

Girls' Education Project – Northern Burkina Faso

Background information

NEEED

In Burkina Faso, as in many parts of the world, far fewer girls than boys go to school. Often parents, who do not value girls' education in the same way as that of boys, spend their limited resources on boys' education. Despite efforts by the government and its development partners to improve the educational system, the rate of illiteracy remains very high (approximately 74%) in Burkina Faso. For women, it is even higher: nearly 80% of women are illiterate and therefore are excluded from the "written" world, with all that this implies in terms of disadvantages. In the Tangaye and Oula Departments (Yatenga Province) of Burkina Faso, only 12% of girls enter primary school as opposed to 38% of boys.

Association NEEED (Nimbus, Enfance, Environnement, Education et Developpement), a non-profit non-governmental organization was founded in 1996 for the purpose of responding to community and educational needs of rural communities in the Yatenga Province of northern Burkina Faso. Founded by a local secondary school professor and his wife (a government midwife), NEEED has a voluntary board made up of rural primary school principals, village leaders, regional government educational personnel, and the former Secretary General of the Ministry of Basic Education and Alphabetization. NEEED has no full time paid staff.

Girls Education Project

NEEED initiated The Girls Education Project in 1999 with the aim of closing the gender gap in primary education in the Tangaye and Oula Departments by enabling as many young rural girls as project funds allow each year to enter school

The goals of The Girls Education Project are to:

- Achieve at least 40% literacy among girls in the two departments with the aim of enabling them to participate in socio-economic development within their communities, region and the country.
- Provide a model to the Ministry of Basic Education and Alphabetization of Burkina Faso for what can be achieved with improved educational opportunities for women.

NEEED offers partners two ways in which to support girls' primary education: 1) the "adoption" of a girl and payment of her school expenses for as long as she is in school (a mechanism used by some European partners); and 2) the lambs'

project. NEEED employs the combination of these two strategies to enable as many young girls as project funds will allow each year to enter school.

Friends of Burkina Faso (FBF) has been the primary partner of the lambs project for the past five years. FBF was attracted to this strategy in terms of 1) its sustainability, 2) the necessity for parental involvement, and 3) the fact that it allowed FBF to support a new population of girls each year. Funds raised by FBF are used to purchase a lamb and school materials (pens, pencils, erasers and paper); a simple skirt and T-shirt; a simple backpack; and a small kerosene lamp to study by at night for each girl for her first year of schooling. The total cost is approximately \$80 per girl (depending upon international exchange rates). The girls and their parents assume responsibility for the costs of the girls' education for the remaining five years of primary school, and four years of middle school for those who qualify. Each year, the girls' parents sell their grown lambs in the Spring and use the money to buy a new lamb and school materials for the following year, plus they return a small sum to the project to enable it to extend its support to other girls.

NEEED works with rural primary school teachers and village leaders each year to identify girls between the ages of 6-7 who wish to enter school. There are no financial criteria due to the uniformly high level of poverty in the region. NEEED currently supports the primary, and more recently the middle school, education of approximately 1700 girls (and eight orphaned boys) in 29 primary schools in the region and now the *College Modern de l'Amitie* (girls middle school). To date, German and Austrian partners support approximately 848 students and FBF supports approximately 860.

Next year, due to the extremely positive response by parents, NEEED plans to support the primary and middle school education of over 2000 girls from 37 villages in the Tangaye, Oula and Namissiguima departments of northern Burkina Faso. FBF plans to increase its support of the number of girls entering primary school by one-third, from 200 to 300, at the request of NEEED

College Modern de l'Amitie

In 2004 as the first girls supported by NEEED entered their final year of primary school, NEEED sought additional funding to build a middle school in order to ensure an optimal educational environment for girls who pass the national qualifying exams. FBF collaborated with groups in Germany and Austria in funding the construction of a modest campus consisting of four classrooms, an administrative unit, a well, and latrines. In this school:

- class size is limited to 50 students per classroom (compared with 100+ students in public high schools)

- teachers are paid regularly and expected to perform (conditions not always achieved in public institutions)
- NEEED set a goal of 80% achievement (that is that 80% of the girls will pass the BEPC, *Brevet d'études du premier cycle*, the national school exam following four years of middle school) – within the public system, the percentage of students passing the BEPC is approximately 25% - 30%.

The first group of girls supported by NEEED completed primary school in June 2005. Nearly 100 girls (twice the number anticipated) passed qualifying exams to attend middle school. The 2006-07 school year, 215 students qualified for entry into the middle school. NEEED sought additional funding in 2006 and completed the construction of an additional four classrooms in order to accommodate the increased number of students and maintain the class size of 50 students maximum. In 2007-08, there will be 400 students, and at least 600 students are anticipated in the following year. NEEED has set a limit of 1000 students in this middle school. Thanks to the fundraising efforts of several partners, NEEED is in the process of building its final set of eight classrooms for the middle school.

College Lunch Project

Due to the availability and cost of land, the *College Modern de l'Amitie* was built in a village 3 km from the town where girls find lodging with families during the school year. Most students (100 in 2005-06, 215 in 2006-07, 400 in 2007-08, and 600+ in the 2008-2009 school year) walk to and from school; a few have bicycles. Students arrive at school early morning, often with little or no breakfast, and remain at school with nothing to eat all day. NEEED's German partner financed the construction of a modest canteen, and FBF committed to the support of the cost of lunches for the students for the first three years, allowing them to have a noon meal and to rest and study before afternoon classes resume. FBF has partnered with Global Giving (www.globalgiving.com) in raising the funds for this project. The total cost of a noon meal for each student is approximately \$0.33. We anticipate that this basic mid-day meal will contribute to an improvement in student performance.

At the end of the 2005-06 school year (the first year of operation of the *college* during which there was no lunch program), 71% of students qualified to continue on to their second year of middle school, 22% had to repeat the first year, and 7% were oriented toward other forms of practical training.

In the 2006-07 school year, 77% of students successfully completed their coursework. These results are very encouraging. Quoting Lacine Sawadogo of NEEED, "A hungry stomach has no ears. What intellectual work can one ask of a child who is overcome by hunger?"

Lambs Support Girls' Education Project #1818

Budget for additional \$40,000

March 2012

Project cost for enrolling each girl in primary school:

- \$20 Cost of classroom materials
 - o Pencils \$1
 - o Pens \$1
 - o paper \$2
 - o small chalkboard \$2
 - o chalk \$2
 - o erasers \$1
 - o lamp \$11
- \$24 Cost of T-shirt, skirt and book bag
 - o Uniform (T-shirt and skirt) \$12
 - o Book bag \$12
- \$46 Cost of a lamb
- \$90 Total cost**

The above costs (in US dollars) vary according to the exchange rate with the French West African franc.

Projected maximum 1100 girls at a maximum cost of \$94 per girl: **\$103,400**. NEEDED has requests to intervene with this project in approximately 100 remaining villages in the Northern Region of Burkina Faso. Their plan is to cover these villages over the next 3-4 years, enabling the enrollment of approximately 2000-2200 girls into village primary schools. Friends of Burkina Faso anticipates supporting a minimum of 1000, and a maximum of 1100, girls. The final number will depend upon 1) the actual number of villages and eligible girls, and 2) support from other donors, both of which are difficult to predict with exactitude at this time. The cost will also depend upon the exchange rate that applies to each year's transfer of funds to this project. Thus, since we anticipate that this will be a final request to raise the funding goal for this project, for funding purposes we are projecting 1100 girls at a cost of \$94 per girl.

We have \$63,000 remaining for this project. It has always been our goal to stay ahead of the projected funding needs of the project in order to ensure stable and consistent funding for this project. The additional \$40,000 will give us a total budget of \$103,000 which will enable Friends of Burkina Faso to cover our commitment: to the education of these girls, and to the longer term promotion of village girls' education in Northern Burkina Faso.

Development agency statements regarding the importance of girls' education

Development agencies, including the United Nations, the U. S. Agency for International Development, and the World Bank have identified girls' education as a key factor in promoting sustainable development.

- According to the UN Fund for Population Activities, "Education is one of the most important means of empowering women with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Educating women has a more significant impact on poverty and development than men's education. It is also the most influential factor in improving child health and reducing infant mortality". (*Women's Empowerment and Reproductive Health*, UN Fund for Population Activities, 2000)
- United States Agency for International Development (USAID) studies have found that "One of the most important findings ever in the development community is that investing in the education of girls yields high returns for economic and social development. Women who complete formal primary school education live very different lives from women who do not: they are healthier and their families are healthier; they have lower levels of fertility; and their children attain higher levels of education. Girls' education programs are most sustainable when they are 'owned' by the country's citizens, not by the donors, and when donor resources are used to mobilize the human and financial resources of a country in support of girls' education. When citizens 'own' the issue of girls' education, they become engaged in developing and carrying out solutions to increase girls' educational opportunities". (USAID Office of Women in Development Vol. 1, No. 2, 1996-7).
- The recently retired director of UNICEF has stated that "It is my central conviction from ten years at UNICEF that nothing will turn the tide against poverty the way that education can, especially for girls. There is no more sure an investment for nations than the investment in a quality basic education for all boys and girls. With girls especially, the returns, with respect to the next generation of children, are striking."
- A former lead economist of the World Bank recently explained that global proclamations on the importance of ending poverty are not likely not be effective because such proclamations imply that the whole world is responsible for achieving grandiose goals, yet no one is held accountable should these goals not be met. He provided an example of what individuals could do to help fight poverty in developing countries: send young girls to school.