline, fueled by generational shifts and the commodification of land relations, weakens a system that had long ensured social cohesion between host communities and migrants. The "mentorship crisis" is not simply a phenomenon of institutional regression; it reveals, according to Gnabeli (2012), a profound transformation of social relations in rural areas, where economic imperatives have gradually supplanted moral and community obligations. (Beauchemin, 2005). The field data collected in the sub-prefecture of Soubré concretely illustrate this evolution: from the structured hospitality of the mentor towards the migrant to a tense relationship surrounding land, marked by the exclusion of migrants from decision-making bodies.

On the issue of migrant integration in rural areas, the work of Costa-Lascoux (2004) reminds us that integration failures constitute a breach of the social contract. In Côte d'Ivoire, this breach is manifested precisely in the shift from a mentoring relationship based on mutual trust to one of domination and exploitation, as denounced by the migrants themselves in surveys. These dynamics are documented at the national level by the OECD/CIRES (2017), whose report on the interactions between public policies, migration, and development in Côte d'Ivoire emphasizes the need to rethink reception mechanisms.

In light of this situation, the study identified three institutional structures, COGES, CVGFR, and CNRCT, that could potentially serve as alternative integration mechanisms. Each possesses real strengths: community participation, inclusive land management, and traditional legitimacy. The survey data shows that where these structures function effectively, they do contribute to building inter-community ties and preventing conflicts. However, their integrative potential remains largely untapped due to informal exclusionary practices that marginalize migrants from decision-making processes, despite their formal inclusion.

This reflection opens several avenues for actors in local governance and migration policy. The emergence of the alternative mechanisms identified in this study, COGES, CVGFR, and CNRCT, illustrates the capacity of rural societies to develop new forms of social regulation. However, their effectiveness in terms of integration remains limited by dynamics of informal exclusion. Therefore, it is first necessary to strengthen the legal frameworks governing these structures to mandate mechanisms for the effective and verifiable participation of migrants. Secondly, it is essential to build upon existing positive experiences, particularly in regions where traditional leadership has demonstrated its ability to maintain social cohesion. Finally, developing an integrated framework that articulates these three mechanisms could constitute a coherent institutional response to the challenge of integration in a country where migration remains an unavoidable structural factor in rural development. If the exclusion of migrants is strategic and not accidental, then the solutions cannot be solely textual. It is necessary to shift the balance of power in areas of uncertainty by making the participation of migrants in decision-making mandatory and verifiable. This situation would shift decision-making power from a monopolized resource to a shared one. This study demonstrating that sustainable solutions require a balance between customary legitimacy and a formal institutional framework.

### **Declaration by Authors**

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