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Original Article

Business Ethics as field of training, teaching and research in Francophone Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article has been written within the framework of the Global Survey of Business Ethics 2010. It is seemingly the first attempt to investigate Business Ethics as academic field in Francophone Africa. After a discussion of methodological considerations, the article provides an overview of how Business Ethics is distributed in Francophone Africa. Even though, it is not well established in that part of Africa, some interesting data have been found in some countries like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Rwanda and Senegal. Business Ethics has been investigated in three areas: teaching, training and research. In Francophone Africa, teaching Business Ethics does not seem to be a reality in traditional faculties of Economics, Management or Commerce. Training in Business Ethics, however, is a reality in Francophone Africa, notably with the non-governmental organizations that deal with political and economic governance, development, and women and gender issues. Research on Business Ethics can be found in journals, bulletins, consultancy reports, university term papers, seminars and colloquia as well as in books.

Key words: Business Ethics, Teaching, Training, Research, Francophone Africa

INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of the Global Survey of Business Ethics 2010, the world was divided into nine world regions, one of which was the Sub-Saharan Africa region. This latter region was once more divided into four sub-regions, one of which is Francophone Africa.

This article is a synthesis of the report that was compiled on the Francophone Africa sub-region. It will first discuss some methodological considerations relevant to the sub-region and then describe the prevalence and distribution of Business Ethics as field of teaching, training and research in the sub-region, after which an overview will be given of the state of teaching, training and research in Francophone Africa. Finally the major challenges that are foreseen in the field of Business Ethics over the next five years will be identified, before a number of concluding observations will be made. But, first, an overview of this African sub-region will be given.

Madagascar. For the purpose of the survey some French speaking countries in West Africa, namely Cameroun, Tchad, Niger, Benin and Togo was however included in the West African region. Thus, the African Francophone sub-region under consideration in this article consists of eleven countries: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mauritania, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Senegal. These countries cover a very large part of Africa from North West (Mauritania) to South East (Madagascar). One could divide them into four different parts: West Africa, Equatorial Africa, Central Africa and Madagascar.

The common characteristic of these countries is that they all use French as a language for teaching, and for research and writing. French culture is also influential in these countries since they had been colonized by France and Belgium. This is notably true on the educational level, especially in the secondary schools and universities.

OVERVIEW OF FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Francophone Africa consists of all the Sub-Saharan French speaking countries, including

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As far as I could have established, no

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previous research has been done on Business Ethics as field of teaching, training and research in Francophone Africa. The information that I was able to acquire was collected mainly through three sources: the responses to survey questionnaires sent to institutions and individuals, a literature review, and desktop searches.

Survey questionnaire

There were two versions of this questionnaire: one addressed to institutions and the other one to individuals. The survey questionnaires had to be distributed in universities, research centres and other institutions involved with Business Ethics. The questionnaires were in English. So the first step was to translate them into French.

The distribution of survey questionnaires was no easy assignment. First I tried to send them through e-mails. Sometimes, this worked well. It was in this way that I was able to establish contacts in Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast and the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In other cases hard copies were sent to individuals and institutions for completion. This was done in Rwanda, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of Congo. This method did not turn out to be very effective as a very low response was received. It only worked well in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In the end I concentrated most of my efforts on Burundi where I live. I personally contacted individuals and institutions and stayed with them till they had finished filling in the questionnaires.

For that reason, I have a quite a good response from Burundi, but very few from other parts of Francophone Africa. Hopefully, this will show that the situation is maybe similar in the other countries and that it should be necessary to make a more precise inquiry. Even in Burundi, the responses from the academic and research milieu were relatively poor. Thus I tried to find Business Ethics wherever it possibly might be practiced: non-governmental organizations, civil society, and development institutions.

Literature review

Literature gives a wider and more precise image of the situation of Business Ethics in Francophone Africa than the responses from the survey questionnaires do. I have got a rich harvest from journals, books, reports, and training documents. Unfortunately, it was not possible to go through the whole literature of Francophone Africa. Once again, I have concentrated my efforts on Burundi.

Desktop searches

I tried to have data from desktop searches. For some countries, this gave me an opportunity to discover institutions or individuals interested in Business Ethics.

It is the case for Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Senegal. For others, it was the only way to discover that Business Ethics is not at all a matter of big interest. This is the case for Gabon, Central African Republic, and Congo.

DISTRIBUTION AND PREVALENCE OF BUSINESS ETHICS IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

It would be safe to say that Business Ethics is not well established in most Francophone African countries. For some countries the research methods mentioned above did not render any information about Business Ethics. For some others, only scant data could be found. In the case of countries like Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ivory Coast, Rwanda and Senegal more substantial information were uncovered that can lay the foundation for further research. The situation regarding Business Ethics in countries in the latter category is discussed below.

- Burundi: From the responses to the survey questionnaire, it seems that almost no teaching in Business Ethics occurs at universities in Burundi. Nevertheless, research related to Business Ethics is published in some journals that are produced in Burundi. The journals in which these articles appear, include the following:
Au Coeur de l'Afrique (In the heart of Africa): a Catholic journal dealing with evangelization and cultural issues since 1969. It has, however, recently stopped publication. Earlier it has regularly published articles on fundamental ethics and public morality. From time to time it has also published articles that are clearly related to Business Ethics, even though the term 'Business Ethics' is never mentioned explicitly.
Les Cahiers du Curdes: the journal of the University Centre for Research in Development and Social Sciences, located in the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Burundi. The journal was launched in the 1980, but was stopped in 1993, and was only revived again in 2009. The focus of the journal is on economics in general, but some of the papers do have a focus on Business Ethics.
La Revue de l'IDEC (RIDE) (The Review of the Institute for Economic Development): this review was initiated in 1997 by the autonomous non-governmental economical research centre, IDEC. It usually publishes purely economic articles, but since the last two or three years, the review has been publishing articles on socio-political issues, some of which have a clear business ethical orientation.
Ethique et Société: This is a relatively new journal devoted to research on ethical issues in society. Thus it is the one journal that contains many articles related to Business Ethics. Even though the journal is issued in Burundi, many African authors, especially from other Francophone Africa countries (like Ivory Coast, Cameroun and Democratic Republic of Congo) publish

articles in this journal.

Business Ethics is also addressed in some non-governmental organizations that deal with development, governance, corruption and social issues. They compile reports, produce documents and organize trainings related to Business Ethics. In Burundi, three of them do a particularly good job in sensitizing people to business ethical issues:

Observatoire de l'Action Gouvernementale produces many reports related to Business Ethics, such as gender discrimination, corruption and economic embezzlement, poverty reduction and social justice issues. Since 2006 it has annually been issuing a report on political and economic governance.

Institut Africain pour le Développement économique et Social au Burundi is another non-governmental organization devoted to development, especially in the rural milieu. In Burundi, it has been functioning for more than 30 years and has many members in the rural areas. The Institute publishes booklets, reviews and documents to sensitize the population in rural communities on how to organize and improve agriculture and to fight for their economic rights. It thus largely focuses on practical business ethical issues. The *Olucome* (the observatory for fighting corruption and economic embezzlement) does not publish systematic reports. It rather does investigations into corruption, especially by the governmental authorities, and makes their findings public. It has published a kind of manifesto with as its motto: "corruption kills many and saves few". *Olucome* has also published a code of deontology for public markets. Its members are organized on the national level and they regularly train people to sensitize them about corruption.

Thus, we can see that even although Business Ethics is not a subject of academic teaching, some research, training and advocacy related to Business Ethics do occur in Burundi.

- Democratic Republic of Congo: Although information about Business Ethics in the Democratic Republic of Congo was rather scant and hard to collect, it is nevertheless clear that there is some activity in the field of Business Ethics. The Catholic University of Kinshasa (the former Faculties of Kinshasa), for example, used to organize in the 1980s every year or two years seminars and colloquia both in Theology and Philosophy. Among the many topics that were discussed, Business Ethics, in the wide sense of the word, was present, notably through fundamental ethics, social justice, human rights and development issues. It was, however, not possible to establish whether these seminars still continues.

In the province of Kasai (South-Central part of the Democratic Republic of Congo), there is considerable activity related to Business Ethics. The CEAF&RI (Centre d'Etudes Africaines et de Recherches Internationales),

focuses on women and gender issues in Africa, but also on developmental issues. This is reflected in conferences, research, and publications and can be seen on their website (<http://www.ceafri.org>). A philosopher, Mrs Albertine Tshibilondi, who is an active member of CEAF&RI has published quite a number of Business Ethics related publications.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there also is the Association des Moralistes Congolais (AMOCO) (Association of Congolese Moralists) that deals with business ethical issues, such as corruption and human rights.

- Ivory Coast: In Ivory Coast, two institutions are particularly devoted to Business Ethics. Both are situated in Abidjan. The Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix (Center for Research and Action for Peace) belongs to the Jesuits and is the heir of the former INADES (African Institute for Development and Social Research). It has four departments of which the Institut de la Dignité et des Droits Humains (IDDH) (Institute for Dignity and Human Rights) is particularly devoted to research and teaching in Business Ethics. The Ecole des Sciences Morales et Politiques d'Afrique de l'Ouest (ESMPAO) (School of Moral and Political Sciences of West Africa) organizes two training programmes leading to postgraduate academic qualifications: a Master's degree in Ethics and Governance and a Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Economic Ethics and Sustainable Development, Conflicts Management and Peace and Human Rights. The 2010-2011 catalogue can be found on the website of the Centre (<http://www.cerap-inades.org>). Since April 2004, the Centre has been publishing a Bulletin: La Lettre de l'IDDH, which regularly provides analysis and information on issues related especially to Human Rights. The last issue (number 19) was published at the end of 2008 and is available on their website. The Institut des Hautes Etudes – Afrique (Institute of Advanced Studies), is also situated in Abidjan. It organizes training seminars on Business Ethics especially for corporate managers. Information can be found on the website of the Institute (<http://www.ihe-afrique.org>).
- Rwanda: Business Ethics as field of study does not seem to be well-known in Rwanda. However, recently, two organizations have been launched that might have an influence on the future for Business Ethics in the country. They are the Private Sector Federation which is described as "the umbrella body of private businesses" in Rwanda. The second organization is Transparency Rwanda. The Private Sector Federation (PSF), which is representative of private sector institutions in Rwanda, has found it necessary to establish two business codes: a Code of Business Ethics and a Code of Corporate Governance. The Code of Business Ethics which applies to all its members has been launched in December

2009 under the title: The Code of Business Ethics & Excellence. The Code is described as a tool that provides guidance on correct ethical behaviour to the members of PSF (cf. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200903230311.html> and <http://allafrica.com/stories/200912310035.html>). The Code of Corporate Governance has been introduced as a tool to “promote integrity and transparency” and that will help “build confidence in business community, prevent financial crisis, curbing corporate scandals and driving reform among others” (cf. <http://allafrica.com/stories/200912310035.html>).

Transparency Rwanda is a non governmental organization which is a chapter of Transparency International. It has recently been launched in Rwanda with the aim of conducting “integrity studies to assess corruption in leading institutions, strategies to prevent corruption within Rwandan judiciary and the integrity of town planning services in the Rwandan capital, Kigali” (cf. http://www.transparency.org/news_room/in_focus/2009/promoting_good_governance). It introduces itself as working closely with international Francophone civil society organisations.

- Senegal: In Senegal, there is the “Institut Africain de Management” (IAM) (African Institute of Management), which deals with Business Ethics. The institute is a centre for research and teaching, and it has both national and sub-regional standing, given all the collaborators it has. On the sub-regional level, the Institute conducts research in Senegal, Mauritania, Mali and Guinea. The researchers publish in many areas related to Business Ethics, such as agriculture, health, and financial services. (cf. <http://www.groupeiam.com/spip.php?article254>).

We can conclude by saying that Business Ethics is not a focus area of academic teaching in Francophone Africa. The exception in this respect is CERAD in Abidjan that is really innovating. But, on the other hand, it is clear that research, training and advocacy related to Business Ethics do exist in the Francophone African sub-region. It is even possible that if we had been able to identify more publications and non-governmental organizations, and had been able to engage with civil society all over the sub-region, we would have discovered more reflections, researches and writings related to Business Ethics in other Francophone African countries.

TEACHING, TRAINING AND RESEARCH IN BUSINESS ETHICS IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICA

Teaching, training, and research in Business Ethics exist to a greater or lesser extent in Francophone Africa in the countries and institutions mentioned above. I will distinguish teaching from training in the following way: teaching manifests in formal courses given in the university programs that lead to graduation, while training consists

of seminars, workshops, and conferences, which do not necessarily lead to academic qualifications.

Teaching

From the responses to the survey questionnaire, one can observe that very few universities offer courses clearly focused on Business Ethics. In Burundi, for example, only three universities mention courses explicitly or implicitly related to Business Ethics. In the University of Mwaro, a course entitled ‘Business Ethics’ (Ethique des Affaires) exists in the undergraduate program of the Faculty of Administration and Management. In Hope of Africa University, situated in Bujumbura, some courses are said to be linked to Business Ethics, such as ‘Business Policy’, ‘Business Law’, and ‘Business Practice’. In Light University of Bujumbura, courses with a Business Ethics dimension are: ‘Arbitration Law’ and ‘Business Administration’ in the Faculty of Administration and Management.

The Centre de Recherche et d’Action pour la Paix (CERAP) in Ivory Coast is the only institution that provides a comprehensive academic programme on Business Ethics. Its Institute for Dignity and Human Rights offers both a Master’s degree in Ethics and Governance and a Postgraduate Professional Diploma in Economic Ethics and Sustainable Development, Conflict Management, and Peace and Human Rights.

In other countries, the Catholic University of Bukavu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has a course entitled ‘Codes of Business Ethics’ and in the National University of Rwanda, in Butare, there is a course entitled ‘Legal Ethics’ that also has a business ethical dimension.

Training

Training in Business Ethics in Francophone Africa is mostly offered by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

In Burundi, for more than 40 years, the INADES-Formation organization has organized training programs to help rural communities to develop themselves. The training that they offer has been published in many training documents. Since 2006, OAG (Observatoire de l’Action Gouvernementale) has also regularly been organizing seminars, workshops, and consultancy studies on the government’s political and economic programs. The topics covered in their training sessions include politics, economics, and social issues, but they all are related to political governance. There also is OLUCOME (Observatoire de la Lutte contre la Corruption et les Malversations Economiques) that organizes sensitization seminars on corruption and economic embezzlement.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kasai province, the CEAF&RI (Centre des Etudes Africaines et de Recherches

Internationales) organizes seminars and conferences that focus on gender and other social issues.

The IHE-AFRIQUE (Institut des Hautes Etudes-Afrique) in Ivory Coast, organizes training seminars for corporate leaders on Business Ethics within the framework of corporate governance. The aim of these seminars is to show that ethics has an important role to play in effective corporate governance. Also in Ivory Coast the Institute for Dignity and Human Rights at the Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix (CERAP) has a continuing training section that offers courses on fundamental rights, humanitarian action, culture of peace, and peaceful conflicts resolution, but also on ethics of economics, Business Ethics, governance ethics, and sustainable development. All of these courses aim at preparing people for citizenship, toleration and democracy.

Research

Research in Business Ethics in Francophone Africa is done mostly by university researchers (especially lecturers in the faculties of Economics and Administration Sciences), research centres, and NGOs. The findings of the research are published in journals, bulletins, consultancy reports, university research term papers, and books or presented at colloquia and seminars.

The main themes that were identified in research publications are indicated below:

- Development issues: An analysis of research publications on development issues revealed that the prominent themes related to the ethics of economic development are: difficulties and conditions for sustainable development, the ethics of economic systems, and the ethics of international economic cooperation.
- Women and gender: A considerable number of articles, books, and reports deal with women and gender issues. The main theme in this research is the social, political and economic constraints that women face in African societies, which prevent their active participation in public life.
- Corruption: Corruption is one of the main challenges faced in the field of Business Ethics in Francophone Africa. Three main themes are prominent in research on corruption: analysis of the phenomenon, denunciation and fighting of corruption, and the social and economic consequences of corruption.
- Poverty: Poverty is another issue of concern in Business Ethics in Francophone Africa. The two main themes that emerge in research are: poverty reduction, and the relationship between economic growth and poverty.
- Political governance and ethics: There is also some research in Francophone Africa that is critical of political governance in the region and of the impact of poor political governance on Business Ethics. The

other side of this approach is the articulation of the ethical requirements of good governance, especially in democratic institutions.

- Corporate governance: The main business ethical theme that is pursued with regard to corporate governance is that of corporate social responsibility.
- Environment: Some questions related to environmental issues are raised by researchers in Francophone Africa. These are notably: radioactive waste, responsibility for and consequences of environmental deterioration, population growth, and sustainable development.

CHALLENGES IN BUSINESS ETHICS

The last question of the survey questionnaires was related to what people and institutions consider to be the major challenges or issues in the field of Business Ethics over the next 5 years. The answers were as many as the people and institutions who have responded. There were, however, some challenges that were mentioned three or more times by different respondents.

The first issue is corruption and economic embezzlement. Corruption is considered a big threat to good political and economic governance in Africa. This is linked with phenomena like tribalism, nepotism, transparency in public affairs management, and political and economic governance in developing countries.

A second big ethical challenge for Africa over the next five years that stood out is corporate social responsibility specifically in relation to globalization and multinational enterprises. In this respect a number of questions are raised: international economic inequalities, poverty reduction policies, and aid for developing countries.

Finally, some people - particularly from the academic milieu - have identified intellectual property as a big issue in Business Ethics in Africa over the next five years.

CONCLUSION

Business Ethics still has not found a proper foothold in universities in Francophone Africa. Business affairs and public service are functioning as if ethics is not necessary for them. However, the research that has been reviewed above demonstrates that people are aware of the necessity of ethics. Many indications of the need for ethics are evident in the themes covered in research and training on Business Ethics. Respondents of the survey questionnaire provided interesting proposals on how to tackle the challenges related to Business Ethics in Africa and especially in Francophone Africa. Their suggestions include: implementing Business Ethics in social and economic relationships; improving quality of goods and services on individual, national, commercial and international levels, fighting corruption

and fraud, and promoting good political and economic governance.

Despite my attempts to cover all countries in Francophone Africa, responses were not forthcoming from all countries, thus this article does not provide a comprehensive view of Business Ethics in Francophone Africa. I hope this research will be a foundation for further research, and I encourage other researchers to continue and improve on what has been presented in this article. I also hope that this article will raise more interest in Business Ethics in Francophone Africa on all levels.

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