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Groundwater Quality: Burkina Faso



This is one of a series of information sheets prepared for each country in which WaterAid works. The sheets aim to identify inorganic constituents of significant risk to health that may occur in groundwater in the country in question. The purpose of the sheets is to provide guidance to WaterAid Country Office staff on targeting efforts on water-quality testing and to encourage further thinking in the organisation on water-quality issues.

Background

Burkina Faso is a landlocked country in the Sahel region of West Africa. It has an area of around 274,000 square kilometres and is bordered to the south by Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo, to the east by Benin and Niger and to the north by Mali (Figure 1).

The terrain is mainly flat or undulating with some small hills in the west and south-eastern parts. The highest point is Tena Kourou (749 m), close to the Mali border, and the lowest point on the Black Volta River (200 m) in the south-eastern part of the country. The Volta Basin occupies around two-thirds of the country and the Black Volta (Mouhoun), Red Volta (Nazinon) and White Volta (Nakambé) Rivers all have their sources in Burkina Faso. The Black Volta is the only perennial river. Many of the river courses are dammed in order to



Figure 1. Relief map of Burkina Faso (courtesy of The General Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin).

accumulate water in the rainy season.

The climate varies from arid in the north to tropical savannah in the south. The country has warm dry winters resulting from northerly Saharan air masses and hot, wet summers from moist Atlantic air. Average annual rainfall decreases from around 1200 mm in the south to 650 mm in the north (around 850 mm in Ouagadougou) and the rainy season lasts from June to October. However, rainfall is often irregular and the region is prone to droughts, especially in the north. Average daytime temperatures range from 30°C in the south to 40°C in the north.

Land use comprises mainly woodland, forest and pastureland with around 13% used for arable agriculture. Some 90% of the population is engaged in subsistence farming. Principal crops produced are peanuts, shea nuts, sesame, cotton, sorghum, millet and corn. The principal industries are cotton lint, beverage manufacture, brewing and agricultural and leather processing.

Geology

The geology of Burkina Faso comprises dominantly ancient (Precambrian) crystalline rocks, consisting of metamorphosed sediments, meta-igneous rocks and abundant intrusive granite. The backbone of the country is composed of Archaean (3000–2700 million years old) crystalline rocks but intercalations of younger (Birimian) crystalline rocks are also common. These are similar to the formations developed in neighbouring Ghana and other parts of West Africa. The margins of a large ancient sedimentary basin (Precambrian to Ordovician age) occupy the western border area. This formation is represented by sandstone, shale and dolomite (limestone). Younger rocks (Mesozoic to Quaternary age) are restricted to sedimentary basins in the extreme north of the country (Gondo Plain), along the border with Mali. Much of this area accommodates the Tertiary Formation of the 'Terminal Continental' (UN, 1988).

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