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**Backgrounder: The rights of rural women in Burkina Faso**

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## Introduction

## The status of women in Burkina Faso is much the same as in neighbouring countries. Rural women derive most of their income from agriculture, animal breeding, and trade. Despite the recognition of women's rights enshrined in the Constitution and other national laws, as well as international and regional texts ratified by Burkina Faso, women’s rights are not always guaranteed. As a result of inadequate material, technical, and financial resources, rural women in Burkina Faso are unable to fully enjoy their rights.

1. **Essential data:**

* According to the 2019 census, Burkina Faso has a population of 20,870,050, 48% of whom are men and 52% women.
* 90% of women have not completed primary education.
* 32% of the rural women who belong to groups or associations collectively own land for their production.
* 52% of girls are married before the age of 18.
* 17% of women use contraception in Burkina Faso.

## 2. Evolution of women's rights in Burkina Faso

## Burkina Faso has ratified several global and regional legal texts that recognize the civil and political rights of its population, and in particular women. These include:

## The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

## The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

## The Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, ratified in 2006.

## The regional convention specific to Africa regroups all the concerns of African women on the educational, health, social, economic and political levels.

## The adoption of a specific law against female genital mutilation in 1996.

## The adoption of a national gender policy in 2009.

## The adoption of a law on gender quota on access to land in 2010 and revised in January 2020.

## The adoption of a law on prevention, suppression, and reparations for violence against women and girls and the care of victims in 2015.

## But, despite these legal agreements in favour of women, women's rights are not always respected.

3. **Key information**

## *Marriage of young girls*

## In Burkina Faso, the legal age for marriage is 17 for women and 20 for men (and in certain cases 15 for girls and 18 for boys). In reality, however, people follow customary law rather than modern law. Under customary law, child marriage is common, especially in rural areas. Thus, child marriage continues to be a serious concern in Burkina Faso, especially in the eastern part of the country, where abduction of girls for the purposes of marriage is rampant.

## More than half (52%) of girls are married before the age of 18. Nearly half are already mothers at 18. Girls and women are not always free to choose their spouse and the timing of their marriage. Instead, they may be given in marriage by their father or the head of the family. They may not also be able to decide on the number and timing of their pregnancies, including both so-called emancipated women and rural women. These decisions may be made by the husband, often under pressure from in-laws.

## *Women's right of access to land in Burkina Faso*

## Women's access to land has always been and will continue to be a critical issue. Women are generally excluded from land management. Worldwide, less than 20% of land owners are women. This discrimination is related to tradition rather than to law.

## Burkina Faso's laws stipulate that land belongs to the State and access to it is regulated by the State.

## In 2007, a decree was issued to introduce a quota system on land to increase women’s access to land. It requires women to be represented in monitoring and evaluation bodies. Various legal texts advocate equal rights between men and women with regard to the right of access to land.

A 1997 law stipulates that in villages, allocation, evaluation, and withdrawal of land is the responsibility of village land management commissions.

## But women continue to face discrimination in the full enjoyment of the right of access to land.

## Women participate significantly in the fight against hunger and food insecurity, malnutrition, and poverty. Although women are leading players in processing and marketing agricultural and non-timber forestry products, they have less and less access to land. The land they can access is often borrowed and women have no control over when the owner will demand the return of the land. This is largely due to customs and traditions.

## Women have no right to own land either through their biological family or through the husband's family. However, women do have the right to use land. In recognition of this, the State has established National Rural Women's Days to promote and defend women’s right to access land and natural resources.

## In addition to difficulties in accessing land, rural women face obstacles in carrying out their agricultural activities. These relate to:

## Limited access to financing due to difficulties in obtaining credit from financial institutions. Managers of credit institutions perceive women as higher risk because of their lack of personal funds to guarantee the loan, and because of socio-cultural prejudices.

## Constraints related to a lack of information and training on modern sustainable agricultural techniques. In Burkina Faso, the majority of capacity-building activities in the agricultural sector primarily target men. Women are often served through programs sponsored by associations on local radio stations.

## *Decision-making*

## More than half (52%) of Burkina Faso’s population is female. But women are under-represented in political decision-making spheres and, consequently, economic and social policies fail to take women’s needs into account in both urban and rural areas.

## Rural women are under-represented in decision-making bodies because of the weight of tradition and socio-cultural constraints, the misinterpretation of religion, and the excessive burden of household chores, which means they do not have the time to devote to affairs in their region. Indeed, according to tradition, a good woman must be submissive to her husband, she must obey and respect him in every respect, and a good wife does not have a lot to say, even if she is ill-treated. This situation has encouraged some women's rights organizations to establish special relationships with locally elected representatives from different regions to ensure that women’s concerns are taken into account.

## *Female genital mutilation*

## Burkinabe law, particularly the Constitution, protects gender equality, but in practice female genital mutilation, forced and early marriages, and domestic violence are common. Only 17 per cent of women in Burkina Faso use contraception, and more than 2,000 women die from childbirth-related complications each year.

## In Burkina Faso, the law prohibits, under penalty of a monetary fine and/or imprisonment, any person from practicing female genital mutilation, as well as their accomplices. However, the practice persists because of cultural and religious considerations and, above all, the stereotype that non-excised women are prone to promiscuity and infidelity, and the belief that the clitoris could cause of infant mortality during childbirth if it touches the baby's head on the delivery table.

## *Education of young girls*

## Though there are laws which stipulate universal education for all, including girls, there are obstacles to equality between girls and boys in education, especially in rural areas. Because of family poverty, young girls are sometimes placed with more well-off families as housemaids to provide their families with income. In a country where the literacy rate in 2018 was 50.1% for men and 36.7% for women, this trend continues despite many policies that favour girls’ education. Many programs are gradually being put in place to promote girls' access to school. Rural areas, particularly in northern Burkina Faso, lag furthest behind in terms of girls' schooling.

## *Women's work in Burkina Faso*

## In Burkina Faso, women's access to the labour market is restricted. Women are mostly employed in the informal sector. In Burkina Faso, women account for only 24. 2% of the formal professional workforce in the public and private sectors.

## In rural areas, women are more active in rural work, but are not involved in the sale of farm produce, which is marketed at the discretion of the male head of the family. Women are responsible for a high proportion of household tasks and spend several hours a day collecting wood and water, preparing meals, and cultivating the family field.

## *Women and traditional practices*

## Some customary practices are unfavourable to women's rights. These include female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and polygamy.

## *Violence against women*

Violence against women is a reality in Burkina Faso. Although it is difficult to find reliable statistics, studies suggest that thousands of women and girls are victims of multiple forms of violence. Women may resign themselves to the fact of violence. In fact, a study found that 43.5% of women find such violence legitimate compared to 34.1% of men. Almost half (44%) of Burkinabe women reported that it was “normal” to be beaten. Women are beaten by some husbands, sometimes under the influence of alcohol, on the pretext that they have burned a meal, have argued, or left the house without the husband's permission.

## *Opportunities for women to express themselves publicly*

## Socio-cultural restrictions do not allow women to express their opinions freely. Girls are often told that a “well-trained” woman does not speak in public, but lowers her gaze and tone.

## Some women do manage to make themselves heard, and are listened to attentively. But women in villages are generally not among them.

*Constraints related to climate change*

Like other countries in the world, Burkina Faso faces the challenges of climate change, including deforestation, drought, floods, severe temperature variations, and soil erosion and degradation. Because these threaten the agricultural sector, they aggravate poverty in rural areas.

The ability of rural women in Burkina Faso to adapt to these changes is limited. They are therefore the most exposed to the consequences of climate change.

*Organizations supporting rural women in Burkina Faso*

## For several decades, feminist organizations have been committed to the cause of women in general and rural women in particular in Burkina Faso.

1. Association d’Appui et d’Eveil Pugsada (ADEP) contact : 25 37 37 11
2. Réseau d’appui à la citoyenneté des femmes rurales d’Afrique d’ouest et du Tchad (RESACIFROAT)
3. Coalition Burkinabè pour les Droits de la Femme (CBDF) Contact : 25 36 46 27

This coalition is composed of 15 organizations, including:

* Femmes, droits, et développement en Afrique (WILDAF), contact : 25 30 64 15
* L’Association Burkinabè pour la Survie de l’Enfance (ABSE)
* L’association Nationale d’Action Rurale (ANAR)
* L’Association des femmes élues du Burkina (AFEB)
* L’Association des Femmes Juristes du Burkina (AJF/BF) Contact : 25 36 15 56
* L’Association des Veuves et Orphelins du Burkina (AVOB)

## Acknowledgements

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