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Burkina Faso, Populations

### **Burkina Faso: Gradual Integration and Long-Term Solutions for the Internally Displaced Burkinabé**

Burkina Faso is an unfortunate case of bad geographic luck combined with a politically unstable environment. Burkina Faso ranked 91 out of 116 countries on the Global Hunger Index [4] and 182 out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index. [22] The landlocked, rainfall-reliant country is considered poor, even by West African standards. More than 40% of the population lives below the poverty line, and it is a food deficit country despite agriculture being the main livelihood for more than 80% of the population. [9] In the Sahel region of Africa (where Burkina Faso is located), there has been a 70% increase in attacks in the region by militant Islamist organizations like ISIS and al-Qaeda. [13] In the case of Burkina Faso, the government's inability to stop these militant attacks has caused distrust and criticism throughout the country. The rising tensions led to the recent military coup where the president and other government officials were removed from office. [24] Ever since, the coup leader, Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, has maintained control of the country. Unfortunately, situations similar to the status quo are not unusual. Throughout the history of Burkina Faso, there has been a cycle of ousting and overthrowing presidents due to public unrest and power struggles. Still, the current power vacuum has led to Burkina Faso's suspension from the African Union, so the military has pledged that it would re-establish constitutional order within a reasonable time. [3]

All of this conflict has only exacerbated one specific problem: out of 18.6 million people living in the country [7], 1.5 million are categorized as internally displaced persons (IDPs). [15] Simply put, almost one in ten people is now internally displaced in Burkina Faso. Internally displaced persons are defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or place of habitual residence." [17] Due to the instability in the country, people have been forced to flee dangerous regions with high conflict and chaos. In order to solve this growing problem, transitional housing must be implemented in the IDP hotspot regions, education for the young displaced must be improved upon, funding must be allocated to general humanitarian aid, and the .

Burkina Faso is a former French colony known as the country of Upper Volta until 1984. The landlocked country is surrounded by Mali (to the north and west), Niger (to the northwest), Benin (to the southeast), and Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo (to the south). The climate can be described as sunny, hot, and dry. The northern part of the country is made up of savanna, and scattered forests can be found in the south. [10] The main crops are sorghum, millet, cowpea, and maize. Millet is mostly grown in the north where it is dry, and maize is grown in the humid south. [8]

In Burkina Faso, the average family is made of 7 people. [2] In the majority of these households, there is inadequate access to necessities. Only 19% of the population has access to electricity [5] and 22% has access to a toilet. [20] Unfortunately, the IDP fleeing their homes have increasingly stressed water and food resources in communities that have taken them in.

Food insecurity is one of many growing problems in Burkina Faso, with 4.8 million people food insecure [6] and 3.3 million people suffering from acute food insecurity. [9] The IDP population is disproportionately affected by this food insecurity crisis. Burkina Faso's Centre-Nord and Sahel regions are affected the most by the internally displaced people. [15] Consequently, more than 60% of the people who suffer from food insecurity reside in the Centre-Nord and Sahel regions. [11] This is no coincidence, as internally displaced people have increased pressure on already scarce resources such as land and food. What this means is that the IDP population is currently bearing the brunt of the food insecurity crisis, so they must be focused on before moving on to the rest of the population.

The internal displacement crisis has spread to multiple countries including Cote D'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, and Benin. In fact, many Ivorian families are hosting up to 30 Burkinabe refugees in small houses. [1] In Burkina Faso, the priority needs of the Burkinabe are shelter, food, health, cash, and work. To provide a better life for the IDP, multiple solutions must be implemented.

A potential solution to alleviate the housing shortcomings of the IDP is to provide transitional, functional housing. Right now, in the city of Baidoa in South Central Somalia, there is a lack of appropriate housing, limited basic services, and limited resources. In the Iskari IDP camp, people lived in makeshift shelters and felt unsafe due to their underdeveloped houses. As a result, a total of 174 transitional shelters were constructed in 3 IDP sites in Baidoa. [18] An organization called ACTED collaborated with various people such as the IDP community leaders in order to ensure fair distribution of shelters to the most vulnerable people. Similar programs to increase personal security would be especially useful in Burkina Faso, where many people are terrified of the ongoing terrorism and military instability. By first creating safe housing for IDP, the effects of food insecurity can be worked on through other solutions.

Another country that experienced the same phenomenon was Brazil. In São Paulo, Brazil, field research was conducted for a study that observed the impacts of transitional shelters for IDPs in urban informal settlements. After thorough research and interviews with Techo (an organization that provides shelter for IDPs), the study found that the transitional shelters benefitted physical and mental health, security, household responsibilities, and community participation. [23] Additionally, 89% of surveyed IDPs in Ukraine report that they have been able to integrate into their host communities. One of the preconditions for successful integration was housing. [21] There is plenty of data that supports the fact that transitional shelters are effective. Therefore, if transitional housing to help the IDP was implemented in Burkina Faso, the housing crisis and immediate security threats could be solved. What this means is that the problem of food insecurity is one step closer to being solved.

In the midst of all the chaos, there is another problem: the impacted student population of IDP. Nearly 54% of IDP are younger than 14, which means they are affected heavily by the closures of 2,244 educational institutes due to terrorist attacks. [12] Helping the IDP includes improving the lives of the suffering children as well. The proposed solutions for the threatened education system are increasing the number of public schools and providing food for students.

Currently, there is extreme overcrowding in Kenyan schools. In fact, enrollment in government primary schools has increased by 1.3 million students in 2003. In response to this issue, the number of public schools increased by 13% between 2012 and 2016. [16] The main problem that the Kenyan government ran into was that the public schools weren't growing fast enough to support the large number of students taking advantage of the free primary education. However, with the help of organizations and other countries, Burkina Faso can avoid this obstacle and efficiently implement this solution. Since Burkina Faso has closed down many schools, the logical solution is to open up more public schools to meet the demands of the underprivileged students. As soon as it is possible to rebuild and create new public schools, Burkina Faso must pursue it.

To mitigate the harms of food insecurity, food can be provided in schools for children. In Madagascar, the government combatted problems in the education system by providing students with food. Over 220,000 children have been positively impacted by the food programs, which are essential to improving food security and education in general. [14] In Burkina Faso, food programs in schools would benefit the internally displaced students who are suffering from disproportionately high rates of food insecurity in Burkina Faso.

Another issue with the IDPs is that there is not enough humanitarian aid being provided. Internally displaced people wish to return home to access their food stocks and feed their families, but the attacks and ongoing conflict are deterring them. Conflict continues to soar, but humanitarian aid is falling behind. There is a critical shortage in aid funding, combined with a lack of assistance from local authorities. The country has appealed for USD 607 million for humanitarian aid, but it

is only 24% funded so far. [6] Therefore, a logical solution to secure the basic necessities for the IDP is to allocate funding to humanitarian operations.

Burkina Faso receives aid from a multitude of sources, such as the World Bank and other countries. The problem is not receiving funding, rather it is where to redirect and allocate funding from. One source of potential funding is the World Bank. Burkina Faso has already partnered with the World Bank to give access to a better water supply to 1.1 million people and improve sanitation for 1.3 million people. [20] Furthermore, Germany has also partnered with Burkina Faso's government to improve sanitation services. This means that there are multiple countries and organizations that are already willing to help the country. Therefore, it is not far-fetched to expect help for something as pressing as the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Recently, one large source of funding for African development came from Japan, which pledged \$30 billion in aid for the continent. [26] This could be especially important, as smaller sums have been promised specifically for food security. Japan has stated its desires to work with the continent, and this could provide more opportunities for struggling countries like Burkina Faso.

All of these solutions can temporarily solve the issue of disproportionate food insecurity within the IDP population in the short-term. However, long-term solutions must be implemented to stop the root cause of all of these issues. Behind the spike in internal displacement and food insecurity is military conflict and government mismanagement. Since the military coup and Damiba's presidency, there has been a 23% increase in militant attacks, and an evacuation order has been declared in northern Burkina Faso. [25] Attacks are occurring all over the country, and there are no signs of it stopping. For example, a recent attack, which took place in August 2022, left six people dead and two people wounded in the eastern part of the nation. [27] All of these problems have led to one of the fastest-growing numbers of IDP in the region. The troubling reality is that the government does not have control of over 40% of their territory due to terrorism. [28]

Burkina Faso is capable of fixing the poorly managed government through the help of international support and advice. The African Union has urged international support for the transitional government, as the ruling junta have plans to instill democracy through the form of presidential elections and constitutional referendums. [28] Through the support of supranational organizations like the UN, Burkina Faso can effectively mend the government issues and begin to fulfill its duties. In particular, there is a treaty designed to protect the IDP in Africa known as the Kampala Convention, which is followed by many African nations. Once Burkina Faso has stabilized its government, it should begin to implement policies related to the Kampala Convention. This will ensure the long-term protection for the victims of the ongoing conflict. [25]

Burkina Faso may be able to end the conflict in the region by blocking off military-related aid that contributes to a dangerous environment. Since 2009, the US has supported Burkina Faso with military funding and has provided up to \$100 million in one year. Concerningly, Burkina Faso has also increased military expenditures up to \$358 million in one year since 2009. A larger military budget means that more human rights abuses occur, as the military has targeted the ethnic Fulani population (6.3% of total population) in the name of fighting terror. Although the current conflict in Burkina Faso can seem complicated, the violence in the country can ultimately be traced back to the US establishment of military support that allowed Burkina Faso to respond to violent attacks with its own war on terror. Militarizing may seem beneficial to stopping terrorists, but the troubling fact is that 80% of people joined terrorist groups because of murders caused by the military. [19]

At first, there is a possibility that American citizens may not be on board with the idea of foreign aid towards Burkina Faso, yet this aid is a priority due to the US involvement in the conflict. It is unjust for the US to forsake Burkina Faso as soon as its military funding backfires, and it is heavily responsible for the occurring conflict. US aid to Burkina Faso can be viewed as a redirection of funds, rather than funding a whole new project, since it was already sending immense amounts of military aid until now.

Global conversation and awareness are also important to consider alongside concrete solutions to these growing problems in Burkina Faso. As internal displacement rises to an all time high, international citizens should be aware of the issues occurring in relatively smaller nations across the world. Similar problems in other countries can raise awareness for Burkina Faso. For example, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has sparked large instances of displacement as a result of fighting. Hopefully, as more people become aware of the situation in West Africa, similar moments of compassion can be seen with international citizens coming to the aid of the struggling Burkinabe.

In the end, the temporary solutions should be prioritized until the region is stable enough to support the IDPs in Burkina Faso. Other countries have gone through numerous programs that have been proven to be successful. The only requirement is for non-governmental organizations like ACTED, world organizations like the World Bank, and other countries like the US to support the programs necessary to solve the IDP crisis. However, the country must also begin to focus on the root causes of the conflict and problems after the immediate crisis has been resolved. Ending the external military funding and operations from countries like the US is the first step in a long road to reaching prosperity and peace in the country. The lives of the internally displaced Burkinabe must be improved in order to solve the disproportionate harms of food insecurity and inadequate housing and human rights.

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