

# Resilience against all odds: socio-economic integration of IDPs in Burkina Faso

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Of the almost 2 million internally displaced people (IDPs) in Burkina Faso, most have been settled in reception sites but others have chosen to integrate into host communities. This article explores the determining factors that have led to their successful integration.

## The onset of a humanitarian crisis

Burkina Faso was first hit by a terrorist attack in 2016, marking the start of a series of attacks in the country. The ensuing security crisis has resulted in more than 2,000 civilian and military deaths and almost 2 million people being internally displaced, alongside widespread closures of schools and health centres.<sup>1</sup> In addition, public services have been withdrawn from high-risk areas, and economic activities, particularly livestock farming, agriculture and trade, have slowed down.

To respond to the crisis, the Burkinabe government, in collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs, has provided for the basic needs of thousands of IDPs. However, as the situation continues, many NGOs are considering the need for a longer-term approach to supporting IDPs, notably by providing capacity building in order to foster socio-economic integration. Almost 28,000 households out of more than 242,000 IDP households across the country have chosen to settle directly among local communities.<sup>2</sup> The author met with families who have successfully integrated into host communities in the north-central region of Kaya, to see how they are rebuilding their lives and to analyse the factors that have contributed to this success.

## Rebuilding life in a new community

Sawadogo Sambo braved a 117km journey by cart from Kelbo to Kaya with his wife, mother and five children, having lost his father and younger brother in terrorist attacks. Sambo hoped to seek help from his uncle in Kaya but was disappointed to find this uncle in a similarly destitute position. Sambo sought help from government social services but had to find work to support his family while he waited for support. He said:

*“At the beginning, my family and I went two or three days without eating and several days without washing. We owe our salvation to my uncle’s neighbours who were the first to help us with water and often food, and then to the social services who gave us food, mats and clothing.”*

Sambo rented a small house of 10m<sup>2</sup> to shelter his family and received support from the NGO Alliance Technique d’Assistance au Développement (ATAD, Technical Partnership for Development Assistance). Under the UNDP-funded project ‘Socio-economic opportunities for empowerment and social cohesion’, ATAD supported Sambo to start a business making and selling leather goods such as bags, shoes and belts. He can now afford to own a

motorbike, rent a bigger house, take care of his family and send his children to school.

### The solidarity of host communities

Ouedraogo Yousouf and his family fled terrorist attacks in Bouroum three years ago. As some of the first IDPs to arrive in Kaya they received more initial support than Sambo. They were welcomed and settled into a reception site called ‘the 38 villas’, known as the heart of local communities in Kaya. They received food, survival kits and even a cash transfer of 4,000 FCFA<sup>3</sup> (6.4 USD at the time of writing) per family member each month. As well as this aid, Yousouf earned income working as a motorbike mechanic.

“The first [IDPs] were moved into the social housing that the Kaya town hall granted because it was not thought that this crisis would last”, said a government social worker and manager of the 38 villas site, which now houses more than 25,000 IDPs. He stated that to promote social cohesion the government social services received support from the NGO ACTED to organise awareness-raising sessions, sharing information on solidarity and peaceful coexistence both with host communities and IDPs, to help them accept each other and live well alongside one another. For this purpose, a cohesion committee was set up, composed of host populations and IDPs, to smooth over any incidents and carry out joint community activities. In addition to the 38 villas site, many host community members have given their land for the settlement of the IDPs; in return, they receive aid and cash transfers.

Having received a cash transfer, Ouedraogo Saidou, a host community member, gave three houses to accommodate IDPs. For him, the IDPs are his brothers and they do everything together; they go to church, to the mosque, do the gardening and go to the market together, and they support one another in death and in marriage. Ouedraogo Rasmané, an IDP representative for the 38 villas site, shared that “an old IDP died in the host site and it was the host populations who helped us to dig the grave”.

### The role of local leaders

Alongside around 20,000 other IDPs, Ouedraogo Wendyam arrived in the

commune of Boussouma having been forced to flee due to terrorist violence. According to the Prefect of Boussouma, the interventions of the Dima of Boussouma and the Canton Chief<sup>4</sup> of Louda were crucial in receiving and settling the IDPs. These local leaders first offered up their own land to IDPs and then invited their people to do the same. The Canton Chief welcomed the first IDPs in his own school and asked the Conseil Villageois de Développement (CVD, Village Development Council) to use around 120 empty houses in his area. He also drilled a borehole in the IDP settlement area for water and provided food. The head of the Louda CVD said:

*“The Chief instructed us to open all the empty houses, including those that were padlocked, to note down the material that was there and to move in IDPs. He also told us to inform the entire population that no IDPs would be turned away.”*

UNHCR expressed its gratitude to the Canton Chief by gifting him a large white sheep, as is the local tradition, for all the efforts he made to welcome, settle and integrate IDPs. All IDPs in Boussouma commune have received help from the host population. Today, Wendyam has opened a shop and has been given a plot of land where he lives with his wife and his children, who are all at school. “Like me, all the IDPs who live here feel at home, everyone tries to work to support themselves”, Wendyam said.

One staff member in Boussouma social services shared that the joint efforts of government administrative services, NGOs and humanitarian organisations were also crucial, particularly through the messaging around social cohesion communicated to both the IDPs and host communities. As part of its Soonré project,<sup>5</sup> a local NGO HELP organised a day of socio-cultural activities – including singing and dance, football, a women’s cycling race and community meals – to promote social cohesion and integration in Songdin, a village in Boussouma. Thanks to these efforts, Boussouma commune is one of the best examples of IDP social integration within a host community in Burkina Faso.

### Factors that determine successful integration

A durable solution for IDPs, whether return, resettlement or local integration, is successful when IDPs “no longer have specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and they can enjoy their human rights without discrimination”.<sup>6</sup> Based on the author’s experience in Kaya, he considers four factors as essential to the successful integration of IDPs into host communities.

First, any process of successful integration must start with a welcoming and solidarity-based approach taken by host communities upon the IDPs’ arrival. Second, the engagement of local opinion leaders is highly important given their influence on the host community. The third determining factor is the willingness of the IDPs to rebuild their lives. Their determination, dedication and commitment are evident in successful examples of socio-economic integration. The fourth factor is aid and support from government services, NGOs and humanitarian organisations, which aim to strengthen social cohesion and improve living conditions for both IDPs and host communities.

A key lesson learned from internal displacement in Burkina Faso relates to coordination: all actors should work together towards local integration or resettlement in contexts where displacement situations may become protracted. This allows IDPs to rebuild their lives quickly, with capacity-building support from humanitarian actors in particular.

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*This article was written as part of the author’s Master’s thesis in International Cooperation and Humanitarian Action.*

1. <https://reports.unocha.org/fr/country/burkina-faso>
2. According to the permanent secretariat of the national council for emergency relief and rehabilitation (SP/CONASUR), as of February 2022.
3. FCFA is the Franc of the Financial Community of Africa, formerly the Franc of the French Colonies in Africa.
4. Dima is the name given to the great Mossi and Gourmatché kings in Burkina Faso, of which there are five. A canton is a local district in Burkina Faso.
5. In the traditional Mooré language of the majority ethnic group in Burkina Faso, soonré means new dawn.
6. Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2010) *IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons*, [bit.ly/IASC-framework](https://bit.ly/IASC-framework)



UNHCR expressing its gratitude to the Canton Chief of Louda for his support to IDPs, with the gift of a large white sheep. (Credit: Amédée Bamouni)