Side-event prior to the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel 2020

Locally-led responses
Key to achieve effective and sustainable change and upholding dignity for vulnerable populations in the Central Sahel

Wednesday, 14 October 2020, 18:00 – 19:30 pm CEST/ 12:00 – 13:30 EST / 17:00 – 18:30 pm GMT+1

The event will be conducted in FRENCH

REGISTER FOR THE EVENT: https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJApcOipqjwpG9wfC4BEXZreRqs1ATY3J-YA

Sponsors and Organizers
Caritas¹, Oxfam IBIS and International Media Support (IMS)

Background

This side-event is to be convened during the Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel 2020. It builds on the Senior Officials Meeting dialogue (8 Sep. 2020) around the three thematic tracks: “Basic Services, Protection and Humanitarian Access and Civil-Military coordination.”

Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali represent complex protection crises where a plethora of agendas intertwine. Like in other protection crises the civilian population bear the brunt of consequences of insecurity and conflict. Halfway through 2020, reported civilian fatalities in the central Sahel has surpassed the total of 2019² and with an alarming increase in displacement³ as well as a sharp decline in citizens’ access to enjoy their most basic human rights, not least physical safety and peace. Furthermore, dissatisfaction with national level leaders and -systems has eroded faith in democracy and civic engagement. In the tri-border area, governance challenges exacerbate weak connections to modern economic and political systems. Along with the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and the onset of the lean season and multiple floods, a hunger crisis threatens the region already hard hit by multiple other crises. An unprecedented 24 million people are already in need of urgent humanitarian assistance.

Locally-led or locally-driven response is an approach in which the people involved in, and most affected by, development problems and violent conflict, work together to create and enact their own solutions to prevent, reduce, and/or transform the problems and the conflicts, with the support they desire from outsiders. Humanitarian, development and peace actors should facilitate collaboration between and among learning networks linking external actors with Sahelian civil society, while also benefitting from critical autochthones expertise within communities to apply it holistically to emergency, development and peace assistance.

The global momentum towards strengthening and prioritizing local leadership and capacity is anchored in several recent initiatives and is often conceptualized as ‘localization’. As part of the Grand Bargain in particular, states and international humanitarian actors alike have committed to significantly increase support to local actors, with a concrete target of 25% of funding reaching local and national actors as directly

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¹ Co-hosted by Catholic Relief Services and Caritas Denmark in collaboration with members of Caritas Internationalis
³ As of 20 August 2020, 1,032,698 individuals were displaced in Burkina Faso, 256,470 in Mali and 199,012 in Niger (IOM, August 2020)
as possible. There is some progress in terms of meeting these localization commitments but there is still a long way to go to meet the 25% target at global level as well as in the Central Sahel.

**Objectives**

The proposed side event focuses on the role of national, local and hyper-local organizations in locally-led and people-centered crisis responses demanding crosscutting humanitarian, development and peace efforts in the Sahel. At a moment where the number of people in dire need of assistance is sharply increasing, locally-led responses have been demonstrated to offer better contextual understanding, stronger focus on people’s actual needs and priorities, better access to marginalized groups and a faster response that delivers more effective, sustainable and dignified support.

The panel of the side-event brings together perspectives of three locally-led responses: Community radios and women’s groups in Liptako-Gourma, promotion of social cohesion through inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue and humanitarian response. The side-event showcases data-driven methods, good practices and lessons learned from locally led efforts.

Strengthening the protection of civilians affected by the multiple conflicts requires Sahelians to rebuild a tattered social contract, and with the help of their allies, restore social order, reconcile conflicting groups, and strengthen social cohesion. By prioritizing local voices, this side event provides an opportunity to understand how locally-led projects in the Sahel have unique access, are more dignified, inclusive and effective in terms of responding to people’s needs and priorities, while also delivering on collective outcomes that are more sustainable and leaving no one behind.

Following three video-introductions showcasing local responses, panelists discuss current challenges and opportunities in implementing locally-led responses as well as proposing innovative and people-centered ways to address the current crisis. The side-event is a reminder to the ministerial roundtable, donor and humanitarian community that locally led responses are insufficiently funded across the three countries. Donors must commit to prioritizing and earmarking more direct humanitarian and nexus funds to local and national actors in the Sahel in line with Grand Bargain and World Humanitarian Summit commitments on localization.

**Key concrete action points and recommendations**

Innovative approaches and tested tools are available to improve how we seek to engage communities in meaningful ways: Oxfam’s Community Perception Tracker, OCADES Caritas Burkina Référentiel sur la Cohésion Sociale et la Paix, IMS peer-to-peer collaboration, mobile driven platforms for communications and funds-transfer and recommendations from the Sahel Peace Initiative’s “Steps Towards Peace”. Specifically, the organizers of this side-event commit to strengthening and diversifying traditional conflict management mechanisms; engaging women as direct actors in the construction and management of hum-dev-peace projects; and promoting local civil society organizations. Panelists challenge the audience to promote locally-led and people-centered responses to the protection crises currently unfolding in the Sahel.

Illustrative opportunities for innovation and localization include:

- Diversifying local governance structures demographically, and engaging consistently with chiefs, mayors and governors alongside ministerial and presidential level politicians
- Supporting leaders, who include youth and women into their councils and governance structures;
- Include core funding and long-term support for local and national actors in order to strengthen the sustainability and capacity of locally led responses
- Allowing musicians, artists and griots to transmit peace messages and to transform gender norms;
- Strengthening local associations, such as savings and loans, youth and women’s groups. These groups unite people and reinforce positive social norms of collaboration and tolerance while building social capital;
- Using local (high frequency) radios to connect villages across the tri-border zone, and to serve as an early warning system.
- Collaborate with community radios to disseminate peace and reconciliation messages;
- Encouraging local (high frequency) radios to connect women and men across villages and communities in the sub-region;
- Building women-only local platforms that go beyond the usual focus on family life, education and food, and enable women to organize and ensure their voices contribute to debates on vital public concerns.