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Redefinition of Gender Roles in Times of Crisis: A study of Displaced Person Camps in the Central-North Region of Burkina Faso

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Abstract

This study examines the redefinition of gender roles in displaced person camps in the Central-North region of Burkina Faso during times of crisis. The objective is to analyse how the humanitarian crisis has modified traditional roles, particularly for women. The methods used include semi-structured interviews and participatory observations with men and women living in the camps. The results reveal that the crisis has led to a redefinition of gender roles, with

increased participation of women in economic activities and a redefinition of family responsibilities for men. Differences in perception between men and women were also observed. These findings highlight the importance of considering gender dynamics in humanitarian policies and programmes. The implications of this study for future research and public policies are discussed, emphasising the need for a holistic approach to promote gender equality in crises.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Gender Dynamics, Humanitarian Crisis, Displaced Persons, Burkina Faso

1. Introduction

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has been facing a major security crisis, characterised by recurrent terrorist attacks (Amnesty International, 2022; OCHA, 2023) ^[1, 16]. This insecurity has resulted in an alarming number of internally displaced persons (UNHCR, 2023) ^[21]. These forced displacements have devastating consequences on the affected populations, deeply disrupting their daily lives, livelihoods, and social relationships (Oxfam, 2021; CARE, 2022) ^[17, 3]. Among the most vulnerable individuals in these crisis contexts are women, men, girls, and boys, who often face specific challenges due to pre-existing gender roles in their society (UNFPA, 2020; UNICEF, 2022) ^[20, 22].

In humanitarian crisis situations, traditional gender roles can be deeply disrupted. Women and girls may face increased risks of gender-based violence, economic deprivation, and discrimination, whereas men and boys may face increased pressures to protect and provide for their families. Understanding how gender roles are redefined in displaced person camps is essential for developing effective and tailored interventions that address the specific needs of each group.

The main objective of this study is to analyse how gender roles are redefined in displaced person camps in the Central-North region of Burkina Faso. By examining gender dynamics in these crisis contexts, we aim to identify the challenges faced by men, women, girls, and boys and the strategies they deploy to cope with these challenges. By understanding these processes of redefining gender roles, we hope to contribute to the development of more inclusive and gender-sensitive policies and programmes for displaced persons.

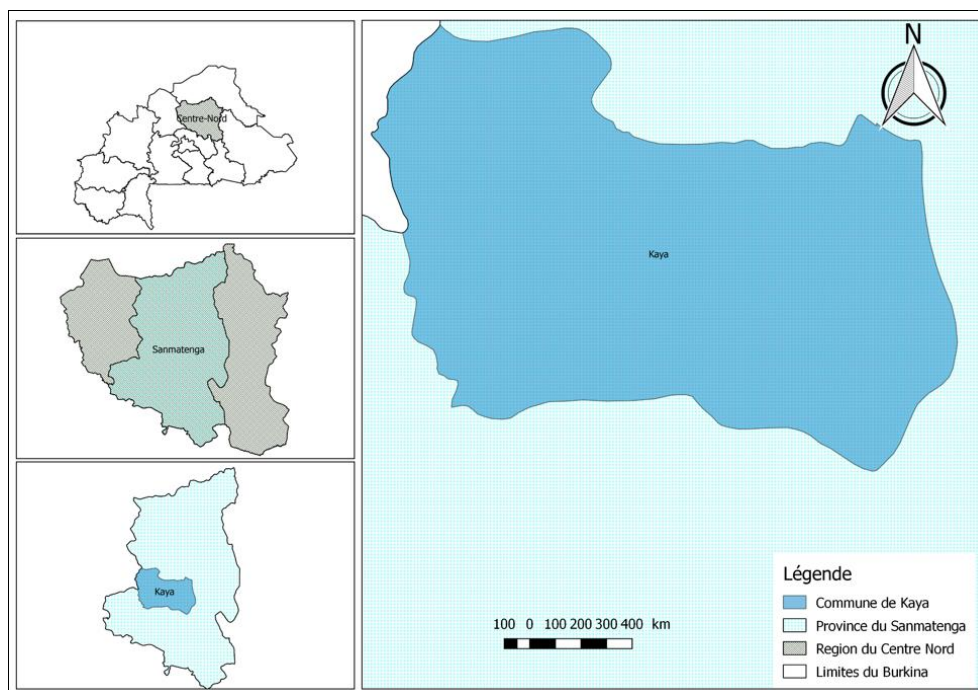


Fig 1: Location map of the study area

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Area

To delimit the scope of our research, we decided to examine the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Central-North region, with a specific focus on the city of Kaya (Figure 1). Located approximately 100 km northeast of Ouagadougou, Kaya will have a total population of 121,970 inhabitants in 2022 (INSD, 2022) [12]. This locality has been particularly affected by the security crisis. Indeed, Kaya's municipality has hosted several IDPs fleeing violence. In total, 119,806 IDPs were residing in Kaya's municipality in February 2023 (CONASUR, 2023) [7]. These individuals have mainly settled in the urban fabric of the city and in peripheral areas, commonly referred to as unplanned areas.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of displaced persons in the Central-North region of Burkina Faso regarding gender roles. The data collection methods include semi-structured interviews and participatory observations, allowing for collecting rich and varied data.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women living in displaced person camps. These interviews were designed to explore in-depth the experiences of the participants regarding gender roles, allowing them to freely express their perceptions, challenges, and coping strategies. Participatory observations are also used to directly observe daily interactions in the camps, enabling researchers to better understand gender dynamics in context. These observations are conducted discreetly and respectfully, considering local cultural norms and practises.

2.3 Sample Population

The sample for this study included both men and women living in displaced person camps. Sampling is performed randomly to ensure the representativeness of the

participants. Selection criteria included the duration of residence in the camp and the willingness of participants to share their experiences.

2.4 Data Collection Procedures

Before participating in the study, all participants were informed of the research objectives and data collection procedures. They are asked to provide their informed consent to participate in the study, knowingly and voluntarily. All collected data are treated confidentially, without disclosing the identity of the participants, to ensure anonymity and safety.

3. Results

3.1 Redefinition of gender roles in camps

The results reveal that the humanitarian crisis has led to a redefinition of gender roles in the camps. For example, many women have taken on responsibilities traditionally assigned to men, such as searching for food and protecting the family.

"I am forced all day to collect sand and gravel to sell. My husband does not live with me here. He went to look for gold, and I was forced to take care of the family alone, which meant food, clothing, and children's health. In a way, I have become the "Zak Soaba" "head of the family," Rasmata tells us. She adds that "the girls, because they no longer go to school, make cakes and sell peanuts in the neighbourhood, things they and I did not do before."

Similarly, some men were forced to take care of household chores and childcare, roles that were often considered feminine in their culture of origin.

3.2 Comparison of traditional roles with roles observed in crisis situations

A comparison between traditional roles and roles observed in a crisis highlights significant changes. For example, in

traditional Burkinabe society, men are often seen as the main providers for the family, whereas women are responsible for household tasks. However, in displaced persons camps, these roles have been altered because of the crisis circumstances, with greater involvement of women in economic activities and increased participation of men in childcare.

Issaka SAWADOGO recounts, "*Before, I was the one taking care of the family, but today, it is my wives who take care of the family's food.*" *They are the ones who feed me and my children. I do not like it, but I have no choice. We have sent the youngest children to the gold sites. "Myself, because of the situation and to not stay at home, I go out in the morning only to return in the evening,"* before adding, "*see for yourself that I cannot stay here all day in the same house with the women and children. "There is no more privacy here, and it is not interesting."*

Ouedraogo Safiatou Nathalie tells us, "*Life here in Kaya is not easy. Everything is expensive, and my husband alone cannot meet the family's needs. Before coming to Kaya, my husband was running a small business. He sold cereal products, fish, poultry, and small ruminants. We had to leave all that to end up in Kaya. Here we are renting, and I am forced to help pay the rent every month. Currently, and by force of circumstances, he is doing masonry. I am forced to fry fish for sale. In addition, I go around the compounds looking for clothes to wash or housework to do. These are things we did not do before but are forced to do out of necessity.*"

3.3 Analysis of differences in perceptions between men and women regarding gender roles

The results also show differences in perceptions between men and women regarding gender roles. For example, some women expressed frustration with the lack of support from men in household chores, while some men expressed feelings of powerlessness in their inability to provide for their families in a traditional manner.

"With what we experience here, we can say that it is transformative... and I believe that the fact that men see us doing work that was meant for them changes their perception of us," says Sawadogo Zara.

"Before, it was the men who took care of us. Now, it is me who takes care of the family. I have more respect for the family because, in general understanding, women should not take care of the family in place of men," says Mariam.

According to Ousmane, "*as a man, I am ashamed that it is my wife who takes care of me.*"

These differences in perception highlight the importance of considering gender perspectives in the design of humanitarian assistance programmes for displaced persons.

4. Discussion

The interpretation of the results of this study considering the existing literature on gender roles in times of crisis

highlights the complexity of gender dynamics in displaced persons camps. As Grabska (2013) ^[10] highlights, gender roles can be deeply affected by armed conflicts. While some studies, such as Kergoat's (2001) ^[13], have highlighted greater autonomy and capacity building for women in times of crisis, others, such as El Jack's (2003) ^[9], have emphasised increased risks of gender-based violence and economic marginalisation. These results suggest that the redefinition of gender roles in camps is a multidimensional process that can have different impacts on men and women, as suggested by Aw-Ndiaye (2001) ^[2].

Implications of new gender dynamics observed in camps

The new gender dynamics observed in camps raise important questions about gender equality and the protection of the rights of women and girls. For example, increased participation of women in economic activities, as highlighted by Kergoat (2001) ^[13], can be seen as a sign of strengthening their autonomy, but it can also expose them to higher risks of violence and exploitation, as demonstrated by El Jack (2003) ^[9]. Similarly, the redefinition of men's roles, as suggested by Grabska (2013) ^[10], can lead to tensions within families and communities, with detrimental long-term consequences for gender relations, as shown in the IDMC study (2015) ^[11].

Possible strategies for promoting gender equality in crises

To promote gender equality in crisis situations, it is essential to adopt a holistic approach that considers the needs and perspectives of men, women, girls, and boys. This can include measures such as gender awareness, as suggested by Toure (2019) ^[19], promoting women and girls' access to education and healthcare, as emphasised by Lanoue (2006) ^[14], and creating equitable economic opportunities for all, as proposed by Loungou (2005) ^[15]. It is also important to ensure that humanitarian policies and programmes, as discussed by the ICRC (2018), consider the specificities of gender roles in displaced persons camps to ensure an effective and sustainable response to the needs of affected populations.

5. Conclusion

This study has shed light on the various ways in which gender roles are being redefined in displaced persons camps in the Centre-North region of Burkina Faso during times of crisis. The results show that the humanitarian crisis has led to significant changes in traditional roles, with greater participation of women in economic activities and a redefinition of family responsibilities for men. These results underscore the importance of considering gender dynamics in the design of policies and humanitarian assistance programmes for displaced persons.

The results of this study have important implications for future research and public policies. Further research is needed on gender dynamics in crisis situations, with a focus on effective strategies to promote gender equality and protect the rights of women and girls. In terms of public policies, it is important to ensure that humanitarian programmes take into account the specificities of gender roles in displaced persons camps to ensure an effective and sustainable response to the needs of affected populations.

In conclusion, it is essential to recognise the gender-related challenges faced by displaced persons and adopt concrete measures to support them. This requires concerted action by

governments, humanitarian organisations, civil society, and the international community to ensure that the specific needs of men, women, girls, and boys are taken into account in the humanitarian response. By working together, we can create a safer and more inclusive environment for displaced persons, where the rights of all are respected and protected.

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