

Groupe de Démographie Africaine

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**POPULATION SIZE
IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES :
AN EVALUATION**

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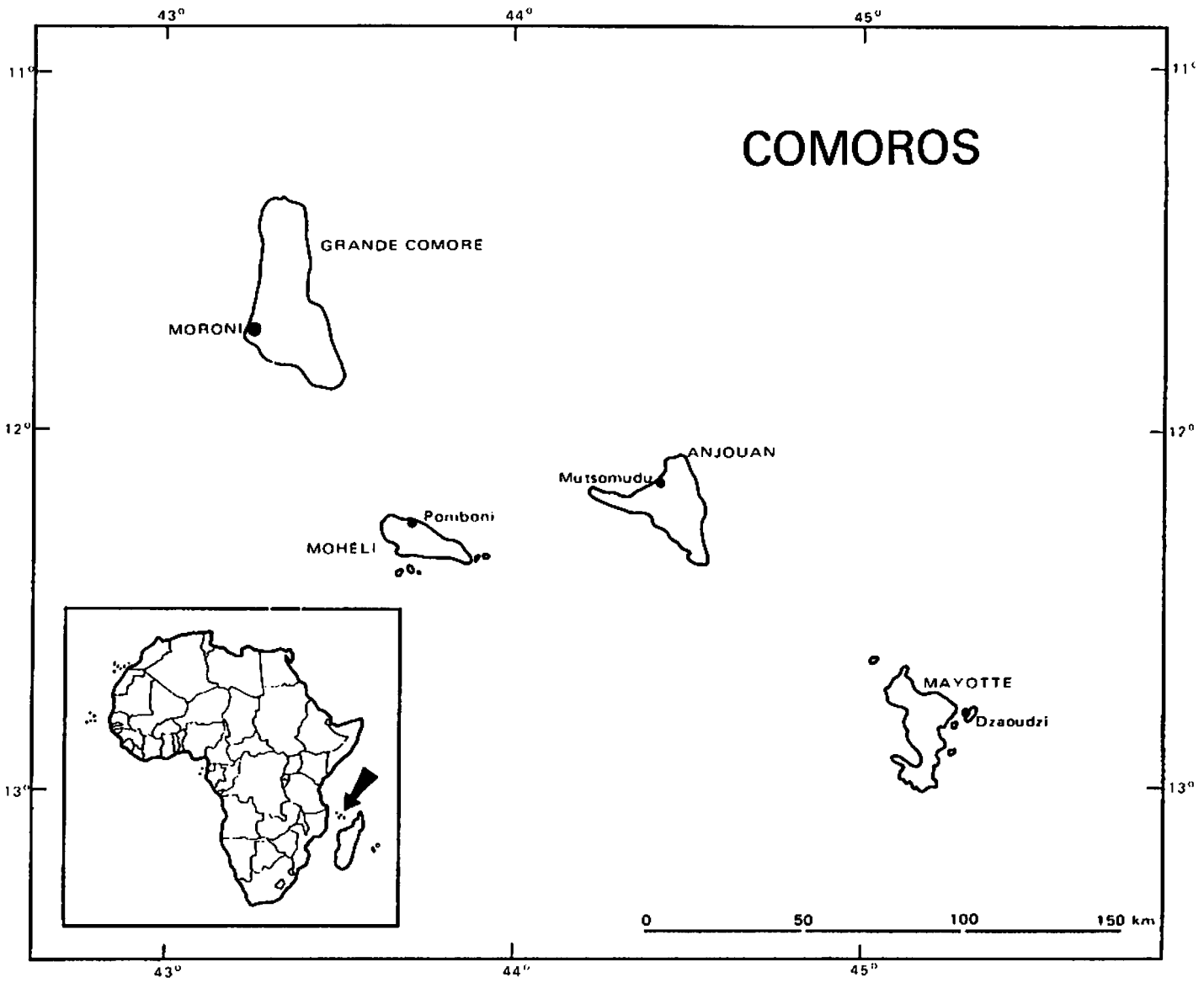
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1982

COMOROS

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C O M O R O S

I. INTRODUCTION1) The Country

The archipelago of the Comoros is made up of four volcanic islands in the Mozambique Channel, between Africa and Madagascar:

- Grande Comore (Neazidja) 1,018 km²
- Anjouan (Ndzouani) 427 km²
- Moheli (Moili) 211 km²
- Mayotte (Maoré) 378 km²

These islands give a total surface area of 2,034 km² for approximately 400,000 inhabitants (the 1980 population).

Of comparatively recent volcanic origin, these four islands have a marked mountainous aspect. Due to the tropical climate, with a temperate dry season (June-October) and a rainy season, the vegetation is often prolific, whereas water sources are scarce (and even non-existent in Grande Comore) because of the porosity of the ground. This raises a serious water shortage problem at the end of the dry season.

2) Population

The population of the Comoros was formed by the successive arrival of groups of varying origins, which progressively merged and which today form a homogeneous population characterized by the same language, Comorian, (although with some variations from one island to the next) and the same religion - Islam.

The oldest group was probably comprised of the Cafres, directly related to the Bantus of Middle Africa and South Africa, who gradually merged with small groups of Arab, Persian, Indonesian and Madagascan origins. The Chiraziens, who came through the Persian Gulf, arrived towards 1000 A.D, with a second influx in the 15th century. The Arabs captured African slaves - the Makoas.

The history of the Comoros is characterized by the continuous conflict between the islands and within each island, by the existence of several sultans who tried to gain power, and by the pillaging of Madagascan pirates who captured slaves. Mayotte, the island which was the most affected, only had 3,000 inhabitants left when it came under French control in 1843.

Colonial administration was gradually established in Mayotte (1843), in Grande Comore and Moheli (1886) and in Anjouan (1912), and brought an end to the conflicts between the sultans and the Madagascan forays. From then on the population began to expand and the colonial administration began to

encourage emigration in order to ease population pressure. Today more than 100.000 Comorians are thought to be living outside the archipelago, namely in Madagascar and in East Africa (40.000 towards 1960 in Tanzania). This sometimes leads to serious problems when there are sudden mass returns as, for example, when the 18.000 "survivors of Majunga" (Madagascar) in 1977 hastily returned after confrontation with the Madagascans.

The population density is very high and overpopulation is steadily worsening, resulting in rapid deforestation causing increased land erosion (especially in Anjouan).

3) Economy

Comoros is predominantly an agricultural country. Two thirds of the population live in villages of less than 3.000 inhabitants. Farming consists of subsistence crops and home livestock breeding as well as export crops. The latter, ylang-ylang, cloves, vanilla and copra, account for almost all the country's export revenue.

However, the country can only guarantee sufficient food supplies by importing (50 kg of rice per inhabitant and per year). The activity of the secondary sector is very underdeveloped - apart from a small fizzy drinks factory, a sawmill, a brickyard, a soap factory and some ylang-ylang distilleries. Tourism is negligible. There is a balance of payments deficit, exports only covering half the imports, and the country is obliged to rely on donations and loans.

4) Administrative Organization

The archipelago of the Comoros gained independence on July 6th 1975, apart from the Island of Mayotte which voted by referendum for the preservation of its French territorial status. Although the new Comorian State was described, on its admission to the United Nations (November 1975), as consisting of four islands, current administration is really only in effect on three islands. The census does not include Mayotte.

Comoros is an Islamic Federal Republic. The President and the Federal Assembly are elected by the entire population. Each island has a governor and an elected assembly. The governors have extensive administrative autonomy and the assembly has some legislative freedom. The islands are divided into prefectures (3 in Grande Comore, 1 in Moheli, 3 in Anjouan), themselves divided into cantons (23 cantons in all).

5) Type of Settlement

There are approximately 335 villages in the Republic of Comoros. The most important of these has an old "Arab" quarter built in stone, with flat roofs, narrow alley-ways, many shops, workshops and mosques. Dispersed settlement is rare. For the most part, the buildings are grouped together to form small villages, and are separated by railings of coconut leaves. The majority of the villages, concentrated along the communication routes which follow the coast line, are comprised of straw huts made of coconut leaves (roofs and walls). The proportion of these huts decreases as the size of the village increases. An intermediary settlement in corrugated iron (roof and walls) has recently expanded due to ease of construction and a cost which is lower than that of stone. Wooden or clay buildings are unusual (the latter are more often to be found among the refugees from

Madagascar). Modern settlements (roof of corrugated iron, walls of parpen) are developing among the wealthier part of the population.

II. DATA SOURCES

1) Civil Registration

Civil registration was developed under colonial administration. However, not long after Independence, under the régime of Ali Soilihi (now fallen), there was a systematic destruction of civil registration certificates, registers and archives. Neither is there any trace of the exploitation of historical registers. Other official documents and archives have also disappeared.

Considered the most satisfactory tool for continuous observation of population events, civil registration is currently the object of a United Nations project financed by UNFPA, which could begin in 1982.

2) General INSEE Documentation

Year by year, fascicles prepared by INSEE give various information about the Comoros. The enumeration operations carried out by the government give the results presented in Table 40.

The seeming decrease in the population in 1950 is due, on the one hand, to the December cyclone which caused over 500 deaths, and on the other hand to a tighter census of the Mayotte population, which was overestimated in 1949.

These same fascicles give the population distribution per island for given years (Table 41).

In 1947 there were 592 Europeans and foreigners in the Comoros (almost half of these were in Mayotte).

The distribution per island in 1951 does not include the 665 French and 165 foreigners.

TABLE 40 - COMOROS - RESULTS OF THE POPULATION COUNTS FROM 1935 TO 1956

| YEAR OF THE POPULATION COUNT | POPULATION | YEAR OF THE POPULATION COUNT | POPULATION |
|---------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------------|
| 1935 | 123 939 | 1950 | 164 938 |
| 1941 | 137 035 | 1951 | 165 613 |
| 1944 | 143 442 | 1954 (a) | 168 000 |
| 1947 | 152 282 | 1956 (a) | 176 500 |
| 1949 | 168 890 | | |

a) The Native Population

TABLE 41 - COMOROS - POPULATION DISTRIBUTION PER ISLAND FROM 1947 TO 1951

| YEAR | ANJOUAN | GRANDE COMORE | MAYOTTE | MOHELI |
|------|---------|---------------|---------|--------|
| 1947 | 49 197 | 80 930 | 17 221 | 4 934 |
| 1949 | 64 653 | 79 525 | 19 043 | 5 669 |
| 1950 | 62 970 | 79 525 | 17 206 | 5 137 |
| 1951 | 60 327 | 81 862 | 17 123 | 5 471 |

3) Population Censuses

The first real census was undertaken by INSEE, on the initiative of ORSTOM, in 1958. The questionnaire consisted of two parts, one on the household schedule, and the other on migration. A one-quarter sample survey was conducted on persons of 14 years and over and on the home (births and deaths).

The results obtained for each island show:

- the population of each village, according to sex and broad age group;
- the population of each village, according to sex and place of birth;
- the population, according to sex, age and place of birth.

TABLE 42 - COMOROS - 1958 CENSUS RESULTS

| ISLAND | POPULATION |
|-----------------|----------------|
| - ANJOUAN | 61 815 |
| - GRANDE COMORE | 90 790 |
| - MAYOTTE | 23 364 |
| - MOHELI | 7 164 |
| TOTAL | <u>183 133</u> |

The 1966 census was conducted by the INSEE Division of overseas departments and territories.

TABLE 43 - COMOROS - 1966 CENSUS RESULTS

| ISLAND | CENSUS DATES | POPULATION |
|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| - ANJOUAN | September 1-20 | 83 829 |
| - GRANDE COMORE | July 18 - August 25 | 118 924 |
| - MAYOTTE | September 1-30 | 32 607 |
| - MOHELI | July 21-30 | 9 545 |
| TOTAL | | <u>244 905</u> |

After Independence in 1975, and the referendum whereby Mayotte opted to provisionally keep its status, two separate censuses took place:

- the census of the Island of Mayotte, by INSEE in July 1978: 47,246;
- and the census of the other three islands forming the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros, with assistance from UNFPA.

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Anjouan | 138,000 |
| Grande Comore | 192,000 |
| Moheli | <u>17,000</u> |

Total 347,000 (provisional results)

TABLE 44 - COMOROS - POPULATION TRENDS IN THE ARCHIPELAGO

| YEAR | TOTAL | ANJOUAN | GRANDE COMORE | MAYOTTE | MOHELI |
|----------|---------|---------|---------------|---------|--------|
| 1843 | - | - | - | 3 000 | - |
| 1866 | 65 000 | - | - | - | - |
| 1870 [2] | 56 300 | 12 000 | 35 000 | 3 300 | 6 000 |
| 1900 [7] | - | 15 000 | - | - | - |
| 1906 | 96 000 | - | - | 11 731 | - |
| 1925 | 120 680 | - | - | - | - |
| 1935 [3] | 123 939 | 37 054 | 65 118 | 15 801 | 5 966 |
| 1941 | 137 035 | - | - | - | - |
| 1944 | 143 442 | - | - | - | - |
| 1947 | 152 282 | 49 197 | 80 930 | 17 221 | 4 934 |
| 1949 | 168 890 | 64 653 | 79 525 | 19 043 | 5 669 |
| 1950 | 164 838 | 62 970 | 79 525 | 17 206 | 5 137 |
| 1951 (1) | 165 613 | 60 327 | 81 862 | 17 123 | 5 471 |
| 1954 | 168 000 | - | - | - | - |
| 1956 | 176 500 | - | - | - | - |
| 1958 | 183 133 | 61 815 | 90 790 | 23 364 | 7 164 |
| 1966 | 244 905 | 83 829 | 118 924 | 32 607 | 9 545 |
| 1973 | - | - | 130 165 | - | - |
| 1974 | - | 101 970 | - | 37 331 | 12 640 |
| 1978 [6] | - | - | - | 47 246 | - |
| 1980 (2) | - | 138 000 | 192 000 | - | 17 000 |

-
- (1) In 1951, the distribution by island does not include the 665 French and 165 foreigners given in the total.
 - (2) Estimates drawn from the provisional census results in the FIR of the Comoros.

4) The Ministry of Health Censuses

These are organized for vaccination campaigns. The Department for Primary Health and the Campaign Against the Major Endemic Diseases in the Comoros published an annual report in 1973 (on the Grande Comore) and another in 1974, on the other three islands, in which the population composition by age group, prefecture and canton was given.

| | |
|----------------------|---------|
| - 1973 Grande Comore | 130,165 |
| - 1974 Anjouan | 101,970 |
| - 1974 Mayotte | 37,331 |
| - 1974 Moheli | 12,640 |

III. CONCLUSION

The following population estimate for January 1st 1975 can be given:

| | |
|---------------|---------------|
| Anjouan | 111,820 |
| Grande Comore | 157,123 |
| Mayotte | 42,168 |
| Moheli | <u>13,401</u> |
| Total | 324,512 |

At present, the very high growth rate means a doubling of the population every 20 years. There is reason to believe that the archipelago will number 800,000 people in the year 2000.

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