

# West Africa regional education: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, and Niger

Funding needed: £170,000



*“No human right is more systematically or extensively violated by governments than the right of their citizens to a basic education.” Kevin Watkins, The Oxfam Education Report, 2000*

## Background

The challenge the world faces in order to meet the Millennium Development Goal of getting every child into primary school by 2015 is greatest in West Africa. Enrolment rates show that for millions of children in this region, and especially for girls, a basic, quality education remains an unachievable dream.

The barriers to education in West Africa, especially for girls, are common, and often inter-related across most countries:

- extreme poverty facing many households and the high costs of education;
- the subjugation of women and the unequal division of labour within the family and community;
- cultural values that seek to conserve traditional values and identity and are often hostile to “western” forms of education;
- the displacement, migration, and nomadic lifestyle of significant portions of the population;
- the prevalence of child labour;
- the early marriage of young girls;
- and the violent conflict found in many parts of the region.

The failure to supply quality education in the region is caused by:

- heavily-indebted governments;
- ill-adapted and outdated teaching methods and curriculum (legacies of the colonial era);
- insufficient and neglected infrastructures and lack of professional teachers;
- relatively young and fragile civil-society movements, poorly equipped to engage with governments or contribute to constructive policy analysis and change.

## Project aims

To develop innovative and sustainable solutions to deliver quality basic education to poor and marginalised communities, and especially to girls, in West Africa.



Heather Johnston

Playtime: girls take a break from lessons in Wasséfie, Menaka district, Gao Region, northern Mali

## Activities

### Strengthening and supporting local organisations

We are working through and with local organisations and coalitions of grassroots groups, such as networks of Parent Teacher Associations, to deliver the regional education programme. We are building the capacity of these organisations to engage with governments and communities to make sustainable and long-term improvements in the provision of and demand for education for all.

Examples of support provided to organisations include:

- Increasing the skills of an indigenous organisation which is developing the curriculum to meet the needs of communities;
- Providing an Internet connection for a campaigning group;
- Building the capacity of partners to better understand and integrate the gender-equity aspects of their work;
- Capacity building of state education services to develop gender-sensitive curricula, teacher-training, and teaching methods;
- Literacy training to Parent Teacher Associations.

**Country facts** ...✦ Less than half the children in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger attend primary school.  
...✦ Average literacy for women across the region: 28% .

### HIV/AIDS-awareness

In recognition of the growing threat of HIV/AIDS, the regional education programme is supporting the prevention and control of the spread of the pandemic, especially among young people in school, and among educators through awareness-raising through drama, school health-clubs, and the production and distribution of materials.

### Advocacy and campaigning work

At local level, activities will range from providing school committees with the skills and confidence to lobby for additional resources for their schools, to equipping a women's group with broadcasting skills, so they can use radio to communicate the importance and value of educating girls.



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Radio is an important tool for raising awareness of education issues, and in particular girls' education

At national level, the programme supports national coalitions to co-ordinate civil-society activities, for example – building the capacity of member organisations to lobby their governments for increased and better spending on education.

Budget-tracking work in Ghana involves using field researchers to determine the amount of money used, for example, to pay teachers, purchase supplies, or maintain schools. Analysis is carried out on the need to increase the budget or to redistribute expenditure depending on needs, and to curb corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies. This year, the research will form the basis for the 'Campaign for free education' in Ghana.

The Global Week of Action (GWA) is a week of popular campaigning activities on education issues. There will be marches, visits to the legislature, and visits by politicians to schools. The 'policy asks' made during the GWA and the

promises made by politicians are followed up throughout the year. In 2006, the theme for the GWA is 'Every child needs a teacher'.

*"I sent my daughters to school because I want them to communicate with others. I will not take them out of school to marry them off, because marriage can wait, but schooling cannot."*

Amadou Adamou, Treasurer of Lonkia Keina Parents' Association, Niger.

### Encouraging more girls into school

We will support the ongoing development of animatrices (women community education workers) who carry out awareness-raising sessions in communities and act as role-models for girls; monitoring attendance and following-up any girl students who drop out of school. In a region where female teachers are very rare, the animatrices have a positive impact on enrolment, attendance, and retention rates of children, especially girls, in addition to significantly influencing parents' attitudes towards education. There has been a notable effect also on reducing the number of young girls marrying.

The animatrices are carrying out gender-awareness work and analysis-training with other staff and partners, including school committees. Participants analyse issues such as why girls drop out of school, or fail to enrol. Positive measures can then be taken to encourage the enrolment, retention, and success of girls in school. For example, because research demonstrated that school fees were a major obstacle to girls schooling in Mali, loans will be granted to village women's groups, so they can earn enough to help support their daughters' schooling.

### Host families

One of the most-common reasons causing children to drop out of school is the nomadic lifestyle of their families. At certain times of year, nomadic families leave home in search of water and/or grazing for their animals. In most cases, their children abandon school to travel with their parents. In an effort to allow more children to complete the school year, Oxfam started a tremendously successful 'host family' system, through which families receive a sheep or goat in return for accommodating and supervising a child from a nomadic family, so they can stay at school. Already, the scheme has 321 host families and 619 students have stayed with them, almost 60 per cent of them girls.

**Country facts** ... In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, less than a fifth of adults are literate, compared to more than a third in the rest of sub-Saharan Africa.  
 ... In Ghana's three poorest northern regions, literacy rates for women are less than half that for men.



Oxfam

"The support from Oxfam made it possible for host families to welcome a student from another family, to the great benefit of the pupils. Traditionally, people used to have such a practice, when a household had to move for a relatively long period. The traveling household would entrust some of its members to another household's care – leaving either a sheep or a goat to compensate for the extra burden. It is a good thing – Oxfam's system originated from our own culture, and is reinforcing solidarity among families."

Amidi Ag Habo, Chairman of the Intahaca Management Committee in Gao Region, Mali

## Impact

The education programme will have a profound impact on some of the poorest, most marginalised communities of West Africa. Due to this work, thousands of children now, as well as future generations, will be given the invaluable opportunity to learn to read and write. Most of them would not otherwise have any chance of a formal education.

There will be changed attitudes and ideas about the education of girls, and towards women in the community in general, as project staff work to raise awareness and lobby for change locally, nationally, and internationally.

## Sample costs

Literacy training for a school committee	£900
Radio broadcasts to inform communities about the importance and value of educating girls	£250
Drama production (HIV-awareness)	£250
Training costs including travel for three members of the coalition	£2,500
Supporting a host family to host a nomadic child over a year (one goat plus animatrice monitoring)	£23



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Girls in Grade 1 class, Boumbounga, Niger