



Spring 2015 Newsletter

Dear Friends of ROAD:

This spring update was written by Etienne Sawadogo, a former computer teacher at the college who is now a Volunteer assistant to those responsible for the girls. We thought that his account would give you an idea of the tangible effects of your generous donations. Here is an English translation of Etienne's account of ROAD-SAJA's involvement at Sainte-Bernadette:

Collège Sainte-Bernadette is a private college belonging to the Congregation of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception of Burkina Faso. It is a boarding school whose residence is part of the Collège. The buildings were built by Plan International, which is based in London England.

The establishment opened its doors during the 2006-2007 school year and accepted about 100 girls, forming Grades 5 & 6. The majority of these girls fled their homes because their parents had promised them in marriage to older men who had many wives and children. What would become of these girls who were forced to live with husbands as old as 60 & 70 years of age? What academic future would they have? What kind of personality could they hope to develop in such an environment?

These questions fortunately found an answer thanks to ROAD-SAJA from Canada. This association has dedicated itself since the opening of the Collège in 2006 to support girls who have escaped from forced marriages. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the members of this association and its founder and president, Denise Baillargeon, now deceased, for all the efforts exerted.

In terms of the financial investment, it is estimated that from 2006 to June 2015, approximately \$232,000 has been sent by ROAD-SAJA. These funds have been used to pay tuition fees, room and board and medication. Without this contribution, these girls would not have been able to pursue their schooling while living in the school's residence.

What are the results to date?

On the academic level, 100 girls from forced marriages have since completed 4 years of schooling, which is the equivalent of Grade 8. Some of these girls have completed 3 additional years, thus obtaining a high school diploma that allows them to attend university. Eleven are now in professions or employed as public servants. Sixteen are pursuing further studies at university.

In addition to academic achievement, this education has provided these girls with comprehension, open-mindedness and a capacity for critical analysis. Their courage has enabled them to act freely without cultural restrictions, and to choose their own husbands. Some are happily married with children of their own. They are now also able to contribute to combating the cultural tradition of forced marriage.

Without any doubt, ROAD-SAJA is essential to the success of Collège Ste-Bernadette in Kongoussi. Their support of these girls is beginning to bear fruit. It is said that “To educate a girl is to educate a Nation”. ROAD-SAJA contributes not only to helping to rescue girls from dangerous matrimonial situations, but also to provide them with intellectual formation, both human and moral, offering them work opportunities, and the capacity to be self-sufficient, emancipated and happy.

The beneficiaries of such support are profoundly grateful to ROAD-SAJA and its donors. Sister Elisabeth Badini (co-founder of the college) and her Sisters wish to say thank you. May God bless all of you and give ROAD-SAJA the strength to continue to be successful in their endeavours.

Etienne Sawadogo

We at ROAD-SAJA, remain grateful for your support and hope that you will continue to support us in your future donations.

Sincerely,

Solange McNeely
ROAD-SAJA President

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