Gender Roles and Girls' Education in Burkina Faso: A Tale of Heterogeneity between Rural Communities

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Abstract

This article examines community-level factors that negatively impact girls' education opportunities in Burkina Faso. The focus is on rural areas where girls tend to have especially low levels of education attainment. Using in-depth qualitative and small scale survey data, we discuss the root causes of the gender gap in education across three communities. The sociocultural factors that influence education opportunities at the local level include child marriage, expectations about gender role, cost, and perceptions regarding risks of harassment of girls by teachers or boys in schools. The findings however suggest heterogeneity in the0 factors that impact education attainment in the three communities. This heterogeneity in local community conditions must be considered when planning development interventions and engaging through programs and policies.

Introduction

Community perceptions play an important role in providing or denying opportunities to their members. This is especially the case for girls' education, with traditional gender roles having a large impact on multiple aspects of girl's lives including whether girls are able to continue their education in secondary schools or not (e.g., Brown, 2012; Klugman et al. 2014). This in turn has implications for the ability of girls and women to expand their capabilities.

While progress has been achieved in Burkina Faso towards higher levels of educational attainment for children, completion rates remain low and girls remain at a disadvantage. According to the EdStats database at the World Bank, the adjusted net enrolment rate at the primary level for girts was 66 percent in 2014 (latest year available). The gender parity index at that level was estimated at 0.95, suggesting that gender parity has almost been achieved in primary schools. However, at the upper secondary level, the situation is different. Very few girls make it to that level and for every two girls at that level, three boys are enrolled (gender parity ratio of 0.69).

Multiple factors lead to this drop in gender parity once girls reach adolescence. These factors include child marriage, gender roles, out-of-pocket and opportunity costs, and perceptions of schools, among others (on the lack of opportunities for adolescent girls in Burkina Faso, see for example Brady et al., 2010). Consider child marriage, defined as a marriage or union taking place before the age of 18. Data from the 2010 Demographic and Health Survey for Burkina-Faso suggest that among women ages 18-22, half of all girls still marry before the age of 18, with almost no reduction over the last 25 years. In rural areas and in the bottom three quintiles of wealth, the proportion of early marriages among women ages 18-22 is at 60 percent or higher (Male and Wodon, 2016). Once girls marry, it is often extremely difficult for them to remain in school (e.g., Field and Ambrus, 2008; UNFPA, 2012; UNICEF, 2014; Wodon et al., 2016).

Because multiple reasons may contribute to gender gaps in educational attainment, the types of interventions that could be implemented to reduce these gaps are also multiple. Should the priority be to delay the age at marriage? Should the distance to schools be reduced, whether this is done by building new schools in remote areas or reducing travel time through public transportation? Should scholarships be provided to girls, as successfully pioneered by Bangladesh and several Latin American countries two decades ago? Should more female teachers be hired? Should the priority be to make separate toilet blocks available for boys and girls? Should more

focus be placed on understanding and changing broader cultural practices and gender roles?

Choosing between these and other potential interventions is difficult and responses depend on country context, but reviews of the evidence can help, Such reviews are now becoming more available thanks to an increase in impact evaluations. One such recent review by Unterhalter et al. (2014) assessed the evidence on the impact of interventions for girls' education focusing on (i) providing resources (including transfers) and infrastructure, (ii) changing instituti.,m ons, and (iii) changing norms and including the most marginalized in education decision making. The review summarized the impact of different types of interventions on three outcomes: participation, learning, and empowerment. For each type of intervention and category of outcome, the evidence on the likelihood of impact was classified as strong, promising, limited, or needed (i.e., weak). For participation, the evidence on the impact of conditional cash transfers, information about the potential employment returns to education, and the provision of additional schools in underserved and unsafe areas was found to be strong. This was also the case for the evidence on some interventions related to teacher training, group-learning, and measures to promote girl-friendly schools as well as learning outside the classroom, for example through tutoring. Several of these interventions (group-learning, programs for learning outside the classroom, and scholarships linked to student performance) were also found to have clear impacts on learning. The evidence on the impact of interventions on empowerment was generally found to be somewhat weaker. Somewhat similar findings were found by Kalamar et al. (2016) when looking at interventions aiming to delay the age at marriage for adolescent girls.

Taking stock of the lessons learned from the literature and assessing how those lessons apply in a given country context is essential before embarking on policy recommendations. But it may not be enough. One of the contributions of this paper is to show that beyond country context, community context matters too because the reasons leading girls to drop out of school are not the same in all communities. This paper investigates the factors leading girls to drop out of school or not pursue their education in Burkina Faso using in-depth qualitative data collected in 2012 in three rural Muslim communities. The findings suggest striking differences between communities.

A basic profile of the three communities is provided in Gemignani and Wodon (2017). The communities are located respectively in Tenkodogo District, Djibo District, and Bobo Dioulasso District. While all three communities are rural and poor with Muslim populations, the community in Bobo Dioulasso District tends to be less traditional in comparison to the other two communities. It is also located closer to a major urban center with opportunities for employment since Bobo Dialousso is the second largest city in the country. The primary ethnic groups are Bobo in Bobo Dioulasso District, Peuhl in Djibo District, and Moore and Bissa in Tenkodogo District.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted in each of the three villages. The information collected dealt among others with community views and practices concerning education in general and the education of girls in particular, the advantages and disadvantages of girls' education, the parents' goals for boy and girl children, the reasons for dropping out of school, and the connections between education and cultural and religious identities. In addition, in-depth interviews with local officials and community members who, during the semi-structured interview or through informal discussion, were able to provide important insights regarding girls' education and child marriage and showed a willingness to discuss local beliefs and practices in greater detail. Finally focus group discussions of six to twelve people took place in all sites (four in each site, for a total of twelve focus groups). The four focus groups at each field site included young married women (15-19 years old), young unmarried women, customary leaders, and religious leaders.

The findings suggest important differences in the factors that impact education attainment in the three

communities. This heterogeneity in local conditions must be acknowledged when planning development interventions and engaging effectively at the local level. Girls in different parts of the country not only have diverse education experiences and outcomes, but the factors driving those outcomes also differ between areas. Cost appears to be the main constraint to girls' education in Bobo Dioulasso District while in Tenkodogo and Djibo Districts cultural and religious factors play a larger role. In Bobo Dioulasso District educated girls are seen as future contributors to the well-being of their family but in Tenkodogo and Djibo Districts they are seen as an asset only for their husband's extended family. Religious leaders in some communities encourage girls' education while in others they criticize schools for causing social and moral upheaval. Investigating the constraints to girls' education at the local level thus helps in identifying and understanding the complex set of factors that limit inclusive access to education.

Given the above setting, the rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section two focuses on social, cultural, and religious factors that shape girls' education opportunities. Three main constraints are identified, related to the gender division of labor and the perceptions of the necessity of male leadership in the home and community, the centrality of marriage as the most important life goal for girls and women, and finally the view that attending school greatly raises the risk of out of wedlock pregnancy. Section three then turns to other factors that reduce girls' schooling directly related to the cost of education, the quality of the education provided in local schools, and their accessibility to children. A brief conclusion follows.

Socio-cultural Constraints to Girls' Education

This section discusses socio-cultural constraints to girls' education especially at the secondary level in the three communities based on findings from in-depth qualitative interviews. The objective is to show differences between the three communities that may matter for policy. The analysis is based on both quotes from interviewees and participants in focus groups, and tabulation of data from the interviews. While sample sizes for the tabulations are limited (a total of 196 interviews were conducted in the three communities), clear differences do emerge.

Table 1: Parents' Education Goals for their Children: Boys versus Girls (%)

	Tenkodogo District		Djibo District		Bobo D. District		All	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
What level of education should a boy/girl reach?								
Attend primary school	6.2	20.0	1.5	12.3	0	0	2.6	10.8
Complete primary school	1.5	7.7	3.1	21.5	0	0	1.5	9.7
Attend secondary school	10.8	24.6	6.2	30.8	9.2	15.4	8.7	23.6
Complete secondary school	4.6	9.2	12.3	7.7	20.0	21.5	12.3	12.8
University	23.1	9.2	16.9	4.6	26.2	21.5	22.1	11.8
Education until finding a job	43.1	10.8	56.9	12.3	43.1	30.8	47.7	18.0
Education until marriage	3.1	15.4	1.5	9.2	0	1.5	1.5	8.7
Other	6.2	1.5	1.5	1.5	0	0	2.6	1.0
Don't know/did not answer	1.5	1.5	0	0	1.5	9.2	1.0	3.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork data.

Respondents in Bobo Dioulasso District are much more in favor of girls' education as compared to respondents from the other two villages. Parents in Bobo Dioulasso District have higher academic expectations for their daughters and they are more likely to link their daughter's academic success with future work opportunities than parents in Tenkodogo and Djibo Districts. As shown in table 1, none of the respondents in Bobo Dioulasso District limit their educational goals for girls to primary school only. But a number of respondents in the other two villages do so, and this is especially the case for daughters: some 27.7 percent of respondents in Tenkodogo District and 33.8 percent in Djibo District say that their daughters should only attend primary school. An additional 15.4 percent of respondents in Tenkodogo District and 9.2 percent in Djibo District (versus only 1.5 percent in Bobo Dioulasso District) say that daughters will attend school only until marriage. Also notable is the fact that 43 percent of respondents in Bobo Dioulasso District state that their daughters will complete secondary school or attend university, versus only 18.4 percent in Tenkodogo District and only 12.3 percent in Djibo District.

Table 2: Children's Right to Education and Reasons for Girls to Leave School (%)

	Tenkodogo District	Djibo District	Bobo D. District	All
	Right to education			
Do children have the right to an education?				
Yes	98.5	98.5	84.6	93.9
No	0	0	0	0
Don't know	0	0	0	0
Did not answer	1.5	1.5	15.4	6.2
Do girls and boys have the same right to an education?				
Yes	56.9	72.3	83.1	70.8
No	40.0	26.2	1.5	22.6
Don't know	1.5	0	0	0.5
Did not answer	1.5	1.5	15.4	6.2
	Reasons for girls to leave school			
External reasons (costs, location, work opportunities)				
Costs of schooling	32.3	52.3	64.5	49.7
Distance to school	1.5	7.7	7.6	5.6
Lack of job opportunities for graduates	0	3.1	4.5	2.6
Girls' work				
Work at home or on the family farm	12.3	16.9	43.0	24.1
Work outside of the home	18.5	1.5	0	6.7
School quality				
Quality of school (academics, exam results, etc.)	0	3.1	1.5	1.5
Quality of school environment (poor treatment, teachers' behavior, harassment, etc.)	6.2	3.1	0	3.1
Family-based reasons				
Parents lack interest in child's education (general response)	3.1	0	3.0	2.1
Parents prefer that the girl marries/ leaves school to prepare for marriage	73.9	81.5	6.1	53.8
Parents concerned about pregnancy risk	13.9	9.2	15.3	12.8
Student-based reasons				
Child's lack of interest in school	4.6	0	12.2	5.6
Low grades	7.7	15.4	10.7	11.3
Pregnancy	1.5	1.5	26.0	9.8

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork data. Note: The question on leaving school was *"Of the following reasons for girls leaving school, how would you rank the three most important reasons in your community?"* Respondents chose from a list or added an "other" category.

Table 2 provides data on perceptions about the right to education. A large majority of respondents in all three villages state that children have a right to education. However, there are significant differences when respondents are asked whether the rights of girls and boys are the same. Only 1.5 percent of parents in Bobo Dioulasso District say that boys have different rights than girls, but the proportions in the other two villages are 40.0 percent and 26.2 percent. There are also differences in the reasons for leaving school. The main reason for leaving school in Tenkodogo District and Djibo District is child marriage (73.9 percent and 81.5 percent) while this is by far less of an issue in Bobo Diouslasso District (6.1 percent). In Tenkodogo District and Djibo District most respondents describe the role of women as that of being in the home and they emphasize the need for girls to focus on their future as mothers and wives rather than on education or professional goals. By contrast respondents in Bobo Dioulasso District do not see cultural roles as representing barriers to girls' education; when they identify problems they are more likely to relate to school costs, a girl's lack of interest in school, or teenage pregnancy. There are some who disapprove of girls' education in Bobo Dioulasso District, but the majority of respondents describe this opposition as something that existed more in the past. While barriers are certainly recognized in the village, they are not viewed as an outcome of cultural or religious factors but more related to practical concerns, again related mostly to cost.

These different attitudes toward girls' education between the three communities can be illustrated through quotes. As parents in Bobo Dioulasso District explained:

"*Before parents said that to educate a girl is a useless investment... but now with the many sensitizations on the radio and everywhere, we are starting to educate our girls and help them. But these girls still face enormous difficulties like unwanted pregnancies and the burden of farm and domestic work"; "Some parents are beginning to educate their daughters because they say that they will have work when they complete their studies, and they can help their parents and help with the education of their brothers and sisters"; "If a woman goes to school and finds work outside the home like teaching, it is a good thing for the household, because she will contribute to expenses. It is the same for our wives who [if educated] would be able to help with small expenses like children's clothing"; "Before many people preferred to find husbands for their daughters rather than send them to school. But things have evolved; many girls are now in school and they are the pride of their parents"; "With the multiple sensitizations, many parents have understood the advantages of girls' education. If your daughter goes to school, she can become a teacher or nurse. This can benefit the entire community. Myself, I started to send my daughters to school, and I hope that when they are adults they will have a job and help me build a permanent house."*

Attitudes towards girls' education in Djibo District are somewhat mixed, with some respondents emphasizing the need for girls to marry early while others suggest that this may be detrimental:

"There are many girls whose studies are interrupted because of marriage. This phenomenon is common here and it is rare to find a girl who finishes Class 5 without getting married. It is a serious obstacle to their personal development and

their schooling"; "Girls are educated en masse, but when they reach CM 1, CM 2, or Class 6, they leave school to get married. We don't allow them to pursue their studies because marriage is the priority for parents"; "For us, marriages take place beginning at 13 years. Everyone knows this, even the school director. So, at any moment, his female students can drop out to join their husband."

Despite strong perceptions of the respective roles of men and women in the household and community, and despite the challenges finding work for women, a number of parents are positive about the future and discuss the kinds of positions that they hope their daughters could achieve. Again in Djibo District, the most remote location in the study, several parents who support girls' education describe the work options available to educated girls. These include work as a nurse or trained midwife in local clinics, as a teacher, tutor or community worker, and in small jobs consisting of part-time work, such as cashier or typist. These parents seem to think that educated women can find gainful employment. As one respondent explained:

"I want my daughters to study because in 20 years, our village will no longer be a village. It will develop and become a town and those girls who have gone to school will easily find work." Another says, "I would like my daughters to prioritize both marriage and their studies. I can't imagine my daughters without a husband at 18 years, but they can marry and pursue their studies with the agreement of their husband. If they become teachers, it will be a great joy for me."

By contrast, quotes from Tenkodogo District underscore a lower priority assigned to girls' education in comparison to boys' education:

"*Boys attend school for a longer period than girls. The difference is visible in secondary school, or more precisely, after Class 5, when the number of girls decreases, and 95 percent of the drop outs are due to marriage. So, for me, school is just for while they are waiting to find a husband"; "For most people, school is not mandatory or useful for girls. It's true that you find many girls at the school, but it is only because they're young and we want them to learn something before their marriage"*

"When he reaches 20 years old, a young man knows that he must marry, and usually the girl that he wants to marry goes to school. We don't hesitate to take her out of school for marriage because, according to our religion, marriage is something sacred"; When a girl is fortunate that her husband has work abroad, she can do anything she wants at home, but she knows that she no longer has the right to go [to school]. It is one of the important conditions of her husband, her parents-in-law, and her brothers-in-law"

"The marital home is a priority for girls. We prefer a girl who is illiterate and married over an educated girl who is idle around the house lacking a husband"

"When a girl becomes an adolescent, we already consider her to be a woman, while the boys at that age continue to play like children. At this point, the girl's education becomes a delicate issue"

"Every Thursday or Sunday evening there is a marriage… we say that 'Whoever says marriage, says end of studies'"

"As soon as a girl gets married, it's 'Goodbye, school'."

The interview with parents also included three open-ended questions about the benefits of education. The first question was about benefits for the student herself, the second for her family of origin, and the third for her future family (spouse and children). Respondents were asked to report only what they personally viewed as important benefits and not just what they had heard as potential benefits in public awareness campaigns and programs promoting school enrolment.

Table 3: Benefits from Girls' Education (%)

	Tenkodogo District	Djibo District	Bobo D. District	All
Benefits for the girl herself				
Reading and writing	36.9	50.8	73.9	53.9
Future work opportunities	29.2	44.6	72.3	48.7
Personal development (intellect, leadership, motivation, etc.)	38.5	40.0	30.8	36.4
Learning French/Arabic/other language	50.7	29.2	12.3	30.8
Math knowledge and skills	6.2	38.5	46.2	30.2
Diploma	3.1	24.6	30.8	19.5
Good behavior	20.0	6.2	3.1	9.7
Benefits for the girl's household (parents, siblings)				
Financial and material support	38.5	63.1	86.2	62.6
Help with literacy/math tasks in the home	30.8	27.7	26.2	28.2
Improved health and hygiene	20.0	13.9	9.2	14.4
Increased social status	9.2	9.2	15.4	11.3
Contributions to religious practices/obligations (e.g. Mecca pilgrimage)	0	6.2	12.3	6.2
Benefits for the girl's future household				
Contribute income to the household	13.9	49.2	64.2	42.6
Contribute to the moral education of her children	30.8	32.3	30.8	31.3
Contribute to education of her children (literacy, math)	13.9	32.3	46.2	30.8
Improved health and hygiene	50.8	29.2	10.8	30.3
Better relationship between husband and wife	21.5	7.7	23.1	17.4
Assist with husband's business	24.6	7.7	0	10.8
Are the benefits from education the same for boys and girls?				
Yes	35.4	36.9	61.5	44.6
No	63.1	63.1	36.9	54.4
Unknown/missing	1.5	0	1.5	1.0
Total	100	100	100	100
What are the reasons for differences in benefits between girls and boys?				
Better job opportunities for men	78.1	63.4	54.2	67.0
Men have more responsibilities in their family, community	22.0	26.8	25.0	24.5
Male children are responsible for their parents	26.8	36.6	16.7	28.3
Female children are more responsible for their parents	7.3	2.4	12.5	6.6
Male children have more academic success	0	48.8	50.0	30.2

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork data.

Note: The question on the benefits from girls' education was: *"In your own view, what are the most important benefits of a girl's education for herself/her present family/her future household?"* Responses were open-ended. The follow-up question was: *"Are the benefits of education the same for boys and for girls? If "No", why not?"*

As shown in Table 3, the perceived benefits from education differ across villages. In Bobo Dioulasso District, more respondents identify benefits than in the other two villages. The main benefits listed are literacy (73.9 percent), work opportunities (72.3 percent), and financial benefits for the girls' parents (86.2 percent) and for her conjugal household (64.2 percent). A large number of respondents also describe benefits from learning basic mathematics (46.2 percent) and from an educated girls' ability to contribute to the future education of her children (46.2 percent). Holding a diploma (BEPC or BAC) is also seen as a benefit by 30.8 percent of respondents.

Respondents in Djibo District occupy a middle ground in comparison to the two other villages in terms of the benefits attributed to girls' education. As in Bobo Dioulasso, parents mention future financial support from their daughters as the main benefit of education (63.1 percent). Other benefits discussed include the possibility of future work opportunities (44.6 percent), literacy (50.8 percent), and personal development (40.0 percent). However, the shares of parents reporting these benefits are much smaller than in Bobo Dioulasson District. In Tenkodogo District, respondents report fewer benefits in all of the categories. Some emphasis is placed on learning to read and write in French and on literacy in general, but the shares of respondents reporting these benefits are lower (50.7 percent and 36.9 percent). Respondents also mention practical benefits of literacy such as improved health and hygiene for a girls' future household (50.8 percent), and the ability of a girl to help her parents with reading and writing tasks in the home (30.8 percent). Only 29.2 percent of respondents mention future job opportunities as a benefit and about a quarter state that girls can use their education to help their future husband with his business. Almost no one lists the benefits of having a diploma.

The reasons behind the lack of perceived benefits for girls were probed though an additional question on whether benefits were different for boys and girls. As shown in Table 3, 61.5 percent of respondents in Bobo Dioulasso state that the benefits are the same for boys and girls, versus 35.4 percent and 36.9 percent in the other two villages. As to the reasons for such differences, most respondents in all three villages described the relative lack of jobs for women. The shares of respondents who say that benefits for girls are lower because they lack job opportunities open to men ranges from 78.1 percent in Tenkodogo District to 63.4 percent in Djibo District and 54.2 percent in Bobo Dioulasso District. About a quarter of all respondents cite cultural factors that require men to provide for their families and another quarter said that boys are more likely than girls to provide support to their parents. The latter is a common feature of patrilineal kinship in Burkina Faso, where male children hold both rights and responsibilities in the father's lineage. However, this is changing with the gradual demise of kinship as the main form of social organization. And in Bobo Dioulasso District 12.5 percent of respondents state the opposing view, namely that benefits are different because girls, not boys, are more likely to stay in close contact with their parents and provide them with continuing support.

Education System Constraints to Girls' Education

Cost of Schooling

While socio-cultural constraints play a key role in limiting girl's education especially in Djibo and Tenkodogo Districts, the cost of education is also a

major reason for girls to leave school. According to data from the nationally representative QUIBB household survey for Burkina Faso, approximately one-quarter of children not in primary school are not attending due to the financial burden. After the more general reason that school is "not necessary" (which may reflect in part socio-cultural constrains as well as poor quality) financial reasons are the most common reason given for non-attendance. The percentages are the same for rural and urban children and are fairly consistent across economic groups, though lower for the wealthiest as would be expected. Fees for attending public primary schools were abolished in 2007, but this and prior studies suggest that other education expenses are still a burden for some families.

These expenses include the cost of books, supplies, clothing, and PTA fees. Although the total amount spent per student is typically less than $15 per year, these small costs can add up to a significant burden for the poorest families especially when they have two or more children in age of schooling. As a respondent in Bobo Dioulasso District explains:

"In this village we are confronted with the harsh reality of poverty which prevents some parents from paying for their children's education. Myself, I had to sell two sheep this year to ensure that my children could attend school."

Or as a resident of Djibo District emphasizing differences in costs between schools explains it:

"We send our children to primary school but we are not used to paying for education. When they ask us to pay, parents remove their children from school and put them back into the Qur'anic school. There they do not ask us to pay for pens and notebooks and at any time the parent can go to school to get their child [when needed at home]."

While the cost of primary school is a concern for some of interviewees, many more describe problems meeting secondary school expenses. Public secondary school typically costs between 15,000 and 20,000 FCFA per year, including enrollment fees, PTA fees, and supplies. Most see this amount as too expensive and also financially risky, given the vagaries of the job market. The high cost of secondary school has prompted a number of strikes and protests in the country in recent years. In 2010 and 2011 there were protests in Tenkodogo District in reaction to an increase in the fees for exit exams and graduation certificates. The high cost of secondary school makes it especially difficult for girls to get family support for their studies. In all three villages, we were told that in the case of limited household resources, preference is given to boys. One respondent stated:

"Many girls end up dropping out because when a parent cannot pay for all of their children, they will only pay for the boys" (Bobo Dioulasso District).

Another parent explained:

"The more that children advance in their studies, the more expensive it becomes, and this means that we give priority to boys" (Djibo District).

Both the higher expected incomes of male children and the higher opportunity costs associated with girls' schooling (due to a loss of girls' household labor) are important in these economic calculations.

Although economic decision making plays an important role in limiting girl's education, it does not tell the whole story however, as illustrated by the scholing choices of wealthier households. One respondent described how parents with more resources (including those involved in transnational labor migration) still choose to withdraw their daughters from school at a certain point"

"This is a Bissa village and even those who are abroad are very pious and they do not allow their daughters to progress far in school. We plan their marriages very early."

Therefore while financial incentives at the secondary level could be an effective strategy for increasing girls' enrollment in the villages, it might not be sufficient in itself except perhaps in Bobo Dioulasso District where the costs of education are seen as the central obstacle for girls. As noted in the

previous section, most of the respondents in the other two villages discussed local gender roles and concerns about sexuality as the most important constraints for girls' education.

Perceptions of Public Schools

Table 4: Perceptions of Public Schools and Preference for Faith-based Schools

	Tenkodogo District	Djibo District	Bobo D. District	All
How satisfied are you with public schools?				
Very satisfied	3.1	1.5	32.3	12.3
Satisfied	40.0	44.6	40.0	41.5
Moderately satisfied	27.7	32.3	23.1	27.7
Unsatisfied	21.5	6.2	1.5	9.7
Very unsatisfied	7.7	15.4	3.1	8.7
Which schools are better for girls?				
Religious schools	75.4	76.9	30.8	61.0
Secular schools	1.5	4.6	60.0	22.1
No difference	15.4	15.4	9.2	13.3
Don't know/Did not answer	7.7	3.0	0	3.6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork data.

Another constraint to girls' education relates to the perception of public schools and the type of the education they provide. Table 4 shows that while three quarters of respondents are very satisfied or satisfied with the public schools in Bobo Dioulasso District, the corresponding figures are only 43.1 percent in Tenkodogo District and 46.1 percent in Djibo District. The main problems identified in relation to girls' low enrolment include the distance to the school and the school environment. Respondents concerned about distance are concentrated in Djibo District where the secondary school is located five kilometers away from the village. In both Djibo and Tenkodogo Districts there was much discussion in focus groups about the school environment and various problems that prevent parents from enrolling girls. There was also some general dissatisfaction with secular approaches to education, as well as concerns about the teachers' (potential lack of) moral behavior and worries about girls' safety and security on school grounds.

In a previous study conducted in Burkina Faso in 2010 with parents at private and public schools in Burkina Faso we found that moral and religious education is a priority for many parents (Gemignani et al., 2014). Among the education goals ranked highest in importance by parents were the teaching of religion, morality and values to children, as well as the promotion of respect for one's culture, community, and tradition. There was also a lot emphasis placed by parents on instilling dedication to one's faith for their children. In that study, parents of children in faith-based schools (both Islamic and Christian) rated their schools higher than those in public schools with the lack of moral teachings in the public education system coming up as a frequent concern in the evaluation of the schools by parents. Parents in this study similarly discussed shortcomings of public schools in terms of a lack of moral and religious guidance provided to children. Girls are seen as especially vulnerable and in greatest need of guidance as well as physical security. This is true even in Bobo Dioulasso District where, despite the overall support for girls' education, community members still worry about the moral outcomes of school attendance. For example, one respondent stated:

"For the Imam and also the traditional leaders, the school leads the girls to abandon their cultural and religious values. They want to convert to Christianity, they want to dance, listen to music, and they refuse to pray. This greatly worries the leaders who don't know where to find a solution" (Bobo Dioulasso District).

In Djibo and Tenkodogo Districts, there are many comments about poor school quality from this moral and religious perspective. Examples of comments in Djibo District include the following:

"*The school is considered as the emanation of Western culture that destroys the morals and customs of the village. Therefore, parents are reluctant to send especially the girls to school. According to them, they become less controllable because school is unable to inculcate good behavior such as wisdom, marriage, and respect for parents*"

"*Here we say that the school transforms girls and leads them to turn their back on the religion and culture. When they attend secondary school, they refuse marriage and prayer and that is against our cultural and religious values. Parents refuse to send the girls to school in order to avoid these changes in their behavior"*

"*People think that school causes parents to lose control of their children. Since this school has come*

to the village, we have not seen its 'fruits' but what we see are children who no longer want to grow crops or keep animals because they went to school. This leads them to leave the village to Djibo or Ouahigouya. They leave to pass their youth as the school advised them, that is drinking beer and not praying, they call it 'enjoying the good life' (faire la belle vie).”

Similarly, examples of comments in Tenkodogo District include the following:”

During prayer on Friday, the Imam said that one must not follow the authorities of our country who have turned away from their responsibility of promoting morality and want to impose foreign cultures on us, adopting measures that do not protect our children and do not educate them but lead them toward entertainment and self-indulgence”; “We send our children to school but it is just to pass the time. The school causes us to lose control of our children and we start noticing that they neglect their prayer, they find it difficult to make their ablutions in order to pray. I would say that the school came here to challenge our religion”; “When one is Muslim and wants to see their children practice the religion correctly, one hesitates to send them to public school because there they learn to challenge the decisions of parents. They do not want to farm during their vacations… When we ask them to go to Qur’anic school to learn to read the Qur’an, some of them refuse. These behaviors give us the impression that the school has changed our children and does not prepare them to practice their religion as their parents wish.”

Public perceptions about the schools and their role in the community are shaped by social and historical contexts, including longstanding struggles for autonomy and self-determination. The deep-seated mistrust of the public education system in some of the villages is an important constraint to girls’ education. The problem is particularly complex as many different opinions exist at the local level, with youth themselves having their own views about the positive and negative aspects of schools. In order to develop stronger bonds between public school and community, it is therefore necessary to acknowledge and work with these varied perspectives.

In addition to overall dissatisfaction with the public education system in some of the villages, specific concerns are often brought up regarding the schools. One problem mentioned repeatedly is related to the teacher’s role in the lives of students and within the community at large. In all the villages, respondents state that men who are single or live separately from their wives are not appropriate teachers for girl students. In some cases, there have been instances of sexual harassment and abuse. Some excerpts of the discussions are found below. As a respondent in Djibo District explained:

“*We are all Muslims and making an effort to educate our daughters. But we don’t like the fact that it is the male teachers who are teaching them. This scares us because at any moment they can be tempted to abuse them. For this reason, one of my brothers removed his daughter from the school and sent her to the Qur’anic school. Elsewhere we have heard about teachers sleeping with their students and we don’t want that to happen here.”*

Concerns were also raised in Tenkodogo District: “*The teachers often say that the girls who drop out to get married are their best students, but I think that they are interested in these girls because some of them do not have wives. It is this type of teacher that they should avoid sending to our place. When a man becomes older, he has the duty to marry because at this age he should be a role model”; “The teachers are not Muslims and they do not seem to give importance to marriage. Most of them, despite their age, are not married. They live alone and this is the source of those kinds of sins [premarital sex]. How can a man who is 30 and lives alone be a good educator?”; “The teachers are non-believers, interested in carnal pleasure. Some of them are married and their wives are elsewhere and they simply want to interfere in our daughters’ futures.”*

In two villages, there have been sexual incidents between girls and secondary school teachers. One respondent in Tenkodogo stated:

"The mothers of girls may remove them from school because they want to protect their daughters… In our secondary school, there are professors who have the reputation of deflowering our daughters."

Another explained:

"They have identified the girls who slept with their professors. These behaviors were denounced during the meetings of parents and secondary school administrators that took place after parents decided to remove their daughters from school and give them away in marriage to young men in the village."

Similarly, in Djibo District, parents often talk about a teacher who married a student:

"At the secondary school of [village], they don't supervise the young, single professors. They are alone in their home and they often ask their girl students to come and sweep their house, wash their clothes, or prepare dinner for them. It was in this way that one of them eventually married a student, even though the professor is not Muslim. This is why many parents do not allow their daughters to attend the secondary school after passing the CEP exam."

In addition to worries concerning potential sexual misconduct of teachers, respondents also discuss the use of alcohol and how this is looked down upon. One respondent in Djibo District stated: *"Islam prohibits drinking… but we see the teachers coming from bars after drinking beer, going directly to class. They could influence our children and encourage them to drink alcohol."* The ability of a teacher to uphold moral standards and to serve as a role model for children is seen as equally important to their ability to provide academic instruction. Respondents suggest that teachers should make a strong effort to understand and adapt to the local context and lifestyle. Other related aspects of the school environment discussed include co-educational classrooms and the frequency of sexual harassment by male students. Respondents described how boys take advantage of girls, offering gifts and money in order to persuade them to become sexually involved and they point out the lack of programs to help promote the sexual, physical, and emotional safety of girl students.

Role of Islamic Education and Schools

Table 5: Preference for Various Types of Schools for Girls' Education

	Tenkodogo District	Djibo District	Bobo D. District	All
Religious schools	75.4	76.9	30.8	61.0
Secular schools	1.5	4.6	60.0	22.1
No difference	15.4	15.4	9.2	13.3
Don't know/refused to answer	7.7	3.0	0	3.6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: Authors, based on fieldwork data.

Islamic education is a popular alternative for many families in and 76.9 percent in Djobo and Tenkodogo Districts. In response to the question of whether schools should offer religious instruction, 69.2 percent of respondents in Tenkodogo District and 76.9 percent in Djibo District agreed, as compared to only 33.9 percent in Bobo Dioulasso District. The questionnaire also asked whether religious or secular schools are better alternatives for girls' education, and again respondents in the first two villages were overwhelmingly in favor of religious education. As shown in Table 5, 75.4 percent of respondents in Tenkodogo District and 76.9 percent in Djibo District were in favor of faith-based schools versus 30.8 percent in Bobo Dioulasso District. One highly valued option for girls are the Franco-Arab schools, often referred to as *medersa*s, which offer faith-based education while also integrating secular subjects into the curriculum. Qur'anic schools sometimes enroll girls as well, but they typically offer religious education only.

Some of the comments about Islamic education in Tenkodogo District where many girls attend the Franco-Arab schools were as follows: "*Franco-Arab schools… are the most important schools… In these schools, our girls are educated according to what our religion allows or forbids for women. The teachers … observe the requirements of the Qur'an in their own lives and they are aware of their responsibilities to our girls. They talk to them about their future life as a wife and a mother, and it is a great relief for parents"; "The first choice for parents … is the Franco-Arab school. Here these schools are becoming the schools for girls. The*

education is the same as other schools except that it is an Islamic school that also provides a religious education"; "The best education (for girls) is one which helps them to become good wives and mothers… Usually those who teach in the Franco-Arab schools are from our village and they understand the concerns of parents. However, the teachers that the government sends to us for the public schools are unknown to us and the education of our daughters does not interest them. They teach what they are required to teach and they receive their salary";

"Religious leaders tell us to avoid [public] school and to privilege Qur'anic schools or medersa that put an emphasis on religious and moral instruction. They tell us to put the girls in [public] school just until they learn to read and write and then enroll them in the medersa";

"We enroll our daughters mainly in the Franco-Arab school because it is less expensive, the girls dress decently and are veiled, and they are not promiscuous with their male classmates";

"[Franco-Arab schools] are better because they teach our daughters what we are looking for most: how to pray, how a girl should act in the society, the type of life she should lead before and during her marriage, and her place at the side of her husband and children"; "Public schools are only an option when the Franco-Arab school is full… or for those who are in Italy."

These statements were all from Tenkodogo District where there is a Franco-Arab school. By contrast, due to its remote location, there are no Franco-Arab schools in the village in Djibo District. A few families send their daughters to live with relatives to attend secondary school in the town of Djibo. However, this is much more common for boys than girls. Several respondents said that they would be much more interest in girls' education if there was an Islamic school in the community: "*Our girls are used to living without school instruction. Today there is a school that is interested in enrolling them but it is not obligatory and it is up to each parent to decide if they will accept. But we all know that if we want the best for our daughters, it is better to wait until we have a medersa."* Another respondent stated :

"Unfortunately there is no medersa at the moment in our village. Otherwise, the parents would not hesitate to enroll their daughters. The girls will better understand their religion and their role in society."

Our previous research (Gemignani et al., 2014) suggests that parents are quite satisfied with the education that children receive in Franco-Arab schools in Burkina Faso. However, it is important to note that these schools lack some of the policy level and administrative links with public schools found in neighboring countries such as Ghana and they show quite a lot of variability in objective measures of quality. For example, they often lack sufficient resources to employ adequate numbers of well trained teachers. They seem to have a good supply of textbooks but have fewer schools with basic amenities such as drinking water and toilets. There are also gender differences in exam success at the three schools visited for this study, and this would also be an important issue to address when aiming to strengthen Franco-Arab schools.

Conclusion

Despite significant gains in primary education over the past two decades, girls' education attainment is still lagging in Burkina Faso, especially at the secondary level. While the inability to afford schooling remains an issue for some households (with scarce resources often allocated to boys' education), the interactions between gender, faith, and culture play a central role in shaping girls' education opportunities. Socio-cultural constraints are not always given adequate attention in education policies and strategies in the hope that resistance to girls' education will diminish as schools are made more available and affordable. Yet, while access and quality matter, they may not always be sufficient to mobilize communities toward meaningful change and acceptance of girls' right to education.

Girls' education is uneven in the three communities considered in this paper. Enrollment and retention remain very low in two of the three villages largely due to gendered values and practices in the household and the community. Gender roles that emphasize separate spheres for men and women and view girls only as future mothers and wives reduce the scope for formal education. Parents' concern about sexuality is also an issue that overwhelms many other considerations. Similar findings were reported among others by Chisamya et. al. (2012) in Malawi and Bangladesh. These authors describe a 'sexualization' of girls in school settings, widespread gender-based violence against girls, and a tendency to interpret girls' successes and failures in the light of their relationships with teachers rather than their academic abilities and efforts. Clearly there is a need to address gender discrimination in its many forms in order for girls to have the opportunity to attend school especially at the secondary level.

The findings presented in this study can help identify promising approaches to girls' education that go beyond the ideal of gender parity in enrolment and address some of the factors underlying current inequities. Approaches that tackle education quality are important here. When parents are already reluctant to send daughters to school, problems with school quality help justify the decision to keep girls at home. High quality schools have a better chance of overcoming resistance because they help create the push that is so sorely missing in these communities.

Franco-Arab schools illustrate the strong linkages between quality (as perceived by the local communities) and girls' enrollment. The decision to send girls to these schools is based on strong relationships of trust and community collaboration that could also be built in the context of secular education. But in order to do this, critical questions need to be asked regarding how public schools can promote stronger relationships with students, parents, and the community at large. These questions include: How are boy and girls students treated by public school teachers? How can schools foster environments characterized by inclusion and respect for different cultures and belief systems? What are some innovative ways to promote safe and secure learning environments? What can be done to improve the real-world relevance of teaching and learning methods so that they make sense in terms of the vast diversity within the county?

Being more sensitive to rural needs and perceptions requires tapping into available local resources such as cultural, human, and social capital. The critical role not only of teachers but also of community leaders should not be ignored and it is important to recognize that teachers in rural areas face complex challenges. Often teachers may not believe that rural schools can change and improve, as expectations fed by the harsh daily reality are low. There is a need for teachers to be not only skilled professionals but also to be able to work flexibly within the local context to innovate and adapt the curriculum in order to make it relevant for communities. For teachers, creating new possibilities and ways of thinking about girls' education and their future while respecting the local community is a difficult but essential task. It can help promote girls' enrollment in school and ultimately effect social change that is transformative and sustainable.

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