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Making a Living: Learning trajectories towards the ability to earn a livelihood.

Research Team

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Project Description

The educational landscape in rural West Africa is currently shaped by a unique historical process. As a result of the large globally influenced schooling campaigns (UN-Millennium Development Goal II, 2000- 2015) which aimed to contribute to the global enrolment of all boys and especially girls, a whole generation of young adults is now growing up who have almost all at least briefly attended school. Many of them were educational pioneers in their families. Thus, a whole generation of youths who were deeply influenced by these campaigns and the related immense hopes and expectations is now becoming adult. However, only a small minority have finished secondary school. Within this unique historical context, our project asks about the roles multiple learning processes – within and outside of school – play in becoming an adult, making a living, and earning a livelihood in one francophone country, Benin.

Understanding making a living as a relational and multifaceted process entangled with socio-economic conditions, as well as social embeddedness and hopes of upward mobility, we ask how the general and abstract promises and hopes of the schooling campaigns are related to actual biographical processes. Population growth, scarcity of land, the rising importance of formal exams and specific problems of the formal labour markets seem to be obstacles to finding one's place in adult life.

Regarding this specific historical moment, at which scientific perspectives on youth in Africa oscillate between hope, *waithood*, and hopelessness, we take a pragmatic and relational perspective in reconstructing concrete ways of becoming an adult and making a living for rural members of that generation. We seek to contribute to connected debates on youth, adulthood and making a living through a relational methodological approach that is oriented towards *following the actor over time and constellations or networks*.

We want to contribute to debates on life courses, youth, and education by relating them to the general themes of the Cluster: multiplicity, relationality, and, on a theoretical level, reflexivity

as well as to develop new ways of researching biographies, which are often carried out retrospectively.

Finally, the project seeks to develop new forms of interdisciplinary collaboration between educational sciences and social anthropology by analysing a jointly generated, common set of data, which we also intend to share with partners in the research region. This collaboration is not limited to shared data generation, but also extends to shared data management between the disciplines.

The research is carried out in cooperation between the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, Germany and the [Laboratoire d'Etude et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local \(LASDEL\)](#) and the University of Parakou in Benin.