

WORKING WITH FAITH-BASED ACTORS FOR  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

CASE STUDY OF THE JOB  
BOOSTER PROGRAMME  
IN BURKINA FASO

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The lower half of the cover features a complex abstract design. It consists of several overlapping geometric shapes and lines. A prominent feature is a large red triangle pointing downwards, which overlaps with a teal triangle pointing upwards. To the left, there are several parallel teal lines of varying lengths, creating a sense of movement and depth. The background is a mix of white and dark grey, with a thin orange horizontal line separating the text area from the abstract design.

# INTRODUCTION

“Faith is one of the most important parts of what we are doing. [...] we always start with prayers, because the first person we are working for is God.” When asked about the relevance of faith in programme implementation, Sonia Yameogo, representing the Burkinabe, Christian NGO, Christian Relief and Development Organization (CREDO), was very clear. For CREDO – working in partnership with the Dutch Christian NGO Woord en Daad (W&D) on the ‘Job Booster Burkina Faso’ (JBBF) programme – religion constitutes an integral part of its work. This case study report examines the role of faith in the development and implementation of the JBBF programme on the ground.

## BOX 1

### WORKING WITH RELIGIOUS ACTORS: A RESEARCH PROJECT

This case study is part of the research project, ‘Working with religious actors for sustainable development’, executed by The Broker and commissioned by Prisma and four of its members: Dorcas, Tearfund, Woord en Daad and World Vision. The project seeks to fill existing knowledge gaps about the role of religion and of faith-based actors – particularly among ‘western’ secular development actors – in sustainable development efforts. The first phase of this project was finalised with an [interactive workshop](#) and resulted in a [synthesis report](#).

The second phase of the research consists of three case studies of faith-based development programmes, aiming to add more colour, depth and nuance to the findings of the synthesis report. By interviewing actors involved in programme inception and implementation, we highlight the role of faith in those actors’ experiences on the ground.

## Job Booster Burkina Faso

From 2018 onwards, W&D implemented the JBBF programme, co-financed by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). The JBBF works towards improving young people's access to meaningful employment opportunities by linking Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to the needs of the private sector. To connect Burkinabe youth, TVET centres and the private sector, W&D places great emphasis on partnerships with national and local governmental authorities, grassroots organisations and Local Faith Actors (LFAs). Additionally, the JBBF is intent on initiating systemic change by: 1) the inclusion of extremely poor youth, youth living with disabilities, and young women; 2) generating climate-resilient employment opportunities; and 3) policy influencing within the national and regional governments regarding youth employment.

### BOX 2

#### BURKINA FASO: THE JOB BOOSTER'S IMPLEMENTING CONTEXT

Located in West Africa and with a population exceeding 20 million, Burkina Faso exhibits great religious diversity: 61% of the population is Muslim; 19% is Roman Catholic; 4% belongs to different Protestant groups; and 15% maintains exclusively indigenous beliefs. The country faces a dire employment situation, whereby the relatively low and stable (youth) unemployment rates conceal a more worrisome trend: the formal sector, private and public, provides only 3% of total employment. The rate of underemployment among youths is equally worrisome. The majority of the labour force is concentrated in the agricultural sector, which is particularly vulnerable to recurrent weather-induced shocks, and in the informal economy. According to JBBF regional coordinator Wolfgang Sanou, terrorist groups operating in the country and the COVID-19 pandemic have further complicated the situation: "Due to terrorism, more and more companies have stopped recruiting new employees or recruit less people than in the past, and that has only become worse with the pandemic."

In this context W&D implemented the Job Booster approach in three regions: Nord; Boucle de Mouhon; and Haute-Bassin. From 2020 onwards, W&D has rolled out a second Job Booster project in the Sahel, Est and Centre-Nord regions.

# The role of faith in the JBBF programme

To shed light on the role of faith in programme implementation and on the experiences of actors on the ground, this case study focuses on three themes, corresponding to some of the JBBF's key elements: 1) collaboration dynamics between W&D and LFAs; 2) partnerships with the private sector; and 3) the incorporation of faith elements in programme implementation. To expand on these themes, we analyse project documents and the invaluable input of staff members of W&D and CREDO, JBBF consortium member and implementing partner.

## ***Local faith actors and international FBOs: unpacking the dynamics of collaboration***

Motivated by faith, FBOs tend to seek out LFAs as partners in their development programmes.[1] Yet, such partnerships often showcase similar imbalances as those observed in secular North-South collaborations, provoking debates on the localisation of aid.[2] To gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and dynamics of collaborations between LFAs and FBOs, we turn our attention to W&D's partnership with CREDO.

CREDO is a Burkinabe, Christian NGO that specialises on education and runs a TVET centre in Bobo-Dioulasso. Its CEO, Pastor Josias Sanogo, explained that their shared basis in faith played an important role in CREDO's motivation to work with W&D: "We share the same values. Prayer is central to both organisations, God is central. [...] We are both transparent and credible organisations, intent on accountability – these are things we share. Both W&D and CREDO are focused on helping the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable through our work." Thus, faith is incremental in the partnership between W&D and CREDO – a partnership, it must be noted, that spans almost three decades – creating crucial common vantage points, including the centrality of God and prayer as well as shared values and mission.

Turning to the collaboration dynamics between the two organisations, their partnership seems quite equitable and horizontal. As Pastor Sanogo explained: "Along with W&D, we have been developing and co-creating the project [JBBF] and we have been here through all the phases. We are not just implementing partners." Sonia Yameogo, who works on implementing the JBBF on behalf of CREDO, attests to this: "We propose the programme's annual objectives to W&D and then we discuss them together [...] to adjust things based on the local context and our own capacity to implement." CREDO's involvement in the conceptualisation of JBBF indicates W&D's dedication to equitable relations with LFAs, closely aligning with the localisation agenda. Beyond programme development and inception, CREDO has assumed several other roles and responsibilities, including the provision of short-term training to Burkinabe youth. CREDO is also instrumental in establishing partnerships between JBBF and the Burkinabe public sector. According to Wolfgang Sanou, W&D's JBBF regional coordinator: "Job Booster consortium partners, like CREDO, have great collaboration experience with the local and regional authorities. Because of CREDO's previous relations with the local and national government, for the Job Booster it was easy to reach out to and continue working with the local government." Mr Sanou's words support the findings presented in our synthesis report: The inclusion of LFAs – with their local networks and knowledge – can enhance local embeddedness, trust in and legitimacy of development programmes, thus contributing to their efficiency and impact.

## **Working with the private sector**

While W&D's partnership with CREDO was an anticipated element of the JBBF, the close collaboration with the Burkinabe private sector stands out as a more innovative aspect. The JBBF has departed from traditional youth-centred TVETs, because W&D's implementation of such an approach in previous programmes did not yield optimal results. Cees Oosterhuis, W&D's JBBF project lead, explained the shortcomings of the traditional approach: "30-60% of the youth who finished from these training programmes found a job more or less after graduating. But [for the remaining trainees] it took 3 or 6 or even 9 months after they had finalised the training to find a job." Evidently, traditional training programmes do not lead to rapid professional placement. This, W&D found, was mostly due to insufficient harmony with labour market demand. In the Job Booster approach W&D, with its partners, addresses this shortcoming with an explicitly market-oriented approach.



*Ouedraogo Balguissa, cloth weaving, ABNT (image credit: Woord en Daad)*

The first step of the market-oriented approach was getting in touch with private companies to discern their labour needs. Thereafter, the JBBF consortium started providing shorter-term training to youth to meet the identified private sector demand. Additionally, W&D employs regional coordinators who maintain close collaboration with companies that will hire the trained youth. Wolfgang Sanou, one of the regional coordinators, explained that the JBBF establishes partnerships with private companies in two ways: 1) Directly: for example, the JBBF has a direct partnership with a bus company, SOTRACO, which recruits 50 young bus drivers each year, including many young women; or 2) Through professional umbrella associations, which form a link to a number of companies in a particular sector: for example, the National Mechanics Association, with whom the JBBF has managed to train and employ 200 youth.

In addition to the efforts of regional coordinators, LFAs also play a role in establishing partnerships with private companies. In the case of W&D and CREDO there is a clear division: "[Wolfgang] contacts companies at a regional level," Sonia Yameogo explains. "We [CREDO] try to set up partnerships with companies at a national scale." CREDO's capacity to reach private companies at a national scale showcases the competency and professionalism of faith-based implementing partners.

This adds nuance to the perception of many Northern NGOs that small, local organisations – including, but not limited to LFAs – are more prone to amateurism and may not have much impact beyond their local communities[3]. By taking private sector collaboration as a starting point, JBBF has not only increased employment rates of the trained youth; it also increased the programme’s cost-effectiveness, as all companies and young participants started contributing to the training costs of youth they intended to hire – with the exception of the poorest youth. Most importantly, after the first implementing years, companies provided the JBBF with invaluable feedback: while the hired youth possessed the professional skills required, they lacked social skills – i.e., they would be late for work, were disorganised and unable to work as part of a team. In response, W&D added a social skills training module to its programme.

### ***Sharing the Christian faith: the social skills training module***

As highlighted in our synthesis report, secular development actors can sometimes be sceptical of faith’s centrality in FBOs’ activities; fearful it might pressure programme beneficiaries to convert to a certain faith.[4] Taking a closer look at JBBF’s social skills training module, we discern how FBOs strike a balance between sharing their faith and avoiding proselytising when implementing their programmes. Following the feedback of private companies, W&D arranged its training programmes into three separate modules: the vocational, the entrepreneurial and the social skills training modules. Expanding on the last module, Cees Oosterhuis said: “In the social skills training, we include elements of faith, as we believe that God gives us all talents. This way, we stimulate youth to expand upon and use their God given talents for the betterment of themselves, their families and their community.” Though it is likely that Christianity plays a role throughout programme implementation due to the Christian values of JBBF staff, by keeping the three modules separate the JBBF training attempts to safeguard a level of transparency and openness about how faith elements are incorporated in the programme. This sense of transparency is fortified by the honest way in which implementing staff choose to share their faith in the field, as explicated by Sonia Yameogo: “Our Christian faith is not about preaching the gospel. We openly say that we are Christians, we can’t say to anyone they must also be Christian. Some trainees ask more about our faith, but [if they] don’t want to talk about it, that is also okay.”

It is clear Christian values are interwoven most explicitly in the social skills module, but that W&D has tried to design the module in such a way that it is suitable for all JBBF participants, regardless of their background. Moreover, while three explicitly Christian organisations aside from W&D are involved in the programme – i.e. CREDO, Compassion and AEAD –, the involved companies and TVET centres (20-30 actors) are not Christian. That said, it must be noted that we have not spoken directly to any of the JBBF participants in this research. We therefore cannot speak to whether JBBF participants from different (religious) backgrounds indeed experience the training as equally suitable for all.

# CONCLUSIONS

By interviewing JBBF actors at headquarter, regional, and local level, this case study provides insight into how the programme has developed from design to implementation. Various findings indicate the added value of the incorporation of religion and religious actors: W&D's collaboration with CREDO showcases **the potential of faith and faith-based values in fostering more equitable North-South partnerships**. Further, in alignment with the findings of the synthesis report, CREDO exhibits **the capacity of LFA's to harmonise programmes with local, regional, and national contexts**, thus enhancing trust and legitimacy on the ground. Undoubtedly, **a shared faith also enhances collaboration with local Christian organisations and beneficiaries**. As interviewees have emphasized, however, relationships are by no means limited to actors that practice a similar faith. In JBBF's implementation, Christianity only really comes to the fore in the social skills training module. This clear separation and the transparency around this faith component challenge the assumption that FBOs and LFAs are not inclusive or would not be able to efficiently support people with different worldviews. That said, we reach this conclusion based on interviews with W&D and CREDO staff. To triangulate our findings regarding JBBF's inclusivity, open and independent dialogue with local youths and communities from different (religious) backgrounds is needed.

## References

[1]Yannicke Goris and Martha Kapazoglou, "A Synthesis Report: Working with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development" (The Broker, December 2021), 8.

[2] Kathryn Ann Kraft and Olivia J. Wilkinson, eds., International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters, Routledge Research in Religion and Development (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020).

[3]Goris, Yannicke and Martha Kapazoglou, "A Synthesis Report: Working with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development" (The Broker, December 2021), 8.

[4] Goris, Yannicke and Martha Kapazoglou, "A Synthesis Report: Working with Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development" (The Broker, December 2021), 18. See also: Paul Bickley, "The Problem of Proselytism." (London: Theos, 2015).

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