

Background Note: Burkina Faso

Official Name: Burkina Faso



PROFILE

Geography

Area: 274,200 sq. km. (106,000 sq. mi.); about the size of Colorado.

Cities: *Capital*--Ouagadougou (pop. 1.5 million). *Other cities*--Bobo-Dioulasso (500,000), Koudougou (90,000).

Terrain: Savanna; brushy plains and scattered hills.

Climate: Sahelian; pronounced wet and dry seasons.

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*--Burkinabe (accent on last e).

Population (2010): 16.3 million.

Annual population growth rate (2010): 3.1%.

Ethnic groups: 63 ethnic groups among which are Mossi (almost half of the total population), followed by Gourmantche, Fulani, Dioula, and Bissa.

Religions: Muslim 60%, Catholic 19%, animist 15%, Protestant 5%.

Languages: French (official); More; Gourma; Ffulfulde; Dioula; Tamasheq.

Education: *Literacy* (2009)--26%.

Health: *Infant mortality rate* (2010)--91.7/1,000. *Life expectancy* (2010)--56.7 years.

Work force: *Agriculture*--77.9%; *industry*--2.1%; *commerce, services, and government*--5.5%.

Government

Type: Republic.

Independence: August 5, 1960.

Constitution: June 11, 1991.

Branches: *Executive*--president (head of state and Council of Ministers) prime minister (head of government).

Legislative--one chamber. *Judiciary*--independent.

Subdivisions: 13 regions, 45 provinces, 351 communes.

Political parties: Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), Alliance for Democracy Federation/ African Democratic Assembly (ADF/RDA), Unity for the Renaissance/Sankarist Party (UNIR/PS), Unity for the Republic (UPR), Convention of Democratic Forces of Burkina (CFD/B), and numerous other small opposition parties.

Suffrage: Direct universal.

Government budget (2010): \$1.53 billion (15.7% of GDP).

Defense (2005): 1.2% of budget.

Economy (Economist Intelligence Unit data)

GDP (2010): \$9.3 billion.

Annual growth rate (2010): 5.2%.

Per capita GDP (2009): \$580.

Avg. inflation rate (2010): -0.8%.

Natural resources: Manganese, gold, limestone, marble, phosphate, zinc, uranium.

Agriculture (34% of 2009 GDP): *Products*--cotton, millet, sorghum, rice, livestock, peanuts, shea nuts, maize.

Industry (26.5% of GDP): *Type*--mining, agricultural processing plants, brewing and bottling, light industry.

Trade (2010): *Exports*--\$1.034 billion. *Main exports* (2009)--gold (\$380.8 million), cotton (\$210.3 million); shea butter (\$37.5 million); livestock; peanuts. *Major markets*--Singapore (9.3%); Belgium (7%); China (4.2%); Ghana (3.8%); India (2.8%). *Imports*--\$1.544 billion. *Main imports* (2009)--capital goods (\$396.2 million); petroleum products (\$380.6 million); food (\$143.8 million). *Major markets*--Cote d'Ivoire (22.3%); France (17.9%); Togo (5.9%); South Africa (3.2%); Belgium (3.1%).

Official exchange rate: Fixed to the euro. *Communaute Financiere Africaine* (CFA) francs 656=1 euro; 474 CFA=U.S. \$1.

GEOGRAPHY

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country located in the middle of West Africa's "hump." It is geographically in the Sahel--the agricultural region between the Sahara Desert and the coastal rain forests. Most of central Burkina Faso lies on a savanna plateau, 200 meters-300 meters (650 ft.-1,000 ft.) above sea level, with fields, brush, and scattered trees.

The largest river is the Mouhoun (Black Volta), which is partially navigable by small craft. Burkina Faso has West Africa's largest elephant population. Game preserves also are home to lions, hippos, monkeys, warthogs, and antelope. Infrastructure and tourism are, however, not well developed. Annual average rainfall varies from about 100 centimeters (40 in.) in the south to less than 25 centimeters (10 in.) in the north and northeast, where hot desert winds accentuate the dryness of the region. The cooler season, November to February, is pleasantly warm and dry (but dusty), with cool evenings. March-June can be very hot. In July-September, the rains bring a 3-month cooler and greener humid season.

PEOPLE

Burkina Faso's 16.3 million people belong to two major West African cultural groups--the Voltaic and the Mande (whose common language is Dioula). The Voltaic Mossi make up about one-half of the population. The Mossi claim descent from warriors who migrated to present-day Burkina Faso from Ghana and established an empire that lasted more than 800 years. Predominantly farmers, the Mossi kingdom is still led by the Mogho Naba, whose court is in Ouagadougou. With a continued high average fertility rate of 6.2 children per woman of reproductive age, total national population is projected to grow to 21.5 million in 2020. While the average annual national population growth rate is 3.1%, urban areas are growing by over 10% per year. Nearly 65% of population is less than 25 years old.

Burkina Faso is an ethnically integrated, secular state. The average population density is 51.4 people per square kilometer (128/sq. mi), but in the center of the country it is about 80 people per square kilometer. Millions of Burkinabe reside in other countries, especially Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. A plurality (60.5%) of Burkinabe are Muslim, but most also adhere to traditional African religions. Christians, both Roman Catholics and Protestants, comprise about 24% of the population, with their largest concentration in urban areas.

Few Burkinabe have had formal education. Schooling is in theory free and compulsory until the age of 16, but only about 80.3% of Burkina's primary school-age children are enrolled in primary school. Of those enrolled, only about 41.7% complete primary school. The University of Ouagadougou, founded in 1974, was the country's first institution of higher education. The Polytechnical University in Bobo-Dioulasso was opened in 1995. The University of Koudougou was founded in 2005 to substitute for the former teachers' training school, Ecole Normale Superieure de Koudougou.

HISTORY

Until the end of the 19th century, the history of Burkina Faso was dominated by the empire-building Mossi. The French arrived and claimed the area in 1896, but Mossi resistance ended only with the capture of their capital Ouagadougou in 1901. The colony of Upper Volta was established in 1919, but it was dismembered and reconstituted several times until the present borders were recognized in 1947.

The French administered the area indirectly through Mossi authorities until independence was achieved on August 5, 1960. The first President, Maurice Yameogo, resigned in 1966 following continuous worker strikes and handed power over to Lt. Col. Sangoule Lamizana, who was head of a government of senior army officers. Lamizana remained in power throughout the 1970s, as President of military and then elected governments.

Following more worker strikes, Col. Saye Zerbo overthrew President Lamizana in 1980. Colonel Zerbo also encountered resistance from workers' unions and was overthrown 2 years later by Maj. Dr. Jean-Baptiste Ouedraogo and the Council of Popular Salvation (CSP). Factional infighting developed between moderates in the CSP and radicals led by Capt. Thomas Sankara, who was appointed Prime Minister in January 1983, but was subsequently arrested. Efforts to bring about his release, directed by Capt. Blaise Compaore, resulted in yet another military coup d'etat, led by Sankara and Compaore on August 4, 1983.

Sankara and Compaore established the National Revolutionary Committee with Sankara as President, and he vowed to "mobilize the masses." But the committee's membership remained secret and was dominated by Marxist-Leninist military officers. In 1984, Upper Volta changed its name to Burkina Faso, meaning "the country of honorable people." But many of the strict security and austerity measures taken by Sankara provoked resistance. Despite his initial

popularity and personal charisma, Sankara was killed in a coup which brought Capt. Blaise Compaore to power in October 1987.

Compaore pledged to pursue the goals of the revolution but to "rectify" Sankara's "deviations" from the original aims. In fact, Compaore reversed most of Sankara's policies and combined the leftist party he headed with more centrist parties after the 1989 arrest and execution of two military officers, Major Jean-Baptiste Boukary Lingini and Captain Henri Zongo, who had supported Compaore and governed with him up to that point.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

With Compaore alone at the helm, a democratic constitution was approved by referendum in 1991. In December 1991, Compaore was elected President, running unopposed after the opposition boycotted the election. The opposition did participate in the following year's legislative elections, in which the ruling party won a majority of seats.

The government of the Fourth Republic includes a strong presidency, a prime minister, a Council of Ministers presided over by the president, a unicameral National Assembly, and the judiciary. The legislature and judiciary are nominally independent but remain susceptible to executive influence. Given the fragile roots of democratic institutions, constitutional checks and balances are seldom effective in practice. Compaore and the CDP dominate the cabinet and all areas of government.

Burkina held multiparty municipal elections in 1995, 2000, and 2006, as well as legislative elections in 1997, 2002, and 2007. Balloting was considered largely free and fair in all elections despite minor irregularities. However, the ruling party's dominance meant that the playing field was not entirely even. The Congress for Democracy and Progress (CDP), the governing party, won overwhelming majorities in all the elections, except for the 2002 legislative elections, where the CDP won with only a small majority of the 111 seats.

Compaore won the November 1998 presidential election for a second 7-year term against two minor-party candidates. But within weeks of Compaore's victory, domestic opposition and civil society groups took to the streets to protest the December 13, 1998, murder of leading independent journalist Norbert Zongo, whose investigations of the death of the President's brother's chauffeur suggested involvement of the Compaore family.

The Collective Against Impunity, including civil society groups, human rights associations, and opposition parties--led by human rights activist Halidou Ouedraogo and opposition political party leaders including the late Prof. Joseph Ki-Zerbo and (for a while) Hermann Yameogo, son of the first President--challenged Compaore and his government to bring Zongo's murderers to justice and make political reforms. The Zongo killings still resonate in Burkina politics, though not as strongly as in the past. There has been no significant progress on the investigation of the case. The case is not closed; it is suspended and can be re-activated until July 2016 if new information is brought before the courts. However, with the December 23, 2009 death of Chief Warrant Officer Marcel Kafando, sole suspect in the case, the case is de facto closed.

Compaore was re-elected to the presidency for a 5-year term in November 2005. Observers considered the election to have been generally free, despite minor irregularities, but not entirely fair due to the ruling party's control of official resources. The constitution had been amended in 2000 to limit the president to a 5-year term, renewable once, beginning with the November 2005 election. The amendment was controversial because it did not make any mention

of retroactivity, meaning that President Compaore's eligibility to present himself for the 2005 presidential election, his third, was a matter of debate. The Constitutional Court ruled in October 2005 that the amendment was not retroactive, and Compaore went on to win the November 2005 presidential election with over 80% of the vote. Most international and national electoral observers believed that the election was fair.

In 2007, the CDP won a majority in the May legislative elections, which observers declared generally free and orderly despite irregularities including fraud involving voter identification cards. Observers agreed that the 2004 revision of the electoral code negatively impacted the 2002 gains of opposition political parties during the 2007 legislative elections.

Running against six opponents, President Compaore won the November 21, 2010 presidential elections with over 80% of the vote, with an estimated 55% voter turnout. Compaore's current term is supposed to be his last, but there have been suggestions that he is preparing to change the constitution to remove limits on the number of terms a president can serve. Legislative elections will be held in May 2012.

Principal Government Officials

President--Blaise Compaore

Prime Minister--Beyon Luc Adolphe Tiao

Foreign Affairs and Regional Cooperation--Djibril Bassole

Ambassador to the United States--Paramanga Ernest Yonli

Burkina Faso maintains an embassy in the United States at 2340 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (tel. 202-332-5577).

Next Elections Scheduled

Legislative elections--May 2012

Presidential elections-- 2015

ECONOMY

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of \$580. About 80% of the population relies on subsistence agriculture, with only a small fraction directly involved in industry and services. Drought, poor soil, lack of adequate communications and other infrastructure, a low literacy rate, and an economy vulnerable to external shocks are all longstanding problems. The export economy also remains subject to fluctuations in world prices.

Burkina remains committed to the structural adjustment program it launched in 1991, and it has been one of the first beneficiaries of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) debt-relief and poverty reduction programs for heavily indebted poor countries. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth, which has historically remained steady, is projected to increase from 3.2% in 2009 to 5.2% in 2010 and to reach 4.7% in 2011. Burkina Faso is recognized as a good development performer and partner. From 2008 to 2009, annual assistance amounts have more than tripled to \$1.3 billion, and annual per capita assistance was estimated in 2009 at \$81.

Many Burkinabe migrate to neighboring countries for work, and the remittances provide a contribution to the

economy's balance of payments that is third only to gold and cotton as a source of foreign exchange earnings. Political and economic problems in Cote d'Ivoire have had a direct impact on this source of revenue for millions of Burkina households. The 8-year-old crisis in neighboring Cote d'Ivoire negatively affected trade between the two countries. Goods and services, as well as remittances, continue to flow from Burkinabe living in Cote d'Ivoire, but they are sometimes rerouted through other countries in the region, such as Togo, Ghana, and Benin. Commercial and personal traffic across the border is slowly rebuilding steam. The current global financial crisis and resulting job losses have also negatively impacted remittances.

Burkina is attempting to improve the economy by developing its mineral resources, particularly gold, improving its infrastructure, making its agricultural and livestock sectors more productive and competitive, and stabilizing the supplies and prices of food grains. Staple crops are millet, sorghum, maize, and rice. The cash crops are cotton, peanuts, karite (shea nuts), and sesame. Livestock, once a major export, has declined. Burkina Faso has increased its gold exports substantially over the past 3 years, with 7.8 tons exported in 2009; it was projected that up to 20 tons could be exported in 2010. Burkina Faso is Africa's largest producer of cotton, which is a major export and in a good year accounts for over half of the value of all exports and employs 17% of the population. In 2010, almost 80% of the cotton planted in Burkina Faso was grown from genetically modified seeds.

Manufacturing is limited to cotton and food processing (mainly in Bobo-Dioulasso) and import substitution heavily protected by tariffs. Some factories are privately owned, and others are set to be privatized. Burkina Faso's newly-written investment code has helped to promote foreign investment. In the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Doing Business 2010 report, Burkina Faso ranked at 147 out of 183 countries, up from 155 in 2009 and 164 in 2008; this improvement reflects the country's successful efforts to create an environment conducive to business growth. Recent reforms include the adoption of a labor code in May 2008, improving the process to transfer property, the elimination of commune authorization requirements, the creation of a one-stop shop to facilitate construction permits, a decrease of the corporate tax rate from 35% to 30%, and a decrease on dividend taxes from 15% to 12%. Foreign investors, particularly in the mining sector, have taken note of this development; since 2007, four commercial gold mines and a manganese mine have been opened. Several others are slated to follow in the next few years. A railway connects Burkina with the port of Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, 1,150 kilometers (712 mi.) away. Primary roads between main towns in Burkina Faso are paved. Domestic air service and flights within Africa are limited. Phones and Internet service providers are relatively reliable, but the cost of utilities is very high.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Burkina Faso has excellent relations with European aid donors. France and the European Union, in particular, provide significant aid. Other donors with large bilateral aid programs include Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, and Canada. Burkina Faso maintains relations with Libya, but they are tense. Burkina Faso recognizes Taiwan. President Compaore is active in sub-regional diplomacy in West Africa. He was elected in January 2007 to be Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and has acted as a mediator in the political crises in neighboring Togo and Cote d'Ivoire and, more recently, Guinea. From January 2008 to December 2009, Burkina Faso was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. Burkina also plays a role regional in peacekeeping operations, having sent two battalions and one company to Darfur under a UNAMID/African Union mandate.

U.S.-BURKINA RELATIONS

U.S. relations with Burkina Faso are excellent. In addition to regional peace and stability, U.S. interests in Burkina are to promote continued democratization and greater respect for human rights and to encourage sustainable economic development. In 2005, Burkina Faso and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) signed a \$12 million Threshold Country Program to build schools and increase girls' enrollment rates. In July 2008, Burkina Faso signed a 5-year compact for \$480.9 million with MCC. The compact program will combat poverty by building roads, improving rural land governance, aiding farmers with agricultural development and irrigation projects, and a second phase of the above-mentioned girls' primary education program. The signing of this MCC Compact Program made the U.S. Burkina Faso's largest bilateral donor. Although the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) closed its office in Ouagadougou in 1995, it re-established a presence in 2009 and increased assistance from about \$15 million annually in 2005 to about \$55 million in 2010.

The Peace Corps entered Burkina Faso in 1967. The Peace Corps program was phased out in 1987, but was invited to return to Burkina Faso in 1995 as part of a newly established health project. One year later, the Peace Corps established a secondary education project, and in 2003, Peace Corps introduced a small-enterprise development project to complement the government's poverty reduction and private sector promotional programs. In 2005, the Government of Burkina Faso asked for assistance to increase the level of girls' access to education, which later became the focus of the MCC's Threshold Compact with Burkina Faso. All Peace Corps Volunteers, regardless of sector, are trained in how to promote awareness on HIV/AIDS and gender and youth development. Currently there are 150 Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Burkina Faso. Seventy-three of these volunteers are second- and third-year volunteers, and 77 have just begun their Peace Corps service. Burkina Faso is a significant country in the Peace Corps' overall growth plan to have 12,000 volunteers worldwide by 2012. Starting in June 2011, the Peace Corps will establish a new sector in Burkina Faso, Agriculture and the Environment, to continue to combat poverty and stay the effects of climate change.

U.S. trade with Burkina Faso in 2009 totaled \$28 million: \$25.8 million in U.S. exports (a 5% increase over 2008 data) and \$2.1 million in Burkinabe exports (a 262% increase over 2008). Top U.S. exports included agricultural products (\$9 million), machinery (\$7 million), donations and low value shipments (\$2 million), rubber (\$2 million), and vehicles (\$2 million). Top U.S. imports were agricultural products (\$280,000), vehicles (\$218,000) and precious stones (\$202,000). Investment possibilities exist, especially in Burkina's mining and communications sectors.

Military ties between the U.S. and Burkina are strengthening. Burkina Faso is a partner in the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program. The United States has already trained three 750-man battalions for peace support operations in Darfur. Using a small Department of Defense International Military Education and Training (IMET) budget, the Embassy has established an English-language laboratory at a local military base, and has maximized attendance at the officer basic courses in the U.S. Representatives from the Ministries of Defense, Security, Foreign Affairs, and Justice and civil society have attended Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS) seminars in the U.S. and regionally. The Government of Burkina Faso has eagerly accepted additional training, especially in counterterrorism and humanitarian assistance, and is contributing to the support of U.S. efforts in the Sahel. Burkina has recently become a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) and USAID plans to start TSCTP activities over the coming year. In May 2010, Burkina Faso hosted Flintlock, a multilateral military exercise.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassador--**Thomas Dougherty**
Deputy Chief of Mission--Deborah Klepp
Peace Corps Country Director--Shannon Meehan
MCC Resident Country Director--Kateri Clement
USAID Country Program Manager--Glenn Anders
Consular Officer--Noah Geesaman
Public Affairs Officer--Meg Riggs
Political/Military Officer--Melanie Zimmerman
Economic Officer--Sarah Gourde
Management Officer--Kevin Doyle

The **U.S. Embassy** in Burkina Faso is located at Avenue Sembene Ousmane, Rue 15, 873 - Ouaga 2000. Mailing addresses are: International mail: Ambassade des Etats-Unis, 01 B.P. 35, Ouagadougou 01, Burkina Faso; Mail from the U.S.: Department of State, 2440 Ouagadougou Place, Washington, DC 20521-2440. Tel: (226) 50-49-5300; fax: (226) 50-49-56-23 or (226) 50-49-53-36. Email address: amembouaga@state.gov.

TRAVEL AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

The U.S. Department of State's Consular Information Program advises Americans traveling and residing abroad through Country Specific Information, Travel Alerts, and Travel Warnings. **Country Specific Information** exists for all countries and includes information on entry and exit requirements, currency regulations, health conditions, safety and security, crime, political disturbances, and the addresses of the U.S. embassies and consulates abroad. **Travel Alerts** are issued to disseminate information quickly about terrorist threats and other relatively short-term conditions overseas that pose significant risks to the security of American travelers. **Travel Warnings** are issued when the State Department recommends that Americans avoid travel to a certain country because the situation is dangerous or unstable.

For the latest security information, Americans living and traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs Internet web site at <http://www.travel.state.gov>, where the current **Worldwide Caution**, **Travel Alerts**, and **Travel Warnings** can be found. **Consular Affairs Publications**, which contain information on obtaining passports and planning a safe trip abroad, are also available at <http://www.travel.state.gov>. For additional information on international travel, see <http://www.usa.gov/Citizen/Topics/Travel/International.shtml>.

The Department of State encourages all U.S. citizens traveling or residing abroad to register via the **State Department's travel registration** website or at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Registration will make your presence and whereabouts known in case it is necessary to contact you in an emergency and will enable you to receive up-to-date information on security conditions.

Emergency information concerning Americans traveling abroad may be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the U.S. and Canada or the regular toll line 1-202-501-4444 for callers outside the U.S. and Canada.

The **National Passport Information Center** (NPIC) is the U.S. Department of State's single, centralized public contact center for U.S. passport information. Telephone: 1-877-4-USA-PPT (1-877-487-2778); TDD/TTY: 1-888-874-

7793. Passport information is available 24 hours, 7 days a week. You may speak with a representative Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., Eastern Time, excluding federal holidays.

Travelers can check the latest health information with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia. A hotline at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) and a web site at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/default.aspx> give the most recent health advisories, immunization recommendations or requirements, and advice on food and drinking water safety for regions and countries. The CDC publication "Health Information for International Travel" can be found at <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/travel/contentYellowBook.aspx>.

Further Electronic Information

Department of State Web Site. Available on the Internet at <http://www.state.gov>, the Department of State web site provides timely, global access to official U.S. foreign policy information, including **Background Notes** and **daily press briefings** along with the directory of **key officers** of Foreign Service posts and more. The Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) provides security information and regional news that impact U.S. companies working abroad through its website <http://www.osac.gov>

Export.gov provides a portal to all export-related assistance and market information offered by the federal government and provides trade leads, free export counseling, help with the export process, and more.