

# THE IMPACT OF THE SECURITY CRISIS ON EDUCATION IN BURKINA FASO



**Nebie Bagnomo Modeste** holds a Master's degree in Science Information and Communication from the University of Ouagadougou. Since 2010, he is responsible for communication and advocacy for the National Coalition for Education for All in Burkina Faso and communication advisor for several structures including the Cadre de Concertation des Associations and NGOs active in Basic Education in Burkina Faso (CCEB).

He is a member of several journalist groups including the Association of Journalists of Burkina (AJB), the Network of Journalists and Communicators for Education/ Gender and Development (REJCED) and the Journalists' Initiatives Network (RIJ).

*Since 2015, Burkina Faso has faced an unprecedented situation of insecurity. Terrorist attacks are regularly perpetrated throughout the country with some severity in eight of the 13 regions which are: the East, the Center-East, the Sahel, the North, the Center-North, the Boucle du Mouhoun, the South-West and the Cascades.*

These attacks cause all kinds of damage and massive population displacement. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), nearly 700 security incidents involving armed groups were recorded between January and September 2022, resulting in more than 600 deaths. This security crisis has also led to a catastrophic humanitarian situation and plunged Burkinabe schools into a disastrous situation in terms of access and quality. In this article we will discuss the effects of the security crisis on the education of children, youth and adults.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, as of 20 September 2022, was 1,520,012 of whom 59.13 percent were children. Also, according to figures from the National Secretariat for Education in Emergencies, 708,341 students, including 339,260 girls, were affected by the closure of 4,258 schools as of 31 May 2022.

This unprecedented crisis has manifested itself in the education sector through aggressions, physical violence and threats against educational actors, assassinations, burning of educational facilities, and destruction of teaching and learning materials. When a school infrastructure closes, there is naturally a break in schooling and children no longer have access to education. Their right to education is thus violated. As of today, more than 20,763 teachers are affected by the crisis and 11 have lost their lives in the course of their duties, according to figures from the Ministry of Education. Others have been brutalised, injured, traumatised, and had their property looted or destroyed. They are also traumatised like the children and have been redeployed to more secure areas. This is the case of Igor Soulga, a schoolteacher who used to work in Pissila and has now been redeployed to Kaya, a hundred kilometres from the capital Ouagadougou.

He says that the teachers lived in perfect harmony with their host communities and taught their children peacefully despite the perceptible terrorist threat. This was the case "until the terrorists came and threatened us to leave the place. At first, they wanted the knowledge transmitters to leave. They threatened us with weapons. There were victims". He would have liked to continue to teach his students until the Certificate of Primary Studies (CEP), but he had no choice. "Personally, it really affected me. I took them [the students] to CP1, I fought to reach a goal and since I didn't reach it, it makes me unhappy. I am bruised inside. Often when I meet my students, I want to shed tears because I see their future interrupted. As a teacher, this makes me unhappy and also I have not been able to help some parents to reintegrate them in centres or in school".



Learners in a literacy room in Banfora

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Thus, thanks to the commitment and dedication of literacy operators and other actors at the central and decentralised levels, literacy campaigns continue to contribute to addressing illiteracy and undereducation in the country, despite the difficult context characterised by the persistent security crisis which has led some learners to abandon learning and education centres.

## What impact on children and the education system?

Of the 1,520,012 internally displaced persons currently in the country, nearly 60 percent are children and nearly 43 percent are of school age. Given the vulnerability of the education system and the massive displacement of populations, the impact on these children is enormous. These internally displaced children find themselves with their parents in host areas where the capacity of classrooms is not sufficient to accommodate them. They are then obliged to wait sometimes one to two years before getting a place in a school to continue their studies. This naturally impacts their academic level.

In addition to this impact, there are difficulties related to access to health, food, shelter and child protection.

Despite the precariousness of internally displaced students, their situation is still enviable compared to others who have not had the chance to flee with their parents because they are still trapped in conflict zones. They lack absolutely everything and no longer have the right to go to school, so they are easy prey for terrorists. It should also be noted that, with the numerous cases of attacks against education and the fact that most of these attacks are perpetrated in schools in front of children, this constitutes a serious violation of their

right. Threats, burning of infrastructure, and killings in front of children cause enormous harm to them, especially emotionally and psychologically.

## The Education Cluster: A framework for better coordination of education efforts in emergency situations

Faced with this unprecedented situation and in order to find structural solutions and give a chance to the thousands of children who, with the insecurity, are no longer able to access the education system or who have dropped out of school, the Burkinabe government and its partners have set up the Education Cluster, which brings together all the actors involved in education in crisis situations. The aim of this approach is to ensure inclusive access to formal, non-formal and informal education that is healthy and protective for children and to improve the learning environment to make it healthy and protective.

This system needs the support of all actors because, in an emergency situation, education remains the safest



A training session for literacy centre facilitators

vehicle to enable children to learn and not be enrolled into the ranks of Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG).

## What about literacy and adult education?

Adult learning and education are key to active citizenship, political participation, social cohesion and gender equality. They are also the basis for important overall socio-economic benefits for individuals, communities and human society in general.

Aware of this fact, the state and development partners are making numerous efforts to boost literacy. Thus, thanks to the commitment and dedication of literacy operators and other actors at the central and decentralised levels, literacy campaigns continue to contribute to addressing illiteracy and undereducation in the country of people, despite the difficult context characterised by the persistent security crisis which has led some learners to abandon learning and education centres.

This is reflected in the results of the 2021-2022 campaign which, according to the Minister of National Education, Literacy and the Promotion of National Languages on the occasion of International Literacy Day 2022, recorded the registration of 66,053 learners in 2,263 centres opened

by 480 operators. Also, in terms of professional capacity building, 6,422 internally displaced learners, including 4,852 girls/women, were trained thanks to the determination of the educational authorities and civil society actors.

However, the progress made in literacy is hampered by, among other things, the impact of terrorist attacks, including the massive displacement of people who flee their villages to take refuge in more secure areas. We must therefore redouble our efforts. Thus, in line with the theme of International Literacy Day 2022: “Transforming learning and literacy spaces”, it is imperative to rethink the fundamental importance of learning and literacy spaces to strengthen resilience and ensure quality, equitable and inclusive education for all.

In the same vein, it seems crucial for the promoters, producers and beneficiaries of literacy and non-formal education services to imagine diversified educational and training offers adapted to the crisis context that Burkina Faso is going through.

In conclusion, the literacy rate in Burkina Faso was 29.7 percent in 2019. All stakeholders in education have been working together to raise these rates for several years. Unfortunately, the security crisis that Burkina Faso is experiencing will cause enormous damage to the education sector in general and to adult education in particular, since all the children who have been forced

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to interrupt their schooling will swell the number of illiterate young people and adults in the coming years. It is therefore urgent to find formal, non-formal or informal mechanisms to ensure that learning and education are not interrupted even during emergency situations.