The NFBEC in Burkina Faso: an educational alternative for the disadvantaged

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The Non Formal Basic Education Centres (NFBEC) were launched in Burkina Faso in January 1995, and to date there are 28 operating centres. The general philosophy of the NFBEC is to ensure equity of access to education through basic education for all, as well as to encourage effective participation of communities and individuals to their own empowerment.

Specific objectives are to:
- Increase the literacy rate in Burkina Faso;
- Encourage the professional insertion of trainees within society, through technical and civic training;
- Promote community participation in the implementation of education;
- Promote multi-resources and competencies;
- Develop educational bridges between the formal and the non-formal through diversified learning opportunities.

Presentation of Non Formal Basic Education Centres (NFBEC)
I. Research Objectives

- Improve the comprehension of the NFBEC programs;
- Emphasise the programme’s outputs as well as its difficulties, encountered in its implementation;
- Identify elements which could further enhance its performance and impact;
- Extract valid and replicable lessons for similar experiences.

II. Research Results

2.1. Management Structure And Partnership of the NFBEC
The hierarchical structure of the NFBEC, as well as undercurrent conflicts between the formal and the non-formal system, have greatly hindered its functioning. Allocated funds are sometimes invested in the formal system to the detriment of NFBEC.

2.2. Organisation and Pedagogical Functioning

Learners are out-of-school rural youth aged between 9 and 14 years old, recruited by classes of 30. Each centre has 4 classrooms, one workshop and one polyvalent room.

The approach allows linkages between formal education and non-formal education, since participants of NFBEC can join the formal secondary schools and the professional training centres.

During the first years of training, national languages as well as pre-professional training are dispensed. The trainee acquires multiple competencies and is ready, once he completes the courses, to either join the 1st year of the formal secondary or technical schooling system, go for further technical training or join a professional training centre or a private enterprise.

These learning opportunities do not suffer from any lack of adhesion from the communities as they value the NFBEC more than the formal primary educational system due to the pre-professional training provided.

For the communities, the training provided goes beyond an initiation phase and offers full competency to practice an art or trade– which is not really the case with NFBEC or local apprenticeship. Courses run from nine to twelve months and take place four hours a day. Practical work takes place in the afternoons.

**Bridges, including communities’ perception**
LEGEND

······→ Opportunities requested but unplanned
→ Opportunities offered
→ Normal Flow (formal)

ABBREVIATIONS

DEP: Direction de l’Enseignement Primaire
DGINA: Direction Générale de l’Institut d’Alphabétisation
DPEBA: Direction Provinciale de l’Enseignement de Base et de l’Alphabétisation
MEBA: Ministère de l’Enseignement de Base et de l’Alphabétisation (Ministry of Literacy and Basic Education)
2.3. Recruitment and training of human resources

The trainers – holders of the BEPC (Brevet Elémentaire du Premier Cycle) are recruited at village level, and receive 4-8 weeks’ training. The State gives them a contract and remunerates 30000FCFA (50US$) per month. The overdue payment of their salaries discourages motivation. The supervisors are from the formal system not having received any specific training in the non-formal educational system.

2.4. Characteristics of the Monitoring and Evaluating Mechanism

The mechanism is based on the formal system.

The characteristics:
- Lack of working tools in some localities
- Absence of a follow-up/monitoring culture (follow-up = assessment in the classroom of the animator’s and learner’s behaviour and responses; physical condition of the classroom)
- Total absence of any participatory analysis with the actors
- Poor qualification of supervisors who possess no training for catering to the non-formal education system
- No evaluation due to dysfunctional elements built in the implementation

2.5. Dynamism of Community Participation

Community participation comes down to financial contribution, as well as participation to local management through management committees. Community participation is partial and intervenes only at the moment of execution. The conceptual phase is the work of technicians. This perception translates, according to some parents, a non-valorisation of their conceptual capacities. However, the myth that knowledge and intellectuals come from the city, stands out in interviews, as well as the fact that illiteracy contributes to the helpless feelings of incapacity of the rural population.

Added difficulties are the unclear roles of the beneficiaries, the low income of the communities, the persisting perception of the NFBEC as a project. Therefore, there is a lack of anticipation regarding the management and functioning of these centres. In fact, the communities only meet when difficulties arise.

2.6. Social Legitimacy of the NFBEC

- The NFBEC are positively perceived because of the concluding experience related to the use of the national language as a medium of teaching during the first years of training.
- Contrary to formal schooling, the NFBEC are closer to the communities’ values, expectations and aspirations. This perception is unfortunately not shared by actors of the formal system at local level, which jeopardises the coexistence of NFBEC and formal schools.

III. Difficulties and weaknesses of the NFBEC

- Partial or no functioning of the management organism at central and decentralised levels;
- Heavy hierarchy within the management;
• Absence of pedagogical training: weakness of the monitoring and evaluating system;
• Profile of out-of-school recruits which sometime outnumber 51.45% 
• Lack of interest of the trainers: poor salary; 
• Low status of NFE; 
• Local institutionalisation of the project at the DEP instead of the DGINA; 
• No clear indication of what the NFBEC lead to.

IV. Lessons Common to the three countries (Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso)

- The target population is heterogeneous and does not respect the selection criteria. This implies that not only is the demand not satisfied but also, that psychological and pedagogical problems impair the centres management;
- Insufficient training of technical personnel, including animators and supervisors; 
- Low appropriation of the NFBEC experience by the communities due to lack of information.
- The budget allocated to Basic Education has either increased or remained constant. However, with regard to NFE, the budget only amounts to 1% of the State budget
- The weakness of the monitoring and evaluating system inspired from the formal system, limits the availability of complete and accurate information on the functioning of the centres (rate of enrolment, flow, drop-outs, pedagogical practices …); 
- A weak institutional capacity due to the commissioning of the steering role to NGOS (Mali) and to the functional lethargy of the management structures (Burkina Faso);
- The unclear status of NFE within the educational system of the three countries. Despite the fact that the laws of orientation exist in some countries like Burkina Faso, the status of NFE would benefit if it were better defined with regard to formal education, and the plans of development of the countries.

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