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2012

Annual activity report

Équilibres & Populations works towards the improvement of women's social status and living conditions, which are a crucial lever of fair and sustainable development. Our action is threefold, and all three components are complementary: sparking change, mobilizing leaders and empowering people.

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01

Sparking change

Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali: in 2012, Équilibres & Populations and its partners maintained their daily efforts towards the improvement of women's status and health in West Africa. Together, they continued to support teenage girls in the strengthening of their capacity to act according to their own choices. Another highlight was the evaluation of the anti-FSM program implemented in Kayes (Mali), which will allow further strengthening of the program in the years to come.

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Empowering people

Équilibres & Populations provides support to civil society stakeholders and to governments, in their actions towards women and girls. Mainstreaming gender into economy projects and increasing the capacity to mobilize European funds have been two major areas of support in 2012.

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Mobilizing leaders

Our core mission is to mobilize policy-makers. In France and in West Africa, 2012 was marked by a more assertive advocacy and key commitments were made, which now need to be implemented on the operational ground.

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Learn more about us

In 2012, Équilibres & Populations established a clearer core project: our values, mission and action principles were collectively reviewed and agreed upon. This shared evaluation allowed us to initiate organizational change as well as to define our core strategic focuses for the 2013-2017 period.

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01

Sparking change

Together with local partners,
Équilibres & Populations
sparks dynamics of social
change in the very heart
of communities.





Combating female sexual mutilation (FSM) in Kayes (Mali): a winning strategy that needs to be strengthened

AN ENTRY POINT TOWARDS A MORE COMPREHENSIVE IMPROVEMENT OF WOMEN'S HEALTH AND STATUS

Since 2006, together with AMSOPT, our Malian partner, we have been implementing a pilot integrated project promoting the abandonment of female sexual mutilation (FSM). The “Protect the next generation” project aims to support the efforts made in the 250 villages included in the health district of Kayes towards the abandonment of the FSM. What we intend to develop is a model and organized dissemination of behavioral change that could be reproduced in other areas in Mali or in other countries that still practice FSM. Based on the fact that putting an end to FSM must be a collective and coordinated process, the project targets clusters of villages linked by marriages. We thus aim to reach a critical threshold so that the prevailing standard ceases to be FSM and becomes the general abandonment of such practices. The project

started out in about 20 villages in 2006 and reached 100 villages in 2012. Upon this upscaling, which was a turning point, Equipop and AMSOPT decided to carry out an external evaluation in order to review our several years of action in Mali. This evaluation was co-funded by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the F3E (French network of about 80 NGOs and territorial administrations) and the latter also provided valuable technical support. The results of this evaluation show that, while the Malian crisis did not help and some necessary adjustments must be made in the future, our project is relevant and offers consistent solutions to the targeted issues. The project even goes beyond FSM, as it proves to be a valuable entry point towards a comprehensive improvement of women's rights and health in the region.

At the crossroads of women's rights and women's health, promoting the abandonment of FSM is a crucial focus in our project. For several years now, Équilibres & Populations has been committed, together with our local partner AMSOPT, to end this harmful practice in the Kayes health district, in Mali. In 2012, the assessment of our 'Protect the next generation' project showed that tangible change is taking place in the 100 villages covered by our activities.

WHILE THE PROJECT CAN COUNT ON STRONG COMMUNITY ROOTS, OUR RESULTS MUST BE FURTHER PROMOTED

The evaluation identified AMSOPT as a valuable partner. This Malian organization has been working in the field for over 20 years and has acquired enough competencies, knowledge and legitimacy to develop activities promoting the abandonment of FSM. AMSOPT is the lead organization of many movements and is frequently asked to provide technical support to other NGOs. One of the first African organizations engaged in the fight against harmful traditional practices, AMSOPT has gained, throughout the years, acknowledgement and support from the local health and social care authorities, as well as from the religious and traditional leaders.

Our work in Kayes is not easy. Our project team (one project manager, three assistants and about ten female facilitators) must show relentless courage and perseverance in order

to earn the communities' trust and foster discussions about FSM. These team members are much more than members of our staff: they are true activists. Their deep and sincere engagement adds credit to our activities and makes it easier to engage the communities. However, the evaluation highlighted the fact that, while AMSOPT has deep community and institutional roots, the project's results needed to be further promoted, both in the health and social care authorities and within the population. The next steps should therefore include more communication and advocacy activities.

PROMOTING HUMAN HEALTH AND RIGHTS: AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY

The FSM issue is tackled through two interconnected approaches: health promotion and human rights promotion. Both approaches are complementary and secure the sustainable abandonment of FSM in the communities. By tackling FSM through both these perspectives, we can not only improve girls and women's health but also empower them in a sustainable way. At this stage, the project is rather predominantly focused on the health approach, which is now well managed by the project team. We must therefore rebalance our strategy by further focusing on human rights.

RESULTS ARE CONCLUSIVE, WE MUST NOW STRENGTHEN OUR LEVERAGE

As stated in the evaluation report, “the outcomes of the implemented activities resulted in the opening of a public debate about FSM, lead to a decline in the practice and caused social standards to start shifting towards an FSM-free society”. While our facilitators admit that they first struggled to earn acceptance in the communities, they are now able to work freely in most villages. To this date, 80 villages have signed a commitment to abandon FSM and 61 of them can now be considered FSM-free. One of our future challenges will be to work further in the villages where some community members are still reluctant,

mostly by further involving men and religious and community leaders in our awareness-raising activities.

In addition to mobilizing local populations against FSM, this project is a lever towards more comprehensive improvements in reproductive health and for women's status. At healthcare level, the project has strengthened the ability of the staff to consolidate the referral system between healthcare centers and hospitals. It has also enabled women suffering from various FSM-related conditions in the villages to receive adequate care. High demand levels for clinic appointments show that women and some men now realize the importance of reproductive health. They also reveal the extent of unsatisfied needs in this area. From a cross-cutting perspective, the project has also strengthened women's capacities in terms of analysis and advocacy. The evaluation of the project was a highlight of 2012 and confirmed that social change was underway in the Kayes district. It also provided us with tangible orientations to consolidate our strategy in the coming years. In 2013, the project will receive support from the French Development Agency and Unicef. Equipop and AMSOPT will therefore be able to maintain their efforts towards a lasting improvement of women's status in Kayes.

Bréhima Ballo, a deeply committed man, pillar of our team

INTERVIEW

Bréhima Ballo is one of the key operational pillars of AMSOPT, our partner organization in Mali. He has been working with AMSOPT for thirteen years and is currently a program manager. He never gave up the fight and works proactively on both the advocacy and community support fronts in order to improve the lives of his Malian sisters.

When did you start promoting the abandonment of female genital mutilation in Mali?

I'm a program manager in AMSOPT and I've been engaged in the fight against FSM for 13 years now. In 1999, as I was writing my final thesis, I was given the opportunity to work with AMSOPT and to discover their projects. My academic research on sexual and reproductive health and rights acquainted me with the FSM issue, and I decided to fight against this harmful practice.

How would you describe the evolution of FSM in Mali?

Before 2000, cutting was a total taboo in Mali. Our activities were censored and we had very little visibility. And then, through advocacy and determination, we progressively managed to install a debate. In 2002, the Malian government took a big step by creating the National Program to end FSM ("Programme national de lutte contre l'excision"), which granted us national recognition. Further down the line, debates about FSM also reached the parliamentary stage, and AMSOPT managed to engage in an open and lasting discussion with some members of Parliament. Lastly, we are now observing a real shift at community level. Nowadays, people in the villages understand the impact of FSM and are willing to change their habits. An increasing number of communities are abandoning FSM. In Kayes, for instance, we're definitely moving towards the end of this practice.



Can you tell us about the impact of the "Protect the next generation" project in the Kayes health district?

In addition to promoting the abandonment of FSM, the project has greatly contributed to improving women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. Providing treatment to women suffering from FSM-induced complications has been a major component of the project. Many women who had lost their zest for life rediscovered joy after benefiting from these treatments. Communities are increasingly aware of the issues raised, and problems caused, by FSM. Additionally, women's rights are now better acknowledged within the communities. For instance, many women now take part in public decision-making, an area that was formerly the full prerogative of men.

How did you manage to work in the midst of the Malian crisis?

We just kept going and never gave up. The crisis did slow down some of our activities, but we stuck with the communities. Women are generally the primary victims of conflicts, so we were determined to keep supporting them, even though we had to adapt the topics of our awareness campaigns.

Did you say « empowerment »?

They are servants, street-sellers, teenage brides or mothers. While each of them has her own story, they all share a number of specificities: they never went to school or dropped out at a very early stage and their childhood was marked with a series of ruptures and violent events that isolated them from their peers and weakened their social circle. Quite paradoxically, these vulnerable (exploited or sexually abused) or high-risk girls are not targeted, and therefore not reached by most health and social care facilities or programs.

We have taken up the challenge to change that through the process of empowerment. Empowerment is a process by which an individual is given the opportunity to build their own capacities to take action and make decisions regarding their own life or their status in society, both on a personal and collective level. Empowerment can be measured on an individual basis, but is even more relevant when measured at a collective level, as it is part of a larger process of social development, fight against discrimination and vulnerability, and social change.

Under various actions funded by the European Union and the French Development Agency, we have developed activities in six African communities (both in rural and urban areas) designed to help these girls build their

self-confidence, acquire the knowledge and capacities they need to benefit more effectively from the health and social care facilities, and increase their ability to fulfill their rights and negotiate (and refuse) sexual relations. In the longer run, the objective is to enable them to plan their own future and to take control of their lives. This, of course, is a long-term process that implies implementing a series of various joint activities. .

DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS

The first step was to give them an opportunity to express their feelings and to help them gain full awareness of their situation. We thus created a space entirely dedicated to them, where they could come once or twice a week and spend time together. During the first months, they got to know each other and to bond with the group leaders hired to support them, and were able to share their daily experiences, to talk freely about their challenges and expectations in various areas such as safety, their relationships with their employer(s), family, men, and their access to health and social care facilities. Various techniques were used to encourage them to express their feelings, such as role-plays

Since 2009, Équilibres & Populations, ASMADE, CeRADIS and Lafia Matassa have been working specifically with girls in vulnerable situations. We aim to improve their sexual and reproductive health and rights by developing their capacity to make decisions and to act upon them, and by triggering some changes within the communities.

and drawing. Then, based on the needs we identified, we offered them a lifeskill-building program, inspired by those implemented by other organizations (Population Council, Plan International). These sessions were an opportunity to reinforce the girls' self-esteem and self-confidence as well as to inform them about their rights and improve their knowledge on topics such as health and sexuality. Time was also dedicated to organized tours of the nearby healthcare and social facilities. Thanks to these carefully planned visits, the girls got to meet with caregivers, health professionals, managers of savings and credit facilities, police officers and legal counselors working in their community, which will make it easier for them to seek these professionals' help if needed. These outings did not only benefit the girls: they also contributed to change the perception these various actors had of them.

LAY THE FOUNDATIONS FOR SOCIAL AND FINANCIAL AUTONOMY

To make sure these girls can eventually access more financial resources by themselves, a number of conditions must be satisfied, which is exactly what our project focused on. For instance, most of the girls in the project received functional literacy lessons that also included basic math. They were then able to move on to a full course and received a nationally recognized diploma. In addition, many of the girls enrolled in vocational training courses such as sewing or agri-food processing. All these activities were facilitated by professionals and gave the girls the basics on which to build an economic activity as well as some recognition in their communities. They were also an opportunity to put in practice the knowledge and life skills previously acquired.

We also took the girls to official institutions so that they could open a savings account under their own name and subscribe to a community health insurance scheme. For many of them, we first had to obtain a birth certificate so they could be legally recognized and apply for a national ID card. Without such "formality", they were still denied many rights and services.

INVOLVE COMMUNITIES AS FIRST LEVERS OF EMPOWERMENT

This focus marks a difference between our approach and those focused exclusively on individual development. Social standards and habits are such strong inhibiting factors that, if nothing is done to change the perception the institutions and communities have of these girls in vulnerable situations, all the knowledge and skills they acquire will remain useless. Through social mediation and collective outreach sessions, we have been able to discuss a number of harmful stereotypes that affect the girls and convince some key stakeholders to remain neutral, or even cooperate. Our staff has therefore played a crucial part on the field. Through regular visits in the families, they first negotiated permission for the girls to enter the project and be free to attend the activities, and then got the families to agree on, and sometimes even participate in (relatives or employer covering the tuition fees, for instance), each activity. They also defused a number of conflicts and managed to prevent some early marriages and to convince some families to let their pregnant teenagers deliver their baby in a maternity ward. More generally, the constant effort put into social outreach has progressively led the girls' families to acknowledge the benefits of their empowerment. In the meantime, regular, collective debates were organized in the communities to address major issues such as gender, rights, family planning and youth sexuality. We also set up a number of fun, convivial events: theatre-forum, celebrations for the International Day of the Girl Child, open house days in the youth centers, radio broadcast... All these efforts led the elders to reconsider their perception of girls in vulnerable situations and to feel more accountable for these girls' future. They also contributed to dismantle the stereotypes and prejudice most people had about these girls. Our efforts to mobilize the communities brought tangible results, such as new

activities being included, budgets being specifically earmarked for unschooled girls in community developments plans, networks of influential partners being established to keep working on mediation, supporting the girls and protecting their rights. Progress has been made and abusing these girls with total impunity is not so easy any more.

TRAIN OUR SOCIAL WORKERS

Project teams are crucial to the success of the process. They have to be given the right tools to be able to work efficiently and find the appropriate stance. The stereotype-deconstruction process therefore started with them and implied questioning personal and collective beliefs as well as making some changes in their professional practice. To that effect, workshops have been organized and facilitated by our Belgian partner Le Monde Selon Les Femmes (see Pascale Maquestiau's interview).

After three years working with the girls and the communities, we observe tangible change. However, we must keep working in order to achieve lasting transformations. This is the challenge we are now taking up, together with our partners.

1. Ouagadougou (Sector 15) and Saaba in Burkina Faso, Cotonou (District 12) and Zogbodomey in Benin, Gamkallé district (Niamey) and Loga in Niger

Pascale Maquestiau, training officer in Le Monde Selon Les Femmes

INTERVIEW

Pascale Maquestiau was our technical partner for three years, within the frame of the *Défi Jeunes* project (literally “Youth Challenge”). In the regular training workshops she held, she supported our teams and helped them integrate the gender approach. A long but very rewarding process.

Pascale, you took part in the project as a gender expert. What exactly was your role?

I was in charge of supporting local partners' efforts to mainstream gender in the three countries covered by the project. To achieve this, we held one training session a year for each team, in each of the three countries.

The first session was dedicated to presenting the concept in the light of each group's resources and analytical insight. In the last two sessions, we worked on opposition and on action plans that could be implemented. Periodic support was also proposed based on the teams' memos.

So you met with all team members, no matter what position they had in the structure and project?

Yes, yes I did. It helped me understand the power mechanisms in each and every one of them. As groups, we tried to strengthen the synergies and to build a shared culture. Of course, a few days a year aren't enough to produce fast and drastic change. So I've always tried to determine to what extent each one of them related to the project, and to gender mainstreaming in general, and to build on that.

How did your intervention and the progressive work you did with the teams in the course of the project contribute to build girls empowerment?

We carried out an analysis of the existing forces and worked on the ones we identified

as being unequal. That process mobilized each team member at their own level and influenced them professionally, and sometimes even personally. The line between empowerment and independence is a hard one to draw, but by changing the way people perceive one another, we opened interesting perspectives.

What have you learnt from this experience and what are your recommendations for the future?

It takes time to mainstream gender in our teams. Perception is deeply influenced by individual stories and institutional contexts, and the gender approach can only trigger mobilization once it has induced a conscious opinion and encouraged change in people's daily

lives. It could be interesting to systematize this change through a gendercoaching-type support, to include monitoring systems and to train project managers in gender-sensitive project management. Some topics, such as masculinities for instance, should be worked on strategically. When a girl in a vulnerable situation manages to say “no” but is confronted to young men from her community who still think that “she only deserves being raped”, her behavioral change cannot overcome discrimination coming from the strongest side. In teams where men and women don't have equal access to institutional responsibilities, institutional support could be proposed.



A close-up photograph of a man and a woman. The man, on the left, is wearing a light-colored, patterned shirt and is looking down at a notebook. The woman, on the right, is wearing a dark brown, patterned headwrap and a matching top with a wide, ornate gold-colored lace collar. She is holding a blue pen and writing in the notebook. The background is slightly blurred, showing some wooden structures.

O2

Mobilizing leaders

Équilibres & Populations mobilizes leaders in order to foster a favorable institutional and legal environment for human development and for women and girls in particular.



Advocacy in France: 2012 marked a successful transition

In terms of advocacy towards the French Government, 2012 was a decisive year, on many levels. With a new administration at the wheel, we had to make contact rapidly and establish a close connection, even though our key battles obviously remained unchanged. In addition, messages had to be made operational to enable France to speak up and advocate for women's health and gender equality issues in the several forthcoming major international meetings.

FRANCE IS BACK ON THE UN STAGE

In March, the annual CSW (Commission on the Status of Women) meeting showed that the international context was increasingly strained by the inability of the Member States to reach an agreement. The conservative positions still held by many countries were trying to reverse the hard-won progress made by women's rights in the most progressive countries, with the latter refusing any rollback.

This difficult situation made the CPD (Commission on Population and Development),

held a few weeks later, a particularly decisive event. However, for the last few years, France had shown very little interest in the CPD, with a rather discreet French delegation in New York and no or very little commitment from central services at the Ministry.

Early in 2012, Equipop insisted that it was crucial for France to get back in the debate, particularly in the light of the CPD's 2012 focus, "Adolescents and Youth", which was one of the new focuses of the French Cooperation. Through this renewed commitment, France was able to hold a strong position, along with other EU countries supported by some of our partner organizations. And a resolution was eventually passed. While we maintain that the final text is not ambitious enough, it did stop the hemorrhage.

TEENAGE GIRLS: A CRUCIAL CHALLENGE

Meanwhile, progress was being made regarding girls in vulnerable situations. In May 2011, Equipop had initiated a Parliamentarians Summit on "Girls and Population", a topic

In 2012, Équilibres & Populations opted for a more aggressive advocacy line. The new Government being more responsive to some of our ideas, discussions have gone from theoretical to operational. Results are tangible, and we now have strong bases for 2013.

that, until then, had drawn very little attention. This substantive work, based on years of field experience and reflection about the most appropriate response to what we observed in developing countries, took an increasingly tangible shape in 2012.

While Equipop widely promoted the “Girls left behind: an invisible population in French development policy?” study, which reviewed the state of play at the end of 2011, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs created a working group on “Teenage girls, young women and development” in January 2012. Equipop, pioneer organization on the field, provided expertise in several seminars designed to establish recommendations, in particular from the sexual and reproductive health perspective.

This knowledge of the interlinkages between French institutions and the sub-Saharan situation contributed to the success of a UNFPA workshop held in Cotonou in November, which aimed to mainstream the girls issue into the fight against maternal mortality. Without Equipop’s input as a mainspring of the process, there would have been no significant participation from civil society, when this latter is a major drive to the success of

the Muskoka initiative started in 2010. On the French front, Equipop, in this second of the five-year Muskoka initiative, continued to promote greater transparency regarding planned expenses and their monitoring.

A MORE POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Our messages were generally heard at a higher level in 2012 than they had ever been before. With the new government being more open to certain approaches, such as the rights-based approach, advocacy took a more political turn, while still relying on the technical support a small organization like ours can provide. In the fall, Pascal Canfin, the French minister in charge of Development invited the Equipop-coordinated Gender Commission of Coordination SUD to participate in a concerted discussion on gender equality. Discussions were also opened with the new Ministry of Women’s Rights, which is a strategic entry point for us to influence governmental initiatives in a cross-cutting manner.

THE RHSC GENERAL ASSEMBLY: A COHESIVE EVENT

As the historical French partner to the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (a global network of public, private and non-governmental organizations), Equipop largely contributed to the decision that the annual general assembly be held in Paris by playing an intermediation role between the French authorities and the Coalition's secretariat. Gathering over two hundred participants from all around the world for two days inevitably raised general awareness on the necessity to redouble efforts to tackle these challenges.

In particular, this forum gave Mrs. Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, then a brand new Minister of Women's Rights, the opportunity to give her first international speech on sexual and reproductive health issues. Following the announcement she had made, a few weeks earlier, that "women's rights diplomacy" was to be developed, Mrs. Vallaud-Belkacem stated that France would soon become a champion of family planning and birth control issues. We naturally see the scope of this new diplomatic approach as very relevant.

IN 2013, LET'S KICK INTO GEAR

Foundations have therefore been laid for France to quit acting like a mere observer on the international stage. In 2013, France will take real, effective initiatives to promote issues related to sexual and reproductive health in multilateral negotiations so that the progressive voice of the European Union can be heard and play, as from early 2013, the role until recently devoted to the British, the Dutch and the Scandinavians. A new challenge will be to find a correct French translation for these donor States with whom we share the will to promote these themes, the so-called "like-minded countries".

Thomas Dubois, a supporter of women's rights and our partner in Foreign Affairs

INTERVIEW

Thomas Dubois has been in office for two years. He is our primary contact in the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs when preparing for UN meetings. By being very open to interactions with civil society, he largely contributed to securing a stronger French participation in multilateral negotiations.

France has recently become more present on the international stage in debates regarding women's health and rights. Would you say the 2012 "Population and Development" commission has triggered a shift?

Yes. For a number of UN Member States, it has been a turning point. The previous negotiations (2011) had resulted in rather pessimistic previsions and the Commission expected major setbacks. So some Member States realized that the Commission had to be better coordinated and more vocal on sexual and reproductive health issues. The 2012 Commission triggered a revival amongst the States who share progressive views on women's rights. They worked on their coordination and regained the leadership in these negotiations. In addition, 2012 was a significant year in the run-up to the post-2015 development agenda and the twentieth anniversary of the Cairo Conference.

What part did civil society play in that "revival" amongst policy-makers?

In 1994, in Cairo, civil society's input had largely modified the international agenda on population and development issues. Today, they are a driving force of this agenda, and of the work being done here in France, in particular in articulating advocacy with a right-based approach. In addition, civil society naturally plays a major role in the protection and enforcement of women's rights.

What kind of input do events such as the RHSC's general assembly bring to the cause?

The annual RHSC meeting we organized in Paris last October was important for France in that it increased our visibility in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights. It was an opportunity for us to deliver our message to the various stakeholders but also to catch up on a number of technical matters.

It also marked the official entry of France into the RHSC steering committee: this committee gathers members of various backgrounds and works on innovative solutions to improve our advocacy tools and strategies.

Did the (re)creation of a Ministry of Women's Rights in France have a positive impact on French cooperation?

Yes. The impact was very positive for gender equality, not only in French cooperation but on all our international commitments, particularly those related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. The deep commitment shown by the Ministry and by the Minister herself largely contributed to improve our country's visibility on these issues. It gave us it a voice, a face. Across the board, our Government's commitment contributed to strengthen French ambitions on these issues.



Girls in West Africa, a strategic priority for Équilibres & Populations

ACTUAL FIGURES AND THE URGENCY TO ACT

From their birth and throughout their life, girls do not benefit from the same access to healthcare as their male counterparts. They are generally less taken care of than boys when it comes to the prevention and treatment of childhood diseases. It is also the case for access to education. During their adolescence, girls have little access to reproductive health services, safe places and adequate counselling on sexuality. They are thus highly exposed to early and/or unintended pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, as well as unsafe abortion and pregnancy or childbirth-related complications.

In West Africa, adolescent females account for nearly a quarter of women of reproductive

age. Girls aged between 15 and 29 contribute 60 % to the total fertility rate. By the time they turn 20, nearly all the girls in the region (92 %) have already had sexual relations and 1 out of 5 has already given birth to at least one child. In addition, 31.6 % of the girls aged 15 to 19 years old are already married or have a partner and 65 % of them have been cut.

Yet, girls are still left out in the development programs and public policies. Youngsters being the future of these countries, their needs must be addressed urgently. Improving their sexual and reproductive health today is both a challenge and a condition for the development of West Africa.

It is precisely for this left-behind population to be better taken in account that Equipop, together with its partners, has been informing and mobilizing the governments of Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger. These advocacy

West Africa is the region in the world with the lowest contraceptive prevalence rate. The maternal mortality rate there is also hardly decreasing. Recent studies show a large proportion of adolescents among maternal deaths and unsafe abortions. Équilibres & Populations is heavily involved with its partners to fight for this 'left out' population and 2012 was marked with encouraging commitments made by decision-makers and development partners. Now is the time to turn these commitments into action.

activities have resulted in a number of political and program commitments. In Benin, for example, young girls in vulnerable situations have been included as a target population in the 2011-2015 national cross-sector strategy for the sexual and reproductive health of youth and adolescents, as well as in its action plan. In Burkina Faso, girls were taken in account in the plan established to reposition family planning (with a specific earmarked budget) as well as in the National Policy on Social Protection document. In Niger, a specific program called "Initiatives Adolescentes" (UNFPA / State) was launched, a program with which our local partner, NGO Lafia Matassa, is closely associated. In all of these countries, political commitment at the highest level was symbolized by the official celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child, on October, 11, 2012. 'We will celebrate this day with

great pomp to express our support', declared his Excellency Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou as a response to the appeal issued by Equipop during his meeting with the civil society in France. It should be noted that this was only the second edition of the International Day of the Girl Child. Indeed, it took many advocacy actions by various NGOs - among which Equipop - and eleven years after the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals for the international community to create a specific day for young girls. If political and program commitment remains a significant indicator, it is simply not enough to improve the living conditions of girls in West Africa. Actual steps will have to be taken to meet the challenge of a harmonious development based on human rights and dignity.

TURNING INTENT INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS

Funds are needed to act and the Muskoka initiative¹ offers a good opportunity to turn intent into action. Such is the opinion of partners, including UNFPA and WHO, who, in November, in Cotonou (Benin), organized a workshop to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights in the programs funded by the French Priority Solidarity Fund for Muskoka. The main objective of this event was to review the action plans against maternal mortality in ten West African countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Central African Republic, Senegal and Togo). National representatives of Health and Youth Ministries and the local UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO agencies were present. For Equipop, it was of primary importance that the voices of African civil society agents, who work for and with these girls on a daily basis, be heard. Thanks to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, this request was granted and Equipop, together with four of its partners, was able to contribute to the debates by highlighting the needs identified in the field and the failures or successes of actions taken so far. At the end of the workshop session, the nine attending delegations drafted precise recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the various programs, including:

1. Basing programs and policies on recent, accurate data.
2. Improving policies to protect female adolescents and enable them to express their full potential.
3. Providing female and male adolescents with information and education about sexual and reproductive health without moralizing.
4. Ensuring girls' access to quality sexual and reproductive health services and, specifically, access to contraception.
5. Building parents' capacity to support their children through the transition from childhood to adulthood.
6. Sparking, through a widespread social mobilization, a durable change based on new social habits and laws that are more in favor of young girls.

We can only hope that all the countries receiving Muskoka funds will review their strategies in order to better respond to the needs of female adolescents and especially that they will develop or support effective programs to drastically improve their living conditions. Equipop will continue to strive for this to happen.

1. For the record, during the Muskoka Summit in June 2010, G8 countries and their partners committed to donate 7 billion euros by 2015 to meet Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5. France will contribute 500 million over 5 years in addition to its annual contribution of 300 million.

Dr Djeneba Sanon-Ouedrago, a key person for women in Burkina Faso

INTERVIEW

Dr Djeneba Sanon-Ouedrago is the head of the Directorate of Maternal and Child Health (DSME) in Burkina Faso, and a regular partner of our organization. We have built a fruitful collaboration over the years.

Why is it important for Burkina Faso to invest in girls and women?

During the World Summit of 2005 for the 10-year review of progress in implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, every country acknowledged that an improvement for women is an improvement for everyone. I agree with this statement. In Burkina Faso, targeted investments for girls and women must be increased and focused on issues which have a catalytic effect on poverty and inequalities. These include: school attendance for girls, improving reproductive and sexual health services, access to significant funding and not simply microcredit and access to decision-making positions.

How does Burkina Faso include the needs of girls in vulnerable situations in its development programs?

It is done across all the sectors working on these vulnerability issues, such as social work, healthcare and promotion of women. They devise action plans that integrate some aspects of the vulnerability issue or specifically focus on it (for instance, there is a project to combat early marriage and the practice of FSM). All sexual health programs now also include specific items concerning the needs of girls in difficult circumstances. However, even though girls are now taken into account by the various programs, they are too often forgotten during the actual implementation of these

programs. There are also other projects running on funds collected by NGOs and other partners (such as the Equipop-supported project implemented by ASMADE).

What is the nature of your collaboration with Equipop on these issues?

Equipop helps conducting advocacy toward the Ministry of Health for a better use of investments in girls' and women's health. We also work together on developing strategies to address the issue of reproductive and sexual health. Equipop's advocacy activities made it possible to achieve a clear definition of the family planning issues, through the organization of the conference on family planning in February 2011 and the follow-up provided by the Ouagadougou partnership on the stimulus package for family planning. Finally, we work together on finding funding for NGOs who run programs to ensure better investments in women and children (such as ASMADE). We also collaborate on task shifting to tackle the lack of qualified human resources. To me, our collaboration with Equipop is valuable and must be strengthened in the future.





03

Empowering people

Équilibres & Populations
empowers development
partners by building their
capacities.



Équilibres & Populations empowers the men and women working on social change to foster women's economic development in Africa

Since the end of 2009, Equipop has been part of the 3-year program called 'Gender and economic development: women as contributors to development', a segment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 'Gender and Economic Development' strategy. This program concerned the agri-food business and crafts sectors in Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Senegal and Togo. It involved a dozen French organizations for international solidarity and thirty African organizations. Its main innovation was to integrate the gender approach in economic development projects. Our challenge was to contribute to the changes in social relations related to sex and in social norms. Cooperative work was carried out by organizations

with technical knowledge on how to support economic projects on one hand and several French and African organizations specialized in gender approach on the other hand. Equipop, who fell in the second category, was thus part of the 'Gender Unit' and supported the integration of the gender approach in the economic activities being developed as well as targeted advocacy activities.

Owning land, being able to move freely to trade, getting trained, attending literacy courses, using the revenues generated by their activities, buying raw material, working as a mechanic, in the construction industry or competing in an election are all rights that the women working for the 'Gender and Economic Development' project wanted to obtain to both strengthen and fully control their activity, even if that implied shaking up and changing unequal social norms. Équilibres & Populations has empowered the various men and women behind this dynamic to improve the effectiveness of their action by helping them to integrate a gender approach in their projects and by supporting them in their advocacy activities.

**ANALYZING SOCIAL SITUATIONS,
INFORMING POPULATIONS AND
RAISING AWARENESS TO ACHIEVE
GREATER EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN
AND WOMEN**

The objective of the program was to challenge stereotypes and practices that prevent women from practicing certain offices, owning land, selling their products themselves, moving freely or even handling their money themselves. Stereotypes stigmatizing the men prepared to encourage the economic activity of their spouse (by contributing to the domestic chores for instance) were also taken into account. Since cultural, social and

family changes cannot be imposed from the outside, it was necessary to involve all men and women concerned, including: wives, husbands, in-laws, local organizations, opinion leaders, traditional chiefs and institutions.

For that purpose, the Gender Unit provided support to various organizations so that they could carry out courses (on gender, equality and rights) for women but also for their family and friends and the communities. We shared practical tools for participatory action, such as daily activity schedules, problem trees or social maps. These various tools made it possible to analyze how much time was spent on each activity, which revealed how overloaded with work women were. Indeed, women

often work three days in one: they do domestic chores and take care of their family, have an income-generating activity and help farming their husband's land. Through talks, debates and action theatre we were able to discuss social issues such as rights, violence or land property.

MOBILIZING DECISION-MAKERS: A NECESSARY LEVER FOR LASTING CHANGES

To ensure that the change in attitudes is followed by actual progresses for women as contributors to the economy, Equipop has from the beginning supported the various project teams in the conduct of local, targeted advocacy activities.

After analyzing the various situations, the topics we worked on and the objectives we pursued were the following: integrating a gender approach in the local development programs, getting the crafts practiced by women who are registered at the chambers of crafts and trades and obtaining proof of ownership or official documents regulating property for land or production areas.

At first, knowledge regarding advocacy activities had to be enhanced, standardized and reinforced through the integration of methodological items and analytical tools. Then, the production of power maps enabled the teams to identify precisely the key stakeholders for a given topic and their potential commitment or opposition to the objective. At that point, alliances with groups sharing the same interests were formed.

Based on the previous stages, the teams developed their strategy, identified the actions to be taken and produced an action plan.

In Benin, for instance, CAGED realized that their objective to integrate gender and/or the project actions in the local development programs could not be reached if they did not themselves propose clear and precise guidelines. The team also had to learn the preparation and validation procedures of the communal budget in order to be able to modify specific budget items.

There were further successes at the end of the program. For instance, the Chamber of Trade and Craft in Burkina Faso acknowledged the trade of street-catering for both males and females. In Kara, Togo, official documents for the use of production areas were obtained from the traditional chiefs. Still in Togo, positive discrimination practices in favor of young women were instituted by the national employment agency. Furthermore, the organizations have learned various techniques and have acquired habits that they will be able to reuse. As proof, the knowledge gained from their experiences enabled them to collectively identify good practices and recommendations on how to carry out advocacy activities effectively.

Films to share



Under the 'Gender and Economic Development' project, forty French organizations have worked with hundreds of women in Benin, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo to tackle the issues related to gender inequality that prevent them from having economic activities on a regular basis.

Équilibres & Populations has coordinated the shooting of three films¹ that shed additional light on this experience.

'La part des femmes' ('The Share of Women') takes a look at the living conditions of African women and stresses the importance of education, training, civil recognition and breaking taboos so that the economic approach can promote their empowerment.

'Genre et économie: les femmes actrices du développement' ('Gender and Economy, Women as Contributors to the Economy'), shows how the gender approach was integrated by the men and women who committed to it and the changes obtained in gender relations.

The play 'Je n'arrête pas de courir' ('I never stop running') is an example of the tools used to dismantle the sexist stereotypes with the communities and to challenge decision-makers.

¹. A methodological brochure coordinated by Adéquations supplements the films.

Reproductive health: Burkina can count on our support in securing European funds

ADVOCACY FOR HEALTH AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CONVINCED THE EU AND THE BURKINABE GOVERNEMENT

The advocacy strategy of Equipop was two-fold and consisted in convincing the EU to concentrate its funding on health on one hand and convincing the Burkinabé Ministry of Health to allocate a larger portion of its budget to reproductive health on the other hand.

Following its new development policy entitled 'Increasing the impact of EU development policy: an agenda for change', the EU concentrated its development efforts on the partner countries who needed it most and where the aid can exert the strongest impact. It's in this context that in 2012, in view of their next collaboration, the EU and Burkina Faso started reflecting on the programming of the 11th European Development Fund (EDF), which runs from 2014 to 2020.

In this context, Equipop supported the Burkinabé CSOs in conducting advocacy activities chiefly focused on acknowledging health as a focal sector. After months of concerted work with the local civil society stakeholders, actual results were obtained. Indeed, after various meetings with the leader of the delegation and the person in charge of social sectors programs (from May to August), the numerous advocacy letters (from May to October) and the participation of Equipop in the consultation of the civil society by the EU on the programming of the 11th EDF on the 26th of July, health was recognized as a focal sector in Burkina Faso for the years 2014-2020, along with food safety and good governance. Alongside this work towards the EU, Equipop has conducted advocacy activities among national decision-makers for several years. These activities have extensively contributed to the increase of resources allocated by the state budget to health and sexual and reproductive rights (SRHR). Indeed, based on the

Contributing to the improvement of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in Burkina Faso by mobilizing the European development aid is the objective set by 'Euroleverage'. In 2012, Équilibres & Populations - who is in charge of the project in Burkina Faso - continued its advocacy activities and supported development stakeholders in mobilizing resources.

analysis of the health budget that we carried out in-house, we can say that the funds allocated to SHRH by the national budget has more than doubled, its rate going from 2% between 2005 and 2009 to 3% between 2009 and 2010 and to 4.5% between 2010 and 2012. Between 2010 and 2012, the average funding allocated to SHRH has thus gained 1.5 point in value in the global funding of the health sector in Burkina Faso. Furthermore, the advocacy activities carried out by Equipop and its partners are ongoing in order to convince the government and the members of parliament to increase in monetary value the budget item related to subsidies for contraceptives, which has stood at 500,000,000 FCFA since 2009, as well as to uphold and increase in monetary value the budget items for emergency obstetric and pre-natal care.

MOBILIZING RESOURCES: INFORMING AND TRAINING GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES AS WELL AS CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

Support provided by Equipop in 2012 in mobilizing resources benefited both the government (EU's MDG initiative) and civil society organizations (capacity building).

During the General Assembly of the UN on MDGs held in September 2010 in New York, the EU, on the basis of the 'Millennium Development Goals' initiative, announced that it would allocate an additional billion euros for the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries (ACP) in order for them to be able to meet the MDGs by 2015. Following this announcement, Equipop committed itself to support the government, and more specifically the Directorate General for Cooperation (DG-COOP), in order for them to list and submit requests to achieve MDG 4 and 5. As a result, in addition to the 23.616 billion FCFA

(approximately 36 million euros) allocated to sector/health support (a significant share of which will be allocated to SHRH), the support provided by Equipop enabled the Burkinabé Government to produce and submit to the EU another development project estimated at 19.68 billion FCFA (approximately 36 million euros) in 2012. Equipop's support to civil society consisted in the regular dissemination of specific information related to European funding and training courses on project design and implementation.

Equipop therefore published a newsletter about the European Union public aid programs and funding, with particular focus on the priorities of the donors.

Concerning the training courses, Equipop organized three meetings to prepare the calls for proposals and a competence-building workshop in mobilizing resources for the CSOs. This workshop focused on document research, public aid in Burkina Faso, problem analysis and solving, budget preparation and activity planning, and gave a dozen organizations an opportunity to acquire the necessary competences to design and implement a project and to mobilize resources for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Kpekpe Nestor Kambire, INTERVIEW a man committed to the improvement of reproductive health in Burkina Faso

Kpekpe Nestor Kambire is the Program Coordinator for the organization 'Solidarité Action Faire Face' (ASAFF), a partner of Équilibres & Populations in the implementation of the 'Euroleverage' project.

ASAFF works on the issues of STIs, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and reproductive health. How did the organization learn about Equipop and why did you take part in the Euroleverage project?

We heard about the 'Euroleverage' project in 2010 during an advocacy workshop organized by the Reproductive Health Group, where we had been invited by the BUR-CASO. That day, the Equipop representative gave a presentation about the various training courses available on mobilizing European resources for SHRH. We approached her to learn more about Equipop and discuss our participation in the workshop on mobilizing resources. Our objective when we took part in 'Euroleverage' was to acquire competences, to get in touch with the others and learn how the European funding system works. We were also looking for potential partnerships in order to strengthen our financial capacities.

In which way was 'Euroleverage' useful to the ASAFF?

Our participation in the project was beneficial in many ways. It enabled us to improve our competencies in project design, to register our organization with the EU on-line database (PADOR) and to collect information on the funding programs of the European countries. The project also contributed to a

significant increase in funding for the ASAFF, which went from 47,650,000 FCFA (72,642 euros) in 2009 to 90 million FCFA (137,000 euros) in 2010. In 2011, it reached 147 million (224,000 euros) and in 2012, 204,754,000 (approximately 312,000 euros). For us, this progress in mobilizing resources is directly related to the support provided by Equipop.

Indeed, 80% of these resources come from international NGOs and from institutions such as the EU through the PROS, the Fondation de France, Sidaction-France and the WFP.

How do you collaborate with Equipop and what would you suggest to improve this collaboration?

Our collaboration with Equipop was very positive. This collaboration, along with the results achieved in mobilizing resources, are the pride of Centre-Est region in terms of contribution to the improvement of reproductive health. We are and will remain grateful to the representatives of Equipop who took us as partners in the 'Euroleverage' project. To further improve our collaboration, we would suggest strengthening it in three areas: advocacy, technical support for SHRH project design and experience-sharing among partner organizations.



04

Learn more about us

Équilibres & Populations was created by a team of doctors and journalists in 1993, in the context of the then upcoming International Cairo Conference on Population and Development. Équilibres & Populations works towards the improvement of women's social status and living conditions, which are a crucial lever of fair and sustainable development.

Équilibres & Populations currently has twelve employees and fifty members and runs on an annual budget of €1.5 million. Our headquarters are located in Paris and we also opened a subregional office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, four years ago.

Our vision and values

We, at Équilibres & Populations, firmly believe that sustainable development cannot be achieved as long as the female half of humanity is left behind. Improved social status and living conditions for women, and improved sexual and reproductive health and rights in particular, are both a lever and an indicator of development.

Our vision is based on a number of core values:

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Équilibres & Populations calls for the universal recognition of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. This must be achieved for everyone, everywhere, through political and social participation and appropriation.

WELL-BEING, FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

Équilibres & Populations considers that the well-being of a people is not measured only by economic indicators but also by the ability of individuals to make enlightened and autonomous choices, while also accepting their own responsibility towards society.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS

Équilibres & Populations stands up for a conception of human development that gives everyone the same social, political and economic opportunities. We want a development that cares about fairness and solidarity, especially between genders and generations, for the success of the present days must not be achieved to the detriment of part of the population or of generations to come.

These values are reflected in our guiding principles

COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

At Équilibres & Populations, we systematically adopt a collaborative approach in our action. We see such an approach as a guarantee of quality in terms of ownership, accountability, sustainability, rooting, empowerment and legitimacy.

This collaborative approach implies the establishment of a sustained dialog and aims to closely associate the various stakeholders to our action: our partner associations, health and social workers, parliamentarians, decision-makers and of course the populations of our target zones.

PARTNERSHIPS

Instead of expanding internally, Équilibres & Populations has chosen to develop the range and the quality of its actions through a strategy of alliances and multi-actor partnerships (CSOs, parliamentarians, journalists, researchers, civil servants, technical experts...). This structure relies on the complementary nature of our various know-hows and increases adaptability and reactivity.

For more than ten years now, we have maintained a continuous collaboration with West African associations with which we share a common vision. Building upon their subtle and thorough knowledge of the communities and of their dynamics, these partners promote change in their respective countries. Through the years, we have established trusting relationships based on these complementary assets that enable us to build and carry out together programs for the populations and advocacy activities that are adapted to local sociopolitical situations.

NETWORKING

Équilibres & Populations has also successfully created or joined synergies between development actors: international solidarity organizations (ISOs), research and academic institutions, public entities, corporations...

We collaborate with ISO networks in France, in Europe and in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. We are involved at different levels: collaborating to collective work and decisions, coordinating working groups, participating to collective organs (Boards).

Our mission and actions

Our organisation works towards the improvement of women's living conditions and social status, which is a crucial lever of fair and sustainable development.

In French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa, part of our action has progressively shifted to focus on girls, and more specifically on these girls and young women whom existing policies and programmes do not manage to reach.

Building on our specific expertise on sexual and reproductive health and rights, we have progressively developed a broader project that involves various action fields (health, education, economy) and systematically includes a gender-based approach.

In order to carry out our mission in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in Europe and North America, we work with a number of actors, including:

- civil society organisations with which we maintain a close partnership bond;
- traditional leaders, women groups, youth clubs;
- NGO coalitions and platforms;
- health professionals;
- technical and administrative experts;
- researchers;
- academics;
- journalists;
- parliamentarians;
- political and administrative decision-makers.

Our action is threefold, and all three components are complementary:

Sparkling social change dynamics at the very heart of the communities through creating and implementing pilot projects in collaboration with local partners;

Mobilizing leaders to create a more favourable institutional and legal environment;

Empowering development partners by strengthening their capacities.

Expertise and know-how

Through the years, we have enriched our knowledge and know-how by drawing from diverse fields: political science, public health and medicine, sociology, anthropology, economy, demography. We make sure to systematically intertwine these various perspectives in order to promote as integrated an approach as possible, which is a significant asset in the comprehension of the logics of the various actors we work with: men or women from the communities in which we work, community leaders, partners, health professionals, decision-makers...

Our work is based on three main fields of expertise.

PUBLIC POLICIES AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Équilibres & Populations has acquired a thorough experience of advocacy towards political actors in international cooperation. We rely on a solid knowledge of the actors and mechanisms that underline public policies and their implementation.

At the local, national and international levels, this enables us to inform, influence, and raise awareness amongst decision-makers (governments, ministry cabinets, high-level civil servants) so that they support specific programs, defend political reforms and make sure they are efficiently implemented. Our expertise is now acknowledged and sought-after by parliamentarians.

PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Équilibres & Populations has a renowned expertise in the field of public health. More specifically, our team has acquired transversal knowledge on the way health systems work in West Africa and in-depth expertise on specific issues such as family planning, emergency obstetric care, fistula, or female sexual mutilation.

The association uses knowledge to focus on prevention (health education, harm reduction, shifts in social norms...) but also on the way health services are organized (health personnel training, users' participation, HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health integration).

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND GENDER

Équilibres & Populations draws its approach from the field of social science. We seek to meet the needs and interests of all members of the communities we work with, which is why we adopt a gender-based approach. This does not mean targeting women as an isolated group but rather focusing on the way individuals act, react and interact according to their gender and social position under the influence of dominant sexual and family models. Our analysis highlights the fact that being a man or a woman in a given society implies socially built roles that need to be understood and questioned if one is to trigger social change.

The gender approach is a decisive lever to promote new behaviours. It requires both women's empowerment and men's participation. Taking gender into account contributes to reaching a twofold objective. Firstly, a political objective: rebalance relationships between men and women for greater justice. Secondly, a socio-economical objective: build the foundations of a development that is truly sustainable because it involves both halves of the populations.

In order to implement our project, and in close collaboration with our partners, we mobilise three main types of know-how:

PROJECT ENGINEERING

As a leader organisation or within consortiums, Équilibres & Populations has developed planning, piloting and coordination capacities. Together with our partners, we identify needs, plan strategies of action, define collaborative and gender-sensitive methods, mobilise resources, manage technical and financial monitoring activities, carry out evaluation of the process and outcomes and capitalise our experience.

INFORMATION AND ADVOCACY

Équilibres & Populations facilitates the access to knowledge and the understanding of the issues related to our mission with a permanent will to make social demand more visible and to bring forward local capacities. We also have an influential role in the shaping and monitoring of public policies and programmes through activities such as: event planning; study tours; awareness campaigns; creation and edition of documentation materials; individual response to solicitations from journalists, parliamentarians or experts; collection and critical analysis of legal documents and public policies or programmes; shaping and diffusion of position papers; creation of or participation to institutional consultation mechanisms; facilitation of or participation to study groups.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Équilibres & Populations helps strengthening the capacities of the various development partners and facilitates experience sharing amongst them. We implement support and consulting activities, co-conduct joint diagnoses, facilitate meetings, supervise or support our partners on the field, participate to the elaboration of didactic tools and design and carry out training sessions.

In 2012, Équilibres & Populations pursued its alliance and networking strategy, both here and there, to further strengthen our advocacy activities and also to build the capacities of the local civil society.

Partnerships

FOCUS ON AN AFRICAN PARTNER: JULIETTE COMPAORÉ AND ASMADE, A LIFE OF DEDICATION

In case the full name of the organization was not clear enough ('l'Association Songui Manégré/Aide au développement Endogène', which means the Songui Manégré Organization for Endogenous Development and reads ASMADE in French) - the organization founded by Juliette Compaoré nearly 20 years ago made the words of the famous Burkinabé historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo their own, 'We don't develop, we develop ourselves'. For such has always been the goal of ASMADE: to contribute to the development by using local dynamics in order to improve access to basic social services (education, health, training and employment). It has done so with so much success that today, 2 million Burkinabé nationals benefit from ASMADE'S services, which also sees itself as a den mother 'who helps to give birth without being the mother of the infant'. On this basis, and even more particularly because ASMADE stresses how the health and rights of women are a key to sustainable development, Equipop and ASMADE were bound to work together, which started as early as in the beginning of the 2000s. But let's first take a look at the story of the founder and director of ASMADE, Juliette Compaoré. In her master's thesis, which she brilliantly defended in 2007 at the university of Paris 3-Sorbonne nouvelle, Juliette insisted on her birth and her youth in a very large rural family in central Burkina Faso. She grew up with family 'education values' and beyond her father's commitment as the president of several groups of villagers, '[her] parents' grain reserves were always available to neighbors, in-laws, friends and acquaintances during the hunger gap'. As she concluded, 'The spirit of sharing and solidarity took shape during my childhood, with my family'.

A sharing spirit she turned to action, 'To cope with the expenses of his large family, [her] father initiated a solidarity fund fueled by the people who had an income and by the sale of farm products'. But this fund was insufficient when she was diagnosed with impaired eyesight during her adolescence, a problem which was only taken care of much later on, when she earned her first salary. It is thus not by chance that ASMADE supports several cooperative initiatives concerning health that draw inspiration from the local practices of the populations rather than imposing turn-key projects. When, at the beginning of the 2000s, Ouagadougou needed a local organization to carry out the political and social mobilization for the large program of the French Cooperation AQUASOU (Improvement of the quality and access to emergency obstetric care), community leaders and healthcare professionals all pointed at ASMADE. This first experience was such a success that it went on with two other EU-supported programs, 'PASSAGE' (Project of solidarity approach in reproductive health) and 'Protéger les adolescentes' (Protect Adolescent Girls). These programs enabled ASMADE to build its advocacy capacity, which is a constant factor in the relationship between Equipop and its partners and has resulted in the creation, in West Africa, of a network of NGOs sharing common ideas on sexual and reproductive health, especially concerning young women in vulnerable situations.

These NGOs have also been strengthened at the organizational level, which will enable them to make themselves known and to attract other partners.

* Learn more: www.ongasmade.org

Networking

A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR WORKING WITH COORDINATION SUD

For an advocacy NGO such as Équilibres & Populations, a presidential election year is a key period: the point for us is to get the various candidates to make the right commitments and to ensure these commitments turn into action. The best way to achieve this goal is naturally to work with Coordination SUD and its 130 member NGOs. What better way to obtain the highest results possible for the ideas we promote than to simultaneously have these ideas adopted by the rest of the network?

In 2012, as administrator of C SUD and leader of the Gender Commission, Equipop was equipped to promote ambitious and precise political positions regarding gender equality. These were then taken into account during the high-level consultations that were to define priorities in the French development policies during the international negotiations about the post-2015 agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, in 2012, the major achievement of Coordination SUD's Gender commission was of course to complete the review of the French Cooperation's Strategic Orientation Document (DOS) entitled 'Gender', which was in place since 2007, and to promote the conclusions of this review. Indeed, the review could only come to the conclusion that, regarding the cross-cutting integration of the gender approach, 'the results obtained are still highly perfectible'. The road was thus paved for the creation of a more operational DOS 2, in 2013.

A STRONGER EXPERTISE WITH GENRE EN ACTION

An early member of the 'Genre en Action' (GeA) network which will celebrate ten years of existence in 2013 Equipop is also a member of GeA's board of directors and its bureau. Being a member of the near 3,400 organizations and individuals who make up GeA puts our organization at the heart of the largest French-speaking ring of experts. Furthermore, since the majority of the members of GeA live in the South, working with GeA represents the best answer to those who claim that gender is an 'imported concept', or worse, 'a white man's thing'. In 2012, in spite of a worrying financial situation, GeA continued to fight for a better knowledge of gender issues and, on that premise, for gender inequalities to really be integrated in development policies and programs in the French-speaking world.

Concerning advocacy activities, GeA naturally contributed all of its expertise to the 'Gender' strategy and the preparation of after 2015. But it also kept fighting for projects started several years ago, such as MIC MAC (to lift women from micro-economic activities and micro-credit), the establishment of the ROEG (the Network of Observatories for Gender, which supports civil society stakeholders in the South) or action-research on gender-related violence in schools.

However, citing only these few examples does not do justice to GeA, whose characteristic hyperactivity is best embodied by the website www.genreenaction.net (1,000 visitors per day) and its 4,000 entries, 300 of which were created during the sole year 2012. Not to mention all the expertise provided to the French Development Agency, whether through the training of its personnel or the drafting of concept notes.

COUNTDOWN 2015 EUROPE AND EURONGOS, TWO STRATEGIC EUROPEAN NETWORKS FOR THE POST-2015 AGENDA

Équilibres & Populations' collective action is primarily carried out through the Countdown 2015 Europe network, a consortium of 16 European NGOs which are all leaders in their respective country. The consortium conducts advocacy activities to convince European governments to increase their commitment concerning family planning in developing countries. Thanks to its structure, the consortium performs monitoring throughout Europe, which proves invaluable since the window to conduct advocacy activities is often narrow. The responsiveness of the network and the trust developed by its members over the eight years of existence of the project ensure maximum effectiveness.

A message carried by Equipop on behalf of such a consortium, recognized as legitimate throughout the European civil society, only has more strength among French decision-makers. That is the true added value of Countdown 2015 Europe for Equipop's national advocacy.

At the international level, the consortium uses Equipop in the debates organized by the European institutions. Oftentimes, key texts are put to vote in the European parliament and the French votes are numerous, especially in the 'Development' commission.

In 2012, an exceptional event occurred and drew all the resources and attention of the consortium. Derived from the structure of the Ouagadougou conference held in February 2011 which was extensively detailed in our previous report donors from everywhere in the world met in London in July 2012 following the appeal of the Gates Foundation to commit or renew the commitment to family planning. Equipop took part in this con-

ference as a member of Countdown 2015 Europe and joined the civil society steering committee. Equipop thus broadcast the appeal to sign the pledge in France, which increased its legitimacy as a major stakeholder in this country.

Equipop is also an active member of another, larger network, EuroNGOs, which supports the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action on population and development. Beyond the usual information sharing and the drafting of messages targeted at European decision-makers, EuroNGOs has become involved in the talks related to after 2015, which are held in a very large environment where many processes are used, making them a cross between the review of the Millennium Development Goals and the Rio +20 Conference on sustainable development.

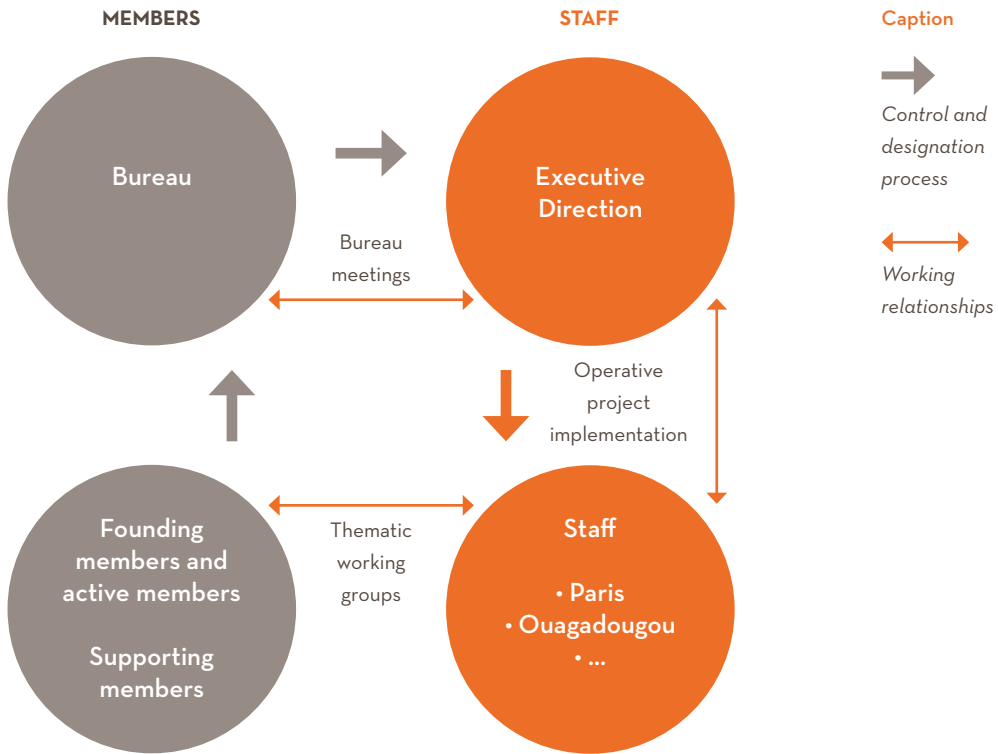
Equipop has thus transmitted information collected at the French level to the rest of the world and vice versa, drawing inspiration from European reflections to take part in the launch of the French consultation about after 2015, the Development and International Solidarity Consultation. Last but not least, Serge Rabier, the executive director of Equipop, has been elected president of EuroNGOs during the general assembly of October 2012. This appointment will put Equipop in a central place for the next two years, which it seems will be determining for the future of the issues at the heart of the organization's mission.

Équilibres & Populations can count on 50 members (doctors, journalists, development professionals) who meet at least once a year in a General Assembly.

The GA elects a Bureau every three years. Our project is implemented by a multidisciplinary team currently composed of 12 staff members.

Our organization initiated a dual structuration process by launching an organizational assessment in 2012 and renewing its membership in 2011.

Civil activism and professional commitment



OUR BUREAU

Dr. Marie-Claude Tesson-Millet,
Chairwoman

Dr. Annick Schwebig,
Vice-Chairwoman and Treasurer

Pr. Jacques Milliez,
Secretary-general

Pr. Claude Sureau,
Ordinary member

Dr. Claude Dumurgier,
Ordinary member

Dr. Alain Marié,
Ordinary member

Bureau meetings are usually held on a quarterly basis.

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¹. Alphabetical order

Olivier Maurel

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INTERVIEW

Olivier Maurel is an independent consultant and researcher who works on governance and socially responsible management with institutions, companies and social economy organizations. He is also a university professor in Paris, Montpellier and Abidjan. He has worked with the team and members of Equipop to 'give birth' to a set of assessments on the state of our organization and the challenges to meet in the future.

For more than six months, you worked with our team and members to develop an organizational assessment. What did you do exactly?

The primary objective was to have more clarity on strategic priorities, actions to take, governance and the organization of work. In concrete terms, we took the time to consult local partners, both technical and financial. This 360° approach enabled us to take stock of the situation. We were able to:

- Redefine the organization's project and its core values by updating the organization's purpose and the principles of its action;
- Adapt the operational project by setting primary objectives;
- List the organizational challenges to ensure effective implementation.

What will be the challenges in the years to come?

They are essentially organizational: securing bigger long-term funding, expanding membership, adapting the governance and using a more effective cross-sector approach in the team work. On the operational level, the project has gained clearer priorities: young girls in vulnerable situations, building capacity of the civil society, interdisciplinary approaches and connecting the various stakeholders.

What are Equipop's assets to undergo this organizational transition?

There are many but I see at least two major ones.

- Firstly, Equipop is recognized and appreciated by policy-makers, public health representatives (both in Europe and in Africa), international agencies, public or private donors and most importantly by local partner organizations. Hence this trust which is a great basis to form future alliances
- Secondly, the team is an asset, be it the pioneering commitment of the organization's leaders or the professionalism of the employees. They are all passionate, set high standards for themselves and show great patience with others. But beware of exhaustion. The team must be expanded and transmit both its spirit and its skills to newcomers.



Our budget

Our organization managed to balance the distribution of its resources before celebrating its 20th birthday. Whereas during the first ten years of our existence, the share of international foundations – mainly American – represented 75% of our resources, this share represented only 39% in 2012, which is nearly equal to the share (35%) of the French bilateral cooperation institutions (Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, French Development Agency). A growing share (22%) comes from the multilateral cooperation institutions (European Union, UN agencies, European and international NGOs).

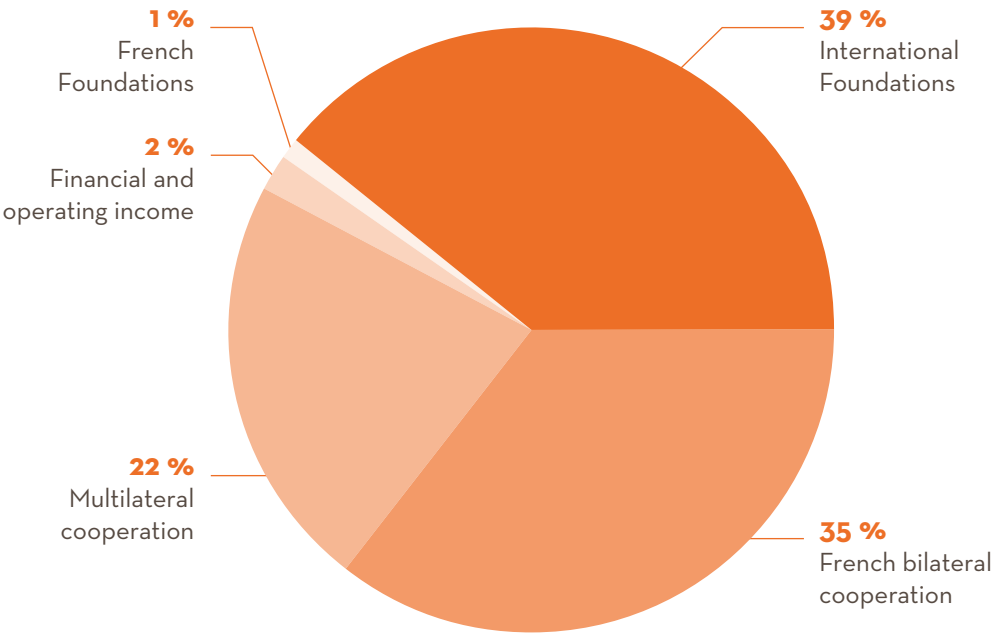
The diversification of our resources enables us to support field work and advocacy activities in a more balanced way. In 2012, the gross proceedings of dedicated funds stood at 2,620,250 euros and net proceedings at 1,381,446. The differential between these two amounts (or ‘dedicated funds’) corresponds to the share of resources allocated to projects, which was not used at the end of the year and was carried over to 2013, in accordance with Equipop’s commitments towards donors.

Between 2011 and 2012, the net proceedings of dedicated funds decreased by 9.8%, which corresponds to the termination of the European Union project for adolescents in vulnerable situations, the main expenditures having

been made the previous years. The project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation sustain the commitment of civil society to reproductive health / family planning / gender in Sub-Saharan Africa, which stands at 1,000,000 euros (772,000 euros of which had been received by December 31, 2012) had no impact on the financial statements since the expenditures are to start in 2013.

Total expenses amounted to 1,385,422 euros, which represents a decrease of 7.6% essentially caused, as said above, by the termination of the EU’s project.

The year 2012 ends with a slight shortfall amounting to 3,977€. The increase of dedicated funds from 929k€ to 1,253k€ essentially shows in the accounts, which went from 897k€ to 1,419k€. It embodies the significant development that the projects have undergone these last few years.



Équilibres & Populations resources in 2012

Perspectives for 2013

In 2013, Équilibres & Populations will implement two important items of its strategic 5-year plan of action, which was devised in 2012. Firstly, our organization will draft new statutes and rules of procedure, which marks a significant turn in the life of Equipop¹. Secondly, two flagship projects will be implemented². Onea, supported by the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation, concerns the plan to make durable the commitment of civil society towards reproductive health/family planning/ gender in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa and the other b, supported by the French Development Agency, is the continued promotion of the ending of female sexual mutilation in Mali in order to support dynamics of social change that favor girls and women.

1. New statutes for our organization...

In 2011 and 2012, the membership of Equipop significantly increased and an organizational assessment was carried out. These two changes initiated a dynamic in our organization's life that new, more detailed statutes and new rules of procedure will reinforce in 2013.

2. A dynamic of mobilization of civil society in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa in favor of girls and women in vulnerable situations.

a. Instead of choosing to grow internally, Equipop elected to increase the perimeter and the quality of its action through a strategy of alliance and partnership with civil society organizations in French-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa. It is an 18-month project to build capacity, reinforce durability and the role of civil society in Benin, Burkina Faso and Niger in terms of SRHR, family planning and gender equality which will also contribute to the creation of a global partnership Equipop will be a member of.

b. Equipop and l'Association Malienne pour le Suivi et l'Orientation des Pratiques Traditionnelles néfastes (AMSOPT, the Mali Organization for the Monitoring and Orientation of Harmful Traditional Practices) united for several years to promote the ending of female sexual mutilation in Mali and to support those who decided to end violence against women. In 2013, this action will be extended to new villages, which will demonstrate that the improvement of the status of girls and women is both a lever and an indicator of development.

Credits

The annual activity report is also available on the website:
www.equipop.org

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