

SEROPIAN Thomas
4eme Année



Educative mission in a school at Dogbo, BENIN
Mission éducative dans une école à Dogbo, BENIN

Rapport de mission à l'étranger ESIEA



La Guilde Européenne du Raid
11, rue de Vaugirard 75006 Paris - FRANCE
Supervisor : Sabine De SOYRES
Internship's period : From 7/31/2004 to 08/31/2004

*For Raoul, Gabin, Joseph, Zaché, Elie, Isidore, Gisèle, Esperance, Gracien
... and all the other kids...*



Figure 1: Children welcoming us in Dogbo

Synthèse en français

Le but premier d'un stage à l'étranger est de découvrir une nouvelle culture. Lorsque j'ai commencé mes recherches, j'ai donc privilégié les destinations lointaines, de préférence non européennes afin de sortir de ma petite bulle occidentale.

J'ai découvert l'organisation non gouvernementale (O.N.G.) "*La Guilde Européenne du Raid*", qui organise des missions humanitaires à vocation éducatives d'un mois dans des pays en voie de développement.

J'ai donc décidé de partir au Bénin, pays d'Afrique occidentale, avec neuf autres français. Ce pays, malgré son statut de pays du tiers monde, fait figure de bon élève, tant au niveau politique, qu'au niveau culturel et de la scolarisation des enfants. De plus, les Béninois mangent à leur faim et vivent en paix.

Notre mission s'est déroulée durant le mois d'août. Elle s'est effectuée en partenariat avec une O.N.G. locale : "*les Pionniers de l'Excellence*". Cette organisation basée dans la ville de Dogbo travaille pour offrir aux enfants de Dogbo une meilleure éducation, ceci en organisant principalement des cours d'été.

Notre but était donc d'apporter une aide humaine et matérielle à cette O.N.G. pour assurer les cours d'été dans l'école du village (du primaire au lycée).

Nous aidions les professeurs à dispenser leurs cours le matin et nous nous occupions d'organiser les activités culturelles l'après midi en vue de donner un spectacle le dernier jour de classe.

Nous avons été accueillis et pris en charge pendant notre séjour par des Béninois. Tant au niveau de notre mode de vie, que de nos visites, nous avons eu la chance de découvrir le visage traditionnel du Bénin.

Nous avons aussi longuement discuté avec les autochtones, de leur vision du monde, qui est évidemment totalement différente de la notre.

Au niveau des enrichissements personnels, cette mission m'aura été bénéfique sur différents points de vue : personnel, humain et professionnel.

D'abord, le fait de vivre le même mode de vie que les africains était très enrichissant : j'ai pu découvrir leurs croyances, leur façon de penser. Les autochtones étaient beaucoup plus ouverts à nous du fait que l'on enseignait dans une école et discutaient beaucoup plus facilement avec nous.

Enseigner devant des classes de plus de quarante élèves m'aura permis de gagner en assurance et en confiance en moi. De plus, expliquer des problèmes requiert une vision globale que je n'avais pas forcément acquise et que j'ai pu améliorer.

Pour finir, j'ai pu découvrir la réalité professionnelle du monde des O.N.G.s et l'ampleur de la préparation d'une mission humanitaire.

English synthesis

The primary goal of a foreign mission is to discover a new culture. So, when I began searching, I privileged far away destinations, in order to pull me out from my european bubble.

I discovered the non-governmental organization (N.G.O.) "*La Guilde Européenne du Raid*" which organizes one month long humanitarian missions, with educative aims, in developing countries.

I decided to go to Benin, a Western Africa country, with nine other french people. This country, in spite of its third world country status, is a good example of achievement in political, cultural and educational ways. Moreover, Beninese people can eat at their fill and live in peace.

Our mission was scheduled during august, in partnership with a local N.G.O. : "*Les Pionniers de l'Excellence*". This organization is based in Dogbo. Its goal is to offer children a better education, especially by organizing summer school sessions.

The expedition goal was to bring human and material help to this N.G.O. for giving these sessions in the local school (from primary to high school).

We helped teachers giving their courses in the morning, and on the afternoon we were providing cultural activities, in order to play a show the last day of the session.

We've been welcomed by some lovely Beninese who were in charge of our trip. So we had the opportunity to discover the traditional Beninese style : the way of life, touristic spots. We also chatted hours long with local native people, about their vision of the world, which is obviously totally different from our occidental one.

Speaking about personal enrichments, this mission would have been clearly profitable in many points of view : personal, human and professional. At first, living the same way than the Beninese was so enriching : I could discover their believes, their way of thinking. Local native people were more opened to us as we were teaching in the school and came chatting more easily.

Teaching in from of more than forty pupils class was also very interesting : I gained in self-confidence. Moreover, I developed my synthetic vision while explaining mathematics problems. Finally, I was able to discover the middle of non governmental organizations and all the work behind the preparation of a humanitarian mission.

Contents

1	Credits	5
2	Introduction	6
3	The context	7
3.1	Geographical context	7
3.1.1	The country : Benin	7
3.1.2	The city : Dogbo	10
3.2	Protagonists	10
3.2.1	Non-Governmental Organizations : a proper definition	10
3.2.2	Les Pionniers de l'Excellence	11
3.2.3	La Guilde Européenne du Raid	12
3.2.4	Other staff	14
4	The development	15
4.1	Before leaving	15
4.1.1	The formation	15
4.1.2	Animations	16
4.1.3	The material	16
4.2	On the spot	17
4.2.1	Courses	17
4.2.2	Cultural activities	18
4.2.3	Evenings and week ends	19
4.3	Back in France	20
4.3.1	The feedback	20
4.3.2	Sharing the experience	21
5	Personal analysis	22
5.1	About discovering a new world	22
5.2	About trying a new kind of job	24
5.3	About working for and with N.G.O.'s	24
6	Conclusion	27

Chapter 1

Credits

- Les Pionniers de l'Excellence
especially Augustin HOUNOU and Albert AGOSSOU for this wonderful month with these kids.
- Solange TOHOUÉDE and Justin TCHEWLE
the two teachers I assisted in mathematics for adapting their pedagogic methods while they were working with me.
- Lucien HOUNOU, our epidemic friend
for all those wonderful meals, the zem trips, the sessions at the market, and everything else.
- The NOUTEHOU Family
François, Félicien, Eudoxi, Noa, Josiane, and especially Aubin, for having taken us in charge during our touristic week ends.
- Blandine, Flora & Zita
Our marvelous cooking team for learning me how to cook a chicken.
- Audrey ABLONDI, Bertrand DELSOL, Renaud GENIN,
Vanessa LEULIER, Delphine MAGNOUAT, Laurent MARTIN,
Cécile QUERCY, Lison RICHARD, Marie VALLAT
the nine other yovos who share this experience with me : This is surely the beginning of beautiful friendships.
- Timothée FRANCO
for having talked to me about La Guilde Européenne du Raid.

Chapter 2

Introduction

While we were checking our luggage at the airport, the controller told us "*I bet you're not going to Cotonou for the beach !!!*".

And he was right : I haven't decided to spend one month in Africa for its touristic spots, neither to relax in a beautiful swimming pool, nor to eat tasty meals.

I decided to do my foreign internship in Benin in order to discover a new culture, a new world. And above all, it was a good occasion to combine business with pleasure. So I decided to try a new experiment I was thinking about for a few years : to join a humanitarian mission.

What can be more exciting than discovering a country with nine other French people, while helping its inhabitants and sharing their way of life, which is very dissimilar from our European one.

In a few words, I was expecting from this expedition something totally new and different from my previous travels.

But, it is obvious that a humanitarian mission doesn't start when we get in the plane. There is an important amount of work to be done before, concerning the preparation, from the material and human point of view.

The aim of this report is to present the goal and the whole work about our task. It is divided into three parts : Firstly, I'll briefly expose the context in where the expedition took place. The second part will be about the whole work around it, before, during and back from Benin. And finally, I'll make a personal analysis of this trip, from professional, human and personal points of views.

Chapter 3

The context

The humanitarian mission I took part was managed by two N.G.O.'s : "*Les Pionniers de l'Excellence*", and "*La Guilde Européene du Raid*". In this part, I'll explain some important points to know in order to apprehend our team's work in a global way.

3.1 Geographical context

In the first place, a few words about the country we've traveled to (*Benin*) and the city which welcomed us (*Dogbo*).

3.1.1 The country : Benin

Overview of the country

The Republic of Benin is a country of Western Africa, located in the Gulf of Guinea between the tropic of Cancer and Ecuador. The border countries are Togo in the west, Nigeria in the east, Burkina Faso and Niger in the north. The capital is Cotonou, in the south of the country.

The country is mainly composed by plains. The Atakora mountain is the highest point, at 658 meters. There are 6.7 millions inhabitants.

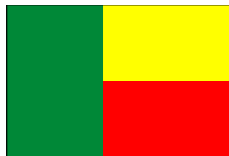


Figure 3.1: The national flag



Figure 3.2: Benin in the world

Its history

Beninese History can be divided into four parts :

The early history : Benin used to be the seat of great medieval African civilizations, built the kingdom of Dahomey and other kingdom-cities such as Allada, Abomey, Porto-Novo, Kétou, Tchabê, de Nikki, de Kouandey.

The colonial chapter : Europeans began arriving in the area in the 18th century, as the kingdom of Dahomey was expanding its territory. The Portuguese, the French, and the Dutch established trading posts along the coast (Porto-Novo, Ouidah, Cotonou), and traded weapons for slaves until 1848. Cities developed themselves thanks to this , then palm oil, since slavery has been abolished.

The post colonial period : Then, the French signed treaties with Kings of Abomey to establish protectorates in the main cities and ports. However, King Behanzin fought the French influence which cost him to be banished to Martinique. As of 1900, the territory became a French colony ruled by a French Governor. Expansion continued to the North (kingdoms of Parakou, Nikki, Kandi), up to the border with former Upper Volta.

On December 4, 1958, it became the République du Dahomey, self-governing within the French community, and on August 1, 1960, the Republic of Benin gained full independence from France.

The post independence years : Between 1960 and 1972, a succession of military interventions provoked many governmental changes. The last of these brought to power Major Mathieu Kérékou as the head of a regime professing strict Marxist-Leninist principles. The Revolutionary Party of the People of Benin (PRPB) remained in complete power until the beginning of the 1990s. Kérékou, encouraged by France and other democratic powers,



Figure 3.3: Kings of Dahomey

convened a national conference that introduced a new democratic constitution and held presidential and legislative elections. Kérékou's principal opponent at the presidential poll, and the ultimate victor, was Prime Minister Nicéphore Soglo. Supporters of Soglo also secured a majority in the National Assembly.

Benin nowadays

Benin has achieved a non violent political transition and is now an example of multi parties democratic system in Western Africa.

About the education, which is the main topic of my internship, Benin is considered as another example for the school attendance. An important place is reserved for education and almost all villages have their primary school.

Meanwhile, the main plague in Africa is analphabetism, and Benin is also concerned (one third of population instead of one half like in some countries such as Mali, which is among Africa's highest).

But, this situation should get better, with the launch of many programs in order to promote the academic studies of children, and especially teenagers.



Figure 3.4: Welcome in Dogbo

3.1.2 The city : Dogbo

Dogbo is the prefecture of *Mono-Couffo* department in the south west of Benin. The city is at 125 kilometers from Cotonou.

Dogbo is the poorest prefecture of the country : less than 10% of the 65 000 habitants have access to electricity and drinkable water.

That's probably why many non governmental organizations have considered this city as a kind of laboratory before enlarging their action elsewhere.

3.2 Protagonists

In this section, I'll introduce all the protagonists involved in the mission I have taken part. Most of them were members of non-governmental organizations, which is a structure I'll have to define before.

3.2.1 Non-Governmental Organizations : a proper definition

Basically, a non-governmental organization (N.G.O.) is an organization which is not a part of a government.

Although the definition can theoretically include corporations which make profit, the term is generally restricted to social and cultural groups whose primary goal is not commercial.



Figure 3.5: Dogbo on the map

N.G.O.'s exist for a variety of goals : improving the state of the natural environment, encouraging the observance of human rights or improving the welfare of those in need.

3.2.2 Les Pionniers de l'Excellence

Les Pionniers de l'Excellence (i.e. Pioneers of Excellence) is a five years old N.G.O whose goal is to provide Beninese children a better education. Its action is for the moment limited to Dogbo. Different actions are taking place



Figure 3.6: Les Pionniers de l'Excellence

for children from primary to high school :

Summer school sessions : pupils are able to preview the program they're going to study during next year, or review lessons they've misunderstood during the previous year. This session is finished by evaluations.

Summer activities : sport games (such as soccer, basketball or handball) or cultural activities (dancing, painting, singing), in order to develop children's artistic and physical capabilities.

These sessions are scheduled in august and last the whole month. A party is ending the session, where all the children can show their parents the result of their activities. At the end of the party, prizes are awarded to the most brilliant pupils of each class.

Another project is under development : it consists of opening a library during the whole school year, for teachers, and then pupils. They both would be able to have access to school books in order to prepare their lessons, or story books.

Those activities are payable : *1500 CFA Francs* (2.30 Euros) for children in primary school and college and *2000 CFA Francs* (3 Euros) for high school pupils per year.

It is obvious that a quite important number of kids can't afford to go to these sessions.

In order to develop those activities, Les Pionniers de l'Excellence need some help on three points. To start with, they need to get the necessary material to animate a school as the organization can't allow itself to buy it : pens, paper, but also sport material such as soccer balls, frees bees, equipment for cultural activities (paint, color pencils, games), and prizes (any kind of small gifts).

They also need to get school or story books in order to fill the library's shelves. Finally, they need volunteers in order to complete the teaching team. As most teachers are not paid during summer sessions, some of them can't afford themselves to spend one month working freely.

3.2.3 La Guilde Européenne du Raid

La Guilde Européenne du Raid (referred to as La Guilde from now on) is a french non-governmental organization created in 1967, and animated by a spirit of volunteer involvement. La Guilde is officially recognized by the French State since 1981, December 22th.

La Guilde is composed by seven subdivisions which I'm going to introduce quickly. Each one is managing different programs with specific goals.

Solidarités Etudiantes

Solidarités Etudiantes (i.e. Student Solidarities) is a subdivision which goal is to support students initiatives so they can express their humanitarian engagements.



Figure 3.7: La Guilde Européenne du Raid

Le Forum d’Agen

Since twenty years, la Guilde holds a meeting in the city of Agen, in the south of France. This meeting has become the main meeting for humanitarian action and development actors in France.

Forum d’Agen in figures : 500 actors, 100 exhibitors, 2000 visitors, 150 000 euros of donations.

Micro-Projects Agency

The micro-projects agency is a solidarity program created in 2000.

This program provides technical advices about how to manage a micro project and a financial help.

COSAME Program

COSAME program stands for *programme de COopération et de Soutien aux Artisans et Micro-Entreprises* (i.e. Micro-Firms and Craftmen Support Co-operation). It has been created in 1998 by La Guilde and public french organisms representing french craft men. It is dedicated to create links between North and South Craftmen in order to develop professional formations in developing countries.

Missions de France

Missions de France (i.e. Mission from France) has been created in 1993.

This program offers young people to engage voluntarily in short periods of time for social, educative or cultural actions in countries such as Armenia, Benin, Bolivia, Chili, Egypt, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Lithuania, Madagascar...

Each mission is organized in partnership wish a local institution (french association or not, local community, school, university, orphanage, embassy or any other).

Most missions are scheduled during summer (June, July, august and September).

That’s the program I chose.



Figure 3.8: A view from our house in Dogbo

Les Pionniers de l'Excellence contacted La Guilde in order to build a partnership : French volunteers would have to bring material needed for summer sessions and help Beninese teachers during august. That's why Missions de France recruited ten people in order to spend one month in Benin.

3.2.4 Other staff

To be in charge with ten *yovos*¹ during one month isn't an easy task. That's why les Pionniers de l'Excellence needed to collaborate with other people in order for them to be ready to welcome us.

For example, the house where we were living is owned by one of the local school teacher's family, who haven't enough money to finish the construction. Les Pionniers de l'Excellence agreed with the family on the following point. The organization would pay the money required, and in exchange, they could lodge us freely in the house.

Moreover, the family's daughter would help us for all the cooking and house tasks.

¹African idiomatic word designing white people

Chapter 4

The development

As I've previously said, our mission team was composed by ten people, from various formations (from medical studies, business school, engineering school, and even two teachers), recruited by La Guilde in order to help les Pionniers de l'Excellence during their summer sessions.

4.1 Before leaving

I still remember this day of December, when I decided to fill La Guilde's application form, following a friend's advice. In effect, the first step to join any mission from La Guilde is to fill and send a resumé and a form about your motivation, and what do you expect from a humanitarian mission. According to your profile, Missions de France staff choose to engage you or not in a mission, and where.

In fact, a mission from La Guilde begins when you receive the letter telling you that you've been accepted to one of their trips. You also receive contacts of people participating to the mission with you. Therefore, we (as a whole team) have to begin the preparation of our mission. This preparation consists on three points.

4.1.1 The formation

Living, even one month in a developing country isn't easy and can be seriously dangerous if you don't know how to protect yourself correctly. You need to know a few advices before leaving France if you don't want to have troubles during your trip.

La Guilde has planned two meetings in order to prevent all volunteers against those risks : the first one is gathering all people concerned by Missions de France. During it, a tropical illness specialist made a speech about special vaccinations, medical treatment against malaria, and how to face others diseases (such as the well known "*touristad*¹"). He told us about the hygiene

¹important digestive troubles due to the local food

during the mission, which is very important (for example, most of time, water is not drinkable, and we have to purify it using special pills).

The other meeting is more specific for the destination where we are going, i.e. Benin, and is held by people who went on mission last year. They dealt with more practical topics, such as the cost of life in Benin, how to change Euros to CFA Francs.

We had another manifestation which was on a more spiritual topic. Discovering a new country is really interesting but can be really more enriching if you are able to watch it with an open mind, and different eyes than our european ones.

Conferences were held during a full week end, by people who have been living abroad for long time in Central, Far East Asia and Africa. These people described us as best as they could in a few times the civilization they discovered and tried to give us instructions in order to apprehend those cultural differences in a more intelligent way.

4.1.2 Animations

The first goal of our mission is to help teachers during the summer sessions, and to manage afternoon activities for children. Even if courses don't need special particularities, animations have to be a little prepared, especially for the last day party, so we could begin to work on it the day we arrive.

The point was to prepare the main theme of the party before leaving Paris, and if possible to have an idea about all the activities we could animate.

Our idea was to do a show inspired from Jules Verne's book *Around the World in 80 Days*, with dances, french songs, some sketches, and paintings from different countries made by the children. It would be funny to see how they imagine France and other countries such as China, USA, through their drawings.

4.1.3 The material

Gathering required material was the other goal of our preparation.

We had to bring with us books and everything required for the animations : pens, pencils, paper, but also sport material such as soccer balls, frees bees, equipments for cultural activities (paint, color pencils, games), and prizes (any kind of small gifts), as said before.

Most of all the stuff we've brought were donations from schools, high schools, public libraries and supermarkets.

Finally, we came to bring with us 380 Kg in packs, including a computer. The problem we had was the overload at the luggage checking : we had to leave four packs in Paris.



Figure 4.1: Departure day, at Charles de Gaulle airport

4.2 On the spot

Our schedule was simple : courses in the morning, cultural activities by the afternoon, and free time in the evening and during week ends.

4.2.1 Courses

Our task was to assist professors from different classes, in different topics. We were free to choose the class and the topics we wanted as far as all classes would have at least one teacher, french or Beninese.

We were most of all the time giving courses with a local teacher. But as we became more and more confident in front of classes of forty pupils, teachers began to leave us doing the course alone, so they could do something else (for example, preparing or correcting exams).

I personally chose to teach mathematics and physics because these are the two topics I knew the best since we study them quite deeply in my engineering school.

I also helped the English teacher for a few courses.

I chose to teach classes from college and high school. Indeed, children's main language is adja² and they start learning french as they enter in primary school. As I was not so familiar with teaching (I had totally no experience with children animation before this mission), I preferred to teach classes from

²Local Beninese dialect

college and high school as it would be easier to communicate.
Courses were held from 8 AM to 12 AM, with two courses of two hours each.

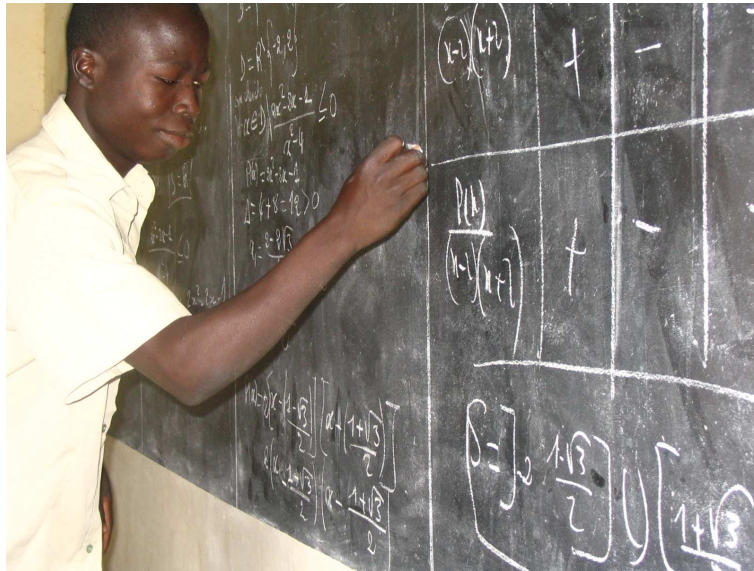


Figure 4.2: Mathematic course

4.2.2 Cultural activities

Cultural activities were held from 3 PM to 6 PM and their animation under our responsibility. In fact, most of them needed material we brought.

We chose activities in order to present the result at the party which would close the summer session in beauty.

However, the greatest part of pupils who are coming to courses on the morning don't participate to those activities : they are used to work on the afternoon with their parents in order to earn enough money to afford themselves those summer sessions.

So, most of kids coming are poor children whose parents can't pay summer sessions fees and who are so happy to play with yovos.

We divided ourselves in different groups, so everybody could participate an activity he enjoyed.

Various activities were organized :

- sport (football, handball, basketball)
- european dances (on Michael Jackson, Ricky Martin, Massive Attack & more music)
- singing activities
- painting

- drawing
- card games

Kids were also able to borrow books from the library (only for the afternoon).
I was dealing with kids who wanted to paint. It was so funny gazing at



Figure 4.3: Painting session

them while they were so concentrated on their paper.
There was one main rule : *Each equipment lent to a pupil had to come back at the end of the day.* Indeed, children had to consider us as friends who were there to play with them, and not as european *Santa Clauses* who were only here to give gifts away.

4.2.3 Evenings and week ends

Evenings and week ends were free time.
I decided to spend it sharing Dogbo's inhabitants way of life. So I (and the whole team) shared their leisure : we attended their traditional banquets with dances, music representations and games.
Moreover, as local people are always so pleased to receive *yovos* in the city, we were often invited to have a lunch with teachers, for example.

We also took part in many religious manifestations : Christian ceremonies, voodoo sacrifices and funerals, which can seem weird to occidental people, but who take all their sense when they are explained by Beninese people. Another great event, very representative of the western African way of life is the local market, held every five days.

But what I had enjoyed the most was spending hours in a local bar chatting with native people : teenagers, teachers, pupils' parents, and simple inhabitants, in order to discover their visions of the world their believes, their works, their lives in a few words. Beers were only at 0.30 euros, so it helped me to create contacts!!!

We visited touristic spots on week ends, but as we were guided by native people too as we wanted to avoid acting like purely occidental tourists.



Figure 4.4: Yovos enjoying their touristic trip

4.3 Back in France

Once we came back in France, we had to give a detailed feedback of our task to *Missions de France's* staff. And of course we enjoyed this trip so much that we are all making plans in order to share this experience again with other people.

4.3.1 The feedback

One of the engagements we have to meet is to give back to *La Guilde* a final report relating our task's progress.

Missions de France's staff can't go and visit all the N.G.O.'s engaged in partnerships, so the assignment reports are very important to them. According to our comments, they can decide how to improve in their work. Missions reports include the following parts : a narrative section, and some personal analysis about how we considered our work during this month, its utility and all the evolutions we can imagine. Another part is dealing with the conditions of life and work, the costs of the travel, always in the same optic of improving the mission.

4.3.2 Sharing the experience

We lived a very special experience during this month and sharing it with our friends became obvious to us.

It was a way to thanks all the people who helped us during the preparation and the mission itself.

Thanks to digital cameras, I took almost hundreds of pictures, so the least I could do was to create a website³, so everybody having access to Internet could have a look on them.

But we are currently reflexing about long term actions, in order to get in touch with those kids we met there. We are planning to "sponsor" some of them, and to contact some french primary schools and colleges in order to correspond with Dogbo's school.



Figure 4.5: A screen shot of my web gallery

³<http://dogbo.physweb.com>

Chapter 5

Personal analysis

In spite of the internship's title, I would like to clarify a few things about my experience. I don't really consider it as a humanitarian mission in the proper meaning of the term, but as an unique experience for me.

In this part, I will try to analyze those enrichments, which can be classified in three points of view : personal, human and professional.

5.1 About discovering a new world

As I've said before, one of the main facts I enjoyed during this trip is that we (i.e. the whole french team) were framed by local people who showed us the real face of Benin.

Contrary to expatriated people who are often living in a kind of occidental bubble (benefiting from their european income to buy huge cars, huge houses and a having a totally contrasting life compared to local people), we were trying as much as possible to lead the same life than local people.

In that way, we were integrated to the local society, and many people considered us like their own friends. We could discover the real face of their traditional society, and way of thinking, which is totally unlike ours. It is strongly linked to their believes, their way of life which always deals with negotiations and D-system.

We've also tried to test all the elements which compose the traditional Beninese everyday life : the markets which gather all the village one night long per week, trips to Cotonou by taxi (where we could be up to eight plus two still alive chickens in a car), the zems (these particular moto-taxis you can take for trips inside the same city), local food (we tasted the Igname, a sort of giant potatoe), and the well known Awele game (a strategy game played with fruit kernels).

Voodoo celebrations have an important place in traditional Beninese life. Beninese people are used to go to pray Voodoo fetish in order to get protection from him for them and all their families.

I can't say if people I met were living under the local poverty level or not.



Figure 5.1: Local market at Dogbo



Figure 5.2: Voodoo celebration near Cotonou

But they were eating at their fill, and were so happy to see yovos!! !! All that allowed me to think back about how I should consider my life.

5.2 About trying a new kind of job

As you already know, I was mainly teaching kids from nearly 13 to 19 years old and of course, this was totally new for me.

I fairly admit that I'm not a teacher anyway. So in order to prepare my courses, I based myself on my record of teachers I had during this period of my life. I tried to remember what I enjoyed and hated the most about them in order to have the same pedagogic approach in class. Moreover, I've stepped backward with years and these perceptions have pretty changed now and some aspects of their personality which I haven't noticed back then seem now very important to me.

Another very interesting point was to work with local teachers, who have a different vision of teaching than european ones.

We were trying two different methods on pupils : on one hand, the traditional, masterful courses where pupils write down theorems under master's dictation, and on the other one, more interactive lessons, where kids can participate more easily.

Both methods have advantages and drawbacks : the first one forces children to stay quiet and silent, but the second one provides the teacher a better feedback.

Teaching alone in front of more than forty kids requires two main qualities. A good synthetic vision of the problem being taught is necessary if you want to give a clear explanation. The ancient advice is still right : " *What is clearly understood will be easy to explain.*"

Fortunately, my level in mathematics, after four years in an engineering school, was sufficient to give understandable lessons, but I still had to make efforts so students could give a sense on their theorems.

The other quality, and which is very important for teachers is self confidence. I learned a lot while having speeches alone in front of forty five little kids. I had to speak slowly and articulate otherwise they would hardly understand. But this first experience in formation was a success (for me indeed, but kids seemed to enjoyed my courses too) and it was a real pleasure to see pupils' face lightening as they were beginning to get the lessons.

5.3 About working for and with N.G.O.'s

During our mission, we collaborated with two N.G.O.'s : a french one and a Beninese. And we met in Dogbo members from other N.G.O.'s working here too. As I've said before, I don't consider my internship as a real humanitarian one, but more a first experience to discover this sphere, to meet professionals or volunteers who prepare their missions on their spare time



Figure 5.3: A high school class listening carefully to a physics course

for months.

We met a french N.G.O. whose aim in the long run is to re open the Dogbo Hospital, by sending medical material. This material is theoretically out of date according to new european laws, but still useful. They also collect medicines.

The main problem they encountered is not about the shipping of their twenty containers (in Benin, you can do almost whatever you want as long as you know concerned people and you have enough money).

The problem was about formation, and still remains here for almost every humanitarian initiative.

In this case, the french N.G.O. was aware of it : they decided to create a special staff who would be initiated to use this material. This staff would take over french doctors once they would come back to France. On the other way round, every year a french delegation would come to check if everything is OK in the hospital and if the material is used properly.

And once again, another good old advice can't be wrong : *Teach him how to fish instead of giving him a trout*. Humanitarian missions are very important. Indeed, big companies won't invest in Africa, because they won't make much profit in short term.

But, the most important is **after** : to be sustainable, a development must be followed by an adapted formation, which is always lacking in Africa, especially for local N.G.O. managers.

As a future engineer, this is a fact I clearly noticed. African people are as smart and intelligent as Europeans, Americans or, Asiatics. They just need to get the right methods of work in order to collaborate with foreign people and get external financings.

Let's be honest : Les Pionniers de l'Excellence is a nice N.G.O., but they are approaching a critical point : the organization can't grow up anymore, launch new projects and develop itself without fresh money.

And its leaders don't really know how to get it. However, they are so voluntary !!!.



Figure 5.4: Me and my new friends

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I don't regret at all having spent my internship doing something which has nothing to deal with my studies.

In effect, this month in this small town with all those kids will be a wonderful record for me.

Thanks to it, I discovered a new culture, a new world, a new way of life.

I've improve my self-confidence while giving courses in front of classes of more than forty pupils.

I've known people I wouldn't have met if I had spent one or two months behind a computer.

This trip changed my perception of the world, from human and professional points of view, open my mind in a certain way.

Indeed, it didn't brought me so much technical skills, but led me a little bit closer to the engineer I want to be, humanly speaking.



Figure 6.1: Bye bye Africa ...

Appendixes



Figure 6.2: My visa

Photo credits

Thomas SEROPIAN : figures 1, 3.1, 3.4, 3.8, 4.1, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2

<http://www.graphicmaps.com> : figure 3.2

<http://afrikafont.free.fr> : figure 3.3

Laurent MARTIN : figures 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.4

Vanessa LEULIER : figure 4.4