# english black

# Package 91, Script 3

July 2010

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# Soil conservation with stone barriers

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### **Notes to broadcaster**

Soil has always been subjected to water and wind erosion, and to human actions which have negative effects. Soils are slowly eroded by water, and fine particles are carried away by the wind. Farmers have accelerated soil degradation through inappropriate plowing and soil management. Yields decrease year after year.

As a result, small farmers can hardly feed their families. They are aware that the soil has lost some of its capacity to produce food. This is the case with farmers in the area of Ramongo, located in central western Burkina Faso, 85 kilometres from the capital, Ouagadougou. Rainwater has carried away the topsoil that feeds the plants. Gullies have reduced the surface area of the fields. However, the farmers are not discouraged. Following a visit by the National Territories Management Program, they built stone barriers throughout their fields.

We met with two local farmers and an agriculture technician who agreed to share their experiences with fighting for soil conservation.

This script is a mini-drama based on actual interviews with farmers and project workers. You could use this script as inspiration to research and write a script on a similar topic in your area. Or you might choose to produce this script on your station, using voice actors to represent the speakers. If so, please make sure to tell your audience at the beginning of the program that the voices are those of actors, not the original people involved in the interviews.

*Instrumental music*

**Storyteller:** The man is small but quite thickset. He is over 60 years old. With his eyes sparkling, Akali gets up, fingers a rather tousled beard and speaks in a reassuring tone.

**Akali:** It was on a January morning. I remember it well. The manager of a government soil conservation program came to meet with us at the agricultural extension worker’s property. There were many of us there that day. He told us that our fields were still good. But they had an enemy. Rainwater threatened them every year. It carried away the good soil and left behind gullies. We cannot sow in those places. To tell the truth, we had noticed that ourselves. So, how can we improve this situation? How can we get that good soil back? That is what he discussed with us.

**Storyteller:** As soon as he was done talking, Akali’s neighbour Badali could not wait to speak, and continued the story.

**Badali:** The subject caught everyone’s attention. Many questions were asked and many proposals were made to slow down the running water. Some suggested planting trees around fields. The audience rejected this proposal. Field owners do not allow tenants to plant trees on fields that don’t belong to them. Besides, a tree does not grow in a single month. Some suggested laying millet stems on the soil to slow down the water. But millet stems have now replaced wood as fuel and are also food for livestock. Others proposed building stone barriers, which they see in neighbouring communities. We talked a lot before reaching a decision.

**Akali:** After long discussions, people chose stone barriers, about which a lot of good is said in neighbouring communities. The man from the government left with that request. A few weeks later, some technicians came to see us. They talked with us and identified those farmers who wanted to build stone barriers. Three days later, they came back with equipment such as picks, hammers and carts, which they distributed to the farmers. Today, there are long stone barriers throughout our village.

**Storyteller:** Seated on a chair facing the farmers, he wore a blue shirt and black pants. His glasses are thick and white like those of male nurses from the colonial era. He is the agricultural extension worker. In the meeting with the farmers, he explains what stone barriers are and how they are built.

**Agricultural extension worker:** Stone barriers are dams made of stones, about 50 centimeters high. The stones are aligned following the contour lines on sloping fields. Contour lines are imaginary lines which connect the parts of a field at equal heights. The barriers slow down the progress of water and allow it to seep into the ground. They also stop water from carrying away the nutrients in the soil. This keeps the soil fertile and moist. So, plants can grow well and generate good yields. And if harvests are good, families will not experience hunger.

**Badali:** This is well said, Mr. agricultural extension worker! Go on!

**Agricultural extension worker:** Nevertheless, building stone barriers over a large area requires stones and lots of labour.

But a small family can also build stone barriers on a small area, and they do not need big equipment. In the field, you have seen how you arranged the stones using a water level. First, you mark out the contour line using the water level. Then, you align the stones along the contour line. The stone barriers are aligned across the slope, and directly opposed to the downward direction of the slope. In this way, they slow down the water’s progress downhill. The number of stone barriers a farmer must make depends on the slope in the field. The steeper the slope, the more stone barriers one has to build.

*Vocal music*

**Storyteller:** People had many difficulties during the building of the stone dams. In a serious tone, Akali recalls the work.

**Akali:** I remember it as if it were yesterday. Building stone barriers in the fields was not easy for us. Some farmers came late to the fields several times, and others simply gave up. The government program helped us a lot. But it was our courage and our patience that allowed us to achieve these results.

**Badali:** Yes, it was difficult.Often, we had to go very far away to collect suitable stones. We offered meals to labourers on working days. But as the proverb says: “God helps those that help themselves.” We worked hard to build those stone barriers in our fields. I know all the benefits I get from the stone barriers. Let Akali be my witness.

**Akali:** Oh yes, it is true!

**Badali:** I have been using this technique in my fields for three years. My grain stores are not as big as I would like, but I am not short of grain to feed my family. Now, my family does not worry about hunger any longer. I can even afford to give some grain to my friends to help them make it through the period after they have finished eating their stored food and before the next harvest.

**Akali:** I give grain away to my loved ones and I also lend some to those who are in need. My grain stores are quite big and I have enough to feed my family.

**Badali:** Be humble, Akali. We acknowledge your kindness and your generosity towards your peers.

**Akali**: We don’t have enough words to thank the responsible person from the government program and our agricultural extension worker. They gave us hope to continue to live. And they renewed our desire to farm the land. Thanks to them, our fields are slowly improving and our harvests have increased strongly.

**Storyteller:** We are back again at the meeting.The agricultural extension worker, with a sudden movement, leaves his chair. He adjusts his glasses, straightens his shirt and comes forward to pay a tribute to Ramongo’s farmers.

**Agricultural extension worker:** Men and women in this village have worked persistently on these projects. It is their own efforts that they are enjoying today. There were people who were just waiting to see the results. Now, they have no doubt any more. The results are tangible. Over half the farmers in this community now have stone barriers in their fields.

**Akali:** Agricultural extension worker, allow me to say that, in all ages, men have developed ways to keep the soil healthy and yields good. In the past, our grandparents used to do mulching and use chicken dung for their little gardens. These were meant to protect and to feed the earth so that, in return, it would be generous to them. But times change. Today, we must use new strategies.

**Agricultural extension worker:** Yes Akali, what you say is right. But in reality, all that we government workers did was to improve your own techniques and make them available to you. It is the farmers who must decide if the work turned out positively or negatively.

**Badali:** My personal impressions are positive. Anyone who has some experience with stone barriers would agree with me. Eroded areas such as gullies are now filled. Now we can use these spaces for seeding. The fields are slowly recovering and we are more and more confident. Today in the village, there are many people who have experience with this practice. They are ready to share with those who would like to build stone barriers in their fields. And of course, our agricultural extension worker is here to guide us and provide precious advice.

*Short musical break*

**Storyteller:** Dear listeners, we congratulate our brave producers in Ramongo for their hard work. We hope that this program was useful to you. Thank you for your attention. Bye bye.

*Instrumental music*

**Acknowledgements**

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**Information sources**

Interviews on February 9, 2010 with:

* Mrs. Francine Kane, **née** Sia, Regional Coordinator, PNGT2 of Centre West.
* Louba Dakio, Chief of Service, Agricultural Development and Production, Regional Direction of Agriculture, Hydraulics and Halieutic Resources, Centre West.
* Boubié Nagalo, Technical Agent, Regional Direction of Agriculture, Hydraulics and Halieutic Resources, Centre West.
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* Salam Kabré, producer in Ramongo.

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