Poverty in Burkina Faso

Sten Hagberg

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Representations and Realities

ULRiCA

A la mémoire d'Elisabeth Malo

Contents

Preface

Poverty has for a long time been a key concept in development discourse, in the sense that it provides the *raison d'être* for much external interventions. International aid has for decades been concerned with the provision of support to poor countries. While many anthropologists conducting long-term fieldwork have touched on the poverty of the people they have studied, few anthropological works have been carried out with a specific focus on poverty and poverty alleviation. The very idea of speaking 'in the name of poor people' has often been challenged as populist and questionable in terms of power relations between the researcher and the researched.

This study is an attempt to represent poor people's perceptions of what it means to be poor and, by extension, how poverty might be combated. It is concerned with representations and realities of poverty. How do poor people perceive poverty? What is the idiom used and what are the critical differences between poor and non-poor? And how do other actors perceive poverty? How do they conceptualise being poor? Finally, what are the harsh realities of poverty in terms of drought, hunger, illness and powerlessness?

The study on which this book is based was conducted as a consultancy assignment for the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) as part of the planning process for a closer and more active Swedish involvement in Burkina Faso. The report was an attempt to grasp a wide range of issues within a short time-span and compiled the field material and policy documents into a relatively short text of some 50 pages (Hagberg 2000a). The present study aims to make an in-depth reflection on representations and

realities of poverty in Burkina Faso. The ethnographic material presented is more elaborated than in the Sida-report.

Many people have contributed to the results of this study. In Burkina Faso a wide range of people have been instrumental in fieldwork carried out since 1988. I would like to thank the following key informants and resource persons for continuous collaboration and support throughout different fieldwork periods: Dénis Bako, Paul Bama, Angèle Bassolet, Daouda Berté, Abdoulaye Diallo, Moussa Diallo, Abdoulaye Nasuru Dicko, Anafi Dicko, Fatoumata Dicko, Clémentine Kankyono, Fatoumata Kini, Boubacar Ly, Kunwari Ouattara, Kassoum Ouédraogo, Maliki Ouédraogo, Mariam Sako, Mamadou Dori Sidibé, Ernest Yao, Emmanuel Zongo, Roger Zoungrana and the late Elisabeth Malo. My deepest thanks to my hosts in different field settings: the families of El Hadj Sambo Sidibé in Djalakoro, Ardjouma Yao in Tomodjan, Sambari Diallo in Sambonaye and Bagora Bationo in Négarpoulou. The fieldwork in March 2000 was conducted under the tutorship of the Ministry of Finances and Planning and, in particular, the Deputy Minister for Economic Development Anne Konaté.

Other people have, in different ways, helped me to pursue this study. They include Göran and Kiné Björkdahl, Christer and Anna-Karin Hermansson, Lennart and Eva Karlsson, Christiane Roamba, Issoufou and Sali Sanou, Issouf Bamnéan Sawadogo, Fousséni and Kady Traoré, Moussa and Hélène Traoré, and Anna Tufvesson. Earlier versions of the manuscript have received comments from several people at Sida, including Richard Bomboma, Jessica Arneback and Katja Jassey. Jan Ovesen, Charlotta Widmark, René Devisch, Staffan Löfving and Paul Dover have also read and made important inputs to the present study. My wife Minata Dao Hagberg, who herself originates from Burkina, has continuously been a discussion partner on how to grasp Burkinabe representations and realities.

I dedicate this study to the memory of the late Elisabeth Malo. Since 1988 we collaborated in most of my fieldwork in the Banfora region. Elisabeth was a skilled extension worker and field assistant with a wonderful smile and a fantastic sense of humour in the midst of harsh realities. She died on 23 August 2000 at the age of thirtyseven.

Sten Hagberg
June 2001

WEST AFRICA

ALGERIA

The Atlantic

MAURETANIA

NIGER

SENEGAL
GAMBIA

MALI

GUINEA
BISSAU   GUINEA

BURKINA
FASO

SIERRA
LEONE   IVORY
COAST

GHANA

BENIN
TOGO

NIGERIA

LIBERIA

Burkina Faso

N

MALI

Dori

NIGER

Réo

Ouagadougou

Bobo-Dioulasso

BENIN

Banfora

GHANA

TOGO

IVORY COAST

0   100   200 km

1 Introduction

Burkina Faso is among the poorest countries of the world according to most international measurements. The 1994 poverty assessment concluded that 44.5 percent of the Burkinabe live below the threshold of absolute poverty. Other assessments confirm that an important part of the population have little access to sufficient income, basic social services and education. Burkina Faso is ranked at the 172nd position among 174 countries, according to the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI). Although different methodologies have been employed in such assessments, the country could generally be classified as poor in terms of economic development, modern educational facilities and social services. However, poverty is not something that we may define once-and-for-all, because it is certainly a question of perception as well. In the 1990s there has been a growing tendency to establish poverty profiles for different countries to measure the level of human development. The most important document is the yearly Human Development Report (Human Development Report 2000).

This study has grown out of a concern that so much is written on poverty and, yet, poor people's perspectives are rarely included in reports and policy debates. It is as if the poor belong to a social category often referred to, but rarely listened to. Statistical figures and hard facts are often presented in such a way that the voices of poor people themselves are merely represented as anecdotes in reports. Therefore the present study is a conscious attempt to go beyond facts and figures and to analyse examples of how poverty is articulated in Burkina and how poverty reduction strategies are outlined. In particular, the study focuses on how poverty is experienced by poor people

themselves. This endeavour is a tricky enterprise in the sense that it raises questions of how to define those people who are poor and of how to represent poor people's perceptions of what it is to be poor. My basic assumption is that poverty is contextual, situational and relational. To define oneself as poor in one context, e.g. in front of a government official, does not necessarily mean that one defines oneself as poor in another, e.g. among one's kinfolks. To be poor in terms of money does not always imply that one is poor according to local cultural notions. Also, while a region may be classified as poor, income differences between people living there may be huge. Hence there is a need to take a closer look at poverty and poverty reduction strategies and thereby critically scrutinise dominant assumptions of poverty.

The overall purpose of the study is to describe and analyse different contexts in which poor people find themselves in Burkina Faso. Central questions are geared towards understanding economic, political and socio-cultural aspects of poverty. Firstly, economic aspects include the dynamics of poor people's production systems and livelihoods. People have to make their living whether they live in the forest zones in the south, in the drylands of the upper north, or in the marginal areas of the capital Ouagadougou. Economic differentiation within communities also needs to be taken into account. Secondly, political aspects concern the extent to which poor people have access to political decision-making and to what extent human rights are respected. Here politics includes traditional institutions, as well as modern party politics. The political stakes involved in development discourse must also be analysed. Thirdly, socio-cultural aspects include the cultural context of poverty, such as kinship and social organisation, cosmological ideas and religious faith. Poor people's definitions of poverty are of central importance in this context. Yet it is equally important to elicit other stakeholders' perceptions of poverty. One particularly needs to analyse how poverty is approached in

policy propositions, as well as practically implemented in the daily work of development activities.

Poverty is approached as contextual, situational and relational; it carries multiple meanings and is not easily defined. According to this perspective poverty must be understood in specific contexts, because what is 'wealth' according to one person is not necessarily seen as such by someone else. Having a lot of children may indicate wealth to some and poverty to others. But, one may argue, there are also attempts to establish comparative variables, such as GDP per capita and HDI, to be applied in different contexts, regions and nation-states. Shouldn't one struggle to establish absolute and generally accepted measurements of poverty and, consequently, of wealth? The position taken in this study is that there is not one single poverty profile to be established, but several profiles of poverty that may be identified. While the measurement according to which households with a daily income of less than $US 1 per head are poor represents one profile, poor people's perceptions represent others.

Anthropology and Poverty

While the scholarly and policy literature abounds with studies that focus on poverty, the anthropological literature focused on poverty in Africa is limited. Booth et al. point out that in anthropology the treatment of issues of poverty and well-being "is diffused across a range of specialist literatures: in early works on kinship, political and marriage systems, religion and economy; in more recent research into rural production systems, food security, gender, health, urban housing, identity and ethnicity, and so on" (Booth et al. 1999:5). Anthropologists have worked with issues of poverty and prosperity in an indirect manner. Although some important recent works have been carried out on poverty (Anderson & Broch-Due 1999; Broch-Due 1995; Broch-Due & Schroeder 2000), the general impression is that few anthro-

pologists are explicitly focusing on poverty, at least in their scholarly works. One main reason seems to be the nature of the subject matter itself. Poverty is an abstraction, referring simultaneously to realities and representations. There are indeed dire realities that people experience and with which they have to cope: hunger, illness, drought, unemployment, and so on. These realities are lived by people. They have to cope with hunger, illness, death and powerlessness. While poverty is rarely the lack of only one thing, "the bottom line is always hunger – the lack of food" (Narayan et al. 2000:4; cf. Richards 1986; Devisch et al. 1995). Yet these realities are at the same time representations of poverty, in the sense that people maintain particular ideas and notions of what poverty is about. Broadly speaking, poverty is simultaneously used as a way to designate 'the other' and a way to present oneself in certain contexts. In this vein, poverty is about representations and as such it requires contextualisation to make sense. In the following, I discuss two different kinds of contexts in which representations of poverty appear.

The first kind of contexts concern the harsh realities of poverty and how people cope with them in various settings. Many people in Burkina (and elsewhere) are certainly vulnerable and exposed to insecurities of different sorts. There are emic concepts of 'poverty' and 'poor people' in different languages spoken in Burkina. Life is hard and people struggle to make ends meet. A main factor rendering life hard in Burkina is lack of rainfall. The water problem is fundamental and it has consequences for agriculture and livestock development. From these basic difficulties of production there arise many other factors. People die of illnesses that could under other circumstances be easily cured by antibiotics. Hunger is frequent in the rural villages just before harvest, when everyone has to work a lot but food is scarce. The nutritional value of food might also be insufficient, especially in cases when people do not consume forest foods, such as the leaves of the baobab (*Adansonia digitata*). Although I do not

intend to measure *how* poor people are and *how* hard life is, it is important to keep in mind that poverty is not only social and cultural representation, but is first and foremost harsh realities with which people have to cope.

Identity is another central dimension to poverty. Broch-Due & Anderson argue that pastoralist peoples of eastern Africa seem to exclude and slough off the poor into non-pastoralist societies. The notion 'the poor are not us' highlights the pastoralists' idea that poverty results in social exclusion. The exploration of this notion reveals something of these societies' self-perceptions and community consciousness (Broch-Due & Anderson 1999:3). The inability to keep livestock transforms the pastoralist into something else; in other words, the poor becomes 'the other'. Among Fulbe pastoralist populations in West Africa, poverty/prosperity is closely linked to livestock. Yet livestock is not only associated with material wealth, but also of the capacity to perform socially admired actions (cf. Riesman 1990). Similarly, while hoe farmers invest much energy and work to become 'excellent farmers' (cf. Dessein 2000; Tengan 2000), cattle – rather than land – are regarded as wealth for many farmers as well (Hagberg 1998:117). These examples illustrate cultural ideals of how to live a good and meaningful life. Statements about a glorious past when the rich took care of the poor are often ventured in such contexts. "Today the world has changed" (*bi koni dunuya yelema* in Dyula), people often say rather regrettably. Tradition is not respected any longer and the fruits of the change are still to be harvested.

The second kind of context of poverty representations involves poverty and poor people in discourses of development. Poverty is a key concept used by national and international development organisations. Poor people, the argument goes, are the end destination of aid. In other words, and more in tune with the discourses of development of 1990s, poor people are the 'primary stakeholders' of any development activity. Yet there is a need to go beyond rhetoric and reflect

upon what 'poverty' and 'the poor' represent in this discourse. While explicit anthropological interest in poverty has been more limited, informed anthropological writings of development have mushroomed during the last decade (cf. Arce & Long 2000; Croll & Parkin 1992; Ferguson 1990; Grillo & Stirrat 1997; Hobart 1993a; Crewe & Harrison 1998). It is therefore useful to explore 'poverty' and 'the poor' within the frame of development discourses. Mark Hobart states that development – a synonym for more or less planned social and economic change – is closely associated with rationality in the sense of western scientific knowledge. The nature of the problem of 'under-development', and its solution, are defined by reference to the world-ordering western scientific knowledge. The main consequence is that the very idea of 'underdevelopment' itself and the means to alleviate the perceived problem is formulated in the dominant powers' account of how the world works. "The relationship of developers and those to-be-developed is constituted by the developers' knowledge and catego-ries, be it the nation-state, the market or the institutions which are designed to give a semblance of control over these confections" (Hobart 1993b:2). This is an important point in that even participatory development activities are often grounded in the definitions and categories of the 'outsiders' (which is another questionable category). Accordingly, the 'poor' are a recurrent variant of the labels applied to 'the other'.

Hobart's categorical opposition, between western scientific knowledge and local forms of knowledge, has been criticised in some recent books (Crewe & Harrison 1998; Grillo & Stirrat 1997). A salient point in this criticism is that Hobart treats development as monolithic; the multiple and often contradictory discourses of devel-opment have been reduced to *the* development discourse. "There is no scope within Hobart's perspective for an analysis of how everybody uses, interprets, and is differently incorporated into different 'dis-courses of development'" (Crewe & Harrison 1998:18).

A common anthropological critique of development is that the development discourse tends to be treated as apolitical. Aspects of power are often couched in the idiom of economics, technology and management. James Ferguson demonstrates in his book *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) that although the Thaba-Tseka project in Lesotho was a failure as an agricultural development project, many of its side effects had a powerful and far-reaching impact on the Thaba-Tseka region. While the project did not transform crop farming or livestock keeping, it did build a road to link Thaba-Tseba more strongly with the capital. This was instrumental in establishing a new district administration and giving the government a much stronger presence in the area than it had before. "The construction of the road and the 'administrative center' may have had little effect on agricultural production, but they were powerful effects in themselves" (Ferguson 1994:252). Similarly, in Burkina development is officially treated as a technical and economic issue, rather than a political one. For instance, in a draft paper prepared by the Ministry of Economy and Finances for a workshop on growth and poverty reduction, aspects of power are almost totally absent (Burkina Faso 2000). It is as if poverty is merely a technical problem the solution of which only requires economic and technological measures.

This brief review of some of the anthropological approaches to poverty serves to remind us that the anthropological contribution is, to a large extent, to provide context. A narrow poverty definition excludes many persons who are locally perceived as poor. Yet an encompassing poverty definition might encounter serious difficulties as well. If the poverty concept is variously used to include low income, deprivation, hunger, powerlessness, social isolation, illness and so on, the concept looses its analytical value altogether. Thus the poverty concept turns into an abstract concept unrelated to context.

The stance taken in this study is that poverty must be treated as contextual, situational and relational. Firstly, poverty is contextually

determined because poor peoples' perceptions of poverty and how they cope with daily life need to be taken seriously. While, for example, investment of money, and other forms of wealth, in rituals could be seen as irrational behaviour according to the outside observer, it might represent important social and cultural investments in networks and kin. Similarly, what is seen as wasting time in one context could be time-effective in another. But poor people are also affected by global contexts, such as world market prices, unequal terms of trade and structural adjustments. To put it bluntly: without context the poverty concept is empty. Secondly, poverty is situationally determined because a person, who might well make ends meet under normal circumstances can be thrown into poverty in specific situations. The situational poverty – or to follow Ilffe's terminology the *conjunctural poverty* (Ilffe 1987) – is an important category. It is also in particular situations that normative orders and ideological stances are put into practice. Thirdly, poverty is relational because one is poor in relation to someone else. The relational dimension of poverty brings in the distinction between 'the poor' and 'the non-poor'. Moreover, the person identified as 'poor' might often identify someone in the neighbourhood who is poorer. Poverty is also relational in the sense that poverty alleviation depends on one's relations to other people, be they kinsfolk, neighbours, government agencies or NGOs.

A Note on Methodology

Any serious fieldwork – e.g. ethnographic fieldwork, quantitative survey or Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) – has to deal with the issue of what categories to use and how to define units of analysis in order to appropriately represent the socio-economic realities of the people under study. The anthropological record of questioning conventional definitions and categories is particularly strong. Basic questions to be asked in the field include: What is a household? To

what extent can economic activities be separated from social and cultural ones? How can one measure and put a price on subsistence activities such as fuel wood collection and raising poultry? The classical anthropological solution to such questions is to try to elicit informants' own notions of, in these examples, 'household', 'economy' and 'money'. Cultural analyses of these often taken-for-granted-phenomena, would then provide insights into how the informants perceive their life worlds. To some extent this was the main methodological strategy applied in this study. By looking into how people define 'poverty' and characterise what it is to be 'poor', I have tried to analyse the ways in which they express themselves on these issues. It has been important to go beyond simply presenting 'the voices of the poor' by also analysing the context in which various idioms of poverty are expressed. Thus the context of poverty is thereby brought to the fore.

A less common and more questionable endeavour for anthropologists is to approach representations and realities of poverty on national and international levels. The reason is that any attempt to study poverty on a national level might be contested on good grounds. In the first place poverty is a highly ambiguous concept in that it is contextually, situationally and relationally determined. To pretend to represent 'the voices of the poor' would be methodologically suspect. If one accepts the definition according to which poor people are those living below the poverty threshold (in Burkina that would mean having less than some 41,000 FCFA to subsist on annually), then the methodological problem is that not all people included in this category are necessarily poor according to cultural conceptions. One is, in short, confronted with a circular kind of logic: to follow poor people's definitions of what it is to be poor is to accept that these people are poor in the first place! A recent book *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* (Narayan et al. 2000) published under the auspices of the World Bank sets out to represent the voices of the poor and their

perceptions of poverty worldwide. While the analysis of the large material, from 50 countries, makes important policy recommendations, it is not clear how 'the poor' taken to represent the voices of the poor were selected. The study concludes that there are more poor people today than there were at the beginning of the 1990s. "Fifty-six percent of the world's population is currently poor: 1.2 billion people live on less than $1 a day and 2.8 billion live on $2 a day" (Narayan et al. 2000:265). Hence despite an articulated and well-argued compilation of reports from 50 countries, the study seems to assume that we all agree upon how to define 'the poor' in the first place.

This study does not pretend to represent all the multiple voices of poor people in Burkina Faso and how they perceive their poverty. Instead I seek to bring context into the abstraction of facts and figures that has so far prevailed in poverty assessments in the country. Given my basic assumption that poverty is to be regarded as contextual, situational and relational, I have sought to represent the contexts, situations and relations within which poor people live.

The scope of the study requires long-term involvement to identify and analyse the key issues. The methodology has relied on a combination of three kinds of sources of data. The study is first and foremost based on anthropological fieldwork conducted in four selected sites in Burkina Faso. These field sites are: 1) *The western region,* notably in the Comoé Province (Banfora), in which I have conducted fieldwork for more than four years; 2) *The central-western region,* notably in villages surrounding the forest reserves of Tiogo and Laba in the Sanguié Province, where I have conducted fieldwork one month every year since 1995, focusing on perceptions of the forest; 3) *The northern region,* notably in Dori, where a specific one-week fieldwork was conducted in a multiethnic village in March 2000; and 4) *The Ouaga-dougou region,* notably in a peri-urban section of the capital, in which a focused survey was carried out during one week in March 2000.

In addition to the fieldwork the present study relies on other sources of data as well. Many studies have been done on issues of poverty, vulnerability and security both in Burkina Faso and elsewhere. It was therefore important to undertake a critical reading of these studies, not only to avoid overlapping, but also to sharpen the analysis of different methodological choices and their implications for the specific poverty profile. Internationally, there is also a growing scholarly literature in which a closer look is taken on the issue of poverty. This source of data is extremely valuable in that it provides alternative ways of comparing poverty between countries, regions and peoples.

A third source of data is provided by policy documents, project descriptions and above all interviews with staff involved in development activities aiming at combating poverty. How do these people understand and make operational all the development jargon? Here I have gathered basic information on institutions and organisations, notably those of the government and various NGOs, which present themselves as combating poverty. Staff working at various levels has been involved: from facilitators in villages to central directors and programme officers in the capital.

Synopsis of the Study

After this introductory chapter, the study makes an overview of the national context in Chapter Two. The country has a population of 10.5 million inhabitants, with an estimated growth rate of 2.8 percent. The majority of people live in rural areas, although the urban growth rate is increasing. The urban population is estimated at about 27 percent. Burkina Faso is ethnically diverse with more than 60 ethnic groups. Being a former French colony, the country gained its independence in 1960. After a postcolonial history with successive civilian and military governments, a democratisation process, including multiparty elec-

tions, associative freedom and free press, was initiated by the adoption of a new constitution in 1991. In the late 1990s, the issue of 'impunity' has come to dominate political debate, between opposing political parties and civil society organisations on the one hand, and the holders of political power, notably within the ruling party CDP, on the other. Burkina Faso has a long tradition of strong civil society institutions, notably trade unions, and they play a crucial role in the democratic process.

In Chapter Three, the fundamental problem of defining poverty is addressed through a review of the different poverty assessments carried out in Burkina. The most important study of poverty has been the Priority Survey, conducted in more than 8,000 households distributed into seven different strata of the national territory (two urban and five rural). Different poverty assessments have been worked out from these findings. Methodological flaws such as the unproblematic use of the household as the basic analytical unit diminish, however, the usefulness of the Priority Survey. Yet it remains an important baseline study, in particular thanks to its large sample. The Poverty Profile which emended from this Survey established a threshold below which poverty is said to prevail.

In Chapter Four, poor people's voices are represented so as to bring the perceptions of poverty and prosperity to the fore. Issues such as migration, modernity, environment, drought and urban land management all relate to poverty and prosperity. In the Banfora region in South-Western Burkina, migratory movements and also conflicts arising from the overlapping of traditional and modern normative orders are discussed in relation to poverty. In the Réo region in Central-Western Burkina, poverty and forest perceptions among farmers are elaborated. The coping with drought and poverty in the drylands in the Dori region in the north is then analysed. In Ouagadougou, the politics of urban land management and how poor people try to access land are addressed.

Chapter Five describes different 'sectors of poverty' according to national and international organisations. In particular, it analyses the relationship between poor people's perceptions of poverty and different development sectors. Topics such as livelihoods and the environment, economic and political reforms, education and training, health and social services are scrutinised with respect to the national situation and poor people's perceptions.

In Chapter Six, initiatives at work to combat poverty are put to the fore. Such initiatives include the individual and household levels, as well as networks based on kinship, religion and friendship. Socio-political institutions such as traditional chieftaincy and formal structures, e.g. development organisations, are included as well. Attention is further paid to national and international programmes to combat poverty.

Chapter Seven concludes the study, by highlighting the flaws and drawbacks of using a poverty concept which is based only on material aspects of life. It also tackles problems of a more inclusive definition of poverty, because to integrate economic, political, social, cultural, educational, health and environmental concerns in one single analytical framework is tricky. The chapter finally brings together some of the main threads of representations and realities of poverty in Burkina Faso.

Jokes and satirical press are important in Burkinabe political culture in the sense that power-holders and other privileged social categories are exposed to criticism. The first state agent says, "It is the civil servants' day: should we rest to celebrate that or are we going to work as usual?", and her colleague replies, "Well, is there a difference?" (Journal du Jeudi 28 June – 4 July 2001:5)

2 The National Context

Burkina Faso (until 1984 Upper Volta, or *Haute-Volta* in French) is a landlocked country south of the Sahara desert in the Sahel region in West Africa. It is bordered by the Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Benin to the south, Mali to the west and north, and Niger to the east. While the northern parts of Burkina receive less than 600 mm of rainfall per year with a dry season of eight to ten months, the southern parts may receive up to 1,000 mm per year, and even more in the South-Western areas (Profil Environnemental 1994). Yet rainfall is variable from year to year and from place to place. According to the UN, Burkina Faso's population was an estimated 11.4 million in 1998, with a growth rate of 2.8 percent per year (EIU 1999), but lower figures are more often cited. The national census gives the figure 10,312,609 inhabitants in December 1996 (INSD 1998). The majority of people live in rural areas, although the urban growth rate is increasing. The urban population is estimated at some 27 percent. The overall population density is 42 inhabitants per km² but the population is spread unevenly. Population density varies from about 10 inhabitants per km² in the north, to 50-100 inhabitants in the more densely populated central parts. The Kadiogo Province, which hosts the capital Ouagadougou, counts 336 inhabitants per km² (INSD 1998:iv).

Burkina Faso is ethnically diverse with more than 60 ethnic groups. In precolonial times, a large part of present-day Burkina was under the control of different Mossi empires. The north and east were frontier lands of Fulbe and Gourmantche kingdoms. In the west and southwest, however, the population is composed of a mosaic of ethnic groups with decentralised socio-political structures, e.g. the Lobi, the

Dagara, the Bobo and the Karaboro. The Mossi remain the single largest ethnic group, but other groups include the Gourmantche, various groups of Gurunsi peoples, the Bwa, the Lobi, the Bobo, the Marka, the Samo, the Senufo and the Fulbe (known as Peul in French).

The territory of present-day Burkina Faso came under French colonisation in the last years of the 19th century, but it was not until 1919 that the colony of Upper Volta was created. The colony was however abolished in 1932 and its territory divided between the French colonies; the French Sudan (present-day Mali), Niger and the Ivory Coast. In 1947, the colony of Upper Volta was reconstituted. It was declared independent from France on 5 August 1960 by Maurice Yaméogo, who became the first president of the country.

Source: INSD 1996c.

The postcolonial period has witnessed different political regimes. In January 1966 Maurice Yaméogo resigned after a popular upheaval, which brought Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana to power. The latter re-

mained president for 14 years and had both military and civilian gov-
ernments until 1980 when a *coup d'état* ended his regime. Another
coup d'état occurred in November 1982. In August 1983 a *coup d'état*
brought Captain Thomas Sankara to power. In daily Burkinabe lan-
guage, this *coup d'état* is referred to as *La révolution*. It was a period
of profound political and economic change, but also the advent of a
more violent political culture. The revolution initiated a vibrant series
of activities of self-adjustment, self-reliance and anti-corruption poli-
cies. It gave the country a new name.[1] Former presidents and minis-
ters were put in front of popular trials to investigate allegations of
corruption and other forms of illicit behaviour. In October 1987 Presi-
dent Sankara was killed in a *coup d'état*, which brought his second-in-
command Captain Blaise Compaoré to power. By the end of 1980s
President Compaoré and his government initiated a democratisation
process. A new constitution was adopted by referendum in June 1991,
which led to the Fourth Republic. In December 1991, Compaoré was
elected in presidential elections, but he was the only candidate since
all other candidates had withdrawn. Legislative elections were held in
1992 and in 1997, and municipal elections in 1995 and in 2000. In the
presidential elections in November 1998 President Compaoré was re-
elected with 87.5 percent of the votes against two candidates of the
moderate opposition. The so-called radical opposition, led among
others by professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo and lawyer Hermann Yaméogo
(son of Maurice Yaméogo, the first president), boycotted the elections
in 1998. Since the assassination of Norbert Zongo, journalist and di-
rector of the independent newspaper *L'Indépendant*, in December
1998, Burkina Faso has experienced a deep social and political crisis,

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[1] The new name of the country is essentially composed of the Mooré term *Burkina*,
signifying men of honour, of dignity, and the Dyula term *Faso* for fatherhouse,
fatherland, giving the 'Fatherland of dignified men'. Fulfulde, being the third national
language, is employed in designing citizens of Burkina Faso, Burkinabe, *be* signifying
children or persons. The name Burkina Faso could hence be regarded as an attempt to
symbolically unite the country.

in which democratic institutions and the respect for civil rights are being tested by different actors, notably those from civil society. The struggle against 'impunity', i.e. the freedom from punishment for 'blood' and economic crimes committed by holders of political power, has particularly been mobilised under the umbrella of the *Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masse et des partis politiques*. Halidou Ouédraogo is the head of the *Collectif*. He is also the president of the Burkinabe Human Rights Movement (MBDHP).[2]

Different models of development have been defended and to some extent implemented in Burkina Faso. During the colonial period, the colony was first and foremost a labour reserve rather than a territorial unit as such. The abolition of the colony in 1932 indicates that French colonial administration did not see the Upper-Volta as a unit. One consequence of this was that economic development, induced by the colonial administration, was not focused on the colony's own potentials. Instead labour migration to plantations in the Ivory Coast – but also to some extent to Ghana (Asiwaju 1976) – became part of the livelihood strategies of many people. Although 'forced labour', according to which each village was forced to provide labour for work (plantations, roads construction etc.), was abolished in 1946, labour migration has continued. Today, it is estimated that there are between two and three million Burkinabe residing in the Ivory Coast. The attention paid to *ivoirité* ('Ivorian-ness') in the Ivory Coast has increased tensions between Burkinabe and Ivorian populations, sometimes even causing bloodshed.

Burkina Faso has an important tradition of trade unions. Despite its low literacy rate (about 15 percent), the country has had a small number of highly educated and motivated people organised in active political groups and trade unions. These political groups have played important roles in the country's postcolonial history. There is a long tradition of political struggle and active civil society institutions. In all

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[2] *Mouvement Burkinabè des Droits de l'Homme et des Peuples.*

major political events, from the *coup d'état* in 1966 until the present-day struggle against impunity, such organisations have been actively involved and constitute a major political force. Pupils and students are of particular importance in mobilisation against abuses committed by those in power. Although the political party in power, currently called *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (CDP), tries to capture and control this political force, the present-day democratisation process is strongly linked to this vaguely defined but politically significant popular movement.

The country was declared independent as a consequence of the referendum organised in 1958. While France accepted the political independence of its African colonies, all of them except Guinea-Conakry entered into the currency union with the former coloniser. In West Africa the CFA francs remained a convertible currency to French francs. Since the 50 percent devaluation in January 1994, 100 FCFA has pegged at 1 FF. If the currency union has provided stability to the country, it also constrains exports and French firms have maintained a privileged position. In the 1960s and 1970s the development model was based on a growth oriented paradigm and the state-led modernisation of agriculture. In 1980s, however, the development model changed drastically with the revolution. The charismatic president Sankara came to represent the new Africa, politically radical and morally good. Corruption was combated and self-reliance was the leitmotiv. *Consommons Burkinabè* was a main slogan, promoting the consumption of domestic products in favour of imported goods. Economically this was a period of self-adjustment. A decade before that the Structural Adjustment Programmes were more or less imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions, Burkina Faso thus entered a self-imposed adjustment of public expenses to promote self-reliance (Zagré 1994). A commonly cited phrase of President Sankara was to urge people to 'liberate their genius of creativity'.

Since 1991 the government opted for a new development policy based on the implementation of a vast Structural Adjustment Programme, which aimed to re-establish the economic and financial balance, to restructure the economy and make it clearly growth oriented (PNUD 1999). Specific objectives included a growth from three to four percent to increase real income by one percent per inhabitant. Restrictions against inflation have been put in place. At the same time specific social objectives were established to smooth the negative effects of macro-economic reforms. The 50 percent devaluation of the FCFA in January 1994 led to a loss of purchasing power for many groups, but stimulated domestic production and increased exports. While most macro-economic objectives were attained in late 1995, notably with an average growth of 4.8 percent between 1994-1996, the social objectives have not been attained in the same manner (PNUD 1999). Increased attention has therefore been paid to poverty and poverty reduction strategies. In this respect Burkina is no exception to the greater concern for social issues in development.

The democratisation process, which begun in the early 1990s with multiparty elections, associative freedom and free press, displays ambiguous features. On the one hand, political parties and independent newspapers have mushroomed, especially in the capital Ouagadougou but also in middle-size towns like Koudougou, Ouahigouya and Banfora. Burkina has about 60 parties, but they are more often linked to a leader than to a political programme. On the other hand, national politics is still mostly the concern of small, educated groups of people who communicate through written statements and petitions published in French. The overwhelming majority is not involved in party politics and the political debate is conducted in a language not accessible to them. This is linked to the low level of formal education, but highlights a main dilemma in the democratisation process. Poor people are among those who do not have easy access to the national political debate. Even though the decentralisation process carries

promises of broader political participation, the relationship between decentralisation and poverty is complex and the process by which local elites capture the transfer of human, material and financial resources is increasingly addressed in West Africa (cf. Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan 1998; de Jong, Loquai & Soiri 1999; Kassibou 1997).

Since the droughts in the 1970s and the 1980s, Burkina Faso has been a leading international actor in combating desertification. The distribution of rainfall, together with land degradation, is a major concern. For rural people it is a question of making ends meet and keeping enough staple foods until next harvest. For urban people, the consequent high food prices as well as the urge to help people back in one's village certainly make rainfall distribution a critical issue. Burkina is active in different regional organisations such as the Economic Organisation of West African States (ECOWAS) and the *Comité Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse au Sahel* (CILSS). In 1999, President Blaise Compaoré was the acting president of the Organization of African Unity (OUA).

International aid funds virtually all public investment in Burkina Faso. Main donors to development are the former colonial power France and the UN organisations, notably the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The World Bank, the IMF and the European Union are also among the largest multilateral donors. Among bilateral donors, Denmark has emerged as a main donor together with the Netherlands and Germany. Many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) work in Burkina. According to figures established by a NGO coordinating organisation (SPONG) there are 150 NGOs registered on the national level: 76 are members of the coordinating organisation and 74 are not (SPONG 2000). These NGOs collaborate with various voluntary associations and village groups.

To sum up this chapter, one needs to note that while self-adjustment in the 1980s was initiated nationally and imposed to promote self-reliance during the revolution, the 1990s adjustment has merely been linked to policies defined by external actors, i.e. the World Bank and the IMF. Another difference is that the latter adjustment has been subject to criticism and debate in a way that was unthinkable in the 1980s. Newspapers, political parties and civil society organisations often take a critical stance towards the Bretton Woods institutions. Although this debate is continuously initiated and carried out by French-speaking and well-educated people in the larger towns, the very existence of this public debate makes an important difference between the 1980s and the 1990s. In the late 1990s increased attention is, at least rhetorically, paid to poor people. Different organisations and government bodies claim that they give priority to the fight against poverty. Macro-economic reforms and political democratisation will not be efficient, the argument goes, unless the reduction of poverty is set as a priority. The combat of poverty today involves most actors in development, but as we will see in the next chapter, poverty remains vaguely defined.

3 Assessing Poverty

Poverty has become a priority of development organisations, but this should not obscure the fact that poverty has a long history in development theory and practice. As I have already outlined in the introduction, 'the poor' are often put to the fore in order to justify development operations. This is of course linked to the fact that public aid given by Northern countries must be justified in the eyes of their parliaments and, in extension, of the taxpayers (cf. Dahl 2001). For instance, in the first official Swedish aid policy in 1962 the main purpose of aid was to improve the living conditions of the poor (Sida 1996). According to the growth oriented development model of the 1960s, wealth was thought to trickle down to the poor more or less automatically. The impact of structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 1990s soon confirmed that the social price to be paid by poor people was high. Hence following the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, poverty has become the main issue to be addressed by donors and national governments alike. Yet to a large extent combating poverty remains rhetorical; 'all' donors, consultants and government representatives talk about poverty. In general, poverty is rarely defined, but approached as a function of other concepts such as growth, well-being, exclusion or equity (Kankwenda et al. 1999; Maxwell 1999; PNUD 1999). In Burkina Faso, attempts have been made to define and hence measure poverty to better understand its depth and spread. This chapter seeks to identify the principal poverty definitions, first by looking into current international debate and then by reviewing the main poverty assessments conducted in recent years in Burkina Faso.

The Poverty Concept

There is a wealth of literature on poverty in different social science disciplines, as well as in policy papers. Often poverty researchers and policy-makers have tried to develop definitions which suit their specific purposes, but different disciplines may also favour different understandings of poverty. More than two hundred entries to poverty definitions are selected in *The International Glossary on Poverty* (Gordon & Spicker 1999). At the macro-level, the theoretical debate about the causation of poverty has been polarised between structural and behavioural models of explanation. While structural approaches emphasise institutionalised systems of equality, macro-economic impacts, exploitation and exclusion, behavioural approaches stress the significance of personal attributes of poor people, which are reinforced by patterns of poverty and dependency transmitted from one generation to the next (Pinker 1999:1). Such polarisation has not helped in the search for poverty explanations and efficient policy responses. Among development organisations and governmental bodies increased attention has been paid to the need to integrate the micro- and macro-levels of analysis. Structural adjustment programmes have not been the appropriate solution to reduce poverty but have all too often even worsened the living conditions of the poor. Consequently, in the 1990s there has been a growing need to address poverty more explicitly. Contrary to what the growth oriented development model had foreseen, wealth did not necessarily trickle down to the poorer segments of society.

Poverty itself is a dynamic rather than a static phenomenon and the poor themselves are subject to complex processes of upward and downward *social mobility*. Attributing all the blame to structural causes ignores the significance of personal attributes and intentions. Placing all the responsibility on improvident behaviour overlooks the marked differences in opportunity and relative advantage and disadvantage that structure people's life chances (Pinker 1999:1).

The recognition of its dynamic character poses the problem of how to measure poverty. A central discussion in this regard is the advantages of *absolute poverty*, measured against the minimum required to maintain a person's physical efficiency, or *relative poverty*, which is measured against the average living conditions in a given society. Poverty assessments often use a combination of tools to measure absolute and relative poverty (Gordon & Spicker 1999; INSD 1996a; INSD 1996b; PNUD 1999). One of the most interesting scholars working on poverty is the Nobel Prize Winner Amartya Sen. He holds that poverty must be seen as "the deprivation of basic capabilities" rather than as merely low income.

> The perspective of capability-poverty does not involve any denial of the sensible view that low income is clearly one of the major causes of poverty, since lack of income can be a principal reason for a person's capability deprivation. (Sen 1999:87)

Sen's works (1981, 1984, 1987, 1999) have contributed to important alternatives to the income-based poverty assessment, because, most often, poverty concepts used in development analysis are 'thin', focusing on material and measurable elements (e.g. income, nutrition). By contrast, in anthropological work of 'thick' description, much more complex and multi-layered pictures emerge (Anderson & Broch-Due 1999; Broch-Due 1995). In recent policy research, attempts have been made to promote popular participation in poverty assessments. The main argument is that both primary and secondary stakeholders should be involved in a process that is capable of influencing policy and practice (Booth et al. 1998).

An important contribution to the study of poverty is John Iliffe's book *The African Poor* in which he distinguishes between structural poverty and conjunctural poverty. While structural poverty is the long-term poverty of individuals due to their personal or social circumstances, conjunctural poverty is the temporary poverty into which

ordinarily self-sufficient people may be thrown by crisis (Iliffe 1987).
With respect to structural poverty Iliffe distinguishes between socie-
ties with ample resources, notably land, and those in which such
resources are scarce.

> In land-rich societies the very poor are characteristically those who lack
> access to the labour needed to exploit land – both their own labour (per-
> haps because they are incapacitated, elderly, or young) and the labour of
> others (because they are bereft of family or other support). (Iliffe
> 1987:4)

In general, it can be argued that the structural poor of pre-colonial
Sub-Saharan Africa were those lacking access to labour, but that
structural poverty resulting from land scarcity appeared only slowly
and under the impact of colonial rule. By contrast, conjunctural
poverty, mainly due to climatic and political insecurity, has exhibited
greater change. Broad increases in wealth, diversified income, better
government, more efficient transportation and market systems, and
improved hygiene and medicine help to explain this change in Africa.
"The cost [...] was that epidemic starvation for all but the rich gave
way to endemic undernutrition for the very poor. Conjunctural and
structural poverty converged" (Iliffe 1987:6). The salient point here is
that while the distinction between conjunctural and structural poverty
is of analytical importance, poor people often find themselves doubly
confronted by these two kinds of poverty. One example of such
double confrontation is related to farming practices in Burkina. While
hoe farming is based on the existence of available non-farmed land,
today cotton cropping is expanding and thus encroaching on potential
land for subsistence farming. Control over labour thereby comes to
coincide with control over land (cf. Hart 1982).

Some recent anthropological contributions to the study of poverty
highlight the interdependence of different dimensions of poverty
(Anderson & Broch-Due 1999; Booth et al. 1999; Broch-Due 1995).

Poverty is not merely a label to be used to describe others, but further includes the interdependence of economic, political and cultural dimensions. Attention must be paid to how poverty is related to social relations, cosmology and moral economy. In the final draft of a paper written for the World Bank, Booth et al. argue that anthropological perspectives on poverty are of value both for how poverty is conceptualised and experienced by diverse African peoples, and for determining to what extent it is possible to generalise about causal linkages and changes over time (Booth et al. 1999).

The most common measurement of poverty and wealth is the estimate of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. In Burkina Faso the GDP per capita was 217 $US in 1998 (EIU 1999). Severe criticism has been launched against this general measurement. Firstly, it assumes that all people work to gain an income and ignores the fact that many people, especially in rural areas, rely on subsistence farming, that is, they consume what they produce. Secondly, money is here defined as the best and most appropriate tool of measurement. Value is converted into money and no other dimensions of poverty are included. Another, though even more rough, tool to measure poverty is to establish the poverty threshold at 1 $US per person and day. It assumes that it is meaningful to use an absolute monetary measurement, something which most scholars would question. The use of US dollars as a common measure indicates all too obvious who is perceived to be governing the world!

As a reaction against the money oriented measurement of poverty, the Human Development Index (HDI) began to be used in the early 1990s. This indicator consists of three elements: 1) the length of life, measured according to the life expectancy at birth; 2) the level of education, measured by an indicator combining a 2/3 share of the level of adult literacy and a 1/3 share of the gross level of combined schooling; and 3) the living standard, measured by the GDP per capita

(PNUD 1999:226). In the most recent HDI-assessment, Burkina Faso occupies the 172nd position of 174 countries.[3]

Another way of measuring poverty is to establish a minimum level of nutritional needs to be met. In Burkina a national poverty profile was established in 1996 on the basis of the Priority Survey of the living conditions among Burkinabe households, carried out between October 1994 and January 1995 (INSD 1996b). The poverty profile departed first from a caloric need of 2,283 calories per adult person per day and second from the expenses structure of the households, notably food and non-food expenses. Estimates then translated this basic nutritional need into the prices applied locally to buy these foods. Apart from the mathematical exercise to convert poverty into money and figures, a criticism deals with the halting comparison between rice, often consumed by urban people, and sorghum and millet, which are the staple foods of the rural poor.

A slightly more inclusive way to define poverty is the basic needs approach. It identifies a number of basic needs to be satisfied in terms of food, clothing, shelter etc. These needs are considered to be identical in whatever context even though the ways in which these needs are satisfied may vary, for instance, according to climate, culture and socio-economic situation. This basic needs approach to poverty has been particularly developed by the UNICEF. It was used at the Social Development Summit in Copenhagen in 1995 to formulate the so-called 20/20 Initiative (UN 1995).

The 'feminisation of poverty' has been an increasingly used concept. Cash crops have frequently meant increased rural wealth, but at some cost in terms of greater vulnerability to world markets and weather fluctuations, and widening inequalities (Booth *et al.* 1999). Social status and relations tend to favour some actors at the expenses of others. Women tend, at least relatively speaking, to be losers in this

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[3] Some countries such as Somalia, Liberia and Bosnia do not at all figure on the HDI-ranking (Human Development Report 2000).

process. Cotton cropping is a case in point in Burkina. While most adult rural men in 'the cotton belt' seek to grow at least some acres of cotton, women see their workload increase but do not directly benefit from 'the cotton money'.

Poverty may concern degrees of social exclusion, because to be poor is also to be marginal and without appropriate social networks. The notion of marginality brings back the poverty concept to people's perceptions. Whether an absolute and comparative measurement is carried out, poverty is linked to the question of how categories of poor people perceive themselves and how, in turn, they are perceived by other members of society. Actor-oriented definitions of poverty move beyond the absolute poverty and take a more relative stance. The main reason is to grasp its contextual character and focus on the dynamics of processes of upward and downward social mobility. People are obliged to struggle to preserve themselves and their dependants from physical want, but their perceptions of this struggle is hardly conveyed in figures. In fact voices of the poor are disturbingly absent in most poverty assessments carried out so far in Burkina Faso.

A book published by the World Bank book apparently represents a new trend. It is based on a review of 81 Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) reports that, in turn, are based on discussions with over 40,000 poor women and men in 50 countries (Narayan et al. 2000). Despite specificities linked to location and social group, the authors were struck by the commonality of the human experience of poverty. "From Georgia to Brazil, from Nigeria to the Philippines, similar underlying themes emerged: hunger, deprivation, powerlessness, violation of dignity, social isolation, resilience, resourcefulness, solidarity, state corruption, rudeness of service providers, and gender inequity" (Nayaran et al. 2000:3). While the interest of the World Bank in poor people's experiences and perspectives is welcome, it frames divergence and specificities as commonality. The book represents 'the voices of the poor' in a compiled manner, referring to

statements without providing any context. Apart from anthropologists' classical difficulty with sweeping generalisations, there are two main objections to be made. Firstly, by compiling scattered voices from so many localities of the world, with the help of PPA reports, the contextual, situational and relational dimensions of poverty are sacrificed. Secondly, by focusing on 'the voices of the poor' the most articulated of the informants are represented in favour of non-verbal forms of communication.

Main Poverty Assessments

The most important national study of poverty that has been conducted in Burkina is the Priority Survey. It was conducted in 8,642 households distributed into seven different strata of the national territory (two urban and five rural). It is particularly the scope of the sample, which renders this survey a useful baseline. It was carried out between October 1994 and January 1995. Later studies have come to build on the data collected by the Priority Survey. In this regard the methodology and the units of analysis that have been used have been reproduced in several studies, policy documents and unpublished papers. The survey was part of the Social Dimensions of the Adjustment Programme and was funded by the African Development Bank, the UNDP and the World Bank. The specific objectives of the Priority Survey were 1) to produce socio-economic indicators of all of households in Burkina; 2) to identify vulnerable socio-economic groups; and 3) to reinforce the technical capacities by providing material and logistic means to the National Institute for Statistics and Demography (INSD) for carrying out other large surveys (INSD 1996a). Given the statistical basis of the survey twelve teams of surveyors were created to cover the country. The survey constitutes a mass of information, which touches upon all aspects of the households' socio-economic conditions. The Priority Survey estimated that there are 1,211,637

households in Burkina. These households have on average 7.8 members and most household heads are men.

Given the fact that the Priority Survey provided a bulk of data to be analysed and that different poverty assessments have later been done on the basis of these findings, there are good reasons to scrutinise the concepts and categories employed in the Priority Survey. Three main problems in terms of categorisation need to be highlighted. Firstly, the household (*ménage*) is defined as the basic socio-economic unit, in which the different members (relatives or not) live in the same house or compound, put their resources together and satisfy in common the essential part of their food needs and other basic needs (INSD 1996a:16). The household remains under the authority of one person called household head (*chef de ménage*). This definition assumes that households are more or less homogeneous. No consideration of power relations within the household is taken into account. The authority of the household head is not questioned but instead reinforced in a way that other voices than that of household head are not likely to be represented. The polygynous household emerges as a particular case in which each wife is expected to feed and clothe her children, but the husband should provide the wives and the children with staple food. The use of the household as the basic socio-economic unit taking neither extra- nor intra-household relations into account is extremely problematic. More generally, such generalised models of households as discrete units of residence, production, consumption and reproduction are inaccurate in most African contexts, because kinship, marriage and economic relations influence household form, making the identification of the household unit complicated (Crewe & Harrison 1998:40).

Secondly, the Priority Survey divides the country into seven strata of which two are urban and five rural. Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso are identified as one stratum and 'other towns' as another.

Five rural strata are defined to distinguish all the then 30 provinces.[4] These were 1) the West, 2) the South and the South-East, 3) the Centre-North, 4) the Centre-South, and 5) the North. A main constraint with this categorisation is that insufficient attention is paid to inter-strata relationships. Rural people maintain kin and other relations with urban people. The impact of money sent back by migrant workers abroad, e.g. in the Ivory Coast, is not taken into account either. The rural exodus from the North is portrayed in a rather stereotypic manner, neglecting the dynamics of migration. Given the fact that mobility is a central characteristic of rural communities, the fixity assumed in the Priority Survey cannot be accepted at face value.

Thirdly, the Priority Survey defines the socio-economic group on the basis of the activity of all people over 10 years old. In consequence, seven socio-economic groups are classified: 1) Salaried in public sector; 2) Salaried in private sector; 3) Merchants and craftsmen; 4) Cash crop farmers; 5) Food crop farmers; 6) Other actives; and 7) Unemployed and inactive people. A main inconvenience is that such a classification is likely to refer to the idea of work according to mostly male household heads. Among the inactive people we find pupils and students, housewives, retired people, disabled and sick persons. This assumption casts serious doubt on reliability and validity. A woman who does not exercise an activity, salaried or not, is thus classified as inactive!

Other questions could be raised regarding the methodological assumptions of the Priority Survey, but the three already mentioned represent the most important flaws. Yet it would be erroneous to conclude that the Priority Survey thereby looses its value altogether. It remains an important baseline study, in particular thanks to its big sample. But if conclusions about the households' living conditions are based on such questionable assumptions, a closer and more critical look at the findings seems to be most appropriate.

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[4] In 1996, the national territory was divided into 45 provinces.

On the basis of the Priority Survey, a poverty profile was established for Burkina Faso (INSD 1996b). The purpose was to establish a poverty threshold to provide better actions to combat it. What is the 'objective' line of poverty on which actions need to be based? What are the characteristics of people leaving poverty for non-poverty? What amounts of money is needed to combat poverty? To address these questions the study first identified one absolute and one relative boundary between poverty and non-poverty. Indicators were then calculated to measure the poverty phenomenon according to significant groups of individuals, whom were adjudged to be statistically, socially and geographically homogeneous (INSD 1996b:6).

The category 'absolute poverty' established a threshold under which poverty is said to prevail. A daily caloric need for an adult was estimated to be 2,283 calories. This figure was then translated into a quantity of nutritional needs and finally the yearly food expenses were estimated through the valorisation of daily nutritional need per adult.[5] The threshold for Burkina was estimated to be 41,099 FCFA per adult per year in the monetary value of October 1994. The threshold of extreme absolute poverty was 31,749 FCFA per adult per year.[6] The analysis of the structure of expenses estimated that the share of food expenses of all expenses was 47 percent on average.

By contrast, the category 'relative poverty' was basically established by dividing the population into fifths (or quintiles) according to living standards. The last 20 percent were the extreme poor, followed by the moderate poor and average living standards, and the 4th and 5th fifths were composed of non-poor. The advantage of this relative poverty measurement is that it directs attention to the relations be-

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[5] Prices of millet and sorghum were used to estimate food expenses, but rice and maize, which are more consumed in the urban area, were not considered.

[6] A specific study was later carried out to better estimate urban poverty. Instead of relying on a national poverty threshold an urban threshold was established: 106,249 FCFA per adult in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso, and 70,214 FCFA for other towns (Sanou & Ouédraogo 1998).

tween citizens of Burkina Faso. It is particularly interesting to note that no segment of the population is described as 'rich'.

Presentation of quintiles of individual levels of life

N°	Quintiles	Slices of average consumption expenses/year and individual	% of the popula-tion	Label on the ladder
1	1st quintile	< 27,619 FCFA	20	Extreme poverty
2	2nd quintile	27,619 - 38,500 FCFA	20	Moderate poverty
3	3rd quintile	38,500 – 54,830 FCFA	20	Average living standard
4	4th quintile	54,830 – 92,277 FCFA	20	Non-poverty
5	5th quintile	>92,277 FCFA	20	Extreme non-poverty
	Total		100	

Table adapted from INSD (1996b:39).

However, many objections might be addressed to the establishment of these figures such as the household as the basic unit of analysis, the relationship between nutritional needs and food expenses and, in consequence, the translation operation of nutritional needs into monetary value. Common to these objections is to question the absence of any social, political and cultural dimensions of poverty. But even in a strictly economic sense the data presented in the poverty profile remain questionable. For instance, it has repeatedly been shown that forest foods are crucial to people's consumption, but these are not included in the Priority Survey. In most rural areas the daily relish called *soumbala* is made out of the beans of African locust tree (*Parkia biglobosa*) and contains much protein. The leaves of the baobab tree (*Adansonia digitata*) are rich in calcium and are cooked daily, especially by Fulbe populations.

Nonetheless, the Poverty Profile draws some interesting conclusions. Firstly, there are two extreme poles in Burkinabe society, which means that the average Burkinabe is not representative. The extreme

pole of poverty is composed of rural people, farmers and polygynous[7] households. The extreme pole of non-poverty or 'wealth' is consti- tuted of salaried, craftsmen and merchants, other actives, male and female bachelors (INSD 1996b:130). Secondly, the Poverty Profile recommends a strategy to combat poverty at the level of individual differences rather than on regional stratifications, socio-economic groups and types of households. It contends that the rough categorisa- tions employed cannot be used as entry-points to combat poverty. Thirdly, the living standards diminish with the increasing size of the household. Poor households have an average size of 9-11 persons and the more wealthy ones have 6-8 persons. Fourthly, migrations seem to be a strategy for the households to reduce poverty. Migration is more important in rural areas than in the urban ones, a strategy for men more than women and among the poor more than the rich. Fifthly, poor people have less access to formal (schooling) and informal (alphabetisation) education. Rural women are the worst off in this respect.

The Poverty Profile has been of political significance. The re- gions classified as poor have come to benefit more from international aid. It could therefore be important for local actors to portray a region as poor in order to attract more money. From the INSD point of view, the Poverty Profile identified the main axes, along which actions could be oriented. But its global character also stimulated the need for more specific and complementary studies (INSD 1996b). In the years to come the INSD initiated six complementary studies on the follow- ing topics: poverty and health; poverty and education; poverty and gender; poverty and labour market; poverty and unemployment; and urban poverty and access to basic social services (Bayala et al. 1997; Kaboré et al. 1997; Lachaud 1997; Nioumou et al. 1997; Ouédraogo et al. 1997; Sanou & Ouédraogo 1998). Each study discusses its specific

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[7] In Burkina Faso people commonly label such households 'polygamous', although the more precise term is polygynous households.
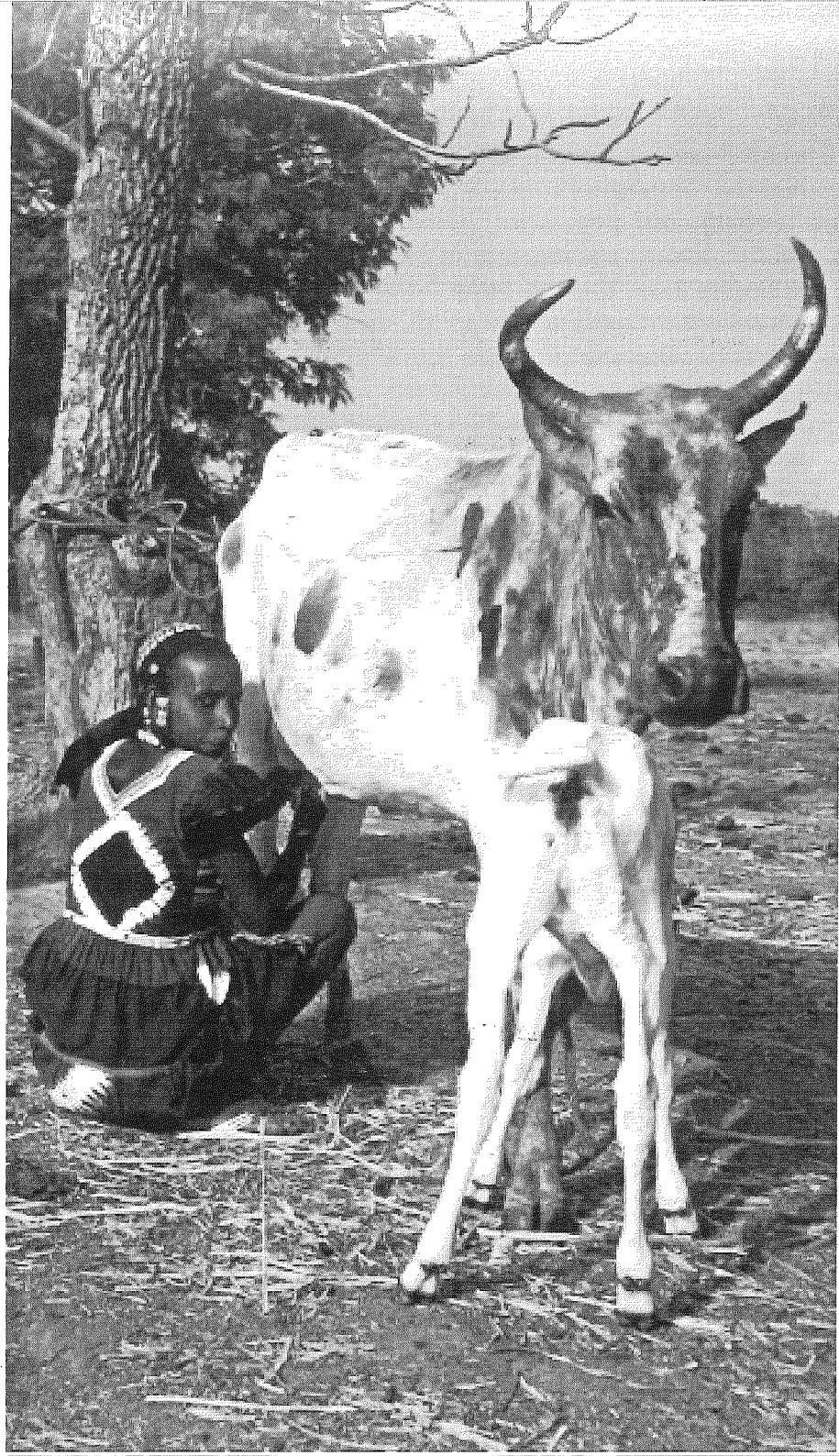
topic and gives more substantial information on different sectors of Burkinabe society. However, they share a common drawback with most poverty assessments in that figures, more than attempts to represent poor people's own voices, dominate. An updated poverty profile was established on the basis of a second Priority Survey, conducted between May and August 1998. The purpose was to understand the evolution of poverty. The absolute poverty threshold was then established at 72,690 FCFA. Yet this poverty profile does not address the methodological flaws outlined above (INSD 2000).

A more innovative study is the one carried out by economist Kimseyinga Sawadogo at Ouagadougou University. It sets out to define different dimensions of poverty and to review the strategies to remedy the problem. The study also focuses on the relationship between the intentions of international aid organisations and Burkinabe decision-makers' perceptions of development interventions (Sawadogo 1997). It relies on interviews with national decision-makers, local state institutions, projects and NGOs, but it also discusses people's perceptions of poverty. Sawadogo states that every social formation and every culture may have a poverty conception, which requires different actions to eradicate it. By taking two examples – the Dyula term *fangntanya* and the Mooré term *taalga* – Sawadogo argues that poverty is traditionally a relative concept linked to work, and its opposite, laziness. Traditionally, poverty is either attributed to sickness, disability or laziness (Sawadogo 1997:9). The study compares the self-adjustment in the 1980s and the externally imposed adjustment in the 1990s. Sawadogo points to the fact that the actions of national decision-makers have not been facilitated by the conditionality of external interventions. The experiences of self-adjustment in the 1980s indicate that if the pursued objectives have been fixed at the national rather than at the international level, the results are more likely to be better. The co-ordination of various activities and actors seems equally important; different conceptions

and discourses of development tend to constrain efficient use of resources (Sawadogo 1997:32).

Since 1997 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) produces a yearly report on sustainable human development in Burkina Faso. The 1998 report focuses explicitly on combating poverty with the ambition to deepen the understanding of this central problem of sustainable human development (PNUD 1999). The report makes a comprehensive review of different approaches to poverty and elaborates on dimensions such as macroeconomics, governance, employment, education, health, gender and environment. Different definitions of poverty are discussed, including poor people's own perceptions. Information on the latter was collected through focus group interviews. Although the Priority Survey provides important information on the population, the qualitative data reveal the generally neglected questions of cultural conception, social stability, governance or the environment (PNUD 1999:25). The report further highlights the economic, moral and social dimensions of people's perceptions of poverty and pays due attention to their survival strategies.

To sum up this chapter, the UNDP report remains a central document in current understanding of poverty among national and international agencies in Burkina Faso. Despite its heavily loaded development jargon, it provides an impressing bulk of information on poverty. Yet a disturbing fact in much of the literature, including the UNDP report, is the lack of awareness of the scholarly literature on poverty. Such awareness would have contributed to a better understanding of different aspects of poverty. Instead, it is as if 'the poor' still remain a category much referred to but rarely listened to. In the next chapter we will therefore change perspective and look into how a selected number of more or less poor people perceive poverty and wealth.

4 Poor People's Voices

In this chapter each study site will first be described according to some basic factors such as agro-ecology, land-use, livelihoods and socio-cultural traits and then specific issues related to poverty will be unfolded. In order to better contextualise the case-studies, I have chosen to elaborate on specific topics of regional relevance in the different study sites. Yet one should bear in mind that these topics often overlap between the four study sites.

The Banfora Region: Mobility and Money

In this section poverty is described in relation to migration and livelihoods. Conflicts between different normative orders are particularly developed in relation to poverty conceptions. The empirical context is the Banfora region, but, to a large extent, the findings are more generally applicable to the South-Western Burkina.[8]

Banfora is the fourth largest town in Burkina Faso and the capital of the Comoé Province. The Province is located in the southwest bordering the Ivory Coast and also close to Mali. The region has relatively favourable agro-ecological conditions in terms of soil, vegetation and rainfall. This part of Burkina is a basin for three main rivers: the Mouhoun (previously the Black Volta), the Comoé and the Léraba. The annual rainfall may generally amount to 1,000 mm and in the extreme south even up to 1,200 mm per year. This is a forest

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[8] This section draws on fieldwork carried out during more than four years between 1988 and 2001; results have already been written up in reports (Hagberg 1990, 1992; Hagberg & Berté 1991, 1992), articles (Hagberg 2000b; Hagberg 2001a) and, in particular, in my PhD-thesis (Hagberg 1998a).

region classified as wooded savannah with important forested areas; fourteen forest reserves are located there (Hagberg 1992). Combined with the favourable ecological conditions Banfora is an important centre for industrial development: there is the sugar cane company SOSUCO which is also linked to liquor distillation, the industrial mill GMB for flour production and the recently established factory for cotton treatment (SOFITEX).

The population density is lower than in the central parts of the country; in 1985 population figures (INSD 1988) gave 14 inhabitants lived per km² with a high concentration in the northern parts of the province. In 1996, the Comoé Province (now divided into Comoé and Léraba) had 16 inhabitants per km² (INSD 1998) The eradication of human and animal tryposonomiasis has opened up new areas for settlement in the south.

Agriculture and animal husbandry constitute the principal economic assets in rural communities. Although land-use practices differ in the region, rural people generally grow various species of sorghum and millet, maize, fonio, rice, beans, groundnuts, sesame and various tubers such as yams and sweet potatoes. Cotton was traditionally grown, but is today promoted by the parastatal cotton company SOFITEX. Cotton has become a main cash crop in Burkina Faso and is strongly promoted at the highest political level. While various groups of farmers keep cattle, the Fulbe are the cattle-keepers *par excellence*. Sheep and goats are also reared. The donkey is a key asset for those who are 'the better-off', because it allows them to transport people, crops and items. Cattle are seen as an asset and mostly reared by wealthier people, but even those who are relatively poor raise poultry.

Two different migratory movements dominate socio-economic development of the region. The first movement involves the many people, especially young men but also women, who migrate to the Ivory Coast to work on plantations or to do other salaried work. In

most villages, there is a continuous stream of people leaving for or returning from the Ivory Coast. In April, when funerals are to be carried out, many people return to their village of origin. Young men often migrate to earn enough to be able to get married. Ideally, they return home with the financial capacity to pay bridewealth, but they still return with an 'elsewhere' in their minds (cf. Laurent 1998). These migrations represent an event with economic as well as symbolic connotations among many groups of farmers in the region (Dessein 2000; Fiéloux 1980; Hagberg 1998a; Lavaud 1991). On return people are expected to bring back money and items. A brand-new bicycle is often seen as the material expression of a successful stay in the Ivory Coast. Inversely, it is a shame to return home without symbols of modernity such as a radio or a bicycle. Thus poverty renders mobility both socially and economically difficult.

The second migratory movement involves people leaving the northern and central parts of Burkina to settle in the south. The Comoé Province is an area which receives a large number of people in search of better living conditions. The most important immigrant groups are Mossi farmers and Fulbe agro-pastoralists. Representing the majority population of the country, people originating from the Mossi kingdoms move and settle in areas southwards. It is not uncommon to hear local farmers complain that the Mossi have outnumbered the autochthonous population (cf. Laurent & Mathieu 1994). The Mossi often become involved in village associations and thereby gain influence in the village. Tensions may develop between the Mossi and other groups of farmers. Fulbe agro-pastoralists move into the area in the search for grazing land and water. But they also move due to conflicts with farmers. Fulbe reside on the fringes of most villages in the region. Disputes related to crop damage and cattle tracks are common, sometimes leading to outbreaks of violence (Hagberg 1998a, 2001a). Farmers tend to perceive the Fulbe agro-pastoralists as wealthy and thus capable of bribing government officials. In case of crop damage,

they might sell off cattle as to get a favourable treatment in court. As I have elaborated elsewhere (Hagberg 1998a, 2000b, 2001a, forthcoming), the socio-political stakes involved are far more complex. While farmers hold that cattle causing crop damage engender famine, Fulbe stress that they are seen as 'strangers' and without any land rights whatsoever (Hagberg 2000b).

Traditional notions of poverty are closely linked to a lack of strength or force, and of capacity to work. In the regional lingua franca Dyula the word for poverty is *fangntanya*. It originates from the word *fanga* ('force', 'strength') or *fama* ('power', 'government'), and *ntan* ('without'). The word *fangntanya* thus stands literally for the state of being without power. Poor people are those who lack the force to sustain themselves. This general term for poverty may include a wide range of people; it is not uncommon to hear people say that 'poverty may not end' (*fangntanya ti se ka ban*). Another word used to describe poverty is *desse* ('lack'). Someone who lacks the means to fulfil basic living conditions is poor. Illness (*bana*) also has connotations with poverty. The sick person lacks the strength to work to become better off.

These perceptions emphasise the lack of agency of the individual and are the antithesis of social and spatial mobility. To move is essentially regarded as a way to escape poverty and to gain prosperity. Hence movement implies that the individual has the capacity to do something about his/her situation. Therefore being without force, to be lacking or to be sick all include the inability to improve living conditions. While such perceptions tend to focus on behavioural aspects of poverty, they do not exclude structural explanations. But poverty is still seen as a deeply personal experience of not having the capacity to improve the situation. The poor might also be lazy. An informant said, "the poor is the lazy, because even if he is rich he will become poor by laziness". The behavioural aspects of poverty are once again empha-

sised. The inability and the unwillingness to work converge in traditional notions of poverty.

These poverty notions can be traced back to farming practices. Hoe farming is a key symbol of individual agency and is a highly valued activity for farmers. For a man the ability to feed oneself is the first goal to achieve. A state agent of the Karaboro ethnic group argued that the Karaboro have always been self-sufficient. "He is a proud man. In traditional Karaboro society, you could not see a Karaboro beggar". Here the point is not to evaluate the realities behind this statement, but rather to note that the discourse on poverty is highly moral. It is a shame to beg and to be unable to feed oneself. The lazy man will remain in the homestead and neglect farming duties, the argument goes, until it is too late to start labour.

Yet farming is not merely men's business, because women are heavily involved in working on the family fields in the Banfora region. The heavy workload of women is widely recognised in the region. For instance, women of the Turka, Gouin and Karaboro ethnic groups work on fields as much as men. They participate in all tasks of the farming season, except clearing new fields. An indicator of the importance of female labour is the high bridewealth practised among these groups (cf. Dacher 1992; Lavaud 1991). Ethnologist Michèle Dacher has studied the impact of female labour in Gouin rural households. She found that a wife might increase production with about 30,000 FCFA per year for her husband. A man with two wives might thus use the surplus created by female labour to marry a third wife (Dacher 1992:81; see also PNUD 1999:142).

Contrary to the centralised Mossi and Fulbe societies, traditional socio-political structures of village communities in Western and South-Western Burkina are strongly decentralised (Dacher 1987; Hagberg 1998a). Among the Karaboro, one of the more than ten groups of farmers living in the Banfora region, two main words signify 'poverty' (*nawan* and *feun* in Karaboro language). While the

first term refers to poverty more generally, the second means suffering. *Nawan fo* means literally the 'owner of poverty' in the same sense that *kule fo* means the 'owner of the village' (village chief). The wealthy possess cattle, cereals and money. Having many children were until recently seen as wealth, in particular when people farmed together under the supervision of the family head, who thus controlled the labour of all dependants. Today people farm separately, but children are nonetheless still perceived as wealth, although urban people do not always share this viewpoint. The poor is the one who is dispossessed of all this: cattle, cereals, money and children.

While cattle, cereals, money and children are traditionally regarded as wealth, land and housing are not. Like many other groups of farmers in this region, the Karaboro kinship system is based on double unilineal descent. The children belong simultaneously, but differently to their father's lineage and mother's lineage. This double belonging is acted out at specific events such as funerals and heritage distribution. At the death of a family head the wealth (cattle, money and other mobile property) is transmitted to the nephews, i.e. to the deceased man's sister's sons. The nephews are considered as 'fathers' for the children when their maternal uncle has died, and may even remarry the widows (Hagberg 1998a:118). Land and housing is transmitted to the children of the deceased man. The children have worked for their deceased father since they were born there and cannot be chased from the land.

This system seems to have worked quite well in the past, but today it has become more problematic. One reason is that urban land is nowadays becoming an asset and people invest money in individually owned plots of land on which they build houses. At the death of the owner, both his sons and nephews may claim it as their heritage. Land is traditionally transmitted patrilineally, whereas movable property is transmitted matrilineally. Thus the nephews often claim that 'their' money was used to buy land in town and that the family heritage has

been diverted. Another problem of the kinship system is linked to the differentiation between mobile and immobile wealth. Today brothers do not farm the same land any longer, because every man seeks to get his own fields. The elder brother is unable to control labour any more. One informant told me that "this explains why Karaboro men marry many wives today". They try to gain labour to control. Due to the fact that Karaboro women participate fully in agricultural work, the control over their labour may increase production for the husband (cf. Dacher 1992). Land is not yet a limiting factor in the southern parts of the Banfora region. People often move southwards to clear new fields and thus sustain themselves. Many Karaboro families with whom I have worked have members settled across the entire region. Migration to the Ivory Coast fits into this general pattern of mobility.

The Banfora region provides an interesting example of mobility and fixity. The local farmers belong, on the one hand, to a village to which they return regularly for rituals. On the other hand, their livelihoods depend to a large extent on mobility. People move to get better farmland. Moving to the Ivory Coast and to the industries in Banfora, notably the sugar cane, provide other options than farming. Rural women also move extensively, to the Ivory Coast but also to their family's homesteads. But the coming of northern peoples, due to drought and the search for better livelihoods, puts local farmers' mobility into perspective. Tensions may arise between firstcomers and latecomers, and important mechanisms of integrating strangers into the local setting are at work (Hagberg 2000b). In general, rural communities of the region are experiencing dramatic change in social organisation. While modernisation promotes the nuclear family and children thus inherit their parents, double unilineal descent is hardly compatible with the way modernity is conceived in Burkina Faso. The heritage, the division of labour and the naming practice (cf. Dacher 1992; Poda 2000) all reveal contradictions. People often say, "money has spoiled the world".

To conclude, the lack of capacity to work emerges as a central notion of poverty. Hoe farming relies to a large extent on the control over labour rather than over land. Lack of wealth and illness are perceived as poverty. Mobility provides, on the one hand, people with other options and one may argue that to move is one way by which poverty is combated. The increasing practice of granting land rights by money transactions – a practice which is rejected according to local cosmology – favours, on the other hand, the fixity of people claiming land rights.

The Réo Region: Forest and People

In this section poverty is described with reference to the relations between rural people and the forest. In particular, the scrutiny of farmers' perceptions of the forest will help us to understand constraints and opportunities in land and forest usage. The empirical context is the Réo region in Central-Western Burkina Faso, but it highlights more generally how the relationship between poverty and the use of natural resources is shaped. The existence of forest reserves in the study site brings in the colonial legacy of land-use.[9]

The Sanguié Province is to a large extent characterised by vast forests along the Mouhoun River. The provincial capital Réo is located in the northern part of the province. Annual rainfall is about 700-800 mm. During colonisation several forested areas were legally transformed into forest reserves. The reason was to preserve and protect them from land encroachment by people living in neighbouring villages. Accordingly, the 'land of the ancestors' was transformed into the white man's forest (Hagberg et al. 1996). Yet the forests have continuously remained under the management of the Master of the

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[9] Fieldwork was carried out during one month per year between 1995 and 1999 as part of an interdisciplinary research programme focusing on forest management. Some social science studies have been published and others are in preparation (Hagberg 1995a, 1998b, 2000c, 2001b; Hagberg et al. 1996).

Earth, representing the principal institution for land distribution in rural societies in Burkina Faso.[10] Like the Banfora region, the Réo region receives Mossi and Fulbe immigrants from the north, something that provides opportunities for people coming from elsewhere but also hardens competition over resources.

Farmers of the Lyele ethnic group perceive the forest both through daily practice and cosmological notions. For the Lyela the forest is a locus of power with multiple and to some extent contradictory meanings. Firstly, it represents the land of the ancestors. Secondly, it is a forest reserve being protected by paramilitary forest guards. Thirdly, the forest also represents a potential for making money (cotton and woodcutting). Cosmologically, the Earth (*cè*) is central to the Lyela not only as a material basis for the community but also as a sacred site. The Master of the Earth (*cè cebal*) is in charge of the community's relations with the Earth. There are still sacred sites in the forest reserve that are circumscribed by numerous interdictions. But the forest is simultaneously a resource which remains under the control of foresters. Today Lyela farmers therefore perceive that fallow lands in the reserve represent an agricultural potential, which they cannot access without breaking state law. With increasing population growth and consequent pressure on farmland, people enter the forest reserve and 'steal to farm'. Lyela farmers can sustain themselves by farming in the forest reserve. But this very action is illegal according to state law. Hence the Lyela have highly ambiguous perceptions of the forest.

The idea of being able to sustain oneself and not depend on other people is strongly present in Lyela forest perceptions. The forest (*gao*) is the dangerous locus of spirits and circumscribed by a wide range of interdictions. The forest also provides the opportunity for the Lyela to make a materially and morally sustained life. The forest is thus both a

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[10] See Hagberg (1998a:86-94) for a discussion of the Masters of the Earth or Earth-Priest in Burkina.

basic human condition and a prerequisite for a 'good life'. It allows people to get farmland, but also to access forest foods. If a Lyele man says "I am going to search for *nyo*" it has at least four possible meanings: 1) The man is going to clear a piece of land and grow food crops; 2) He is going on adventures, that is, he will go and search for a better life somewhere else; 3) He is going to move from one village to another in order to improve his livelihood; and 4) If a Lyele man is very poor and nothing is left to eat, he might say that he would search for *nyo* elsewhere (Hagberg 2001b).

Common to these different meanings is the moving from the known to the unknown; it implies the departure from the known fields, villages and perhaps people. However, the Lyela women also search for *nyo*, but in a much more down-to-earth manner. A woman might go out and collect the edible leaves of the small tree called *nyo* (*Maerua angolensis*). The forest food *nyo* is crucial for survival: "When the granaries are empty before harvest, the *nyo* may save people". People eat *nyo* and can be sufficed until the next day. As for the foods crops, women and men differ with respect to the forest products that they use, which means that a gendered approach to forest use is important (Hagberg et al. 1996; Lyfors 1999). The most obvious example is that while men cut trees for sale, women collect firewood for domestic consumption (Hagberg 1998b).

For Lyela men the search for *nyo* is an idiom for the idea that any man who has the ability and willingness to work the land (thus the Earth) should be able to feed himself and his family. Again the idea of the capacity to work is a critical element of struggle against poverty. This idea contrasts with the forest reserves, to which the Lyela are denied access. People fear forest agents, who, according to them, impose fines on villagers. Today, however, farmers cultivate in the forest reserve, but they are well aware that they may be chased. Therefore they say that they 'steal to farm'. A Lyele elder made the following statement:

> Today we are afraid. [...] What we are doing now is 'forced labour' [cf. *travail forcé* in colonial times]. We work as if we were employed by someone else. Even this year [1998] they [the forest agents] came and took our bicycles to Réo [the provincial capital]. [...] As land today belongs to the government they claim it.

The forest agents hinder people from growing food in the forest reserve and thus to sustain themselves. Hence Lyela notions of poverty reveal that those who are willing and capable to work cannot possibly be poor. Accordingly, land is not regarded as wealth *per se*, but working it is what brings wealth. This idea corresponds to the one revealed by Karaboro farmers. It seems to be a valid general statement about rural people's self-perception in Burkina Faso. The Master of the Earth distributes land, but he can rarely refuse someone to settle. To search for *nyo* also represents a right in that no man should prevent another man from sustaining himself and his family. But cash cropping and tree planting are regarded differently, because in these cases people work to earn money rather than to sustain themselves. In particular, tree planting transforms land into an individual property and therefore people are reluctant to grant rights to plant trees (cf. Hagberg 1995; Laurent & Mathieu 1995).

Two main observations must be made here. Firstly, people do make important distinctions between work for survival and work to make money. The Master of the Earth could not refuse a person to search for *nyo*. People say that it is only God who may decide who is going to live and who is going to die. An informant in the village of Négarpoulou explained the different kinds of work:

> Those people who cut wood in the forest earn money of the White men. They are paid later by someone who works with the White men. So that is the work of the White men. [...] If you negotiate with the merchant and [then are able to] put money in your pocket, that is not the work of the White men. But it is not the search for *nyo* either.

To plant trees and to cultivate cotton in order to earn money is treated differently than if someone only seeks to subsist. There is thus a qualitative difference of how the Lyela perceive work for survival, work for money and work of the White men.

Secondly, Lyela women see their work load increase substantially when cotton is cultivated. Women and children have to work on the husband's/father's cotton field, but they do not directly benefit from the cotton money. A woman stated, "the husband does not need to negotiate to get his wife/wives participate in harvesting cotton. All people will simply join working in the field".

Lyela farmers consider that the threats to the forest come from foresters, as well as Mossi and Fulbe, that is, different categories of strangers. An informant argued for instance that "the Mossi destroy the trees when they harvest". Others accuse the foresters of making money rather than protecting the environment. In this respect Lyela farmers' forest perceptions must be understood as part of the contemporary social struggle in which they are engaged (Hagberg 2001b).

To conclude, the forest represents a source of power with many different meanings for the Lyela. They need to clear the forest to sustain themselves but they fear at the same time the sanctions of the foresters. The increasing difficulties of working forestland also imply a poor human condition; people see their capacity to sustain themselves by their own work threatened. They are vulnerable, because they must rely on the state's decisions. In other words, environmental protection may result that local people loose the control over their use of resources.

The Dori Region: Herds and Droughts

In this section the relationship between poverty and drought is described. The purpose is to highlight how people handle the effects of

irregular rainfall and recurrent droughts and the extent to which these phenomena colour perceptions of poverty. [11]

Since the new territorial division in 1996, the northern region with its capital Dori covers the provinces of Seno, Oudalan, Yagha and Soum. The region receives about 400 to 550 mm mean annual rainfall, mainly between June and September. Between December and February the dust-laden wind Harmattan blows from the northeast. The area is predominantly inhabited by the Fulbe, but other important groups are the Tuareg and the Bella, both of which speak the Tamaschek language. These societies are hierarchical chieftaincies; Dori is the main centre of the Liptako Emirate (Irwin 1981) and the Tuareg chieftaincy is located in Gorom-Gorom (Guignard 1984). In this region a main divide is that between the aristocrats ('free men') and their formers captives, such as the Fulbe Rimbe versus the Fulbe Rimaibe, and the Tuareg versus the Bella. In early 19th century the Fulbe conducted a successful *jihad* against the Gourmantche and thereby took political control over the region. While in the town political power was exercised through the Emirate Council, a chief (*jooro*) headed each village. Prior to colonisation the Dori Emirate controlled more than 50 villages (Ouédraogo 1997). Although the region is today an administrative entity, the importance of these socio-political structures could hardly be underestimated. Between 1995-2000 the Emir was simultaneously the elected Mayor of Dori. A close relative of the Emir is the president of the graziers' union of the Seno Province. It seems that political power in Dori is legitimised and

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[11] One week of fieldwork was carried out in the Dori region, notably in the town Dori and in the village of Sambonaye in March 2000. Interviews with key informants were combined with focus groups interviews on characteristics of poverty and wealth. Two field-assistants *cum* facilitators (one woman and one man) conducted focus group interviews among women and men of different groups such as the Fulbe, the Rimaibe, the Bella, the Gourmanche and the Gaoube. I have also taken cognisance of some main works of the region by scholars, state organisations and NGOs (Bolwig & Paarup-Laursen 1999; Irwin 1981; Kintz 1982, 1985; Kremling 1999; Lund 1999; Ouédraogo 1997; Querre 2000; Riesman 1974, 1984, 1992).

asserted through the elite's capacity to control connections between Ouagadougou and Dori, and between Dori and its surrounding villages (Lund 1999).

The village of Sambonaye exemplifies the relationship between Dori and its dependent villages. People of different groups herd cattle and sheep combined with the subsistence farming of millet, sorghum, sesame, groundnuts, beans, maize and cotton. Contrary to southern parts of Burkina, cotton is only grown for the local spinning of threads. Formerly, there were a lot of cattle, but due to droughts people have lost many animals. According to a Fulbe informant, today the Rimaibe are wealthier than the Fulbe, despite their historical relationship of masters (Fulbe) and dependents (Rimaibe). "It is the will of God", he added. In particular, the Fulbe cattle died during *Paigu*, which is the Fulfulde name for the drought of 1984.[12] The Fulbe continue to herd cattle, sometimes entrusted to them by urban-based cattle-owning Rimaibe. Access to milk is a main asset for herders. Herder and herd-owner relationships have a long history in the region and exemplify the interdependence of different groups. The herders are also paid to bring the cattle to fertilise fields with cattle droppings.

Although much work is organised on a family basis, there are different kinds of community associations (*bogu* in Fulfulde) that accomplish works such as farming and house building. Most *bogu* are organised at the request of an individual, who wants to get help with farming and reciprocates by providing food, tobacco, cola-nuts and cigarettes. Occasionally the community may organise what is called *faaba* to help a person in need. At these occasions people bring their own food. It is seen as a moral obligation to help someone in need. A Fulbe man in his 50s narrated the following event:

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[12] *Paigu* signifies 'disperse', 'flee' in Fulfulde.

I once experienced that all adult people [i.e. men, my note] were called to the mosque for the six o'clock prayer. After the prayer it was announced that one person in the village was in great difficulties. Therefore all people were told to do what they could to help him to get on his feet again. All people should come with a contribution the following morning. Some people gave a bucket of millet, another offered him 250 FCFA, a third 500 FCFA, a fourth 1,000 FCFA and so on. Thanks to this help the person was able to get on his feet again. It is now three years ago. He managed to get through the difficulties.

In the focus group interviews the issue of past and present perceptions of poverty was raised. A group of Fulbe women concluded that in the past a poor person was not embarrassed to work.

Poor people suffered a lot, but they could never eat leaving other poor aside. The little they had was shared among the poor. Today the world is cruel. People only think of themselves. Everyone wants to see their neighbour suffer without helping.

A group of Bella men said that those who did not possess anything could live among rich people. The latter gave the poor a small herd to get access to milk. A poor man served the rich as farm labourer, herder etc. "Yesterday's poor was the one who was lazy and who only farmed without herding animals". Another group raised the issue of kinship: "there were good kin relations, because your brother, sister or even someone outside the family would help the poor". Most informants raised also the will of God; some people have remained poor because it was God's will.

To some extent these ideas are based on a strong moral notion of a glorious past of community solidarity. The poor were well integrated into society and taken care of, at least if they were ready to work themselves. Yet a Gourmantche man concluded that the poor suffered a lot, because there was no aid. The person could be obliged to travel

long distances to get food, but such travel required a donkey: "Thus you could die of hunger". Today, the man continued, this problem does not exist any longer. "With the White man we have transport and food may be distributed by airplane".

People's ideas about present-day poverty are different from those that they have about poverty in the past, even though laziness is also evoked as one of its contemporary characteristics. In addition, many informants enigmatically said that those who work a lot, but do not get anything back are poor. To be poor is to farm all the year without harvesting. This means that lack of rainfall brings poverty. Yet when asked to clarify, people did not seem to be willing to pronounce the word 'drought'. One informant said that 'drought' is a bad word; it is so bad that it should not even be said.

People were further asked to characterise a poor person and a poor family respectively. A group of Fulbe women said that the person who lacks herds, food and clothes, and who is not in good health is poor. A poor family has nothing and even if someone helps them they will be negligent; children cry and everything is sad there. In addition to these general characteristics evoked by most informants, a man said that a poor person is lonely with his poverty. A group of Bella women similarly suggested that the worst off among the poor is the orphan who lacks affection from his/her family and stands without advice and wealth. Poverty may also relate to domestic cycles of the household. An informant said that having many children meant both poverty and wealth. He explained that young children implied ex-penses and illness, but if they reached a mature age they would become wealth. While for most informants poverty is the lack of essential things, such as good health, food, herds and clothing, the lack of money was not always evoked as a specific characteristic of poverty. Common to these perceptions is that the capacity to leave the state of poverty is constrained by the absence of these things. The

Fulfulde words used to describe poverty are *talka* ('poverty') and *mwala* ('lack'). An informant said, "the head of poverty is illness".

Although analytically the opposite of poverty is not wealth, but non-poverty, in focus group interviews wealth was described as opposed to poverty. The person who possesses herds, food, goods and money is rich. A male elder of the Gaoube group, being transhumant pastoralists, suggested that cattle, sheep, goats, donkeys and drome-daries are wealth. "That is the wealth of people of the bush". He did not even mention money. According to another group of men, wealth is money, fields, herds and knowledge. In particular, knowledge is to know how to read and write, to have the capacity to remember the past and to know how to live with other people. Interestingly, this concept of knowledge (*andal* in Fulfulde) includes literacy, memory and vivacity as well as social skills. Formerly, the rich person was the pillar of the village and supported other people and could even give them a small herd and thereby give them access to milk. "The rich person had pity for the poor". Today, however, most informants hold that the rich do not offer anything to other people. They only earn money for themselves. The moral and social obligation of the rich is revealed in all statements:

> The truth is that today people are rich. There are goods. But if you go to the rich to solve a problem, the rich person will receive you and let you expose it. You will reveal all your secrets [about your poverty]. But in the end the rich will not give you anything. He will say that you have come at a bad moment and that he has nothing. Thus you were sure to solve your problem, but now the problem is made public and yet it is not solved.

Thus people perceive the lack of morality of present-day rich people. Yesterday's rich emerges as a big man who would help people and thereby gain influence. This idea relates to political leadership, be-cause the village chief always had the possibility to help someone in

need. People offered him a proportion of the harvest and this would be used to receive guests and also to support those in trouble. If this was not sufficient the chief could ask all villagers to contribute. But today people give the chief less than they did before. The village chief is still seen as the link between the Emir and the population. Formerly, the Emir had fields that he could lend out to poor people and people paid the tribute (*diim*) to the Emir. The system of *diim* has now been abolished. Yet patron-client relations continue to be central in regional politics. Lund reports that people in villages and in Dori recognised the capacity of patrons in Dori to protect their clients.

> Being a client is not a bad deal in view of the possible alternative: not being someone's client, which exposes one to the predatory actions of others who enjoy protection and back-up from their patrons. (Lund 1999:23)

The fieldwork in the Dori region revealed the importance of what people refer to as 'rural exodus'. Young people leave to work in the Ivory Coast or to go to the cities. There are also gold findings in the region, which provide other options for people as well. Yet migrants continue to support their family at home. Rural exodus may be linked to poverty in the village, but it also stresses the capacity to act and thus to leave. In this vein, migration is a livelihood strategy in that certain members of the family leave to search for a better life elsewhere. During years of drought, as in 1984, many people left with large herds and returned later with only a few head.

The Dori region provides a contrasting example to the Banfora and Réo regions, because the Dori region is composed of sparsely populated drylands. There is a rural exodus of people leaving the countryside for the southern parts of Burkina, and for towns and cities. Informants clearly stated that cattle are wealth, a finding which fits well with other studies of this region. Paul Riesman, who worked in the Djibo area in the 1960s and 1970s, suggested that cattle enable

Fulbe to live as Fulbe. Cattle contribute to human survival, but are above all a form of wealth. "Wealth is important in FulBe society not because it enables one to live better in terms of comfort, good food, fine clothes, etc., but because it enables one to accomplish all sorts of socially admired actions" (Riesman 1990:327). Here wealth relates to social performance. Poverty is revealed by inferior social perform-ance; the poor person is lonely and without family. Adding to the lack of capacity to work the poor person is perceived as someone unable to perform socially admired actions.

To conclude, the non-monetary notions of poverty are particu-larly striking. Morality is also stressed in that the rich are expected to perform moral and social actions to help the poor. But today, people complain, the rich do not 'see' the poor any longer. In the Dori region people are also well aware that drought may occur and throw many into poverty.

The Ouagadougou Region: The Politics of Urban Land

In this section, processes of urbanisation are particularly studied. People move from the countryside to towns and cities.[13] The relation-ship between poverty and access to residential land is a common predicament among poor urban dwellers. The fourth study site was selected to represent the margins of the urban environment, in par-ticular in the capital Ouagadougou. Urban growth is a complex phenomenon in many African cities and Ouagadougou is no excep-

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[13] Fieldwork was carried out during one week in Bendogho, a zone in the process of becoming part of urban planning, and, to a lesser extent, in St. Léon, an old 'poor' section in the centre of Ouagadougou in March 2000. Two male field assistants worked with me in this study site. During fieldwork individual interviews were conducted randomly with people in the neighbourhood complemented with specific interviews with key informants such as the traditional chief, the administrative representative and the general secretary at the Mayor's office. I have also taken cognisance of some other studies carried out in Ouagadougou (Gomgnimbou *et al.* 1999; Kinda 1995; Sanou 1992, 1993; Thylefors 1995; van Dijk 1986).

tion. People enter the capital for various reasons, but common to all is the struggle for better living conditions.

While Ouagadougou had 442,000 inhabitants in 1985, the 1996 census counted 710,000 inhabitants in the city of Ouagadougou and almost one million for the Kadiogo Province (INSD 1988; INSD 1998). In the 1990s the city has become construction area (*chantier*) but also a site for production and commercialisation of local material (Kinda 1995). Marginal areas at the fringes grow fast. There people make bricks for house building, break stones for construction and do petty trade. These poor men, women and children who live at the outskirts of Ouagadougou and work within the so-called 'informal sector' are simultaneously linked to the infrastructural investments of the city. Bendogho is one such marginal area located close to the national road 4 to Fada N'Gourma. Bendogho is classified as a zone *non-lotie*, that is, an area which is not yet included in the urban area. Land is thus not distributed according to state law. Instead land distribution passes through the traditional Mossi chief, the Naba. Yet Bendogho is under way to become part of the urban area. The over-whelming majority of informants were of the ethnic group Mossi.

In Mooré (the language of the Mossi) the word used for poverty is *talga*. Like the Fulfulde word *talaka*, it is of Arabic origin. The poor person is one who does not possess anything and who is suffering. The poor has 'small eyes' (*nimbaneda*), that is, the poor makes you feel pity. People generally argued that those who have no employment are poor. Housing is another indicator of poverty. A 25-year-old woman stated: "the poor has no food, is badly clothed, and everything is in disorder". While employment and housing were strongly empha-sised in the interviews, poverty is also expressed by the lack of desired social performances. The poor person cannot get married but can only invoke the mercy of God. Another characteristic of the poor is de-pendence; the poor must rely on the support of other people. The sick

person is the most poor: "When you have good health you may always hope".

Formerly, poverty was the result of bad harvests, hardship to get food and no herds. The poor lived in disorder and they were dirty. The poor were characterised by total absence of good things. For the informants, of whom many originate from villages, poverty was, in sum, linked to the hardship of farming. Today, however, housing has become important. The house is an asset and an indicator of prosperity/poverty. Some also suggested that the means of transport are essential to present-day life. A bicycle or a motorbike might provide the means by which poverty is alleviated for the individual. Many informants emphasised the need for money to buy food and medicine.

Informants stressed that those who live decently earn sufficiently to feed themselves and pay housing, bills and other expenses. They constitute the goal for poor people, because the rich often remain unreachable to them. The rich person is 'the owner of force' (*pangsoaba*) or 'the owner of money' (*ligdsoaba*). In describing the rich the informants tended to paint an ideal picture; rich people have villas, cars and even airplanes. In a rich family, all people eat well and are happy, except in cases of illness. The rich may even take care of his/her extended family: "The rich may even buy motorbikes for his/her nephews and cousins".

A main problem, raised by the informants, was the urban parcelling of Bendogho. People see this as a way to get infrastructure investments, because the state administration is reluctant to invest in areas where traditional land management prevails. Running water, sanitation and roads are regarded as priorities. Legally, the urban parcelling implies that the area will move from the current situation in which access to and distribution of land passes through the traditional chief to a modern management regime under the auspices of the municipality. Thus Bendogho is on its way to become integrated into the Ouagadougou city scheme. Until recently a person who wanted to

settle in Bendogho went to the village chief. The person could get a piece of land by giving a cock, cola-nuts and the local sorghum beer *dolo* for sacrifices. According to the village chief in question, "with the modern world", money entered this circuit. With urban parcelling the traditional authority of the village chief would pave the way for the municipality. Interestingly, the village chief did not oppose this, because it would bring 'development' and at least partly because he is also one of the municipal advisors. According to a representative of the municipality (Arrondissement de Nongrmassom), in Bendogho "it is the population and not the state that has demanded and paid this parcelling".

In practice, the operation of urban parcelling is a complicated bureaucratic process. A census was first carried out of all residents living in the area. Later, three different categories of inhabitants/residents were defined: Category A (the house is inhabited by its owner and is appropriate for living); Category X (the house is appropriate for living but not inhabited by its owner); and Category D (the house is inappropriate or just a hut). People classified in category A would first get a plot and then those of category X. However, people in category D will not be able to get a plot. Each resident of A and X should pay a fee – 35,000 FCFA for Category A and 50,000 FCFA for Category X – to get the receipt (a small piece of paper) with the category and the number. But as land speculation is increasing many people in need of money have started to sell their receipt to merchants and government officials. They thereby sell their right to a plot. Merchants are willing to pay for such a 'paper' in order to sell the land right later to people from elsewhere (e.g. government officials).

The operation of urban parcelling divided the area into 8,058 plots, each of a surface area of 210-300 m². Yet according to the census there are 13,059 residents who should be granted a plot. Thus 5,000 plots are lacking to satisfy the need (and the right) of all the residents. Therefore the municipality has started to negotiate with the

neighbouring Saaba Department to get an additional number of plots; 10,000 plots will be added to satisfy the need of those who have not yet been granted any plot and of those who inhabit the new area of the Saaba Department now. However, if important investments are planned by the state administration, these people are likely to be the first to lose their plots.[14]

The issue of housing is a central concern to many people. On the fringes of Ouagadougou people struggle to erect a rudimentary house so as to be ensured that they will fall into categories A and X when the parcel operation is initiated. Drinking water is another crucial problem to the area as well as schooling and other infrastructure investments. There is only one pump in Bendogho, a fact which raises tensions between queuing women. Yet it is not likely that major infrastructure investments will be done unless the urban parcelling is finished. The message of the state administration is that land first must be classified as 'modern'. In fact the argument for urban parcelling is that the area should develop. The French notion *la mise en valeur* ('to develop') is central in this regard.

In the centre of Ouagadougou the situation is radically different. In the old sections of the capital sanitation poses serious problems. Water, electricity and other facilities exist, but many people cannot afford them. In addition, people may rent a room in which a whole family will live. The dream for such people is to get a plot. Residents in Bendogho, who will hopefully acquire a plot during the year to come, might be seen as 'better off', compared to those who live in a rented room in a courtyard in the centre of Ouagadougou.

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[14] There is an important debate in Ouagadougou with respect to the compulsory relocation of former residents of the area, which gave place to the luxury villas of Ouaga 2000 (*Le Pays* 14 March 2000:3-6; *Journal du Jeudi* 9-15 March 2000:2; *L'Observateur Paalga* 23 March 2000:6). An audit has recently scrutinised the urban parcelling of Bogodogo, Boulmiougou, Nongrmassom and Signonghin (*L'Observateur Paalga* 18 April 2001).

The short fieldwork did not allow any deeper inquiry of various forms of urban social and economic self-help associations so common elsewhere. Women and men originating from one region often form different associations to support the members for social events (marriage, baptism and burial) and for petty trade and other income generating activities. However, interviews in Bendogho suggested that the residents, at least at the moment, rather focus their attention on the distribution of parcels in order to get a piece of land.

To conclude, the transition from traditional land distribution to a modern one – in other words, from non-state normative order to state law – opens up land speculation and politics of increasing inclusion and exclusion. The urban parcelling is a way by which the state may invest in an area; it thereby becomes 'modern'. Drinking water, schools, sanitation and other infrastructure investments require a parcelling of land. The residents have priority to access these plots, but poor people often find themselves confronted with immediate problems to solve. Hence many sell their plot to rich merchants and salaried persons, who thereby get access to urban land.

In this chapter I have tried to represent the voices and realities of the poor. I have sought to analyse contexts, situations and relations with which poor people are confronted. Although some general patterns might be recognised with respect to the ways by which 'the poor' perceive poverty, the point has been to provide examples of such contexts rather than to pretend to outline any statistically representative sample. The reason is that statistics have been overemphasised in poverty assessments, while poverty analyses based on qualitative data are still largely absent in Burkina. Beyond poor people's perceptions, it is also important to take a closer look at different 'sectors of poverty' in a more general sense. Poverty is not merely a concept by which to describe a certain human condition. It is also a highly politicised concept employed in development discourse. In Burkina poverty

assessments have been conducted in different sectors in order to better understand its dynamics, e.g. poverty and natural resources, as well as poverty and education. In Chapter Five the analysis of 'sectors of poverty' seeks to elicit poor people's realities in respect of national and international intervention.

5 Sectors of Poverty

This chapter describes different 'sectors of poverty' and how these are shaped in present-day Burkina Faso. While my ambition in Chapter Four was to voice poor people's perceptions of poverty, here the purpose is to bring in a more general analysis of poverty and particularly to investigate how poor people's perspectives relate to different sectors. The expression 'sectors of poverty' is consciously provocative; it aims to remind us that poverty is part of development discourse. Poverty may be used to justify external interventions in one setting or to excuse bad practice in another. Hence there is a bureaucratic logic that frames the ways in which poverty is understood and in extension combated.

Five different 'sectors of poverty' are analysed here: 1) Rural livelihoods and the environment; 2) Economic and political reforms; 3) Decentralisation; 4) Education and training; and 5) Health and social services. Gender relations are important in all 'sectors of poverty'; a specific study on gender and poverty in Burkina has been carried out (Nioumou et al. 1997), based on the Priority Survey (INSD 1996a). In Chapter Six I will then look into specific initiatives undertaken to combat poverty at various levels of society.

Rural Livelihoods and the Environment

Farming and herding are the main activities on which people in Burkina Faso subsist. Figures differ and are often uncertain, but the vast majority of people (some estimates say 73 percent, others more than 80 percent) reside in the countryside. Rain-fed agriculture domi-

nates, which exposes people's livelihoods to uncertainties. Droughts and processes of land degradation imply that people are continuously coping with uncertain and uneven rainfall. Access to resources in the rural areas goes through diverse and often overlapping social institutions. Shifting patterns of access to and control over resources have been changing particularly during the twentieth century (Berry 1993; Birgegård 1993), and the establishment of formal rights have often favoured the powerful at the expense of people with secondary rights, e.g. women, herders etc. (Shipton & Goheen 1992). In Burkina Faso, the legacy of French colonialism continues to influence both 'traditional' notions of land-use and postcolonial land reforms. In practice, the Land and Tenure Reorganisation (RAF) has often been interpreted locally as meaning that 'Burkina belongs to everybody', and it has thus been used to legitimise actions which put traditional notions of land access aside (Hagberg 1998a:220-223). The *de facto* control over resources rather than *de jure* ownership is central to understanding the effects on poverty.

Current thinking on how to promote sustainable livelihoods places people and the priorities they define firmly at the centre of analysis (Ashley & Carney 1999). In Burkina Faso, most development programmes are labelled 'participatory'. The national programme for land management (*gestion des terroirs*), which advocates the *approche terroir*, is based on participatory development. Yet it has been convincingly demonstrated that *approche terroir* could hardly be seen as compatible with the realities that people in rural communities face everyday. "The notions of space, limits and control that are at the heart of the concept *terroir* are implicitly those associated with sedentary populations living in stable village settings" (Painter et al. 1994:450; see also Engberg-Petersen 1995). Features related to social differentiation, mobility and diversification, which all constitute key dimensions of rural livelihoods, are thus excluded.

Female access to landed resources is limited. A woman may gain access to a piece of land 'in the name' of a man (her husband or brother), but not with any lasting rights. This does not *per se* mean that women are insecure in terms of tenure (Hagberg 1995b). But given the fact that women are, in addition, obliged to work most of the time on their husbands' fields, they do not control their own labour to any large extent. Heavy and time consuming domestic tasks diminish rural women's opportunities to access resources. The division of labour often excludes women from other activities such as animal husbandry. The raising of pigs among Nuna and Lyela populations is for example a female activity *per se*, but women are excluded from cattle and sheep keeping. Fulbe women, on the other hand, own animals themselves, but their father and/or brothers maintain the management responsibility for the herd.

The environment code, to be implemented since 1997, defines the environment as "the ensemble of physical, chemical and biological elements, natural or artificial, and the economic, social, political and cultural factors that have an effect on the process of maintaining life, the transformation or development of the milieu, the resources, natural or not, and the human activities" (Burkina Faso 1997:6, translation mine). Accordingly, environmental concerns are intertwined with questions of how to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the Burkinabe, without comprising the capacity to satisfy future genera-tions' needs. Forests are characterised by wooded savannah and approximately 14 percent (3.8 millions ha) of them are classified as national parks (390,000 ha), game reserves (2,545,000 ha) and forest reserves (880,000 ha) (PNUD 1999:170). Environmental conditions differ particularly between the north and the south. Three different agro-ecological zones are usually distinguished. The southern Suda-nian zone presents the greatest potentials of natural resources (forests, water and land) with annual rainfall of 900-1,000 mm. This means that the zone has assets of national importance in terms of food secu-

rity and rural production more generally. Migratory movements towards the south have contributed to increase pressure on these resources. The northern Sudanian zone is mainly composed of the *Plateau Mossi* (that is, the central plateau of the country) with a high population density. Rainfall is normally 700-800 mm. Many people migrate southwards from this region and to the Ivory Coast to improve their livelihoods. The Sahelian zone is characterised by relatively low population density with annual rainfall of 500-700 mm (PNUD 1999; Profil Environnemental 1994). Environmental degradation is closely linked to people's capacity to combat poverty in the rural area.

The interpretation of migratory movements towards the southern parts of the country requires much caution. On the one hand, people migrate to settle in areas with better rainfall and more fertile land. They move from the drylands in the upper north, especially since the droughts of 1969-73 and 1984-5. But people's coping with uncertainty and temporary migration is, on the other hand, a well-known livelihood strategy. The southward migration is nothing new and, consequently, doomsday scenarios should be critically examined in the light of research findings. Solid and empirically grounded analyses rather than broad generalisations are needed to understand these migratory movements. An example of sweeping generalisations is a study carried out on the relationship between people's poverty and their behaviour towards natural resources (Yaméogo 1999). The study, which was conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of Environment and Water, sets out to explain that inapt farming practices, bush fires and animal divagation threaten the environment. The surface of usable farmland was estimated to almost nine million ha in 1994, or about 32 percent of the national territory. Land actually under cultivation is about 3.5 million and of these only 21,000 ha were irrigated (Yaméogo 1999:9). Deforestation provides a main challenge; some figures indicate that up to 32,000 ha of the forests are cleared each year. The study of poverty and natural resource use identifies two

types of factors in natural resource degradation: first, natural factors such as rainfall and soil erosion; and second, human factors, notably farming techniques, human and animal pressure on resources and ritual usage of bush fire (Yaméogo 1999:12). The degradation of natural resources has serious consequences for people's livelihoods. The study makes a list of negative consequences for food security, income, migration and health, but it is hardly convincing. Migration is, once again, portrayed as an essentially evil phenomenon, which must be controlled. Similarly, transhumance is linked to environmental degradation (Yaméogo 1999:15), but no convincing argument whatsoever is presented.

There is certainly a complex relationship between natural resource degradation and people's poverty, but it is a simplification and all too often erroneous to blame poor people for this. Cotton cropping is maybe the best example of how strong political and economic interests in terms of export income favour degradation of natural resources. To rural people, the environment represents, *inter alia*, symbolic conceptions, political forces, historical memories and economic and ecological resources. Thus environmental problems cannot be addressed as purely ecological problems, because the environmental impact and social impact of, for instance, deforestation is not easily distinguished. But to do this a far better understanding of rural people's livelihoods is needed than the one presented in the above-mentioned poverty and environment assessment.

Economic and Political Reforms

Important macro-economic reforms have been carried out as part of the structural adjustment programmes. Yet unlike many other African countries, Burkina Faso had an experience of self-adjustment in the 1980s. In 1991, the country signed an agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and thereby wiped out its rebellious reputation

since the 1980s (Zagré 1994). According to the UNDP, annual growth between 1991 and 1997 was 3.9 percent. Good harvests and an increasing cotton price have certainly favoured this, but it is difficult to estimate the effect of structural adjustment *per se* (PNUD 1999:50-51). The 50 percent devaluation of FCFA in January 1994 changed the conditions for commercial activities. The rising costs of imported goods not only increased demand for domestic products, but traders consequently adjusted the prices. Burkina Faso relies on international aid, due to the fact that domestic savings (public and private) remain weak. In 1997, aid represented 24 percent of GDP (PNUD 1999:51). The impact of macro-economic reforms on poverty is discussed in the UNDP-report and this subject is beyond the scope of this study. However, a general impression is that political issues are avoided in speaking about these reforms. For instance, the land and tenure reform (RAF) is promoted as bringing security to farmers and other users, but so far it has rather created confusion and allowed for bypassing traditional institutions such as the Master of the Earth (cf. Hagberg 1998a, 2001). In most policy documents it is as if development is a technical rather than a political enterprise.

Economic and political reforms might look gender neutral, but they affect women and men differently. While the fuel wood price affects men's woodcutting, women gather wood for domestic consumption. Increased food prices may also hit women because they are responsible for the cooking. After the 50 percent devaluation in 1994, it was clear that the ingeniousness of many urban women was what made ends meet for households. But if women may have access to some resources, formal political decision-making is traditionally reserved for men. There are almost no female traditional chiefs, nor official female village representatives (*responsable administratif villageois*). Women may nonetheless make their voices heard through a women's representative, and in economic decision-making, women often have significant influence. In particular, the many female traders

manage their money independently without any formal claims by their husbands. Another example is beer brewing. In villages, a woman brewing the traditional beer *dolo* may not allow her husband to drink unless he pays!

Poor people, especially in urban areas, perceive lack of employment as a central dimension of poverty; urban unemployment is estimated to about 15 percent (Kaboré et al. 1997; Lachaud 1997). Underemployment is important in rural areas, because rural producers tend to be underemployed in the dry season. The vulnerability of the youth is particularly accentuated here. Access to employment is determined by three central elements: first, technical and professional competence; second, the circulation of information of available employment; and third, availability of active producers (PNUD 1999:87-88). Informal sector employment is by far the most important; a young boy may be employed as a salaried herder for 5,000 FCFA per month, and a girl may leave school to work as a maid for food, shelter and between 3,500-5,000 FCFA per month (PNUD 1999:89). The fact that the minimum guaranteed salary is 1,045 FCFA per day has no implications for these people.

Access to employment often passes through family and kin networks. A younger brother of an already employed person may be taken as a volunteer at a work place. Such networks border on corruption and nepotism, but are not necessarily perceived as such. Instead kin relations are seen as a resource as good as any other. In western Burkina, the Mossi are generally said to have 'long arms', that is, they maintain contacts high up in the state administration (cf. Hagberg forthcoming).

Since the adoption of the constitution of the Fourth Republic in June 1991, Burkina Faso has engaged a democratisation process. Multi-party elections have been organised: presidential elections in 1991 and 1998, legislative elections in 1992 and 1997 and municipal elections in 1995 and in 2000. There are up to 60 political parties,

many which have formed larger alliances and coalitions. The *Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès* (CDP) is the majority coalition, supporting President Compaoré and the government. The CDP occupies 101 out of 111 seats in the National Assembly. The so-called moderate opposition includes the Green Party of Ram Ouédraogo and the Refusal Front of Fréderic Guirma (ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs). The radical opposition is commonly referred to as the *Groupe du 14 février*. Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo and lawyer Hermann Yaméogo are some of its leading figures. The Human Rights Movement (MDHB), in particular through its president Halidou Ouédraogo, has come to occupy a strong political position as the main organisation in the Collective of democratic mass organisations and political parties, created after the murder of the journalist Norbert Zongo in December 1998.[15] Relations are strained between the social and political opposition, and the government, but this has also led to important steps forward of democratisation process. For instance, a proportional election system has been suggested to replace the prevailing majority system.

Notwithstanding political debates and independent newspapers, a main challenge is how to involve more people in the political process. All newspapers are in French and targeted on the literate few. The majority of non-French speakers and readers cannot follow the national political debates, except through broadcasts in national languages (basically Fulfulde, Dyula and Mooré). While the state-owned radio may to some extent broadcast voices of the political opposition, it remains under government control. The participation of poor people in the political system is most often reduced to campaigns and meetings organised for coming elections. Food, money and campaign items (T-shirts, caps) are distributed to villagers. In 1995, I

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[15] This umbrella organisation is called *Collectif des organisations démocratiques de masse et des partis politiques* and is the organisational expression of the movement 'Trop c'est trop' (Ouédraogo 1999).

asked a group of male elders in a village about political parties. An old man made the following statement:

> We do not know what politics is. As we live far away [from the city], we have not had the chance to have children becoming state agents. We did not vote in municipal elections [in February 1995]. You know, we eat if the political parties come here to talk with us. But we are not here to vote.

Similarly, a poor friend of mine without any modern schooling whatsoever, acquired membership cards of several political parties prior to the elections in 1991. The point for him was to be able to show the card of the winning party after the elections and thereby ensure the support from politically influential people. Although it may be argued that these examples paint an overly dark picture, they nonetheless highlight the dilemma of poor people's participation in political processes. In Burkina, it is commonly acknowledged that elections are won on the countryside, where the majority of people live. But power is to be lost in town, where the politically influent and well-articulated population reside.

Decentralisation

It is often assumed that decentralisation is a way to promote good governance, in the sense that it implies the transfer of power and resources to local constituencies to be administered by elected authorities. Politically, decentralisation aims to institutionalise proximity politics, that is, people should be enabled to participate more in decision-making processes. Decentralisation is currently part and parcel of the development discourse and strongly supported by international donors.

Burkina has opted for a decentralisation in 'small steps' (*à petits pas*), that is, a progressive implementation. Municipal elections were

held in February 1995. In September 2000 the second municipal elections were organised. The presidential movement won with 879 council places against 209 for the opposition. The overwhelming majority (44) of the 49 fully independent municipalities was won by the presidential movement. The opposition won in Koudougou, Houndé and Batié. In Boulsa and in Boromo each movement got 50 percent. In 1998, the National Assembly adopted legislative texts, which aimed to formalise the decentralisation process. With the explicit purpose of reinforcing the capacities of local constituencies to intervene, these texts focus on the orientation of decentralisation, the organisation of the territory, the organisation and functioning of local constituencies and the implementation of decentralisation. The overall goal is to incite social and economic development and democracy by means of decentralisation (PNUD 1999).

It is obvious that much remains to be done in the field of decentralisation. The rhetorically loaded jargon of decentralisation still has to be translated into concrete activities and effective participation. The relationship between locally legitimate institutions, and the constituencies created by decentralisation, needs careful attention (cf. Konaté & Sanou 1995; Laurent 1995; Sebahara 2000). The strongly hierarchical administrative system is not easily transformed to one of locally based development and administration. A well-positioned local government official said that decentralisation must be 'framed to avoid anarchy'. But the problem is the extent to which local constituencies will be granted real decision-making power or not.

> For local Burkinabe collectivities to become *fers de lance* in the combat against poverty and promoters of a local development reducing the poverty phenomenon, it is indispensable that the central state accepts to play through the decentralisation game, that the process is accompanied by an effective transfer of human, material and financial resources, without which the intervention capacities of local collectivities would be reduced. (PNUD 1999:75, translation mine)

The UNDP-report adds that three main principles have been included in the texts adopted in 1998: the subsidiary principle (the state intervenes only if local constituencies cannot accomplish the mission); the repartition of competence; and the concomitance of transfers of resources and competences.

The linkage between decentralisation and poverty reduction needs to be further explored. On the basis of case-studies carried out in Mozambique, Ethiopia and Guinea-Conakry, a recent report points out that decentralisation is a highly politicised process. While some political actors see decentralisation as part of a patrimonial agenda aimed at preserving the monopoly of power and ensuring control over resources, others pursue reformist objectives aimed at creating more transparency, accountability and efficiency in the management of local affairs (de Jong, Loquai & Soiri 1999:5). This conclusion fits well with debates on decentralisation in Burkina. Whereas it is a positive step to move modern politics closer to local constituencies, nothing guarantees that local elites should be more apt to take poor people's views into account. The politics of urban land management elaborated in the previous chapter clearly illustrates the difficulties involved in ensuring that the residents have access to plots of land.

Education and Training

According to the INSD-study of poverty and education, 31.5 percent of seven-year-old children are admitted to primary school. Children of non-poor are three times more likely to attend school than those of the poor. Only 19 percent of poor people's children attend school at seven (Bayala et al. 1997; Kaboré et al. 1999). Differences in school attendance are great between children in rural (25.4 percent) and urban (72.6 percent) areas. Nationally, two main motives of non-schooling are identified: the high costs and the refusal of parents. There exist variations between different regions. Lack of infrastructure was also

mentioned. In the northern region 17 percent considered that school-ing was not necessary. Access to education and training is different for boys and girls. In the urban area, 67.4 percent of all 'active women' remain without any modern education whatsoever; the figure for the boys is high but less striking (47.6 percent). In the rural area the figures are 95 percent and 85.3 percent respectively (INSD 1996b:164).

Drop-outs are common in the transition from primary to secon-dary education. More than half of the pupils from last year of primary education do not enter into secondary school and as much as 75 percent of poor pupils drop out. The net secondary schooling (primary and secondary) intake is estimated to 11.3 percent; more than 96 percent of poor boys and 98 percent of poor girls do not go to secon-dary school (Bayala et al. 1997). High costs and parents' refusal appear as the main motives for non-schooling of children. Non-poor pupils in the rural areas do not attend school, for reasons of parents' refusal or because it is not seen as necessary. Further statistics could be cited, but the tendency is clear: the level of schooling remains extremely low.

People who do not send their children to school cannot solely be regarded as 'ignorant', but might have made a rational choice. While some would see school as a threat to identity and traditional values, others would consider that the children's labour is needed for the family to subsist. Fulbe informants in Sidéradougou (in the Banfora region) told me at several occasions that the Fulbe do not go to school. When the White colonialists wanted children for the schools, the Fulbe sent their 'slaves' – that is, the former captives the Rimaibe – to school. The Fulbe children stayed outside the modern education. Today, however, they see that their 'slaves' have become government officials and that their own interests are not defended.

There are reasons to reflect upon other constraints. One reason is that unemployment is common even among youth who have spent

years in school. The economic incentive to send children to school is thus less convincing today. A main problem is that many children who go to school do not return to farm work. To send children to school might constitute a double loss: first they cannot participate in farming and herding and thus contribute to subsistence, and second they might not be able to get a job after school but are unwilling to farm again. Another reason is that modern education is conducted in French, the official language, which is not spoken by most people. When children come to school they have first to learn French before they can proceed to other subject matters. There are a few interesting experiences of primary school in national languages.

A main approach to promote schools in local languages was for a long time the training of young farmers (*Formation des Jeunes Agriculteurs*). Centres were established to carry out 'alphabetisation' with drop-outs from school and provide them with 'functional knowledge' related to rural life. They were trained in modern farming practices and rudimentary book keeping. This approach to train future 'modern farmers' has, for various reasons, not produced the expected outcome. Today village groups appear to take a stronger responsibility in alphabetisation. For instance, in the village of Noumoudara (20 km south of Bobo-Dioulasso) fifty female farmers have in recent years been trained in reading and writing in the lingua franca Dyula.

The Koranic schools represent another schooling in line with local Muslim moral and educational values. In particular, the Franco-Arabic schools seek to integrate Muslim teaching with knowledge in French. It provides an interesting compromise between modern education and Islamic teaching, in particular for many Fulbe. For instance, the only two Fulbe who speak rudimentary French in the village of Djalakoro, where I have worked for long time, have both attended the Franco-Arabic school.

The Islamic *marabouts* are another category of teachers. The *marabout* is a religious leader and a cleric, who possesses exceptional

spiritual powers (*baraka*). Healing, magic and divination are important parts of Islam practised in Burkina and in many other parts of West Africa as well. Most persons consult *marabouts* for cures, to obtain protective amulets, to learn about the future or ways to obtain favourable treatment in business or legal affairs. In general, the West African Sufi brotherhoods are based on the strong link between the disciple and his religious leader, the latter being the intermediary in the disciple's search for *baraka* (Evers Rosander 1997:4). In practice, the *marabout* often gathers a group of young boys around him, to whom he teaches the Quran. These boys (*garibu* in Dyula) pass most of the day begging for food and money, the latter which they should bring back to the *marabout*.

Health and Social Services

Despite important progress since independence in 1960, the health situation in Burkina is worrying. Between 1960 and 1993 life expectancy increased from 32 years to 52.2 years, general mortality decreased from 32‰ to 16.5‰ and infant-juvenile mortality from 300‰ to 185‰ (PNUD 1999:122). Infection and parasitic diseases, such as malaria, respiratory and skin diseases and diarrhoea, dominate. Deadly epidemics such as meningitis, cholera and yellow fever break out periodically. In 1996, more than 42,000 cases of meningitis caused 4,226 deaths. In 2001 a new meningitis epidemic broke out; in April, nearly 10,000 cases had been reported causing about 1,400 deaths. HIV/AIDS has had a rapid expansion. In 1994, it was estimated that there were 450,000 infected persons. National statistics indicate that seven percent of population is affected, but other figures suggest a higher rate. Certain provinces are estimated to have as many as 15 percent of the male sexually active population infected (PNUD 1999:123). Sensitisation campaigns are being conducted and the government speaks openly about HIV/AIDS.

Factors slowing any rapid improvement of people's health in-
clude population increase (partly due to early marriage), under-
equipped environmental sanitation (running water, housing), lack of
education and weak economic performance. The health system itself
also displays some insufficiencies. Less than 10 percent of the na-
tional budget is invested in health. There is a lack of infrastructure
(hospitals, equipment, training etc.) and personnel, in combination
with high costs of drugs. In 1995, there were 28,572 persons per
doctor and 12,879 persons per nurse.[16] The relationship between
poverty, famine and malnutrition is evident. People suffer from
famine and malnutrition because they are poor. Malnutrition, espe-
cially among children, contributes to reduce future productivity as
their physical and mental development is retarded (PNUD 1999:172-
173).

It is generally recognised that many health problems are gender
specific. Those related to child bearing are the most obvious, but there
are others as well. Male circumcision and female excision practices
have different health consequences. Female excision is forbidden by
law and combated through many sensitisation campaigns, but it is still
widely practised in Burkina, especially in rural areas.

The INSD-study of poverty and health sought to identify indi-
viduals' and households' health behaviour in order to have better
information on how to reduce poverty. In particular, households'
living conditions, children's health and access to health services
emerge as important variables (Ouédraogo et al. 1997). Crowded
housing and unhealthy environment are important factors for death
rates among the population. The healthiness of the immediate envi-
ronment is dependent on the mode of waste disposal, the type of
sanitation, the type of human excrements' disposal and the mode of
water provision for households. In rural areas, however, health be-

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[16] The recommended norms of the World Health Organisation are 10,000 persons per
doctor and 5,000 persons per nurse.

haviour is more homogeneous irrespective of wealth. In urban areas living standards are linked to environmental sanitation. Eighty-three percent of non-poor households have access to running water against 42 percent of poor households; 93 percent of non-poor households use WC or latrines, whereas 30 percent of poor urban households use 'nature'.

Morbidity levels were estimated from the proportion of individuals reported sick during a period of 30 days prior to the INSD-survey. Nationally, the morbidity level was 16 percent, but with important differences. In fact the level of morbidity increases with better living conditions: 25 percent for non-poor, 17 percent for the intermediate category and 11 percent for poor households. The reason seems to be that the rural poor have a tendency not to declare illness contrary to urban and non-poor households. This is because the former seek to live through the illness due to economic, social and cultural reasons (Ouédraogo et al. 1997). An underlying question is that the non-reporting indicates that illness is culturally constructed and thus difficult to define objectively; the same disease could be identified as 'fatigue' by one, 'illness' by a second and 'witchcraft' by a third. It happens that when children living in town go back to the father's or mother's village of origin they are called 'nivaquine-kids' by the villagers, that is, they need to take drugs against malaria. Another question is whether people in the village have better health. Although these different surveys identify rural people as the most poor ones, the lower morbidity levels among poor households would indicate a much more complex picture. While malaria is a disease which affects people all the year around in towns, in villages, malaria mosquitoes are often absent during the dry season. On the other hand rural people are prone to illness in rainy season, in particular in July and August before harvest. They work on their farms during this period and are often hungry. Children and old people are most seriously affected. In 1997 when famine struck in Négarpoulou, a village in Central-Western

Burkina, a woman told me that from July to September people sub-sisted solely on forest foods.

The INSD-study investigated child health by surveying cases of diarrhoea among children between 0 and 59 months during two weeks preceding the fieldwork. While about 26 percent of the children of poor and intermediate households had diarrhoea during the period, the ratio was 22 percent of non-poor households (Ouédraogo et al. 1997). Cases of diarrhoea and malnutrition were highlighted because of problems of weight, growth and emaciation are particularly important among these children. Regarding weight problems, boys are more affected than girls.

Several other aspects are analysed in the poverty and health study, which generally speaking contributes to improved understanding of health problems among the poor. But serious problems arise when different aspects are used for some general conclusions. Factors determining the presence of malnutrition are the disability of household head, levels of life (poor and intermediate), the sex of the child (boys), and the absence of modern education of the mother. The fact of having had diarrhoea increases likelihood for weight insufficiencies among children. "In addition, the fact for a child of being in a poor household, absence of modern education of the mother, animist beliefs, the fact of residing in the Northern region have a positive influence on appearance of retarded growth" (Ouédraogo et al. 1997:7, translation mine). This kind of reasoning falls back on the too broad and generalising categories employed by the Priority Survey. People's perceptions of illness are transformed into a definition of illness based on specific medical criteria without due attention to methodological considerations. The accumulation of single factors misrepresents the processes at work.

This objection does not deny health problems. Illness is common and statistics on health services are telling. Ninety-two percent of the households use health centres, but only 39 percent of the sick persons.

Several key factors, such as the distance, the means of transport and the capacity to pay drugs, influence the use of health centres. Medicines are regarded as expensive, which lead people to try other solutions first. Herbal medicine (*pharmacopée*) is developed and recognised officially. In Banfora the *Centre de Pharmacopée Traditionnelle* has, among others, succeeded in combining modern and herbalist treatments; its former head, Dr Dakuyo, is a renowned doctor nationally.

A specific study has been carried out to better understand urban poverty and access to basic social services (Sanou & Ouédraogo 1998). In the prices of October 1994, an urban poverty threshold was established at 106,249 FCFA per adult in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso and at 70,214 FCFA for other towns. Particular attention was paid to the level of access to basic social services such as health, education, housing, water provision and energy. Socio-economic characteristics of urban poverty include a high level of unemployment especially in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso (17 percent) and that more than half of all urban household heads have a professional status of independent non-farmers (Sanou & Ouédraogo 1998). However, 17.2 percent of urban-based household heads are food farmers. This fact highlights the importance of the urban-rural connections. Gender disaggregated statistics reveal important differences regarding employment opportunities. For example, while men dominate among well-educated staff in higher or middle level positions (around 85 percent men against 15 percent women), women dominate in trade (66.4 percent against 33.6 percent). Farmers, the far most important occupation, are estimated to be almost 50/50 between women and men.

It is important to underline that issues of health and social services, to a large extent involve not only financial and logistical aspects, but also cultural and social dimensions. Although appropriate curing is still needed, poor people's perceptions of illness should be central to
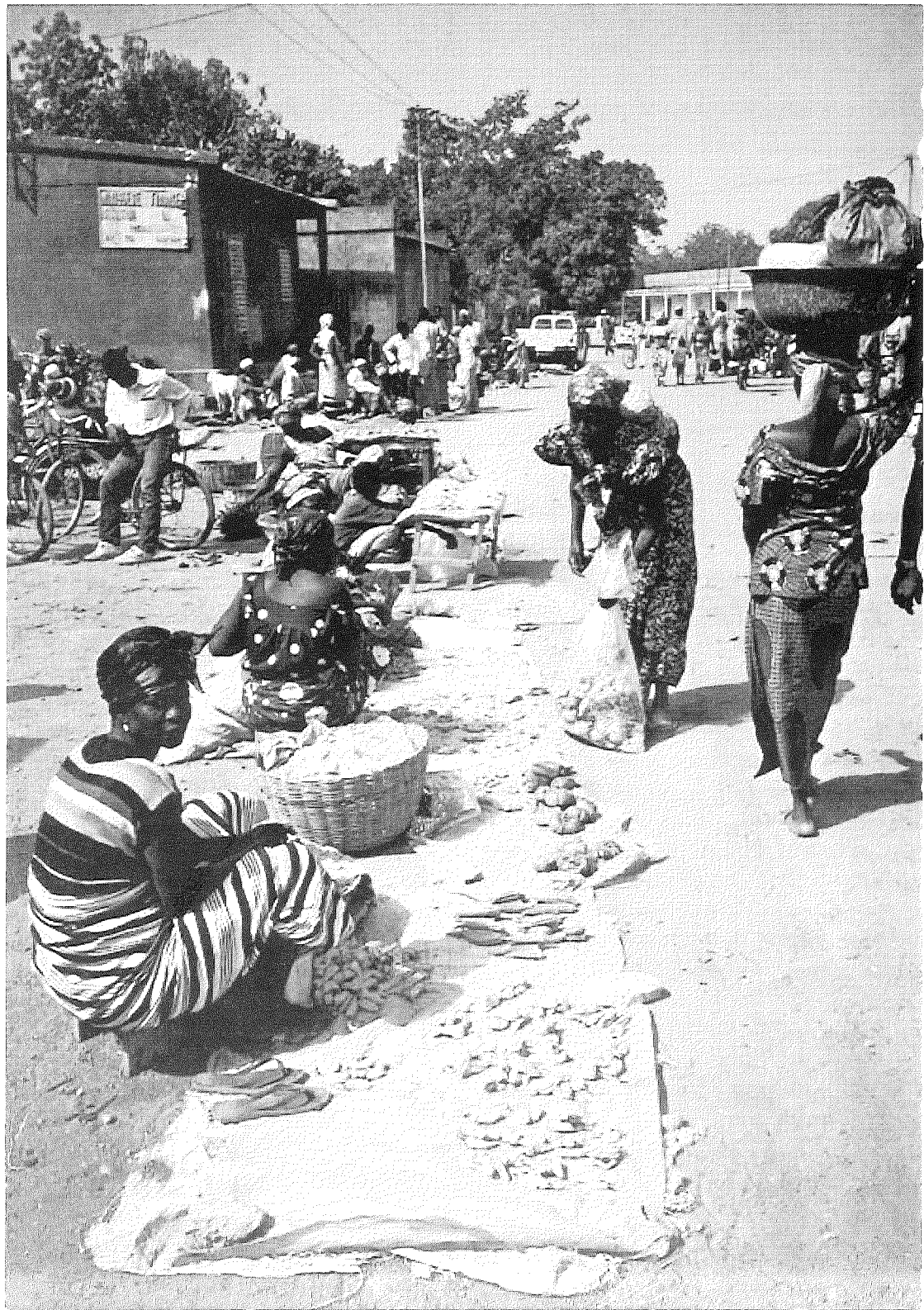
any health strategy. While some health problems may be defined as linked to a family crisis, people might explain others by reference to witchcraft. In general, however, people practise a combination of 'traditional' and 'modern' curing. People may first try to treat a disease 'in the African way' (e.g. *farafinya* in Dyula) and then turn to the 'White man's way' (*tubabuya*). While certain diseases cannot be treated by modern medicine, others are directly addressed by traditional curing.

Handicapped persons represent a social category which is particularly exposed to poverty (SIDA 1995). In Burkina, many beggars in towns and cities are physically disabled. Other handicapped persons work as guards of cars and moto-bikes outside bars, hotels and public services. Economic and social activities to integrate disabled persons into society are supported by organisations such as the *Être Comme Les Autres* (ECLA) and the Handicap International. The economic activities supported by ECLA seek to ensure a living and make people sustain themselves. The social activities require external support to be carried out (ECLA n.d.; Handicap International 1998).

A common conception of poverty, which has been apparent through the fieldwork is that the sick person is poor. This also includes the disabled. The point is, once again, that the poor person lacks the capacity to work and thus to escape poverty. Hence even the materially rich may through illness or accident succumb to poverty.

To sum up this chapter, in which different 'sectors of poverty' have been addressed, it seems appropriate to say that although many studies have been conducted, the dynamics of poor people's initiatives to combat poverty is hardly ever included. Initiatives to struggle for a better life have either been approached through government strategies, or through the activities of NGOs with varying degrees of satisfactory implementation. The scope of this study is far too broad to make a substantial contribution in this regard, but in the next chapter I will

seek to identify some of the strategies that poor people themselves adopt in the struggle for a better life.

6 Initiatives to Combat Poverty

This chapter primarily describes initiatives undertaken by poor people in various contexts, situations and relations. It begins at the individual and household levels and moves on to kinship, neighbourhood and other social networks. I shall then discuss socio-political structures and their role in combating poverty and also include more formal organisations. Some examples of regional development efforts, such as the Naam-movement and the pastoral APESS, are described. The chapter finally discusses national and international programmes launched to combat poverty.

Individual and Household levels

In line with poor people's perceptions of poverty, to fight against it is first and foremost to act. The lazy and the sick are unwilling or unable to end their poverty, "the sick [person] is the head of poverty". People must also struggle with irregular rainfall. The fear of drought is of such importance that people tend to avoid pronouncing the word 'drought'. Instead many informants said, "you are poor if you farm throughout the year without harvesting anything".

In rural areas, farming and herding are seen as principal ways to combat poverty. People grow food and try to sell some of the harvest. Some informants were more explicit, mentioning different crops. Maize is often highly ranked because it is the first crop harvested. It ends the period of hunger. A way to combat poverty is to migrate. "The person who is not harvesting well might flee to the Ivory Coast, Ghana or to Ouagadougou and then return and buy food. He who is

moving is chasing poverty". Young people also migrate in search for a more independent life, away from social obligations at home. The Fulbe herders who work for herd owners in the south often seek to build a herd of their own. The Lyela women who search for *nyo* – the forest food of crucial importance during famine – certainly play a key role. The list of examples is not exhaustive, but the important point is to take into account that poor people have several coping strategies, including farming and herding.

Rural people also rely on people residing outside the homestead. It is therefore questionable whether livelihoods may be appropriately represented if only the activities linked to a specific locality are included. Government officials and other people who are better off may, for instance, send food to the home village. If the rainy season is bad, there is an obligation to help the villagers. Economic constraints may, nonetheless, decrease the capacity of salaried 'brothers' and 'sisters', as demonstrated in a study of the social consequences of the 1994-devaluation (Thylefors 1995).

In the urban area people carry out many activities in the daily struggle to make ends meet. In the Bendogho section of Ouagadougou, important activities include the production of mud bricks and the breaking of stones for sale to be used in construction works. Petty trade is an important livelihood strategy. Begging is also a livelihood strategy, especially in cities. Some people stressed the individual character of livelihoods because every one makes the best s/he can. In Burkina, a popular saying is *chacun pour soi, Dieu pour tous.*[17]

Combating poverty should not be reduced to only economic variables of daily life. Young men in the Banfora region migrate to the Ivory Coast to earn money for marriage. Similarly, to participate in a funeral or other important family events may be socially indispensable

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[17] "Each one for him/herself, God for everyone". This is often jokingly trans-formed to "chacun s'asseoit, Dieu le pousse".

despite the fact that it hinders the individual from working produc-
tively. An old griot[18] woman gave me an example:

> There was a rich man, who never attended any baptism. Instead he par-
> ticipated by sending money. But when he was to celebrate a baptism for
> one of his children, the old people in the area decided to send money but
> not attend the baptism. The baptism was spoiled, because people did not
> attend.

This example shows the extent to which social gatherings are impor-
tant for people. It is a sort of social network to be maintained and
expanded. The example further evokes the morality of social perform-
ance.

Networks

Kin and other social networks are central to poor people. When times
are hard they need networks, which link them with more resourceful
persons. Kinship is maybe the most important social network, but its
practical implications are often misrepresented. A man may rely on a
kinsman to obtain resources and favours, but it is far from always the
case. Demands, often considered as 'excessive' in the eyes of the
more resourceful part, are not only placed on persons related through
kin. In villages, however, kinsmen collaborate to get rid of bottlenecks
in production systems, i.e. to clear a piece of land or to go in transhu-
mance with the herd. Adult men no longer work under the supervision
of the male elder, whose authority is today more attached to rituals
and family issues, such as marriage and heritage.

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[18] Griot is the French word, though of Wolof origin, for a socio-professional 'caste' of
bards. The griots spend most of their time singing and reciting genealogies. Despite that
they are despised by many noble people for whom they traditionally worked, the griots
earn their living from these and other socially important activities.

Generally speaking kinship is the idiom in which most social relations are expressed. A 'brother' from the village is not necessarily a brother, but the two individuals are 'brothers' when they are in Ouagadougou. This may even be observed in national politics. President Compaoré was said to be the son in law to the late President Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, because Burkina's first lady originates from the Ivory Coast. The kinship idiom may also express ethnic identity. It is not uncommon that people from western Burkina use to label each other 'brother' or 'sister' when they are in the capital, despite the fact that they might even belong to different ethnic groups. The use of kinship idiom forms part of a certain kind of political culture.

Friendship and neighbourhood provide another basis for network. A person may solve certain problems by mobilising such a network, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Hagberg 2000b). Similarly, a farmer with a friend well positioned in the centre of the department (district) may rely upon him to introduce a dossier to the head of department. While kinship involves rights and duties, depending on the specific relation between two individuals, friendship is less hierarchical. A friend may be more intimate than a kinsman. Former classmates equally maintain friendships of importance.

Religious networks may be crucial for poor people. Mossi migrants often use religious ties to obtain land in southern Burkina (Faure 1996). The Wahabiya, a Sunni sect of increasing importance, are locally perceived to be a community of faith attracting rich merchants. People tend to mobilise any religious network. Islamic networks are particularly strong because so many merchants are Muslims. The merchants are another category with which people seek good relations. A merchant may lend money when a person is in need. Even government officials may depend on such relations "when the month has two figures" (a common expression to say that the salary is finished, i.e. from the 10th until payment on the 25th).

Islam contains strong moral ideas on poverty and how to reduce poverty. Every person should be reminded of the poor and offer alms to them, in particular at religious feasts such as the Ramadan. Such alms are called *zakat* and are distributed explicitly to the poor. To fast during this month is seen as a reminder for people to be grateful that one has food to eat and water to drink. Other alms given to poor people at any moment are called *saraka* (sacrifice); to offer alms to poor people is a duty to every Muslim. Interestingly, this conception of poverty stresses that those people who have the possibility should try to give something to the poor. It comes close to Christian charity also practised by Catholics and Protestants in Burkina.

An interesting phenomenon is the *tontines*, which is a form of widespread savings networks (Sanou 1992, 1993). The functioning of the *tontine* is that all the members regularly (each week or each month) pay a fixed sum to a common fund. At each occasion, one specific member takes all the money to invest in social activities, such as a funeral ceremony or the wedding of a daughter, or in economic ventures, such as petty trade. The *tontine* is a widespread instrument in rural areas and even in urban areas where more currency is in circulation. Such financial instruments remain indispensable to collect savings and make loans among the lower middle class. They constitute a substantial promise in countries, like that of Burkina, whose public financial institutions fail to adequately meet the needs of the people. For instance, a group of women's in Bobo-Dioulasso, whose members do not have any salaried work, practise a system by which 100 FCFA is paid per week. The group counts 60 members, who each week will gather up to 6,000 FCFA (60 FF), an important sum for petty trade.

The salient point regarding networks is to emphasise that they provide important resources when livelihoods are endangered. But these networks need to be maintained, and in this respect poor people are particularly vulnerable. Many poor persons, such as the socially

marginalized, may lack such relations. They lack the capacity to undertake socially admired actions, a situation which further deepens their poverty.

Socio-political Institutions and Formal Structures

Traditional chiefs had specific responsibilities towards the poor. The Emir of Liptako, for example, provided poor people with the means (land to cultivate and animals to herd) to escape poverty. At village level, the village chief (*jooro*) had specific responsibilities:

> If someone is poor the village chief has always the possibility to help him. All villagers give something to him at harvest, he has always some surplus. [...] But today people do not give much to the village chief.

All people do not share such an idealised conception of traditional chieftaincy. An influent merchant in Ouagadougou said that the hierarchical Mossi kingdom of the centre (Ouagadougou) had isolated people culturally. Compared to the Mossi of Yatenga (Ouahigouya), they have remained without impulses from other societies. "That is why", the merchant concluded, "the Mossi of the Centre are poor".

The Mogho Naba, the king of Ouagadougou, is still an important personality. The government seeks his advice with respect to various issues, for example female excision and prostitution. Several ministers of Mogho Naba are at the same time deputies of the national assembly. In Western and South-Western Burkina Faso there is no similar chieftaincy. These societies are much more decentralised. There the chief may exist by name, but he is not necessarily obeyed. Despite this fact, it is important to note that influential people and political leaders base their legitimacy not only in the modern spheres but also in the traditional ones (Hagberg 1998a).

The emphasis on networks and traditional socio-political structures should not obscure the existence of important formal structures,

recognised by the Burkinabe state. In many villages, farmers' cooperatives (*groupements villageois*) through which agricultural extension works are powerful economic organisations. This is particularly the case in the 'cotton belt' in Central and Western Burkina. People belonging to the family of the village chief often lead these cooperatives. Yet there are some cases where dynamic persons outside the chieftaincy have taken the lead. This may, for instance, provide migrants with access to power.

In villages, traditional work associations exist both for women and men. There is a linkage between these associations and farmers' cooperatives. While people tend to organise work according to traditional associations, that is people of each village section (*quartier*) working together, the village cooperative serves as a window towards the outside world.

Women groups exist in villages and neighbourhoods. In villages, these groups often carry out community work, such as farming in a common field or farming against payment in someone's field. It is not uncommon that women work collectively in the cotton field of an individual man and thereby earn money for the group. In a village in Western Burkina Faso a women group works for example in cotton fields for 150 FCFA per woman and day.

Beyond the local level, regional and national organisations have mushroomed. A national union of cotton-growers was recently established. This organisation has increased the bargaining power of producers towards the cotton company SOFITEX. Similarly, a union of woodcutters has become instrumental in defending producers' interests against both wood merchants and foresters (Delnooz 1999). In Western Burkina, graziers are organised in a trade union (*Syndicat des Eleveurs de l'Ouest du Burkina*). The purpose is to defend the interests of their members in cases of conflict with farmers and, more generally, to lobby for animal husbandry regionally and nationally. The hunting organisation *Benkadi* with one foot in the traditional

sphere and another in the modern one emerges as a civil defence organisation of regional magnitude (Hagberg 1998a, 2001c).

A well-known example of a regional organisation, bridging the state administration and traditional organisational forms, is the Naam-movement (Ouédraogo 1990; Pradervand 1990). The founder is Bernard Lédéa Ouédraogo, who received the Right Livelihoods Award in 1990. The Naam-movement is built upon the traditional work associations (*kombi naam*) among the Mossi, but has become a federation of village organisations.[19] The founder was Mayor of Ouahigouya 1995-2000 and another leader is deeply involved in the national policies of decentralisation. The organisation is linked to traditional structures as well as to the modern state. In Dori, the *Association pour la Promotion de l'Elevage au Sahel et en Savane* (APESS) was founded by Boubacar Ly, a veterinary surgeon and currently secretary general of the organisation. The organisation suggests that herders organise themselves in a movement for an ideal forum to discuss and implement technical innovations, the most important being the hay shed. An interesting dimension of the APESS is that it reaches far beyond national boundaries in Burkina, as it is found Niger, Cameroon, Mali and Senegal as well. The organisation's president is General Muhammadu Buhari, the ex-president of Nigeria. This confirms the image of an organisation of pan-African potential, a fact which also has raised criticism. The APESS is furthermore trying to create a graziers' bank, to incite the members to save in money rather than in cattle (Kremling 1999).

There are many international NGOs working in Burkina, with an explicit poverty focus in their interventions (SPONG 2000). In prac-tice, they tend to be linked to national and local NGOs in their specific development activities. But the distribution of NGOs is geographically uneven. The northern towns such as Ouahigouya and Dori abound

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[19] The official name of the Naam-movement is *Fédération Nationale des Groupements Naam* (FNGN).

with NGOs and development projects. This is basically due to the environmental problems that face people in this region. It also relates to the basic assumption that the combat against desertification is to be carried out in the North. In the southern parts of Burkina, the presence of international NGOs is sparse. For instance, Save the Children is the only international NGO, which has representation in Banfora.

The Swedish Diakonia is an international NGO which is well established in Burkina Faso. It began to work with famine relief in West Africa after the droughts in the 1970s. Since 1987 the organisation has a residential representative in Burkina. Today, activities are more focused on rural development. Diakonia has established partnership with a wide range of local organisations. Activities related to basic needs predominate: food security, the individuals' place in civil society, anti-corruption and land issues. In particular, Diakonia emphasises the need to link education to these activities (Diakonia 1998).

The salient point of this section on socio-political institutions and formal structures is to recognise that there are no distinct boundaries between traditional institutions and modern ones. Instead successful institutions seem to adjust to different contexts. While the APESS is a development organisation that establishes partnerships with international donors and organisations, it is simultaneously represented as a Fulbe organisation transgressing international political boundaries. Similarly, several ministers of the Mossi king Mogho Naba are members of the national assembly.

National and International Programmes

While most development agencies and government organisations make statements about combating poverty, the impression one gets is that little is actually done in specific programmes. Many development activities involve a general aim to reduce poverty, but it is not always clear how to implement such a strategy and few concrete results have

emerged. One exception to this regrettable state is, at least at surface, the efforts by the UNDP. Other donors have made statements, but, according to an experienced staff-member at the UNDP in Ouagadougou, nothing concrete has yet come out.

As a consequence of the Priority Survey, the UNDP initiated, together with the government, a programme to combat poverty. The *Programme d'Appui aux Initiatives Communautaires de Base/Lutte contre la Pauvreté* (PAICB/LCP) intervenes in Burkina's five poorest regions, as defined by the Priority Survey (INSD 1996a). Three kinds of activities are promoted: 1) The funding of economic, entrepreneurial activities; 2) The training of human resources (population, NGOs, government staff); 3) 'Prospecting' (studies, coordination) on the poverty theme. The programme funds credits to poor people in order to help them escape from poverty. It has also started a bulletin entitled *Pauvreté et Développement* as to share experiences of how to combat poverty. In the Dori region, 40 micro-projects were financed in 1999. However, only associations that are recognised by the state administration are allowed to apply for funding. This means that those who have the capacity to organise themselves are likely to be supported. A well-positioned government official rhetorically asked me whether the programme really reaches the poor.

The World Food Programme (WFP) bases its food aid on the national poverty profile (INSD 1996b). It directs support to the Northern and Eastern parts of Burkina, but has stopped food distribution to the Southern and Western parts. In particular, the programme aims at supporting vulnerable segments of the population. In 1998, the WFP launched a study on gender relations in five provinces, being part of a specific project (Rabo & Ouédraogo 1998). The purpose was to better understand the disparities between women and men regarding access to and control over resources and benefits. The study concludes that women are generally less favoured by project intervention both in natural resource management (land, equipment and technological

know-how are controlled by men) and with respect to food security (restricted access to infrastructure such as cereals banks).

The 20/20 Initiative works on a different level. This was originally initiated at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995. In order to solve the poverty problem, the governments in the North should invest 20 percent of their international aid to support basic needs, and governments in the South should invest 20 percent of public expenses in basic social sectors (health, education, social affairs and drinking water). Burkina is a pilot country to implement the 20/20 initiative. In 1995 11.8 percent of the budget was allocated to basic social services and in 1996 the figure increased to 15.4 percent. Of more than 23 billion FCFA, primary education (57 percent) was the highest priority, followed by health (36 percent); the remaining 7 percent were used to fund drinking water and reproductive health. In 1996, primary education and health received respectively 55.6 percent and 38 percent of the budget. Among international donors, the mean budget allocation to basic social services in 1995-1996 was 17.3 percent (PNUD 1999:62).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank launched the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in 1996, as an effort to eliminate unsustainable debt in the world's poorest, most heavily indebted countries. Burkina Faso was early classified as one of the initial countries to qualify for assistance in 1997. In July 2000 it was announced that the IMF and the World Bank confirmed that Burkina Faso qualifies for the HIPC Initiative. The country was thereby eligible to begin receiving around US$ 400 million in debt service relief, or US$ 229 million in net present value terms. In a press release the IMF states that Burkina Faso's completion point is "a recognition by the international community of the progress made in implementing economic reforms and in the social sectors" (IMF 11 July 2000).

To sum up this chapter, it is critically important to appraise the different levels at which initiatives to combat poverty are undertaken. Although this study has put particular emphasis on the 'voices of the poor', important political, economic and socio-cultural structures influence poor people's capacities to help themselves.

7 Representations and Realities

My study of poverty and initiatives to combat poverty in Burkina Faso has revealed the wide range of previous studies and ongoing activities that have been undertaken in the 1990s. Yet despite attempts to establish a country-specific poverty profile, notably by the *Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie* (INSD) with the support from the African Development Bank, the UNDP and the World Bank, a rather divergent picture emerges. Different actors, organisations and activities tend to represent multiple profiles of poverty, rather than one single one. In other words, the establishment of one poverty profile, sanctioned by the state administration and the political majority, would be in contradiction to participatory rhetoric on poverty. Instead, poor people's perceptions of poverty and prosperity need to be included in the measurement of poverty and the design of any poverty reduction strategy (cf. Narayan et al. 2000).

Poor people in Burkina Faso are simultaneously struggling with structural poverty and conjunctural poverty (Iliffe 1987). On the one hand, people who experience structural poverty are poor due to their personal and social circumstances. The marginalized person is poor in that access to social networks is restricted. Long-term illness brings poverty, because the individual is unable to change his/her situation. More generally, one can argue that rural producers in Burkina are structurally poor, because most of them are directly exposed to world market prices. The cotton farmer may have relative wealth, but is subject to forces beyond his control. Conjunctural poverty is, on the other hand, more widespread. Any self-sufficient person may temporarily be thrown into poverty by crisis. The irregularity of rainfall is

the best example; if there is no harvest famine will hit the village, as was the case in Négarpoulou in 1997. Families, which under normal conditions would make ends meet, were unable to get enough food and had to rely on forest foods. Unemployment and illness are other factors which may throw even those with a decent standard of living into poverty.

In line with the discussion of structural and conjunctural poverty, this study has highlighted the flaws and drawbacks of using a poverty concept which only takes material aspects of life into account. Whether we use an absolute or a relative method for measuring poverty, our measurement can only grasp the visible and numerable dimensions. A granary of millet consumed by the members of the family is converted into the local market price, domestic tasks carried out by women and children are defined as 'unproductive' and social activities become 'leisure'. My findings indicate instead that poverty is related to lack of agency; poor people remain unable to act to change their situation. This includes the lack of ability to perform socially valued actions. My findings furthermore indicate that poverty is morally loaded. It is, on the one hand, a moral duty to help people in need. But, on the other hand, it is often shameful for a person to be unable to sustain and feed his/her family.

A more inclusive definition of poverty, formulated from a so-called rights' perspective, is not without conceptual problems either. To integrate economic, political, social, cultural, educational, health and environmental concerns into one single analytical framework is easier said than done. If poverty is linked to all these concerns, haven't we entered a circular argument? Poverty has then become a so inclusive concept that it looses its analytical value. Swedish development cooperation for poverty reduction is, for instance, guided by a definition of poverty that encompasses the lack of access to and control over those social, economic and political resources being necessary for attaining a decent standard of living. Poverty is defined

in terms of three basic dimensions: security, capacity and opportunities (Regeringskansliet 1997; Sida 1996). Although it is sensible to address fundamental questions related to the human condition rather than only the visible and material expressions of poverty the operational value of such a poverty definition is uncertain.

While the broader poverty concept is a welcome step, it still pertains inherent difficulties. The impressive bulk of material presented in the book *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* (Narayan et al. 2000) certainly provides insights into the ways in which poor people express and represent their realities. The authors suggest directions for change in development policy and practices. Yet they also see the danger that despite Participatory Poverty Assessments, development agencies will simply continue 'business as usual'. Poverty is experienced locally in a specific context, in a specific place and in specific interaction, while those who plan for poverty reduction are far away (Narayan et al. 2000:283).

This last point leads me to the core problem of implementing any generalised poverty concept. I started out this study by arguing that poverty is contextual, situational and relational. People's perceptions of poverty cannot be appropriately represented unless the context, the situation and the relation in which it prevails are duly understood. To label oneself as poor is one kind of representation. To talk about other people as poor is another. For sure, many people in Burkina could be classified as poor according to most general criteria and I do not question the fact that many are suffering. Instead it is the lack of context in most poverty assessments carried out in Burkina (and probably elsewhere) that is disturbing. In order to contextualise representations and realities of poverty I here outline some main characteristics of poverty in Burkina Faso.

Annual rainfall is constantly a concern not only for rural producers but for any Burkinabe citizen. Periods of drought, even local ones, involve all actors in the affected region: food prices increase, rural

people leave to seek food elsewhere and urban people, including state agents and merchants, are burdened by demands to help relatives out of the crisis. Some merchants certainly benefit from crises, but they are simultaneously approached by an increasing number of people in need. It is significant that in the northern Burkina droughts are named, e.g. *Paigu* in 1984, but people are unwilling to pronounce the word 'drought'.

People also relate to various networks to make ends meet. For the poor, kinsfolk are often very important for certain events (funerals, rituals, income opportunities). Friendship or patron-client relation-ships may be more instrumental in other situations. To have 'long arms' into state administration or other networks linking to resource-ful persons might be crucial, especially in times of crisis. Conversely, without 'long arms' the person has hard times at local administration, dispensary and social security office.

In Burkina Faso, notions of poverty have much to do with the ca-pacity to act and to work in order to leave the state of poverty within which the person finds him/herself. Without force the person is poor and unable to struggle (*fangntanya* in Dyula). The force is not primar-ily physical, though it may be for example in the case of sick and disabled people, but it is first and foremost economic and political. This force is associated with governing; the government is called *fama*, that is, a term linked to force (*fanga*). Among rural farmers the capacity to clear new land and grow food is highly valued. Farm work is the highly valued cultural ideal. This reflects back on the fact that in hoe farming, it is the control over labour rather than the control over land which is at stake. Children who go to school might run the risk of not getting 'a white man's job' and not being willing to farm any longer. Fulbe pastoralists value the capacity to act, but in a quite different way. They avoid farming themselves, but herd cattle and sheep. Cattle are wealth, not only because they allow people to get food, shelter and clothes, but also because they give them the oppor-

tunity to perform socially valued actions. The capacity to be social and participate in community events is another dimension of prosperity. A poor person, as one informant said in Bendogho, is a lonely person without people around and everything is sad.

Different initiatives to combat poverty demonstrate the extent to which poor people strive to get a better living. They mobilise networks and build up social relations. Such relations are not only horizontal (organisations, savings groups) but are also vertical in that people relate to more resourceful persons through various networks based on kinship, religion and/or political alliance. Patron-client relations are important in that it is necessary for poor people to be someone's client. The capacity of the patrons to protect and assist clients is critical. Market places abound with petty traders, selling one cigarette or single pieces of sugar to clients, who cannot afford to buy these items in a whole packet. In urban areas, women often sit in front of their home and sell fried food, cola-nuts or similar products to by-passers. Such people are poor according to both absolute and relative measurements, but they seek to take the opportunities that are offered to them. Another opportunity is migration; people leave to make a better life elsewhere. Despite efforts to make people settle, mobility is an opportunity to be explored. Yet those left behind might be even poorer, at least materially, because they lack the capacity to leave.

I would like to end this study by stressing that representations and realities of poverty need to be continuously addressed in specific contexts, situations and relations. In other words, any poverty concept – from the simple $US 1 line to the rights' perspective – will fail to become operational unless it is analysed in a specific context, in a specific situation and within specific relations. While planners tend to work with idealised, timeless and depersonalised versions of an imagined world to be regulated, it is in contexts, situations and relations rather than in development discourse that ordinary men, women and children experience poverty.

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