

## BRIGHT Schools Are a Shining Example of Sustainable Girls' Education in Burkina Faso

Father Isidore Ouedraogo lives in the capital city of Ouagadougou and plays a leadership role with one of the country's leading relief organizations. Father Isidore, the Executive National Secretary of Caritas-Burkina Faso, returned to his mother's village of Tangasgo in 2004 with the dream of building the village's first school. When he arrived, he was pleasantly surprised to see that the Millennium Challenge Corporation's (MCC) BRIGHT (Burkinabé Response to Improve Girls' Chances to Succeed) schools project, which is administered in partnership with USAID, had already broken ground on the village's first school. The BRIGHT School in Tangasgo focuses on high-quality girls' education and is just one of 132 public schools being constructed or expanded under MCC's \$28.8 million BRIGHT II school project in Burkina Faso.

Less than half of Burkina Faso's girls attend primary school. This is due to a lack of school facilities within walking distance of their homes, time-consuming household chores, and early forced marriages. The BRIGHT project is attempting to remove these barriers and increase enrollment and completion of primary schools for all children in Burkina Faso, but particularly girls. This program began in 2005 with a \$12.9-million Threshold Program investment by MCC to construct "girl-friendly" educational complexes in 132 rural villages in provinces with the lowest historical rates (country-wide) for girls' primary school enrollment and completion.



*Ms. Kondaga and her students benefit from the electricity provided by solar panels*

These girl-friendly schools are equipped with separate latrines for boys and girls, food for school cafeterias, and day care centers to care for students' siblings. The Threshold Program also includes a community awareness program for the targeted areas and take-home food for girls who achieve a 90 percent attendance rate. These activities are meant to reduce the burden of household chores and to increase support for girls' schooling, as opposed to early marriage.

MCC's \$480.9 million Compact with the Government of Burkina Faso, signed in 2008, continues these efforts through the BRIGHT II program. By constructing three additional classrooms at each of the 132 schools, BRIGHT II maintains a focus on increasing girls' primary school completion rates by allowing them to advance to higher grades. The compact project also provides literacy and project management training for women in these communities.

To contribute to the BRIGHT project, Father Isidore donated his home, allowing the principal, Madame Kondaga Delphine, to stay there while her home was being built. He recalls that each night, he would light a kerosene lamp so that Mme Kondaga could tutor and provide extra help to students eager to learn more. For Ms. Kondaga, teaching is a commitment to others and a way of life.

"She was a woman who truly wanted to do this work; she was my motivation," Father Isidore says. Moved by Ms. Kondaga's work and the students who wanted to learn from her, Father Isidore shared the story of the Tangasgo BRIGHT School with two of his friends from the Italian Missionary Group of Meranno, Father Paolo and Father Balbo, who then donated \$12,000 to buy and install solar panels for the school, church and health unit.

Today, the solar panels enable Ms. Kondaga and the other teachers to continue teaching and providing extra help to students beyond regular school hours. With electricity at the school, students no longer have to strain their eyes to read at night, and they have a place to gather with their peers and finish homework assignments.

## Sustainability through Ownership

Father Isidore is not the only one to invest in Tangasgo's BRIGHT School. The Mother's Association for the school has initiated several projects to ensure that the school continues to be successful. Each member of the Association is responsible for 8-10 students' attendance at school. When one student is absent, the responsible mother must visit the student's home, find out why he or she was absent, and encourage the child to return to



*Father Isidore and Ms. Kondaga, the President of the Mother's Association, are committed to enhancing the sustainability of Tangasgo's BRIGHT School.*

school. These mothers also educate the community about the importance of education, explaining that the opportunity costs of keeping children working in the fields are much higher than sending the child to school.

Mrs. Elizabeth Ouedraogo, the President of the Mother's Association, explains that she is determined to establish community ownership over the school. The Association also grows vegetables to supplement the BRIGHT lunches and organizes sports and other social activities.

The efforts of Father Isidore, Mme Kondaga, and the Mother's Association complement and increase the impact of MCC's investment by ensuring that the school continues its success after the MCC compact closes out. The BRIGHT school of Kondaga demonstrates the strong, sustainable partnership between MCC and the people of Burkina Faso, and it stands as an outstanding example of the U.S. Government and Burkina Faso's commitment to reduce poverty through an innovative and sustained approach to development.