

BURKINA FASO

ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACCUSED OF WITCHCRAFT

In 1994, at the age of 74, **Habibou Sawadogo** was banished from her village after being found ‘guilty’ of using witchcraft to cause the death of a child. In 2011, Amnesty International and local partners began working with community leaders to abolish the tradition of banishment. Through engagement and dialogue, villagers understood such practices violated the dignity and human rights of women. As a result, many women were reunited with their communities.



Above: Women banished from their communities at a center in Yako, Passoré Province

In Mossi society, life is ruled by customary law and practices, where the *Naabas* (traditional leaders) make key decisions affecting the political, social and economic life of the community.

TRADITIONAL BELIEF IN WITCHCRAFT

Despite the existence of regional laws protecting the rights of women, traditional customs often prevail and banishment of women accused of witchcraft still happens in rural communities in Burkina Faso. “*Siongo*” and “*Zangogo*” rituals are used to identify people—mostly elderly women—thought to possess powers used to cause the death of others. Those accused of witchcraft are then subject to discrimination and violence.

Local partners worked closely with communities in Kourweogo and Passoré provinces to change this practice. After training in human rights education, two of the King’s traditional leaders visited the villages to engage directly with the local people.

Through active participation in workshops, community dialogue, theater forum plays and radio programs, the villagers considered why it was never men or the mother or widow in a powerful local family who was banished from the community.

The Mossi people began to realize that these practices were mostly directed against older women—particularly those who were poor and uneducated or isolated from other family members. They began to understand principles of equality, dignity and power, and to recognize the existence of discriminatory, unequal and unjust treatment of women who were already marginalized from their community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL PRACTICES

In 2011, with the support of the Mogho Naaba (the King of the Mossi people), Amnesty International in Burkina Faso and its

POSITIVE RESULTS OF HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

The practice of banishing older women on allegations of witchcraft gradually disappeared in 16 villages of Bousse in Kourweogo Province alone. Several women accused of witchcraft were not banished from their homes and many women were reintegrated into their communities in Kourweogo and Passoré provinces. A center was also created to host ostracized women from other regions of the country during negotiations for their rehabilitation and return.

Eighteen years after being forced to leave her home, **Habibou Sawadogo** returned to her community and was reunited with her family.

A NATIONAL PLAN TO END BANISHMENT

In 2012, the government of Burkina Faso adopted a national plan of action to end the banishment of women accused of witchcraft. Under the four-year plan, the Ministry for Social Action and National Solidarity offers legal, financial and psychosocial support to women who have been victims of such practice.

For more info: Amnesty International Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLC1Tpc8BU



THE KING ADDRESSES THE MOSSI PEOPLE



On June 10, 2011, the Mogho Naaba proclaimed:

“I cannot approve, on the basis of traditional or cultural beliefs, that human rights and dignity continue to be violated. I accordingly invite all the citizens of Burkina Faso and mainly people living in the villages, districts and regions under my control ... to put an end to all forms of violence and social exclusion of women. I invite and encourage all initiatives for the social integration of all the women excluded from their communities and to assist them in their return to their communities.”

WOMEN’S RIGHTS IN BURKINA FASO



In 2006, Burkina Faso ratified the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women, which commits States to “ensure the right of elderly women to freedom from violence, including sexual abuse, discrimination based on age and the right to be treated with dignity.”



“ On the day of my banishment, the “*Siongo*” came to my house three times . . . Eventually they decided I was responsible [for the death of the child].

I had to immediately leave the village or risk losing my life. ”

Habibou Sawadogo



“ Ending this form of exclusion and violence against women is a process that involves cooperation at all levels—from international, regional and national laws, to the work of community-based organizations, traditional leaders and community members. ”

Moussa Ouedraogo, Amnesty International Burkina Faso



Above: Raising awareness on the rights of women with traditional chiefs in Bousse



Above: Theatre forum on social exclusion of women in Kingria, Passoré Province