Community-based literacy, Burkina Faso

Final evaluation report

by Steve Walter

[Topics: Africa: Burkina Faso, case studies, evaluation, literacy programs]

1. An overview of the project

The project which is the subject of this evaluation is a literacy project called "Community-based Literacy, Burkina Faso." Primary external funding came from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The primary executing agency in Burkina Faso was the Summer Institute of Linguistics, an International NGO. The CIDA reference number is 01776-S44242. As the project title suggests, the project was carried out in the country of Burkina Faso in West Africa.

Although conceptualized as a single project, the project had four components in terms of target population and the location of these populations in Burkina Faso. Each component coincides with a distinct linguistic people group. In most cases, such people groups are associated with a particular geographic zone in the country. Each group speaks a distinct language with these languages being known as "national languages" in the parlance of the country. There are approximately 70 such people groups in the country, with nearly every citizen having close ties to one or another of these cultural units.

The four people groups—Bissa, Bwamu, Cerma, Karaboro—participating in the project have a combined population of 750–800,000 people which is close to 10 percent of the national population. In this sense, the potential impact of the project is substantial.

1.1. Relevant facts about Burkina Faso

The following facts are relevant to understanding the context in which the project was carried out and for grasping the significance of the evaluative discussion on project activities:

Population: 9.8 million

Rural population: 82 percent of the total

Number of ethnic groups or languages: 72

Percentage of the population speaking French: 10 percent

Adult literacy rate: 10–20 percent

Number of villages in the country: 8,000

Per capita GNP: $300

Percentage of eligible age cohort beginning primary school: 38 percent

1.2. The literacy situation in Burkina Faso

Estimates of the national adult literacy rate range from 10 to 20 percent. Most of this literacy is French based. Rates of literacy in the respective mother tongues are negligible. National language policy encourages literacy through the mother tongue, although most past activity has focused on the three most populous languages: Moore, Dioula, and Fulfulde.

After the revolution (1983), an effort was launched—known as the Alpha Commando program—to make the country literate in a short, single burst of intense activity. People were brought to a single location from every village in the country and given basic orientation on how to teach literacy. Then they were sent back to their villages to organize classes and to teach people to read. The program produced little significant improvement in literacy, but did create a certain amount of awareness as to the need for literacy and associated skills.

To give technical leadership to work in adult education, the National Literacy Institute (INA) was organized within the Ministry of Education. This Institute is designed as a technical support agency. Actual programs in the field are the responsibility of another agency: Literacy Service to the Masses (SA) also working under the Ministry of Education.

1.3. Structure and methodology of the current project

In its execution, the project has been a joint effort of the Burkina Faso branch, Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL-Burkina Faso), and the Ministry of Education. On the Ministry's side, project responsibility was assumed at the provincial level by DPEBA, the provincial realization of the national Ministry of Education, and by SA, the province-level adult literacy agency. Within SIL, project

responsibility was allocated to field teams having specific programmatic responsibilities for each of the people groups participating in the literacy project. These teams are administered by SIL-Burkina Faso. General project coordination was the responsibility of Mrs. Olivia Tottle, a member of SIL-Burkina Faso. The reader is referred to Appendix 2 for a diagram of the general organizational structure of the project.

The four participating people groups were chosen for inclusion in the project because

a.   there was strong local motivation for literacy

b.   the necessary foundational linguistic research had already been done by SIL, and

c.   basic pedagogical materials as well as a body of post-literacy materials already existed (or were in draft) to support basic literacy classes.

1.4. The basic literacy cycle

For historical reasons, Burkina Faso has evolved the somewhat unusual pattern of scheduling literacy classes in short, intensive sessions during the hot, dry season of the year (January to May). Needed materials are developed in August to November preceding the season, refresher courses for teachers are offered in December, teachers are trained in January, and classes are held from February to April. After the season is over, technical and administrative staffs get together, under the auspices of DPEBA, to evaluate the season's activities and to make needed adjustments for the next season.

1.5. Program levels

The project being evaluated was conceptualized to have three levels. Each level takes a season to complete meaning that it takes three seasons, or three calendar years, for the student to complete the full cycle of courses or levels of the program. The levels are the following:

Level 1   Basic literacy (including basic math)

Level 2   Advanced literacy (more math, fluency in reading, and writing)

Level 3   Basic oral French and literacy in French

Learners are not required to progress through the three levels. Learners who successfully complete the first level are encouraged to take the second level, but less than half do so. Participation in the third level is primarily a matter of individual interest and initiative.

1.6. Local sponsoring committees and commissions

A significant feature of the project has been the organization of local bodies to provide community-level leadership and support. There are two levels of such bodies: language subcommissions and village committees.

1.6.1. Language subcommissions

Each language group is expected to have a language committee or subcommission which speaks for the community on matters of

- language policy

- problems of language development

- educational strategies, and

- priorities for literacy and other language-based, development activity.

These subcommissions are generally made up of recognized leaders and elders who also have a reasonable level of education.

The role of the subcommissions with respect to the literacy project was

- to provide a general endorsement of the literacy program

- to make needed decisions on orthographic problems

- to contribute to the development of needed materials, and

- to actively promote the literacy program throughout the language area.

1.6.2. Village literacy committees

Each village wishing to host literacy classes was required to have a literacy committee. This committee was/is responsible for

- the physical plant (if there is one)

- promoting participation in the literacy program at the village level

- registration of participants in the literacy classes, and

- handling any problems which come up with respect to the literacy classes, such as teacher absenteeism, missing materials or equipment, and teacher/community problems.

1.7. Materials and curriculum

Most of the didactic materials used in the project were developed by SIL teams assigned to the respective language community. The initial primers for each used an instructional model developed by INA, the adult literacy agency. The method is an eclectic method with a functional theme. Depending on the focus of the teachers, the method may have either a top-down or bottom-up instructional focus. The method is similar to that used in many adult literacy programs around the world.

Each lesson begins by making a practical point such as planting trees or boiling water. A sentence appears in the lesson containing at least one word containing a letter or sound to be focused on for that lesson. This is followed by some simple text for basic reading practice.

Separate materials exist for teaching math. These materials are supplemented by generic materials supplied by INA.

Other materials include post-literacy materials primarily on a range of development issues in health, agriculture, and nutrition.

Among the four project components, materials for the second and third levels are somewhat less homogeneous than in the first level.

1.8. Teacher selection and training

Because this was a mother tongue literacy project, all teachers had to be speakers of the language of instruction. Since, in most cases, there was little or no previous experience with mother tongue literacy, there was no pool of experienced teachers to draw from. Accordingly, the first batch of teacher candidates was drawn from among those who had had at least a little formal schooling in the French-based school system. These were taught to read in their own language, and then were taught to teach others how to read. They were also given basic instruction in classroom management, record keeping, and so forth.

After the first year of classes, the pool of potential teachers expanded to include those who had participated in the initial literacy cycle. As the program became more solid, it became a standard requirement that teacher candidates complete at least the first two courses (basic literacy, advanced literacy) before being eligible to work as a teacher.

In most cases, training consisted of a two- to four-week training course in the provincial capital or other appropriate center. The training content included

a. further skill development in reading, math, and other content areas

b. orientation to any linguistic or orthographic changes being introduced

c. teaching skills and methods

d. classroom management

e. project record keeping and reporting, and

f. various practical management and logistical matters, such as delivery of materials, timing of supervisory visits, and disposition of classroom equipment.

Initially, the training staff consisted of the SIL linguists/literacy specialists and any experienced local teachers. As the project became established, training was taken over by local supervisors and coordinators under the broad supervision of provincial adult literacy officers (SA).

1.9. Supervision

In each component, project supervision existed on two levels:

a. The actual village-level classes

b. The overall program for that component

1.9.1. Village-level supervision

Responsibility for supervision of the actual classes was split between the SIL literacy teams and named supervisors. Initially, supervisory responsibility was assumed primarily by the SIL teams. However, as capable and qualified local personnel were identified and developed, these assumed supervisory functions. By the time the project ended (in terms of Canadian input), most village-level supervision had been taken over by local personnel.

Supervision at this level consisted of the following activities: regularly visiting and monitoring classroom activity, helping teachers handle any problems which had arisen, and distributing any needed materials.

1.9.2. Component-level supervision

Responsibility for the supervision (or coordination) of each component was variously split between SIL, DPEBA, SA, and a named coordinator. The nature of the involvement of each depended on such things as factors of availability, training and expertise, and ability to travel.

Activities at this level included: training, reporting, problem solving, and coordination of activities between the various stakeholders.

1.10. Evaluation

Project evaluation activities occurred at three levels: learner evaluations, component-level operational evaluations, and project-level evaluation (of which this report is the end product).

1.10.1. Learner evaluation

DPEBA has an established system for evaluating each learner at the end of the learning season. This has been most formalized for those completing the basic level literacy classes as there has been a national desire to officially "certify" those who have become literate. The evaluation consists of an individualized test having written and production components. A separate, language-specific evaluation instrument has been prepared for each component. The evaluation is administered and evaluated under SA supervision at the end of the literacy season. A government certificate is given to all who pass the test.

1.10.2. Component-level evaluation

Shortly after the end of each literacy season, SIL, DPEBA, SA, and local project personnel (the coordinator and supervisors) get together to evaluate the season. This evaluation includes a look at materials, the functioning of the various classes, the suitability of the teacher training, and any needed operational adjustments which should be made.

1.10.3. Project-level evaluation

At the end of the project (as funded by CIDA), a formal evaluation of the whole project was carried out. This evaluation included

- a review of project documents

- site visits and interviews

- interviews with project staffs

- discussions with national technical personnel, and

- some spot testing of program participants.

2. Procedure of the evaluation

Evaluation paradigm

The general instructions for the evaluation are set forth in the Terms of Reference. The reader is referred to Appendix 1 for a full statement of these terms. Methodologically, the general evaluational paradigm used was that of information-based or naturalistic evaluation (Bhola 1990) sans some of the constructivist phenomenological notions that many associate with the process of naturalistic evaluation.

2.1. Evaluation model

Generally, the evaluation model underlying this study melds elements from the CIPP (Context-Input-Process-Product) model of Daniel Stufflebeam and the discrepancy evaluation model of Malcolm Provus.

Specifically, the evaluation was carried out in a such a way that the following four goals would be achieved:

1. To determine the extent to which the project's goals were met

2. To determine ways in which the program could and should be improved (assuming that it continues in some form)

3. To identify specific and concrete impact upon those participating in the project

4. To garner (articulate) any insights about the theory and practice of literacy generated by the program

2.2. Evaluational activities

In order to gather the information needed to meet the goals of the evaluation, the following activities were undertaken:

1. A careful review of all official project documents

2. Interviews with all SIL project staff, including general administrative staff

3. Interviews with all DPEBA and SA staff personnel involved in project implementation

4. Visits to all four project locations to observe the setting, facilities, training activities, and classes (where these were in session)

5. Meetings with local project personnel (teachers, supervisors, and coordinators)

6. Meetings with local subcommissions, where possible

7. Analysis of project data

8. Meetings with a sampling of cooperating NGOs involved directly or indirectly in project activities

9. An interview with the director of the National Literacy Institute

10. An interview with the Minister of Education.

2.3. Preliminary presentation of findings

The final phase of the evaluation in Burkina Faso included separate presentations of preliminary findings to participating SIL staff personnel (plus the senior administrative staff), and to the general director of the National Literacy Institute. These presentations seemed well received and served several purposes. First, the presentation to the SIL staff gave an opportunity to verify and refine some of the observations made and conclusions drawn by the evaluator.

Secondly, the presentation to the head of the National Literacy Institute provided not only an opportunity to inform the director of project activity but also to elicit feedback from this agency on some of the problem areas which had been identified.

Thirdly, the presentation to the National Literacy Institute provided an additional point of contact between the two agencies (SIL and INA) at a technical level which should facilitate future cooperation between the two agencies.

3. Project goals and objectives

As per the goals of the evaluation, the first task was to evaluate the extent to which the project's goals and objectives were met. This discussion includes some comments on the appropriateness of these goals and objectives.

3.1. Statement of goals and objectives

In the original project application, the following general goals were specified:

1. To promote literacy as a community value

2. To promote the use of literacy as a basic condition for local and personal development

3. To promote the development of local institutions, movements, or associations which will be capable of providing long-term continuity in literacy and development activities

In subsequent project documents, the list of goals was further operationalized to include the following:

1. To increase the level of literacy, especially among women

2. To encourage the population to read and use their newly acquired literacy and math skills for economic development and improvement of the environment

3. To use and improve the autonomous literacy structures to insure that literacy will continue

4. To achieve a sufficient number of mother tongue literates in each language to insure cultural sustainability

5. To work closely with the Burkina Faso government in assisting them with their mass literacy efforts

In the original project application, the following specific objectives were stated:

1. The training of 250 literacy instructors to teach the basic course

2. The training of 25 literacy instructors to teach the advanced literacy courses

3. *Hold at least 300 basic literacy classes

4. 2,500 successful graduates of the basic literacy courses

5. 500 graduates of the advanced literacy courses

6. The publication of 55 titles and 77,250 exemplars of didactic and functional literacy materials

7. The training of 21 supervisors

8. The construction of three regional literacy centers

*This number of classes is not explicitly stated in the proposal, but has been inferred from other goals and information about class size, expected attrition rates, and expected pass-fail rates.

3.2. Appropriateness of project goals and objectives

The stated goals are not inappropriate. Nevertheless, a couple of the goals were too general and/or ambitious to be realistic, especially the goal of achieving literateness as a community value. Similarly, the (1997). *Notes on Literacy, 23*(1).

goal of achieving sufficient literacy to produce long-term sustainability is a good goal but beyond the scope of this modest project.

On the other hand, the project objectives seem to have been both appropriate and realistic. As will be noted in the subsequent discussion, project results came very close to matching project objectives. Actually, apart from a problem in learner assessment, most objectives were met or exceeded.

3.3. Project results relative to specific objectives

The following table compares project objectives with actual results.

Table 1 A quantitative comparison of project results with project objectives

Project results compared to project objectives

	Stated objectives	Project results
Basic literacy instructors	250	274
Advanced literacy instructors	25	21
Basic literacy classes	300	331
Successful graduates (basic)	2,500	1,651/3,145*
Successful graduates (advanced)	500	390
Publications (titles)	55	59
Publications (exemplars)	77,250	32,776
Supervisors trained	21	42
Regional centers constructed	3	3

* Two values for number of successful literacy graduates is given. The second number represents an adjusted estimate of effective literacy. The rationale for this adjustment is explained below.

3.4. Comments on the project results in the table

It is necessary to add some notes of explanation of the results in Table 1, especially for those items which seem to vary somewhat from the initial project objectives.

3.4.1. Successful graduates (basic)

The results of the basic literacy classes (Level 1) are set forth in the following table.

Table 2 Table showing the overall rates of participation and successful completion of the basic literacy classes in the project

Program achievements - Level 1 (Basic literacy)

	Registered			Finished			Passed		
	M*	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Bissa	676	689	1,365	397	434	831	281	221	502
Bwamu	952	333	1,285	477	208	685	304	75	379
Cerma	812	397	1,209	571	295	866	229	70	299
Karaboro	1,545	425	1,970	1,226	342	1,568	371	100	471
Total A	3,985	1,844	5,829	2,671	1,279	3,950	1,185	466	1,651
Total B									3,145

*M = male and F = female

The objective was 2,500. The result has two values: 1,651 (Total A) and 3,145 (Total B). The first number (1,651) is the number of people officially declared literate in the project. However, one of the findings of the evaluation was that the basic literacy classes included a very rigorous math component, including complex division and multiplication. Graduates had to successfully pass **both** the reading and math components to be officially declared literate. For this reason, an adjusted estimate of successful graduates has been provided (3,145) to better reflect actual literacy achievement. This estimate was calculated by assuming that at least two-thirds of those who finished the course but failed to pass both sections of the final evaluation still achieved an acceptable level of basic literacy.

3.4.2. Successful graduates (advanced)

According to project records, 820 people enrolled in the advanced literacy classes, 656 finished the classes, and 390 people passed the test for this level. The full data are set forth below in Table 3.

The project objective was for 500 successful graduates. Although there were 656 people who completed the course, only 390 of these actually passed the test. On one hand, the goal was exceeded in that more people completed the course than called for by the project objective. On the other hand, the number

passing the final exam was less than the proposed objective. The evaluation did not investigate the reason(s) for this differential for the advanced course.

The pass rates for the advanced classes were significantly higher (59.5 percent) than those for the beginning classes (41.8 percent). On the other hand, the percentage of female participants was slightly lower (26.6 percent) than in the basic classes (31.6 percent).

Table 3 Table showing the results of the advanced classes for all four components participating in the project

Program achievements - Level 2 (Advanced literacy)

	Registered			Enrolled			Passed			Pass rate
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Bissa	214	141	355	178	108	286	140	73	213	74.5
Bwamu	103	19	122	68	11	79	48	10	58	73.4
Cerma	71	35	106	49	23	72	29	10	39	54.2
Karaboro	214	23	237	197	22	219	71	9	80	36.5
Total	602	218	820	492	164	656	288	102	390	59.5

3.4.3. Publications (exemplars)

The discrepancy here is due to several factors:

1. The projects greatly scaled back the volume of newsletters printed. This reduced the raw count of published exemplars by about 12,000.

2. A considerable body of literature was published with funding from other sources because they were needed before project moneys became available. This accounts for another 17,000 exemplars.

3. The number of copies of many publications was scaled back as more realistic estimates of need emerged, observing the pace of program development. This further reduced the number of exemplars by 5–10,000 although it did not greatly reduce the printing cost.

4. Some material was supplied by INA, meaning it did not need to be published from project funds.

In sum, the literature goal, in terms of the breadth of literature, seems generally to have been met although the sheer volume of material is below that originally projected.

On balance, the quantifiable objectives of the project were satisfactorily met. Subsequent sections will examine in more detail questions of program effectiveness, namely, pass rates, program completion, and the participation of women.

3.5. Project results relative to general program objectives

3.5.1. To promote literacy as a community value

There is not universal agreement on what this means nor on the measures which indicate that this ideal has been met. General discussions on the matter include a number of salient factors.

1. Basic literacy skills are essential to carrying out the daily activities of life.

2. A literate environment exists (signs, posters, directions, charts, pieces of literature, advertising, and so forth are encountered repeatedly throughout the day).

3. Local institutions exist which both use and depend upon literacy for their normal operation. Shirley Brice-Heath has argued (personal communication) that a language community must contain at least two institutions which require literacy before literacy becomes a community value.

4. Literacy is valued to the point that basic education for children becomes a high priority.

By most of these measures, it would seem that this goal has not yet been met in project locations. This is not surprising, given that most villagers still live at a subsistence level, existing rates of literacy are very low, and the level of technology commonly found at the village level does not require literacy. Furthermore, most of the evidence suggests that, even under supportive conditions, the attainment of this goal takes about a generation.

The fact that this goal was not specifically met by the project cannot fairly be seen as a measure of project failure. The conditions which support literacy as a community value are complex including education, levels of economic development, institutional development, available literature, and levels of social and institutional complexity. With respect to the present project, it seems appropriate to observe that the road to general literateness must begin somewhere, and the project has provided a solid beginning for the four target communities. The body of local literature has been enlarged, a corps of trained teachers exists, embryonic institutions have been developed, and a group of people in each community has become literate. Some confident first steps have been taken toward literateness as a community value.

3.5.2. To promote the use of literacy for local and personal development

Without prolonged observation of those who successfully completed the literacy courses, it is difficult to adequately assess this objective. We are largely dependent on indirect and anecdotal evidence. The indirect evidence includes such factors as the amount of literature being bought and read in the villages (a steady volume of material being bought), the number of people taking the advanced courses (about half of

those successfully completing the basic course), the local desire to continue literacy classes even though funding may not be available, the number of people seeking assistance from general development agencies, and the increased likelihood that literacy graduates will venture into entrepreneurship.

Anecdotal evidence included the following accounts. In one village, it was reported that two men who had graduated from the literacy class were emboldened to start a small agricultural cooperative, growing and marketing vegetables. This was made possible by the math and literacy skills gained in the literacy courses.

In another case, it was reported that a woman who had finished the literacy class was so keen to help others in her compound that she taught four of the six women living there to read over the course of a year's time.

A negative example of the consequences of illiteracy surfaced in another village. An elderly woman had children in the capital city who sent her a potpourri of medicines for her use. When she became sick, she took them all, not knowing the difference and nearly died. After being rushed to the hospital to have her stomach pumped out, she has become an advocate of literacy even though she, herself, remains illiterate.

A fourth anecdote had to do with a crippled man who sells cigarettes for a living. Before attending the literacy classes, he was often talked into selling cigarettes on credit with the result that he typically lost money. After taking the literacy classes, he began making notes of who owed how much and for how long. People stopped buying on credit, knowing that sooner or later they would have to pay up. As a result, this small vendor now operates a more effective business.

Taken singly, such anecdotes seem unimpressive. But multiplied hundreds and even thousands of times, the cumulative impact upon a community and a nation is more significant.

3.5.3. To promote the development of local institutions for long-term continuity

This goal is judged to have been well met. All but one of the languages (Karaboro) involved in the project now have a language subcommission. Furthermore, each village having a village literacy center now has either a literacy committee or the village delegate and/or elders act as a go-between, that is, between the villagers and literacy coordinator/SIL. In addition, the corps of supervisors and coordinators in each language project acts as another informal institution promoting literacy.

These local institutions have generally functioned very effectively in the tasks they were assigned. Even so, they still have much to learn to achieve the broader goals of literacy, education, and development. This point will be developed further in later discussions on project strengths and recommendations.

3.5.4. To increase the level of literacy especially among women

The broad subject of increase in literacy has already been addressed. What about the levels of literacy among women? The analysis of project data indicates that about one-third (31.6 percent) of all participants in the basic literacy classes were women. This is a commendable achievement, given the

cultural and pragmatic challenges which tend to keep women out of literacy classes. While the pass-fail rates for women were lower than those for men, the determination of the women to become literate is evidenced by the fact that a higher percentage of women than men finished each basic class relative to the number that enrolled. (See the next section for a further discussion of this matter.)

3.5.5. To assist the Burkina Faso government with their mass literacy efforts

In terms of making progress toward literacy, this goal was met in all four project components. In terms of achieving an effective level of official participation in local language literacy, the goal was satisfactorily met in three of the four components. The fourth component, Karaboro, has largely operated outside the domain of official involvement. The reasons for this are numerous, including the working style of the SIL literacy worker, the attitude of the local adult literacy official about language policy, certain isolationist tendencies on the part of the Karaboro people, and an unfortunate incident involving a motorcycle.

Despite these problems, literacy activity in this component flourished. In fact, it was the only component which managed to organized French transition classes. Nonetheless, the situation was not and is not healthy and merits some administrative attention to solve the misunderstandings.

In summary, the goals which were clearly achievable during the time frame of the project have been quite satisfactorily, even admirably achieved given the starting conditions for literacy. The goals which are intrinsically long term will take time to achieve. The one significant problem area is quite solvable and has not precluded program activity.

4. General evaluative assessments

This second section of the evaluative commentary on the project addresses the question of what project elements could and/or should be improved. These comments assume project continuation though the matter of continuation is clearly outside the scope of the present evaluation.

4.1. Significant findings

In carrying out the evaluation, a number of features of this particular project stood out which merit comment. These are listed below with additional explanation as needed.

4.1.1. Country-specific findings

1. In the main, there is an open and supportive atmosphere toward mother tongue literacy in the country. Official national policy provides good support for mother tongue literacy for adults. In actual practice, however, this has been generally limited to literacy in Moore, Dioula, and Fulfulde, the most widely spoken mother tongues of the country. Nonetheless, higher-level as well as lower-level officials signaled their general belief that the mother tongue is the most effective route to literacy for the rural adult population of the country.

2. The National Literacy Institute (INA) is one of, if not the most effective adult literacy agency in West Africa.
   While INA is not directly involved in grass roots programs (grass roots delivery is through SA, another agency in the Ministry of Education), it does provide good technical support for such programs. The leadership of INA seems capable, energetic, and has a good vision for adult literacy in the country.

3. There is a reasonably effective national apparatus for delivery of adult literacy.
   In Burkina Faso, adult literacy and primary education function together at the provincial level. While this would seem unusual, especially in Western countries, it turns out to be quite effective and appropriate in Burkina Faso. This may well be the case because of the high levels of illiteracy in the country, as well as the fact that there is still a high degree of ruralization in the country and minimal bilingualism in French, the language of formal education.
   While this apparatus is short on funds and technical personnel, it does seem generally amenable to cooperation with NGOs interested in literacy. This attitude has been obvious in evaluating the present project. In fact, there was some evidence that the official adult literacy apparatus may depend almost too much on NGOs for programmatic activity in adult literacy, choosing to let these take the fore in many cases.
   I do not see this as a substantial problem, as long as all parties seek to work together in carrying out programs in adult literacy.

4.1.2. Project-specific findings (organizationally)

4. In the main, there was solid and constructive cooperation between SIL and SA in carrying out the project.
   The level of cooperation evident in the project between SIL and official agencies in carrying out a basic mother tongue literacy program is somewhat unusual. In the more typical case (around the world), SIL linguists and literacy workers have tended to prefer to carry out trial literacy programs more independently because of the tentative and experimental nature of such programs. Conversely, it is commonly the case that national adult literacy agencies lack active, provincial-level staffs able to take a meaningful role in basic mother tongue literacy projects.
   Both SIL and official functionaries are to be commended for the evident level of cooperation: SIL for its willingness to do the extra work needed to carry out these projects cooperatively, and INA/SA for its willingness to accommodate itself to the awkwardness of working closely with an expatriate NGO. Even though there were some rough edges, it is my opinion that the partnership has been an effective one.

5. The project benefited enormously from having some very high quality, component-level, project coordinators.
   Every project manager looks for key staff to assist in project implementation. This particular project was notable for the outstanding quality of the local personnel who functioned as component level coordinators (that is, the Bissa component, the Bwamu component, the Cerma component, [and] the Karaboro component). These coordinators have vision, determination, technical ability, and integrity. The project owes much to these anonymous but very capable local leaders.

6. There was enthusiasm for the project and project results at the village level.
   Not uncommonly, one sees apathy and indifference among those for whom programs are developed. While literacy is still a "new thing" for many of the villagers targeted by the project, there was evident enthusiasm about literacy. With such enthusiasm, it is rewarding to be a part of a literacy program.

7. There was a fast response time once the project was approved/funded.
   Both SIL and official agencies are to be commended for having project components up and running so quickly. Obviously, there had been previous foundational work done in terms of linguistic research and materials development. Nonetheless, all parties moved quickly and effectively to get the program up and running once funds became available.

4.1.3. Project-specific findings (technically)

There were a few interesting findings at the technical level of the project. These are spelled out below with appropriate comment. In several cases, there will be further analysis of findings in subsequent sections of the evaluation.

8. The overall pass rate was 41.8 percent, an unusually low rate for a basic literacy program.
   Worldwide, most reasonably-managed literacy programs expect a success rate of 65–80 percent. In this project, the pass rate was only 41.8 percent for those who finished the course. Relative to those who started (enrolled), the pass rate was only 28.3 percent, a very low success rate indeed! In general, it was noted that very few passed the final evaluation unless

   a. they had previous experience in the formal school system, or

   b. they had gone through the basic literacy course at least once before.

There will be considerable further discussion of this finding in a following section.

10. A higher percentage of women (69.4 percent) than men (67 percent) stayed in basic literacy classes for the full season.
    In all four project components, female participants were more likely to stay in the program for the whole season. No one in the project had a clear explanation for this finding, although there were a number of hypotheses.

11. Women (36 percent) were considerably less likely to pass the final evaluation than men (44 percent).
    Offsetting the advantage identified in Point 9, women were less likely to pass the final evaluation. There were two major hypotheses for this finding.

    a. Fewer women than men had experience in the regular school system.

    b. Women were less concerned about a certificate formally declaring them literate. Rather, they were satisfied with the knowledge they had gained in the course.

12. In two components—Bissa and Bwamu—there was more than a 20 percent differential in the pass-fail rates between men and women (favoring men).

No one had a satisfactory explanation for this finding. The Bissa component has a strong women's program with female teachers and supervisors and a considerable recent history of literacy, yet it had a 20 percent differential. On the other hand, the most traditional group—the Karaboro—had nearly identical pass-fail rates for men and women. Surely there is an explanation but this evaluation did not uncover one.

13. A significantly higher percentage of people finished in Cerma and Karaboro (15 percent advantage) compared to Bissa and Bwamu.
In Karaboro, there are fewer schools available so many see the literacy classes as their only opportunity to learn to read. There was no comparable explanation for Cerma.

14. The ability (financially) and the will to sustain literacy activities without funding support is in question. The evidence encountered suggests that program activity will probably drop off about 75–80 percent, but basic classes will probably continue at least for some period of time.
It is a goal of most development efforts that conditions be established such that autonomous, sustained activities continue after external support ends. The achievement of such conditions is a delicate blend of many factors including

- motivation

- timing

- technical knowledge

- leadership

- available resources, and

- supporting social and cultural factors.

In the case of the present project, most of these factors are present, although in varying degrees from one project site to another. In the absence of external funding, the factor of available resources probably looms the largest in terms of sustainability. There is motivation, leadership, technical knowledge (for most elements of the project), and supporting cultural conditions. It is for this reason that a prediction of continuing activity at 25 percent present levels seems reasonable. This estimate could probably be raised but for the rather grim economic situation in the country (average per capita GNP of about $300 dollars).

4.2. Notable strengths of the project

Most development projects have definite strengths and weaknesses. This section and the next will identify and contrast the strong and weak features of this project. While the lists of strengths and weakness are about of equal length, the reader should clearly understand that the project is **not** being viewed as a weak or mediocre program. The strong points of the project tend to characterize the project broadly, while the list of weaknesses or problems are generally more technical or of reduced (negative) import to the project.

1. Strong relationship between SIL and DPEBA/SA.
   The project was a joint effort of SIL, the NGO, and DPEBA/SA, the provincial-level government agencies responsible for primary education and adult literacy, respectively. The division of roles and responsibilities was, generally, as follows:

DPEBA/SA provided	SIL provided
Routine teacher training	Linguistic research
Learner evaluation	Initial teacher training
Certification	Materials
Some supervision	Village-level coordination
Some generic materials	Project management services

   This seems to have worked quite well, even though there were a few rough edges and some details fell through the cracks of undefined responsibility. The relationship or partnership seems to be one which can be built upon more broadly for a sustained attack upon the problem of illiteracy in the country.

3. The existence of local language committees in each project component (except Karaboro).
   A strong feature of the project is the existence of local language committees. These committees are a first step in building a local institutional base for sustained literacy and other development activities at the village level.
   There are two levels of such committees; language committees (higher level) and village literacy committees (lower level). This two-level structure provides, on the one hand, a body of recognized authority to speak for the entire people group on matters related to language and literacy, and on the other hand, a grass roots level of organization capable of providing support and delivery at the village level.
   This has been an effective strategy for beginning to "indigenize" literacy and associated development activities in the target communities. It is a model worthy of emulation in similar projects elsewhere.

4. High-quality leadership in project components, especially local project coordinators.
   This point has already been touched on in the previous section. As with the preceding point, it is worth noting that such leadership augurs well for continued project activity and substantial project expansion should needed resources be made available.

5. Formal learner evaluation at the end of each season.
   It is not uncommon in literacy programs that learners are certified as literate, solely on the basis of having completed the class. In fact, in some more "pell-mell" campaigns, people have been counted as literate merely for having registered for the classes.
   In good programs, some testing or evaluation process is implemented, whereby program participants are tested to determine whether they have truly become literate. This was the case in the present project. Roughly speaking, a generic achievement test is given to all course graduates to determine

whether they can officially be certified as literate. A test covering reading skills, dictation, and competence in math was devised and given to all graduates. Those who passed were given certificates indicating successful completion of the basic literacy courses.

Responsibility for devising, administering, and evaluating the tests fell primarily to the provincial adult education officer (SA). This official was assisted by the SIL linguist or the project coordinator since most of the SA officials are not speakers of the language(s) spoken in the province of assignment.

6. A single common instructional model for the basic literacy materials.

    All of the beginning didactic materials for reading instruction use the same instructional model, an eclectic method with a functional literacy orientation. The use of a common model was especially helpful to the SA staff who were officially responsible for instructional content (although they were not directly involved in primer construction). The use of a familiar model facilitated their role in program supervision.

7. A strong linguistic base for the beginning didactic materials.

    All of the languages being used in the literacy classes are recently written languages. Therefore, a substantial amount of linguistic work has had to be done to support the literacy effort. This work has been carried out by SIL linguists and seems very adequate for the immediate purposes of literacy. Not only do the materials appear to be linguistically sound, but the mere fact that literacy is being done in the mother tongue appears to have a galvanizing effect on the local people. In the evaluation, the point was repeatedly made that "now we can become real citizens because we are literate and our languages are real languages because they've been written."

    These attitudinal impacts are important, both at the human level as well as at the institutional level. A small, multilingual country like Burkina Faso needs to effectively engage its citizenry if it is to develop. Those who have participated in this literacy project appear to represent a constructive addition to the fabric of national life because of what they have learned.

8. Strong participation on the part of women in the program.

    One of the major goals of the project was that of raising the level of literacy among the female population. This is in keeping with a major international thrust to give special attention to the needs of women in developing countries. The profile of female participation in the basic literacy classes is given in Table 4.

Rates of female participation in basic literacy classes

	Registered		Finished		Passed	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
Bissa	689	50.5	434	52.2	221	44.0
Bwamu	333	25.9	208	30.4	75	19.8
Cerma	397	32.8	295	34.1	70	23.4
Karaboro	425	21.6	342	21.8	100	21.2
Total	1844	31.6	1279	32.4	466	28.2

While overall, the level of female participation in the project is quite high relative to initial projects in similar cultural conditions elsewhere, the results were not evenly spread through all four project components.

Overall, the rate of female participation was 31.6 percent of the total. For the social, cultural, and economic conditions of the area, this would be considered very good although it still leaves women underrepresented in the project.

The Bissa project somewhat distorts the picture, however, as more than 50 percent of the participants in this group were women, leaving the others with participation rates around 25 percent. The lowest rates of participation were in Bwamu and Karaboro, the two groups which are the most traditional, and which have the lowest current indices of children in school.

It is noteworthy to observe that, percentagewise, more women than men finished the basic literacy classes. This is a clear indicator that the women are motivated for literacy and will go to considerable lengths to become literate. The project is to be commended for having involved so many women at this early stage though much remains to be done to put a dent in the problem of female illiteracy.

9. A strong math component in the beginning literacy class
    It has become a de facto norm to include a math component in basic literacy classes although this still does not happen universally. The present project has a strong math component in the basic classes, as well as in the advanced classes. In fact, this component may even have been too strong. More will be said on this later.

10. Good record keeping and information flow
    It is very common in small-scale literacy projects that basic record keeping and information flow are inadequate. By contrast, the present project has done a good, even excellent, job of record keeping. Whether this is an artifact of the French penchant for keeping detailed records, or merely a commitment to good information on the part of the project staffs, is not clear. What is clear, is that

good information flow exists on the project, including such areas as details on class attendance, test scores, and teacher evaluations.

11. Strong financial management on the part of SIL
    Because the grant was to SIL as an international NGO, this agency was responsible for the management of funds. An examination of the project budget and look at the financial records and record keeping system indicate that this aspect of the project was handled fairly and professionally. There was an instance of theft or loss when a national contractor hired to build one of the literacy centers was found guilty of misuse of funds. This was caught early in the job and the man was prosecuted, found guilty, and ordered to repay the money stolen. Unfortunately, the man disappeared and authorities are still looking for him.
    Otherwise, financial management was handled very well.

4.3. Specific problems identified

A number of problems were identified which, if handled, would smooth out areas of irregularity and further strengthen project function and impact. Most of these problems are addressed with specific recommendations so will only be identified and briefly discussed here. None of the problems identified seriously impaired project operation.

1. The instructional season is very short and intense.
   Since the early 1980s, Burkina Faso has followed the tradition of holding short, intense literacy classes during the hot, dry season from January to April. The goal is to have at least 300 hours of instruction during this period. It is frequent that this goal is met by having 40 to 48 class days in which learners meet for six to eight hours per day. This is an extraordinarily heavy schedule, especially for people not used to sitting in a classroom at all, let alone for six hours a day.
   When one adds to this intense schedule, the fact that classes meet in nonair-conditioned buildings with ambient temperatures of 100–115 degrees Fahrenheit, one should not be surprised that instructional effectiveness is sharply reduced.
   The counter argument is that, during this period of time, people are not otherwise occupied in normal subsistence activities. Once the rains start, everyone becomes preoccupied with farming activities.

2. There is a general problem of coordination because of communication problems (for example, lack of telephones, lack of vehicles [on the part of DPEBA and SA staffs], and long distances to travel).
   In a certain sense, this is an obvious and expected problem. It is to be assumed that communication will be difficult in an underdeveloped country. In this particular case, the problem takes on an added dimension because of the cooperative nature of the project. When multiple agencies are involved, the need for effective communication increases. The lack of communication lead to visible though not usually serious breakdowns in areas such as supervision, evaluation, and problem solving.

3. Teachers with no educational background caused some weaknesses in the quality of the instruction, especially early in the project's life span.
   In the earliest phase of the project, people were chosen to be teachers who had no previous teaching experience and little or no educational background in the formal school system. As a result, even though they received basic training in the teacher training courses, some of these people were

ineffectual as literacy instructors. The problem tended to be ameliorated as the project proceeded and the pool of teachers expanded.

4. The interrelationship between the SIL teams and provincial officials (DPEBA and SA) was not always clear.
    The project was designed to be a cooperative effort between SIL and DPEBA/SA. However, project implementation proceeded without a careful spelling out of respective responsibilities between SIL and DPEBA/SA staffs. As a result, there was a certain amount of confusion, different understandings as to who was responsible for what, and a certain number of details which simply "fell through the cracks." In some cases, an extra effort to handle misunderstandings between SIL personnel and official personnel solved these problems. In other cases, they remained largely unresolved.

5. The basic instructional design is not well suited for minimally trained or unsophisticated teachers (literacy instructors).
    The basic instructional model used in the primers in the project was specified by INA. The method is an eclectic method popular for many adult education programs. The advantage of this approach is that it maximizes learner participation and sense of accomplishment. The downside is that the method usually requires more sophisticated and better-trained teachers. In this particular project, the average educational level of the teachers was probably two to three years (counting the literacy classes as a year). Teachers with this level of experience generally need a more structured method of instruction to function effectively.
    The director of INA recognized this problem and indicated that the agency was planning to take an in-depth look at the matter. The problem is not a simple one as many materials already exist, existing teachers and supervisors are familiar with the method, and it seems generally adequate to the task.

6. Cooperating provincial officials had minimal orientation on the basic objectives of the project.
    The original project proposal was developed by SIL with only nominal input from the National Literacy Institute. SIL sought and secured project funding. As a consequence, there was a reduced sense of "buy-in" or ownership on the part of local provincial officials who were to be partners in project implementation.

7. The sustainability objective is vastly too optimistic and needs stronger conceptualization.
    The conditions of internal sustainability are still somewhat ephemeral. What is known for certain is that self-sustainability typically requires 10 to 20 years. The stated goal of achieving sustainability in two years was not realistic. Still, it should be noted that this has or had little to do with effective project implementation.

8. Almost across the board, there is/was not enough post-season literacy activity to keep new literacy skills sharp.
    It is widely reported in literacy projects in developing countries that not enough post-literacy material exists to keep reading skills sharp. In this particular project, there was more post-literacy material available than one normally encounters. The more serious problem, however, is that most villages do not represent a "literate environment." There are few signs, posters, advertisements, newspapers, bulletin boards, or charts which stimulate even nominal amounts of reading.
    The problem is further compounded by the somewhat informal division of the year into a "learning

season" and a "working season." During the learning season, the learner is intensely involved with print. In the working season, such involvement is almost nil.

9. There is considerable variation in the interpretation and application of national language policies at the provincial level.
   While the national language policy states that literacy should be supported in all of the national languages of the country, the vast majority of such work has been in just three languages: Moore, Dioula, and Fulfulde. During the evaluation, it was found that some adult education specialists have come to accept—consciously or unconsciously—that these three languages are the only ones really worthy of literacy activity. Implicitly or explicitly, speakers of other languages ought to limit themselves to literacy in one of these three languages. This attitude entirely misses the point that, for speakers of language X, Moore or Dioula are just as inaccessible as French or English.
   For others, there is concern that mother tongue literacy will lead to ethnic conflict and separatism. Worldwide, there is little evidence that this happens unless other compelling conditions also occur, such as political and economic discrimination.
   For the project, the consequence of this variability was uneven support for some components of the project. This was most evident in the Cerma and Karaboro projects, where there was not only benign neglect of some project literacy activities, but even a little covert rivalry, paying Karaboro speakers to attend Dioula literacy classes rather than the Karaboro literacy classes. While this did not seriously disrupt or compromise the Karaboro literacy classes, it did send negative signals to the Karaboro project staff.

10. There was considerable variation in the experience and style of the SIL literacy teams.
    Even though SIL has a reasonably adequate system in place for providing consultant and technical support to its project teams, this cannot overcome the fact that some of the project staff were newly arrived in the country and had little experience. While the technical components of the project were not compromised, there was some impact on coordination and integration with the DPEBA/SA apparatus.

11. There is some evidence that the evaluation process is not even among all the provinces.
    Responsibility for the evaluation of learners falls to the province level adult education officer. One result is that there is considerable variation in the testing standard from one province to another. In the case of Bissa, for example, the people are scattered in two different provinces so that two different provincial officers are involved in developing evaluation instruments. The result was a significantly different pass-fail rate in one province than the other, because the evaluation metric was more rigorous in one than the other.

12. The math component of the basic literacy courses is too rigorous causing unnecessarily high fail rates on the final learner evaluations.
    It is highly desirable to have a good numeracy component in any basic literacy class. Learners need to master basic facts and processes in addition and subtraction, telling time, handling cash transactions, and understanding the use of weights and measures.
    In this project, however, the math component, which is a national curriculum component, went well beyond basic numeracy, including not only complex addition and subtraction problems, but also the full gamut of division and multiplication processes.

It was widely observed that very few first-time learners master all of this math. Those who pass the math section of the examination are almost always those who have been to formal school classes or who have taken the literacy classes at least once before.

Given that simple electronic calculators are available everywhere in the country for a couple of dollars, it seems totally inappropriate to put such a heavy emphasis on math thus significantly depressing success rates in the literacy classes.

4.4. Project design

For the most part, the project design was realistic and appropriate to the situation. The design glossed over or understated the necessary linguistic research which needed to be done to make the project possible. Since this work had already been done by SIL as a part of its normal program, there was probably not a felt need to add this component to the project design. Even so, it is helpful to grantors and others who review project designs to be aware of the role that such work has in basic literacy projects in linguistically diverse nations.

As discussed elsewhere in this evaluation, a couple of the goals stated for the project were far too ambitious to actually be achieved within the time span of the project. This observation applies most specifically to those goals which have to do with such areas as process—achieving literateness as a community value and having a significant impact on local development. While the project represented significant first steps in the accomplishment of these goals, full or visible attainment is five to 20 years away.

The technical design of the project was very suitable. The evaluation showed project implementation closely approximated project design.

4.5. Project administration and management

Since the project was based on a grant to SIL as an NGO, SIL assumed lead-agency responsibility in carrying out the project. At the implementational level, however, responsibility was shared between SIL, INA, and DPEBA/SA.

Within SIL, the administration of SIL-Burkina Faso assumed general administrative oversight. On behalf of the SIL administration, Mrs. Olivia Tottle of SIL, was given responsibility for general project coordination. The accounting department of SIL, under the leadership of Sharon Thompson, handled— very well, in fact—the financial management of project funds. General operational responsibility was assumed by the SIL teams assigned to the language projects which corresponded to project components: Bissa, Bwamu, Cerma, and Karaboro.

This somewhat decentralized management structure worked for the most part, but it is not optimal for this kind of project. It would have been desirable to have someone on SIL's part who had direct administrative responsibility for the project. Having a project administrator would/could have solved some of the low-level problems of misunderstanding between SIL teams and DPEBA staffs working at the component

level. Such a manager would also have been in a position to interface directly with INA to strengthen that working relationship and to handle some of the technical issues which arose in project implementation.

5. Cost and cost effectiveness

According to project records, project expenditures were as listed in the following table.

Table 5 A breakdown of budgetary allocations in the project

Financial profile (All figures given in Canadian Dollars)

	Amount	Percent of total
Training	$11,715	3.9%
Materials & supplies	61,936	20.5%
Supervision & coordination	32,820	10.8%
Facilities & equipment	43,380	14.3%
Teacher reimbursement	28,460	9.4%
Research & development	50,000	16.5%
Operations	32,530	10.7%
Technical support	10,000	3.3%
General administration	25,457	8.4%
Evaluation	6,500	2.1%
TOTAL	302,798	100%

Several points are worth making about this profile of expenditures. First, the amount allocated to teacher reimbursement is a low percentage of the total budget. Teachers received only a nominal honorarium for their teaching. While all teachers would like to get paid more, there was a general recognition in the project that work as a teacher was really a form of community service. This helped substantially to hold down program costs.

Secondly, the research and development costs, in combination with the cost of materials constituted just over one-third of the total budget. The research and development costs were borne entirely by SIL as its contribution to the project. The materials, on the other hand, were published entirely from actual cash input into the project. Relative to Canadian cash input, this item amounted to about 50 percent of the total budget. Obviously, this is one reason why mother tongue literacy programs are sometimes viewed as unacceptably expensive.

Thirdly, training costs were comparatively small. These costs were held down by

a. keeping training sessions short

b. not paying trainees during the time of the training, and

c. encouraging the village literacy committees to pay transportation costs to the training site as their contribution to the project.

In this project, what did it cost to achieve literacy for those participating in the project? How does this cost compare to other projects and programs? The key data are set forth in the following table. Total project cost was $302,000 Canadian, while actual external cash input was $132,000 Canadian.

Table 6 Per student costs in the project, community-based literacy, Burkina Faso, from 1993–1995

Cost effectiveness - Basic literacy (Figures adjusted to US dollars)

Literates	Cost basis	Cost per enrollee	Cost per finisher	Cost per passer
Reported	Cash Input	$15.62	$23.05	$55.15
(1651)	Total cost	$38.58	$59.93	$136.20
Adjusted	Cash Input	$15.62	$23.05	$28.95
(3145)	Total cost	$38.58	$59.93	$71.50

In Table 6, the cost per student has been broken down in several ways. First, there are two major divisions based on reported success rates versus the adjusted success rates. This distinction is based upon the observation made elsewhere in this evaluation that the evaluation process used in the project considerably distorted project success in terms of those who became effectively literate. Also, there is a division between "cash input" and "total cost." The latter includes various in-kind contributions by the

participating agencies and villages. The factors for "cash input" are limited to actual grant funds and other external moneys invested in the project.

The table is further subdivided to show cost per enrollee, per finisher, and per literate (as reported by two different metrics). Of primary interest is the cost per literate, a metric sometimes used to calculate the overall investment cost of literacy. This metric may also be used to compare literacy programs for internal efficiency.

The cost factors of greatest interest are in the right-most column. At the one extreme we note a cost-per-literate of $136.20. This figure is based upon the most conservative number for literates (based on a relatively rigorous examination) as well as a maximal accounting of project inputs including many in-kind project inputs. This cost is somewhat high by normal SIL and other NGO standards ($50–75), but is well below costs reported for the Experimental World Literacy Project ($300–350 dollars per literate).

If we take the more realistic estimate of literates from the project (3,145) we note a total cost of $71.50, again based on a maximal estimate of project costs. Based solely on external cash inputs, the cost-per-literate is reduced to $28.95. In either case, this cost per literate is quite favorable and demonstrates an acceptable level of internal efficiency in achieving results. If the project had continued for another year or two, the cost factors would have been even more favorable as there were high front end costs in getting this project launched. Cost per literate for the next two years could easily be half that reported here.

These data also provide an indication that the cost-per-literate in Burkina Faso need not be exorbitant. In fact, even with no allowance for efficiencies of scale, we can roughly estimate that the cost of achieving universal adult literacy in Burkina Faso would be in the range of $115–286 million.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations address specific issues identified during the evaluation process. Most of the recommendations address matters very specific to the project and its continuation. However, a few recommendations of a more general nature have also been included which go beyond the immediate project to the broader context in which the project took place. It is recognized that this liberty, in a certain sense, goes beyond the mandate of the evaluation. Nonetheless, it has seemed appropriate to include these recommendations as both SIL and INA will be continuing their work in literacy in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, the evaluation is not just an academic exercise, but is linked, however tenuously, to the long-term future of the country and people of Burkina Faso. For this reason, there is a certain moral urgency to promoting steps which speak to this future.

6.1. General recommendations

1. Experiment with a longer instructional season.
   It is recommended that official agencies seriously investigate the option of a longer instructional season (six to eight months for example). The suggested advantages are:

   a. Less intensity, thus, more effective learning

b. A more prolonged exposure to print over the course of the year, thus, more reinforcement and less loss during the "off season"

At the same time, it is recognized that there may be some significant disadvantages as well:

a. Higher cost because of more supervisory time needed

b. A greater tendency to not stay in classes when fields are further away from the village

The director of INA reported that there had already been some experimentation with a longer instructional season with poor results. However, there was not time to discuss the full circumstances of these experiments to determine whether there were other identifiable explanations for the reduced effectiveness.

4. Develop written working agreements between SIL project staff and provincial-level DPEBA/SA officers.
   As the project was implemented, agreements with DPEBA/SA officers were almost entirely oral. This allowed for substantial slippage in follow through. To solve this problem, it is recommended that there be a written agreement or plan of action between SIL teams and DPEBA/SA officers. These agreements would spell out plans for the coming literacy season, would indicate who was responsible for what activities, and would provide a written record of plans for the year. Such written agreements should be filed with appropriate administrative staffs in both agencies.

5. Develop some means of insuring a higher level of equivalence among the various literacy examinations.
   It is recommended that the National Literacy Institute, in coordination with relevant entities, make an effort to define a generalized basic literacy skills test for use throughout the country. An attempt should be made to have approximately the same number of questions or exercises in each test component, to have equivalence in the level of difficulty of the questions, and to verify the linguistic validity of the questions posed on the test.

6. Do some joint planning when literacy programs are under consideration.
   SIL, INA, DPEBA, and SA have been cooperating in the execution of this literacy project. It is quite likely that all four will continue to be jointly involved in future literacy programming. SIL has a contract with the Ministry of Education. Therefore, it would seem most appropriate that, where literacy programming is concerned, all agencies would benefit from some joint strategic planning. **Therefore, it is recommended that the agencies concerned seek to do some joint planning whenever literacy programs are being developed in which all will be involved in the execution.** Each agency brings unique strengths, resources, and perspectives to literacy programming. All stand to benefit from joint participation in planning sessions with respect to literacy programs.

6.2. Project-specific technical recommendations

1. Rethink/expand the role and function of the language committees incorporating, where feasible, the literacy apparatus.
   A stated goal of the project was to begin developing local infrastructures and institutions capable of

providing long-term support for literacy activity at the language and village level. To this end, the present project made very good progress in organizing language-level as well as village-level committees wherever literacy classes took place. In addition to these committees, a delivery apparatus was also developed under the aegis of SIL and DPEBA/SA.

The committees can be considered the "political" arm of local literacy with the delivery apparatus (coordinator, supervisors, teachers) being the "technical" arm of local literacy. Both of these "arms," as local institutions, proved quite effective in carrying out their respective tasks. However, in the short life span of the project, these two "arms" had only token levels of integration.

To better achieve the project ideals of local autonomy and sustainability, there is a need for stronger integration of the political and technical components of the project.

Therefore, it is recommended that SIL and/or SA officers seek ways to achieve a higher level of integration of these two local functions.

2. Provide further training for inexperienced literacy instructors.

One problem encountered was that of inexperienced teachers being assigned to teach basic literacy classes. While this problem was greater in the earlier phases of the project, it may be a continuing problem in that teachers are typically nominated by village committees and may or may not have adequate background or experience.

Accordingly, it is recommended that, when such teacher candidates come, appropriate adjustments be made to the training requirements for such teachers. This might include extra sessions of practice teaching, or even a time (a season) of being mentored in a class before assuming full responsibility for a class.

3. Include much more supplementary drill material in the basic literacy classes to complement the instructional method being used.

The basic instructional method used (an eclectic method) is generally workable, especially when handled by capable and experienced teachers, but could be made considerably more effective with the addition of some supplemental drill material.

Therefore, it is recommended that attention be given by technical staff at INA and by other training staffs to the development of a generic set of supplemental drills or exercises which can be easily and routinely add to each basic lesson by the teacher.

This need not entail modifications of the primer materials. Rather, teachers can be trained to create and apply a simple set of supplementary exercises to enhance the quality of the instruction for beginning readers.

4. Develop and include a stronger writing component in the advanced literacy classes (Level 2).

The field of reading instruction is becoming increasingly aware that writing supports reading. It was noticed during the evaluation that the present instructional system puts little emphasis on writing (neither form writing nor creative writing). The inclusion of a stronger writing component (probably in the second level classes) would serve two purposes:

a. Reinforcing and strengthening reading/writing skills

b. Adding to the body of potential literature available to be used in the community

Therefore, it is recommended that the curriculum designers give attention to developing ways in which more writing can be incorporated in the second level curriculum.

6.3. Recommendations to SIL

1. This kind of a project needs to have a full-time project director with direct administrative responsibility for the project.
   This project functioned without a full-time person having direct administrative responsibility for the project. There was a project coordinator who handled very general matters such as

   - record keeping

   - reporting

   - very basic coordinational issues, and

   - the logistics of the evaluation.

Most of the direct responsibility for project implementation was devolved to the SIL and SA staffs working at the component or provincial level. The SIL administration was available to solve major problems when such arose.
As it turned out, there were not many major problems which had to be solved so this approach worked. However, it is not a strong model of project administration and did leave a fair number of nagging problems unresolved.
Therefore, it is recommended (to the SIL administration) that such projects have a full-time project director to oversee all aspects of project implementation. A commitment to provide such a director should be one of the significant considerations in applying for grant moneys to carry out such projects in the future.

3. Updating current proposals for literacy and development
   Following the successful completion of the current project, SIL has already developed and circulated a follow-up funding proposal. The new proposal was reviewed during the time of the evaluation, although this was not explicitly a part of the Terms of Reference for the evaluation. Since the new proposal had been developed before the evaluation was carried out, it had no access to the findings of the evaluation. Now that the formal evaluation has been completed, two recommendations with respect to the new funding proposal are germane.
   First, it would be both appropriate and highly desirable to update the new project proposal based on the findings of this evaluation. This could be accomplished either by updating the document itself, or by circulating this evaluation as an emendation to the new proposal. Secondly, some consideration should be given to broadening any new program design (for literacy) to include more explicit development components along lines addressed in the final section of this evaluation ("Literacy and Development").
   While SIL is not specifically a development agency in the narrower sense of the term, it is clear, at the same time, that Burkina Faso will be facing significant developmental challenges in the not-too-distant future. Therefore, it would seem appropriate that any project which falls in the general

category of development–including literacy—should include at least some components addressing some of the broader development needs of the populace.

6.4. Recommendation to potential donors

1. Further investment in mother tongue literacy.
   It is a facile thing (and politically correct) for a politician, policy maker, or development specialist to espouse 100 percent literacy. It is quite another to allocate funds to universal literacy when there are so many competing demands for limited available funding.
   Should major donors consider additional funding for literacy in Burkina Faso? Is literacy important to the country? Would such money be wasted? Burkina Faso is an interesting case, and the present literacy project and accompanying evaluation shed at least some light on the question of future development funding in the country.
   Eighty percent of the population live by subsistence agriculture. The carrying capacity of the land has already been exceeded. Current rates of adult literacy are not more than 15 percent (less according to the Minister of Education). The current school system is not a solution in terms of impacting current literacy rates. The population continues to grow at a rate of just under three percent per year, a fact which will lead to a 50 percent increase in population in the next 15 years and a doubling of the population in the next 25 years.
   The net result is that the country is currently "locked into a pattern of development options" which will, over the next ten to 15 years, lead to severe ecological degradation, further desertification, and widespread famine. The widespread lack of literacy almost guarantees this eventual scenario. The only doubt is the timing. The only solution is a wholesale commitment to alternative models of resource use **and** family planning.
   On the positive side, Burkina Faso is a country with above-average resilience and spirit. It still receives a good supply of rain for a Sahelian country. What it lacks is a population with the conceptual tools and models to restructure itself and its relationship to the land. Such tools are based on basic literacy and numeracy. (See the following section on literacy and development for a more detailed explanation of this conceptual linkage.)
   It appears that there are three options: spend modest amounts of money now for programs of basic literacy and development; spend larger amounts of money later in programs of emergency assistance after large scale disaster; do nothing and let the country slowly disintegrate from the combined weight of scarcity and over-population.
   None of these is an especially attractive option. Most donor nations and agencies have plenty of internal problems to solve without worrying about the needs of other parts of the world. Donors wish to see emerging nations develop the skill and initiative to solve their own problems and have invested substantial resources in an effort to see this happen. Informed observers note that Burkina Faso is one of the emerging nations which has handled itself reasonably well with respect to development needs. Still, it is the view of this observer that the future of the nation, while not currently grim, is not very bright either. Perhaps most haunting, is the belief that a timely investment now of the right sort could go far toward tilting the odds in a favorable direction for the people of Burkina Faso.
   Therefore, it is a recommendation of this report that development donors interested in Burkina Faso seek to fund informed literacy/development projects having a tripartite focus on

literacy/basic adult education, family planning, and the creation of effective alternative models of rural resource utilization.

7. The issue of mother tongue education in Burkina Faso

A primary justification for adult literacy is that it is presumed to be a foundational (necessary but not sufficient) condition for development. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation suggested that it might also be appropriate to consider the possible place of mother tongue education in the mix of literacy and development. This seems appropriate given that the country of Burkina Faso is now seriously studying mother tongue education as an alternative model to the existing system. In fact, some experimental projects are already being tested.

For strategic purposes, a nation's educational policy makers must think in terms of an educational system designed to meet the general economic, political, and moral needs of the country. Most ex-colonial nations inherited educational systems designed to meet the needs of the colonial power. Some of these ex-colonial nations are now beginning to wrestle with the question of appropriateness of such models to their unique situations. Burkina Faso is just one of these countries.

7.1. The argument for mother tongue education

Most arguments for mother tongue education are based more narrowly on issues of ethnic identity and educational effectiveness. In the case of Burkina Faso, there is a much more complex and overarching case to be made for the importance of mother tongue education in the development of the country. The essential argument runs like this:

Given that, in the sphere of education:

About 80 percent of the population of Burkina Faso is rural, living in 8,000 traditional villages scattered around the country.

Only 50–60 percent of rural villages have schools.

Only about 35 percent of school-aged children ever begin school.

By the end of the fourth level, only 15.5 percent of the age cohort remains in school (see Appendix 3 for a graph of typical patterns of school leaving in Burkina Faso).

It appears that at least four years of schooling are required to maintain literacy into adulthood.

Therefore:

The present education system would appear to effectively institutionalize adult illiteracy at about the 85 percent level nationwide.

Is the current educational system meeting the long-terms needs of this country? This seems debatable. The continued high rate of adult illiteracy, the lack of jobs for educated graduates, and village-level nonparticipation in the educational process are all factors suggesting the need for a fundamental reconceptualization of education in Burkina Faso. The following set of facts lend support to this conclusion.

Given that, in the economic sphere:

The carrying capacity of the land has already been exceeded (assuming the current pattern of land usage)

Exploitable natural resources to support economic development on a large scale are not known to exist

A classical education in French prepares one to work primarily in an urban and technological environment

Burkina Faso can not presently support large-scale urbanization

UNESCO figures demonstrate a clear relationship between level of education and birth rates

Therefore, what is needed is:

An educational strategy which achieves much higher levels of participation and retention especially for females (at least five years)

An education which is oriented to rural life and economics

An education which directly addresses the developmental needs of the country

7.2. Conclusion

The best prescription would seem to be a mother tongue education program with a high level of village integration and a very pragmatic curriculum tailored specifically to the development needs of the country.

Such a system would be little short of a total reinvention of education in Burkina Faso. On the one hand, this would seem a very radical step to take. On the other hand, it is becoming increasingly clear that radical changes are probably necessary.

In its favor, Burkina Faso is a country with a history of pursuing unconventional solutions to its problems. It is also a country with more than the normal amount of passion for self-help, national pride, and a willingness to mobilize the populace for national causes.

8. Literacy and development: The case of swidden agriculturists in an overextended ecosystem

8.1. Introduction

The project being evaluated is very much a "simple" literacy project. While it is generally assumed that such a project has, or will have, broader developmental implications, there were no overt development components (so defined) in the project. Yet, at least, or especially in the case of Burkina Faso, there are potentially profound developmental implications of a persistent pattern of illiteracy. In fact, a case can be made that the future of the country is probably riding on a satisfactory solution to a problem complex including illiteracy as a key element.

The following brief analysis attempts to specify the key elements of this problem complex. While the project being evaluated made no claim to being a clear and obvious solution to the problems which exist, the evaluation process evoked by the project may, in fact, provide some insight into the broader issues at stake.

8.2. Literacy and development in Burkina Faso

In almost any setting, it is relatively easy to observe developmental benefits of literacy at the level of the individual and/or his immediate family. Such benefits are much harder to project systemically for a whole nation. Burkina Faso, however, is an interesting case where the relationship may be easier to model. Consider the following line of reasoning.

Roughly 80 percent of the population of Burkina Faso are swidden agriculturists (slash-and-burn agriculture). Swidden agricultural systems have the following characteristics:

- Decision making about resource utilization is highly fragmented (usually at the level of the individual farmer).

- Available resources (for example, land, water, wood, plant and animal life, minerals, and energy sources) are not manipulated in a reasoned manner, they are used or consumed as encountered and needed.

- The knowledge/technology base is very flat or thin.

- The level of abstractness (models, planning, profit, [and] cost-benefit) is usually minimal.

- There is little sense or explicit knowledge of the interrelatedness of natural systems.

Swidden agriculture is a simple and energy-efficient subsistence system **as long as** there is enough land available to support the existing population. In the case of Burkina Faso, it is said that the land needed to support a given family unit is 15 to 20 times the amount of land needed to support the same family for one year. In essence, each piece of land needs 15 to 20 years to recuperate from previous use.

The critical problem for swidden systems is that of carrying capacity. What happens when the population reaches the level where it is no longer possible to leave land fallow for the needed 15 to 20 years? The

land slowly becomes exhausted supporting fewer and fewer people. Erosion and desertification occur. Famine looms.

The carrying capacity of Burkina Faso is estimated to be about seven million people. The population is nearing 10 million. Farmers already report that land is having to be abandoned because it is worn out. The present model of land utilization cannot long sustain the (current and growing) population of Burkina Faso, to say nothing of supporting economic development. There is little choice but to begin developing alternative agricultural or economic models for the country.

It would seem that a wholesale, nationwide solution must incorporate most or all of the following elements.

- The rural farmer must learn to **manipulate** (not simply use or abuse) the available resources in a constructive manner, especially water and energy resources. That is, he must learn to do long range planning, and to work cooperatively with others.

- One or several abstract models must be developed of how to use the available resources more effectively. Various such models exist but will require a combination of public and private initiative to identify, test, and diffuse them.

- There must be a coordinated use of available resources with some differentiation of tasks and rewards.

- Rural farmers will have to be trained in the use of various techniques and strategies for manipulating abstract models and symbols (for example, planning, coordination, calculation of benefits, debts, shared obligations, and all forms of problem analysis).

To summarize, the following steps seem essential to securing long-term national well-being.

- Population growth must be slowed down.

- Water resources must be harnessed and managed on both national and micro levels.

- Steps must be taken to protect and strengthen soil resources.

- The land must be used both directly (planting crops) and indirectly (for example, trees and forage).

- A more complex and efficient model of land use must be developed.

- Widespread but low-technology irrigation needs to be developed.

How are any of these things to be accomplished? What does literacy and education have to do with any of these proposed steps? The evidence of many countries and people groups is that little of this is possible apart from basic literacy and probably some education. Literacy and education provide one with the conceptual and computational tools needed to deal with the higher level of systemic complexity entailed in a differentiated and planned agricultural system. And since the vast majority of the population of Burkina Faso is monolingual in a local language, it seems that mother tongue literacy and/or education is an essential ingredient in the developmental future of Burkina Faso.
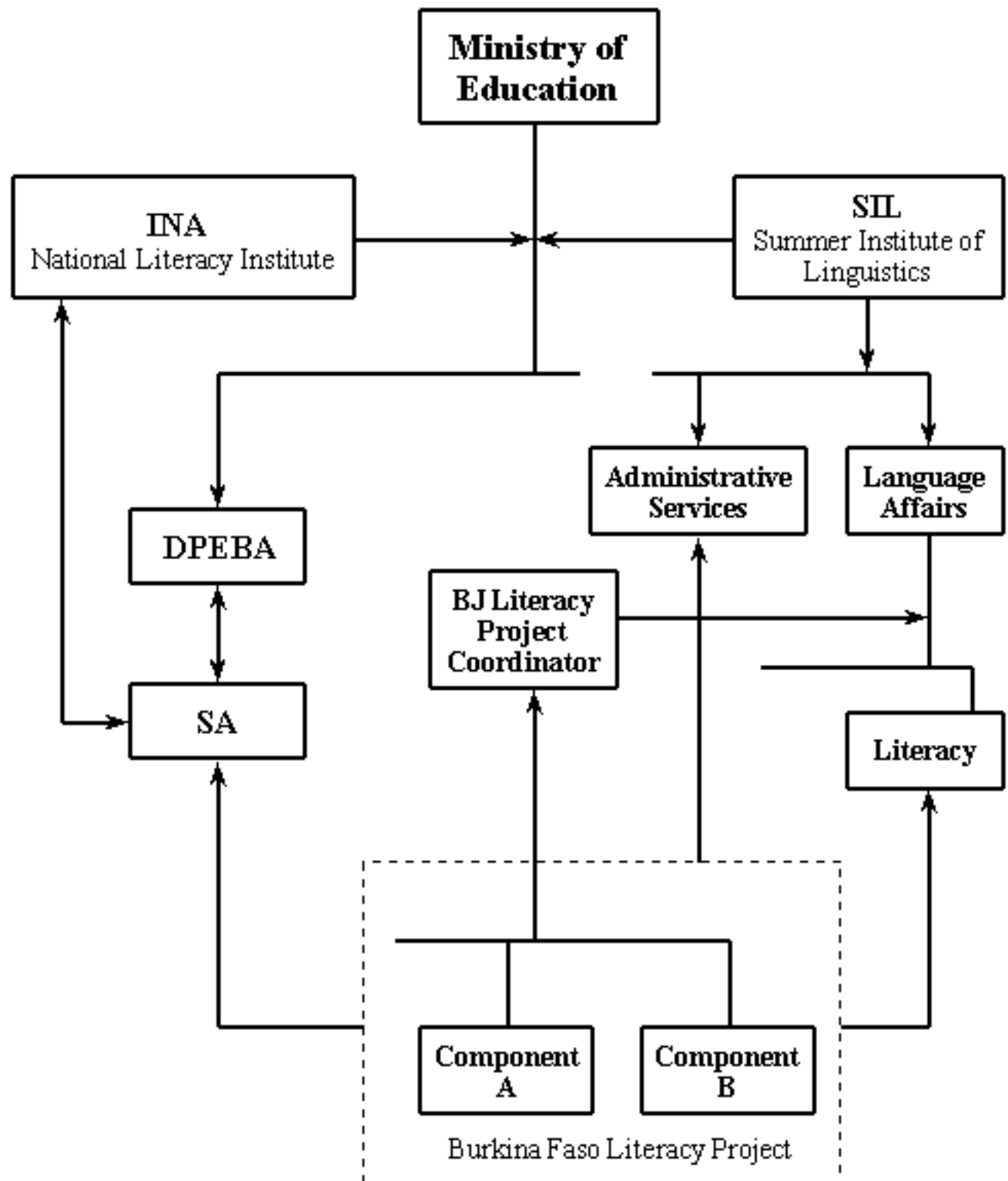
Appendix 1. Terms of reference

The following is the stated Terms of Reference given to the evaluator for the purposes of this project evaluation.

To conduct an evaluation of the 1993–1995 project plan of the Community-based Literacy Program of SIL in Burkina Faso specifically:

1. To review and comment on the longer-term objectives of the program, together with the approach and methods used to achieve these objectives. The stated project goals were to promote literacy as a community value and as a basic condition for local and personal development. Organizationally, the approach used attempts to set up local and regional structures, that is, language literacy committees which can take full responsibility for all literacy and associated development activities in their community. As designed this now includes three components: basic literacy, functional literacy, and bridging into French (the official language). Other components, for example use of mother tongue languages in schools/formal education, may or should be added if essential for achieving the longer-term goals of the program.

2. To review the results obtained for each of the four language groups included in the program, that is, Bissa, Bwamu, Cerma, and Karaboro, taking into account the initial conditions of each language group as well as any conditions specific to each group which (may) have affected the results obtained.

3. To review program structure, management, and administration including procedures for training, teaching, supervision, reporting, monitoring, and evaluation. This should include a discussion of SIL's role and the essential services it provides in program planning, management, and implementation as well as in relating to government agencies and networking with other NGOs.

4. To comment on the impact of this program in terms of improved literacy rates, involvement of women (as learners, teachers, supervisors, and in other leadership roles), community development initiatives (if any), strengthening of organizational capabilities and improved living conditions (illustrated with human-interest stories).

5. Lessons learned and recommendations.

Appendix 2. Organizational chart

Oganizational chart of agency relationships

Appendix 3. Attendance patterns
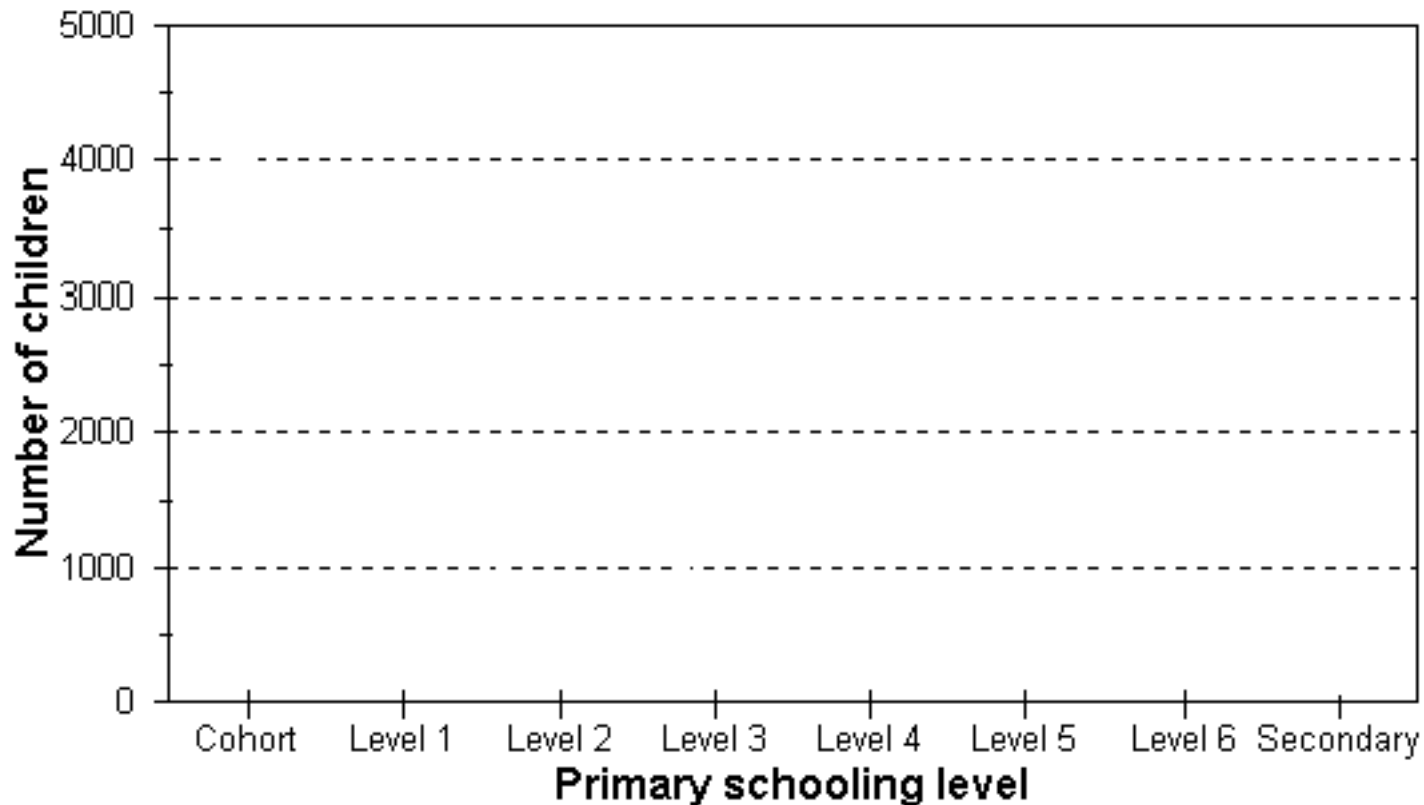
Schooling in rural Burkina Faso: The pattern of attrition

The above graph shows the pattern of school participation/leaving for one province in Burkina Faso. Data from various sources indicate that this pattern is quite normal for the country. The essential facts are these:

1. Only about 35 percent of school-aged children begin school.

2. By Level 4, half of those who began school have dropped out.

3. Only about one out of five of those successfully completing primary school will enter the secondary schools.

In addition, it appears to be generally true that most students who do not finish at least four years of school revert back to illiteracy within 10 years. Therefore, the present school system institutionalizes adult literacy in the country at about 85 percent.

Appendix 4. List of agencies referenced in the report

CIDA   Canadian International Development Agency
CIDA is the Canadian government agency which oversees and administers that country's foreign assistance. CIDA makes use of a variety of strategies for channeling this development assistance including Canadian nongovernmental organizations.

DPEBA   *Direction Provinciale d'Enseignement de Base et d'Alphabétisation* (Provincial Office for Basic Education and Literacy)
The DPEBA offices are the province-level offices responsible for all basic education. These offices report directly to the Ministry of Education and are the primary delivery apparatus for primary school education in the country.

INA   *Institut National d'Alphabétisation* (National Literacy Institute)
INA is also a direct dependent of the Ministry of Education. The Institute is primarily a technical support agency. All actual programs at the provincial level are carried out by SA (see below) although the relationship is that of a dotted line rather than a reporting relationship.

SA   *Service d'Alphabétisation* (Literacy Service)
SA is the primary delivery apparatus for literacy and basic adult education at the provincial level. At this level, SA works under the general oversight of DPEBA.

SIL   Summer Institute of Linguistics *(Société Internationale de Linguistique)*
SIL is an international NGO specializing in language-related work around the world. Each national branch of SIL is independently chartered and administered, but works in cooperation with chartered branches in other countries.

References

Bhola, H. S. 1990. Evaluating 'Literacy for development' projects, programs and campaigns*:* Evaluation planning, design and implementation, and utilization of evaluation results. Hamburg, Germany: *UNESCO Institute for Education; DSE [German Foundation for International Developement]*.
See also Bhola 1990 Bibliography (Literacy) Citations

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