

# Eliminating child marriage in Burkina Faso: A plan for protection, empowerment and community action



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



## Fast Facts

**Country:** Burkina Faso

**Duration:** May 2008 to August 2011

**Implementing UN Agencies:** UNFPA; UNICEF

**Other Implementing Partners:** Population Council; Ministry of Social Affairs and National Solidarity

**Budget:** \$1,645,312.90

**Key Words:** Early marriage; gender equality; education; health

## BACKGROUND

Although the Government had ratified laws to prevent discrimination against women and girls, traditional practices and beliefs, such as early child marriage, continued to persist with significant consequences for young girls and their families. Under traditional Burkinabé law, girls were encouraged to get married before the age of 17, which they often did. Thereafter, they faced further challenges since marriage often meant the end of schooling and any hope for professional and skills development – the very assets they needed to break out of a cycle of poverty. Under great pressure to bear children, more than half of those married ended up having children at a very young age.

With inadequate access to healthcare, early childrearing posed significant health risks to adolescent mothers and their children. Meanwhile, among those married, an estimated 36 per cent were in polygamous marriages. Young girls in polygamous relationships were more likely to contract sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV. The combination of these factors and their cumulative impact on educational, legal, health and economic indicators contributed to high levels of human insecurity among married women and those they cared for in Burkina Faso.

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of the project was to increase the human security of adolescent girls – who were married or were at-risk of an early marriage – living in 24 small and medium-sized villages within five regions. Through an integrated and multi-sectoral approach that sought to improve their education, health and social status, the project aimed (i) to engage with over 100 local community leaders to gain their support in mobilizing the social and political will to enforce laws respecting human rights, including those of women;

(ii) to give 50 per cent of girls the opportunity to stay in school and to access economic resources; (iii) to mitigate the negative impacts of early marriage for 50 per cent of married adolescent girls through a peer education programme, vocational trainings and access to healthcare in 24 locations; and (iv) to improve maternal and child health services among both married and unmarried adolescents as well as women living in the target villages.

### BENEFICIARIES

The direct beneficiaries of the project were single and unmarried adolescent girls who were both in and out of school. This included the most vulnerable

adolescent girls aged between 12 and 19 living in the 24 villages. Married girls were expected to further benefit from improved reproductive health services,



including pre- and post-natal care; increased access to information; and greater social capital through vocational and life-skills training programmes.

## NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

(i) By mobilizing community leaders, the project successfully created an enabling environment for defending the rights of women and adolescent girls. Small networks of community leaders were established and offered training and advocacy skills. To maximize the impact of these networks, partnerships were also formed with community radio and television stations and art troupes to produce programmes and commercials on early marriage and its potentially negative consequences. Through these partnerships, the project held 94 film screenings, 140 drama forums, 58 radio plays, and 46 thematic musical performances, which ultimately reached more than 200,000 people.

(ii) The project managed to support nearly 500 adolescent girls who were at-risk of early marriage through continued education and employment skills training, which allowed them to stay in school and improve their employment prospects. In addition to a scholarship programme that covered educational costs,

Indirectly, children of young married mothers, alongside their husbands and in-laws were also beneficiaries of the project.

the project established 13 basic literacy centres and 13 basic training facilities in order to reach a broader group of adolescent women, and to introduce life-skills and employment training programmes beyond what traditional education would have offered them. Courses organized through the centres drew widespread attention from officials who subsequently suggested that the activities should be offered more broadly.

(iii) For young married women the project established a support network that comprised 144 'mother educators', vocational training opportunities and improved healthcare access in the 24 villages. In collaboration with local associations, mother educators carried out a host of community mobilization activities including 967 educational talks, 28 advocacy meetings and 671 home visits, reaching more than 50,000 people.

## LESSONS LEARNED

The project highlighted the necessity of an integrated, multi-sectoral and multi-actor approach to addressing the negative consequences of child marriage and gender inequality on women, development and poverty reduction. Moreover, the project underlined the various elements contributing to child marriage and brought together the relevant Government agencies as well as local community leaders whose participation was indispensable in appropriately and

effectively communicating on this sensitive topic. By working closely with communities; garnering support from the relevant community leaders and Government agencies; and addressing the multiple dimensions of insecurity caused by early child marriage, the project created the space for advancing the structural and behavioural changes needed to advance the rights of women and girls in the 24 villages.