

Concept Note on a Ministerial Roundtable on the Central Sahel

Responding to Humanitarian Challenges in a Long-Term Perspective

Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

Co-hosted by Denmark, Germany, the European Union, and the United Nations

The security and humanitarian situation in the Central Sahel have deteriorated significantly over the last few years. In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, several complex and fast-growing crises are developing with unprecedented levels of armed violence, insecurity and displacement. Thousands of civilians have been killed and hundreds of thousands forced to flee their homes. In addition, insecurity and forced displacement are destroying the social fabric of communities and disrupting basic social services and governance. Food insecurity and human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, are on a sharp rise.

All this is unfolding in a region at the bottom of global development indices. Across the Sahel, already-severe vulnerabilities are deepening due to the convergence of poverty, social exclusion, rapid population growth, food insecurity, internal displacement, weak governance, violent extremism and conflict. In addition, climate change is severely impacting communities and exacerbating conflict dynamics, putting a strain on centuries-old delicate relationships between farmers and herders. The region is warming at a rate one and a half times faster than the global average, with unpredictable rain patterns and frequent floods.

COVID-19 poses an additional emerging threat to the region that may exacerbate ongoing crises even further and stretch already weak systems and structures. Women and girls are disproportionately exposed to the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. This involves a heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence, threats to reproductive health, exploitation and a deepening of pre-existing inequalities.

While access to affected populations is challenged by the deteriorating security situation, humanitarian needs are substantial and growing fast. In 2020, 7.5 million people across the three countries will need urgent humanitarian assistance. In **Mali**, the number of people in need of urgent life-saving humanitarian assistance is expected to reach 4.9 million this year – an increase of more than a million compared to the beginning of 2019. In **Burkina Faso**, nearly one-third of the population is affected by the crisis, and 2.9 million people are currently in need of life-saving humanitarian assistance. In Western **Niger**, 1 million people are expected to need assistance in 2020. Altogether, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), on behalf of the humanitarian community, is urgently appealing for more than US\$1 billion to support the most vulnerable in the region in 2020. Without timely and sufficient resources, the humanitarian crises will continue to escalate, further eroding the resilience of communities and putting millions of vulnerable children, women and men at further risk.

The challenge is not just about mobilizing sufficient resources for humanitarian assistance. It is equally important to better align humanitarian, development and peace actors behind collective outcomes to the extent possible and relevant, and to strengthen the capacity of and partnerships with national governments and local authorities to protect development gains and in support of sustainable recovery. In this perspective, the provision of principled humanitarian assistance must be framed within a nexus **perspective**, thus strengthening collaboration, coherence and complementarity with development, and peacebuilding efforts to the greatest extent possible and in a manner that capitalizes on the comparative advantages of involved stakeholders. The overall aim is to ensure adequate humanitarian assistance and sustainable recovery for affected communities and institutions, including efforts that focus on reducing vulnerabilities, durable solutions for displaced populations, and humanitarian civil-military coordination.

To discuss these perspectives, and to gather political momentum and mobilize support from donors, a **virtual Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)**, leading up to a **Ministerial Roundtable**, on the humanitarian situation in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger will be organized in September 2020. The conferences will be co-hosted by

Denmark, Germany, the European Union (ECHO), and the United Nations (led by OCHA with UNDP) – in conjunction with other international efforts and initiatives in support of the Sahel, including the ECOSOC Transition Event to discuss the transition from relief to development in June.

Ahead of the conference, a short document will be issued by the United Nations, summarizing the needs and responses in all three countries with respect to protection and humanitarian assistance, while also outlining the required interlinkages with longer-term development efforts and policy action in support of lasting solutions.

Objectives and outcomes

The objectives and outcomes of the SOM and the Ministerial Roundtable will be to:

- Mobilize humanitarian and complementary development and resilience resources for organizations serving the most vulnerable and at-risk people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – preferably in the form of flexible, multi-year funding. Concrete outcomes will include financial pledges for 2020 and/or 2021.
- Galvanize political support, including at national level, for principled humanitarian action, unimpeded humanitarian access to those affected by the crises, and strengthened protection of civilians. Concrete outcomes could be political commitments regarding principled humanitarian assistance, respect for international humanitarian law, and effective humanitarian civil-military coordination.
- Support the elaboration of a framework of collaboration between humanitarian action, development, and peacebuilding, and propose country-specific roadmaps for sustainable recovery. Concrete outcomes could include country-specific roadmaps for an effective nexus approach, and national government commitments regarding the provision of basic services and to durable solutions.

Organization and Participation

The Senior Officials' Meeting (virtual) in early September will bring together representatives from affected governments, civil society actors, the UN and international humanitarian and development organizations, multilateral financing institutions and bilateral and multilateral donors. The purpose will be to review operational lessons learned and forward-looking plans in select thematic tracks that cut across humanitarian action, development cooperation and peace efforts, while paying special attention to the impact and consequences of COVID-19.

All UN Member States will be invited to participate at the Senior Official/Director level, including the affected governments, bilateral or multilateral donors, and regional actors. Also, operational UN agencies, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movements, non-governmental organizations, civil society representatives, multilateral financial institutions, and other key stakeholders will be invited and will inform the discussion.

The Ministerial Roundtable will take place by the end of October in Copenhagen, Denmark (pending the COVID-19 situation). It will consist of:

- A ministerial-level opening session
- Short thematic panels, building on the outcomes of the senior officials' meeting.
- Pledging event with member state and donor interventions.
- Closing session.

A co-chairs' summary document will be prepared at the conclusion of the conference, identifying key action points and opportunities for follow-up.