3 FGM in Burkina Faso

3.1 Socio-economic conditions

This chapter focuses on the socio-economic background of the landlocked West African country Burkina Faso, formerly called Republic of Upper Volta. It is geographically situated in the Sahel--the agricultural region between the Sahara Desert and the coastal rain forests--and has a size of 274000 km² (75% the size of Germany). With 17.8 million inhabitants (CIA – The World Fact Book, Population: 2013a), of whom 43.9% live below the poverty line, Burkina Faso is classified both as a least developed country and a low-income, food-deficit country (Auswärtiges Amt, 2013: 1st break). It belongs to the poorest countries in the world: four out of five Burkinabé live on less than two Euros a day. The 2013 Human Development Report ranked Burkina Faso 183 out of 186 countries, with a per capita gross domestic product (GDP) of 435€ (HD Report Burkina Faso, 2013: 15; Auswärtiges Amt, 2013; BTI Country Report, 2012: 2). Subsistence agriculture and livestock provide a living for approximately 90% of the population. Due to the climatic variations in rainfall, irrigation is limited and the soil quality varies. The primary components of Burkina Faso’s industrial sector are manufacturing, mining, and construction, yet only a small fraction of the population is directly involved in industry and services (CIA – The World Fact Book, Economy: 2013b; Diplomacy in Action, Burkina Faso: 2011). The country has few natural resources and a weak industrial base. Cotton is the main cash crop. According to the CIA World Fact Book, Burkina Faso is listed as the country with the 4th highest unemployment rate in the world: 77% of the Burkinabé do not have a job (CIA – The World Fact Book, Economy: 2013b). Besides poverty, the depletion of the soil, an unbalanced nutri-

33 The term ‘Burkina Faso’ means ‘land of the upright people’ in Mooré and Dioula, the major native languages of the country. The former President Thomas Sankara renamed the country (originally called ‘Republic of Upper Volta’) on 4 August 1984. ‘Burkina’ may be translated as ‘men of integrity’ from the Mooré language, and ‘Faso’ means ‘father’s house’ (fà = father, só = house, village) in Dioula. The inhabitants of Burkina Faso are known as Burkinabè. The suffix ‘-bé’ is borrowed from the third most common language, the Fulfuldé (language of the Fulbé) (Hopkins, 2005: 65).
tion, corruption, a high mortality rate due to deficient sanitation, and the lack of education impede the development of the country. Nearly half of the population (45.5%) is younger than 15, which means that the average age is 17 (CIA – The World Fact Book, People and Society: 2013a);\(^3\) the average life expectancy is 54.4 years (ibid). The expected years of schooling per person is 6 years. Only 21.8% of the population aged 15 and over can read and write: 29.4% of men and 15.2% of women (ibid). Hence, the country has the lowest literacy rate in the world: 71.3% of the population is not able to read or write.

Women and especially expectant mothers are exposed to problematic health complications in Burkina Faso. A little more than three women (3.4) per 1000 births die during childbirth or immediately thereafter. This number indicates that maternal and child mortality rates in Burkina Faso are among the highest globally (DHS, 2012: 211).

Burkina Faso has 60 ethnic groups, each of them with their own language. Its population consists of over 40% Mossi, the other ethnic groups comprise the other 60% (includes Gurunsi, Senufo, Lobi, Bobo, Mande, and Fulani). Despite the high diversity of ethnic groups, the country does not record any major ethnical conflicts. Disputes and disagreements are sorted out locally with the help of traditional chief committees; different groups live together in peace.

Burkina Faso lies in the ‘patriarchal belt’, which means that according to tradition the father of a family decides on the transmission of customs such as FGM.

In the following, the specific research area of this study will be examined. Insight will be given into the complex prerequisites of the economic and social structure of the villages where the research took place.

The NGO AFD, with whom I collaborated during the execution of the ciné débats, has its home base in the village of Nanné in the region of Kongoussi. This organisation has been engaged in awareness-raising campaigns on FGM in the region for many years, and all moderators originate from the area (see chapter 8.3.1). Kongoussi and all five neighbouring villages selected for the research are located in the Bam region in the centre of the north of Burkina Faso. Most inhabitants (89.35%) speak Mooré, the language of the ethnic group Mossi, another 9.08% are ethnic Peulh who speak Fulfuldé and other languages.

Major challenges of the region are the low literacy rate and poor quality of education. At 44.8%, the primary school enrolment rate in the re-

\(^3\) In comparison: The average age in Germany is 45.7 years (CIA– The World Fact Book, People and Society: 2013a).