
General Budget Support: “Burkina Faso is not sleeping”

*Richard Gerster**

People’s motivation to work for the educational or health system in rural areas of the West African country Burkina Faso is not very big. “It is difficult for a nurse to survive on 50’000 CFA (just over 100 US dollars) per month”, says Souleymane Gnon Gre of the health ministry in the regional city of Fada N’Gourma. Furthermore, in the bush there are no opportunities for distraction. One is far removed from career possibilities. In order to pick up the salary, it takes a long way: one or two days on foot, by bike or motorbike to the next bank. The amount of absences from the place of work as identified in a recent study comes therefore as no surprise. On average the teachers employed by the state only hold 574 of the planned 961 lessons each year. Improving the working conditions for the state employees is necessary.



A large share of the daily chores rest with the women.

Why budget support?

Reviewing the employment conditions for public servants can only be done at the national level and for all ministries at once. An individual foreign donor which is for example active in the educational sector in one of Burkina Faso’s regions would be overburdened by an effective dialogue with the government. Legitimacy as well as broad experience would be lacking. This is why

some years ago various donors have pooled together and started providing direct support for Burkina Faso’s state budget. This so called budget support is a suitable context for conducting a political dialogue with the government and looking for solutions jointly.

In 2008 nine donors (the African Development Bank, Denmark, Germany, the European Commission, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the World Bank) as well as some observers (namely the International Monetary Fund, the UN Development Programme UNDP, Canada and Austria) were united by general budget support. Budget support assists the government’s intentions of fighting poverty which is widespread in the country. People with an annual income of less than 170 dollars (82’672 CFA) are considered to be extremely poor – in 2003 this amounted to 46.4 out of 100 people. According to some modelling which will need to be confirmed through surveys this amount has been reduced to 42.6 percent by 2007. In total the sum provided by budget support each year amounts to around 230 million dollars – well over 6 million dollars from Switzerland (8 mio CHF) – an amount equivalent to around 15 percent of the state’s expenses. In return the government commits to meeting agreed targets and implementing reforms. The donors’ coordinated approach should reduce the transaction costs of all parties involved. The vision is to have “a single, harmonised and simplified process” (Aide Mémoire 2008) for the measurement of progress of the reforms as well as the evaluation of the payment criteria.

The government does not like the geographic orientation of some foreign organisations, as they are more often than not different from national priorities and cause for new injustices. “Budget support in combination with our own resources allows us to balance out the international donors’ pref-



For many the budget is a closed book, not for François Zoundi of the ministry of finance.

ferences", says Soma Baru, president of the national parliament's finance commission. Furthermore, classic project aid is often administered via separate channels and therefore bypassing the budget. "If 40 percent of the effective expenses in the health sector are executed outside of the budget, it means that 40 percent of the health budget are outside of parliamentary control", assesses Kaphalo Silwe of the private centre for democratic governance.

"Budget support is an important sign for stability and trust", says Léné Sebgo, general director of international cooperation in

the ministry of finance. "But we do have our own resources. Burkina Faso is not sleeping." Burkina Faso is building on this trust and the successes of the past years if it is now on the short-list of those countries considered for a six year cooperation contract (Millennium Contract) with the European Union. One cannot miss the pride of playing in the same league with seven other countries such as Ghana.

"A project might solve a specific problem, but it is no guarantee for development in the sense of a societal change", illustrates Lélé Sebgo the limits of traditional cooperation. On the other hand, budget support is no panacea either. Because, "we have to be careful to not let the functioning of the state become a purpose of its own but that it delivers results for the population", says Jules Philippe Tougma of the non-governmental organisation GRAF. "Burkina Faso has too many plans which are not implemented."

No walk in the park

Switzerland has shaped budget support in Burkina Faso from its beginning. In spite of providing a share of less than three percent



Rural electrification increases economic opportunities.

it became the chair of the donor group for the of 2006. When it comes to public finances Switzerland pays particular attention to the mobilisation of own income (see separate article) and provides targeted additional support. Based on its distinctive grass roots work in the regions, it is also actively contributing to areas such as decentralisation, rural development, the role of women and civil society. Budget support is based on often cumbersome legwork.

Because it is not enough to, for example, to simply increase the budgets for education within the state budget. At the end of the day it is the result that counts. How many children have finished their primary education? Do they really know how to read, write and calculate? "Budget support has become the basis for a substantial dialogue, also with the sectoral ministries, which permits to foster results based cultures in sectors such as health or agriculture. Agreeing on a joint matrix of measures and results has been a turning point", says François Zoundi of the finance ministry. That is how the instrument of budget support with its results based performance agreement has become a vehicle to improve the dialogue between the finance ministry and the other sectoral ministries.

In the Aide Mémoire of 2008 the donors write: "The dialogue's quality around important topics such as poverty, inflation and the fight against corruption has further improved in 2007." From the international partners' perspective however the integration of the sectoral ministries is still considered a weakness. They demand a stronger identification with the reforms which are



Agriculture, including the cultivation of maize, is the foundation for life and survival in the country.

backed up by budget support and a more prominent participation in the dialogue and the expert commissions. The ideal case is presented in the educational sector which in 2008 has conducted the sectoral exam for the first time in the month ahead of the annual conference. "We are working on strengthening the sectoral dialogue in order for general budget support to be based on it", says François Zoundi.

The performance framework ("matrix") which has to be fulfilled by the government in order to receive the budget support disbursements, is extensive: In 2008 it contained 28 measures, 27 indicators and four references to other processes. Furthermore some of the measures and indicators are divided up and therefore contain multiple requirements. Without this trick the number would have been even higher. Detailed definitions of some measures (for example decentralisation) loose their strategic character and become operational. This complexity is the result of laborious negotiation processes with the government in which each donor wanted to have its preferences represented in the matrix. Furthermore the matrix should not only contain payment hurdles. It also claims to document the government's development progress and efforts in a comprehensive manner. "It is a general concern to reduce the number. But what we want to avoid at all costs is that individual donors want to have special arrangements with the government", says Mariam Diop who is in charge of Denmark's budget support and currently coordinating the donor group.



Security amounts to little in the face of poverty and the need of transport: Man and chicken on the roof of a minibus.

Keeping an eye on it all

Ultimately, the future of countries such as Burkina Faso lies with the private initiative of its inhabitants which live and work in most difficult circumstances. But it cannot be done without the state: schooling, health or security are public goods which particularly for the poor population are only accessible via a functioning state. This vision serves as a point of orientation for budget

support. Each state stands in a social context. "In Burkina Faso there are too many words without deeds, too many strategies without implementation", assesses a critical observer. "Looking over the state's shoulders is therefore a duty for all citizens." If and how the government is called to account by parliament and the public – the media and civil society – influences the effectiveness and efficiency of budget support considerably.



Priority for poverty reduction – yes, but how can a replacement for the international airport in the middle of the million city of Ouagadougou be financed?

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