

BOUL-YAM CARAVANE

(Burkina Faso)

How to improve access to books in the context of humanitarian crises?

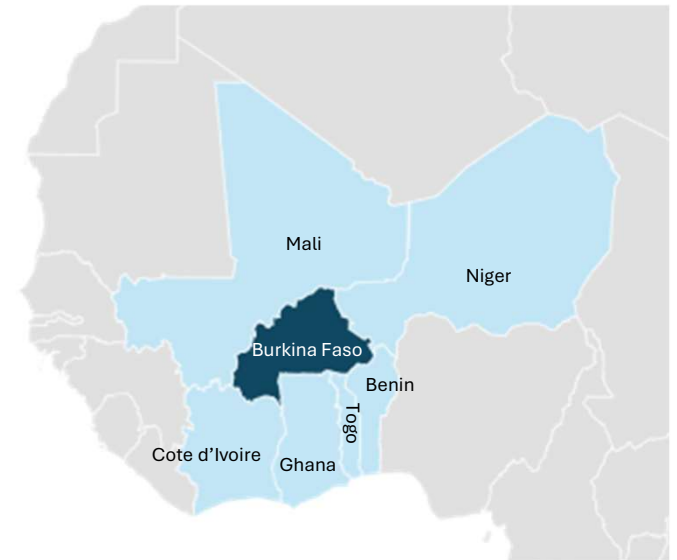


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COUNTRY AND HUMANITARIAN CONTEXT

- **Demographics:** Landlocked country with ~24 million inhabitants, of which 41% are between the age of 0 and 14 years.
- **Linguistic diversity:** More than 70 languages are spoken, of which Mooré, French, Fulfuldé and Dioula are the most common.
- **Education:** 77% of children are enrolled in primary school but only 52% complete the cycle. The literacy rate among people 14 years of age and older is only 42%.
- **Security:** Existing conflict involving multiple armed groups. Between 30 and 40% of the territory is not under government control.
- **Humanitarian impact:** UNHCR estimates that there are about 2 million internally displaced persons (8% of the population) and 4.5 million are in need of humanitarian assistance.
- **School closure:** UNICEF estimates that between 5 000 and 5 300 schools are closed, equivalent of 20 to 22% of all schools in the country.
- **Access to books:** Libraries are rare and often underfunded. Reading of narrative texts is integrated only in the post-primary school program.



PROJECT OVERVIEW

- **Origin:** Launched by WAKAT which aims to promote access to culture and the arts among the young, incl. through the mobile library “Boul-Yam Caravane”.
- **Launch:** Created in 2022 with the support of the Government of Luxembourg to promote access to books among the youth.
- **Deployment:** Monthly visits to 12 schools and youth centres in Ouagadougou and ad-hoc interventions at youth festivals.
- **Extension (since 2023) :** Partnership with NGO “Soleil dans la Main” (Ouagadougou, Kongoussi, Koudougou) and visits to internal displacement camps (ex. Kuilsé).
- **Stock:** Approximately 1 350 books, incl. more than 800 books specifically dedicated to childhood and youth.
- **Local roots:** When the library is not in circulation, the books remain accessible to the public at the cultural centre of WAKAT.



BEST PRACTICE 1: Design

- **Mobility:** The use of a tricycle allows the library to travel on unpaved roads, during the rainy season, and reach more remote localities and displacement camps.
- **Maintenance & costs:** Can be easily repaired by local mechanics and maintenance and fuel costs are more affordable than those of a bus.
- **Administrative ease:** More simple procedures to acquire licenses and authorizations compared to a heavy vehicle.
- **Modularity:** Structure is modular for easy conversion, with possibility to elevate roof and use space as a stage.
- **Energy:** Equiped with two solar panels that power the sound system which is needed as schools are mostly not connected to the power grid.



It is essential to adapt the design of the mobile library to the reality and limitations of the field in order to reach a maximum of people at the lowest cost.

BEST PRACTICE 2: Target population



- **Priority to youth:** Targets children and youth to have a bigger and longer-term impact on literacy levels.
- **Under-served communities:** Interventions focus on under-served communities with low access to books, low-income households and those that host internally displaced persons.
- **Inclusivity:** Welcomes all children regardless of literacy levels or school enrollment status - activities are adapted to all levels of knowledge/skill in orality and reading.
- **Social cohesion :** A space to meet and exchange thereby strengthening community linkages.

Boul-Yam Caravane puts inclusivity and social cohesion at the heart of its interventions turing the mobile library into a place for exchange and discovery for all.

BEST PRACTICE 3: Activities

- **Diverse offer:** Free access to books, complemented by public lectures, role play, enunciation competitions, writing workshops and story-telling.
- **Linkage to local traditions:** Acknowledges and promotes local culture by inviting local storytellers, authors and stage actors.
- **Inclusion of music:** Use of traditional instruments (calebasse, djembé, koundé) to reflect local culture of story-telling.
- **Promotion of cultural heritage:** Increasing focus on the promotion of local and African literature to promote discovery cultural heritage.



The activities of the mobile library must be adapted to local culture, all skill levels and the areas of interest of the youth, all while promoting knowledge of local and African culture.

BEST PRACTICE 4: Business model



- **Free service:** The service is 100% free in order to ensure equitable access to books regardless of background and income.
- **Own resources:** Income is generated by paid-for services (festival outings, private schools, events) and subscriptions to the fixed library in Tampouy.
- **Dependence on donations:** More than 75% of our books are donated (primarily from Luxembourg) which limits ability to acquire African books.
- **Limits of profitability:** Income does not cover expenditure thereby requiring constant recourse to grants from NGOs to balance budget.

To render the service sustainable, Boul-Yam Caravane must consolidate its business model to include more paid-for services to continue to offer free social services to its target population.

CHALLENGES

1 Limited offer and increasing demand

Each visit by the mobile library attracts more than 1,000 children, despite a collection of only 1,350 books. The size of the vehicle limits the available resources, and demand from schools far exceeds the available capacity.

2 Lack of digitalization

The service has not been digitized due to a lack of resources, team expertise, Internet access, and a stable power supply (despite solar panels). Administrative management relies on paper, and there is no indexing system.

3 Limited ability to lend

Regular borrowing is not possible because the mobile library does not visit the same locations on a regular basis and has no system for tracking, reminders, or imposing fines. Only people who live near the cultural center can become members.

4 Security and access

Insecurity prevents access to many areas, and the tricycle limits the range of travel to within 3 hours of Ouagadougou. The numerous checkpoints and searches conducted by law enforcement also pose a significant obstacle.

5 Financial sustainability

The main challenge lies in financial sustainability—that is, Boul-Yam Caravane’s ability to sell some of its services to subsidize its social activities.

CONCLUSION

- There is **enormous demand for extracurricular reading activities and access to books** in the country, particularly among disadvantaged populations, regardless of their literacy level.
- Mobile libraries are an **effective way to instill a love of reading in children** and to promote literacy and cultural awareness.
- Despite security and economic challenges, it is **possible to promote this access through mobile libraries managed by private organizations** and tailored to the realities on the ground and the humanitarian context.
- In humanitarian crises, mobile libraries can serve as **spaces for exchange, discussion, inclusion, and interaction** among children from different backgrounds and social classes, thereby contributing to social cohesion.
- The success of such an initiative also depends on **tailoring the mobile library's activities to the knowledge and skills of young people**, as well as to their cultural identity.