ADOLESCENT FATHERHOOD WITH THE CONTEMPORARY
MALE YOUTH IN ABIDJAN (CÔTE D’IVOIRE):
THE REALITIES OF CONSTRUCTION, DECONSTRUCTION
AND RECONSTRUCTION

Mathieu TCHETCHE *

Abstract
How young peoples’ stake environment shapes the experimentation of adolescent
fatherhood so as to generate multiform mutations? Such is the main question at the origin of
this text. From the analysis of construction phenomenon realities, deconstruction of
illusions relating thereto and of reconstruction of a new father true-life in Côte d’Ivoire, it
appears that the concern of integration and responsibility remains at the center of adolescent
fatherhood experimentation. The construction of the phenomenon is articulated around the
democratic ideal promoted by the mass media and school. It carries illusory insurance
manifested by disordered sexual life and leading to the paternity at so young ages (between
14 and 19 years). Concerning the deconstruction of illusions, it presents itself as the
manifestation of community awareness through the use of socio-cultural values to generate
the parental responsibility of young people incriminated. This leads them to start a
reconstruction of their true-life around the search of financial autonomy from activities
which are generally the opposite of their original career plan.

Keywords: Adolescent fatherhood, Construction, Deconstruction, Reconstruction,
democratic ideal, illusory insurance, sociocultural values, financial autonomy

* Assistant professor at the University ALassane OUATTARA of Bouaké, Department of
Anthropology and Sociology; email: tchetchesbcd@yahoo.fr

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Résumé

Comment les enjeux de l’environnement des jeunes façonnent-ils l’expérimentation de la paternité adolescente au point d’engendrer des mutations multiformes ? Telle est la question à l’origine de ce texte. A partir de l’analyse des réalités de construction du phénomène, de déconstruction des illusions y afférant et de reconstruction du vécu de jeune père en Côte d’Ivoire, il ressort que le souci d’intégration et de responsabilité reste au cœur de l’expérimentation de la paternité adolescente. Pour ce que la construction du phénomène s’articule autour de l’idéal démocratique impulsé par les mass media et l’école, celle-ci est porteuse d’assurances illusoires qui se manifestent par une vie sexuelle désordonnée et aboutissant à la paternité à de si jeunes âges (entre 14 et 19 ans). Quant à la déconstruction des illusions, elle se présente comme la manifestation de la conscientisation communautaire à travers le recours aux valeurs socioculturelles pour engager la responsabilité parentale des jeunes incriminés. Cela amène ces derniers à entamer une reconstruction de leur vécu autour de la recherche d’une autonomie financière, à partir d’activités qui sont globalement à l’antipode de leur projet professionnel initial.


1. Introduction

In the framework of the reproductive health, the issue of adolescents’ participation to fertility inevitably raises the issue of parental experience among them. This reality can be seen as the consequence of uncontrolled sexual life. It is transversal to three forms of education which are formal education provided by school, non-formal education made through specialized training and marginal education which shapes within households and communities (Gillis et al. 1998, pp. 259-262).

Like the motherhood of young girls which is the concern of a substantial literature due to supposed vulnerability of this target, it is necessary to investigate the experience of fatherhood among the young boys who are also vulnerable as young girls. Hence the present study places at the heart of our analysis the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood and its implications on the lives of African youth, especially male youth of Côte d’Ivoire.

The concept of adolescent fatherhood is the fact that a young man becomes a father before 19 years old, that is to say, the age group from 14 to 19 years (Irié and Yapo, 2001, p. 116). This period is revealed for the adolescent as the period of “toutes les interrogaions et incertitudes” (Rohart, 2001, p. 75) expressed by “all questions and uncertainties”. Thus, the experience of adolescent fatherhood can affect the quality of the training of youth, undeniable human capital1 (Schultz, 1961) and its ability of children education. It is the source of moral crisis due to environment created by the globalization.

1 This concept indicates the accentuation and improvement of all the human training methods to raise the productivity.
Therefore, the construction of lasting marital relations between two families seems abandoned by young peoples in favor of opportunistic relationships and other risks. At the first level of these abuses is the sexual behavior of young adolescents, the second level reveals the problem of family reunification for the child’s education; it is followed by the management of parental authority and finally, comes the problem of financial autonomy regulation.

At the level of sexual behavior, everything starts with the context of development of young adolescents. Indeed, many of them as said Jacob et al. (1993, p. 142) “ont acquis leurs connaissances de façon plutôt informelle, à partir de discussions avec des amis ou de leurs experiences personnelles” translated by “have acquired sexual knowledge rather in an informal way, from discussions with friends or personal experiences”. As far as of the general theory of modernization, the adoption of new sexual behavior by young peoples is explained by the influence of modernization which gradually undermines traditional values regarding sexuality (Kobelembi, 2005, p. 66).

Concerning the issues of family reunification, the instability young father causes the "leak" of this one as shown by Loignon in Ca sexprime (2005, p. 3) in these terms: “le jeune homme quittera souvent la mère de l’enfant pendant la grossesse ou dans les années qui suivent la naissance. Dans d’autres cas, le garçon doit faire face à l’hostilité de la famille de la jeune fille…”. Which means that: "the young man will often leave the mother of the child during pregnancy or the years following the birth. In other cases, the boy must face the hostility of the girl’s family…”

About the management of parental authority, it’s almost denied to the adolescent father. In fact, since that authority falls to parents or guardians of young parents, they are especially likely to be absent fathers (Sara et al. 2001, p. 2).

Regarding the issue of financial autonomy, most young parents are short of funds, because of the lack of job regularly paid. Those who are engaged in an activity as small as are not always able to take care of themselves because premartial fatherhood is associated with lower earning (Nock, 1998, p. 257). Therefore, several types of behavior are observed among many young Africans. It is the development of sex with older women, financially affluent and able to reduce their expenses. Moreover, the perversity leads some young people to have sex with older men against a financial reward (Kobe lembi 2005, p. 75). Other young people aware of their responsibility of father, engage themselves in income-earning activities that allow them to assume totally or just a part of the family expenses. These income-earning activities ensure them to invest themselves in new responsibilities without real means (Ca sexprime, 2005).

All this constitute important issues in the life of young people facing adolescent fatherhood. Hence the concern as follows: How environmental issues shape adolescent fatherhood experimentation so as to generate multiform mutations?
From this question, we propose to seek, in first, the relationship between the contemporary construction of sexual experiences of youth and the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood in Côte d'Ivoire, and then to see how the experiment of adolescent fatherhood is involved in the deconstruction of this juvenile reality and finally understand the role of this phenomenon in the impulse of social reconstruction of the experiences of young Ivoirians parents.

The first specific objective consists in identifying the facts that establish the connection between the contemporary construction of juvenile sexual experience and the present phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood. The second objective aims at pointing out the illusions created by the phenomenon of adolescent fatherhood. The goal of the third objective is to understand the mechanisms of socio-economic repositioning of young fathers regarding their sensitization of the parental responsibility. The objectives listed above are rooted in a set of theoretical and methodological approaches that should be clarified.

1. Theoretical and methodological anchoring

1.1. Theoretical anchoring

The analytical deployment of this work is based on the theory called constructivism. It has been promoted by Peter and Luckmann (1966) who envisage the social reality and the social phenomena us constructed. Bourdieu (1987) has participated to it through the concept of materialist constructivism which uses the schema of perception, thought, action called “habitus” and the social structures called “groups and fields”.

The using of the triptych Construction, Deconstruction, Reconstruction calls three realities. The first is the construction of youth sexual model which creates the phenomenon of adolescent parenthood. The second is the deconstruction traduced by the awareness of various illusions developed by young people in their teens namely and the need of responsibilities they have to assume. The third concerning reconstruction presents the changes, the new strategies of social integration and the participation to the community development by the adolescent fathers became young.

1.2. Methodology

As the methodological point of view, the target population is constituted by the young peoples aged from 15 to 30 who have experienced the paternity between 14 and 19 years. It is therefore a retrospective survey. The field of our study covers four districts in the city of Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, an important metropolis in Africa. The popular neighborhoods in question are
respectively the urban districts of Abobo, Adjamé, Kumasi and Yopougon. In Abobo, the study is interested in young parents living in separate houses with commons court-yard\(^2\). In Adjamé, it is focused on several young people with casual work at the bus station through trade ambulatory, driver helper and conveyor activities. In Kumasi and Yopougon there are young people living in areas developed by the Ivorian Company of Construction and Property Management (SICOGI) whose are the object of interest.

The sample size is 200 youth aged from 15 to 30 years with experience of fatherhood between 14 and 19 years for 50 per site. The target populations were stratified into groups of young attending school and those who are taken out of the school system are excluded from the study. The survey technique is the accidental approach. It is a non-probabilistic technique which involves pulling items available and present at each site at the time of the investigation until exhaustion of the sample set.

Furthermore, this study combines the quantitative approach with closed questions that allow getting statistics and qualitative approach in its phenomenological version. It lists the forms of socio-familial conflicts and alternatives adopted for the reconstruction of young fathers’ experiences.

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2 Foundations of the adolescents’ fatherhood construction

The construction of the adolescent fatherhood phenomenon lies within the overall framework of modern construction of social. This relates according to Ramonet (2002, p. 146) to the global expansion of the Western urban model on the world context, on the mass media and education. It is therefore appropriate to examine the respective influences that result.

2.1 About the mass media in the construction of the phenomenon

The mass media are constituted by communication media such as television, radio, internet and mobile with their multifaceted applications. Because of globalization, they flood the African adolescents and especially those of Côte d'Ivoire with images deemed "repugnant" by the society. These channels, websites and magazines are accused rightly or wrongly being an apologist for justifying the premarital sexual activity. In the study sample, 91% of young fathers reported having experienced this interest in adolescence. Almost, for all of them, the mass media are the origin.

\(^2\) Houses with common court-yard are group of houses were the inhabitants have their own house but they share the toilette and the court-yard with the others of the court. In these area the houses are less cheaper
Similarly, these channels contribute to the reduction of traditional control through marginalization of Community institutions which supervise youth sexuality. Obviously, most of the current generation of young people are unaware of their community’s processes of sexual supervision or undervalue them when they are known. This proves to be the case for young people interviewed.

In the solicitation of their point of view on three institutions of the community integration in Côte d’Ivoire which are "Poro3", "Fakuè4" and "Doubéhï5", these are not properly elucidated by speakers. Some of them talk about their lapsing while those who try to accept them, disguise their attributions. Clearly, the "Poro" and "Fakuè" are put in the same category as an introduction to mystical things while "doubéhï" is considered as the popularization element of sexuality between citizens of the same village. It is in this context with the rise of mass media, parents and children watch the same offer of television programs. Even when for reasons of modesty, parents try to avoid this posture by selecting programs or limiting access to television, adolescents watch these programs with friends where parental control is less strict.

In view of the foregoing, it is clear that the mass media move adolescent away from their family and submit them to sexual exogenous models. This role seems to be the same for school as we attempt to demonstrate in the following section.

2.2. About the role of the school in the construction of the adolescent fatherhood phenomenon

Despite the numerous benefits of school, it takes children away from their family during the time of training.

Moreover, by teaching the democracy, freedom and the rights of children, the school gives to the adolescents or young, the opportunity to contest certain values and norms of their community.

In this work, many young fathers are no longer under the authority of their socialization group. 48 per cent of them pretend to take their independence. Because of freedom, many of young fathers rebelled against the authority of parents or elders during their adolescent age.

Even if school predisposes young people to defer the first sexuality, they need of freedom and the effects of mass media lead them toward haste. This is the case

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3 Traditional institutions of the adult life integration by the Senufo people (people in the north of Côte d’Ivoire), where after his training, the young boy can try sexual experience with a girl in order to marry her.

4 Traditional institutions of the adult life integration by the Ebrié people. They use to call it “generation festivity”. It is most of the time practice by lagoon people in Côte d’Ivoire. It achievement allows the young boy to found a family and at the time take social responsibilities.

5 Liberal institution of the Bété people in the centre- west of Côte d’Ivoire. It allows young boys and girls to simulate voluntarily with the parent’s control, a couple relations without sexuality because of the consanguinity.
of young fathers under study. Clearly, this freedom submits them to precocious fatherhood and disrupts households regularly constituted.

In many cases, the acquired freedom by the young people creates a lack of communication. In fact, 78 per cent of adolescent fathers reported that their parents were unaware of their sexual lives. But, 22 per cent whose parents were aware of the sexual experience say they have not received adequate family care. Similarly, 82.1 per cent of the samples turn towards people outside the family, particularly friends.

Finally, this freedom of adolescents’ goes with attitudes of distrust prevention messages. Those issued against unwanted pregnancies, Sexual Transmissible Disease (STD) and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) are trampled by adolescent who have rather the desire to develop the qualities of seducers. When asked them about the knowledge of the problems concerning unwanted pregnancies, STD and HIV/AIDS, the answer of the young fathers is positive. They asserted to know the means of prevention before the experience of fatherhood. Indeed, less than 10 per cent of young people claimed to have been in the habit of using condoms during adolescence. Approximately, 80 per cent claimed not to care about. Their reason lies in the refusal of girls (19%) or in that of boys (35%). In most cases, the refusal is mutual (51%), while for only five per cent of the sample, the wrong use of contraceptive is the result of pregnancy, suspicious of adolescent fatherhood.

Consequently, the social world of adolescents, built around the influence of mass media and schooling turns into a fanciful society. But this dream is overshadowed by the reactions of referrals from the family, by stopping school fees and sometimes denial of the parents by discovering the paternity of the adolescent. This ambivalent situation provokes the problem of deconstruction. It seems to be rooted in the use of socio-cultural constraints.

### 3. Socio-cultural constraints as a source of deconstructing illusions related to the experience of adolescent fatherhood

Deconstruction mechanisms adopted by young people spring into two realities. One relates to the illusions of the experience of being father and the other focuses on the illusions of life experience as a couple.

#### 3.1. About the constraints related to the experience of being a father

The experience of fatherhood among young adolescents necessarily involves two traditional obligations. One is characterized by the permanent presence of the

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8 In Côte d’Ivoire the prevention messages against unwanted pregnancies, STD, and HIV/AIDS are convey on TV, radio, at school and in health structures towards the behavior changing communication meetings.
father in order to inculcate the social, cultural and religious values in them. The other is expressed by the financial autonomy of the father for the schooling of the child and its various treatments. It is the reason why in each Ivorian community, the young deemed to be married, received a cultivable ground and a space to build his house. These two offers are the proof of their social freedom.

In the modernist social construction, the young people are disillusioned by the realities of their rights when they became fathers. On the one hand, the requirement of permanent presence close to the child for his education is not done. Indeed, the care of children returned either to the youth's family or to the mothers’. Therefore, the education of 37 per cent among the young schooling at the time of the survey is provided by the parents of the mother, while in 31 per cent it is realized by the parents of the young father. There is only 22 per cent of the sample who became students. They claim to be responsible for their child's education and considered the grandparents as mere guardians of their offspring.

On the other hand, young fathers are mostly in financial dependency. In fact, the parents (fathers, uncles, aunts, etc.) assure the need of the young boys and those of the newborn. This situation is not without impacts the schooling of young fathers. So, 20 per cent of the sample left school in benefit of the child. In the case of 21 per cent, parents assure the education of the young father and his child. Other constraints are related to the experience of couple life. These constraints are evoked by the following part.

3.2. About the constraints related to the experience of living in couple

After the precocious pregnancy, negotiations between concerned families lead to the girls’ transfer boy’s house. 30 per cent of young fathers interviewed are concerned by this situation which makes them live different experiences. For some of them, this moving of the girl turns into a marital status. It causes the procedures for the payment of the dowry and the wedding planning. For some others, the moving of the young girl lasts just the time of the child feeding. Concerning the young father students, only ten per cent having a scholarship, live with the child and his mother. However, 20 per cent, have done the same thing with they own activities. For the secondary school boys whose partners are pupil, 48 per cent show the time table as obstacle of marital responsibility. Consequently, the requirements of the mother girls’ parents create in the family of the young men a conflicting atmosphere. Evidently, there are accused to modify the configuration of their families. These complaints are the following: the increasing of the family budget, the unexpected expansion of the household, and its’ transformation in bi generational family.

This is concerned with the customary weeding. It is organized in order to remedy the dishonor inflict of the families involved in the problem of the pregnancy and to reinstate the youngs in the normal community life.
The main decision created but this recrimination is the abandonment of the school fees. This is the case of most of non-biological children which represent 13 per cent of the sample. For young boys living with their begetter parents, many of them are forbidden to exert any kind of authority on the young mother girl. This attitude is not necessarily symptomatic of the desire to punish the young boy. But it reflects according to the explanation of the young boys themselves, the will to preserve the integrity of the young mother and to ensure an efficient growth of their grandchild. This is the proof of illusions’ deconstruction concerning the married life as experienced by young people before being father. 

In the long time, in front of the lack of financial resources, the inability to have control over their own children and the fact of constitute with them a burden for the family, The young peoples who are trying to assume their responsibilities, begin a process of awareness materialized by the reconstruction of their social universe. This process will be cleared up in the following development.

4. Strategic reconstruction of the adolescent fathers’ real-life

This reconstruction is on two points. The first one is the forfeiture lived of young parents and the second is the strategies used by them to go back up.

4.1. About forfeiture as a catalyst for the reconstruction of adolescent fatherhood’s experience

Before the situation of fatherhood, the adolescent and thanks to different conventions claimed, the right for schooling, food, pocket money, spare time and freedom in the choice of their friends (ONU, 1993). These make the parents in a situation of powerless against them.

In this research, 69.1 per cent of the sample cumulated during adolescence the five types of right, 97 per cent have accumulated at least three types, and the whole sample had at least the right to have pocket money. It appears that the adolescents concerned by this phenomenon benefited in their majority of a kindness of their parents. However, during the adolescent fatherhood, the rights are systematically replaced by the duties. In this regard, one of the respondents argued: "For a long time, I used my pocket money to satisfy the needs of my girlfriend who is now the mother of my child". This talk corroborates the idea that the adolescent is in the imbruglio of paternity for fear that his girlfriend becomes the mistress of older and wealthier man (Irié and Yapo, 2001).

The supposed rights acquired by the young boys will show their limits as soon as the appearance of the pregnancy and the acceptance of the expenses which are

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8 It’s the convention of UNO concerning the right of children, published in Geneva in June 1993.
related to it. Some testimonies testify this confusion. One of the interlocutors asserts this: "To punish me, my father decided not to give me pocket money. For that reason, I fled the pregnancy of my child. I even refused it at the beginning fearing not to be able assume. I was ashamed of my father's eyes and I was thinking about how to assume my responsibilities".

Another person testifies that: "My parents have not dismissed me. They accepted to lodge my girlfriend after delivery; but I was ashamed to live with her and the child in the same house with my parents. It was like I married her while it was not the case. I was obliged to assume".

A third respondent reveals: "all the time, my uncle threatens me. He says that I must now behave as father because I am no longer a child".

The testimonies above-mentioned shows that the role of father is seen through the taking of responsibilities and according to Quéniart (2004, p. 15), leads to resign himself to not having his youth life but develop a real attachment for a home-living life. Aware of this fact, the young peoples try by many ways to accomplish their obligation through initiations which seem to be dangerous.

4.2. About strategic initiatives of the fatherhood life’s reconstruction

The initiatives of young fathers are based on logic of risk-taking. It can be explained by the concern for these young people to earn money so as to pay the expenses of the child, his mother and become independent towards the parents. They feel motivate to take responsibilities towards their families and themselves (Devault, 2005, p. 62). While some activities they adopt are conventionally admitted, the others skim the defiance of the norms accepted in society. It happens in the areas of trade, culture and politics.

Concerning the trading area, 42 percent of the sample works inner. They do activities such as the management of cellular phones boxes at the streets side and the photo and video reporting and the management of cyber café. If at first sight these activities appear to be correct, many young boys who take part in them are swindling via internet. While, others use the casting pretext to swindle some people seeking celebrity through cinema. To avoid saying it openly, young boys use expressions such as "look someone self", "make gumbo", "enter the bush" or "browse". Those expressions are respectively in French “se chercher”, “faire du gombo”, “entrer en brousse” and “brouter”. Those subversive activities bring them more money.

Regarding culture, 31 per cent of the sample is concerned with singing and dancing activities without any training and experience. They participate to the creation of new musical rhythms that convey new habits and patterns. This is the case of rhythm like "coupé décalé". Through this rhythm, some singers magnify and others denounce the fraud and the megalomania of young boy called, "Vendeur d’Illusion" meaning "Sellers of Illusions". Among the disks jokers (DJ) who
promote this rhythm rate, there are several young fathers. They find themselves confronted with unlawful activities such as dealer or the procuring.

In the field of politics, the wind of democracy that swept Africa in the early 1990s touched also young fathers. 27 per cent of them have found refuge in that area and try to assume themselves thanks to politics. They developed clear strategies. In fact, they claim to serve the political parties and political leaders at different levels of responsibility. They earn their money in the commissions that they receive after performing tasks that the politicians entrusted to them. Some claim to be intermediaries between their leader (Deputy, Mayor, important politician, etc.) and the population by planning appointments.

For some others, they participate in securing the meeting of their movement through recognition of the organizers. In short term, this recognition is expressed by obtaining banknotes. In the medium and long term, these young peoples are integrated into a perpetuate activity. These are the entrance to the public office, the police, the gendarmerie and the army from a sponsorship. The politico-military crisis which Côte d’Ivoire is trying to get out has exacerbated this kind of behavior among many youngs. So that, those enrolled in armed band claim to be integrated in military and paramilitary troops.

Moreover, recruitment networks based on militancy and of recognition of the risk taken by the young people are increased. Some young peoples in Côte d’Ivoire have been propelled officers, soldiers of rank in the army at the thanks to the war. This situation gives a rise the corruption. These are the drifts linked to the responsibility interpellation of father at the age of adolescence.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this argumentation, it appears that, the use of democracy offers to African adolescents and particularly those of Côte d’Ivoire, is not always profitable neither to them, to their parents, and nor to the society.

In the understanding of the adolescent fatherhood, it gives us to see that in Côte d’Ivoire, this phenomenon rages. Specifically, it is more common among young people receiving substantial assistance of parents, unlike their Western counterparts.

Concerning the latter, Sara et al (2001) reveals that this phenomenon is more prevalent in poor communities living in difficult conditions especially in United States. The attitudes leading Ivorian youth to the phenomenon are encouraged by the mass media and schools. This concerns also youth of others African countries as said Gueye et al (2000) cited by Kobelembi (2005, p. 70) “increasing modernization and media exposure, along with a decline in the authority of parents and elders, have undermined the societal and cultural rules that formerly controlled and informed adolescents sexuality”.

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Besides, unanimity is done around the mistrust attitude of adolescents about prudence messages in the fight against unwanted pregnancies, STDs and HIV / AIDS. In this context, Loignon 1996; Duffort and St. Laurent, 2000; Cromer et al, 1997 cited by Ca sexprime (2005) evoke resistance to contraception. Their early fatherhood comes also from precocious sexual activity Sara et al (2001).

As a result, parents continue to take care of the adolescent father, his child and as well as the child's mother. This is in accordance with the situation in developed countries. Indeed, grandparents are involved in the education of young children with no income or low income (Gee & Rhodes, 2003, p. 381).

Moreover, in the consideration of the awareness concerning the responsibility of father, the young peoples go into more or less risky activities (Duncun, 2005). This responsibility taken is understood as the obligation of a person to answer for his actions because of the role, the responsibilities that he has to assume and bear the consequences (Quéniart, 2004).

To protect the family, the adolescent father and his child, it should be taken prevention initiatives upstream and downstream, acting by protecting each target. Prevention initiative will consist for social services to sensitize households on strategies to face up to the puberty of their children. It will also consist in helping them to discover their sexuality. For the pupils and students schools have to develop health clubs in which young boys and girls will be able to discuss on the factors of interrupting of studies and develop by themselves control strategies against these factors.

Concerning the initiative of protection, it is important to consider a strategic promotion of non-formal education alongside the official form. This could help to train young fathers in business management they undertake. This order of education could be articulated on the one hand, around functional literacy for the illiterate and the other hand, around training in entrepreneurship strategies, in simplified accountancy and budget management to all these contractors.

Such a program required a synergetic action by governmental structures, development aid agencies and non-governmental organizations. This is to ensure the stability of adolescent fathers and their children's education in an atmosphere of trust with the presence of the mother. Through such a strategy, we can avoid the problems of governance which posed the hope of facilitating access to public service for those who followed the political road.

References


