

BURKINA FASO

• ANDRÉ-EUGÈNE ILBOUDO

Burkina Faso (formerly Alto Volta) is an old French colony. Independent since August 1960, it could be described as a democratic country until the 1970s. In the 1980s it went through a period of instability, but since 1991 it has returned to the road toward democracy. It is a relatively peaceful country and in the light of its recent economic evolution (growth close to 4% per year), financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund consider it a good follower of the process of economic recovery.

Despite its relatively stable social situation today, it is impossible to erase from the collective memory of Burkina Faso's inhabitants the vicissitudes of the 1980s, marked by a succession of military and exceptional regimes. The memory of those years brings to its inhabitants' mind the serious violations committed against individual freedom: defamation campaigns, humiliation, torture, deprivation of freedom for months or years and subsequent release without charges being brought or any explanation being given, unfair dismissals, arbitrary transfers, disappearances, political assassinations, etc.

To break with the past, in a referendum on June 2, 1991, the country adopted a constitution that marks the birth of the 4th Republic. The political regime is civil and republican. All the legal and institutional elements are in place.

There is a full multi-party system, specifically with representation of opposition parties in the Assembly who can exercise their rights without any apparent impediment, even with a supra-majority party (87 out of 107 including three women) dominating the Assembly. Although there are no limitations on parties, it is necessary to belong to one in order to be a candidate in the legislative elections, but not in presidential elections.

At the social level, the express approval by the international financial institutions is rejected by workers and unions, who argue that «this appreciation is not reflected in an improvement of daily life (daily food) for the inhabitants of Burkina Faso» because, as the poverty profile indicates (INSD February 1996), «44.5% of inhabitants live below the poverty threshold», i.e., on less than 41,099 CFA francs, or the equivalent of 83 US dollars per year.

Burkina Faso is a country with limited resources. Poverty is endemic. All costs are beyond reach, including production and consumer spending. Stabilization must be promoted with a view to better management of the growth stage, in order to achieve

LIFE EXPECTANCY: 52.2 YEARS

greater well-being at all social levels. Burkina also depends on «partners» in its development, to implement a strategy of its own to fight poverty.

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

According to the UNDP report, our country holds 170th place on the HDI. But it is clear that not all of its inhabitants are poor, although the country's general standard of living in the regions is below the mean. Overall, both in urban and rural contexts, income is concentrated and reflects major inequalities in the distribution of living standards. In the rural area, close to 80% of the population receives 40% of national income, and 20% of the rural population receives 60% of rural income, where we see an inequality within the country's inequality. In the urban area, the proportions are almost identical, since 20% of the urban population accounts for 65% of income.

At the level of the Socio-Economic Groups (SEGs), the inequalities are relatively intermediate, but the national level shows specific inadequate distribution in each SEG which combines and aggravates the overall inequalities.

In terms of standard of living, the average inhabitant is, statistically, not very representative of the typical inhabitant of Burkina Faso. This is due to the fact that the distribution of individuals on the scale of living standards reflects a predomination of the two opposite poles.

An analysis of sociodemographic characteristics shows that the poor are persons with a very large social burden (124.4 persons depend on every 100 poor individuals), unlike the rich (76.9 persons depend on every 100 rich individuals). This percentage of theoretical dependence is 101.3%, and is much higher in rural areas (109.1%) than in urban areas (83.9%).

The standard of living drops as the size of households increases. Officially, 27.8% of the inhabitants of Burkina Faso live below the threshold of extreme poverty. Extreme poverty is determined based on a national threshold of 31,749 CFA francs (less than 64 US dollars) per adult per year.

Further below this extreme poverty, 20% of the population has a standard of living lower than 27,619 CFA francs (less than 56 US

dollars) per adult per year. And 97.5% of this 20% is rural, while only 2.5% is urban.

Moreover, of the 20% of inhabitants having a standard of living of over 92,277 CFA francs (over 184 US dollars) per adult per year, 51.8% are rural and 48.2% are urban.

Poverty is localized fundamentally in rural zones in the center–north, center–south, southeast and north. It primarily affects farmers and particularly orchard producers (51.5%). Poverty is found above all in polygamous households having three or more women (56.8%) and more in households headed by men than in those headed by women. In male–headed households, poverty is stronger in polygamous than in monogamous or single ones.

The degree of poverty is linked to the size of the household, regardless of the location. Less than 10% of individuals belonging to a household having from 1 to 4 persons is poor, but more than 30% of those belonging to households with more than 13 persons are extremely poor.

ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

Poverty, in terms of literacy and schooling, is primarily rural and the inequalities between sexes and standards of living are much greater in rural areas than in urban areas.

In cities, the poorest households have a schooling index of 45.3% and the richest 74.3%; in the country, the poorest households have a schooling index of 18.1%, while the richest's index is 46.7%.

As regards the environment, the National Environment Plan (PANE) has been in effect since 1991. Its objective is to seek socioeconomic equilibrium and to contribute to self–sufficiency and food security, and to offer the population better living conditions. In this sense, the rural population is in a certain way trapped in a vicious circle: they are victims of the environment and in turn make the environment a victim of their poverty, depleting it in different ways.

Regarding water and hygiene, various hydraulic projects are being carried out in the country to perform and provide equipment for drilling. In the urban areas, the National Water and Sanitation Institute (ONEA) is responsible for distribution of drinking water.

Supply sources vary according to the area and standard of living. The rural areas get their supply chiefly from wells (54.4%, whereas for urban areas it is 19.7%), while the urban areas get their water primarily from public fountains (50.2%, as compared to 3.3% in rural areas) and faucets (24%, compared to 0.5% in rural areas). 11% of rural households, compared to 1% of urban households, get their water from waterways.

The quality of water from traditional wells and particularly from waterways is not monitored and at times is bad (bacterial pollution), so that the poorest sectors who use these sources are more exposed to water–related illnesses.

Crowding of household members in their dwelling is another criterion for evaluating well–being. We find on the average 2.4 persons per room in almost all the regions of the country, except in the north, where it is 4 persons.

The cost of the different building materials implies their use as a function of the area and above all of the standard of living. Earth crushed with water or pressed predominates (87.9%) in rural areas, where it is used twice as often as in the city (47.2%), where hard (24.8%) and semi–hard (27.2%) constructions prevail.

The sanitary services used depend on the zone. Rural dwellers resort primarily to nature (83.3% of households) and urban dwellers use WCs and above all latrines (88.4%).

Showers without plumbing are the sanitary item most used in rural areas (77%) and in urban areas (87%). Showers with plumbing are an isolated phenomenon (2.4%), primarily in urban areas (8.5% as compared to 0.9% in rural areas), and are characteristic of urban non–poor households (12%).

EDUCATION

Poverty is also reflected in education. Statistics show that 18.9% of Burkina Faso's inhabitants over 15 years of age know how to read and write, i.e., 12% in rural areas and 50% in urban areas. Men read and write (27.1%) at a rate of 2 to 1 in comparison to women (11.5%). The poorest men (10.8%) are illiterate at a rate of 5 to 1 in comparison to women (53.8%), while the poorest women (3.0%) are illiterate in a proportion of 11 to 1 as compared to the richest (33.5%).

The schooling index is 33.7% for primary education, distributed highly unevenly between rural and urban areas. In cities, the index is twice the national average (68.5%). In rural areas, the index is approximately 27.5%.

The disparities by sex are reflected in a male schooling index of 38.6% and a female schooling index of 28.3%, with a relation of 73.4 women for every 100 men. This primary school index forced the Ministry of Basic Education to concentrate its efforts from 1991 to 1995 on three major areas:

- Expanding basic education and literacy training.
- Improving the quality and the applicability of primary education as well as of literacy training.
- Strengthening the department's management capacity.

The different activities undertaken in pursuance of these goals tended to implement infrastructures, promote schooling in general and of girls in particular, apply innovative teaching methods (1,265 multi–grade classes in two shifts, 30 satellite schools and 28 non–formal basic education centers).

With a view to improving the quality and the applicability of education, in 1995 700 student–teachers were trained in the national Primary Teacher Training Schools (ENEP), along with hiring 950 assistant teachers, 5000 supervisors and facilitators at literacy training centers, 60 teachers in charge, 23 pedagogical counselors, and 15 inspectors and school principals. Studies are underway with a view to improving the situation of teachers, preparing a steering plan for training, and reviewing school curricula and manuals.

Private primary education accounts for less than 10% of students and is an essentially urban, or more precisely metropoli-

tan, phenomenon, representing 24.6% of the primary school population.

The net schooling index is 11.28% at secondary level. It breaks down unevenly between the cities (35.5%) and the country (5.1%). The poorest of the population complete secondary school 12 times less than the richest. Private secondary education represents one-third of the percentage of secondary schooling.

In Burkina Faso, higher education is in an embryonic stage. The University of Ouagadougou opened in 1965 as a Higher Training School for secondary school teachers and added other sections only in 1974. At present, the net tertiary schooling index is less than 1% (0.9%), and the population with such schooling is concentrated in Ouagadougou.

Tertiary education benefits male students above all, who have an index of 1.4% as compared to 0.35% for women, i.e. 4 times less than for men.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Burkina Faso adopted a health policy based on development of primary health care using the approach of the Bamako Initiative, whose key elements are as follows:

- To strengthen primary health care through decentralization of the health care system.
- To ensure the quality of health services by strengthening technical health care training.
- To implement a new pharmaceutical policy geared to increasing geographic and financial access to medication through promotion of Generic Essential Drugs and improvement of the supply system.
- To fight against disease, epidemics and AIDS.

37 health care districts, 13 surgery centers, and 557 health centers have available a stock of generic essential drugs, and 509 steering committees operate in the health training area. As regards promotion of maternal–infant health and development of family planning, a vaccination prevention strategy and the Expanded Vaccination Program (PEV) have been in place for several years. The birth rate is 45.2%. the mortality rate is 16.4%. Life expectancy is short: 52.2 years.

AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases threaten to undo the progress made.

Despite all these efforts, the percentage of public spending that goes to social items dropped from 28% to 23%. The average for the 1993–1995 period was 26%.

The moderate malnutrition index is high in children from 0 to 5 years of age: 30%. Burkina is struggling for human security, defined as ensuring each inhabitant access to, among other things, basic nutrition, including safe drinking water and improvement of food and nutritional status.

Burkina Faso's inhabitants spend more on food than on non-food items. The percentage of food spending within total spending drops as the standard of living rises, when non-food spending rises. Among the poorest sectors it exceeds 58%, whereas among

the richest it is 40.7%.

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND PUBLIC SOCIAL SPENDING

Burkina Faso's first Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) put more emphasis on cutting overall demand through restrictive budget policies than on adoption of measures geared to improving supply. The social implications of the adjustment were not taken into account explicitly, since no study was carried out regarding the impact of the SAP measures on poor or at-risk populations.

During the transitional stage of improving supply, parallel but uncoordinated actions were instituted to provide aid to the poor or at-risk populations.

At present efforts are being made to coordinate actions geared to these populations, integrating them in the national anti-poverty strategy.

The Project on the Social Dimensions of Adjustment, jointly sponsored by the World Bank, the UNDP and the ADB, following the initial structural adjustment programs, is seeking to create and strengthen institutional capabilities for formulation and management of economic and social policies, ensure better understanding of the vulnerability of some socioeconomic groups, and to as rigorously as possible assess the impact of the reforms on the structure of poverty in the country.

One of the most urgent challenges Burkina Faso faces today is to increase the population's income level through sustainable economic development that broadly favors the most disadvantaged sectors.

From 1980–1990, the combined effect of inappropriate economic and financial policies had plunged the country into a serious situation. Average annual growth of real GDP was in the area of 4% between 1980 and 1988, and dropped to 1.6% between 1989 and 1990 under the burden of the distortion and the structural rigidity that affected production sectors, uncontrolled deficits, mismanaged public finances and accumulation of internal and external debt service lags.

In the light of these conditions, as of 1991 Burkina Faso authorities initiated a series of economic and sectoral reforms (PAS) geared to improving the competitiveness of the economy, constructing the basis for durable growth capable of improving standards of living and reducing poverty.

The PAS objectives have not been achieved in the period established for the program and its implementation was interrupted in 1992 due to an agenda overloaded by the transition to democracy. In 1993 the government instituted macroeconomic and structural reforms based on an internal strategy. But the financial deficits that had to be corrected were high and the CFA franc devaluated in the countries of the West African Monetary Union in January 1994.

In the meantime, per capita income is among the lowest worldwide, with the aggravating factor of highly unequal distribution. A consequence of this is that a high proportion of the population lives in a situation of absolute poverty. Most urban and, above all, rural

workers obtain only very marginal income as the fruit of their labor, at levels in no way related to basic needs. But poverty is also, and above all, female. Despite the larger proportion at national level (100 women for every 98 men), there are more women living in poverty and more men living in non-poverty. At the lowest standards of living, the average is 100 women per 95 men, while at higher standards of living it is 100 women for every 102 men.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND ASSISTANCE

From 1988 to 1990, the distribution of technical assistance by sector did not reflect the priorities of Burkina Faso's economy. Social sectors saw the benefits of an average 15% of the volume of assistance.

Public investment programs (PIP) from 1992 to 1993 showed a prevalence of external loans over aid. Social sectors absorb on the average 8.9% of total investments made.

This information indicates that a complementary effort would be necessary to achieve the goal of 20% for social spending. Investors are urged to step up total aid to basic social services to 20%.

- André-Eugène Ilboudo was Director of the «Vive le Paysan/Saponé» Association, one of the country's most important grassroots organizations, I now work with an active promotion organization devoted to research and to shaping the opinions of NGO leaders and government officials in connection with political reforms to be undertaken toward social development.