

## **Find Your Path: Bridging Opportunities for Burkinabè Students**

Burkina Faso

Brown University

Team members: Grâce Ouédraogo, Burkina Faso, UWC-AC (Project Leader)

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### **PART A: final report**

**Section I: Narrative (Ideally two pages, not to exceed three pages. Please incorporate answers to the following questions within your narrative.)**

**a. A two-sentence summary of the goals of your project**

Our project aimed to connect students with the right resources to improve access to quality higher education.

**b. Did other fund-raising efforts contribute to your project? What were they?**

Our project was fully funded by the Projects for Peace award.

**c. How did you come up with the idea for your project?**

As students ourselves, we noticed the challenges faced by high school students when transitioning to higher education in Burkina Faso. The lack of information and mentoring, coupled with financial barriers discourages students from applying to college. We started thinking about ways to make this process more accessible and show that a successful path through education is possible.

**d. Why do you think the issue your project is responding to exists?**

In our opinion, the problem boils down to the limited resources available and the lack of information. With a hundred students per classroom on average, Burkinabè public high schools are overcrowded. This leaves little room for counseling services, often considered superfluous. Those able to afford private tutoring turn to that option. Others have to wait for the annual university fair held in the capital city. As a result, low-income students and young people in rural areas are excluded from university counseling.

**e. Why did you choose your host site to work in? What was it like to work in your host site?**

First, we decided to collaborate with Trouve Ta Voie Afriki (TTVA), a student-led organization providing online college counseling services to high school students in Burkina Faso and Cameroon. TTVA's extensive experience in creating university application-related content was particularly helpful. Our project took place in Ouagadougou for practical reasons. First, because it has the highest concentration of higher education institutions in Burkina Faso. Second, because we were the most familiar with this city, home to the majority of our team members. The choice of Ouagadougou attracted a consequent number of participants and simplified our project's logistical planning. However, this made it difficult for students in rural areas to participate in our summer school. We picked JokkoLabs Ouagadougou as our host site. The central location of this co-working space made it ideal for our project.

**f. Did you feel at any point that the project was not going to work? In what ways?**

Planning a summer school remotely is a tricky task. All team members were in different countries during the months leading up to the project. We planned to organize everything remotely ahead of time, and spend two weeks before the beginning of the summer school to finalize details on-site, in Ouagadougou. However, this turned out to be more difficult than expected, especially for finding a

host site. The advertised start date was approaching, and we were still looking for a space to host the summer school. Eventually, we hired on-site volunteers to simplify the process.

**g. What were the challenges you encountered in communicating with people?**

Online communication hardly replaces in-person interactions. The biggest challenge we encountered was delayed responses.

**h. How do you define peace?**

Peace is self-fulfillment and social harmony.

**i. How does or will your project contribute to peace? Short-term? Long-term? a. Please describe changes created by the project during the summer? b. Please describe anticipated changes that will continue in the future as a result of the project.**

The project's ultimate goal was to change the perception of education in the country and encourage parents to send their children to school. Education is a core element of sustainable development, which is in turn essential for peace. In the short term, the summer school connected students with the right resources to access higher education. In the long-term, the information channels and mentoring systems that we created will continue to serve as an alternative to the inefficient counseling systems in Burkina Faso. All our team members were given educational opportunities in the past. Today, we are building bridges for current high school students. We have no doubt that this chain will continue with our summer school participants.

**j. Has your project changed the way you think about the world? How has it changed you?**

This project made me realize that nothing is impossible. Perseverance, flexibility, and determination get through the most challenging obstacles. Seeing the participant's engagement during our activities and hearing their positive feedback afterward is a real inspiration.

**k. Was your project impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic? If yes, please describe any impacts you and/or community members engaged in your experience. How did you advance your project's goals despite these challenges?**

During the summer school, COVID-19 had a minimal impact on the project because Burkina Faso is not severely affected. However, the pandemic was a challenge during the organization phase of our project. It was difficult to communicate with local high schools for instance. We leveraged social media to promote the event and find participants.

Our main pandemic-related challenges were all related to remote communication. Make sure to check in frequently with your team members and partners to ensure that you are on the same page. Additionally, finding on-site help is essential for conducting a remote project. A good partnership with trustworthy locally-based people will save you time and energy.

**l. At the end of your narrative, please provide a one- to two-sentence personal statement**

Grace Ouedraogo: Through this project, I understood the ripple effect of giving back. Empowering a student today is an indirect way of empowering thousands more in the future.

**m. Please provide team leader full name and, if applicable, full list of team member names**

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## Section II: Photographs

