

## Country Profile: BURKINA FASO



**Burkina Faso is the 7<sup>th</sup> poorest country in the world, and with much of its northern provinces based firmly in the Sahel its people are at the sharp end of climate change. These factors make it a current focus of European Commission support.**

### A Geographical Overview

#### Land

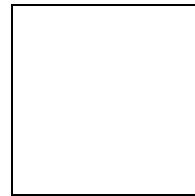
Burkina Faso is a landlocked country, with Benin, Togo, Ghana and The Ivory Coast as its neighbours in the south, Mali in the north-west and Niger in the east.

Burkina Faso covers an area of 274,200 sq km, about half the size of France, and lies just south of the Sahara desert, in an area known as the Sahel. Almost half of Burkina is composed of the Mossi plateau, which slopes gently southwards and is characterised by its distinctive red earth colour. The plateau is traversed by the three Volta Rivers (the Black, White and Red). These rivers swell during the rainy season and all but dry up during the dry season.

#### A Changing Climate

Climate zones range from the arid Sahelian in the north to the tropical savannah in the south. Average rainfall ranges from between 100cm in the south and 25cm in the north.

Burkina Faso is undergoing severe changes in its previously predictable weather patterns. According to the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) rainfall in the Sahel decreased between 29-49 per cent from the first half to the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Sahara is encroaching by 300m a year and the temperature is increasing, with a 0.4°C rise between 1981 and 1995.



#### Agriculture and resources

Over 80 per cent of the population rely on farming and fishing. In the drier north, keeping livestock is the main economic activity. In the central region, agricultural production is dominated by groundnuts, millet and sorghum. Cotton, maize, rice, fruit and vegetables are grown in the south-west.

#### Population and Demography

Burkina Faso's 14 million people have an average age of 16.7 years old and life expectancy is around 52 years old.

#### History and Government

##### Early history

The territory now known as Burkina Faso was once ruled by the great Mossi Empire, an indigenous kingdom dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century and still in place when the French occupied the region in 1896.

France granted self-governance to what was then known as Upper Volta in 1957 and full independence three years later, with Maurice Yaméogo as the first president.

##### Instability and revolution

The first post-independence administration was characterised by authoritarianism and corruption. Rigged elections provoked a

military coup headed by General Sangoulé Lamizana, which ousted the government in 1966. Years of fluctuating stability and coups followed.

### **The Sankara Years**

In August 1983 the Conseil National de la Revolution (CNR) was established with Mr Sankara as president. The CNR sought to reduce the country's heavy dependence on foreign aid, shift resources to the most productive sectors and expand access to healthcare and education.

With the intention of giving the people a sense of national pride, the country was renamed Burkina Faso in 1984, meaning the 'land of the upright'. But by 1987, internal divisions had erupted and Sankara was assassinated by supporters of a Mr Compaoré.

### **The Compaoré presidency**

The violence which marked the coup, followed into Compaoré's presidency with further executions of CNR leaders. In spite of popular protests, he won presidential elections in 1991 and 1998.

Following a high profile murder in which he was implicated Compaoré reluctantly conceded to reforms: allowing opposition into parliament and limiting Presidents to just two terms in office. However, in 2005, just before the next election, it was declared this law would not apply until after the end of Compaoré's third term. The next election is due in November 2010.

### **Cultural context**

#### **Ethnic groups**

Burkina Faso is an ethnically diverse society. The Mossi people account for about half the population, with 59 other groups forming the other half.

Distinctions are based on language, with More, Peul and Dioula the three most common. French is also spoken throughout

the country, although less so in rural areas. Relations between the groups are fairly fluid and relaxed, with relatively few displays of inter-ethnic hostility.

### **Religion**

A common saying in Burkina is "some are Muslim, some are Christian, and all are Animist"

Animism, the 'traditional' religion, consists of a diversity of beliefs with many local variants. It remains widespread throughout all of Burkina and is not confined to any particular ethnic group. Essentially a faith in the enduring existence of ancestors, it also recognises the existence of gods, including Tenga, the goddess of the earth.

Officially about 60% of Burkinabe are Muslim, with the majority being Sunni.

Christianity arrived in Burkina at the end of the nineteenth century, with missionaries and followed by French colonial rule. Today around 20% of Burkinabe are Christian, mostly Roman Catholics.

### **The Arts**

Every other year, the state sponsors the highly popular 'Festival Panafricain du Cinéma de Ouagadougou' which attracts crowds from outside Africa and has earned Ouagadougou the nickname "the Cannes of Africa."

### **Social, Political and Economic Context**

#### **Economic development ..**

The economy is largely driven by agriculture, accounting for 32 per cent of the country's GDP and over 80 per cent of employment. Cotton brings in nearly 60 per cent of total export earnings but is dependant on world prices and developed countries subsidising their own produce.

Recent policies have featured the extensive privatisation of state enterprises,

liberalisation of major domestic and international sectors, reform of the banking system, greater incentives for private investment and tighter controls on public expenditure

#### **...and ongoing poverty**

Burkina Faso is the seventh poorest country in the world, according to UN development indicators. Over 45 per cent of the population is estimated to live in poverty, and 71 per cent live on less than \$2 a day. Poverty is particularly prevalent in rural areas.

Burkina Faso became eligible for debt relief in July 2000 under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative and has since received US\$ 930 million. However, Burkina Faso's total external debt currently still stands at over US\$1.33 billion.

#### **Food Security**

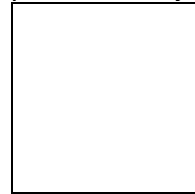
Food security in Burkina Faso is threatened by climate change, ongoing land degradation and increases in world food prices. Between 2006 and 2008 staple food prices had risen by 60% causing riots. The government has since lowered taxes on food.

#### **HIV**

HIV prevalence is 2 per cent, the second highest infection rate in West Africa, and 75 per cent of those with advanced HIV are not receiving treatment.

#### **Gender**

In general women continue to occupy a subordinate position and experience discrimination in such areas as education, jobs, property, and family rights. Traditionally women do much of the subsistence farming work. Overall, women represent 45 percent of the work force. However, women make up only 5 per cent of the private sector and hold 11 per cent of parliamentary seats.



Female Genital mutilation (FGM) was outlawed in 1996 and has since seen a fall of 40 per cent although it remains common in rural areas.

#### **Human rights**

Excessive poverty denies many Burkinabes access to basic human rights. Problems include child labour, child trafficking, violence and discrimination against women and children, arbitrary arrests, excessive force against civilians and official impunity.

#### **Civil Society**

Trades Unions, students and other civil society groups play a significant political role, at least in the capital. Strikes and demonstrations are common as a means of putting pressure on the government. These activities are largely tolerated