
Rural development in Burkina Faso: More security, less migration

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The worldwide explosion of prices for staple food can be traced all the way to the backyards in the Sahel state of Burkina Faso. In the spring of 2008 protests against the prices made even made headlines. In the middle of 2008 one 50 kg bag of rice from Thailand costs a little over 40 US dollars (21'000 CFA) on the market of Ouahigouya in the North of the country. Six months ago the price was not even 30 dollars (13'000 CFA). Local rice became more expensive as well, even if the increase was not as drastic. Also prices for seeds and fertilisers went up. The predominant staple food in the North, however, is sorghum whose price has remained stable.



Family plots are the foundation for the lives of most farmers in Burkina Faso.

Eight out of ten of the 15 million inhabitants in Burkina Faso live in rural areas. Agriculture and animal husbandry are therefore the lifelines of 80 percent of the population – even if the capital Ouagadougou is home to around one million people by now. Cotton, Burkina Faso's most important export product, is in a crisis because of agricultural subsidies in the USA. Since then, interest in a wider range of rural products for export and subsistence has increased. Thanks to the higher prices of many foodstuffs the production of staple food will become cost-covering again or even profitable.

Enlarging the product range

In spite of the outstanding significance that agriculture has for the population as well as the national economy the government has so far not invested significantly in the sector. Upon the outbreak of the food crisis the government suspended value added taxes and import duties on staple foods as an immediate measure in order to break the uplift of prices. This caused expenses of almost 25 million dollars (12 bn CFA) in 2008. Whether this costly measure can be undone again remains to be seen. At the same time domestic cultivation of staple food was prioritised. Self sufficiency with respect to rice until 2015 is the goal. In order to promote the local cultivation of rice, the agricultural authorities of the Northern region have sold seeds and fertilisers to the local farmers at much cheaper prices. The official strategy for rural development particularly wants to increase the income of family farms by diversification, market orientation and modernisation.

“Burkina Faso has to increase its agricultural production. There is no way around it”, says the agricultural director of Yatenga province in the North of the country, Elié O. Dianda. Some years ago agricultural production increased thanks to expanding areas. But that will not be possible to the same extent in the future, even though the population increases. “That is why the government invests a lot in food security by promoting the cultivation of staple foods, vegetables and fruit through family farms.” Several pioneer projects have furthermore shown that it is possible to make more from the soil by using sustainable farming methods.

In the so far uncultivated Loubré low lands (“bas-fond aménagé”) the agricultural authority has made possible the irrigation of some 100 hectares. 162 households have each been allocated a plot of land of 900 m² which they can use for the cultiva-



Small lots of land which can be irrigated are attractive for farmers: Rice is increasingly featured on their menus.

tion of rice during the rain season. “So far rice was only on our menu on special holidays and the sorghum harvest was not enough to feed our families for 12 months of the year”, rejoices Amadé Sawadogo, one of the farmers. “In the dry season we plant onions, tomatoes and cabbage.” Until now, such low land plots have been created for 1000 hectares and the state wants to multiply the surface.

Priority for rural development

Food security and rural development are treated as a priority in the government’s poverty reduction strategy. On this basis nine international partners, including Switzerland, co-finance the state budget. Through this the government has some additional room for manoeuvre for the implementation of its programmes. In a performance agreement with the donors the government committed to implementing a number of precisely defined measures and to meeting specific goals. These include, for example, stocking an adequate provision of staple foods or submitting a draft for a new rural land law to parliament. In their 2008 Aid Mémoire the foreign donors criticise a lack of strategic analysis in the area of rural development and insist that the private sector as well as civil society will be integrated in the elaboration of a programme for rural development. The central government’s importance is decreasing for the benefit of the community level and private actors.

“How much money has flown from the national budget to the Northern region in the past years?” There is no simple answer to



Only if life in the country is more attractive, will it be possible to break migration to the cities.

this question which my interlocutors could provide right away, because the payments are made through various channels. But since 2003 there was a marked increase in regional personnel. Furthermore, since 2006 there are freely available project credits (“crédits délégués”) and those have increased as well. Talking to non-governmental organisations which work in the agricultural sector it turns out that the open answer is no coincidence. The state budgets for rural development are very confusing and hardly transparent, also because several ministries are involved.

Small fish from Tougou

In the 70ies and 80ies of the last century emigration from the Sahel to the coastal regions was widespread. Irrigation systems can help to prevent depopulation. “The dam makes it possible for us to have a second sorghum harvest each year and to grow a lot of vegetables. Now the people again see a future in the village. Some

young people do go to the Ivory Coast as seasonal workers during the dry season, but they come back”, says Mamadi Ouedraogo, head of the village in Tougou in the Northern region of Burkina Faso.

Another project is nourishing the village head’s optimism: In view of a balanced diet fish farming has come to the attention of the agricultural authority as of late. Building small dams also in areas which receive little rain has contributed to the creation of a fishing industry, for example in Tougou. An installation for the breeding of fish is just about to be put into operation. In 12 basins some 20 million small fish should be produced annually. They reproduce every two months. Leftovers of local cereals (bran, sorghum) or termites which are free serve as fish food. The goal is to also promote private initiative for fish breeding and to deliver small fish from the station in Tougou to small entrepreneurs. General budget support also supports such small projects of the agricultural authority in the regions.



Selling fish on a market.



The "Rue de la Suisse" in Ouahigouya: A recognition of intensive and longstanding cooperation.

"Swiss road"

For more than 20 years, Switzerland has promoted rural development in a very diverse manner. It coordinates its work with that of other donors. Self help for family farms by developing farmers' organisations enjoyed priority. Drip irrigation in the cultivation of vegetables, organic cotton in combination with organic fertilising and crop rotation or the marketing of cereals are further elements and phases of Swiss development cooperation. Other important issues were farmers' access to the market, to training, and services such as microfinance. Technical improvements always went hand in hand with advocating for better framework conditions at the institutional and political level.

Ouahigouya is the capital of the Northern region in Burkina Faso, close to the border

to Mali. The small city is the regional capital and a pole of growth with almost 100'000 inhabitants. Swiss cooperation has left visible traces in the infrastructure of the place. In June 2008 a new abattoir which meets international hygienic standards has been inaugurated. The pulsating market in the centre is also a visible result of the cooperation with Switzerland. The city says thank you by prominently signposting an access road with "Swiss road" ("Rue de la Suisse"). The constructions are the Helvetic contribution to three small cities to strengthen the communities' capacities and to solve their problems themselves, because infrastructure generates local income for the cities. That is how Switzerland's engagement at the regional level goes hand in hand with the support for reforms at the national level through general budget support.

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