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Burkina Faso: Local Procurement to Build Infrastructure and Stabilize Prices

Burkina Faso, which means “Land of Incorruptible People”, gained independence from France in 1960 as Upper Volta. Since independence it has been ruled primarily by the military and has experienced several coups. Stricken by years of violence, the nation’s infrastructure is no longer able to process its crop yields into food efficiently or effectively transport them to markets. Burkina Faso is a landlocked country situated in the hub of the Sahel region, which is prone to recurrent natural disasters such as drought (Projects and Programs). The fact remains that poverty, and thus food insecurity, in the Sahel region has increased over the last ten years due to drought, poor distribution of rainfall, locust invasions, and the 2006 floods. Foreign aid has been rushing into Burkina Faso, even more so since 2011 drought that led to over 100,000 Malians taking refuge within its borders (World Food Programme). However these foreign subsidized crops and food aid continue to depreciate the value of locally grown produce by small, rural farmers. In order to improve the situation of food insecurity in Burkina Faso foreign aid must be used in a way that will ultimately help rural farmers sustain themselves in the long run, as they are the bulk of the population. One venue to achieve this is known as Local and Regional Procurement (LRP). LRP is the purchase of food aid by donors and food aid organizations from within the country in which the food is needed.

In Burkina Faso about 85% of the population is engaged in agriculture, of which approximately 80% practice at the subsistence level. Only 10% of all agricultural production is cash crops. Food insecurity and malnutrition rates in Burkina Faso are chronically high; in 2012 it ranked 46 out of 76 on the global hunger index. The influx of refugees has also contributed to the challenges surrounding food insecurity. Children under five are the most vulnerable to food insecurity; 39% of children under 5 are stunted, and 12% are wasted (Burkina Faso). Health expenditures are kept to a minimum, only 6.5% of Burkina Faso’s gross domestic product (GDP) goes towards health care, as compared to 17.9% in the United States (Strong Institutions). Nationally only 43.9% of all children are fully vaccinated, and over 60% of women have inadequate access to healthcare. While 60.2% of the population has access to portable water, less than 10% has access to sanitation (Burkina Faso).

Endemic poverty and malnutrition hurts educational attendance and outcomes as well. Children with poor health are less able to concentrate, have lower educational performance and attainment, and are more likely to drop out of school, which jeopardizes their long-term food security. GDP dedicated to education is quite low at 3.4% (Strong Institutions). Only 27% of all men and 15% of all women are literate, and the national primary school enrollment rate is only 42.7%. However, this number obscures significant disparities by region, gender, and socio-economic status. Girls’ overall enrollment rates are 36%, while enrollment rates in the rural northern and eastern regions are as low as 20%. Nationally, two girls for every three boys attend primary school, and only half as many girls as boys go to secondary school. In urban areas the rate is about three times as high as in the countryside (Countries and Their Cultures).

In Burkina Faso the small, rural farmers make up the bulk of the population, and this is the socio-economic group whose living conditions are the most vulnerable in terms of money, opportunity and capabilities. There is little irrigation and people practice mainly rainfall hoe culture, which is highly vulnerable to variations in precipitation. In all regions, the rainfall pattern tends to vary dramatically from year to year in timing, quantity, and regional distribution. There are good and bad years and this may change from one village to the next. Recurring droughts are the most dangerous natural hazards, sometimes leading to famine. The typical short, violent storms contribute to problems of soil erosion and

crop damage. The most important crop is millet (sorghum and penisetum). In certain regions corn, rice, groundnuts, vegetables, okra, and yams are cultivated. Farmer's raise livestock as well, however meat is rarely eaten. The main staple food is a kind of paste prepared with millet or corn flour. In most rural areas both women and men work in agriculture. Men are expected to furnish the millet, while women are in charge of all other things (Countries and Their Cultures).

Extended family is very important and relatives from the husband or wife's side may live together with the nuclear family. In rural areas the average household size is over eight people, and it is not uncommon for three, four, or more generations to live under one roof. Infant care and child rearing is the responsibility not only of the biological parents, but of the whole compound and, in rural areas, the entire village (Countries and Their Cultures).

Poverty in the Sahel region has increased over the last ten years due to drought, poor distribution of rainfall, locust invasions, and floods. However, despite this, many actually regard Burkina Faso as a 'regional breadbasket'. Burkina Faso is divided into zones that are either self-sufficient, deficient, or surplus producing. Last year there were 890,000 metric tons of potentially marketable grains, and a potential domestic demand for only 675,000 metric tons of grain. This surplus is sufficient to meet demand in deficit zones within the country as well as to export in order to meet deficit-fueled demand in neighboring countries (World Food Programme). The major obstacle for doing this is simply the country's infrastructure; getting the produce from the farmers to the consumers, and also having a market for their produce at all. What in reality happens is that the vast surpluses, year after year, that do not find a market are wasted either by being placed into inadequate storage and rotting or simply being thrown out right from the start. Despite the continuous support received from various NGOs and other development partners during the past several decades, Burkina Faso is still ranked 181st out of 187 countries. And according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the per capita income is the lowest in the Sahel region (\$1,124) (Burkina Faso).

However, rebuilding infrastructure and access to markets is not sufficient to guarantee security for a subsistence farmer. Even if rural farmers did have the resources to transport their produce to markets, it is highly likely that there won't be any market. To compound the dilemmas posed to rural farmers by lack of infrastructure, foreign entities continue to add cheaper produce to the market in the form of food aid, even more so since Malians began taking refuge within its borders. The fact that Burkina Faso is landlocked, make the country's population particularly vulnerable to economic shocks such as high and low food prices that can be caused by such aid, and this ultimately limits vulnerable people's access to food. Although it undoubtedly has good intentions, the UN World Food Program (WFP) has contributed to depreciating wheat prices by supplying the immediate needs of the poor with imported, subsidized food. Subsidies flowing from these foreign governments are about 2.5 times the development assistance they provide (Lentz).

No amount of foreign aid can sustain a nation because it is only temporary. The most effective foreign aid is aid that will create a self-sustaining populace. Food aid, specifically, does not provide long-term solutions because it does not improve the average rural farmer's ability to sustain themselves independently in the future. To solve Burkina Faso's food crises, international actors must redistribute funds that are received in the form of food aid to a more proactive approach that facilitates the movement of local produce to the market, and builds infrastructure at the same time. One venue to achieve this is known as Local and Regional Procurement (LRP). LRP is the purchase of food aid by donors and food aid organizations from within the country in which the food is needed (Lentz et al.). Local and regional purchases play a potentially significant role in maintaining farmer production incentives during surplus years, simply because there *will* be a market, and thus maintain demand. The revenue generated by the purchases returns to farming households, which further assists households to invest in agricultural production, income generating activities, as well as education and health care. Many studies

commissioned by the World Food Program (WFP), in countries such as Ethiopia, Malawi, and Guatemala, have shown that sustained food aid via LRP has many positive effects on a nation's economy (World Food Programme). Local procurement has been shown to successfully stimulate market development, spur investment in food processing industries, and enhance farmers' productivity. In the long run, sustained local procurement in a developing country such as Burkina Faso may raise farm-gate prices, increase farmers' investments in productivity, and improve farm incomes.

Local Procurement may also serve developmental goals in at least two ways: (1) by boosting long-term additional supply from local and regional farmers, and (2) from beneficiaries building local infrastructure with the incentive of food, food-vouchers or cash transfers. Being an alternative, local procurement of food aid in Africa has also attracted growing interest because of its ability to reduce speed delivery times. For this reason, many food aid donors, other than the US, have switched to local and regional procurement of food aid commodities, and, if expanded throughout Burkina Faso, could have great impacts on the present food insecurity (Lentz et al.).

Local and Regional Procurement can be implemented in a variety of ways, mainly two. One approach would be to buy produce directly from local and regional farmers and distribute it to food aid recipients in place of traditional food aid. Alternatively, they may give cash or vouchers to a targeted population directly so they can buy food in their local markets. In this case, typically, an aiding agency announces the date of a fair and what produce will be redeemable by the voucher recipients. On the day of the fair, the small rural farmers gather in one location to sell their commodities to the targeted recipients that were provided with vouchers that exchange for commodities from the invited local farmers (Coulter and Hodges).

Because Burkina Faso is a landlocked country it would benefit greatly from projects like LRP, which has been proven in various studies to cut shipment time by a great amount. In landlocked countries, projects relying on LRP rather than transoceanic shipments, through which traditional food aid is provided, save on average between 11 and 24 weeks (Coulter and Hodges). In one small study, Burkina Faso was the country with the second largest number of weeks saved. It was shown that LRP saved, on average, 19.5 weeks compared to transoceanic food aid deliveries, a substantial difference that could have potentially great impacts (Coulter and Hodges).

Burkina Faso is made up of three agro-climatic zones. As a result, the country includes surplus food-production zones, self-sufficient production zones, and zones that are deficient in food production. The annual 2010 MoA food security report shows that sixteen zones had a food deficit, sixteen a food surplus, and thirteen were neither deficient or in surplus during the last production cycle. In order to implement any plan of Local Procurement it is necessary first to identify from which regions the food aid will be produced and to what regions it will be transported (Coulter and Hodges).

The next step is to strengthen the capacity of community farmer groups to produce high quality produce by training local farmers. To ensure high quality of the purchased commodities, project 'animators' train local farmers in the distribution zone on minimum quality standards for production and storage of their produce using demonstrations. This is when more efficient and effective techniques are demonstrated, including the use of improved varieties of seeds, the promotion of intercropping to reduce pests, the introduction of fertilizers and herbicides, and hermetic storing. This is not only meant to ensure the quality of the produce which will be distributed as aid, but also provides an opportunity to build farmer cooperative capacity in terms of bulk sales, negotiation, and contract management (Lentz). It is essential that farmers develop these skills in order to enter into sales with other buyers, especially exporters and to meet the needs of future local procurement purchases.

Once all produce is harvested the aiding foreign countries are responsible for transport as well. Because

Burkina Faso lacks in infrastructure, development is another aspect that Local and Regional Procurement improves. Not only do the aiding nations have to set in place a basic transport system, and provide commodities such as warehouses and storage facilities for the produce, beneficiaries in food-deficient zones must also build local infrastructure in return for food, food-vouchers or cash transfers, and acts as a form of incentive to motivate locals as well (Lentz).

Formal sector traders can play a large part in promoting greater competition between these food aid marketing channels as well. Venues to do this include developing stock positions from which they can supply both private and food aid customers, and encourage the traders to invest in warehouse storage in the food-surplus zones and to sell further down the chain. In countries characterized by large price fluctuations, such as Burkina Faso, it is desirable to make a net positive contribution to price stability, in order to work in favor of the livelihood of surplus producing rural farmers and of consumers. According to various studies led by the World Food Program (WFP), by varying the quantities of certain commodities procured locally, according to the size of the local crop and the timing of its availability, it is possible to do so (Coulter and Hodges).

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