Responding to Humanitarian Challenges in a Long-Term Perspective
Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger
Senior Officials Meeting, 8 September 2020

Documentation of the consultations at country and regional level

Consultative process
Ahead of the Senior Officials Meeting, ECHO and OCHA facilitated a series of workshops with humanitarian and development partners in Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and at the regional level in Dakar. The iterative consultations focused on the three thematic tracks defined by the co-hosts - Basic social services, Protection, and Humanitarian Access & Principles / Civil-Military Coordination - aiming to frame and inform the discussions at the SOM through joint analysis and recommendations from the country and regional level.

The resulting documentation includes three thematic papers by country and the region, formulating the main positions and recommendations, highlighting common and consensual aspects in the three countries as well as pointing to specific divergences and challenges that may give rise to debate. The executive summary synthesizes the key outputs and conclusions of the 12 thematic papers.

Context
The situation in the Central Sahel has deteriorated significantly over the last years. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and western Niger, complex and fast-growing crises are causing unprecedented needs. Armed violence and insecurity have forced more people than ever before to flee their homes, destroying the social fabric of communities and disrupting basic social services and governance. Across the region, the number of internally displaced people has risen from 70,000 to 1.4 million in less than two years, including 1 million in Burkina Faso, 267,000 in Mali and 140,000 in western Niger. Human rights violations, including gender-based violence and violence against children, are on a sharp rise. A dramatic food and nutrition crisis hits conflict-affected regions the hardest and, according to the April 2020 Cadre Harmonisé analysis, the number of people facing a critical lack of food has more than tripled in Burkina Faso, almost doubled in Mali, and increased by 77 per cent in Niger – without taking into account the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on populations in the region. Access to people in need has become increasingly difficult, and militarized and politicized response constitutes a major risk to humanitarian action. Humanitarian actors are increasingly exposed to risks and targeted in attacks.

The crisis hits communities at the bottom of global development indices that are highly vulnerable due to the convergence of poverty, social exclusion, population growth, food insecurity, lack of education, weak governance and conflict. In addition, climate change is severely impacting rural and pastoralist communities and exacerbating conflict dynamics. The region is warming faster than the global average, with unpredictable rain patterns and frequent floods. The COVID-19 pandemic risks overwhelming basic services, exacerbating ongoing crises and food and nutrition insecurity, and deeply impacting the socio-economic situation of vulnerable households, mostly farmers and pastoralists, and their capacity to adapt and recover from further crises.

Humanitarian needs are growing fast. After mid-year revisions and considering the impact of Covid-19, some 13.4 million people in the three countries require urgent assistance – 5 million more than estimated at the beginning of the year. This includes 6.8 million in Mali, 2.9 million in Burkina Faso, and 3.7 million in Niger, out of which 1.4 million in its western provinces. At the same time, eight months into the year, humanitarian response plans remain severely underfunded.

In addition to sufficient resources, principled humanitarian assistance must be framed within the nexus perspective, strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity with development efforts. The overall aim is to ensure adequate assistance and sustainable recovery for affected communities and institutions, including efforts that focus on reducing vulnerabilities, strengthening of social cohesion, resilience and peacebuilding through durable solutions for displaced populations, and more efficient humanitarian civil-military coordination.
Theme 1 – Basic social services

The three countries in the Central Sahel face a structural gap in basic social services, against the backdrop of rapid population growth and climate change. In addition, there is now a security, humanitarian, epidemic and environmental crisis, particularly in the Liptako-Gourma border area. This multifaceted crisis further limits access to basic social services and humanitarian assistance, fueling conflicts and insecurity, which in turn exacerbate inequalities. This calls for a duality of action:

- providing HUMANITARIAN assistance for an immediate coordinated response to the needs of the population while helping to strengthen the resilience of communities;
- investing in DEVELOPMENT, by supporting the State in providing structural responses, strengthening the resilience of communities through an integrated approach that focuses efforts on providing productive means and basic services in the same geographic areas.

Key recommendations and action points

1. Responding to the development crisis in an urgent, inclusive and sustainable manner

   - Develop, finance and implement multi-year strategies to support basic public services, particularly in so-called conflict zones, that are adaptable (through support for flexible and rapid basic social service projects) while ensuring access for the most vulnerable (Recommendation addressed to States, support from donors and regional institutions).
   - Promote the inclusion of structural actions in national planning tools and budgets, including the strengthening of national social protection systems. Support the development of a national adaptive social protection system that integrates situations of recurring vulnerabilities (refugees, displaced persons, migrants...) and avoids tensions between groups. Strengthen early warning systems, risk analysis, accountability and government capacity to monitor multiple threats (Humanitarian, development and peace actors, donors).
   - Strengthen governance through accountability mechanisms, such as the establishment of a local consultation and monitoring and evaluation framework to ensure the relevance of actions and feedback on programs. This consultation framework will allow for joint decisions on issues such as eligibility criteria, budget management or technical aspects by involving the participation of local civil society (humanitarian and development actors and donors).
   - Put in place mechanisms to monitor the situation and vulnerabilities of populations remaining in difficult areas and who no longer have access to basic social services (States, HCT).
   - Ensure actions offer technical support to national institutions and enhance national capacity and allow for the transfer of skills while avoiding substituting the actions of the State. In areas where humanitarian aid is needed, commit to providing at least 80 per cent of targeted people in need with medium and long-term solutions. Build the capacity of local communities and ensure that planning strategies at the local level combine humanitarian and development actions. Support the government in finding solutions where basic social services are closed due to insecurity, such as schools and health centers (Humanitarian and development actors).
   - Ensure that Official Development Assistance is based on the analysis of needs, vulnerabilities and risks and supports government social policies based on local knowledge, with a clear separation between “humanitarian/development” and “security/stabilization” spheres (Donors).
   - Coordinate the mobilization of resources for regular cross-border consultations to operationalize a vision of the cross-border space, focusing on transport infrastructure and economic activity (Regional Institutions).
   - Support debt cancellation (public and private) for the countries of the Central Sahel (Donors).
2. **Ensuring that the necessary resources are allocated**
   - Increase sectoral budgets and integrated social protection systems in line with increasing needs and demographics. Ensure equitable financial access to social services for all by establishing free (for the most affected populations) and progressive payment systems and other social safety nets, through the identification of innovative endogenous sources of financing and fiscal justice *(States, donor support).*
   - Define funding strategies for preparedness and responses to shocks in collaboration with donors *(States, donor support).*
   - Secure at least 80 per cent funding for humanitarian response plans, including funding for rapid response mechanisms, risk and needs analysis, and response coordination and preparedness, through flexible, multi-year funding. Adhere to the Common Donor Approach and strengthen humanitarian donor coordination.
   - Require that allocations to social public services be maintained in national budgets as a condition for budget support *(Donors).*

3. **Strengthening coherence and complementarity of actions**
   - Participate effectively in coordination mechanisms, including intersectoral coordination, to improve the identification of needs, the process of analyzing options specific to each zone, ensure accountability for the quality of responses, work more closely with decentralized State services (taking into account the diversity of security contexts), particularly for community involvement *(humanitarian, development and peace actors).*
   - Strengthen coordination with development actors and banks, particularly in conflict zones *(humanitarian, development and peace actors, humanitarian donors).*

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**Theme 2 – Protection**

The current crisis is also referred to as a protection crisis. It is rooted in a series of crises, pressures, service and governance failures that have reinforced the sense of frustration, discrimination, injustice and inequality experienced by populations. Armed conflicts give rise to protection needs. Not only do immediate needs call for emergency responses, but there is also a need to strengthen the protective environment and to provide quality services accessible to all. Simplifying the conflict to its security dimension increases the risk that the root causes will continue to fuel it. Strengthening protection services is essential to ensure respect for human rights, security, dignity and coverage of needs. More generally, access to justice has been considerably impeded by the crisis, depriving populations of recourse to the courts to enforce their rights.

**Key recommendations and action points**

The regional and national recommendations are articulated in five axes that aim to promote physical protection, legal protection and material protection.

1. **Recognize that the crisis is a protection crisis above all**
   - The centrality of protection must be reflected in the definition and implementation of humanitarian response plans, and the priorities of donors and States, through the consistent allocation of resources *(Recommendation addressed to Humanitarian Actors, States).*
   - Place the protection of civilians and the full respect of rights (international human rights law, international humanitarian law, Convention on the Rights of the Child, international refugee law and the normative framework for IDPs) at the heart of the humanitarian, political and military response *(States).*
   - Support initiatives to collect data on displacement and protection in order to monitor the situation and enable assistance, accountability and social justice *(donors).*
Within the framework of the Ministerial Declaration resulting from the Bamako Protection and Solutions Dialogue of September 2019, strengthen the operationalization of the "Bamako Process," a formal intergovernmental platform aimed at ensuring coordination of the implementation of the conclusions (Central Sahelian States, humanitarian actors and donors).

2. Do not reduce the crisis to its security aspect and address the root causes.
   Acknowledge the endogenous nature of the current crisis and make a firm commitment to resolve it by first addressing the root causes of the conflicts, and to:
   - Increase support for community-based, non-military peace initiatives that address the root causes of conflict and promote resilience and non-violent protection mechanisms, including dialogue and mediation initiatives (donors, states).
   - Establish an independent and inclusive national dialogue that focuses on the needs and protection of civilians, strengthening governance and political dialogue at all levels, including with non-state armed groups. (States).
   - Support cross-border and multisectoral approaches to address protection concerns regarding mixed movements along borders and routes (donors and humanitarian actors).

3. Ensure continuity and strengthened services
   - Ensure the restoration and/or adaptation of public services and basic social services, including in areas affected by the crisis and remove administrative restrictions limiting access to these services for the affected population (States).
   - Strengthen coordination between specialized state protection services, humanitarian and development actors (States, humanitarian and development actors).
   - Guarantee the continuity of civil registration and identification services in crisis-affected areas, in accordance with the Bamako Declaration of 2019, which recognizes that civil registration services are part of basic essential services, particularly in emergency situations. (States).
   - Ensure adequate coverage of the resources needed to detect violations of the law and to set up a coordinated response mechanism (Donors).
   - Strengthen endogenous protection systems, in particular by supporting Community Protection Committees and Community Protection Initiatives in the provision of emergency protection response (States, humanitarian actors, donors).
   - Strengthen specific protection systems for children, youth, women and victims of sexual violence (Central Sahel States, humanitarian actors and donors).
   - Strengthen the government’s strategy for schooling in areas with high security challenges, to mitigate protection risks, such as recruitment and exploitation of children (States, humanitarian actors, donors).
   - Fully respect neutrality and impartiality in targeting populations and taking into account all vulnerable people (States, humanitarian actors).

4. Promote the rule of law
   - Implement previous regional/international commitments, including those made during this roundtable, even in the event of a change of government (States).
   - Accompany and strengthen the capacities of national institutions to design and implement national policies that strengthen the effective inclusion of protection in local, regional and national (donor) development plans.
   - Strengthen the judicial system and establish independent and impartial courts with jurisdiction over legal violations committed during the conflict. Prosecute and bring the perpetrators of these violations before the said court (States).
   - Offer training to those who will play a role in restorative justice processes (States).
   - Work under the leadership of the Regional Economic Communities (ECOWAS, ECCAS) for the creation and promotion of a regional framework for the protection of persons (States, sub-regional organizations, donors).
• Provide technical and financial support for the design and operationalization of a national strategy for the protection of witnesses and victims (Donors).

5. Engaging in innovative solutions that strengthen social cohesion and inclusion

• Encourage broad participation including of children, women, marginalized populations in innovative solutions to promote social cohesion (humanitarian and development actors, States).
• Promote the demobilization and reintegration of persons associated with armed groups, self-defense groups and militias (States, donors).
• Work towards finding and implementing durable solutions for displaced persons, including improved access to civil documentation and land (States, donors, humanitarian and development actors) and support conflict prevention approaches related to land and property rights (States, development actors).
• Ensure the implementation of programs that allow for social cohesion by including the coverage of psychosocial needs generated by crises (States, humanitarian actors).

Theme 3: Humanitarian principles, humanitarian spaces for civil-military coordination

The security situation in the Sahel has deteriorated sharply in recent years, deeply affecting civilian populations, who are forced to flee. Conflicts risk spreading to other areas or countries in the subregion, with strong humanitarian implications for the civilian population, triggering community divides and ethnic stigmatization with lasting consequences. At the same time, insecurity has severely hampered humanitarian access in the region, while counter-terrorism measures have made it more difficult to carry out humanitarian activities in areas where non-state armed groups (NSAGs), labeled as "terrorists", are active. The anti-terrorism policies put in place by national legislation and donor states have considerably reduced the space for negotiation on humanitarian access.

The measures taken to limit the extension of the influence of armed groups and regain control over territories have direct impacts on populations and access to basic services. The imposition of armed escorts limits the operational capacities of humanitarian and development actors and generates negative effects on the security of humanitarian personnel as well as a tendency to maintain humanitarian actors in safer areas.

The relative weakness of operational dialogue within civil-military coordination platforms has prevented the establishment of the necessary relations between civil and military authorities and humanitarian actors, a sine qua non condition for guaranteeing humanitarian principles. The pre-electoral context in Niger and Burkina Faso and the current uncertain political situation in Mali could make this coordination even more difficult in the coming months as the needs on the ground continue to increase and require increased consultation among actors.

In order to guarantee access, humanitarian actors rely on humanitarian acceptance and principles, and therefore on a necessary distinction between humanitarian action and political and military actions on the ground. This element is essential to prevent humanitarian actors from being the target of pressure or exactions. For donors who aim to link humanitarian, development and peace projects, it is crucial that funding decisions and project success indicators focus on vulnerability and response to needs.

Key recommendations and action points

1. Access and humanitarian principles

• Formally commit to respecting and upholding international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles that aim to protect and preserve humanitarian assistance. Strengthen awareness and capacity of military, civilian and humanitarian actors in International Humanitarian Law, humanitarian principles and civil-military coordination through training and workshops for a better knowledge and dissemination of the principles to strengthen their implementation. (recommendation addressed to OCHA, civil authorities, military and humanitarian actors)
• Create conditions to ensure respect for humanitarian principles in integrated missions and approaches. Ensure at the institutional level of donors that humanitarian action has no other objective than the provision of assistance based on humanitarian principles. Establish an impartial complaint mechanism directly accessible to civil society organizations in each country, allowing for the escalation of proven risks and breaches of humanitarian principles, when these issues have not been resolved within the Humanitarian Country Team. Ensure better accountability for humanitarian principles at all levels of the Humanitarian Country Team (UN, donors).
• Support training of humanitarian actors in humanitarian negotiations and enable them to exercise, as much as possible, their right to negotiate humanitarian access with all parties to the conflict, including non-state armed groups, and facilitate access to essential services (Civil authorities, donors).
• Avoid administrative procedures reducing mobility and response capacity of humanitarian organizations in emergency situations (States, donors).
• Increase financial and logistical support for humanitarian air services to enable the transport of personnel and equipment to hard-to-reach areas (donors, WFP).
• Develop multi-year and flexible funding mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of immediate and adapted responses in hard-to-reach areas (donors).

2. Relations and Coordination between humanitarians and civil/military authorities
• Ensure meaningful and decision-making participation of humanitarian actors (including civil society), civilian and military actors, in the civil-military coordination structures established by OCHA on behalf of humanitarian country teams.
• For this coordination to be effective:
  - Ensure sufficient allocation of CM-Coord resources to OCHA to facilitate effective coordination (donors, OCHA).
  - Provide civil-military humanitarian coordination actors with trainings on principles, define specific guidelines for each country and steer the dialogue towards constructive discussions on key issues (access, security, acceptance, use of armed escorts, etc.) (OCHA, civil authorities, military and humanitarian actors).
• Create and lead a regional civil-military humanitarian coordination platform to support country platforms and enable civil and military actors such as the G5 Sahel, ECOWAS or the Barkhane force to better take part in the humanitarian operational dialogue, and ensure the necessary distinction on the ground between military operations and humanitarian actions (OCHA, humanitarian actors, G5 Sahel, ECOWAS).

3. Opportunities and Challenges related to the Nexus
• Establish (or strengthen) a dialogue between the State, donors, humanitarian and development organizations and civil society to better define the expected cooperation and the red lines within the framework of the 3rd pillar (Peace). (State, institutional donors and humanitarian / development actors).
• Ensure a clear distinction between humanitarian and development assistance and actions in support of political, security and military agendas in order to not compromise the perception of neutrality of humanitarian and development actors.
• Military forces are invited to limit their emergency social actions in the field to quick impact projects (QIPs) or infrastructure projects, while informing civil and humanitarian actors beforehand in accordance with international principles of distinction (National civil and military authorities, donors).
• Ensure that humanitarian principles are respected in public communication materials so that humanitarian organizations are no longer associated with statements in support of armed forces or a State, including in the framework of integrated projects (States, donors, United Nations and NGOs).
• In consultation with communities and local actors, identify operational opportunities to implement the Nexus and further integrate social cohesion responses based on humanitarian principles into humanitarian and development responses in conflict-affected areas (Humanitarian and development actors).

• Create coherent complementarities between humanitarian response, crisis prevention and the strengthening of integrated and geographically focused resilience approaches to respond more effectively and adequately to immediate needs, vulnerabilities and risks (Humanitarian and development actors).

• Incorporate the peace pillar into a peacebuilding approach that is removed from military efforts in the region. In particular, it could be based on community-based conflict mitigation and social cohesion strategies (States, donors and development actors).