

# General and specific objectives of an education in view of caring for the elderly in africa

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## Introduction

For a long time Africa remained outside the problems of old age. The number of the elderly was relatively reduced, very rare specimens of people lived long enough to be real old persons with difficulties.

New realities have generated new conditions of life and, more and more people are now attaining a greater age. Thus, within the coming decades, a serious attention should be paid to the process of ageing as much as to the sociological changes that would inevitably be brought about with the increasing number of years of life ahead of an aged person.

Instead of waiting for the situation to be created before seeking solutions, as a research worker, I have started collecting information for a number of years now.

Usually, African people tend to make provisions for death only, seldom for life or for old age; but nowadays, our new environment requires a thorough reflection based on scientific research to propose approaches to seek solutions in order to face the difficulties that come with old age.

As African people, we are supposed to be without ageing problems. But in reality, change has occurred. Mutations were brought in by our contact with other civilizations, and we now do meet with difficulties and problems created by old age.

In order to suggest a few proposals for an education that equips us to care for the elderly in our countries, I will first of all state the content of the recent research work undertaken on the ageing process and situation in Africa. In a second part, I will present my methodological approach in relation to my research activities on old age and the aims of the present article. A third part will show the change occurring both in the attitude of people and in the evolution of the situation of the elderly. A fourth part will be devoted to the conditions for a decision making that will ensure success. The fifth one will suggest aims for an education of adults, youth, children in Africa to help care for the elderly, a situation that most people still take for granted. A sixth and last part will draw attention to some environmental conditions required in our everyday lives for an education to prepare the people to care for the elderly in Africa to take place.

## Literature survey

My literature survey will be twofold. First of all, I will report my reading about old age, and next, I will mention some of what scientists produced when it comes to defining educational objectives.

### On old age

When, in the early 90s, I started reflecting on the subject of old age provision in Côte d'Ivoire, the books discussing such a problem were rather scarce. I searched the university library, met with the head

librarian, but only a few articles in the encyclopaedia gave some information under entries such as 'gériatrie', 'gérontologie', 'vieillesse', and 'vieillessement'.

The first important book I came across in a bookshop is *Histoire de la Vieillesse*<sup>1</sup>. The book presents a survey from Antiquity to the XX<sup>th</sup> century, but its concern is Europe.

In his introduction, the author states : 'The Third World countries, those in the tropical and equatorial area, that possess elderly people, do not face the old age problem experienced, in the rich countries, those in the temperate zones of the northern hemisphere'<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> DUBOIS J. P., *Histoire de la vieillesse*, Paris, PUF, 1994.

<sup>2</sup> DUBOIS J.P., *Op. Cit.*, p. 4 « Les pays du Tiers Monde, ceux de l'espace tropical et équatorial, qui ont des vieillards, n'ont pas le problème de la vieillesse posé dans les pays riches, ceux de l'espace tempéré de l'hémisphère Nord ».

The book shows the evolution of ideas about old age throughout the centuries. Examples mention important aged persons who in their days were showered with honour such as Victor Hugo (1802 – 1885) in France, Guillaume 1<sup>er</sup> (1797 – 1888) in Germany, Guiseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901) in Italy. The last chapter presents the situation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when more people seem to live longer. One part of the chapter is entitled 'dependent old age'. It shows how the society takes over a role formerly assigned to the families. A fact is underlined : for most dependent aged people, the first evil is loneliness, and as solution : social help at home or in an institution... Social help at home is encouraged.<sup>3</sup>

The conclusion of the book underlines the fact that 'Our societies do not lack money, but they choose to spend their money in a sense that keeps their own balance... When funding old age appears more urgent than other choices, a simple shifting will suffice'<sup>4</sup>.

The second document that gave me more insight into the subject is a special issue of *Santé du monde*, the magazine of the World Health Organization. It contains twenty articles written by authors from all over the world. The names and addresses appear at the end of each text.

The editorial announces : 'In 2020 more than one billion people in the world will be aged over sixty, and more than two thirds among them will be living in a developing country'.<sup>5</sup>

The coming century should be concerned with life quality, which includes health as an important element. 1999 is the International Year for the Elderly, the theme being Ageing and Health.

Among the articles, the one by Pr. Margret Baltes attracted my attention. She asserts that there is no golden rule to define what can be considered as successful ageing, for criteria vary from one person to the other. Good ageing does not mean just avoiding problems, the change and the loss of functions that happen with age. On the contrary, ageing means fighting, in spite of failures, in order to maximise the gains and to minimise the losses.

The abundant work of Margret Baltes on ageing, in 'Gerontology', 'The Psychology of the oldest : the fourth age', 'Gender in very old age', 'Ageing and Mental health', to quote but a few titles, enables her to present in her two-page articles a large amount of information. She suggests a readjustment of aims and means in order to minimise the losses in function and maximise the objectives. While growing old, a person should limit his or her objectives in order to do what he or she really enjoys and thus acquire new types of competence or accepting to do without some. Thanks to the strategies of selection, optimization and compensation, some people are able to contribute to the success of their own ageing.

In the special issue of the WHO magazine, only two articles concern Africa. 'The wise' by APT Nana, 'Ageing well in Africa' by AMOSUN Seyi Ladele and Reddy PRISCILLA . The main idea is that old people should be allowed to participate in the development process of their families, their communities and their nations. The services in the communities should benefit from the experience of the elderly who will satisfy their own needs through being useful. The authors are from Ghana and South Africa.

Two other documents were thoroughly read. One is entitled 'Ageing in Africa' by APT Nana (1997) the second written by OKIJIE (1988) presents 'Ageing in Sub Saharan Africa'. The first underlines the need for an intergenerational approach to social welfare in Africa. The second throws light on the trends in population dynamics. Both include suggestions for research, the improvement of the quality of the care to be provided for the elderly.

The last book to be mentioned in this part is 'Vieillir en Afrique 1994' published under the supervision of Claudine Attias-Donfut & Leopold Rosenmayr. Fifteen authors gave their contribution, part of the results of years of research in Africa, over twenty or more years for some of them. They are the precious witnesses of what we were and what we have become ; their word is of high value to us.

After reading the book, one gets a clear insight into the problem of old age in Africa. Some important

<sup>3</sup> DUBOIS J.P. , *Op. Cit.* p.118.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Santé du Monde : Magazine de l'OMS*, n° 3, 1997, p. 3.

questions, such as, why were old people more respected in the past than they are today, have been answered. All the situations experienced by the elderly are thoroughly assessed through the different articles, but some of the questions were not answered, for instance one of Rosenmayr's pieces is when he wonders : 'would African societies be able to produce a historical world-wide example avoiding the cruel and drastic devaluation experienced by the elderly in western civilizations ? In spite of the poverty, will it be possible to find alternative forms of caring, taking charge of the fragilized elderly in Africa ? These are the questions that studies such as this one should answer'.<sup>6</sup>

Sylvie Renaut repeats the same question in a different article 'In the present context will the elderly be able to keep their status and their place in the society ?'<sup>7</sup>

As an African woman interested in research on old age provision in Côte d'Ivoire, I felt called upon to share some of my own reflections on the topic, under the form of proposals for the definition of objectives for an education aiming at better or more care for the elderly.

### Defining educational objectives

This part of my literature survey reports a former research work undertaken for my Doctorat d'État under the supervision of Pr J. Dulck<sup>8</sup>. A forty-two-page chapter was devoted to the definition of the objectives. For the present work, I revisited some of the books.

Educating people always implies an objective, whether clearly stated or not. Authors such as Viviane & Gilbert De Landsheere, D. Krathwohl, B.S. Bloom have thoroughly discussed the process of defining the objectives, the theoretical analysis that helps build such a scientific approach to practical facts to be dealt with in order to maximise the learning process among the people to be taught.

Most of them agree on the necessity of distinguishing three levels in the definition of objectives. The first is rather abstract, the definitions are general and are often useful in the development of programmes of

instruction, the kind of courses to be organized, the duration of the courses. The second level is more concrete, directed towards observable behaviours. It helps in analysing the general objectives to formulate more specific ones. These are useful because they constitute teaching modules. The aims of a course are thus stated in terms of behaviours to be attained. The third level offers the possibility of creating materials describing the kind of performance that is expected to be attained in order to declare that the objectives have been achieved.<sup>9</sup>

In the limits of the present article, more need not be discussed about the topic of the definition of the teaching objectives, a process often practised in our profession. Yet one can mention Mager's practical suggestions in the definition of the operational objectives. For instance, he heavily insists on the necessity of stating with precision *who is the person* that is supposed to adopt the expected behaviour.

Reading the books and the documents have brought much more insight into the subject. The next step will lead to the presentation of my methodological approach.

### Methodological approach and aims

My research on old age provision started on the occasion of visits I paid to elderly nuns and priests, former missionaries who were our teachers in primary or secondary schools from the early 50s to the late 60s in Côte d'Ivoire. They had been living in special houses for the care of the elderly in France for the last few years.

As young adults, they spent all their lives in our different countries in Africa, now that they have become too old, they have come back to a country, their own, but a 'strange' country because they were away for such a long time.

I started wondering why, we, African people, who have benefitted from their work over all these decades, were not able to keep them with us when they become

<sup>6</sup> ROSENMAYR L., Plus que la sagesse : vieillir à Sonongo in *Viellir en Afrique* s/d ATTIAS DONCUT & ROSENMAYR, Paris PUF, 1994, p. 253 – Les sociétés africaines seront-elles capables de produire un exemple historique mondial en s'épargnant la cruelle et drastique dévaluation qu'ont connue les vieux dans les civilisations occidentales ? Sera-t-il possible en dépit de la pauvreté- de trouver des formes alternatives de soins et de prise en charge pour les personnes âgées fragilisées en Afrique ? C'est à ces questions que des études comme celles-ci doivent répondre.

<sup>7</sup> RENAUT S., L'Afrique au Sud du Sahara : quelques éléments de démographie, in *Viellir en Afrique*, p. 325.

<sup>8</sup> ODI ASSAMOI : *L'Enseignement de l'anglais en Côte d'Ivoire de 1946 à 1977*, Paris, Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1983, 2 t., 742 p., Thèse pour le Doctorat d'État.

<sup>9</sup> DE LANDSHEERE Viviane & Gilbert, *Définir les objectifs de l'éducation*, Liège, Ed. George Thone, 1976, p. 24-25.

too old to work. What was their own opinion about that ? What would they have decided if they had a choice ?

Back home in February 1990, I began 'chasing' after documents on the subject. Only articles in the Encyclopaedia were available. The University library in Abidjan was poor on the topic. I also searched bookshops.

*Santé du Monde's* special issue in 1997 constituted the key element in my research. After reading it, I wrote a letter to all the authors of the articles of *Actif à tout âge*. The first answer came from Pr. Margret Baltes of the University of Berlin. She sent a large amount of her articles and contributions published in scientific reviews.

The second came from Age Concern, England. It permitted the purchase of books dealing with the subject.

From Bellville, South Africa Dr. Amosum sent important articles full of precious informations.

A fourth letter from Malta gave the reference of *Vieillir en Afrique*.

Out of twenty-four letters sent all over the world, five answers came. They were qualitatively important and useful. The informations they gave me were essential for my research orientation.

While collecting information from books and articles I prepared various elements for the different projects of surveys. The contact with the people helped in the formulation of the topic.

For the present study, my aim is to provide elements of answers to some of the questions formulated by the team that wrote *Vieillir en Afrique*. If some of the questions have been answered such as why were old people more respected in the past than they are today in Africa, some others have not received any answer for the time being. Therefore I want my study to lay some basis for the formulation of some kind of response to the terrible questions that our friends, the European scientists have put to us : 'Would African societies be able to produce a historical worldwide example avoiding the cruel and drastic devaluation experienced by the elderly in western civilizations ?'

There is a saying among the Akye people that, 'When a person is intending to eat the head of an animal he or she needn't be afraid of the eyes'. To face the problem is the beginning of the solution. Changes have occurred. What are they ?

## Evolution of the situation – attitude and behaviours

### The elderly

For Côte d'Ivoire the results of the 1999 general census are not available yet to be used, but the scientists have already mentioned the increase in the total number of the old people in Africa in general in the coming years. Sylvie Renaut states that the relative part of the elderly will remain unchanged though that should not hide the importance of the progression of the number of the aged 65 and more, which will increase three times by 2025. From 7 million in 1960, they are 15 million nowadays, and by 2025 the number will reach 50 million<sup>10</sup>.

The situation of the elderly is thoroughly assessed throughout the book *Vieillir en Afrique*. The main problem the authors raise, stems from the economic environment, a poverty that has become the normal state of everyone in Africa nowadays. The political unrest, the wars and AIDS have built a hot burning fire around each African individual.

A proverb states that 'When the whole head is burning down, one cannot care for the eyes. Our general situation being very difficult, the elderly are likely to experience the same status, but in a worse version.

Journet & Julliard report the words of an old woman complaining : 'I am here, I am waiting for God. It is not good to be as old as I am, for what about hunger ? In the morning I am hungry ! At noon I am hungry. In the evening I am hungry ! And I have no strength left to cook. Everyday I wait for God<sup>11</sup>.'

Food constitutes the real problem. How to feed the elderly in a convenient way ? They do need nutriment, but when the young ones have not got enough to eat, can the housewife give a sufficient meal to the older ones ? The needs of the elderly are less important

<sup>10</sup> RENAUT S. L'Afrique au Sud du Sahara : quelques éléments démographiques, in *Vieillir en Afrique*. p. 32-322.

<sup>11</sup> JOURNET & JULLIARD. Le van des Grands-mères, in *Vieillir en Afrique*, p. 202-203.

because there is no growing process going on, no important physical activity to be undertaken, but yet, the minimum should be available to keep them in good health condition. That is also a duty for the adults.

The difficulties in our lives have created new attitudes and behaviours.

### **New attitudes and behaviours**

The new attitudes and behaviours stem from the difficulties of communication in a world that has changed while part of it has remained unchanged. Two examples will explain the puzzle : language and sorcery.

One important difficulty in the life of an elderly person lies in language. Grand-parents and grand-children do not possess the 'same' mother tongue any longer. The children born in towns in Côte d'Ivoire for instance tend to use French even when the parents belong to the same ethnic group. The absence of common language cripples communication between the elderly and the children.

The second difficulty arises from our African beliefs about the elderly. They possess spiritual power that can be positive or negative as Manga Bekombo puts it: 'He or she is a witch or an anti-witch, he or she is a seer, a medicine man or medicine woman, the guardian of oracles'<sup>12</sup>. This creates fear in the relationship with the elderly. People suspect their ability to curse youngsters in case of misbehaviour.'

The people living in towns prefer to go back to their villages on their own, without their children because they are afraid of their own parents and relatives. Suspicion becomes the common rule.

If all the relatives in the village are supposed to be ill-minded against one's own family living in town, how can one think of helping the aged members ? For in traditional mind one has to avoid feeding a sorcerer because the more good you do to your family witch, the more harmful he becomes against you. But, nobody knows for sure who are the witches in a family. Witchcraft is first of all a family affair.

However, sorcery possesses its own rules and antidote. One way to avoid it is justice. For African people, to refuse to share what you possess or what people believe you have acquired, constitutes an opened door to witchcraft. For us, a child that has been sent to school

belongs to the whole extended family. He or she is an investment. If the dividends take time to be drawn, the family gets restless and starts planning mischief.

Unfortunately for the individual, school learning process transforms a person in such a deep way that needs have to be satisfied urgently before he or she can think of any extended family. School learning provokes a deep mutation in the individual that makes one compares the educated African to a bat. In the sky a flying bat looks like any bird, but on the ground, a bird can hop, when a bat cannot move. The educated African can react as any European or American educated person would in any given situation and solve any problem in the western way, but at the same time, deep down he or she remains an African with reactions he or she does not always master. Things sometimes happen as if we have been endowed with a double personality which generates complicated problems.

This constitutes a situation we have to take into account. We have to face it, to analyse it thoroughly with the new methods we have acquired through our contact with western civilisation. But at the same time we also need to remember our African-ness and to recall this proverb of ours that states : 'Before flying, a bird always questions its nest', meaning that you have to know your own conditions and be conscious of them.

In effect, another proverb affirms that 'a one-armed person always starts dressing earlier than the others'. He or she knows his or her limitations. Compared to all the other people in the world, we Africans are one-armed, or one-handed or, even and one-legged persons. Therefore it is urgent for us to become conscious of our own situation and realise that, as the proverb puts it, 'Even if you are very ugly, you do not borrow your handsome friend's face to go and woo a girl, you do manage with your own ugly one', just as another proverb says: 'A short tailed cow chases the flies with its own tail, not with the long one that does not belong to it'.

All these proverbs quoted here mean that nobody at all will have to think, reflect and find ready-made solutions to our problems. We have to take our responsibility facing the problem of the elderly in Africa. There are conditions to be gathered in order to take the right decision that will ensure the agreement of all concerned,

<sup>12</sup> MANGA & JULLIARD, *Viellissement, culture et société en Afrique*, in *Viellir en Afrique*, p. 202-203.

sine qua non conditions for success. Discussing that constitutes the following part of our article.

## Conditions for a good decision making

In order to draw the outlines of the decision making process that can ensure success in our present situation in Africa, I will cast a brief look at the decision making processes that have been used so far, then I will recall how important questions were settled in the past, that way, I hope to suggest an approach that takes into account African peculiarities.

### Recent procedures

Very often, for our development programmes in Africa, local and foreign experts meet in their offices in the capital town of the country. They plan action very carefully; they obtain the money from outside and elaborate the project.

The administrative authorities are required to tell the concerned populations that a project has been studied and set up for them in order to improve their living conditions. The chiefs are summoned to the capital of the district and duly informed. They go back to tell the villagers that a project is ready for them to get a better life in their village.

It could be a community health project, an agricultural one or an educational one; the procedure will be the same. The villagers will happily dance on the arrival of the specialists in charge of the project. The expert will start the work according to the precise protocol set up by the scientists who designed the whole project. On paper, everything appears to be so logical and efficient that the results are a must.

Unfortunately, very often, a few years after, those who initiated the project have to face the reality and acknowledge their failure. Our countries in Africa are overcrowded with such important projects, the machines of which are rotting under the bush. Some of the tools have become the property of the cunning people that managed to be involved in such projects. Large parts of the money are sojourning in the bank accounts of a few heads of concerned department, preferably outside the country. The generous people who, in Europe or America, worked to raise the sums of money that was graciously offered to help the hungry Africans, will never hear of the result of their effort.

### Past procedures

To get involvement of the people in a decision, it is of utmost importance to follow the procedure used in the region. It always takes time, but it is important to 'waste' some time in the first place before starting, to make sure that everyone has. The majority does not mean anything to us, consensus does. The procedure is slow and time-consuming, but once every one has agreed, the project becomes everyone's own personal affair. No failure can happen.

Formerly when an important question was to be settled, the head of the village called the council of elders. They reflected then the heads of the clans and wards met. They informed the heads of the different extended families, which in their turn informed all their members, male and female.

Afterwards a general meeting was called to give the information officially. A few leading people expressed their point of view and a decision was taken, that was the total will of the whole village.

Unless these preliminary steps have been respected, no project, however logical or good, can dream of any success in rural areas in Africa.

### What about today ?

Nowadays life in towns in Africa tries to copy what is supposed to happen in our former masters' countries.

In the case under consideration here, i-e, old age provision, I think the media should play the leading role to inform the people and draw their attention. Newspapers should start publishing informations on the subject, beautiful photographs of old people from all over the world. Over the radio and on television, programmes should discuss the point.

The different religious denominations in the country would tell their members the problem. Trade unions, schools, social groups would participate in the information. Thus the whole population will be ready to listen to the proposals to be made to them.

Once the preliminary information have reached its target, the futures decisions will be announced to call for the reaction of the people.

In Côte d'Ivoire, on crucial occasions, there were assemblies known as Conseil National, when different groups were asked to report on all the problems encountered over the last few years. The different components of the society read their reports. It went on for days, and then decisions were taken<sup>13</sup>.



But, before we come to decision making, a preliminary preparation resides in the education of the people concerned. Now that the world has changed so much, how are we going to take care of our elderly ? The answer lies in the definition of the general and specific objectives of an education to care for the elderly.

## Education to care for the elderly

### A necessity ?

In traditional Africa there is a saying that no one is supposed to teach God to children. Yet every African grows up to know that a supreme God does exist. The teaching approaches in the past were rather miserly in words but rich in silent observations.

The former Africans were astonished when Europeans used scientific questioning to understand what they observe round them.

You could ask someone to teach you something but while he or she is teaching you, you have to keep silent and observe, then perform what you have assimilated.

But our former world collided with the European's and it resulted in different mutations in the outside world as much as in the inside one. Nowadays everything has to be put into words, repeated several times before the youngsters hear a word.

Among traditional Africans the behaviour that was most appreciated consists in a good action initiated by a person without being demanded to do so. That is the sign of a good education. Once you have been told, your action loses part of its value, because for traditional Africans only a corpse has to be told something before acting<sup>14</sup>. To be asked to do something before reacting reduces the value, the beauty and the elegance of a behaviour or an action. You are supposed to look for advice at home before coming into the open 'Before flying a bird questions its nest'.

Unfortunately, our children do not any longer understand anything. Without a longish explanation they do not care to listen to.

In this new world of ours, *if we want the elderly to be taken care of, we have to tell everyone about it* : adults, young people, children, men, women, educated people, illiterate people living in towns or in the villages, manual workers, unemployed people, everybody.

The first information will include a few ideas such as these : 'People are living longer nowadays. Some of our relatives are getting older and older, but they have not got enough money to save for their very old age. Poverty has become a normal situation for most of the inhabitants of our country. The problem of old age cannot be tackled individually therefore it is urgent to take a decision as soon as possible. You are all invited to think about solutions to propose them later on'. Such a message repeated on the radio in all the languages spoken in the country, on the television, in the newspapers and magazines will draw the attention of people.

### General aims

An education to care for the elderly concerns all the people living in the country. Each group of persons will perform different actions : the adults, the youth, the children. What behaviour can be expected from the adults to make sure that they are ready to book after the elderly ?

#### Adults

Adults are expected to think of the life conditions of the elderly members of the extended family. They will have to club together in order to raise sums of money to be kept in their village bank for the care of the elderly : health, food, leisure problems. In the same way they proceed for the funerals when huge sums of money are raised in a few days.

They have to show their interest, love and concern for the elderly through visits and listening to them, sitting near them for a moment. The elderly need physical contact with the adults.

They have to respect them. A proverb says that everyone knows the name of the old woman though she is called grandmother.

<sup>13</sup> The last Conseil National took place in 1989 but no decision was taken. We are still experiencing the consequences.

<sup>14</sup> When after death, people want to know why the person has died, the questions or orders are formulated in the following manner : ' If your death is natural do not move forward ; if it has been provoked, come forward, then look for that person.'

### The youth

Young people should be involved in the care of the elderly. In rural areas, the few young men still present in the village, will be required to bring back from the bush, part of what they have got during the day : game, honey, sweet palmwine, fruits.

The girls will bring something from the market on market days, such as delicacies, sugar, and cakes. All of them should feel concerned by the old ones, greet them in the morning, seat near them and listen to them for a while, before leaving for work or in the evening on return.

In towns, young people are students or pupils. At school they should study, in civics, the necessity of respecting and loving the elderly, caring for them. Old people in rural areas, old people in towns, these should be themes, sequences of their learning programmes in classroom, aiming at a change of behaviour in the closest future.

In that part of civics and moral education programme, stories staging old people in African tales should be told, so that the teachers may discuss the moral teaching behind them and help learners draw conclusions leading to action in real life.

In philosophy classes, the teachers should organise debates on the philosophy of old age in traditional Africa and analyse our belief about it.

### Children

At school, children should learn about old age and the necessity of caring for the elderly. Pupils will be asked to report the names of their villages and the names of their grandparents after getting the information from their own parents at home.

In kindergarten, stories staging the old people in African traditional story telling will be read to the children. Teachers will draw their attention to the present time.

At home, they should think of their grandparents when they receive gift from their own parents at Christmas.

In the rural areas, the teachers can take the class to pay a visit to a few selected old people in the village. The pupils will question them about their own childhood, what has changed.

Little by little, interest in the elderly will be created at every level, among children, youth and adults at the same time.

### A practical example

In the general aims, I suggested that adults club together to raise sums of money to be kept in a bank for the care of the old members of the extended families.

As an example I take the case of an extended family known as ASKA in Kongoué Kouadiokro in the Baoulé Region Côte d'Ivoire.

### Raising the money

The ASKA extended family will be limited to the descents of the ASKA original 'couple', a polygamous family of two wives, half brothers and sisters are included. The children of the ASKA family are about a dozen, all of them are adults with children and grandchildren for some of them, the youngest are not married yet. Clubbing together will concern those adults and their grown up children who are parents. With an average number of five children per adult the number of grandchildren will be about sixty.

For the time being, only one member of the ASKA extended family can be considered as an elderly to be looked after as the father and one of the wives have died. Some elements in the ASKA original couple's family could be looked after.

At a year meeting responsible members will be chosen. Each individual will belong to two extended families as an active member.

### Organization at the village level : the *kpoman nin taha taha* centre<sup>15</sup>

In a village such as Kongoué Kouadiokro where there are about 300 inhabitants, only a dozen or less people can be considered as elderly, too old to go to the plantation.

At the village level, three compounds or two can be chosen as a place where the elderly will be taken to for the day. That compound will be known as the *Kpoman nin Taha Taha centre*, meaning the walking stick and the first steps centre where children and elderly will be looked after by adults on duty<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. ALLA SENI ep. ODI. – Nationalism and old age provision paper at a conference on Nation/Nationalism : a common enterprise University of Cape Coast 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ALLA SENI ep. ODI, Op. Cit, 1999.



The aims are simple : to make sure that the old ones get exercise everyday, eat sufficient food three time a day, enjoy the company of the young ones under the supervision of an adult. The contact between them will improve the language ability and performance of the children.

An important aspect of the *Kpoman nin Taha Taha* centre concerns the *obligation of bringing back to the centre part of what one has found at one's plantation for one's family: yam, fire wood, vegetables game*<sup>17</sup>. Men, women, young people, children coming back from somewhere, plantation, travel, errands should be encouraged to stop at the centre to greet the elderly, talk to them, exchange news, just as an easy way to show interest in them, a simple daily duty.

The workers from the village, living in towns should also think of bringing to the centre eggs, medicine, soja flour, sugar, cocoa, milk powder when they visit their parents or relatives. That way, the problem of hunger, which is the first important one for an elderly, will be solved. Old people do not eat large quantities of food, but they do need to eat often, four little meals a day, just like children.

Each extended family club will hand in some money, when they have a member joining the centre.

#### **A difficulty to be aware of**

In the African mind, old people are fairly often thought to be witches. How can one put old people and young children together for a whole day, everyday without initiating those who are so malleable at this stage? This fear is real, but in Africa, there are plants that discourage witches in their deeds. For instance there will always be a provision of lemon at the centre.

The healers and the seers will be approached in order to put traditional arms in the *Kpoman in Taha Taha* centre to avoid problems.

This is also when the members of the different religions in the villages will have to care for the souls of their aged believers, asking them for prayers and blessings while they are fed and taken care of. They will feel important anew because formerly the elderly kept a traditional religious role in the community.

## **Environmental conditions for an education to care for the elderly**

In modern Africa, the rural areas are not overcrowded, and an old person can walk at her or his own rhythm without being run into by any one in a hurry. There are no cars or bicycles or motorcycles to run them over.

In African towns, Abidjan constitutes the best illustration, there are no pavements for the pedestrians. One has to fight with the cars, the lorries, the bicycles and the motorcycles to walk from one place to another.

In the wards of the town where individual houses are built, not only the owners will construct high walls to protect their villas, but they will also occupy the portion of the soil that belongs to the community, the public property, the place reserved for the pavement.

In front of their high walls, the owners plant lawns and they put barbed wire round them so that the pedestrians are forced to walk on the carriageway. Some owners will even create artificial hillocks on which they grow thorny plants in order to prevent people from walking near their enclosing high walls. All the streets in Abidjan present the same image. Moreover, the available pavements are transformed into markets. There is no way for pedestrians. Where will our elderly go for a walk, when there is no footway?

In this 1999, the International Year for Elderly, an action could be taken officially : to clear the footways in towns. If year 2000 could rise and see pavements on each side of the carriageways in some towns of Africa, we could declare that Africa is also about to enter the third millenary.

## **Conclusion**

At the end of my reflection on the possible aims of an education in view of caring for the elderly, I conclude that it is an action that can be envisaged, but the absence of political will can be the first obstacle ; the second will be constituted by the idea that the African elderly do not face any difficulty in their lives, for they are respected and loved by every one around them, they are happy.

<sup>17</sup> It is a kind of traditional sacrifice for the happiness of all.

If we, African educated people become conscious of the real difficulties summarised by the general poverty of everyone nowadays, if we decide to face our situation, we will question our net, and it will tell us the truth so as to answer professor Rosenmayr's question : 'Would African societies be able to produce a historical worldwide example, avoiding the cruel and drastic devaluation experienced by the elderly in western civilisations in spite of poverty... ?' Yes, we can ! We just need to make up our minds... On time. □

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## Abstract

For most people, including Africans, old age problems do not exist in Africa. However recent research has proved that the situation has changed to such an extent that scientists such as Pr Leopold Rosenmayr wonder : 'Would African societies be able to produce a historical worldwide example avoiding the cruel and drastic devaluation experienced by the elderly in western civilizations ? In spite of the poverty, will it be possible to find alternative forms of caring, taking charge of the fragilized elderly in Africa ? These are the questions that studies such as this one should answer'.

**Keywords:** elderly, old age, educational objectives, proverbs, procedures, Kpoman nin Taha Taha centre, environment.