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A Profile on Gender Relations

Towards Gender Equality in Burkina Faso



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Introduction

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. Precariously situated on the southern edge of the Sahara desert and north of the humid forests of the coast, with few natural resources, fragile soils and erroneous rainfall it offers no easy living to its population. The large majority of the population is rural and gains its living from farming and livestock. Men and women are involved in a daily struggle against poverty.

Burkina Faso also counts as one of the countries in the World with the highest degree of inequality between women and men.¹ The principal obstacle to gender equality is said to be the 'socio-cultural weight' of tradition which prevents rural women from contributing to development.² However this macro-level perspective misses the processes that go on in the villages. It misses local women's contributions to development, their dynamism to adjust to new circumstances and to explore new strategies to gain their living. While they bend the rules and stretch the norms of 'tradition', they change the gender system from within.

Both poverty reduction and the reduction of gender inequality are national priorities in Burkina Faso. However in practice, these two strategies are not integrated well and there is also a wide gap between what the national policies say and how they are applied. According to Burkina Faso's National Poverty Profile 44,5 percent of the Burkinabe live below the line of absolute poverty. Women are in majority among the extremely poor, which is perhaps not unexpected since women are in majority in the total population.³ It is more problematic that women are in minority among the 'non-poor'. Men seem to have been more successful in escaping poverty than women have.

This report sets out to explore the mechanisms behind the gendered distribution of poverty. What are the linkages between gender and poverty? To answer this question one needs to understand how livelihoods are gendered. This gendering is an effect of the division of roles and responsibilities within the family, which can only be understood in reference to the culturally specific ideals about what it means to be a man or a woman and the culturally ascribed relationship between men and women.

The report is organized as follows: The **first chapter** explains how gender intersects with other systems of difference, such as ethnicity, class, caste, religion, etc. This chapter argues that there are many masculinities

and femininities, and that not all women face the same problems. The chapter ends by identifying common traits across the differences, and describes how children are socialized into masculinity and femininity and their future roles as husband and wives. This leads to the **second chapter**, which describes how marriage and the family system have changed since colonial times as well as the processes behind these changes. It ends with a description of the Code of the Individual and the Family, which was passed into law in 1990, but is applied to a very low degree. The chapter argues that the law is not adapted to family life as lived, and that it is unfortunate that a majority of couples are left outside formal jurisdiction. The **third chapter** demonstrates the different ways people earn their living. It insists on showing the large variety of livelihoods, even in the rural areas, and points to the links between rural and urban livelihoods through migration. Across different cases modernization has eroded some of women's livelihoods, but their ability to invent new survival strategies is a common theme throughout the chapter.

While the first three chapters reflected the ways people think and how they get along in their daily lives, the perspective shifts in the **fourth chapter** to reflect a view from above. The chapters four to seven describe what the authorities and the civil society are doing to combat poverty and gender equality, and discuss whether the interventions are likely to have the expected impact.

Chapter four discusses the State's approach to combat poverty as well as gender inequality. The lack of gender analysis in Burkina Faso's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is highlighted, and linked to the invisibility of women in the large statistical surveys, which were the basis for the anti-poverty strategy. The seemingly low commitment of the Government to gender equality is reflected in the lack of resources and expertise allocated to the Ministry for Women's promotion. **Chapter five** focuses on the social sector activities, as they are defined in the PRSP. It describes how and why women have less access than men to basic education and health services, and discusses the measures taken to facilitate women's access. **Chapter six** describes the legal situation of women, and the ways international conventions influence the national legislation. It also investigates the extent to which Burkinabe women are able to influence national legislation. **Chapter seven** discusses the obstacles to women's representation in the democratic system, i.e. in local and national politics and in civil society. It also gives a few examples of what can be done to strengthen women's participation in democracy and their ability to influence national politics. **Chapter eight** draws the conclusions from this report, and points to the fact that gender inequality exist on all levels of the society, and that a top-down approach to gender inequality is unlikely to lead to expected results.

This study is mainly a desk study. Of a total of five work weeks, one week was spent in Ouagadougou. The report builds on three kinds of sources: (i) official development related documents produced by international organizations, Burkina Faso's state authorities, NGO's and consul-

¹ According to UNDP's Gender Related Development Index (See Appendix II)

² See for example Burkina Faso's report to the Cedaw-committee: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/22sess.htm>

³ According to recent estimations, Burkina Faso has 12 million inhabitants (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002a). Women constitute 51 percent and men 49 percent of the population (INSD 2000a).

tancy firms; (ii) interviews with civil servants and NGO activists, (iii) academic literature in relation to women and gender in Burkina Faso. In addition, the report builds on the author's long-term fieldwork and dissertation analysis⁴ over a period of more than ten years, and the previous four year working experience in the "Improved stove project", which was included in the Swedish funded Sahel-program.⁵

⁴ Sida financed this research.

⁵ The Sahel-program aimed at combating desertification. It was administrated through the United Nations Sudano-Sahelian Office (UNSO) and implemented by the Governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger from 1983 to 1993.

Burkina Faso – Context and Background

‘Gender’⁶ refers to the culturally ascribed differences between men and women and to the relationship between them. ‘Gender’ defines what it means to be a man or a woman in a specific society tied to notions of how men and women ought to relate to each other. The analysis of ‘gender’ is complicated by the fact that it cannot be isolated from other kinds of differences, such as age, ethnicity, class, caste, profession and religion. As a result there are a variety of masculinities and femininities, which relate to each other in different ways. Therefore a gender analysis should not be limited to the juxtaposition and comparison of women and men as homogenous categories. All women do not share the same problems nor do they have the same interests.

This gender profile starts with a social and cultural map of Burkina Faso and discusses how gender interacts with other kinds of differences. Thereafter, I point to a few common themes found in the gender systems of the local societies. The chapter ends with an outline of the procedure by which children are socialized into men and women according to the norms of society.

Ethnic groups and their social structure

There are more than 60 ethnic groups in Burkina Faso. The Mossi are most numerous, constituting almost half of the total population. They live in the central parts of the country, while other groups are dispersed on the national peripheries. Sedentary and semi-nomadic pastoral people, such as the Fulani⁷ are in majority in the dry north while people who have farming as their principal livelihood are in majority in the rest of the country. Cattle-herding Fulani are mobile and the farming populations have a long history of interaction with Fulani on move southward for greener pastures. Many Fulani have settled among farmers further south. The western part of the country is ethnically very mixed and has therefore often been described as a cultural mosaic.

⁶ ‘Gender’ is a grammatical term meaning ‘kind’ or ‘category’, and was picked up by Anglophone feminist social scientists in the 70’s as an analytical tool to study the cultural mechanisms that made men and women to be different and unequal. The gender concept has not been used in French academia, where the differences between men and women were analyzed in terms of *la différence sexuelle*. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1999) The concept crossed the language barrier in the 90s with the translation of development documents into French.

⁷ Fulani is the commonly used appellation in English texts. In French these people are called Peul, but they call themselves FulBe in their own language.

The ethnic groups differ in their political and social organization. In pre-colonial times the Mossi, the Gourmanche and the Fulani lived in hierarchically organized states. It matters today whether your ancestors were noble, commoners or former slaves. Other groups, such as the Gourunsi, the Bobo, the Bwa and the Senoufo were egalitarian village societies where a council of male elders representing all the village's descent groups decided about village matters. Villages had relationships with other villages, but there was no political organization above village level. Other groups, such as the Lobi and the Dagara lived in dispersed settlements connected mainly by links of descent.⁸

In present day Burkina Faso, pre-colonial social organization is the matrix according to which the local societies are organized. Mossi chiefs are actively involved in national and local politics, while the societies in the western and southwestern part of the country identify themselves as 'people who refuse masters'. Differences in social organization influence the significance that persons from different cultural backgrounds accord to hierarchy and to the public display of deference. Nevertheless there are cultural similarities between ethnic groups, as well as variations within them.

The majority of the Burkinabe live in societies where kinship is recognized according to the father's line, i.e. patrilineal societies. However, in the West and Southwest there are several societies with a matrilineal or double descent system. In a matrilineal system, kinship is recognized according to the mother's line, which means that a man does not inherit from his father but from his mother's brother. In a double descent system, the matrilineal and the patrilineal groups play different roles in a person's life, for example among the Lobi where magical and ritual powers are transmitted through the father's line, and material wealth and the means of production are transmitted in the mother's line.⁹ Among the Gouin, the Turka and the Karaboro the double descent system implies that a man inherits use-rights to non-movable property, such as farmland and trees, from his father and movable property, such as cattle and consumer goods, from his mother's brother.¹⁰ Matrilineal societies are often mistakenly understood as implying matriarchy, i.e. that women are the principal authority holders. This is not the case. However, as women in these societies are under two authority structures, the group of classificatory husbands and the group of classificatory brothers, they may be able to make use of fissures and contradictions between the authorities of these two groups, and thereby carve out a larger space of action for themselves.

Some societies, particularly those who trace their origins to the Mandé cultural area (i.e. present day Mali, Guinea), comprise sub-categories called 'castes'. These socio-professional groups are considered so different that they should marry only with their own kind. Among the 'blacksmiths', men are smiths and women are potters, and among the *griots* (bards) men and women are musicians and storytellers. A child of a 'blacksmith' or a *griot* continues to be considered as belonging to a 'caste' even if she/he does not practice the profession. The position of the

⁸ See Savonnet-Guyot (1986) for a description of the social and political structures of different local societies.

⁹ (de Rouville 1987)

¹⁰ (Dacher and Lallemand 1992; Hagberg 2001)

'castes' in the social hierarchy is ambivalent. In stratified societies they are positioned outside the hierarchy of 'noble', 'commoners', and 'slaves'. To some extent people of 'caste' are marginal, but at the same time they are respected because of their mastery of specific powers on which people of 'non-caste' depend. Because of their ambivalent position, people of 'caste' are mediators both between people and in people's relations with the supernatural powers.¹¹

Religion and social inequalities

Religion is an important dimension of identity and belonging. As will be explained in detail in the following chapter, both Islam and Christianity impact the local family structure and spouses' ideal roles in marriage. However, in this chapter I will limit myself to a discussion of how religion intersects with other differences such as ethnicity, class, profession, etc.

Muslim and non-Muslim groups have cohabited for centuries in what now is Burkina Faso. Islam spread in West Africa through the combination of expansionist warfare and trade. In conjunction with these processes, some professions and social strata have become more identified with Islam, such as the cattle-keeping Fulani, the Dyula and Zara traders and the Mossi from Yatenga. However, many of the groups who today identify as Muslim converted as late as in the 30s and 40s in response to colonial pressures. In pre-colonial times, Muslims were socially superior and often used slaves to do farm-work. Therefore, farm-work is not considered a dignifying occupation by many of the Muslim groups, although they engage in it by necessity. In contrast for farmers adhering to traditional religions, farm work is integral to their religious practice.

Christianity arrived in this area during the early years of colonialism. The first were American Protestants, but the most influential were the catholic order called White Fathers. Principal centers for Catholic missionary activity have been around Ouagadougou and Koupéla and the Mossi population, around Bobo-Dioulasso and the Bobo population and on the border to Ghana among the Dagara population. In the 30s the Dagara went through a most spectacular movement of mass-conversion, and today practically all Dagara can be considered Catholic.¹²

According to the 1996 census, 16,6 % of the Burkinabe were Roman Catholic, 3,0 % were Protestant, 55,9% were Muslim, 23,7 % adhered to traditional religions, 0,2 % were in the category of "others" and 0,6% were "without religion".¹³ During the colonialist era Catholicism became connected with modernity, while adherence to Islam came to represent resistance to modernity. Catholics received more schooling, and as a consequence the Catholics constitute an educated elite today.¹⁴ Their influence in the administration is considerable compared to their small number in the total population.

During the 80s and 90s the number of Christians increased faster than the number of Muslims.¹⁵ This was due to a strong religious revival

¹¹ (Badini 1994:19)

¹² (Some 1995)

¹³ (INSD 2000a)

¹⁴ (Otayek 1997)

¹⁵ (Otayek 1997)

movement among the Catholics but particularly about the Protestant minority. Small protestant churches of the Pentecostal and Evangelical kinds have attracted a large numbers of adherents, particularly among the Mossi.¹⁶ Conversion to Protestantism often implies a radical break with a previous way of life.

Lately an increase in conversions to Islam have been observed, due to the activities of Muslim associations such as the Ahmediyya, and it is possible that the Muslim conversion rate is catching up on the Christian. Even in the Muslim community a trend towards a stricter application of religion and a can be observed, with the growth of the Wahhabia sect, which is very strict on female veiling. The Wahhabia have many adherents among the Fulani in the North, particularly among the descendants of former slaves, who are attracted by its message of egalitarianism. According to a common popular explanation the religious revival movements are a consequence of the economic crisis, i.e. people are said to turn to religion in hope for an improved life situation.

Common themes across differences

In spite of the above-mentioned religious and cultural differences, two hierarchies exist in all ethnic groups in Burkina Faso: age and gender. Differences between ethnic groups in these regards are differences in degree and scope rather than in kind. The age hierarchy implies that a senior always has authority over a junior and that a junior always has to respect a senior. Coming of age is a gradual process, marked by a few important breaking points, such as initiation, marriage and having a child. Being an adult does not imply that you are equal to all other adults. There is always an elder sibling, a parent or an old person who has to be shown due respect as well as younger relations over whom authority can be wielded.

While the age hierarchy is egalitarian in so far that everybody who has long life will reach the top of the hierarchy, the gender hierarchy is given and cannot be transgressed. Furthermore, gender carries more weight than age. This means that a man has authority over a woman even if she is older than him. An important exception to this principle is the mother, who in all the local societies has a very particular position. A man always has to respect his mother. He cannot command her as he would command any other woman. Emotionally he is very close to her. She is likely to know his secrets and he will take advice from her. This means that a woman who has an adult son can influence men's decisions not only at home but also, if the son is influential, in the local society. The importance accorded to motherhood has consequences for the relationship between siblings. Although there are a lot of other children who a child calls sisters and brothers, there is a particular relationship between those born by the same mother. Therefore, sisters and brothers of the same mother are very close to each other. This close relationship between siblings continues in to the next generation, in so far as a man's sister has a particular relationship to his children. Similarly, a woman's brother has a close relationship to her children. To sum up, even if a

¹⁶ (Otayek and Dialo 1998)

man is capable of mistreating his wife, he will always protect his sister, respect his mother and his aunts.

Socializing children to ideal men and women

From early age, boys and girls are educated differently with the aim that they will correspond to the ideals of how a man or a woman should be. All societies in Burkina are pro-natalist, i.e. parents want to have many children. Children are the meaning of life and for many the principal reason for marriage.¹⁷ In patrilineal societies, boys are particularly valued because they reproduce the descent group. For example among the Mossi, when the birth of a baby is announced it is talked about as an “autochthon”¹⁸ if it is a boy and “a stranger” if it is a girl.¹⁹ This means that a boy is destined to stay and a girl to leave at marriage. Although it can be a tragedy for a woman not to have sons, daughters are also valued. They are important in marriage exchanges, and on a more personal level, a woman with only sons has an unbearable workload and misses the companionship of daughters. To illustrate the process through which infants become men and women I use the example of Mossi educational practices.²⁰

Mossi children are considered to be born hermaphrodites. They thus have to be ‘made’ male or female. This is done through education and, as described in the next section, through the physical operation of the genitals. The educational process starts as soon as the child is weaned, i.e. at the earliest when it is able to walk, at latest at the age of three. Small children are encouraged to playfully imitate the gender-specific tasks of the adults. A girl starts very early to help her mother with looking after smaller children, assist in food preparation and other household activities. She also waits upon her father.²¹ In her future life as a wife she needs to be capable of sensing her husband’s need before he even spells them out. Boys are a little older when they leave the domain of the mother and start to work with their father. Between the age of 7 and 10 children help their parents with gender-specific tasks but are also fully responsible for some tasks which can be performed by girls and boys alike, such as herding animals or chasing birds from the millet field. From the age of 11, girls and boys are their mother’s and fathers daily work companions, and gradually learn the various ‘male’ and ‘female’ work tasks by doing them over and over again.²²

Along with this practical education children’s behavior and attitude is closely supervised and corrected when necessary. This entails teaching children when to talk, how to talk and to whom. While a boy has to be respectful to men older than himself and to his mother, a girl needs to be respectful to all men irrespective of age as well as to women older than her. Later, when married, she will have to be respectful to all her hus-

¹⁷ (Poda and Some 1995)

¹⁸ ‘Autochthon’ could be translated as ‘native’. However, the word has the specific meaning of ‘people who have links to the land’. In West Africa there is a hierarchical relationship between ‘autochthones’ and ‘strangers’ i.e. people who do not have a relationship to the land.

¹⁹ (Coopération au développement des Pays-Bas 1997 :151)

²⁰ Unless another source is mentioned, the following paragraph is essentially based on Badini’s (1994) study about Mossi traditional education, which unfortunately does not have much information specifically on how girls are educated.

²¹ Author’s fieldwork observations.

²² The complexities of female activities have been described by Maizi (1993) in her study of Mossi women.

band's kin. Moreover, different personal qualities are attributed to men and women. Men are expected to have authority, be strong, courageous, laborious and self-controlled. They should be able to live up to their principal duty of being a husband, which is to provide millet and to ensure the health of the family. Both women and men are expected to be laborious. Women are supposed to be obedient, caring, amiable, and enduring. They are thought of as being slow, mild, easily anguished and unable to control themselves. A woman should be able to live up to her principal duty as a wife and mother, which is to care for her children, provide meals and water, and be at the service of her husband. A bad performance of wifely duties is understood as a lack of respect towards the husband.²³

Children belong to the descent group rather than to their parents. If a parent does not seem to manage his or her role as an educator well, the elders of the descent group may decide to separate the child from its parents and let another relative educate it. Even in less dramatic cases, fostering is a common practice.²⁴ The initiative to fostering is sometimes taken by the relative, who needs to complete his or her household with a child of a certain age for specific tasks, or by parents who decide that a change of environment would benefit the child. Generally, it is considered beneficial for a child to receive education from other adults in addition to its parents. A child should not be too attached to its mother.

Parallel to the dyadic relationship between mother and (foster)daughter, father and (foster)son, children are educated by their age group, which at first is an informal group of play-mates, later an organized group of boys or girls which will go through the initiation process together. The Mossi society is stratified according to social class, age and gender. However, within age groups, relations are egalitarian. Much of the education that takes place within such a group is a form of self-education. The children learn the norms of society from adults, but they correct each other in the age group. Adults very rarely interfere in the group's internal matter. The time children spend with their age mates has been reduced and the initiation rites modified, due to children's school attendance.

In most local societies, group education and initiation rites are still practiced, at least for boys. Not all societies have age group education and initiation rites for girls, and where these exist the aim is to prepare the girls for marriage.²⁵ For the boys, initiation means that they become capable of collectively managing the public and ritual affairs of the village.²⁶ Initiation is a differentiation factor that overrides age, i.e. a boy who did not participate in the initiation will never be considered fully adult.

It is not possible here to give a full overview of boys' and girls' education in different ethnic groups. The Mossi are often said to be the most hierarchical and patriarchal of all societies in Burkina Faso. Although they constitute a majority, they cannot be taken to represent the whole

²³ Adapted from: 'Coopération au développement des Pays-Bas' (1997:151) and Thorsen (2002). See also Figure 1 in Appendix I.

²⁴ Fostering is different from adoption in so far that links with the parents are not cut. Fostering is always considered a temporal arrangement, even when the child stays for extended periods with its foster parents.

²⁵ See for example Dacher's (1992) description of Gouin girls' initiation.

²⁶ See for example Le Moal's (1980) detailed description of Bobo male initiation. In some Bobo villages, girls were also organized in age groups, but little is known about the roles of these groups and of the rituals surrounding them. Generally there is a lack of documentation about women's rituals as earlier anthropologists were biased towards studying men.

population. However, even if women in some ethnic groups are not obliged to be as submissive to their husband as the Mossi women are, it is a matter of degree rather than of kind. For example, a Bwa woman, who in the literature is described as having more personal autonomy than Mossi women, is nevertheless educated to be "obliging, devoted and generous".²⁷

The sex is cut to create a gender

Female genital cutting and male circumcision has to be understood as part of the process of making children male or female. The Mossi use the same word to talk about both operations. When the boy's foreskin is cut, a female element of his genitals is eliminated. When the girl's clitoris is cut a male element of her genitals is eliminated. The Mossi perform the operation on children aged 15, as part of the initiation ritual through which the child is transformed into an adult.²⁸

According to official estimations more than 60 % of the Burkinabe women have had their genitals cut. The operation is most frequent among the Mossi, the Senoufo and the Gourmantche while other groups have a very low prevalence. *Clitoridectomy*, i.e. the removal of the clitoral hood and/or the clitoris, is the most frequent form of female genital cutting in Burkina Faso and according to WHO's classification this is the least severe form. Increasingly, the operation is performed on babies and disconnected from its ceremonies, but the average age is around 6 or 7.²⁹ Not all ethnic groups perform this operation as part of an initiation rite, and not all initiation rites involve the operation. According to tradition, the Bobo have always cut the girls' genitals shortly after she is born and without any specific ceremony. In contrast, the boys' circumcision is a relative recent phenomenon due to Muslim influence, and not integrated in the initiation ceremony.³⁰ Muslims consider female genital cutting to be a Muslim tradition, however it seems to have existed since pre-Islamic times and the Koran does not prescribe it.

Whether the female genital cutting is performed as part of an initiation ritual or as an operation directly after birth, some beliefs about it seem to be common across ethnic differences: The operation is one step in the process of becoming a woman. It is also assumed that a girl who has not been cut will be 'light-footed'. She is said to have difficult deliveries, and if the baby touches the clitoris at birth it will not survive. In some ethnic groups, a woman who has not undergone the operation will not be honored with the funerary rituals that are performed at the death of an old woman. Her funeral will be different and constitute a public shame for all members of her descent group.³¹ In other words, the pressure from kin on parents to let their daughters undergo the operation is great. However, female genital cutting is illegal, and can since 1996 be severely punished. The authorities are working together with NGOs in a national commission to fight against the practice. Whether female genital cutting is about to be abandoned is too early to say.

²⁷ (Coulibaly 1990:25)

²⁸ (Badini 1994)

²⁹ (CNLPE 1999)

³⁰ (de Montjoie, de Montclos et al. 1967:55-56)

³¹ (Poda and Some 1995)

Conclusion

Children's socialization into man-hood and woman-hood starts at early age. The way sons and daughters are treated differently should not be understood as deliberate discrimination of girls, but rather as a way parents are concerned about their children's success in life. A person, who is unable to live up to generally accepted ideals of how a man or a woman should behave, will encounter problems. However, in Burkina Faso there are various masculinities and femininities depending on how gender intersects with other kinds of differences such as ethnic identity, class, 'caste' religion, etc. Therefore one should be careful not to assume that all women face the same problems and share the same interests.

Across cultural and social differences there are a few common traits: Two hierarchies, age and gender permeate all local societies. Gender carries more weight than age. A man is always superior to a woman, except for the case of a son and his mother. In all the local societies motherhood important and gives women access to social recognition and to power.

Marriage, the family and the state

In Burkina Faso there is only one socially accepted way for a girl to become a woman: to marry and to have children. Likewise, for a boy there is only one socially accepted way to become a man: to marry and have children. Therefore, understanding the family system and the relationship between spouses is the key to understanding gender inequalities in the society at large. I start with an outline of customary marriage practices, and the ways they have been contested and reinforced. I go on to describe the variety of family systems that exist in Burkina Faso today, and the processes that transform patterns of family formation, such as the monetarization of society, changes in livelihood practices, and the alternative sets of values made available by adherence to new religions. I close this chapter with a discussion of how, since colonial times, the state has tried through legislation to transform the local family system according to Western/Christian norms.

Arranged marriages – contested but maintained

In pre-colonial times, a farming unit consisted of a localized descent group. For instance, among the Bobo and the Bwa, such a farming unit could consist of as many as 20–100 persons.³² The larger the group the more it was divided and subdivided into smaller units for specific practical purposes. The mother/child unit was the smallest entity, and the conjugal tie was just one among several ties connecting members of the farming unit. Work tasks were separated according to gender and in daily life women did women's work amongst women and men did men's work amongst men. Junior women were under the authority of senior women. The eldest male of the group was the principal authority holder but his power was limited by a system of checks and balances. Abuses of power would lead to loss of authority³³

Children were the collective property of the group as opposed to their parents. In a patrilineal society a child calls all male relatives of his father a 'father'. For a wife all her husband's male relatives are her husbands and shall be met with due respect and deference. Therefore, when a man dies, it is considered normal that the widow and the children be allocated to another man of the descent group. The anthropological term for such

³² According to Le Moal (1980:58) and the different sources he consulted.

³³ See Savonnet-Guyot for descriptions of how authority was kept within checks and balances (1986)

a marriage is *levirate*. In societies in which descent is recognized according to the mother's side the deceased man's maternal relatives inherit the widow and the children.

The purpose of marriage is to reproduce the group and to create and maintain relations with other groups. Marriage can thus be described as an exchange of women between descent groups. This is the logic behind the *sororate* marriages, still practiced by some ethnic groups.³⁴ This means that if a married woman dies, her kin has to replace her with one of her sisters.

The practicalities and ceremonies surrounding marriage differ from one ethnic group to another: among the Bobo, marriageable girls should be exchanged between descent groups³⁵, while the Lobi require bride-wealth payment in cattle and in cowry shells.³⁶ Among the Bwa, a young man has to spend many days working in the future in-law's farm before the marriage can be sealed.³⁷ The Mossi practice several forms of marriage exchanges. One form, characteristic for a stratified society, is that commoners give their daughters to chiefs, who thereafter allocate them as wives to his followers. The first daughter of such a girl belongs to the chief who gives her away in marriage, etc. Thereby the chief creates bonds of loyalty between himself and his followers.³⁸ The Fulani, who have the longest history of being Muslim, prefer to marry their daughters within the patrilineal descent group, a common practice in Northern Africa but uncommon in other societies in Burkina Faso. The Fulani marriage payments are of three kinds: a bride-wealth paid by the groom to the bride's family, a bride-gift in cattle given by the groom to the bride and a dowry given to the bride by her own relatives.³⁹ Although marriage practices differ, it is a common principle in most ethnic groups, that a woman's first-born daughter should marry into her mother's family of origin, i.e. marry a maternal cousin, in order to 'fill up the gap'.

Rather than being simply a trade in women, marriage payments are part of a complex and long term system of exchange between groups of people. The girl's family is compensated for a loss of a member but at the same time both families build reciprocal relations and enhance their social network. In most cases part of the marriage payment consist of consumables, such as a chicken, cola-nuts or millet beer. These are not kept by the girl's family but are offered to the ancestors and ritually consumed by the elders. Without the proper fulfillment of all the marriage formalities the groom may not be considered to be the father of his children.

Many of the traditional marriage practices are still applied, but in response to social and economic changes, they take on new meanings when applied in new contexts. For instance, cotton farmers' insistence on receiving a girl in exchange for a daughter can be motivated by the labor requirement of cotton farming rather than by loyalty to tradition. For a poor family in a society where bride-wealth payments are required, the

³⁴ The law prohibits both *levirate* and *sororate* but such marriages are still frequently arranged.

³⁵ (Saul 1989; Sanou 1994)

³⁶ (de Rouville 1987; Schneider 1990)

³⁷ (Retel-Laurentin 1979)

³⁸ (Skinner 1960)

³⁹ (Puget 1999)

marriage of a daughter can be a way to resolve an immediate economic problem. However, it would be an oversimplification to see these customs either as merely remnants from the past, or to give them a purely economic meaning. Rather people tend to use tradition in order to resolve problems of modern life.

Since the beginning of colonialism, arranged marriages have increasingly been challenged by young girls who elope with a boyfriend of their choice and hide away until their relatives accept their liaison. The Catholic missionaries encouraged these elopements and gained many converts as they received and protected such couples. In 1939 Catholic lobbying succeeded in influencing colonial legislation to forbid forced marriages. However, it was never possible to implement the *Décret Mandel*, as the law was called.⁴⁰ Although present day legislation forbids marriage without the free consent of the two spouses, the struggle between girls and their parents about the choice of marriage partners continues.

It may not be surprising that young people today refuse arranged marriages, but why do many still accept them? One explanation at hand is that they are forced to it or that they want to please their parents. It is also possible that a girl accepts an arranged marriage to avoid being considered an old spinster and thereby deviate from what is considered ideal womanhood. Countryside girls marry when they are around 15–17 (Fulani girls marry earlier).⁴¹ For a young man the reasons to accept an arranged marriage are the same. But an imposed wife is less of a problem for a young man, as he has the possibility of marrying a girl of his choice later. The common arrangement that a girl marries the son of her mother's brother is probably not such a bad deal for a girl. Her uncle, who is supposed to have an affectionate relation to his sister's children, is likely to be an ideal father-in-law. The girl's maternal grandparents, with whom she has a very close and egalitarian relationship, may also live in the same compound. Therefore, even if the young man is no good, he will not have a chance to treat his wife badly as long as he is living in the compound of his father.

In arranged marriages, the spouses' kin continue to be responsible for the couple. This means that if a woman is not treated well by her husband, she will run off to her father's house. Thereafter both parties will investigate into the causes of the trouble in order to find out who has misbehaved. If it is the man, his relatives will go to the woman's kin and ask for forgiveness. If the woman is to blame, her relatives will ask the husband to forgive the wife and to take her back. The end of the story is that if the husband has mistreated his wife, she will go back to him only after he and his kin have guaranteed that he will not repeat the mistreatment. If the man continues his behavior, his close kin may even intervene to punish him. If in the long run the situation does not improve, the woman's kin will encourage her to leave the husband.

In love marriages, particularly if the marriage took place against the explicit will of the parents, the situation is completely different. If problems arise between the spouses, the woman might not receive any help from her kin. Her father is likely to tell her that he has nothing to do with

⁴⁰(de Benoist 1987)

⁴¹ In 1993 the medium age at first marriage for women who were then between 20–49 years old was 17,5 years, and the medium age for their first childbirth was 19,1 years. (INSD 1994)

this marriage and if she has problems she has to sort them out for herself.⁴²

To sum up, the tendency from arranged marriages to love marriages has resulted in greater individual freedom for young people, but also a higher degree of risk in so far as they are alone to take the consequences of a bad choice. For the woman this means that if the relationship is good, she is better off with a man of her choice than in an arranged marriage. But, if the relationship is bad, she may be exposed to her husband's abusive use of power, a power on which there may be no constraints.

Family forms in transition

As mentioned, the principal family unit for the farming populations at the beginning of colonialism was the descent group, which could comprise as much as a hundred persons. With the monetarization of society, these large farming units crumbled. Young men who wanted to control the fruits of their own labor instead of having it managed by the elders, set up their independent farms with their wives and children. They were encouraged by the Christian missionaries who advocated the conjugal family as the foundation for a new kind of society, as well as by the colonial and post-colonial states that considered the European type of nuclear family to be the ideal unit for economic development of the country.

In this process the conjugal bond has become more important while relations with kin have become less important. With the present tendency for young people to marry a partner of their own choosing, marriage is becoming more of a contract between individuals and less an alliance between descent groups. Money made it possible for younger men to gain autonomy from the authority of the elders. In this new kind of nuclear families a wife came under the authority of her husband in a way previously unknown.

As an agricultural production unit the small nuclear family entails many inconveniences. Therefore in the following generation middle-aged parents strive to keep married sons and their families within the farming unit and thereby increase their labor force. The result is a three generational constellation, which could be called 'polynuclear', and which in many ways differs from the descent based farming units of the past. Today's farming units are smaller and the checks and balances to the power of the head have been lost. Young men strive for economic autonomy, but cannot always achieve it. To work in Côte d'Ivoire and earn money to set themselves up as farmers is one way. Mossi couples migrate from the central plateau, southwestward and settle where land is not yet scarce. Sons who stayed with the father tend to split up when he dies, but some continue to farm together even thereafter.

The composition of the agricultural production unit is the result of two contradictory forces, a centripetal and a centrifugal one. There are good reasons for households to cultivate together. They can pool their resources in order to acquire new agricultural equipment and they are less vulnerable to crisis like serious illness. There is also a frequently

⁴² Author's own fieldwork in a Bobo village. See also Roth's (1994) study of Zara in Bobo-Dioulasso.

expressed ideal that brothers should stick together. But problems of common management often push them to break up: the suspicion that one is working harder than the other; that women and minor children of one constitute a drain on common resources, or dissatisfaction with the decision-making process. If the centrifugal forces become stronger than the centripetal, the one who believes himself able to do better on his own will make himself independent.

The advantages of large farming units are different depending on the ecological zone. In the cotton zone a numerous family makes it easier for the male head to manage labor bottlenecks and to be a successful producer. As fathers are afraid that sons may run away to Côte d'Ivoire, they try to make them stay by getting them married early and letting them take part in decisions about the farm. With increasing mechanization the trend seems to be from the nuclear towards larger family units.⁴³

In the central and northern parts of the country, where farming is less profitable, the head of household has no interest in keeping all his sons on the farm. Instead they are likely to go elsewhere to earn money and send a part of it home. Some go to work in towns, others to Côte d'Ivoire, young Fulani men take jobs as long distance herders, etc. In case these young men are married they leave their wife and children in the paternal compound. Others take their wife and children with them and migrate westward to establish themselves as farmers.

One should be aware that the group of people who farms together and the group of people who lives together is not always identical. The inhabitants of two different compounds can farm together, while the inhabitants of another compound may have split into two farming units. Furthermore, the group which eats from the same cooking pot is not always the group which lives together or which farms together. If the compound is large, it often consists of several eating units comprising a married man, his wives and children. The composition of the eating units can differ depending on the season. During the farming season the whole farming unit eats together and organizes cooking according to a rotating scheme. After harvest this organization splits into smaller units. Within the each conjugal unit, there is a male-managed and a female-managed economic sphere. In polygamous households each married woman constitutes a separate cooking unit and there is a strict organization of what day which woman is to cook for the husband and the other wives.

Among the Fulani cattle-herders in the north, the family system has evolved from small and mobile family units to larger three generational. This trend results from their change of lifestyle, from nomadic or semi-nomadic to sedentary.⁴⁴

In towns, the whole spectrum from single-person to multi-generational and extended households can be found. Nuclear couples are most commonly civil servants or middle class employees. But even these generally have young rural relatives living with them, either for household services or for their studies. Poorer people are living in larger units, with a nuclear family at its center and with more or less distant kin attached to it. As employments are insecure people who live together can

⁴³ (Faure 1994)

⁴⁴ (Puget 1999)

help each other along. The urban extended family differs from the rural because it does not primarily constitute a production unit. In town co-habiting means that resources from different sources are pooled and that the household head's control over household members' labor and income is smaller.

Polygamy and how women deal with it

More than 51 percent of burkinabe women and 33 percent of the men live in polygamous marriages.⁴⁵ As most monogamous marriages can become polygamous and *vice versa*, it would thus be wrong to talk about polygamy and monogamy as different types of marriage. Exceptions are the minority of urban couples who have concluded a civil marriage and chosen monogamy. In those couples a man will have to divorce his wife before being able to marry another, and it is difficult for his mistress to achieve wifehood status.

Although some women are forced into polygamous marriage against their will, others enter such marriages voluntarily. It is important to understand the reasons for their opting for polygamous marriages. One major reason is that it is important for a woman to be married. It is her threshold to adulthood. Therefore, being married to whoever it is, is better than not being married at all. Even for widows or divorcees polygamy may be a not so bad option, as the norms of society make life difficult for a woman who lives by herself, particularly in the rural areas. Therefore, a woman whose husband brings home a second wife will not necessarily leave him, unless she is still young enough to find another man. However, she may try to make life difficult for the co-wife so that she eventually leaves by own initiative. A widow may accept the option to be remarried to a brother of the deceased husband in a *levirate* marriage to avoid being separated from her children who, belong to their father's descent group.

Elopement to join another man is one way for a dissatisfied wife to try to improve her life situation.⁴⁶ Very often she joins a man who is already married. As long as it is difficult for a woman to live by herself, polygamy is a requirement for a minimum of mobility on the marriage market. Furthermore, husbands know that a wife may elope if badly treated. Sometimes husbands use this strategy to get rid of an unpleasant wife. But, because no man wants to be reputed for being unable to keep a wife, elopements also put husbands under pressure to treat their wives decently.

There are also practical advantages for women of living in a polygamous marriage. Particularly in the rural areas wives take turns in cooking and looking after each other's children. Thereby they gain a little spare time for own account activities. If they get along well, co-wives enjoy each other's work-companionship and can become each other's best friends.⁴⁷ Elderly women may appreciate to receive a young co-wife to whom they can assign the heaviest work tasks. A further argument in favor of polygamy is the taboo for a woman to have intercourse while she

⁴⁵ (INSD 2000a:19)

⁴⁶ Married women's elopements have been described for the Bwa by Retel-Laurentin (1979), for urban women in Bobo-Dioulasso by Roth (1994), mentioned by Schneider (1990) for the Lobi and by Rookhuizen (1986:59-61) for the Mossi.

⁴⁷ (Mason 1988)

is still breast-feeding. This taboo exists for all ethnic groups in Burkina Faso. Considering that a child is weaned earliest when it is able to walk and latest at the age of three, the parents have to refrain from sex for long periods. The woman may prefer to have a co-wife who at least contributes to the work on the farm, than to take the risk that her husband spends the family's money on women outside the household. In towns, there is less of a need to share the workload, and here rivalry between wives is more likely to occur. Consequently the opinion against polygamy has been strongest among urban women.

According to the latest census (1996) the percentage of people living in polygamous marriages has gone down over a ten-year period. In 1985, 57 percent of the women lived in polygamous marriages against 51,7 in 1996, and the average number of women per married man in the whole population was 1,6 in 1985 and 1,5 in 1996. There are however important regional differences. Polygamy is most common on the central Mossi plateau, with exception for Ouagadougou. In the northern provinces Oudalan, Seno, Yagha, i.e. where the Fulani dominate, the incidence of polygamy is lowest. It is most common that a man has two wives. Men with three or four wives are rare and can be found mainly on the central Mossi plateau.⁴⁸

Religion and the ideal relationship between spouses

Both Christianity and Islam have had an impact on the way people marry and live their lives, but in a diffuse way. One should not assume that all couples live in accordance with the teachings of their religious leaders. Furthermore, inter-religious marriages are frequent. But, the ideals about what a marriage should be are disseminated by the representatives of the world religions, available both to the adherents, but also to others who might find these ideals useful.

In both Christianity and Islam the conjugal family is the most important unit. Although Islam considers marriage a religious duty, it is not a religious sacrament, like for the Catholics. In other words a Muslim marriage is a contract between persons and can thus be dissolved, not an act transmitting God's grace and which should be eternal. Islam does not expect spouses to 'become one' as Christianity does.

Early Catholic missionaries were appalled by the lack of emotional intimacy between spouses in West African couples, and imagined that if only spouses had chosen each other, their relationship would have been more affectionate, and the marriages would become more stable. In the book *La femme noire en Afrique Occidentale* written by a nun who advocated the emancipation of women, the ideal relationship between spouses is summarized as: "There is perfect equality between the spouses: both owe each other reciprocal fidelity,... However, this equality does not destroy the necessary hierarchy: in the Christian households, the husband is pre-eminent, and the woman has to remain submitted to him, as the church is submitted to Christ."⁴⁹

Unlike Christianity, Islam had no organized missionary project. Interpretations of the Koran and other holy texts spread through dyadic

⁴⁸ (INSD 2000a)

⁴⁹ (Marie-André du Sacré Coeur 1939:221)

teacher-student relationships. Islam has thus been differently interpreted in different parts of West Africa and the practical implications for women have varied. While the Christian ideal about relations between spouses contains elements of both equality and hierarchy, Muslim married life is definitely hierarchical. It is characterized by a strict separation of rights and duties between a husband and his wife. Spouses live their daily lives in different economic and social spheres. It has to be pointed out that the gender segregation in West Africa is much less strict than in Arab Countries. Women move freely in public places, and veiling is limited to covering the hair with a head-cloth. The complete veiling and confinement of women to the home, as practiced by the Wahhabia sect, is an exception from this pattern. Gender segregation among the majority of Muslims in Burkina Faso consists of men doing men's things together with men, and women doing women's things together with women. Spouses spend very little time in each other's company and do not necessarily inform each other about their preoccupations.⁵⁰

Generally, Islam has been more compatible with local family structures than Christianity. Islamization did not lead to the break up of corporate descent groups. Arranged marriages continue to be practiced by Muslims, although according to *sharia* a person should not be married against her will. Polygamy is a pre-Islamic practice, but Islam limited the number of wives to four and requested their equal treatment. The Muslim view of the complementary but hierarchical relationship between spouses fitted well with pre-Muslim values. On the other hand, the Christian ideal of intimacy and companionship, the idea of spouses 'becoming one' was more alien and has been proved to be difficult to apply in practice.

Islam gave men the right to divorce their wives and the purpose of the bride-gift, which until recently a young Fulani man had to give his bride at marriage, was that the woman should have some economic security in case her husband repudiated her.⁵¹ Among non-Muslims, a man could in the past only rid himself of an unpleasant wife if he treated her so badly that she left by own initiative.⁵² As a contrast, the Catholics were against divorce altogether. The colonial missionaries were scandalized when Christian married women eloped to join another man.⁵³

At a glance, the Christian marriage, with its ideal about spouses 'becoming one', may seem more egalitarian and thus more advantageous for women than the Muslim. However, as described in several studies from Burkina Faso, Muslim wives have considerable bargaining power, because rights and responsibilities are clearly linked.⁵⁴ According to the Koran (cf. 4:38) a wife has the duty to obey her husband because he is providing for the family. As most men are unable to satisfy all their wives' needs, the wife can use this as an argument not to obey him. In a study of Zara women in Bobo-Dioulasso the situation is summarized as follows:⁵⁵ A small minority of men are able to pay everything for their

⁵⁰ (Roth 1994; Roost Vischer 1997; Puget 1999)

⁵¹ As reported from the Seno province the Fulani tradition of giving a bride-gift has been abandoned. Divorces are frequent and easy, initiated by men as well as by women (Puget 1999).

⁵² (Roth 1994)

⁵³ (de Montjoye and de Montclos 1952-55:40)

⁵⁴ (Roth 1994; Roost Vischer 1997; Puget 1999)

⁵⁵ (Roth 1994)

wives, and they do not allow their wives to have an income generating activity. Another minority of men is unable to provide for the family, and they are likely sooner or later to be abandoned by the wife. Most couples are in between these two extremes; i.e. the husband provides for the family but not sufficiently. Therefore he has no choice than to allow his wife to work. As the wife contributes to paying the expenses of the family she has an argument to contest the husband's authority. Between spouses rights and obligations are constantly renegotiated and many women are successful in carving out a space of action for themselves outside the husband's control.

The present trend towards a stricter interpretation of religion is likely to have implications for women. The above-mentioned Wahhabia and their insistence on female seclusion, is a case in point. Some of the Christian protestant groups apply a literal reading of the bible and insist on the man's headship within the family.

Family law in the modern state

When Burkina Faso declared independence in 1960, the country had inherited a dual legal system; one copied on French law, the other based on so called 'traditional law' and executed through the Tribunal Courts (*Tribunaux Coutumiers*). For a majority of the population family matters would be judged in the latter. Verdicts were made according to an *ad hoc* interpretation of custom by the appointed local dignitaries that constituted the court.⁵⁶ The educated and urban elite found it increasingly inadequate to be judged by these courts. Since independence there was therefore a growing petition for a legal reform.

A reformed law, the Code of the Individual and the Family, which ended the dual legal system was not adopted until 1989 and became valid in 1990.⁵⁷ This law is a radicalized version of French law. The juridical value of 'custom' has been abolished altogether. The conjugal family is the basic unit, and all citizens are considered equal before the law. Only civil marriages are formally valid, although other marriages concluded before 1990 have not become invalid. Although monogamy is the norm, an option to choose polygamous marriage exists if the spouses consent to it. Monogamous couples can choose to have either joint or separately owned property. Separate property is the norm for polygamous marriages. A man is obliged to treat all his wives equally. The institution of 'head of family' has been abolished, and the spouses are considered as equal partners. Marriage can only be concluded after free contentment of the two spouses and marriage payments have become illegal. A widow can no longer be disinherited by her husband's relatives. Both *levirate* and *sororate* marriages are forbidden. The law limits which relatives a person is obliged to support materially. Both parents have equal parental duties for their children, irrespective if they are married or not. Only biological paternity counts for establishing fatherhood rights and responsibilities.⁵⁸

The Christian influence on the Code of the Individual and the Family is most clearly visible in the bias towards monogamy and joint ownership

⁵⁶ (Bohmer 1980)

⁵⁷ (Burkina Faso 1990)

⁵⁸ (Burkina Faso 1990; summary mainly based on Cavin 1998)

of property. In an NGO-booklet used to spread knowledge about the law, joint ownership of property is even described as “a proof of love”.⁵⁹ The idea of spouses’ joint ownership is alien to most local traditions including Islam, and so is the idea of romantic love as a reason for marriage. The latter idea has however gradually been embraced by young people in towns as part of the ‘modern way of life’. The abolition of economic responsibilities to kin outside the conjugal unit reflects a preoccupation of urban middle class families, who often struggle with how to handle claims from poorer relatives. The Muslim influence is most apparent in the possibility to choose a polygamous marriage and in the obligation to treat all wives equally. In fact, this is the only point on which the Code differs from how it was drafted. A suggestion that polygamy should be abolished proved unacceptable to the large Muslim population as well as to traditionalists. Even a majority of women strongly defended polygamy.⁶⁰ The law’s claim that all wives should be treated equally concurs with Muslim law, but differs from many local traditions, according to which wives have different rights and responsibilities depending on when and how they entered in marriage. However, the abolition of ‘head of household’ status and the stated equality between spouses is alien to Christian, Muslim and local traditions. It reflects the radical position of the Thomas Sankara government (1984–87) under which the preparatory work for the new law was made.

The gap between the texts and life as lived

A study from 1995 on marriage practices in Ouagadougou shows that the new law is radically different from the ways people marry and live their lives.⁶¹ The law is even more distant from rural realities. Most people in the rural areas probably do not even know that the law exists. Therefore both the state authorities and several NGOs have started campaigns to spread knowledge about the law and to facilitate procedures for concluding a civil marriage.

For most rural people a civil marriage is not a priority. For them the marriage has to be valid in the eyes of kin and the local community. Therefore the performance of the ceremonies and marriage payments required by ‘custom’ are essential. For people of Christian or Muslim faith, marriage in church or in the mosque is important as well. Both these ceremonies occasion expenses. A civil marriage would generate further costs and additional bureaucratic procedures. Identity cards and birth certificates are needed, and not everybody has such papers. For those who are illiterate, preparing a civil marriage may thus be experienced as complicated and without any tangible advantage. Poverty is likely to be one reason for people not to conclude a civil marriage.

Cohabitation without a formal marriage procedure of any kind is common in towns as well as in the rural areas. In the rural areas cohabitation results from the fact that some customary marriages do not have a formal procedure for divorce, therefore even if a woman leaves her husband to live with another man, she will nevertheless forever be considered customarily married to the first husband. This is the case for

⁵⁹ (Promo-Femmes 2000)

⁶⁰ (Kanse 1989:71)

⁶¹ (Cavin 1998)

the Bwa, where it is nevertheless common that a wife leaves her husband for a *de facto* cohabitation with another man.⁶² In societies where high bride-wealth payments are common, a new union becomes formally valid when the new husband has reimbursed the bride-wealth payments to the first husband, something that may require some time. This is the case for the Lobi.⁶³ In towns, women obtain a *de facto* divorce by simply leaving the husband and either stay with relatives or move in with another man. Such *de facto* divorces are more common than formal divorces, probably because women lack the money and the skills to engage in a court procedure.⁶⁴ In towns, cohabitation as a way to test a relationship before marriage is becoming more and more common.⁶⁵

In the near future, the Code of the Individual and the Family will only have consequences for those who take their family problems to court. Most problems of this kind are resolved within the kin networks and with traditional leaders as mediators.⁶⁶ Persons most likely to take their cases to court are those who believe the verdict will be to their advance, and who have the knowledge as well as the financial means for it the procedure. Whether the law will be advantageous for women and children depends primarily on how it is applied by the courts. Furthermore, women may not have the same capabilities as men to make use of the law to further their interests. Unless the authorities and the NGO's succeed with their present campaign to convince the population that a civil marriage is necessary, a major weakness of the new family law is that it leaves a majority of couples outside the realm of formal jurisdiction.

Conclusions

Marriage and social structure in Burkina Faso have undergone considerable changes during the lifetime of a person. These changes are connected to multiple other processes, such as the spread of Islam and Christianity, the commercialisation of livelihoods, and the development of an urban lifestyle. Family units have become smaller and young people have increasingly refused arranged marriages. There exists today a broad spectrum of family forms, smaller and larger, two generational and three-generational, dependent on where they live, by what they live and where they are in their life cycle. Similarly, there exist a broad spectrum of marriages, from love marriages to forced marriages, and in-between cases. The colonial and post-colonial states have in vain used legislation to transform the Burkinabe family in line with Western norms.

The gender and age hierarchies are common to all family forms, and structure relationships between their members. As it seems, the European notion of 'head of household', has merged with pre-existing hierarchical principles and formed a strong amalgam. The checks and balances, which in the past limited the power of the 'descent group elder', do not limit the power of 'head of household'. Family units became smaller because men wanted greater economic independence. As we shall see in the next chapter, men's economic entrepreneurship had consequences for their wives.

⁶² (Retel-Laurentin 1979)

⁶³ (Schneider 1990)

⁶⁴ (Roth 1994)

⁶⁵ (Bardem and Gobatto 1995)

⁶⁶ (Cavin 1998)

Work and Livelihoods

While the first chapter described the norms and values attached to ideal man-hood and ideal woman-hood, the second chapter explored the social organization of the family and men's and women's position within it. This chapter proceeds to take a close look at how livelihoods are gendered. How do people earn their living and which are the mechanisms behind the gendered division of labor?

Most people in Burkina Faso would argue that the division of tasks between women and men is natural and an effect of their physical differences. However, a closer look at what men and women actually do reveals constant changes in the division of labor. What men and women do is less a matter of tasks being 'male' or 'female' but rather that men control the more profitable work, leaving women with those tasks that are unpaid or less profitable. For example in the cotton zone, farming is profitable and firmly in control of the male household head, who uses his authority to make wives contribute even with tasks that are considered 'male'. In contrast, where millet farming generates little surplus value, it is increasingly left to women, in spite of the ideal that husbands are millet-providers. Generally, women are considered natural apt to cook, nurse and educate children. However, when those same occupations are salaried professions, men are in majority as cooks, health staff and teachers, a pattern that was laid out already under colonialism.

This chapter starts with a description of some rural livelihoods and ends with a description of some urban livelihoods. A section about migratory movements connects the two, as a reminder that livelihood cases should not be considered isolated from each other, keeping in mind the constant flow of people across the regional and rural/urban divides. These migratory movements are gendered as well.

Rural livelihoods

In official development documents variations of the following schema for women's role in farming are frequently reproduced⁶⁷:

In the first case, women participate in all the operations on the family farm and in addition they maintain personal fields. This is the case among the Mossi, Gourmantche, Bissa and Samo (in the central and eastern parts) and among the Bwa, Gouin, Turka, etc. (in the western

⁶⁷ (Burkina Faso 1993, 1993 #58 ; Sanwidi and Yacouba 2000)

parts). Rice is a feminine crop both for the Bissa and for the Gouin.

In the second case, men clear the land and hoe and the women put the seeds in the soil. Thereafter women are free to pursue other activities until the harvest, where they have gender specific tasks. Women can have personal fields. This is the case among the Bobo, Gourunsi, and the southern Senoufo.

The third case resembles the above in so far that women's participation in farming is limited to sowing and harvesting. The difference is that women do not farm personal fields but concentrate on small trade, particularly beer brewing. This is the case of the Dagara, Lobi, etc. (in the south-western part).

In the fourth case, women do not work on the family farm at all. This is the case for those groups for which livestock keeping is the ideal way of life, such as the Fulani, Rimaibe, Bella (in the North) and for the very Muslim Dafing (in the North-West). In these groups, women sometimes have personal fields. They also engage in small livestock breeding and trade. These are also the principal activities of the northern Senoufo (in the Northwest).

The above description is simplified and does not capture the fact that the gendered division of labour is constantly renegotiated in response to new situations and economic necessity. As will be shown in three examples further down, women have taken on new tasks and responsibilities within farming.

Widespread among West African cereal farmers is the notion of complementarity between husband and wife. In principle, the husband furnishes the cereals for the daily meal of stiff porridge and the wives furnish the vegetable sauce that makes the meal complete.⁶⁸ As described above, women in most of the local societies contribute labor to the production of cereals in the family field, but nevertheless this grain is considered as the husband's contribution. The wife is supposed not only to transform these grains into stiff porridge, but also to furnish the daily sauce and all its ingredients. She fulfils her part of the division of responsibilities without any labor- or cash input from her husband.

Although the environmental and cultural conditions differ in Burkina Faso, a shared experience for rural women is that the deterioration of the natural environment makes it more difficult to fulfill the responsibility to cook and to provide the sauce for the daily meal. In all ethnic groups, women are responsible for grinding and pounding grains, cooking, fetching water and collecting firewood. Women collect wild plants, for food, medicine and other purposes. Leaves and flowers from weeds, bushes and trees are used as vegetables in the daily sauce. Very important is the collection of shea nuts⁶⁹, from which women extract a fat, used for cooking, skin treatment, lamp oil, soap production and many other purposes. Women also sell this fat to obtain cash, but when constrained by time they simply collect the nuts and sell the dried kernels. The production of *soumbala*, a condiment that is made of the fermented grains of the locust-bean tree⁷⁰, is another important female activity.

⁶⁸ (Venema 1986)

⁶⁹ Shea is the same as *karité* in French speaking Africa. It is the nut of the tree *Butyrospermum paradoxum*. For the importance of shea production for women and their economy see studies by de Beij (1986) and Helmfrid (1998).

⁷⁰ (*Parkia biglobosa*)

Soumbala makes the sauce tasty and is very rich in vitamins and protein. The woman can either use it in cooking or sell it to obtain cash.

Women have to walk longer and longer distances to find the firewood and the edible plants they need. Decreasing biodiversity is likely to affect nutrition negatively because a few cultivated vegetables cannot validly replace the large number of wild plants consumed.⁷¹ Furthermore, with increased competition for wood and other products from the bush, women are tempted to use the bush in a non-sustainable way, for example they cut trees too frequently without giving them sufficiently time to regenerate.

The forest authorities often blame rural women for the destruction of the natural vegetation. However, most of the forest destruction is caused by the extension of the farmed areas. Plough farming, cash cropping, population growth and migration, are all factors that contribute to the rapid transformation of savannah forest into farmland. The practice of long fallow periods has been more or less abandoned. The need for firewood causes rapid deforestation around the towns and larger agglomerations.

In the long run the abandonment of long fallow periods will make it more difficult for women to fulfill their role as 'sauce-producers'. The useful trees (in particular the shea tree, and the locust bean tree), which since time immemorial were spared when a field was cleared after a fallow period, are becoming old. These trees need long fallows in order to regenerate, but they produce good fruits only in the open cultivated landscape. In the cotton zone, the most economically minded farmers have eliminated these trees altogether, which the agricultural extension services advised them to do until recently.

Generally, the agricultural extension services and the research institutions have been more active in promoting cash crops than promoting food crops. The exception to this is maize, which has been promoted along with cotton farming. However, the nutritional value of maize is poorer than the value of millet, which is about to be abandoned as a staple in the cotton zone. Among the food crops, the agricultural extension services have promoted cereals rather than all those different plants, which women need in order to provide the sauce.

In short, agricultural development has facilitated men's responsibility to provide cash. Women are getting more and more involved in cereal production, while at the same time continuing to provide the sauce under increasingly difficult conditions. To illustrate this point I will give a detailed description of three livelihoods and discuss changes in the gendered division of labour and responsibilities: cotton-farmers of the West, subsistence farmers of the Centre, and agro-pastoralists of the North. These cases were selected to represent Burkina Faso's three major ecotypes: the Sahelian north with an average annual rainfall of less than 600 mm, the Sudano-Sahelian zone in the centre of the country with 600–900 mm on average and the Guinea-Sudanian zone in the south-west of the country with more than 900 mm of rainfall on average.⁷²

⁷¹ Research in a Bobo village in Western Burkina Faso identified more than forty plants, which according to season, were used as sauce ingredients. More than thirty of these were wild plants (Helmfrid 1998).

⁷² (IIED 1999:29)

Many rural livelihoods are not captured by these three cases, for instance women and men on irrigation schemes, women and men on settlement schemes, male yams-farmers in the south, fishermen and fish-trading women, female rice-farmers, vegetable producers for urban markets, male and female gold-diggers, male and female peddlers, female beer-brewers, craftspeople such as blacksmiths (male) and potters (female).⁷³

*Commercial cotton-farming in the south-west*⁷⁴

In the western part of the country most farmers grow cotton. Commercial cotton farming has made possible a relatively high degree of mechanization. The majority of the farmers in the cotton zone now use ox-ploughs and a few have tractors.⁷⁵ They are therefore able to produce not only more cotton, but also a surplus in maize. For women, commercial farming means more work but not necessarily more well-being, as the money is in the hands of the head of household.

Cotton is farmed in the Sudanian zone of Western Burkina Faso, Southern Mali and Northern Côte d'Ivoire. These regions share similar natural and climatic conditions, which have proved suitable for cotton cultivation. The national economies of both Burkina Faso and Mali are extremely dependent on the exportation of cotton.⁷⁶

Several studies show that women's workload has increased as a result of cotton farming.⁷⁷ Wives of ox-plough farmers work more than wives of hoe-farmers and wives of tractor farmers work more than wives of ox-farmers.⁷⁸ Women have less time to farm for own account, and have had a net loss of welfare due to cotton farming.⁷⁹ Women's increased participation in farm work can be explained by the expansion of farmed areas. The plough facilitates the task of soil preparation, however there is more work in planting, weeding and harvesting. The old division of labor by age and sex therefore had to be modified. Women had to take on new tasks, such as weeding. Today a preferred division of labor exists, but if necessary any member of a farming unit can be asked to do any kind of task. Furthermore, the farming season was prolonged compared to how it was before commercial cotton farming started. Planting begins earlier and the cotton harvest continues several months after the cereals are harvested.

As a consequence of cotton farming women have less time for what is considered 'women's work', such as collecting and preserving wild plants

⁷³ Freidberg (2001) describes how in villages outside Bobo-Dioulasso vegetable growing became a male activity while it became a female activity to sell them. Gouin women's rice farming is described by Dacher (1992) and van Koppen (1998) relates how an irrigation project distributed rice-plots to men rather than to women. Similarly, women on a settlement scheme were excluded when land was allocated to household heads (Ouédraogo and Ouédraogo 1986). Female and male crafts of the Lobi are described by Schneider (1990) and crafts of the Mossi women are described by Maizi (1993). The importance of women's beer brewing is described by Saul (1981). Schneider (1993) describes how gold-digging is an exclusively female occupation for the Lobi.

⁷⁴ This description is based on own fieldwork in a village in the Houet province. The village is multi ethnic, but the Bobo are the 'autochthones'.

⁷⁵ (Schwartz 1993; Tersiguel 1995)

According to the national average only 30 % of the households possess a plough (whether ox or tractor drawn) (Economist Intelligence Unit 1999–2000). The majority of these ploughs are found in the cotton zone.

⁷⁶ Cotton is Burkina Faso's principal export product. In 2000 the value of the cotton export was 102 million US dollars, which should be compared to the value of livestock (42 million dollars) and gold (8 million dollars), which are the second and third important export products (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002a).

⁷⁷ (Bassett 1988; Faure 1994; Tersiguel 1995; Lijja and Sanders 1998)

⁷⁸ (Tersiguel 1995)

⁷⁹ (Lijja and Sanders 1998)

for the daily sauce, collecting wood and water, cooking, caring for babies and doing own income generating activities. In the cotton zone not all women farm a plot of their own, but many women have personal crops on the family farm. Women grow hibiscus, okra, beans, cowpeas, pepper and other vegetables needed for the daily sauce, groundnuts for sale and red sorghum for brewing. Male farmers are reluctant to let their wives have a plot of her own, because they want to dispose of wives' work time on the family field.

It is apparent, that cotton generates wealth. The number of iron-sheet roofs and stone-houses are increasing. Men possess bicycles or even motorbikes. Young men can be seen carrying around cassette recorders during their leisure time. Women in the cotton zone are in the paradoxical situation that although there is a relatively large amount of cash in the village, a very small part of this is in their hands. In a village in the Houet province, the sums given in 1996 to women at the end of the farming season varied between zero and 15.000 CFA in cash and a bag of cereal. Many of the male farmers could easily spend ten times that sum per year on drinks and other personal expenses. While others came empty handed from the cotton sale, with nothing left when the credits had been cut.⁸⁰

In order to make their meager capital grow, women are busy during the short dry season (from March to May) brewing beer and doing other income generating activities. Women need personal money for expenses that are part of their responsibilities according to the local gender order. Women are supposed to pay for their personal clothes and for cooking utensils. They also try to furnish their married daughters with cooking utensils, and sometimes they pay for their children's clothes. Furthermore, women are entirely responsible for providing the ingredients for the daily sauce. With the time constraints of farming women sometimes have to buy condiments. It is the woman who pays for the milling expenses in case she does not want to pound and hand-grind herself. Most women prefer to have some money hidden for unforeseen needs.

In a cotton-growing village in the Houet province, women did not mind the hard work but wanted a larger share of the cotton money.⁸¹ It is of course difficult for a wife to have an idea about what would be a fair share. Normally she does not even know how much the husband receives after credits have been cut, and wives often presume that the husband has more money than he has. Distribution of resources within the household is often a cause for conjugal disputes and domestic violence. It has to be pointed out that those women were not against cotton-farming as such. Women of all ages agreed that cotton farming has enriched their lives with things that did not exist in the past, such as clothes, enamel dishes, aluminum cooking pots. Elderly women, who remember past famines, particularly pointed out increased food security as an advantage of modern farming.

One should keep in mind that not everybody has the means to buy the appreciated consumer goods, nor does every family have food security. Even in cotton villages, there are families who live in extreme pov-

⁸⁰ Author's PhD thesis in preparation.

⁸¹ Author's PhD thesis in preparation.

erty. For example, if one of the adults is ill at a crucial moment of the agricultural cycle, that year's harvest will be at risk. There are also cases when farmers lost their cotton harvest due to insect attacks, and therefore found themselves indebted for the credits taken at the beginning of the season. Many farmers sell cereals to have quick access to cash, and will later be obliged to buy food at a higher price. Easily they find themselves in a vicious circle of increasing indebtedness. The last resort is to sell the agricultural equipment. In poor families, where the food produced on the family's field is insufficient, both women and men have to develop multiple activities to make ends meet. What poor women gain through their own account activities is used to feed the family rather than to buy clothes and enamel dishes.

It is not possible to imagine what cotton farming would have been like if the agricultural extension services had chosen a different target group than young heads of nuclear family units. However, directing the message to women would have been fruitless because women had access neither to land nor to other people's labor. It was the emergence of the conjugal type of family that gave husbands the possibility to make personal use of his wives' labor and to succeed in commercial farming. In the pre-commercial production system women's labor belonged to the descent group where elderly women managed younger women's labor, and the whole agricultural enterprise was managed by the eldest male of the descent group.

Farming to subsist on the central plateau

According to Burkina Faso's Priority Survey the large majority of the poor and the extremely poor live in the central parts of the country. The soil is poor and rains are insufficient for cotton. Therefore these farmers have not had access to credits and plough technology. The majority are hoe-farmers. Need for cash has resulted in a gendered division of labor, which is very different from what was described above for the cotton zone. The Mossi women of the central plateau have gradually come to be more responsible for millet production, while it has become a men's job to work for cash. Numerous men have emigrated temporarily or more permanently to Côte d'Ivoire and have left the wife in charge of farming. In the central parts of the country there is the highest incidence of women as *de facto* heads of household. Not every migrant worker manages to send money home, but many do. In fact, some of the *de facto* women headed households in the National Priority Survey were relatively well off thanks to the remittances from men working on the coast.⁸²

Men who do not migrate are obliged to find cash otherwise. They develop multiple activities, such as trade, day labor, raising small animals and vegetable gardening. The millet produced on the family field is not sufficient as food for the whole year. There are different ways for a head of a farming unit to make this millet last. Either he distributes millet only for one daily meal, leaving to the women to provide the rest, or he insists that the millet from the women's stock is finished before he opens the common granary, or he may simply refuse to open the common granary

⁸² (Nioumou, Bambara et al. 1997)

until the rainy season when everybody needs to eat well to be able to work hard.⁸³

During the dry season the woman thus has to feed the family with what she grows on her personal field. Although the Mossi and Bissa adhere to the ideal that men should provide the staple cereal and women the sauce, women have become millet providers as well. They do not talk about themselves in such terms; rather they talk about their farming as part of their mothering role. They are “feeding their children”.⁸⁴ In two villages near Tenkodogo women presented themselves as marginal producers while in reality they farmed as much as 56 % of the cultivated area of these villages. Women talked about their fields as groundnut-fields while in reality they had planted 56 % of the area with millet and only 37 % with groundnuts, which are both a sauce ingredient and a cash crop.⁸⁵

Women are constrained in their farming by the internal organization of the family. They do not fully control their own labor time, and they have limited access to other family member’s labor. This limits their possibility to handle labor-bottlenecks and keep up the timeliness of operations. They have limited access to manure because the manure produced within the farming unit is most likely to be used in the family field. If the husband possesses an ox-plough he may plow her field, but only after work on the family field has been done. The agricultural extension services have only recently started to address women directly, and most women do not receive any information about new farming techniques.⁸⁶ Because of these constraints the productivity of labor in female farming is generally lower than on family farms.

As in the cotton zone, disputes within families about resource use are common. In daily life there is a constant bargaining about who shall provide what.⁸⁷ When there is scarcity bargaining easily leads to disputes, which may end up in violence.⁸⁸ When food is rare, men have the possibility to use money to eat on visits in markets or towns, while the woman is left to resolve food problem at home. As women cannot trust men to provide cash when needed, women in this part of the country are constantly busy with various income-generating activities. Contrary to women in the cotton zone, who hardly have time to produce shea-butter and *soumbala* even for their own needs, women on the central plateau produce for their need as well as for sale. Women in this area are also busy collecting and processing other forest products for sale. However, their problem is that forest products have become rare. When shea-nuts and locust-beans become scarce, disputes arise about who has the right to these fruits; is it a man or a woman, is it the person who farms the land, or is it the person who considers himself the owner.

⁸³ Personal communication G ke Appeldoorn, *S cretariat Permanent de la Coordination des Politiques sectoriels agricoles*.

⁸⁴ (Rookhuizen 1986; Thorsen and Reenberg 2000; 2002)

⁸⁵ (Thorsen 2002)

⁸⁶ (Evenson and Siegel 1999)

⁸⁷ (Thorsen and Reenberg 2000; Thorsen 2002)

⁸⁸ In group-interviews with women, men and youngsters, poverty was often mentioned as a cause for domestic violence (Barry and Kabore 1998).

*Agro-Pastoralism in the North*⁸⁹

In the Northern parts of the country, the productive system has evolved from either cattle herding for some and farming for other categories of the population towards agro-pastoralism for everybody. The present trend is to keep cattle for meat rather than for milk. This entails an income-loss for women who in the past were in charge of the milk-trade. In this process women have become more active in farming as well as in raising small animals like sheep.

The Fulani society, which dominates this part of the country, consists of three classes, the 'free' Fulani men and women, the Rimaibe, descendants of former slaves and the different socio-professional 'castes'. In the past, the livelihoods of the three classes were distinctly different. The 'free' Fulani were pastoralists specialised particularly in cattle for milk production. Although both men and women owned cattle, the division of labour was that the men cared for the cattle and the women took care of the milk. For the 'free' Fulani farming was the work of slaves. The craftsmen of 'caste' did not farm either. Instead they exchanged their services against millet and milk. When slavery was forbidden by the colonial administration in the beginning of the 20th century, the Fulani production system changed radically. Since then, herdsmen have started to farm, the former slaves started to engage in husbandry, and the people of 'caste' did both. Today almost everybody is an agro-pastoralist, but at the same time the values of the past influence the identities of the present in such a way that what is acceptable behaviour for one individual of one social class may not be so for an individual of another social class.

In the beginning of the 70s and in the beginning of the 80s the Sahel suffered from several years of serious draughts. Many Fulani lost their herds. This is when more and more Fulani women started farming, an activity entirely new for them. Their contribution to work on their husbands' farms had previously been limited to thinning the millet seedlings. Women also started commercial fattening of sheep or even young cattle. Thereby they compensated for a loss of income resulting from men's new preference to raise cattle for meat rather than for milk production. Besides livestock raising and farming, Fulani women of all categories earn money with old and new crafts, spinning cotton yarn, plating straw mats, ceramic works, plating hair and simple jewellery.

Presently, most women engage in some farming, except those few who have sufficient quantities of milk at home. Women grow sauce ingredients such as okra, hibiscus and groundnuts, but also cereals. They prefer sorghum to millet, which is the crop grown by men. Sorghum succeeds even if planted late, and women are constantly late because they first have to help their husbands with sowing and thinning. Agricultural extension services, and Fulani men and women alike, minimize the importance of women's farming activities. Women of either social class do not talk about themselves as farmers. Instead they talk about their farming as an extension of their roles as mothers and feeders of the family. They farm in order to feed their children, to obtain sauce ingredi-

⁸⁹ Unless another source is mentioned this section is a summary of a study made in the Seno province about Fulani women's development strategies (Puget 1999).

ents and cash for small expenses. In the past, their milk trade covered such expenses. In fact, some women also manage to accumulate personal wealth such as animals and jewellery.

The inhabitants of the North have learned to live with erroneous rainfall. Migration is a strategy to survive the dry season and is an integral part of their livelihood strategy. Small family units set off with their children and cattle to settle for a few months in a village of farmers. There they take on all kinds of paid work and they exchange milk for millet. Some families settle permanently, and as a result Fulani settlements are found all over the country. Young men go to the coastal countries for paid work. Other men and women work in gold extraction in northern Burkina's gold field. The temporary migrants return to the North as soon as the first clouds indicate the beginning of the rainy season.

Women's access to farmland

With women's increasing involvement in farming their insecure land tenure has become a problem on the development agenda. At present there is a gap between what the law says about land rights, and actual practice. Therefore the problem of insecure rights is faced not only by women but also by men who are living in villages where they are considered as 'non-autochthonous'. According to the traditional tenure system, which is most commonly applied, land is a collective property of descent groups, who attribute use rights to other groups and individuals. There are thus primary, secondary and tertiary right-holders to farmland, in a system of overlapping rights, which is flexible enough to give everybody access to land unless there is absolute scarcity. Traditional tenure has not prevented the development of commercial farming in western Burkina Faso.⁹⁰ Labour and labour-saving technology rather than land have been differentiating factors according to which some farmers are poor and others non-poor.

The descendants of the first inhabitant of a location are considered the 'owners' of the land, and the eldest male of that descent group is the 'custodian of the land' (*chef de terre*) who is in charge of distributing use rights to people and of performing rituals and sacrifices to the spirits of the locality. In 1984 the law on Agrarian and Land Reorganization (RAF)⁹¹ was established, rendering all land the property of the state. This reform faced much resentment from the traditional land-right holders and until today it has not been possible to apply it. In the 90s, due to new political trends, this law was modified several times so that it became possible for the state to grant private land ownership to individuals. These modifications resulted in further anxieties and power struggles among land right holders.

In the minds of the local populations, as well as for many civil servants, land matters only concern men. The right holders mentioned above are men, and the power struggles are among men. In the past, in those ethnic groups where a married woman traditionally had her own plot of farmland, she received this plot through her husband. This meant

⁹⁰ (Saul 1993)

⁹¹ (*Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière*)

theoretically that if her husband died, she lost her plot. But, as long as a woman was supposed to be always attached to a man, this was not a problem. She would be allocated a new plot from her new husband. If a woman refused to remarry, and preferred to fend alone for herself and her children, her access to land would be more precarious. But, if she had a son, he had rights to land in his father's descent group, and she could therefore continue to farm there in the name of the son. As land is becoming both scarce and increasingly exhausted, at least in the central most densely populated parts of the country, women's access to land has become more difficult, and they are in most cases given fields of lesser quality.

Access to land for men and women differs according to where they live, who they are, who a woman's husband is, who their ancestors were and how successful they are in negotiating access. In many parts of southern and western Burkina Faso, it is still possible to open up new farmland in the bush. Scarcity in farmland does not exist. Here women's main constraint to own farming is lack of time and technology. In the Tenkodogo area, in the east, access for farmland is not found to be a problem for women, because men are slowly disengaging themselves from millet farming in favour of more lucrative occupations.⁹²

In multi-ethnic villages women's access to land is determined by who her husband is. Husbands in villages where they are considered 'non-autochthonous' do not have secure land rights either. They are granted use right to a field by one of the autochthonous men. This field is likely to be of poor quality, and it can be taken back any time. A study in a multi-ethnic village in the cotton zone suggests that when farmland becomes scarce, the autochthonous farmers are reluctant to lend land to Mossi men, but prefer to lend it to women who are less likely to claim long-term use-rights. In the villages studied it was common for Mossi women to obtain personal fields from other men because their husband's field was not sufficiently large. These women had a more easy access to land than their husband, but at the same time it was more insecure.⁹³

The land situation in the former Fulani caliphate Liptaako, is another particular case.⁹⁴ Here farmland is private property and can thus be bought and sold. This is explained by the fact that the Fulani, who came as religious conquerors in the beginning of the 19th century, do not have such sacred links to the earth as the farming populations who live further south have. For the latter the idea of selling land is still offensive (although near towns this taboo has been broken and a land market has developed). In the Seno province, good farmland is private property of men, while land of less quality, grazing land and bush areas are owned collectively. As marriages are fragile, women do not like to be dependent on a husband. Therefore they try to obtain plots from different source, in addition to the plot made available to them by their husband. A few women had inherited farmland from their mother or grandmother. There are also cases when a woman has bought a plot with own money.

Fulani women's difficult access to farmland may astonish people familiar with Islamic law. According to this law, daughters inherit half

⁹² (Thorsen and Reenberg 2000)

⁹³ (Kevane and Gray 1999)

⁹⁴ (Puget 1999)

the share that sons get. Theoretically the Fulani in northern Burkina apply this principle. However, women prefer to let their brothers take their share of the inheritance. The reason is that if ever a woman finds herself without a husband she will turn to her brother who is expected to provide for her. Only in cases when a woman has no full brothers will she claim her share of the inheritance.

The setting in which women's access to land has been most constrained are the irrigation and settlement schemes on which the state authorities in collaboration with foreign development experts have applied rigid procedures for land allocation. Based on the idea of an European kind of unitary household, land was distributed only to (male) heads of household.⁹⁵

To sum up, securing women's tenure rights is difficult. Imposed privatisation is not likely to resolve the problem. Instead women would risk becoming even more marginalized. If land becomes a merchandise, which can be bought and sold, it is unlikely that landholding men will continue to let women and immigrated men use their land for free. When access to land becomes a matter of money, women and poor men are likely to be the losers.

Migratory movements.

As mentioned there is a flux of people moving from the north and the center to the southern and western parts of the country. Here they settle and break new farmland. These are mainly small nuclear families. There is also a migration of men, some of them in company of a wife, to the coastal countries, mainly Côte d'Ivoire but also to Ghana and Benin. In the western and southwestern part of the country it has become like a proof of manhood to go to the coast for work.⁹⁶ Men return with fancy clothes, bicycles and cassette recorders. Some go to the coast to earn money to pay bride-wealth at home, others intend to buy oxen and a plough and set themselves up as independent farmers. Young lovers elope to Côte d'Ivoire, and stay there until their relatives have accepted their liaison. Although young people from different parts of the country may share these motives, men's labor migration from the central parts of the country is particular, because it is long term and they leave their families behind. They provide for their families from at a distance.

Since colonialism, Burkina Faso has provided workers for the plantation economies of the coastal countries. Most migrants leave with the intention to come back home with money. However, during the years quite a number stayed. According to common estimations there are between two and three million Burkinabe citizens living in Côte d'Ivoire. Many migrants had already moved back to Burkina due to the economic crisis of the 90s. Others fled from the armed conflict in 2002–3. In households who depended on remittances from migrants, the situation is now becoming difficult.

There is also a migratory movement of youngsters from the countryside to towns. Vulnerability studies labels these youngsters exploited and vulnerable.⁹⁷ Girls work as domestic maids, in street trade or as

⁹⁵ (Ouédraogo and Ouédraogo 1986; van Koppen 1998)

⁹⁶ As described by Fieloux (1980) for the Lobi and by Hagberg (2001) for the Karaboro

⁹⁷ (Lachaud 1997; Ouattara, Kabore et al. 1997)

bargirls⁹⁸. Young men work as apprentices and in trade as well. Even if they are exploited, they may still consider themselves to be better off in town as opposed to working on the family farm. Life in town at least gives them a little personal pocket money. Besides, they learn new skills. Of course they are vulnerable in the sense that adults can take advantage of them. Particularly girls may become victims of sexual harassment and abuse.

Lately public attention has been paid to the problem of child laborers and trafficking of both boys and girls, which has developed over the last decade.⁹⁹ As fostering is an old practice in the region, and as parents generally consider labor away from home an educational benefit to children, it is difficult to draw a sharp line between fostering and trafficking. However, professional intermediation of child labor has been documented over the past two-three years. These children are hired as plantation workers, where they work under slave-like conditions, underpaid, or sometimes not paid at all. Groups of such children have been repatriated, but they seem to return to the coast as soon as they can. Although they are badly paid, what they gain is still more than they receive from working on the family farm.¹⁰⁰

A recent study of children's labor migration shows that 9,5 percent of Burkinabe children 6–17 years old lived away from their parents.¹⁰¹ This percentage includes the whole spectrum from children living in good conditions with a relative where they attend school, family helpers, apprentices and laborers in slave-like condition. Almost 83.000 Burkinabe children work abroad, more than 47.000 boys and 35.000 girls. More than 82.000 rural children have migrated to work in urban areas of Burkina Faso, almost 47.000 boys and almost 36.000 girls. The highest shares of international child labor migration are found in the South West, Center East and East. Poverty is the reason most frequently mentioned for child migration. However, it is not the poorest families who are most likely to send away a child. Parent's decision to send a child abroad seems to be a conscious anti-poverty strategy rather than an act of despair.

Finally, there is a movement of people from the urban areas back to the countryside. Some returnees have earned money elsewhere and now invest in farming or other business in their village. Such cases are common in the cotton zone. Others are retired civil servants, who have prepared for old age in the village. Others again, return because they find it difficult to survive in town or have fallen ill and come home to die. If relations with family and kin have been maintained, there is always a place for them to stay and a piece of land where they can grow some millet. One has to keep in mind that public provisions for old people are non-existent in Burkina Faso, except for those few who have been in formal employment. If one studied the lifecycle of urban people, one would probably find that many of them start and they end their lives in the countryside.

⁹⁸ See for example Ouédraogo's (1995) study of Dagara girls' migration to Bobo-Dioulasso. Their motives are personal ambitions for a better life, and they want to be respected for what they are doing. See also Bardem and Gobatto (1995) for a description of Ghanaian girls' livelihood strategies in Ouagadougou

⁹⁹ (Kielland and Sanogo 2002)

¹⁰⁰ (Unicef 2002)

¹⁰¹ (Kielland and Sanogo 2002)

Urban livelihoods

Although the overwhelming majority of Burkina Faso's population lives in the countryside, towns are growing rapidly. Between 1975 and 1996 the urban population quadrupled. This increase was due to migration to towns, but also to the fact that some larger villages have been declared towns, as a result of the creation of new provinces. Ouagadougou and the smaller towns have the highest growth rates. Between 1975–1985 Ouagadougou annual growth was 9,4 % and between 1985–1996 it was 4,3 %.¹⁰² It has been difficult for the authorities to keep up with the development of infrastructures such as water, sanitation, electricity, and transport. In families living on the urban peripheries it is women who are most likely to sense the inconveniences.

In the urban context people develop new kinds of livelihoods: salaried jobs, entrepreneurship, trade, and crafts, etc. On the labor market men and women face the same problems but differently. Both men and women want to have a job. Men seem to have advantages in getting into formal employment, where they constitute the majority, 81,7 percent men and 18,3 percent women. It also seems to be easier for men to establish themselves as employers: 95,5 percent of the employers are men, and only 4,5 percent women.¹⁰³ The fact that men generally have received more schooling partly explains this difference. Furthermore, some employers are reluctant to employ women because they tend to get pregnant and need a maternity leave. But, one can also imagine that a society where jobs are often obtained through personal contacts, a man is likely to employ a fellow man assuming that the man should be able to provide for his family.

The urban population has assimilated the ideal of the 'male breadwinner', as introduced by the colonial administration and supported both by Christianity and Islam, (an ideal much different from the rural division of labor where men's and women's tasks in production are different but complementary). However, in reality few urban men's incomes are high enough to support a housewife. Therefore, most women in towns have some income generating activities. Even if an ideal husband should give his wife *le prix des condiments*, a daily sum for buying food (including the sauce), the reality is that many women contribute by using their personal money to feed the family. Some women are even sustaining their unemployed husband.

Even in urban families it is most common that spouses have their economies separated, with a clear division of who pays what. This division is constantly renegotiated, and disputes about who pays for what are common. For example, in families where both husband and wives are civil servants, some men argue in vain to convince the wife that expenses, such as housing, food and children's schooling, should be shared equally. Women use the ideal of the male provider as an argument to keep their salary for personal expenses. In couples where the husband is relatively rich, he may try to forbid his wife to engage in income generating activities, something that most women would refuse to accept. Even if a woman receives sufficient money from the husband, having a personal

¹⁰² (INSD 2000a)

¹⁰³ (Nioumou, Bambara et al. 1997:30) See Appendix II, Table 2 for numbers of women and men in public employment.

income is a matter of security. Urban women know that marriages are fragile and husbands unreliable.

The ideal of the male breadwinner can be advantageous for women in towns. They can get along by attaching themselves to men, either through marriage, prostitution or through any intermediary form.¹⁰⁴ As long as a woman is young, there is no shame for her in squeezing money out of different boyfriends. Thereby she puts them to test to see whether they are worth marrying.¹⁰⁵ For a poor man the ideal of being the breadwinner is a burden. He is unable to marry and will even find it difficult to maintain a girl friend.

Protected employment

The term 'protected employment' refers to the fact that the employed person is covered by the work laws and by the laws for social security. 'Protected employment' gives right to a pension, paid maternity leave, a paid annual leave and an insurance against work accidents. Such employments can be either in the public sector as a civil servant or in the private sector as an employee.

Most attractive jobs are found in the public sector, because although salaries are modest, the employment is considered secure. However, since 1991 the recruitment of civil servants has been limited to health-care staff and schoolteachers. This means that even people with a university degree will have to search for jobs in the private sector. Since the privatization and state restructuring of the early 90s there has been an increase in private enterprises and NGOs take over many of the jobs previously carried out by civil servants. A labor market exists for people with education. However, jobs are not enough, and from the perspective of the individual it may be difficult to access employment without the right contacts.

Data from the Priority Survey (1994–95) indicates that, on average women's salaries in protected employment are slightly higher than men's, but when salaries in similar professions are compared there is no difference. However there is one difference between how men and women are paid: women are more likely to be valued for their education, while men tend to be valued for their age and experience.¹⁰⁶

The informal sector

Any income generating activity except 'protected employment' and farming are here considered part of the informal sector. This means that the spectrum of activities included is wide, and the problems encountered by men and women are varied. They all share the condition that they ideally should earn enough money both to survive at present, and be able to set aside for the future. In reality many people active in the informal sector just manage to survive from day to day.

Statistical data indicates that the average woman in the informal sector gains less on her income generating activity than the average man does.¹⁰⁷ Even if men and women of similar age, education and experi-

¹⁰⁴ (Bardem and Gobatto 1995)

¹⁰⁵ (Roth 1994; Bardem and Gobatto 1995)

¹⁰⁶ (Lachaud 1997:78)

¹⁰⁷ (Lachaud 1997:79)

ences are compared, there is still a large difference between men's and women's incomes. Women are confined to activities, which generate very low profit, such as small trade. Compared to men, women are discriminated because of their limited access to credit as well as constraining social structures, such as the division of tasks within the family.¹⁰⁸ The sums women need to start an activity are often so small that the credit institutions do not want them as customers.

Women's gender specific skills confine them to the less lucrative activities. They exercise those professions, which they have been trained for by their mother: farming, processing and selling food, beer-brewing, and small trade. Formal education and vocational training would open up new professions for them. For instance, in the case of tailoring, which used to be a men's job, women have become active after receiving training.¹⁰⁹ Behind official statistics about the informal sector, there is another, even more invisible sector where women undertake activities which generate incomes that are not significant enough to be considered. In official statistics these women are labeled 'housewives', although they all do something to earn money.¹¹⁰

Few studies exist about urban women's economic activities and they are already about ten years old. However, during the past ten years Ouagadougou has experienced an economic boom, which is likely to have opened up new possibilities for women's entrepreneurship. It is possible that women presently are more active and face other kinds of problems than ten years ago. The devaluation of the CFA currency in 1994¹¹¹ obliged women to expand their income generating to compensate for the household's loss in purchasing power.¹¹² Since then, new kinds of small businesses have emerged, where women are working, such as telecenters, public secretariats, photocopy shops, etc. A less glamorous professional group of female sand workers has emerged as a result of the building boom in Ouagadougou, producing sand and gravel for building purposes, illegally and with hard physical effort on the outskirts of the town.¹¹³ If one wants to support female entrepreneurship much more and up-to date information is needed about who they are and what problems they face. It is important that women are not forever confined to the small scale and the informal. Even if much can be done to strengthen women who are on the margins of survival, conditions should also be created for women to become actors in big business.

Unemployment

Unemployment is principally an urban problem. The unemployment rate in 1994/95 was 15,2 percent in the urban and 0,8 percent in the rural environment.¹¹⁴ Most of the unemployed are relatively well educated. About half of the youngsters who leave secondary school¹¹⁵ do not

¹⁰⁸ (Lachaud 1997:87)

¹⁰⁹ (Dijkman and Van Dijk 1993)

¹¹⁰ (Roost Vischer 1997)

¹¹¹ The CFA franc is a West African currency, which had a fixed course in relation to the French franc. In 1994 the CFA was devaluated to half its value. Because Burkina Faso is extremely dependent on imported goods, this led to a general increase in prices without an increase in salaries.

¹¹² (Thylefors 1995)

¹¹³ (Kinda 1995)

¹¹⁴ (Lachaud 1997:166)

¹¹⁵ (*niveau secondaire deuxième cycle ou niveau CAP*)

find an employment. The problem is that many people's education is too high and too theoretical, while there is a shortage of people with vocational training.¹¹⁶

Fewer women than men are unemployed. In the towns, 16,3 percent of the men and only 13,4 percent of the women were unemployed in 1994/95. There is probably a hidden unemployment among women, who by the survey were defined as 'house-wives' but who might have wanted to take a job if they had the opportunity. Unemployment of young people seems to be permanent rather than transitory.¹¹⁷

Conclusions

The cases related in this chapter show that the content of male and female roles and responsibilities is flexible, while the division as such seems to persist. Women have taken on masculine tasks and incorporated them in their role as mothers and wives. Furthermore, they have lost some of the feminine responsibilities to men, as these tasks became salaried professions, such as nursing, cooking and educating. At present a wife of a cotton farmer wields the hoe, although in the past this was not a woman's work. Women accept to do it because it is a wife's responsibility to assist her husband. Similarly, when Fulani or Mossi women grow millet they do not present themselves as millet producers, which is a masculine responsibility, instead they talk about it as 'feeding the children'. This observation raises a delicate question: how to support female producers, without challenging the ideology of the male millet-provider, which both men and women seem to want to uphold.

Women did not initiate the above-described changes. Rather they adjusted to men's changed livelihood strategies. The authorities supported men's cash earning and women were left with the unpaid or badly paid work. Similarly on the urban labor market, more men than women are found in the better-paid employments. The pattern was laid out under colonialism, when a salaried labor market was created for men, and men were educated for these kinds of jobs. As a consequence women are in majority in the most badly paid activities, particularly in the informal sector.

Men's and women's livelihood activities are differently gendered. Therefore, if poverty is to be eradicated, women's and men's poverties will have to be addressed differently. From a gender equality perspective it is also important facilitate for women to enter into lucrative businesses.

¹¹⁶ (Lachaud 1997)

¹¹⁷ (Lachaud 1997)

Poverty reduction and gender equality

The past chapter described the ways livelihoods in Burkina Faso are gendered. The constraints people face when they try to make ends meet are different depending on whether the person is a man or a woman. Gendered differences in economic behavior can only be understood in relation to men's and women's ideal roles within the family. These roles differ to some extent depending on age, ethnic group, religious belonging, class, etc. However, if one wants to understand why poverty is unevenly distributed among the population, gender is a key element.

From this chapter and onwards the perspective changes from the micro-level and the logics of local people's ways of thinking and living, to the national level and the measures undertaken by the government and the international community to promote both poverty reduction and gender equality.

The Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP)

Although poverty reduction has been the objective of development interventions as long as these have existed, poverty became the catchword on the international aid agenda in the late 90's. The structural adjustment programs, which the Bretton Woods institution had imposed on poor countries, had aimed at creating a healthy national economy through public expenditure cut-downs and privatization of state-owned enterprises and services. These programs had some negative secondary effects for poor people, which led the Bretton Woods institutions to follow up the programs with social sector investments, and later to insist on 'Poverty Reduction' as a goal for national policies. It has to be noted that the effects of structural adjustment were less severe in Burkina Faso than in similar countries. Thanks to the austere economic policy of the radical Thomas Sankara government (1984–1987), the national economy of Burkina Faso was already relatively balanced.¹¹⁸

In response to new conditions for loans from the Bretton Woods institutions, Burkina Faso produced a strategic document in 2000 on how to reduce poverty in the country, a so called Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)¹¹⁹ Seven major principles are guiding this strategy: (i) refocusing the role of the State; (ii) sustainable management of natural

¹¹⁸ (Sawadogo 1997)

¹¹⁹ (Burkina Faso 2000). In French *Cadre Stratégique de Lutte contre la Pauvreté (CSLP)*. Two progress reports (Burkina Faso 2001; 2002) have been made.

resources; (iii) promotion of a new partnership with donors; (iv) promotion of good governance; (v) inclusion of the regional dimension; (vi) regional balance; and (vii) the gender dimension. Furthermore, the PRSP has four strategic objectives: (i) acceleration of equity-based growth; (ii) guaranteeing access by the poor to basic social services; (iii) expansion of job opportunities and income-generating activities for the poorest inhabitants; and (iv) promotion of good governance.

The purpose of this document was to serve as a comprehensive framework for the country's economic policies in all sectors. Consequently, all international donors would have to place their aid within this framework. Donors who had confidence in the PRSP, and in the country's capacity to implement it as intended, were invited to send their economic contribution directly into the state's treasury, so called 'budget support'. This is how Sweden in 2001 and 2002 came to contribute yearly 40 millions crowns to Burkina Faso's national budget. As gender equality is one of the goals for Swedish international development cooperation, it is particularly interesting to contemplate whether a gender perspective has been integrated in the PRSP and if this poverty reduction strategy is likely to have positive effects for gender equality.

The PRSP was produced in great hurry because the Government of Burkina Faso urgently wanted the debt relief (the so called HICP initiative) that could be granted only when a poverty reduction strategy existed.¹²⁰ The document thus came to be established without the broad involvement of civil society that the World Bank had required. In fact, not even all the technical ministries were involved. The role of the National Assembly was limited to voting for the document. The PRSP will be revised during 2003, and the authorities intend to include a broader spectrum of actors in the revision process.

In spite of the shortcomings of the elaboration procedure, the first PRSP 2000 is very ambitious and contains many good initiatives for reducing poverty. However, although the paper mentions the gender dimension as being important, there is no analysis of how gender affects the distribution of poverty. There are only a few concrete actions suggested for how to reduce female poverty. A statement in the short paragraph about gender (paragraph 4.1.5), "The Government therefore considers that women's participation in development is a key determinant in its development strategy" reveals an unawareness of women's already important contribution to development, and a lack of understanding of what gender is all about.

In the PRSP there are some inherent contradictions, which would have become obvious if women and their already considerable participation in development, not least through unpaid labor contribution, had been considered. First, the PRSP suggests that land be privatized and argues that this would be advantageous for the poor. This suggestion disregards the fact that women are among the secondary and tertiary land right holders, and would therefore risk losing their use-right if access to land becomes a matter of money. Second, the PRSP envisages a number of ambitious actions to reverse soil degradation, such as the construction of anti-erosive stone lines, the creation of compost pits, etc.

¹²⁰ (Danida 2002)

All these measures are extremely labor intense. They are mostly performed on land controlled by men. In the past women have provided as much as 60–80% of the labor on anti-desertification project sites but without being fully implicated in the management of natural resources.¹²¹ Third, is it possible to produce more cotton and at the same time send more children to school, as the PRSP suggests? Cotton is to a large extent produced with unpaid family labor and the question one has to pose is whether women can or want to take on even more of this workload. Fourth, the section on basic education in the PRSP is in favor of women and girls, and it insists on increasing the number of girls in school. However the causes for girl's low school attendance are not analyzed and the remedy proposed is simply to increase girls' school attendance.

Are women poorer than men?

Women's invisibility in the strategy paper, and the invisibility of women's efforts in development can partly be attributed to the methodological bias in the two large statistical surveys about poverty that were made in 1994 and 1998 by Burkina Faso's national institute for statistic and demography, *Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie* (INSD). The living conditions of 8,642 Burkinabe households had been surveyed, and data from the first survey was used to establish a National Poverty Profile in 1996. The PRSP was elaborated on the basis of statistics from this survey.

The Priority Survey unfortunately does not furnish disaggregated data below the household level. Thereby the economic sphere managed by the wife within the household is invisible. Farmers' wives are classified as family helpers (*aide-familiaux*) and wives of employed men are classified as inactive. The value of women's work is not accounted for and inequalities in resource distribution within the household cannot be grasped. The Priority Survey defines the 'household' (*ménage*) as the basic socio-economic unit, in which the different members (relatives or not) live in the same house or compound, pool their resources and jointly provide for the essential part of their food and other basic needs.¹²² This definition fits badly with the variety of domestic organizations that exists in Burkina Faso, as described in the chapter about marriage and the family. Husbands and wives normally do not pool their resources, and they even tend to keep their resources secret from each other. Therefore a survey that directs its questions to the male household head is bound to miss information about women. Similarly, a survey that does not account for relations between households will misrepresent cases where several farming units live in the same compound, or when several households farm together. To sum up, the Priority Survey's application of a European definition of what a 'household' is, and the disregard of economic relations within and between such units obscures the ways survival strategies are gendered.¹²³

¹²¹ (Sanou 1993)

¹²² (INSD 1996a:16)

¹²³ The use of the 'household' as the smallest unit for a micro-economic survey has been criticized for years and the arguments against it are well summarized in the Sida-publication on "Gender Inequality and Poverty" (Baden, Milward et al. 1998:26–42). The 'household' concept has proved to be particularly difficult to apply in the West-African context where spouses have separate economies and little or no knowledge of in each other's incomes.

The crucial issue for the establishment of poverty reduction strategies is the identification of the poor and the criteria for measuring poverty reduction. Who are poor and where are they living? There are several ways to define poverty, and the definition chosen is likely to influence the answer and in the end have political consequences.¹²⁴

In Burkina Faso's National Poverty Profile from 1996, the poverty line is calculated on the basis of a daily need of 2,283 calories per adult person and thereafter converted into local food prices. Thus the threshold for absolute poverty was defined as 41,099 FCFA per adult and per year in the monetary value of October 1994 and the threshold of extreme absolute poverty was 31,749 FCFA per adult per year. This definition gave two clear-cut categories of households, poor and extremely poor, the rest of the surveyed households were divided into three further categories classified as relatively 'non-poor'. The whole population was thus classified into five categories, of which two were under the poverty line.

In addition the surveyed population was divided into five geographical strata. The two large cities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso constituted one urban strata, the smaller towns another, and the rest of the territory was subdivided into five rural strata. The purpose of the exercise was to identify where the majority of the poor households lived so that resources could be channeled to the poorest regions.¹²⁵

The National Poverty Profile concludes that 44,5 percent of the Burkinabe lived below the line of absolute poverty in 1994–95.¹²⁶ As it proved difficult to draw conclusions from the wealth of statistics, the INSD produced six thematic studies on 'poverty and health'; 'poverty and education'; 'gender and poverty'; 'poverty and labor market'; 'poverty and unemployment' and 'urban poverty and access to basic social services'.¹²⁷ Although these studies provide more in-depth analyses, their value is still limited by the methodological weaknesses in the initial data collection as described above.

The report on "gender and poverty" illustrates how difficult it is to do a gender-analysis on survey data where women only figure if they are heads of household. It would have made no sense to compare female heads of households with male heads of households. A woman is head of household because she has no husband, or the husband is absent, while the male head of household has one or several wives. These two family forms are thus not comparable. The authors of the "gender and poverty" study resort to a comparison between single men and female heads of household in order to find out if there is a correlation between gender and their living standards. Single men and female heads represent only 10,3% of the population and their life-situation is particular compared to the majority of the population who live in conjugal or extended families. The category 'female heads' was subdivided into: *de jure* heads, i.e. unmarried, divorced women and widows, and *de facto* heads, i.e. women who were married but lived separately from their husband. The average

¹²⁴ For a critical discussion about money-metric definitions of poverty see Hagberg (2001)

¹²⁵ See Hagberg (2001) for a critique of this rigid categorization, which glosses over economic stratification within regions, and disregards relations and flows of people between regions.

¹²⁶ (INSD 1996b)

¹²⁷ (Bayala, Kabore et al. 1997; Kaboré, Sanou et al. 1997; Lachaud 1997; Nioumou, Bambara et al. 1997; Ouédraogo, Zoubga et al. 1997; Sanou and Ouédraogo 1998)

living standard of the *de jure* female heads of households was higher than the living standard of the *de facto* heads but lower than it was for single men. The high average living standard of single women can be explained by the fact that some were young urban educated professionals or businesswomen, who had not yet married or were divorced.¹²⁸ Other *de facto* female heads received considerable money remittances from a migrant husband. Although single men had the highest average living standard, they were also more numerous in the categories of absolute and extreme poverty. The absence of poverty among female heads of household can be explained by inheritance from a deceased husbands, and aid they receive from relatives.

Generally, single men and persons living in female-headed households were less likely to be poor than persons living in male-headed households. In other words married persons were poorer than unmarried, and the more wives a man had, the poorer they all were. The authors of the “gender and poverty” analysis emphasize that they do not suggest a causal link between marriage and poverty. The difference in living standard is rather an effect of where people live and how they earn their living.

Does the above mean that women are more likely to be poor than men? No. Although women are in majority among the extremely poor, 51,7% women against 48,3% men, this difference is proportional to the percentage of women and men in the total population. Therefore, one cannot conclude that women are more likely to be extremely poor than men. But, how does it come that men are in majority among the non-poor, 50,8% men against 49,2% women? As it seems, men have been more successful than women to avoid poverty. In the category of the extreme non-poor the proportions are similarly to the advantage of men.

How certain are those data? As mentioned, the priority survey did not disaggregate data below household level. Individual poverty averages were calculated by dividing the total living standard of the household, by the number of persons, as if resources in families are allocated in an egalitarian manner. Since resources are not equally distributed among all household members, married women’s poverty within male-headed households is likely to be larger than these statistics indicate.

Promotion of gender equality

Women’s emancipation has been on the political agenda in Burkina Faso at least since 1975 after the first UN conference for the promotion of women. It was a national priority from 1984 to 1987 when the country was governed by a group of young radical officers under president Thomas Sankara.¹²⁹ To strengthen the efforts for gender equality in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) the Ministry for Women’s Promotion¹³⁰ was created in 1997. Women’s promotion had until then been a responsibility of the Ministry for Social Action and for National Solidarity¹³¹, more precisely of the Direction for the Family’s Promotion¹³².

¹²⁸ As can be seen in Appendix II, Table 2, a majority of the civil servants are unmarried men and women.

¹²⁹ (Kanse 1989)

¹³⁰ (Le Ministère de la Promotion de la Femme)

¹³¹ (Le Ministère de l’Action Sociale et de la Solidarité Nationale)

¹³² (La Direction de la Promotion de la Famille)

With the creation of the new ministry 10 of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing document were selected and these were summarized into 5 programs, which constituted the core of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Women 1998–2000. These 5 programs were: (i) the fight against poverty, (ii) the development of women's human resources, (iii) the promotion and protection of women's and small girls' fundamental rights, (iv) advocacy and social mobilization for a positive image of women, (v) institutional mechanisms for implementation, coordination, and monitoring/evaluation. Within these five programs 92 activities were suggested, 26 were judged a priority for the action plan 1998–2000. The cost for implementing the plan was evaluated to 2,063 milliards CFA, of which 20 % would be paid from the state and 80 % would have to be asked for from donors.

The plan was not adopted until 1999, which retarded its implementation. The evaluation report estimates that only 20 % of the planned activities have been executed.¹³³ For lack of data, the evaluation team was unable to assess whether these activities have had a strategic impact on gender equality or not. There are many reasons for this mediocre performance: First, the planned activities were too numerous for a three-year period. Second, the ministry did not receive the expected funding, neither from its national government nor from international donors. The latter financed 22,5% of the budget, while the state did not finance anything except the ministry's functioning. Third, there were numerous shortcomings both in the ministry's internal organization and in its communication and cooperation with other ministries, NGOs and donors. Fourth, the ministry was short of staff with the necessary competence.

In Burkina Faso, gender equality is a 'crosscutting issue' supposed to be part and parcel of all sector policies. According to the Action Plan, the Ministry for Women's Promotion should apply the method 'make do' (*Faire-Faire*), meaning that the activities mentioned in the plan should be implemented by other ministries or NGOs rather than by this ministry itself. The role of this ministry would be to develop policies and strategies for promoting gender equality, to coordinate, to follow up and to evaluate. But, as communication between the different structures was deficient and the division of responsibilities unclear, the implementation of the plan was hampered. In fact, the evaluation report reveals irritation among staff from the technical ministries who thought that staff from the Ministry for Women's Promotion interfered with their work.

The Ministry for Women's Promotion works with a network of 'gender focal points' in the different ministries. These persons have been selected for their competence and interest in gender issues, but most of them are not in strategic positions in the ministries, which makes it difficult for them to have an impact on policy planning. Furthermore, their role as a 'gender focal point' is not formalized, which makes it easy for the higher-level decision makers to disregard their existence. The best position to implement a gender perspective within a ministry would have been at the Direction for Studies and Plans¹³⁴, which every ministry has.

¹³³ (SAEC 2002)

¹³⁴ (*Direction des Etudes et des Plans*)

The evaluation report also notes that the ‘focal points’ experienced their role as unclear, and that there was a lack of communication between themselves and the Ministry for Women’s Promotion.

Several donors had been involved in the elaboration of the Action Plan, but did not contribute to its implementation. It is unclear whether they withdrew because the implementation strategy was unclear, or if the ministry did not make enough efforts to approach the donors for funding. The fact that the national government did not contribute funds may have given the donors the impression that gender equality was not a priority.

Another key ministry for women’s promotion is the Ministry for Human Rights¹³⁵, which was created in 2002 after having been part of the Ministry of Justice. Its task is to revise existing legislation in order to adjust it in line with international conventions and laws about human rights. One of its Directions is specifically responsible for Women’s Rights issues. Its principal collaboration partners are said to be the Ministry for Women’s Promotion and the Ministry of Justice. However, neither the Ministry of Justice nor the Ministry for Human Rights are mentioned on the list of ‘gender focal points’ with whom the Ministry for Women’s Promotion is supposed to collaborate.

In February 2003, it was not yet clear how the Ministry for Women’s Promotion would participate in the present reformulation of the PRSP document. The ministry intended to elaborate a National Gender Strategy and have it ready in time for the PRSP revision. The National Gender Strategy would then have been a guiding document to be considered in the PRSP process. This time schedule proved too optimistic, and the National Gender Strategy is likely to be finalized too late to serve as an input to the new PRSP.

Gender in development

The bleak performance of the Ministry for Women’s promotion does not mean that nothing has been done for women in Burkina Faso. The national report to the ‘Beijing +5’ conference (2000) and the national reports to CEDAW, both contain impressive lists of projects and other measures in favor of women.¹³⁶

For the last two decades it has been common that development projects have had some specific activities for the promotion of women. This was in line with the so called ‘Women in Development Approach’, according to which activities for women were an add-on to a seemingly gender neutral project, which in reality mainly benefited men. The idea that a gender analysis should be an integral part of the whole project in all its phases was not introduced in Burkina Faso until the late the 90s. As shown by two independent evaluations of rural development programs, there are many activities in favor of gender equality going on. However, both studies conclude that these initiatives are not part of an overall analysis or global strategy. Furthermore, for lack of data it is difficult to grasp the totality of what has been achieved and to evaluate the impact on women’s situation.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ (*Le Ministère de la Promotion des Droits de l’Homme*)

¹³⁶ (Burkina Faso 1997; Burkina Faso 1999)

¹³⁷ (Sanwidi and Yacouba 2000; Sangare Compaore 2002)

During the past couple of years, the 'gender' concept has spread rapidly in Ouagadougou. Many persons both civil servants and NGO leaders have received gender training. For many, the word 'gender' refers to a method rather than to the difference between men and women, which continues to be talked about in terms of 'sex'. For others 'gender' is simply synonymous with women. Many consider the method too theoretical and difficult to use. A few initiatives are under way to develop simplified gender tools adapted to local realities and the needs of each organization. There seem to exist a spectrum of understandings of what 'gender' is about: from the necessity to open up women's activities to male participation, to the idea that gender is a matter of vulnerability. Sometimes all kinds of vulnerable groups are included under the 'gender' label; women, handicapped, old, young, etc... The logic of this line of thought leaves only a tiny minority of middle aged, middle class men to represent 'normality'. Some categories, which are likely to be exposed to discrimination because they do not fit the commonly accepted gender categories, i.e. homosexuals, transvestites, sex-workers and child-less, are however rarely mentioned. Detached from its intellectual roots (located in the Anglophone world) and without having grown out of a local experience, the gender concept is about to be filled with meaning by the different actors in Burkina Faso.

Conclusion

The fight against poverty has been one of the programs of the Action Plan for the Promotion of Women 1998–2000. The 'gender dimension' is one of the major principles guiding the strategy for poverty reduction (PRSP). One could therefore expect decision-makers to be aware of the importance and interrelatedness of the two issues. Unfortunately this awareness has not translated into an integration of policies. The lack of gender analysis in the PRSP, which is the document that presently carries most weight among the donors, is deplorable. The lack of financial support to women's promotion, and the weakness of the ministry in charge, is deplorable as well. In spite of the stated commitment that a 'gender approach' shall crosscut all sectors of public efforts for development, there seem to be no consensus about what 'gender' is, how it can be analyzed and how this analysis can be applied in the fight against poverty. As the PRSP will be revised during 2003 a possibility for a better integration of the gender issue exists. It is still an open question to what extent the Ministry for Women's Promotion is participating in the PRSP revision process.

Education, Health and Well-being

In the PRSP much weight is given to social sector investments. The debt relief funds, which were accorded as a result of the establishment of a PRSP, have been used for such investments. In 2002 basic education and health received about 70% of the PRSP related spending¹³⁸ The rest was spent on water installations and roads.

Curiously, the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity, which has to care for the old, the sick, the disabled, the orphans, the refugees and the poorest of the poor, are not part of the social sector as defined by the PRSP. This omission reveals a somewhat utilitarian approach of the PRSP, where social sector investments are motivated by the idea that they constitute a motor for development. Nevertheless, in any society there exist categories of persons who cannot contribute to development, but still need to be cared for.

This said, I proceed to describe the two most important social sector activities, as defined by the PRSP: basic education and health care. Women do not have as much access to these services as men have, and the reasons for this inequality are found in the gender system, which exists both in local societies and permeates the health- and educational institutions.

Basic education

Only a minority of Burkinabe children goes to school. The gross school enrolment rate at primary level is 41% (48% for boys and 33% for girls), 10% for secondary education and 1% for higher education.¹³⁹ Among the adults only a small minority are literate: 24,8 % of the men and 12,9 % of the women.¹⁴⁰

In the PRSP, increased access to basic education is considered a means to reduce poverty. The low school enrolment rate of girls has attracted particular attention. In the PRSP, the section about basic education is explicitly in favor of girls and of gender equality. Still, as will be argued further down, it does not address the crucial problem of women's work or the irrelevant content of formal school education.

Burkina Faso has an ambitious ten-year plan (2001–2010) for the development of basic education.¹⁴¹ The plan is subdivided into four

¹³⁸ (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002a)

¹³⁹ (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002b)

¹⁴⁰ (INSD 2000b:30)

¹⁴¹ *Plan Decennal de Developpement de l'Education de Base (PDDEB)*.

programs with the following long-term aims: (i) to increase primary school enrolment rate from 42,7% to 70% with an emphasis on improving the enrolment rate of girls and in rural areas; (ii) to raise the adult literacy rate from its current 26% to 40%; (iii) to improve the quality of education, through reduced failure rates, on-going teacher training and other measures; and (iv) to strengthen the management and supervision capacities of educational institutions.

Teachers unions in Burkina Faso have warned that the quality of education may suffer, arguing that the development plan places greater emphasis on quantitative expansion than on the quality of teaching. The training of newly recruited teachers has been reduced from two years to one year. Moreover, new teachers will no longer become civil servants, but will increasingly be employed by the communes, with a lower salary and less security. Furthermore, there is a risk that the excessive emphasis on basic education may lead to further neglect of secondary and higher education.¹⁴²

Girls' education has been a priority since the UN Conference for Women in Beijing (1995). Within the Ministry for Basic Education a Direction for Girls' Education¹⁴³ has been created. Studies have shown that school-books contain stereotypical gender images¹⁴⁴, that male as well as female teachers treat girls differently from boys, and that girls are often discriminated.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, girls are exposed to sexual harassment, violence and even rape by teachers as well as by fellow-pupils.¹⁴⁶ In short, schools are not very nice places for girls. The school could be the ideal setting to challenge gender inequalities and to encourage critical thinking about stereotypes. At present, the school rather cements existing stereotypes.

The reasons for girls' low school attendance are well known. These are: (i) Socio-cultural reasons: Parents consider the mother to be a daughter's best educator, parents' fear that the girl will become 'loose' and get pregnant, or they fear that the girl will start questioning their authority. (ii) Economic reasons: School-expenses are too high. Parents cannot afford to lose the girl's labor. Others don't want to risk losing the expected marriage payment if she runs away from marriage. Investment in girls' education does not benefit the parents, as she will not stay with them to provide for them at old age. (iii) Institutional and pedagogical reasons: Schoolbooks contain sexist stereotypes. Schools are far from villages and the curriculum is not adapted to the needs of a rural woman. (iv) Politico-administrative reasons: The colonial heritage that favors boys' schooling. Parents favor boys' education because they assure the continuity of the descent group (in patrilineal societies).¹⁴⁷

There are large disparities between provinces in the rate of girls' school attendance. Where Christian missionaries have been active, a large percentage of the population has been to school and parents are therefore more likely to send both boys and girls to school. However among the Fulani, who are strongly Muslim, the formal school is consid-

¹⁴² (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002a)

¹⁴³ *Direction de la Promotion de l'Education des Filles*

¹⁴⁴ (Ouédraogo 1998)

¹⁴⁵ (Sidibe, Dague et al. 1996)

¹⁴⁶ (Jousset and Ouédraogo 1994)

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mme Millogo Pare Isabelle, *Direction de la Promotion de l'Education des Filles*.

ered Christian and therefore rejected. They prefer to send their children to Koran school, or to the *franco-arab* school, a school that combines Islamic education with French language and modern school subjects. On the central Mossi plateau, arranged marriages at early age are the principal constraint for girls' schooling. Among matrilineal and double-descent societies in the South West it is often the girl's maternal uncle who does not allow the girl to be sent to school. For girls who continue to secondary school the main problem is that these schools are far from home. The girl will be sent to live with a family, where she is expected to do household work, and where she may be exposed to sexual harassment.

In order to promote girls' schooling a number of initiatives have been taken: (i) Mothers of schoolgirls were encouraged to get together in Educating Mothers' Associations.¹⁴⁸ The idea is that if the mother is more involved in her daughter's schooling, she will refrain from giving her a lot of household-work. To incite women to join these associations a fund is made available, part of which the women can use to support the school, part of which they can distribute as credits among themselves. (ii) Awareness-raising of parents about why it is important for girls to go to school, (iii) Measures of 'positive discrimination' are taken, such as the free gift of 5176 school books to girls, food gifts distributed to female pupils, as well as other gifts such as writing materials, and school bags, which are obtained from different sponsors.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate for some girls to continue to secondary school there has been a grant system, which is bound to end in 2003. To facilitate for women to study at university, female students have a priority for receiving a room at the campus.

In order to improve the quality of schooling, the schoolbooks have been revised to eliminate stereotypical images of women and men. Unfortunately these new books have not been printed yet, for lack of funds. The teachers' training program has been revised so that new teachers now are taught to be conscious about gender and avoid discriminating girls. The curriculum of basic education will be revised so that the pupils will receive some practical training as well. A pre-school system with so called 'satellite schools' has been started. Here children are taught in their native language and start to learn a little French to be prepared for school, where everything is in French.

The activities to promote girls' schooling have been targeted to the 20 provinces with the lowest school attendance. It is too early to tell if they have had impact. However, the above-described activities do not address the key problem of women's work. First, women need their daughters' help in daily activities. Typically, a woman who has sons but no daughters will 'borrow' a girl to assist her. Second, as mentioned, household work is part of a girl's education to become a woman and wife. If she spends too much time at school she will not be well prepared for what is expected of her once she is married, and she may suffer hardship in her married life.

Several reports acknowledge that the content of formal education is irrelevant for the majority of the rural population.¹⁴⁹ It is therefore difficult to understand why the Burkinabe authorities have chosen to

¹⁴⁸ (*Association des Mères Educatrices*)

¹⁴⁹ (SORCA-BMB, SCET-Tunisie et al. 1995; Kielland and Sanogo 2002; Hagberg 2003)

spend much resources on expanding access to basic education (building more schools, training more teachers, etc.), prior to the development of a new curriculum, training of the existing teachers, and printing of the new school-books.

In the past parents used to send their children to school because they wanted them to become civil servants. Today they know that formal schooling alienates children from farming, without opening doors for them to a white-collar job. Parents thus have good reasons for choosing other paths for their children.¹⁵⁰ One such path is to send the child abroad or to an urban relative. In 2001 a total of more than 60.000 rural children left home in order to work in the cities or in the neighboring countries, equally many girls as boys. Girls were more often than boys sent in hope of finding an apprenticeship, and interestingly in 12 percent of the cases for 'emancipation'.¹⁵¹ These figures indicate that many parents want their daughters to acquire new knowledge. If schools dispensed more relevant knowledge, parents would probably be more motivated to send girls to school.

Health services

In Burkina Faso, lack of health is a notorious problem. Life expectancy is low, 53 years for women and 51 for men. The infant mortality rate is among the highest in the world, 104 children per thousand live births. Out of 250 children 27 die during the first year. For every 177 child-births, one woman dies from complications.¹⁵² Bad health weighs heavily on women, as it is their role to care for the sick, a work which is invisible in all statistics, and which prevents women from using time on income earning.

HIV/AIDS has become a serious problem, a human tragedy and a drain on the country's resources. According to estimations 7,7 % of the population are infected, which is the second highest rate in West Africa, after Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁵³ Although generic aids-medicines are available, they are still too expensive for the majority of the infected. The HIV/AIDS pandemic hits women harder than men for several reasons; first, physically women seem to be more easily infected than men, second their bargaining position in sexual relations within or outside marriage is weak. Sometimes is difficult for a woman to refuse sex or insist on the man using a condom.¹⁵⁴ Third, if a woman is suspected to be infected, the stigma is greater. Frequently men put the blame for the HIV/AIDS pandemic on women, without considering that men have infected these women.¹⁵⁵ Fourth, women and girls suffer the consequences of Aids, as they are the principal care givers for the sick and the dying.

The relative high infection rate of female teenagers calls for particular attention. In the age group 15–24 years, as many as 9,73 percent of the

¹⁵⁰ (Hagberg 2003),

¹⁵¹ (Kielland and Sanogo 2002)

¹⁵² (INSD 1994)

¹⁵³ (Economist Intelligence Unit 2002b)

¹⁵⁴ A study about the sexual habits of single women in Ouagadougou, argues that women's capacity to negotiate safe sex is stronger than commonly believed. But the authors point out that the girls/women who are least likely to insist on the use of a condom are those girls who hope for the partner to marry them and those girls who are economically dependent on their lovers (Bardem and Gobatto 1995).

¹⁵⁵ See for example Poda (1995:34)

girls are infected, i.e. far over the national average, while the percentage for boys is only 3,98.¹⁵⁶ One reason for this difference is that women often have partners older than themselves. In reaction to the AIDS pandemic, men are looking for young girlfriends, hoping thereby to avoid being infected.

Teenage pre-marriage pregnancies are increasing. However, as statistics lumps the unmarried with the married teenagers, it is not possible to estimate the scope of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, these girls are rarely in a position to earn a living and take care of the child, and they are not always supported by their relatives. As a result the number of children who are only loosely attached to a household is increasing, particularly in towns.

The number of health facilities and staff are far below the minimum standards set by WHO: In Burkina Faso there is one medical doctor per 29.815 inhabitants, against the WHO norm that there should be one per 10.000 inhabitants. There is only one mid-wife per 29.168 inhabitants, against the WHO norm that there should be one for 5.000 inhabitants. There is only one nurse with a superior diploma per 8.145 inhabitants against the WHO norm that there should be one for 3.000, and there is only one nurse with a inferior diploma for 6.829 inhabitants against the WHO norm that there should be one for 1.000. Only 39 percent of pregnant women receive prenatal treatment, and only 34 percent of deliveries are assisted by a birth-attendant trained in modern medicine.¹⁵⁷

However, the state accords high priority to improving health services. The health service is the most decentralized public service. This is in line with the 'Bamako initiative' (1987), saying that local communities should carry the costs of health care. Burkina Faso is subdivided into health care districts. In every district there shall be a health center, including a health clinic, a maternity clinic and a pharmacy. An elected committee manages the health center. For a start the pharmacy receives a stock of cheap generic medicine, and the health committee is responsible for its renewal. There shall be one health center every 10 kilometer.

At a glance the problems of the health sector may seem simply as a lack of economic and medical resources: Health care services are not sufficiently available. The competence and sometimes the motivation of the medical staff are low. Poor people avoid going to the doctor because they cannot afford the medicines. However, there is another more complex side of the problem: People frequently have a different understanding of the cause of the illness, and they therefore trust the traditional healer more than they trust the health staff.¹⁵⁸ Herbal self-treatments and treatments by healers are the by far most frequently applied treatments, and that is not only for economic reasons. At the health center patients are often met with arrogance and incomprehension.¹⁵⁹ Sometimes health staff does not even understand the local language. Therefore, to improve health care services, a change in attitude among health staff would be

¹⁵⁶ (UNFPA 2002)

¹⁵⁷ (CNLPE 1999:4) (The statistics are from 1996).

¹⁵⁸ See for example Dacher's (1992) study about causes for illness as the Gouin see them, Fainzang's (1986) study from the Bisa, or Roger-Petitjean's (1999) study about child-care in from Bobo-Dioulasso.

¹⁵⁹ (Poda and Some 1995)

necessary. Patients need to be met with respect and they need to be listened to in order to develop trust in the health services.

Women have less access to modern health service than men. The percentage of women with medical problems who use modern health care is about half the percentage of men with medical problems. Monetary spending for women's treatment are about half the monetary spending for men's treatment.¹⁶⁰ Women are at disadvantage because first, they are exposed to specific risks in connection to pregnancies and childbirths and particularly so if they have been exposed to female genital cutting; second they have less money for medical treatment. Third, health centers are often too far away, and fourth, their husband may not allow them to seek medical help. The fact that most health staff is male is another constraint and a threat to women's health. Women are reluctant to have their bodies examined by a male health worker, and the lack of female health staff may prevent women from seeking help when they need it.¹⁶¹

Although the lack of female health staff is recognized as a problem, there is no easy solution to be found. Each time when new health staff is recruited there are 240 men to 30 women. Once recruited, the women have problems to follow the course because of their children. Once they start their work career, their family situation makes it difficult for them to work in the rural areas. For lack of sufficient female staff, male midwives have even been recruited. To make health staff more gender aware, a gender-training module has been included in the preparatory program for new health personnel.¹⁶²

Conclusion

Social sector investments are accorded high priority by the Burkinabe government. The social sector, as the PRSP defines it, comprises basic education, health care, water and infrastructures. It does not include caring for people unable to care for themselves. The access to social services is gendered in a twofold way. First, women have less access to education and health services due to their position within the family and within society. For example, parents do not send their daughter to school, because they depend on her labour, and they want to educate her for success in married life. Women less often take their illnesses to the health clinic than men, probably because they possess less money. The reason why women have less money is that they are confined to the least lucrative activities. However, in addition to the constraints faced by women and girls in their families, the public structures, which dispense health care and education, are also gendered to the disadvantage of women. The staff is to a majority male. Both male and female schoolteachers' attitudes to girls is discriminatory. A qualitative improvement of health services and basic education would include measures to make these services more accessible to women and less discriminating. Some initiatives in this direction are already taken.

¹⁶⁰ (SORCA-BMB, SCET-Tunisie et al. 1995:6)

¹⁶¹ (Poda and Some 1995)

¹⁶² Interview with Mme Ouedraogo Seg-nogo, (*Conseiller de Santé, Ministère de la Santé*), 'gender focal point' at the Ministry for Health.

Women's rights and the law

Burkina Faso has signed all international and African conventions regarding Human Rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Consequently Burkina Faso has tried to adjust its legislation to those conventions. As already touched upon in previous chapters, there is a gap between the national legislation and its application. In this chapter I start with summarizing the national laws in favor of women's rights. Thereafter I describe how Burkina Faso's report to the United Nations' Women's anti-discrimination committee was received and which recommendations were made by the committee.

National laws in favor of women

Burkina Faso's Constitution, which was adopted in 1991, is explicit on men's and women's equal rights.¹⁶³ Some of the more specific codes had been prepared earlier, and particularly the law on Agrarian and Land Reorganization (RAF) (*Réorganisation Agraire et Foncière*) and the Code of the Individual and the Family (*Le Code de personnes et la famille*) are a heritage of the radical politics of the Thomas Sankara government (1984–87).

The constitution guarantees **women's civil rights** in so far as it states that that all Burkinabe are born free and with equal rights. It prohibits sexual discrimination, it insists on free consent as a condition for marriage, and on the equal treatment of children irrespective of sex.

Civil Rights are further guaranteed by the Code of the Individual and the Family from 1990. As explained in Chapter Two, this law forbids forced marriages and insists on the free consent of both spouses. It stipulates that spouses have equal rights and duties and that both are juridically capable. This means that there is no such thing as a 'head of household', and that the concept 'authority of the father' has been replaced with 'authority of the parents'. Together the spouses are morally and materially responsible for the household, and they decide together about where to live after marriage. Each of the spouses has the right to work without permission from the other, and each of the spouses has the right to sign a contract in the name of the family. The law fixes a

¹⁶³ This summary of national legislation is mainly based on a booklet edited by the Association of Women Lawyers in Burkina Faso (*Association des femmes Juristes du Burkina Faso*) (AFJ/BF 2001). The booklet is more up to date than the Burkina Faso's report to the CEDAW commission, which was prepared already in 1997.

minimum age for marriage (17 for girls, 20 for boys). It is forbidden for one of the spouses to sell the home and the furniture without the consent of the other. Any marriage payment is considered illegal. All children irrespective of sex have equal rights to succession, and the widow and the widower have equal right to the other's heritage.

Women's civil rights are further protected by the Penal Code, which punishes all discrimination whether based on race, regionalism, religion, sex or caste with 1–5 years imprisonment. Infractions against the marriage law and female genital cutting are punished as well. As a protection of women, bar-owners who allow prostitutes to operate in their establishment can be punished, and bars in proximity of schools, maternities, etc. are forbidden.

The Constitution protects **women's political rights** as it specifies that every Burkinabe has civic and political rights, such as the right to participate in the management of state and society and the right to vote and to be elected. The Electoral Code gives that every Burkinabe irrespective of sex the right to vote.

The Constitution also guarantees **women's economic rights**, i.e. the right to private property and entrepreneurial freedom within existing laws. Women and men also have equal rights to land. According to the Agrarian and Land Reorganization (RAF) the state can attribute urban and rural land to individuals irrespective of sex or their married status. The national credit fund created particularly to support women's economic activities, *Fonds d'Appui aux Activités Rémunératrices des femmes (FAARF)*, is an example of measures taken by the state to further women's economic rights.

The constitution guarantees **women's social and cultural rights** in stipulating that every citizen has right to health, education, work and leisure. It protects motherhood and childhood. Elderly, handicapped and social cases have a right to assistance. With the Law on Education from 1996 education has become a national priority. Every citizen has right to education irrespective of sex, origin, race or religion. Girl's education is promoted.

The constitution grants everybody **equal right to work**. The Work Code protects pregnant women, at least those who are in formal employment. The same law lays down that women and men shall have the same salary for similar jobs, while at the same time protecting women from jobs are considered unsuitable, either because they are dangerous or could endanger their morality. The text about employment in the public sector stipulates equal access to public employment for men and women. The social security law gives women in formal employment the right to three months paid maternity leave.¹⁶⁴

Women's right to health is guaranteed by the constitution as everybody has right to good health and physical integrity. Since 1996 female genital cutting is considered a crime by the Penal Code. The parents, the person who performed the operation, and other persons who knew about the event can be punished with imprisonment of between 6 months and 3 years and a fine of 150.000 CFA. If the girl dies as a result, the punishment is between 5 and 10 years in prison.

¹⁶⁴ Statut general de la Fonction Publique and Le Code de Sécurité Sociale

The gap between the laws and life as lived is widely recognized and many NGO's are active in spreading knowledge about the rights of women. Still there are many obstacles for a woman to take a case to court. She needs to have enough money, she needs to be assisted by somebody knowledgeable in the procedure, and she risks being ostracized by her kin and the local society. Men dominate the juridical system. These men are themselves products of a male-dominated society and are likely to share many of the norms and values, which discriminate against women. However, it may also be that some of these laws do not correspond to the priorities of some women and even go against their sense of justice.

In Burkina Faso there is a discussion among urban intellectuals about how to improve existing legislation in favor of women. The Association of Women Lawyers questions why a child shall only carry the name of its father, and not both the paternal and maternal names. They also point to the absurdity of a paragraph in the family law stipulating that if a married woman has a baby, whom her husband refuses to recognize, the woman is obliged to divorce her husband and marry the biological father of the child. Although the law that prohibited information about contraceptives was abolished in 1987, there is still need for a law-text concerning women's reproductive rights, i.e. their rights to decide about their number of children.¹⁶⁵ A coalition of NGOs, *La Coalition Burkinabè pour le Droits de la Femme (CBDF)* is advocating that sexual harassment, social exclusion for assumed witchcraft, and the banning of family members shall be penalized in the law.¹⁶⁶ The Ministry for Human Rights considers rising girls' minimum age for marriage to 20 years, equal with boys'. This Ministry also reflects on what further measures are needed in order to abolish *levirate* marriages, which are already forbidden but continue to be practiced.¹⁶⁷

Recommendations from the CEDAW committee

Burkina Faso signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1984. It's most recent report, a combined second and third report, was submitted in December 1997, but not discussed by the CEDAW committee until its twenty-second session in January-February 2000.¹⁶⁸

The report, which covers the period 1989 to 1997, was well received and the government of Burkina Faso was commended by the CEDAW committee for its efforts to apply the convention. However the committee also raised concerns about the low degree of application of the laws and identified the causes for it as; the scarcity of state resources and the discriminatory customary and traditional practices, which worsen the already high illiteracy rate and hinder the implementation of the convention. Furthermore, the country's low development indicators¹⁶⁹ were considered an obstacle to the implementation of the convention. The committee insisted on the need to increase women's and girls' access to

¹⁶⁵ (AFJ/BF 2001)

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Mme Kaboré Hortense, *Coalition Burkinabè pour les Droits de la Femme*.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Mme Touré, *Conseiller technique au Ministère de la promotion des Droits Humains*

¹⁶⁸ (United Nations 2000)

¹⁶⁹ See Appendix II for current development indicators on Burkina Faso.

education, literacy, civic education and to launch information campaigns particularly in the rural areas in order to “encourage a change in people’s way of thinking”. The committee also remarked on the absence of a law to protect women who are victims of domestic and sexual violence and recommended the government to take adequate legislative and structural measures. At present, rape within marriage is not considered a crime in Burkina, because according to the law sexual intercourse is one of the mutual rights of spouses. Women’s low representation in the electoral bodies was another concern for the committee, and a quota system to get more women into politics was recommended. Other remarks concerned women’s and girl’s health, the need for reproductive health programs for women and girls, the need to make abortions legal, the need for more information about HIV/AIDS. The committee deplored the non-implementation of the land laws, stressed women’s need for access to credits, and recommended that the state take measures against discrimination on the labor market. Finally the committee insisted that the Government work towards the elimination of the practice of polygamy, and to change attitudes towards this practice.

Many of the measures taken so far for the advancement of women in Burkina Faso, are in line with the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action. It is positive that the government of Burkina Faso has the ambition to adjust its laws to international and African conventions regarding gender equality. At the same time it is a problem that national laws in Burkina Faso are closer to the norms and values of the international community than they are to lived realities in the country. The government now is confronted with the difficult task of adjusting the behavior of its population to the laws.

Conclusion

Burkina Faso has many laws in favor of gender equality, and it continues to adjust its legislation to international conventions about human rights. However, there is a gap between the law text and lived realities for the majority of the people. Women’s lack of knowledge of their legal rights is one cause; another is the male dominated juridical system, which, particularly on the local level, does not apply the law as intended. However, it is also possible that the laws have been written according to norms and values, which are alien to a majority of the Burkinabe, who therefore prefer to resolve their problems through kin and traditional mediators. As mentioned in Chapter 2, a major problem with the Code of the Individual and the Family is that it leaves a majority of the couples outside the realm of formal jurisdiction.

Citizenship, democracy and public life

The past chapter ended with the observation that Burkina Faso has adjusted its national legislation in line with international conventions, but that there is a huge gap between these laws and life as lived. In the chapter about poverty reduction it was described how Burkina Faso's PRSP lacked a gender analysis, and that the strategy's positive impact for women therefore was not evident. Furthermore, the government's commitment to gender equality has not translated into resource allocation to the Ministry for Women's Promotion. The chapter about the social sector described the mechanisms through which the school system and the health care system discriminate against women. In the ideal utopian democracy the elected representatives of the people can correct such shortcomings by decisions in the parliament. And if they do not, interest groups and the media would raise these issues and lobby for a change.

It would be far beyond the scope of this report to discuss whether Burkina Faso's is a well-functioning democracy. The aim of this chapter is to look at the different channels by which the population can influence national decision-making. Particularly I look at women's representation in these structures. Who are these female politicians and activists? Which constraints do they face, and what are their chances of influencing decision-making? I start with discussing the problem of some people's lack of citizenship rights, and then continue to discuss women in politics and using women's participation in local politics as an example. Thereafter I go on to discuss women's participation in producers' organizations and NGO's.

The importance of Citizenship

It is a democratic problem in Burkina Faso that many rural people, particularly women, lack full citizenship. They lack knowledge about their rights, they lack knowledge to engage in politics, and most basic of all; they do not have an identity card. A person without an identity card cannot vote, cannot conclude a civil marriage, cannot take an issue to court, nor can he/she be accorded a credit. In the eyes of the authorities this person does not exist. Persons without identity card cannot even travel to town without being harassed by the police. The reasons for not having an identity card can be several. The person may not have the money to establish one, the husband sometimes does not allow his wife to

have a card, and it is also possible that the person lacks a birth certificate, which makes the establishment of a identity card a more complicated procedure.

Several NGOs are active in facilitating women's access to full citizenship. They have had information campaigns about women's rights and about the Code of the Individual and the Family. They have also organized special campaigns for the establishment of identity cards. During such campaigns representatives of the authorities come to the village and offer a simple procedure to establish the necessary papers.

Women in politics

It is a relatively new phenomenon for women to participate in the decision-making in public affairs. As far as one knows, female political authority holders did not exist in pre-colonial society. Elderly women have had important ritual functions, and women's networks and associations have fulfilled important tasks in community life, but there has existed no such thing as female village chiefs. Colonial and post-colonial authorities have cemented this bias. In addition to the constraints imposed on women by the gender system, there are few role models available for women who want to be among the political decision-makers today. Women constitute a majority of the voters, but are in minority among the elected. The government consists of 35 ministers, of which only 4 (11%) are women. The parliament consists of 111 deputies of which only 13 (8,10%) are women. The decentralized communes are headed by 57 mayors of whom only 3 (5,26%) are women, and assisted by 1092 municipality counselors of which only 228 (28,87%) are women.¹⁷⁰

Since the Constitution was adopted in 1991, Burkina Faso is undergoing a process of decentralization, where some of the state's responsibilities for local development will be transferred to local communes. These communes will elect their leaders, and mobilize their own funds through local taxes, user fees and external development aid. Since the decentralization process started in the towns, 49 urban communes and 8 *arrondissements* (subdivisions of communes in the large towns) have been created. This year (2003) communes are supposed to be created in rural areas and elections shall be held. A proposal is presently being considered. Where communes exist, they have already taken over the responsibility for health care and basic education.

The National Decentralization Commission¹⁷¹ has a pivotal role in this process. It was created in 1993 with the mandate to reflect upon, to spur and to give impulses to the decentralization process. Its first achievements were the creation of a juridical framework for decentralization, as well as service structures and funds to support the new communes. Among these initiatives was a German funded project, CND/GTZ/Formation, with the objective to strengthen the competences of the elected local decision makers. Within this program it is a priority to increase women's participation in the decentralization process, and a large number of specific activities have been undertaken in this sense.

¹⁷⁰ (Diasso Yaméogo 2002:47)

¹⁷¹ Commission Nationale de la Décentralisation (CND)

However, not until recently (2002) a comprehensive strategy for the promotion of women within the communities has been developed. This strategy comprises five axes: (i) social mobilization, (ii) awareness raising, (iv) training, (v) research/action and (vi) mobilization of resources. Within the last axe it is stated that the communes shall develop their own initiatives for the promotion of women and if necessary approach international donors to obtain funding.¹⁷²

Although the number of elected women is still low compared to the number of elected men, targeted awareness raising and lobbying have contributed to increase women's participation. Between the two electoral years 1995 and 2000, the number of communes had increased from 41 to 57. However, the total number of elected persons was almost the same because the number of municipality counselors¹⁷³ had been reduced. The percentage of women among the candidates for these posts increased from 10,5% to 18,4%. Women candidates were placed higher on the lists, therefore they were more likely to be elected. Women's percentage of the elected increased from 9% in 1995 to 21% in 2000.¹⁷⁴

The difficulties facing women engaged in local politics will here serve as an example of the difficulties faced by female politicians generally. These difficulties are an effect of the ideal roles attributed to women and men in society and to which they have been socialized since early childhood. Age, matrimonial status and social class also seem to be a differentiating factor in so far as some women are more likely than others to become politicians. The majority of the elected women are married, middle aged, and have a record of activism within a local women's organization.¹⁷⁵ The large majority (75%) of the women elected in 2000 had received some schooling and were at least literate, but there seem to be no correlation between level of education and the level of the political post. A majority of the elected women are civil servants or employed in the private sector. The larger the town is, the more likely the elected women are civil servants. Women who by their profession are in close contact with the population, such as nurses, schoolteachers or extension agents are more likely to be elected than women in other professions.

A majority of the elected women did not take the initiative to campaign themselves. Rather they were dragged into politics by the mechanism that political parties attract dynamic and well-known women leaders in order to attract votes from women. Others were pushed into politics by a relative or a husband. In the second elections (2000) some women had taken the initiative to go into politics following the example of the women elected in 1995.

Women who want to participate in local politics encounter the following difficulties: (i) on the lists established by the parties, most women candidates are ranked low and have no chance of being elected; (ii) norms and values about women's ideal behavior have as consequence that some women lack confidence, and others are hindered by their husband; (iii) it costs to campaign, and most women do not have the means for it unless the party can contribute; (iv) to many men as well as

¹⁷² (ACFED/SAHEL 2002)

¹⁷³ (*conseiller municipaux*)

¹⁷⁴ (Tall 2001)

¹⁷⁵ (Diasso Yaméogo 2002)

women it is not quite clear what it means to be elected in the decentralized structures, but women seem to be a little more careful to take this responsibility; (v) information does not circulate well within the political parties, and women often do not know how to candidate; (vi) women sense that they are not sufficiently trained for the task and they are therefore not confident in their role as elected.

It is interesting to note that elected men and women differed in the way they understood the role of women in the municipality council. While women believed that they were working for the development of the locality and the general improvement of life conditions, men believed that women's role should be to mobilize the female population, to represent the female population in public relations, and to be a link to female voters. In evaluating their female colleagues' fulfillment of their mandate, men complained that some women had been too quiet and too passive. Women's complaints were more numerous: they had hoped that this would be a paid assignment (which it is not), their experience was not sufficiently valorized, their voters did not sufficiently support them, women's issues had low priority in the council's work, they had not been sufficiently prepared for the mandate, they had little knowledge about the decentralization process, how the council was supposed to function and what would be their own role in it. Furthermore, they complained that they were not informed about what was going on, that they were given the most unimportant tasks, that the male colleagues had a "complex of superiority" and even blocked initiatives coming from women. Women also felt that party politics made it difficult to collaborate across party lines.

In short, women in politics face numerous problems. With the objective to motivate and encourage more women to engage in politics, and to strengthen their competence and capacity once they are elected, the Association of Elected Women of Burkina Faso¹⁷⁶ was created. This organization brings together all elected women, from the national to the local level and across party lines. Women who have been elected, but not re-elected continue to be members. Thereby their experience will still be available for the association. The same goes for women who were on the lists but who were not elected. The crosscutting nature of the association makes it possible for female politicians at a national level to gain knowledge about problems encountered by women on the local level. For example, before the elections in 2000 the Electoral Code was changed so that the municipality council would be smaller. Six members (including the mayor) would be reduced to three. Rumors started to circulate that councilor would become a paid assignment, which it is not. Therefore, influential men were quick to put their own names at the top of the parties' election lists. Few women would have a chance to become elected. Female politicians on local level observed this, contacted women deputies in the National Assembly, who successfully lobbied to add one person to the suggested number in the municipality council, before the new law was voted on the National Assembly. Thereby women had a better chance than they would otherwise have had.

Complications in creating autonomous communes in the rural areas are likely to be even greater than those already faced in towns. Com-

¹⁷⁶ (Association des Femmes Elues du Burkina Faso)

munes will first be created in the administrative centers and larger agglomerations. Clusters of villages will form a commune. One can imagine how traditional hierarchies, old animosities between villages and ethnic tensions, will color local politics. Rural women will encounter even greater difficulties to participate in this power play, than women in towns. Their level of formal education is lower, norms about ideal female behavior are more uniform, and role models are non-existent. The targeted efforts to support women's participation in politics have proved to be fruitful so far, but they have to be extended and further reinforced.

In March of 2003 a campaign was launched to lobby of a quota system for women on the lists of political parties for elections to parliament. The initiative was taken by the Center for Democratic Governance (CGD), and follows the manual elaborated by IDEA in Stockholm, "Women in Parliament".¹⁷⁷

Women in farmers' organizations

During the 90s, local producer organizations came to be organized in federations at the provincial, regional and national levels.¹⁷⁸ This was in line with the long-term objective that the state should withdraw and that extension services should be furnished by the producer organizations. The national producer federations are meant to be discussion partners to the state and to defend the interests of its members. Producer federations exist for livestock-keepers, cotton farmers, professional farmers, peasants, young farmers and women. Except for the cotton producers, the other federations are still fragile, and there is a lack of communication between the different levels. In other words, the local membership organizations know very little about what their national representatives do.

In the villages it is a common practice for women and men to organize themselves separately. There are thus women's groups and men's groups. In most regions women's groups are more numerous than men's groups.¹⁷⁹ The exception is the Southwest, i.e. in the cotton zone, where there are more than twice as many men's groups as women's groups. There are groups with mixed membership, but they are less numerous than either men's or women's groups everywhere. Young people's groups are a minority. In spite of their numerous local organizations, women were not well represented at the provincial, regional and national levels. The higher up in the hierarchy, the fewer were the women in the committees. When a woman had a post of responsibility she was either treasurer (because women are considered trustworthy in money matters), secretary (because women were considered good at taking care of documents) or responsible for organizing (because housewives are considered good organizers). There were no female presidents, because this person would have to travel a lot, and women's mobility is generally constrained. In the only federation where members were uniquely female, The Rural Women's Federation¹⁸⁰, the national leadership consisted of urban

¹⁷⁷ Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique. More information can be found at: www.cgdbf.org

¹⁷⁸ This section is a summary of a study by Yiriwa-Consult (2003)

¹⁷⁹ According to latest information in May 2003 (Personal communication from Géke Appeldoorn, *Sécretariat Permanent de la Coordination des Politiques sectoriels agricoles*).

¹⁸⁰ *Fédération Nationale des Femmes Rurales du Burkina (FENAFER/B)*

women. Lack of formal education is an obstacle for rural women's leadership on regional and national level.

From this brief description one can conclude that the obstacles to women's participation in producers' federations are conditioned by the gender system. In those cases when women have been elected to committees, their participation is conditioned by norms about what a woman is and should be. Although rural women are numerous in local organization, they let themselves be represented by men or by urban women at the higher levels of the organization.

The NGO scene

According to an inventory from 1993 there were 164 formally recognized NGOs in Burkina Faso, and 44 % of these worked for women's promotion.¹⁸¹ As a result of the political reform program and the state's disengagement from development activities, the number of NGOs is likely to have increased.

However, the NGO scene is difficult to grasp. Not all NGO's are broad membership movements. Some could rather be characterized as consultancy firms or family enterprises. Furthermore it is difficult to assess if the leaders of national NGOs are really voicing the concerns of their provincial or local members. All NGOs are extremely dependent on external funding. They thereby tend to become executors of development projects rather than organizations to further members' interests. In Ouagadougou it is easy to encounter dynamic and competent leaders of women's NGOs. Generally these are well-educated middle-class women. Some of them are civil servants in high positions. Several are working on issues of women's rights and citizenship. They also fight against domestic violence and participate in the campaign against female genital cutting. Some are engaged in micro-projects on the local level. Furthermore, women have recently been involved in advocacy towards the authorities and the international donors. However, a lasting impression from brief encounters with women leaders in Ouagadougou is that information spreads from the center to the periphery. The role of NGOs in relation to rural and poor women seems to be mainly educational. Whether they also function as representatives of the rural and poor women is an open question.

Conclusions

An unknown number of women are outside the democratic system because they lack identity card and therefore cannot vote. Among the voters women constitute the majority but they are in minority among the elected. Women are very active in women's grass-root organizations, but in the federations of which they are members, men are the leaders. The higher up in the hierarchy, the fewer the female leaders. Women's NGO's are numerous, both on the local and the national level. However, the question is how well the leaders represent their members. Even if realisti-

¹⁸¹ (Bacye and et al. 1993)

cally an organization that wants to make its voice heard on the national level needs educated leaders, it is essential that the internal democracy of the organization allows for information to circulate and obliges the leaders to listen to the voices of the poor and the rural.

Ways ahead

This report set out to explore the ways gender and poverty are linked in Burkina Faso. How does gender affect the distribution of poverty? Will more equal gender relations contribute to poverty reduction and *vice versa*? How can gender relations be made more equal? As the preceding chapters have shown, there are no simple answers to these questions. Links between gender and poverty exist but are complex and the chains of causality long and winding.

Livelihoods are gendered. More women than men are active in the least profitable activities. The reasons for this are various; women are more numerous than men in the population, women have less education or lack skills that would allow them to be active in other sectors, they do not dispose freely of their time because of hierarchical relationships within the household, women are discriminated against on the labor market, etc. **Family structures are gendered.** Therefore, some women are poor because their husband is poor, others are poor although their husband is non-poor, and some women are poor because they gain their living from a badly paid activity. **Society at large is gendered.** The state administration, the democratic institutions, the juridical institutions, the religious structures, civil society, and the international donor organizations consist of people who have been socialized into a male dominated gender system, in such a way that most of them do not question their own preconceived gender notions. It is therefore not surprising that development policies since colonial times have promoted men's activities rather than women's, that policies reinforce existing ideas of male head-ship, and that the modern state's commitment to gender equality has been a matter of words rather than of deeds.

The different chains of causal links between gender and poverty seem to come together in one organizing principle: the gender system, i.e. the cultural definition of what it means to be a man or a woman and what should be the ideal relationships between them. These norms and values vary over time and depending on the crosscutting socio-cultural categories. However, the definition of masculinity as linked to the role of being a provider and an authority person within the family, and the definition of femininity as linked to being a mother and her husband's respectful helper, seem to be common across socio-cultural differences in Burkina Faso.

In Burkina Faso, official development documents picture women as victims of ‘socio-cultural weight’¹⁸². As the argument goes, this ‘weight’ has to be eliminated so that women can ‘develop’. This line of thought is problematic for two reasons. First, it obscures the socio-cultural creativity that women manifest on the micro-level when they constantly adapt to new situations and invent strategies by which they carve out new spaces of action for themselves and compensate for losses in other domains. Second, as the development discourse locates the ‘socio-cultural weight’ among the rural and uneducated, it creates a blind spot on the urban, and educated. The existence of ‘socio-cultural weight’ within the centers of national decision-making is therefore not perceived.

A quite different picture emerges from the many micro-level studies referred to in the first three chapters of this report. Many of these studies describe processes of change in the social structure, in peoples livelihoods, and consequently also in the gender system. Some of these changes have been to the detriment of women, for example cotton farming, male labor migration and the shift from milk production to meat production, as has been described in the chapter about ‘livelihoods’. These causes are rather elements of ‘modernity’ than remnants from the past. Women have shown both creativity and socio-cultural ingenuity in dealing with these changes.

The existence of norms and values, which are used to the detriment of women, is undeniable. However, women constantly bargain to improve their situation within the family and in local society. Publicly they adhere to the gender norms of their society, but diverge from those norms in actual practice. Women bend the norms, expand their scope for maneuver and thereby undermine the gender norms.

Development intervention therefore should aim at **strengthening women’s bargaining positions** within families and societies by making incomes and knowledge more accessible for them. Women’s economic activities for their own account can be promoted through credit schemes, new knowledge and technology. Their work-burden can be eased through labor saving technologies. Knowledge about their legal and democratic rights can give women arguments to use in bargaining. All these measures are classical women’s projects components. However, they should not build on preconceived notions of what is good and bad for women. They should instead (i) start from an in-depth knowledge of the local gender context, (ii) have in-built mechanisms obliging the development institution to listen to women’s voices all along the intervention process, (iii) contain flexibility as far as not all activities will have to be executed only to satisfy project evaluators, and (iv) be flexible enough to let experiences from the field affect the organization and content of the project.

Micro-level support to women will not be sufficient. Even if a patriarchal husband is a pain, most women will know how to handle him. It is more difficult for a woman to handle constraints imposed by those macro processes resulting from seemingly gender-neutral political decisions on highest national level or by international donors. Therefore, **awareness**

¹⁸² The expression used is *pesanteurs socio-culturels*, commonly translated as ‘socio-cultural weight’. A literal translation would be ‘socio-cultural gravity’. The expression evokes the image of a force outside a person’s control, which makes bodies heavy and drags them to the ground.



raising efforts should be redirected towards **the highest level of decision makers**, politicians, civil servants and development planners. They have to be made aware that whatever they decide, the decision will have gendered consequences. Their capacity to assess the gendered consequences of their decisions needs to be supported.

A third axis of intervention would be to strengthen women's **participation in political and civil life**, so that they can defend their own interests through parliamentary action and civil society advocacy towards the state. A quota system is needed to bring more women into politics. However, it is essential that women be supported to have the capacity to fulfill their role well, once they have been elected. Furthermore, political and civil structures need to develop ways to listen to and represent the voices of the rural and the poor.

Appendix I

The ideal husband

According to women

- provides millet (12)
- ensures the health of the family (9)
- does not beat his wife (7)
- provides medicine to cure illnesses (6)
- buys clothes for his wife and children (6)
- does not argue with his wife (6)
- is considerate towards his wife (4)
- shares everything with his family (2)
- collaborates with his wife (2)
- shares his wife's expenses (2)
- helps and respects the in-laws (2)
- does not spend all his money on drinking (1)

According to men

- provides millet (14)
- provides medicine & hospital to cure illness (9)
- ensures the health of the family (6)
- does not argue with his wife (6)
- makes an effort to be a successful provider (4)
- shares everything with his family (2)
- helps his sons to get married (2)
- is considerate towards his wife/wives (2)
- helps his wife with certain agric. tasks (1)
- buys clothes if he has the means to do so (1)
- helps neighbours and in-laws (1)
- does not drink *dolo* (1)

The ideal wife

According to women

- cares well for her children (18)
- offers her husband food & water (13)
- does everything her husband asks her to do (7)
- has a good relationship with her co-wives (7)
- respects her husband (6)
- provides millet if the husband hasn't got any (6)
- has a good relationship with her husband (4)
- helps her husband, e.g. with millet or money (3)
- shows respect to visitors (3)
- works hard (2)
- collaborates with her husband (2)
- does her husband's laundry (2)

According to men

- respects her husband (13)
- cooks for the family & does the domestic work (9)
- cares well for her children (8)
- offers her husband food & water (8)
- has a good relationship with her husband (5)
- has a good relationship with her co-wives (3)
- works hard in the household fields (3)
- does not start an argument (3)
- does not argue with family and neighbours (2)
- offers visitors food & water (2)
- has her own field to provide food and clothes (2)
- minds the animals if her husband is away (1)

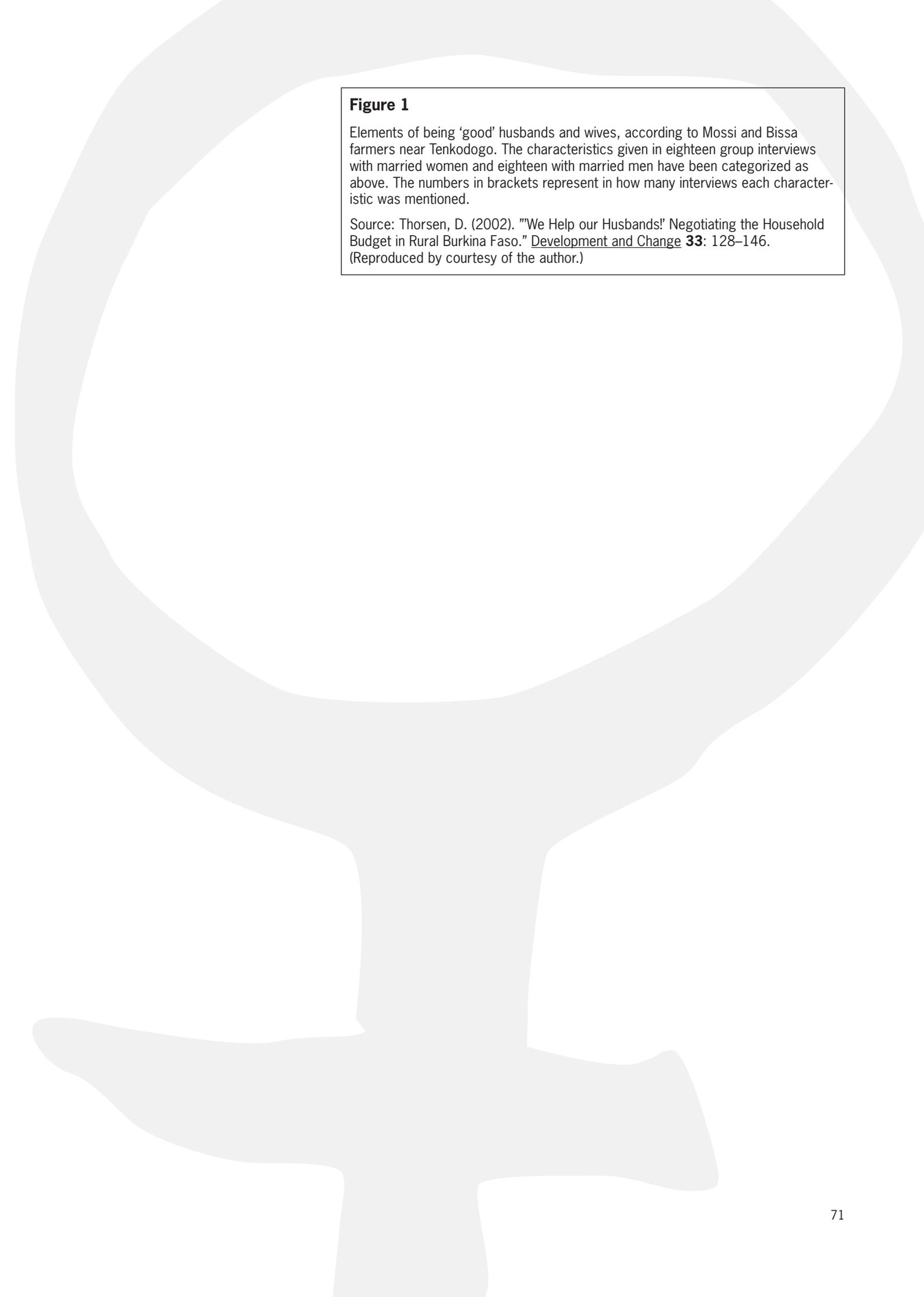


Figure 1

Elements of being 'good' husbands and wives, according to Mossi and Bissa farmers near Tenkodogo. The characteristics given in eighteen group interviews with married women and eighteen with married men have been categorized as above. The numbers in brackets represent in how many interviews each characteristic was mentioned.

Source: Thorsen, D. (2002). "We Help our Husbands! Negotiating the Household Budget in Rural Burkina Faso." *Development and Change* **33**: 128–146. (Reproduced by courtesy of the author.)

Appendix II

Statistics as presented in this appendix should be read with great care. As its best statistics may reveal general patterns, at its worst they are complete nonsense. The value of statistics is determined by the initial data collection of which we know little. Statistics never reveal any information about causes. Therefore the argument of this report does not build on the below statistics, rather they have been included as illustration. Except for the first section, the tables cover topics in the order in which they are presented in the text.

Burkina Faso on the global ranking lists:

Basic economic and social indicators, according to The World Bank:

- GNP per capita of \$ 230
- 61,2% of people living on less than \$ 1 per day
- life expectancy at birth of 45 years
- poorest 10% of the population shares 2,2% of national income
- richest 10% of the population shares 39,5% of national income

Source: World Development Report 2002, Oxford University Press for the World Bank

Burkina Faso ranks as number 172 out of 174 countries on all relevant UNDP ranking lists:

- 1) Human Development Index (HDI), which is based on weighting and synthesis of 3 indicators: life expectancy at birth, educational attainment and standard of living.
- 2) Human Poverty Index calculates deprivation, based on the indicators in the HDI.
- 3) Gender-related Development Index (GDI), uses the same indicators as the HDI, but "adjusts the average achievement of each country in life expectancy, educational attainment and income in accordance with the disparity in achievement between women and men.
- 4) The Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) is based on women's and men's percentage shares of administrative and managerial positions, of professional and technical jobs, and of parliamentary seats.

EMPLOYMENT

Table 1: Employment in all sectors (1996):

Professions	Men		Women		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Farming, live-stock, fishing, forest	2586270	46,2	2501160	44,7	5087430	90,9
Administration, higher civil servants, professionals	10129	0,2	2226	0,0	12355	0,2
Administration, middle civil servants	11486	0,2	3802	0,1	15288	0,3
Workers, employees, low civil servants	24444	0,4	10160	0,2	34604	0,6
Trade, business	73900	1,3	125998	2,3	199898	3,6
Crafts	80548	1,4	27813	0,5	108361	1,9
Domestic services	41807	0,7	11823	0,2	53630	1,0
Armed forces	12845	0,2	204	0,0	13049	0,2
Other professions	5969	0,1	819	0,0	6788	0,1
Without profession, non specified	40372	0,7	27068	0,5	67440	1,2
Total	2887770	51,6	2711073	48,4	5598843	100

Source: INSD (2000) Analyse des Resultats du Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitation de 1996, Volume I, Ouagadougou, Ministère de l'Economie et du Plan, p.100.

Table 2: Public employment (1998):

Civil status	Men	Women	Total
Unmarried	25.617	6.963	32.580
%	78,6	21,4	100
Married	14.365	5.322	19.687
%	73,0	27,0	100
Divorced	10	18	28
%	35,7	64,2	100
Widows/widowers	11	57	68
%	16,2	83,8	100
Total	40.003	12.360	52.363
%	76,4	23,6	100

Adapted from: INSD (2000) Annuaire statistique du Burkina Faso 1999. Ouagadougou, Ministère de l'Economie et du Plan, p.48

POVERTY

Table 3: Division in % of individuals according to sex and living standard

	Extreme poverty	Moderate poverty	Average standard	Non-poverty	Extreme non-poverty	Total
Men	48,3	49,2	49	50,8	50,4	49,6
Women	51,7	50,8	51	49,2	49,6	50,4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4: Division of individuals according to sex and living standard in %

	Extreme poverty	Moderate poverty	Average standard	Non-poverty	Extreme non-poverty	Total
Men	19,5	19,9	19,8	20,4	20,3	100
Women	20,5	20,1	20,2	20,6	19,7	100
Total	20	20	20	20	20	100

Source: Nioumou, D. et al (1997) Etudes spécifiques approfondies de données de l'Enquête Prioritaire. Genre et Pauvreté au Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou, Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie, p.12-14.

FORMAL EDUCATION

Table 5: Percentage of children in relevant age groups who attend school (gross enrolment rate):

	1994			1998		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Primary school	74,2	28,4	35,2	102,3	30,8	40,9
Boys	79,0	34,3	40,5	105,8	37,1	46,7
Girls	69,4	21,8	29,3	98,7	23,9	34,7
Secondary school	36,7	4,9	11,2	48,8	4,5	13,0
Boys	44,8	6,6	13,7	56,4	5,8	15,4
Girls	28,8	3,1	8,5	41,2	3,1	10,2
Higher education	6,1	0,0	1,4	4,9	0,0	1,3
Boys	8,6	0,0	2,1	7,9	0,1	2,3
Girls	3,4	0,0	0,7	1,9	0,0	0,4

Source: INSD (2000) Profil et Evolution de la Pauvreté au Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou, Ministère de l'Economie et du Plan, p. 34.

Table 6: Percentage of adult population that is literate:

	1994			1998		
	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	Total
Literacy rate	51,6	11,8	18,9	50,6	10,8	18,4
Men	61,7	18,8	27,1	59,9	15,6	24,8
Women	40,9	5,7	11,4	42,0	6,8	12,9

Source: INSD (2000) Profil et Evolution de la Pauvreté au Burkina Faso. Ougagadougou, Ministère de l'Economie et du Plan, p. 30.

HEALTH

Table 7: Illness and consultations (1998):

	Urban	Rural	Total
% of population who during a 15 day period had been ill.	10,7	6,4	7,1
Men	10,1	6,2	6,8
Women	11,5	6,4	7,2
% of population who had consulted somebody (health center or healer) for a case of illness.	5,2	2,5	2,9
Men	4,7	2,4	2,8
Women	5,8	2,5	3,1

Source: INSD (2000) Profil et Evolution de la Pauvreté au Burkina Faso. Ougagadougou, Ministère de l'Economie et du Plan, p. 43.

Table 8: Reproductive health:

	Total fertility rate	% births with skilled attendants	Under five mortality rate (Male/Female)	Teenage mothers (births per thousand women aged 15-19)	Married women's use of contraceptives (15-49 years)		HIV prevalence rate (%) in ages 15-24 (Male/female)
					Any method	Modern methods	
Burkina Faso	6,8	31	151/141	151	12	5	3,98/9,73
Average in less developed regions in the world	2,92	58	86/86	54	59	54	No data

Adapted from: UNFPA (2002) State of World Population 2002. "People Poverty and Possibilities". New York. United Nations Population Fund, available at: www.unfpa.org

DEMOCRACY

Table 9: Women's participation in politics and public life

Position	Number of women	Number of men	% Women of Total
Members of the of the Economic and Social Council	16	93	17,29
Ministers	4	36	11
Mayors	3	57	5,26
Municipality counselors	228	1092	28,87
Ambassadors	3	25	12
Ministerial general secretaries	2	36	6,6
High commissioner	3	45	6,6
Deputies	13	111	8,10

Source: Diasso/Yameogo, C (2002) Etude sur le profil des elues locales et identification de leurs besoins in formation. Ouagadougou, Commission Nationale de Decentralisation.

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