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# Strategic Gateway: The Port of Lomé's Pivotal Role in Togo's Economic Prosperity and West African Hinterland Development Through the Lens of Communication and Information

Noufou OUEDRAOGO<sup>1\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D., Communication Faculty, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: [o.noufou@gmail.com](mailto:o.noufou@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

The Port of Lomé is a pivotal economic gateway in West Africa, crucial for regional trade and development, particularly for landlocked countries like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. This research examines its economic significance through the lenses of Structuration Theory, Critical Theory, and Comparative Advantage Theory. Structuration Theory, as articulated by Anthony Giddens (1984), frames the analysis of how communication structures within the port environment are influenced by broader socio-economic processes. It explores the role of these structures in shaping trade efficiency, governance dynamics, and regional integration initiatives. Critical Theory, stemming from Max Horkheimer (1947), provides a critical examination of power dynamics, economic inequalities, and communication practices within the port. It scrutinizes how decision-making processes and communication strategies at the Port of Lomé reinforce existing economic structures, aiming to foster more equitable distribution of economic benefits across stakeholders. Comparative Advantage Theory, coined by David Ricardo (1817), evaluates how the Port of Lomé (PAL) leverages its strategic advantages – such as deep-water access and geographical proximity – to enhance regional trade competitiveness. Methodologically, the study employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis of the port's statistics and economic indicators quantifies the PAL's contribution to regional GDP and trade volumes. Qualitative interviews provide nuanced insights into stakeholder perspectives, operational challenges, and policy implications. Documentary analysis and observational studies offer historical context and governance insights crucial for understanding the port's evolution and impact. Ethical considerations uphold research integrity and confidentiality throughout data collection and analysis processes, ensuring robust findings on the PAL's economic dynamics in West Africa.

**Keywords:** *Economic impact, Hinterland Countries, West Africa, PAL, Port of Lomé*

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## 1. Introduction

In West Africa, as everywhere else in the world, the maritime sector is the lifeblood of the economy and, in many cases, a central element of food security and sovereignty. Given the incredible volume of maritime trade, ports play a crucial role in the economic vitality of West African States, whether coastal or landlocked. Beyond the goods that enter through West African ports, an incalculable quantity is also exported. Historically, these exports were mainly made up of raw

\* Corresponding author: Noufou OUEDRAOGO, Ph.D., Communication Faculty, Marmara University, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: [o.noufou@gmail.com](mailto:o.noufou@gmail.com)

materials such as diamonds, gold, minerals, coffee bean, cocoa, cotton, fish, lumber and other agricultural and extractive products. With the expansion of the exportable manufacturing and craft sectors, exports of finished products are increasing. Access to safe and secure maritime transit routes becomes, therefore, essential for the successful integration of these products in the global market.

Economically, the maritime domain is at the center of Sub-Saharan Africa's development and prosperity. In West Africa, more than in other parts of the world, fish is a major source of food. In some countries, 90% of dietary protein comes from fish (IMO, 2012). This means that beyond the economic importance of the maritime domain, certain West African countries, especially the Alliance of Sahel States<sup>1</sup>, depend on the importation of food products for the survival of their populations. Any interruption of access to ports poses a threat to food security in these countries. The maritime sector in West Africa is therefore crucial not only for the economy, but also for food security and sovereignty.

Thus, port activities constitute a driver of development for the economies of both coastal and landlocked countries. Today, sea routes are the means par excellence for transporting products of all ranges, particularly from industrialized countries, or in the opposite direction with raw materials to supply processing industries. In the ECOWAS<sup>2</sup> and UEMOA<sup>3</sup> area, the ports of coastal countries constitute powerful levers for the countries of the hinterland – that is to say landlocked states such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger which form the AES organization – to boost their economy. Moreover, to satisfy the needs of these states, 90% of their goods take the sea route via the ports of Benin, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Ghana, Nigeria and/or Togo. For coastal countries, port activities contribute on average 20% of their GDP and 80% of their customs revenue (Gblokpo, 2016).

This is the case of the Autonomous Port of Lomé, generally abbreviated PAL [Port Autonome de Lomé], a deep-water port which ensures trade between the neighboring countries of its hinterland, in particular Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and the rest of the world. In this research, I focus on the strategic data of the PAL, in particular the sectoral status of the port, the most shipped products, the importance of import/export, the economic impact of the port, the existing illegal activities, etc. The methodology used includes several approaches such as documentary analysis, interviews, observations, periodic reports, newsletters and archives scrutinizing. It is therefore an exploratory study that is essentially based on a detailed description in order to show the foundations of the cross-reading analyses.

## 2. Methodology

In order to conduct the current study on the Port of Lomé and its economic impact on Togo and neighboring West African hinterland countries, the research methodology involves a mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Given the multidimensional nature of the research topic, the following key research methods have been implemented:

### 2.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

This consisted in utilizing official port statistics, trade data, and economic indicators (i.e., GDP contributions, employment figures, cargo volumes). The main objective here is to analyze quantitative data to assess the economic impact of the Port of Lomé (PAL). In doing so, this quantitative data analysis helped providing numerical insights into the port's role in regional trade, economic growth, and employment generation.

### 2.2. Qualitative Interviews

Semi-structured interviews with the port's authorities, government officials, shipping companies, and local businesses have been conducted. The aim is to gather insights from key stakeholders on the PAL's operations and economic contributions. This method offered qualitative understanding of operational challenges, stakeholder perspectives, and policy implications.

### 2.3. Documentary Review

This consisted in analyzing historical records, government reports, academic literature, and international trade agreements related to the Port of Lomé. This aimed at reviewing documents for historical context and policy insights. The documentary review provided background on the port's development, infrastructure projects, and regulatory frameworks.

### 2.4. Observational Study

This consisted in conducting on-site visits to document logistics processes, infrastructure utilization, and interaction among stakeholders. The main objective is to observe the port's operations and infrastructure firsthand. This observational study offered direct insights into operational efficiency, infrastructure challenges, and environmental impacts.

<sup>1</sup> The Alliance of Sahel States, known as AES in French which stands for *Alliance des Etats du Sahel*, was created in September 2023 by three West African landlocked countries: Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

<sup>2</sup> Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

<sup>3</sup> UEMOA is the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

### 2.5. Cross-Case Analysis

This consisted in synthesizing data from quantitative analysis, interviews, documentary review, and observational study. This aimed at comparing findings across different aspects (economic impact, governance, and infrastructure) of the Port of Lomé. In doing so, it was possible to provide a comprehensive understanding of the port's significance, challenges, and opportunities for development.

## 3. Theoretical Framework

In this research on the Port of Lomé and its economic impact on Togo and neighboring West African hinterland countries, three main social and communication theories have been implemented: the structuration theory, the critical theory, and the comparative advantage theory.

### 3.1. The Structuration Theory

The Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) helped comprehending how larger social and organizational processes both shape and are shaped by communication practices and structures within the Port of Lomé. Using this theory permitted looking at the two-way link that exists between the institutional setting of the port and the communication practices. The idea of this social and communication theory was put forth by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his 1984 book *“The Constitution of Society”* to investigate social practices, hermeneutics, and phenomenology at the crucial nexus of actors and structures.

### 3.2. The Critical Theory

This theory has been used to critically analyze the power dynamics, inequalities, and socio-political implications related to the Port of Lomé's communication practices and economic impact. This helped exploring how communication can perpetuate or challenge existing economic structures and relationships within the region.

In fact, a number of Frankfurt School academics—Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, etc.—developed the critical thinking theory in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The critique of perceived social pathologies, the definition of social emancipation, and criticism of contemporary capitalist society were the main areas of concentration for these researchers. Marxist fundamental concepts including mass culture, fetishism, reification, and commodification have been examined in this context.

Therefore, the critical thinking process encompasses the following skills: questioning, acknowledging, testing, ambiguity recognition, examining, interpreting, evaluating, reasoning, reflecting, making informed decisions, and articulating, justifying, and clarifying positions (Gramsci, 1947; Horkheimer and Adorno, 1947; Horkheimer, 1968; Marcuse, 1969; Honneth, 1987). What is meant to be understood as critical thinking is precisely the process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information generated by, or obtained from, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to belief and action.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947) asserted that the foundation of critical thinking can be found in broadly applicable philosophical principles that transcend subject matter limitations. Clarity, correctness, precision, consistency, relevance, observable proof, strong arguments, depth, breadth, and justice are some of these values. It is vital to examine the implicit mental structures or components that form the basis of all reasoning. The aim, the issue or query at hand, the presumptions, the concepts, and the empirical basis; the reasoning that results in the conclusions, implications, and consequences; the objections from the other side; and the frame of reference are some of these. Critical thinking is a versatile family of interconnected modes of thinking that encompasses scientific, mathematical, historical, anthropological, economic, moral, and philosophical thinking. It is flexible in its approach to a wide range of themes, issues, and objectives.

### 3.3. The Comparative Advantage Theory

As per the principle of comparative advantage, countries engage in commerce by exporting goods where they have a comparative advantage in production and importing other goods in return. The comparative advantage theory was first put forth by British economist and political scientist David Ricardo in his 1817 book *“On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation”*. The theory of comparative advantage and Adam Smith's absolute advantage thesis from 1776 are in opposition to each other. In fact, “absolute advantage” refers to the capacity to produce more or better goods and services than a rival (Smith, 1776). But rather than always referring to a better volume or grade of output, the phrase “comparative advantage” refers to the ability to provide goods and services at a lower opportunity cost (Ricardo, 1817). Nations can benefit from trade by focusing on manufacturing the items they are best at creating and importing the goods they are not as good at producing from other countries, according to David Ricardo (1817).

Stated differently, a comparative advantage is the capacity of an economy to produce a particular commodity or service at a lower opportunity cost than its trading counterparts. Actually, the benefits of trade to countries, companies, and individuals may be explained by the principle of comparative advantage. In terms of international trade, comparative advantage refers to the products that a country can produce more cheaply or more easily than those of other competitive countries.

Comparative advantage, the premise that all parties can always benefit from voluntary trade and collaboration, is one of the most important concepts in bilateral relations between states. Since this usually illustrates the benefits of trade, several contemporary economists now acknowledge that focusing on “comparative advantages” may help prevent resource exploitation and depletion brought about by “absolute advantages.” It also serves as the foundation for the theory of international trade. Comprehending comparative advantage requires a solid grasp of opportunity cost.

The concept of “Homo reciprocans,” or “reciprocating human,” is closely linked to the theory of comparative advantage (Dohmen *et al.*, 2006). This theory sees people as cooperative agents who are motivated to improve their surroundings by positive or negative reciprocity, or rewarding or punishing others, even in situations where it is not reasonable to expect them to benefit themselves. Stated differently, this idea runs counter to the concept of “homo economicus” (Smith, 1776), which puts forth the contrary argument that individuals are motivated solely by their own interests. However, if we assume that the parameters of the *homo economicus*’ utility functions can depend on how other agents are deemed valuable, then the two theories can be reconciled.

#### 4. Overview of the Port of Lomé

The Autonomous Port of Lomé represents the driving force of Togo’s economic vitality. More than 80% of commercial exchanges pass through it (Vimeno, 2017). In addition, the diversity of its activities, all of which create wealth and generate jobs, as well as the considerable development possibilities available to it, make it possible to assess its positioning in its environment and its economic weight. For landlocked countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, the Port of Lomé is the transit port par excellence, thus fulfilling its vocation as a tool for sub-regional economic integration.

When it was created on April 7, 1967, the Autonomous Port of Lomé provided, in addition to its sovereign functions, industrial and commercial functions. However, in the 2000s, handling activities were subject to concessions. Today, the Port Authority, in addition to its ascendant duties, handles certain categories of goods, notably wheat, rice, clinker, sugar and hydrocarbons.

Along with these abovementioned duties, the PAL performed industrial and commercial activities in Togo. Hence, the Port Authority is in charge of the management of the port and maritime area, as well as the operation of the installations, ship piloting and towing, material and legal guard of the cargo, maintenance of lighthouses and beacons, etc. Additionally, it continues to handle several types of products. This goes without saying that Togo’s economy is driven by the Port of Lomé, which is also the ideal transit port for landlocked nations like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger.

The objective of the PAL is to position itself as the logistics hub of West Africa. To do this, it has been committed for decades to offering better quality of its services, modernization of its equipment and infrastructure, and improvement of its competitiveness and attractiveness. The only deep-water port in West Africa, the Port of Lomé benefits from ultra-modern facilities and equipment which reduce vessel waiting times and the speed of embarkations and disembarkations. Thus, the Port of Lomé has become the hub of a vast distribution network; becoming, *de facto and de jure*, a leading port platform in the sub-region which offers a range of unique and competitive port services.

The port of Lomé is the only port on the coast of West Africa from which numerous cities may be accessed by road in a single day. Thanks to its strategic geographical position and its connectivity, the Port of Lomé is the arm of the sea for the Sahel countries. According to the Director General, Rear Admiral Fogan Kodjo ADEGNON, “for more than four decades, we have tried to meet many challenges. We are pursuing our development objectives to make our port platform one of the most competitive in the sub-region. For us, it is a question of doing more today than yesterday and more tomorrow” (Lapilotine, 2019: p. 9).

#### 5. Assets of the Port of Lomé and its Various Activities

Togo has been able to benefit from a unique edge provided by nature, just like any West African coastal nation. The Gulf of Guinea—a portion of the Atlantic Ocean that flows along this nation’s southern border which is home to 8.6 million people—is more than simply a tourist attraction. It also has economic value, with the Port of Lomé serving as its crown jewel. This platform deserted not only Togo but the entire sub-region and even farther, having been inaugurated in 1868 and then rebuilt over the years with the construction and strengthening of the docks.

The Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL)<sup>4</sup>, which is known as the sole deep-water port in the West African sub-region, does not fall short in its reputation. The PAL, which handled 1.6 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEU) and 25 million tons of cargo in 2020, was still the top container port in West Africa (PAL Report, 2022). LCT has acquired two mobile cranes and ten container trucks so far in 2022 to upgrade its fleet of handling equipment and enhance its capacity. According to reports, it is ranked fifth on the regional level and 96<sup>th</sup> globally among the top 100 ports out of 500. Given all of these statistics, the sub-region's landlocked nations like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger rely on it. For instance, in 2019, 60% of Togo's economic activities came from the Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL Report, 2022). This number is supported by the increase in daily transactions between the various industry participants.

It should be emphasized right away that the Autonomous Port of Lomé is also a collection of industries that support one another in order to be competitive. A couple of examples include the recently restored fishing port and the industrial free zone, both of which help to balance things out. However, the commercial side of import and export undoubtedly takes precedence. From the general administration of this state-owned company to the Ship Chandlers, it is a chain of work that follows one another round-the-clock to ensure the continuity of economic activity.

Any imported item is inevitably subject to customs duties, which are typically determined by the market worth of the item. In order for the cargo to exit the port facilities, this is a crucial requirement. The on-site customs services make sure that these financial standards are strictly followed. Additionally, these customs fees make up a significant portion of the port's income; more specifically, 80% in 2019 for the Autonomous Port of Lomé (La Pilotine, 2019). The nature of the items imported or exported is also ensured by customs in accordance with national and international legislation.

Along with direct purchases and sales, the Port's activities also involve handling, transportation, and logistics. On departure and arrival, ship chandlers are in charge of supplying the ships with provisions, gear, and even gasoline. The Ship Chandlers guarantee a risk-free voyage on the sea, whether for business ships or boats of convenience. Instead of captains or boat owners, they handle the shopping and ensure that deliveries are made on time. Many secure cruises left their mark at the Autonomous Port of Lomé, proving that this enterprise is seaworthy.

The Port Administration is the governing body which oversees all primary activities as well as intermediates. The Chief Executive Officer receives this directive from the Board of Directors, as well as the Chief Operating Officer and Supervisory Board. There are dozens of management roles inside the administration, and this depends on the highly specific and significant activities that are required of them. Rear Admiral Fogan Kodjo ADEGNON has been the Director General at the Autonomous Port of Lomé since 2005.

## 6. The Institution Under the Control of the Maritime Sector

Under the terms of article 3 of Law No.90-26 of December 4, 1990 reforming the institutional and legal framework of Togolese companies, public companies are considered to be "organizations with legal personality, having financial autonomy, intended to produce and sell goods and services with a view to generating profits and in which the State or legal entities under public law hold all or more than half of the share capital" (Togo Presse, 1990). These provisions of the law oblige public companies to make profits.

The Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL) is a public company whose purpose is the operation of port activities. In addition to its general management, the PAL is made up of support – advisory structures and central management. They are, in accordance with the organization chart, attached to the Director General. They essentially play the role of advisor to the Director General. In addition to the Deputy Director General, a General Secretariat position was created in 2000. The Secretary General of the PAL comes under the authority of the General Management Committee. It is headed by a Director placed under the authority of the coordinator of the General Management Committee.

The PAL organizational criteria are functional. The organization chart of the PAL was established by Order No. 12/ MCT of December 7, 1987. This organization chart has undergone an evolution on the basis of the creation by decision of technical departments as noted above. The staff of the Port of Lomé is made up of permanent agents, contract workers, seconded workers and dockers (professionals, collaborators, occasional workers, daily laborers). The number of PAL agents decreased from 899 in 2008 to 881 in 2009 and 884 agents in 2010, a continuous decline from 1.7% to 2.0% (PAL Report, 2014). This category of personnel is also managed by the Human Resources Department.

With a draft of 14 m, the Port of Lomé has more than 1,752 meters of quay allowing it to accommodate between 8 and 10 ships at a time. The quays are protected by two dykes which protect the PAL from silting:

- The main western pier of 1720 m, a protective structure made of crushed stones with a crest of +4.50 m IGN;
- The eastern counter-pier, made of gneiss rock, 950 m long and 19.25 m wide. The two dikes delimit a basin of 81 hectares and an average depth of 9.5 m.

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<sup>4</sup> PAL stands for *Port Autonome de Lomé*, in French.

The PAL has storage spaces including stores, land and parking lots. To this end, 115,000 m<sup>2</sup> of covered areas are made available to operators for the storage of their goods inside the free port. Other stores are also available near the port. Furthermore, the Togolese Storage Company has large tanks for storing hydrocarbons. The 300,000 m<sup>2</sup> platforms are used by the PAL, and others of 84,000 m<sup>2</sup> belonging to landlocked countries (Vimenyo, 2017). These platforms were set up for the storage of containers and other goods, such as construction materials. The port of Lomé also has several parking lots for trucks and used vehicles.

With 55.3 thousands TEU, the volume of containerized traffic remains stable in the first half of 2023, according to Container Trade Statistics<sup>5</sup>. However, we note an increase of 7% in containerized traffic in Sub-Saharan Africa over the same period, which corresponds to 3% of the world volume, or 1.9 thousand TEU. This confers exceptional advantages to the PAL.

## 7. PAL, A Dynamic Port With Exceptional Advantages

The Port of Lomé's capacity to accept high-tonnage boats is a crucial asset, and its depth of 16.60 is unmatched by any other port in West Africa. Additionally, it provides a particularly advantageous location for the largest international shipping lines seeking quick access to numerous capitals in West Africa. Economic actors and port users at the Port of Lomé can take advantage of a variety of ship docking services that are ISO 9001 (2015 version) certified, ISO 14001 (2015 version) certified for the environment, and OHSAS 18001 (2007 version) certified for health and security standards in accordance with the international Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code.

The Port of Lomé now provides its users with a tool for streamlining administrative procedures and protecting port and customs operations with the introduction of "One-stop service for External Trade" (also known by the abbreviation GUCE). The Port of Lomé boasts a variety of facilities and provides top-notch stevedoring services from well-known businesses around the world. The PAL has started a program to expand and modernize its facilities in order to increase its competitiveness. In October 2014, a third dock with a length of 450 meters and a depth of 15 meters went into operation. Four ship-to-shore gantry cranes and eight terminal cranes are currently present in the new 38-hectare container terminal.

The port of Lomé can handle transshipment traffic for the whole West African Coast because of the 16.60 meters depth and 1050 meters of straight dock that were constructed as part of the Lomé Container Terminal project. The Terminal has 24 terminal cranes and nine ship-to-shore gantry cranes for cutting-edge handling. This terminal spans an area of 50 hectares. According to its General Director, the PAL will eventually be able to handle over 4 million containers per year in traffic. The Togolese government wants to transform Lomé into a vital and dynamic transshipment hub for West Africa as well as a catalyst for economic expansion.

The annual study report on maritime transport, prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) published in 2019, notes among other things that in Africa, the Autonomous Port of Lomé has become the first Hub port of the West African region. It is followed by Pointe Noire in Congo and Luanda in Angola. Ports Saïd in Egypt and Tanger Med in Morocco, are the leading African ports in the Mediterranean region; Tanger Med recorded the highest absolute increase in its index in the world during the first decade of its activities since 2007.

According to this United Nations report mentioned above, it is "stimulated by the modernization reforms and benefiting from the congestion of the port of Lagos, in Nigeria, that the port of Lomé has developed rapidly in recent years". Another factor influencing the good performance of the main ports in the region is that they have managed to attract direct services from China, thus strengthening their indices. Added to this is the impact of additional services and larger vessels deployed on these routes. This report reveals that the Port of Abidjan, in Ivory Coast, which still ranked first in the region in 2016, fell to seventh place in 2019. Lagos left the 'TOP 10' of the most connected from the region in 2006 for the sixteenth position in 2019, while other Nigerian ports (Tin Can Island and Apapa) joined the ranking.

West Africa's connectivity to the African continent is relatively weak, as its geographical position does not connect it to major north-south or east-west shipping routes. In Southern Africa, 4 of the top 10 ports in the region are in South Africa, namely Durban, Cape Town, Coega and Port Elizabeth. The other ports in the top 10 are in Mozambique (Maputo, Beira and Nacala) and Madagascar (Toamasina and Mahajanga), all of which have significantly lower indices than the top 4 South African ports. In fact, in this region, port connectivity is closely linked to each country's own trade systems.

The Commercial Director of the Port of Lomé, Adanlete Lawson Akuélé Yewona, appreciated the advantages of the Port of Lomé in these terms:

<sup>5</sup> Since the end of the liner conference system in Europe in 2008, Container Trades Statistics Ltd (CTS) has been producing high-quality TEU volume and pricing index data.

The only natural deep-water port in the West African sub-region, and also the only one, for the moment, able to accommodate third generation ships, the Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL) is the first container terminal in West Africa. Its assets make it a real hub for goods on the West African coast: speed of formalities, rehabilitation and construction of relay infrastructure, particularly the capital’s bypass roads (La Pilotine, 2019).

This state of fact plays a starring role in the capacity of import/export activities of the Autonomous Port of Lomé.

### 8. Capacity of The PAL’s Import/Export Activities

PAL freight traffic consists of imports, exports and transshipments. Container ships remain by far the ships that the PAL welcomes the most. In 2022, the port of Lomé rose two spots from the previous year to 96<sup>th</sup> place. Over the relevant time period, it processed 1.9 million TEU, or 13.7% more than in 2020. For the second year in a succession, container lifts experienced double-digit growth. The report indicated current initiatives intended to double the port’s capacity during the coming decades. The speculations state that, in general, MSC is the market leader in this regard: Plans through the end of the decade necessitate devoting up to \$530 million, which will nearly double its existing capacity to approximately 4 million TEUs. The PAL, apart from local imports and exports (Togo), serves neighboring countries such as Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali and even Ghana (although it is a coastal country). The PAL’s main export operations are agricultural products (coffee, cocoa and cotton), transshipment and hydrocarbons.

### 9. The Evolution of the PAL’s Traffic

As I mentioned above, the Port of Lomé is the only port on the West African coast through which you can reach several capitals in a single day. The Port of Lomé, thus, offers the advantage of transporting goods at very competitive times and costs. The Figures 1-7 below show the different maritime activities between 2012 and 2022.

Despite the advantages and positive aspects of the PAL abovementioned, there are still some illegal activities and drawbacks which undermine the good reputation of the port.

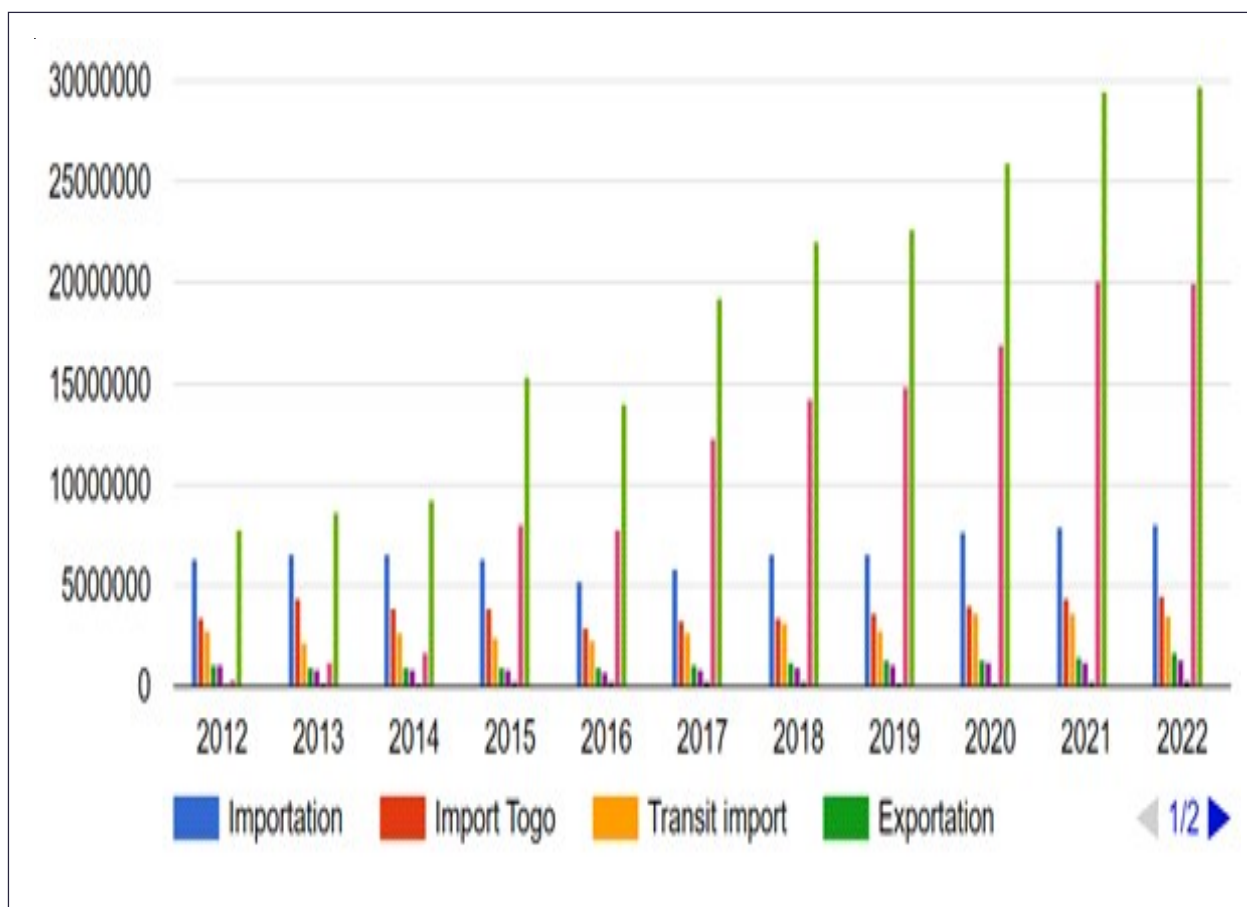


Figure 1: Global Traffic [Import, Import Togo, Transit Import and Export]

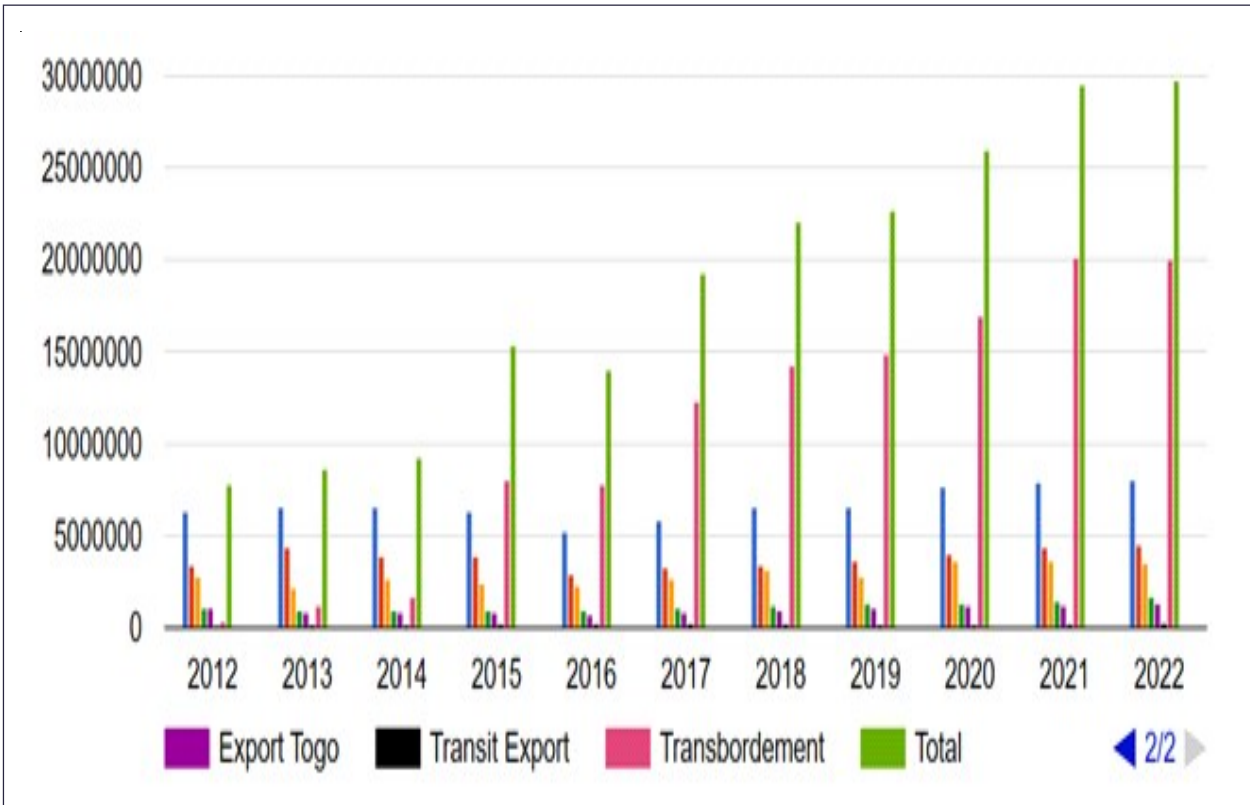


Figure 2: Global Traffic [Export Togo, Transit Export & Transshipment]

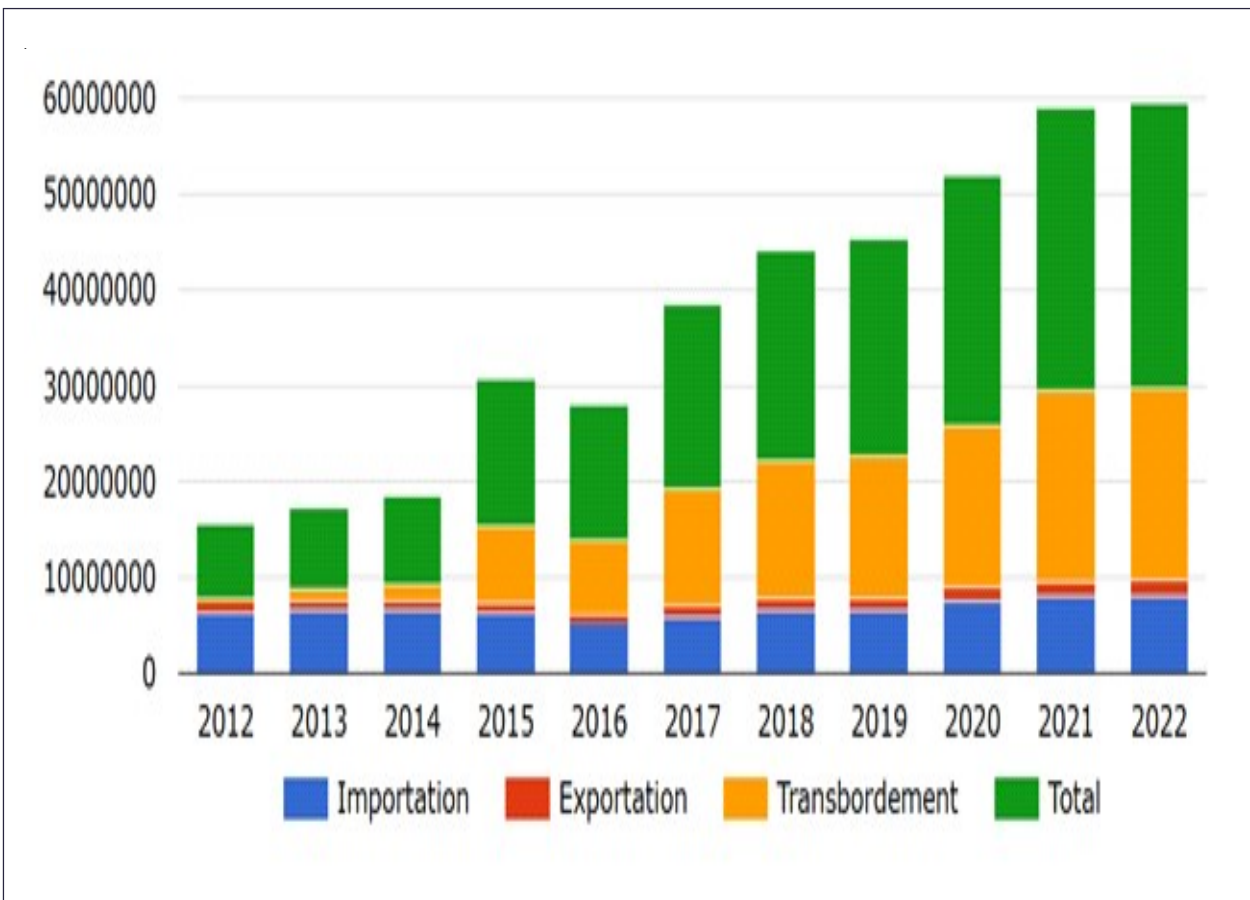


Figure 3: Global Traffic [Data about Import, Export & Transshipment]



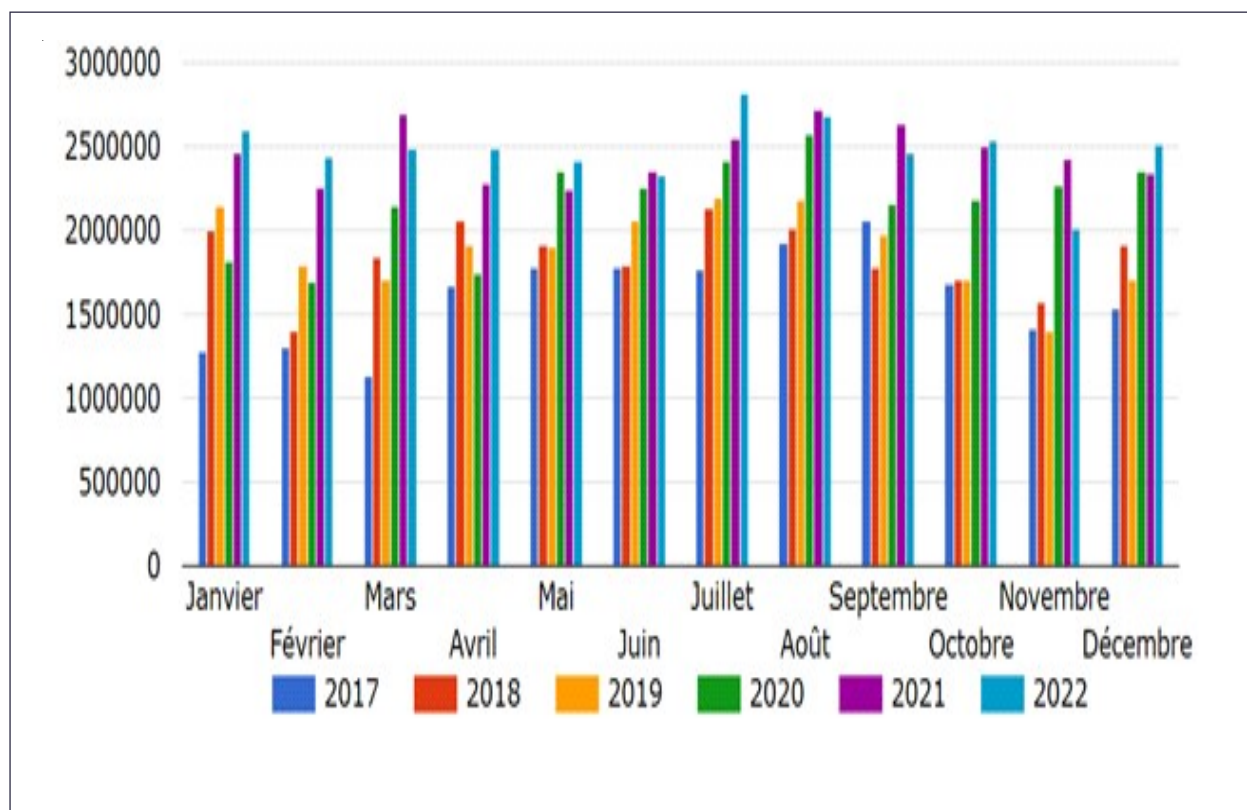


Figure 4: Monthly Evolution of Global Traffic [from January 2017 to December 2022]

### 10. The Importance of PAL for West African States

Since the early 2000s, the Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL) has confirmed its position as the leading transit port for the countries of the hinterland (Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso). Thanks to the free trade agreements with Togo, these landlocked countries transport most of their exports and imports through the PAL, which contributes 9.56% to the performance of this port. The port of Lomé must, however, face competition from other ports in the sub-region, namely those of Cotonou, Tema and Abidjan. There is therefore the problem of strategies to be developed by the port actors of Lomé in the face of the changes underway in this economic sector. Already in December 1976, Togo had promulgated an ordinance suspending the statistical tax on goods passing through Togolese territory from Niger, Mali and Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso). The elimination of this rate, which is 2%, aims to attract operators from these countries (Togo Presse, 1976).

However, the difficulties of access by sea to the coastal ports of West Africa have for a long time been the main bottlenecks for the development and exchange of products in countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. “The majority of imports and exports from these landlocked countries in the ECOWAS region are done by land from or to coastal countries” (Hartmann, 2010). For these countries, ports remain the main entry and exit points for their agricultural and mining products.

At the PAL, the large volume of transit is intended for Burkina Faso (82.5%). For Cotonou Port, the largest transit volume is reserved for Niger (80%) and for Abidjan Port, goods in transit are mainly destined for Burkina Faso (62.1%) and Mali (36.4%). For these three landlocked countries, import and export volumes via the port of Cotonou are the largest. The ports of Abidjan and Lomé follow in that order. All these West African ports aim to become “hubs” in this region (Ibid, 2010). Since the 2000s, they have engaged in charm offensives to retain and captivate port operators from other competing ports. Ports are then forced to adapt to the needs imposed by their customers: shippers and ship-owners or logistics chain organizers.

Consequently, the PAL is in strong competition with the ports of Cotonou, Accra and Abidjan because these four ports serve the same landlocked countries. They seek to retain the loyalty of shippers in these countries while trying to eat into the national traffic of their competitors. The PAL, despite its natural advantage making it the only deep-water port in the sub-region and the modernization of its facilities favoring a reduction in waiting times for ships in the harbor as well as an increase in the rate of disembarkation and boarding, is faced with difficulties.

Since 2014, port traffic has been diverted to other ports in the sub-region due to the strict application in Togo of the UEMOA regulation, by Order No. 14/2005/CM/UEMOA, relating to the harmonization of standards and procedures for controlling the size, weight and load of heavy goods vehicles in the UMOA space (PAL, 2016). Vehicles in violation pay a fine of 20,000 CFA/ton (approximately 35 USD) additional for internal transport and 60,000 CFA/ton (approximately 100 USD) additional for international transport. Added to this, is the systematic shedding of the surplus.

By choosing to respect this regulation, the PAL, although having a good reputation, has undermined its competitiveness, leading to the departure of the customers to its competitors. In addition, the establishment of the Togolese Revenue Office played a fundamental role in the decline in the competitiveness of the port. According to surveys, 76% of port stakeholders believe that the requirements and rigor of the Office and the company Antaser Togo SA no longer facilitate arrangements of any kind to reduce the real values of customs taxes. For example, for electronic cargo tracking, Antaser charges 25,000 CFA (approximately 45 USD) for a 40-foot container from Europe and 70,000 CFA (approximately 120 USD) for Asia and Oceania. But these samples are not taken in Benin and Ivory Coast. At the customs level, the increase in the level of customs indices has increased costs. Ghana, for example, has not yet implemented this new regulation due to public health reasons, legislative requirements and other technical considerations.

According to 71% of port stakeholders, it is these poorly designed or inefficiently carried out reforms that undermine economic performance and impact the dynamics of the port of Lomé.

### **11. The Economic Impact of the Port of Lomé on Togo**

The opening of the maritime sector to the private sectors, which began in the 2000s, resulted in the construction of modern infrastructure and equipment (Vimeno, 2017). To make the PAL the first destination for boats in the sub-region, Togo has granted the construction of a third wharf specializing in transshipment to the Bolloré Africa Logistics group, now replaced by Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC). Inaugurated on October 14, 2014, this third wharf, 450 meters long with a draft of 15 meters, is valued at 300 billion CFA francs – around 490 million USD – (PAL, 2014). This group acquired four quay gantries to improve the handling productivity of this terminal.

The establishment of these infrastructures aims to strengthen the competitiveness of the PAL and position it as one of the major ports in the sub-region. This terminal allows the reception of large capacity ships, capable of transporting at least 7,000 20-foot containers. It has a storage area of 38 ha for the handling and storage of an annual volume of 1.9 million containers (PAL, 2022). It is operated by the Lomé Container Terminal (LCT) consortium, formed by the Getma group and the major Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC).

Sub-regional integration is reinforced by the establishment of this infrastructure which allows Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to transit their products more quickly. Imports and exports represent 20% of the volume of port activities (PAL, 2016). According to the PAL estimates in 2016, the work creates 800 indirect jobs for both Togolese and immigrants from these landlocked countries and contributes to increasing customs and tax revenues for these countries. For Togo, the port occupying 80% of commercial trade, offers transshipment operations from the 36<sup>th</sup> quay which represent more than 5% of the overall traffic volume.

In short, thanks to the activities of the PAL, Togo was able to enhance its role as a real actor for economic integration and a development pole on the West African coast. As the port environment is changing, port development must be based on a dynamic vision. In so doing, various international actors are involved in this process.

### **12. Foreign Companies at the PAL**

Several foreign companies and investors have been operating for years at the Port of Lomé. It is possible to enumerate some international groups such as Brightness Maritime Agency, specialized in vessel consignment and assistance to seagoing personnel and cargo, Afrima, a Libyan Shipping group, the Ghanaian group Adonai Shipping Limited, the German group AKO Trans, the Danish Atlantic Shipping, an international company specialized in fishing vessels, the Saudi group Benya Shipping, a company dedicated to providing tailored marine services, the French logistic company CMA CGM (ex Delmas), the Danish logistic group MAERSK LINE, the Austrian company MITRACO, the French NECOTRANS (GETMA), the Burkinabe ADEFA TRANSIT, the group LCAAFRICALOGISTICS which is also partner of China Airport Construction company (CACC), handling CACC cargo for Lomé and Niamtougou Airports projects, etc. just to name a few. Besides, there were many companies affiliated to the French Bolloré which have been forced to pack their luggage after the latter sold its rights to Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC).

In fact, the French group Bolloré sold its logistics activities in Africa to the Italo-Swiss Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC). The transaction was on the basis of a \$6.1 billion enterprise value (nearly 3,740 billion CFA Francs). The decision was taken on March 31, 2022 by Bolloré Transport & Logistics, following the traction undertaken by the

two handling giants since 2021. This transfer came into effect at the end of the first quarter of 2023. Although Bolloré still remains on the continent, particularly in the sectors of communication, publishing and especially the media, as through Canal +, this nevertheless marks a significant withdrawal from a region which has strongly contributed to its prosperity, in a context where the African presence of Vincent Bolloré, founder of the group, in Africa is increasingly criticized, at the same time as a certain anti-French feeling is growing.

For the other giant involved in the transaction [MSC], this operation strengthens its position in the port sector on the continent, particularly in Togo. With the agreement of the Togolese authorities on the operation, MSC got its hands on Togo Terminal, managed by the Togolese subsidiary of Bolloré Africa Logistics (BAL). Enough to strengthen its base in a Port which has already become its regional hub and an important relay for its container traffic in this part of the world. Indeed, in Lomé, Italo-Suisse already manages the Lomé Container Terminal (LCT), through its subsidiary Terminal Investment Limited (TIL), which has boosted port activities, positioning it among the best container traffic on the African continent. According to its strategic plan, MSC plans to invest up to \$500 million in the Port of Lomé by 2030.

### 13. Legal Process Against Bolloré Holding

Bolloré Africa Logistics, formerly called SDV, obtained management of the port of Conakry a few months after the election of Alpha Condé at the end of 2010, and won the concession in Lomé shortly before the re-election in 2010 in Togo of Faure Gnassingbé, who was then both advised by Havas. Based, in particular, on the documents found during the 2016 searches at the headquarters of the Bolloré Group, the magistrates suspected Havas of having under-invoiced for its services rendered to the two victorious candidates in order to obtain, in return, the management of the port concessions.

In this case, the Bolloré group had already “formally” contested having committed irregularities in Africa where it manages 16 port terminals. However, investigating judges Serge Tournaire and Aude Buresi proceeded with the expected indictment of the holding company, for the qualifications of “corruption of a foreign agent”, use of forgery, and complicity in “breach of trust”—according to Olivier Baratelli, the lawyer for the group. Complaining alongside, local people in Cameroon, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, and Cambodia have criticized the corporation for stealing land and destroying the environment.

Before the sale of its Africa logistics division, the company had been charged with engaging in a variety of transactions that gave it access to African port concessions that were fraudulent and illegal. One of the most significant was in Togo. Bolloré agreed to pay a settlement of 12 million euros in 2021 to have court cases involving corruption allegations in the West African country dismissed. Following these circumvolutions, the Chinese group, which already operates the Tincan Island Container Terminal in Lagos, Nigeria, joined the Bolloré Africa Logistics group in Togo, which ultimately transferred its rights to the MSC.

### 14. Discussions: Illegal Activities and Jeopardies At the Port of Lomé

At the PAL, shoreline handling and development work have been a source of environmental impact for several years. This concerns the production and dumping of waste, biological and chemical pollution of the marine environment. These activities lead to negative consequences on the marine environment such as the degradation of marine and coastal fisheries, the risks of food poisoning, the development of infectious and respiratory diseases and the degradation of water quality (Fiagan, 2013). An action plan based on the protection of coastal erosion and the dumping of solid and liquid waste could help prevent and manage the fight against marine pollution. This plan will consist of permanent surveillance of the Togolese coasts and the training of agents specialized in the management of maritime disasters. Various nuisances and any other environmental damage caused to third parties must also be taken into account in the port’s environmental protection policy.

It has been noted since 2013 that the roads and traffic areas of the port of Lomé are in an advanced state of deterioration due to their dilapidation. Established after the independences, it is therefore urgent to restore the road infrastructure, particularly inside the port and the service roads of the platforms. Rehabilitate and extend the sanitation system, the drinking water supply network, renovate the electrical cable, internet and telephone network, widen the main arteries, parking areas, corridors, entry and exit, etc. are the main challenging tasks that the port authorities are facing nowadays.

This delay in the development of the PAL road infrastructure hinders the free movement of handling equipment, large goods transport vehicles, the movement of dockers and wastes time for the various companies. This situation leads to an estimated loss of USD 2.774 million between 2014 and 2015 (Hetcheli and Dandonougbo, 2018). Therefore, there is an urgent need to rapidly rehabilitate road infrastructure, which will allow port companies to save more than \$3.265 million per year.

In the opinion of the staff representatives, their Managing Director during the period from 2008 to 2010 presented himself as “a man who worries about workers”<sup>6</sup>. But, it is no less true that a certain number of frequent actions in the Company frustrate the staff. These actions include frustrating things such as:

- a) Nepotism in the tenure of contract workers;
- b) Unpaid overtime or paid on an incorrect calculation basis;
- c) Lack of promotion despite the vacancy of several positions;
- d) Long-term temporary works (10 years for some) in certain positions;
- e) Non-entitlement to compensation for temporary workers due to lack of decision to appoint them;
- f) Overexploitation of staff assigned to the docks;
- g) Many work accidents leading to a high rate of disability;
- h) Designation for internal and external missions not based on objective criteria, etc.

Added to this, are accounting problems. The large volumes of transactions (port activities, domain and payroll) are entered by different departments. The link between the different transactions is established based on manual entries, the software acquired for this purpose not being used. This poses a risk to the full consideration of data and regularizations resulting from errors, omissions, etc. during registrations (Hetcheli and Dandonougbo, 2018). Likewise, data harmonization is unreliable. The centralization of data and the production of financial statements are carried out by the Finance and Accounting Department. Data from personnel, port operations and the domain are centralized manually.

The issue of security is also a major issue in the operation of port activities. The Gulf of Guinea, with its 5,700 km of coastline, is the new epicenter of maritime piracy in Africa (Institute for Security Studies, 2015). From January 2005 to May 2015, more than 205 attacks on ships were recorded in the Gulf of Guinea. From April 2006 to May 2012, more than 27 boat attacks (thefts, kidnappings or failed attempts) were recorded by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) on the coasts of West Africa, 80% of which were off the coast of Nigeria, compared to 2 in East Africa (IMO, 2012). Togolese, Beninese and Ivorian waters recorded 68 pirate attacks between 2006 and mid-September 2012.

To deal with this, the PAL has adopted measures aimed at securing ships, the port area, people and goods in transit to the Sahel countries. The control of the safety of ships and navigation is entrusted to the Directorate of the Merchant Marine. A High Council for the Sea is set up and a Maritime Prefect is appointed to reinforce safety and security at PAL. This high council, which has 2 patrollers, has set up a system to better organize and coordinate services. In their task, police officers are supported by private employees of security companies (Togolese Guarding and Surveillance Company and Togo Assistance Services) who have concluded a contract with the PAL Directorate.

Thus, artificial barriers to monitor entrances and exits are erected by the PAL. An international summit of the African Union (AU) on maritime security and safety was organized from October 10 to 15, 2016 in Togo. The charter signed (30 signatories) during this summit, which aims to strengthen cooperation to safeguard Africa’s maritime space, shows the importance of the issue of maritime security for the Togolese authorities.

Likewise, communication between the different PAL structures poses a problem due to the poor functioning of the internet network. The flow rate is very low and the connection is sometimes faulty (Hetcheli and Dandonougbo, 2018). Given that the Single Window Operating System for Foreign Trade operates from the Internet network, the malfunction of the network causes the port and the various economic operators to lose a cost of 545 million CFA francs (approximately 900,000 USD) per year.

## 15. The Future of the Port of Lomé

In search of growth drivers abroad, China Merchants Holdings (Hong Kong Stock, 0144) acquired a 50% stake in the company Thesar Maritime Ltd, awarded a 35-year government concession contract, extendable to 45 years, to develop and operate a 53-hectare container terminal in the deep-water port of Lomé in Togo. Ultimately, this container terminal will handle up to 2.2 million TEUs per year and will allow the port of Lomé to capture a share of the container volume in the Gulf of Guinea, with an average growth of 10.3% over the last 15 years.

The sale of 50% of Thesar Maritime for 150 million euros was made by Terminal Investment Ltd, which kept the remaining 50%. Terminal Investment Ltd maintains strong relations with Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC), the

<sup>6</sup> Report PAL (2015: P53). Report of definitive observations of the control of the management of the autonomous port of Lomé. Available Online at the following link: <https://www.courdescomptes.tg/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/PAL-LOME.pdf>.

world’s second largest container shipping group which is committed to serving the Togolese terminal for 15 years. The Managing Director of China Merchants Holdings appreciates it in the following terms:

We are really impressed by the infrastructure work in Lomé. Togo is a country that is full of potential; in short, it is a hub of the sub-region. We will continue to work with our Togolese partners to identify development opportunities (PAL, 2022).

Lomé Container Terminal (LCT), which has, year after year, improved its own record, is notably the linchpin of Lomé’s meteoric entry into the top 100 world ports for container traffic. In 2020, the platform born from the Joint Venture between China Merchant and Terminal Investment Limited (TIL), a dedicated operational vehicle of the ship-owner MSC, handled 1,366,114 TEUs, up 20%, despite Covid-19 which brought the global economy to a standstill and cut several sea lanes.

Since its commissioning in 2014, an operation which involved financial support from several major institutions such as the IFC and Proparco, LCT has seen its volume of containers processed increase by almost 40 times (3,952%) (See Figure 5).

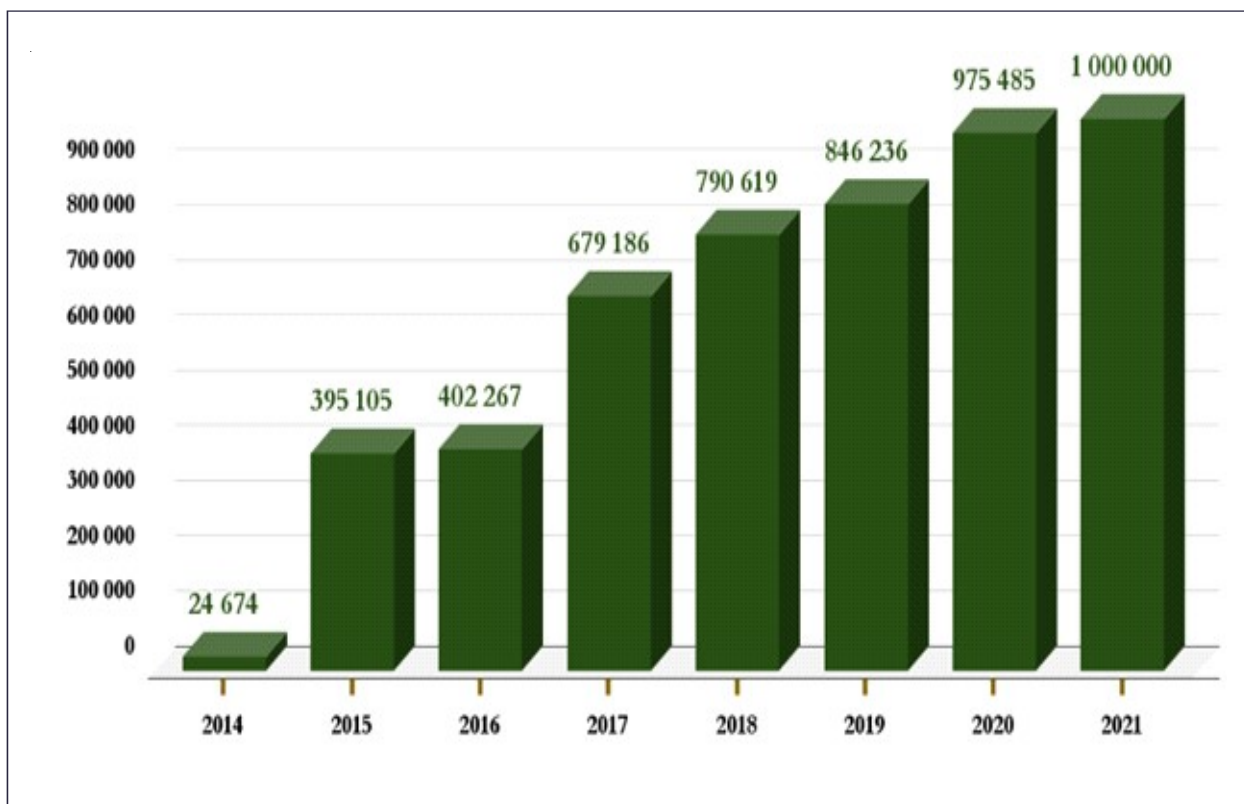


Figure 5: Evolution of the Number of Containers Processed by LCT (2014-2021)

Nowadays, the port of Lomé welcomes on average around forty ships per month; and according to its manager, “one of the pillars of this growth is the contribution of our main client which is none else but Mediterranean Shipping Company (MSC) which has made the Port of Lomé its preferred destination to serve Africa.” The world’s second largest ship-owner had clearly announced its investment ambitions, notably of more than \$500 million by 2030, as abovementioned. Overall, the Port of Lomé, which has gradually become since the arrival of LCT, the reference port in terms of transshipment in the sub-region – more than 70% of the containers handled are in transshipment – continues to widen the gap with its main competitors in this segment.

## 16. Conclusion

A deep-water free port, the Autonomous Port of Lomé (PAL) enjoys considerable assets which allow it to position itself as a real tool for economic integration and a development pole on the West African coast. The observation is that the port of Lomé operates in a very competitive environment, because it is in strong competition with the ports of Cotonou, Téma and Abidjan. Since 2000, Togo has initiated profound changes in the governance of its port, with the aim of responding effectively to free trade agreements and attracting operators from landlocked countries. With the political turmoil following the sanctions imposed by the ECOWAS organization on the Alliance of Sahel States after their military

coups, the PAL, which remained opened for activities, became more frequented by these West African hinterland countries.

The hinterland countries are involved in port activities within port communities. Thus, the Port of Lomé has made available to these countries spaces which have been developed and built into platforms, covered warehouses and offices which are directly exploited by the institutions of these countries in Togo for the transit of their goods. Burkina Faso, for example, has built infrastructure in the port area of Lomé which consists of 10,000 m<sup>2</sup> of covered warehouses and 11,600 m<sup>2</sup> of land and offices (PAL, 2016). The advantages granted for goods in transit are of two types. Tariff advantages relating to reductions in port taxes and fees; and non-tariff advantages relating to exemption periods granted to goods in transit and measures to facilitate transit formalities.

The institutions from hinterland countries such as Shippers' Councils and Chambers of Commerce have representation in the Port of Lomé. This is the case of the Burkinabe Council for Shippers and the Niger Council of Public Transport Users. These representations are very involved in the life of port communities which consultation frameworks are bringing together all port stakeholders and operators in order to improve the services offered to their users. The representations of the Shippers' Councils and Chambers of Commerce in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger actively participate in the operation of the port activities.

However, as I have mentioned, major constraints still hinder the establishment of an efficient port structure. Despite the multiple assets available to the PAL, the weakness of communication networks, coastal erosion, strong competition from other ports in the West African sub-region – Cotonou, Téma and Abidjan – and poor governance hamper its activities. Thus, to respond more effectively to the requirements of globalization, the development of infrastructure, the environmental issue, compliance with procurement rules, the improvement of communication networks, etc. should be key elements for the competitiveness of the Port of Lomé.

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