Burkina Faso coalition campaigns for justice in journalist Zongo’s death, 1998-2001

December 1998 to September 2001

Country: Burkina Faso
Location City/State/Province: Sapouy and Ouagadougou

Goals:
The protesters' goal was to bring justice to the homicide of Norbert Zongo.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches › Press Conference
- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Enough is Enough
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Enough is Enough
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 097. Protest strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols › Enough is Enough
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike

Methods in 4th segment:
• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols  › Enoug is Enough
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols  › Enoug is Enough
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

• 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
• 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
• 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Notes on Methods:
The specificities of the methods utilized in this campaign are unclear. Also, while there were clearly many demonstrations, the quantity is unknown as well.

Classifications

Classification:
Change
Cluster:
Human Rights
Group characterization:

• human rights activists
• students
• workers

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Halidou Ouedraogo (Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights, Collective); Kassoum Kambou (lawyer, human rights organization MBDHP, independent commission leader); Hermann Yameogo (ADF/RDA); Thibaud Nana (President of the Association Thomas Sankara); Chrysogone Zougmore (secretary general of the Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights, Coalition leader); Tole Sagnon (leading trade unionist); Benewende Sankara (lawyer); Andre Tibiri (student leader)

Partners:
Reporters Without Borders; 57 unions, human rights organizations and opposition political parties; electrical workers

External allies:
United States; European governments

Involvement of social elites:
Not Known
Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- 57 unions
- human rights organizations and opposition parties

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Electrical workers
- Europe
- United States

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Electrical workers (Exit)

Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

- Reporters Without Borders
- some opposition parties

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:
It is unclear when the United States and Europe took away their international aid from Burkina Faso. Also, it is unclear when exactly Reporters Without Borders became involved with the investigations.

Segment Length: 5 1/2 months

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
President Blaise Compaore and his security forces

Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not Known

Campaigner violence:
There were several clashes with the police during demonstrations.

Repressive Violence:
The police, army, and gendermerie all clashed with the demonstrators, utilizing tear-gas and other violent methods. Additionally, the police arrested several of the campaign leaders.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
1 point out of 6 points

Survival:
1 point out of 1 points

Growth:
3 points out of 3 points
Notes on outcomes:
The demonstrators, through their many efforts, did not in fact bring justice to the murder of Norbert Zongo. No Presidential security staffers were convicted of the crimes (although one was charged, later to be dismissed). The campaign does receive one point for the new government's recognition and its announcement of a National Day of Forgiveness (in which it asked to be pardoned for the various injustices endured by civilians since 1960).

The organizations retained all their infrastructure.

The campaign became very large, expanding to dozens of organizations and receiving lots of international attention (and gaining the support of the United States and Europe).

In Burkina Faso from December 1998 through September 2001, protesters demonstrated against the government’s supposed cover-up of journalist Norbert Zongo’s homicide. Prior to his death, Zongo, a prominent writer for an independent magazine, was known for his criticisms of the government with regards to its policy of impunity (that is, perpetrators of violent crimes are neither taken to court nor punished).

In fact, at the time of his death, Zongo was investigating the death of David Oedraogo, the chauffeur of the President’s brother, whom Zongo believed died at the hands of presidential guard members. Three of Zongo’s companions were also killed on December 13, 1998. The bodies were found in a burnt-out vehicle in the city of Sapuoy, and the deaths were originally declared an accident by the national radio service. Immediately, students went to the streets to protest, accusing President Blaise Compaore of being involved in the killings. Their campaign goal was to bring justice to the case, utilizing internal pressure but also getting international attention so as to force external pressure as well.

Just a few days after Zongo and his companions’ deaths, Burkina Faso activists and students began their protests and demonstrations. Several of these demonstrations did indeed lead to violent clashes with the armed forces (police, gendarmerie, and army). With the public’s outrage, the government actually established an independent commission in January 1999 to investigate Zongo’s death. Yet, opposition parties and civil society organizations persisted with the protests.

One notable leader of these protests was Halidou Ouedraogo, head of the Burkinabe Movement for Human Rights and the new umbrella organization, the Collective of Mass Democratic Organization and Political Parties. The Collective, in addition to organizing various strikes and demonstrations, also took the initiative to start its own investigation. It sought out media attention by giving several press conferences on the investigation. Fifty-seven unions, human rights organizations and opposition political parties joined this coalition. Together, the Collective documented 91 political killings.

By the end of January, the government-started commission began its investigation. Lawyer Kassoum Kambou, a human rights activist, headed the commission. Despite the ongoing investigation, nonviolent tactics did not cease. Participants utilized political debates, writings, and petitions to serve their goal. In May 1999, the commission finished the investigative report (although the three commission members representing the government refused to sign it) and made it public. The report specifically named six men in the President’s security forces as an inner circle likely to be involved in the killings.

After the report was made public, people in Burkina Faso resumed their demonstrations. Several leaders were actually interrogated and arrested by the gendarmerie. Electrical workers embarked on a strike that actually shut down the nation’s power supply.

On May 21, 1999, President Blaise Compaore made a public address to Burkina Faso, announcing several new initiatives. He promised financial compensation for the families of the deceased, the creation of a new advisory board to deal with the crisis, amongst a few other things.

Yet on December 1, 1999, leading members of the Collective were arrested. This list of leaders included Halidou Ouedraogo (president of the human rights organization), Tole Sagnon (leading trade unionist), Benewende Sankara (lawyer), Andre Tibiri
(student leader), and two journalists. They had issued a statement calling on security forces to protect demonstrators during a November 27th protest.

Demonstrations after this period became a little more violent, from both ends. In April 2000, the armed forces stopped a march, leading to violent clashes. In October 2000, the government actually chose to invalidate the prior academic year (1999-2000) because strikes put students out of school for too long.

In February 2001, Sgt. Marcel Kafando was charged with the murder of Zongo but the charges were dismissed and he was permitted to live in the comfort of his own home.

In March 2001, under the new control of Prime Minister Ernest Paramanga Yonli, the government announced a National Day of Forgiveness in which the State asked for the people’s pardon for various injustices occurring since 1960.

In the span of the two and a half years of the campaign, Europe and the U.S. discontinued giving Burkina Faso international aid. The protesters also gained the support of opposition parties in Burkina Faso who were generally hesitant to speak out against the government openly.

In July 2006, nearly eight years after the murder, the investigating Judge ruled that the investigation of the murder of Norbert Zongo must be abandoned. This ruling was then confirmed on appeal.

**Research Notes**

**Influences:**

See Additional Notes.

**Sources:**


Also, Amnesty International has written some literature on the topic.

**Additional Notes:**

After 2006 (the year the Judge ordered the end of the investigation), protests did in fact continue, demanding that they reopen the case. This campaign was separate from the 1998-2001 campaign.

The extent of campaigner violence is unknown, but it appears the campaign was principally nonviolent and that just a few of the protesters became violent once met with police presence.

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

Samantha Bennett, 10/04/2011

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