

**Gender bias in education in Burkina-Faso:
Who pays the piper? Who calls the tune?
A case for homegrown policies**

Some Touorouzou

State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo & Canisius College

tsome@buffalo.edu

In this chapter, I analyze policies developed by the government of Burkina Faso in order to redress an imbalance in gender education. Girls, in effect, are not getting their fair share of education, whether in quantity or quality. I critique existing policies concerning gender issues in education by first taking stock of different policies launched in favor of the education of girls, the context of their formation, and identify shortcomings therein. It has been found that international organizations, beyond their commitment to reverse the lag in the education of girls, bring with them an agenda that is at times contradictory with the aim of education for all. At the same time that governments are prodded to school all girls, Structural Adjustments Programs that generally bring more poverty and less public spending, are at loggerheads with increased access. Moreover, the policy choices of international organizations seem to be ill-equipped to subvert existing ideological and patriarchal structures. These structures do not allow for the empowerment of women. The government itself is found to have very little leverage on current policies, raising the nagging question of their appropriation.

The paper ends with some policy recommendations that go beyond the construction of facilities and resources to address issues of the school experiences of girls, the curriculum-in-use, and overall problem of teacher training and compensation.

Introduction

Burkina Faso, a former colony of France, is an agricultural country that belongs to the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC)s). The indicators of social development are amongst the lowest on the continent. Thus, access to education is very low for citizens in general and even worse for girls and women. Not only are girls enrolled far less in schools than boys but they experience a higher attrition: chronic failure, falling behind in grade levels, and failing their exams. They are also less likely than boys to attain higher education. In the recent past, the proper place of a woman was not to be seen beyond the confines of the home. A well-known proverb of the Mossi group--a linguistic community that makes up more than fifty percent of the population—consider *pagaa la yiri*, the woman makes the home. This philosophy is ultimately crippling for women and girls.

This paper is an attempt to assess existing policies concerning gender issues in education and explores the gender issue through three questions: What are the policies implemented by the government and the other stakeholders in order to bridge the gender inequality in education within the global context of power imbalance? Are these policies sustainable? What is to be done?

The first part of the paper takes stock of different gender policies prevailing in education and their corresponding actors. The second part captures the inadequacies of these policies for remedial action. In conclusion, other possible avenues are explored in recommendations for future action. There is the potential to optimize girls' participation in education in a manner that addresses not only quantity but also quality. The scope of this study is limited to the formal educational system that concerns girls within normal school age. Thus, adult education and informal education have not been considered here even though they are a viable option for women's empowerment in a country where there are gross gender inequalities.

The global context

In 1975, International Women's Year established a landmark in awareness of gender inequalities that pervade societies. The situation of women in Africa is one of the most regressive in the world. Since then, research into sex differences has attained a degree of rigor and scholarly interest never achieved before. At the same time, gender research has made the field increasingly policy-oriented. If gender discrimination in education has been drastically reduced in developed countries, everything being equal, the situation is still worrisome in many developing countries.

Table 1: Net Primary Enrollment Rates in Selected Countries (1996)

Country	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Benin	80	47
Burkina Faso	37	24
Central Africa Republic (1990)	64	42
Chad	59	33
Congo Democratic Republic (1990)	61	48
	63	47
Côte- D' Ivoire	72	47
Gambia	50	33
Guinea	38	25
Mali	61	53
Mauritania	30	19
Niger	65	55
Senegal	93	69
Togo		

Source: Adapted from UNESCO, Education for All: Status and Trends 2000, Paris, p. 69.

In developing countries, women still suffer from serious differences in literacy rates and school enrolment. Recently, there has been a global push toward redressing this imbalance, certainly because of the risk of domino effect on all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as argues *The Global Campaign for Education*. In 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, at the World Conference on Education for All, world leaders agreed that the 'most urgent priority [was] to ensure access to and improve the quality of

education for girls and women and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. A deadline was set: universal access to, and completion of, primary education should be achieved by the year 2000. (Choike, 2005).

An impressive body of literature documents policies undertaken by either individual states or the international community. Yet, it is important to distinguish every phase of the dimensions of policy making including policy process, policy implementation, or policy evaluation as working categories for analytical purposes. Thus, the dominant framework of national governments and international organizations has been Women in Development (WID). According to certain views, the WID approach does not challenge the status quo as it leaves the political economy of gender untouched. This suggests that hegemonic forces at work in society are not de-stabilized and severely limit the scope of interventions. The most important limitation of this approach is that mere insistence on girls' access to education is not likely to reconfigure the gender power balance in society. Unfortunately, according to Diaw (2002), the WID approach is the dominant approach for gender and educational policy education. "It has become the conventional wisdom for gender issues in international development, spearheaded by international finance organizations such as the World Bank and adopted by most national governments and other universities agencies" (p. 56). Already, Kelly (1987) cautions us against the women in development paradigm as misleading in so far as it brushes patriarchy under the carpet. The reason is that women and their education are considered "as divorced from patriarchal structures that oppress women. Education and development become vehicles to incorporate women into male-dominated status hierarchies and institutions" (Kelly, 1987, p. 4).

In the same vein, Stiglitz (1998) takes a dim view of the action of international assistance that fails to take into account patriarchal ideologies informing the sexual division of labor in these terms:

The type of assistance often given for education leaves the problem of gender inequalities untouched, and in fact presupposes strong reproductive roles for women.

International assistance for the production of textbooks has been on the increase, yet seldom is new production accompanied by a concern for removing sexual stereotypes and adding content that might serve the constitution of altered gendered identities. Donor agencies are increasingly aware of the need to support girls' education through multiple mechanisms and building boarding facilities. Unfortunately, there is simultaneous pressure on recipient countries to reduce their budgets, which often translates into reductions in educational and other social services. (p. 33- 34)

In order to deconstruct all the interventions, whether national or bilateral or multilateral, a quick detour into policymaking will prove enlightening. Dubnick and Bardes (1983) state policy is the expressed intentions of government actors relative to a public problem and the activities pertaining to these intentions (as cited in Fowler, 2000). When faced with a situation that has pushed its way into the public arena as a problem, the government is always obliged to take measures. These measures need not be genuine in the sense that

the government, as a power broker, - and a rational one at that - may wish to dwell only at the symbolic level, thus giving “psychic” satisfaction to the people to whom it has a mandate. In this sense, Fowler (2000) views public policy as a dynamic process fraught with values. Policy making is the Trojan horse used by power-brokers to juggle public problems. In this regard, it expresses the government’s intentions and official pronouncements, and its modus operandi includes activity as well as inactivity.

Very aptly, Harman (1984) alerts us to the fact that the context of a policy is very important as policy never comes out of the blue. He also remarks that policy adoption is far more complicated in developed countries than it is in developing countries where policy may be superimposed in a top-down fashion through a presidential or a ministerial fiat. But if it can be so easily drawn up on paper, the most difficult part comes at the time of implementation. That is where grassroots seem to have their own back, and with a vengeance. Because they have not been associated with the policy from the beginning, there is, at best, much foot dragging, and outright opposition, at worst, as there is no sense of ownership. The policy necessarily loses its “teeth,” so to speak, once bereft of popular support. To minimize the numerous pitfalls that lurk in the way of educational innovation and reform in Africa, Samoff, Sebatane & Dembele’s (2001) cautionary note is not lacking in commonsense: “Start small but think big” (p. 5). These authors think that in order for innovation and reform in cash-strapped Africa to have any chance of success, it is important “to prepare the ground well, with careful planning, extensive communication among those involved, and adequate funding” (p. 5). Only when the results have been monitored and assessed, is it wise to expand the pilot to other settings. This they call ‘going to scale’.

Scaling up in education is intended to expand access and improve quality for more people over a wider geographical area, and to do so in ways that are efficient, equitable, and sustainable. Since education is central to development, the strategies adopted to promote reform by enlarging the scale of effective pilots must address the broader development objectives of empowerment, equity, social transformation, and sustainable change. (Samoff et al., 2001, p. 6)

Although this warning is very general and does not address the specific implementation of gender policies in education in resource-poor countries like Burkina-Faso, it can come in handy.

In fact, policymakers hardly resist the temptation to “bite more than they can chew”. Scott (1998), in *Seeing like a State*, unpacks the mechanisms that cripple public policies formulated and implemented in order to alleviate human sufferings. Grand schemes never work because they are not grounded in people’s *mētis*, that is to say, people’s experiences. Scott takes a dim view of a high modernist approach to solving social problems that are only perceived as technical or financial in nature. If the tremendous gender disparities that still exist in a post-modernist era make it understandable, it cannot excuse the superficial voluntarism that informs the war against gender inequity in education, at least in the case of Burkina Faso

Table 2: Gender inequality in education in Burkina-Faso

Female adult literacy rate (age 15 and above), 2001	14.9
Adult literacy rate (female as % of male), 2001	43
Female youth literacy rate (% age 15-24), 2001	24.5
Youth literacy rate (female as % of male), 2001	52
Female primary net enrolment ratio (female as % of male), 2000-01	29
Primary net enrolment ratio (female as % of male) 2000-01	.71
Female secondary net enrolment ratio, 2000-01	6
Secondary net enrolment ratio (female as % of male), 2000-01	.65
Female tertiary gross enrolment ratio, 2000-01
Female tertiary gross enrolment ratio (female as % of male), 2000-01
Tertiary gross enrolment ratio (female as % of male), 2000-01.	23

Source: *Human Development Reports, Burkina-Faso, Human Development Indicators 2003.*

Table 3: Schooling in the academic year 2001-2002

	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total
Primary School	550,504	58.40	392,108	41.59	942,612
Secondary School	130,485	60.08	86,691	39.91	217,176
University	11,589	74.59	3,946	25.40	155,335

Source: Kedrebeogo, G. (2002). *African Gender and Development Index in Basile Guissou, 2003, p. 1.*

National policy in the making

Understanding the national and international context that informs policy, different actors and outcomes are important. Document analysis of newspapers or official documents issued by government, non-government organizations, or international organizations will enhance this understanding. Serious attempts to reverse trends in gender inequity in education have been prompted by a set of situations both at home and at the international level. The short period of the Revolution from 1983 to 1987 launched an all-out war against vestigial forces, to use the revolutionary phraseology that had currency. This period spawned the blossoming of the liberation of women for sustainable national development. Equality between men and women became the social credo of the National Revolutionary Council (CNR). In the mid-80s one of the most progressive family codes on the continent to date was drawn. Women were called upon to make themselves seen in the public arenas. In the name of the Revolution, more women occupied positions as executives (ministers, CEOs, etc.), and, entered into hitherto male-coded jobs such as the army and customs. At the same time, vast campaigns were launched to send girls to schools.

At the international level, the discourse of globalization reinforced the momentum somewhat gained at home. Thus, the Education for All-EFA-initiative launched in Jomtien (Thailand) in March 1990 came in as a supportive framework. The international community committed itself to meeting the basic educational needs of all, with a special attention given to the education of girls, and this, in quantity as well as in quality. In 1993, a meeting in Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso reached a consensus

among African leaders on how best to tackle the education of girls. Further to the conference that came up with the proposition to envision gender educational policies in multiple perspectives, the government of Burkina Faso proposed the creation of an international institute for the education of girls and women. This center is to act as an information, training, and resource center, tasked with coordinating actions to promote the education of girls and women as well as to promote the integration of gender studies in development policies and programs. UNESCO agreed to the project during its 30th session in 1999. In July 2000, forty-six specialists of girls, women, and gender education from Burkina-Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Gambia, Senegal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Guinea-Bissau, Ethiopia, Guinea-Conakry, Ghana, Malawi, Germany, the United States, and France, brought the International Center for the Education of African Girls and Women (CIEFFA) to the baptismal font. Also present were UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the WAEMU (West African Economic and Monetary Union), the FAWE (Forum for Africa Women Educationalists), to mention the most prominent actors.

On June 24, 2003, the UNICEF program for the promotion of girls' education, the "*Initiative 25 for 2005*," was launched by the President of the Republic in the presence of the Executive Director of UNESCO, Carrol Bellamy. In her own words, there can be no meaningful and sustainable transformation in society and no substantial reduction of poverty as long as girls are not receiving the quality education they are entitled to as equal partners in development (Bendré, 2003).

Initiative 25 for 2005 concerns the twenty-five countries which have the lowest rates of girls' schooling, below seventy percent, with a gender gap of more than ten percent between boys and girls in basic education, or, a high country-risk that does not allow a parity of access to school (wars, AIDS, cataclysms, etc.). The goals assigned to these twenty-five countries are: at least twenty of the countries should identify concrete measures in order to ensure parity between boys and girls (UNICEF, 2003a). They have to ensure the development of policies, procedures, and mechanisms in order to promote quality learning in the schools that favor a gender approach in at least fifty percent of the countries concerned. The aim was to reduce at least to thirty percent of the number of unschooled girls before 2005. For its part, the government of Burkina-Faso had already cancelled all scholarships for boys. Now, only deserving girls can benefit from scholarships at the secondary school level through what is called "la discrimination positive", or positive discrimination, a Sahelian version of American Affirmative Action. Measures are being examined in order to contain the teachers' drain from remote villages where social amenities are scarce.

The then Minister of Basic Education, Mathieu Ouedraogo, is of the mind that the teachers should also occupy center stage, as well as the student, if millions of dollars in aid are to be of any use. In an articulate fashion, he considers that it is no longer acceptable for young people who are used to electricity, new technologies and information, running water and the telephone to be appointed in remote areas where they live in poor housing and where they are obliged to work in darkness with kerosene-lamps (Ouedraogo, 2004).

In September 2003, Burkina-Faso launched its 10-Year Basic Education Development Plan (PDDEB) as part of the country debt relief under the enhanced HIPC

initiative. The United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) was launched at the World Educational Forum held at Dakar in April 2000 under the aegis of the UN. The overall goal is articulated around five strategic objectives: 1) building political and resource commitments; 2) ending the gender gap;

3) ending gender bias and discrimination within educational systems; 4) helping girls' education in crisis, conflict, and post-conflict situations; and, 5) eliminating ingrained gender bias that limits the demand for girls' education (Other International Initiatives, 2004).

Under this scheme, more schools will be built with the aim to impact positively on the schooling of girls. By 2010, sixty-five percent of girls are expected to get into school against the current twenty-eight percent. Also, mothers will be called to make a contribution. An Association of Mothers Educationists, (AME), the French acronym for "soul," is in the pipeline in each school. Also, for the academic year 2003-2004, a free distribution of 18,000 notebooks, pens, and pencils in the ten regions in the country was planned for the schools with the lowest rate of girls. The project is supposed to be extended to the remaining three regions.

In 1995, the Satellite School Initiative started with the support of UNICEF, and the governments of Canada, Netherlands, France, Norway, Germany, United States, and Taiwan. Satellite School Initiative provides outreach educational services for primary school students between seven and nine years of age. They are located in mostly poor, rural villages without elementary schools. They must have a class enrollment of at least fifty percent girls (Kent, 2004). They help keep the girls and boys close to their homes and culture. It is particularly important for parents who fear that their daughters might be raped while traveling long distances to school. They are reported to have a ninety-five percent success rate. Equipped with double-closets, gender-separated latrines, their contribution to girls' schooling is beyond doubt. By 2005, the expectation is that they would continue to contribute to raise the girls' schooling in the country to sixty percent.

As for the World Bank, it is interested in issues of access and equity, quality, and efficiency at the secondary school level (World Bank, 2004). Gender equity ranks high in the World Bank project concerns. In order to promote greater equality in education, gender-specific objectives have been developed with a goal to increase the education of girls in secondary and tertiary education by 2001, expand dormitory space for girls, increase the number of scholarships that are exclusively for girls, expand access to secondary education for boys and girls in the poorest households and in underserved zones, and those from higher-income households and urban areas.

Ongoing policies: The chink in the armour

The government of Burkina-Faso views the promotion of girls and women as one of the most decisive elements in its development policy. In order to allow a greater role in the development process, a Ministry for Women's Affairs has been established with clear mandates. It is tasked with evaluating strategies aimed at the promotion of women. The *1998-2000 Action Plan* of the Ministry includes the development of women's human resources and contributes to equal access of girls to education and training.

At the same time, it is designed to encourage the professional training of women and their access to revenue generating activities. In a nutshell, there is a clear view that education is the source of human capital for a better economy. The WID perspective is

wholeheartedly endorsed. In order for educational policies to come true, they must be incorporated into the political and institutional landscape. *La Loi d'Orientation de l'Education* (MESSRS, 1996) attends to this concern. However, the gender gap in education will certainly stay with us for yet a long time, partly because of the way policies are engineered and implemented, and, partly because of circumstances beyond the control of authorities. The next section turns to revealing cracks in the system.

Despite the unstinting support of international donors—at least at the level of promises -- expected outcomes of the fight against gender inequities in education are slow to emerge. One may fault the way policies are being devised. Stromquist (1998, 1999), for example, takes the international organizations' approach to gender in development issues to task. She questions the very ideology behind these institutions, namely, their hidden agenda of furthering capitalism. Scott (1995), for his part, finds the World Bank's about-face concerning its new engagement for the cause of gender development to be most suspicious.

The World Bank's shifting representation of women from one that virtually ignored the category in 1981 to a strategy that attempts to incorporate women in structural adjustment programs (by representing women as targets of state policy and a safety net during the deepening of capitalist development) are also significant. (p. 129)

Scott contends that there is only one explanation to this new attitude it has something to do with the Bank's intention to reduce women's fertility and its view of women as potential contributors to the accumulation of capital. Another area of concern is that, although the authorities show generosity in the measures taken to reduce the gender gap, these policies remain highly bureaucratic. They have most often been developed inside the four walls of the ministry, within the Ministry of Education, by experts in education, and by bilateral and multi-lateral sponsors. This does not mean there is no public discussion at all. But with regard to the way the fora are convened – the participants being carefully sifted to minimize dissent- one can fully understand why these bureaucrat-crafted policies are generally adopted with minimal modification. UNICEF, the World Bank, and UNESCO, etc., cannot be sole partners with the ministry. The other stakeholders, teachers, students' parents, students, teachers' unions, and all of civil society at large, have a valuable say in the way the gap in gender education could be stopped. It can even be argued that they are the gatekeepers to the success of such policies and there seems to be little wisdom in playing games with them. In this sense, the government does not value the local 'experiences,' the people's *mētis*. Kere (2002), a representative of the NGO, Save the Children, in a document entitled, "The Experience of Planning and Implementation," establishes largely the 'go-it-alone' attitude of the government of Burkina concerning the PDDEB. No initiative had been undertaken to involve the different partners of EFA in Burkina- Faso. She laments the partial character of the PDDEB document as it covers neither the timeframe nor all the objectives and strategies as spelt out in Dakar.

In point of fact, the PDDEB covers the period 2001-2010 whereas the National Action Plan/EFA spans the period 2001- 2015. The PDDEB is only limited to the basic education while the National Action Plan/EFA includes the secondary school. Likewise,

the National Action Plan advocates for the setting up of specific strategies such as that of the struggle to eradicate AIDS. Such questions are not addressed in the PDDEB.

For one thing, the gap between male and female enrolment, which is quite large, is gradually decreasing. The gender equality index has increased from 0.64 to 0.70. Yet, the general public is not content with such meager results. From June 24 to June 26, 2003, the High school and University Parent Teachers' Association (the UNAPESB) held a congress in the capital city of Ouagadougou, in collaboration with the International Federation for Parents' Education (FIEEP/IFPE), under the auspices of the first lady, Mrs. Chantal Compaoré. They evoked the Declaration of Ouagadougou adopted by the Panafrican Conference on Girls' Education in 1993. The Declaration stated that in the South, without the education of girls, the objective of equality between males and females may not see the light of day.

The UNAPESB deplored that despite the advocacy adopted in the decade by national action plans, we are left with the sad observation that few girls, contrary to boys, attend school. Worse still, those lucky enough to attend do not show equal academic success, be it at the high school or at the university level. When it is well-known that UNAPESB is an organization of civil society very close to the government, some critics even say that it is the 'creation' of the authorities, this confession can be easily collapsed into the government's own perspective and programs.

On a more general note, all the policies --EFA and PDDEB -- seem to be impaired by the stigma of "acceleration". At the beginning of the academic year 2003-2004, the Minister of Basic Education declared over-confidently that no family will have to pay registration fees for girls. Likewise, girls would be provided with a student kit. To reassure primary school principals, the Minister of Basic Education instructed them to register all students without regard to previous limitations on number of students per class. Any overcrowding was to be reported to the Ministry in order for solutions to be worked out (UNICEF, 2003b). This, if anything, it is proof that tight planning is the least shared element in the crafting and implementation of policies to address inequities in education.

Moreover, it is difficult not to object to the populist approach to the problem. It seems inappropriate to ask principals to disregard regulations governing the level of enrolment in classes. If the hidden objective is to inflate figures in a number crunching exercise — and it seems rather likely -- to enroll just to beat the numbers, then the Minister's opening gambit is understandable. What kinds of solutions does the Minister have to offer on the spot in case of the overcrowded classes that resulted? Already, public primary schools are bursting at the seams with overcrowded classes. Classes containing more than one hundred students are the rule rather than the exception. It is important to think about the pedagogic implications of the student-teacher ratio. The teachers' Union, SYNATEB, the most vocal union in Basic Education, has alerted the press as to the devastation that is wrought on the educational system with the PDDEB under the World Bank expertise. UNICEF speaks highly of the way Burkina-Faso is steering its "Education for All Initiative." After a joint field mission, the Ministry of Basic Education and Literacy drew up a report and identified key areas of progress. For example, twenty provinces with the lowest school enrolment where UNICEF and university system interventions are concentrated have an increase of forty-three percent in registrations. For girls, the increase amounts to slightly more than forty-six percent.

Against this background in a rosy Ministerial report, the Prime Minister elected himself to bell the cat (CLARIFY MEANING bell the cat?). Prime Minister Paramanga Yonly opined that despite tremendous efforts made by the government in allocating resources for education, many children are still not in school. His view is that if this huge amount of money was invested with coherent policies, the results would be comparable (Bendré, 2003).

The courageous confession of the Prime Minister has hit the bull's eye. There seems to be a race against time. When one looks at the goals stipulated in "Education for All-Burkina Faso," one is astonished by the "blitzkrieg" mindset that permeates the policies. In general, it is good judgment to exercise a reasoned skepticism against any social goals couched in millenarian accents, as if a doomsday scenario (CLARIFY?) was no longer a question of months, hence the urgency of a race against time. For example, what was it so particular about the year 2000 that all of a sudden education had to be necessarily distributed to all by that deadline? Was it really feasible? Was it not just one shallow slogan to keep on with business as usual? The much vaunted health for all by the Year 2000 - in the field of health- has taught us prudence in policies set up in such broad and over-optimistic terms.

Thus, any social policy with the ambition to fix a social issue that would set so tight a timeline runs the risk of losing the intent of its purpose. What is more, in education, different inadequacies are not fixed that easily. When it comes to education that takes place within a context that has its specificities, it is hard to believe that the gender equity will be provided in the "twinkling of an eye" within a decade or so. As a matter of fact, ten or fifteen years are minimal in reversing trends that have entrenched themselves in the social context over centuries. To cling to a tight schedule could signal more than naiveté, rather, the absence of a serious commitment, or just a token gesture. Social change is, at best, incremental and rarely accommodates quantum leaps. In social transformation, perhaps more than in any other field of human activity, we must allow for time in order for change to gain momentum.

To be fair to the authorities though, they bought hope but based upon the wrong assumptions. They all seem to hold that low levels of education still raging within the developing world, and in Burkina-Faso, in particular, comes from lack of financial resources and technical backing. In this manner, if financial resources were mobilized properly along with the proper technical backing, the problem would be solved. A Band-Aid approach to education is seriously questionable. EFA in the Year 2000 showed itself to be a virtual horizon. At this stage, it exists more in the mind, rather than out in the field. At least it has proven to be a step-in-the-right direction. As far as parity between sexes in education is concerned, it is difficult for the sixteen countries that met at the Forum of Dakar to close the gap. EFA Global Monitoring Report (2003-2004) admits that the parity goal for 2005 remains elusive for many countries and requires urgent action through a range of interrelated interventions. Yet, according to EFA Global Monitoring Report, even where parity has been achieved, educational equality is often far from being attained (UNESCO, 2003).

According to a World Report entitled *Genre and Education for All*, published in November 2003 in follow-up to the EFA 2003-2004, discrimination against girls is still rife in countries like Burkina-Faso, Djibouti, and Niger. The causes are many. Traditions

such as early marriage persist. Education for All is as yet to rise beyond incantations in the face of the meager results reaped.

Overall, it is easy to see that there is virtually no “pure” state policy to address the lag in girls’ education. All initiatives seem to be spearheaded by international organizations. These organizations intervene to formulate financial policies, often with strings attached. They are often the ones who conceptualize and steer development and implementation. There would be nothing wrong if their agenda was not most often at loggerheads with the professed policy. This approach is hardly sustainable.

What is to be done?

Improvement in the participation of girls in the educational process in Burkina-Faso certainly needs a more genuine participatory approach. For the time being, there is a tendency for the government and international donors to present themselves as the ones with the necessary expertise with ins and outs of the situation. If girls are lagging far behind boys, it is not only a problem of resources. There is also a social dynamic behind it. It is necessary to involve a maximum number of different stakeholders in the society. The problem is historical, cultural, sociological, and psychological. Unless the war against gender inequity in education is waged, bearing in mind these multiple perspectives, the government and the international organizations may be barking up the wrong tree. It is not enough to exhort parents to send their daughters to school mirroring the possibility of social advancement. Stirring incremental incentives can backfire. The parents’ hierarchy of needs, social promotion -- at least such as conceptualized by the government and the donors -- may not reflect tally with that which they hold dearest.

The real struggle may lie in the subversion of the time-old perception of woman in society, including the prohibition of forced or precocious marriages, and gendered power relations. Unless the perception of women in society is to change, any current advances may not survive, and may revert to prior situations. The elimination of children’s work where it is merely an exploitative situation can also increase the participation of girls in schooling. A fine fieldwork must be conducted within the directions and the desires of the rural communities who can identify the leaders and other resource people who have the charisma to influence the populace. That could include individualized “canvassing,” on a door-to-door basis holds great potential for effectiveness, beginning with the local chiefs who are still held in high esteem by their constituents. Such inclusive arrangements could lead to the desired sound pedagogy, which should always be shaped with respect to people’s needs and expectations.

In the name of social injustice, the government’s denial of scholarships to boys does not hold well in public’s opinion who feels cheated when, further to this measure, increasingly fewer and fewer girls are benefiting from scholarships in the secondary schools contrary to the official discourse. This action reinforced the impression that the government has taken a self-serving measure to further the cause of structural adjustments recommended by the World Bank. To do so, might kill two birds with one stone, to shift the burden of educational costs from governmental revenue to parental revenue, while advancing the political goal to address equity among sexes.

Government policies could also have more influence if the efforts were not mainly concentrated at the level of “bricks and blocks.” Although it is important to have

the necessary educational infrastructure, it would be a bad move to dwell too much at that level. Building schools, exonerating girls from paying fees, etc., will ultimately prove to be of use if these actions coincide with building strong institutions. Among others, patriarchal ideologies that seep through the school walls from broader society have to be addressed with a view to empowering girls, the women of tomorrow. As Lioba Moshi contends in *Women and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Power, Opportunities, and Constraints*,

Currently, the home remains the source of the acquisition of social and cultural values, including gender identity and division of labor based on gender. In addition, the school environment is not much different from the home. The school has become an extension of social values in the home, thus allowing the roles, activities, and goals that have been shaped by the home social order to reign. Consequently, the female child does not experience the institutional change expected to result from the introduction of formal education...The social order in school must cease to perpetuate a division of labor that is similar to that of the home, which, although vital to various functions of the home, legitimates inequality between girls and boys, and later women and men. (as cited in Bloch, Beokuta-Betts et al (1998), p. xi-xii).

Providing role models for these girls within schools is very important. Girls can feel that school is worth it if they capture a strong signal of equality of males and females amongst their instructors. For the time being, there are very few female head teachers. The number shrinks as one rises higher up the education ladder. According to anecdotal evidence less than ten percent of female teachers are principals at the secondary school level. Women professors remain invisible in the higher educational landscape. It has been shown that where there is equality between male teachers and female teachers, the enrolment of girls is higher and their engagement with learning is sustainable.

Also, while the government certainly has it at heart to better the condition of girls, it seems to have lost sight of the fact that the provision of a multicultural curriculum supported by sound teaching methods is not merely dressing. So far, the overhaul of the curriculum to make it gender-sensitive has not permeated the debate about the education of girls. The curriculum containing disabling messages for girls remains in use. Also, nothing seems to have been initiated to make the self-fulfilling prophecy of the treatment by teachers for boys and girls the same. For example,

Numerous studies have found that teachers behave differently towards boys and girls in ways that are reinforced in pupils' reactions to this differential treatment. Teachers tend to give more directional and instructional responses and greater attention to boys rather than girls. Whereas boys receive greater criticism from teachers, it is more often about their behaviour and motivation than the quality of their work. The reverse is true for girls. Hence the implied message is that the effort is there, but not the brains. This, together with other reinforcing factors within the school, in turn influence more general characteristics of the personality of girls and boys such as self-confidence and independence. (OECD, 1986, p. 47)

A consensus of opinion, unfortunately, is crystallized on how to increase the number of girls at school. As it is, emphasis is on quantity, not the quality of the school experiences of girls. Anderson–Leavitt et al. (1998) have done a fine job of developing a qualitative description of life in Guinean schools. They have gone to great length to document the subjugation of girls in a climate of discouragement, of the teacher self-fulfilling prophecy vis-à-vis girls, of strategies to control boy's behaviour, all of which were detrimental to the performance of girls. In the face of the risk of a continued mis-identification of girls with school, they proposed female teachers as a solution. This could go a long way towards minimizing underperformance, falling below-grade level, repeating grades, dropping out, and potentially, a lapse back square one. The rehabilitation of the teaching profession should be coincidental with measures aimed to boost girls' education.

In many countries, teachers' salaries have declined over the past two decades. According to the 2005 EFA Global Monitoring Report, in Africa, teacher earnings were lower in real terms in 2000 than they were in 1970. Pressures on the teaching profession have not ceased to soar due to overcrowded classrooms. In countries where enrolments have recently surged, the pupils-teacher ratio has risen to 60: 1, leading to more double-shift teaching. (UNESCO, 2005)

The government will take up the challenge of girls' education effectively in rehabilitating the teaching profession after many years of neglect. Teachers are amongst the worst-off in society today and it is not rare to hear somebody being asked this question: "Are you working or are you a teacher?" as if being a teacher was not a profession on its own and full right. It must be made possible for students in general and for girls in particular to want to be like their teachers, as a source for motivation. That is not the case as teachers are floundering in the lumpen proletariat. Otherwise, the victory in the battle for gender equality in education may be a pyrrhic one at best. At worst, it may simply be a fool's errand. The government has adopted a cheap way of training primary school teachers under le Cadre de Lutte Stratégique Contre la Pauvreté (the Strategic Framework for Poverty Alleviation) and the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative. These arrangements, all of which are the products of international financial institutions -- such as the World Bank and the IMF-- mandate the government to recruit teachers with a reduced period of training. They have no right to go on strike and have no career advancement plan. Teacher training that used to last for two years in the Ecoles Nationales des Enseignants du Primaire (ENEPs) has been curtailed to six months (Some, 2005).

That is why UNESCO sets a great score about the quality of education, not just the rush to quantity. This quality may not be forthcoming, at least, not before 2015. The reason is that while countries like Burkina-Faso are prodded to achieve gender parity in education, the international community has not provided the necessary resources, as argued by Global Campaign for Education. Worse still, the structural adjustments that are implemented by governments in many countries, including Burkina-Faso, have their exigencies. The thousands of workers who have lost their jobs through the restructuring of companies will find it very hard to send their children to school. When push comes to shove, the girls are the first casualties of poverty. Parents prefer to reserve all the chances for boys who are sociologically expected to assure the continuity of the family. As public expenditures have to be kept at a minimum, it is very difficult to attain the global education targets as spelt out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the

EFA. These goals are being undermined by the IMF's imposition of budget targets. Recent research undertaken in other parts of the world illustrates the need to effectively increase investment in education. Such increase will be needed for building schools, training and employing teachers, and making education more accessible to poor and disadvantaged children. But in most cases, they cannot do so without exceeding limits imposed by the IMF, thus, making it effectively impossible for them to meet MDG commitments and the demands of their electorates (G C E and Action Aid International, September 2005).

That is why the EFA appears to have an under-funded mandate. EFA can only promote education for all when all support education. Improvement within the larger context of an educational system hinges on financial resources, the sinew of war. This is not to suggest that money is the end-of-it all, though.

Even if all developing countries substantially increased their own education investments, they would still need additional support from countries in order to achieve the MDGs. Rich countries recognized this when they pledged in 2000 that 'no country seriously committed to education for all will be allowed to fail for lack of resources'. Fine words, but despite the huge wealth amassed in the world since 2000, rich countries have directed very small amounts to the hidden emergency of girls out of school. Donor countries give only a fifth of the aid that would amount to about half the cost of one Stealth bomber. (Global Campaign for Education and Action Aid International, September 2005, p. 3)

Conclusion

With the support of international organizations, Burkina-Faso has engaged vigorously with the war against inequality in education between boys and girls. The international context has been instrumental in that process, after the International Women's day in 1975, and followed by the world summit of Jomtien on education. These policies, though, are at their weakest as they take place in the midst of competing public needs that are widespread in a developing country. Also, institutional development and grassroots mobilization have been neglected as are obvious attempts to subvert a gender imbalance in power relations where patriarchal ideologies continue to inform a majority of the societal values and beliefs. The government is focused on increasing the number of girls in schools while paying less attention to such factors as the bigger picture of the status of education nationwide, the ecology of the school, the curriculum-in-use, the hidden curriculum, teacher training and compensation, and involvement of civil society.

Gender bias in education is best seen as a societal issue with many layers. It takes for its resolution a multi-dimensional approach as well as human and financial resources. The one-size-fits-all package of policies implemented by the World Bank, and other purveyors of money, carried over several developing countries may fail to hit the mark as the context of each country is specific. What is most disturbing is the sense that there is no nationally owned policy toward re-dressing the gender balance in education. The lack of correspondence in the efforts among the three strands, Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Education, points to disarray in policymaking and policy choices. More coherence and coordination need to be achieved. The impression that the World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF are enforcing their policies in education smacks of a loss of control

of the government over its citizens' destiny. This is politically and psychologically disabling. The first place to start in the redressing of the balance is a sustained adhesion of all the stakeholders within the country. To proceed otherwise is to put the cart before the oxen.

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