

# AFRICAPOLIS: Urbanization Trends in West Africa 1950-2020

**Download the AFRICAPOLIS report and its atlas:**  
<http://www.afd.fr/jahia/Jahia/Africapolis>

**Consult the e-Geopolis database at:**  
<http://e-geopolis.eu>

## High urbanization growth in West Africa

Since the end of World War II, West Africa has been distinguished by extremely high urban growth (x 16) due to a high population growth rate (2.7% on average from 1950-2000) and a 4.2-fold increase in the urbanization rate. Even if, with 31% of its inhabitants living in an agglomeration of more than 10,000 inhabitants, West Africa remains one of the least urbanized regions. However, its urban growth is one of the fastest in the world. This remarkable development deserves a more accurate analysis of the changes that have occurred since 1950 and of the perspectives on the 2020 horizon.

### → AFRICAPOLIS: new data, more accurate and verifiable statistics

It has been difficult to develop a general overview of urbanization in West Africa based on existing studies. The issue of regional statistics' comparability and of the definitions of what is urban has restricted the analytic approach, as has the inaccuracy of available databases. Thus, statistics on urbanization often just list the largest agglomerations or, at best, the towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Yet West Africa only has 194 agglomerations of more than 100,000 inhabitants, which means that 90% of towns remain buried in anonymity. The AFRICAPOLIS program therefore seeks to respond to this lacuna in geostatistical information with an innovative compilation of census data, satellite images and toponymy. Attention is focused on the number of inhabitants, urban density and growth, as well as the morphology of agglomerations. The result is a significant improvement compared to the data provided by the GRUMP (global rural - urban mapping program)

project of Columbia University and WALTPS, *West Africa Long Term Perspective Study* (Sahel and West Africa Club, OECD 1998), whose statistics are used by numerous development institutions.

AFRICAPOLIS is a real database, identifying close to 1,300 agglomerations of more than 10,000 inhabitants in 2010 and enabling the updating of international statistics. Thus, whereas the UN/DESA identifies 23 West African agglomerations of more than 750,000 inhabitants, AFRICAPOLIS lists 19 : Lagos (NGA), Abidjan (CIV), Accra (GHA), Idaban (NGA), Dakar (SEN), Kano (NGA), Kumasi (GHA), Conakry (GIN), Bamako (MLI), Lomé (TGO), Kaduna (NGA), Cotonou (BEN), Ouagadougou (BFA), Port Harcourt (NGA), Benin City (NGA), Monrovia (LBR), Freetown (SLE), Ilorin (NGA), and Niamey (NER). The difference in results is explained by the fact that the UN refers to census data sent by States and which are sometimes overestimated.

Errors in assessing urbanization can lead to partial diagnostics of development needs. Underestimating by 20 million urban dwellers in the region can lead, for example, to 200 agglomerations of 10,000 inhabitants being omitted from quite significant opportunities in development, governance, the economy, transport, access to equipment, equipment, education and health. Accurate identification of growing urban populations and their localization remains therefore an essential asset for every development actor.

## Conclusions of the AFRICAPOLIS Report

The maps and analyses in AFRICAPOLIS make it possible to highlight certain regional population trends:

- a growing increase in the proportion of the population in West Africa living in urban agglomerations
- the formation by 2020 of an urban band of high density in the coastal area of the Gulf of Guinea
- the current structuring of urban networks
- the recent merging of secondary towns and small urban centers
- a proliferation of small agglomerations
- noteworthy types of population concentrations and urbanization, such as the effects of the creation of a North-South axis along major roads or the intrazonal diversity of population formations observed from the rank-size analyses of the Africapolis database.

### The Spatial Process of Urbanization

In West Africa, as in the rest of the world, there have been three kinds of recent urban growth:

- the densification of existing agglomerations
- the spread of existing agglomerations
- the emergence of new agglomerations, either based on an existing village nucleus (urbanization *in situ*) or as specially created new towns (urbanization *ex-nihilo*), or as unplanned gatherings or concentrations resulting in new agglomerations.

These data throw doubt on the classic perception of urban growth as resulting mainly from migration from rural areas: within the context of a high birth rate, it is on the contrary the lack of rural exodus that can explain urbanization, which in this case takes the form of a proliferation of small and medium-sized agglomerations. Analysis of urban growth can not therefore be restricted to the large towns alone.

### The Proliferation of Small Agglomerations in West Africa

The increased spread of agglomerations, going from 125 units to 1,500 in 70 years, has encouraged the filling of empty spaces, as well as the densification of already urbanized areas. Between 1950 and 2000, the average yearly expansion of the urbanized surface has been 5.1%, as opposed to 4.3% for the population. The average distance separating agglomerations has been divided by 3, going from 111Km to 33Km for the whole region.

Access to towns and their services has therefore considerably increased at the same time as the supply of transport has been reduced.

The proliferation of secondary agglomerations is recent. This phenomenon appears in three kinds of geographical space:

- the rural areas of most density;
- the periphery of large agglomerations;
- along major roads.

In West Africa, two factors cause the intensity of the process of urbanization *in situ*: the natural demographic growth and the poor hierarchical distribution of population formations in rural areas.

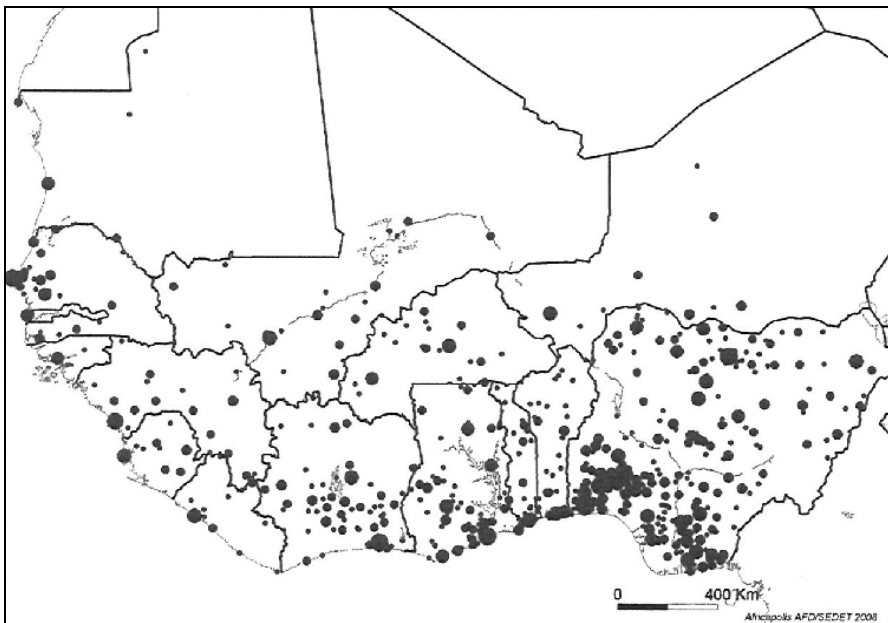
The strong potential for rural exodus linked to demographic growth in these areas is limited by a weak opening to new arrivals because of the scarcity of towns. In parallel, urban exodus is maximized under certain conditions : along major roads and the periphery of large agglomerations.

We observe the densification of rural areas (urbanization *in situ*) in parallel with the proliferation of small agglomerations within the orbit of large capital cities. These agglomerations are found mainly along the major roads supplying the town centers and can be located up to 100Km outside the large towns. They result from a mixture of local population, rural exodus and urban decongestion.

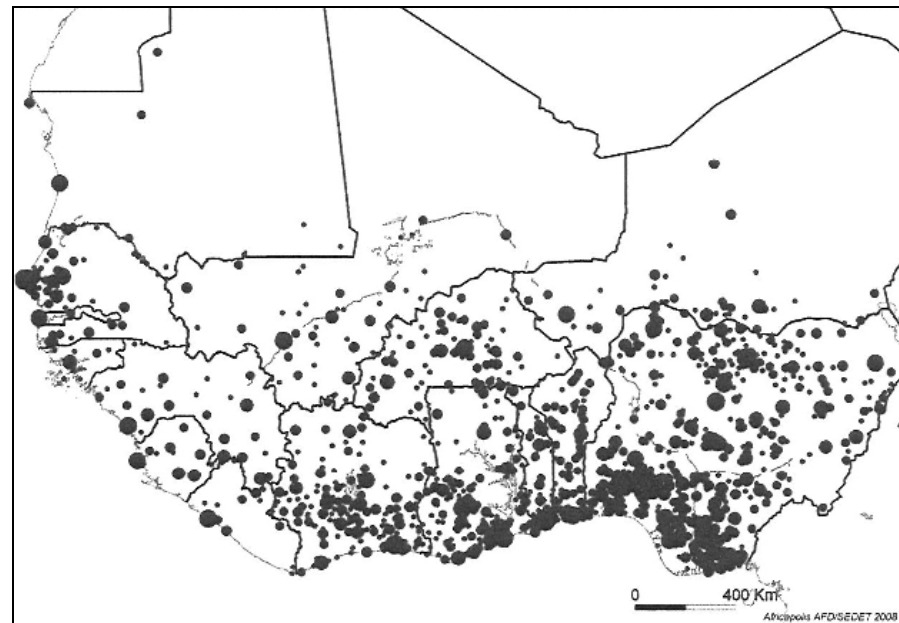
These small agglomerations on the fringe between the rural and urban world often develop outside any legal or social framework appropriate to dense population concentrations. The importance of the metropolis in urban populations is decreasing. What then should be the strategies for dealing with this multiplication of urban centers and what reforms are required for this mesh of territories? Should national and international actors not encourage support to secondary agglomerations to balance the roles between the metropolis and the rest of the country?

Today, 15 out of 16 West African countries are in the last quartile of poverty: the poorest being Liberia (228<sup>th</sup> in the world ranking out of 230 with a GDP per inhabitant of \$140 per year). African urban growth does not necessarily go hand in hand with industrial and financial growth: African towns are often poorly equipped and do not necessarily guarantee an improvement in living and development conditions. This means that our analysis of these developing population areas must be reviewed and deepened. Africapolis is participating in this effort.

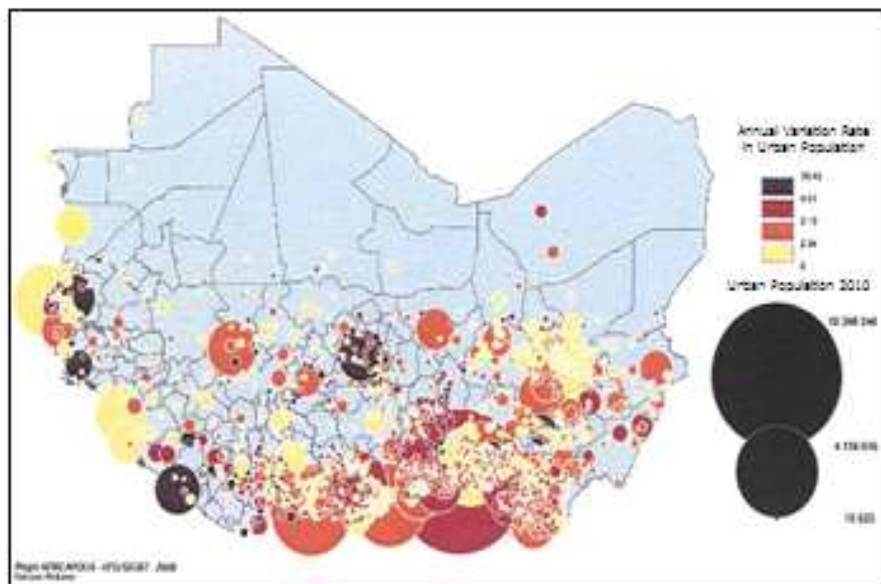
## AFRICAPOLIS: A GEOSTATISTICAL REPRESENTATION OF URBANIZATION IN WEST AFRICA



Spread of agglomerations of more than 10,000 inhabitants in West Africa, 1980



Spread of agglomerations of more than 10,000 inhabitants in West Africa, 2010



Agglomerations of more than 10,000 inhabitants in 2010 and annual variation rate 2010-2020



The Western section of the agglomeration of Kamsar, Guinea : an agglomeration of 34,000 inhabitants officially classified as "rural"



## SUMMARY OF AFRICAPOLIS COUNTRY SHEETS

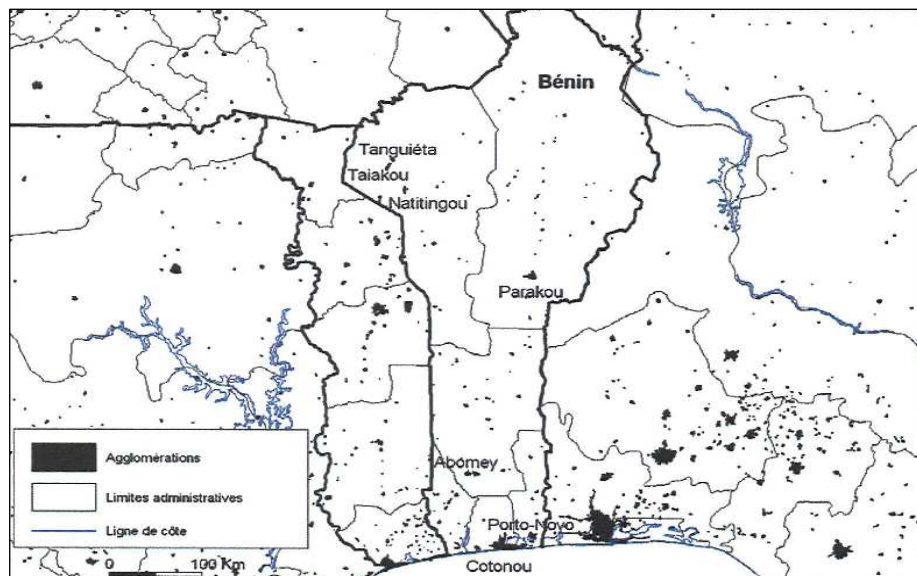
### Benin

Population	1979	2002	2020	1950-2000
(in millions)	3.33	6.8	11.34	Pop x 4.2

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	10.8	32.6	43	46
% of the population living in the metropolitan areas (Cotonou, Porto-Novo)	8	15,8	17,9	17,6
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	3	37	67	85
average size	17,512	15,567	24,007	37,857
% of resident population	2.8	16.8	25.09	28.4

→ The population living in the 2 metropolises of the country grew twofold between 1960 and 2000. Progression in secondary centers (more than 10,000 inhabitants) grew by 9.

**Territorial Division.** In 2002: 12 departments, 77 communes, 546 districts, 3,750 neighborhoods/villages



**Agglomerations of Benin in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

### Burkina Faso

Population	1975	2006	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	5,64	13,9	18,4	Pop x 3,6

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	3,9	11	22	27,8
% of population living in the metropolitan areas (Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso)	3,1	6,6	11	13,33
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	2	16	56	93
average size	15 177	17 941	22 250	28 678
% of resident population	0,83	4,38	10,94	14,48

**Territorial Division.** In 2006: 13 regions, 45 provinces, 350 urban and rural communes + commune of Ouagadougou, 8600 villages.



**Agglomerations of Burkina Faso in 2000** (Map: Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Cape Verde

Population	1991	2000	2020	1950-2000
	355 278	434 812	593 880	Pop x 3

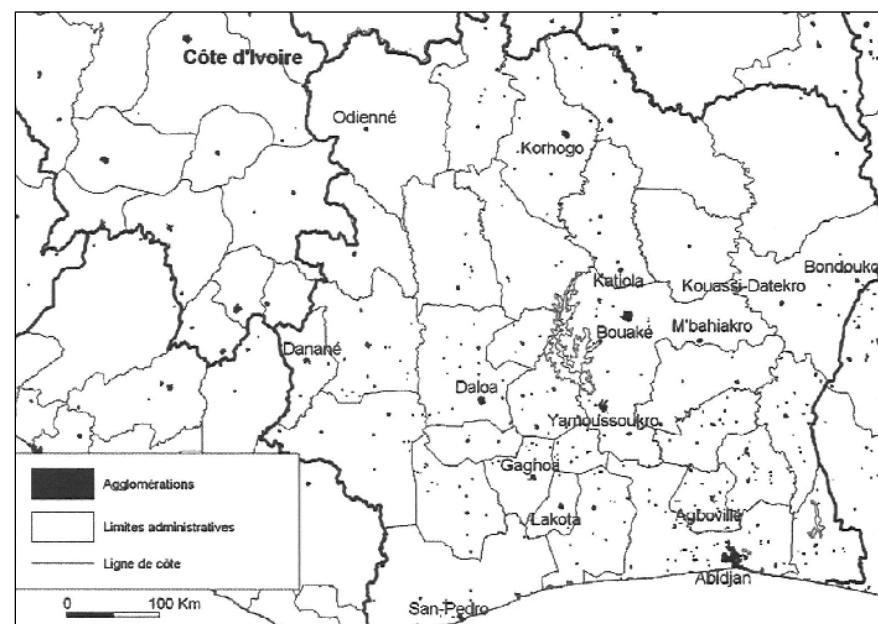
Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	15,8	25,2	39,3	57,7
% of the population living in metropolitan areas (Praia)	6,5	12,7	21,8	27,1
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	2	2	3	8
average size	15 750	37 250	56 892	42 863
% of resident population	6	12	39	58

## Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Population	1975	1998	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	6,7	15,37	25,9	Pop x 6,1

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	9,7	34,3	42,6	46,8
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of (Abidjan)	5,6	16	19,3	19,6
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	8	52	106	195
average size	21 027	28 305	35 930	36 089
% of resident population	4,1	18,3	23,3	27,2

**Territorial Division.** In 1998 : 19 regions, 58 départements, 183 sub-préfectures, 8540 localities (core village + 35 217 camps)



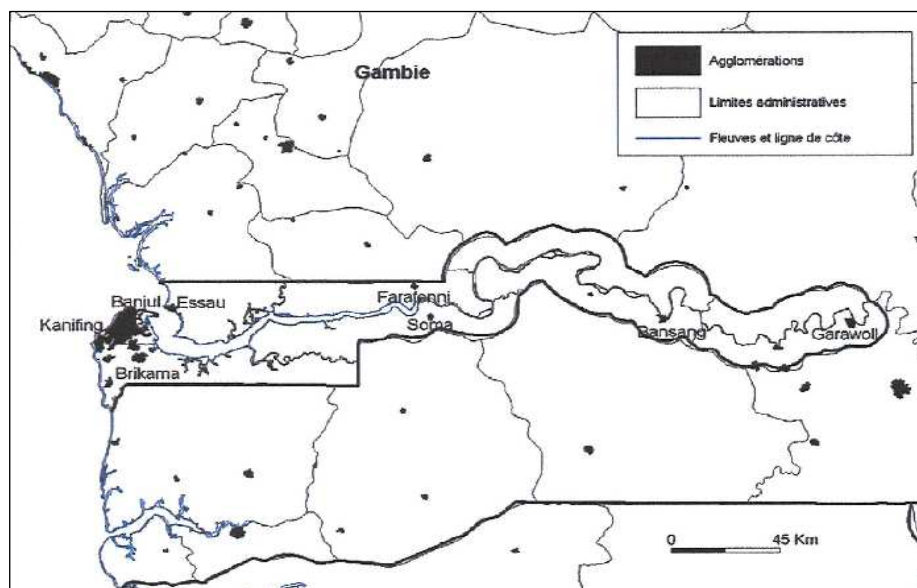
**Agglomerations of Côte d'Ivoire in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of The Gambia

Population	1963	1983	2020	1950-2000
	315 486	687 817	2 062 110	Pop x 5,2

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	8,6	25,7	42,7	47,4
% of the population residing in the metropolitan areas (Banjul, Kanifing)	8,6	23,1	35,3	37,6
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	0	1	5	8
average size	-	16 067	21 183	25 268
% of resident population	-	10	19,2	20,7

**Territorial Division.** In 2003 : 8 *Local Governments Areas*, 39 districts, 1883 settlements



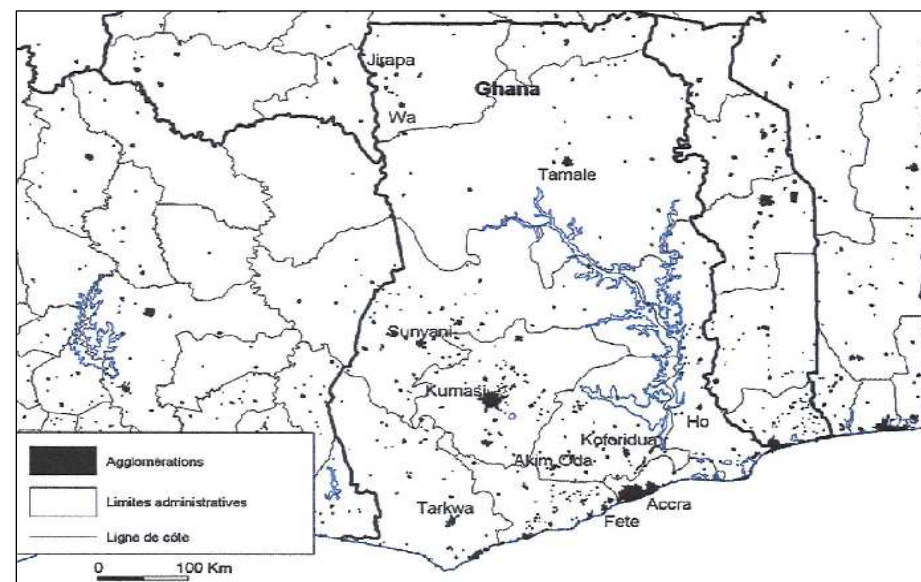
**Agglomerations of The Gambia in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Ghana

Population	1960	2000	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	15,19	19,27	26,84	Pop x 4,1

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	17,4	27,2	39,1	48,4
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Accra	5,4	9,4	13,7	16,4
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	30	57	117	199
average size	26 840	34 252	40 045	43 257
% of resident population	12	17,7	25,4	32,1

**Territorial Division.** In 2000: 10 Administrative regions, 167 Local Governments Councils, 56 000 settlements.



**Agglomerations of Ghana in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Guinea

Population	1954-55	1996	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	2,46	7,16	10,22	Pop x 2,9

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	6,2	24,3	31	36
% the population residing in the metropolitan area of Conakry	3,6	14,6	16,2	18,6
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	4	18	26	25
average size	17 653	24 706	49 956	70 906
% of resident population	2,6	9,7	14,8	17,3

**Territorial Division.** In 1996 : 7 regions, 33 préfectures, 340 sub-préfectures including 38 urban communes, 28 000 villages.

## Republic of Guinea Bissau

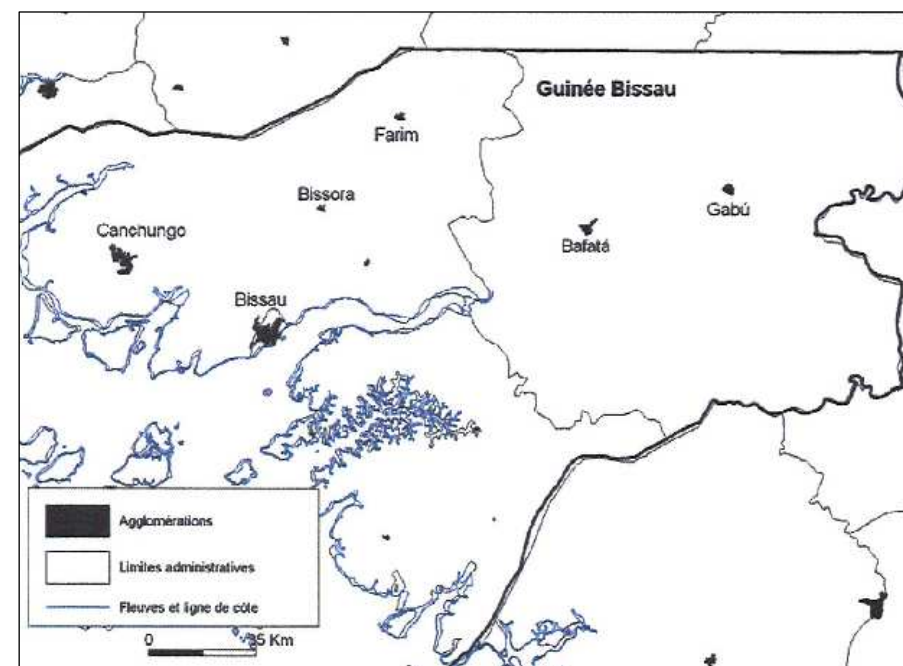
Population	1960	1991	2020	1950-2000
	525 437	954 492	1 803 288	Pop x 2,3

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	9,5	16,5	27,7	42,2
% of the population residing in the Bissau metropolitan area	9,5	14,8	25,1	34,1
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	0	1	2	9
average size	-	13 760	15 587	16 179
% of resident population	-	1,8	2,6	8,1

**Territorial Division.** In 1991 : 9 régions, 37 setores, number of villages unknown



**Agglomerations of Guinea in 2000** (Carte : Africapolis/SEDET)



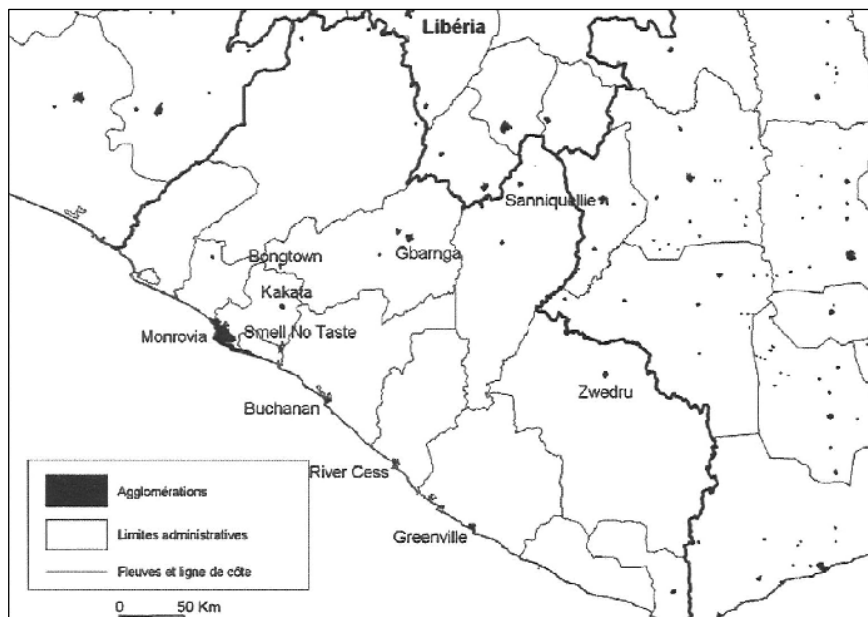
**Agglomerations of Guinea Bissau in 2000** (Carte : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Liberia

Population	1962	1984	2008	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	1,016	2,101	3,489	3,760	Pop x 3,4

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	7,1	26,7	36,5	53,5
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Monrovia	7,1	17,4	27,4	42,2
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	0	11	13	16
average size	-	15 343	19 666	26 743
% of resident population	-	9,3	9,1	11,3

**Territorial Division.** In 2005 : 14 counties, 102 districts, 1800 settlements.



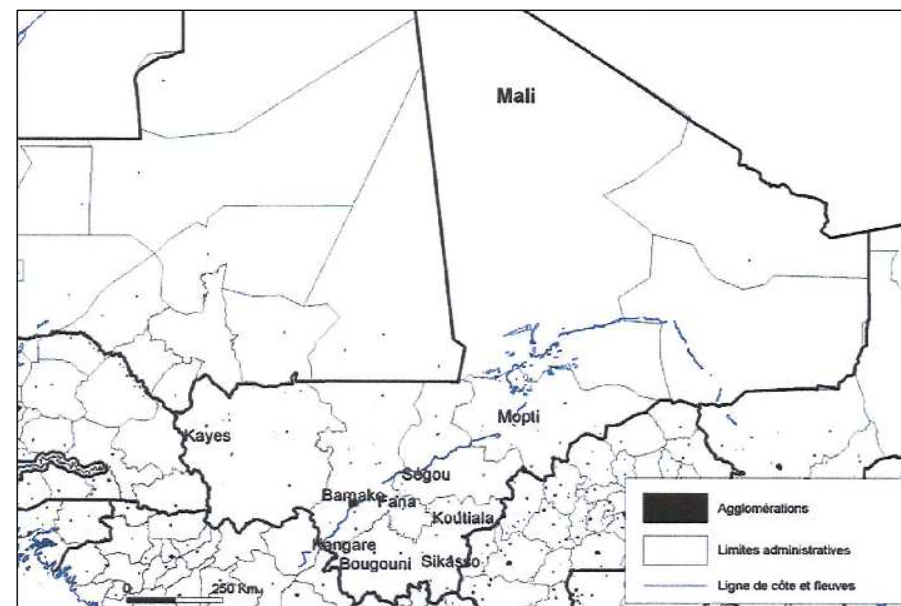
**Agglomerations of Liberia in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Mali

Population	1976	1998	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	6,395	9,810	16,140	Pop x 3

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	4,4	14,3	20,9	25,5
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Bamako	2,3	7	11,2	12,1
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	5	18	29	60
average size	17 594	27 904	34 306	30 648
% of resident population	2,1	7,3	9,7	11,4

**Territorial Division.** In 1998 : 9 regions, 48 circles, 301 arrondissements or communes (including 6 in Bamako), 701 communes (including 6 in Bamako), 11 525 villages.



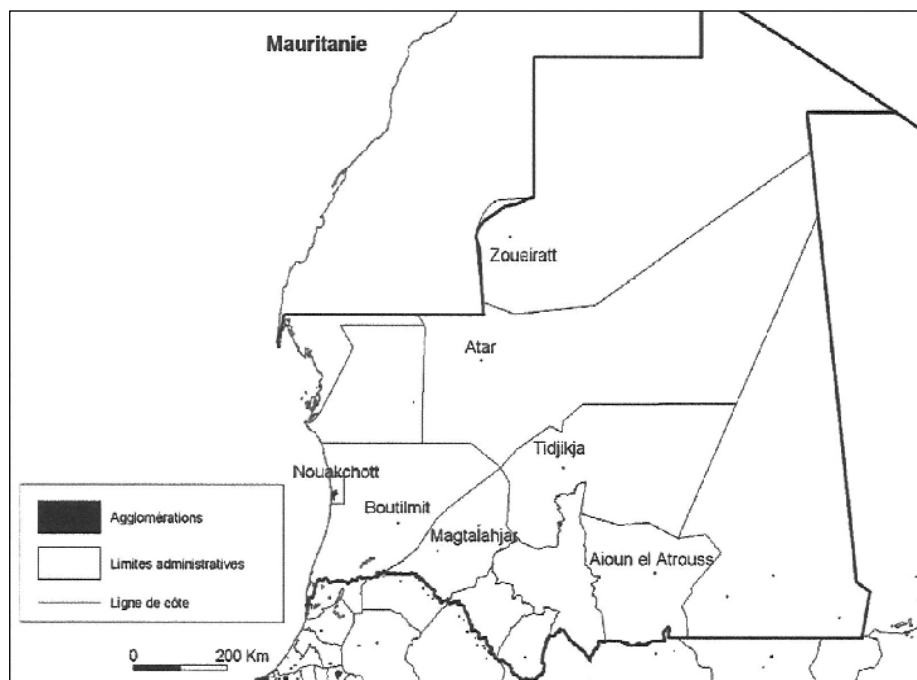
**Agglomerations of Mali in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## The Islamic Republic of Mauritania

Population	1976	2000	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	1,339	2,548	3,703	Pop x 5,4

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	0	19,2	31,4	30,9
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Nouakchott	0	12,1	21,9	22,7
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	0	5	9	10
average size	-	21 242	26 759	30 426
% of resident population	-	7,1	9,5	8,2

**Territorial Division.** In 2000 : 12 regions + Nouakchott district composed of 9 communes, 4 500 villages



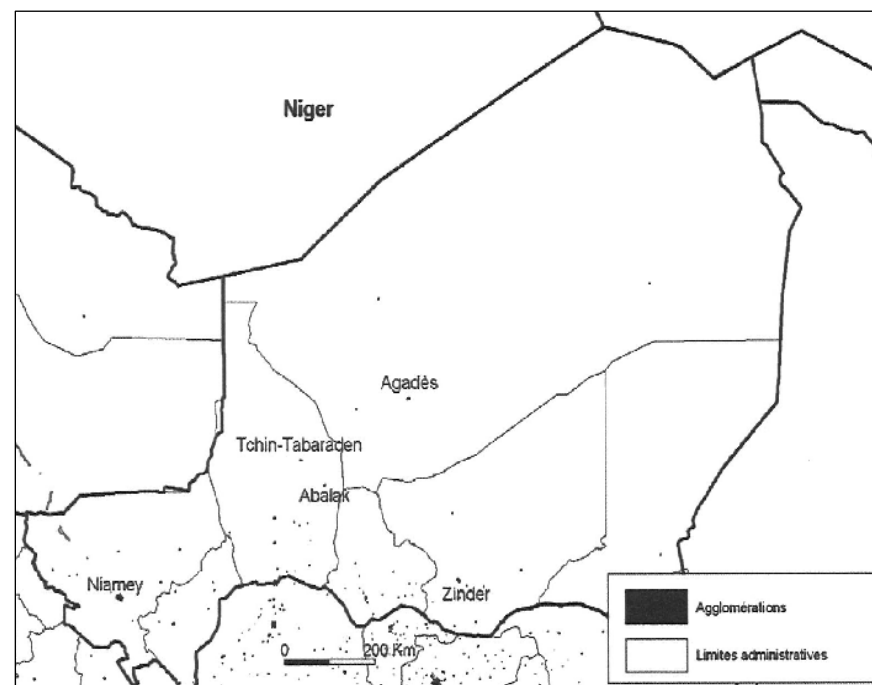
**Agglomerations of Mauritania in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Niger

Population	1977	2001	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	5,103	10,790	15,978	Pop x 4,6

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	2,8	9,3	16,1	18,3
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Niamey	1,1	4,7	6,2	6,8
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	3	9	34	49
average size	16 958	28 771	30 428	37 361
% of resident population	1,7	4,6	9,9	11,4

**Territorial Division.** In 2001 : 8 départements, 38 arrondissements, 265 communes including 213 rural ones, 23 000 villages



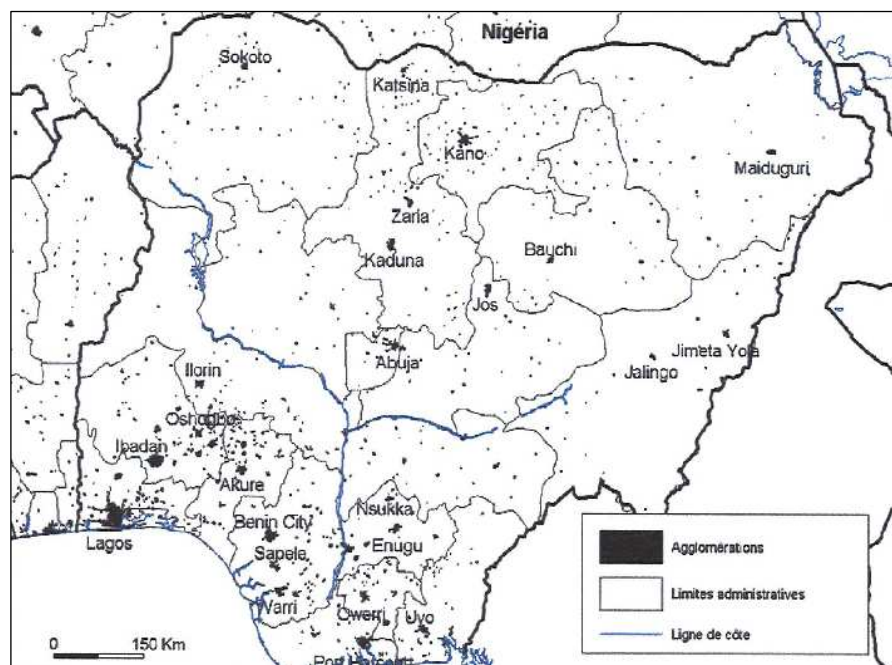
**Agglomerations of Niger in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Federal Republic of Nigeria

Population	1991	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	88,515	193,1	Pop x 5,7

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	15,3	23,5	30	30,9
% of the population residing in the metropolitan areas (Lagos, Ibadan and Kano)	4,4	7,4	9,9	9,5
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	133	253	438	574
average size	34 918	45 241	57 090	71 918
% of resident population	10,9	16,1	20,4	21,3

**Territorial Division.** In 2006 : the *Federal Capital Territory d'Abuja*, 36 *States*, 774 *Local Governments Areas*, 24 500 villages



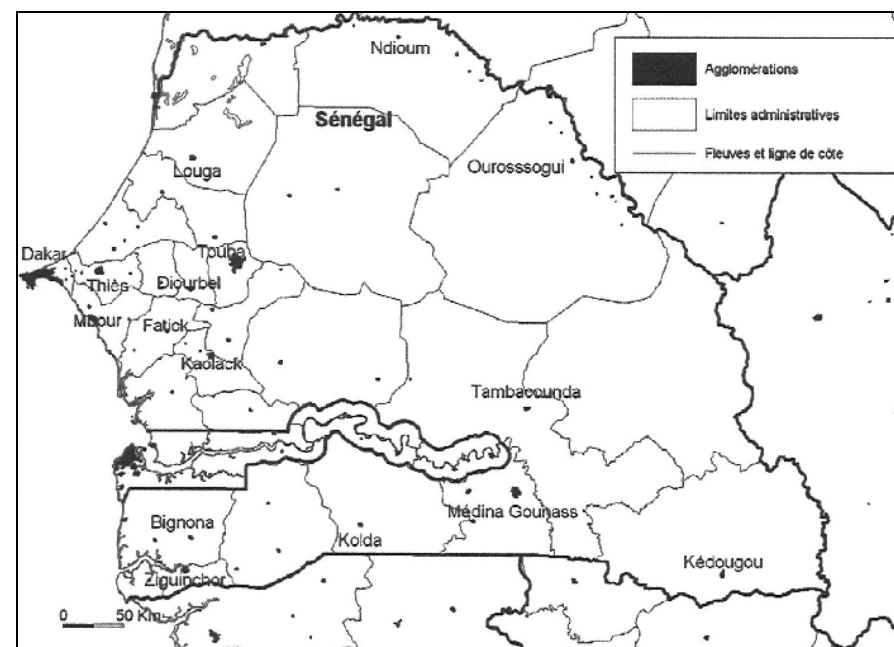
**Agglomerations of Nigeria in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Senegal

Population	2002	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	9,546	14,933	Pop x 4,7

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	26,1	38,8	45,8	43,9
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Dakar	6,9	9,4	6,7	4,5
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	8	23	42	59
average size	31 338	39 215	48 067	56 256
% of resident population	10	16,1	21,6	22,3

**Territorial Division.** In 2002 : 11 regions, 34 départements, 92 arrondissements, 13 500 villages.



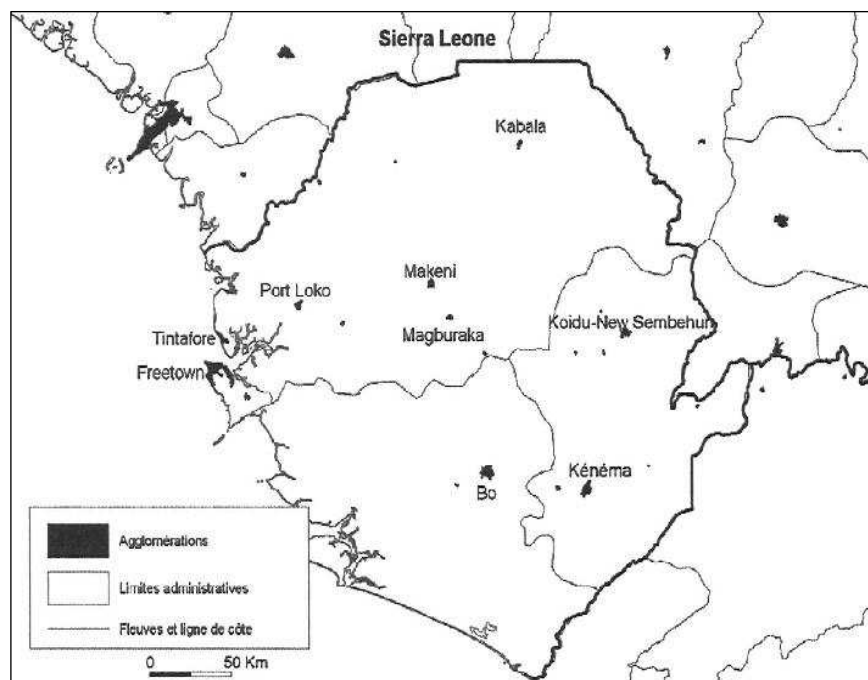
**Agglomerations of Senegal in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Sierra Leone

Population	1963	1985	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	2,180	3,516	6,385	Pop x 2,4

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	7	18,7	24,7	27,6
% of the population residing in metropolitan areas (Freetown)	5,3	11,8	15,5	16,7
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	2	7	11	17
average size	17 661	30 963	38 285	40 811
% of resident population	1,7	6,9	9,1	10,9

**Territorial Division.** In 2004 : 4 provinces, 14 districts, 161 chiefdoms, 1500 villages



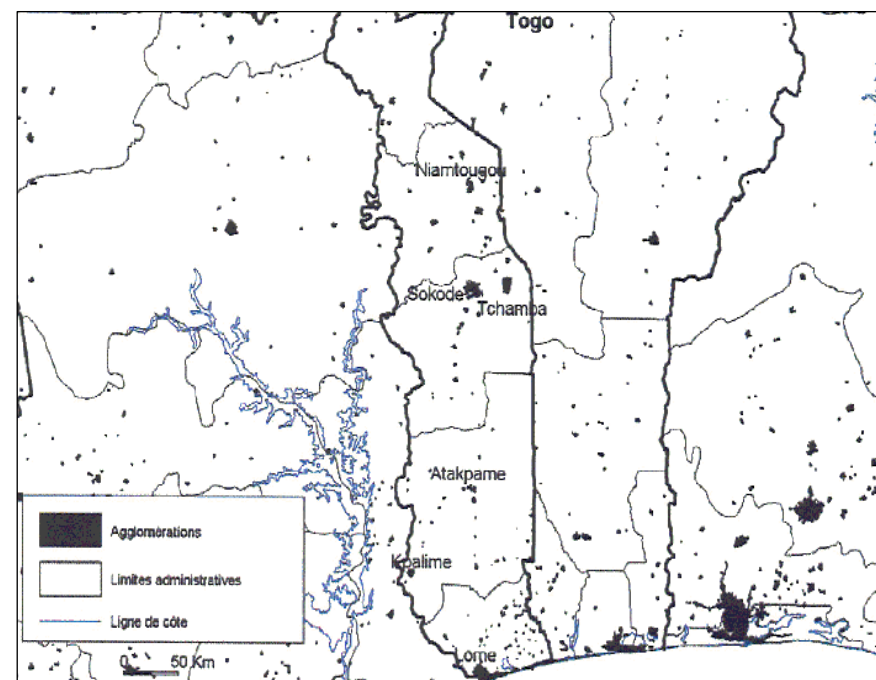
**Agglomerations of Sierra Leone in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)

## Republic of Togo

Population	1970	1981	2020	1950-2000
(en millions)	1,998	2,72	7,254	Pop x 4

Urbanization	1960	1980	2000	2020
Geopolis urbanization rate	8,8	28,5	42,9	49,8
% of the population residing in the metropolitan area of Lomé	5,4	15,9	22,7	24,6
Secondary Towns of 10,000 inhabitants & above				
number	4	19	38	70
average size	12 462	17 472	24 103	26 125
% of resident population	3,4	12,7	20,2	25,2

**Territorial Division.** In 1981 : 5 regions, 21 communes including Lomé, 21 préfectures, cantons/villages, hamlets and farms.



**Agglomerations of Togo in 2000** (Map : Africapolis/SEDET)