

# Contribution to Sustainable Peacebuilding through Youth Employment in Agriculture in Burkina Faso

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2024, AFJN launched a pilot project titled *Contribution to Sustainable Peacebuilding through Youth Employment in Agriculture in Burkina Faso*. The initiative was led by Fr. Barwendé Sané, SJ, AFJN Senior Fellow, and aimed to explore sustainable peacebuilding solutions by encouraging youth to transition from violence to agricultural engagement. Inspired by Isaiah 2:4, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares...,” the project sought to assess how youth participation in agriculture could foster stability and empowerment. By promoting agriculture as a pathway to peace, the initiative aspires to transform tools of conflict into instruments of growth and harmony.



Fr. Sané and Ingenieur M. Grégoire Sama, Expert in Agriculture

## WHAT MAKES AFJN'S APPROACH UNIQUE

Notably, AFJN's initiative is not the first to consider agriculture a solution for long-term peace. In November 2023, the government of Burkina Faso launched *L'Offensive Agropastorale et Halieutique 2023-2025: La révolution agricole en marche au Burkina Faso* with the goal of achieving food sovereignty by 2025. Several initiatives were implemented to increase production and benefit local populations. What distinguished AFJN's mission was its bottom-up approach, engaging government leaders, researchers, local chieftains, farmers, students, and association leaders.

AFJN's approach stands out in contrast to the strategies typically employed by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local church leaders in Burkina Faso.

**1. Fostering Reflective Dialogue Over Immediate Responses**

- o While many NGOs, both local and international, focus on addressing the immediate needs of displaced populations, AFJN prioritized fostering reflection and dialogue. This approach empowered civil society and government leaders to develop their own innovative solutions to pressing challenges.

**2. Encouraging Active Commitment Beyond Prayer or Criticism**

- o Unlike some local church leaders who may limit their involvement to prayers for peace, political critiques, or passive observation, AFJN actively engaged various societal actors to commit to actionable steps for sustainable peacebuilding.

**3. Inclusive, Bottom-Up Engagement**

- o AFJN adopted a grassroots approach, bringing together individuals and groups from diverse identities and sectors, including:
  - Government agencies
  - Local chieftaincies
  - Leaders of cooperatives and associations
  - Researchers and academics
  - Students



A Workshop in Ouagadougou

**WHAT CAN WE TAKE AWAY FROM THE 2 WORKSHOPS?**

The first workshops took place in Ouahigouya, a key city in northern Burkina Faso known for its strategic importance and cultural significance. Participants in this session highlighted the importance of addressing local challenges while leveraging community strengths. The second

session, held in Ouagadougou, the nation's capital, expanded the dialogue to include national-level actors such as government officials, civil society organizations, and researchers. Through these discussions, several key themes emerged:

- **Community Strengthening:**  
Workshop participants emphasized the need to promote strong political will, conflict mediation, civic engagement, peace education, and inclusive decision-making processes, particularly in agriculture and community development.
- **Youth Empowerment:**  
Participants underscored the importance of equipping youth with agricultural and entrepreneurial skills. They proposed utilizing unused arable land with subsidies for local products and establishing platforms to foster collaboration among farmers, herders, and other stakeholders.
- **Long-Term Development:**  
The discussions highlighted the value of developing and promoting cooperative models rooted in solidarity. Participants suggested educating communities on the benefits of such models and engaging youth and women in civic and peacebuilding initiatives through targeted programs.

## **EXPECTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **How AFJN Can Make a Significant Impact in Burkina Faso and the Sahel Region**

#### **1. Strengthen Interreligious Coalitions**

Support leaders in forming a coalition of interreligious leaders to promote sustainable peacebuilding. This coalition can actively engage youth in agricultural initiatives, fostering unity, collaboration, and shared responsibility across communities.

#### **2. Expand Dialogue Frameworks**

Continue creating and sustaining platforms that enable dialogue and collaboration among diverse communities. These platforms should ensure that all voices are heard and actively included in decision-making processes, paving the way for inclusive and sustainable solutions.

#### **3. Support Youth and Local Initiatives**

Facilitate the development of youth cooperatives and provide support for a range of local initiatives. These efforts will empower communities to craft their own solutions to local challenges, building resilience and ownership from within.

#### **4. Empower Young People**

Equip young people with agricultural training through associations, groups, or individual mentorship programs. Advocate for the implementation of land laws to secure equitable access to arable land. Establish and support training centers, ensuring youth have the necessary resources and skills upon completing their programs. Additionally, fund innovative

and promising micro-projects to inspire creativity and entrepreneurship among the next generation.

### **5. Promote Regional Expansion**

Build on the success of current initiatives by replicating and expanding these efforts in other Sahelian countries, such as Mali and Niger. By fostering regional collaboration and sustainable development, AFJN can contribute to broader stability and progress throughout the region.



Participants in the Ouagadougou Workshop

**Fr. Barwendé Sané, SJ.**