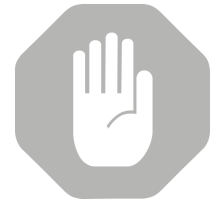


Togo Focus Group Research

Report and Analysis



Report and Analysis of the Focus Group Research carried out in Togo by MECI on behalf of SCWA during 2016.

Edition — recompiled 2f (English) 2024.

...refer to Annex 1a edition — collated 2c2b (English) 2016, (reformatted 2022) — for the full anonymised data.

Introduction

For localities where accusations of witchcraft against children are common, the SCWA Coalition has developed an effective Model of Change. In partnership with local leaders in the churches and faith-based organisations, we work to advocate and act by challenging harmful beliefs and practices, and by providing positive alternatives.

Focus groups in context...

Our Model of Change proposes five phases: 1. developing relationships and forming a Planning Committee; 2. researching understandings using Focus Groups; 3. facilitating dialogue via an Action Forum; 4. inspiring action through Interactive Training Workshops; and 5. cascading impact into the wider community.

The second phase (researching understandings using Focus Groups) has been crucial to gaining insight into the essential *roots*, everyday *realities*, and existing *responses* to child witch accusations, and provided the foundations for developing an effective modular intervention to target several of key aspects of how adults perceive and treat children.

SCWA's partners completed initial Focus Group Research as follows:

- in **D.R. Congo** (Kinshasa region) by EPED during 2013.
- in **Togo** by MECI during 2016.
- in **Nigeria** by BRCI (in Cross River State) and Storychangers (in Akwa Ibom State) during 2020.

Note that all the Anonymised Data arising from this Focus Group Research in each location is retained on file by SCWA, with copies in the original languages (where provided) as well as translated into French or English.

This report concerns the Focus Group Research completed in Togo.

Togo

The Togolese republic is a small country in West Africa bordered by Ghana to the west, Benin to the east, and Burkina Faso to the north. It covers an area of about 57,000 square kilometres. It ranks 41st in geographical size out of 54 African nations. The capital city is Lomé, which lies on the Gulf of Guinea in the extreme southwestern corner of Togo.

There is a mix of religions, with indigenous beliefs including animism and voodoo being widespread. There are significant Christian and Muslim minorities.

Witchcraft beliefs are common across the nation and are present in all religious groups. Children are increasingly targeted, although elderly people are also vulnerable to accusations. Those labelled as “witches” then are stigmatised, ostracised, and subject to harm through various forms of abuse.

the Research

Focus Group Research (phase 2 of the Model of Change) was undertaken in Togo during 2016 by SCWA’s partner MECI (Mission Enfant pour Christ International).

MECI subsequently went on to host an Action Forum (phase 3) later in the year, and begin to work with churches to tackle the issue through Interactive Training Workshops (phase 4), particularly using SCWA’s *The Heart of the Matter* resource, with strong support from the Pentecostal Church across the border in Ghana.

Notable in respect of the Togo research are the following:

- some 26 focus groups were held in total;
- involving adults (women’s and men’s groups), youth, and children;
- in both rural and urban areas;
- reflecting to a limited degree the wide mix of faiths in Togo.

The research was carried out by local people, a combination of MECI staff and trusted volunteers, in a peer-to-peer relationship with the group participants. The sessions were structured to provide open questions giving participants the opportunity to explain their beliefs around witchcraft, their perception of causes of accusations, descriptions of what forms these accusations take, and the outcomes for those accused. Responses in each group were recorded verbatim by a scribe from the organising team, and without any comment from the scribe or facilitator.

the Groups

A total of 26 Focus Groups were held across all five regions of Togo, with participants ranging from 12 to 90 years of age.

- In **Savanes** region **6 Focus Groups**: Dapaong 2 groups (mixed youth: 13; female adults: 8), Nassable 2 groups (mixed youth: 8; female adults: 10), Poinssongui (male adults: 14), Tantoitre (male adults: 13).
- In **Kara** region **3 Focus Groups**: Dongoyo (mixed youth & adults: 8), Kara-Tomdé (male adults: 6), Laoundé (mixed adults: 11).

- In **Centrale** region **3 Focus Groups**: Akpaka (female adults: 10), Mono 2 groups (mixed youth: 11; male adults: 5).
- In **Plateaux** region **1 Focus Group**: Notse (female adults: 10).
- In **Maritime** region **10 Focus Groups**: Abokopé (female adults: 8), Adétikopé (mixed adults: 12), Gbotto-Kossidamé (mixed adults: 10), Katanga (mixed adults: 10), Sanguera 2 groups (female children: 10; mixed youth: 10); Solidarité 2 groups (female adults: 11; male adults: 10), Tokoin (male adults: 10), Tsevie (male adults: 9).
- ...and finally, **unspecified** region **3 Focus Groups**: Dale (mixed youth: 8; female adults: 9; male adults 13).

There were representatives of different religions, as follows:

- Christian (161),
- Animist (51),
- Muslim (10),
- Voodoo (4),
- Pagan (1).

Speaking more than 15 languages in total, three were dominant (Ewé, Moba, Kabiyé), with a few participants speaking a language of their origin in a neighbouring state. Responses were translated and recorded in French.

the Questions

Open questions were carefully scripted to encourage free expression around the topic, without appearing to make any critique or place value (positive or negative) on any given answer.

Three questions put to the Focus Group participants explored the perceived roots of these accusations against children, three explored the reality of what happens to those who are accused, and three explored what responses are being made, or should be made, to this issue in their community.

The full list of original questions is appended.

Carolyn Gent & Pablo Stockley

Analysis and Comments

All the Anonymised Data arising from the Focus Group Research performed in Togo was submitted to **Professor Owen Davies of the University of Hertfordshire** for analysis and comment. (Dr Emma Battell Lowman of Leicester University assisted with some of the translations and insights.)

General remarks

It was repeatedly stated by interviewees that the problem of child witches and their practices varied from region to region, but there was generally little sense of inter-confessional accusation or blame for the problem in mixed or single-religion communities. One Christian social assistant in Dongoyo said, "For the Christian, exorcism is not accompanied by violence, but among the animists it is the contrary. To my knowledge the accusations are a little rarer

among the Muslims.” Neither were there explicit expressions of inter-communal or inter-ethnic blame. In short, it was a problem that everyone shared. There is little to analyse from the small number of Voodoo followers in the sample. They kept largely quiet apparently, restricting themselves to confirming that witchcraft and witches existed. Judging from where Animists and Muslims were in a small minority they appeared more open to giving opinions. I have not observed any significant gendered differences of opinion about child witches from the transcripts, but age clearly determines views on when the ‘problem’ of child witches started.

Perceived nature of witchcraft

Understanding of witchcraft obviously varied according to people’s religious views, but there were also cultural overlaps in what people said as well. Views on the centrality of spirits and possession crossed all denominational boundaries. Christians in particular placed a strong emphasis on witchcraft being spiritual and related to those motivated by envy, hatred, and jealousy gaining powers from evil spirits or Satan. Sometimes ‘sorcellerie’ was also seen as being a positive force, depending on who used it. Other explanations included: “it is the obscure forces of nature” and the manipulation of “spiritual sciences”. For Animists witchcraft also had a physical basis, particularly with regard to eating human flesh. A Kara Animist, for example, said witches were those “who eat people or kill people in the night”. A Christian in the same village agreed – “it is those who eat people (eat the spirit)”. The notion that child witches exhibited and could be identified by their clairvoyance was expressed fairly frequently. Ideas of hereditary witchcraft were common. Food was widely considered as a means of transmitting witchcraft to children, and there was some concern about children’s lack of discernment in what they ate and drank (see below on children being too spoilt).

Purported rise of the child witch problem

Numerous interviewees identified precise dates for the advent of child witches in their communities. A sixty-year-old Animist from Adetikope believed it began “in the time of the gramophone”, while an adult male from Mono thought it all started in 1967. Most rooted it in the recent past, from the 1990s onward. A nineteen-year-old from Nassable thought it started in the 21st century. In Dapaong village one said it began in the year 2000 and another in 2006. In Poissongui there was a consensus that the problem commenced in 1995. Explanations were rarely given or at least recorded for such precise dates. An Akpaka woman said it started in the 1990s due to the advent of democracy. A Mono animist similarly complained that “the advent of democracy makes the children no longer fear anything”.

Presumed causes of the child witch problem

- **the Elderly:** Several interviewees blamed the child witch problem on elderly female witches who were increasing their power in the land through recruiting the young.
- **Spoilt Children:** That children had become too spoilt was a pervasive view among all age groups and communities. Numerous times we here that children these days want to ‘taste’ everything and have no boundaries anymore. They are too agitated and excited. That they do as they please, come go when they want. Parents were also to

blame. They no longer smacked their children, no longer punished them. A Nassable teenager explained that children were no longer afraid of people. This freedom and lack of boundaries made them easy prey to other witches/Satan/charlatans/transmission through food (funeral food is mentioned specifically). Two teenagers from Dapaong linked child witches with drinking alcohol, for example.

- **the State:** Several people expressed the view that the state had been lax and let the child witch problem happen. A Christian man from Poissongui complained, “there is not a law concerning witchcraft. The State has not done anything about it”. Another stated, “the authorities must accept and recognise that witchcraft exists”. The link between child witchcraft and democracy has already been noted above.
- **Polygamy:** A couple of Christians from Laoundè thought the problem stemmed from polygamy. A wife who was jealous of the other wives would transmit her evil spirits to the children.
- **the Devil:** One Christian adult believed the Devil had changed his strategy in recent years by identifying children as his best hunting ground for new witches.
- **Charlatans:** Charlatans and false charlatans were considered quite widely as vectors for the spread of child witches, and were accused of doing so for cynical and venal purposes. The definition of a charlatan in relation to the range of other healers or magicians is not made clear.
- **Church and Schools:** A Christian youth from Nassable thought that child witches had arisen to combat the spread of Christian children, and that schools had helped create the problem. A Dale youth similarly believed that the phenomenon of child witches was linked to the advent of schooling. A 49-year-old Christian teacher also thought the church had aggravated the problem because people kept seeing the Devil behind everything.

Proposed solutions: what to do?

The answers to this question were varied. Of some concern, perhaps, were the responses of a couple of fourteen-year-old Christian boys from Dongoyo who said “we can kill them often”. A Dale man said it was not possible to deliver a child witch from sorcery, “it is impossible to save a child witch”. More generally there was concern across all communities for children and a sense of compassion.

The churches: In Dongoyo there was a call for “all men of God” to create a plan among the churches and form teams, but only among “brother Christians” it seemed. A couple of evangelists called for more evangelism. Exorcisms and prayer sessions were obviously mentioned as a cure for individuals. Among Christians the idea of taking child witches to churches and prayer centres was widespread, but there was also a focus on encouraging and supporting parents to take responsibility for rehabilitation.

Family, sensitivity, and compassion: One Christian resident of Dongoyo talked of going “softly softly” to bring child witches back into the home environment. Another from Dapaong said “do not detest these children, love them like others”. An Animist from Mono said that members of the family must help the children, and another from Kara said “we must treat them to reintegrate them” (see below on healers). A Tokoin man even suggested sending the children to psychologists.

Healers: It is quite noticeable that Animists frequently thought that healers were central to the solution as they were the only ones who could cure children of being witches. Once cured they could be reintegrated back into their families and communities. As a male Animist from Poissongui said, “there is no solution other than sending them to the *guerisseur*”. Another from Laoundè observed that it was advisable to seek early consultations “to exorcise the little ones before the situation got worse”. Christians repeatedly talked of taking child witches to a *fétiche* or *féticheur* for cure. One from Nassable described how the *féticheur* gave witches sacred water that made them die of dysentery. But when asked how to solve the problem of child witches, Christian villagers did not state that the *féticheurs* were part of the solution — that was the role of church and state.

Professor Owen Davies

Conclusion

As far as we are aware, this is the first time such ground-breaking research has been carried out across the whole nation of Togo (in every region).

The research indicated:

- Beliefs in witchcraft and in the existence of child witches exist across urban and rural areas, throughout the country, and across genders, ages and all religious groups.
- A general notion persists that accusations against children are a relatively recent phenomenon, often attributed to specific dates, sometimes associated with the advent of democracy. [1]
- There appears to be a widespread belief that softening attitudes towards children are in part to blame. Children are often perceived as ‘spoilt’ and thus vulnerable to initiation into witchcraft
- Attitudes towards children who are accused of witchcraft range very widely. At one end of the spectrum is relative compassion and the notion that accused children can be cured and reintegrated into families and communities. At the other extreme is the belief that accused children can never be ‘saved’ and should be killed.
- Both positive and negative attitudes are found across religious faiths. It does not appear that any one group is markedly more positive or negative than others, and these beliefs do not seem to be determined by religion.
- Rising involvement of children is linked by some respondents to schools and education.

The research demonstrated that there are more similarities than differences in beliefs relating to witchcraft and witchcraft accusations across different areas of Togo, and also across gender, age, and religious groups — whether global religions or traditional animist beliefs. It is harder to draw conclusions about Voodoo beliefs as those participants mostly chose not to contribute

¹ In July and August 1992, a commission composed of presidential and opposition representatives negotiated a new political agreement. On September 27th, the public overwhelmingly approved the text of a new, democratic constitution, formally initiating Togo's fourth republic (source: *US Dept of State, 2009–2017*).

<https://2009-2017.state.gov/outofdate/bgn/togo/47186.htm>

[#:~:text=In%20July%20and%20August%201992,formally%20initiating%20Togo's%20fourth%20republic](#)

their opinions and experiences beyond a general agreement that witchcraft and witchcraft accusations exist.

Comparisons with other localities

Since this research in Togo, SCWA has performed similar research in other locations. We have observed that there is broad similarity with results emerging from Focus Groups in different areas of the D.R. Congo (Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Kasai, and Goma) and also in Nigeria (Akwa Ibom, and Cross River state).

Interventions using *The Heart of the Matter* modular training resource in 2017 have proven successful in changing attitudes towards accusations and in promoting the perception that causing harm to children through accusations is never acceptable.

Further information on the positive impact and outcomes of using *The Heart of the Matter* resource can be found in SCWA's report entitled: *Getting to the Heart of the Matter* (SCWA: 2018), and the following *One Year On* (SCWA, 2021) report.

QUESTIONS

LES RACINES

- 1a. Comment comprenez-vous la sorcellerie et les croyances qui y sont associées ?
- 1b. Étant donné que dans le passé c'était les personnes âgées qui étaient accusées, de sorcellerie, comment expliquez-vous ce changement de situation qui maintenant se focalise sur les enfants, et de quand date ce changement ? Quel est l'évènement de votre histoire qui a précédé ce changement ?
- 1c. Quelles sont les forces motrices et les croyances qui créent ou aggravent ce phénomène des soient-disant enfants sorciers au Togo ?

THE ROOTS

- 1a. How do you understand witchcraft, and beliefs associated with it?
- 1b. Given that in the past it was the elderly who were accused of witchcraft, how do you explain this change in the situation, which now focuses on children, and when did this change take place? What event in your history preceded this change?
- 1c. What are the driving forces and beliefs that create or aggravate the phenomenon of so-called child witches in Togo?

LES RÉALITÉS

- 2a. Quelles sont les pratiques associées aux accusations de sorcellerie sur les enfants ?
- 2b. Est-ce que ces pratiques ainsi que ceux qui les commettent varient selon les régions ou selon les religions ?
- 2c. En se basant sur toutes les pratiques liées aux accusations de sorcellerie sur les enfants, quel est l'impact sur la vie quotidienne de ces enfants victimes, dans leurs communautés respectives ?

THE REALITIES

- 2a. What practices are associated with accusations of witchcraft against children?
- 2b. Do these practices and those who commit them vary according to region or religion?
- 2c. Based on all the practices associated with accusations of witchcraft against children, what is the impact on the daily lives of these child victims in their respective communities?

LES RÉPONSES

- 3a. Qu'est-ce qui se fait actuellement par tous ceux qui sont impliqués pour éradiquer ce phénomène ?
- 3b. Comment pouvons-nous réaliser la réintégration sociale des enfants victimes de ce phénomène ?
- 3c. Quelles sont les stratégies et les cadres d'actions qui doivent être mis en place pour mobiliser et équiper l'Église, afin qu'elle devienne le lieu idéal pour protéger les enfants ?

THE RESPONSES

- 3a. What is currently being done by all those involved to eradicate this phenomenon?
 - 3b. How can we achieve the social reintegration of child victims of this phenomenon?
 - 3c. What strategies and frameworks for action need to be put in place to mobilise and equip the Church to become the ideal place to protect children?
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