THE ISSUE

- In the Central Sahelian nations of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, a decade of violent instability has left 18 million individuals in need of humanitarian assistance.

- Climate change, underdevelopment, ethnic violence, corruption, and state decay have left civilians in need of peacebuilding, humanitarian, and development support. The deterioration of security conditions, however, has limited civilian access to essential services and impacted humanitarian response capabilities.

- Donors have promoted the “triple nexus” approach aimed at enhancing the coordination and effectiveness of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions. Yet, implementation in the Sahel has been hamstrung by a lack of common understanding among partners and a disconnect between the interests and operations of humanitarian and security actors.

- For the triple nexus approach to effectively improve conditions in the Sahel, humanitarian, development, and security partners must improve collaboration. Actors in the region should develop operational frameworks that ensure they enhance complementary objectives.

INTRODUCTION

The security and humanitarian crisis in the Sahel is staggering into its 10th year. A conflict that began with rebels and allied jihadist groups sweeping out of the desert into northern Mali in 2012 has transformed into a dizzyingly complex cross-border catastrophe hollowing out the heart of West Africa.

Jihadist groups allied to al Qaeda and the Islamic State, as well as a myriad of armed groups and criminal gangs, are slowly bringing the Central Sahelian nations of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso to their knees. In these countries, the number of people in need of aid is steadily rising, with more than 13 million people in need of life-saving assistance—or about a quarter of the region’s population.

Climate change, underdevelopment, cycles of ethnic violence, rapid population growth, corruption, failed international interventions, and state decay in rural areas all exacerbate the crisis. Tens of millions in remote communities have found themselves at the whim of armed actors. More than 2 million people have been displaced internally or are refugees. Because of poor record-keeping, there is no accurate figure for the number of dead from the conflict—it is likely in the tens of thousands.

The Sahel’s fractured political sphere seems to grow more complicated each year. To gain access to affected communities, humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development actors must navigate a path between armed states, non-state armed groups, and local power brokers with vested interests in quietly directing resources one
way or another. Additionally, humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors, urged to act in a coordinated and unified “triple nexus” approach, are often at odds with each other about what programming to implement, where to implement it, and how to do so.

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The economic damage wrought by the pandemic and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine will make the rest of 2022 and 2023 far worse. Humanitarians estimate that one in three children under five in the Central Sahel—a total of 4 million children—are already at risk of starvation in June 2022 because of an unprecedented regional food crisis.

Just as needs increase, funding for the Sahel seems to be drying up because of international fatigue regarding the Sahel and increasing humanitarian needs elsewhere. Last year, the humanitarian community in the Sahel only received 41 percent of the funds needed to respond to the region’s urgent and growing needs, the lowest amount since 2015.

This brief outlines the most significant factors limiting humanitarian access and highlights concerns from a broad array of stakeholders across the region about the lack of humanitarian coordination, with a focus on Mali and Burkina Faso. It also explores how international actors can better streamline efforts and reduce tensions between humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, and development to support stabilization in the region. This research is based on interviews in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Senegal, considered the regional humanitarian headquarters, from March to May 2022, along with a stakeholder roundtable convened in Washington in June 2022.

KEY ISSUES HAMPERING HUMANITARIAN ACCESS ACROSS THE SAHEL

LACK OF COORDINATION AND THE “TRIPLE NEXUS”

There is no shortage of humanitarian and development agencies in the Sahel. Yet many of those interviewed on the ground said that a lack of coordination often leads to confusion, missed targets, widespread disillusionment, and blurred lines between humanitarian, development, and peacekeeping and military actors.

One major area of concern for many of those interviewed in the field was the “triple nexus” approach, which aims to coordinate humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities to strengthen long-term resilience.

In the Sahel, the triple nexus intentionally funnels organizations with historically different operational models into one unified response. This approach aims to synergize disparate approaches to achieve improved outcomes for target populations.

While this makes sense as a theoretical framework, the policy conversation pushing for the triple nexus does not align with the complex realities and lived experiences in the Sahel. There is widespread, systemic confusion between organizations and donors about what the nexus means in practice.

One humanitarian program director described the Sahel as the international “playground for the triple nexus concept” and suggested that donors who had previously supported their work were “abandoning” them due to their program and staff’s resistance to implementing the nexus. Others argued that while many in the humanitarian community refer abstractly to the triple nexus, there is an “identity crisis” around the concept, with no clear idea of what it should mean.

There is a clear disconnect between senior administrative staff and donors in hubs such as Washington, D.C., and Geneva and those implementing programming in complex conflict-affected regions. When CSIS convened a high-level group of administrative staff for a roundtable discussion about the triple nexus in the Sahel, this systemic confusion was plain to see.

One of the central points of confusion centers on the peacebuilding pillar. The securitization of the humanitarian response by local military operations has significantly impacted the work of development agencies both in the Sahel and at the executive level. There is widespread debate about the extent to which humanitarian and development agencies should engage
with military actors as well as whether working with, or with the support of, armed actors undermines operations. Currently, many of the Sahel’s local military actors are not aware of the triple nexus, let alone their own critical role in its success or failure.

However, many humanitarian, development, and civil society organizations believe that military actors involved in the conflict should not be involved in any humanitarian response efforts. Sources argued that the humanitarian engagement of security forces blurs the line between the state and humanitarian actors. Humanitarian actors are increasingly forced to carry out activities that go beyond their mandate and are being compelled to work in proximity and coordination with political or military actors in the pursuit of stabilization objectives. This association has been perceived to undermine the capacity and independent objectives of humanitarian programming.

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This is having an impact on humanitarian access and the ability of actors to negotiate access in all three Central Sahelian countries. Most non-state armed groups have allowed humanitarian actors access unless they are working on culturally sensitive subjects such as gender issues and reproductive health. However, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are increasingly finding themselves working on nexus issues, such as protection, mediation, and state-building. This focus jeopardizes the apolitical role of NGOs and, if perceived as at odds with the objectives of armed groups, may result in exclusion or expulsion from areas of humanitarian need.

Multiple humanitarian sources across the region expressed dissatisfaction that the triple nexus approach has been imposed on them by donors. They argued that the concept is unsuited to the complex reality on the ground and that the triple nexus is “politicizing” their relief work and forcing them to carry out activities that go beyond their mandate, such as working closely with military actors. They said this undermines their security and the security of the people they are trying to help.

For example, in Mali, Operation Barkhane has reportedly asked NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance immediately after the recapture of a town or area. One source helping to coordinate different NGOs said that they often see this as an approach consistent with nexus concepts, whereby the areas of engagement are chosen based on the interests of military actors, including achieving stabilization goals and reinforcing security gains. For a time, there was a concentration of projects in the Liptako Gourma zone, the zone favored by Barkhane operations. The source continued:

> The nexus is problematic for us because not all actors have the same definition of what it should be. The problem is that in Mali, the main technical and financial partners of NGOs are also involved in the military response.

> At the political level, what takes precedence is the military vision of reconquering territory rather than our vision of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. It is said that the triple nexus is humanitarian, development, and security, but we are not sure if we want to be part of it.

> For us, the nexus must be focused on peace activities first. There must be respect for the mandates. As soon as you get into security, you violate your humanitarian principles. For us, the inclusion of peace is essential in this triple nexus. Other actors see the strategic, political, and military side instead.

Humanitarian interviewees in the Sahel also expressed overarching concerns about the function of nexus funding. They said that while donors had pushed for the concept, humanitarians feel set up for failure, with shrinking or stagnated budgets, a new framework to work around, and spiraling needs.

Interviewees and participants at the CSIS roundtable suggested that open streams of collaboration between aid agencies and local non-state actors be inaugurated as a gateway to uninterrupted, equitable humanitarian assistance in the Sahel. One participant insisted that this dialogue be a means of informing militant forces...
of their place in the nexus and securing access for aid, without making military actors responders to conflict. Participants acknowledged that a cohesive understanding of the nexus and its wide apparatus is crucial to establishing relationships and mutual understanding between all parties.

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Participants agreed that allocating resources and legitimacy to regional bodies and civil society organizations in the region, such as the People’s Coalition for the Sahel, is crucial to reorienting humanitarian and security responses to threats. This ensures that local civil society organizations and stakeholders on the ground are provided the platform to instate their perspectives in conversations around development frameworks on the operational and programmatic levels. Communication, coordination, and emphasis on a shared agenda for actors across all three nexus pillars are key to the success of the nexus.

**IEDS AND KIDNAPPING**

Humanitarians in all three countries say that the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) over the last few years and the dramatic increase in kidnappings are dramatically impacting their ability to work in the field. Because of a lack of local capacity and systemic inequality within the humanitarian sector, expatriates tend to manage humanitarian or development projects in the field. However, the increased risk of kidnapping means they are often not allowed to monitor their projects themselves. This affects quality control, undermines investments and outcomes, and means that major international agencies often lack the capacity to independently verify their impact on the ground or monitor events that could affect their operations. Instead, they must rely heavily on local partners with their own complex identities and relationships to the conflict which need to be balanced. Those interviewed said that sometimes these local partners turn out to be compromised with hidden connections to political interests or to criminal gangs who use them to keep the money flowing.

**GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE**

Since six French aid workers and their Nigerien guide were killed in a national park near Niger’s capital by Islamic State’s West Africa Province (ISWAP) group in August 2020, Sahelian governments have become increasingly reluctant to let aid workers go into moderate- or high-risk areas without military escorts. This is an understandable reaction from officials in Bamako, Ouagadougou, and Niamey, who do not want to be seen as hapless.

However, armed escorts make it far harder to build trust with communities and undermine the indispensable neutrality of aid groups. Moreover, there is no formal agreement or understanding across the sector on the use of military convoys. Aid workers from various local and international agencies in the region were outraged that some UN agencies agreed to take armed government escorts. They said the lack of a coherent policy from different aid groups undermines their mandate and sectoral coherence, blurring the line between humanitarians and combatants.

The situation with armed escorts is particularly bad in Niger. After the attack outside Niamey in late 2020, the government made escorts mandatory, which severely hampered aid operations across the country. However, decisionmaking was devolved from the central government to the governors, which left humanitarian groups space for negotiation at a regional level. Increased opportunities for negotiation have allowed many humanitarian and development groups to return to activities somewhat as normal. However, the situation in Niger is far from ideal.

**SECURITY FRAGMENTATION AND VILLAGE “SIEGES”**

The Sahel is home to an extraordinary array of armed actors and international responses, ranging from British UN peacekeepers in Mali and U.S. drone teams in Niger to Koglweogo self-defense groups in Burkina Faso and the 5,000-man-strong G5 Sahel Force, which is meant to be operating across the region’s borders. The fragmented international military response has been a headache for humanitarians to navigate for years, but recent events have made it even more complex.
Because of a decade of failed counterterrorism strategies, Mali has pivoted away from the Western-led counterterrorism effort and toward Russian support, despite Moscow’s atrocious record on human rights abuses and attacks on humanitarian actors. At the same time, France is slowly withdrawing thousands of troops from the country. Hundreds of Kremlin-linked Wagner Group mercenaries have poured into the country since late 2021. This new force has already been accused of egregious human rights abuses, including torture and mass executions. Aid workers told CSIS that the Russians are a major destabilizing force, throwing some of their carefully managed relationships into flux.

Moreover, the relatively new jihadist group tactic of encircling villages in so-called “sieges” to break the local populations in Mali has also had a severe impact on access. The villages of Farebougou and Marebougou have become part of political battles in Bamako, complicating what NGOs can and cannot do. The village siege tactic is increasingly being used in Burkina Faso, and humanitarians are worried it could catch on across the region.

CASE STUDIES

Mali: A Politicized Quagmire

Much like in Burkina Faso and Niger, aid workers in Mali must walk a careful line between state forces and jihadist groups. If they are seen by the jihadist groups as cooperating with hostile forces, it puts their staff in grave danger. The Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) is mainly active around the town of Ansongo in the east of the country and the Ménaka region. ISGS is unpredictable and more violent than other groups, exhibiting a stronger criminal dimension and a willingness to attack humanitarians. They rotate troops regularly at checkpoints, making humanitarian access far more complicated. As one senior aid worker noted, “If Barkhane hits them, [ISGS] will come back to the village suspected of collaborating with the French and killed everyone, civilians and humanitarians.”

Aid workers say that Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM)—the umbrella coalition of al Qaeda–aligned groups operating in the Sahel—is easier to negotiate with. Aid workers must respect certain rules of behavior in areas controlled by JNIM, such as men not being in the same vehicle as women, or else they will be refused access. However, if JNIM suspects connections between aid workers and the Malian army (FAMA) or militias, such as the Dozo hunters, they are known to kidnap aid workers.

The line between combatants and humanitarians is often blurred because of the sheer number of actors operating in an area and because of blurred mandates. For example, Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA, the UN peacekeeping operation, will sometimes provide aid to gain acceptance for their missions. Signatories to the Algiers Peace Agreement are more receptive to allowing humanitarian access, and access can be negotiated directly. But for non-signatory groups, negotiations must go indirectly through community leaders and negotiators.

Several sources working in Mali emphasized how confused mandates lead to violence and increased risk.

International forces often implement Quick Impact Projects (QIPs). When they implement these humanitarian projects, there are risks for the populations. These projects also allow them to obtain intelligence on the presence and positions of armed groups. But this then exposes the population.

These QIPs create confusion around different mandates in the minds of the populations, who no longer distinguish between humanitarians and the military. After the military has passed through, if the population suffers a revenge attack, they will become much more reluctant to accept aid from humanitarian organizations in the future because for them, receiving aid now presents a risk of attacks from armed groups.

The so-called Quick Impact Projects delivered by MINUSMA are informed by the triple nexus concept. They are meant to lead to positive outcomes, but they also blur lines. One humanitarian working across the region showed CSIS images of leaflets that MINUSMA had allegedly distributed with its food aid, asking recipients to report on terrorists. For them, this was a completely unacceptable blurring of agendas which put the recipients, as well as their staff on the field, at risk of reprisal attacks. As a humanitarian from another organization in Bamako put it, “This poses a problem of distinction for us because the populations and the groups then think that we are the same, and this creates confusion between humanitarians and the military.”

Despite the issue being raised with MINUSMA on several occasions, humanitarians interviewed on the matter said that the problem persists. However, several humanitarians stressed that without cooperation with MINUSMA, they will be cut off from vast tracks of people in need, including
Gao. They emphasized there is strong cooperation given the number of nationalities serving in MINUSMA. One worker noted, “There is a strong suspicion linked to all these humanitarian-military operations, which often create confusion among radical actors. They have the impression that behind the humanitarian actor, there may be a military person. It is therefore difficult to go into areas because negotiation becomes more difficult because of these fears.”

While there has not been a major change in access to land since the 2020 and 2021 coups d’état in Mali, aid workers are also coming under increasing pressure from FAMA. Since January, FAMA has set up a “Temporary Restricted Area” that prevents planes from flying over the center of the country. This complicates humanitarian operations, as it blocks essential humanitarian flights run by the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), which is managed by the World Food Programme.

FAMA is also tightening control over the areas it controls, in part to keep out potential international witnesses to crimes it commits alongside new Russian mercenaries. One source said FAMA sometimes threatens humanitarians by saying things like: “How come you can go to such and such an area, and we cannot? That means you are working with the terrorists.”

Humanitarians interviewed said they did share locations of their installations, such as hospitals, to avoid the horrific attacks seen in Syria. However, understandably, there is limited information sharing between security and humanitarian actors. A senior humanitarian said, “We never give information that could be used for strategic or military purposes. We don’t give the position of groups for example. In areas where there are many operations, we will notify our movements. The FAMA will tell us where they are operating and advise us against coming at such and such a time. But that’s all.”

The lack of communication can result in serious problems. For example, FAMA sometimes launches operations without warnings, and humanitarian workers find themselves in villages caught up in an army assault.

A major issue expressed by multiple international actors is that the dire security situation means that many organizations rely far too heavily on local actors who are sometimes severely compromised. For example, to reach certain areas, humanitarian organizations are often forced to go through a particular car rental company that is allegedly in contact with local criminals. Sources said that local criminals give the car company the green light, and if humanitarians use other cars, they run a high risk of being robbed.

Other times, humanitarian groups in northern Mali can end up working indirectly with jihadist groups. One senior aid worker in Bamako spelled out the problems:

You may need to know the right community contacts who work with the jihadist groups to make contact. Then they ask for something in return, such as renting a car from them, hiring local staff, and making the local economy work, even if it may benefit these armed groups. . . . This raises the same dilemma every time: Does this betray humanitarian principles?”

Another humanitarian working across the region mirrored this sentiment, saying that this is a particular problem in northern Mali and the region around Ménaka:

You may need to know the right community contacts who work with the jihadist groups to make contact. Then they ask for something in return, such as renting a car from them, hiring local staff, and making the local economy work, even if it may benefit these armed groups. . . . This raises the same dilemma every time: Does this betray humanitarian principles?”

Some of the agencies have become blind to what’s going on on the ground. Reliant wholly on local actors who say when it’s safe to go and saying you have you use my vehicles. The people renting you access have an invested interest in maintaining the response. May it be economic or political.

That can end up your operation directed to one ethnic group. Which makes you non-neutral and non-discriminating and more disposed to security incidents if you’re seen to be too biased to one ethnic group. . . . You can end up being instrumentalized.

Most of the teams we had in the country were not really used to be working in volatile environments or insecure areas and did not know how to negotiate access. So, the initial reaction is not to go.

Humanitarian workers shared concerns that while this issue is most prevalent in Mali, humanitarian efforts in Burkina Faso have begun to experience similar constraints.

**BURKINA FASO: STATE COLLAPSE AND CIVIL SOCIETY ATTACKS**

Burkina Faso is perhaps the most worrying of all the Sahelian nations. The speed of the country’s decline since the first terror attack in the capital Ouagadougou in January 2016 is staggering. Between January and April 2022, some 600 people were killed, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. This is about triple the number in the same period in 2021.

In 2020, it was still possible for humanitarians, journalists, and civil society organizations to travel easily to large parts
of the country. But by May 2022, security threats were almost everywhere. Many administrators, politicians, and humanitarians are siloed off in major urban areas such as the capital Ouagadougou, Kaya, or Bobo Dioulasso.

The state struggles to exert power far outside these urban areas. Researchers, humanitarian workers, and civil society sources all said that the situation is desperate. As one Ouagadougou-based security researcher put it:

In 2015 and 2016, it was still possible to go to remote areas. But since the beginning of 2020, it has been impossible to move beyond the big cities . . . . Researchers cannot carry out their activities normally, and the same applies to other structures and organizations, whether they are from civil society or international.

For research, the defense and security forces strongly advise against going to remote places that they have no control. When there are opportunities, we go, but it's very rare. The security forces don't want us to follow them or escort us. Even military escorts don't prevent terrorist attacks.

Even if you are escorted by the military, you are still in danger. Even the military themselves are in danger because they too are under attack. Everyone in Burkina Faso feels threatened. Nobody is safe. Even the fighters of terrorist groups are threatened. They kill each other in a war for position, space, and resources. Some are executed because they want to leave the group or when sharing stolen goods.

A senior humanitarian working across the region compared the situation to Angola in the 1990s:

IEDs [are a] big issue in Burkina Faso now. The main cities in the country are isolated. You cannot drive outside major urban areas. The road up to Dori is not accessible anymore. A lot of people have to come to main cities to get attention. . . . It's a bit like the Angolan Civil War. The jihadists—or non-state armed groups if you want to call them that—have managed to landlock people and cities.

There are lots of areas which no one has access to. Not [humanitarian groups]. Not the army. Private companies still go everywhere, though.

In a desperate attempt to claw back control over rural areas, the government has started training local self-defense militias to aid in the fight against jihadist and criminal groups. While the situation in Burkina Faso for access is not yet as dire as northeast Nigeria, where humanitarians must find a path through a myriad of non-state armed militias, it is not far off. A senior civil society organization member said that the sheer number of non-state armed groups and the fact the state has armed hundreds of militia groups has created a situation of "total confusion."

Forty percent of the territory is threatened or occupied by armed terrorist groups. Alongside the armed terrorist groups, there is the free circulation of arms with the self-defense militias, namely the Koglweogo, the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland, the Dozo, who have been armed by state actors, using state resources. . . . We no longer know who is armed and who is not. The danger comes from everywhere. And this is a major obstacle for the work we do on the ground.

The entry of civilians armed by the Burkinabe state [into the conflict] was the key factor in the worsening of the security situation. This has opened the door for many people of dubious character, bandits, and thieves to have access to weapons given by the state in the name of the fight against terrorism.

Secondly, there is the regulatory and legislative context [that] must be taken into account. [A] state of emergency has been declared in 14 provinces of the country, and this considerably restricts freedoms on the ground.

Much like in Mali, humanitarian and civil society sources in Burkina Faso said they are increasingly relying on local agents to monitor situations outside of urban areas such as Kaya, Dori, Fada, and Tougan. While the situation with compromised local partners is not as bad as in Mali, such actors say they are worried it will become worse as the conflict-humanitarian economy becomes more entrenched.

One thing that makes Burkina Faso stand out from the rest of the Sahelian nations is the crackdown on civil society groups who contribute to the peacebuilding processes. Before the conflict began, Burkina Faso was filled with thriving civil society movements that drew off a long Sankarist tradition of direct citizen action. This has gradually been eroded since the conflict, with a noticeable decline since the military coup in January 2022.
One Burkinabe civil society source working on peacebuilding said:

The constant insecurity anxiety means that any contradictory voice is fought. It is systematically perceived as a voice working for the enemy, a destabilizing voice. As a result, defenders of rights are fought.

We receive regular death threats. . . . The terrain is very difficult and hostile, and it is getting worse because we have been under military rule since January 24. The regime is even considering extending the state of emergency to the whole country.

We do not benefit from the support of the security services in the framework of our missions. When we go into the field, we are considered persona non grata by the security.

Another civil society actor documenting human rights abuses across the country said the situation is almost hopeless because of the combined threats of non-state armed groups and the security forces:

Insecurity poses a very serious threat to our activities. We can no longer plan our activities as we used to. We are no longer able to travel to certain regions and certain provinces for our activities, either to promote human rights, monitor human rights, or to investigate cases of violation.

The situation means that we no longer address the issue of specific rights or the schooling of young girls because this is not the current concern. To be resilient, we are obliged to work with local relays in the provinces and in remote areas.

The human rights defender is critical of abuses against the population, regardless of where they come from, whether they are committed by the defense and security forces or by terrorist groups. And in this context, the human rights defender may be targeted by the regular forces or by terrorist groups.

The danger for human rights defenders is not always the terrorists; even the regular forces—police, military, gendarmerie—can also constitute a danger.

Along with the increased security risks and the attacks on civil society groups, one of the key constraints on humanitarian access in Burkina Faso is the government itself. Negotiations with armed groups are banned under Burkinabe law. This makes Burkina Faso far harder to operate in for humanitarian groups than any other country in the Central Sahel. One humanitarian source noted:

The most important thing is to have access to the population and to all the parties involved in the conflict. The advantage of Mali compared to Niger and Burkina Faso is that there have been no obstacles to negotiations with the parties to the conflict so far. The authorities understand the importance of neutrality. In Niger, it’s getting a bit better, in Burkina Faso, it’s still unclear. But sometimes in Mali, there can be governmental blockages.

While some humanitarians interviewed said that they just about manage to operate in the gray zone to secure access to some areas, they stressed how difficult it is. As one coordinator put it, “Burkina Faso prohibited any negotiations with non-state armed groups. Sometimes you can go. Sometimes you can’t. You need to be super flexible.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The situation in the Sahel today remains one of deeply constrained access due to the highly fragmented security picture, challenges of engagement with non-state armed groups, and pressures on humanitarian partners to carry out harmonized triple nexus-type programs despite the complexity of the operational context. To improve humanitarian outcomes in the Central Sahel, donors and humanitarian partners should agree on a set of frameworks and processes to inform the humanitarian response. Some recommendations include:

• **Create open channels for collaboration between aid agencies and local non-state actors to enable uninterrupted, equitable humanitarian assistance in the Sahel.** Current restrictions on talks with non-state armed groups, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso, are unproductive and do the most damage to Sahelian citizens in need of aid.

• **Establish sector-wide standards regarding the use of military convoys.** At the same time, regional governments, particularly Niger, should ease restrictions on convoys.

• **Rethink triple nexus programming across the Sahel.** While certain regions may be ready for integrated programming, relying on feedback and concerns from humanitarian actors around the need for discrete and independent assistance programs is essential.
• **In the face of severe restrictions on the movement of international staff, there should be a major cross-regional and agency push to have local and regional staff managing key field projects.** While there has been significant progress on this in recent years, decisions are made too often by foreign staff with limited regional knowledge. External actors serve to support and uphold the principles and proceedings put forth by regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States. External actors must speak with Africans, not for them.

International agencies should support civil society members wherever possible. They are a key part of the solution to the crisis, and many groups are currently being crushed by paranoid governments. This support should include both program support as well as core funding to support local organizations’ growth and credibility.

• **Increase funding.** While the international community continues to push expectations and interventions onto the Sahel, the resources necessary to implement substantial initiatives have not been forthcoming.

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