



The FASST project is supporting children in the conflict-affected northern and eastern regions of Burkina Faso to continue their schooling in spite of threats posed by insurgents.

# Safer Schools for Girls in Burkina Faso

YEAR 3 OF 4.5  
IMPACT REPORT  
FALL 2023

Creating inclusive learning spaces in a time of crisis

As Burkina Faso faces growing conflict and insecurity, Plan International is providing internally displaced children with a safe path back to education.

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## DID YOU KNOW?

FASST stands for *Renforcer le droit des filles à achever une scolarité sécurisée et à temps au Burkina Faso*, which translates to “Strengthening girls’ right to complete safe and timely schooling in Burkina Faso.”

## FASST FACTS

- **What:** The FASST project works to ensure that children can uphold their right to education, even in emergencies.
- **How:** The project seeks to:
  - Promote girls’ right to education within communities
  - Establish accelerated-learning centres and remedial courses to help children catch up on missed schooling
  - Improve school attendance by supporting school meals and take-home rations, as well as funding (cash transfers) to cover basic supplies for girls
  - Improve safety protocols in schools and learning centres and build and refurbish school latrines so they are accessible and inclusive
  - Support safe and inclusive school management by strengthening the capacities of school management committees and local education officials and supporting teacher well-being
- **Where:** We work in several regions of Burkina Faso, including the North (Passoré, Yatenga), Centre-Nord (Sanmatenga, Bam), the East (Gourma, Tapoa) and the Sahel (Oudalan, Seno).
- **When:** FASST is in Year 3 of its 4.5-year project term (2019–2024).
- **Who:** Our partners include the Strømme Foundation, the Government of Canada and the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages of Burkina Faso.

# The First Word

## Upholding the right to education, even in emergencies

In Burkina Faso, nearly 1 million children are currently affected by school closures caused by rising levels of violence and insecurity. For students who have been displaced from their homes, resuming their studies is more complicated than finding a school in a new community. Physical and emotional trauma can have a lasting effect on children’s growth and development. That’s why the Safer Schools in Burkina Faso project (FASST) prioritizes safe, inclusive learning spaces that are both accessible and accommodating.

As we complete Year 3 of this critical four-and-a-half-year project, we are proud to share the impact of our work. With your support, we have improved safety protocols in schools and learning centres across our partner communities, built and refurbished school facilities, established accelerated-learning centres to help children catch up on missed schooling and continued to advocate for children’s right to education, especially for girls.



## Thank you for your support

Through your generous contributions to the FASST project, we are providing internally displaced children with a safe path back to education. This report highlights the transformative impact of your support in the lives of students and communities.

Here, you will meet Awa, an emerging advocate for education who knows that school lunches are essential fuel for young minds. You’ll also hear from young Fatimata, who was displaced by conflict but was determined to get a fresh start in her host community; she had both the energy and the focus to head back to school and only needed the funds to pay for it. Finally, you’ll learn about the healing effect of clean water from Fati, who felt it firsthand and shared the secret with her younger sister.

These stories speak to the power of our collective impact. Plan International is immensely grateful for your trust in our work and your dedication to the well-being of children in Burkina Faso.

Top: Girls learn in a classroom supported by Plan International. Bottom: A Plan staff member attends a community meeting to encourage parents to send their children to school.

**Thank you for your continued support.**

# The Situation

With nearly 2 million people displaced by conflict, Burkina Faso is “the world’s most neglected crisis.”



At a community meeting, parents are urged to send their children to school.

Burkina Faso has long been known for its unique storytelling tradition, celebrated mosque architecture and sweeping landscapes. In recent years, it also has been at the forefront of mass vaccination campaigns in the region and efforts to reverse desertification.

Today, however, the country finds itself at the centre of a complex conflict that has caused turmoil across West Africa’s Sahel. What began in 2012 as a rebellion by extremist groups in Mali has spilled into neighbouring Niger and Burkina Faso, creating what the Norwegian Refugee Council now calls “the world’s most neglected crisis.”

Armed extremists are targeting schools across Burkina Faso, driving teachers and students from

their classrooms. Experts warn that the worsening security situation is putting an entire generation of learners at risk.

“The future of our country is at stake,” says Seydou Traoré, project technical coordinator at Plan International in Burkina Faso. “Over and above the human lives that are lost almost daily, education is in peril.”

In early 2022, a series of military coups escalated the humanitarian crisis, with 800,000 people trapped in towns and villages under armed blockade and 4.9 million in need of aid.

“Children either could not go to school because the schools were closed or because, even without conflict,

they could not have attended because of poverty and other barriers,” says Siriki Héma, education specialist at Plan International in Burkina Faso. “In this context, FASST has given access to quality education, especially for girls and adolescents.”

The project features accelerated-learning programs that condense up to three years of missed learning into nine months, helping students quickly catch up to their grade level, and teachers and facilitators

are trained to support students in reintegrating into the formal school system. FASST also addresses other barriers that keep children from school, such as hunger and a lack of access to clean water and sanitation facilities.

Since 2019, our project teams and partners have worked to foster greater safety and stability for Burkinabé children, supporting them to seize their right to an education.

After armed men threatened her school, **Rainatou**, 13, was forced to leave everything she knew and loved in Yamba, Burkina Faso: her school, her home and her family. She now lives with her uncle so that she can attend school.



## BY THE NUMBERS

- **6,100 schools** closed in Burkina Faso
- **1 million children** out of school
- **31,000 teachers** out of work

# The Rundown

The FASST project has reached more than 100,000 children and adolescents, including 55,067 girls.



Project facilitator **Bibata Zaongo** teaches children like 11-year-old **Nourou**, who dropped out of school when he had to flee his village.



**Nadinga** and other volunteers go door to door to encourage parents to send their children to school.

Children work at a blackboard at a school supported by the program.



## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

**\$14,659,062**

over four years, including:

**\$14,000,000** from  
Global Affairs Canada

**\$659,062** from supporters of  
Plan International Canada  
and the Strømme Foundation

“Parents are very poor. They want to have something to eat before they [take up the costs to] register their children in school,” she says.

Since the launch of the FASST project in 2019, parents no longer have to choose between feeding or educating their children. The project provides food for school canteens at 100 accelerated-learning centres and 21 participating Franco-Arab schools across the country. Take-home rations of rice and beans are also provided as further incentive to keep girls in school.

*Learn more about the school meals program in Burkina Faso on page 10.*

### Removing the Bathroom Barrier

Clean water and separate bathrooms for girls and boys are essential to student success, but many schools in Burkina Faso lack these basic facilities. This means children are exposed to water-borne diseases, and with little privacy, girls often miss school when they’re menstruating.

In partnership with **Solvatten**, the FASST project has delivered 2,592 water-purification kits to 370 schools, including primary schools, accelerated-learning centres and temporary learning spaces, to provide clean water for drinking and washing. (*Read more about these Solvatten kits on page 12.*) By 2024, repairs will be made to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in 23 schools.

“

Before the [accelerated-learning] centres opened, I couldn’t read, write or do math. Thanks to the centre, I can read, write and do math in both Moore and French. This gave me what I needed to transfer to regular classes. By the second school term, I was ranked first in my class.”

– **Fatao**, project participant

## BY THE NUMBERS

Since 2019, this is what Plan International Canada supporters have made possible:

**3,920** girls received take-home rations of rice and beans.



**3,526** teachers, community leaders, educators, government officials and project volunteers received training to promote and protect children's education in the case of emergencies.

**478** school clubs were activated or enhanced.



**8,465** children who were previously out of school studied in **302** accelerated-learning centres across the country.

**5,762** girls in Burkina Faso received a cash transfer of 50,000 FCFA (approximately \$110 CAD) to cover their school tuition.

**1,644** hand-washing devices and 2,663 boxes of soap were provided to **306** schools and temporary learning centres.



**292** school management committees were formed or reactivated and trained, comprising **2,007** committee members.

**21** Franco-Arab schools and **100** accelerated-learning centres received food for their school canteens in the 2022–23 school year.

**875** radio campaigns to raise awareness for WASH and COVID-19 prevention were implemented across the project regions of operation.



**3,449** girls across **123** schools received "dignity kits" with items such as washable sanitary pads, kettles for boiling water, underwear, soap and a bucket for washing.

## STORY OF CHANGE

## School Lunches Help Children Succeed

Every day, as Awa prepares school lunches for children in the market town of Fada, she knows that she is providing more than a meal. She is actively helping to keep students in class.

“The children come to school every day,” Awa says. “They are delighted to have a meal. It’s really beneficial.” In Burkina Faso, where extremist groups have weaponized hunger — targeting crops, stealing livestock and extorting money from vulnerable communities — many students have been forced to leave school. With families unable to feed themselves or forced to flee, school fees have become a luxury that few can afford. Students who remain enrolled are often absent, having to miss classes to search for work. As a result, they can fall behind or eventually leave school altogether. Awa is familiar with this story.

When violence broke out in her community three years ago, she and her family fled. They managed to find

safety in a neighbouring town, but Awa could not afford to re-enrol her children in school. When a community volunteer and member of the FASST project team informed Awa that a nearby accelerated-learning centre was offering free classes to out-of-school children ages 9 to 12, Awa not only enrolled her own four children but also rallied other children from the neighbourhood to attend.

Awa also joined the school management committee, and noticed that many children were missing out on learning because of hunger. In response, the school opened a canteen, supplied with food and utensils through the FASST project. Awa immediately signed up for management training. Under her watch, every student now receives a midday meal from Monday to Saturday, improving their attendance, focus and motivation. “Since the introduction of the school canteen, we have noticed a change among the learners,” says Awa. “When the children go home at midday, they take their lunch. Some share their food with siblings who are not yet enrolled. Then they rush to get back, so as not to be late for afternoon classes.”

## LEARN MORE

Why are school meals a solution to hunger and education? Scan the QR code to read more.



## STORY OF CHANGE

## Fatimata Gets a Fresh Start, with Tuition from FASST

As Fatimata prepared for a new school year, violence broke out near her village. Her family had to flee their home and found safety in a host community 50 kilometres away. Fatimata was determined to resume her studies, but her parents couldn’t afford the fees while struggling to sustain the family.

Recognizing Fatimata’s ambition, her grandmother stepped in, promising the school authorities that she would pay the tuition later that year. Fatimata enrolled in school, but the excitement was short-lived; her grandmother could not honour her commitment.

“I didn’t know how to find the money,” says Fatimata, who found herself facing expulsion. “Many girls and boys find themselves in conditions similar to mine, and some have to stop their studies for lack of means.”



The FASST project is working to counter this trend. In the 2022–23 school year, Fatimata was one of 4,885 girls across Burkina Faso to receive a cash transfer of 50,000 FCFA (approximately \$110 CAD) to cover their tuition. Being back in the classroom means a chance at a fresh start. “I’m very happy,” says Fatimata. “With this help, I will be able to complete my studies.”

Students like **Saoudata** received a cash transfer to help cover school tuition fees. Saoudata joined a FASST accelerated-learning program to catch up with her lessons, and now she is back at a mainstream school.

## STORY OF CHANGE

# Solar Water Filters Lead to Improved School Performance

“

The Solvatten system has allowed the teachers and the students to have drinkable water. This has improved school performance, because teachers no longer have to go to town to get water.”

—School principal  
in Dori

Some of the children called it “a healing water,” but it was simply this: clean. Clean water that would not make Fati and her classmates sick.

Fati’s school has had a water supply system for several years, but the school has recently welcomed increasing numbers of children who, like Fati, are fleeing conflict. In only three years, the school grew from six classes to 22, stretching its resources to accommodate 2,000 students. Its water system, built for a much smaller population, was overwhelmed.

When Fati arrived in her new community, she felt safe from violence and worked hard at her studies.

She graduated from an accelerated-learning program and went on to excel in regular classes. But her new school introduced a new risk: To access water, students had to draw from contaminated sources, and many were exposed to water-borne diseases such as cholera, hepatitis E and diarrhea.

School authorities resolved to treat the water and, through the FASST project in partnership with Solvatten, provided a solar filter. Now, Fati drinks purified water at school. She also fills her canteen each day and brings the clean water home to share with her little sister, who is not yet enrolled in school.

“Since our teacher told us to drink the Solvatten water, I do it every day,” says Fati. “I am healthy. I don’t get sick anymore, and I come to school every day.”

## WASH BY THE NUMBERS

### In Burkina Faso:

**43%** of schools do not have access to water.



**25%** of schools do not have access to basic sanitation facilities.

Only **18%** of schools have access to basic hygiene.

Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is essential for children’s health and well-being. As part of the FASST project, Plan International Canada and its partners are renovating or building sanitation facilities in schools across Burkina Faso and distributing Solvatten filter systems so that students have access to clean water.

### The FASST project will provide:

**23** schools with new or upgraded sanitation facilities



**2,592** water-purification kits across **370** educational centres, including **137** primary schools, **63** Franco-Arabic schools and **143** accelerated-learning centres

“

The [COVID-19] barrier measures are: avoid spitting on the ground, avoid shaking hands. Keep a distance of one metre, wear a face mask, wash your hands well too. Cough and sneeze into your elbow.”

— **Kenza**, project participant



In the eastern region of Burkina Faso, **Kenza** tries out the water and sanitation system installed at her school through the FASST project. Children at the schools where the project operates are now fully aware of the actions they can take to prevent COVID-19.

## Thank you for your commitment to the safety, growth and education of children.

Every child deserves a safe school. Through the FASST project, Plan International Canada is creating opportunities for Burkinabé children to return to school and to grow and thrive — especially the girls and young women who have been driven from class due to conflict. Together, we can help children claim their right to education.

Plan International is committed to supporting children in overcoming barriers to education and achieving their potential. We are grateful to our incredible community of donors as we work to improve the safety of schools and equip students with the tools they need to succeed. None of this work would be possible without your contribution.

**Thank you again for your continued support.**



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## About Plan International Canada

Plan International Canada strives for a just world that advances children's rights and equality for girls. We stand with children, especially girls, wherever they are oppressed, exploited, left behind or not equally valued. Plan International and Plan International Canada have no political or religious affiliations; however, we do believe in the power of global citizenship. We are a member of a global organization that partners with youth, families, communities, local organizations, supporters, celebrated ambassadors and governments. We collaborate with women-led groups and youth councils in shaping our programs. We work to ensure that children, especially girls, are safe, healthy, educated and empowered.