

KID'S KORNERS

Baobab tree provides shade for Burkinabe village

BOALA, Burkina Faso — The last 60 miles of the road to Boala is a rutted dirt track, impassable during the June-September rainy season. The sun-hardened, reddish brown soil of the Mossi Plateau stretches out to a flat horizon. Firewood gatherers and grazing livestock have virtually deforested this sub-Saharan countryside.

In this stark scene, an old baobab tree stands out like a giant on the landscape, its dark, pendulous fruit hanging from nearly bare branches. The people of this country, the Burkinabe, have found some 30 uses for the baobab, including forage for cattle and goats, string and medicine produced from the bark, and food from the fruit. The leaves are ground into a viscous sauce to be poured over the national dish called "to," a porridge made of millet and sorghum.

IN EQUATORIAL HEAT

Moreover, in a country so close to the equator that the seasonal variation in the length of a day is only 20 minutes, where midday temperatures average 100 degrees, all trees are valued simply for their shade.

The deep black shade of a spreading mango tree in a family's courtyard is a great luxury. An old Neere or Kaya tree is the scene of village meetings and a resting place for old people and children. One who looks higher into the branches is likely to see baboons and vultures.

Until Aug. 4, 1984, Burkina Faso was known as Upper Volta. The French named their landlocked African colony for the three branches of the Volta River that

flow out of its heights, through neighbors to the south, and into the Gulf of Guinea. The Voltaics gained their independence in 1960.

The national name change marked the first anniversary of the coup d'etat that brought Capt. Thomas Sankara's military government to power. The old name represented the colonial past, which Sankara is determined to eradicate. Burkina Faso, roughly translated, means "land of uncorrupted men." The citizens no longer call themselves Voltaics, but Burkinabe.

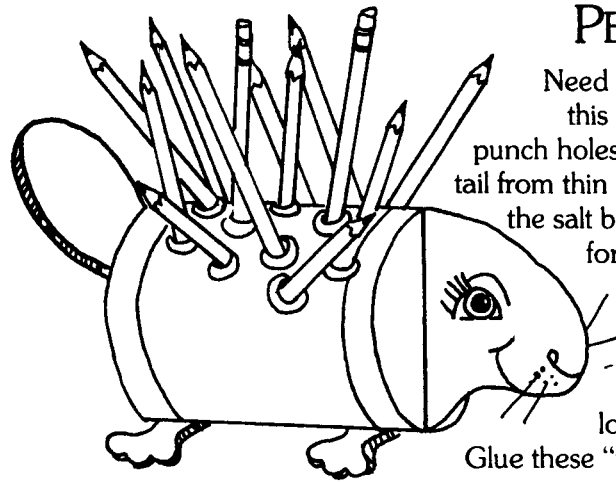
Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world, and its people face immense challenges: how to increase agricultural yields, provide pure water and basic health care, fight desertification, and build roads where none exist. In spite of a massive influx of foreign aid, the Burkinabe are finding it very difficult to translate expertise and costly programs into substantive change.

Too often, newly built hospitals stand unopened and unused for lack of personnel and medicines. The rural population (90 percent of the seven million total) continue to work their fields with a "daba," the traditional handmade farming implement.

STUBBORN REALITIES

In short, like countries elsewhere in the third world, Burkina Faso has found that it is easier to change its government and its name than to change the realities of poverty and environment.

Boala, population about 400, is



PENCIL PORKY

Need a place to put your pencils? Then make this porcupine pencil holder. Use a pencil to punch holes in an empty salt box. Cut a head and a tail from thin cardboard (see drawing). At one end of the salt box, cut a slit as wide as the tail. Cut a slit for the head at the other end. Apply some glue to the slits and wedge in the head and tail. While the glue is drying, cut two strips of heavy cardboard. (Each strip should be about 1" wide and 4" long.) Cut notches on the ends for claws. Glue these "feet" to the bottom of your pencil porky.

120 miles from the capital city of Ouagadougou. Only the 60 miles nearest the capital are paved. Visitors who make the arduous journey believe at first that the road is deserted. After a while they realize that they are never far from a cluster of mud huts with thatched roofs.

On both sides of the road, the terrain is crisscrossed with narrow footpaths. Groups of women with babies on their backs and heavy clay pots of water on their heads return from distant wells. If a bicycle or motorbike passes, it is most likely ridden by a man, and generally a flapping chicken or bleating goat is tied behind him. Young boys commonly tend the herds, while girls transport firewood, water, or baskets of grain on their heads. Only an old man or a chief is ever seen on horseback.

The rare foreign visitors to Boala are usually greeted by a crowd. Villagers bring buckets of water so that travelers can wash the dust of the journey from their faces and hands. From the only refrigerator in the village are brought extremely cold bottles of cola, orange soda, or soda water.

The villagers of Boala are especially proud of their clinic. Sparsely furnished, it has a small dispensary where a young girl with an elementary knowledge of first aid treats patients with complaints ranging from infected cuts to serious illnesses. But vaccines are scarce and rarely available to people in isolated villages like Boala.

The Boala clinic's bare delivery room is recognizable only by its delivery table. A midwife is available, but she lacks the knowledge or resources to deal with complications. Across the hall is a small recovery room where a new mother can rest and regain her strength before returning on foot to her own village. Just outside the delivery room is a cooking area where families can prepare food for the patient who stays longer than a few hours. Visiting husbands can sleep in a mud hut next door.

FILTERED THROUGH STONES

The clinic has a simple water filter that is merely one clay pot atop another. The top pot, partly

filled with stones, has small holes in the bottom. When well water is poured into the top container, it passes through the stones, which filter out some impurities. The system is primitive, but it indicates the villagers' awareness of the connection between pure water and health, especially for people who are ill or weak.

At times of rejoicing or in honor of special visitors, some 40 women and children gather under a large tree and form a circle. For an hour of high-spirited celebration, they

dance to the rhythm of clapping hands, stamping feet, and singing. One woman after another enters the circle, each one trying to outdance the other as the crowd voices its appreciation with loud cheers and laughter.

The two oldest women in the village are the acknowledged champions. The rapture of the small children watching the dance suggests that Boala will always have dancers.

COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-----------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. PEACH |
| 2. RED | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

HIPPOPOTAMUS IS A BIG LAND AND WATER ANIMAL. IT LIVES IN STREAMS, SWAMPS AND MARSHES OF TROPICAL AFRICA. THE HIPPOPOTAMUS' NAME MEANS "RIVER HORSE". IT IS NOT RELATED TO THE HORSE BUT TO THE HOG. THE HIPPO CAN WEIGH AS MUCH AS 8000 LBS. NEXT TO THE ELEPHANT IT IS THE HEAVIEST OF ALL LAND MAMMALS.

