

The Hunger Project Canada: Blog

An Open Call with Aissa Barry, Head of Programs, The Hunger Project Burkina Faso¹

By Matt Bunch, PhD



Aissa Barry is Head of Programs for the Hunger Project (THP) Burkina Faso. She holds Masters Degrees in Management of Projects from ISIG International (now the Université Aube Nouvelle) and Master of Letters from The Université de Ouagadougou. She has been with The Hunger Project Burkina Faso for nine years where she has worked with rural communities across the country. Her experience has brought her to challenging situations, but has also revealed the resilience and determination of the people.

The Facts

In present day Burkina Faso, one in seven people (3.3 million people) are living with hunger. More than 800,000 people are living in cities under blockade with limited or no access to basic necessities. Farmers can't farm. Markets can't operate.

Global hunger, measured by the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) (Sustainable Development Goal Indicator 2.1.1), remained relatively unchanged from 2021 to 2022 but is still far above pre-COVID-19-pandemic levels, affecting around 9.2 percent of the world population in 2022 compared with 7.9 percent in 2019.²

The PoU in Africa rose from 19.4 percent in 2021 to 19.7 percent in 2022, driven mostly by increases in Northern and Southern Africa. The number of people facing hunger in Africa has increased by 11 million people since 2021 and by more than 57 million people since the outbreak of the pandemic.³ It is projected that almost 600 million people will be chronically undernourished in 2030.

Food insecurity affects women more than men in every region of the world. However, the gender gap in food insecurity at the global level, which had widened in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, narrowed from 3.8 percentage points in 2021 to 2.4 percentage points in 2022, suggesting that the disproportionate impacts of the pandemic on women's food insecurity have eased globally and in some regions.⁴

¹ This blog is based on a presentation delivered by Aissa Barry, Head of Programs for [The Hunger Project Burkina Faso](#), to The Hunger Project Canada and a public audience via Zoom on December 15, 2023.² Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations, [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023](#). fao.org, 2023.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Touflé

In addition to her extensive work with THP Burkina Faso, Aissa has direct experience with challenging situations for her own community.

In 2019 when her community of Touflé was overtaken by a terrorist group at a time when the community was ready to declare self-reliance. They were thriving; a bank and community clinic were operating, there was access to healthy, locally-grown food, children were in school and women were managing businesses.

Then the terrorists came and everyone fled. Residents didn't have time to get their luggage, their money or any possessions. Aissa is clear about the situation: "They left with nothing. Only themselves." 13,061 members of the community were displaced with no warning, and relocated to the safest location 13 miles away in Titao City.

The story of Touflé could easily be one of dependency — like that of over two million people across Burkina Faso. Many of the displaced people still live in tent camps, unsure of what else to do. They receive food aid from UN agencies. Despite the best efforts of community members and supportive agencies, only some of their children were able to attend school. They felt hopeless, restless and helpless. However, with Touflé something extraordinary happened.

When they arrived in Titao City, community leaders rented a room to serve as a base of operations. They set up workshops to support a community re-start. And ahead of the terrorists' attack, Touflé's rural bank had successfully transferred customer bank accounts. Not all was lost. In Titao City, people were able to obtain new loans, start new businesses and access new markets.

Most importantly, while the terrorists could set them back, they could not take away who the community now knew themselves to be: powerful leaders for a future without hunger. The community is able to look back today at all they have accomplished and created: their bank and community clinic are operational again, community members have access to healthy, locally-grown food, children are in school and women are managing businesses and undertaking leadership roles. Aissa reflects that "[t]hey are able to stand on their powerful partnership with The Hunger Project to create a new foundation."

We Can and We Will

The Hunger Project brings individuals together to create and implement a new community vision. In cooperation with community members, THP supports women to become equal leaders, to take action and be part of the decisions that will shape their futures. The communities create a dynamic and "buzzing" community hub where people come to gather, to learn, to share and to be social. The people form committees focused on health and nutrition, food security, education, microfinance and women's empowerment.

The Hunger Project employs a “train the trainer model” that has an amplifying effect throughout the community. For example, after participating in THP training programs, community leaders teach literacy classes, run youth programs and host support groups to keep mothers and their babies healthy and safe. They build a food bank to store grains to sell later or to use when there are food shortages.

These are tangible skills.

A critical element of the partnerships is to work with community members on their own mindsets and leadership goals. People are able to see themselves as visionaries who can create a world without hunger and move from “I can’t” to “I can,” and then to “We can” and “We will.”

The goal is self-reliance.

To date, after a multi-year partnership with The Hunger Project, 12 communities have declared self-reliance in Burkina Faso and more than 1.1 million people across Africa are now living in self-reliant communities, leading their own development from here on.

The Hunger Project strengthens the capacity of people in communities. Every person has the potential to overcome adverse circumstances. A mindset built on self actualization and supported by well reasoned strategies is one of the most powerful tools available to people in any community. This is how The Hunger Project builds resilience. The process begins with the individual and then grows to include entire communities.

As Aissa points out, the “conflict in Burkina Faso nearly brought 13,061 people back into chronic hunger. But their spirit survived.” The cycle of inequity that accompanies conflict — the dependency it creates and the destabilization it causes — has been broken in Touffé.

Aissa concluded her presentation with these words:

“I believe in a world where cycles can be broken. I believe in a world of resilient communities. A world without hunger. Please would you say it with me?”

A world without hunger!”