

Meeting the challenges and fulfilling the promises for Burkina Faso's children

What is life like for a child growing up in Burkina Faso today? By way of an answer it's possible, easily and rapidly, to line up an array of important challenges. We only need a glance at the statistics telling us that, despite all efforts and progress, rates for school attendance and literacy are still amongst the lowest in the world, for example - or those showing one child out of five will not live beyond his or her fifth birthday and one third of the same age group suffers chronic malnutrition - to see the nature of the obstacles a Burkinabé child faces in enjoying childhood, and later developing into a healthy, literate, employable adult.

Burkina Faso is classified as among the poorest countries in the world, and we know that still around 46 percent of the 13.7 million population lives below the poverty threshold. Such a level of poverty inevitably implies deprivation and marginalisation for a number of vulnerable groups, families and children. It makes the question of poverty reduction and equity central to harmonious and sustainable development for all.

Despite steady recorded progress over the last years, notably in immunization of children and girls' enrolment in school, access for

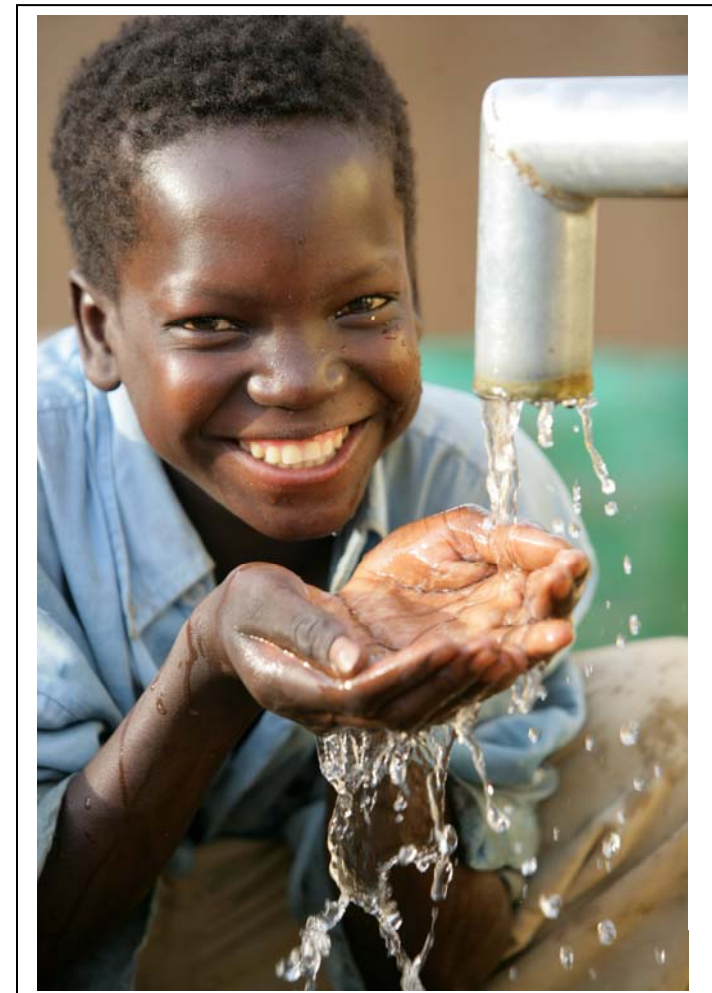
numbers of Burkina Faso's most vulnerable children to primary health care or basic education is nonexistent, very limited – or comes too late.

Such children may also suffer from lack of safe drinking water or adequate sanitation and may be exposed to exploitation or abuse, or be trafficked and forced into doing punishing hours of hazardous work. The prevalence of HIV and AIDS is an increasing concern. Adolescents are severely affected, with over 50 percent of new infections reported as being from this age group.

Within this context, scaling up and speeding the pace are crucial in planning for development that will deliver progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

But with the negatives there are many positives to consider too. Burkinabés themselves do not speak of their situation with pessimism. As described in this brochure, whether you talk to a teacher, a hospital administrator, an AIDS counsellor or an adolescent youth group leader, you will hear how they are managing to overcome difficulties or to dispel fears and innovate.

The spirit of cooperation and mutual help





visibly flourishes in urban and rural communities alike, organizations and committees of all kinds actively involving individuals in tackling social problems with zest and resourcefulness. The concept of society overall as an extension of the extended family is current. This means that, from the household level up, actions taken in pursuit of equity and solidarity can, while aiming for growth and development, result in a tangible and sustainable reduction of poverty.

A good example of the ethic of dedication to communal goals is the lively UNICEF-assisted childcare facility run on a voluntary cooperative basis which has been set up next to the stone quarry at Pissy, a Ouagadougou suburb. It significantly contributes to reducing children's exposure to the danger-filled work environment, while helping the women workers organize themselves.

Communication in general is strength. A network of 60 rural radio stations beaming broadcasts across the country means that many communities are reached with information and messages in relation to civil rights, health and welfare. They are encouraged too, to treat the medium as interactive and air views and opinions on current affairs and the issues concerning them.

In this context UNICEF Burkina Faso, in its Programme of Cooperation with the government, prioritises the optimum ways children can be helped to survive and thrive. This is done through working with partners across the field, whether government ministries, UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral partners, or the range of community-based organisations and associations emerging from

the country's vibrant civil society.

Three major thrusts steer UNICEF activities, often reinforcing each other, in an integrated programme designed to achieve accelerated child survival and development, education for all. The Programme also helps to combat HIV and AIDS, focussing on the prevention of mother- to-child transmission, paediatric care, and primary prevention among young people and protection of orphans. Providing clean water and sanitation and promoting hygiene education, particularly in school locations and households, is also entailed.

In the area of protection the emphasis is on mitigating the impact of poverty on vulnerable groups and children, such as young girls with no education, who are often exploited. Programmes offering them a second chance for becoming literate and learning a trade bring these marginalized young people back from the brink and allow them to take charge of their own futures. Emphasis is also being placed on action to help children with disability and for those exposed to the worst forms of child labour.

In Burkina Faso the potential and the will for people to move to a higher level of participation in development and engagement in the processes of society is being clearly demonstrated as the country's de-centralization rolls out.

Dedicated to accelerating the survival, the development, the protection and the participation of children, UNICEF is committed to helping with this, retaining its clear focus on the specifics of the children's agenda and, through strengthened partnerships, ensuring it delivers on its mission. This brochure highlights some of the interventions which are

currently delivering results.

Our ambitious Programme of Cooperation with Burkina Faso is based on the commitment of our multiple partners and the contributions of our donors.

Speaking on behalf of the children of Burkina Faso, we would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all of them. We are convinced that, together, we will succeed in contributing significantly to improving every Burkinabé child's life.

On behalf of the UNICEF Burkina Faso team I wish you enjoyable reading!



Hervé Périès
Representative, UNICEF Burkina Faso

