Senior Officials’ Meeting

Responding to humanitarian challenges in a long-term perspective in the Central Sahel
Tuesday, 8 September 2020
Co-hosted by Denmark, Germany, the EU and the United Nations

Report from the thematic track discussions on basic services¹

Co-facilitator: Mr Michael Köhler, Deputy Director General for the Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) – European Commission

Opening remarks: Ms. Mbaranga Gasarabwe, UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General, and Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator, Mali

Panel Members:
- Mr Raogo Antoine Sawadogo, President, Laboratoire Citoyennetés
- Mr Mamadou Diop, Regional Representative, Action Against Hunger.
- Mrs. Marie-Pierre Poirier, Regional Director for West and Central Africa, UNICEF
- Mr Casimir B. Segueda, Governor for Centre-Nord, Burkina Faso,
- Dr. Siga Fatima Jagne, Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender, ECOWAS.
- Mr Nicolas Vincent, Country Manager, Agence Française de Développement, France.

Ms. Mbaranga Gasarabwe, started her opening remarks by highlighting the complex and multidimensional crisis that is being faced in Central Sahel, noting that the population in need of basic services, including food, water and sanitation, health, and education is rapidly increasing and that bringing assistance of local populations has never been so urgent. She also stressed that strengthening the delivery of basic social services was a top priority for both humanitarian and development actors and that those actors are expected to work alongside with state authorities to provide structural solutions for the effective and sustainable delivery of basic services. Such an effort can be done only through an HDP nexus approach, where actors across the nexus must come-up with common objectives and joined up planning instruments. Moreover, Ms. Mbaranga emphasized that effective and sustainable delivery of basic services must be accompanied by significant investments in peace building initiatives, in supporting local livelihoods and resilience capacities, and in promoting community protection mechanisms.

The panel discussed the high level of economic losses suffered and human resources challenges due to the impact of the conflict. The provision of basic services is affected by a series of structural challenges: the need to rebuilt infrastructure, to adapt the provision of basic services to new population patterns, including in terms of coordination and processes, the need to ensure the security in areas of origin and restore the presence of the state in conflict-affected areas. The displaced population shall be considered as actors of their own well-being and not only as people in need of assistance. The panel proposed the setting up of a High Authority at national level, linked to the Presidency and in charge

¹ This document has been prepared in the framework of the Central Sahel Conference. However, it does not necessarily reflect the views of the co-organizers, who cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
of coordinating the reconstruction and restoration of basic services in conflict-affected areas. New funding mechanisms should be setup in concertation among international partners, national and local authorities and civil society organizations, to enable a better access to and channeling of funds for a coordinated response to the crisis.

The panel members presented a brief report on the civil society consultation process, highlighting in particular that 40% of the population live below the poverty line, but also that national budget expenditure on basic social services has been reducing over the last years and does not manage to address weaknesses. The situation is worsened by the consequences of the armed conflicts, with unprecedented food crisis and forced displacement, increasing the need for social safety net and basic services. The panel indicated that a dual approach is required: development and national resources need to be directed in areas conflict-affected to adapt the services to the new demand and humanitarian aid funding needs to be increased. A joint humanitarian – development needs analysis shall inform the required complementarities and synergies between the different supports provided, while a specific attention is needed on capacity building of local stakeholders and institutions.

Panel members presented the worrying situation faced by vulnerable populations in Central Sahel countries, with 8.3 million children out of school and out of reach, the disruption of basic health services, the reduction in vaccination coverage and the doubling of children without access to safe water in one year. To address this situation, humanitarian and development actions should be made agile, risk-informed, strengthening local capacities and leading to durable solution where possible and while scaling up humanitarian action. Alternative operational options should be envisaged, such cash transfer programmes. It is essential that programmes are embedded within national systems and designed to be adaptable and responsive to shocks.

Replacing the discussion on the role of local authorities in the delivery of basic services, the panel stressed out the complex situation in which the local administrations are: targeted attacks against local authorities and local administration have resulted in the mass departure of staff from fragile areas or areas with high security challenges. The consequence is (i) a rural exodus to urban hubs and more stable regions where high pressure is put on basic services infrastructure, (ii) the closure or slowdown of public services, and (iii) a deep crisis of local economic activity. In such a situation, the panel emphasized that the State must play a role of coordination and facilitation, the local authorities being in charge of leading the local coordination mechanisms. This effort should be supported by technical and financial partners who should build long-term capacities of national and local authorities for the sustainability of social protection instruments.

After looking at the role of local authorities, the Panel took a broader perspective and looked at the regional dimension of strengthening effective delivery of social services in the Central Sahel context. The important role of regional cooperation and interstate collaboration was highlighted for the effectiveness of policies as well as on management of the cross-border dimension for the delivery of basic services. In that regard, the panel stressed the need for reliable information which includes working on improving data collection, data organization and sharing, strengthening sectoral surveillance mechanisms and early warning mechanisms and establishing comprehensive vulnerability data sets for at-risk regions and livelihoods. Improved data will support both humanitarian actors and national governments to design and implement evidence-based and risk-informed social protection programmes. It will also strengthen the linkages between resilience, food security, nutrition and economic growth. Ensuring these initiatives reach the most vulnerable households and are shock sensitive.

The panel discussed as well example of development programmes and their adaptation to the new situation created by the armed conflicts, in areas where state presence is increasingly being challenged. This adaptation has led for example to the creation of new funding instruments, designed to address needs in fragile areas and using faster and adapted contractual procedures. If national institutions is the main partner in development cooperation actions, the support to the population in fragile areas requires working with a wider range of actors that remain present in the field, know the local context, such as NGOs. The panel underlined that this adaptation need to address some challenges, such as strengthening the situation analysis by integrating new dimensions related to conflicts, but also adapting and strengthening the monitoring and evaluation systems, adequate financial tracking. While working with local stakeholders to provide short-term support, the panel recommended as well maintaining a long-term development perspective and continuing working on restoring the presence of the state in fragile areas.

**Main points raised during the discussion:**

Throughout the various interventions during the panel discussion, there was a general consensus on the fact that access to basic services by the most vulnerable needs an urgent support, is also a key condition for peace and stability in the
region and that likewise, stability and security are necessary to ensure effective and sustainable delivery of basic services. Therefore, the collaboration of actors for an effective articulation between Humanitarian, Development and Peace actions, from the local to the regional level, emerged as a key determinant for successfully addressing the urgent and long-term needs for basic services faced by the population.

In that regard, the role of the state and public services was central to the discussion and the questions of accountability, transparency and cost effectiveness were noted as important conditions to restore the state capacity in delivering basic services, noting that restoring state capacities was an important element for the sustainability of those services. Practical experiences from the three countries and from the broader region such as the establishment of a universal protection system in Ghana and development of innovative partnership for the delivery of hydraulic systems in Mali were given as example of what can work in developing effective basic services mechanisms on the long-term. In that regard, a question was raised on the need to attract development investments in unstable areas.

The discussion also emphasised the importance of early warning systems that could play an important role in anticipating crisis for early action and therefore in addressing potential emergencies at an early stage. Related to this, the discussion highlighted the need for performant information systems with accurate data that can facilitate the monitoring of a rapidly evolving situation, and support decision-making process for effective action at all levels.

**Summary of key messages and recommendations from the discussion:**

There is a recognition national and local authorities are facing structural challenges for the provision of basic services in the Sahel region: climate change, high poverty or population and urbanization growth are just a few. These challenges will remain present in the foreseeable future but are amplified by the impact of armed conflicts and their consequences: insecurity, shrinking state presence and disruption of functioning of basic services in fragile areas, forced displacement and non-adapted provision of basic services in areas affected by increasing concentration of population.

In front of the high volatility of the situation, the response to the needs for basic services requires actions implemented by actors present and knowing the areas targeted. However, it cannot be the responsibility of the humanitarian actors only. It requires as well the integration of scaled up short-term humanitarian interventions and longer-term perspective development efforts, balancing between the two within a timing adapted to the evolution of the security situation.

Complementary to the recommendations coming out from the civil society organizations consultations, the following recommendations emerged from the discussions:

- The provision of adapted basic services shall not only focus on conflict-affected areas, but also on areas hosting displaced populations. A support from development partners is required to accompany national and local institutions in the adaptation of basic services to the new demands in basic services;

- There is a need to better articulate humanitarian and development action in conflict-affected areas through common analysis exercises; the setting up of joined-up flexible, multi-annual planning and funding instruments. Humanitarian actions shall however not linked to securitization and stabilization objectives.

- New approaches are recommended: focusing on local priority needs under a territory perspective more than a sector specific approach; scaling up efforts on cash transfer and social protection systems in place and making them shock responsive, supporting mobile social services to better access the most vulnerable, strengthening preparedness for early action.

- The situation requires as well the integration of a do no harm approach in conflict-affected areas, integrating a specific attention to conflict sensitivity. Community engagement needs to be foreseen as a key element for any programme to be successful.

- Operational and financial flexibility need to be embedded in the actions: for example by non-earmarking up to a given percentage of a project budget, and allowing a flexible adaptation to evolving needs and opportunities for action.
In areas affected by conflicts, capacity building on adapted behavior for local communities and dialogue with all parties shall be foreseen to protect and secure essential social services – facilities and workforce, in line with obligations under international human rights and international humanitarian law.