BURKINA FASO CASE STUDY

Review of Technology-Based Interventions to Address Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation

UNFPA

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DATA-POP ALLIANCE

BURKINA FASO

BURKINA FASO OVERVIEW

Child marriage prevalence[1] (proportion of young women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18 years)		52%
FGM prevalence[2] (proportion of women and girls aged 15–49 years)		76%
Internet users[3] (proportions of the adult male and female populations)		56% of men 39% of women
Mobile phone ownership[4] (proportions of the adult male and female populations)		94% of men 88% of women
Level of government support for digital literacy[5] (scale 0–3)[6]		Low: 0

THE CONTEXT OF CHILD MARRIAGE AND FGM IN THE COUNTRY

Widespread poverty and deeply rooted traditions continue to drive child marriage and FGM in Burkina Faso, despite the government's commitment to eliminate both. According to recent data, 42.3 per cent of women aged 18 to 49 had been subjected to both harmful practices.[7]

The prevalence of child marriage in Burkina Faso remains stagnant at 52 per cent, placing the country as the seventh highest in the world, with one in two girls married before the age of 18.[8] In many cases, these marriages are polygamous and with an average of a 10.9-year age difference between married girls and their husbands.[9] Girls in the Sahel region in northern Burkina Faso are particularly at risk, with a prevalence rate at 65 per cent, and also marrying on an average two years earlier than those living outside the Sahel.[10]

While there is no progress when it comes to eradicating child marriage, FGM has become less common in Burkina Faso, being one of the few African countries that has passed an anti-FGM law (in 1996). The level of FGM among women aged 15 to 49 years has declined significantly since 1999, from 83.6 per cent to 76 per cent in 2010.[11] However, the practice is mostly performed on girls before the age of 5 years, with prevalence ranging from 22 per cent to 87 per cent per cent depending on one's ethnicity. Although the prevalence of FGM remains high, only 9 per cent of the population believe that the practice should continue. Additionally, fewer adolescents have undergone FGM in Burkina Faso, suggesting that the practice is less likely to be passed down across generations.[12] Cross-border FGM, however, continues to be a challenge, as citizens often travel into countries where anti-FGM laws are weakly enforced or simply do not exist.[13]

NEWS ABOUT HARMFUL PRACTICES: WORD CLOUD MAPS AND NUMBERS OF REPORTS

A GDELT word cloud and figures on reports for child marriage and FGM are not available for Burkina Faso. After filtering the database for a comprehensive pool of keywords related to FGM and child marriage and technology, there were no results returned for associated reports pertaining to child marriage and/or FGM in the country. Consequently, a country word cloud map representing the most common words portrayed in the reports is also unavailable.

THE TECHNOLOGY ENVIRONMENT IN BURKINA FASO

Addressing both child marriage and FGM in Burkina Faso through digital platforms requires an understanding of the technological environment in the country. Burkina Faso is among the least electrified countries in the world, with only 19 per cent of the population having access to electricity. By regional standards, this rate is well below the average of 48.4 per cent across sub-Saharan Africa. Of the country's 22.1 million population, 69 per cent of households are

concentrated in rural areas where electricity access is at a staggering 4.7 per cent compared with 65.8 per cent for those living in urban areas.[14] Only 26 per cent of households thus have access to the internet – of which men have greater access at 56 per cent than women at 39 per cent – but the country has recorded more and more internet users over the years (measured by the proportion of households that have access to the internet and that have used it in the past 12 months).[15] On top of disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, internet restrictions and nationwide shutdowns amid political unrest, such low internet penetration is exacerbated by the high cost of connectivity in a country that is among the world's poorest. When it comes to network coverage, 3G technology continues to account for most mobile networks at a rate of 48 per cent compared with minimal 4G connections at 27 per cent.[16] Burkina Faso's landlocked location and primarily rural population make it commercially unattractive for digital infrastructure to develop outside the main cities and communities with poor or no access to electricity.[17] On the other hand, mobile cellular subscriptions (i.e., subscriptions to a mobile telephone service) are very high with 106 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, making Burkina Faso among the leading countries in sub-Saharan Africa with the most mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions.[18] While there are more male mobile phone subscribers at 94 per cent compared with female subscribers at 88 per cent, this gap has been shrinking over time.[19] Mobile phones are used to interact with radio stations either through basic features such as call or text since smartphone penetration is low in the country (37 per cent) and the radio remains to be the preferred media channel, as is the case across sub-Saharan Africa.[20]

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In terms of digital literacy, Burkina Faso has the lowest year-on-year average growth rate globally, scoring 2.89 out of 7 among the population possessing sufficient digital skills.[21] Despite government efforts to create an enabling environment for ICT infrastructure to flourish through the support of development organizations, there is a lack of a national strategy directly addressing digital literacy for students and training for teachers.[22] Moreover, Burkina Faso also lacks strategies addressing the gender digital divide. According to the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), the country scores 39 per cent for digital inclusiveness, which is still relatively low on both global and regional scales.[23]

MAPPING OF TECH INTERVENTIONS

The interventions mapped in this section stem from an initial landscape exercise conducted jointly by UNICEF and UNFPA, followed by a systematic review of publicly available data and information on technology-driven and technology-enabled interventions addressing child marriage and/or FGM in Burkina Faso. The compiled information was curated and complemented with insights emerging from key informant interviews conducted with local stakeholders.

CODING TYPE OF INTERVENTION
[◉] Technology-driven intervention/solution (tech is a core element)
[◐] Technology-enabled intervention/solution (tech is secondary to the intervention, there are other non-tech components)

♀ FEMINIST LENSES

The seventh column of the interventions table below identifies how organizations have included feminist lenses into the design and implementation of the interventions by highlighting four key aspects:

1	Consultation with experts and/or community leaders	Consultations with gender or thematic experts and/or local leaders were conducted during the development, implementation, and/or monitoring and evaluation of the interventions.
2	Consultations with target group(s)	The interventions incorporated, at any stage, consultations with the populations targeted, especially girls and women of different ethnicities, ages, sexual orientations, classes, and other social markers.
3	Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) instruments	Monitoring and evaluation activities were carried out to measure the intervention's progress and sustainability, and/or to generate disaggregated information, gender-sensitive/responsive indicators, and/or gender analysis frameworks.
4	Womenand/or girl-led organization(s)	The intervention was designed and/or implemented, partly or completely, by a womenand/or girl-led organization(s).

Additional descriptive information about the feminist lenses and potential intersectional approach (i.e., addressing ethnicity, language, class or other aspects of the target group's identity) is provided within the table, following the general description of each intervention, which can be identified by the use of this symbol [♀]. This analysis is based on information collected during semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders and/or publicly available information.

RAPIDPRO / 2017 — ONGOING / ◎

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECH-NOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Inc.	UNICEF	Child marriage & FGM	Nationwide	**1.** Individual level empowerment **2.** Family and community engagement **3.** Service development and strengthening	• Mobile phones • SMS messaging • Social media	**1.** Consultations with experts and/or community leaders **2.** M&E instruments

RapidPro is a free and open-source software that allows for mobile-based applications to be easily developed and scaled up. According to a representative from UNICEF Burkina Faso, it powers mobile applications like U-Report, mHealth and other citizen engagement platforms for an improved data tracking and reporting system. RapidPro gathers data through short message services (SMS) and other communication channels (e.g., social media) to automate data analysis and allow real-time information collection from the target end-users. RapidPro is implemented in Burkina Faso in English, French and all local dialects. This mobile software has significantly improved communication among youth, community members and health officials and other health-related service providers.

♀ This intervention integrates an intersectional feminist approach by powering mobile health systems that improve decision-making at local, district and national levels regarding women's and girls' access to services. It also disseminates targeted information and sensitization messages towards groups with specific vulnerabilities (e.g., pregnant women, ill children). Scaling up RapidPro to Burkina Faso included initial scoping missions to country offices and national government counterparts to learn best practices and be informed by experts on the field. RapidPro also enables real-time programme monitoring and data collection from target end-users, including beneficiaries, using gender-sensitive indicators.[24]

QG JEUNE / 2018 – ONGOING / ◉

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
• Government of Belgium • Government of Canada • Government of the Netherlands • Luxembourg Aid and Development • UNICEF • UNAIDS • Orange Mobile	UNFPA	Child marriage & FGM	Nationwide	1. Individual level empowerment 2. Family and community engagement 3. Service development and strengthening	• Mobile phones • Mobile phone application • Multimedia platform	1. Consultations with experts and/or community leaders 2. Consultations with target group(s) 3. M&E instruments

QG Jeune is an interactive digital platform designed by youth and for youth. It is a reference tool launched in 2018 dedicated to strengthening young people's access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services on a large scale for the development of their full potential.[25] It connects adolescents and youth (aged 15–24) to specialists providing quality information and tools to help them make informed choices and motivate them to adopt safer and healthier behaviours.[26] As the platform generates data on the use of SRH services by adolescents, the platform also offers a selection of wellness products and services to promote sustainable behaviours among youth. Through a virtual currency reward system, those visiting health centres and/or responding to surveys on the use of SRH services are connected to local businesses to benefit from them. QG Jeune also offers educational courses developed by health-care professionals to strengthen the youth's knowledge on SRH issues and open a platform to learn about other themes as well – such as environmental management, addiction prevention and leadership – especially for adolescents who have been forced to drop out of school. There are currently over 30,000 unique users on the website and over 30 million interactions on the QG Jeune platform.[27]

♀ This intervention integrates an intersectional feminist approach by intentionally involving youth (boys and girls) in the design and implementation of QG Jeune. Through a participatory approach, it was designed by youth with guidance from UNFPA and other experts in validating its methodology. It also aims to promote positive masculinities to transform young boys into actors for change that can fight against child marriage and FGM. Moreover, UNFPA conducts annual and quarterly reports using gender-disaggregated data to review the progress of its interventions. The internal surveys answered by the users also help measure the impact of the different channels of demand that spark the interest of young people in SRH, help understand their behaviour regarding access to SRH services and evaluate their experience on the services needed.[28]

ICIVIL PLATFORM / 2018 – ONGOING / ◉

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECHNOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
• UNICEF • UNFPA	iCivil	Child marriage & FGM	Nationwide	1. Service development and strengthening 2. Legal and policy systems interventions	• Mobile phones • Mobile phone application • Digital wristband	N/A[29]

The iCivil is a modern and centralized Civil Registration and Vital Statistics platform that digitizes the existing civil registration process in Burkina Faso through a wristband.[30] Midwives are trained to use smartphones to register births and vital statistics accurately in real time directly into the national system. This provides a digital medical record of the child and eases their access to a lifetime of public services beyond health care. iCivil is projected to expand to other services such as recordings, deaths, divorces, obtaining passports and tracking vaccinations.[31] In its pilot phase from 2015–2016, it registered 2,600 newborns, constituting a 30 per cent increase in birth registration compared with previous years.[32]

SOS EXCISION HOTLINE / 1990 − ONGOING / ◎

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECH-NOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
N/A	Comité National de Lutte contre la Pratique de l'Excision	FGM	Nationwide	1. Individual level empowerment 2. Family and community engagement 3. Service development and strengthening 4. Legal and policy systems interventions	• Toll-free hotline • Mobile phones • Radio	N/A[33]

The state-sponsored, toll-free 24-hour hotline called "SOS Excision" provides a fast and anonymous way of reporting girls at risk of FGM.[34] SOS Excision was launched even before the adoption of the law criminalizing FGM in the country. The guaranteed anonymity of the callers – mostly women, youth and educated individuals – allows them to report any information that could help prevent or punish the perpetrators and accomplices of FGM and alert the police at no cost. Approximately 150 calls a year are made and 70 per cent of all FGM cases before the courts come through this manner.[35]

C'EST LA VIE! TV SERIES / 2018 − 2021 / ◎

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION(S)	IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION(S)	HARMFUL PRACTICE(S)	LOCATION(S)	IMPACT AREA	TYPE OF TECH-NOLOGIES USED	FEMINIST LENSES
• Réseau africain pour l'éducation à la santé • Programme de Marketing Social et de Communication pour la Santé (PROMACO) • Voix de femmes • Ratanga Club	Equipop	Child marriage & FGM	Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, the Niger, Senegal, Chad and Togo	1. Individual level empowerment 2. Family and community engagement	• Television • Social media • Mass media	N/A[36]

C'est la vie! ('That's life!') is a regional campaign for social and behaviour change designed and deployed in West and Central Africa to stimulate personal reflections and collective debates on existing social norms and to support changes in individual and societal behaviour in terms of SRH, maternal and child health, and gender-based violence.[37] It is made up of a wide range of what is called 'edutainment' (educational entertainment) content. The campaign is deployed online (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), in the mass media (at the continental level with more than 40 local media partners), and at a community level thanks to a network of partner CSOs.

ENDNOTES

1   DHS (2010), as cited in UNICEF (2022a), *Burkina Faso country profi*le

2   DHS (2010), as cited in UNICEF (2020e), *Burkina Faso country profi*le

3   Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)

4   Ibid.

5   Economist Impact (2022)

6   The score on government support for digital literacy, on a scale from 0–3 (low to high), reflects a government plan or strategy to address digital literacy for students and/or teachers – through the design and development of courses in ICT skills, computer science, programming or other classes for students; and through ICT capacity-building courses for teachers. A zero score indicates that the government does not have such a plan/strategy, neither for students and nor for teachers; a score of 1 reflects a plan for student digital literacy but without including teacher capacity-building; a medium score of 2 indicates a current plan for both; and the highest score of 3 reflects a plan addressing both students and teachers, and with the courses and capacity-building starting at the primary school level.

7   UNICEF (2021d)

8   UNICEF and UNFPA (2020a)

9   Erulkar et al. (2020)

10   UNICEF and UNFPA (2020a)

11   Chikhungu and Madise (2015)

12   UNICEF and UNFPA (2020a)

13   Wouango et al. (2020)

14   World Bank (2020c)

15   Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)

16   ITU as cited in Economist Impact (2022)

17   International Finance Corporation (IFC, 2019)

18   ITU as cited in Economist Impact (2022)

19   Gallup (2020), as cited in Economist Impact (2022)

20   United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF, 2021)

21   World Bank (2019a)

22   Economist Impact country research (2021), as cited in the Economist Impact (2022)

23   UNCDF (2021)

24   Information obtained from an interview with a UNFPA Burkina Faso representative

25   QG Jeune (2021)

26   UNFPA (2021b)

27   QG Jeune (2021)

28   Information obtained from an interview with a UNFPA Burkina Faso representative

29   Organisation/intervention not interviewed

30   MAIF (2017)

31   UNFPA (2021c)

32   GSMA (2018)

33   Organization/intervention not interviewed

34   UNICEF and UNFPA (2020a); Diop et al. (2006)

35   UNFPA (2018)

36   Organization/intervention not interviewed

37   Equipop and RAES (2017)

REVIEW OF
TECHNOLOGY-BASED
INTERVENTIONS
TO ADDRESS CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

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