Trying to Make Ends Meet

Women’s Livelihoods in Bendogho, Burkina Faso

Report from a Minor Field Study, Department of Cultural Anthropology
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by
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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the livelihoods of women in Bendogho, an urban neighbourhood in the fringes of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Bendogho is a densely populated area that has not yet been incorporated as part of the urban infrastructure. The majority of the dwellers there are of Mossi origin. The role women play in the local economy is of great significance. Both because of the additional income they bring into the household, but also because of the increased freedom it represents. The money women earn is almost always hers to spend. The majority of women who are engaged in some income-generating activity are involved in petty trade. In front of their houses or at the local market they sell fruit, nuts, prepared meals and firewood. The conditions and the competition are tough though, and many are forced to give up their business. In the struggle to make ends meet, the need to manipulate the means available is constantly present, regardless of whether the women succeed in their present efforts of maintaining or improving their income-generating activity. This report brings to attention the various constraints and possibilities that influence the economic activities among Bendogho women while it underlines that the women are not one homogenous group, but that there exists a great diversity among them. The livelihood activities of women in an area like Bendogho is a phenomenon that will not go away and which needs to be accounted for in all types of poverty assessments and development planning.

Keywords

anthropology, livelihoods, local economy, poverty, urban, women

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and Concepts

Burkina Faso is by most international standards considered as one of the poorest countries in the world. In the United Nations’ Human Development Index (HDI) of 2003, the country is ranked as number 173 out of 175 countries included (HDI 2003a). According to the assessment made by the World Bank that adopts the GDP per capita measurement, Burkina Faso ranks amongst the 20 poorest countries in the world (Nsengiyumwa, 1994). Measurements like these – absolute ways of measuring poverty - focus on the material aspect of poverty and may contain unreliable national data. For instance, it may lack information about income in the informal sector or about non-monetary income, like returns from subsistence production (Regeringskansliet 1996/97: 12). Further, these kinds of assessment do not account for peoples’ unique circumstances, like people's own perceptions of poverty, and ways in which they try to fight it. The actual context is thus left out. Neither is there any indication that poverty must be regarded as relative, as a consequence of different contexts and various meanings they carry. In the ‘Profiles of Poverty’, a report on Burkina Faso, Hagberg underlines the importance of viewing different actors, organisations and activities as representing multiple profiles of poverty. Therefore, what must also be included in the measurement of poverty, and hence what will be given attention in this report, is the definitions of poverty used by the poor themselves (Hagberg 2000:2). A more probing discussion on poverty is presented by Hagberg (2001), who argues that poverty is to be seen as situational, contextual and relational.

Alongside the talk of ‘the poor and poverty’, there is often the notion of 'development'. As an introductory remark on this matter, it is both beneficial and refreshing to bring to attention an interesting and thought-provoking remark made by Ferguson (1994). He argues that ‘development’ is “an interpretative
grid through which the impoverished regions of the world are known to us” and that as such it constitutes a “dominant problematic”. A question that follows this statement is whether there is a possibility of viewing these regions - of which Bendogho, the area of the fieldwork, is one - differently, leaving ‘development’ aside. Without ignoring the often vital need of development efforts, I would like to argue that it is possible, and also that it is beneficial both for ‘us’ and for ‘them’ to take another point of departure than ‘development’. Burkina Faso is an example that confirms the existence of this permeated phenomenon. The development policy is not only something through which we filter the country. ‘Development’ consists of a grid for us as well as for the inhabitants of Burkina Faso and other ‘developing countries’. It is precisely because of its deep-rooted presence that this concept has to be acknowledged and confronted. Therefore, I will include a brief part that discusses ‘development’ together with perceptions of it as expressed by the inhabitants of Bendogho, without, however, permitting it to dominate or represent the point of departure of this report.

Instead, by focusing on the actual circumstances and livelihoods, another point of departure is taken. Through a focus on people as actors – honouring the empowerment approach – this report is thus an attempt to provide a context for the type of field many anti-poverty and development efforts are aimed at. More specifically, it is the circumstances of Bendogho women and their role as local economic actors that constitute the main focus.

Chambers (1998) suggests that livelihood, rather than employment, seems to fit better as a concept to depict the realities of poor people. Taking into consideration the harsh reality facing many of the inhabitants of Bendogho – where the amount of people having a fixed and regular salary is negligible - this appears to be a well-balanced suggestion. Chambers further reasons that by pairing together ‘livelihood’, which denotes the various activities that make up a living, with ‘sustainable’, which refers to the longer-term view, we are able to penetrate and acknowledge their reality. With the use of concepts as ‘sustainable livelihoods’, we can then help to empower people (Chambers 1998:22f). I would
like, for my part, to leave aside the additional concept of ‘sustainable’, since the complete concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ is more normative than descriptive. Should ‘sustainable’ be added, a reasonable question is, in my opinion, how far could ‘sustainable’ be stretched, to what extent can the realities of many poor people be considered sustainable and where should the outer limits of applying the whole concept of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ lie. Chambers continues his argument wanting to alter the common assumption that poor people ‘live hand-to-mouth and take the short view’ when they are, in fact, continuously show “tenacity and sacrifice in trying to take the long view and safeguarding the base for their livelihoods” (ibid.). This line of argument does not really support a need to label their struggle as ‘sustainable’. My impression is that the use of this concept entails connotations it cannot support without limiting the actual use of the concept itself in different contexts. When labelling poor people’s livelihoods as ‘sustainable’, one risk assuming that their struggle results in a secure and steady solution – since they are trying to take the long-term view - when this is far from reality for many poor people.

The reality for people defined as the poor strata of society is not uniform but complex and multi-faceted, as are the strategies to generate an income and the ways to enhance quality of life. Unfortunately, this has not yet been adequately recognised in today’s discussion. In their continuous analyses of employment and unemployment figures, economists and statisticians are contributing to the maintenance of this trend, “as they continue to (…) project their categories and concerns onto the raw and rather different reality of most of the poor in the South” (Chambers 1995:11). This report will thus highlight the complexity of the strivings of the everyday life of the inhabitants of Bendogho.

1.2 Purpose and Methods

The overall purpose of this report is to reach an understanding of how women in Bendogho - a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso -
perceive their livelihoods in general, and how they are actors in the local economy in particular. More specifically, the report aims to describe poor women’s livelihoods and how they struggle to make ends meet. In their efforts of trying to do this, women are engaged in various activities, which practically all could be said to belong to the local economy. The report will look into the particular activities that are available for women, the opportunities and constraints of the activities, and identify other means of subsistence that are available.

The report is based on a two and a half months’ fieldwork in the capital of Ouagadougou, from the beginning of July to mid-September 2001. The information obtained in the field is influenced by the fact that the fieldwork was carried out during the rainy season of the year. Certain features are present or influenced because of this, while others may be absent or attracting lesser attention during this period of year, or because of the short period of the stay itself. The collecting of gravel is for example an income-generating activity carried out during this period. This is because of the ability of the rain to single out the gravel making it more visible and easier to collect.

In order to accomplish the above purpose, I set about to interviewing in Bendogho. Most of my interviewees were married women of Mossi origin. The men I interviewed were also married and Mossi. Two of the women were not married and two were widows, nineteen women were of Muslim faith and twelve reported to be Catholics. Most women lived in households including their nuclear family and sometimes a close relative, like a father or a nephew. Seven women lived in polygynous households where their husband had chosen to have two wives. These were all of Muslim faith. I used semi-structured interviews on 31 women altogether. In order to get a better grasp of the life-worlds of Bendogho women, 10 in-depth interviews were carried out (chosen among the 31). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 10 men. In addition to these interviews, I attended different neighbourhood meetings and meetings of a voluntary association. At every visit I had a female translator to my assistance,
fluent in both French, the official language of Burkina Faso, and Mooré, the language of the Mossi, the dominant ethnic group in Bendogho (as in Burkina Faso). Especially the latter was necessary since almost none of the women interviewed spoke French. Most of the interviewed men, on the other hand, did speak French.

1.3 Synopsis

The remainder of the report is organised as follows: the next chapter, Chapter Two, introduces the field area. Since a vast majority of the residents in Bendogho is of Mossi origin, I begin with a general portrayal of Mossi society. I then give a brief historical background with particular emphasis on social structure. Thereafter, the location of Bendogho itself is presented. Upon this follows a short chapter, Chapter Three, on the notions of development and poverty and the perceptions of these notions as seen by the inhabitants of Bendogho. By applying a model created by Robert Chambers (1995), the proceeding chapter, Chapter Four, treats some aspects of the field study material in three separate sections. The aim behind the use of this model is to provide the reader with a new set of “lenses”, whereby the material – the everyday realities of people in Bendogho – can be seen. In order to get a better grasp of the context within which Bendogho women live, three case studies are included. These make up Chapter Five. Their intention is to enrich the understanding and to provide the reader with a more complex picture of the setting where women are struggling to make ends meet. Hence the actual circumstances are given space. In the concluding remarks, Chapter Six, I argue for the necessity of constantly maintaining contact with reality, the actual context, from where all the figures, definitions and concepts are drawn, the place at which all development plans and efforts are aimed.
2. MOSSI DWELLERS OF BENDOGHO

In this chapter my intention is to provide the reader with an image of people residing in Bendogho. Since the vast majority of the dwellers are of Mossi origin, I will account for some of the main features of the structural organisation and history of the Mossi. I will then move forward describing the Bendogho area as such and thereby placing the Mossi within an actual contextual and situational framework.

2.1 The Mossi

Out of around 60 different ethnic groups in Burkina Faso, the Mossi form the single largest group (Hagberg 2001:15f). Mossi society is basically patrilineal. For a man this has the implication that he takes part in the status and the corporate resources of his patrilineage, but has no access to the status or assets of his mother’s patrilineage, apart from certain ritual rights and duties. Mossi lineages are generally exogamous. Usually, a man marries a woman from another lineage, with which his own lineage had long-term series of reciprocal exchanges of goods and services. In this circuit, women were considered to be the most valuable part. In marriage arrangements, it was implicative to give a woman in return to the same lineage segment from which she came. The beginning of a long-term relationship of exchanges could start with two men from different lineages who became friends and one rendered the other a service or received a favour from him. Since a relation between two individuals is viewed as a relation between the two lineages to which they belong, these lineages were therewith regarded to be involved (Skinner 1989:23ff).

If it is the men who are important for this type of relationship, the role of women is also of great significance. They hold an important place in Mossi traditions of origin and their role in the evolution of the state – as mothers, consorts, sisters and daughters - is being increasingly recognised for its importance. In fact, their
institutional roles are absolutely vital in the maintenance of the power of the state. Some women play the role of state-building warriors, a position of limited duration, since they later married and had children, maybe sons who took power in the conquered states. The function of these women’s marriage was of considerable importance for the consolidation of states by bringing together the conquerors and the conquered. Another function of women's role was to perform important rituals with the purpose of strengthening the power of kings, under whom they served as ritual representatives of the ruler. Throughout all of these tasks, royal women’s achievements worked for the benefit of the kin and the corporate group with which they affiliated and were, as such, seldom actions taken on their on behalf (Skinner 1989:10f).

The Mossi and their customs have a long and strong hold in Burkina Faso, where the present capital of Ouagadougou occupies a central position in history. Originating from the kingdom of Gambaga, what is part of today’s Ghana, the Mossi warriors spread northwards and conquered the territory that makes up central parts of present-day Burkina Faso. These events took place during the 15th century, whereby the existing peoples - Fulse, Kalamse, Kamboinse, Kibisi and Ninisi - of the newly won land were forced to submission (Jaglin 1995:29). The source of power, upon which the founders of the Mossi dynasty relied and believed in, is called *naam*, provided by their unique God (*Wende*), the ruler of universe. The conquered peoples, on the other hand, were assigned *Tenga*, the God of soil and thunder, and, as such, the donor of fertility. With the spread of the Mossi, the conquered peoples were introduced to a new concept of government: the state. Until then, the cultivators had been organised in micro-societies of lineage or village model (Savonnet-Guyot 1986:86f). Yet, the highly organised political system of the Mossi would not have come into being without these ‘bands of strangers’. Skinner argues that it was in fact these ‘bands of strangers’ themselves that were responsible for the state formation (Skinner 1989:6).
Leading the task of building the new state were the worldly leaders of Mossi society, the Nanamse (Naaba, sing.). They were part of a strict hierarchical structure determined by kinship. The less distance to the royal lineage, the greater the political power of the Naaba. Caused by lineage segmentation, some segments were given easier access to the naam and this in turn gave fuel to conflicts over sovereignty, with the result that new kingdoms, principalities and districts were created. In the top position was, and still is, the Moogo Naaba, who resides in the capital of Ouagadougou and functions as the head of the entire royal clan (Jaglin 1995:30; Skinner 1989:15). All positions of importance within the traditional political organisation were limited to persons who claimed lineal descent from the ancient founders of the Mossi nation. This meant that each and every one of the heads of kingdoms, principalities, districts and villages, claimed descent in the royal line (Skinner 1989:15). At each and every ‘level’, the Mossi chief, the Naaba, exercised his political and judicial authority almost without limits, with an assisting court at his disposal (Augustin 1994:13). As for Bendogho, which is a former village, it has for example its own Naaba, a respected authority who deals with various matters in the area. He also has his own court. All of the Nanamse residences are placed identically within their settlements. Interestingly, and in complete opposition to the well-known centre – periphery model, the Naaba residence is found in the periphery and never in the centre of the village. Spatially, it is thus an arrangement where the centre is commanded by the periphery, from where the authority of the Naaba exercises its dominating and organisational powers (Savonnet-Guyot 1986:109). The same setting is true of Bendogho, where the Naaba residence was well separated from the dense housing area.

Since the power and its underlying ideology had to be determined if the new state was to have a chance to function, an arrangement between the two groups – the conquerors and the conquered – had to be settled. It was therefore concluded that Wende gave to Tenga the responsibility of securing good harvests – prosperity - with priests of the conquered to carry out the necessary rituals to have rainfall. As result, the conquered retained their supremacy, with a class of priests who took care of the basic needs of the conquered populace as
politicians. Carrying *naam* was exclusive for the descendants of the founders of the Mossi dynasty. A fact used to legitimise their right to exercise power many centuries to come (Savonnet-Guyot 1986:86f). Not being the *autochtones* (first-comers), the conquerors were nevertheless obliged to pass via the first inhabitants of the land to take part of its benefits. In other words, they could only turn to *Tenga* indirectly, via the mediation of the people they had conquered. This division between power over people and power over land, and the special equilibrium this gave birth to is, no doubt, one of the explaining factors behind the strength and duration of Mossi Empire. Besides the distinction between the conquered and the conquerors, maintained this way, there is the additional classification of different categories of professions (Jaglin 1995:30). The term *autochtones*, or first-comers, is still in use today. In Bendogho for example, this term is used to differentiate between people residing in the area. In this case though, as good as all people – regardless of the length of stay – are of Mossi origin. It thus seems that this is a term that has lingered on and taken on a slightly new meaning, where it is used to differ among people who have Bendogho as their birthplace and those who arrived at a later point.

The diverse origins and languages of the different conquered peoples were absorbed and included in a common origin with the conquerors, that of *Moogo* (the world). This means that they have come to refer to the same myth of origin, to the same founder *Ouédraogo*, that they speak the same language (mooré) – the by far dominating language of Bendogho - and that they also confess to the one and only principal of power, namely that of *naam*. The result was therefore not only one of conquest, it was also a successful undertaking in the sense that it managed to unify and administer a vast territory and empire for a very long period of time (Savonnet-Guyot 1986:86f). However, at the time of independence in 1960, the traditional political organisation of the Mossi was faced with significant pressures. Yet, contrary to analyses suggesting that it was on the edge of collapse, Skinner (1989:2) points out that the political system of the Mossi seems to use its whole potential before it eventually fades away. The Mossi state has even been refereed to as a state within the state (Augustin 1994:13). Without doubt, traditional authorities of Mossi society and its
traditions are still pertinent to today’s modern society and its political sphere (Hagberg 1998). For example, the strong hierarchical structure of Mossi society is evident in any village or neighbourhood. Bendogho is no exception.

2.2 Bendogho

Bendogho is situated outside Ouagadougou, along both sides of the dead straight national road 4 to Fada N’Gourma. The area is located just after a busy little market place, which extends almost onto the road, with people and vehicles sharing the space in front of numerous booths. The road is elevated, flanked by sloping sides, which lead down to a concrete ditch on each bank. The first houses are located only some ten meters from the ditches. Outstretched behind this first uneven row of houses is a, for the most part, densely housed area. The traditional huts have had to give way to the more modern type of four-wall banco houses. Banco, sun-dried mud bricks, is a building material that comes rather cheap, mainly because it is usually produced in the nearby environment. The closer to the centre of town, concrete and bricks are more frequently used in the construction. As for roof material, corrugated sheet metal is by far the most common all over Ouagadougou. In Bendogho, some of the houses have a coating of concrete covering the rough banco surface. This helps the houses to withstand rainfall. Without such a coating, houses tend to crumble during the heavy rainfalls, making it a good investment for those who can afford it.
A good illustration of the various building materials and techniques, as well as the impact the rain can have on a house constructed with pure banco (near right).

Another feature distinguishing the better-off households is the presence of a proper wall surrounding the yard, and metal doors, which are expensive, both in the wall and at the actual entrance of the house. Households that are rented and the ones less affluent lack these things, or have only rudimentary fence walls. To buy material to construct a banco house and a metal door costs between 150,000 and 225,000 FCFA\(^1\).

\(^1\) FCFA= Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine, 1 Euro= 656 FCFA, 1 USD= 700 FCFA.
A woman with her child sitting outside her house. The yard of the house lacks a proper wall but has a light fence made out of straw that provides some seclusion. This construction, frequently seen all around Bendogho, also includes a roof that offers some shade away from the intense sun. To the left of the woman is a stove, used for daily cooking. On the right is a pile of firewood.

The split of Bendogho along the road is at the same time a divide of responsibility between two different municipalities, arrondissements, of Nongrmassom and Bodogodo. It is, however, one sector - number 28 - out of the 30 sectors that divide Ouagadougou. Bendogho is a neighbourhood described as a zone non-lotie, which means that it has not yet been incorporated as a part of the city’s urban structure. The distribution of land is thus far outside of the law. This means that the authorities are not very likely to make infrastructure investments. Living in a zone non-lotie consequently implies an absence of access to running-water, sewage system and electricity. To have electricity
drawn is arranged privately costing 200,000 FCFA for the connection. To install
electricity in the whole area would facilitate different domestic and economic
activities. Further, street lamps may scare off thieves. The area also lacks a
proper road network. This description fits rather well with the definition of
informal housing made by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements.
Two elements are identified as central here; that the housing is either illegally
built, or constructed on land not properly purchased through the formal system;
and that it lacks environmental services and community facilities. (UNCHS 1996)

According to the authorities and certain residents of Bendogho, the
neighbourhood is nevertheless on its way to become incorporated in the urban
structure. The term used for this process of urban parcelling is *lotissement*,
whereby residents can get legally valid receipts, confirming the right to their
plots. This process is desired intensively by most inhabitants, mainly because
people are aware of that the chance for infrastructure investments such as
electricity, running-water, and a functioning sewage system are considerably
higher after the realisation of *lotissement*. The dividing line between the vast
area awaiting the parcelling process and a neighbouring area, which has already
undergone that process is made visible by a straight line of electric cables
running alongside an equally straight line of houses, separating the two areas.
The urban parcelling process is not free from complications though. There is a great insecurity among the residents of Bendogho as to what the consequences of this process will be for each and every household. A distressing fact for several people is the risk of losing their present residence because of lack of money, or because a landlord may want to sell the plot in order to gain some cash. Even owning one's house is no certain guarantee for the future. Together with the parcelling process comes the drawing of the road network, electric cables, and sewage system. Some households may consequently have to be torn down, without any compensation or help to build a new house.

As a first step in the urban parcelling process, a census is held. Then, the existing houses - and consequently their dwellers - are divided into three different categories: A, X and D. Category A signifies a house inhabited by its owner and appropriate for living. According to category X, the house is still considered to be appropriate for living, but it is not inhabited by its owner. Finally, classified as D, the house is judged inappropriate for living. The above division has implications for the later acquiring of plots. Those in category A will be the ones first in line, followed by those belonging to category X. The small piece of paper valid as a receipt for the house, with the category and number of the house on it, costs 35,000 and 50,000 FCFA respectively (för vad, de olika kategorierna?). People in category D, however, will not be able to get a plot at all. Neither will, of course, those living in rented houses. The awareness of this harsh reality has led people to try to construct a rudimentary house good enough to be included in one of the categories A or X. (Hagberg 2001:62f) Since the neighbourhood has not yet been parcelled, and because of the insecurity born out of this situation, many consider themselves to be living in a temporary and improvised arrangement.

Migration is one way to try to improve life-situation for those who have the material means to leave their place of habitat. Among those left behind there are those who are too poor to move. (Hagberg 2001:107) Hence people come to Ouagadougou with the hope of finding work and a better future. Some people
may already have arranged for a job, or hope to find one through established connections. Some start to work in the city without a proper place to live. They choose to come to Bendogho, often with the intention to get a plot when the parcelling is initiated. It is the men who have the greatest influence when it comes to choosing place of habitation, just as it is their search for work that often causes the decision to move. Women follow:

If your husband likes it somewhere, you should also like it there. Especially here, in Bendogho, where we are not renting, but are living in our very own place.

The great majority of the people interviewed had connections, or what was even more common, relatives residing in Bendogho. Many of the women arrived there for their marriage. Only a couple of them were actually born in Bendogho. Visiting parents or other relatives was a done on a regular basis. In this respect, people are not “stuck” in one place, many tend rather to be quite mobile. Quite many have lived in more than one place before coming to Bendogho.

The Bendogho area has been inhabited for several decades. An elderly woman, who was referred to as one of the first habitants of Bendogho, claimed to have arrived some forty years ago. As a gesture of gratitude for helping out a friend, her husband and she were given an extensive bit of land for cultivation and construction. At the very beginning, Bendogho was not really more than a little village, consisting of only five households of Mossi dwellers placed in a bush-like environment. Many among those who arrived first moved into the area after having been chased away from the neighbourhood of St Camille, situated about 5 km from Bendogho. The reason they had to leave was the government's plan to complete certain projects on this particular piece of land. In Bendogho they had to start all over again. The procedure of acquiring land was different in those days:
When you desired an empty piece of land, you found the amount of cola nuts necessary and you went with it to the owner of the land in question. You explained to him which part you desired and he went away to delimit the land for you. That’s all! You didn’t pay anything.

In former days, nobody had the right to actually sell the land, since it primarily belonged to the ancestors and not to the living. When interested in a particular piece of land one had to see the person considered the ‘owner’ of this land. In addition to cola nuts, it was generally also required to bring a cock. The cola nuts were for the ‘owner’ to enjoy. The cock was brought as a sacrifice to the ancestors by cutting its throat and pouring the blood over the soil. Later, money was added to these traditional gifts. The price of a piece of land nowadays lies somewhere between 25,000 and 50,000 FCFA, a sum paid directly to the person considered to be the ‘owner’. According to a long-term resident, there used to be about 100-150 people coming to Bendogho each year to settle down, but nowadays he finds it hard to estimate the number of people arriving with the intention to live there. There is no longer any free space available for building new houses. All land belongs to someone, most likely a person residing in Bendogho, who is regarded as the owner of this land and who can, if he wants to, sell a piece of land for money. After the urban parcelling has been completed, the legal authority of land distribution will be in the hands of the municipality.

Back in the times when Bendogho was a village, people made a living by cultivating the land. For this purpose, water was needed. The task of getting the necessary amount was a great burden. Every day, the women had to walk at least six kilometres, sometimes as far as nine, to get the water required. The water was needed for vegetable gardens and for daily tasks, such as the washing, laundry and cooking. The other major problem of that time concerned health. Since there was no medical centre in Bendogho – a service that is still lacking in the area - one had to bring the sick to Saaba, the only village with a medical

2 The cola nut is a tree-fruit from the cola. When chewed, the cola nut releases a red juice with a stimulating effect. The consumption of cola nuts is most common among the elderly.
centre. There also was, and still is, the option of using the services of a traditional healer. As stated by the same elderly woman - one of the first inhabitants of Bendogho - the major problems facing Bendogho today are of a completely different character. The principal problem at the present time is the scarcity of food. Before, when Bendogho was not an overpopulated area, but consisted of only a few households, the food supply was sufficient. As for today, the space required for cultivating enough to cover the daily subsistence needs exists no longer. There id therefore the need to obtain a certain amount of money in order to buy food.

The scarcity of food and problems acquiring it is no doubt a problem for many inhabitants of Bendogho today. But contrary to the view given by the elderly woman, the water issue remains a great frustration for many people. Several people regard it to be the most unsatisfying factor in Bendogho. Before, households could choose between bringing water from a water tower or a water pump, both located at a frustrating distance from numerous households. Even if it is not a walk of six or nine kilometres, as in the situation experienced by the elderly woman, the distance is enough to upset people, rendering their everyday doings more difficult. With the water tower being out of order, people now have the choice of using the water pump or walking to a water tower in the neighbouring parcelled area. Many households use wheeled barrels – modified oil drums – to fetch water, a task executed mainly by women and children, who can often be seen walking by with a barrel pulled behind them. Buckets and other containers are also used for this purpose. The water, which is provided by facilities built by the municipality, costs money: about 200 FCFA per oil drum. The cost for water amounts to a considerable sum for the poor households and rises during the hot and dry season when the consumption may often double. The amount of water for drinking, personal hygiene and washing of clothes all tend to increase during these months. Economising is especially difficult for poor households without risking negative implications on the maintenance of adequate hygiene. Another problem that occurs is interruptions in the flow of water (Thylefors 1995:24).
Apart from the two concrete ditches running alongside the main road, which are basically built to collect the rain, there is no sewage system or refuse dump. Used water is simply poured out in the yard, or just outside. Some households have a little canal leading through the wall to a hole just outside the house, where dirty water and refuse are collected. Latrine, which is found within the courtyard, is a deep hole. Most commonly, refuse is gathered into small heaps that are burned. These can be seen everywhere, as can the burnt rests. This type of refuse handling is not unique for neighbourhoods as Bendogho and is practised quite commonly around Ouagadougou.

Five schools are located in the Bendogho area, two of them public, and three private. Classes are big, numbering about 70-80 pupils each. Education is of great concern among parents, as knowledge in general and the learning of French are estimated to increase the chances of the children to find a reasonable job and create a better future for themselves. This, in turn, may also increase the ability of the children to provide for their parents when they get old. The annual inscription fee for the public schools is about 2,000 FCFA. However, the money required for buying books and writing material is the most important expense. The private schools are much more expensive. For many households, this requires a great deal of saving. In addition to the annual fee, there is the need to equip the children with proper clothes, books, and other items necessary to be able to attend lessons.

As mentioned earlier, the *Naaba* authority is also to be found in Bendogho, where it is composed of one “head” *Naaba* and seven other *Nanamse*, who are the equivalent of “ministers”. The role of the “head” *Naaba* is to govern over Bendogho, with the assistance of his “ministers”, which all have different assignments ascribed to them. First, there is the *Wiid-naaba*, who is responsible for passing on information from the *Naaba* to the inhabitants. The second minister, the *Balm-naaba*, has the special task of saluting the *Naaba* at traditional ceremonies. The task of the *Larlé-naaba* is to act as mouthpiece of the *Naaba*, since he, by tradition, never speaks directly to his audience. Then
there is the Zak-naaba, who takes care of the court of the Naaba. When there is a ceremony, it is the task of the Samané-naaba to see to that everything is prepared and all the necessary arrangements are taken care of. The specific task of the Guib-naaba is to ensure future succession of Naaba. Finally, there is the Kam-naaba, who's concern are the young and making sure they are properly informed. It is also customary to notify the Kam-naaba of intentions to marry.

The Naaba authority is hence of great importance for the local society as it has a variety of traditional assignments attached to it. Besides the tasks just mentioned, the Naaba controls conflicts over land and intervenes to a limited extent in matters of marriage arrangements. The Naaba is, further, a link to the formal authorities, with which he has contact on a regular basis. It is also to this authority that people turn when in need of advice or settlement in sensitive matters and conflicts of various kinds. In a typical case of a conflict between neighbours, when the parts have tried and failed to solve the conflict themselves that the Naaba's influential and decisive power is consulted. Should the conflict not be solved this way, one has to turn to the state authorities for further assistance. Conflicts of different kinds can also be subject of discussion during the community meetings held every other Sunday morning. In addition to this, it happens that extra meetings are arranged in order to solve a conflict.

The urban growth of Africa’s cities has expanded rapidly since World War II, caused mostly by in-migration. The urban authorities, however, have had a difficult time accommodating for the growth rate and provide low-income housing, urban services or sufficient employment (Nelson 1999:1). Bendogho is hence a good example of such an expanding site in the urban environment where all of these amass while waiting for a change to occur.
It can be argued that classifying people as poor implies that they are victims. If this view is dominant in the arena of development, there is a possibility of two different outcomes. At best, it can be an effective method for directing necessities into a specific area. The disadvantageous outcome would be the risk of people being regarded as passive receivers who become dependent on development operations. To avoid this on an active basis, there is the option of choosing another way of approaching people defined as poor, and consequently, as subjects of development efforts. It is to regard people as actors and to proceed accordingly. Before mentioning the advantage and potential of this method, it is worth underlining the big risk, which also lies within such an approach. This would be the case if a development project supplies people with what is considered the instruments for coping with the situation and then leave it like that. Another possibility is a reduced contribution of development funding, originating from a view that people are capable of taking care of the situation themselves, being actors. In other words, there is a possibility of closing one’s eyes for the actual need and not investing enough for the project to become successful. In the opinion of Gardner, aid-funded development projects are likely to foster dependency unless they explicitly hand over decision-making power to participants (Gardner 1997:139).

The best possible outcome of the actor-oriented approach would result in the control and power to master one’s own situation. This is what is often referred to as empowerment. The approach of acknowledging people as actors argues that development can only come from within. This approach has also led to an increasing focus on participation and empowerment in development during the last decade or so (Woost 1997:229). It is the local people and their knowledge that is recognised in this approach, which considers multiple realities and diverse social practices of various actors. Grillo nonetheless warns for assuming that local knowledge to be complete, accomplished and therefore static and unchanging. Both for the developers and for the people they set out to assist, it is
important to remember that neither side has a monopoly of knowledge or ignorance (Grillo 1997:3,8,25). Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy (1994) also express the view that genuine development efforts must involve the people concerned. They further mention that development process may proceed more slowly if it involves extensive participation by local people when it comes to setting objectives and making plans, but that this process will be better off in the long run (Zachariah & Sooryamoorthy 1994:24f).

The notion of development and the talk of foreign aid are not unfamiliar to the inhabitants of Bendogho. It is known to them mostly as something talked about on the radio or the television, but something that is out of their reach and goes on outside of the neighbourhood, something that others may benefit from. The inhabitants of Bendogho have so far not been subject of any aid-funded project but wish they were given some support in order to start an income-generating activity or association, or to improve and strengthen the association they have to ensure its continuation. There is also a desire for direct aid in form of food to facilitate everyday life. As described by one woman: “One thing that could be done in order to improve the situation is to grant poor people loans so that they could carry out a petty trade activity and also distribute food to them”.

In their descriptions of a poor person, the informants mention the food issue as a central feature. The by far most common description of a poor person is that he or she does not have any money to be able to buy food. Some of the informants like to describe the poor by dividing them into different categories: “There are those without a house or any food to eat, those who can eat but don’t have any money and those who are ill and can’t work”. The aspect of good health seems to be central as well. A person who is ill is always singled out as the one worst off and poorest: “there are those without money but with good health – me – and then there are those who are ill, with physical handicaps”. Social performances are also recognised as important. One woman in her sixties states:

People say that nobody is poor if you have children. But it is difficult if they grow up and don’t find a job. You need money in order to help them become someone.
One is also poor when lacking respect from your own family or other members of society. In such case, children may leave home in the search of a better life elsewhere. Another common aspect of poverty is lack of proper clothing. Situation where one cannot satisfy own or family's most elementary needs but is dependent on someone else for wellbeing is another characteristic of the poor. A married woman with five children stated: “A poor person is someone who can’t feed himself, who doesn’t have enough clothes and can’t take care of himself or his children, he can’t satisfy the needs and leads a life in misery”. Many of the inhabitants in Bendogho see on the notion of development as the passing from a situation less favourable to a better one: that a change, an improvement, takes place. One woman, who at the time was taking a sewing course, includes the example of the acquisition of a sewing machine to describe the concept of development:

For example, if one is helping Burkina and people are capable of implementing certain activities and this in turn will provide for the needs of the population, they have evolved and according to me it is a case of development. In my case for example I’m selling biscuits. If I would succeed in buying a sewing machine it would be an example of development.

To be able to take care of ones own needs, without having to turn to others for help, is described as a proof that development has occurred. Such a position could also allow for the possibility to help others, family or neighbours, who lack these means. The presence of this desire for independence is strong: “A poor person is always busy thinking about what he shall do in order to get by”, as described by one man. Development means also that the country, the State and the government of Burkina Faso, have the means to be able to meet the needs of its citizens, with improvements of the infrastructure, among other things. As described by two men:

A developed country is a country where you live in peace and security. Where all the activities are flourishing and where people are educated and independent.
I understand the notion of development at two levels. Firstly as the elevation of a country that is not as advanced compared to others. Secondly it’s when a country that finds itself in a crisis of some kind receives financial aid that permits for the county to get back on feet. To sum up development is change.

There exists however a lack of confidence in the government among the inhabitants as to the handling of foreign aid. One woman states: “We hear the talk of foreign aid on the radio and television. But we, the poor, don’t benefit from this aid because the means are embezzled”. And similar another that:

They always promise to help us but each time it ends with nothing. We don’t know what they do with this aid. I wish that they could give us the means directly to us instead of letting them pass through the hands of a third part, because there is a lot of embezzlement going on.

The housing issue has grown to become a clearly visible indicator of prosperity/poverty in the urban environment (Hagberg 2001:61). As mentioned before, there are evident differences between the qualities of the houses in Bendogho. In such parts of the city as Bendogho the buying or renting of residential land and houses, is so far a process executed outside of the law. From the viewpoint of the authorities, the state and the municipality, the parcelling process could hence be seen as a matter of extending their control over the inhabitants, of organising them in a pattern of order, as a question of development (Rigg 2001). However, people in Bendogho await this process, as described earlier, with mixed emotions. The French expression la mise en valeur, which means ‘to develop’, is the focus and agenda of the authorities, and is, as such, constantly debated in all types of media. The discourse of development, with its talk of taking initiatives to fight poverty, is vivid in Burkina Faso. It is, however, an issue approached in technical and economic, rather than political terms, by the Burkinabè politicians (Burkina Faso 2000). ”It is as if poverty is merely a technical problem the solution of which only requires economic and
technological measures” (Hagberg 2001:7). Bendogho is an example of the actual implications that this kind of attitude towards the notion of development has. The *lotissement* project is thus what development is about, as far as the authorities are concerned. The distance to any actor-oriented approach with empowerment as its ultimate goal seems to be distant.
4. LIVELIHOODS

By way of exploration of the realities of poor people, and with the passing of time, the concept of livelihood - to describe poor peoples’ struggle to get by – has been suggested above as more appropriate than employment. For many poor people, formal employment neither is, nor can become their source of income. Another point worthy of notice arguing against the use of the concept of employment is that the individual or the household often engages in several different activities throughout a year. Diversifying behaviour is sought to increase income, reduce vulnerability and improve life conditions. The concept of livelihood does not have the limiting and deceptive characteristics that the use of employment carries, but is fit to embrace and describe the many facets of poor peoples’ subsistence activities, where employment also can be included, but then rather as a component of livelihood (Chambers 1995:11, 27).

Robert Chambers (1995) has come up with a model that I find useful for the purpose of organising and presenting some of the findings of the fieldwork upon which the report is based. The model is designed to describe the components and flows in a livelihood and consists of three parts, set in a triangular form, which all relate and contribute to a core of livelihood – the actual living. The aim of introducing this model is to provide a context for the everyday realities in which Bendogho women struggle to make ends meet. An inclusive part of this aim is also to describe different factors of concern for the different livelihoods carried out by women.

The different parts making up the model, which influence each other to a wide extent, are ‘Livelihood Capabilities’, ‘Stores and Resources’ and ‘Claims and Access’. ‘Livelihood capabilities’ refers to the role of people contributing to a living through various income generating activities. The person’s physical state is of great significance for the livelihood capabilities and for a person’s chance to carry out his/hers income generating activities. Factors such as illness, gender,
and age are all of major significance in this respect. ‘Stores and Resources’ are the tangible assets at a household's disposal. Stores, such as food stocks, valuable stores of gold, jewellery and woven textiles, as well as cash savings posited in banks of thrift and credit schemes, and resources such as land, water, trees, livestock, farm equipment, tools and domestic utensils, are all examples of tangible assets that could be commanded by a household. ‘Claims and Access’ is comprised of the intangible assets of a household. Claims can be made for material, moral or other practical support. Access signifies the possibility to use a resource, store, or service, or to obtain information, material, technology, employment, food, or income (Chambers 1995:24). The close relationship between parts in Chambers model can be illustrated by a woman who contracts an illness, whereby she becomes hindered to exercise her usual income-generating activity and is forced to give it up altogether. Her ‘livelihood capabilities’ have hence been exposed to a serious setback. The lack of income further stops her from putting aside money - ‘stores and resources’- for the purpose of making the small regular payments to the tontine, a sort of women’s cash saving association - ‘claims and access’- in which she is a member. She has thereby lost her capability to ‘store’ money and as a result she cannot continue her membership in the tontine, since being able to make regular payments is the prerequisite for joining. To be member in such a cash-saving association means you have ‘access’ to a service that can be of great value to women. This is only but one example in which the three parts can influence each other.

4.1 Livelihood Capabilities

Since many women have husbands who earn low incomes, have insecure employment or - as sometimes - no income at all, women themselves engaging in income generating activities can be an important contribution to the household:
I manage to share in the expenses of our household and it is often that my husband doesn’t gain anything. And often I take vegetables to use in my cooking. (Woman selling vegetables, with her husband working as a tailor).

Although the amount of money gained is most often fairly small, it can still allow women to participate in the expenses of the household, such as food costs, children’s education, and health expenses. The women residing in Bendogho have an adequate notion of different expenses, the ones concerned directly with the household as well as the ones tied to a possible income-generating activity. Nearly 60% of the women interviewed participate in the household economy while 2 women bear the main responsibility of the household economy. The income of a woman is at her disposal, and even though her income is most often very modest, it nevertheless grants her an increased independence. Many women appreciate managing on their own. As expressed by one woman: “I manage to prepare the meals, to buy clothes for the children, and to satisfy my own needs, without the help of anyone”. Another woman summarised in a similar way: “I can take care of my own small expenses and those of my children, without asking anyone to assist me, as along as it is not a serious problem of any kind”. It thus increases women's influence on expenditures, especially for own purposes. Personal items, soap, shoes, and children’s clothes and toys are among the things women chose to spend their money on. Although they decide how to use their money, in some households there is also an element of involvement from the husband:

You have to look after your children. I buy whatever they want when their father is not at home!

Women’s opportunities of finding a salaried job are limited. The portion of girls receiving education is increasing, but even for these girls, education has proved to be far from a guarantee for employment (Djikman & Van Dijk 1993:273). Most of the women in Bendogho have none or only a few years of schooling. About 60% of those I interviewed have never received any schooling at all, 9
women have gone to school for between 3 and 6 years, and 2 continued up to college level. With this lack in formal education, their opportunities of finding a salaried job are even further limited and it is up to the women themselves to create an income-generating activity. Consequently, those who do have an income of their own are engaged in the sort of income-generating activity not requiring formal educational skills, with small scale selling being by far the most common. The women look for an income-generating activity that does not require much of an initial investment. There is also the option of making inquiries about jobs at various places, or taking special entrance examinations for jobs. For example, one woman was promised aid from her brother-in-law in order to carry out an entrance examination to become an assistant midwife, but since he never came to get her dossier, which was needed in the process, this was not pursued. The importance of having connections in the pursuit of finding a job is recognised.

Dijkman and Van Dijk (1993) point out that activities are strictly segregated. Women and men operate to a large extent in different income-generating activity domains. It is common among men to learn a job through informal training or apprenticeship, while women tend to be denied access to apprenticeship in activities considered male.
Two boys practising the craft of carpentry at a joiner’s workshop in Bendogho.

Women are not allowed of crossing the necessary barriers to enter male activities. This obviously diminishes the choice of income-generating activities available for women.
Domestic tasks, such as child raising, fetching water and wood, cleaning and cooking, which are traditionally regarded as female, gives Burkinabè girls and women a considerable amount of training over the years. Here is a group of girls among pots and pans in the yard of their household, helping out with the cooking.

Women wanting to earn an income will most often choose activities related to the domestic tasks they have learned to master. This way domestic skills learned by girls may prove to be useful knowledge for future activities (1993:273, 277f, 285).

Although women of Bendogho are engaged in various forms of subsistence, the majority is involved in some sort of small scale selling. Firewood, nuts, soap,
fruit, vegetables, biscuits, herbs, juice and prepared meals - with the base consisting mainly of rice - are typical products for sale just outside the home or at the local market. Selling at the local market, or even better, at one of the big markets in the town centre, is more profitable than limiting the selling to the vicinity of one's home. A little more than a third of the women carried out their activities outside of home. Those who gathered gravel needed for making bricks engaged in an income-generating activity found at the bottom of the hierarchical scale (Burkina Faso 2000:180). The best time for collecting gravel is after rainfall, rain making the pebbles more visible. The collecting of gravel is a physical demanding and unsatisfactory activity:

The problem is that it’s an activity you can’t do on a regular basis, because of the physical effort involved. It’s no future in this kind of activity and you are not able to save any money of it. But since I haven’t got any means to start another activity, this is what remains for me to do.

Another income-generating activity that has the advantage of an almost no initial nor continuous investment is that of hairdressing practices by a couple of women among those interviewed. The style of hair is important among Burkinabè women and there seems to be an endless variation of hairstyles, most of which are beautifully plaited creations.

A couple of women made crocheted baby clothes as a complementary activity, especially when there were problems in carrying out their main income-generating activity. Apart from collecting or purchasing goods, most of the preparations for the different activities are made at home. The water issue and the lack of electricity are unsatisfactory in this respect. The absence of electricity brings about limitations as to what activities that can be carried out and in what way. Fetching water can be a time-consuming task, especially if there is a rupture in the pipe system. As for selling itself, it takes place either at the local market place or at home, in the courtyard or just outside the house. While women are to a large extent tied to the household in the carrying out of
activities, men usually leave home early in the morning to return in the late hours of the evening. Working as carpenter, tailor, construction worker, brick maker, salesman, taxi driver or guard are typical male activities for Bendogho men. Only a few women worked outside of home or the nearby area as housekeeper or laundress. Among those women, one worked in her husband’s store and another took a course in order to learn sewing. Amongst all 31 women interviewed, there was only one who had a ‘secure employment’. This woman worked with the social service. She was engaged in matters of family planning, divorces, street children and combating female mutilation. She had a monthly salary until she fell ill to an illness that was not medically recognised.

The activity of selling is not linked to a secure income. The risk of not selling enough appears to be an ever-present fact and too often the result out of a day’s work. The profit for the women involved in selling lies somewhere between 50 and 500 FCFA per day. Several women stated that a collapse of their income-generating activity was common. A third of the women interviewed had no income-generating activity going or was just about to start one off. Two thirds said to have problems with their activity. According to one woman, any project or income-generating activity runs the risk of fizzling out from one day to another, consequently affecting the direction in life. The knowledge of what the following day will bring is scarce. No one can determine what is going to happen. In some families, the daily income decides whether they will have enough to eat that day or not. As declared by one woman without any income generating activity herself, with a husband exercising petits metiers, odd jobs: “If my husband doesn’t find anything to do during the day, we don’t eat that particular day”. Having nothing to eat is not unique:

We are living a difficult life here. Many people don’t have any job. We don’t always have something to eat. (A woman not engaged in any income-generating activity, with a husband selling flower and plants).
In the situation of one elderly widow, who earned a little sum from collecting heaps of gravel, the income just covered expenses so that she could barely eat. Most of her children were not in a position where they could contribute. Although she could not see a future in her present income-generating activity, considering the physical effort it demanded of her, and that she got by only with great difficulty, she claimed her only other option was relying on God.

Bendogho was generally described as a place where it was hard to exercise one’s activities, and further said to offer fewer opportunities for selling compared to central Ouagadougou. This was explained in terms of restricted means of obtaining adequate equipment for one’s income-generating activity, caused by a fragile household economy with a range of expenses to cover, and the limited amount of customers combined with constant competition. The possibilities for selling being limited were expressed by one woman as the foremost reason for living in an insecure economic situation. Many women, about 70% of those 21 women engaged in an income generating activity, wished for conditions to change, diversify, or expand their present trade activity, or to find a job with a better pay. There were also those who desired loans given to the poor in order for them to be able to engage in selling activities. Another desire was to be able to pay the necessary raw material in cash, instead of being forced to buy on credit, which increased costs. To buy goods on credit always involves an extra risk, since trouble trading guarantee problems with the creditor. Such situations do not facilitate subsequent credit.

In answer to what they would do if they were not able to carry out their present income-generating activity, many women – who used to carry out their activity outside the home - said they would simply stay at home. One woman saw returning to the countryside to cultivate as a last resort if unable to carry out her current income-generating activity of selling firewood. In order to be able to start anew, in case the selling activity failed completely, women have to hope for aid from the husband or some well-off relative. The primary hope was put in the husband:
My activity often collapses and so I’ve to stop. Thereafter I wait until my husband has made enough money to help me start anew. (Woman selling vegetables, with a husband employed as a cleaner).

Being in the situation, where one is very dependent on one’s husband, is obviously a state of true discontentment, as expressed by some women. Many also claimed not to know at all who could be of assistance in times.

Hence, not all women are engaged in some sort of income-generating activity. Illness and handicap are common reasons, which make efforts of various activities demanding, or even impossible to pursue. It also makes it more difficult to convert income into capability. That is, they may need more income to achieve the same functioning (Sen 1999:88). In these cases, women become all the more reliant on their husbands to take care of them, especially in helping them, as mentioned above, in setting up their income-generating activity anew. The opportunities and freedom that come with an income disappear with it. Lacking own income is difficult. The needs and expenses are still there. For some households, it can be that all providers are out of employment or are hindered to pursue their income-generating activity at the same time. In such a situation, the conditions are extremely precarious, wherefore many inhabitants stated that they helped each other out, giving loans and food to neighbours in need.

For people in Bendogho, contracting illness of some kind is not unusual. Rather, it is an element of everyday life in neighbourhoods like this, where the environment and life conditions are not the most beneficial (see p. 23). Nevertheless, becoming ill is many people’s greatest fear. Not only because of the effects, which the disease has, but also because no one is sure whether they can afford the necessary medicines. Diarrhoea and malnutrition occur when the nutritional requirements are not met or if the nutriment is defect in any way. Moreover, there are seasonal diseases, such as malaria and meningitis. The rainy
season, beginning in June, with its peak in August, favours the existence of the malaria mosquito. Most outbreaks of meningitis occur during the really dry period of the year, about six months later. Contracting a disease implies aggravating circumstances as the condition is likely to render both the practices of an income-generating activity and the carrying out of chores difficult or impossible. The body and its physical state are often the decisive factor of a person’s livelihood capabilities. Health is, in other words, central and highly valued, as stated by two women: “What is indispensable, when it comes to carrying out your income-generating activity, is health, simply because you can’t rely on others (employees for example) to carry out your activities in your place”. “Since I’m in good health, there are no problems!”

For the woman, the effects of childbearing on the body can be physical quite demanding. Especially so if the woman has given many births:

Seeing your children growing up you can feel the body ageing. The body has also been subjected to a great deal of difficult physical changes because of all the childbirths.
Childbirth can be difficult and risky for both the mother and her baby. Out of 100,000 mothers, 480 loose their life while giving birth, whereas 104 out of 1,000 children die during delivery. The mortality rate for children up to five years of age is 197 per 1,000 live births. These figures influence, of course, the general life expectancy, which, is estimated at barely 46 years of age (HDI 2003b). (All the figures date from 2001).

When ill and incapable to pursue one's income-generating activity, the consequence can often be an increased burden on the other spouse to provide for the family. In one such case, a woman who was selling biscuits and nuts was been ill for a month and relied entirely on her husband for care. Besides having lost the additional income, which previously meant she could meet some of her own needs, she came to lack means to start her income-generating activity anew. Thus, not only does she and her family suffer directly from the contracted disease. There are also other after-effects in terms of added dependency on her
husband, reduced economic independence and problems in resuming her income-generating activity.

The age-factor is also of importance. Although the young children and the very old people do not contribute financially to any higher degree, mainly because of limited physical capabilities, both carry out chores and activities of various kinds. When not in school, children can assist parents in their commercial activity or they can, especially when teenagers, carry out an income-generating activity on their own. To sell vegetables, collect gravel, and look after cattle are a few examples of what children do. For the elderly, there is no point of retirement - if you have not had secure employment - they generally carry on with their activities as long as they can. Beyond that point, they have to count on support from relatives.

The gender aspect is interesting in how space and time dimension of activities differ between men and women. Although men assist women to a certain extent in the household chores, the household is the main responsibility of women. So is the responsibility of the children. These factors combined mean that both the space and the time dimension are somewhat restricted for women. The household, as well as the children consume time, and since the place for carrying out the chores and taking care of the children is in the vicinity of the homestead, this situation ties women to the home. While it can be argued that carrying out chores is also an important contribution, the point here is that woman’s possibility of devoting herself to an income-generating livelihood activity is at risk of being restricted.

4.2 Stores and Resources

Stores of money and food are not great in the households of Bendogho. Many households live on the very margin, being everyday obliged to consume all of the income of that day, if there ever was any to begin with. Out of the 31 women
interviewed, five used the expression of ‘living from day to day’ to describe their situation, but the number of women talking about uncertain economical conditions was even larger. It is of vital importance to underline though that there are considerable differences among Bendogho women and their households when it comes to level of wealth. In households where the woman had enough income to share in the expenses of the household, she did so, contributing according to her possibilities.

Women with incomes that allow for saving on a daily or weekly basis are sometimes members of a tontine, a sort of saving association described in more detail in the following section. Little more than half of the married women had husbands with a steady income, who were the main providers for their families. Also among these households, there were variations in wealth. For example, one particularly well off woman, originating from the Côte d’Ivoire, was living with her four children and her co-wife in a well-managed house, with a concrete courtyard and lots of proper furniture and decorations inside. In Côte d’Ivoire, she sold vegetables, but since coming to Burkina Faso and Bendogho one year ago, she had not carried out any income-generating activity herself. Instead, she lived on money sent from her husband, who was working in France. She found it hard to start an in Bendogho, but had been promised money from her husband so that she could buy a fridge for the purpose of selling refreshments closer to the centre of town.

Regarding the category of resources, the asset of land is one important part of the resource spectrum, both for constructing and cultivating purposes, as well as a source of investment. Benefiting from such an investment, the owner is frequently engaged in the offering of a house for rent, located at the same or at a separate plot. Properties like a house can sometimes also be lent, for a period of time, to relatives worse-off, who lack means of their own to buy or rent a place to live. A note-worthy feature in the process of the awaited lotissement is also the sale of this kind of investment plots. Among the 31 women, slightly more
than 60 % lived in households, where the house was the property of their husbands.

Some of the households had small vegetable gardens suitable for cultivation of for example maize, mainly for private consumption. This is of course a limited and insecure type of resource which depends on the weather conditions and with the time of harvest being possible only during a certain time of year. Maize is, however, of special significance since it is one of the first crops to be harvested, in September/October, after the often difficult, hungry period of the year (Skinner 1989:4). Livestock is also a resource of some households. Cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and hens can be seen wandering about in the neighbourhood. Products like milk, eggs and meat are obtained from livestock, with goats and sheep being the main source of meat. Cattle, which is kept as principal source of milk, can be found grazing in the green ditches, and looked after by young boys. Taking into account the time of possession of the animals, they can also be considered, or described as, belonging to the sphere of stores.

To be in possession of a vehicle – a bicycle, a moped, a motorcycle, or a car – is a resource of great advantage. The bicycle is the most common means of transport in Bendogho, but not every household can afford one and to get hold of one often needs saving up for a longer period of time. To be in possession of more than one bicycle is rare and for those households with a bicycle it is mainly for the husband to use. Bicycle serves also as a means of transport to more distant schools of secondary and higher education. Other vehicles feature less frequently in the neighbourhood of Bendogho but there are some better-off inhabitants who possess more advanced modes of transportation. Considering the choice of possible income-generating activities, total absence of a vehicle could be a limiting factor. An absence of a vehicle restricts one's area of possible income-generating activities to Bendogho. This is obviously a limiting factor creating a disadvantage for many, especially women, since, as mentioned, even if the household possesses a bicycle, the men are those who get to use it.
The lack of cash savings is a limiting factor in people’s pursuits to start, expand or diversify an income-generating activity. The lack of this type of economical store renders the procuring of necessary resources as domestic utensils, tools and other equipment difficult. Without enough money to be able to pay in cash for different raw material and ingredients, only the more expensive option of buying the goods on credit is available. Lack of economical support is often the reason for activities failing, leaving no direct possibility to start anew other than to wait for husband to help out when he obtains the means.

The water issue, pointed out by many people - men and women alike - as the most unsatisfactory condition, deserves to be mentioned in this context. The water reserves are limited, distribution badly situated and sometimes subjected to ruptures. Not even the better-off households in Bendogho have a well of their own.

4.3 Claims and Access

In the case of Bendogho, there are several forms of intangible assets that are of great importance in many ways for the inhabitants. Firstly examined is the importance of social relations through which one has a range of advantages. Secondly, the worth of access to formal education is discussed. Following this, the role of a neighbourhood association is explained. After the above sections, three women’s associations are described and discussed. Some desired assets that lack the form of intangibles, yet also of interest for people in Bendogho, are also discussed.

Social relationships are at the core of people’s assets. There are various social relationships that may work to one’s advantage, just as the lack of, or problems with them affect people’s situation in an aggravating manner. An atmosphere of envy was described by four women as affecting the neighbour situation causing some women not to get along. A situation like this is sometimes reason enough
for changing place of habitation. Good neighbourhood relation is clearly one important asset. Many women mentioned this as one of the most important factors influencing the ability to be at ease where they lived. Thirteen of the women interviewed mentioned, without a prompting question, the need to be on good terms with their neighbours. Frequent was the lending of minor amounts of sugar, salt, flavour etc, as was giving of small financial loans. In times of illness or other types of hardship, neighbours may also stand by each other, providing practical and moral support, according to their means:

People help each other here. Consequently people make common cause with each other, in times of joy as in times of sorrow. People support each other morally and financially, both at happy events and unfortunate occasions. If someone is ill, for example, we could help by giving money for the cure. It is also often that food is given to people.

The acquisition of information is yet another asset obtained via neighbours. It may concern information about the water supply, the price of rice or maize at different places, and information relevant for job search or income generating activities. All these features could be listed as services provided among neighbours, whereby food, money, information, as well as practical and moral support are exchanged. The above is also particularly valid for relatives. Having said this, some better-off relatives prefer not to get too involved in matters of their poorer relations, afraid of constantly having to deal with overbearing demands. Others regard it as a point of honour to be able to assist their relatives. In these cases, it is almost always the income of the husband that allows such commitment, which affirms their prestigious position. Nearly half of the women have a number of relatives residing in Bendogho or nearby, while two women in their thirties are born in the neighbourhood. People place great value on contact with relatives. When possible, almost 80 % of women pay their family regular visits. Most women have relatives living in a village, which is often at the same time the women’s place of birth. When visiting, women occasionally help in cultivating work for which they often receive gifts of food, like bowls of beans or millet.
The role of education and its importance is extensively recognised among families in Bendogho. Access to knowledge in form of formal education and the learning of French, the official language of Burkina Faso, is considered to equip children with skills facilitating their chances of finding a good living and creating a better future. This increases the children ability to help their parents economically. Many parents struggle to make the schooling of their children a priority, but access to education is for simple economic reasons limited for many children. A child able to begin school is often forced to quit because of problems with financing. Even the better-off parents, where the father has a sizeable and steady income, can be troubled by this kind of expenditures:

I hope to be able to take care of my children, so that they can make a future for themselves. But at the same time I’m worried since I don’t know if my husband and I will have the means necessary to allow them to continue school.

There are both public and private schools in Bendogho. There are three private schools in Bendogho. Some children go to such schools in other parts of town however. The annual fee for primary school varies between 17,500 FCFA and 22,500 FCFA. College may cost 75,000 FCFA per year and for the few continuing beyond college, the fee can reach up to 150,000 FCFA, a considerable amount of money for people in areas like Bendogho. One single woman, had children who reached this level of education. She was also the only one among the interviewees who had a proper employment, working as a social worker. But the fact that her children have received an education demanded a great economic effort from her and her husband. The husband however does not live together with her and does not contribute to her household since he, just as his wife, has stopped working:

I’ve suffered a lot to make sure that the children’s education has been paid for. But as for the present situation I cannot rely on them to help me out financially, because they have only insignificant salaries.
For children at the age of seven, there is only one school in the Bendogho area. This school charges an initial inscription fee of 1,000 FCFA, followed by an annual fee of 2,000 FCFA.

It is estimated that only one third of the children in Burkina Faso are admitted to school at the age of seven. In the poor areas only 19 percent are admitted, compared to 62.7 percent of the ‘non-poor children’ (Bayala et al. 1997; Gérard 1998; Kaboré et al.; Ouédraogo 1998 in Hagberg 2002:47).

Besides the issue of school fees, lack of means of transport can be yet another obstacle to education, adding to costs and hindering the possibilities of continuing. Some parents also require from their children that they carry out petty trade and chores around the house.

To be able and willing to send one's children to school is also a matter of favouring a modern way of life and a future in the city at the expense of a traditional lifestyle. However, the educated youth often have problems to find a salaried job and it is common to find these people engaging themselves in informal activities. Children who go to school clearly get access to a kind of
knowledge than those who do not. This experience is also a matter of importance for the concept of identity, both at an individual level and at a collective level. The educated young person conceives of him/herself by including the school experience and may, because of this, not choose the traditional way of life. Among the many students not able to finish their education because of lack of money, it is most likely that their partial formal education will not provide them with the job or income-generating activity. It rather represents one of the parts in the *bricolage* (*se débrouiller* in French), which refers to that widely faceted way of getting by, to sustain a living (Hagberg 2002:43,52ff).

The neighbourhood association is a valuable and useful forum for information and discussion. The association was founded in June 1999, in the aftermath of a child’s death. Following a child's death, when the relatives of the deceased asked for a place to bury the child, the autochthonous dwellers refused them a place. Since the body has to be buried within a day after dying and there was no vehicle at hand, the relatives walked all night with the body to a far away cemetery. After this incident, the ‘newcomers’ - people not born in Bendogho that is - decided to unite themselves by founding an association, where they would be able to discuss and try to improve the conditions under which they live. Neighbourhood meetings are not a new phenomenon in Bendogho. The idea and the unique thing behind the creation of this new association was to strengthen the position of the ‘newcomers’. At the very first meeting 15 people gathered, yet just two weeks 89 people turned up. Today 1,200 people have become members. The association is well organised with a board counting 20 members, each with different assignment. Passing on information, handling disputes, youth and sports, social affairs and matters of economy, are among the areas of responsibility for the secretaries of the board. There are further five members of honour – the *Naaba* among others – and four advisors. In February 2000, the association received its official recognition receipt from the municipality. To join the association, one must pay a sum of 1,000 FCFA. Membership is identified by a membership card.
With sessions every other Sunday, members meet to discuss in the shadow under a big tree situated in an open area among the dwellings. People sit on wooden benches set in a square in front of the president and the board. Before each meeting, the board gets together to create an agenda that sets a framework for discussion. After the agenda has been presented at the opening of every meeting, everyone present is free to speak. Both women and men are welcome to attend and speak at the meetings, but as could be observed, more than 95% of those present were men. One explanation is the fact that it is principally the head of the family, i.e. the husband, who is expected to represent the household at meetings. Those women who attend neighbourhood meetings, not just the neighbourhood association mentioned here, know of difficulties when it comes to their involvement and often hesitate to speak:

In general women refrain from speaking at the meetings because of fear of critique, if a woman intervenes they say she just wants to “show off”. I myself have attended meetings but without saying anything, since I don’t want them to talk about me afterwards.

At the meetings women sometimes intervene, putting forward their views. But it’s said not to be taken seriously, since women are never satisfied.

The things discussed at the meetings are rarely spoken about between husband and wife at home. The implication of the above remarks is that women have in reality a limited access to the meetings, to the information given and discussed, and to the decisions taken. During the meetings notes are taken for the archives. So far the association has, among other things, procured a hearse, intervened to try to mend the water tower, solved several disputes, and met with the mayor of their municipality and of Ouagadougou, to discuss the process of lotissement. The association represents an important forum, where from people can obtain information that may have considerable implications for the living conditions. Information and discussion about the preparations for the lotissement and the time of its implementation can determine decisions of whether or not to stay in
Access to different associations is a fairly common phenomenon in Bendogho, although – as explained below - there are also limiting factors concerning the ability to join, and the length of existence of the associations. One type of association is similar to saving societies, referred to as *tontines*. These are a frequent occurrence in both rural and urban areas, as a non-official option in a society, where the financial structures do not correspond to the needs of the great majority of the population. The phenomenon of *tontines* is by no means a recent creation, but has long been part of the traditional society. The early *tontines* were grounded on family or kin relations and could intervene in all sorts of economical and social contexts, not just on a financial level (Sanou 1992:153,155). Carrying this function, the *tontines* have been described as a precursor to forms of assurance (Ottemberg in Sanou 1992:155). In the case of Bendogho, the *tontines* are not based on any kind of family or kin affinity. To be a member in a *tontine* today is an easier way of saving money. A sum of money agreed upon within the *tontine* is deposited on a regular basis to a cashier, who looks after it or places it in a bank for a period of time. It is the cashier, who is one of the group members, who returns the money saved.

One of the *tontines* in Bendogho, created six years ago, consists of seven members - after some have left Bendogho - who are each supposed to give 5,000 FCFA per month. Once a month, one of the members can withdraw 35,000 FCFA, a sizeable figure, to dispose of as she wishes. “The money adds up to a considerable amount and not just a small sum” expressed by one woman. With seven participants and providing proper functioning, a member can expect to collect money every seventh month. Another well-functioning *tontine*, which came into being three years ago, has as many as 30 women saving money, with a weekly deposit sum of 700 FCFA per person. It is not rare to have a fluctuating number of members, as in the case of another *tontine* with between 10 and 20 members. This is mainly due to the fact that many women are only
capable to join a *tontine* at times when they operate a successful income-generating activity. The special strategy of this society was to suspend savings and payments during August, when many women experience great constrains on their selling activities. In this *tontine*, the members did not pay a fixed sum but gave in proportion to their means. Thus, some gave 250 FCFA per day while others gave 1,000 FCFA per day. At the end of the month, each member is free to collect her money. Since it is not uncommon for people waiting to collect their money, the cashier deposits the money at the *caisse populaire*, a sort of savings bank, on a regular basis, to ensure that the money will not be spent in the meantime. This *tontine* further claimed to be open to all women and men, who like to join.

The difficulty of saving money on one’s own was recognised by many women. Therefore, another advantage of the *tontines* was the facilitating mechanism of the process of saving money through a collective basis. All women agreed that the idea behind *tontines* was a good way for the women to help each other out, but far from everyone could expect to become a member. The difficulty facing several women, who wished to join in, was lack of money. Many income-generating activities simply do not allow for a membership. Only those with a regular income can enjoy the benefits of a membership in a *tontine*, since its existence is based on the constant payments by its members. There is also a risk of becoming involved as a member if the means to pursue a membership and uphold your payments dwindle, as one women warned. Another factor, of major importance for the *tontines*, is the existence of solidarity and honesty in the group. With the absence of these, the *tontine* will not last long. The occurrence of dishonesty among the members was given as a reason by one woman for not taking an interest in participating.

A similar distrust is also to be found within a women’s association created in Bendogho a few years ago. The association was established on the proposal of a woman from outside Bendogho (“some kind of municipal employee”), who approached some of the women with the idea. More than a hundred women are
at present part of the association. An elderly woman holds the position of president, with the assistance from the initiator of the association. The initiator further offered them repayable loans to facilitate the practice of selling activities. But the women were not in agreement and the offer was not accepted, even though the initiator has paid them visits several times. Although the main discussion has focused on the loans, a second important goal was to have a women's association in Bendogho to represent women in different situations. This has not quite lived up to the expectations. Considering loans responsibility is key. People are afraid to engage in things that render them accountable. Further, it is claimed that many women do not pay the money back, placing the burden of their failure on the woman in contact with the person giving the loan. Considering this risk, it is highly problematic to find someone willing to take a loan on behalf of others.

The association, which is open to all women, has nevertheless been an opportunity for women to get to know each other better and make new acquaintances. Through this association, the neighbourhood community spirit has been reinforced. Social gatherings with food and drink have also been organised, financed by voluntary donations. The meetings do not occur on a regular basis, but when there is something to discuss, a tambourine calls people to a meeting.

Another association with a more specific pursuit is the association of shea butter, or beurre de karité (Butyrospermum paradoxum). With a total membership that has grown up to 180 women, the association is manufacturing shea butter, a product used mainly for cooking purposes. In spite of its limited success, membership in the association entails several advantages for women involved.
The shea butter association is not based on affinity. The only condition to join in is that you are a woman, are interested in becoming a member and can pay the admission fee of 100 FCFA per month.

First of all, it is not a requirement to have the necessary skills before joining in. The knowledge of production is simply passed on from those who possess the know-how to women lacking this information. There is also the opportunity of taking part in seminars and workshops to learn about the production. These are held quite often around the city. The association also takes part in common meetings with other women’s associations in their sector. Even though they are not involved in the same kind of income-generating activity, they can exchange experiences. To be a member in this association represents an opportunity to obtain valuable information of how to make shea butter.

Secondly, insight is shared about what it means to be a member of an association. This is useful information, whether its production is working or not. The shea butter association received authorisation three years ago but its existence dates back to 1991. This time has allowed for the building up of a proper structure, with a board, secretary, participation in joint meetings of
different women’s associations and seminars and – when the means allow it – a well organised production structure, with delegated assignments for everyone.

Out of 180 members, 100 are to be found in five adjacent villages. These women are the distributors of the shea kernels. The task of visiting these villages in order to buy the kernels is then imposed on a group of women from Bendogho. When in possession of the kernels, the different phases of washing, drying, breaking and deep-frying them follow. After a tour to the mill, with the purpose of pulverisation, the making of the actual butter continues. In the production, every woman has a specific task assigned to her, in proportion to which she is salaried. To be a member can hence be a way of obtaining an income. The president is also engaged with the task of finding institutions willing to grant loans. One year she succeeded in obtaining a loan for 20 women in the association. Not all women in the association participate in the production of shea butter. Some have their own selling activities but take part in various social events, like marriages, baptisms and funerals, where the association is involved. Even before the creation of the association, some women gathered at these kinds of events. Such groups are still numerous in Bendogho.

It was when the current president got involved in a project occupied with shea butter production, that she had the idea to interest other Bendogho women in this domain. The association is still in contact with this project, where from they get information of different demands and courses. Outside orders tend to be rare although the association was accorded a part of quite an extensive order the year before, when asked to produce 20 tonnes per month at a price of 500 FCFA per kilo. The benefit was of course not as big as it would have been, had the complete order been put to their association. The production is quite limited, aimed almost exclusively for local consumption. At present, the association also has problems finding a permanent location, since the current place is only lent by the husband of the president. The association has neither enough capital to be able to meet possible orders properly, nor do they have any partners to support them. The difficulty in getting access to water and other means of production are
further aggravating circumstances. According to leaders of the association, each woman ought to keep her own journal, where everything concerning the production is noted, as for example the quantity of kernels taken, the specific task you carry out and the corresponding salary given. Therefore, the fact that more than 50% of the members are illiterate poses another problem.

Once a month, the board gathers for a meeting, and every other week, there is a meeting for all the members. At one meeting that I attended, it was announced that there were 30 membership cards left. After these, the association would not accept any more members in the domain of production. One could still join in the social events though. Some positive news was also announced. Firstly, the board had been in contact with another, larger association that had easier access to information on external order and could forward this kind of information. Secondly, they had been contacted by a bank willing to grant a loan ranging from 5,000 to 5,000,000 FCFA. The bank also suggested buying sacs of rice and maize on credit. The condition for the association given was to open an account.

Livelihoods are made up by many components, all important in their own respect. The presence or absence of a certain component impinges on how the women and their families make ends meet, as do the specific combination of components. Taken together, the components can be seen as a wide net of possibilities and constraints, of hope and despair that are manifested in the passing of each day.
5. CASE STUDIES

In order to expand the grasp of the context, within which Bendogho women live their lives and try to conduct various livelihood activities, three case studies are included. The presentation of three separate cases, of the setting of three different women’s lives, is an important complement to the preceding chapter. It allows a more full-fledged picture to be presented of the elements influencing women’s lives and of the possibilities and constraints they face.

5.1 Case Study No. 1: Salimata

Salimata\(^3\) is a woman with an air of self-confidence and pride. Married at 17, now with four children, she is somewhere in her early fifties. She is talkative, not hesitating to give long descriptions of her personal life. A big laughter or a harsh comment, yelled to one of the daughters nearby every now and then accompanies the seriousness of her statements. Like almost half of the 31 women I interviewed, her family is of Muslim faith, though she does not have any co-wives. Salimata is of Mossi origin. She lives with her husband and the children. Two nephews also reside within the same household. The situation of her married life is rather precarious. About fifteen years ago, her husband left for the Côte d’Ivoire, trying his luck there like many other Burkinabè people. During the whole of his stay, he did not contact her at all. With him gone, Salimata started to have problems with her neighbours, something she had not experienced before. Meanwhile, Salimata also had another man’s child. A couple of years ago, her husband returned. In the Côte d’Ivoire he had worked with carriage but back in Ouagadougou he found himself without any income-generating activity. To be out of work he described as the least satisfying factor. Especially so without connections, it he found it to be a difficult task to find any work:

\(^3\) All names included in the report are fictitious.
Since I got back I have not been working. Not even for a single day during these two years. I’m looking for a job but without finding any. I make inquiries here, there and everywhere. But I don’t know who could be able to help me since I haven’t got any “long arms” (bras longues, i.e. contacts).

As mentioned, he is now again living with his family, but since he has failed in finding an income-generating activity, he is depending upon his wife, hence the whole economical responsibility for the household is in the hands of Salimata.

In her efforts of obtaining an income large enough to meet the needs of the members of the household, she makes different rice and porridge tô (the traditional dish of maize, sorghum or millet) dishes to sell in the local market place. The base in tô consists of maize. The expenditure of maize amounts to about 2 sacs/fortnight. Out of these sacs she is able to raise a profit of 5,000 FCFA, after deducting the other expenses. Among those is the daily cost of water, which equals 600 FCFA for three barrels (reconstructed oil drums) and the daily consumption of firewood that costs 500 FCFA. The use of water and firewood is not only for the purpose of cooking the food for sale. It is also required for the personal hygiene, the washing of clothes and the preparing of meals. For Salimata, the advantage of this income-generating activity is that she is able to feed her family without any help. She is, however, not completely alone. When it comes to preparing the dishes, she has assistance from her children. They also help her in the task of bringing home water. The main problem though is that the trade is not very successful. Salimata’s attitude towards the future is rather pessimistic. Reflecting on the present situation, with her income-generating activity not doing well at all, she wonders if the conditions of life will lead the family to become even poorer than now. Another factor causing distress is the fact that she is obliged to buy the necessary ingredients on credit. The reason for this is simply lack of capital. This way expenses rise. Nevertheless, she keeps on carrying out the same income-generating activity since she finds no alternative. Should she, for whatever reason, be unable to pursue her income-generating activity, she sees no other option than for the household to split and go separate ways.
Moving is not something new for Salimata. Bendogho is her sixth place of habitation. A little village close to the town of Koupéla is her birthplace, situated about 100 km from Ouagadougou. Since this is her place of birth and she has been on good terms with her parents, she talks in positive terms about Koupéla. But she also has a very sad memory in connection to this place. At the age of ten, her parents divorced, an event, she points out, which has marked her life deeply since her mother left them at that moment. After Salimata married, she and her husband went to Attinguè in the Côte d’Ivoire to try their luck. The advantage of being in Attinguè was that they had enough food. They stayed there for twelve years, but when their income-generating activities it did not work out to their satisfaction, they moved. They went back Burkina Faso, to Dédougou, a middle-sized town, where they practised a great deal of cultivation in a region where the rainfall is relatively plentiful. Later, they decided to go Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city in Burkina and considered the industrial capital of the country. But since the town was far away from their original villages, this was not quite satisfactory either. Then, Salimata decided to move to Ouagadougou, allowing them to visit their families more frequently. Her older brother is still living near Koupéla, practising cultivation. During these visits, she is often given small gifts. It also happens that she spends a month in the village of her husband. In Ouagadougou, they first lived in sector 24. The move to Bendogho was caused by the problems Salimata experienced with her neighbours after her husband left for the Côte d’Ivoire. Moving to Bendogho means she is still part of the urban environment but the ties with her rural background are still maintained through regular visits.

Salimata’s house is favourably situated near the road to Fada N’Gourma. In comparison to other houses in the Bendogho area, her house is rather big, consisting of several compounds that are linked together, with a concrete wall closing the courtyard and a metal door as entrance. According to Salimata, it is through connections that one is able to obtain an area for construction. Without someone who can intervene on one's behalf, it is difficult to find a place to live. Salimata was lucky enough to have this “someone” who acted to her benefit when she came here six years ago. She may be fortunate to be the owner of her
house, yet she is also troubled since she does not know what changes the future will bring concerning her housing. The uncertainty of when the *lotissement* will come about is one of her greatest worries. It is a great stress not to know when it will be implemented and how the topographic mapping will affect her house. Unfortunately, her deepest fears of having to abandon the house because of the planned road network were justified. At a later point, she told that she had been informed by the topographers that she had to move. Her house would be torn down in favour of the planned road system. There will be no compensation nor help finding a new place to live. And Salimata has no idea of how she will be able to construct a new house for her family, since the burden of providing for the family lays only on her.

The fact that Salimata’s husband was absent during a long period of time meant that, to a large extent, he missed out on the raising of the children. The element of respect towards the parents and the acceptance of their rules are important things to try to evoke among the children. Unfortunately for Salimata, this is something that has worked out to her satisfaction. With time, her children have been challenging the authority of the parents, wanting to manifest their freedom. Now, it has reached the point where Salimata does not know any longer what to do in order to solve certain problems. In the case of her daughters this is something that risks having implications on their future married life:

The children have gained a certain freedom and they don’t respect their parents any longer. For example, if my daughters get married one day maybe they won’t be capable of living a “good” life together with their husbands, since they are used to not respecting us (me and my husband). But the men won’t allow a lack of respect towards them.

Salimata emphasises the importance of caring about the future of your children and the fact that her grown daughters are not yet married is thus causing her great worries. Salimata herself, who was married at the age of 17, had to adjust to the fact that her marriage meant a restrained freedom. She was obliged to submit to her husband. The freedom of movement she had experienced before
marrning became limited in her new household. When she desired to go places, she always had to ask permission of her husband. Nowadays, as being the main provider of the family, she is a much more independent and she puts stress on the mutual respect between spouses.

Both with regard to the new attitude between children and parents, and because of education, Salimata states that the choices for her children are different, compared to the situation of her generation. Unlike her, all of her four children have been educated up to a certain level. The youngest is now 17 years, an age beyond which very few with limited assets, as is the case with her family, continue their education. None of Salimata’s children has. Salimata believes the benefit of education is being able to find a way to make a living. Even for those who have not really succeeded in school, there is still the chance of learning French, the official language of Burkina Faso, which equips them with the capability of conversing with people of influence and access.

5.2 Case Study No. 2: Noélie

Noélie is a young woman in her early twenties. She presents herself as attentive and is often offering a welcoming and contagious smile. Noélie came to Bendogho 5 years ago because her husband was already residing there, being an autochtone. Her mother is also an inhabitant of the same part of Bendogho. Born in Yamoussoukro in the Côte d’Ivoire and previously being an inhabitant of sector 27, Noélie has had a good experience of the urban conditions. The little house where she has been residing during the five-year period in Bendogho is located a few hundred meters in from the main road. Noélie is of Catholic faith and lives in a nuclear family household with her husband and her two children, three years respectively six months old.

Noélie has aspirations of being able to make a living through sewing and selling of clothes. With the intention of accomplishing this aim, she is taking a course in
sewing, where she can learn how to make both children and adult clothing. The course lasts four years, with an annual fee of 17,500 FCFA. To be able to make a living out of her skills, she will need a sewing machine of her own. This will of course need an economic effort, something her present situation does not quite allow. She is hoping that someone will be able to help her in this endeavour, so that she can profit from her skills.

In addition to the sewing course, Noélie is making biscuits for sale. Since the course has a break during July and August, she has more time for this kind of income-generating activity. The making of biscuits takes place at home while the selling happens at the local market place. For her production, she needs of wheat-flour, oil and fuel. The use of oil has a tendency to be high and the daily expenses for all of the necessities amounts to about 4,250 FCFA. Her profit amounts to between 400 and 500 FCFA per day. If she will not be able to go on making biscuits, she claims not to know what to do. There are no other possibilities, although earlier, Noélie sold fried yams and a kind of donut. The main reason for selling biscuits is to help her husband, if he were to be out of work. At present he has an employment as a driver. Thanks to her modest income, she is also capable of contributing to the expenses of the household. Together with the money he earns, they are able to meet the essential needs of their household, and, because of this, Noélie claims to appreciate her life in Bendogho. She and her husband have no intention of changing place of residence. They await the lotissement, and hope to continue to live in the same house, road network plans permitting.

However, not all aspects of her daily life are to her satisfaction. Many of the neighbouring women do not get along equally as well. In this respect, the situation in both of her former settlements, in Côte d’Ivoire and sector 27, was much better. The neighbours got along without any problems. In the former place, there was also the advantage of enough food for everyone. Every time she goes to the market, she can receive news from sector 27, so as to keep up to date with what is happening over there. In this respect, the market place is a place of
good news distribution. The harsh relations between neighbours in Bendogho are, according to Noélie, born out of envy. When in dispute, their husbands can sometimes intervene by giving advice or by trying to reason with the women. In the case of Noélie, her husband can, for example, give her the advice to stay at home, so as to refrain from taking part in the arguments. Most of the arguments also tend sooner or later to ebb out.

Concerning her status as a married woman, she is quite satisfied. Previously, she lived together with her present husband as concubines (concubinage), which among other things entails that the man has no obligations whatsoever towards the woman his female partner. Since it is the man who is most likely to be the owner or the person renting a house, he can simply throw her out, without further explanation. As for Noélie, she is enjoying the change the marriage has brought on:

My life has become more interesting (that is, better) than before. When we lived in concubinage my ‘husband’ thought of himself as free and used to come home late hours (23h –24h), but after the marriage he enters home early, about 20h.

Having children is another altering experience: with them comes a great deal of responsibility. Noélie has to care for their wellbeing, something she finds quite difficult, especially so the task of constantly having to watch over the children. As for the time of my fieldwork, the youngest child had accompanied Noélie’s mother to the village, where they were to stay and cultivate for a period of three to four months. Noélie is also lucky because of the assistance in taking care of the children she gets from her husband. Often when she has to attend to her activities, her husband steps in. The responsibility for the domestic work, though, is mainly hers. Considering the future of her children, she hopes that they will not be living in the same pitiful situation as she finds herself in. She prefers to picture the future as change for the better. Her furthermore worries concern the different diseases that pose a risk all year round. The greatest cause of the state of poverty at present is, according to Noélie, to be found in the lack
of employment because a proper job allows keeping up hope. In the endeavour of finding work, she likes to underline the benefit that education may have. When trying to find a job, it is common to be asked if you know French. Knowing French and being literate is an advantage. Noélie herself has had six years of schooling.\(^4\)

### 5.3 Case Study No. 3: Célestine

Célestine is nearly thirty but with a tired expression on her face, she appears older. Gradually, I learn that she is ill at the time but she is nevertheless willing to do the interview, offering a very friendly and co-operative attitude. Being married and of Catholic faith Célestine is, in spite of her relatively young age, mother of five children, aged between nine months and eleven years. Célestine has moved around quite a lot, living both in villages and in towns. She pays regular visits to one of the places, the neighbourhood of Koulouba in the centre of town, her former place of habitation. Like many others, she also goes to live in the village for parts of the year, usually staying with the relatives of her husband. Bendogho is her sixth place of habitation, and Célestine belongs to those who have arrived in Bendogho quite recently. In this neighbourhood, she has only been staying for about nine months, and, as such, she is confronted with several obstacles, apart from her present physical condition.

At the time of the first interview, she stated that, since her arrival, she had not been able to start any income-generating activity. A few weeks later, the situation seemed to have got a little more hopeful. Célestine has plans to buy cola nuts on credit in the local market place, planning to sell them on retail. The concept of *tontines*, which she regards as a form of aid, is appealing to Célestine, but she is not a member since she lacks the necessary funds. Even with the planned selling of cola nuts, it is by no means certain that she will be able to join.

\(^4\) Noélie, just as Célestine, still prefer to do the interview in Mooré.
Housing is another factor of concern. Here, just as at their former place of habitation, they are renting the house where they live. The house they presently inhabit belongs to one of their friends and may, at any given time, be requested back, at which point they will find themselves obliged to move out. The housing situation is therefore quite temporary and the house itself is located in the corner of a larger crossing lacking even the smallest courtyard. Cèlestine still considers Bendogho to be a better neighbourhood than the previous, which was located in the centre of Ouagadougou, and where facilities were quite good with access to electricity and water, and at a close distance to schools for the children. Yet, despite these advantages, Cèlestine prefers Bendogho, even though she mentions the water issue as unsatisfactory, as well as the high degree of rubbish, which she thinks ought to be cleaned. Other factors of dissatisfaction are the lack of medical centre and few schools. The importance of education is highly valued by Cèlestine. She has had five years of schooling and remembers being forced to leave school - after her father died and the household economy did not allow for her to continue – as one of the most memorable and painful events. It is her strict opinion, shared by quite a few people in Bendogho, that being properly educated allows the children to build a future, to take care of themselves and their family, and hopefully also be able to come to the assistance of their parents. Up until now, she and her husband have been able to keep the two eldest children, aged 11 and 8, in a public school with an inscription fee of 2,000 FCFA and an annual fee of 1,000 FCFA. Her children are the focus of great concern and happiness:

They (the children) have made me happy. I’ve become responsible and I think of their education, of their future. Every parent should make an effort to assure the future of one’s children. One must make sure that they don’t miss anything.

Throughout the first interview, Cèlestine’s husband is present, sitting right beside her or within a radius of only a few meters. All of this time, he is attending to the youngest child, entertaining it while smiling and showing great affection. This was one of the few occasions when the husband was actually at
home – at the time of an interview - and not just happening to pass by. The circumstances could have been more pleasant though. Usually, he works as a driver but with his vehicle in need of repair, he is temporarily out of work. With neither Cèlestine nor her husband earning any money at the moment, the situation is really precarious, and, on the whole, Cèlestine claims that life since marriage has got more difficult. All in all, considering their position as newcomers, who may find it harder to establish themselves in the neighbourhood and benefit from various social networks, and their poor material circumstances, they are definitely among those worst-off in the area. Luckily, at the moment, there are some people at her husband’s work who can offer them some help. The couple has some relatives in the neighbourhood but Cèlestine does not mention anything about any help from them, and since they are newcomers, they have not had the time to make many friends. Cèlestine’s own estimation of her life in Bendogho is that she is waiting and relying upon God.
6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The role of women in the local economy cannot and should not be neglected. The livelihood activities performed by Bendogho women represent a valuable coping mechanism that deserves attention. It is part of the complexity of the urban growth phenomenon, and Bendogho women have to be recognised as local economic actors in this context. In this report, it has been my aim to increase the awareness and comprehension of this subject. Women in Bendogho are engaging in various kinds of income-generating activities, with the purpose of contributing to the incomes of their households, and to achieve a higher degree of independence for themselves through the money earned. They show proof of creativity and endurance, as well as signs of tiredness and lack of hope, as a result of the various ordeals and problems dogging their activities and efforts to create durable and profitable schemes. These activities deserve attention.

The Bendogho women strive continuously, regardless of whether they succeed in their present efforts of maintaining or improving their income-generating activities, of exercising them in the long-term span, or not. For many households, each day is a struggle, every day they are confronted with the issue of how to make ends meet. The margins are often too narrow to withstand a decrease of income. When this happens, many are simply forced to deplete their own resources or cut down spending of the household, economising on the basic necessities of life. To prevent situations like these is thus a matter of having adequate reserves. The need to constantly manipulating the means available is therefore ever present. In this effort, women in Bendogho are often balancing on the edge. Sudden and harsh changes are common and with the aspect of uncertainty constantly lurking, many women find themselves in a vulnerable position. In times of particular hardship, the social network of relatives and neighbours can function as an assurance of sorts by giving or lending money and/or food. Many also maintain continuous relation with relatives living in the country, from whom they may receive gifts of food, and with whom they could
go to stay for periods of time. Should they confront the worst of circumstances without any possibilities whatsoever to continue the strivings in Bendogho, a place like this may also represent the ultimate resort of rescue.

The constraints and possibilities of pursuing an income-generating activity are clearly different when comparing two women and their households. Therefore, once again, I would like to stress the importance of being sensitive to the fact that the situation of Bendogho women is anything but homogenous. Deprived people are not a uniform whole. There exists a great diversity among the poor. Bendogho is a neighbourhood with different social strata, a feature that partly lingers on from the traditional Mossi society, but which is also a consequence of the difference in living conditions among the inhabitants. Although people share in the lack of electricity and suffer the consequences of the difficult access to water, their circumstances are in many regards different. The discrepancies between women is noticeable with regard to housing situation, material assets, social connections, individual agency, health issues, access to useful information, livelihood activity of the husband etc. The conditions and the ways in which they try to fight poverty thus show considerable differences.

Although there are differences, a vast majority of poor people live on a constant edge of survival, where their income-generating activities tend to crash on a more or less regular basis and where some households every now and then lacks food. That is why the addition of the concept of ‘sustainable’ to ‘livelihood’, as suggested by Chambers (1998), seems rather ill-fitting and misleading in the description of Bendogho. The various livelihood activities are inevitably bound to continue, if the struggle for survival is to be pursued. The necessities will always be there. Consequently, the context in focus must not be based on criterion stated beforehand, such as the livelihoods of the poor being ‘sustainable’.
To meet and deal with the daily demands and continuous needs, people have to create their own *bricolage*. In practice, this means to recognise that, as far as it is possible, there are different ways to ‘make ends meet’ and alternative ways to execute a livelihood. To construct their *bricolage*, people have to become experts on their environment, the physical as well as the social. Social connections are of great importance in this respect. Some people are *autochtones*, others have moved into the city from their villages. The latter category is faced with new rules, frameworks and social networks. They may have relatives or friends already residing in Bendogho but to create a social network from which they might benefit in their every day strivings takes time, which clearly works to their disadvantage in the pursuit of creating their *bricolage*. The size of the household is another matter of relevance. With a larger household, there are more people able to contribute to the household and the chances for the *bricolage* to grow thus increases. It is also more likely to expand the greater the number of components of a livelihood that can be controlled. This is partly dependent on individual agency, but there are factors that may be difficult to control, as the housing situation, for example, which is tightly knit to the outcome of the parcelling process. Maybe it is necessary to invest money in one’s house in order to increase the chances for it to be classified as a house A or X (see p. 21), allowing, to continue as a dweller in Bendogho. Investing in a house may imply refraining from other ways of using money, thus limiting the expansion of *bricolage*. Even if a house qualifies for the category A or X, there is, however, a risk of being torn down to give room for future road network. In other words, one's priorities might not pay off resulting in the need to change place of habitation and seeking new *bricolage* constructions.

It is difficult to estimate the percentage of women active in the so-called ‘informal economy’. The question is also what point would there be determining such a ‘fact’. With an urban growth rate on the increase, areas like Bendogho will not disappear, neither will the need of income bringing activities. In my opinion, it should hence be more interesting trying to penetrate the everyday realities of women in an area as Bendogho, to focus on their involvement and
attempts of involvement in various livelihood activities, to try to understand the problematic behind their efforts and to accept that a livelihood is an intricate chain of factors. This is what has been the aim of this report, and it is of considerable importance that this kind of information is given more attention in development efforts and poverty assessments.
7. RÉSUMÉ

Ce rapport se concentre sur les moyens d’existence des femmes au Bendogho, un quartier urbain de la périphérie d’Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, et comment elles s’y prennent pour s’en sortir. Bendogho est une zone très peuplée qui est sur le point d’être incorporée dans l’infrastructure urbaine. La majorité des habitants sont d’origine Mossi. La structure hiérarchique traditionnelle de la société mossi est une caractéristique dont on s’aperçoit toujours à Bendogho, le pouvoir des Nanamse en étant un exemple manifeste.

Le rôle que jouent les femmes dans l’économie locale est d’une grande importance due au revenu supplémentaire qu’elles peuvent rapporter au ménage, près de 60% des 31 femmes interrogées participent financièrement au ménage, mais aussi due au gain de liberté que cela représente car c’est presque toujours les femmes qui décident comment dépenser l’argent que elles ont gagné. Cependant, les femmes et les hommes exercent dans des domaines d’activité différents puisque les femmes sont pratiquement dans l’incapacité de traverser les barrières nécessaires pour avoir accès aux activités masculines habituellement accessibles par des formations informelles ou par l’apprentissage. Dès bas âge, les filles reçoivent une formation considérable quant aux tâches domestiques. Dans les efforts des femmes de s’engager dans une activité rémunératrice elles se réfèrent souvent à ce savoir-faire. Les exemples d’activités demandant un investissement presque négligeable et continu sont le ramassage de gravier, qui sera utilisé dans la fabrication de briques, et la coiffure. La majorité des femmes engagées dans une activité rémunératrice sont impliquées dans le petit commerce. Elles vendent des produits tels que des repas préparés, du bois à brûler, des fruits et des noix au marché local ou devant leur maison. Les conditions et la concurrence sont cependant rudes et il n’est pas rare de devoir y renoncer. Les femmes avec un revenu qui permet une petite épargne journalière ou hebdomadaire sont parfois membres d’une tontine, c'est-à-dire une sorte de société d’épargne qui fait parti depuis longtemps de la société traditionnelle.
Ce rapport met en avant les différentes contraintes et possibilités qui influencent les activités. Il souligne que les femmes de Bendogho ne forment pas un groupe homogène mais qu’il existe une grande diversité parmi elles. On s’aperçoit de la divergence entre femmes par rapport à la situation résidentielle, les biens matériels, les liens sociaux, les questions de santé, l’accès aux informations utiles, l’activité rémunératrice du mari etc. Ces diversités doivent être prises en compte dans toute sorte d’évaluation de pauvreté ou plan de développement. La perception de la pauvreté et du développement exprimée par l’individu-même est ici d’une importance majeure. Le rapport insiste sur les réalités de la vie quotidienne des femmes à travers trois études de cas visent à donner une image plus complexe de leur situation. Dans la lutte pour s’en sortir, le besoin d’utiliser les moyens disponibles est constamment présent, sans considérer si, dans l’effort présent pour maintenir ou améliorer leur activité rémunératrice, elles réussissent ou non à continuer de l’exercer à long terme.
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