BREAK THE BARRIERS TO FREE CHOICE IN BURKINA FASO

MY BODY : MY RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

> “It’s us who carry the pregnancy to term, us alone! We have to decide whether we want to get pregnant or not!”
>
> Bibata Ouédraogo, women’s rights activist

If you’re a girl in Burkina Faso, chances are your childhood won’t last long. Forced early marriage is common, as is early pregnancy.

If you’re a woman, you may be denied contraception, simply because you don’t have your husband’s permission. And if you do manage to get contraception, you may be forced to use it in secret for fear of being accused of adultery by your partner or in-laws – just because you want to prevent an unwanted pregnancy.

If you’re a rape survivor, pregnant as a result of that assault, you must pay for your own emergency medical care – something that is out of reach for most victims.

In Burkina Faso, whether you’re a woman or a girl, you are prevented from making crucial decisions that belong to you. Decisions like whether or when to get married, whom to marry, and whether or when to get pregnant. These barriers to choice are fuelled by social attitudes that value men and boys over women and girls.

Cover: Fatimata proudly holds her first born child.

The local health centre (called CSPS) in a village, east of Bobo-Dioulasso. Clinics or pharmacies are often too far away and too expensive to get to, preventing many women from having the access they need to contraceptive goods, services and information.

A woman and her baby on motorbike – a common sight in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso.

This discrimination results in abuses of the basic human rights of women and girls, including their right to life, to education and to quality health care, particularly sexual and reproductive health care.

> "I didn't know I could get pregnant after sex."
>
> Mariama, aged 24, who has three children

Above all, this discrimination denies women and girls their sexual and reproductive rights – rights which allow them to freely make decisions about what happens to their bodies and their lives without threat of violence. This includes the right to proper information and services on sexual health, family planning and sexuality (see box page 7).

The consequences of these abuses are clear when you look at the numbers. Only 64.2% of girls can access education but many of them are forced to give up school to get married or to take on domestic work. Burkina Faso has one of the lowest rates of contraceptive use among women in the world: 17% at last count in 2014. By the time they are 19 years old, most girls have already become wives, and nearly half of all young women are already mothers.

> "When I was 12, my father married me off to a 25-year-old man. I refused to go to his house. My parents beat me, but I refused to leave the family home."
>
> Rose, aged 46. Her resistance won out and she is now married to the man she loves.

The rolling hills of Kokoualé village, southwest Burkina Faso. In rural communities like this, getting to a local clinic or pharmacy, takes a long time. Cost, distance and the fact that women often have to ask their husband, father or in-laws for permission to travel, can seriously delay women's access to urgent medical advice, goods and services.

MY BODY MY RIGHTS IN BURKINA FASO

For the girls whose families force them to get married, for the woman who needs her husband's or in-laws' permission to use contraception; for the girl who becomes pregnant after being raped and has no choice but to carry that pregnancy to term; Amnesty International launches its My Body My Rights campaign in Burkina Faso.

My Body My Rights is Amnesty's global campaign defending sexual and reproductive rights. In Burkina Faso, we are urging the government to live up to its obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of everyone, including women and girls. We want the authorities to remove the barriers to free choice for women and girls by

- Guaranteeing them access to a full range of sexual and reproductive health care, information and services, including quality contraceptive products.
- Strengthening and enforcing existing laws banning forced marriage and child marriage.
- Protecting the rights of rape survivors.

Girls on their way to school in Ouagadougou. With early forced marriage a common practice in Burkina Faso, many girls never get a chance to complete their education.

WHAT ARE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS?

You have a right to

- Make decisions about your own health and sex life.
- Ask for and get information on sexuality, contraception and related health services, regardless of your gender or how much money you have.
- Decide if and when to have children.
- Choose whether or not to marry.
- Live free from rape and other forms of violence, including forced pregnancy, sterilization, genital mutilation and forced marriage.

Remember, sexual and reproductive rights are human rights. They belong to us all – women, girls, men and boys.

Women gather to talk about forced and early marriage, early and unwanted pregnancy, their difficulties getting contraception, and the discrimination they face as women.

TOGETHER WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Support Amnesty's My Body My Rights campaign.

Together we can make sure that

- Girls can be girls and are no longer forced into early marriage.
- Women and girls have open access to sexual health information and services.
- Rape survivors are supported in their fight to protect their rights.

Join now. Let's break the barriers to free choice for women and girls in Burkina Faso.

Find out more:

www.amnesty.org/mybodymyrightsBurkinaFaso

www.facebook.com/amnestyglobal

#MyBodyMyRights

Photography © Amnesty International
(cover © Anna Kari)
Index: AFR 60/1960/2015
July 2015

MY BODY : MY RIGHTS

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL