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Editor

Kenneth King

Editorial Address

Kenneth King, Centre of African Studies, 7 Buccleuch Place,
University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9LW, Scotland UK
Telephone (44) 0131 650 3878; Fax: (44) 0131 650 6535
Emails: Kenneth.King@ed.ac.uk or P.King@ed.ac.uk
Co-ordination Address

Michel Carton, Institut Universitaire d'Etudes du Développement (IUED),
Post Box 136, Rue Rothschild 24, 1211 Geneva 21, Switzerland.
Telephone: (41) 22 906 5900/1; fax: (41) 22 906 5994
Email: Michel.Carton@iued.unige.ch

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**EDUCATION FOR ALL IN BURKINA FASO,
STILL NOT FOR TOMORROW.....**

Marc Pilon

Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD), Paris
Unité d'Enseignement et de Recherche en Démographie (UERD), Ouagadougou.
Email: Marc.Pilon@ird.bf

After independence, the August 3rd 1965 decree organizing the primary school system of the former Upper-Volta re-emphasized the goal of achieving by 1980 universal school, a target that had been fixed by the conference of Ministers of African States, held in Addis-Ababa in 1961; but the same decree made also the goal contingent on 'the capacity of educational structures'. In 1960, the gross enrolment rate was 6.5% for the 7-14 years age group; in 1980, it was still only 15.8%.

The Sankarist revolutionary period (1983-87) emphasized increasing the educational supply - 'one village, one school', while the World Bank project aimed at achieving a primary school rate of 60% by the year 2000. Both the actions undertaken during the 1990 decade and the Jomtien declaration confirm the stress placed upon primary schooling, both as far as local authorities and their international partners are concerned. But at the beginning of the academic year 1998/99 the gross rate (relative to the 7-12 years age group) reached only 40.5%, with the net rate being at the level of 32.5%.

Thus, just at the beginning of the new century, only one third of the school-aged Burkinabè kids are attending primary school. This national average masks some important geographic disparities (one fourth of the provinces have a gross enrolment rate below 20%) as well as the persistent under schooling of girls (with a net enrolment rate of 27.7% as opposed to 39.7% for boys).

In addition, although they have improved, teaching conditions remain below par. In 1997/98, the average number of pupils per class was 50, which is beyond the international average (35); almost one half of teaching force (43%) do not have a professional diploma; only 1% of rural schools as against 37% of their urban counterparts have electricity. The efficiency of the educational system remains poor. In 1997/1998 the repeaters were about 17% of the over-all school population since out of the 1000 kids entering the primary first grade, only 308 (that is less than one kid out of 3) obtain the graduating certificate at the end of the cycle.

The recent years have been characterised by a growing dimension of foreign aid originating from bilateral and multilateral technical and financial partners, but also from the growing number of NGOs involved in basic education (about 50 today). In addition to diverse reforms tried out by public authorities, these multiple forms of assistance are not well coordinated and they contribute to make the country a kind of experimental arena.

To be sure, the recent implementation of a national framework for coordinating the activities and initiatives of the major technical and financial partners involved in basic education represents some progress (although it is commonsensical) but it occurs after 40 years of so-called cooperation! This coordination is implemented in the context of the 'decennial basic education development project for the period 2000-09' adopted by the June 3th 1999 decree. One of its objectives is to reach a gross primary school enrolment ratio of 70% by 2009.

Despite past and current financial efforts, Burkina Faso is still far from being able to ensure 'Education for All'. The objective is made more difficult by the rate of demographic growth (the average annual growth is 2.6%). Facing all these constraints, whether they are defined in quantitative or qualitative terms, the objective of a formal schooling available to all remains a formidable challenge with multifaceted stakes for Burkina Faso.

The main concern of institutional actors seems to be to seek systematically 'an increase of the number of children enrolled', - to increase school enrolment rates without paying a proportionate amount of attention to the educational aspects of the policy,- that is, to educational quality. What will be then the meaning of achieving a universal enrolment, but without students having reached an appropriate level of skills. **Improved schooling is fine, but for what kind of education?**

Admission in post primary and post secondary educational institutions remains selective in Burkina Faso and this characteristic is underscored further by the World Bank's ambition to privatize the secondary and post secondary school systems. This raises the issue of identifying both the specific functions of the various educational sectors and appropriate linkages between them: **'A school' (or an educational system) for what and for whom?**

The international community is increasingly involved both in financial terms and in defining policies. As the national partner seems unable to offer alternative educational projects, the way coordination works for the time being is likely to strengthen the current trend. This process affects also major issues within the international community itself, notably with regard to the logic governing the returns to investments, whether these returns are defined in financial terms (supply of equipment and services) or 'ideological' terms (that is, through the selection of curricula and textbooks and through training programs). In other words, **who will define the Burkinabè school of the future.**

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