

The Quest for Gender Equality in Burkina Faso:  
Female Workloads, Education and Empowerment

by

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with Jennifer Hilda Frisanco



## Preface

Only 8.1 % percent of women ages 15 and above in Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta) were literate in 2005, compared to 18.5% of men. The question of why this inequality remained alongside others, twenty-five years after the enthusiasm and energy inspired by Upper Volta's multi-faceted UNESCO/UNDP Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education, preoccupied Scholastique Kompaoré and Brenda Gael McSweeney. Mrs. Kompaoré, a sociologist, was the National Coordinator of this Equal Access initiative from 1972 to 1978 and prior to that participated in carrying out feasibility studies for the Project. Dr. McSweeney, a development specialist, was in charge of the Project at the United Nations Development Programme's Ouagadougou office. The authors' documentary research, drawing especially on their field data collected since the 1970s, did not reveal substantial evolution in the percentage of literate women. On the bright side, they noted significant progress in women's empowerment in terms of economic autonomy and community voice, plus solid improvements in girls' education at the primary level which augur well for the future.

The authors went back in 2005 to the zones of the Project for Equal Access to Education to examine its legacy, including various aspects of women's lives in villages that participated. They looked particularly into the impact of workload-lightening technologies; literacy, income-generating activities and political voice of women; and access to education for girls. This paper outlines their conclusions and identifies topics for further investigation in the quest for gender equality and female empowerment in Burkina Faso.

## Context

This story starts in a country earlier called Upper Volta (now Burkina Faso), located in West Africa. Burkina has a total population of about 12.8 million inhabitants<sup>1</sup> and most of its citizens live in rural areas, even though more and more migrate to the cities every year. On the Human Development Index, Burkina Faso is ranked at number 174 out of 177 countries.<sup>2</sup> The ranking is based on average life expectancy, educational indicators and standard of living. Burkina Faso's ranking is due to its poor health conditions that result in a life expectancy at birth of 48 years,<sup>3</sup> and even more so, due to its low literacy rate of 12.8 % of adults age 15 and older<sup>4</sup>. A key explanatory factor for the even lower literacy rate among adult women is that women's heavy workloads limit their time to access education. However since the 1970s, technologies have been introduced to help free up women's time. The government today has also acted to prioritize the introduction of workload-lightening technologies for women, and increase the literacy rate of its female citizens through dedicated programmes. The government is now spending 22 % of its revenues on education, more than the all-Africa average.<sup>5</sup> Thus a question that emerges is why gender inequalities remain in literacy.

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 300.

<sup>3</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 286 (2004 data).

<sup>4</sup> Literacy data from UNESCO, *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2006*, p. 284 (data refer to a year between 2000 and 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Pôle de Dakar, UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa, *EFA > Paving the Way for Action: Education for All in Africa*, p. 191.

## DETAILED MAP OF BURKINA FASO, showing the three Project sites



On this map, one can locate the three zones of the Women's Education Project: Banfora in the south-west; Kongoussi, centre-north; and Pô, centre-south.

Map Credit: [http://www.ashantiafricantours.com/images/map\\_burkina\\_big.jpg](http://www.ashantiafricantours.com/images/map_burkina_big.jpg)

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### Larba

In 1972 Larba Zibaré from the tiny southern village of Boala in the region of Pô, walked into the United Nations Development Programme office, sat himself down, and asserted that he would not budge until UNDP promised that the Women's Education Project that was operating in a neighbouring village be expanded into *his* village. Larba's stance challenged the views of UNDP Headquarters officials who had expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the women's literacy component of this Project. Larba personified the news that had not reached the UN's New York Headquarters, namely, that the workload-lightening aspects and practical messages of the initiative were highly valued by male and female villagers alike.

Larba Zibaré, 2005



Photo Credit: Stanley Freedman-Gurspan

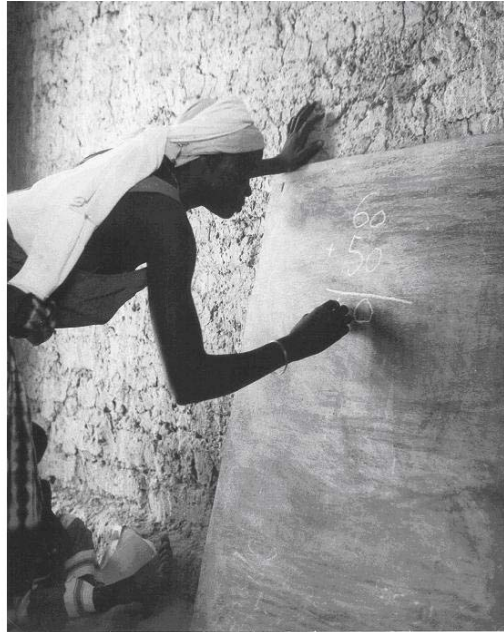
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### **The Upper Volta/UNESCO/UNDP Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education**

When Upper Volta declared its independence in 1960, the country provided education for 6 % of its population and only one girl attended school for every three boys. The commonly evoked reasons for this inequality are listed below in order of importance:

- The reluctance of mothers to forgo their daughters' help in carrying out exhausting domestic tasks and taking care of younger siblings;
- The early and forced marriage of girls;
- A shortage of schools and the almost complete lack of schools outside of urban centres and major villages;
- Poverty that led parents to give priority to educating their boys, who would perpetuate the family name and be of more help later on than their girls, who would get married and settle elsewhere.

The government, convinced of the benefit of offering equal educational opportunities to boys and girls to promote the nation's harmonious development, tapped UNESCO's technical assistance and UNDP funding to launch a multi-pronged project in the 1970s with as one specific goal, equal access to education for women and girls. Three regions, Kongoussi, Banfora and Pô that differed from each other in terms of geography, primary ethnic group, local economy and primary language, were chosen to host a 10-year Pilot Project. The Project was also expected to inspire other countries in the region through seminars and study trips.



Pre-Project sociological studies confirmed that Kasséna women from Pô enjoyed more control over their lives and their material goods. The Mossi women of Kongoussi and those coming from three ethnic groups (Goin, Turka and Karaboro) of the Banfora zone were the ones most subjugated to their families and husbands. These baseline studies also demonstrated that regardless of the community, women were generally more overwhelmed by work than men. The studies came to the following conclusions:

- In order to improve girls' enrolment and retention in school, mothers needed to be educated;
- Women's and girls' workloads needed to be reduced to give them the desire, energy and time necessary for their education.

A team of state agents, periodically trained, was constituted in each region. On the national level, a team based in Ouagadougou and assisted by UNESCO's international experts was responsible for the Project's direction and for the coordination of Project activities.

The strategy focused on raising public awareness both within the three Project zones and throughout the country as a whole. Traditional political and administrative leaders, elected officials and development partners were encouraged to support the Project, including through replication of some of the Project's activities and financial contributions.

### **Female and Male Workloads: Then and Now**

Project sociologists identified the massive workloads of women as factors inhibiting access of women and girls to education. The following table shows that women in the 1970s carried out two-thirds of the village production/distribution/supply tasks, virtually all of the household tasks, and nearly one-quarter of the community obligations. The women, having only about one hour and fifteen minutes of free time a day, needed their daughters to help out.

## RURAL ACTIVITIES (KONGOUSSI ZONE): WOMEN'S WORKLOADS, late 1970s

Women's share of work expressed as a percentage of total time allocated by both men and women to each category

<b>A. PRODUCTION, SUPPLY, DISTRIBUTION</b>	
1. Food and cash crop distribution	64 %
a. Sowing	49 %
b. Weeding, tilling	95 %
c. Harvesting	25 %
d. Travel between fields	86 %
e. Gathering wild crops	61 %
f. Other crop production activities	64 %
2. Domestic food storage	2 %
3. Food processing	85 %
a. Grinding, pounding grain	100 %
b. Winnowing	100 %
c. Threshing	100 %
d. Other processing activities	54 %
4. Animal husbandry	60 %
5. Marketing	95 %
6. Brewing	100 %
7. Water Supply	100 %
8. Fuel Supply	76 %
<b>B. CRAFTS AND OTHER PROFESSIONS</b>	23 %
1. Straw Work	0
2. Spinning cotton	100 %
3. Tailoring	19 %
4. Midwifery	100 %
5. Other crafts/professions (e.g. metal work, pottery, weaving, bee-keeping...)	0
<b>C. COMMUNITY</b>	23 %
1. Community projects	100 %
2. Other community obligations	0
<b>D. HOUSEHOLD</b>	97 %
1. Rearing, initial care of children	100 %
2. Cooking, cleaning, washing	99 %
3. House building	0
4. House repair	0
<b>E. PERSONAL NEEDS</b>	37 %
1. Rest, relaxing	33 %
2. Meals	42 %
3. Personal hygiene and other personal needs (including medical)	75 %
<b>F. FREE TIME</b>	40 %
1. Religion	25 %
2. Educational activities (learning to read, attending a UNESCO meeting or class...)	82 %
3. Media (radio, reading a book...)	0
4. Conversation	17 %
5. Going visiting (including such social obligations as funerals)	70 %
6. Errands (including going to purchase personal consumption items such as kola nuts or tobacco next door)	11 %

WOMEN'S WORK: TOTAL (A+B+C+D) 56 %

WOMEN'S PERSONAL NEEDS AND FREE TIME: TOTAL (E+F) 38 %

\*Activity not undertaken by women or men during mini sample observation.

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Source: Brenda Gael McSweeney, *The Negative impact of development on women reconsidered: A study of the women's education project in Upper Volta*, p. 115.



Labour-intensive traditional processing of shea butter in the 1970s

From very early ages, girls' workloads tended to be the double of those of boys, for an average of more than seven hours of work a day.

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COMPARISON OF PHASING INTO WORKLOADS  
(KONGOUSSI ZONE) BY SEX

Ages	Average for Four Villages Daily hours of work	
	Girls	Boys
7	5.3	0.7
9	7.4	2.8
11	8.5	3.2
13	6.0	5.2
15	8.8	4.4

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Source: Brenda Gael McSweeney, "Collection and Analysis of Data on Rural Women's Time Use," *Studies in Family Planning* Volume 10 Number 11/12 November/December 1979, p. 382.



Being a girl-child in the 70s ...

Time-diaries based on observation of work in the 1970s supported the hypothesis that age did not strongly affect women's time use. Young girls and older women alike shouldered substantial burdens. Study of a small sample from the village of Zimtenga in the Kongoussi region revealed that the three older women (average age: forty-eight) worked the most hours, averaging more than 11 hours in their first fourteen waking hours.



Pô Zone, 2005 – seniors still hard at work, as shown by this Kasséna woman brewing millet beer

An on-the-spot interview probing women's and men's workloads three decades later in the same villages revealed important changes, illustrated by the table below.



WOMEN'S AND MEN'S  
COMPARATIVE WORKLOADS  
Kongoussi Zone – 2005

	♀	♂
	Women	Men
Water provision	Yes	
Supplying food	Yes	Yes
Agriculture		
Family fields	Yes	Yes
Personal fields	Yes	Yes
Tilling	Yes	Majority
Sowing	All	None
Weeding	Yes	Yes
Cultivating vegetables/cash crops	Yes	Yes
Harvesting	Yes	Yes
Storage/guarding grain		Yes
Supplying food		
Daytime meals	Yes	
Evening meals		Yes
Grain, meat		Yes
Condiments	Yes	Cash for
Mill payment	Yes	Yes
Household work	All	
Washing clothes	All	
House repair		All
Care of the sick	Yes	Yes
Marketing		
Livestock		Yes
Peanuts, peas, millet, beans	Yes	
Wheat flour paddies ( <i>'beignets'</i> )	Yes	
Girls' education – discuss together	Yes	Yes
Paying school fees	May help	Yes
Arranging girls' marriages	Yes	Yes
Governance/community obligations	Some voice	Yes

Source: Interview, November 2005, with Gabriel Ouédraogo, former Head of the Women's Education Project in the Kongoussi zone.

The “blurring” of the sexual division of labour shown in the above table represents a shift from the situation in the 1970s, when tasks were highly gender-specific. Daily life is now characterized by greater participation of both sexes in a wider range of activities. Women's role in decision-making

has also changed. Important household and community decisions are now not typically taken without prior consultation with the women.

### **Reduction of Women's Workloads**

At the Project's inception women were still spending a great deal of time on repetitive activities using rudimentary tools. Water drawn from ponds or open wells close to the ground was often polluted and the source of sicknesses such as diarrhoea and bilharzia. During six months in a year water became a rare resource when most of the wells and ponds dried up.



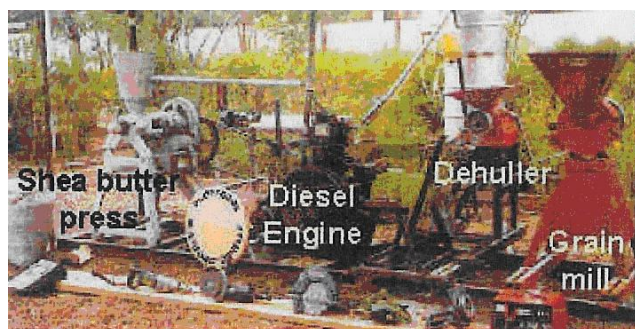
Women quarrelled over the water, and what they managed to obtain they then had to transport for long distances using large clay jugs carried on their heads. The Project back in the seventies introduced activities to facilitate access to clean water. Volunteers from the U.S. Peace Corps and rural artisans trained in Ouagadougou dug wells, many with very wide diameters enabling several women to draw water at the same time and to use pulleys rather than traditional ladles to extract it. The construction of raised wells offered better protection against water contamination, and women were taught how to make charcoal filters or boil water to make it potable.

The scarcity of wood for fuel was another problem. The increase in village populations and deforestation forced women to go further and further away from villages to find fuel. The Project responded by giving each village a cart to use in hauling wood. Interestingly, the men and older boys took over this simple technology, and the associated workloads. Fuel efficient ovens were built and their popularization undertaken in order to save wood, and, through the assistance of Denmark's Danchurchaid, the first solar cookers were tested in rural settings.

Another energy and time-consuming activity was the transformation of grain into flour. Traditionally, grain was ground in mortars or crushed between stones. The Project introduced hullers and grain mills in the pilot villages. Women selected by the villagers were trained to manage and maintain the mills. Once women gained some free time, the Trickle Up programme and other Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) offered them small credits and training, enabling them to use their new-found time to engage in income-generating activities such as making and selling of food products, soap and shea butter, and woven cloth.



The focus on the crucial variable of workload reduction has continued over the decades. The multifunctional platform is the latest technology to have been brought into villages to lighten women's workloads and improve their lives. The machine first appeared in 1994/95 in Mali and Burkina Faso. The multifunctional platform is a revolutionary technology designed with women in mind. The platform is made of a simple diesel engine that, depending on villages' needs, can be used with a grain mill, de-huller, shea butter press, water pump and battery charger, and can provide electricity which permits children to study at night around light-bulbs and merchants to keep their kiosks open. The platform mechanizes labour-intensive tasks, enabling women to save time and reinvest it as they choose, be it for pursuit of professional training, for income-generating businesses or literacy classes, or for something else of their choice. The strategy was for the machine to be bought by groups of women who would then oversee, operate, maintain and profit from the machine. This allowed rural women to create and own a business based on the machine's functions.<sup>6</sup>



The Multifunctional Platform – Source: <http://www.ptfm.net/old/mfpwhat.htm>

Furthermore, the machine has played an important role in encouraging women's empowerment in Burkina. The electricity generating feature in particular has helped raise women's status in society, since the women gained prestige when providing electricity in such places as health clinics, educational centres and places of worship. Their new earnings facilitated their access to further credit, which has fostered their entrepreneurship ambitions.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ptfm.net/old/mfpwhat.htm>

## Women's and Girls' Education

The Project's interest was on practical education. The Project for Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education identified leaders among the village women and helped train them. Local leaders mobilized other women to join in preparing and gathering women to listen to weekly radio programmes aimed at improving daily lives. The shows dealt with a wide range of topics, including for example the making of coal water filters, improved ovens, nutritious children's food, agriculture with draft animals, and sowing in rows. Literacy, given a major push in 1974 from national education reform, also focused on the practical.

The Project helped university linguists to establish the alphabet for transcription of national languages. It then produced teaching materials and written materials in the three languages most commonly spoken in the Project sites, a critical step since earlier those languages were unwritten. The Project supported teaching arithmetic and reading and writing in the three languages, skills the villagers needed in order to improve their living and working conditions. Certificates were awarded to villagers completing a 3-year course. In 1976 the Project attracted international attention when awarded a special mention in the prestigious UNESCO Nadeja Kroupskaia literacy prize competition. The entire country seemed passionate about literacy. Songs actually lauded the Project's results and with its assistance, NGOs started transcribing Project materials into other languages. The increasing demand for written materials led to the government's adoption of literacy as a tool for adult education and the creation of the National Institute for Literacy and Adult Education (INAFEA) to ensure its expansion.



Practical learning during International Women's Year: 1975

Over the years, the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy adopted the strategy of boosting literacy by increasing access to it. The villages themselves chose if they wanted to become literate through initiatives of NGOs, or from bilateral and multilateral projects. The Ministry retained the right to train professional staff to teach and supervise, as well as monitor the curriculum. This process took place in three phases: initial literacy, complementary basic training and specific technical training. Another three years of education in practical French was then offered primarily in bilingual schools and in the Centre of Non Formal Education.

Improving girls' education and women's literacy is now the flagship programme of the UN System in Burkina (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WFP, WHO, FAO, etc.).<sup>7</sup> These organisations have prepared with government partners an educational program for both women and girls, and it is rare that their interventions do not have a specific women's literacy component. The projects start their activities only when a sufficient number of women are present. For example, the National Fund for Literacy and Non Formal Education (FONAENF) agrees to fund literacy centres if women constitute 60 % of those present. Many women's associations teach their members to read and do arithmetic.

The community outreach undertaken by the Ministry and its partners combined with quotas for female participation maintained by certain projects, have resulted in girls attending school in almost equal numbers to boys. In 2005 nearly 8 girls were enrolled and completed primary schooling for every 10 boys<sup>8</sup>. Incentives such as offering education to girls at no cost and distributing free school supplies have been effective. In addition, Government policy changed in 1974 so that girls are no longer sent back home from school because they are pregnant. Many challenges remain, however, for women and for the population as a whole. Only one girl for three boys currently reaches high school. Also, the national rate for school attendance is currently only 56 %, far from the objective of universal schooling set for 2015.



Tarfila Village, Banfora Zone 2005

Today the demanding schedules of women are still a key issue. Numerous incentives have been put in place to increase women's participation in educational programs. Unfortunately, the variation that characterizes the interventions in favour of women has created uneasy tensions between villagers because of the difference of treatment. That is, in the same villages

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<sup>7</sup> Activities are situated within the Government of Burkina's strategic Ten-Year Development Plan for Basic Education (PDDEB), launched in 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Pôle de Dakar, UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Africa, *EFA > Paving the Way for Action: Education for All in Africa*, pp. 191 and 289.

where centres coexist, meal and/or other financial benefits are offered to their participants; these programs exclude some villagers who do not benefit from the programs and thus do not receive that kind of help. The uneasy atmosphere generated can hamper the education efforts put in place.

Progress is being made yet challenges abound. Women's literacy rates are still woefully low. Women's efforts to be literate might also be slowed by the fact that literacy and the control of knowledge are mainly monitored by men, which may also disadvantage women. The literacy process drop-out rates are also higher for females than males.

The incentives for literacy are not great, as few documents are published in national languages, and literacy diplomas are not recognized nationally. There is also a lack of clarity about expectations from literacy programs, is one aiming at practical functional literacy or becoming literate as an end in itself, which might be stifling progress. The various literacy initiatives are often uncoordinated and there is too little follow-up to boost overall outcomes.

### **Economics and Community Political Voice**

*“Women's increasing economic wealth has been a catalyst in allowing women to gain a political voice in villages.” - Mrs. Scholastique Kompaoré, July 2006*



As discussed earlier the use of technology, such as the multifunctional platform, has freed up time, allowing women to focus on educational training and income-generating activities. Women's economic improvement is closely intertwined with the access to functional literacy and training. Access to education for women and girls has proven to bear its fruits as women can and have become major household income contributors. Women's income generating capacity has thus slowly changed villagers' mentalities, reshaping women's traditional community and household roles. As a result, today parents in most parts of the country understand the importance of sending both their little boys and girls to school. At the heart of this flourishing gender parity is women's economic power as well as women's group solidarity. Self confidence and group empowerment have worked together, allowing women

to affirm themselves at the household and community levels.

### **Education as a Catalyst for Women’s Empowerment**

The Project used radio and theater to encourage women to leave behind their silence in the company of men, as imposed by tradition, to express their thoughts and to participate in development. In the villages visited in 2005, the women have visibly done so; the authors were struck by the ease with which the women of Boala in the Pô zone spoke up and gave their opinions on a variety of subjects, ranging from their everyday concerns and the relationship between men and women to politics. Some were wearing T-shirts in support of the political party of their candidate for the elections. The women are no longer afraid of credit to start up a business or manufacturing concern. Various vocational training and functional literacy programs help them pursue their income generating activities over the long term. The Tarfila women in the region of Banfora, who started with a Project grinding mill and later purchased one for themselves, talked to the authors of their plan to boost savings, and they added, then even buy a truck for their commerce. Women from Zimtenga in the Kongoussi zone acquired individual parcels of land along Lake Bam, where they grow vegetables, some of which are exported. Cooperation set up in 1976 with the residents of Geldrop in Holland facilitated this. A future goal is to buy better agricultural tools.



Women’s voice in the Project villages:  
Then .....and Now

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### **Health**

Functional literacy and basic education have played a major role in improving health conditions in rural areas. Women became sensitive to hygiene issues by listening to health advice on the radio while performing their daily chores. Radio programs have played an essential role in educating women as an inexpensive and non-intrusive way to reach people.

These radio programs as well as health pamphlets taught them for example about the importance of filtering water to avoid disease. These educational tools successfully increase women's knowledge about health by teaching them how to perform simple tasks to improve hygiene practices.



Childbirth conditions also improved; before, there was one doctor for three hundred thousand inhabitants. Childbirth took place at home in horrific hygienic conditions and with the assistance of matrons with no formal training. Maternal and infant mortality rates were very high. Collaborating with certain health services allowed chosen matrons to be trained in birth clinics by midwives, giving them a basic knowledge to ensure deliveries in better hygienic conditions and to advise, prepare and assist women in a more effective way. Village clinics were built by local populations, which facilitated the issuing of birth certificates, paving the way for enrolling children in schools. Mothers were also taught to prepare food which would improve the diet of children, often suffering from kwashiorkor.

These technologies and facilities were introduced with a package of measures to ensure their sustainability. The package included training of well diggers and village mechanics, availability of maintenance and repair services, capacity of beneficiaries to maintain equipment, and easy access to spare parts, even the possibility to make them on the spot.

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### **Interview with Dr. Hubert Bourreau, M.D., on health conditions in the mid-60s**

“The Hospital of Pô was in fact an old health centre dating from the colonial times, located near the Catholic Mission, adapted for external consultations: check-ups, injections of quinine or penicillin and bandaging were done in the big common room, all close together, noisy and relaxed. The hospitalization room was empty when I arrived. In this epoch, in 1965, there were no pharmacies in the town of Pô; civil servants had to manage to give their prescriptions to travellers, numerous on this path connecting Ouagadougou to Ghana. In Ouagadougou, there were two private pharmacies owned by French pharmacists and the national pharmacy.

A birth clinic was constructed close to the administrative buildings of the Commandant of Circle in the 50s. It was quite functional, with a big common room for the new mothers, a birthing room, a big room for examination of pregnant women and an office for consultation next to the entrance hall that was used as a waiting room. The maternity was managed by a



nurse trained as an African Medical Assistant (the more highly trained nurses and the midwives were assigned to the big towns). There were approximately a hundred births per month. The infants were transported monthly to facilities where they could be weighed.”

Even today, for the poorest one fifth of Burkina’s population, only 18 % of births are attended by skilled health personnel and the under-five mortality rate is 239 per 1,000 live births<sup>9</sup>. Improvements in the health situation in the country together with those in education are key to boosting Burkina’s rating on the Human Development Index.

### **Current Situation – Workload-Lightening Technology, Boosting Female Voice**

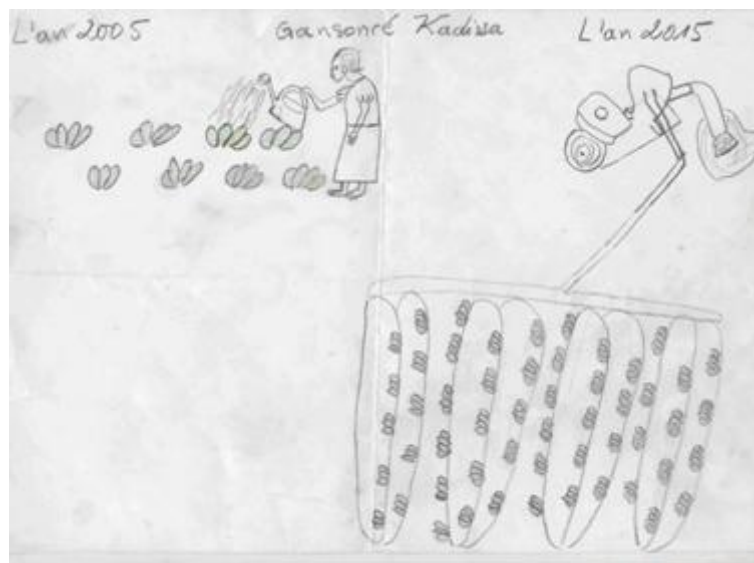
What is the situation today? What has been accomplished in terms of lightening women’s and girls’ onerous tasks, improving their access to education and literacy, and broadening female political voice and economic choice? From a few mills in big villages at the start of the Project, today one sees mills fulfilling many tasks, from the husking of seeds to transformation into oil, a bit everywhere in the villages. Mills manufactured on the spot allow easy repair and maintenance, as trained artisans and spare parts are available. Some mills are put on wheels and moved around from market to market. It is rare to see a woman grinding grain between stones, and apprenticeship in handling mills is part of girls’ training.

Furthermore, more towns have access to electricity thanks to solar energy. Again, certain areas in several villages have electric bulbs under which one can see women selling food and children studying, and more often girls than boys.

Back in the 70s when the Women’s Education Project started, piped water used to be a luxury. Today, artisan wells are increasingly replaced by more sophisticated ones. Girls, boys, women and men can all be seen around them.

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Sketch by Kadissa Gansoré in Kongoussi, still dreaming of better days ...



Watering can, 2005

Agricultural pump, 2015

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<sup>9</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 310.

A debate that one wishes to launch with readers concerns the actual impact of technologies. In Burkina Faso the technologies introduced have been prized. Even in 2005, when asked to portray 'personal project dreams,' two-thirds of the women in the Kongoussi zone sketched their wish for improved water supply in ten years' time. And many sketch the traditional water filter introduced by the Women's Education Project, still in use today.<sup>10</sup> Small wonder, since 39 % of the population is still without sustainable access to an improved water source.<sup>11</sup>

The 'traditional' wisdom states that new technologies do not necessarily reduce women's overall workloads; women tend instead to improve their productivity or standard of living (as reflected in the writings of Hungarian sociologist Alexander Szalai). Assessment of gender-specific time-budgets is receiving fresh interest (for example, in the writings of Nobel-prize-winning economist Daniel Kahneman). Since from the villages to the Government and donor partners of Burkina, a lot of stock is being placed in the multipurpose platform, one is seeking experiences and insights of readers, notably based on gender-disaggregated workload studies that capture the impact of technologies.

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Women's mobility has changed too. More and more women move around by bicycles or mopeds, or even on motorcycles, which facilitates the commercial activities in which they participate. Increased mobility allows them to increase their involvement in different social activities too.



From a Project Monitor in the 70s, to Government staff today

The use of the donkey or bullock cart has become common; one trip to the well with big plastic containers or barrels is sufficient to bring back enough water or wood for days. This mode of transportation brings men to contribute to the transportation of water, wood, and crops, tasks which were traditionally only done by women.

Thanks to UNICEF, and also to certain projects funded through bilateral assistance, community kindergartens were established in villages and welcomed children from three

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<sup>10</sup> See the pioneering work of Professor Brian R. Little of Harvard/Carleton Universities and his 'personal projects' analysis, twinned with that of 'personal' and 'professional' dream sketches and narratives used by Brenda Gael McSweeney and her collaborators in India and Burkina.

<sup>11</sup> UNDP, *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 294.

years old and up. This permitted women to gain a bit of time. Nurseries were also constructed around literacy centres to welcome children while literacy campaigns were underway.

The major field work is done by plough and a few men set the example by helping women in their personal fields. Finally, the main technology that appeared these last few years is the multifunctional platform that has brought a lot of hope for women, to save time and energy.

### **The Legacy: “Grandchildren” of the Project:**

As a Pilot Project, the Women’s Education Project created paths to improve and diversify the possibilities of education offered to women and girls, and facilitated access. Through numerous seminars, it also influenced the policies of other neighbouring countries. From consulting documents, interviews with officials in charge of education, NGOs, development partners, education and women’s literacy program leaders, it appears that the orientations traced by the Project for Equal Access to Education for Women and Girls are still being followed today as these key testimonies illustrate.

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#### **Ideas on the Legacy of the Project**

*Jacqueline Ki-Zerbo, first coordinator of the Project, sees the effort as one that bore the most fruit, pursuing objectives and results integrated in a common vision with a multidisciplinary approach: a pioneer and valid initiative that responds to the preoccupations of women. For her, the Project can legitimately claim the fact that it has sown seeds; many public programmes, secular and private, have been inspired by this Project.*

Jacqueline Ki-Zerbo, in an interview  
with the authors, November 2005



Photo Credit: Stanley Freedman-Gurspan

*Elisabeth Aminata Ouédraogo Bancé, Director of the CIEFFA thinks that the Upper Volta/ UNESCO Project was a very important foundation for the education of women and girls, that demonstrated new approaches in this field.*

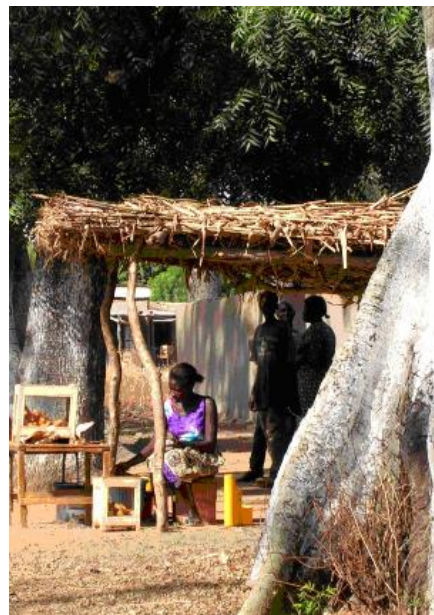
*Mrs. Hortense Kaboré, consultant, declared to Scholastique Kompaoré: “The impact of your engagement and work at the head of the Project, your interviews, your pleas in the media, raised consciousness that has facilitated the task to generations of women, whom you have inspired, and catalysed the creation of women’s associations that do not cease to increase.”*

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### **Courtyard Dreams**

Titi Yaguibou, age seventy, of the Pô region has three surviving children of six, a boy and two girls. Titi's existence is by no means easy – she farms and sells small produce by the roadside. She did not attend school. Her only dream for herself – for ten years hence, or even five – is to be at rest: she has sketched herself as a skeleton. Titi feels that she has made her contribution, and now she may exit.

"I wish to open a shop!" declares Titi's daughter Cécile. Cécile's sketch of her 'dream' existence ten years hence is in stark contrast with that of her 70-year old mother. Cécile speaks with ease in English, unusual in rural areas in a Francophone country. She had three years of formal education, and has knowledge of five languages. Cécile has an elaborate two-stage dream. She wishes to own a freezer and take charge of a bakery, then to run a supermarket.



Neighbors in the courtyard dream too. Twenty-seven year-old Valérie had nine years of formal schooling. She hopes to move up from the roadside, pictured above where she sells her beignets. For her four year-old daughter Gisèle, she sketches a career as a civil servant. One wishes to explore further whether explicitly setting forth a personal project dream helps individuals or groups of women to break out of a vicious circle of poverty, to focus on and realize their dreams.<sup>12</sup> The authors also wish to probe further the link of ‘education’ – whether functional literacy or formal schooling – with precise ‘project dreams’. Valérie in any case is on her way – she is now teaching functional literacy classes in the Kasséna language.

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<sup>12</sup> See also the work of Brian R. Little on personal projects pursuits at: <http://www.brianrlittle.com/>

## Project Personnel and Partners

Village women interviewed in 2005 would still like the Project to return. The women of Boala insist on the need to restore the twinning between villages initiated under the Project, for a better interethnic understanding and knowledge, and for the exchange of Project activities and cultural activities, such as dance and music.

Benoît Ouédraogo, rural development expert, deems that the Project owes its success in literacy to the fact that this was *functional* literacy, which improved the living conditions of women, in conjunction with all the written documents that had clear-cut information to attain this precise result.

According to Alice Tiendrébéogo, Director of FONAENF: “Lightening of the work burden of women and girls, through appropriate technologies, and improving revenues with income-generating activities, plus facilitating access to education for women and girls constitutes a “chain” or package that the Project took into account. But we have not taken full advantage of this experience; we have not analyzed the work accomplished. It is the same for the current projects; projects are not followed up. Each partner comes, does their work, and leaves.”

Aimé Damiba, Director of Burkina’s Educational Planning in the 70s and now a UNESCO consultant, concurs that one has not drawn the lessons of experience from the all the various dimensions of the Project.



Photo of a sketch by school children near Pô, on “Obstacles to Education” and what can be done about them – displayed in the Governor’s Foyer

School children in the Pô Zone prepared the poster above that sets out their ideas on “problems that education runs into”:

- Poverty and ignorance of parents
- Lack of infrastructure
- Certain children do not have birth certificates.

They then enumerate what they feel is “necessary”:

- Free schooling
- Education for all, girls just like boys
- Schools in every village
- Sensitising parents to the importance of school
- Obtaining birth certificates for children
- Opening literacy centres for adults and school leavers
- No early marriage.

The school children conclude their poster with: “To educate a girl = to educate a nation.”

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The government officials responsible for the country’s education programs continue to redouble efforts to improve women’s and girls’ access to education. By continuing to associate neighbouring countries, with which Burkina Faso shares common languages, one could increase access to literacy documents and even systematize the production of documentation and written exchanges. It is important to have an exchange with readers, notably on success stories in lowering women’s workloads and boosting their literacy and choices.

Officials from the Netherlands Development Organization, who have been spearheading the coordination work of the donor community on gender in Burkina, published a comprehensive study in 2005. Amongst the findings was that the impact of the action of the many women leaders in Burkina Faso today could have an even greater impact if synergies and complementarities were strengthened. Also, they believe that gender mainstreaming would permit action within a development framework where women and men participate equally to formulate and implement policies and programs addressing their specific needs<sup>13</sup>.

As leading thinker on gender and development issues, Martha Nussbaum, states: “One of the most effective ways of promoting women’s control over their environment, and their effective right of political participation, is to promote women’s literacy.”<sup>14</sup>

Readers are invited to share insights, manuscripts and comments with the authors on what best to do to move towards gender equality in Burkina Faso, notably ideas for successfully lightening women's workloads, boosting girls' education and women's literacy, and promoting female empowerment, at the following email address: [equality.burkina@gmail.com](mailto:equality.burkina@gmail.com)

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<sup>13</sup> SNV

<sup>14</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: the capabilities approach*, p. 81

## **The Future: Towards Gender Equality and Development**

As the authors see it, the education priorities for women and girls remain the same: to increase the opportunities for education and facilitate equal access, and to increase women's options as well as choices regarding development and its benefits. There are numerous interventions currently in place in Burkina: seemingly every project, every Ministry has a dedicated focus on women, and there are numerous NGOs committed to women's issues. It is important that these interventions that carve out somewhat exclusive territories primarily in the large cities and their surroundings be well coordinated. Identification of a Ministry or organization from which one can obtain full data concerning the spectrum of interventions and their outcomes would be a positive contribution. A future challenge is to establish an overall information dissemination system that provides an overview and analysis of successful efforts in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, and that enables organizations to capitalize on past experiences. A unified information clearinghouse will provide data-driven guidance about the most effective ways of moving ahead.

Activities over the past three decades have yielded strong positive results in terms of narrowing Burkina's 'gender gap' in primary school enrollments and completion of the primary cycle of schooling, and in increasing women's economic autonomy and voice in the villages and beyond. The continued priority and investment in lessening women's workloads and promoting female education of Burkina's Government and citizens as well as their development partners are cause for optimism. As a Burkina proverb states, "Two hands scoop up more flour."



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- Corat, Sanye Gulser, Head of Section for Women and Gender Equality, Bureau of Strategic Planning, UNESCO, Paris, June 2005 and July 2006
- Aksornkool, Namtip, Chief, Section for Literacy and Non-formal Education, UNESCO Paris, June 2005 and July 2006
- Ouédraogo Bansé, Elisabeth Aminata, Director of CIEFFA, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 30/11/05
- Sirima, Fofana, President of CBDF, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 30/11/05
- Lankoandé, Ali, President, Party for Democracy and Progress/Socialist Party (PDP/PS) and former Minister of Education, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 30/11/05
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- Ouédraogo, Awa, President of the World March of Women/Action of Burkina, Group Interview, Ouagadougou, 1/12/05
- Ouédraogo, Alfred Yambénogo, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 1/12/05
- Konaté, Mariam, Former Manager of the Project at Banfora, Personal Interview, Bobo-Dioulasso, 1-3/12/05
- Former Project Instructors of Banfora, Group Interview, 3/12/05
- Women's Group of Tarfila, village of the Project in the Banfora Zone, Group Interview, 2/12/05
- Ouédraogo, Gabriel, Former Manager of the Project in the Kongoussi Zone, Personal Interview, Zimtenga, 5/12/05
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- Adouabou, Alice, Former UNESCO Project Personnel, Pô Zone, Personal Interview, 12/05
- Former Instructors from the Project at Pô, Group Interview, 6/12/05
- Chief Administrator of Guiaro, Davou, born Sié Aminata, 7/12/05
- Azoupiou, Daouda, Inspector of Primary Teaching, 7/12/05
- Komon, Issoufou, Pedagogic Advisor, Personal Interview, 7/12/05
- Villagers of Boala and Larba Zibaré, Group Interview, 7/12/05
- Group of women leaders from Pô, Group Interview, and 8/12/05
- Ouédraogo, Benoît, Consultant in Education, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 9/12/05
- Kafando, Georges, Head, Educational Program at UNICEF, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, December 2005
- Jan de Witte, Regional Director for West Africa and the Gender Team, SNV, Group Interview, Ouagadougou, December 2005
- Damiba, Aimé, Former International Civil Servant at UNESCO/BREDA in Dakar, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 13/12/05
- Tiendrébéogo/Kaboret, Alice, Coordinator/Director of FONAENF and President of FAWE, Personal Interview, Ouagadougou, 19/12/05
- Ndong Jatta, Ann Therese, Director, Division of Basic Education, UNESCO Paris, June 2006
- Buchert, Lene, Senior Programme Specialist, UNESCO Paris, June 2006
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## Acronyms

- **ACCT:** Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique/Agency of Cultural and Technical Cooperation
- **AVV:** Autorité des Aménagements des Vallées des Volta/Volta Valley Authority
- **AFJ/BF:** Association des Femmes Juristes du Burkina Faso/Association of Women Jurists of Burkina Faso
- **CBDF:** Coalition Burkinabée des Droits de la Femme/Burkina's Coalition for Women's Rights
- **CIEFFA :** Centre International pour l'Éducation des Filles et des Femmes en Afrique/International Center for Girls' and Women's Education in Africa
- **CNFE:** Centre of Non Formal Education
- **CREAA:** Conseil Régional pour l'Éducation des Adultes en Afrique/Regional Council for the Education of Adults in Africa
- **EFA:** Education for All
- **FAWE:** Forum for African Women Educationalists
- **FAO:** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- **FONAENF:** Fonds National pour l'Alphabétisation et l'Éducation Non Formelle/National Fund for Literacy and Non Formal Education
- **GaIDI :** Gender and International Development Initiatives of WSRC
- **GMIF:** Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Framework of UNESCO
- **INAFSA :** Institut National d'Alphabétisation et la Formation des Adultes/National Institute for Adult Literacy and Education in Burkina Faso
- **LIFE:** Literacy Initiative For Empowerment of UNESCO
- **JICA :** Japanese International Cooperation Agency
- **MEBA :** Ministère de l'Éducation de Base et de l'Alphabétisation, Burkina Faso/Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy, Burkina Faso
- **MMF/ANBF:** Marche Mondiale de la Femme/Action Nationale Burkina Faso; World March of Women/National Action Burkina Faso
- **NGO :** Non Governmental Organization
- **PDDEB:** Basic Education Development Plan
- **SHS:** Social and Human Sciences Sector, UNESCO Paris
- **SNV:** Netherlands Development Organization
- **UNDP:** United Nations Development Programme
- **UNESCO/BREDA:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Regional Office in Dakar
- **UNFPA:** United Nations Population Fund
- **UNICEF:** The United Nations Children's Fund
- **UNITWIN:** UNESCO's university twinning and networking programme in the social and human sciences
- **UNV:** United Nations Volunteers
- **USAID:** United States Agency for International Development
- **WFP:** United Nations World Food Programme
- **WSP:** Women's Studies Program at Boston University
- **WSRC:** Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University
- **WHO:** World Health Organization

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Mrs. Scholastique Kompaoré is a development consultant currently living in Ouagadougou, where she actively lobbies for women's rights. She has been elected as President of the 'Marche Mondiale des Femmes/Action Nationales du Burkina Faso'. She was the National Coordinator of UNESCO's Project for 'Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education' in the seventies. Mrs. Kompaoré directed the United Nations Development Programme's initiative, "Strengthening Civil Society Capacities to Combat Poverty" in Central Africa. She was also the Harare-based Coordinator of the UN Volunteers' Domestic Development Service, an exchange of community development workers in Africa south of the Sahara.

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### **Jennifer Hilda Frisanco**

Under the Scholar-Student Partnership at the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University, Jennifer Hilda Frisanco has been researching and working actively on the Project "Equal Access of Women and Girls to Education" for a year and a half. She focused on 'International and Global Studies' at Brandeis University. Ms. Frisanco is a dual national from France and Switzerland. She is now pursuing a career in international business in Miami, Florida.

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