



DEPRIVED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

NAMENTENGA, BURKINA FASO



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Young girls helping with household chores

Executive Summary

The adult literacy rates in Burkina Faso are among the lowest in the world: only 22% of people aged 15 and older can read and write (this is just above the lowest scoring country Mali). The percentage of women who can read and write constitutes a meagre 52% of the male literate population [UNDP 2006]. Net enrolment rates are low, even compared to African averages. In 2006, only 47% of children of primary school age were enrolled in school, with even lower rates in many rural areas [MEBA BF 2006].

Research was conducted in Namentenga, northeast Burkina, in December 2006 and January 2007. Only 38% of the region is considered arable. As in the rest of the country, agricultural production is mainly subsistence oriented and the maximisation of food security is the major objective. This province was selected because in 2006 it had a net primary enrolment of only 34%. Data was collected in the villages Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin. Both villages have had their own primary school since the 1980s. Girls are significantly outnumbered by boys in school, although their numbers are rising [MEBA BF Direction Provinciale 2006]. A total of 497 primary school teachers work in the province, of which 133 are female. This results in a primary teacher-pupil ratio of 1:49.

The most recent figures show that performance in primary school exams of pupils in Tougouri district is low compared to the other departments in the province, with only 56% of pupils obtaining the primary school certificate. In 2005, only 8% of primary school leavers were considered at the level to continue onto secondary school (*entrée en sixieme*). In 2006, this was 12% [*idem*].

Preconceptions

In policy literature on Burkina Faso, as well as in informal conversations with local people and government officials, “poverty” and “ignorance” were brought up as main explanations for low enrolment figures. Ignorance, in this context, seems to refer to a lack of awareness of the benefits of education. High incidence of household poverty results in an inability or reluctance to bear the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of education. Child labour is mentioned infrequently as a reason, which is surprising as Burkina Faso has one of the highest percentages of working children in the world.

Traditional culture and assumed antagonistic feelings towards modernisation (western influences) play an important role in the education debate in Burkina. The country has been characterised as a place where “tradition and custom are deep-rooted, often for sound social and economic reasons”, and that, “for many rural people, schooling poses a clear and present threat to social stability, particularly the education of girls” [The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003]. Furthermore, the fact that formal education is still often considered a Christian institution could have a negative effect on enrolment of Muslim and animist children [Yaro 1995]. In addition, Structural Adjustment Programmes, implemented since the 1990s, have seriously reduced employment opportunities, and primary education would have lost some of its appeal due to the bleak employment prospects.

There is little data on these supposed ideas, and thus this study aims to provide clarity on the positive and negative ideas of formal education on a local level, and the effects they may have on enrolment figures.

Parental beliefs

Economic research suggests that in Burkina Faso, private financial returns to primary education are very low, but that returns to secondary and tertiary education are considerably higher [Kazianga 2004].¹ This section presents a summary of the perceived benefits of and returns on education, and their effect on enrolment.

Economic and intrinsic gains

Parents, both with and without children in school, explained how they feel that education awakens children and teaches them to express themselves clearly. Many remarks pertained to this sentiment. More significantly though, the emphasis was put on how education can and should lead to a formal job with a monthly salary, otherwise known as a Nasara job². A woman during a group interview explained how they send their children to school to learn how to read and write. She continued: “The child becomes intelligent and he can be a good farmer and be good at rearing animals. But we want that the children find work as nurse, teacher or customs official. Because it does not rain, if the children get a job, they will help the family.”

People were evidently aware of the small chance children have at actually obtaining a Nasara job, and therefore tried to also be positive about other outcomes (such as literacy), but it was nevertheless clear that the benefits of education are associated more with modern society and less with farming. In fact, many parents see education as a way out of the current lifestyle and traditional occupation of agriculture. Poor harvests and unreliable rainfall over the last years were frequently brought up as a reason to invest in formal education for a child. A father commented: “The importance of education encourages me. That they will find work and help their parents. Because farming does not give a lot anymore and the cows are dying.”

These cases suggest that the belief, “they do not know that school can help them”³, might be a simplified explanation for the low enrolment in the area. Negative experiences with the returns on education are more likely to play a role.

The emphasis on attaining a Nasara job has had an unfortunate effect on primary school enrolment numbers. Success stories have been a motivation, but personal observations have taught them that few children are actually successful (even after completing secondary school). Even though most villagers also acknowledge the intrinsic value to education (literacy and numeracy), this cannot compensate the investments made (indirect, direct and opportunity costs).

¹ Please note that in this study, only returns from wage labour are included and that returns from education in self-employed labour are excluded.

² The land of the Nasaras (Nasaratenga) is sometimes translated as “the West” (land of the Whites), but also used locally to refer to modern, urban places in general. A Nasara job is thus a term that refers to a white-collared job.

³ Explanation given by the AME president in Dabonsmoree for low education figures in her village.

The value of primary education

Finding a Nasara job is locally considered the main purpose of education. However, only about 5% of Burkinabe people work in wage-paid jobs, which is well below the percentage of people with a formal education [UNDP 2006]. Also, in Burkina, finding formal work usually requires at least a secondary education, which is only attained by a small minority of rural Burkinabe [Kazianga 2004].

Most informants were well aware of this situation, based on experiences within the own household and neighbourhoods. In both villages, primary schools had opened in the early 1980s and the first village-educated pupils are now reaching their thirties. Balances on the benefits of education are being drawn up in the communities. Their own estimates indicate that a small 20% of their age-mates, who completed primary school, have found a formal job. The remainder have migrated to other cities or countries, or have returned to the village to farm.

The popular discourse on education among the largely illiterate research population distinguished between “those who fail” and “those who succeed”. The only way to be included in the latter group is to find a Nasara job; only in this way are financial returns perceived to be significant and investments justified. Where there is disappointment there is “failure”; a father commented: “It is discouraging that you can send your children to school and at the end you do not benefit.”

The local criteria to measure success evidently differ from those used in international objectives such as the Millennium Goals, which focus on the completion of Primary School. Benefits attributed, by respondents, to the completion of only primary school were minimal. People, who have completed primary school, or even Junior Secondary School, are still locally regarded as “failures”.

So, sending a child to school is risky in the eyes of many illiterate parents in Dabonmoree and Toyogdin. They hope that the child will “go far”, get the Nasara job and help the family financially. They fear, however, that the child will either drop out after primary or during secondary school, due to low marks or money problems, caused by unreliable rainfall, death or disease in the family.⁴ Because little value is attributed to completing only primary school, assumed and real barriers at the secondary level have a negative consequence on the enrolment in primary school.

Additional risks

The belief that people with some schooling will be less motivated to work on the family farm makes sending a child to school extra risky, especially because prospects of “succeeding” are uncertain. A number of elders said about their co-villagers, who had not found formal employment: “They are at the middle, they don’t do the books and they don’t farm.”

Emphasis was on the lack of will rather than on the lack of farming skills, and it was acknowledged that all children work on the farm when growing up, after school and during holidays. According to most, the critical defining line was primary school. Those with only primary school would still be

⁴ Research has been carried out to determine whether low enrolment in Burkina can be explained by low private returns on education. This study confirms the idea of parents that returns on primary education, especially in the public sector, are low. Returns on secondary and tertiary education, however, were found to be relatively high and primary education is only useful if the child is able to subsequently complete at least secondary school. Kazianga explains: “As a consequence, parents will enrol their children if opportunity and direct schooling costs up to the completion of at least secondary school are affordable.” [Kazianga 2004]

willing to farm “because they have not been away to rest”. Those who had been attending secondary school in town for several years were especially at risk because they “had a rest, and now they are not strong anymore.”

Benefits for girls

In both villages, girls were severely underrepresented, which suggests gender-based differences in the perceived benefits of formal education. However, likely as a consequence of the “success” of some women and of the presence of female teachers (in Dabonsmoree), attaining a formal job is also considered a possibility for girls. Furthermore, schoolgirls express similar goals as boys, and for girls too, completion of primary school alone is not satisfactory for “success”.

The gender-based differences start coming to light when considering obstacles for girls at secondary level. Little investment is made in the primary education of girls, since so few girls succeed in secondary schooling. Statistics show that only 30% of secondary school girls pass the first year. Particularly mothers argued that this is due to the work girls perform at home after school, giving them less time for revision. According to parents, the risk of pregnancy of secondary school girls further diminishes chances of “going far” in education, a risk to which especially poor school girls are exposed. In addition, it was repeatedly stated that educating a girl increases the chance that she will refuse an arranged marriage, which is for the father often shameful as well as a financial loss.

Among the Fulani

Children of Fulani origin are strongly underrepresented in the village schools. The Fulani are an originally pastoralist ethnic group who are becoming gradually more sedentary in Burkina Faso and increasingly engage in more intensive farming. Most Fulani people in Dabonsmoree have been present in the area for decades, but they continue to be the minority.

Interviews showed that ideas about benefits were not present to the same degree among all Fulani. Some fathers acknowledged that they had never considered the option to send a child to school. A Fulani mother of two young sons: “I do not want my sons to leave me behind. They need to look after our animals anyway, so they do not have to leave.” This suggests that for some Fulani people, education as an alternative to the traditional occupation is not as important as among the Mossi.

Religious and traditional influences on perceptions

The traditional religion of animism, which exists in different manifestations throughout Africa, is based on worshipping ancestors and the ancestral ground and is closely related to farming. A growing minority in the area is Christian or Muslim, but many animist traditions continue to be practiced by all. The strong animist traditions in the area are often believed to slow down development processes in general and a turn to formal education in particular.

Formal education is normally considered a Christian institution (missionaries opened the first schools in the country), but neither Islam nor animism are factors that negatively influence enrolment. It was observed how literacy is frequently used in securing traditions. Some fathers stated that a literate person in the house was practical from a religious (animist) point of view, because the traditional rituals and sacrifices could be written down on paper and stored for future generations (even by those who had converted to Christianity or Islam).

It has been suggested that the existence of Quranic teachers (marabouts), may explain low education figures in Muslim parts of Burkina Faso [Yaro 1995:682; Hagberg 2002], because Muslim parents often consider Quranic education more relevant for their children. Among the Mossi population in Dabonmoree, only a few children had been sent to Quranic schools; among the Fulani people it appeared more common. For some, the Quranic school is an alternative to formal education, with benefits that are closer to “the own world” of agricultural village life.

Motivation and barriers to education

Local ideas about the purpose and benefits of a formal education, and the ways in which they can influence enrolment, were presented above. However, even parents who recognise the benefits may not enrol all their children, because there are other practical, financial, cultural and social factors with a restraining impact.

Enrolment procedures

The way in which enrolment is announced and organised can greatly influence the numbers of pupils. In Burkina Faso, enrolment for class I normally takes place at least once a year. In Dabonmoree, however, there is only one possibility for enrolment every two years, due to a shift from a double stream system (six classes for three teachers and three classrooms) to the old system of a three-class school (with two age groups in one class).

In contrast to observations made in Ghana, where no age limit for admission into Primary I was implemented [De Lange 2007], head teachers adhered to an age limit of about nine, which is two years above the normal age of entry into primary school. Age, however, was often estimated, because most children lack birth certificates.

The strict adherence to the age limit and the fact that new pupils are admitted only once a year (at the beginning, and not during the school year), or even only once every two years, means that there is a relatively short period of time (a few weeks) in a child’s life that is crucial for its future in terms of education. This perhaps constitutes an important aspect behind non-enrolment: if for whatever reasons, parents during those crucial weeks are occupied with different concerns or are not in a position to register, the child will be out of school for the next two years, and possibly for the rest of his or her life.

Child agency

We ask our parents why we cannot go to school, but they tell us that we have passed the age of enrolment and they also say that there is no money and that there is work to be done. (Harpoka, 11, not in school)

The age limitation for enrolment restricts the agency of children. 7 or 8 year-old children are much less likely to express a desire to go to school or to enrol themselves, as was sometimes observed in Northern Ghana among older children [De Lange 2007]. And as the quote above illustrates, as soon as children have passed the age of enrolment, parents have an additional argument to withhold them from school.

Children are, however, as they grow older, increasingly influential to their own attendance and continued enrolment. Most dropouts encountered had been the child's own decision. They mentioned oppressive school environments (punishments, bullying etc), loneliness due to a lack of peers, and distracting alternatives (such as playing with friends in the bush). When children grow up, parental control diminishes, and continued enrolment thus greatly relies on the child's own desire for education.

Costs of education

A 1997 study showed that only 19% of poor children were in school, compared to a national average of 35% [Hagberg 2002]. It is believed that this is mainly due to the cost involved in schooling (direct costs), as well as the income being missed out on when children are in school (opportunity costs).

Primary school comes with barely any costs in Burkina Faso. There are no tuition fees and no uniform requirements. In the research villages, writing utensils are supplied by the NGO Plan. The only fee demanded from parents is the PTA fee, which is used for school maintenance and teachers' travel costs. Yet for the poorest households even very low costs can pose a barrier.

Much more significant are the secondary school costs, including tuition fees. For children in the research villages, and other rural areas, going to secondary school involves many additional costs for accommodation, food, schoolbooks, utensils, clothing and transport.

From data collected during the fieldwork, it appears that the poverty argument is often used, and probably for good reasons, but it may also be an easy argument to resort to and thus may even be used by families that by local standards are not poor at all. The incapacity to bear costs of primary education is thus the reason for non-enrolment in some - but not all - cases. It appeared that, in those families with no children in school, other factors are at play as well, such as child work, lack of confidence in the returns on education and plans to marry-off a daughter.

The high secondary school costs do not only delay school careers or cut them short. The data also shows that the expected high costs of secondary school make people hesitant to send one, let alone several, of their children to primary school. This is due to the low value attributed to obtaining a primary education alone. The willingness to enrol a child, and pay the costs, hence appears to depend largely on expected returns, rather than on a social norm, automatism or an idea that a child has the right to be educated. And to attain satisfying returns, people believe that primary education alone is not sufficient.

Child work

Burkina Faso has high numbers of children performing economic and domestic activities; 65% of children between 7 and 14 are engaged in economic activities, compared to an African average of 32%.⁵ As in most African countries [Andvig 2001; Kielland & Tovo 2006:57], work performed by children in the research villages is family controlled: on family farms, in the household or, in some cases, in a small family business. The few children working in a business (such as shops or as bicycle mechanics) work for their fathers or uncles and are normally unpaid.

⁵ Data available from <http://www.ilo.org/ipecc/index.htm>

Those children who work as paid labourers usually (temporarily) leave their home village. In the research villages, this concerned mainly boys aged 11 and older who travelled to other parts of Burkina (provinces Gnagna/Kompienga/Tapoa) to work in agriculture. The decision to leave is mostly made by children themselves, rather than by parents. In a study in a neighbouring area it turned out that children sometimes return to school after their migration and that their temporary migration does not necessarily mean an end to their education [De Lange 2006]. It is not always clear if labour migration plans cause dropout, but in some cases it was observed to have clearly prevented them from completing their secondary education. In this respect, the practice can be seen to have a negative effect on primary enrolment as well, as (perceived) barriers at the secondary level and low confidence in the completion of a secondary education make people less motivated to invest in primary education.

After about the age of six, girls' responsibilities in the household gradually increase. They sweep the yard, fetch buckets of water from the communal tap, well, pump or lake and do the dishes and laundry. They pound grains with large wooden pestles in stone mortars, and assist their mothers with cooking. They collect firewood in the bush, and, in the rainy season, women and girls also gather sheanuts (noix de karite). Time records collected from girls living in several compounds, however, show that they are not overloaded with work, as there are usually many girls to share the work with. However, due to inferior resources, distant wells and pumps, and lack of electricity, their chores are extremely time-consuming, and thus an obstacle to their education. It was commonly stated by women, that they needed one girl with them, during the day.

We also encountered a considerable number of girls who had worked in households elsewhere, as well as households with daughters currently working elsewhere. Yet in contrast to the labour migration observed among boys, this normally concerned family arranged placements, rather than paid labour. None of the girls that we encountered involved in this tradition attended school.

Boys and girls are expected and needed to work on the family fields, which produce food for family consumption. Initially children's tasks are mainly directed at developing skills, but boys and girls of ages ten and above are expected to contribute considerably. Teaching farming skills is seen as the responsibility of the family, rather than of the school. Elders in Dabonsoree stated: "We teach our children how to farm. It is like a school, but we do it." Farming work was barely mentioned as an obstacle to school - children perform the tasks in their free time, and schools mostly accommodate the demand for extra hands during harvest season. A similar situation exists for herding activities. Only among the Fulani, who consider herding a valuable and respectable way of life, is it considered a reason for children to not go to school.

PTA and community involvement

Organisations like the Parents Teachers Association (PTA) and school boards are crucial instruments for communities to monitor and influence the access and quality of schools. In Burkina Faso, every school is required to have an APE committee (Association Parents Elèves) as well as an AME (Association Mères Educatrices) committee. The APE committee, which is mainly formed by the fathers, organises meetings with the parents of the pupils, in collaboration with the teachers. The AME is especially for women, (pupils' mothers and female caretakers) and was introduced to involve women in the schools management as well.

In the research villages, the associations meet regularly, although less during the rainy season when there is a lot of farm work to be done. Parents commented that the APE is mainly concerned with collecting money to pay for school maintenance etc. The AME is considered to be responsible for arranging the school lunches. Both associations are involved with recruitment; they visit households, and organise sensitisation discussions in the villages.

The parents complained about the quality of the education available to them. The main complaint was that pupils can graduate from primary school, and still be illiterate; they blame this on a lack of teachers, lack of replacements during maternity leave or illness, the multi-grade system, and frequent teacher absences (when, for example, teachers are called away for official government duties). However, the APE and AME members explained that due to unequal power relations and dependency, they don't dare to complain about the teachers as they may choose to leave the village altogether or will treat their child differently.

The illiterate parent committee leaders have little means to really change the behaviour of the teachers without access to official channels. For most pupils' parents, the committees entail collecting money or talking about it, and not much else. Also, in villages with many families without children in school, school associations only reach the minority with children in school, instead of the entire community. This means, for example, that Fulani people, and their opinions, are somewhat excluded.

Conclusion

The low education figures in Burkina can be, to a degree, attributed to a lack of schools, especially in remote areas. However, it has also become clear that, even in villages where a primary school is available, many children are not enrolled or drop out. This study aimed to provide information that can help to increase the demand for primary education on a local level. It has done so by looking at the perceptions of education as well as other factors, on a community and household level, which influence enrolment.

The main findings are:

- Even the poorest and the most remote households were aware of the benefits of education.
- Attaining a formal job is the main perceived goal and benefit of education - a formal, governmental job ensures a salary, and thus makes life easier for the graduate and its family. Education is mainly seen as a means to an end, whereby the end result is the acquisition of a "white-collar job" (for example, teacher, soldier or nurse).
- Very few villagers commented on economic gains to be had from education for farmers.
- Primary education alone (or even lower secondary) is not given much credit. In fact, any student who has not been able to find a Nasara job (white-collar) is generally considered a "failure".
- The slim chances of actually attaining a Nasara job withhold many people from enrolling their children in the first place. In addition, schooling is believed to make children less apt at farming - "Ending in the middle, without a job, and without the motivation to farm" is considered the worst-case scenario.

- Particular enrolment procedures in combination with the adherence to an enrolment age limit, means that decisions about education must be made in a timely fashion, or else a child's education and future may be permanently affected.
- The enrolment age limit restricts child agency (once children are old enough to decide for themselves, they are no longer allowed to enrol).
- The lack of credit given to primary education alone, and the costs associated with secondary school, results in parents enrolling only the number of children they believe they are able to support all the way throughout secondary education. For the poorest families, this may mean no child at all. Addressing other hurdles at the secondary level (such as teenage pregnancies, labour migration of boys and girls, arranged marriages etc) may help with increasing higher primary enrolment.
- In general, the farm work performed by school-going children is done in their free time, and is a positive part of their overall development; it does not prove to be an obstacle to their education.
- Cattle herders, however, form a large part of the out-of-school children. It appeared that even when adult labourers are available, this type of work is preferably assigned to children.
- The practice of girls moving in with relatives to perform household chores is a direct obstacle to their education.
- Educating girls is believed to make them more likely to refuse an arranged marriage. The decision to send a girl to school often means that she will not be married off.
- The low enrolment numbers of the Fulani can be partly explained by their continued faith in their pastoral way of life, and their lack of a desire for a Nasara job.
- Parents consider the schools of inferior quality, mainly due to teacher absences and poor infrastructure. Control mechanisms are weak - parent associations are in a poor position to exert power over teachers and demand increased hours.
- Parent associations do not reach the whole community; households without any children in school are particularly excluded.

In this context of poor quality education and poor formal job prospects, sending a child to school means taking certain risks and bearing both direct- and opportunity costs. The prospect of costs at the secondary level can also decrease primary enrolment, because little value is attributed to only primary school. Opportunity costs, in the context of girl-child education, do not only refer to loss of income or food production, but also to the potential loss of prospective services or social securities because an educated girl is highly likely to refuse an arranged marriage.

In many cases, these obstacles can be overcome by changing certain traditions, but people need to have good reasons for this. As long as people see the attainment of a white-collar job as the only significant outcome of a formal education, and as long as these jobs remain scarce, a change in perspective and action is unlikely to happen on a larger scale.

As long as secondary education in Burkina Faso continues to bring with it additional costs, and as long as other obstacles persist in causing high dropout rates at the secondary level, primary education must start to be valued in its own right, and thus its quality must be improved. This is only possible if primary education begins to be recognised as beneficial to other occupations, other than white-collar jobs. This could be done, for example, by creating and promoting opportunities

for primary graduates in self-employment and farming. Moreover, it was observed that the commercial farming activities of certain ambitious dropouts slightly changes perceptions about education. Also, the message in sensitisation campaigns should no longer focus on white-collar jobs. There seems to be a great potential in the willingness of illiterate parents to help improve the quality of their local schools. Increasing the numbers of children who graduate from primary school and improving their overall results, may come about if the community (through PTAs and other committees) is given more power over school management, curriculum and employment. The community is presently unable to hold teachers accountable for their numbers of teaching hours and methods of punishment due to unequal power relations. Also, promoting child-friendly teaching methods appeared important to parents during the fieldwork, especially in the lowest classes, as parents are often not interested or unable to force their children to attend school, and an unfriendly school environment motivates absences rather than attendance.

Introduction

International treaties have recognised free and compulsory elementary education as a human right for more than half a century now, and especially during the last decade the drive for universal (primary) education has gained momentum. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon in 2000, set 2015 as the year in which universal primary education (MDG-2) and gender equality (MDG-3) are to be achieved. Despite such efforts and their echoes in national policies, many children are still out of school. The mid-term results for MDG-2 suggest that big strides have been made in terms of universal enrolment, but also give reasons for concern.

The overall statistics are merely averages and tend to hide what happens to the most vulnerable and most excluded children. Various forms of deprivation continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 200 million. Successes in extending primary education have been unmistakable, but actual school attendance in most regions is still dramatically low, despite high gross enrolment figures (and fairly lower net enrolment figures).

Table 1: Out-of-School Children (millions)

	1998	2002	% Girls
Sub-Sahara Africa	45	40	55
Arab States	8	7	58
Eastern Asia	8	15	58
South & West Asia	36	30	59
Latin America	4	2	45
North America & Europe	2	2	53
Central & Eastern Europe	3	3	55

Source: UNESCO [UNESCO 2005:48]

Table 1 shows that the number of out-of-school children has generally decreased since 1998; unfortunately, the progress is slow and too many children have not yet found their way into the education system.

The current policy focus on education is not only based on the adherence to the “child’s right to develop its personality, talents, physical and mental abilities to its fullest potential” (CRC article 29). Education is also generally considered a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour and in promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development [UNICEF 2006]. Both approaches largely draw their attention away from the perspectives of parents and children themselves. Efforts have been directed instead towards sensitising uneducated masses of their “right to education” and the “importance of education”. Yet not much is known about how exactly uneducated people perceive education as a tool (or impediment) for their own family’s subsistence or advancement. What future

expectations and aspirations do parents have for their children, or children for themselves? How does (basic) education feature in these ideas? And does the quality of the education on offer influence such ideas? What are the perceived obstacles preventing access to education, and which changes should be made to remove these obstacles?

Repeatedly, there has been a summing up of relevant factors that form major barriers for achieving basic education for all. Sarkar [2004:12] has classified these factors into four groups:

- *Accessibility* - the physical and social distance to school, discrimination, the burden of household chores, and the burden faced by children combining work and schooling
- *Affordability* - direct, indirect, and opportunity costs
- *Quality* - the lack of infrastructure, facilities, materials, and support systems for children, inadequate conditions of work for teachers, low status of teachers, lack of adequate training, aids and materials for teachers, and the lack of sensitivity of education authorities and teachers to the needs of children at risk
- *Relevance* - curriculum detached from local needs, values and the aspirations of children at risk, curriculum inadequate to prepare students for gainful skilled employment

Quality issues have become a central theme in the education debate over the last few years. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define the purpose of education [UNESCO 2004] and that quality can influence parents' choices to invest in education [Plan Netherlands 2006]. However, not much is known about the (lack of) intrinsic, social, cultural or economic benefits different parents and children may see in the education that is on offer to them, or in which way they feel school-attendance may influence their children's prospects. By collecting village case studies from seven developing countries, this study aimed to provide insights into local ideas about future expectations and aspirations of parents and children, and how (basic) education features in these ideas.

In periods of three to four months during 2006 and 2007, research was conducted in different areas of three South-Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) and four Sub-Saharan-African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries were selected on the basis of their enrolment and attendance data.

Figures for the selected regions for 2000-2005 show that in Sub-Saharan Africa only 61%, and in South Asia 74% [UNICEF 2007:105] of children of primary school age are enrolled. In certain countries within those regions figures are significantly lower. The selected countries, with the exception of Kenya, used to have adult literacy rates that were substantially below the average of developing countries, but have made substantial progress over the last decades. The exception is Kenya, where the youth literacy rates in 2004 were actually lower than in 1990. Table 2 shows that where the countries in Asia have done reasonably well (in Nepal, for example, female literacy increased from 27% in 1990 to 60% in 2004), the African countries have had mixed results. Burkina Faso still had, in the early years of this century, male and female youth literacy rates of only 25.5% and 14.0% respectively.

Table 2: Literacy in Selected Countries

	Adult & Youth Literacy				Share of Females in Illiteracy		Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate				Not enrolled (millions)
	1990		2002-4		1990	2002-4	1990		2002-4		2002-4
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	
Bangladesh	44.3	23.7	50.3	31.4	56	57	50.7	33.2	84.2	67.7	2.9
Nepal	47.4	14.0	62.7	34.9	63	65	67.0	27.3	80.6	60.1	0.9
Pakistan	49.3	20.1	61.7	35.2	62	63	62.5	30.6	74.8	53.9	8.1
Burkina			18.5	8.1					25.5	14.0	1.4
Ethiopia	37.6	19.8	49.2	33.8	57	57	51.5	34.1	63.0	51.8	5.7
Ghana	70.1	47.2	62.9	45.7	65	60	88.2	75.4			1.3
Kenya	80.9	60.8	77.7	70.2	68	58	92.9	86.7	79.8	80.0	2.0
Developing countries	75.9	57.9	83.2	69.5	63	64	85.8	75.8	85.0	88.7	

Aggregated from UNESCO [UNESCO 2005]

Access to the research areas was facilitated by local staff of Plan International and other NGOs, but they were not necessarily regions in which these NGOs worked. The long stay in each area, a minimum of three weeks, allowed the researcher to build up a relationship of trust and to distinguish official statements from reality.

This study was initiated to deepen the understanding of household and village level perception of education in rural areas, and to get an insight into the factors determining the continuation of non-enrolment and non-attendance despite the efforts made by governments and NGOs to facilitate education for everyone, including the poorest segments of society. A central, underlying theme is the perception of education in terms of relevance and quality by parents and children, and the way these perceptions influence decision-making with regard to school enrolment and attendance. The main question addressed is:

How does the perception, on household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or drop-out?

The research was qualitative in nature and the results cannot haphazardly be applied to any country at large. However, the research areas were selected in such a way that they covered the poorest families in the poorest areas where school-enrolment is low.

The research involved close contact with the various stakeholders, particularly with the parents and the children. Much attention was given to their perceptions, and thus to how their circumstances, ideas and experiences may explain non-enrolment, non-attendance and drop-out, or enrolment and attendance in the face of adversity. Such insights are needed in order to design education policies that respond well to the ideas and circumstances on a grass-roots level.

Country selection

Burkina Faso was selected as one of the seven research countries for several reasons. In the first place, net enrolment rates are low, even compared to African averages. In 2006, 47% of children of primary school age were enrolled in school, with even lower rates in many rural areas [MEBA BF 2006]. These low primary enrolment figures can partially be explained by the lack of schools, especially in remote rural areas. Addressing infrastructural and personal shortages, as the government and NGOs are currently doing, is indeed vital for realising the right to education for Burkinabe children. However, the reality in Burkina Faso also shows that even in areas where schools and teachers are present, many children are not enrolled in school or stop attending before they have completed primary school. This study on perceptions of and barriers to education on a local level helps to understand why this situation persists.

Burkina was an interesting option for this particular study as its adult literacy rates are among the lowest in the world: only 22% of people aged 15 and older can read and write (this is just above the lowest scoring country Mali). This allows us to collect interesting information on how illiterate people look at formal education for their children. The percentage of women who can read and write constitutes a meagre 52% of the male literate population [UNDP 2006]. Also, Burkina is often given as an example of a country where many people oppose modernising influences of education and have lost confidence in the returns of a formal education [Hagberg 2002; The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003; Kielland & Tovo 2006]. It therefore seemed appropriate for the broader discussion on education in sub-Saharan Africa to collect verification of such feelings through empirical field research.

The research was facilitated by the existing IREWOC contacts and experience in the country and Plan Burkina had already expressed an interest in a qualitative study on access and barriers to primary education in the country.

The province of Namentenga, in northeast Burkina, was chosen as the specific research area due to its low net primary enrolment of 34% in 2006 (versus 47% on a national level). Only some provinces in the Northern Sahel and the Eastern Region have lower scores. The fact that the NGO Plan Burkina has been involved in the province for almost 30 years also contributed to the choice for Namentenga, as it would allow taking into account the influences an international NGO can have on perceptions of education. Selecting this area was also done with the aim to provide information that could directly serve Plan in its interventions.

This report concerns a qualitative case study, in which official quantitative data was used to map and analyse the research setting. Data was collected during a two-month stay in Burkina Faso in December 2006 and January 2007. The researcher spent six weeks in the province of Namentenga, of which over 4 weeks in the research villages Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin. The research villages were selected in collaboration with the Plan staff in Boulsa (Namentenga's capital). It was decided to spend three weeks in the first village of Dabonsmoree and an additional short stay (4 days) in the village of Toyogdin. In the villages, data was gathered through individual interviews, focus group discussions, informal conversations and observations in the school and in the village.

Both villages were chosen on the basis of low numbers of children enrolled in school combined with a relatively large village size. Both villages have over 2000 inhabitants, but, respectively, just 100 and 150 children in school. In the eyes of the Plan staff this was particularly significant because both villages had produced “educational role models” in the past (a member of parliament and a female lawyer). In Toyogdin, low enrolment figures were furthermore remarkable as Plan had been intervening for over 15 years (in Dabonsmoree this had only been a few years). For these reasons, both villages were considered appropriate settings to discover attitudes, ideas and conditions that negatively influence school enrolment and that may be present, more or less, in other areas as well.

Outline of the report

Chapter 1 presents a general picture of the research country, history and current state of education. Some commonly given explanations for the low enrolment rates in the country are dealt with. The ways in which data was collected are discussed as well as the limitations that may have influenced the outcomes. An impression is given of the educational situation in the villages under study; how many children go to school and what parts of the community do they represent? The research question is formulated and specified for the research context, on the basis of this background.

In the subsequent chapters the collected findings are presented. Chapter 2 examines how adults and children in the research villages look at education; what do the (mainly illiterate) respondents believe formal education can do for them or their children? Views of children, parents, teachers and educated villagers are included.

Chapter 3 discusses the barriers to education. What factors explain why so few children in the area are enrolled in primary school and why certain groups (e.g. girls, Fulani) are particularly affected? In addition, the relation between the school and the community is addressed, including the question whether parents are in a position to exert control over the quality. Finally, in a concluding chapter, policy options are provided that help to make quality education a reality for more children in Burkina Faso.



Happy to be in school

Chapter 1

Background Information: context, methodology and location

1.1 Context

1.1.1 Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in West Africa with approximately 14 million inhabitants. Agriculture is the main source of income for 90% of its inhabitants, of which the majority farms for the family subsistence. Its current Human Development Index is among the lowest in the world with 0.342 [UNDP 2006]; only Mali, Sierra Leone and Niger have lower HDI's. Nevertheless, a positive trend can be discerned, as in 1975, Burkina Faso's HDI was only 0.256. Life expectancy at birth is 47.9 years. This is a relatively better score, which may be partly due to the fact that HIV infection level is relatively low at around 4% [UNICEF 2005; CIA 2007].

Until the arrival of the French in the late 19th century, the area was dominated by the empire-building Mossi people. The colony of "Upper Volta" was established in 1919, but only took its present borders in 1947. Upper Volta gained independence in 1960 and the name was changed to Burkina Faso during the 1980s revolutionary regime. The current President, Blaise Compaore, came to power during a coup in 1987 and was later democratically elected. Even though there has recently been some unrest, mainly between army and the police, the country is relatively stable.

Since 1991 Burkina Faso has been engaged in structural adjustment programmes (SAP). In 2000, Burkina adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (which included the formulation of the objective 'Education For All') in the context of the introduction of the enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) and it was one of the first countries to benefit from debt-relief programmes.

Estimates on adult literacy rates (> 15 years) vary from 13% between 2000-2004 [UNICEF 2005], to 22% for 2004 [UNDP 2006] and 26.6% for 2003 [CIA 2007]. Among males, literacy levels are more than twice as high as among women; respectively 19% versus 8% [UNICEF 2005]. In 2004, primary school net enrolment was 31 for girls and 42 for boys. Attendance figures were lower at respectively 25% and 29% and approximately 10% of children of secondary school age attended secondary school (idem).

Traditional African, Islamic, as well as Christian religions are practiced throughout the country, with larger Muslim populations in the North. Climate ranges from arid in the north to semi-humid in the southwest. Rainfall varies greatly from year to year and soils are often poor [Breusers 1998:3-5]. Cotton, which is mainly grown on farms in the southern half of the country, is the country's main

export product. Conditions for agriculture are far from favourable in most parts of the country. Temporary and permanent migration to neighbouring countries (such as Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Niger) has been an important feature of socio-economic life in Burkina since colonial times [Breusers 1998].

1.1.2 Namentenga

The province of Namentenga is situated in the North-Central Region (together with the provinces of Sanmentenga and Bam). The region is situated in the most southern part of the Sahel. Rainfall is between 500-600 mm. Only 38% of the region is considered arable.

Millet is the main food crop. As in the rest of the country, agricultural production is mainly subsistence oriented and the maximization of food security is the major objective. Grain shortages (and subsequent periodic hunger) are common. Hunger has been a problem for decades and is by no means a new phenomenon. Today's crisis is considered exceptionally serious because of the environmental degradation that is now occurring [Breusers 1998].

The dominant ethnic group in Namentenga are the Mossi people. The Mossi are of Mande origin, who originally come from Gambaga in Northern Ghana and came to what is now Burkina Faso between the 13th and 15th century. In addition, pastoralist Fulani people, Gourmantche from adjoining Eastern Burkina, and some other ethnic minorities inhabit the province.

The population of Namentenga has been described as "conservatist" [Maclure 1994] and "traditionalist" (Plan staff members in Ouagadougou, December 2006). Compared to other regions, Christian and Muslim influences are relatively small and animism is the major religion. Richard Maclure, a former Plan director and academic scholar wrote about the Namentenga area in the 1990s and remarked on its conservatism (idem: 270):

Given the fragility of their natural environment and the limits of knowledge which constrict people's sense of control over secular events, a powerful strain of conservatism pervades a society whose structures are demonstrably functional in its subsistence context. Conservatism as used here is not defined as simply attitudinal, a collective expression of individual sentiments. Rather, the essential conservatism of a society is inherent in its structures and conventional processes.

But Maclure also observed, in the early nineties, that, as a result of return migration and monetization "a process of profound social change is underway in Mossi culture, accompanied by tensions and divisions." He signalled a decline of older kinsmen, and greater autonomy for younger kinsmen - a few villagers have access to financial capital (as government officials or as private entrepreneurs) - as well as uneven relationships between village societies and the (still largely) alien "structures of government administration" (idem: 271).

1.1.3 Educational history

Not much is known about traditional forms of education that existed in the country before the French colonisation and arrival of Christian missionaries around 1900, but it can be assumed that the first literacy education was introduced by Muslims several centuries ago. With Islamic expansion in West-Africa, rural institutions were set up, combining elementary Islamic education and farm

production [Saul 1984:71]. Christian missionaries introduced the first western style schools. The French colonisers invested only marginally in formal education in the then Upper Volta, because the area was mainly considered a labour reserve for the richer, coastal areas of Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire. In order to educate local administrators, the French focussed on chiefs' sons. In contrast to the colonisers, missionaries also endeavoured to educate girls, because they had a different interest, namely educating good Christians.

At independence in 1960, school enrolment rates were consistently low at 6.7%. Between 1960 and 1966, there was a growth to 10.5% (from 51.000 to 98.000). The subsequent stagnation in growth has been attributed to the cutting in public spending by the government (so-called "self-adjustment") and the government's decision to stop subsidising Christian institutions [Kobiano 2006:61].

Yet since independence the focus has been on more than just the numbers of children in school. Since then, several policies have been undertaken to address problems in terms of quality teaching as well as relevance of curriculum. Just after independence, concerns were expressed for a curriculum reform that would do justice to the new geographical, historical and cultural reality. The resulting policy document, however, was never implemented because it was considered too superficial. In the 1960s, the idea that youths should obtain more knowledge about agriculture in order to increase production became popular. From 1967 onwards so-called CERs (Centres d'Education Rurales or "rural education centres") were opened, where 3 year programmes were taught in agricultural education. The initiative, however, was abandoned when an evaluation in 1970 indicated that the programme had only reached 20% of the 136.000 youths who were targeted [Kobiano 2006:46].

From 1971 to 1980 number of children who started going to school increased slowly, which was at least partly due to external funding. Half way through the 1980s there was another significant growth in enrolment numbers. As part of the revolutionary policies, between 1983 and 1987, 22.379 new classrooms were built (compared to 1884 between 1969 and 1983). An obligatory national service obliged people to teach in rural areas and many new teachers were recruited and employed after only a few months of training. Between 1982 and 1990, enrolment rates rose from 16% to 30%, yet a decline in quality of teaching is likely to have occurred due to the low qualification requirements for teachers [Kobiano 2006:45].

During the structural adjustment programmes (SAP) that started in the early 1990s, investments were made by international institutions to improve the supply of education (mainly by recruiting and educating teachers). Foreign debt negatively influenced educational outcomes yet it should be taken into account that Burkina's SAP programme was of the "second generation", in a period when international institutions started to recognise the harmful social effects of the adjustment programmes (idem). The simultaneous impoverishment and the decline in formal employment opportunities diminished the demand for education [Kazianga 2004]. Low attendance, low quality, and inadequate management schemes have characterised the situation since the nineties. Alternatives were formulated, of which the bisongo (pre-school), satellite schools (classes in remote areas) and non-formal basic education centres can be considered most significant. In 1996, a special action plan for girls was put in place by the government, with the aim to raise enrolment of girls, keep them in school and let them succeed. A special board for girls' education, Direction de la Promotion de l'Education des Filles (DPEF), was set up.

1.1.4 Education policies today: PDDEB

In 1996, the Burkinabe law made education compulsory for all children aged 6 to 16, provided that infrastructure, equipment, human resources and school rules allow it. Even in areas where schools exist, the law is not or only weakly enforced and in reality primary schooling is not entirely free, due to parent teacher association fees and costs for school utensils. Secondary schooling (for children aged roughly 13-19) is very expensive for peasants, with costs of well over 50 euros per year or more. The government acknowledges the ensuing conflict between formally adopted governmental regulations and the reality on the ground. It has been reported that children have been expelled from school for non-payment of school fees “despite the legal ban on expelling children before they reach the age of 16” (www.meba.gov.bf).

Very recently (in 2007), a new law was adopted to considerably reduce fees in secondary schools and to make (lower) secondary school free and compulsory. Allegedly, this law will initially only be applied in several regions of the country.

The educational policy for 2001-2010 is laid down in the PDDEB programme⁶, funded by several funding countries and institutions (e.g. the World Bank). The programme aims for an enrolment rate of 70% in 2010, with a focus on girls in rural areas, and an improvement in quality, relevance and efficiency of basic education through the education of teachers, supervising personnel, improvement of conditions in schools and a continuous supervision of schools. Every year the government now trains 2500-3000 teachers and builds about the same number of classrooms. In an effort to reduce costs for parents, a starter-pack with the required school utensils is now supplied for every primary schoolchild by the government and, in certain areas, by the NGO Plan. The so-called school fund is remitted by the government to schools to use for renovations to reduce the fees payable by parents; this is comparable to the capitation grant in Ghana [De Lange 2007].

The PDDEB is now entering its second phase, which means that the focus will shift from access to quality. The first phase has resulted in growing attendance of pupils, but teachers, policy makers and donors still see many problems. Teacher training has been reduced to only one year, of which almost half is an internship. In addition, despite the fact that the 2.500 teachers can normally be selected from a pool of 15.000-20.000 applicants, the ability level of teachers is generally considered to be insufficient. As the first pupils who went to school during PDDEB are now graduating from primary school, the lack of secondary schools, as well as jobs is becoming evident. Even though several efforts have been made regarding curriculum reform in the past, there is still a need for a more relevant curriculum. Policy makers speak of a need for “more capacity-based” education, but at the same time it is questionable whether this is possible with the current level of teaching staff and facilities.⁷

Several NGOs work beside, or with, the government in the field of formal and non-formal, public and private education. Plan International, which has been active in the country since 1976, is one of the major actors with interventions in seven provinces. Education is one of the four major programmes of this child-centred development organisation (next to health, water and sanitation,

⁶ PDDEB: Politique sectorielle de développement du système éducatif

⁷ Based on interviews with education officials, PDDEB donor countries and Plan International

and child rights.) Interventions are generally based on “a new budget policy” in which communities select, and manage their own projects.

A major education project in which Plan Burkina currently participates, together with several partners such as USAID, is the BRIGHT project (“Burkinabe response to improve girls’ chances to succeed”). The programme entails the construction of 132 schools and accompanying programmes in 10 provinces (including Namentenga), with the aim to improve access to and quality of education in Burkina, particularly for girls. The programme’s objective is to raise girls’ enrolment figures in the programme areas and to raise attendance rates by at least 85%. The NGO CRS (Catholic Relief Services), which participates in BRIGHT is also a major actor in the country through its school food programme (since the sixties).

1.1.5 Educational system

The education system in Burkina Faso is organised into formal and non-formal education sub-systems. The formal section comprises basic education (6 years), lower secondary (4 years), upper secondary (4+3=7) and tertiary education. Basic education comprises preschool education (for children aged 3-6 years) and primary schools (that accept children between 6-13 years old). Primary schools are divided in 3 cycles: the preparatory course (CP1 and CP2), the elementary courses (CE1 and CE2) and the middle course (CM1 and CM2), which is finalised with a certificate (CEP) that is needed to continue to secondary education.

There are two types of secondary education: general education and technical & professional education. The large majority of secondary students are in general education. In general education, the first cycle of four years is finalised with an exam (Brevet d’Etudes du Premier Cycle: BEPC). The BEPC certificate is the minimum requirement for admission to the (selection process for) certain tertiary institutions including Teacher Training College and Nursing College. The second cycle of (general) secondary education lasts another three years and is concluded by the BAC exam (le Baccalaureate), which provides access to university.

There are three types of formal technical & professional secondary education. The first type takes 3 to 4 years and results in the CAP (Certificate d’Aptitudes Professionnelles). The second type starts with the BEPC and then takes 2 years, resulting in the BEP (Brevet Etudes Professionnelles). The third type also starts with the BEPC and then takes 3 years, resulting in the BAC (le Baccalaureate).

The MEBA (National Department of Basic Education and Literacy) is in charge of the education of primary teachers in 5 so-called ENEPs (Teacher Training Colleges). Yearly tests are organised throughout the country for admission into these governmental colleges. In addition, there are several private schools and universities.

In line with the ongoing decentralisation processes, a growing number of educational responsibilities are being transferred from the MEBA to decentralised structures. On a regional level there are DREBA offices; the DPEBA are at provincial level, and the CEB are on a district level. One CEB (Circonscription d’Education de Base) supplies books and inspectors to about 20 schools (but often much more). Inspectors are officially expected to inspect every school about 6 times a year, but in reality this is often only once or twice a year, which is largely understood to be due to fuel costs and understaffing. Teachers are expected to prepare their lessons in notebooks, which are checked by the inspectors, who also look in the pupil’s notebooks to check what they have been taught. On a

local level, municipal councils, as well as NGOs, are implicated in the construction of schools, supply of materials, training of teachers and the establishment of Parent Teacher Associations (PTA).

Teachers in rural areas are usually young. After teacher training college, teachers are placed in rural or even remote areas, and are more likely to be placed in urban areas only after they gain more experience. Teachers are placed in the schools by the MEBA and usually change schools every few years. This means that teachers do not normally teach in their communities of origin. In some cases they are even from different ethnic (and linguistic) backgrounds than the village majority.

Primary schools are often, especially in rural areas, organised into a “multi-grade” system. A return to this “classical system” (that existed in the 1980s) is now officially being encouraged, as was observed in one of the research villages. It entails enrolling pupils only once every 2 years, and thus grouping two age groups into one class; this is done due to the lack of teachers. In urban areas, where enrolment rates are much higher and more teachers are available, the double stream system is sometimes used (whereby each grade has several classes and teachers).

School days are Monday to Wednesday and Friday and Saturday. School hours are 7.30-12.30 and 15.00-17.00. The “long vac” officially runs from mid-July to September. In reality, especially in many rural areas, primary schools stop teaching 1-2 months earlier and the actual holiday coincides largely with the yearly rainy season when the bulk of the farming and herding work has to be done

1.1.6 Education in the research area

A primary school in the North-central region has been present in Kaya since 1926 and in Tougouri since 1948 (respectively 20 and 35 km from the research villages). They remained the nearest schools for the research villages until the 1980s, when, during the revolutionary regime, schools were opened in both villages.

In 2000, Namentenga province counted 92 primary schools. This amount almost doubled in the six following years and in 2006 the province of Namentenga counted 178 primary schools (with 475 classes), attended by 24.000 pupils, which is 43% of all children in Namentenga of primary school-going age. The majority of children in school are boys. In 2005-2006, 36% of girls went to school, which is considerably lower than the percentage of boys in school. Nevertheless, the percentage of girls is on the increase [MEBA BF Direction Provinciale 2006]. A total number of 497 primary school teachers work in the province, of which 133 are female. This results in a primary teacher-pupil ratio of 1:49.

In the province, over 31.000 children aged between 7 and 12 do not go to school “despite the existence of structures” [idem]. However, not all communities have a primary school and it is obvious that more classrooms and teachers are needed if all children are to be enrolled in school.

Since 1999, enrolment figures in Namentenga have risen with on average 13.6% per year. This makes it one of the faster growing provinces, although it should be taken into account that all the provinces with low education figures have higher relative percentages of growth.

The province of Namentenga consists of 5 CEB departments; the two research villages are situated in the CEB department of Tougouri. In Tougouri, out of 13.090 children aged 7-12, 4.185 go to school. This means a net enrolment rate of around 32%, which is among the lowest in the province.

Around 40% of newly enrolled pupils in Namentenga are girls, which is below the national level of 45%.

Some insights into the performance of pupils in the different departments can be obtained by looking at the success rates of the primary school certificate exam and the percentage of bursaries obtained (comparing between scores obtained in different years is less reliable because the difficulty of the national exam may differ from year to year). The most recent figures show that performance in primary school exams of pupils in Tougouri district is low compared to the other departments in the province, with only 56% of pupils obtaining the primary school certificate. In 2005, only 8% of primary school leavers were considered at the level to continue onto secondary school (*entrée en sixieme*). In 2006, this was 12% [idem].

1.2 Poverty and ignorance as explanations for low enrolment: popular slogan or reality?

In policy literature on Burkina Faso, as well as in informal conversations with local people and government officials, “poverty” and “ignorance” were brought up as main explanations for low enrolment figures. An opinion poll, held among the Burkinabe population, showed that 90% of the population believes that ignorance and poverty are the main reasons for low educational figures.⁸ Ignorance, in this context, seems to refer to a lack of awareness of parents of the benefits of education. In policy literature as well as in popular opinion, child labour plays a relatively small role, especially considering that Burkina Faso has one of the highest percentages of working children in the world.

It is generally believed that the high incidence of household poverty, especially in rural areas, results in parents’ inability or reluctance to bear the direct costs of education. In addition, it has been argued that indirect or opportunity costs of education (i.e. the short-term benefits a household misses out on when a child is in school) play a major role.

Traditional culture and antagonistic feelings towards modernisation (western influences) play an important role in the education debate in Burkina. The MEBA (Ministry of Education Burkina) mentioned on its website in April of 2007, that parents may oppose education because it may change children in a negative way. They emphasise that this argument is in particular relevant in the case of girls⁹:

The communities perceive of education as an institution that negatively influences children and in particular girls, by instilling an antagonist attitude against their parents’ culture. For numerous families, formal education provokes in girls a behaviour that threatens their status quo in a social order based on superiority of men over women and the community over the individual. (Translated by this author)

Researchers and NGOs have also associated the low school enrolment in the country (and the research area in particular) with tradition and animist traditions. Burkina has been characterised as

⁸ www.insd.bf

⁹ www.meba.gov.bf

a country where “tradition and custom are deep-rooted, often for sound social and economic reasons”. And that: “for many rural people, schooling poses a clear and present threat to social stability, particularly the education of girls” [The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003]. Hagberg [2002] has suggested that the traditional religion would discourage parents to send their children to school, because formal education would be considered to make children less apt to perform the earth rituals or other traditional practices.

Islam has also been mentioned as a factor that slows down school enrolment [Yaro 1995; Hagberg 2002]. Muslims would be more inclined to send their children to Quranic schools, than to Western style, formal schools. Furthermore, the fact that formal education is still often considered a Christian institution could have a negative effect on enrolment of Muslim and animist children [Yaro 1995].

Besides these micro-economic, cultural and social factors, macro-economic developments are also frequently brought up as influencing perceptions of education on a local level. Structural adjustment programmes that have been implemented since the 1990s are believed to have played an important role in this, by reducing employment opportunities even for the well-educated [for example, Hagberg 2002:35]. It has been argued that this has had negative influences on the willingness of parents to enrol their children in school. A report on education by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs [2003:63] concluded:

In light of the vagaries of the labour market, many parents are concluding that there is little to distinguish between those young people who have completed primary school and those who have not. Given the bleak employment prospects facing the majority of youth in Burkina Faso, primary education has for many households lost its veneer as a valuable private investment.

In this report it is also argued that the large group of post primary leavers poses a threat to social stability:

There is a strong indication that achievement in primary school, when followed by prolonged unemployment and uncertainty about personal futures, can in fact be a source of profound frustration. With thousands of children completing primary school every year and heading into uncertain futures without guidance and support, more attention must be paid to covering the gap between children’s completion of primary school and their assumption of adult responsibilities. (Idem:101)

These studies suggest a crisis of faith in advantages of education or even negative associations with formal education, of which the effects are extremely strong, because so many families live in poor financial conditions. Hardly any reliable data is available on these supposed ideas. This study hence aims to provide clarity on the positive and negative ideas of and associations with formal education on a local level and the effect this can have on enrolment figures.

1.3 Field study

The data that forms the basis of this study was collected during a stay in Burkina Faso in December 2006 and January 2007. Six weeks were spent in the province of Namentenga, of which over 4 weeks in the villages Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin.

During the three-week stay in Dabonsmoree, children were interviewed and observed and time was spent in and around the school. 14 focus group discussions were held with 6-10 persons (adults and children) in groups divided according to age, gender, ethnic group and/or educational attainment. In addition, 20 compounds were visited, where individually or in groups, different family members were interviewed. Key persons (e.g. Imam, catechist, elders, parents, teachers, school head-teacher, and deputy in parliament) were interviewed. The fact that the researcher stayed in the research villages day and night allowed her to build up relationships of trust and to raise understanding through informal conversations with varying community members.

In Toyogdin group interviews were held with adult men, women and a group of literate young men. The chief, as well as two sub-chiefs were interviewed and several informal conversations were held with children in and out of school. Two households were visited, the PTA was interviewed and a meeting of parents was attended. Class observations and informal conversations with the teachers were carried out.

In both villages, focus was on people with children of primary school-going age, who were easily found because of the large average household size in the area. Special attention was given to the perceptions of family members, including non-biological guardians, because the extended family structure often plays a more important role than the nuclear family structure.

In addition, the more “official” discourse as expressed by education campaigns and government publications, as well as the viewpoint of the teaching staff, were taken into account in order to compare the different perspectives and to identify tensions between them.

In the large majority of individual interviews and group discussions, interpretation from the local language Mossi was needed. In Dabonsmoree, this was done by a young woman with almost 12 years of formal education who had been living in the village since her marriage, who also assisted in organising group discussions and selecting informants. Two French speaking farmers in their late twenties served as key informants and also helped in organising group interviews with varying participants. Contact with (and interpretation among) the Fulani (Peul) community was mainly conducted by one young man, who had learned French in his travels. Informal contact was also maintained with the village’s clinic staff and teachers, who lived in and around the house where the researcher stayed during the study. In Toyogdin, translation and field assistance was given by one of the Plan volunteers in the village who was in charge of contact with sponsor children.

At first sight, studying the perception of education as a European in a Burkinabe village may not seem the best way to grasp the real ideas about formal education on a local level. In both the historical context and the current development interventions, Europeans have repeatedly tried to encourage or even enforce a turn to formal education. Consequently, politeness, fear, or a desire to please the stranger can lead to answers in favour of education. In addition, an anticipation of financial assistance may induce respondents to stress the financial barriers rather than possible negative cultural perceptions of education.

We were well aware of these factors and it may have taken an additional effort to win the trust of respondents and sometimes more provocative manners were needed to encourage people to express their real thoughts. Many parents, when talking about negative ideas about education stressed that they had only recently realised that these ideas were false (and in this way justified that they had so far not sent any children to school). It is difficult to determine whether this sudden change of ideas had indeed occurred among these respondents, or that they were just saying it to please me. In any case, these answers give valuable insights that have played a role until very recently and that may still play a role in some families. On the other hand, being an outsider also had its advantages; informants often felt inclined to teach the interested visitor about their way of living, thoughts and culture, thereby revealing interesting assumptions and discourses.

1.4 Research locations: community and school

1.4.1 Dabonsmoree

The village of Dabonsmoree is situated around 50 km north of the provincial capital Boulsa and around 32 km south of the district capital Tougouri. It has around 2000 inhabitants living in over 100 mud compounds scattered around the village territory. The village is divided into seven districts, each hosting between 10 and 22 compounds. There is a traditional chief (chef de village) as well as several sub-chiefs. According to village youth, the village name Dabonsmoree means “do not provoke me!” and popular history tells that the first settler had left the city of Ouagadougou after being denied the chieftaincy. He decided to stay in Namentenga and founded the Dabonsmoree community.

The village is traversed by a dirt road, which is used by only a few motorised vehicles, even though it is a major route in the province. On market days in Dabonsmoree or in nearby towns, the village is accessed by trucks and minibuses, but no regular bus service passes through the village. There is no electricity in the village, apart from solar panels in the clinic.

There are 5 water pumps, unevenly distributed over the dispersed village territory. The market place hosts a simple market every three days. Along the main road there are a few wooden bars selling tea, Nescafe, and spirits; and shops for the basic groceries, such as soap, matches or tinned tomatoes as well as petrol in bottles. There are a number of bicycle fitters, and a few women sell porridge, snacks or rice.

The Mossi people, speaking the Moree language, are the dominant ethnic group in the village. Several large Fulani (Peul) families live on the village outskirts; they settled in the village long ago and constitute an estimated 15-20% of the village population. In addition, some people of Rimaibe and Marensé origin can be found. Growing minorities in the area are Christians and Muslims, but many animist traditions pervade all stages of life and animist practices are practiced by all religious groups. Christianity is in particular popular among women and children, even when the husbands/fathers remain animist. Among Mossi families different religions are practiced. Fulani and Rimaibe people in the village are generally Muslim.

With support from Plan, a health centre (CSPS), including a birth clinic and staff bungalows, has been set up. There is a large youth centre, which was built by a Member of Parliament who was born in the village, Theodore Sawadogo, and opens only occasionally. In addition, there are some

dilapidated benches with a blackboard under a roof, where literacy courses are taught, and a cereal bank. All local people live in mud houses with straw, or occasionally, tin roofs.

Farming is the main economic activity. Produce is mainly for family subsistence, but sometimes surpluses are sold at the market. In addition, animal rearing is an important activity. Most families have some goats and sheep, some families have one or a few cows, whilst a minority has larger herds, especially the ethnic group of Fulani people. Livestock is considered a sign of wealth and serves as a buffer in time of poor harvests. The last harvest before the study in 2006-07 had been reasonable, but people still clearly remembered the drought from a few years before. In Dabonsmoree, two young men were engaged in irrigated gardening in the nearby plots.

During the study over hundred women from the village participated in micro credit schemes offered by the international NGO CRS (Catholic Relief Services). The money was mainly invested in goats for breeding and in utensils to sell snacks at the market.

Just outside the village centre, and chief's area, is the primary school; a simple three-classroom building with a large playing field and water pump. Three teachers' bungalows have been built next to the school. Only one bungalow is currently in use (by the head master) because the two female teachers are living with their husbands elsewhere in the village. (One is married to the nurse and one is living in the house of the MP who usually resides in Ouagadougou). Next to the school is a small shed where the CRS (Catholic Relief Services) midday meals are prepared by girls, who receive some financial compensation from the PTA.

The Dabonsmoree primary school had just below 100 pupils, at the time of research. There were 5 classes and three teachers, who taught in 3 class rooms. There was no first class because no new pupils had been enrolled this year. In line with official policies, the school was turning back to the classic system with only one enrolment period every two years (see chapter 3). This system makes it possible to have one teacher for every class instead of one teacher for every two classes as was the case up till now. The two highest classes had 25 pupils (9 girls, 16 boys). The mid level had 35 pupils (15 girls and 20 boys). The lowest class (the second class or CP2) had 35 pupils (11 girls, 24 boys) as well as 14 so-called "auditeurs-libres" (free listeners). As we can see from these numbers, girls were largely underrepresented.

During the time of the research, attendance of pupils was almost equal to the number of enrolled children, which meant that absence was not a major problem. According to teachers, in the rest of the year, absence is mainly a problem in the lower classes, especially during the season of traditional festivities. According to the teachers and pupils alike, absence for such reasons is rare in the two highest classes, because older children are aware of the "importance of education". Teachers, parents and children commented that a child's absence for more than two days normally entails a visit from the teacher or, more commonly, a written convocation, to explain the absence. Thus, absences are responded to, but have no serious consequences for the parents.

The teachers and children let it be known that from every class, one or two children had dropped out over the last two years. There was a girl who had been taken out of school by her parents, a boy who had left to work in the south and who had refused to repeat the class after coming back. In addition, one Fulani girl had died from a snake bite, which had led to the drop-out of the other two Fulani girls from her community.

In 2005 and 2006, less than half of pupils going for the primary school certificate succeeded. Those who failed to obtain the certificate almost all stayed in school to repeat the year. Among those who had obtained the desired certificate, however, most also repeated the year, giving parents more time to collect the high fees needed for secondary school. Apparently, leaving primary school (either with or without certificate) was not a popular option, at least during the last few years.

1.4.2 Toyogdin

The village of Toyogdin had about 2700 inhabitants living in dispersed settlements. It is off the main road on which Dabonsmoree is situated, and can only be reached by dirt tracks. The school and teacher bungalows are in the chief's quarter. The market is situated a few kilometres away from the school, close to a protestant church. There is no electricity. In addition to Mossi and Fulani there is also a large Gourmantche representation in the village.

Plan Burkina has had a programme in the village since 1991. A micro-credit programme is currently being set up in the village. There has been a school since the early 1980s, built by an NGO. Toyogdin primary had 153 pupils at the time of the study, taught by three teachers who lived in bungalows near the school. As the table below shows, girls were strongly underrepresented, except in class 1.

Table 3: The pupils in Toyogdin Primary, per grade, by gender. 2006-2007

CP1:	50 (26 boys, 24 girls)
CP2:	25 (18 boys, 7 girls)
CE1:	16 (14 boys, 2 girls)
CE2:	26 (15 boys, 11 girls)
CM1:	18 (13 boys, 5 girls)
CM2:	18 (11 boys, 7 girls)

1.4.3 Educational picture in the research villages

According to the official figures obtained from the education office in Tougouri, the number of pupils had increased in both villages since 2001. In Dabonsmoree, 111 children were enrolled in 2006 compared to only 82 in 2001. In Toyogdin, there had been an increase from 123 to 146 children. In Dabonsmoree, the proportion of girls (gender ratio) has improved from around 0.4 to 0.6. In Toyogdin, the proportion of girls has remained stable over the last 5 years at about 0.55. Drop-out rates in Dabonsmoree appear to vary, but a downward trend can be discerned since 2003. In Toyogdin, drop-out fluctuates around 10%.

It was observed that the homes of the pupils were not evenly distributed across the village and that in some quarters school attendance was remarkably lower than in others. In Dabonsmoree Primary, more than half of the children were from two of the in total seven quarters; the chief's quarter and the adjoining quarter where the school was situated. In one quarter (Soumda Besoum), only two out of 18 compounds had children in school. In the main Fulani quarter, none of the families had any children in school (they had recently taken the three girls out of school). The single remaining Fulani girl in the school came from a different Fulani quarter. There were three children who came from surrounding villages, outside Dabonsmoree. It can be estimated that less than half of the

approximately 100 compounds in Dabonsmoree with several children of school-going age, had children in school.

School children came from Catholic, Muslim and animist backgrounds. In line with the village composition in general, most children came from animist families (even though it should be noted that in many households, multiple religions are practiced). Reflecting the composition of the village, the large majority of the pupils, as well as the teachers, were Mossi; there was one Fulani girl and a few Rimaibe children. The schoolchildren were aged about seven to fifteen; the youngest “free listeners” in the lowest class were about four. Among the oldest children were children who had not (yet) passed the CEP exam and who were now repeating the highest class. The highest class also hosted a few pupils who had passed the exam and were waiting for their parents to find the needed funds for enrolment in secondary school. Even though in the lower classes, drop out was certainly a problem, persistence of pupils in the higher classes was evident. Those who failed the exam as well as those who passed, but who did not yet have the financial means for secondary school, usually continued attending school. Even though only six children made the step to secondary education in 2005 and 2006, none of the remaining children have stopped schooling altogether and/or started working.

In the village of Toyogdin too, the chief’s quarter supplied a relatively large share of school children (almost 25%). A quarter about three kilometres away from the school, where a protestant church is situated, accounted for another 25% of pupils. There were several quarters in Toyogdin that supplied none or only a couple of pupils. In Toyogdin it was furthermore remarkable that in the two lowest classes (CP1/2) only two children had no elder siblings (from their compound) in school. The remaining children all had siblings (or cousins living in the same compound) who were also in primary school.

1.4.4 Functioning of the schools

In both schools it was observed that all classes were behind schedule. In Toyogdin’s highest (sixth) class, for example, second year books were used for reading. The poor output also turned out from the fact that over the last few years, neither of the two schools had delivered pupils who passed their final primary school exam with a so-called *entrée a sixieme*, which means a major reduction in secondary school fees.

In Dabonsmoree particularly, teachers acknowledged that there had been a lack of teaching over the last year. The two female teachers (CP and CE) had both recently given birth and during their (legally entitled) leaves they had not been replaced. At the time of the study, they were still breast feeding their children in the breaks and sometimes longer. In addition, the CP teacher was appointed (and paid) by the government to carry out the census, with two other female teachers from other towns. This meant that her class was not or hardly taught for at least a month. In addition, preparations for the 2007 election had caused absence of teachers. During the stay in Dabonsmoree, the male head teacher (director) travelled, without informing the PTA, for several days.

No absence of teachers was observed during the short stay in Toyogdin, but the school was closed for two days of those days, due to the large yearly festival. In both villages, teachers stated that they were allowed a few days off every month to collect their salary from the city where they were registered (Kaya, Boulsa or even Ouagadougou). Conferences and workshops organised by NGOs or

the government were also, by teachers, considered valid reasons for teacher absence, as well as funerals of relatives and hospital visits. Both schools had functioning parent teacher associations (PTA) as well as an AME (associations for mothers and female teachers), consisting of illiterate parents. In Dabonsmoree the PTA had set the PTA fee at 1500 CFA and in Toyogdin at 1250 CFA. Until recently, Plan had paid (part of) the PTA fee in Toyogdin, but had stopped this support in 2005.

Even though it could not be observed due to the timing of the field study, it appeared from accounts from teachers, parents and children that the long holiday was normally much longer than the official 6-8 weeks (mid July-September). Apart from the highest class pupils who have to prepare for the CEP exam, pupils normally stop attending mid/late May, when the end-of year tests have been completed and the agricultural season starts.

Chapter 2

Perceptions of Formal Education

When I see children who have gained a Nasara job (= white-collar/white man's job), I feel like sending my children to school as well. (mother of 5, none in school, Dabonsmoree)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, enrolment figures are slowly increasing in the research villages. The enrolment figures imply, however, that one cannot yet speak of an established social norm to send children to school. In the province of Namentenga about 3 out of 10 children aged 7-13 are in school, and in the research villages, enrolment figures were observed to be even lower¹⁰.

It can be assumed that cultural, financial or social barriers to education are more likely to be overcome if parents and children see clear benefits in the completion of a formal education [Matz 2003; Kielland & Tovo 2006]. Economic research suggests that in Burkina Faso, private financial returns to primary education are very low, but that returns to secondary and tertiary education are considerably higher [Kazianga 2004]¹¹. Not much is known, however, about the way this affects decision making about (primary) education, or about the way other possible (non-financial) returns are taken into account. This chapter will provide insights into the question whether the low primary enrolment in Burkina can be explained by low (perceived) returns on education. It looks into the purposes of education as formulated by parents, children and teachers and into the ways educated people, with and without jobs, are believed to profit from their formal education. In this context, attention is given to beliefs about how/if behavioural changes are instilled in children through schooling.

The observed attitudes and perceptions on education do not all necessarily lead to low enrolment; they might also contribute to the growing primary enrolment figures in the area. In the province of Namentenga, enrolment figures are higher than they have ever been and they have been rising since independence in 1960. Despite the relatively low pace of change, parents and children are increasingly turning to education, and it is therefore relevant to question them about this process.

In addition, it should be kept in mind that in a complex qualitative analysis like this, there are no entirely-negative or entirely-positive determinants. It was observed that certain negative perceptions of education were equally present among parents who had sent one or more children to

¹⁰ No official figures are available for the research villages, but they can be estimated at well below 20% (Dabonsmoree for example has 100 school children out of a village population of over 2000)

¹¹ Please note that in this study, only returns in wage -labour are included and that returns from education in self-employed labour are excluded.

school. Also, certain positive ideas about education existed among people who sent none of their children to school. It should be acknowledged that the actual behaviour is an outcome of the perceptions dealt with in this chapter, as well as of other, economical and socio-cultural factors which will be addressed in Chapter 3.

Investigating local ideas about purposes and benefits of schooling are particularly interesting in the light of the “ignorance” factor. As we have seen above, “ignorance” is an often cited explanation for low enrolment rates, referring to an alleged unawareness of the benefits of education in predominantly illiterate communities. This chapter deals with the following questions:

- Do parents have ideas about the purposes and outcomes of formal education for their own children and what shape do these ideas take?
- How is the situation of growing school attendance coinciding with decreasing formal job opportunities dealt with?
- How do primary school children themselves see the purpose of their school attendance and what future prospects do they have in mind?
- How do non-school-going children look at school and how do educated adults who are “still farming” look at the benefits of education?
- What do teachers consider the benefits of primary education?

2.1 Perceived benefits

In both group- and individual interviews, respondents were asked what, in their eyes, was the benefit of sending a child to school. It should be noted that among the adult respondents, both parents *without* and parents *with* children in school were present. The following quotes give an impression of comments made by parents in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin, about the intrinsic and instrumental (practical) benefits of a formal education in daily life.

In a focus group discussion of (illiterate) men: “A child who is not in school, is lost. It will suffer in its travels.”

A grandmother with some of her grandchildren in school: “Those who go to school are ‘more awake’ and they can express themselves.”

In a group discussion with illiterate men, it appeared that according to them: “It is a benefit that a child can express itself well and will not be scared, for example, when military comes to the village.”

And a Rimaibe mother (daughter dropped out years ago, planning to send one child to school next year): “The one who is in school is no longer in the dark. She can use her knowledge to give advice.”

Most respondents, however, stressed that gaining a formal job with a monthly salary, would be the main benefit of a formal education. As we can read from the comments below, gaining work as a result of education was often equated with gaining “a Nasara job” (a white-collar job, or “working with the whites”). The land of the Nasaras (Nasaratenga) is sometimes translated as “the West” (country of the whites), but is also used locally to refer to modern, urban places in their own country (such as the capital Ouagadougou). Even though it was generally assumed that these jobs

would be found outside the own village, it was often anticipated that not only the children themselves but also the parents (back in the village) would benefit financially.

A relatively well-to-do father with 2 wives, 13 children, and none in school, said: “Other people send children to school, because now everyone sends his children to school. And it can be good for the children, because they can go to Nasaratenga, become a nurse or a teacher.”

A father, with 14 children, among whom one son who dropped out, was planning to send his daughter into the next enrolment round. He said: “A benefit of education is that you will have knowledge (bangre) and that you can translate into French. The one-eyed is king of the land of blind! And also, if she will succeed, she will get a monthly salary that will benefit us.”

As the following remarks illustrate, women especially acknowledge the intrinsic and practical advantages of literacy, but they too said that the financial security of a monthly salary is most essential.

A woman during a group interview: “We send a child to school, so that it learns how to read and write. The child becomes intelligent and he can be a good farmer and be good at rearing animals. But we want that the children find work as nurse, teacher or customs official. Because it does not rain, if the children get a job, they will help the family.”

Mariam, who had had one child in school who had dropped out and had left to Ouagadougou: “School helps a lot, because they can read the paper. And if he gains a job, it will be a benefit for him. And also being able to read and write is an advantage.”

The AME (mothers association) members in Toyogdin explained how they tried to transmit the “importance of education” to other parents. They said: “We say that knowing how to read and write is a good thing. And even if he does not find a job, he can do personal projects outside school. He can take care of himself. They can do voluntary work with the micro-credit programme or at the clinic if they cannot find a proper job.”

Although people did not only refer to the wage-paid, Nasara jobs (probably due to the realisation that only a few children actually reach this goal), they clearly associated the benefits of education with modern society and saw no benefits of education in farming.

The comments on the benefits of education, presented here, appear to reflect for a large part the rhetoric about the importance of education as promoted by governments and NGOs. Some people seemed to consider our question about “the benefits of education” as a test, and reproduced what they had been told in governmental or NGO meetings or what they had heard on the radio, rather than recounting their own experiences or ideas. Some respondents even asked the interpreter for help to give the right answers. In an effort to move away from these reproductions of official rhetoric, we asked parents what “encouraged (or would encourage) them to send their children to

school". In some cases, this led to interesting insights into personal motivations regarding education.

It turned out that many parents saw education as a way out of the current lifestyle and traditional occupation of agriculture. Frequently, the poor harvests and unreliable rainfall over the last years were brought up as a motivation to invest in formal education for a child. People especially recounted bad experiences with (arable) farming (millet and maize) rather than with animal rearing, which is also an important activity in the area.

A father (with 2 wives, relatively well-to-do, 13 children, and none in school) commented: "The importance of education encourages me. That they will find work and help their parents. Because farming does not give a lot anymore and the cows are dying."

According to some men in Dabonsmoree, gaining knowledge as such was already an important incentive: "It encourages us that they will get knowledge ('bangre'). It is what you know what other people don't know, like writing and understanding French. We have 'bangre' too, but that is in the field of farming and animals."

Many people, however, explicitly stated that it was mainly the prospect of a paid, government job for their children that made them consider investing in education. Seeing village children who had become civil servants appeared to be strongly motivating.

A mother without any children in school said: "When I see children who have gained a Nasara job (i.e. a white man's job), I feel like sending my children to school as well."

Mo, a single father, with 3 children of school-going age, none in school, who lived in the village centre, put it bluntly: "If the government makes sure that all students get work as for example teachers, policemen or gendarmes, I will send all my children to school!"

A mother during a group interview: "The success of a neighbour's child encourages us and also when we see civil servants. It is also the change in behaviour that encourages us. School children are cleaner and they dress themselves well."

Several women in a women's group: "We are happy when the children become civil servants."

From these comments we can conclude that most people, including those who had not sent any of their children to school, could think of benefits of formal education and factors that made them desire to formally educate their children. This observation hence suggests that ignorance - understood as a total lack of awareness about the benefits of formal education - was not the case. It was sometimes stated, even by parents without children in school, that: "Everyone now says everyday that you have to send your children to school!"

The widespread awareness of certain benefits of education is further backed up by the observation that it was not uncommon that households without any of their children in school at the time of the study had sent a child to school in the past, often their first-born son. These cases indicate that the

belief “they do not know that school can help us”¹², might be a simplified explanation for the low enrolment in the area. Negative experiences with the returns on education of these older children sometimes played a role in this, which will be further discussed in the paragraph on success and failure.

2.1.1 Isolated?

The observed “awareness” and absence of “ignorance” could be considered surprising, regarding the fact that many families lived in relatively isolated circumstances. Many respondents did not have regular access to radio or any other mass media. Theatre plays or other sensitisation meetings are normally organised (by NGOs) in the village centre, which can be far away from the outskirts of the spread-out villages. In addition, even though labour migration to Cote d’Ivoire is a common phenomenon in the area, it appeared that there were also people who had never or hardly ever travelled outside their own village. Apparently, however, messages on the importance of education often reach even these people. A father, with 13 children out of school, told me: “Since recently, friends come to me and say that I should send a child to school.” a remark that most other fathers confirmed. The group of elders in Dabonsmoree explained that they increasingly felt the social pressure to enrol children in school: “the current situation encourages us to send. If everyone does it and you don’t, you will be behind!”

2.1.2 “Success or failure”

We saw above that finding a salaried, formal job was locally considered as the main purpose of education. However, only about 5% of Burkinabe people work in wage-paid jobs, which is well below the percentage of people with a formal education [UNDP 2006]. Also, in Burkina gaining formal work usually requires at least a secondary education, which is only attained by a small minority of rural Burkinabe [Kazianga 2004]. So, how has this reality shaped ideas about education in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin?

In the first place, it appeared that most informants were well aware of this situation. It was commonly stated that not all school-going children would be able to complete secondary and tertiary education and find the desired formal jobs. This idea was based on experiences within the own household or neighbourhood. In both villages, primary schools had opened in the early 1980s and the first village-educated batch was now reaching their thirties. Balances on the benefits of education were being drawn up in the communities.

In Dabonsmoree educated young men who had attended the village school in its first years, estimated that around 20% of their age mates who had also completed primary school had found formal jobs. The remainder had either migrated to another country or city, or had returned to the village to farm. According to very rough estimations among other villagers, “less than half of children who had completed the village school” had found jobs.

Interviews with younger “returned students” (between 20 and 25 years old) indicated that among their former classmates only a few had continued or were already working in the military or as a teacher. Many were said to be currently working in Cote d’Ivoire, Ouagadougou or the cotton

¹² Explanation given by the AME president in Dabonsmoree for low education figures in her village.

growing areas of Kompienga. In Toyogdin, it was also estimated by the village's first school graduates, now in their late twenties, that from the 32 pupils who had reached the last class, the majority was now farming again.

Consequently, in the popular discourse on education among the mainly illiterate research population, a strong distinction was made between "those who fail" and "those who succeed" - referring to those who found a white-collar or wage-paid job. Especially the monthly salary was emphasised and the financial gains were also occasionally expressed in cattle, the traditional way to measure wealth. A man in Dabonsmoree said, during a focus group discussion: "Someone who succeeds can have ten cows! But many do not succeed."

A father of 10 children (3-27 years), in Toyogdin, expressed his disappointment about the situation of his oldest son who completed secondary school, but who was still looking for work. He said: "The radio talks a lot about education. They say that schooling gives you to eat. But getting a salary will not happen!" A father of 8, (2 educated, one succeeded and one had failed): "It is discouraging that you can send your children to school and at the end you do not benefit."

It hence appears that the local criteria for success were different from those used in international objectives like the Millennium Development Goals, which focus on the completion of primary education. Benefits attributed to the completion of only primary school, by respondents, were minimal. It is, also by primary school graduates themselves, recognised to increase motivation to enrol the own children or siblings in school, or to help them with homework. An older man in Dabonsmoree said: "they can advice their little brothers about school and about being clean."

Those who had dropped out during or after primary school, but also people who had dropped out in the first classes of secondary school, were usually classified as "not having gained". Those who had gained a secondary certificate (BEPC after 4 years or even BAC after 7 years), but who had not (yet) been able to be selected for governmental training colleges or university, were normally also categorised as "not having succeeded." On a village level, villagers belonging to this category were generally referred to as "school children who have not finished their studies.", even if they had 10 years of schooling. In fact, only those with government jobs were believed to have completed their studies.

Yet, the defining lines between failure and success were not always clear. In a group discussion with illiterate men in Dabonsmoree, for example, there was no full agreement how Nestor, a man in his late twenties with around 10 years of schooling, should be categorised. His co-villagers stressed that his level of education was very high and took into consideration that he played an important role in the local village administration as well as in commercial farming in the nearby irrigated plots.

A group interview with the village elders (sub-chiefs) provided some insights into the way education was perceived among the traditional elite and about the way the villagers who had been enrolled in school in the past, were assessed. It showed how the discourse on failure and success is used to talk about their co-villagers. It also again confirms that benefits of primary education were considered minimal or even negligible. It should be noted that these traditional village leaders generally headed families with several school children. One of the elders told me:

In the past, every year the chief had to supply some children for the school in Kaya or Tougouri. Often, the children did not want to go, but the chief had to force them.

Between 1926 and 1983, there was the school in Tougouri. There is one person who has succeeded; he is a depute (MP) now. There are other villagers who have gone to Tougouri school, but they have not succeeded. There are several former pupils from our own school, which was built in 1983, who have succeeded. They are teachers, soldiers, nurses or accountants. Even more, though, have completed primary school or secondary school, but they are still here in the village. They farm, but it is not going well! They are at the middle, they don't do the books and they don't farm. But, at the same time, they do have some benefits. They can read letters, they can travel without problems and they can express themselves in public.

Researcher: But do they not have benefits in agriculture?

Yes, they do composting and things like that, we don't do. But they cannot stand the sun for a long time anymore!

The father of nine children, all out of school, who mentioned finding a white-collar job as the main benefit, also said that that "some of them come back because they cannot find a job and do not have money".

As this data shows, sending a child to school is taking a risk in the eyes of many illiterate parents in Dabonmoree and Toyogdin. Hopefully, the child will "go far" and get the white-collar job and help the family financially. More likely, however, the child will either drop out after primary or during secondary school due to low marks or money problems, caused by unreliable rainfall, death or disease in the family.¹³ Because hardly any value is attributed to only completing primary school, assumed and real barriers at the secondary level have a negative consequence on the enrolment in primary school.

2.2 Negative effects of education: laziness

The belief that people with some schooling will be less motivated to work on the family farm makes sending a child to school extra risky, especially because prospects of "succeeding" are uncertain. As the elders above said about their co-villagers who had not found formal employment: "They are at the middle, they don't do the books and they don't farm."

Sten Hagberg ([2002:34] has looked at education in Burkina in terms of knowledge and identity and observed:

¹³ Alternative research shows that this perception on the economic benefits of primary education largely reflects the reality [Kazianga 2004]. Research has been carried out to determine whether low enrolment in Burkina can be explained by low private returns on education. This study confirms the idea of parents that returns on primary education, especially in the public sector, are low. Rate of returns on primary education in the public sectors were found to be very small for men and almost zero for women. Returns on secondary and tertiary education, however, were found to be relatively high and it is observed that primary education is only useful if the child is able to subsequently complete at least secondary school. Kazianga explains: "As a consequence, parents will enrol their children if opportunity and direct schooling costs up to the completion of at least secondary school are affordable." (idem)

Schooling is associated with modernity, implying that children are to leave the rural life behind them. The school is seen as 'spoiling' children. They go to school to get a job, but are unable, and often unwilling, to do farm work any longer. Schooling may then involve a double loss: a financial burden and a drain of labour.

Education was indeed frequently associated, in the research villages, with a refusal to work on the farm, yet it seemed that ideas on this topic were changing. A father with educated sons as well as several children out of school, said:

After 3 years, they do not want to farm anymore. They say they have become 'a man of the whites'. You tell them to work on the land and when you come back they are gone. Also my son who had BEPC (=10 years of schooling) does not want to farm anymore. But he is forced to, because he needs money to do the tests to get a job.

Emphasis was on the lack of will rather than on the lack of farming skills, and it was acknowledged that all children work on the farm when growing up, after school and during holidays. Moreover, this reduced motivation to farm was not considered a problem if the pupil got a white-collar job with a monthly salary - although it was stressed that it was a problem because so many children would not reach this goal.

A mother of 7 children, 2 in school: "A child in school will not like to farm anymore"

A mother of 4, none in school: "Some become lazy. When they drop out they do not want to farm anymore".

Father of 7, 1 in school: "Those who are at home farm better than those at school. Their idea is to follow the whites.

Two co-wives in Dabonsmoree, relatively well-off, currently no children in school, explained their strategy that was a result of the belief that laziness was a risk: "We prefer to send some to school and leave some for farming. If we send all, some will succeed, and those who will not succeed, will be lazy."

Some parents, on the other hand, stressed that this idea of laziness was a myth.

Father of 3 (no child in school): "Some do not want to farm, but they were already lazy before they were sent to school."

And, a mother (of young children, not yet in school): "If the child fails, it can still go into farming. Those who say it cannot, do not think far".

According to most, the critical defining line was primary school. Those with only primary school would still be willing to farm "because they have not been away to rest". Those who had been attending secondary school in town for several years were especially at risk. Tanga (18), for example, had dropped out in the first year of secondary school, a few years ago. He had, like many boys, migrated to work, and was now working in the kiosk. His parents said: "He can farm like those who have not been to school, because he has not been to school for a long time".

Several educated young men confirmed that they were less motivated to farm, but they also stressed that they had "no choice than to farm". On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that

in Dabonsmoree, some educated youth engaged in innovative farming methods and dry season farming. Also, the temporary labour migration many dropouts had engaged in (to work on commercial farms in Kompienga or elsewhere) seemed to contribute towards a more positive attitude towards farming.

2.3 Benefits for girls

In both village schools, girls were underrepresented; they comprised in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin respectively 35% and 37% of the school children. It is therefore relevant to look into possible gender-based differences in perceived benefits of a formal education. Firstly, we will look at the perceived intrinsic and instrumental benefits. As the following remarks illustrate, some people pointed at the benefits of education in trade (a typical female activity) and in the important role literate women could play in women's groups. Hardly anyone, however, credited education with benefits for the upbringing of children, which is a very important women's task.

Village elders in Dabonsmoree commented: "An educated girl is better informed. She will be more successful in trading. All good wives can bring up children. No, she will not be better in raising children, but she will be able to support them financially."

The women in the group discussion in Toyogdin said (about the few women in the villages who had received some schooling): "They are the secretaries in our women groups. They are in front of us when we get the micro credit from the catholic mission, CRS and popular bank."

Yet, as it was for boys, acquiring the white-collar job was considered the main criterion to measure the benefits of educating a girl. In both villages, there were one or more female members of the chief's family who had "succeeded" and were now formally employed in the capital (with the tax office and a law firm). It is likely that as a consequence of the success of some women and of the presence of female teachers (in the case of Dabonsmoree), "succeeding" and getting a formal job is also considered possible for girls. Schoolgirls expressed similar goals as boys. Rose (13), for example, who was considered a weak student by the teachers, said: "I want to become a civil servant, because the salary makes your life easier."

Also for girls, completing only primary school, was hardly valued. Two sub-chiefs in Toyogdin, for example, had a few girls in their family who had been up to secondary school, but who had not gained BEPC. According to them, they had not benefited from this "because we have not been lucky" (their daughters had not found jobs).

So, parents said they would educate girls for the same reasons as boys. Yet, in line with a national opinion poll mentioned above, parents expressed less confidence in the chances of success for girls than boys. Especially obstacles at the secondary level were brought up. Parents in the research villages did not mention a perceived intellectual inferiority of girls, which may also be due to campaigns held in the country. Yet they stressed that many girls drop out of school in the first years of secondary school, which is confirmed by statistical data on the area showing that only about 30% of secondary school girls is promoted after the first year (data obtained from the Secondary Education Office in Boulssa). Particularly mothers argued that the poor performance of girls is due to the work girls perform at home after school, which means that they have less time for revision and homework. According to parents, the risk of pregnancy of secondary school girls further diminishes chances of "going far" in education, a risk to which especially poor school girls are exposed. Further

research should clarify other reasons why so few girls succeed in *secondary* schooling, which is relevant because it affects the willingness to invest in the *primary* education of girls.

It is a common assumption that a girls' schooling is considered less useful by parents in Burkina, because the girl will leave the household after marriage and only her in-laws will benefit from her skills or future income [e.g. Hagberg 2002]. Even though this system of patrilocal marriage also exists in the research villages among the Mossi majority, this argument was never brought up by parents in this group¹⁴. They said that a girl who was able to find a Nasara job would still visit her blood-relatives and help out. This idea may be related to the fact that civil servants indeed normally do not move in with the husband's family, but live in urban areas or villages where they are placed by the government. "Succeeding" is generally associated with moving away from the village, also for boys. In this light, it becomes understandable that the traditional system of settlement does not play an important role in gender-specific perceptions of education.

In the next chapter we will discuss what other cultural and socio-economic barriers may prevent a girl from enrolling and/or completing her education. With regard to the locally perceived benefits of education for girls it can be concluded that education for girls is believed to (ideally) serve the same purpose as it does for boys, namely finding a white-collar job. Incentives to enrol are hence comparable. However, parents did consider it more risky to invest in a girls' education because they thought that chances of success were even smaller than for boys, due to the risks of pregnancy or poor performance as a result of household duties.

2.4 Perceptions among Fulani people

Even though no statistical data is available, it can be stated that in the research area, children of Fulani origin are strongly underrepresented in school. In Dabonsmoree only one Fulani child was enrolled in school, despite the fact that the village had a large Fulani community. The Fulani are an originally pastoralist ethnic group who are becoming increasingly sedentary in Burkina Faso and increasingly engage in more intensive farming. Most Fulani people in Dabonsmoree have been present in the area for decades.

Even though no formally educated Fulani men or women were present in the Dabonsmoree Fulani community, it should be noted that there were large differences within the Fulani community, as is the case among the Mossi. Some young Fulani men had travelled and worked abroad and had even followed literacy courses. Other Fulani people, however, appeared to live more isolated, even though most did frequently visit the village market and contact with Mossi people appeared common.

Some Fulani parents mentioned the same benefits to education as the Mossi majority. A father, without any children in school, stated during a FGD: "School is good because it makes children wake up." We spoke to a prominent family in the Dabonsmoree Fulani community, who had sent a daughter to school, in the past. The girl had, according to the teachers, been a bright student. She

¹⁴ It should be noted that Fulani girls (at least in Dabonsmoree) commonly marry within their own clan or family, so the above argument would not apply to them at all.

had recently died of a snake-bite. Her older brother explained how their father had gotten the idea: “My father had seen the Fulani in Ouagadougou and saw that they had become civil servants and then he thought about sending his children to school as well.”

However, the interviews with Fulani people in Dabonsmoree also showed that ideas about benefits were not present to the same degree among all Fulani. In the focus group, some fathers acknowledged that they had never considered the option to send a child to school. In household visits, a few Fulani mothers stressed that they did not want their children to go away and that they would be rearing animals in the future anyway. A Fulani mother of two young sons: “I do not want my sons to leave me behind. They need to look after our animals anyway, so they do not have to leave.”

This suggests that for some Fulani people education, as an alternative to the traditional occupation, was not as important as among Mossi and Rimaibe (a small minority in the area). We can hence say that the dream of finding a Nasara job was less widespread among the Fulani.

The story behind the only Fulani girl who was still¹⁵ enrolled in the school, confirms that leaving the traditional occupation of animal rearing was not a strong incentive for all Fulani. Yet it also shows that this does not necessarily mean that Fulani oppose modernity and education. This girl was apparently enrolled in the school because her father believed that it could help the family get involved with more modern animal rearing techniques. The head teacher told me that her father had made this unusual decision because he had seen that stock breeding was becoming increasingly intensive (in terms of food and medicine for the cattle) and that in this context, an educated person could be of great value.

2.5 Religious and traditional influences on perceptions

The traditional religion of animism, which exists in different manifestations throughout Africa, is based on worshipping ancestors and the ancestral ground and is closely related to farming. A growing minority in the area is Christian or Muslim, but many animist traditions continue to be practiced by all religious groups (see introduction). Women and children are strongly overrepresented in the village churches. The strong animist traditions in the area are often believed to slow down development processes in general and a turn to formal education in particular.

Formal education is normally associated with Christianity, as Christian missionaries opened the first schools in the country. Nowadays, many “Nasaras” have converted to Christianity (but also Islam) during their education away from home¹⁶. Dabonsmoree’s catechist indeed considered the ability to read the bible as a main benefit of literacy. This aspect was, however, hardly ever brought up by

¹⁵ Three other girls had been enrolled until recently. One girl had died (snake -bite) and the others had stopped too.

¹⁶ However, conditions are not that clear cut. “Nasaras”, such as teachers and government officials in Burkina can also be Muslim, or occasionally animist. And, also uneducated people who migrate for work, often convert to Christianity or Islam. The head teacher in Dabonsmoree, for example, was a Muslim and Islam is sometimes seen by villagers as a “modern religion” (as compared to animism) as well, which people convert to when they leave the village for work or study. It was also remarked by villagers that there were Nasaras in surrounding villages, who still (openly) practiced animism. Also, there are several traditional chiefs in the province who have had a formal education.

other informants. The question we will address here is whether there were certain aspects or consequences of education that were considered especially relevant in relation to the traditional religion (animism) or to Islam. In Chapter 3 we will assess whether specific traditions or rituals form a barrier to school attendance and we will take a detailed look into the influence of forced marriage on the primary school enrolment of girls.

It was observed that literacy was used in securing traditions. Some fathers stated that a literate person in the house was practical in a religious (animist) perspective, because the traditional rituals and sacrifices could be written down on paper and stored for future generations (even by those who had converted to Christianity or Islam). Educated young men, who had all grown up in animist households, also emphasised that animism not necessarily negatively influenced perceptions about formal education. A young man with some years of education, who called himself an animist, said: “Animism is not a reason not to enrol children into school. It’s even the opposite, because education allows you to write down how you have to make the sacrifice. We have all done that for our fathers, even those who have become Christians and Muslims. You cannot refuse.”

Muslims, who were in many cases of Fulani origin, were underrepresented in the village school in Dabonmoree. For the Fulani this may be due to various reasons related to ethnicity and pastoralist ways of living. It has been suggested that the existence of Quranic teachers (marabouts), may explain low education figures in Muslim parts of Burkina Faso [Yaro 1995:682; Hagberg 2002], because Muslim parents may consider Quranic education more relevant for their children. In Burkina, as in neighbouring Sahel countries, it is common among Muslim parents to send one or more sons to live and work with a Marabout. The students live away from home for several years to learn how to recite the Quran. French or other subjects from the official curriculum are not taught in this type of school and it does not form part of the official education system. Usually, the boys work for their teachers as well and are expected to beg for food.

Some Quranic students (talibés) from other areas were living with a Quranic teacher in Dabonmoree, but they were absent most of the fieldwork period, because they were begging in other towns. Among the Mossi population in Dabonmoree, only a few children had been sent to Quranic schools; among the Fulani people it appeared more common.

For some, the Quranic school is an alternative to formal education, with sometimes more relevant benefits than the formal school. An interview with the Dabonmoree village Imam provided some insights. It appeared that he had sent one son to a Marabout elsewhere and another son to the formal school. His comments confirm the assumption that Quranic school and formal school are considered to serve different ends and that formal school is not always believed to be of a great benefit. He said:

I prefer the Quranic school to the other school, because after the normal school, there is no work and they also get lazy. The Quranic school teaches children to suffer. They have to beg and they will learn that life is difficult. If they pass the exam, they can become Imam or teacher. It can even help them in agriculture. Because, if the verses he will cite prove successful, others will come to farm for him.

Even though he had sent one child to formal school, hoping that he would succeed as a Nasara, the uncertainty of finding a Nasara job played a role in the decision to invest in both options. He

thought that Quranic school was a more reliable source of economical benefits than formal school, because reciting the Quranic verses to co-villagers, would be repaid in labour. We do not have sufficient field data on this matter to draw general conclusions. It can be assumed, however, that for some, Quranic school is an alternative to formal education, which has benefits that are closer to “the own world” of agricultural village life.

2.6 Children out of school (Mossi)

Children of school-going age, who were out of school, appeared to have clear ideas about the benefits of schooling, but which they were denied. Pascal (13) who worked as a bicycle mechanic said: “I would prefer to go to school, to gain knowledge and speak French. I prefer to get the knowledge you learn in school, because it is that kind of knowledge that gives us to eat today.” Pascal was not sure, however, if school would always lead to better future incomes. He said: “Some of the students have come back to farm. Some have more food than us, others don’t”.

Also Moussa, a 12 year old boy who was considered by his father and co-villagers as a lazy boy, because he refused to herd his father’s goats and did not engage in small jobs on the market, said he regretted not being in school. He told me:

School is good to get knowledge and to find a job like teacher or nurse. It is nice to teach children how to read and write ... There are many places you cannot go to if you cannot read, like meetings. School is better than literacy training, because you will learn French and you can use it elsewhere.

Children out of school shared the ideas about the “karambi vaala” (i.e. the students who have not completed their studies and have come back to farm). In a focus group with out-of-school girls it was agreed that, “There are also people in the village who have been to school and now they have come back to farm. They can farm like the others, but they are not strong like the others because they have taken a rest when they were away for schooling.”

I also asked out-of-school children about the main differences between themselves and the school children. A boy (10 years) responded: “A difference between us and the school children is that that they can read French. They can farm too, but we farm more. Often school starts when the rains have not yet stopped and there is still work to be done.”

Not all children out of school, however, regretted they had not been sent to school. In a group interview with a group of 13 girls aged 10-16, in a remote quarter of Toyogdin, only one girl said she wished she could go to school. The other girls said they preferred to help their mothers. According to the girls, the few girls who were in school were “more awake/open” than they are, because they knew how to read and write. Nevertheless, they preferred staying at home, because “most girls were at home.”

Some out-of-school children, with siblings in school, felt they were treated differently by their parents and that their parents spent more money on their school going siblings. Sassinata (10) said: “they get clothing and sometimes they get money to buy porridge or rice.”

In general, it was observed that especially children who lived among or close to many “school children” regretted not being in school. In quarters where school enrolment was uncommon, and where consequently large groups of children could be found out of school, children appeared less

concerned (or not concerned at all) about their being out of school. These children generally saw themselves becoming farmers or traders and could not easily think of other possible jobs. Most said they knew “children like them” who had learnt a trade like mechanics, but said that they had never considered to ask their parents to get a placement too.

2.7 Ideas among school children

School children usually had an exceptional standing within their compounds. They also clearly felt the pressures of the expectation to “succeed”. Class conversations with pupils showed the effect of peer pressure/social pressure on their future wishes and expressed preferences of the children. Children in the higher classes said that their objective was to become a teacher, nurse or (for boys), policeman or soldier. Even the younger children, who were not yet able to formulate specific jobs, were clear about their purpose: “becoming Nasara (white/office person), not a farmer!” Consequently, pupils said that “they did not like farming because it was not their occupation”, despite the fact that they were all from farming households. The only reason they were farming was because “it gives us to eat.”

Children from years 3 and 4 in Dabonsmoree commented: “We don’t want to farm. School is more important. If you succeed, you can help your parents.” These comments reflect not only their real feelings, but also seemed to be influenced by ideas about how, in their identity as school children, they are supposed to think about farming.

In the higher classes it was “not done” to like farming even though children stressed that it was important to help their parents and brothers and sisters in the rainy season, because it was the only way to get food and money. This identity seemed to be formed gradually during primary school. A young boy in class 2 in Toyogdin, for example, who dared to admit that he actually liked farming, was quickly shushed by his age mates. Children from CE (year 3-4) in Dabonsmoree explained: “Those who do not go to school like farming more than we do, because farming is their work. School is our work. We can read, write and speak French. They can farm better.”

Omarou (13, class 6), who had already obtained the certificate, but was waiting for his father to find the secondary school fees, and continued attending so that he would not fall behind, said: “I farm, but I do not like it. My aim is to become a civil servant, a teacher. I like teaching.” In Toyogdin, school children stressed that they did not see themselves as proper villagers: “The main difference is that they are villagers, we are school children.”

It was also evident that, for the children, completing only primary school was by no means a satisfying prospect. All children said they expected that they would try to complete secondary school. Even pupils who had once, or more times, repeated classes and who were classified by their teachers as underperforming, did not consider it an option to voluntarily limit their education to primary school. Animata (13), for example, who had already repeated two classes was among the slow learners, according to the teachers, said she was determined to continue onto secondary school next year. She said that she was motivated by the teachers to try and continue: “The teachers tell me not to be discouraged. That I should try and continue.” A conversation with her mother confirmed that this was the goal of the family as well.

These remarks show commonalities with what has been written by other scholars about the application of modern, formal education in the African, and pastoral, context. It appears that

certain problems, for which the basis was laid in the colonial times, are still alive. Rayfield commented:

The main problem of modern schools, starting with missionary schools during the colonial time, is that they withdraw children from society and inculcate them with values and knowledge that make it difficult for them to return to their society. The very existence of classrooms conveyed the strong message that it is more honourable to sit in an office than to earn a living by manual labour [1983].

He mentions Burkina Faso as an example of a country that created rural schools after independence, where both French and agricultural skills were taught, but writes that the main problem was that “the students didn't know French and the teachers didn't know agriculture” (idem).

2.8 Opinions of teachers

Teachers too, seemed to share for a large part the idea that primary school was in the first place a preparation for further education and ideally, a white-collar job. In Toyogdin, the teachers said they found it very discouraging that so few children from school continued and completed secondary schooling. According to them, the high number of people with only primary schooling and the low number of children who completed secondary school in the village was perceived negatively and little value was attributed to completing primary school only.

In Dabonsmoree Primary school there was also a focus on proceeding onto secondary education. The head teacher was proud that since his arrival a few years ago, hardly any pupils had abandoned school; they had either left to secondary school or were still repeating the last class, hoping for better results or waiting for their parents to save enough money for secondary school fees. He regretted, however, that so many dropped out during secondary school. Yet the head teacher in Dabonsmoree was able to point at some positive influences of the group of young men in the village, who had had primary schooling and/or some years of secondary schooling. He pointed at the two former school students who were the only villagers exploiting an irrigated vegetable garden and hoped this would have positive results for the community.

2.9 Opinion of educated villagers

We have seen that for children in school it was their ultimate goal to acquire a “Nasara” job and to leave farming behind. We have also seen that parents of former students who had returned to the village (the so-called karambi vala) and were “forced to farm” (or were still looking for work) often felt they had lost the money they had invested. This raises the question what the “karambi vala” in the research villages themselves thought about the benefits of their own education, despite the fact that they had “failed” in the community's eyes. Even though many of these educated farmers did not yet have children of school-going age, their insights about the value of education in their own lives are valuable for this study.

The research population of educated farmers in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin mainly consisted of men in their twenties who had attended the village school. In Dabonsmoree we mainly spoke to educated persons with some years of secondary education. In Toyogdin the focus group discussion we organised consisted of men with only 5 or 6 years of primary schooling, because few people were

living in the village with secondary schooling. We were able to collect diverse and extensive data from this group of villagers, in both formal group discussions and informal conversations in the local coffee bar or market. Communication with both groups was facilitated by the fact that they spoke French and no interpreter was needed.

Conversations with the educated men and, occasionally, women showed that they were certainly disappointed and sometimes even frustrated about their status as a (subsistence) farmer, and were often still trying to find a government job. However, all said they felt they had certainly experienced benefits from their education. These benefits were mainly related to the practical benefits of being able to read, write and speak French. Financial benefits, however, seemed meagre and limited to odd jobs with projects or governmental services.

In Toyogdin, an educated man said: “We benefit from our education because we speak some French. And we can do voluntary jobs in the projects.”

In Dabonsmoree, an educated man commented: “Our children are cleaner. We also have a different relation with our wives and we look after our children.”

And, even though they did not feel they had acquired real income generating skills through their education, they felt they had, in a way, some financial benefits: “Also, we can manage our money better. We do not buy dolo (locally brewed millet beer). Poverty is also a question of allocating money.”

In both villages even those with (almost) only primary education said that a major difference was that they would send all their children to school. They acknowledged that they had similar obstacles to overcome (mainly in terms of direct costs) as their illiterate co-villagers. However, they said that an important difference was that they were more motivated to do so and that they managed their money better. Also, they stressed that they were aware that children were not always going to school voluntarily and that they knew, because of their education, that force was sometimes needed. The problem for children to combine school with work, mainly the herding of animals, was acknowledged, but it was not considered a major problem because it was assumed there would also be other (related) children around to do this work. Apparently, in finding solutions to ensure education for their own children, people rely on the expectation that there will also be out-of-school children in their community.

Obviously, these people were well aware of the fact that completing a formal education would not always lead to the desired government employment. Yet this did not appear to affect their determination to educate their own children, up to at least BEPC (10 years). The intrinsic value of education, which they had experienced themselves, was important. It is difficult to say, however, if they will really do this, because none of these people already had children of secondary school age and only a few had small children in primary school. Many of them said, however: “We will make sure that our children go to school, at least to 4th class (9 years)”. Another group in Dabonsmoree: “It is for sure that we will send all our children to school. And if they do not want to go, we will force them. They have to get 3rd or 4th at the minimum. Also, our way of spending is different. Those who do not want to send their children think it is wasting money”.

With respect to the effects of their education on their way of farming, opinions differed considerably between the educated young men in the two villages. These differences are probably

partly due to the fact that the educated people in Toyogdin had enjoyed fewer years of education than the educated informants in Dabonsmoree (4-6 years and 5-10 years respectively). The group in Dabonsmoree stressed that they used different techniques than their illiterate co-villagers, whilst their educated age mates in Toyogdin said their formal education had not changed their ways of farming. “We understand better what the extension workers teach us. And some of us even go to ask them something in Tougouri or Boulsa.” Also, they referred to the fact that the only two young men who engaged in (commercial) horticulture in the nearby irrigated garden plots, both had at least primary schooling. In both cases, they felt that they benefited from literacy and numeracy skills and their increased ability to learn new things, rather than directly from agricultural skills they had learned in school. Even though agriculture is officially a subject in formal (primary) school, this was never brought up as significant.

Conversations with older illiterate informants, suggested, moreover, that it was not always easy for educated farmers to apply the new techniques. Young men often work on family fields, under authority of the family head. One family head said: “I do not know if my (educated) son has learned new techniques. But even if he has, it won’t make a difference, because I am the chief of the field and I decide how we farm.” It was a strong conviction that farming was to be learned at home, not in school: “We teach children how to farm. It is like a school too, but we do it.”

Yet also educated younger men with their own fields insisted that their harvests (and incomes) were not higher due to their improved techniques. As was confirmed by other villagers that this could be explained by the fact that “karambi vaala” farmed smaller surfaces and shorter hours. It was stated by illiterate people and confirmed by the educated minority that many educated men were not so motivated to farm long hours. Yet it was emphasised as well, that leaving agriculture was no option as that they had “no choice but to farm”.

In Toyogdin where the young men I spoke to had a maximum of 6 years schooling, they remarked that there was no difference in terms of farming. In contrast to their age-mates in Dabonsmoree, they said they did not see benefits in applying techniques as proposed by governmental and NGO workers. “In agriculture, there is no difference. We farm in the same way as the others do. We do not do what the agric people (extension workers) tell us, we see that it takes us behind schedule, because it takes too much time.” However, just like their colleagues in Dabonsmoree, who had on average more education, they felt that they were less motivated to farm “Yes, I think we are different, we think more about other things and we are less motivated to farm.”

2.10 Conclusion

According to people in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin, formal education should lead to acquiring knowledge (*bangre*). Some - but not all - parents said that the knowledge gained through formal education “opened up children’s minds” and that it made children look after themselves better. The most important facet of *bangre*, however, was that it could possibly lead to formal, salaried job (Nasara job). The term Nasara refers to white strangers, but also to white-collar, government workers. An older respondent, who had no children in school, told me: “Nasaratenga is for the karambiisi”. (Nasaratenga is for the schoolchildren). Nasaratenga refers to the land of the white people. It is often understood as Europe or “the West”, but it appears that it also refers to the modernised urban settings in their own country.

Parents made very clear that the purpose of education was for the child to become a civil servant; with a salaried job, a moped and a brick house. School children shared this hope and felt their identity as school children (“not villagers”) required them to dislike or even shun farming as an activity for them to perform.

The dream of finding a Nasara job was less widespread in Dabonsmoree’s Fulani community, where hardly any children were enrolled in school. Even though a few girls had been sent to school in the past, some fathers did not seem to consider enrolling children an option. Leaving the current pastoralist lifestyle was not considered as desirable as it was among the dominant Mossi group.

This association between education and Nasara work, among the Mossi majority, had an unfortunate effect on the enrolment of children into primary school. People were clear that the success stories were a motivation for them; a monthly salary would help the entire family. On the other hand, the observation that most children failed to achieve this, even if they were sent to school, was brought up as one of the most discouraging aspects for school enrolment of their children. Even though it was recognised, by most, that having (French) literacy and numeracy skills also certainly had some intrinsic benefits, it appeared that these could not compensate for the money spent and investments made (in terms of child work, marriage prospects etc., see next chapter).

As the benefits of schooling were mainly seen in jobs requiring at least a secondary education, hardly any benefits could be brought up of only completing primary education or a few years of secondary schooling. In fact, according to many people (including teachers), completing primary school only was the equivalent to dropping out of school. Parents considered it cruel not to let their children continue to (the expensive) secondary school, which could be a reason for not enrolling them in the first place. Co-wives in Dabonsmoree, relatively well-off, currently no children in school, said: “It’s discouraging if they don’t have money to make them continue after primary. Only primary is not good. Only those who have listened well will be able to read and write.” The low quality of primary schooling might play a role in this, and will be discussed in the next chapter.

The common perception that schooling will make children less motivated to farm, which was confirmed (or even exaggerated) by school children and educated adults themselves, further decreased the motivation to invest in an education that would not necessarily lead to formal work. It was believed by adults and school children alike that schooling was a preparation for a different life, away from the village, and farming in the future would only be done if there was no alternatives. We cannot say, however, that alienation of the traditional occupation, and leaving the village, was actually feared by the Mossi parents. Yet such consequences are regarded negatively unless education leads to the desired results of a salaried job that will benefit the entire family.

The purposes of education for girls were formulated in similar ways, but chances of reaching the goal of a white-collar job were considered smaller, an idea that reflects the high drop-out rates of girls in secondary schools in the area. Gender-specific barriers at the secondary level seem to partly explain the low percentages of girls in primary school (why enrol in primary school if secondary school is unattainable anyway?). In the next chapters we will also look at other barriers that prevent girls in particular from enrolling.

Chapter 3

Other Factors Influencing Primary School Enrolment

We ask our parents why we cannot go to school, but they tell us that we have passed the age of enrolment and they also say that there is no money and that there is work to be done. (Harpoka, 11, not in school)

This comment provides some suggestions about the factors that withhold children from attending school. In the previous chapter we discussed local ideas about the purpose and benefits of a formal education, as we believe that such ideas can play a major role in the decision to send a child to school or not (and to keep that child in school). Yet, it is obviously not only the value attributed to (completing) a formal education that determines how many children are in school. Even parents who see the benefits may not have children in school, because there are financial, cultural and social factors that have a restraining impact. Also, practical factors, like the way recruitment is announced and organised in the village, may have an impact. In this chapter we will look at several factors that appeared to play a role in the low enrolment figures in the two research villages.

3.1 Recruitment/sensitisation

In Burkina Faso, enrolment for class 1 normally takes place at least once a year. In Dabonsmoree, however, there had, since 2005, been only one possibility for enrolment every two years, due to a shift from a double stream system (6 classes for 3 teachers and 3 classrooms) to the old system of a three-class school. Consequently, there had been no enrolment in the year when the study took place (2006-2007) and the school consisted of five classes (with three teachers). Nevertheless, over around ten “free listeners” (auditeurs libres) had been admitted in the lowest class in September, although they were expected to officially enter first class in September 2007.

In contrast to observations made in Ghana, where no age limit for admission into Primary 1 was implemented [De Lange 2007], head teachers adhered to an age limit of about nine, two years above the normal age of entry into primary school. Age, however, was often estimated, because most children lack birth certificates. Because only few children in the village have officially been registered, children without birth certificates were accepted, as the head teacher in Dabonsmoree explained: “Otherwise we would only have 7 or 8 children in the school.” Also in contrast to what was observed in Ghana, no children were admitted to the first class during the year, according to the head teacher in order to avoid “chaotic situations”. The strict adherence to the age limit and the fact that new pupils are admitted only once a year, or even once every two years, means that there is a relatively short period of time (a few weeks) in a child’s life that is crucial for its future in terms of education. It may not have been realised that this could constitute an important aspect

behind non-enrolment: if for whatever reasons, parents during those crucial weeks are occupied with different concerns or are not in a position to register, the child will be out of school for the next 2 years, and thus for the rest of his or her life.

Katarina Tomasevski [2004:36] has criticised the “preclusion of children if they are merely 12 or even 10 years old, in poor countries. Dismissing over-age children from school or precluding the enrolment penalizes children who cannot go to work because they had to work”. On the other hand, it is questionable whether using flexible age limits undermines the creation of clear social norms on education.

Moreover, it was not always clear for parents how and when they could register their children in school. We met one old father, for example, who said that he had recently enrolled his daughter with the female teacher who had visited his compound. The girl turned out, however, to not be enrolled, since, as we found out from one of the teachers, this visit had concerned the national census, not school enrolment.

In both villages, considerable efforts had been required to motivate parents to enrol their children. It appeared that simply announcing that the enrolment period had started, was not enough. By setting up certain activities parents could effectively be motivated to actually enrol their children. The head master in Dabonsmoree said: “I really had a problem to enrol children for CP1 (class 1) last year. After announcing the enrolment period at the market, only a few parents enrolled their children in school. So, I went door to door with the PTA (parent-teacher association) president. At the end we had to send children home, because there were too many for one class!”

From conversations with the head teacher, PTA president and villagers in Dabonsmoree, it became clear that the “from door to door” recruitment campaign comprised visits to virtually all compounds without any children in school, during several days at the beginning of the school year. The head master commented on the way they tried to convince parents to enrol children: “We have not said that they should enrol their children. We have said that in the future they will benefit, that animals can die.” The recruitment campaign proved successful; about 60 children were said to have been enrolled and over 15 of them were sent home, mainly the below-age children.

There had been other recruitment activities in Dabonsmoree as well. In the two preceding years, two theatre groups from the provincial capital had performed on the topic of education. One play was about two fathers with two sons; one of them had sent his son to school, the other had not. The one at school came home on a motorbike with luxurious things, which obviously had made the other father regret that he had not done the same. Later, a similar story had been played about two girls of who only one was sent to school and who subsequently got a white-collar job and could then help her family.

In Toyogdin as well, several “sensitisation activities” had taken place, in which the village chief was actively engaged. He was not literate himself, but had several relatives who were working in formal jobs in the capital. He had talked to people from families with non-school-going children and in village meetings he requested them to help him check if there were any children who were the correct age to be enrolled. The AME (mother-female-teacher association) had supposedly also done some “sensitisation talks” with the community to “show the importance of schooling”. The head teacher furthermore told me that he had other occasional ways to make local people aware of the need of education: “If they come to me to read a letter for them, I won’t read it for them. I will

tell them instead that if they would have sent a child to school, they would not need to ask me this!”

Despite these efforts, however, last year’s recruitment at the village market and by informing traditional authorities from each village quarter, had initially resulted in only a few enrolments. Therefore, Toyogdin’s teachers had asked some secondary school children from the villages (who were attending in Tougouri) to talk about the benefits of education, in combination with a football match, drinks and some food. 50 children (26 boys/24 girls) in class 1 indicate that these activities may have proved to be successful. A problem, however, is that enrolment exceeds the capacity of the school in terms of infrastructure and staff. If recruitment is as successful every year, more classrooms and teachers will be needed.

There is some confusion about whose responsibility it is to organise sensitisation programmes. The headmasters in both villages, although they had both been engaged in activities, stressed that it was not their responsibility and that it was an additional burden. The educated young people had been engaged in sensitisation activities in Dabonsmoree as well; they said they would be interested in expanding these efforts, if funds were available. The government education service and the PTA district committee do organise meetings in several villages, but not in all villages and not every year.

There is also some confusion about the message itself. Conversations with the district level CEB (education services), as well as with Plan officials indicated that no clear policies or strategies on the content and the form of the sensitisation messages were in place. An assessment of the messages that were transferred about education by PTAs and theatre groups, largely explains the perception of education as discussed in Chapter 2. They appear to reinforce stereotypes of “Nasaras” and largely reproduce the colonial message “that it is more honourable to sit in an office than to earn a living by manual labour”, as Rayfield indicated (see paragraph 2.7).

The story line in the “sensitisation theatre” - a popular way of canvassing messages in an area where literacy is rare and many people do not have a radio - focussed on the benefits of having a white-collar job, rather than the benefits education can have on a local level. Furthermore, the initiatives on a local level aimed at convincing people without children in school to send at least one child rather than every child. Campaigns were not “child rights based”, but focused on the material benefits a family could have from educating a child.

In addition, the approach from the education officials indicated that the obstacles to education brought up by parents were not always taken seriously, but rather interpreted as false excuses. An official in Tougouri told us that, in their own sensitisation efforts, convincing parents was mainly done by rejecting the obstacles mentioned by parents:

How we do it normally is, we ask their point of view, why they do not send their children to school. We then tell them that it is not true. If they say that they cannot do it because they have to look after the animals, we say that they have to herd in holidays only, and that even in the dry season parents can guard them. And if they tell us that the children will not find work, we tell them that the state cannot give work to all children but that knowledge can help them in their lives anyway.

From the above observations we can conclude that only few parents decided to enrol a child in school on their own initiative, i.e. without being actively, personally approached by teachers, PTA or secondary school-going adolescents. Apparently, even after a physical school presence of almost 25 years, active incentives and publicity campaigns continued to be needed. School enrolment is not yet an ingredient of a normal childhood. It is not yet the general norm to which all parents and all children automatically adhere. Although the previous chapter showed that virtually all people could mention the various benefits of education and many seemed eager to enrol at least one child in school, the step to actual enrolment was apparently not taken easily.

3.1.1 Who makes decisions and when are they made?

It was repeatedly stated by women that it is the fathers who decide if a child goes to school. They said: "A child belongs to the father. That is why the father decides." A few women, however, said that school enrolment was the decision of the father and mother together; and in another few cases it was not the father, but the family head, usually the oldest male, who made the decision.

It appeared that school fees were often - at least partly - paid by the mothers, especially in the case of girls. However, this apparently only marginally changed their position in terms of decision making concerning education. Women acknowledged that their "husband would not be able to refuse" if they would pay for their child's enrolment fees themselves, but they also said that they were afraid that later (perhaps when the child would reach the age of secondary school), they would be denied the financial support of their husbands if they now acted on their own. As a mother said: "It is discouraging if we send a child to school and our husbands refuse to pay for fees afterwards."

3.1.2 Agency of children

Due to the adherence to the age limit for entry into primary school, children themselves had hardly any bargaining power in the decision making. The age restriction limits the agency of children. Children at the age of around 7 or 8 are much less likely to express a desire to go to school or to enrol themselves, as was sometimes observed in Northern Ghana [De Lange 2007]. And as the quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, as soon as they have passed the age of enrolment, the parents have an extra argument to withhold the child from school.

Children who were already enrolled in school, on the other hand, can often influence their own attendance and enrolment in subsequent classes. Even though, in some cases, parents took the children out of school (to perform work for example), drop-out had often been the child's own choice. This was particularly the case in the lowest classes and "voluntary drop out" among the oldest primary students was rare, according to the teachers, because "only at a certain age children start to understand the importance of education".

Children, who had been enrolled, sometimes refused to go to school. From conversations with primary drop-outs, it appeared that physical punishments and/or bad performance in class are major reasons for this. Sybri (12), who dropped out a few years ago: "I stopped because I did not like school; I was always last and the teachers beat me when I did not know my lessons." Some children had also dropped out because they were the only child from a compound or area to go to school, and did not enjoy having to travel to and attend school without siblings or friends.

Mothers, in a group discussion in Dabonsmoree, explained that they had two strategies to make a child go to school: “If the child refuses to go, we either beat it or give it something to flatter it, like some money to buy porridge.” Yet it appeared that, in some cases, the (illiterate) parents were uninterested or unable to force their young children to go to school. The completion of the first years of primary school thus depended largely on the motivation of the child itself and children sometimes used creative methods to avoid school. We encountered a mother who told of her son attending, as she phrased it, “*école boissonnaire*” (bush school). Apparently, her son had in the past pretended to go to school, while actually playing in the bush. Parents stressed that the refusal of children to attend, and the drop-out rate, discouraged them to enrol more children. A mother of two sons who had both dropped out said: “We are not sending our children anymore, because two sons have refused, and they were even hiding in the bush. They have barred the road for the others!”

A mother of a household with seven children stressed that they had stopped sending children to school, because their children refused to attend, mainly in the lower classes: “We sent them to school, but they refuse. So my husband does not want to send any children anymore.” Child agency in this case, with parents unable or unwilling to exert sufficient pressure, may lead to non-attendance, not only of the particular child, but also of the younger siblings in the compound and the neighbourhood.

We had the impression, however, that this refusal was becoming less common, possibly due to (slightly) more child-friendly teaching methods. Almost all cases recorded of children refusing to go to school were at least a few years ago. Despite the severe methods applied by teachers in the lowest classes and accounts of beatings from pupils in the higher classes, these days less violence was being used, according to villagers and teachers (see paragraph 3.5.2). One of the elders in Dabonsmoree, who had children in school years ago and was now sending his youngest children, confirmed this: “In the past I had to beat my children before they went to school. Now, they take a bath and leave themselves.” This single concrete case could indeed indicate that education has become more normalised in childhood and although it may not yet be the norm, it is no longer perceived as an alien and oppressive activity that children do their best to avoid.

3.2 Costs of education

Poverty forces parents to make priority choices, which, in terms of education, often prove to be unfortunate for girls [Hagberg 2002]¹⁷. A 1997 study showed that only 19% of poor children were in school, compared to a national average of 35% [Hagberg 2002]. It is believed that this is mainly due to the cost involved in schooling (direct costs), as well as the income being missed out on when children are in school (opportunity costs). Examples from different parts in the world show that a total abolition of school fees often leads to explosive enrolment (e.g. Burundi, Uganda), which suggests that fees, even if they are low, form a barrier to education for all [Kattan & Burnett 2004]. This paragraph questions if and why direct costs related to formal education pose a barrier to

¹⁷ www.meba.org

primary education in Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin. Possible opportunity costs are addressed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Both inside and outside the village, we received conflicting messages on the impact on enrolment by direct costs of primary school. Some parents were outspoken in their view that all children in the village would be in school if primary fees were abolished, which suggests that fees are the major obstacle to a primary education. A mechanic in the village centre, without any children in school said: "I cannot read the ideas of other people. But they always say that they lack the means."

Local officials and teachers, on the other hand, were keen to emphasise that the alleged cost of education was sometimes used by parents as an excuse for a decision that had in reality been made on the basis of other considerations. They pointed at the cattle that are sometimes owned by families who do not send any children to school and at the high expense of some social events (funerals, marriage) that families incur; and yet they claim not to be able to pay much smaller amounts for school.

In this respect, however, it should also be noted that, in contrast to the low primary enrolment level, the revenue level in Namentenga is not among the lowest in the country¹⁸. The relatively low enrolment figure would suggest that in this province, non-economic factors are relevant to non-enrolment. Below we will discuss the actual costs of primary school and the effect these may have. We will also take into account secondary school costs, because the costs of schooling to be incurred at higher levels appear to have an important influence on enrolment at the primary level.

3.2.1 Primary school costs

In conformance with national education laws in Burkina Faso, no tuition fees were levied in the research schools. The main cost charged to parents was the PTA fee, which had been set by the parents and PTA at 1250 and 1500 CFA respectively (approximately 2 euros and 2.25 euros) per year. This money was used to pay for maintenance of the school and for transport to the district capital for teachers. The fee was collected by the teachers because they had most contact with the pupils and the money was (officially) kept by the parent-members of the PTA. Pupils paid their fees in the course of the year and according to the teachers all pupils had usually paid by the end of the year. Additional, smaller amounts were levied throughout the year (50-100 cedi/7-15 eurocents), mainly to contribute to transport costs for the school lunch. It can be estimated that total (direct costs) of primary school were three to four euros a year. It should be noted that in Toyogdin, up until 2005, PTA fees had been (partly) paid by the NGO Plan Burkina. According to the teachers, the discontinuation of this programme in 2005 had not caused higher levels of drop-out. (For a more detailed description of the functioning of the PTA and its female version AME, see paragraph 3.5.1).

In both villages, books were supplied by the government (though not in sufficient numbers). A writing kit (slate, chalk, paper, pencils) was supplied by Plan. Parents were very pleased with this supply and stressed that having to buy these utensils had posed an obstacle to education in the past. In Burkina Faso, there is no uniform requirement in public schools. A certain degree of

¹⁸ www.pnud.bf

neatness is normally required, even though in reality many children attended class barefoot and in tattered clothing.

3.2.2 Secondary school costs

In Burkina Faso, secondary school fees are much higher than primary school fees. Fees for secondary school vary according to the pupil's results of the primary certificate exam. Children, who attain a certain minimum score, can qualify for so-called *entrée en sixième*; the government then pays for enrolment fees (yet not for other costs such as uniform, food, PTA fees etc). Yet over the last few years hardly any children from the research villages had benefited from the grant. This was mainly due to poor test performances, but also to the fact that primary graduates were often either too old or did not have a birth certificate made before class 2 (which is an official requirement for a grant for secondary school fees, in order to avoid fraud with the age limits). In Dabonsmoree, the majority of children in the highest classes had only recently acquired a birth certificate (as part of a Plan programme) and they were hence already disqualified for the grant. In Dabonsmoree's registers for 2000-2006, only one pupil could be found who had qualified for the grant; according to the headmaster, it had been the son of an agricultural extension worker who had temporarily stayed in the village. The national bursary system, which existed until the 1980s, was abandoned and now only NGOs occasionally provide bursaries for needy students.

Without reduction, the first year fee for the secondary schools in the area is around 27.000 CFA (41 euros) per year, plus the costs for a uniform (5000CFA) and school utensils. In the following years as well, a distinction is made on the basis of the results gained after primary school. For children in the research villages, and other rural areas, going to secondary school involves many additional costs for accommodation, food, schoolbooks, utensils, clothing and transport. In Dabonsmoree, the children can attend secondary school in the town of Tougouri (32 km away) or Boulsa (60 km); recently they have also been attending in Zeguedeguin (18 Km). The choice of a school and town usually depends on possible contacts, because secondary school children usually stay with a "tuteur" (host) and his family, who could be a relative or far acquaintance. The pupil's parents usually compensate the hosts by providing food or money and especially girls are often expected to perform household tasks after school in the host family.

3.2.3 Costs: an obstacle?

The "lack of means" was frequently brought up by parents - especially fathers - as the main reason for not having children in school. However, it was the general opinion among parents, teachers and children, that the village schools were attended by both the poor and the better-off. It was agreed that costs of education formed a direct barrier for the very poor families, especially if there were several children of school going age. On the other hand, we also encountered several families who were certainly not among the poorer section of the village, but who had no children in school. The poverty argument is often used, and probably for good reasons, but it may also be an easy argument to resort to and thus may even be used by families that by local standards are not poor at all. The incapacity to bear costs of primary education is thus the reason for non-enrolment in some - but not all - cases.

Parents explained that there were different reasons for parents not to enrol their children, and that these reasons should not be confused. It was repeatedly stated that some families in the village had

problems feeding themselves and that, for them, any additional costs would be an obstacle. But it was also stated that: “Some are not able to, others do not want to.” In individual interviews with people with very few resources, the direct costs of primary education were hardly ever mentioned as the major obstacle to sending at least one child to school. It appeared that, in those families with no children in school, other factors had been at play as well, such as child work, lack of confidence in the returns on education and plans to marry-off a daughter.

The fact that children from poor families are restrained from continuing their studies after primary school clearly affects primary enrolment. “Going far” in secondary school, which means reaching the upper level, is considered much more common among the “better off”. Nestor (educated, 28, farmer) said: “If you see a child who is in 3rd or 4th class (class 9-10), you know his father is not a poor man.” During a FGD with fathers in Dabonsmoree, a father commented: “There are poor who educate their children, but in primary school only”. But on the other hand, some people without any animals, but with clear determination, stressed that they expected to be able to pay for the secondary school fees. A father without children in school said: “Even at the secondary level, you can push them far. You push one, and after that he can help the others.”

Mothers in a FGD also stated that secondary school is too expensive for poor people: “Parents need to have cows if they want to send a child to the secondary school.” Yet, they later added that some other sources of income could be tapped: “There are people without cows who have children in secondary school. They sell their millet or sesame or groundnuts.”

Also, as mentioned above, the high costs of secondary school often force primary graduates to remain in primary school, even after they have passed the exams. Sometimes this is to give parents more time to save enough money, but in other cases parents hope that the child will sit the exam again the following year and obtain the required results to be eligible for the government grant - the extra year of studies can improve his or her chances. Hawa (13), who was “first” in her class, told us: “I gained the certificate last year and my father told me to repeat class. He will try to do some trade, he is a butcher and a farmer.”

Yet the high secondary school costs do not only delay school careers, or cut them short. The data also shows that the expected high costs of secondary school make people hesitant to send one, let alone several, of their children to primary school. Even though some people did not know the exact costs of secondary schooling, they had usually heard that it was very expensive. A father of nine, who had sent one child to school in the past:

I cannot enrol more. I sent my first son to school and it has been a loss. I still suffer for my son. School is expensive. It is not the primary school that is the problem. If a child does not gain entrée en sixieme (grant), you will have to pay a lot for secondary school. You cannot tell your child that it has to stop. And it does not rain a lot these times.

The connection between high secondary education costs and reluctance to send children to (relatively cheap) primary school is explained by the low value attributed to primary education, but also to a common idea that not allowing a child to continue after primary school is cruel to the child. The observation that many parents indeed try to find money to help their children continue into secondary school, after several years of “waiting” in class six, further proves this. Some parents even said that it was better not to educate a child at all than to tell it to stop after primary level.

This attitude explains why cutting, or even expunging, costs for primary school is not enough to convince parents to enrol their children. Parents also need to be confident that their children will be able to continue their education in the long run.

Guarcello et al. [2006:14] explained how barriers on the secondary level can have a real effect on enrolment into primary school:

Even when school access constraints are limited to higher levels of schooling, they can be part of the reason why children do not attend school at all or drop out of the primary school. The most commonly used explanation for this finding is that returns to education tend to be much higher for (lower) secondary than for primary. Parents have hence an incentive to send their children to primary school rather than to work if they know that their offspring will also have access to (lower) secondary education, where the seed of the initial investment in human capital begin to bear fruit.

The willingness to enrol a child, and pay the costs, hence appears to depend largely on expected returns, rather than on a social norm, automatism or an idea that a child has the right to be educated. Parents often made comparisons with investing in cows or sowing crops, when talking about the costs of education, in order to stress that returns were unsure but important. It was repeatedly stated that some fathers “think they are wasting their money; they prefer investing in cows.” Consequently, the willingness of parents to pay sometimes depends on the results of the child. Children from the highest primary class in Dabonsmoree said: “Our parents are happy to pay the PTA money, because they are the ones who enrolled us. But if we are not doing well in school, they do not like to pay.” Also in conversations with secondary drop-outs, “lack of means” and “poor results”, were often mentioned hand-in-hand as the reason for drop-out, which suggests that fathers are less willing to pay for fees if chances of success start to decrease.

The fact that wealth is often invested in animals also helps to explain the complex relation between costs and enrolment of children in school. Cows (as well as goats and sheep) are seen, by the Mossi majority, as a buffer in times of hunger or disease. Fathers admitted that, for this reason, they were reluctant to sell their cows for school fees. The status of owning cattle, probably also plays a role in this. The headmaster’s (Toyogdin) remark further explains: “Some people have wealth, but they are not used to spending money.”

Even the young, educated farmers in both villages, stressed that they aimed to invest in cattle. In Toyogdin one man said: “It is indispensable to have animals. We are going to send all our children to school. Other people’s children will guard our animals.” And: “No we don’t want to put all our money in the bank, it will not grow much. You need animals. Finding a Fulani to herd is difficult. And they can steal and sell your animals.” Educated farmers in Dabonsmoree added: “We need to have them in time of hunger.”

3.2.4 Conclusion: costs

The data shows that for some people any expense would be a problem and an additional worry, which they prefer to avoid. On the other hand, it is not certain that they would send their children to school if they had a bit more money or cattle, because many better-off people do not send their children to school either. In the area, being rich means owning cattle, which fathers do not always

sell for educational costs. In this way, costs formed a barrier not only for the poorest, but also for those with more wealth. This could explain the strong effect that the abolition of primary fees has had in many countries on enrolment figures.

The advantage of low primary fees is largely overshadowed by the high secondary school costs. The idea that education is very expensive is mainly based on the secondary school costs. In fact, secondary school costs are considerably reduced if pupils obtain certain results for the primary school final exam (secondary school entrance exams); they can then qualify for a governmental grant. Unfortunately, the required results are hardly ever attained by children from Dabonsmoree and Toyogdin. The effect of the high costs of secondary schooling on primary school enrolment is significant, because so little value is attributed to completing only primary school. Parents are likely to send only the number of children to school that they think they can afford to support in secondary school (or will invest only if they think the child will also be able to overcome other obstacles at the secondary level).

Families are usually large in the area and very few farmers would be able to pay secondary fees for all their children. Those who send more than one child to school often anticipate (and possibly hope) that some will drop out, which will then not actively be prevented.

3.3 Child work: an obstacle?

It has been repeatedly shown that child work and low education figures are related problems. Reducing child work is considered critical to achieving Education for All. At the same time, it has also been observed that causal links between work involvement and school attendance cannot be definitely established. Also, there are reports that school and work can sometimes be combined successfully and that, in some cases, earning an income can help children to achieve educational goals [Guarcello et al. 2006; The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006]. Attendance of working children varies across countries; this is explained by differences in nature or intensity of work carried out by children, as well as structural differences in the way that education systems accommodate the exigencies of child work [Guarcello et al. 2006:2].

Burkina Faso has high numbers of children performing economic and domestic activities. According to UNICEF estimates, 57% of children between 5 and 14 are engaged in child labour, which is among the highest rates in the world [UNICEF 2004]. By looking at the different types of child work, its nature and intensity and the way the school system accommodates this work, we will here discuss how and in what ways work of children interferes with education. Insights will help to determine whether it is necessary to focus policy on the eradication of child labour in order to reach EFA in the area.

As in most African countries [Andvig 2001; Kielland & Tovo 2006:57], work performed by children in the research villages is family controlled: on family farms, in the household or, in some cases, in a small family business. The few children working in a business (such as shops or as bicycle mechanics) were working for their father or uncle and their work was thus family controlled and normally unpaid. Those children who had worked as paid labourers had usually (temporarily) left their home village. In the research villages, this concerned mainly boys aged 11 and older who travelled to other parts of Burkina (provinces Gnagna/Kompienga/Tapoa) to work in agriculture. We also encountered a considerable amount of girls who had worked in households elsewhere, as well

as households with daughters currently working elsewhere. Yet in contrast to the labour migration observed among boys, this normally concerned family arranged placements, rather than paid labour. The paragraphs below describe the nature and intensity of the most common types of work in the village and what the effects are on primary education.

3.3.1 Domestic work (girls)

Young girls are often expected to look after their younger siblings while their mothers work on the fields. After about the age of six, girls' responsibilities in the household gradually increase. They sweep the yard, fetch buckets of water from the communal tap, well, pump or lake and do the dishes and laundry. One of the most time-consuming tasks for girls (and women) is the pounding of grains with large wooden pestles in stone mortars. Girls also assist their mothers in cooking. Learning how to stir flour in water to prepare the national staple dish (thick porridge), is considered an important part of the social education of girls. Another task, in which rural girls, and boys to a lesser extent, are engaged, is collecting firewood in the bush. In the rainy season, women and girls also gather sheanuts (noix de karite) for processing into sheabutter, for sale or home use. Time records collected from girls living in several compounds, however, showed that they were not overloaded with work, as there were many girls to share the work with. Four out-of-school girls, aged 10-14, told us about their different activities:

We grind millet, fetch water and grind millet again. We also prepare food with the others, we have fun. It's a lot better than grinding. Grindings hurts the hands. Two of us sell cookies or rice as well. And we go and look for sheanuts in the bush and sometimes we herd the sheep and goats. And we farm with our father, but also on our own farm.

The domestic chores are performed year round and, besides other gender-specific factors, were found to be an obstacle to the education of girls. Wells and pumps are scarce, and electricity is lacking, and so household duties become very time-consuming. Primary school schedules take up the whole day, five days a week, and sending all girls to school would mean a heavy additional workload for the adult women. The intensity of the work depends on the number and age of women present in the household. Nevertheless, mothers in Dabonsmoree said: "We need one girl next to us. We cannot do all the work ourselves." A Rimaibe family in Dabonsmoree added: "We have two girls here who have the age to go to school. We will send one and keep one here, so that she can help her mother to look after the little children."

In addition, girls are often sent to work in other households. In the majority of households, it was observed that at least one daughter had been placed with a widowed grandma or aunt. It was stated that placement with related widowers was "becoming a tradition". In none of the cases were these girls attending school. Even the PTA president in Dabonsmoree had a daughter living with a grandmother, and who was not in school. He said to regret this, but also remarked that: "Someone has to help the old lady and there is no school in the village where she lives. The children over there, who attend, are living with relatives elsewhere." It was suggested that the fact that these girls rarely go to school, is related to the fact that these grandmothers often attain the right to "marry-off" these girls. And girls who will be married off are not sent to school, "because they will refuse their husbands if they have been to school." (See paragraph 3.4.1 on forced marriage).

Whereas some girls did not go to school because of their involvement in household duties, most school girls also recorded busy schedules of work after school, but obviously, they did perform less work than their non-school going age mates. They were believed to learn the necessary skills needed, after school and in the holidays, and help their mothers. In some households, where school attendance of daughters had caused a lack of work force in the household, the family had taken in a girl from an acquainted household to perform these activities. In general, it was stated by mothers that: "Girls have less knowledge because they are performing domestic tasks when the boys are revising notes." Children in class 6 in Dabonsmoree also stated that the need or expectation to work at home was the reason for their poor results (compared to other pupils in town). "In Boulsa and President, schools are better. It is because in towns, children can learn their lessons more; we get a lot of work at home. We all get it, but especially girls."

3.3.2 Farm work

Boys and girls are expected and needed to work on the family fields, which produce food for family consumption. Initially children's tasks are mainly directed at developing skills, but boys and girls of ages ten and above are expected to contribute considerably. Teaching farming skills is considered a responsibility of the family, rather than of the school. Elders in Dabonsoree: "We teach our children how to farm. It is like a school, but we do it."

At about the age of fourteen, children are expected to fully contribute to the household workforce. They are engaged in the different stages of production: ploughing, sowing, weeding and harvesting. As almost all farm work takes place in the rainy season, which coincides with the school holidays, primary school children also take part in this farm work and usually secondary school children come home to help as well. Some people argued, however, that the school sometimes already started when the work on the land was not yet finished and that this caused an inconvenient situation on the farm.

Boys and girls -in and out of school- often have their own farming plot where they grow groundnuts or other crops. Food for the family is grown on the family field, on which the children also work, yet children have their own plot of land to meet their more personal needs such as clothing or school utensils themselves. Children hence play an important role in the farm work in the villages. Especially in households with few able-bodied adults, their hands are needed to secure the food for the family.

Learning how to farm is considered indispensable in this context of subsistence farming. Children in school said: "We all farm". All children regarded farming an important part of their lives "because it gives us to eat". Leaving all work to the parents was not considered an option. As one schoolboy said: "You cannot sit down and watch your father do the work; you cannot do it." Also for girls, being a good farmer is considered important for their future. A twelve-year-old girl who worked in a small shop in Dabonsmoree said: "It is important to farm, because when you marry you can't be lazy."

Farming was not often brought up as a direct barrier to farming. Despite the fact that schools run five days a week until 5 o'clock, working on the fields by children was rarely brought up as an interference to primary education. Nor was it often brought up as the main task of children of primary school-age who were out of school. This may be related to the fact that until the age of about 12 or 14, children are not considered to contribute fully. Also the fact that few lessons are

taught during the agriculture season, plays a role. This is partly due to the official holiday, which lasts from mid July until mid September, but also to the fact that in reality only the highest class actually attends up to that moment. Allegedly, schools in rural areas stop operating towards the end of May. In this way, the school system (informally) accommodates the need to work on the land; unfortunately this compromises the amounts of lessons taught.

On the other hand, farming was sometimes brought up as an indirect barrier to education. Some parents stressed that because they had to farm, they needed the other children to look after their youngest siblings or the animals. However, they admitted that this was mainly the case in the rainy season when schools are closed anyway.

3.3.3 Herding animals

Children in class 3-4 in Dabonsmoree: “Our brothers and sisters who do not go to school look after the goats.”

Elders in Dabonsmoree: “As long as there are animals in the village, there will be children out of school.”

Animal rearing is an important economic activity in the research villages, like elsewhere in Northern and Eastern parts of the country. Investing in goats, sheep or cows is seen as the main way of earning money, building up status and creating a buffer for difficult times. Herding is a job that is rarely done by adults, even though young men among the Fulani also herd. The responsibility of herders is great, as the cattle are the family’s bank account and a healthy herd may bring major profits. In houses with several cows, at least two boys (but sometimes four) are selected to do the herding work. The richest families often entrust their cows to the Fulani, who live on the outskirts of the village, but they often also keep some cows or a bullock closer to home.

In certain periods people take the animals back to the house to prepare it for sale or for ploughing work. People with a larger herd often keep them in a fenced area close to the house. Also the women’s micro-credit programmes, for example, focus mainly on goat breeding. Bullocks - as well as donkeys - are often used for ploughing.

Goats and sheep are frequently guarded by very young children who have not yet reached the age of enrolment. Yet when the herd has to be brought further away from the house to graze and drink, then older children do the job as well. During the dry season, when there are no crops to be protected, the cattle is regularly left unguarded. Cows are herded by boys from about the age of ten onwards, but sometimes younger. Cows were observed roaming around unguarded during the dry season, yet quite some farmers preferred their cows to be herded in the dry season as well, to prevent theft. Boys could herd alone or in pairs; within families, rotation systems exist to give children a rest.

Some men with animals stressed that they needed the cattle so that they could pay for a formal education for some of their children. A young man in Dabonsmoree was planning to send only a few of his children to school: “I will not send all; they have to make sure that there is money to send the others to school.” Two men in a large, relatively well-to-do household in Dabonsmoree said: “We need animals, so that we can send some children to school. So we will send some to school and leave some to look after the animals.”

It is clear that both Fulani and Mossi boys, who were not in school, were assigned the task of herding goats or cows. It is not clear, however, how often herding is the reason for not sending a child to school, as herding in the area is predominantly needed in the period when schools are closed. It appeared that people increasingly preferred to have the animals guarded in the dry season as well, which could partly explain why so many children are out of school. Yet it also raises the question why children, and not adults, are performing this task, especially because, according to the villagers, there is not much else to do during the dry months of the year. Adult men admitted that they do not have other work to do during the dry season, but stressed that adults are not suitable for herding, because they are not as concentrated or motivated to follow the animals all day. During a focus group discussion, men in Dabonmoree said: “An adult can’t do it. He will fall asleep.” When we asked the father of 13 children why his 11 year old son and 9 year old daughter were herding the animals, instead of a parent, he said: “A child walks faster than the adults. That’s why they do it.”

Also, some men stressed that they had done it when they were young, that they were tired of it and that it was now their turn to rest. Three men from a large compound in Dabonmoree, with some children in school and several out of school, said: “Old men do not want to walk anymore. And if you have no child to help you, they can do it.”

Evidently, this division of labour is mainly rooted in tradition, routine and normative ideas. Even though some farmers said (smilingly) that they were prepared to herd the animals themselves, it was observed that a grown (Mossi) man walking with animals was usually laughed at or pitied.

Among the pastoralist Fulani informants, herding cattle was explicitly brought up as a reason for not sending any of their sons to school. More than among the Mossi, cattle breeding was presented as their way of living, which they would not like to change. A Fulani grandmother explained why Fulani had no children in school: “The problem is that we have one child to herd the goats and we need one to look after the cows, so who will be going to school? We have more animals than the Mossi, because animal rearing is our basis.” In this context Fulani people also explained that they have smaller families, because men usually have only one wife. A father would hence need all his children, or at least sons, to look after the cattle. The original nomadic lifestyle of the Fulani people has often been used as the explanation for their low enrolment in formal schools. The Fulani community in Dabonmoree, however, was no longer nomadic; they had been living in the same area for decades and thus the lifestyle argument no longer applies.

In the research villages, the herding work performed by children does play a role in the common idea that it is unwise to expect all children in the village to go to school. Even a grandfather in Dabonmoree, who believed that soon all children would go to school, anticipated that many of them would drop out quickly, in favour of the herding work. He said: “Maybe in ten years time, all children will go to school. Those who drop-out will guard the animals.” Alternatives to herding animals were not common. Pegging the cows was only considered possible if it concerned one or two animals. Entrusting animals to the Fulani is considered a solution to the Mossi, but obviously interferes with the education of the Fulani children.

3.3.4 Child labour migration: “Going to Kompienga”

As has been observed in other Burkinabe villages [e.g. De Lange 2006], many boys aged ten and above leave home to work for a few months, and up to a year or more, to earn money in

commercial agriculture in neighbouring provinces or countries. They are sometimes recruited by middlemen or farmers and abuse at the workplace is common. The practice has been referred to as child trafficking and programmes aim at the sensitisation and interception of migrating children.

The decision to leave is often made by the child rather than by the parents and children often leave in secret. In a study in a neighbouring area it turned out that children sometimes return to school after their migration and that their temporary migration does not necessarily mean an end to their education [idem].

During the study in Dabonsmoree, which started just before the traditional “festival season”, it was observed that groups of boys were returning from other rural areas in the country. Even though many boys had in reality mainly worked in the neighbouring province of Gnagna, they called their trip “going to Kompienga” (Kompienga is a popular destination for migrating boys; this has become an expression to generally refer to the labour migration by boys). This migration concerned mainly boys who had never attended school or had stopped schooling long before their departure. Also, cases were encountered of older boys who had migrated after dropping out of secondary school. Only one case was observed of a boy who had left primary school for “Kompienga”.

It concerned the case of a schoolboy who had left the fifth class to go to work in the groundnut fields in the Bogande area, about 50 km away. The money he had earned (16000 CFA/24 euros) had not been enough to buy the bicycle he had initially left for. His parents, however, had complemented his earnings to enable him to buy the bicycle; they were worried he would otherwise leave home again. After his return, his parents had tried to enrol him back into school, yet he had refused to do so. According to the head teacher, the boy had refused because he had been forced by the teachers to repeat the class he had missed (and hence go back one class). The boy himself added: “After coming back they said I had to repeat the class, because I had missed lessons. I did not like it because I wanted to continue with my class mates.” He said, however, that fear for physical punishment (beating) by the teacher had also played a role. “Every time I did not know my lessons, the teacher would hit me.”

The practice of children, of primary school age, leaving home to work elsewhere may not have been a major reason for drop-out in the research villages. Yet peer pressure and newly-acquired consumer goods may convince children to try their luck. The Dabonsmoree teachers had, for that reason, forbidden this boy to come to the school with his bike, which might have tempted other pupils to migrate for labour.

It was observed that among secondary school children, labour migration was quite common after they had dropped out. It was not always clear if their labour migration plans had caused their drop-out, but in some cases it did clearly prevent them from completing their secondary education. In this respect, the practice can be seen to have a negative effect on primary enrolment as well, as we have seen that (perceived) barriers at the secondary level and low confidence in the completion of a secondary education made people less motivated to invest in primary education.

3.3.5 Conclusion: child work

It appears that the most important tasks done by out-of-school children are herding animals (for boys) and household tasks (for girls). Working on the fields is done by all children, including school children, during the holidays. The herding of animals should not necessarily interfere with school in

because it is mostly done in the rainy period from June until late September, when the village schools are closed. However, many people prefer their cows to be herded in the dry season as well, mainly to prevent theft and to feed them well for good profits. Some people believed that alternatives were possible, such as adults taking up the work, pegging them and using more intensive ways of feeding, but it was generally felt that education for all will remain a fantasy as long as there are cattle. Particularly among the pastoralist Fulani minority, who normally take care of large herds, the herding tasks prevented children from going to school. According to the Fulani people themselves, this was also due to the fact that they usually had only one wife and hence fewer children per father, to do the work.

For girls, domestic tasks are very time consuming, especially grinding grains and fetching water and firewood. Not only does it prevent parents from enrolling all daughters, it is also often an additional burden for school girls who often have busy schedules of work after school. Women said they need at least one girl to help them. The practice of placement of girls with elderly, related widows was observed as a common obstacle to girl-child education.

The child labour migration of boys did not appear to be a direct reason for drop-out of primary school children, as it concerned mainly boys who were already out of school and older (secondary school) boys. Caution should be taken, however, because it has been observed to be common among primary school boys as well, in some other areas in Burkina [De Lange 2006]. Moreover, drop-out of girls may also be related to the need or desire to look for work in other areas, but as we spoke to only a few girls who had dropped out of secondary school, we cannot draw general conclusions about this.

The need for children to work on their parents' or their own fields appeared to not be a major barrier to primary education, because school holidays coincide with the farming season. School children work on the fields or guard the animals during summer holidays, yet it was often stated that they worked less than their non-school-going age mates. It can be regarded positively that children also participate in farming and herding, as it teaches them farming skills. They also feel responsibility to help secure family subsistence and their own needs, such as clothing.

3.4 Rituals and Traditions

Divisions between Christianity (modernity and education) and traditional lifestyles (farming and rituals) are not as clear cut as sometimes thought. Even though many teachers are Christian (or Muslim), there are also role models present in the area who combine traditional chieftaincy positions with a formal education or a formal job with animism. Chapter 2 showed that some animist fathers see a benefit in literacy for the conservation of traditions.

Normally, only one son (usually the oldest) in a family is selected to learn and perform the rituals (sacrifices etc). Fear of children leaving the traditional tradition does not seem to play an important role in the (un-)willingness to send children to school. Even uneducated children are likely to leave the village to look for work and greener pastures; thus keeping children out-of-school does not guarantee that they will stay at home and perform traditional rituals.

However, it cannot be denied that certain traditions in the area do indeed have an impact on (quality) education. Rituals, especially funerals, may take several days and different tasks are assigned to family members, including children. This was mentioned by teachers as a major reason

for absences (especially girls). Furthermore, the importance attached to owning animals is related to traditions and animist sacrifices. Animals are given to relatives and in-laws on specific occasions, according to fixed rules, to secure ties and show respect. Even though this was not explicitly mentioned by informants, the costs this may involve may make it difficult for poor families to invest in education or other needs.

Forced marriage is a tradition that was repeatedly connected to low enrolment and high drop-out. Even though it can be regarded as a cultural, rather than a religious tradition, forced and arranged marriages are often classified as “traditionalist” or Muslim practices.

3.4.1 Forced marriage

Traditionally, girls are married off by their parents, often long before they reach the age to marry (around 17 for Mossi and 13-14 for Fulani). It was stated that girls as young as two years old are sometimes married-off, even though they usually stay with their parents until the marriage. A father can offer a girl to a befriended household to express his gratitude for labour or financial assistance received in difficult times, or to secure friendship ties. Men can also start working on someone else’s field to demonstrate an interest in the daughters. Girls are married to age-mates, but also to older men (often as second or third wives), although this is locally not always seen as desirable by both girls and adults.

Fathers insisted that girls had no say in the choice of husband. One father told me in Dabonsmoree: “I have one daughter promised to a friend. He did some work for me. But it is not just to pay him back. It is also because I know he is a good person.” According to parents, the risk that girls would refuse to marry the person her father had promised her to, increased considerably with her level of education. In fact, it was often brought up as the main change to occur in girls when they are educated. The expectation that educated girls would refuse the arranged marriage was brought up as a major reason not to send (all) girls to school. On the other hand, it was repeatedly stated that uneducated girls were increasingly refusing the arranged husbands as well.

Dabonsmoree’s AME president put it as an undeniable given: “A ‘promised girl’ will not go to school, because she will refuse her husband.”

A Mother: “A school girl will leave her husband after two days. But today also illiterate girls do so!”

A mother of schoolgirls aged 9 and 12: “The schoolgirls want civil servants. They refuse the man to whom you give them to marry.”

A father (1 son and 1 daughter in school, several children out of school): “There is a difference with regard to marriage. Schoolgirls will apply what they have learned and they will choose their husbands themselves. ”

Sending a girl to school and minimising the chances of marrying her off successfully could also have financial consequences. The bride price (paid to the bride’s parents) is smaller than in some other areas in the region, but interested candidates will work on the land of the girl’s father, which can increase the family’s harvest. Sending a girl to school does therefore not only mean that fees have to be paid, but also that the possible bride’s price and other benefits are lost. Also, poor or vulnerable families may feel pressured not to send a girl to school if they have promised their

daughter(s) to someone who has helped them out in difficult times. Sending these girls to school is seen as breaking the promise because it is anticipated that educated girls will refuse to be married off.

Even though the government, churches and NGOs have been setting up several campaigns in the area to stop the practice, fathers appeared to speak quite openly about the practice. In a meeting with men in Toyogdin, for example, it was agreed that nowadays, about 50% of girls in the area are married off. Generally, these are all out-of-school girls.

Young girls were more discrete about the issue. When we discussed the practice of “destination” with some girls who were not in school, they responded mainly with giggles. Boys and parents, however, said they knew some girls who were indeed promised to someone. The comment of Mariam (14, not in school) shows that fear of “refusal” is not limited to educated girls. She said: “We do not know if our fathers have given us away. Our parents would not tell us, because they think we would run away. But we won’t!”

However, girls in the highest classes of Dabonsmoree Primary school confirmed that they were or would not be promised “because they were school girls”. It seems that only in exceptional cases are educated girls married off. We encountered a young lady, for example, with almost ten years of education, who was living as a third wife with an illiterate husband in the village. She had been given away by her widowed mother to this man, because he had done a lot for her during difficult times.

Evidently, the need or desire to marry-off a daughter may lead to the refusal to send her to school, because “educated girls will pick their own husbands.” The resistance against the practice is blamed on education. On the other hand, there is a growing awareness that resistance to the practice is not limited to educated girls, and that also illiterate girls may oppose it. Resistance of all girls to this practice may perhaps lead to an end of the practice of forced marriage and hence contribute to education for all girls.

3.5 Parents’ committees & community involvement

APE chairman Dabonsmoree: “The quality is good if there are enough notebooks and food and if we get help to force the teachers to teach.”

Besides a conducive learning environment and the quality of teaching, the integration of the school in the community is considered a key characteristic of a quality school [Plan Netherlands 2005:22-23]. Integration entails the involvement of parents, attitudes towards teachers and involvement of local government. Well functioning community-based organisations like the PTA, school boards and the SMC (school management committee) are considered central instruments for communities to monitor and influence the access and quality of education [Plan Netherlands 2005:26-27]. Strengthening PTA and SMC committees is hence often one of the main interventions in order to improve access to, and quality of, education.

3.5.1 APE & AME committees

In Burkina Faso, every school is required to have an APE committee (Association Parents Elèves) as well as an AME (Association Mères Educatrices) committee. The APE committee, which is mainly

formed by the fathers, organises meetings with the parents of the pupils, in collaboration with the teachers. The AME is especially for women, (pupils' mothers and female caretakers) and was introduced to involve women in the schools management as well.

In both villages, the APE and AME presidents and various parents were interviewed about their involvement in and knowledge of the APE and AME. The committees consisted of six or seven members, but the respective chairmen and chairwomen appeared most active and best known. Some of the parents in the committee had had a few years of education, but none of them worked in a "literate" job. The educated young farmers in the villages did not actively take part in the committees, because only a few of them had children of school-going-age themselves. In both villages, some civil-servants (e.g. nurses and teachers) had children in the school, yet they felt that they should not be members of the committees, because it should be the responsibility of "the villagers themselves".

In Dabonsmoree as well as in Toyogdin, the APE presidents were from the chief's family. This did not, however, mean that they were among the wealthier people in the village. The Dabonsmoree president, for example, did not possess cattle or other important assets. According to villagers, he had been elected because he was serious and did not drink much beer. The Toyogdin AME president was also married into the chief's lineage. She was known as a successful farmer and businesswomen, who sold beer at the market. The chairpersons all had several children in the school, yet they also had children who had dropped out or had never been enrolled.

The APE and AME committees appeared to meet quite regularly, yet this depends strongly on the time of the year. There are hardly any meetings during the rainy season when there is a lot of work on the farm. In the dry season, the committees were said to organise meetings with all parents about once a month, or bimonthly. During the study, in the dry season, it was indeed observed that several meetings were organised.

We asked the APE president in Dabonsmoree about the tasks of his committee. He said:

The APE decides about the school fees. We have called a meeting and proposed amounts like 1200 and 1500 CFA. We have voted for the 1250 CFA. At the beginning of the year, we say to the parents that they have to pay. After that the teachers collect it. During the year, we organise meetings to tell them they have to pay. If a child has not paid at the end, we do not do anything. But last year every child has paid! We have also told the parents that they cannot send the children to school dirty and if there is a problem in the school, we repair it.

About the division of tasks, he said: "The teachers do the book keeping. Our secretary can read and write so he checks what they do. If we have some money left at the end of the year, we organise a party for the students. We award the best students with notebooks and pens."

The parents of pupils we spoke to confirmed that the PTA was mainly about collecting money. A father of two children in school described the APE as follows: "Sometimes they call us and we talk about how we are going to pay the fees." Parents and committee members said they frequently held meetings, but that, in the end, "it is the teachers who decide."

There was no agreement about the purpose of the collected money and the way in which it was spent in reality did not correspond with the official policy. According to both teachers and parents,

it was mainly to refund transport costs for teachers, or occasionally APE/AME members travelling to the town of Tougouri for administrative school matters. The APE president said:

The fees we collect are for fuel for the teachers, or ourselves, to travel to Tougouri to deliver or take papers. CRS (Catholic relief Services) also demands some money for the transport of the lunch. And when strangers come here, we take some money to give them to eat. And also this year Tougouri (education service) has demanded 16.000 and 10.000, it is a new law.

According to the headmaster in Dabonsmoree, the fees were for transport costs of teachers and PTA members, as well as school maintenance. According to the officials in Tougouri, however, teachers were already compensated for transport costs and the PTA fees were mainly for school maintenance.

It seemed that the mothers' meetings (AME) were somewhat less focussed on money problems. However, they are supposed to be involved in levying the small fees for the school lunch. The AME chairwoman in Dabonsmoree was quite humble about her tasks: "They have not confided a great deal to us..." But later she added: "the AME is to help the school children. One year we grew peas for the school lunch, because CRS is often late with the food supply. We also choose the girls who prepare the school lunch."

The committees are also active in recruiting pupils. The PTA president in Dabonsmoree played an important role in the recruitment of new pupils when he visited all households without children in school, together with the head teacher. The mothers' committee in Toyogdin stressed that they had done some sensitisation: "we did some talks in the village, that you have to send you children to school. And we also pay the women who are cooking the lunch." Evidently, parent committees can play an important role in increasing access. It was not clear whether the Fulani households were visited as well.

The committee-chairpersons in both villages had engaged in trainings, organised by the state and often sponsored by NGOs. In Dabonsmoree, they had participated in a training session on tree planting and water taps in the classrooms and they had attended a meeting with the PTA committees on a departmental level. The chairpersons in Dabonsmoree said, when asked what they had discussed in the departmental meetings: "they have told us that we have to pay 12.000 and 16.000 this year, for some activity."¹⁹ In Toyogdin, they had trained about "supervision of children and sensitisation".

The collaboration between the teachers and PTA committee was not without problems, at least in Dabonsmoree. According to committee members, the teachers sometimes failed to deposit the money they had collected from the pupils to the treasurer. They were said to spend it on travel to the administrative capital, before depositing it with the treasurer, as they should formally do. The AME also had some suspicions of teachers taking grains from the supplies, donated by the CRS.

¹⁹ According to the officials in Tougouri, this concerned a new fee that parent committees pay to the department-level PTA to allow the department-level PTA to organise sensitisation activities in remote villages.

“Because they do not farm, they have to.” The teachers, in their turn, sometimes said that it was difficult to manage the school with the mainly illiterate parents who would not understand certain things.

Despite the emphasis put on the fee-collecting tasks of the APE, it became clear from conversations with the chairpersons in Dabonsmoree that they also felt responsible for some form of quality control. It was, however, never mentioned explicitly as one of their tasks. Such locally-based mechanisms of control are particularly important in rural areas in countries with weakly developed or malfunctioning governmental structures. In the research areas, the official inspection played only a limited a role. Inspectors are expected to visit the schools several times a year, but in reality this was usually only once a year. According to the officials this was due to lack of funding for transport to the villages.

We will here first look at the way the quality was assessed by the parents and children. It has been claimed that this can have an important effect on the willingness of parents to enrol their children. The AME president, as well, said: “The fact that the teachers do not do their work well, discourages the parents to send their children to school.” We have already touched upon the perceived quality in a more general sense in Chapter 2. The observation that many parents had lost confidence in their children “succeeding” and the low value attributed to completing only primary education, suggests that there is a problem with regard to the quality of the education offered in the village. We will here investigate how parents take into account the quality of the education offered in their village.

3.5.2 Perceived quality

Most people, especially those without children in school, had no real opinion about the quality of the school or the teaching. This is in line with studies claiming that school quality seems to matter more at relatively higher levels of education (and lower levels of child work) [Guarcello et al. 2006]. Others, however, especially those with children in school, clearly had negative ideas about the education that was available in their village. This was especially the case in Dabonsmoree. A group of mothers with children in school said: “There are students who get to class six and cannot read or write! It depends on the child, but also on the teacher.”

The educated farmers in Dabonsmoree, of which only a few already had their own children in school, stressed that the quality had deteriorated since they had been in school. They said that the success rates of the primary certificate exam were much higher in the past and stressed that in their day, primary school graduates were actual literates, whilst this could not be said of the current graduates. Besides the absence of teachers, they blamed the multi-grade system, in which one teacher has to teach two classes, for the low performances. They were particularly angry about the fact that teachers were also selected to conduct official (paid) duties such as the census and elections, whilst some people in the village also had the required education level.

In Toyogdin we collected only a limited amount of information about the perceived quality of the school. We had the impression, however, that people were more satisfied about the teachers and school than in Dabonsmoree. The educated farmers argued that quality had improved since they had started school about 20 years before.

In Dabonsmoree the APE president said of the low success rate of the primary school final exam:

The level of the pupils is very low. They do not gain their primary school certificate. This year only three out of seven children have passed the exam, and they were repeaters. The quality would be good if there are enough notebooks and food and if we get help to force the teachers to teach.

According to different groups of people, the main problem with regard to the quality offered, was a “lack of teaching”. A grandfather from the same household as the Dabonsmoree APE president, said: “The teachers travel a lot. Their boss in Tougouri (inspection) allows them to travel like that.” The APE president worried about the current level:

The level of the pupils is not good. The teachers are often absent. When the teachers are absent, the children are just sitting in class, chatting. The teachers do not do their work. Often they do not come and if they come, they hand out an exercise and leave again. One knows because many children cannot read after five or six years of schooling!

Some people complained in particular about the female teachers (two out of three teachers in Dabonsmoree were young women). Fathers in a group discussion complained: “The teaching is not good, two of the teachers are women with children, they have been away a lot.” Only occasionally was the lack of materials mentioned: “Pupils in Boulssa have more bangre, because they have more financial means at school. It is more developed over there”.

Children from the higher classes in Dabonsmoree were also quite critical about the amount of teaching. They also stressed that the occasional beatings discouraged them: “The teacher beats us when we make a mistake, with a stick on our back. It has not happened this year yet. But it discourages us.” The children acknowledged that there was a lack of teaching but appeared afraid to elaborate on it. One of the few boys to have dropped out from the higher classes also blamed the beatings for his refusal to return to school. He said: “Every time I did not know my lessons, the teacher would hit me.”

For a large part, however, children blamed themselves or their (rural) living conditions for their poor performance. They believed that their results would be better if they would spend more time revising notes. Work was considered the main impediment. Pupils from the highest 2 classes in Dabonsmoree said: “In Boulssa and Tougouri there are better schools, because children over there have less work to do.” This attitude seems to reflect the view of the teachers who put a lot of emphasis on revision of notes for good results. But most children get home just before dark and only a few families have lanterns; and there is usually a lot of work to be done at home. The school children said that they would not, for example, herd animals with their brothers and sisters during weekends, because lessons had to be learned.

3.5.3 Local efforts to improve quality

We have seen that in Dabonsmoree, certain people criticised the teaching in their village. In order to change this, people felt that more control from above was needed and referred to the “teachers’ boss” in the town of Tougouri about 30 kilometre away.

Mo (young man, Fulani): “The level is not like in Ouaga. The teachers do not do their work. They do not fear that their boss sees them out of class.”

A Mossi father: “Often the teachers do not teach, they are moving around. We do not know how to stop them. Perhaps we can have a guard (surveillant) from the government.”

The PTA president, who seemed to keep track of the hours of teaching, said: “In Tougouri they have said that if a teacher is absent, we should go to the head teacher. If the head teacher is absent, we should go to Tougouri.” Addressing the teachers themselves about their repeated absences was considered problematic, due to unequal power relations and dependency on the teachers. As the female AME president said: “We are afraid that the teachers become angry and they will decide to stop teaching altogether.”

The group of educated young farmers in Dabonsmoree also appeared to critically observe the school, even if they had not yet children in the school. By being educated themselves they appeared to be less scared to address the teachers. The children of these educated young farmers are only now reaching school-age, and as they are now starting to be enrolled, their fathers could possibly play an important role in the community’s involvement in the school management and quality control. On the other hand, caution should be taken. Among some teachers, negative remarks could be heard about the “chommeurs” (jobless) or “demilitarised youth” in the village.

It appeared that the PTA president and the AME president had tried to put pressure on the education authorities in Tougouri to address the teacher absences, albeit not yet successfully. A few months before the study took place, the Dabonsmoree chairpersons had taken part in a meeting with all parent committees in the department (42 schools). A departmental committee had been elected and they had been informed that they were now obliged to pay a sum of around 30 euros to the education services, from the PTA fees they had earned. As the AME president told us, they had seized the occasion to bring up the issue of “lack of teaching” in their village. She explained: “At the meeting in Tougouri, we brought up the absence of teachers. We have said that we are not going to give the money if nothing will change. The inspection has said that we have to give the money and that they will arrange it. But it has not changed yet.”

3.5.4 Position of teachers in the community

Integration of the school in the community does not only depend on the involvement of villagers in the school management. It also depends on the position of the teachers within the community. With regard to the remarks about the quality made above, it is interesting to look at the perception of the quality of the school of the teachers themselves. As we read in the background chapter, none of the teachers in the research villages were originally from the research villages or nearby villages. In Dabonsmoree, all teachers were living in the village with their spouses and children. In Toyogdin, the teachers were a bit younger and were all bachelors. Some of them had taken smaller brothers into their houses to help with household chores and attend the village school as pupils.

In Dabonsmoree, teachers and the head teacher acknowledged that there were problems in terms of quality. They blamed the rural conditions and pointed at the fact that children never speak French at home. Also, the children were not able to do homework well, because of a lack of tables and lighting, and because they had to work at home. The class 1 teacher furthermore said that absence was a problem; especially young girls miss classes for a day or so to help their mothers. In addition,

they explained that the children were exposed to few things outside school. She used the following example: “Last week, I wanted to explain them something about pure alcohol. So I brought some cotton with alcohol and made them smell. No single child knew what it was.” Also, it was stated that the attitude of the children had changed. According to a female teacher: “In the past everyone wanted to be best in the class; it is not like that anymore.” In addition, a lack of books, especially for reading and history, was brought up and it was stressed that in some books they had to start halfway, because the first pages were missing.

The teachers had had short periods of training; in both cases, the head teachers had had 12-13 years of schooling with a few months of teacher training. The other teachers usually had 10 years of schooling with 1 or 2 years of teacher training. None of the teachers felt insufficiently equipped to teach. On the other hand, they said they would welcome additional training, as long as it was on relevant topics and they were financially compensated or rewarded. A recent HIV/Aids workshop was not considered relevant, for example, as HIV sensitisation was already part of the official curriculum and they had not learned new things. They found compensation for all expenses very important (food, cigarettes, fuel), because they would be “making an effort” by travelling to the town, over bad roads or even tracks.

In Dabonsmoree, teachers agreed that there had been a problem with teacher-absences. The head teacher commented that especially the maternity leaves had caused absences, but stressed this had been inevitable because “these ladies also have the right to have children” and no replacements had been available. According to him, other justifications for teacher absences were administrative tasks for elections or the census, funerals and salary collection. The female teacher in Dabonsmoree admitted that her job for the national census had caused delays in her class; she had not been teaching for about a month. According to the head teachers, every teacher was allowed to take three days a month to travel to the city where his salary was remitted²⁰. Education officials in Tougouri said that teachers had the right to only one or two days for this purpose.

The teachers together with the medical staff form a separate community within the villages. In contrast to the villagers, they are all literates with salaries, have lived in cities to study and are either Christians or Muslims. They only marginally participate in village life. During the festivals that took place at the time of the study, teachers visited the markets stalls that had been organised, but they did not, however, participate in the dancing and drinking that went on into the night. Contact with the villagers was mainly school-related, rather than based on involvement in social life.

On the other hand, teachers appeared quite well aware of the background of the children and, some of the, issues going on in the village. In Dabonsmoree, the head teacher said he had gone door-to-door with the PTA president to recruit new pupils. Also, teachers generally knew the reasons or circumstances of the children who had left school during the last few years (death, illness, migration). All teachers were Mossi or Dioula and thus the knowledge about and contact with the Fulani people was less frequent. This could also be due to the fact that the Fulani communities live away from the school and few Fulani children attend. No discriminative attitudes towards the

²⁰ Changing the place of payment after a teacher moves to a new school is considered problematic for administrative reasons. This means that teachers have to continue to travel to the town they had worked previously.

Fulani in particular were observed and teachers had, in the past, successfully approached Fulani people about education.

Concluding we can say that according to parents the quality of the school was mainly threatened by a shortage in the teaching. This could partly be attributed to (infra-) structural problems; there are, for example, no replacements for female teachers on maternity leave, which is a growing problem with growing numbers of female teachers. Also, simple personal or school-related administrative matters can take a long time due to weakly-developed transport and communication systems. Yet the amount and quality of teaching also largely depends on (self) control and motivation of the teachers, because of the quality and frequency of inspection and because sanctions are hardly ever imposed. Due to unequal power relations between the teachers and the villagers, it is difficult for the community to enforce a better level of teaching. It appeared that the illiterate parent-committee leaders had little means to really change the behaviour of the teachers, without access to the official channels, who were believed to have real sanctioning power over the teachers. Also, the actual involvement in the (quality of the) school was limited to a few persons (mainly the chairpersons). For most pupils' parents, the committee entailed paying money or talking about it, and not much else. Also, it should be noted that in villages with many families without children in school, PTA committees only reach the minority who have children in school, instead of the entire community. This means, for example, that Fulani people, and their opinions, are somewhat excluded.



Children in school

Conclusion

At its independence in 1960, Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta) had a weakly developed formal education system. In the years following independence (net) primary enrolment rates grew from less than 7% to around 35% by 2004. This is still considerably lower than the average for Sub-Saharan Africa (which is approximately 66%). The current law on education, which was issued in 1996, stipulates that “no child should be excluded from the educational system before the age of 16 years, provided that infrastructures, equipments, human resources and current rules allow it.”²¹

The low education figures in Burkina can be, to a degree, attributed to a lack of schools, especially in remote areas. However, it has also become clear that, even in villages where a primary school is available, many children are not enrolled or drop out. Promoting education does hence not only require the construction of schools, but also interventions geared at increasing the demand for schooling (among parents and children) or increasing the quality of schooling [Filmer 2004:22]. This study aims to provide information that can help to increase the demand for primary education on a local level. It does so by looking at the perceptions of education as well as other factors, on a community or household level, which influence enrolment.

The report is based on a case study in two villages in the department of Tougouri, Namentenga province, in the North-Central region. Primary enrolment rates in the department are around 31% and among the enrolled children only 40% are girls. The bulk of the data was collected from the predominantly Mossi community of Dabonsmoree, as well as among Dabonsmoree’s Fulani minority (who constituted an estimated 20% of the 2.200 inhabitants). It appeared that only one Fulani child was attending school.

Households with many children who were all out of school were common in the research villages. We encountered only a few families with all children in school. All parents, with or without children in school, could consider some positive changes that a formal education can bring about. People said that they were aware that “every child should be in school”; they had become aware of this by campaigns and parents from the community who addressed them about the issue. Also the poorest and those living in remote corners of the village could point out benefits to education.

Women in particular emphasised that getting a formal job, with a monthly salary, is the main benefit (and goal) of a formal education, as it would make life easier for the entire family. Education is mainly seen as a means to an end, whereby the end result is the acquisition of a “white-collar job” (for example, teacher, soldier or nurse). Economic benefits to be gained from education for a farmer were hardly ever mentioned, yet for women, it was pointed out that their trading activities could benefit from schooling.

²¹ www.meba.gov.bf

Hardly any value was attributed to completing only primary school. Local people with a completed primary education or even 9 years of education were often considered drop-outs anyway, if they had not found a white-collar job. School children too considered it their goal to become Nasara, a term referring to French speaking, formally employed people (but also white people). The children themselves considered stopping before secondary school as a failure and major disappointment.

The prospect of a salaried Nasara job works as a reason for parents to enrol their children and for children to stay in school. At the same time, it also works as an impediment; people became increasingly aware that only very few children actually manage to reach this goal. Not acquiring the desired white-collar job is considered additionally problematic because some villagers believe that education makes people less apt in farming. "Ending in the middle, without a job and without the motivation to farm" was considered the worst-case scenario. This fear appeared to underlie decisions not to send all children to school or only the number of children that can be supported up to the highest level. For the poorest families, this may mean, no child at all.

The idea that the purpose of education is to "sit in an office" is rooted in not only colonial history, but is also still being reinforced by the government and NGOs. Education campaigns still often focus on the merits of an education in finding an office job rather than on other economic and intrinsic benefits in self-employment, farming or household management.

Yet even by parents who believed that sending a few children to school could have positive effects, the step to action was not easily taken. In both villages it appeared that only a few parents had decided to enrol a child in school on their own initiative, i.e. without being actively, personally approached by teachers, parent-committee members or secondary school-going adolescents. Evidently, even after almost 25 years of having a school in the village, active incentives and well designed publicity campaigns continue to be necessary.

Enrolment of children takes place either once a year or once every two years, and the age limit of 8-9 is strictly adhered to. This means that decisions about education must be made in a timely fashion, or else a child's education and thus future may be permanently affected. This age limit, furthermore, limits the agency of a child; in neighbouring Ghana it was observed that older children often start school on their own initiative. This is, however, less likely to occur already at the young age of eight or nine.

Decisions made about a child's education are usually the responsibility of the father. The decision to send a child to school or not, is obviously subject to other constraints, besides the ideas about long-term consequences of education. First of all, attending primary school still involves some indirect costs (e.g. PTA fees, 3-4 euros a year), even though there are no tuition fees and school utensils are supplied by the NGO Plan or the government. Taking into account the destitute poverty of some households, any expense can pose a problem and an additional worry. On the other hand, it is not certain if they, with more money or cattle, would send their children to school, because many better-off people do not send their children to school either.

In the area, being rich means owning cattle, which fathers do not always readily sell for education, especially as the economic returns on education are far from guaranteed. In this way, costs formed a barrier not only for the poorest, but also for those with more wealth. This could explain the strong effect that the abolition of primary fees in many countries has had on enrolment figures.

Nevertheless, the influence of the low primary fees is largely overshadowed by the high secondary school costs and other factors that may cause drop-out during secondary school. People attribute little value to the completion of only primary school, and with future costs and barriers during secondary school looming over them, parents are likely to send only the number of children to school that they believe they can afford to support in the long run. Bursaries supplied by the government are hardly ever attained by children from the research villages, because they generally do not reach the needed results in the primary school final exams (secondary school entry exams).

The communities are based on subsistence farming and learning how to grow food is an important part of the social upbringing of a child. The need for children to work on their parents' or their own fields did, during the fieldwork, not appear to be a major barrier to primary education, because (official) school holidays coincide with the farming season. School children work on the fields or guard the animals during summer holidays. It can be regarded positively that school children participate in farming and herding; they feel responsible to contribute to the family subsistence and to meet their own needs such as clothing; in addition, this work helps the children to learn farming skills.

A relevant group of out-of-school children was formed by the cattle boys. The herding of animals should not necessarily interfere with primary schooling because it is mostly done in the rainy period from June until late September, when the village schools are closed. However, many people like their cows to be herded in the dry season as well; this is mainly to prevent theft and to feed them well for good profits. Even though in the dry season adults are available to do such work, herding is nevertheless assigned to children (it is not regarded as appropriate work for an adult). Particularly among the pastoralist Fulani minority, who normally take care of large herds of cattle, the herding tasks prevent children from going to school.

The child labour migration of boys did not appear to be a direct reason for drop-out of primary school children, as labour migration concerns mainly out-of-school boys and older (secondary school) boys. Drop-out of girls may also be related to the need or desire to look for work in other areas, but as we spoke to only a few girls who had dropped out of secondary school, we cannot draw general conclusions about this.

The practice of placement of girls with elderly widows or other relatives was observed to be a common obstacle to girl-child education. Yet also the domestic tasks at home are very time consuming, especially grinding grains and fetching water and firewood. Not only does it prevent parents from enrolling all daughters in the first place, it is also often an additional burden for schoolgirls who often have busy schedules of work after school. In addition, the expectation that educated girls will refuse an arranged marriage was frequently mentioned as a major reason not to send a girl to school. On the other hand, it was also stated that uneducated girls are increasingly refusing the arranged husbands too. Another factor that plays a role in the under-representation of girls in school is the low confidence in the educational success of girls and, consequently, their ability to acquire a Nasara job. Poor performances in secondary school and the risk of pregnancy were brought up as factors increasing the risk of investing money in a girls' education. The reasons for poor performance and high drop-out rates of secondary school girls need further investigation, especially since it evidently affects initial primary school enrolment as well.

The fact that there were hardly any Fulani children in school is remarkable, especially because they have become more or less sedentary and have been living in the village for decades. Their low enrolment can partly be explained by their lack of interest in Nasara jobs and their desire for their children to continue in their footsteps. However, they do show an interest in finding new innovative ways for cattle rearing, in which, they admit, literacy could be of help.

The decreasing confidence in the chances of “success” of the village schoolchildren may also be related to the poor functioning of the school, especially in Dabonsmoree. Absences of teachers are common, for various reasons. The hours of teaching largely relies on self-control of the teachers, as official inspection mechanisms are weak. It was observed that in Dabonsmoree, parent committee members actively tried to force the teachers to teach. However, especially because of unequal power relations and the community’s dependency on the teachers, they needed assistance from official structures, which they did not sufficiently receive. Parent committees appeared to be a relevant tool with which to involve at least some committee members in the functioning of the school. The bulk of the parents (who met in full assembly), however, considered the meetings to be no more than an occasion to talk about how to raise the PTA fees. Also, it should be noted that parent committees do not automatically involve the whole village. In areas where enrolment is low, they only reach families with children in school and may hence exclude entire ethnic groups of parts of the country.

In this context of poor quality education and poor formal job prospects, sending a child to school means taking certain risks and bearing both direct- and opportunity costs. The prospect of costs at the secondary level can also decrease primary enrolment, because little value is attributed to only primary school. Opportunity costs- in the context of girl-child education - do not only refer to loss of income or food production, but also to the potential loss of prospective services or social securities because an educated girl is highly likely to refuse an arranged marriage.

In many cases, these obstacles can be overcome by changing certain traditions, but people need to have good reasons for this. As long as people see the attainment of a white-collar job as the only significant outcome of a formal education, and as long as these jobs remain scarce, a change in perspective and action is unlikely to happen on a larger scale.

As long as secondary education in Burkina Faso continues to bring with it additional costs, and as long as other obstacles persist in causing high drop-out rates at the secondary level, primary education must start to be valued in its own right, and thus its quality must be improved. This is only possible if primary education begins to be recognised as beneficial to other occupations, other than white-collar jobs. This could be done, for example, by creating and promoting opportunities for primary graduates in self-employment and farming. Moreover, it was observed that the commercial farming activities of certain ambitious drop-outs slightly changes perceptions about education. Also, the message in sensitisation campaigns should no longer focus on white-collar jobs.

Increasing the numbers of children who graduate from primary school and improving their overall results, may come about if the community (through PTAs and other committees) is given more power over school management, curriculum and employment. The community must be given the opportunity to hold teachers and administrators accountable for their choices and actions (for example, numbers of teaching hours and methods of punishment). Promoting child-friendly teaching

methods appeared important to parents during the fieldwork, especially in the lowest classes, as parents are often disinterested or unable in forcing their children to attend school, and an unfriendly school environment motivates absences rather than attendance.

A new-and-improved child-friendly environment in primary schools, with teachers that are held accountable, a community that is involved, and a curriculum that is relevant to village life, will ideally lead to more confidence in the (further) educational success of the community's children as well as to the acknowledgement of real benefits of only a primary education.



Children helping with household chores

Resources

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