

## *Chapter 8*

# **The Professional Insertion of African Graduates: The Case of the Université de Conakry**

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### **INTRODUCTION AND APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM**

This section includes a discussion of basic training, additional training, internships and their role in ensuring access to employment. It will also look at the role of training as well as contacts in Guinea. Generally speaking, this study seeks to understand and explain how, through additional training, internships and networks of family contacts, graduates of higher institutions manage to enter the Guinean job market. Relying on qualitative data collected in Conakry, Guinea, in West Africa, from 40 graduates who left two Faculties of the *Université de Conakry* (FLSH and FS), it attempts to:

- 1) Create a profile of respondents, their basic university training, additional training pursued and the role of these in determining job access and
- 2) Explain the role of internships and the contacts in Guinea.

The purpose of this study is not to outline in details how graduates integrate into the job market, but rather to examine the principal aspects of the link between basic university training, additional training and contact networks in helping graduates to access jobs in Guinea.

I propose an interpretative model of the insertion process and hypothesize that the elements that play a decisive role on the career path of graduates of the Guinean university system are family background and the contact networks associated with it. In other words, family origin can, at times, give a distinct advantage in the search for a job. This advantage manifests itself in offers of on the job training (internships) and the financing of additional training in computing, English or management accounting, for example.

I will first show the impact of additional training on access to employment by looking at a) the types of training pursued and b) the skills acquired after training, closely relating these to basic training. Secondly, by drawing on the data collected, I will show the role that internships and contacts (corruption and nepotism) play in determining graduates' ability to obtain jobs in Guinea.

## Education and Careerism

### THE STUDY

This exploratory study on graduates' insertion into the job market uses a sample base of 40 graduates of the *Universite de Conakry* (20 from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and 20 from the Faculty of Sciences). Conakry was chosen because just over half (51, 1%) of the country's urban population of more than 2.400.000 live there (Guinea has a population of just over 7.100.000 people). This means that Conakry has the highest number of graduates from the Guinean university system. Besides, the *Universite de Conakry* is the largest Guinean institution of higher learning.

The survey sample is drawn from student lists, by year and discipline, provided by Faculties or departments. Given the subject matter, I opted for a qualitative approach and use of the interview, which seemed the most appropriate tool for collecting detailed and complex data on the training and professional insertion of graduates over a period of two years. On the basis of the data collected, I propose a model, which from a sociological standpoint makes it possible to track the insertion process. This model of analysis emphasizes the links between further training, internships and networks of contacts, while seeking to respond to the following questions:

- a) Do graduates of the *Universite de Conakry* manage to enter the job market, under what conditions, over what period of time and what difficulties do they face?
- b) What assets do graduates who find jobs shortly after graduation have over the majority of their colleagues who have to wait more than two years before landing a first job?
- c) How does basic university training articulate with the Guinean job market?

### PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The data gathered show the following: Fifteen respondents are from *Basse Guinee*, eleven of whom studied in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FLSH). Twelve respondents are from *Moyenne Guinee*, nine of whom did their studies in the Faculty of Science (FS). Six graduates are from *Guinee Forestiere*, all of whom studied 0 Tc(f) Tj-0.721( dat) F0.343 Tc( th) Tj0 Tc(e) Tj1.152 Tw40.014 Tc((FH)) Tj0 Tc(.) Tj0.

### The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

old. The oldest graduate (30 years old) studied in the FLSH, while the oldest graduate from the FS is 29 years old. The average age of graduates from both Faculties is 26 years.

If interviewees are mainly sons of civil servant—23 out of 40—(eleven from the FLSH and twelve from the FS), eight of them have a father who is a farmer and a mother who is a homemaker (six from the FLSH and two from the FS) and seven have parents who are business people. There are three whose parents are artisans or from the working class. The average number of years between entering primary school and completing university is 19 years for those who studied in the FS and 18 years for those who studied in the FLSH.

Of the 40 persons interviewed, half are unemployed, the most affected being graduates from the FS. Employed graduates are broken down as follows: 12 are contract workers with renewable yearly contracts (all are contracted to the Ministry of Pre-University Education [*Ministere de l'enseignement pre-universitaire*]) while the other eight are engaged in work of unspecified duration. Among the latter, seven work in the private sector and one in the Guinean civil service. Employed respondents, whether they work in the private or public sector, except for a few, occupy jobs that are not related to their field of study at university. Of the 20 employed graduates, only eight, four from the FS and four from the FLSH, work in an area related to their field of study. Of the 20 persons interviewed who studied in the FS, five graduated in mathematics, five in physics, five in biology and five in chemistry. The study streams in the FLSH were more varied, with four graduates each from the teacher of French option, sociology, cultural facilitation, and three each from journalism, history and tourism.

At the *Universite de Conakry* the normal program of study lasts four years, except for the Faculty of Medicine and Pharmacy, where it is between five and six years. The data collected shows that the average university stay was four years, with the longest being six years, or two repeats over the course of a university career.

### TRAINING AT THE UNIVERSITE DE CONAKRY

Established in 1962, the *Universite de Conakry* comprises four Faculties (Sciences; Medicine and Pharmacy; Law, Economics and Management Sciences; Arts and Social Sciences), a Polytechnic Institute, a data-processing center, and an environmental research and

## Education and Careerism

ing. Attrition rate was less than 10% in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and 25% in Faculty of Science (PADES, 1998).

Each program has its own time frame within which students are expected to complete their studies. This aims at discouraging the phenomenon of the "professional student", that is, the student who remains at university indefinitely, occupying a space that could be used by a high school leaver. And, since it ultimately costs the state to keep students in university for a protracted period, judicious management suggests that resources be used in the training of as many persons as possible.

In the FS, 61% of registered students complete their studies within the specified time frame (four years), 9% complete after an additional year and the others complete after two additional years or withdraw. In the FLSH, 68% of registered students complete their studies within the normal cycle (four years), 18% after an additional year, 12% two years later, while 2% withdraw.

With regard to our sample, the exercise consisted in collecting data by way of a guided interview of 40 graduates, who left the *Universite de Conakry* a year or two ago. The 40 graduates are broken down as follows: 20 from the FS, including five women, and 20 from the FLSH, including six women. All options and streams of study were targeted in each Faculty. In the FS, there are the following options: mathematics, chemistry, physics and biology. Given that there are few laboratories and industries (chemical, physical and biological) in the country, graduates from these options have difficulties finding jobs.

With regard to the FLSH, the streams are as follows: teacher of French, sociology, cultural facilitation, journalism, history and tourism. Respondents from these options generally find work in education. However, students do not always leave the university with the skills necessary for entering the world of work. Although some new courses have been put in place in a few programs to remedy this situation, access to these courses remains limited. A case in point is the informatics course, which is a compulsory course for all students in the Faculty. The condition at the university, where access is limited to students in the computer program (numbering no more than 30 per year). Another situation relates to the teaching of English, which is a compulsory course for all students in the Faculty. The condition at the university, where access is limited to students in the computer program (numbering no more than 30 per year). Another situation relates to the teaching of English, which is a compulsory course for all students in the Faculty.

## The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

for the world of work and seldom manage to enter the job market. In addition, university education is not sufficiently linked to the world of work and produces graduates who are ill-informed about the job market, under-productive because they lack specific training in the area endeavor of the businesses in which they are employed.

Apparently, this is why specialization is necessary in the Guinean economic context, meaning that in addition to job related skills in English, informatics, management, courses in setting up and managing small businesses should be added to university programs. In such a context, graduates, upon leaving university, are forced to do additional training, seek internships or use their networks of contacts in order to adapt the demands of the Guinean job market. This situation leads one to ask the question: how valuable is basic university training? Do the diplomas awarded correspond to the needs of the Guinean job market?

### **ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT**

In this section, I present the types of additional training pursued, the skills acquired and the role of internships in accessing employment. However, I must first point out that the data gathered in this study show that graduates' perceptions regarding certain points converge perfectly; on other points there is only partial convergence, while there is disagreement on the rest. For example, there is complete agreement regarding the need for training in computing, English and management accounting and the role of internships in accessing jobs. Respondents' perceptions diverged on the role of contacts in accessing jobs.

### **TYPES OF TRAINING**

The data show that a majority of interviewees attach great importance to additional training as a means of enhancing their chances of entering the job market. The types of training most requested by employed as well as unemployed graduates are computing, English, accounting or management. These areas of study are seldom offered (and not at all in some Faculties) at the *Université de Conakry*. This underscores the need to do this training during or after the university.

Several types of training options may be demarcated. For ease of reference, these are broken down into four categories. The first consists of computing and English. A number of graduates have pursued training courses in these areas or wish to do so as soon as possible (EMAS1, EMAS17, EFFE29, EFFE30 and EMAS11). The subject areas in this category are regarded as essential to enhancing competitiveness on the job market. This has been the case for EMAS 14, who has, in addition, pursued a variety of other training options, such as accounting management and computing. In fact, there is often no lack of desire to pursue additional training. Often, however, the problem is an inability to pay for the courses. Learning to use a software such as Word, for instance, costs 50.000 FG, an amount which is prohibitively high for many graduates. This is equivalent to 41 Canadian dollars as one Canadian dollar is 1.228 FG at the time of this

## Education and Careerism

study. Of course, some respondents had the opportunity to pursue internships at institutions where computers were available. On the other hand, for those who did not have that opportunity, it would be necessary for universities and Faculties to make provisions to facilitate students learning to use this tool that is vital not only for training but also for job searches.

The second category consists of management accounting. Many graduates pursue additional training in this area or "entrepreneurship," or wish to do so as soon as possible. For many, pursuing a variety of training options enhances their ability to enter the job market, while others claim that the courage it took for them to do additional training made it possible for them to escape the camp of unemployed graduates.

A third category of training comprises teacher education (EMAS3) or German language (UFFS39 and EMFS34). Graduates who pursue this option do so independently of training in, say, computing. Those pursuing courses in this category demonstrate clearly why there is need for a variety of additional training options in order to adapt to the needs of the Guinean job market. The following excerpt illustrates:

While at university, I studied educational psychology, which means that at the end of my studies I could launch out into teaching. Above all that allowed me to find my way into the profession without waiting for a long time. Thus, I managed to enter the teaching profession from the outset (EMAS3).

In other instances, additional training constitutes doing **only** courses in German language, which some graduates think will enhance their chances of getting employed. In Guinea there are businesses, such as the vehicle importation company, GETMA, that hires graduates with competence in German. The fear of unemployment after university often leads graduates to pursue various training options in order to gain skills that increase their chances of entering the job market. Furthermore, as Barry (2000) points out, graduates seek the advice of educated parents in the pursuit of multiple avenues of training, which explains why some graduates pursue additional studies simultaneously with university programs. However, as EMAS11 explains, it is often difficult to carry both university and alternative studies course loads:

While at university, I attempted to do additional courses in English and computing simultaneously, but after a certain point I had to abandon them because of lack of funds and because there was nobody to help me out. From experience, I can say that these kinds of training can help when it comes time to look for jobs. Everywhere I went, employers were looking for training in English and computing

If some students were not able to carry both university and additional courses simultaneously, others did so without problems and in the end managed to find jobs. In summary, if respondents have had (or expect) to pursue a number of options for further training in order to boost their chances of entering the job

## The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

market, computing, followed by English and accounting, remains a priority for all of them. These subject areas are followed by circumstantial training (teacher education, German, etc).

### **SKILLS ACQUIRED AFTER TRAINING**

In general, training in computing is limited to business office software. Respondents who spoke about the skills acquired after further training in computing, mainly said that they were able to do word processing and the entry and analysis of survey data on Excel. Many expressed a sense of satisfaction and confidence at being able to enter and analyze survey data.

If interviewees were generally skilled in software such as Word and Excel, few claimed to master database processing software such as Access. Some respondents, however, from the Faculty of Sciences, according to their future interests or place of internship, trained and gained valuable skills in scientific software, such as Mathematica. They expect that this experience will boost their chances of getting jobs with projects or NGOs in Guinea. Beyond training in business office software, some respondents have improved their computing skills by adding internet surfing and research to their repertoire. "I am not an expert on the matter (research on the net) now, but I can boast of having surfed and of being able to use this new technology to access information" comments EMAS3.

Regarding skills in English, most who have studied the language as an additional course said they managed fairly well in it. However, only three persons claimed to be proficient. Two of these have found jobs because of their mastery of English, a determining factor in recruitment tests they did. It seems that many students learn English, but few demonstrate sufficient knowledge of it in interviews or in hiring tests. This lack of competence constitutes a major handicap in the way of getting a job in Guinea, where knowledge of English is the most important requirement in job offers posted by most NGOs and projects.

All the respondents who benefited from additional training in teacher education claimed to have gained experience and that they were able to effectively deliver classes at the secondary level. However, since i,

### Education and Careerism

My being computer literate was an asset for the job I was seeking. They were looking for somebody to do data entry for the agencies in the company that employed me and since at that time I had done computing and had a degree, I had an advantage. That helped me quite a bit in finding my job (EFFS30).

The respondents claim that basic university training and contacts help in job access but that without contacts it is even more difficult, if not impossible to find employment in Guinea's current socio-economic climate. This shows generally how important further training is in graduates' search for employment. Furthermore, when graduates apply for jobs, priority is given to those whose dossiers indicate that they have pursued additional training. It is for this reason that large numbers of students are increasingly becoming interested in computing and English, since employers in Guinea, as elsewhere, require that candidates have these two skills in addition to their basic university training. Thus, even respondents who have not yet pursued the option of further training hope to do so as soon as possible, since it is an indispensable requirement of the job market both for those already employed and those looking for their first job. As EMAS15 states, "I haven't really done any additional training but I am thinking of doing some. Actually, I am betting on management accounting because my current job is related to finance".

To a certain extent, respondents felt that the lack of additional training hindered them accessing employment, notably in the NGOs working in Guinea. Indeed, most NGOs give priority to proficiency in English or computing in their recruitment of staff, which, as the following extract illustrates, shows the importance of pursuing training in these areas:

Not being computer literate and not speaking English are a handicap for me. We know that scientific output today is in English. Even if we are a French-speaking country, training in English can lead to a success rate of 60% on the job market, particularly among the NGOs. (UMAS13)

Yet, if respondents generally agree on the role of further training in job access in Guinea, most focus on computing and English, which are the skills most often sought after by employers. This suggests that graduates pursue training in these areas as a function of the perceived effect they will have on employment

## The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

ability to understand English. To appreciate this scenario, it must be recalled that companies in Guinea have very few analysts/programmers, which explains in part the demand for knowledge of database management software. Training in computing and English is thus a significant step for graduates, since acquiring these skills significantly impacts on their ability to enter the job market.

This situation is not unique to Guinea. In Canada, for instance, a study carried out by Audet (1995: 484) with Relance de l'Universite de Montreal shows that the rate of insertion into the job market of data-processing students 12 weeks after graduating is 100%. It is, however, necessary to point out that here it is a question of training information specialists, whereas in Guinea, training is in relation to basic software. Another study carried out by Piche and Ouedraogo (1995) in Mali and Senegal show similar results, pointing to the fact that computer literacy generally constitutes an asset for insertion into the job market. Another point worth noting is the gap between finishing university and defense of research project. In fact without a diploma, those leaving university are not able to apply for jobs and therefore are left in unemployment. Even after defending the research paper, graduates are faced with administrative obstacles that prevent them from receiving their diplomas immediately. Thus, these graduates prefer to devote their time engaged in "practical internships" in businesses in order to gain a certain level of experience and advantage in regard to job offers.

### **METHODS OF INSERTING INTO THE JOB MARKET**

This section examines the role of internships in determining access to employment, as well as the importance given to contacts, more specifically of parents and friends, in the Guinean job market.

#### **The Role of Internships in Obtaining jobs**

For a long time, the Guinean State was the main, if not the only employer of graduates. Today, however, the search for employment is left to the efforts of the graduates, since for more than a decade the Guinean public sector has seldom recruited new staff. This, combined with the very low rate of private sector recruitment makes internships and further training even more necessary for gaining access to employment. Respondents' opinions on the role of internships in obtaining jobs are divided. The vast majority of them think that internships constitute an effective means of insertion into the job market. To a certain extent, respondents feel that internships allow them to overcome some barriers to employment, such as lack of experience. Given that many job offers require applicants to have at least two or three years working experience, internships can give graduates the opportunity to gain that experience. For this category of graduates, not having a job necessarily means that they have to pursue internships to enrich their experience in order to gain access to certain categories of work, notably with institutions such as the UNDP and UNICEF, which are potential employers of graduates.

## Education and Careerism

If the vast majority of interviewees think that internships constitute an effective means of insertion into the job market, since graduates who are successful on internships have greater chances of being retained by the organizations where they have attachments, others judge that these internship attachments do not always allow graduates to pick up jobs. On the contrary, they think it contributes to holding back graduates even more. Moreover, interviewees say graduates sometimes remain in internships for more than two years in the hope of some day being hired. Unfortunately, however, many end up not being employed. In such situations, trainees find themselves back at the starting block. Indeed, some employers take advantage of the excess labor supply and the fact that interns are not paid to prop up their businesses, choosing to renew internships rather than recruit the graduates. Thus, graduates move from one internship to another over the course of several years, as the following extract testifies:

There are internships where you can do 6 or 7 months, sometimes even years, without being hired. The most striking example in Guinea is Radio Television Guineenne, where there are persons who have done as many as 11 years as interns and have still not been employed. But because that is how they make their living, they cannot leave (EMAS19).

It should be noted that *Radio Television guineenne* is the only radio/television station in Guinea. Thus interns who have learnt skills working with the organization have no employment alternatives. Although interns at the station are not paid, they live off gifts from members of the public or organizations that are pleased with their work.

From a certain point of view, respondents do not appreciate having to do internships in order to pick up jobs. However, they feel that if students cannot find jobs at the end of their studies, it is better for them to do internships or pursue additional training. They justify this view by pointing out that in general, Guinean universities, and that of Conakry in particular, do not train specialists but generalists. This translates into the phenomenon of training not corresponding to job requirements, a major weakness of African education systems in general and that of Guinea in particular. This is

### The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

From the data gathered, it appears that internships give an advantage in job search and job access, since certain ministries and offices will hire graduates because they have done two years of internship and now know their jobs. Respondents view even places that offer internship without the possibility of subsequent hiring them as essential to guaranteeing access to employment, since the skills acquired at one place can always be transferred to another organization. Thus, internships allow graduates to pick up jobs even if it is not at the place where the internship is offered.

Lastly, it is necessary to point out that apart from internships and training, certain graduates use other procedures to gain access to jobs, for example the work experience accumulated during studies. It must be remembered that there are the rare students who combine studies with work, generally in a family business. Upon leaving university, these students find employment immediately because they already have work experience. All things considered, internships, further training and work experience during studies are the primary routes for graduates to find employment in Guinea.

Analysis of the results of the study of the role of internships in gaining access to jobs makes it possible to conclude that respondents' valorization of internships corresponds with the perceptions of employers, who pay attention to these aspects when seeking to hire. Indeed, there is a strong correspondence between the perceptions of respondents and those of employers.

## Education and Careerism

In industrialized countries, one could be led to think, at first sight, that university graduates, because of their high level of training and the selection process through which they have passed, would encounter problems of professional insertion. They indeed have a relative advantage on the job market. But, to appreciate this advantage, it is important to place it against the backdrop of the public sector, which constituted the main avenue of employment for graduates. Indeed, during the 80s, as a result of pressures on expenditure, the public sector underwent significant transformation, making it no longer able to offer the same employment possibilities; but this was at a time when higher education was continuing to expand. These constraints are even more acute in the context of economic recession at the start of the 90s, and are likely to seriously modify the outlets graduates have for employment. [...] The gap between supply and demand leads to a worsening of the conditions of insertion for graduates and to under-employment.

Finally, to get a broader picture of the influence of internships on professional insertion, one must not only pay attention to socio-economic factors. The structural adjustment programs of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which affect in particular, Conakry, Guinea's capital and the place where most businesses likely to offer employment to graduates are concentrated.

Often graduates combine internships and contact networks (dealt with in details in the next section) in the aim of getting jobs. This combination, aimed at enhancing professional insertion, results from the fact that basic university training does not correspond to employment options in the Guinean market, a situation which is typical of many African countries. For example, a study conducted by Lachaud (1994) in Mali, indicates that the imbalance between training and employment affects the job market in such a way that in the 90s only between 30 and 50 percent of graduates were able to find jobs. The lowest rates of employment was seen among graduates who had general training, although graduates with training in

### The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

One can therefore conclude that in certain instances, graduates' perceptions about the role of internships correspond to the reality of the Guinean job market. In the absence of internships, chances of entering the work world are limited. However, when graduates have contacts, they can readily get employment without serving as interns. One can therefore say that an internship that is supported by a network of contacts can lead to problem from insertion into the job market.

### **THE WEIGHT OF CONTACT NETWORKS IN GUINEA**

In Guinea, contact networks occupy an extremely important position when seeking employment. For both employed and unemployed respondents, contact networks, along with training and internships, constitute means of easing the way into the job market. In general, respondents with jobs claimed to have used their contacts to get these jobs, and those seeking jobs say they will make use of their contacts if the need arises.

This reality of the Guinean job market corroborates the theory of Kelley (1976: 99) regarding access to employment, which states: "it is a lasting advantage to be born in a high-class family. This advantage manifests itself at school and when getting a first job, which has lasting effects on the career of a person". In other words, family background gives an unquestionable advantage in the search for employment. In Guinea, this advantage translates into the possibility of being offered on the job placement, help to finance further training or to start a business.

This situation is not specific to Guinea. A study carried out in Canada by Guedon (2000: 80), confirms this analysis by showing that: "graduates from a comfortable and financially secure home environment, those with a happily employed father or those able to use the resources at their disposal, are in a better position of insertion than graduates deprived of social support and constrained to turn to short term and irregular jobs." This position is shared by authors such as Fournier (1997) and Gauthier (1990), who maintain that graduates with a troubled family history and chronic problems at school, run a greater risk of being excluded over the long run from the regular job market.

Two categories of respondents can be distinguished: The first consists of those graduates employed in the private or public sector, who found employment by using their network of contacts. Respondents who have no contacts (relatives or friends) find it very difficult to gain employment in Guinea, where it is necessary to be recommended or to have well placed relatives or acquaintances who can give that kind of assistance, as EFFS30 points out:

In my case, if I had not gotten wind of the contest, I am sure I would not have found out that they were hiring here (place of work). And there too, if I didn't know a few people (contacts), I would surely have not gotten the job.

## Education and Careerism

Data collected during the interviews show that at the *Universite de Conakry*, graduates whose parents do not have the financial means use their contact networks (friends, professors, cousins, aunts, uncles etc.) to benefit from additional training. This reality of the Guinean job market is not unique. If one refers, for example, to Granovetters (1983) work on "The strength of weak ties", one sees that access to the job market more often results from distant contacts rather than from direct family ties. It is what authors such as Granovetter (1992) call "small chain" networks, which are sometimes more productive than family networks in enabling professional insertion. This point of view is shared by Nicole-Drancourt (1995), who concludes that the graduates of the institutes of technologies of the *Universite de Franche* got their first jobs mainly through networks of former school friends. Respondents without such contact networks or who come from low status families, end up either under-employed in order to save for further studies or give up the idea of further training, which generally leads to chronic unemployment and/or their exclusion from the job market (see diagram of the insertion process on page 5).

The phenomenon of using contacts get jobs is not unique to Guinea. A similar situation was observed in Mali, where a study was conducted by Piche and Antoine (1995). The authors of this study show that it is through social, family and cultural networks that young graduates are able to find their place in the urban job market of Bamako.

The second category includes respondents who are not yet employed, but who plan to make use of contacts in their attempts to find jobs. They believe that with their basic university training and skills it is difficult, without contacts, to get employment. If some respondents only think of making use of contacts, others go further to explain the effect of contact networks on the Guinean job market and to denounce certain attitudes that they consider unacceptable, such as the relegation of training to second place with primacy being accorded to contacts, a situation which often leads to nepotism, as UMFS24 explains:

I know a friend who did a test for a post as an accounting expert. The (previous) accounting expert had returned home and had to be replaced by a Guinean. A formal test was arranged, however, it was discovered that his father was a high-ranking official of the ministry in charge of the company in question. He was therefore given a hand and now occupies this well paid job with a company car with chauffeur and all, and that does not include the other benefits. Yet this guy does not have the necessary skills for the job. This shows that training is not the most important aspect in Guinea for getting a job. It is also important to have contacts, very good contacts, otherwise getting a job is practically impossible.

This situation is also present in places such as Mali, where some graduates make use of their "family ties" to get employment. Furthermore, Gerald's (1997) study, "The Marginalization and Quest for Integration of Young Unemployed Bamako Graduates" [*Marginalisation et recherche d'integration desjeunesdipl-*

### The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

*mis Bamakois au chomage"]* shows the extent to which graduates need the help of contacts in professional insertion. Gerard's study reveals that 81.6% of the young people questioned feel that, without contact networks, they cannot find work in Bamako; 58.5% of graduates who found jobs got them by this means.

In my study in Guinea, some respondents point out that after a series of disappointing recruitment test results, they began regarding contact networks or money as the only means of getting jobs. Even those respondents who got their jobs by simply depositing their dossiers stress the importance of contacts, and point to the fact that many graduates have used money as a means of acquiring jobs. The use of money in the Guinean job market constitutes a form of generalized corruption and is consequently an obstacle in the way of graduates seeking their first job. This means that graduates with no financial means or parental support can do nothing in the face of competition from persons able to pay the amounts frequently demanded of up to three times the monthly salary of a senior civil servant. According to interviewees, public sector recruitment tests, for example, require between 500.000 and 1 million FG (This was between 407 and 814 Canadian dollars at the time of collecting data for this study (November, 2001)).

Once the required sum is paid, there is no need to worry about tests. What matters is knowing who to give the money to and when. After the money is paid over, a ministerial decree is normally issued indicating that the graduate has been employed.

Interpretation of the data in this section makes it possible to conclude that generally respondents (whether employed or not) are all agreed on the influence of contact networks in Guinea. It is noteworthy that the perceptions of respondents, and surprisingly those of respondents who are employed, regarding the use of family

## Education and Careerism

role of family networks in determining access to employment is shared by Paul and Renaud (1976), for whom the child of a high class family is given economic support that he or she uses to gain an education, material goods and contact networks. The inverse occurs with the son of a lower status family.

Authors such as Vinokur (1995), point out that factors such as educational background and level and type of diploma do not explain all aspects of how persons get access to their first jobs, since persons with the same educational background can have different professional paths. Thus for Vinokur (1995), on the basis of an identical diploma, young people from privileged backgrounds and/or those with contacts have a greater advantage of gaining employment compared to other young people. In fact, it is obvious that social origin implicitly translates into capacity to resort to professional, family or friendship networks formed on the basis of family connections in order to access a first job. This reading brings into focus the family network and its role in the rate of professional insertion of individuals and their ascent up the social ladder. In the words of Passeron (1970: 27):

By modeling the ambitions of each family member to the family's social status, every family sub-system plays an essential role in the process of job insertion. The family thus determines, in the first instance, access to and, thereafter, the keeping of a job. Employment, in its turn, provides skills and prepares individuals for occupying available social positions.

In the case of Guinea in general and the *Universite de Conakry* in particular, graduates have different opportunities to successfully insert into the professional world. By its social position, its capital (cultural and economic) and its structure, the family network plays an important role in this process. This role is most evident during basic university training, when resources need to be mobilized and during the search for employment, when other types of resources, such as internships and additional training need to be mobilized.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to seek to understand how the professional insertion of certain graduates of the Guinean university system, specifically those trained at the *Universite de Conakry*, occurred. With regard to the problematic, analysis focused on the output of the university system and the insertion of graduates into the job market. It avoids seeing professional insertion as a simple uninterrupted passage from university to the job market. Rather, it sees it as a process spread over a period of time, during which graduates may go from basic university training to additional training and internships, from job search to employment/unemployment or exclusion (inactivity) from the job market. This analysis calls into question the link between the training Guinean graduates received and their ability to find employment. This brings to the fore the persistent question of the inadequacy of university training in meeting employment needs in the country.

### The Professional Insertion of African Graduates

Contrary to assumptions that graduates of Faculty of Science have a better rate of professional insertion, the observations in this study suggest that graduates of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences do better at obtaining jobs after graduation. The need for further trainings indicate that contrary to conventional wisdom, basic university training is no longer enough as a means of providing access to employment in Guinea. Another tendency, which appears clear in this study, and which is corroborated by other studies, is that that Guinean graduates, whose dossier consisted solely of basic university training were either unemployed or in unstable jobs after leaving the *Universite de Conakry*. This explains why a large proportion of them choose to do further training with the obvious aim of increasing their chances of gaining employment even if in an area unrelated to their training. According to PADES, participating in internships seems (60% of respondents) to be the most important way of gaining a job in Guinea. In this regard, this study joins that of PADES, while at the same time confirming its own research hypothesis that internships are indispensable in gaining employment in Guinea. Additionally, contrary to PADES' study, which shows that employed and unemployed graduates consider university training very positively, this study shows that employed and unemployed graduates of the *Universite de Conakry* do not judge the training they received very positively. This negative evaluation of their university training related to the fact that the programs taught did not meet the needs of the Guinean job market.

Regarding employment, comparisons show that it is graduates who have at least done additional training (in computing, English or management- accounting) who manage to make the best of their situations, especially considering the fact that in Guinea today, without additional training and without internship, it is difficult even impossible to get a job. Additionally, employed interviewees confirm that contact networks play an important role in accessing jobs in Guinea. Respondents all agree that this is a factor that regularly determines who gets jobs in Guinea. This phenomenon is aggravated by corruption and nepotism.

### Notes

I would like to thank *R. Anthony Lewis* for the translation of this text.

Guinea has four regions: *Basse Guinee*, *Moyenne Guinee*, *Haute Guinee* and *Guinee Forestiere*.

I used a few abbreviations in this chapter. Below are the full renditions of each of them:

- FLSH = *Faculte des lettres et sciences humaines* = Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and FS = *Faculte des sciences* = Faculty of Sciences.
- EMAS= Employed Male graduate, Faculty Arts and Social Sciences.
- UMAS= Unemployed male graduate, Faculty des Lettres et Sciences Humaines.
- EFAS= Employed female graduate, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
- UFAS= Unemployed female graduate, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.
- EMFS= Employed male graduate, Faculty of Sciences.

### Education and Careerism

- UMFS= Unemployed male graduate, Faculty of Sciences.
- EFFS= Employed female graduate, Faculty of Sciences.
- UFFS= Unemployed female graduate, Faculty of Sciences.

These areas of study are seldom offered (and not at all in some Faculties) at the *Université de Conakry*.

Or 41 Canadian dollars (one Canadian dollar = 1.228 FG at the time of this study).

*Radio Television guineenne* is the only radio/television station in Guinea, thus interns who have learnt skills working with the organization have no employment alternatives. Although interns at the station are not paid, they live off gifts from members of the public or organizations that are pleased with their work.

Audet (1988), *Relance du ministere de l'Education* states that in 1987, a period of relative prosperity, only 54% of students with an undergraduate degree for two years were employed in permanent jobs related to their area of study.

Between 407 and 814 Canadian dollars at the time of collecting data for this study (November, 2001).

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