

# Agricultural Migration and Socio-environmental Recomposition in the Ivorian Cavally: Case-Study of the Department of Bloléquin: 1980-2000

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**Abstract:** The Cavally region, located in the west of Côte d'Ivoire, is a space strongly marked by the migratory phenomenon. Since the 1980s to the present day, this region has received migrants from neighboring countries of Côte d'Ivoire and foreigners in search of arable and available lands for the development of agricultural activity. In the area of Bloléquin, one of the departments of this region, the migrants are almost made up of autochthonous Dan people and Burkinabés. The strong presence of these foreigners is not without consequences on social organization and environmental evolution. This article therefore plans to question History on the process of installation of Dans and Burkinabe migrants in the department of Bloléquin and the impact of their presence on society and the environment. Examination of the existing literature as well as oral surveys made it possible to obtain the required information. It emerges from the analysis that the labor migrations of the Dan and Burkinabé peoples in the department of Bloléquin not only led to the proliferation and emergence of strong agricultural colonies, have also changed the local economy and impacted the social environment.

**Keywords:** Migrations, Work, Colonies, Dan, Burkinabes

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## 1. Introduction

Spread over an area of 11,376 km<sup>2</sup> in the west of Côte d'Ivoire, the Cavally region covers a border area with Liberia over more than 150 km (MEDD 2017, 2). A large part of this border with Liberia is materialized by a natural border, the Cavally River which separates the two countries. It is surrounded by the TONKPI region in the north, the GUEMON region in the east, the SAN PEDRO region in the south, and Liberia in the west. It includes four Departments: BLOLEQUIN, TAI, TOULEPLEU and GUIGLO, Chief town of the Region. If this region has always presented itself as a region of high immigration [13], the department of Bloléquin has recorded since the 1980s, for various reasons, a strong presence of allochthonous Dan migrants and foreigners from Burkina Faso. This is not without consequences. Their migratory flow has only slowed down due to numerous land disputes around the military-political crisis that Côte d'Ivoire experienced in the 2000s. However, many are those who end up settling permanently in this

supposed Wê area. They created strong colonies there with an agricultural vocation, thus modifying the framework of settlement and the environment of that area.

The importance of the number and the agricultural activity of the Dan and Burkinabés in this department of the Cavally region leads us to question ourselves not only on their settlement process, their way of life and especially on the socio-economic and environmental impacts of their migrations. The main question that this article attempts to answer is therefore to know how the migrations of Dan allochtones and foreigners from Burkina Faso have led to the emergence of plantation colonies and their effects in the department of Bloléquin in Cavally?

The methodology of the study consisted in collecting data from the existing literature and field survey. Concerning the collection of data from this literature, we reviewed books, articles and ministerial data related to the topic under study. At the level of the field survey, we had

directive interviews with people belonging to the three linguistic groups (Wê, Dan and Burkinabe) as well as other Ivorian allochthones.

This analysis is developed in three major axes. The first axis highlights the factors of intense migratory movements and settlement of Dan and Burkinabés in the department of Bloléquin in Cavally since the 1980s, the second axis highlights the way of life of Dan and Burkinabé migrants in this department and finally the last axis shows the socio-economic and environmental impacts of this colonization of the Dan and Burkinabés on this department.

## 2. Factors of Dan and Burkinabé Migration in Cavally Since the 1980s

In this part, we will present the reasons that have made the department of Bloléquin the preferred destination for allochthonous Dan migrants and foreigners from Burkina Faso since the 1980s. These reasons are based on the very attractive natural assets offered by the Cavally region to any visitors, to the crisis in the peasant State of Côte d'Ivoire

since those same years.

### 2.1. Cavally Region: A Naturally Attractive Area

The “Cavally and Guémon regions are extremely fertile ones that have favored strong migration for decades”. These regions, and especially the Cavally offers migrants various natural assets to their settlement as well as to the development of socio-economic activities. Belonging to the hot and humid tropical climate, type favoring abundant and regular rainfall, the vegetation in this region is suitable to successful agriculture. In addition, these areas are abundantly watered by several rivers, including Cavally and others important ones such as N'zo, Douihi, N'zé, Niyon and Goin. This also favors traditional fishing. It also presents immense plains, numerous wide shallows and hills and the vegetation is dense and humid forest type. The region has protected areas, the most important ones are: the classified forest of Goin Dèbé (133,170 ha) and the classified forest of Cavally (64,200 ha). The soil in these zones is of a rich ferrallitic type. The region also has a rich mining potential with indices of Cobalt, Nickel, gold and diamonds.

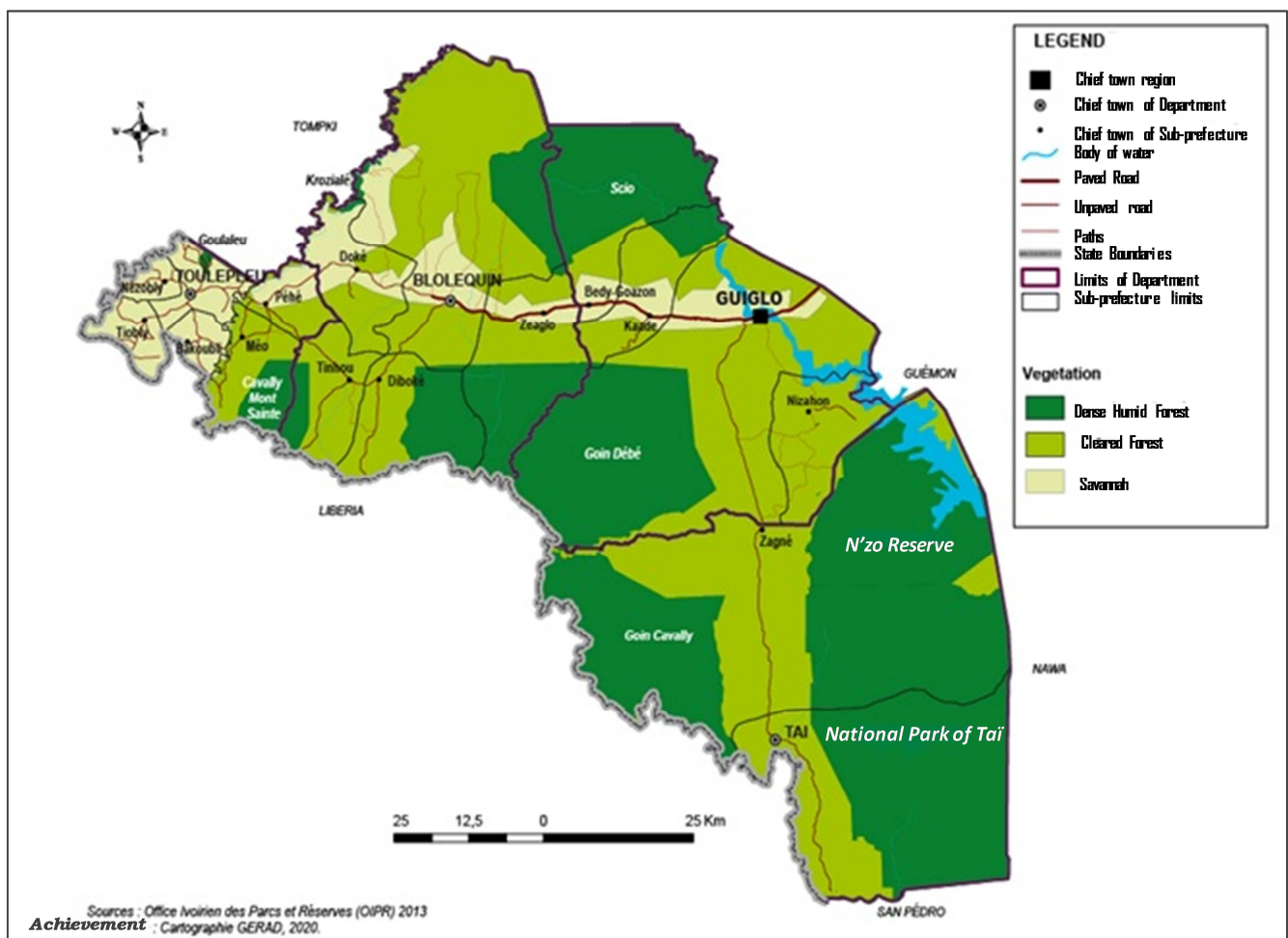


Figure 1. Vegetation map of the Cavally region, source (MEDD 2017, p5).

Naturally endowed with a vast, well-watered vegetation and with exploitable spaces, the Cavally region is positioned

as a privileged region for many migrants.

In addition to this we must add the proximity of this very

rich region to the Dan country, a people with great agriculture and hunting skills. However, in hosting these migrants, the department of Bloléquin is distinguished not only by the importance of the Dan and Burkinabe communities, but above all by the intensity of their agricultural activities with notable impacts. What could have thus motivated the massive choice of this department by the Dan and the Burkinabe?

## 2.2. The Crisis in the Peasant State Since the 1980s

In the aftermath of independence, the Ivorian leaders headed by Félix Houphouët Boigny, bet on agricultural development for the economic take-off of the country without anticipating a necessary diversification and starting the development of the mining sector. Such a policy should naturally encourage people to invest more in the agricultural sector. The Dan peoples are not left out of this situation. However, faced with the problem of forest depletion in most of their areas of origin, they turn in large numbers to the neighboring Cavally and particularly to the department of Bloléquin, due not only to its proximity but also to the existence of a strong forest reserve not yet exploited. Also, the economic crisis of the 1980s caused employment defaults in urban areas. That situation led the Ivorian authorities to advocate a return to the land policy to find a solution to youth unemployment [6]. This leads everywhere and intensely in Yacouba land to a questioning of the contracts previously signed between the parents and the workers of yesteryear: which regularly led to conflicts [11]. This other situation throws many Dan nationals on the path of migration towards the department of Bloléquin in the Cavally, in search of new cultivable land nearby<sup>1</sup>.

As for the Burkinabes, their massive presence first in Côte d'Ivoire is explained by the colonial policy. Indeed, to adopt an agricultural policy in the forest colony of Côte d'Ivoire, the colonists mobilized an abundant labor force from the French West Africa (AOF) area, particularly from Upper-Volta [8, 6, 7, 10]. The French colonizers thought that the Voltaics were better field workers than the natives. They constitute a race "exceptionally hardworking and well gifted in agriculture", so much so that we can recognize in them "the immense merit of making their soil produce almost the maximum" [5].

After independence, the Ivorian leaders continued the same policy and encouraged their migration to forest areas, particularly in the south-west and west of Côte d'Ivoire. Also, when the lands in the center of the country became impoverished, some Burkinabés, with Baoulé peasants, emigrated en masse from the 1980s to the west and south-west, especially in large numbers in the Bloléquin department where the lands were still fertile for the practice of the coffee-cocoa pairing. Attracted by the natural potential, but mostly driven by the crisis in the peasant state, many Dan immigrants and foreigners from Burkina Faso

have thus made the Cavally region their preferred direction from the 1980s, towards the department of Bloléquin which offered them even more exploitable spaces. What lifestyle did they adopt in this department?

## 3. The Main Activities of Migrants in the Department of Bloléquin

This part will show the main activities of Dan and Burkinabe migrants in the forests of the department of Bloléquin, since their massive migrations in this area. These activities range from hunting to extensive agriculture.

### 3.1. Hunting: Primary Activity of Dan Migrants

If agriculture appears to be the main activity in which the Dan and Burkinabe migrants in the department of Bloléquin in the Cavally have actively invested a lot, it is also important to note that the first Dan migrants were first involved in hunting. The region of Cavally and especially this department of Bloléquin, particularly rich in flora, was also very rich in terrestrial fauna. Its ecosystem was all the same suitable to the development of large mammals such as elephants, chimpanzees, deer and monkeys. There were also black-backed duikers, brown mongooses, small mammals (genets, bats, rodents), [3]. All this wealth of fauna led the first Dan migrants in the area to get massively involved in hunting. "*While some small groups engaged in ivory trafficking, the majority practiced subsistence hunting. Their spoils were first intended for consumption, then they sold the surplus on the local market to meet the first needs*"<sup>2</sup>. This poaching has given names like "Boya Bieuzoeuh, Tangasseu Bieuzoeuh; which means in the Dan language, "Boya/Tagasseu: elephant killers". There was also Doé, a Liberian well-known for slaughtering the biggest and fiercest of elephants. Doé alone killed in the department of Bloléquin more than 15 formidable elephants, says BAN Blaise<sup>3</sup>. According to the Dan oral tradition of this area, when an elephant resisted the biggest poachers in the area, they organized themselves to call Doé. He would walk from Liberia to come and kill the animal. This same tradition tells that Doé had a magic potion that he blew on the tracks of the elephant which allowed him to quickly find the animal and kill it. "When Doé slaughtered an elephant, he took the ivory and we went to carve the animal to share the meat"<sup>4</sup>. Poachers made their way through the forest to go sixty kilometers from the first camps, in search of game. Each could return in a period of five (5) to ten (10) days with thirty dried animals for sale on the local market. "The makeshift baits they built here and there through the forest have mostly become encampments and large villages today"<sup>5</sup>. There was a river in the area called "Siô", where the animals came to

<sup>1</sup>We recall that the Dan are the immediate neighbors of the Wê, generally settled in the far west of the country.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with DOUE Pierre, founder of the Douèpleu camp, February 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Ban Blaise, son of Ban Jeannot, one of the first Dan hunters in Zehipleu village.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Noutoua Mady Françoise, housewife in Zehipleu, January 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Noutoua Françoise op cit.

drink. This river has remained the benchmark for hunting. There were times when hunters met there for hunting parties<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, if the presence of many animals has converted a few Dan migrants into occasional hunters, many other Dan, as well as the Burkinabes who came, have been more involved in agriculture.

### 3.2. Agriculture: Main Activity of Dan and Burkinabe Migrants

The existence of a large reserve of forest not yet exploited in the Cavally and particularly in the department of Bloléquin, attracted a large number of immediate neighbors of the native Wè: the Dan or Yacouba. The latter invest more in agriculture; their main economic activity. They practice extensive agriculture, which consisted of producing on large areas. This agriculture was initially subsistence farming, and then gradually turned into a cash crop with the introduction of crops such as coffee, cocoa, rubber and palm oil. This female interlocutor explains it well to us in these terms:

“Initially, we made large rice plantations that could be extended over five (5) to ten (10) hectares. The harvests were intended for our annual consumption. On the same space, we put the coffee or cocoa plants and at the end of the rice harvest we maintained our coffee or cocoa plantations<sup>7</sup>”.

Agriculture in this department gave names of great Dan farmers such as Gbieu Jocket de Finneu, Vah Victor de Zéalé, Douè Pierre de Zéalé, Bagui Gohogbeu de Téapleu, Méango Georges de Zolé (...) <sup>8</sup>.

As for the Burkinabé community, the colonial policy which had mobilized it as a labor force in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the impoverishment of the soil in the center of the country [6], had already led to their strong presence in the western forest areas of the country, particularly in Cavally. Many amongst them chose the department of Bloléquin and invested massively in agriculture. If the first ones found Wè or Dan guardins in this department, the most numerous are those who followed their brothers, their uncles or even their acquaintances and subsequently became great farmers, Gonli Gbieugbeu tells us<sup>9</sup>.

“My older brother came to Côte d'Ivoire in 1976, he was first in Tiassalé area. He then went down to the Goya area where we followed him, my cousin and I. I have been here since 1986. I have about 30 hectares of cocoa and about ten hectares of coffee”<sup>10</sup>.

When he was asked how they became forest owners, Rasmané Alphonse answers:

“We started as laborers, we did *Aboussan*, then we did the system of planting and sharing. This system consisted in making a plantation of coffee or cocoa on a plot given by the boss. When the field becomes exploitable,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the field returned to the landowner and a quarter returned to us. It is the multiplication of this system over the years that has enabled us to have our own coffee and cocoa fields<sup>11</sup>”.

This response confirms the fact that “as soon as they arrived within the territories of the Wè villages, the migrants in the regions of Guémon and Cavally adopted strategies to benefit from plots of land” [12]. Thus, if guardianship and inter-community marriages have allowed migrants, mostly Dan, to benefit from land free of charge, in the Bloléquin area, for them, foreigners, especially Burkinabés, often gained access to land after “consultation with the village authorities, either by donation or by “purchase”, with amounts ranging from 50,000 FCFA to 100,000 FCFA per hectare, depending on the demands. The investigations reveal that the migrants, who obtained plots by donation, are those who first served as laborers for their guardian Wè for several years before the latter gave them a plot of land, as a sign of indebtedness [12]. Chauveau explains it to us in these terms:

Migrants initially had access to land through the traditional institution of guardianship. In its “historic” version, tutorship established a relationship of patronage between natives and migrants, to whom access to land was granted on the basis of a principle of moral economy: each individual must have access to the resources necessary for his survival. The migrant had a perennial duty of recognition towards his guardian (transmitted to his heirs) expressed through donations of agricultural products, work aid, financial contributions at funerals, etc. [9] Having therefore become landowners in this Wè department, the Dan allochthones and foreigners from Burkina Faso will truly invest in agriculture and dominate the agricultural economy of the area. “Here in the department and particularly in the Bougalou canton, 80% of the plantations belong to the Dan and the Burkinabés”, reveals VAH Marcelin<sup>12</sup>. This quasi-dominance of Dan allochthones and Burkinabe foreigners in the agricultural economy of the Bloléquin department has a strong impact on its socio-economic and environmental fabric.

## 4. Impacts of Dan and Burkinabé Agricultural Migrations in Cavally

The massive migration of Dan and Burkinabés in the department of Bloléquin since the 1980s has not only led to the birth and proliferation of agricultural colonies, but also to a drastic reduction in plant cover.

6All our investigations confirm the existence of this river

7Interview with Zeuli Antoinette, 69, housewife in Zehipleu, S/P of Bloléquin, wife of a Dan migrant.

8Zéalé, Finneu, Zolé are Dan villages in the departments of Zouan-Hounien and Danané whose natives have become great farmers in the department of Bloléquin.

9Interview with Gonli Gbieugbeu, Head of Zehipleu, a Dan village.

10Sawadogo Drissa, head of the Burkinabé community of Goya 2, S/P of Bloléquin.

11Interview with Rasmané Alphonse, Burkinabe national, landowner at Zehipleu S/P of Bloléquin.

12Interview with Vah Marcelin, President of the youth of Zehipleu village.

#### 4.1. Proliferation and Emergence of Dan and Burkinabé Agricultural Colonies

The massive Dan and Burkinabé migrations in the department of Bloléquin led to a proliferation of agricultural colonies there. A colony, according to the national center of textual and lexical resources<sup>13</sup> is a meeting of men, of populations which was formed and is perpetuated in the place of their settlement. It is said of all foreigners from the same country who stay permanently in a region, in a department or in a given city. An agricultural colony is therefore a gathering of people for the purpose of clearing uncultivated or unexploited land. This is the case of many agricultural colonies created by Dan nationals and Burkinabe foreigners in this department of Bloléquin. The existence of large forest reserves having strongly attracted many Dan and Burkinabe migrants, they have been staying there for decades. This promotes in this area, a real proliferation of Dan and Burkinabé agricultural colonies. Thus, following incessant migratory movements, there has been a gradual and long-term settlement of many people from various backgrounds, particularly the Dan and the Burkinabe. This progressive settlement has led to a demographic density through the creation of many Dan and foreign Burkinabés villages in this Wê department. For example, from the limit of Cavally River to Doké (see map below), there are many Dan and Burkinabé agricultural colonies. These colonies are fixed by many and large villages such as Miangopleu, Goya 2, Baguipleu, Zehipleu, Guézahi, Sopleu, Tomimpleu, Yipoueuta, chanter colonel (Colonel's Site), Bahpleu, belonging to the Dan. All these Dan villages are old camps created by the first Dan hunters and farmers who came to the area, Mr. Zehi told us<sup>14</sup>. We also have villages like Sounkalobougou, Flambougou Bobossoa, Daloa, Treich-ville, Soubré, Plateau<sup>15</sup> which belong to Burkinabés. There is even a whole canton of the department which is considered a Yacouba canton: it is the Bougalou canton. In this canton, 90% of the population is made up of Dan and Burkinabe. These Dan come from almost all the Dan tribes that border the department of Bloléquin. *We find for example the Dan of Blossé who are in the majority, the Dan of Loholé canton, those of Oua canton (...)*<sup>16</sup>. As for the Burkinabés, they mainly consist of Mossis, Bobo, Samo, Gouroussi and even Sénoufos from Burkina Faso. These communities form large ethnic or sub-regional entities which have set up in their new area of establishment the socio-political organizations of their societies of origin. This proliferation of Dan and Burkinabé agricultural colonies had a strong impact on the economic fabric and then the plant cover of this department.

#### 4.2. Development of the Plantation Economy and Reduction of Vegetation Cover

The strong presence of Dan and Burkinabé communities of agricultural vocation in the department of Bloléquin in Cavally, for many decades impacts not only its economy, but also its vegetation cover. Colonies with an agricultural vocation, these Danes and Burkinabés have invested more in cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, rubber, palm oil, etc., to boost the local economy. This leads to the development of the plantation economy in this department; because the populations of this sector live only on agriculture. Thus, in addition to having made this area an area rich in coffee cultivation in the 1990s, the department of Bloléquin has been counted since the 2000s, among the largest cocoa producing areas in Côte d'Ivoire. "This department produces around 100,000 tons of cocoa and 80,000 tons of coffee," an economic operator told us<sup>17</sup>. Cultivators can have up to 15 or even 20 to 30 hectares of coffee or cocoa and there are thousands of small planters of this kind. These plantations have been and remain the main sources of income for these communities. Cash crops, produced in this area by the Dan and the Burkinabes with a view to marketing, are often contrasted with self-consumed food crops. However, food crops sometimes become cash crops (rice, cassava, maize). Concerning the export crops, they are opposed to crops produced to supply the local and national markets. This positively boosts the economy of this department through the proliferation and development of dynamic rural markets.

Moreover, this strong foreign presence in the forests of Bloléquin also leads to a drastic disappearance of the plant cover, because the farming techniques used there are the forest destroying ones. Indeed, these Dan and Burkinabe communities still use archaic methods and techniques with multiple drawbacks on the vegetation cover. Thus, from the clearing of forests, to burning through wood cutting (see the diagrams below), these methods are forest destroyers. They are highlighted by the following diagram:

The immediate consequence of these regularly used traditional methods is rapid deforestation. The Cavally GCF confirms this in these terms: "The dynamics of land use shows that the Cavally region is experiencing accelerated deforestation of its plant cover, following the national trend (16 million ha in 1960 to 3.4 million ha in 2015). These protected areas are more and more under serious threat from human activities. Today, we are witnessing a process of destruction of classified forests due to the extension of cultivated land in forest reserves. The forest is heavily attacked by farmers who settle there to carry out agricultural activities. Farmers are indeed the main responsible of forest loss.

<sup>13</sup>www.cnrtl

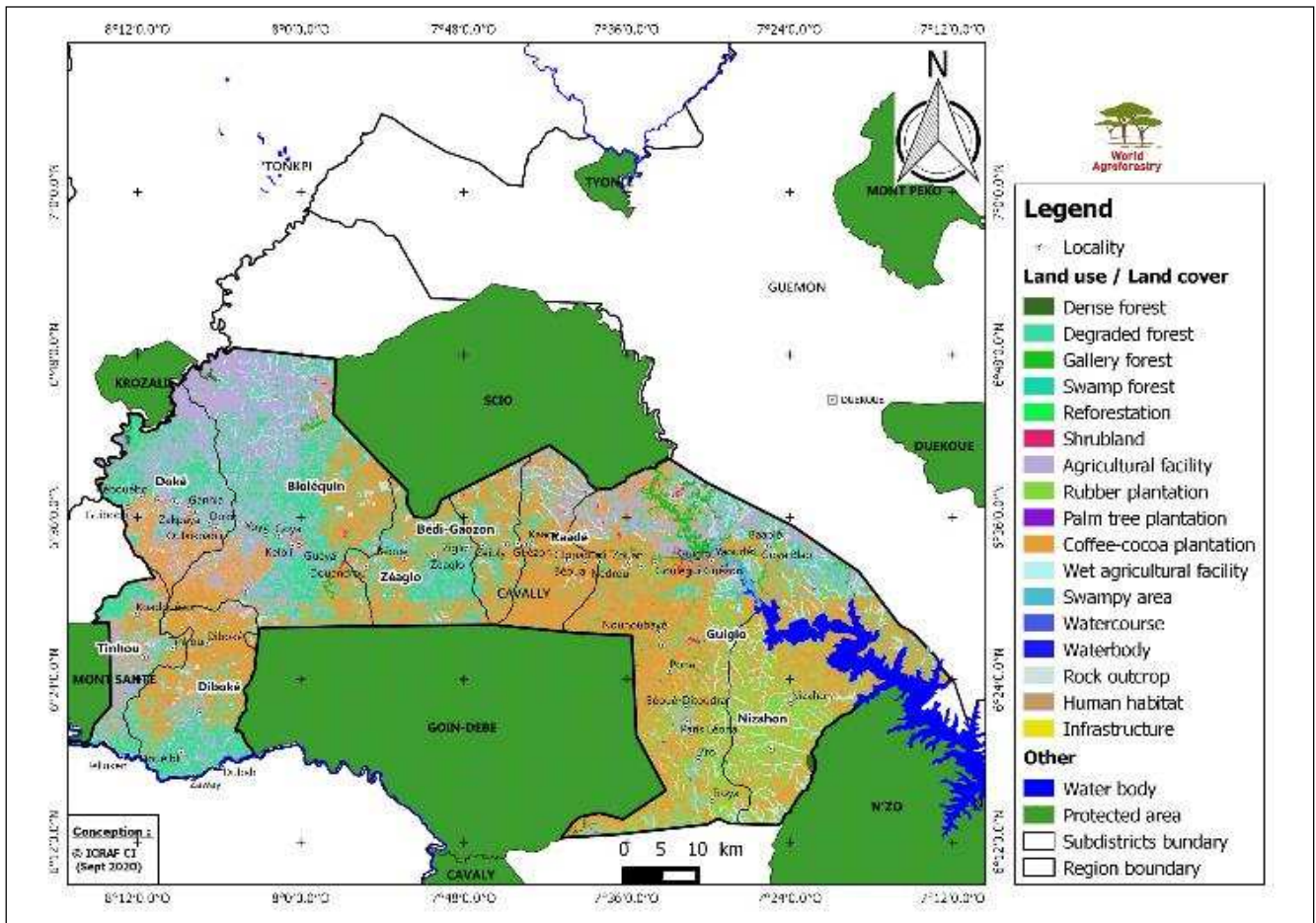
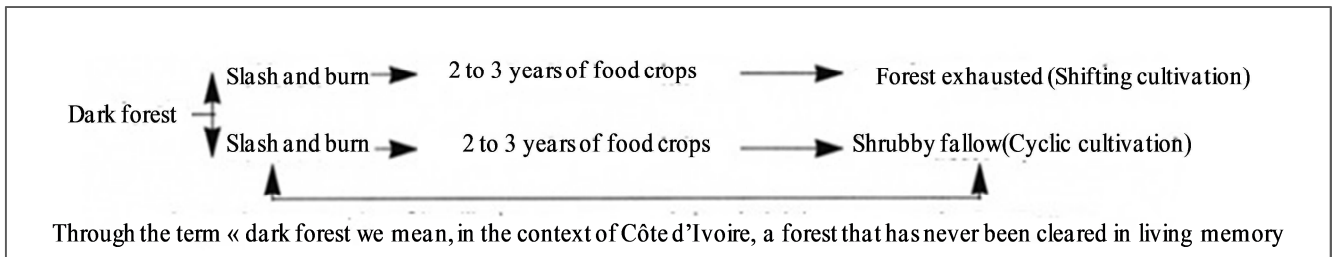
<sup>14</sup>Mr. Zehi is a Wê, founder of the Zehipleu village, he was mostly surrounded by Dan migrants who named his camp Zehipleu, that is to say Zehi's home place.

<sup>15</sup>Villages like Daloa and Vavoua were created by Burkinabé nationals, who came from the departments of Daloa and Vavoua, in search of new lands: hence, the names of the villages they created.

<sup>16</sup>Interview with Gonli Gbieugbeu, head Zehipleu village.

<sup>17</sup>Interview with Mr. Abass, a Lebanese national, product buyer (coffee-cocoa), in the department of Bloléquin, conducted in March 2022.





This map thus shows the excessive use of land and especially of the forest, in all the departments of Cavally. Thus, we can say that the presence of Dan and Burkinabe agricultural colonies in the department of Blolékou in Cavally has certainly contributed to the socio-economic development of that region, but their large number in the forests, on top of the use of forest devastating methods and techniques, strongly contributes to large-scale deforestation.

## 5. Conclusion

Attracted by the natural potential and mainly driven by the crisis in the peasant State of Côte d'Ivoire in the 1980s, many Dan immigrants and foreigners from Burkina Faso have

made the region of Cavally and especially its department of Blolékouin their preferred direction. If agriculture appears to be the main activity of these migrants, it is important to note that the first Dan migrants also practiced hunting owing to the rich fauna of this area. Established in strong colonies and become by the system of guardianship or marriage with landowners, these Dan and Burkinabe have contributed to the socio-economic development of the region. However, their large numbers in the forests, along with their use of forest-devastating methods and techniques, have broadly contributed to large-scale deforestation. Only the military-political crisis of the 2000s, with its corollary of land crises, slowed down the migratory flow of these two communities a little.

## Appendix

List of people interviewed for this study:

N°	Last name and first names	Ages	Function or status	Dates and place	Theme
1	Ban Blaise	50 years old	farmer	December 2021	The activities of the Dan in Cavally
2	Doue Pierre	94 years old	village founder	December 2021	Dan du Cally Foundation
3	Gonli Gbieugbeu	81 years old	village head	February 01, 2022	Migrations in the Cavally
4	Mr. Abass	47 years	Lebanese buyer of agricultural products	March 2022	The economic weight of the department of Bloléquin
5	Noutoua Francoise	72 years old	Houswife	March 2022	The activities of the Dan living in the Cavally Region
6	Rasmane Alphonse	60 years	Burkinabé, family head	January 26, 2021	The activities of the Burkinabés living in the Cavally Region
7	Sawadogo Drissa	66 years old	Burkinabe	March 2022	Activity of the Burkinabé living in the Cavally Region
8	VAH Marcelin	45 years old	Youth President	February 02, 2022	Dan le Cavally migrations
9	Zehi Bernard	92 years old	Founder of Zehipleu village	January 2022	The process of founding villages
10	Zeli Antoinette	71 years old	Housewife	January 2022	The activities of the Dan living in the Cavally Region

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