



# LOCAL HUMANITARIAN LEADERSHIP IN BURKINA FASO

Translating rhetoric into action

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This report looks at the marginalization faced by local actors in the humanitarian response in Burkina Faso. It examines the causes and challenges of their experience, in particular by foregrounding their perceptions. The report highlights existing good practice and proposes specific actions to strengthen the role of local actors and potentially local humanitarian leadership in the response.

The study suggests ways of developing a response led by local humanitarian actors that better meets needs and is faster, more sustainable, more relevant, and, finally, more responsive to the changing reality dictated by increased violence, while keeping people at the centre.

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# ACRONYMS

ABS	Association Bon Samaritain (Good Samaritan Association)
ACODEV	Alliances Communautaires pour le Développement (Community Alliances for Development)
AGED	Association pour la Gestion de l'Environnement pour le Développement (Environmental Management for Development Association)
APEPJ	Association Pendgwendé pour l'Epanouissement de la Jeunesse du Centre-Nord (Pendgwendé Association for Youth Development in Centre-Nord)
APIJ/CN	Association pour la Promotion de l'Intégration des Jeunes du Centre-Nord (Association for the Promotion of Youth Inclusion in Centre-Nord)
APIL	Action pour la Promotion des Initiatives Locales (Action for the Promotion of Local Initiatives)
APS	Association pour la Promotion de la Santé (Association for Health Promotion)
ATAD	Alliance Technique d'Assistance pour le Développement (Technical Partnership for Development Assistance)
AVAD	Association Vision Action Développement (Vision Action Development Association)
CBA	Community based association
CBHW	Community-based health worker
C4C	Charter for Change
CONASUR	Conseil National de Secours d'Urgence et de Réhabilitation (National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation)
FGN	Fédération des Groupements Naam (Federation of Naam Groups)
GB	Grand Bargain
HDP Nexus	Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus
INGO	International non-Government organization
LHL	Local humanitarian leadership
NSAG	Groupes armés non etatiques (non-state armed groups)
OCADES	Organisation Catholique pour le Développement et la Solidarité (Catholic Organization for Development and Solidarity)
RAJ	Réseau Afrique Jeunesse (Africa Youth Network)
SERACOM	Service rural d'Approvisionnement et de Commercialisation (Rural Supply and Marketing Service)
SPONG	Secrétariat Permanent des ONG (NGO Permanent Secretariat)
VDC	Village development council

# SUMMARY

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has faced an expansion of the armed conflict that began in central Mali and spread across the tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance increased by 60% between 2020 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> As a result, interventions which were previously development-focused have changed dramatically. National and local non-state actors are adapting as best they can to this new crisis. However, more than three years since this massive shift towards humanitarian action, they are still very much on the sidelines of a humanitarian response dominated by international actors. On the other hand, international partners and donors are increasing resources for an appropriate humanitarian response, but a 0.17% direct transfer of funds to local actors in 2020<sup>2</sup> is an indication of how little consideration local humanitarian leadership (LHL) requirements are currently given.

This report first looks at the causes and challenges that help explain this marginalization, in particular by foregrounding the perceptions of the local actors interviewed. The second part seeks to highlight existing good practices and proposes specific actions to strengthen the role of local actors, and potentially LHL, in the response in Burkina Faso.

This report focuses on four key LHL challenges and proposed solutions:

1. Local and national partners are still very much relegated to a service-provider role rather than being full partners. This is reflected clearly in pre- and post- humanitarian project phases, including assessment, the definition of the intervention logic, the choice of activities, or even the selection of private contractors. It leads to a certain disconnect between real needs and the response that is provided. While the women's rights organizations interviewed seem to have an improved understanding of the humanitarian ecosystem and networking opportunities, the issues they address – such as women's leadership and advocacy – are still underfunded in this environment that is increasingly humanitarian-focused. They choose to restrict themselves to the development work they already know, and do not yet see enough opportunity for them to fully integrate humanitarian action into their operations.
2. Lack of inclusion in programming has a direct impact on the ability of any structure or individual to participate in the coordination groups of the international humanitarian system, and their sense of whether it is legitimate for them to do so. Through our research we saw how local and national partners are marginalized in humanitarian coordination. This carries a double burden, as we also found that national and local actors are not involved in local coordination groups that are strong enough to stand up to international coordination.
3. The primary unmet need from the community-based associations (CBAs), national NGOs (NNGOs) and community actors we met is more appropriate, continuous and equitable capacity building, rather than funding. While most

international partners include capacity building as a part of their humanitarian projects, this component remains mostly an ad hoc peripheral activity limited by poor financing. Moreover, it is still in line with a top-down approach rather than a 'capacity exchange' way of working. Such an approach does not take sufficient account of local responses already implemented by local actors, or even the communities themselves, and does not seek to build on or to learn from them.

4. Responses to the needs of vulnerable people in hard-to-reach areas rely mainly on the communities themselves, as well as on CBAs and a few national or even international NGOs, that still have access. However, budgets are not suitable for an operational environment that evolves every day; training programmes are too general; and the lack of dialogue between international partners, donors and local actors is not only hindering their security management, but also pushes them to use unsafe techniques.

Some solutions to these challenges have been proposed. There are a number of specific examples where international partners are committed to greater inclusion of local actors, and in particular the communities, in both preparing projects and asking for a legitimate space in international coordination fora. Other alternatives suggested are more inspired by success stories and initiatives carried out by local actors. We also identified a number of equitable and horizontal capacity-exchange approaches more conducive to making use of local expertise.

Based on this research, our main recommendations for all humanitarian local actors, international partners and donors are as follows:

- Consider partnership and capacity-strengthening approaches to be a medium-term process that requires monitoring and adequate prioritization in order to allocate the budgets and time required.
- Embed humanitarian intervention into an approach where local actors and international partners understand that neither should disappear, but that they must identify their complementarities and specific needs that bring them together in the response.
- Significantly increase the quantity and quality of humanitarian funding, as pledged by the Grand Bargain (GB), to reach the 25% ratio flowing directly to local actors – including women's rights organizations, – to ensure humanitarian preparedness and response as well as recovery.
- Favour flexible and multi-year funding, such as the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus, to respond to the significant and rapid increase in humanitarian need, and take into consideration the lessons learned and practices of well-established development stakeholders.
- Push for change in international partners' internal mindset towards greater power sharing and more diverse partnerships.
- Institutionalize a dialogue at least every six months to develop non-project intervention scenarios with CBAs, NNGOs and devolved authorities to be taken as the basis for preparing future responses in addition to local contingency plans.

- Promote the active participation of NNGOs and CBAs in the humanitarian coordination structures through their effective inclusion in project preparation and in strategic discussions on intervention logic.
- Move from a capacity-building to a capacity-sharing approach by institutionalizing peer evaluation tools co-created by local actors and international partners.
- Ensure the creation of an official consultation channel including local actors, NNGOs and CBAs and donors to discuss the nature of security risks undertaken systematically before and during projects, including through budgetary changes.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This research is guided by Oxfam's desire to improve, together with the humanitarian community, and to learn from the good practices identified and illustrated in this report. It is important to note that as a humanitarian actor we should be the first to learn and put into practice the commitments we have made to our partners and the people we assist, as well as to donors and the humanitarian community.

Since 2015, Burkina Faso has faced an expansion of the armed conflict that began in central Mali and spread through the tri-border area between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. The situation deteriorated significantly from 2018 onwards, with peaks in violence leading to massive waves of population displacement that continue to this day. In two years, from January 2019 to January 2021, more than one million people were forced to flee the violence. These numbers continued to grow, and there were nearly 1.4 million displaced people at the end of July 2021.<sup>3</sup> These fragile, conflict-affected regions were already suffering from food insecurity and chronic poverty, as well as below-average access to basic services. The large-scale arrival of internally displaced people (IDPs) into often impoverished communities increased the pressure on the limited number of basic services, as well as precarious livelihoods. Hundreds of schools and health centres were closed because of the violence, and insecurity drastically affected people's access to their cropland, grazing areas and even the essential services that remained undamaged. A humanitarian crisis erupted and the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance more than doubled from 1.2 million to 3.5 million between early 2019 and early 2021.<sup>4</sup>

The scale and speed of the deepening humanitarian crisis initially strained the capacity of the local, national and international actors operating in Burkina Faso. At the time, they were still mainly focused on development interventions and some ad hoc food security and nutrition responses during lean periods or environmental shocks. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) only opened an office in Ouagadougou in July 2019. The humanitarian coordination system, including clusters, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and the appointment of a humanitarian coordinator, were established in November 2019. The state agency CONASUR, until then responsible for the management of mainly natural disasters, pivoted to respond to the humanitarian crisis triggered by the conflict, in particular ensuring IDP registration. International actors with a dual mandate gradually moved to the humanitarian field and new international humanitarian actors reached Burkina Faso.

National and local non-state actors are adapting as best they can to this new crisis. However, more than three years since this massive shift towards humanitarian action, they are still very much on the sidelines of a humanitarian response that is heavily dominated by international actors. This situation goes against the international commitments signed by a large number of INGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies and donors in Burkina Faso, in particular the Grand Bargain (GB) and the Charter for Change (C4C). The

*'Social cohesion rates are in the green, while conflict indices are in the red. When you consider that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are three times the host population, you understand that solidarity is fully active; otherwise, this [situation] would have already exploded.'*  
Secretary general of an NNGO based in Ouagadougou

signatories to these two texts undertake to support national and local humanitarian actors in playing a greater role in the management and conduct of humanitarian responses. LHL is seen as a means to enable more legitimate, accountable, sustainable and appropriate responses to the needs of people hit by crisis.

This report first looks at the causes and challenges that help explain this marginalization, in particular by foregrounding the perceptions of the local actors interviewed. The second part seeks to highlight existing good practices and proposes specific actions to strengthen the role of local actors and potentially LHL in the response in Burkina Faso.

The local actors considered are of several types. National NGOs (NNGOs) are countrywide or multi-regional in scope and, in most cases, have an office in Ouagadougou and in the regional capitals. Community-based associations (CBAs) are smaller NGOs based in the commune (municipality) or village where they were founded, sometimes also reaching neighbouring provinces or regions. They rarely have their headquarters in Ouagadougou and range in size by number of employees, financial capacity and the area they cover. They generally have a limited number of staff and rely on volunteers. NNGOs and CBAs are structures defined under Law 64/2015.<sup>5</sup> 'CBA' is an unofficial term specifically used in this research to highlight their stronger local roots. It is also how these associations refer to each other. Community actors and focal points include all individuals or groups of individuals who are part of the communities receiving assistance, and are designated by the UN, INGOs, NNGOs and CBAs as community contacts or individuals involved in the community-based component of projects. These include community liaisons, endogenous agents, committees and community champions.

The report is based on desk research and 79 individual or group qualitative interviews lasting about two hours, with 19 members of INGOs and UN agencies, two donors, two international and national NGO fora, and 30 national and local actors working in the Centre-Nord, Sahel and Nord regions. These 30 actors include one government official, 11 INGO members, 14 CBA members, five women's organizations implementing one-off humanitarian actions, and 22 various community focal points from Dori, Barsalogho, Gorgadji, Kaya, Pissila and Tougouri. Forty-three of the people interviewed were women and 65 were men.

## 2 MARGINALIZATION OF LOCAL ACTORS IN A RESPONSE DOMINATED BY INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

The number of people in need of humanitarian assistance has increased by 60% between 2020 and 2021. The result is that approaches which were previously development-focused have changed dramatically.<sup>6</sup> This sudden and rapid change in needs since the 2019 escalation has had a strong impact on civil society actors, whether NNGOs, CBAs or community members themselves. For those interviewed in any of these categories, the main challenge is not the limited adaptive capacity<sup>7</sup> of national and local actors, but the fact that the shift from development to humanitarian action has resulted in a partial marginalization of local actors.

*'Actions have not changed (...). Before, most vulnerable people were those who had few livestock; today, IDPs have replaced them.'*  
Director of an NNGO in Ouagadougou.

### A. LOCAL ACTORS RELEGATED TO A SERVICE-PROVIDER ROLE

Local and national partners are still largely relegated to the role of data collecting and technical monitoring and evaluation during implementation. They rarely participate in other strategic phases of the project cycle. Only three out of the 30 NNGOs and CBAs interviewed say they have actively designed a humanitarian project, and 12 have never responded to a humanitarian project either with or without an international partner.<sup>8</sup> One member of an INGO we met explained that sometimes NNGOs and CBAs sign a letter of partnership commitment with INGOs, but most of the time they do not know all of the details of the project, its intervention logic and its objectives before signing.

*'INGOs and donors like literature, good writing, but rhetoric does not always work in the field (...). It is difficult for an association to succeed if its staff is not involved in writing the project. We do what we are supposed to do, but neither the people nor the staff are allowed to own the project.'*  
Member of a CBA based in the Nord region

This is reflected very clearly in the phases of needs assessment and definition of the project intervention logic. According to an NNGO based in Kaya, the pre- and post-project assessment stages are usually entrusted to external consultants that rarely make use of the CBAs' contextual understanding. In addition, because of their proximity to local communities and their regular contact with people receiving assistance, many CBAs continue to collect data on a regular basis. This is the case with two CBAs in Kaya that collect data on rape and unwanted pregnancies. While such data are sometimes used by their international partners, they do not lead these actors to better involve and support local stakeholders, some of which report 'an abuse of the associations because they [the international partners] are getting resources from them instead of supporting them.'

*'Many elements that we would like to include, especially on social cohesion, as well as on more basic aspects such as needs identification or the selection of response areas, are not considered.'*  
CBA member in Kaya

CBAs and NNGOs often implement projects in affected areas, but they are rarely involved upstream in defining approaches and interventions. This can lead to a certain disconnect between actual needs and the responses

provided. This was demonstrated by one CBA who was interviewed about a project. The intervention logic had been decided unilaterally by the international partner, who then required quality reporting without providing the budget to recruit literate community liaisons that would be able to make written reports. Such inconsistencies could be avoided by ensuring joint programme preparation and definition.

According to the international, national and community actors interviewed, a lack of adequate funding and the urgency of the response are the main reasons underlying the low involvement of CBAs and NNGOs in all parts of the project cycle. Humanitarian funding is still considered too limited to allow pre-project consultation by international partners. Similarly, the urgency of the initial emergency response made it difficult to carry out extensive consultations. Thus, **direct funding to local actors in Burkina Faso represented only 0.17%<sup>9</sup> of the overall humanitarian funds allocated to the country<sup>10</sup> in 2020.** This lack of direct funding partly explains the high level of dependency and marginalization of national and local actors in humanitarian action.

The NNGOs and CBAs interviewed also explained that they are excluded from discussions and decisions about options and choices regarding private providers. Although they are not truly considered full actors in humanitarian action, private contractors play an important role in providing the response and sometimes have greater responsibilities than the NNGOs and CBAs themselves. Whether local or based in major cities, they often play an important role as suppliers of goods and services in hard-to-reach areas. However, their part sometimes goes beyond this, particularly in hard-to-reach areas where international partners delegate to them some of the implementation of 'hard' activities (e.g. well construction), thus downgrading the role of NNGO and CBA partners to the implementation of 'soft' activities<sup>11</sup> (e.g. awareness campaigns on best hygiene practices). Lack of knowledge or operational control of humanitarian principles remains one of the difficulties perceived by international actors when working with CBAs and NNGOs, but such challenges seem to be forgotten when it comes to using private contractors, to the extent that they are sometimes free, for example, to use armed escorts to transport humanitarian supplies to hard-to-reach areas.<sup>12</sup>

An NNGO based in the Nord region added that private contractors do not feel committed to cooperating with local actors nor to taking their observations into account, since they were not chosen by local actors. Community support liaisons and leaders have been ignored by private contractors who have spent time in their villages to build drinking water facilities or latrines and refused to use local labour. Local partners reported bad practices on construction sites that affected the durability of works built in a hurry. Other examples show the disconnect that may exist between the needs and wishes of people receiving assistance and the response provided by private contractors who are not subject to the same accountability standards as humanitarian organizations. For example, some drinking water kits ordered by international partners without consulting local actors were refused by local people because the 20L jerrycans were black, a colour that is not in accordance with local practice (water in black jerrycans heats up more quickly and does not last as well).

## B. LOCAL ACTORS ABSENT FROM HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION AND DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURES

Too little inclusion of local actors in project preparation has a direct impact on the ability and sense of legitimacy of any structure or individual wanting to participate in the coordination groups of the international humanitarian system. Cluster systems were activated in 2019<sup>13</sup> in Burkina Faso, followed by the establishment of the Humanitarian Coordinator position, the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) and decentralized clusters in all five regions affected by the crisis.

NNGOs as well as CBAs are still largely excluded from most strategic coordination structures. The NGO Permanent Secretariat in Burkina Faso (SPONG) is currently the only entity at least partially representing the NNGOs and CBAs that attend the HCT meetings. Twenty out of the 30 NNGOs and CBAs we interviewed participate in SPONG. However, this entity is not intended to represent only local or national NGOs, and a large number of the INGOs that were also operating before the crisis in Burkina Faso are also part of it. In parallel, humanitarian INGOs are represented by a rotating committee made up of three of their organizations, and by the Forum of Humanitarian INGOs (FONGIH in French), which was created in 2018 and brings together the sector's leading organizations in the country. Furthermore, smaller CBAs do not feel legitimate enough to actively take part in other strategic coordination, such as the Rapid Response Operational Cooperation Group (RROCG in French) set up in October 2020.

NNGOs and CBAs are invited to participate in national and decentralized clusters. Fifteen of the 30 NNGOs and CBAs interviewed say they are involved in clusters. These organizations can see the benefits of being represented in the groups, particularly in terms of capacity building and tool sharing. Nevertheless, they say they do not have a role equal to INGOs for various reasons. The lack of control over funding, project management and visibility results in an inability of these structures to become active players in coordination, for example by engaging in certain responses and areas. The closer the ecosystem actors are to the affected areas, the less they see their place in a global humanitarian system and the less they feel their participation is legitimate. None of the organizations we met were aware of C4C or the GB expectations, which raises the question of who benefits from these principles if they are unknown to the target actors. The participation of national and local actors is often downgraded to being mere observers or sources of information, which publicly reinforces the power imbalance between local and international actors.

This marginalization of the NNGOs and CBAs within the humanitarian coordination structures is reinforced by the lack of shared coordination both within and between themselves, which makes it more difficult for them to raise their voices and to have joint relevance within the coordination structures. Only six out of 15 local actors interviewed who say they are involved in clusters are CBAs. CBAs seem to prefer local or regional coordination networks, which have a more concrete mandate and impact and more horizontal coordination. Most of these coordination groups were set up before the crisis on the initiative of development actors. This is the

*'A mistake made by international partners, particularly subject to the often-inflexible rules of donors, is to establish a kind of paternalistic relationship with national organizations, close to a patronage system.'* NNGO director in Ouagadougou

case, for example, with the African Youth Network (RAJ), which aimed to coordinate the efforts of the various member CBAs working on youth issues in the Centre-Nord region. Coordination within NNGOs and between these entities and CBAs is also very limited. Only four out of 16 CBAs interviewed work with NNGOs on a regular and structured basis and/or are involved in a consortium to implement a project.<sup>14</sup>

This lack of coordination can also be seen at the community level. Difficulties with access and the need to have community focal points lead humanitarian organizations to set up a variety of community structures, such as liaisons, committees, focal points, endogenous agents and community champions. However, these approaches have mainly been implemented in a fragmented way, with each organization creating its own structures according to its internal criteria. They lack systematic coordination with other actors and often ignore the existing structures that were implemented before the crisis. The different community structures and committees established in the same localities hardly work together and remain focused on their projects and blind to what other similar structures are doing in the area. The community committees and liaisons interviewed explain that they want more visibility within their communities and call for a pooling of community structures to focus their efforts.

The women's rights organizations interviewed seem to have a better understanding of the humanitarian ecosystem. These organizations, whose work is often devoted to women's leadership, now contribute to the humanitarian response by raising awareness among women. Their focus on communication and advocacy with government authorities, as well as some of their members' political profiles, may partly explain their better adaptation to and understanding of a new environment. However, they are not sufficiently recognized for their work because it differs from usual humanitarian operations and too few humanitarian funds finance their activities. Many of them still work strictly on development programmes for which they have the expertise to respond. Even if the emergency situation gradually takes hold in their areas of intervention, they decide to respond on an ad hoc basis with their own available funds while continuing their main development activities.

### **C. A FAILURE OF CAPACITY BUILDING TO THE DETRIMENT OF SKILL SHARING**

More appropriate, continuous and equitable capacity building, rather than funding, remains the primary demand from the CBAs, NNGOs and community actors we met. However, the current response is still far from providing this type of support. While most international partners include capacity building as a part of their humanitarian projects, this component remains mostly an ad hoc peripheral activity limited by poor financing, and is still in line with a top-down approach rather than a capacity exchange way of working.

All the NNGOs and CBAs interviewed who have international partners say they have received at least one training session on humanitarian principles, SPHERE standards or security courses. However, this training is often relatively short and ad hoc, and is provided to implement a specific project

rather than as part of true capacity-building logic. Due to financial and time constraints for both partners, it is often the case that only one or two people from the local organization can be trained in relatively theoretical basics over one, or at most, a few, hours. This training is relatively fleeting, especially since local partners suffer from high turnover in their teams because of precarious funding or the recruitment of local team members by international organizations.

Nevertheless, the scope and relevance of such capacity-building approaches are most limited by their highly vertical and top-down style. Capacity assessments and the development of capacity-building plans are at the moment only determined by the international partners based on their criteria, and without even consulting the local actors who are supposed to benefit from them. This results in challenges on quality and coherence of the proposed capacity building in relation to what local actors actually need. On humanitarian principles, for example, the local actors interviewed on this subject explain that they know and understand the principles and that, rather than theoretical training on the principles, it would be more useful for them to be supported in their concrete day-to-day implementation in affected areas.

Similarly, they all raise the need to build the capacity of the whole structure in order to ensure readiness and that they have the tools to respond to crises. This includes a variety of aspects such as the need to strengthen these structures' institutional and support capacities, whether it be human resources, logistics, administration or security/access. The small percentage of the humanitarian budget – approximately 7% – allocated to these structures does not cover institutional strengthening. The 7% is used for salary supplements, security supplies, fuel payments, and, 'at best, the purchase of a car to be left in a dilapidated parking lot', as the director of an NNGO explains. Project management will be ensured, but its effectiveness will not.

This top-down and unilateral logic does not sufficiently take into account the local responses already implemented by local actors or even the communities themselves, and does not seek to make use of or learn from these responses or to consider and promote skills that already exist.

The solutions initially provided by NNGOs and CBAs at the onset of the crisis in 2018 were based on practices developed at the local level.<sup>15</sup> Some organizations, such as APS, AGED, Believers Fraternal Union (UFC in French) and SERACOM, were already doing humanitarian work before the current crises. In 2003, APS, whose activities in 2021 were 85% development and 15% humanitarian action, undertook humanitarian activities<sup>16</sup> that included a development response. In Barsalogo, the CBAs were already working to improve hygiene, sanitation and health because their commune had insufficient drinking water coverage before the crisis.<sup>17</sup> The organizations that were not already working in the humanitarian sector draw upon their development experience to provide solutions that can be applied to humanitarian action, such as peacebuilding, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), or education. However, when it came to a large-scale humanitarian response, international humanitarian partners showed little interest in the

*'When we try to strictly implement the activity lines, it is not certain that next time the structure will be operational. It's also impossible to plan ahead. We are looking for a structure of sufficient capacity while maintaining the same size.'* Member of an NNGO in Kaya

*In 2014, in the presence of many international partners, Guillaume Le Duc, development manager of the NGO Alima, said that 'With 7%, you don't necessarily have the means to offer career opportunities to improve staff skills, which can make a project 50 times more effective.'*

expertise already available within CBAs and NNGOs, and local actors did not sufficiently promote their know-how.

These various observations led the director of an NNGO to propose not only to identify the weaknesses, but also the strengths and resources of the different local or international actors in order to allow for mutual learning and skill sharing between actors within an ecosystem.<sup>18</sup>

## **D. A RESPONSE THAT RESTRICTS LHL TO A DANGEROUS LACK-OF-ACCESS CONTINGENCY**

Humanitarian access is still one of the main challenges in Burkina Faso. Attacks by NSAGs as well as improvised explosive devices drastically limit access to certain areas and often make the use of major roads risky and unpredictable. With a few exceptions, INGOs and major NNGOs remain confined to the main towns and capitals of the affected provinces or regions, with limited reach in the surrounding areas.

Furthermore, access can be blocked overnight due to sudden changes in the security situation.

Responding to the needs of vulnerable people in hard-to-reach areas relies mainly on the communities themselves, as well as on the CBAs and some national or even international NGOs that still have access. Their local roots and presence allow CBAs and some NNGOs to continue responses in their home provinces or areas. For example, six of the CBAs we met still work regularly in Pensa, Dablo, Foubé and Kongoussi (Centre-Nord), Mansila, Gorom-Gorom and Gorgadji (Sahel), and in the communes around Ouahigouya (Nord), all of them villages that are rarely visited by international and national NGOs. Similarly, most humanitarian responses – whether led by international, national or local actors – rely on community focal points who are able to monitor and partially implement responses despite unpredictable and highly volatile access.

Twenty-two out of the 30 CBAs and NNGOs interviewed go through community liaisons to work in inaccessible areas.

The local actors interviewed are unanimous in their wish to maintain their responses, despite being aware of the risks they are taking. However, only two of them knew about risk transfer. According to one NNGO's staff, downgrading the added value of a CBA or an NNGO to access and local knowledge is the primary cause of risk transfer. Thus, the security of local partners is just a peripheral concern to which neither the resources nor the time necessary to really mitigate the risks are allocated. The budget earmarked for local partners' 'security' is usually limited to a few training sessions and sometimes cost support, but rarely goes as far as genuine support or the financing of dedicated human resources.

The training courses themselves are often inadequate. They are relatively frequent, and sometimes planned outside the project budgets, but their quality does not meet the evolving context and the structure's long-term needs. Only 15 out of the 30 organizations we met have been trained in risk management by an international partner. For the other 15, only the project

*'To enable this sharing, we must listen to each other and incorporate the theory into practical activities to ensure greater ownership.'* CBA based in Kaya.

*'An NGO that declares a red area and asks someone else to go there without adjusting budgets is necessarily transferring risks.'* Member of an NNGO in Kaya

team was trained, not other staff. However, even for the project teams, such courses are often seen as general and poorly tailored to the specific context of each municipality in Burkina Faso, which complicates their implementation.

The international partners interviewed all say that they make their own security advisors available to the local partner, but none of them plan to budget for a security advisor position within the local partner organizations themselves. Twenty-seven out of 30 of the NNGOs and CBAs interviewed do not have a security officer within their structure and depend on the support of the international partner. In an increasingly dangerous operational context, this role is, by default, carried out by a member of the local structure who also has other duties, and therefore frequently has neither the time nor the skills to fulfil it entirely.

The direct cause of the budget and training quality challenges is the minimal room given to local actors to inform the international partner and the donor of the risks undertaken during operations and movements. All the interviewed NNGOs and CBAs working with international humanitarian partners say they do not dare request such space because they would not have evidence of a security incident to present to donors to ask for support. An NNGO director told us that he had tried and failed several times to talk to the international partner with whom he was working on a project in order to explain the new risks involved. He told us that he still intends to ask the international partner to make donors aware of the risk issues and necessary mitigation measures.

In the absence of dialogue between international partners, donors and local actors, the latter have to take on all security responsibilities to cope with increasing humanitarian need, in particular by adopting internal techniques to manage the risks involved in movements and operations. They handle such situations via community participation, in particular town councils and village development councils, and via community liaisons by sharing information on the phone – work undertaken on a voluntary basis. The result is that ‘the source is not always reliable, but it is better than nothing’, as one CBA we met in Kaya acknowledges.

*‘There is a transfer of risk as the proposed budgets are like those in a normal security situation. We feel that the security aspect is ignored.’ An NNGO in the Sahel region*

# 3 SOLUTIONS

## A. FROM A SERVICE-PROVIDER TO A COMPLEMENTARY-ALLIANCE LOGIC

### BEST PRACTICES PROPOSED BY INTERNATIONAL ACTORS

There are a number of specific examples where international partners are committed to greater inclusion of local actors, and in particular the communities themselves.

This is the case, for example, for an ACTED-UNICEF pilot project started in March 2020 that seeks to include community liaisons in the assessment and targeting phases in areas inaccessible to the two international partners. The project takes into consideration the time needed to train the liaisons in multi-sectoral assessments (MSA) and, with their input, proposes simplified MSA tools that can be used by these local actors and are more contextually appropriate. The liaisons that still live in the localities and wish to remain there then conduct the door-to-door surveys themselves, knowing precisely why they collect data and for which project. They are also trained on their roles, humanitarian principles and cross-cutting protection, accountability, and complaint management mechanisms, as well as awareness raising. This approach should make it possible to collect information in areas that have sometimes not received aid in a year, while ensuring better ownership and inclusion of community liaisons in the project.

The response to the COVID-19 crisis in Burkina Faso seems to have raised awareness of the importance of making use of the expertise of local actors in humanitarian and health responses. This is particularly the case for an Oxfam project funded by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO). The project was developed in less than a month based on input from the health districts, which suggested the relevant associations and invited them to produce a briefing package, including a COVID-19 action plan and response budget. Thirty CBAs from Tougouri, Barsalogo, Kaya, Pissila, Gorom-Gorom and Dori were selected and funded in two stages to carry out the activities. This greater inclusion and leadership of local actors has enabled the response to have a bigger impact, particularly regarding prevention. In some areas, COVID-19 was not a priority for people whose children were already seriously affected by other, more widespread and visible waterborne diseases. In response, the project's CBAs adapted their prevention activities, explaining to mothers that the recommended behaviours could also prevent most of these other diseases. The tangible and clear reduction in these diseases finally convinced the mothers of the soundness of the recommended hygiene practices for their children and for COVID-19.

*'You can't develop someone, but you need to give them the tools to develop and be able to decide on their own. Committed actors are the starting point.'* Director of an NNGO based in Ouagadougou

Other projects seek to support the growth of local cross-community solidarity practices and to adapt to the changing context when the number of IDPs means that the development project area becomes a locality requiring a humanitarian response. This is particularly the case for NITIDAE, a French development INGO and its European Union (EU)-funded Landscape PONASI/Wakanda project. The project supports ‘twinning’ displaced and host women and young girls. Once an internally displaced woman or girl is genuinely registered as a displaced person and a person receiving assistance, she is invited to a meeting of local women to find a volunteer who will take her on as a twin. These two women will share everything: an agricultural production plot, the maintenance and the work, as well as production processing. They will be supported by the project to increase production, which results in a benefit for both women and their households, and their integration into the community.

Finally, some international partners directly fund CBAs or NNGOs on a project basis. This is the case for APIJ-CN, a CBA which receives direct funding from UNICEF in Burkina Faso for a project<sup>19</sup> in Dablo, Namissiguima and Pensa (Centre-Nord region). APIJ-CN staff say they proposed all the activities and budget within a framework determined by UNICEF. According to the CBA, the international agency did not make any changes to their proposal, giving them full responsibility for carrying out all project activities, both soft and hard. They also explain that piloting their own project strengthens their feeling of legitimacy within the coordinating structures.

*‘It gives us self-confidence and pride in providing the response that we know is right. It has strengthened our structure in terms of financial and HR management.’ A member of APIJ-CN, a CBA based in Kaya, about the UNICEF project*

## **EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS STORIES AND INITIATIVES LED BY LOCAL ACTORS**

Some of the NNGOs and CBAs interviewed are taking the initiative, even with no institutional funding, to maintain or start response activities on a voluntary basis, through community fundraising events or the use of their own funds. This is the case, for example, with the Heart Cry Association, which specializes in providing schooling for young host and displaced children, and whose teachers and members still carry out a number of activities on a voluntary basis during periods of no funding. The voluntary activities range from providing a few hours of lessons to children not in school, to community collection of medicines and clothes for vulnerable mothers and children.

An additional step suggested by some of the NNGOs and CBAs interviewed would be to make room for local actors to propose projects on their own initiative to international partners and donors. This was considered in an ACODEV project that was presented at the Dori town council in March 2020, before the health crisis broke out in Burkina Faso. The CBA built on a multi-stakeholder approach by including both institutional and community actors to lead the response.<sup>20</sup> After its presentation to the town council, the project was funded by UNICEF and led by a consortium of NNGOs, CBAs and INGOs under the leadership of ACODEV and the Dori municipality.

*[It is helpful to] ‘be able to see how a civil society evolves and develops response plans, in an inclusive way, which can then be proposed to an international partner as the basis for a project.’ Member of a Sahel region CBA*

Conducting systematic and sufficiently inclusive consultations is time-consuming and often impossible when responses to new emergencies are required within days or weeks at most. However, the CBAs and NNGOs

interviewed make concrete proposals to overcome these challenges in a crisis that has been ongoing for many years. More than half of them say they would be willing to get more involved if calls for proposals were more accessible and humanitarian project preparation more inclusive, while recognizing that this would require their approaches to be adjusted. They ask international partners to contribute to response plans that are based on jointly prepared non-project scenarios and analysed down to the level of risk anticipation, in order to stick to the needs of the target population.

## **B. COORDINATION AND REPRESENTATION**

Efforts to improve coordination between local actors got under way within SPONG through the creation of the Humanitarian Working Group (GTH in French)<sup>21</sup> in late 2021. This group aims to bring together NNGOs and CBAs keen to coordinate and advocate on shared humanitarian issues.

The adaptation of existing networks such as the RAJ to the humanitarian environment, as well as the emergence of new coordination networks, is also relevant. These different local coordination networks mainly bring together development CBAs that are adjusting to the impacts of the humanitarian situation, including the large-scale arrival of displaced people. This is the case, for example, with the women's leadership network set up in Kaya in 2019, which seeks to support the inclusion of displaced women in various cooperative networks (including women soap producers, millet producers and others). Other networks already in place, such as the RAJ, are adapting to the new crisis context, in particular by including the new problems faced by displaced and host people in their advocacy efforts with town councils and local authorities for essential services. Women's organizations are also very active and vibrant, in particular in their leadership approaches that provide women and men with the tools to self-represent and express their needs and lived experiences. They focus primarily on the establishment of consultation frameworks and the involvement in large networks of women trained in leadership, thus encouraging synergies with other women's organizations.<sup>22</sup>

Town councils still seem to play an important role in local coordination, including in insecure areas where they are still operating. Some initiatives are even primarily intended to develop commune-centred coordinated responses. This was the case with efforts by ACODEV at the beginning of the crisis. Using its own funding, the organization brought together 26 communes in Sahel region to operationalize a local monitoring and early warning system for situations of risk.

## C. TOWARDS MORE SUSTAINABLE AND MUTUAL CAPACITY BUILDING

The implementation of more equitable and horizontal capacity-exchange approaches would make it possible to make better use of positive local adaptation practices that already existed, sometimes for several years. For example, in Plateau-Central region, the development association Manegdbzanga uses its own funds (made up of membership fees and personal contributions) to support farmers to build up part of the harvest as contingency stocks that can be distributed in the event of a crisis. Farmers in Dapelgo village were thus able to respond in 2020 to the influx of 2,000 IDPs by using stocks that had been built up since 2017. Promoting such approaches would strengthen local capacities to cope with recurrent shocks in a response that reinforces social cohesion, i.e., responses led and owned by the communities themselves.

Local actors are also calling for greater integration of their social cohesion expertise into humanitarian responses. A number of stakeholders initially focused on development already have strong experience in ensuring cohesion through collective work. This is the case with UFC, an NNGO whose work is based on harvesting rainwater for market garden crops (*boull*)<sup>23</sup> that are managed and maintained by the different groups within the village or commune, including IDPs.

A number of CBAs and NNGOs are already developing capacity building and exchange methods that may offer inspiration to international actors. This is the case with AVAD, APEPJ-S, ACODEV, ABS, APIL, OCADES, APIJ-CN and ATAD, among others. ABS, for example, is part of the regional coordination for civil society organizations and regularly supports other associations – such as the women's association Kolombao – in their project design, drafting and submission. APIL, an NNGO, works with CBAs to jointly create training programmes on social cohesion. AVAD, which was a small CBA in 2000, received significant support from the World Food Programme, and capacity building has now become one of its main intervention pillars.

A number of international actors are also beginning to develop genuine partnership approaches, leaving project leadership to local organizations and allowing them to strengthen their structural capacity. Christian Aid (an INGO) makes, under its partnership strategy, small amounts of its own funds available to its local partners every year so that they can freely develop their own four- to six-month humanitarian projects. Christian Aid provides coaching to its partners throughout the project process but pledges that 'no franc shall be spent [by the INGO].' SERACOM, an NNGO which benefited from this fund,<sup>24</sup> identified the problems it wanted to address through its project, held discussions with people it planned to assist, defined the activities, managed the practical implementation of the project and signed contracts with private contractors. SERACOM explains that such a project allows them to involve all their structures – including support services – in project drafting and to strengthen their structures by budgeting for the necessary resources, while providing capacity building for all programme and support teams. This also allows them to act faster and be less

constrained by the burdensome internal procedures of international partners and to choose their own private contractors, which in turn considerably strengthens their project-drafting ability, as they are autonomous but can also rely on technical support.

This example shows the importance of considering partnership and capacity-building approaches to be medium-term processes that require monitoring and adequate prioritization to allocate the budgets and time needed for them.

## D. FOR IMPROVED AND SAFER ACCESS

In a 2017 report,<sup>25</sup> the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) indicated that local actors 'should be provided capacity to design security plans and training, cover security costs, including insurance against risks faced by its staff, at the same level an international organisation would have in a similar environment'. It was difficult to collect examples of good practice for this particular challenge, which is likely to grow considerably in view of the increasing needs and the worsening security situation, but feedback from the local actors interviewed suggests a number of potential solutions.

One potential avenue in particular was mentioned by an NNGO working in education across the country, including in crisis areas. Observing that new educational facilities or programmes draw the attention of and sometimes attacks by NSAGs, it ensures that schools never stop running so that they do not look like they are new after a break in classes. This NGO also advises other education stakeholders to avoid creating new institutions or programmes and instead to restore old ones or build on what already exists. This example and others show how important it is to involve partner or local CBAs and NNGOs from the very early stages of project design to also ensure that the project is appropriate and takes into account the risks and mitigation proposed by local actors.

*'We operate on behalf of humanity. Abandoning our beneficiaries is not an option even if we are at risk.' Official from a CBA in Kaya*

The main request from local partners is the need for international allies and donors to adapt and take into account the budgets that are necessary to ensure safe access. This means financing human resources dedicated to local partners' access and security, appropriate insurance solutions, and essential equipment such as radios and vehicles. The local actors interviewed also propose the establishment of a forum for ongoing and immediate dialogue between local actors and donors to facilitate the consideration of their operational and access realities, as well as the inclusion of the cost of ensuring their security as an eligible cost in calls for projects.

The local actors interviewed also suggested the implementation of flexible access strategies that are developed together and based on scenarios of crisis anticipation, identifying mitigation and contingency measures. Other proposals concern the implementation of training tools and modules on access and security management that are tailored to and contextualized for local partners to allow for direct operational implementation, as well as sharing training between local and national actors.

# 4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite some significant efforts by local and international actors, LHL in Burkina Faso is today more a matter of eloquent speeches and empty promises than of reality. In order to translate rhetoric into action, international humanitarian actors should change their logic of intervention. This requires sufficient financial and time resources to build real, equitable partnership approaches in the medium term. The inclusion of local actors in strategic decision making throughout the project cycle, the establishment of a genuine and equitable dialogue between local and international partners, and the implementation of skill-exchange approaches that are more strongly aligned with local actors' needs and make full use of their expertise, must be a given. In addition, taking responsibility for and providing real support to local partners in their access and security-risk management, involving local partners on equal terms in humanitarian coordination, and taking into account other existing coordination structures are all essential concrete aspects in which more can and should be done if international partners truly want it. A number of good practices already exist and can be extended and taken into consideration in implementing LHL in Burkina Faso. These are our recommendations to the various stakeholders:

*In this new operational environment, 'We are trying to build LHL in Burkina Faso, but NNGOs and CBAs are not yet in a humanitarian system ready for local actors to take the lead'. NNGO member.*

## A. TO LOCAL ACTORS

- Ensure regular pre- and post-project dialogue with international partners and humanitarian donors in order to:
  - Ensure the quality of funds flowing to local actors, based on what has already been built locally, and on a joint needs assessment in the intervention area.
  - Allocate a part of the budget to security management and to better understanding the intervention logic for each area deemed inaccessible.
- Develop local contingency plans prepared in advance by town councils, together with local CBAs and NNGOs, based on a joint risk analysis.
- Change the level of information available to local actors for equal power-sharing based on:
  - A self-assessment of local organizations' humanitarian capacity, and of community resilience.
  - Ongoing data collection on people's vulnerabilities in humanitarian contexts and on needs identification.
- Ensure synergies between CBAs and NNGOs to create a coordination network for humanitarian project management at the local level, with the aim of reaching out to international partners with proposals discussed within the network.

- Expand the good practice in capacity sharing through the institutionalization of this component in NNGOs' and CBAs' strategies.

## B. TO INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

- Respect the GB and C4C commitments requiring 25% of funding to be channelled to local actors, including humanitarian women's organizations.
- Diversify partnerships with CBAs and women's rights organizations in addition to NNGOs in humanitarian and nexus projects to encourage local actors to work in synergy.
- Institutionalize a dialogue at least every six months to develop non-project intervention scenarios with CBAs, NNGOs and devolved authorities. This will provide a basis for preparing future responses that can be the subject of project co-creation.
- Gradually include local partners in the selection process of private contractors to move towards full delegation of this responsibility.
- Financially and technically support the creation of programme coordination fora among CBAs at the commune level, which NNGOs can join in addition to SPONG.
- Foreground humanitarian requests on needs and their coverage through consultation with local actors and/or groups such as the SPONG Humanitarian Working Group in order to build grassroots advocacy.
- Recruit a mentor with the right tools (not just a partnerships manager) to initiate and mainstream internal mindset changes towards greater power-sharing.
- Gradually offer small funds in the form of projects to strengthen local structures that have the ability to raise substantial funds or require additional support to reach this stage.
- Make it compulsory to jointly develop criteria for assessing capacity-building plans by ensuring that the action plan governing the strengthening period is respected and rooted in the partner's reality.
- Move from a capacity-building to a capacity-sharing approach by:
  - Imposing the use of an assessment of the international partner by the local structure in addition to their self-evaluation.
  - Assigning joint responsibility to local and international partners to determine the content of training to ensure a diversified range of information.
  - Adding training modules on management capacity building and organizational policy.
- Ensure the creation of a formal consultation channel with local actors, NNGOs and CBAs to systematically discuss the nature of the security risks involved before and during projects, in particular through the addition of a budget line specific to the local partner's security

management, taking into account training, equipment and human resources needs.

## C. TO HUMANITARIAN DONORS

- Significantly increase the quantity and quality of humanitarian funding to reach the 25% ratio pledged directly to local actors – including women's rights organizations – to ensure humanitarian preparedness and response as well as recovery.
- Favour flexible and multi-year funding such as the HDP Nexus to respond to the significant and rapid increase in need, both humanitarian and of the local structure, and take into consideration the lessons learned and practices of well-established development stakeholders.
- Plan visits to affected areas to engage with local authorities and actors in order to appreciate the challenging operating environment in certain places.
- Increase the mandatory allocation of 7% of the international partner's budget for administrative capacity building so that the strengthening of the project team can be combined with the strengthening of the organizational structure.
- Create a budget line separate from management costs that is dedicated solely to local actors' needs related to capacity building in risk management.
- Finance and implement remote monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for humanitarian projects by encouraging collaboration with experts from academia, the private sector and civil society.

# NOTES

- 1 Respectively, according to both years' Humanitarian Response Plans.
- 2 OCHA Financial Tracking Service: Burkina Faso 2020.  
<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/930/recipient-types>
- 3 UNHCR Operational Data Portal: Refugee Situations. Burkina Faso.  
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/bfa>
- 4 *Plan de Réponse Humanitaire Burkina Faso*, January 2021.  
[https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/bfa\\_viz\\_hrp\\_2021\\_21042021.pdf](https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/bfa_viz_hrp_2021_21042021.pdf)
- 5 Law 064 of 2015 is the law now governing freedom of association and makes the authorization process more restrictive. It aims to limit the proliferation of associations and to encourage the emergence of civil society organizations that are able to address effective involvement in the various processes of dialogue with the authorities. It removes the political nature of associations by no longer accepting political NGOs under its umbrella, in order to clearly separate political parties and associations. It allows non-foreign associations to enter an agreement with the Burkina Faso government and become 'NGOs', thus acquiring legal existence.
- 6 Respectively, according to both years' Humanitarian Response Plans.
- 7 It is not so much the activities themselves that have changed but rather (i) the pace, (ii) the workload, (iii) the government counterparts and (iv) the types of vulnerabilities.
- 8 They still respond to the emergency using their own funds in their locality.
- 9 OCHA Financial Tracking Service: Burkina Faso 2020.  
<https://fts.unocha.org/appeals/930/recipient-types>
- 10 This includes direct funding to national NGOs and CBAs and does not include national Red Cross societies.
- 11 *Soft* activities include awareness raising, communication, coordination, advocacy, etc., while *hard* activities include infrastructure. In the WASH component, *soft* consists of mainly public health promotion activities, and *hard* consists of engineering activities such as water-point rehabilitation, drilling, water-trucking, latrine construction, etc.
- 12 There are a number of service providers transporting humanitarian supplies whose convoys have been targeted by NSAGs, as was the case on the road between Gendbila and Barsalogo in September 2019.
- 13 OCHA Services. Cluster and Inter-cluster Description Mapping: Burkina Faso.  
<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/burkina-faso/cluster-and-inter-cluster-description-mapping-burkina-faso>
- 14 We are not considering here associations that are used for one-off activities, but those that are engaged in a regular partnership with NNGOs.
- 15 The existing expertise on interventions regarding social cohesion or pooling the work of IDPs and the host population.
- 16 They were working on natural disasters and child malnutrition.
- 17 In 2021, the commune had a significant shortfall in drinking water coverage estimated at about 80%, i.e., some 2,407 m<sup>3</sup>/day. The crisis further exacerbated the impact of this situation.
- 18 A. Kergoat, et al. (2020). *The Power of Local Action: Learning and Exploring Possibilities for Local Humanitarian Leadership*, p20. Oxfam America.  
<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/research-publications/power-local-action-oxfam-learning-compendium-local-humanitarian-leadership/>
- 19 'Integrated protection and education assistance for internally displaced children and youth and members of host communities, especially girls, affected by the security crisis in Dablo, Namissiguima and Pensa, Centre-Nord'.

20 The institutional and community actors include: Dori town hall; Sahel Regional Council; the Health Office technical services at the local level (Regional Health Direction-DRS, health district, regional hospital-CHR, and Health and Social Promotion Centres-CSPS); water and sanitation technical services (Regional Water and Sanitation Direction-DREA, National Water and Sanitation Office-ONEA); technical and financial partners (UNICEF, Oxfam, Danish Refugee Council-DRC, CHEMONIC International, etc.); and local associations and NGOs (ACODEV, NJAYRI, Burkinabe Human and People's Rights Movement MBDHP/SENO, Sahel Youth Regional Council-CRJ/SHL, and Sahel ECO - Engineering).

21 Supported by Oxfam and Children Believe.

22 Women lawyers, *Cadre de concertation pour l'éducation de base*, a network of former women parliamentarians and lawyers.

23 An irrigation method used in intensive market gardening, originally from Burkina Faso.

24 'Strengthening the resilience of vulnerable displaced households in Djibo'.

25 C. Fabre. (2017). *Localising the Response*. OECD.  
<https://www.oecd.org/development/humanitarian-donors/docs/Localisingtheresponse.pdf>



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