

Togo



Translated – Link to original article in French is below

## Coastal Erosion in Togo, Chaos and Desolation on the Bank

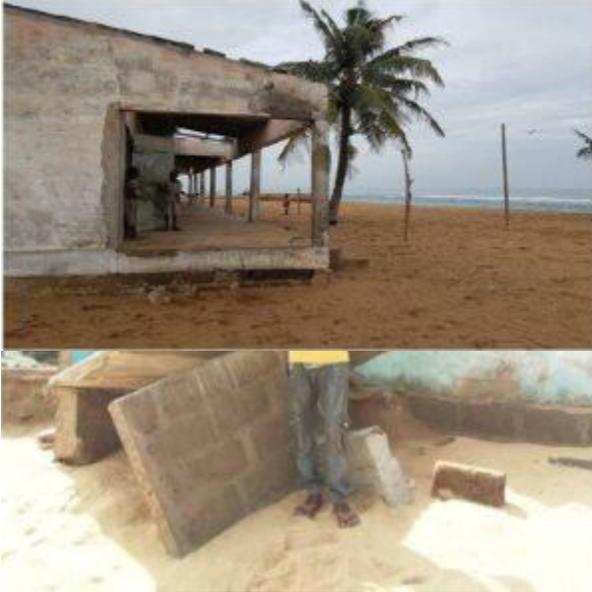


Beaches that disappear, the ocean that swallows roads, houses, cemeteries, churches, animist convents etc., the phenomenon becomes commonplace on the continent, especially on the West African coasts. Coastal erosion, this natural phenomenon, which is accelerating under the effect of climate change (sealevel rise) does not spare the Togolese coasts, making the lives of the riparian populations apparently left to their sad fate very harsh.

In forty years, the ocean has engulfed several houses, a dozen coastal villages, the first two national roads number 2 of the country. The few residents who remained behind despite everything, live with fear in their stomachs, powerless in the face of the damage of the advance of the sea, stunned at the sight of their homes devastated by the waves and engulfed in the ocean. More than ever, their fear of being invaded, body and property, one of those four mornings by this ocean in fury, is morbid.

They are the inhabitants of the Edge of the Togolese coast living at the mercy of the murderous waves of the sea. In Aného, Agbodrafo, Kpémé, Gbodjomé, Goumoukopé, Agbavi, Kpogan, Afidényigban, Baguida ... the consequences of coastal erosion are a real nightmare for them.

Latest episode to date in Aného: on the night of 29 to 30 September 2015, the sea launched again to the assault of the districts of Magna, Fantécomé, Légbanou, Flamani, Bokotikponou, Ela and Djamadi located on the coast. Even today, the traces of the fury of the waters are visible: uprooted coconut trees, invaded housefronts, foundations laid bare...



Defined as a phenomenon of shoreline retreat due to the decrease in sedimentary volume in transit and wave action on aerial and underwater beaches (UNFCCC, 2010), coastal erosion swallows entire sections of the shore with unimaginable consequences. Statistics from Togo's National Oceanographic Data Center reveal that the effects of coastal erosion are very important and estimated on average at 10 m per year over 30 km.

Sol X Ray, Togolese artist of the song, resident and victim of coastal erosion, met in Gbodjomé, draws up the state of the situation. "Togo began to experience coastal erosion in the year of the

construction of the autonomous port of Lomé in 1968. Since its commissioning, twelve (12) villages have been recorded. Here is the observation of the last 30 years: nearly 1500 meters of land were engulfed by the ocean from 1985 to 2005, a lull from 2005 to October 2013 with an almost total absence of erosion, a hyper active erosion from October 2013 to date... Over the past three years, erosion has forced entire families to relocate further afield as they could after the destruction of their habitats by the ocean and in the anguish of emigrating again if nothing is done to stop erosion."

"The sea engulfs about 8 m of coastline each year especially with the construction of the 3th quay. Houses, historic cities, fetish convents, roads. The first road 2 km away from the sea was swallowed up with the construction of the 3th quay. The second one as well. Our homes are destroyed and our belongings have gone into the sea. The fishermen deserted the place and had to find refuge elsewhere. It is the savior who can" says a victim in Doévikopé, a town located just a stone's throw from the fishing port of Lomé.

"The sea took everything from us. I say everything including our fetishes. We have nothing left. We do not know where to go because our ancestors settled on the coast for a very long time. We have resumed their activity, which is fishing. We have always lived here. Look at Monsieur (indicating a place), this is where all my five children were born. Today, our house has been swept away by the sea. We sleep on the ground in the open air to the music of mosquitoes," says a lady, in her forties.

A father, a fisherman of his state recounts the drama of a nightmarish night: "My family and I were sleeping one night when suddenly we heard waves crashing on our house. By the time I woke up, woke up the children and took shelter, the walls collapsed and it was general panic. We had to stay up all night. In one night the sea swallowed the ten meters that separated us from the waves. Now we no longer know which saint to devote ourselves to."

"In 15 years, a lot of things have disappeared. Families are displaced but they still live in the anguish of backing down," says Mimi "Gbodjomé is totally disfigured. There, (showing a place at the bottom of the sea) there was a huge beach with huts, rooms and on the other side, a fishing village. There were constructions, the ocean swallowed everything up."

Even idols are at a loss. The vodou temples are taken in turn, the guardians are distraught. "Our lands disappeared at sea are measured in kilometres. Our grandparents' houses, family cemeteries, our fetishes are all swept away. Every three years, our homes are submerged by the waves. Sometimes, in the same year, we lose up to eight (8) pieces under water. A few months ago I had to change the place of my idols again under the pressure of the waves. We are as if abandoned, helpless, without help. The ocean took everything from us," says a vodou priest.

These localities would not be, today, in the process of disappearing if there had been no development work on the Autonomous Port of Lomé, say local residents. "The problem of erosion in Togo is accentuated by the exploitation of the Autonomous Port of Lomé, the third quay, the mineral port etc." insists a local elected official. The collective of victims of coastal erosion was set up in 2014 to make the authorities of the Port of Lomé and the partners who financed the construction of 3th wharf whose activities accentuate erosion.

Edoh Tonoudo, the president of this Collective, entrusts the Bolloré group, the company that built the 3th quai and is indignant at the attitude of the country's authorities. "It was the construction of the two major ports that amplified coastal erosion and deepened the poverty of the people here. All the steps taken with partners, in particular the World Bank, have so far been unsuccessful, despite the panoply of meetings and conferences held. Bolloré and the World Bank have lost all human sensitivity. They are only interested in their interests and their interests. And not the rights of the population. People can suffer, die; they don't care," he said. He added: "If the World Bank recognizes that there are negative impacts caused by this port, let it compensate the populations. After Bolloré will follow. And if the responsibility of the State is engaged, it too will assume."

A valid argument, says a geographer, professor researcher at the University of Lomé, specialist in coastal risk management and coastal environment. "The high rate of coastal retreat is due to the fact that the 40 kilometers of coastline between the port and the Togo-Benin border constitutes what we call an erosion segment. The effects of climate change on our coasts are increasingly being observed. And then, the main work that disrupts the dynamics of coastal drift on our coast are the port works of Lomé. In this case, the main pier and the sand stop dam that has just been built," he explains.

### **Economic activity affected, distraught populations**

On the spot, the populations seem resigned to dealing with the phenomenon. "It's our whole way of life that is being questioned," says Ange, a resident of Aného. Fishing, the main activity of local populations, is severely disturbed. Due to rising sea levels and the power of marine currents, they have, for the most part, preferred to relocate their activity to Lake Togo, not far from Aného.

"Instead of facing the breaking waves, we rather felt that we had to find another alternative: come and fish on Lake Togo. Even if the yield is not what we expect, we are still content with the little we catch," says Folly, a fisherman we meet in Agbodrafo.

Everything is engulfed at the bottom of the ocean. "I lost my house. All that remains are the ruins and I live there waiting for the waves to dislodge me permanently because I have no place to go. I lie on that mat. We are deprived of our income-generating activities. It was with the fishing activity that I had built my villa here which you see what remains because of coastal erosion. The sea swallowed my life. The neighbors who have the means have moved to the city, but I'm still there," said Kodjo Gbogbo, a 76-year-old father of 11.

If the life of the inhabitants of the coast is already strewn with difficulties, today it is even more so. The rest of the inhabitants of the coast are at risk of being dislodged by the sea whose level is constantly rising. The danger has since been present in coastal localities, where fishermen, traders, "resourcefuls", small traffickers, large bandits are also piled up according to some sources.

"The population is suffering and our activities are being disrupted. After the construction of the 3rd wharf, coastal erosion accelerated. My palace, as well as the cemetery are in the sea. It is necessary that the officials of the Autonomous Port of Lomé and the 3rd quay come to compensate us", deploras a notable of the chief of the village of Agbavi and member of the collective of victims of the coastal erosion of the village of Agbavi. "A few years ago, we gave 240,000 FCFA to people to rent. This sum was only used to cover a year in advance of rental and since then nothing.", adds another.

The village of Agbavi (located about twenty km east of Lomé) is one of the most affected. Here, the fury of the waves is particularly devastating. Enough to make live those who have chosen to stay like Kokou Kouléhoho in constant fear. "We are afraid to sleep at night. The waves are stronger and flood the houses. I am forced to sleep during the day and be awake at night just in case. Nobody cares about us," he says. To fight against the advance of the sea, we have installed makeshift dams that unfortunately, are quickly bypassed by the sea during high tides to penetrate ever deeper into the land," he added.

"The locality of Gbétsogbé is not spared either. Many of its inhabitants and other health and social structures have been swept away by the sea. This has forced a large part of its inhabitants to transhumance with the consequence of a change in subsistence activities. From the fishing they used to live on, they are now trying with difficulties to agriculture and manoeuvring that do not succeed them," says a resident who is desperately trying to live with the phenomenon since, he confides, he does not know where to go.

### **The Togolese solution to erosion**



At the operational level, coastal protection actions were carried out with the installation between 1986 and 1989 of the protection works of the wharf of Kpémé, Goumou Kopé, the town hall of Aného and the Cathedral of Saints Pierre and Paul, the Hotel Tropicana, that of the coastal protection works of Aného from 2009 to 2014.

For Professor Blivi Adoté, Geomorphologist, to whom the phenomenon does not escape, "The city of Aného and the locality of Agbodrafo will disappear from the map of Togo in 10 years if nothing is done in the next 3 or 5 years to curb coastal erosion that gnaws every year

35m of land on the Togolese coast". The Togolese teacher-researcher, renowned as an experienced, made this statement at a conference held at the Sarakawa Hotel in Lomé attended by the ambassadors of the countries of Africa, Europe and the USA and the European Union accredited in Lomé.

As an effective solution to protect the Togolese coasts from relentless erosion, Prof. Blivi proposes the reloading of the beach. "The only solution left that can help to resolve this erosion crisis is to recharge the beaches; this means that you have to fetch sand on the high seas and come and make compensation," he said. A requalification project that requires the trifle sum of 125 billion FCFA for 50km of coastline to be protected according to research conducted. Only political will is enough to achieve this. For this, a project to protect the coast has emerged.

### **An innovative solution**

On the beach of Gbodjomé, 25 kilometers southeast of Lomé, Déo Eklou-Natey, a Togolese geotechnical engineer, has imagined a technology to slow down the advance of the ocean. This technology makes it possible to prevent the waves washed up on the beach from leaving with sand. Better, the little sand with which these waters arrive at the beach is recovered in wells 3 or 4m high glued to each other. "It's a curtain facing the , designed to tear the sand it had stolen from the sea before. It's a system I used to protect my house from marine erosion and also recover the sand from the sea," says Déo Eklou-Natey.

"It's like the breakwaters that run along the coast and the ocean doesn't come anymore. It turned into a sand trap that protects our homes. It's something temporary and it takes immense resources for it to be a medium-term solution," says reggae artist Sol X Ray.

Unlike spikes (blocks of stones that the water manages to immerse and must manually load with sand), wells take care of themselves without any human intervention. "Every system has its limits. The ear system was introduced in Togo in 1981, but with evolution, we believe that the present technique is more effective than the ears that have also proven themselves over time," says Mr. Eklou-Natey, the designer.

The results of the pilot phase reassure the government and the World Bank, which are giving their full support to the scaling up of this technology (Gbodjomé-Agbodrafo) through the West Africa Coastal Zone Resilience Investment Project (WACA-ResIp). "It is effective and has given its results," says Adou Rahim Alimi, coordinator of the Waca ResIP-Togo project. Work based on the well technique has already started and will protect nearly 940 households, homes and social and economic infrastructure.

This West Africa Coastal Zone Resilience Investment Project aims to strengthen the resilience of communities and target areas in the West African coastal zone. It was designed in partnership with the people of West Africa who live on the coast and depend on it for their livelihoods, food security and prosperity.

The programme supports countries' efforts to improve the management of their shared coastal resources and reduce natural and anthropogenic risks to coastal communities. Launched on November 30, 2018, in Togo, the WACA program provides for the realization of a good number of activities including the protection of the segment between the localities of Agbodrafo and Aného Benin border, 18 km long, the dredging of the Gbaga channel over 24 km.

All in all, we can ask ourselves the question of whether it can be the appropriate and definitive solution for a phenomenon with devastating effects despite the many reflections and solutions for the protection of the coasts in the face of the fury of the ocean.

Report by Ekué Kodjo KOUDOHAH, with the technical assistance of the West African Journalists Association (AJAO) and the Mano River Union Natural Resource Rights and Governance Platform (UFM CSO Platform).

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