

A stylized world map composed of various shades of blue polygons, serving as a background for the top section of the document.

DISCUSSION PAPER No. 336

Climate change and conflict in the Central Sahel: A shared responsibility to support local resilience

By Maëlle Salzinger and Sophie Desmidt

March 2023

In the Central Sahel, both the climate and security crises are acute. Strengthening the ability of local communities and actors to respond and adapt to shocks is pivotal and urgent.

This paper shows that regional support to local resilience is much-needed but should have a stronger focus on vulnerable areas. Regional, national and international actors should better coordinate their actions based on regional organisations' comparative advantages. They should also simplify existing coordination and cooperation mechanisms; which, more importantly, should be led and owned by the region.

The responses to the crisis should also rely more on localised gender-sensitive and conflict-sensitive analyses and take into account psychological factors. They should be more informed by Sahelian expertise and able to rely on more (flexible) funding, including from Sahel states towards their own regional organisations.

Lastly, stronger support for community resilience should not divert from the state's responsibility to protect civilians and ensure basic living conditions. Support for resilience should be complementary and reaffirm the state's primary role to address governance issues and protect civilians through military and non-military measures.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Acronyms	iv
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
Key findings	3
1.Regional responses to address climate change and insecurity in the Sahel.....	3
2.The need for fine-grained and locally grounded context analysis.....	4
2.1. Gender and youth in the Central Sahel	4
2.2. Conflict sensitivity that recognises complex drivers and actors.....	6
2.3. More attention for psychological factors is needed.....	9
3.Donor dependency and its effects	11
3.1. Financing responses: an enduring challenge.....	11
3.2. Effects of donor dependency on regional responses	12
3.3. Effects of donor dependency on local initiatives.....	12
4.Coordinated and integrated responses.....	13
4.1. Coordination challenges	13
4.2. Siloed regional responses	14
4.3. Promising examples of integrated regional approaches	15
5.Finding the right balance between people’s resilience and state responsibility.....	16
5.1. Limited use of local resilience mechanisms.....	16
5.2. From short-term coping mechanisms towards long-term resilience.....	17
5.3. The state’s primary responsibility to respond to the crisis	18
6.Sahel-led responses and knowledge production	19
6.1. New types of local partners and initiatives	20
6.2. Regional leadership over regional responses	21
6.3. Sahel-led knowledge production	22
7.Ways forward	23
References.....	26

List of Boxes

Box 1: Presentation of the OKP-RESCOM Sahel project	iii
Box 2: Example from local level research in Filingué (Niger)	5
Box 3: Examples of various actors involved in communities' security responses in Mali	8
Box 4: The importance of taking into account psychological factors	9
Box 5: Community responses to security challenges in Burkina Faso and perceptions of state responsibility	19
Box 6: Legal clinics and caravans: promising practices for the Sahel.....	20

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all partners involved in the OKP RESCOM Sahel project for the collaboration and exchanges throughout the project. This includes the teams of the three partners universities in particular; the University of Joseph Zi-Kerbo in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the University of Legal and Political Sciences in Bamako, Mali, and the University of Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, Niger.

In particular we would like to thank Professor Amadou Boureima and Dr. Lawali Dambo from the University of Abdou Moumouni (Niger), Professor Tanga Pierre Zoungrana from the University of Joseph Zi-Kerbo (Burkina Faso) and Professor Moussa Djiré from the University of University of Legal and Political Sciences (Mali). We would also like to thank Joop Clappers from CINOP and Diederik de Boer from MSM. Special thanks go to Stefano Locatelli from MSM for his overall management of the research project.

The authors would also like to thank all the interviewees for their time to engage with us over the past two years. Finally, the authors would like to give special thanks to ECDPM colleagues for their various contributions and advice, in particular Volker Hauck for his advice and guidance, but also Sara Giancesello and Kawsar Laanani for their research support. We would also like to thank Joyce Olders and Yaseena Van 't Hoff for their support in the editing and layout, and infographics of this paper (respectively).

Box 1: Presentation of the OKP-RESCOM Sahel project

The OKP-RESCOM Sahel project

The OKP-RESCOM Sahel project aims to generate knowledge on the interactions between climate change, conflict, security issues and the rule of law in the Central Sahel (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso) and to identify measures for long-term capacity building and resilience of local communities. Axe I of the project is a joint research project with the three Sahelian universities on community resilience, security and rule of law in the context of climate change and conflict in the Central Sahel. The funder of this study is the Netherlands Organisation for Internationalisation of Education (NUFFIC).

Research Consortium

The consortium of the OKP-SHL-104897 project "Climate Change, Security and the Rule of Law in the Sahel: Optimising the Contribution of Universities to Strengthen Community Resilience" is composed of three Universities in the Central Sahel and three Dutch institutions:

- Université des sciences juridiques et politiques de Bamako (USJPB), Mali
- Université Abdou Moumouni de Niamey (UAM), Niger
- Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo (UJKZ) de Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- Maastricht School of Management (MSM), The Netherlands
- European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), The Netherlands
- CINOP, The Netherlands.



Acronyms

ALG	Liptako Gourma Authority
AU	African Commission
CGD	Centre for Democratic Governance
CILSS	Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel
CNPV	National Centre for the Promotion of Volunteering in Mali
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSS	Sahelian Security College of Bamako
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
ECOWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EUMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
FemWise	Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GGWI	Great Green Wall Initiative
HD	Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
IDP	Internally displaced people
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
LASDEL	Study and Research Laboratory on Social Dynamics and Local Development
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LGA	Liptako-Gourma authority
LoCAL	Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility
MISAHIEL	African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHIEL)
MSM	Maastricht School of Management
NBA	Niger Basin Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRM	Natural resource management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PATI	Prosper Africa Trade and Investment
PIC	Niger Basin Authority's Investment Plan for Building Resilience to Climate Change
PRAPS	Regional Support Project for Pastoralism in the Sahel
RBM	Billital Maroobé Network
SDS	Security and Development Strategy
SRS	Lake Chad Basin Commission's Security and Resilience strategy
UAM	University Abdou Moumouni de Niamey
UEMOA	West African Economic and Monetary Union
UJKZ	University Joseph Ki-Zerbo
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
USJPB	University of Legal and Political Sciences of Bamako
VDP	Volunteers for the Defence of the Fatherland
WASCAL	West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use

Executive Summary

This paper presents the main takeaways from research on the impact of climate change and conflict on local resilience in the Central Sahel, as part of the OKP-RESCOM project.¹ This project was a collaboration between three universities in the Central Sahel (Universities of Joseph Zi-Kerbo in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the University of Legal and Political Sciences in Bamako, Mali, and the University of Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, Niger) and three Netherlands-based organisations (CINOP, the Maastricht School of Management (MSM), and ECDPM, the Centre for Africa-Europe relations).

This paper is based on two key strands of research, namely field research in selected locations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger; and a regional-level analysis of the role of regional and subregional organisations in supporting community' resilience.² Through this research, we arrived at **six key findings on how local, national and regional actors respond to the combined challenges of climate change and insecurity in the Central Sahel**. We also present **seven ways forward** to overcome current challenges and improve responses to the crisis.

Our six key findings:

- 1. Regional responses and partnerships to address climate change and insecurity are emerging and show complementarities, but remain under-explored:** The origins and effects of climate change and conflicts do not stop at borders and require sustained coordination and collaboration. Border areas in the Central Sahel are fragile and insufficiently addressed by regional actors. Further, some regional organisations have set up partnerships but **many areas of complementarity remain under-explored**, for instance on the linkages between military, non-military and socio-economic measures against insecurity.
- 2. Supporting the resilience of Sahel communities requires a much more fine-grained and locally grounded context analysis:** The diverse roles of **youth and women** in climate adaptation, peace- and resilience-building activities are increasingly recognised by various actors active in the region but structural barriers remain for them to participate effectively. International actors insufficiently take into account the inherently political nature of climate adaptation which is linked to governance and the distribution of natural resources, and the complex interactions between local communities and various conflict actors. These issues are deprioritised in **the fight against (international) terrorism**. Communities' experience of continued violence, displacement and poverty also points to the need to give psychological factors more attention.
- 3. Current resources are insufficient, and donor dependency prevents supporting resilience processes durably: Not enough resources** are geared towards building sustainable resilience in the Central Sahel, at the local and regional level. Sahel states' financial contributions to the regional organisations they have set up are low or even missing in certain cases. This **prevents regional organisations from** going beyond temporary, project-based interventions that rely primarily on international donor funding. This **reliance is unsustainable and affects** responses, which are marked by short-termism, limited funding flexibility, and a lack of systematic anchoring in local processes.

¹ See Box 1.

² Regional organisations looked at during this research include the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS), the Liptako Gourma Authority (ALG), the Niger Basin Authority (NBA), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the G5 Sahel, West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL).

-
4. **More coordinated and integrated responses are urgently needed:** At present, there is a lack of coordination between various actors working on climate and security issues without a common- agenda in the Sahel, including NGOs, governments, local actors, technical services, and regional organisations. Siloed approaches to climate change adaptation, (human) development and security persist, with few regional organisations setting up integrated approaches that help communities face the pressure of combined challenges.
 5. **Current responses risk creating an imbalance between the need for people’s resilience and state responsibility:** Communities in the Sahel have developed resilience mechanisms to deal with climate impacts and insecurity. But these are **not sufficiently understood, supported and used by regional and international actors**. At the same time, in a context of continued high insecurity, many communities are forced to adopt (potentially) negative coping mechanisms. Communities are rightfully calling for **improved governance and stronger state accountability as primary solutions** to the crisis.
 6. **Sahel-led responses and knowledge production receive insufficient attention:** Sahelian knowledge brokers and experts are underrepresented in the research and discussions that concern them. International actors have greater visibility, influence over knowledge and programming, and do not always support Sahelian leadership and coordination in practice. Still, diverse local actors can play a greater role in analysing the crises and leading responses, including universities and local expert networks.

Seven ways forward to address these challenges (more detailed in the conclusion):

1. **Regional responses should- be based on partnerships that make the best use of regional actors’ comparative advantages, and have a stronger focus on border areas.** Such responses should deliberately aim to support community resilience via a combination of measures to strengthen peace and stability, connect peripheral communities to urban centres, restore economic activities and public services, and help sustain livelihoods in case of climate shocks.
2. **More conflict- and gender-sensitive responses that take into account psychological aspects of communities’ experiences can support more effective and sustainable responses to the Sahel crisis.** This implies investing in localised assessments that take into account better the complex political, economic and psychological factors that play into the conflict, while recognising the diverse landscape of actors involved. Improving our understanding of this complex context requires stronger Sahelian leadership over the (conflict) analysis and stepping away from a singular focus on combating terrorism.
3. **Financial resources to address the climate and security crises in the Sahel should be increased, especially via Sahel countries holding up to their commitment of financing their regional organisations.** Funding by international and national actors can support more interventions (including at the regional level) that support local resilience efforts. This support will need to become **more flexible on criteria, planning and procedures** so that regional actors, local CSOs and local innovators can develop responses gradually and based on their needs and priorities, and ensure a systematic anchoring in local processes and realities.
4. **Regional coordination efforts should push for simplified coordination mechanisms and more integrated responses to climate, security and governance challenges.** These are better suited to the Sahel crisis because they can bring multiple dividends in a context of strained resources. This would require adopting conflict-sensitive approaches to natural resource management and climate adaptation at the local level,

and building on the emerging experiences of regional programmes that promote integrated approaches such as PRAPS and FREXUS.

5. **Community resilience strategies should be better understood, supported and capitalised on by national, regional and international actors.** This includes ensuring coherent approaches to human mobility as a key resilience strategy for pastoralists and other vulnerable populations in the region. National and international actors should also provide more support to peaceful community dialogue initiatives, to help communities avoid negative coping strategies like compromising with terrorist groups.
6. **The primary responses to the crisis should be centred on state responsibility, with support for community resilience as a complementary measure.** This is because state capacities remain essential to withstand shocks like terrorist attacks and extreme weather events. Responses to the conflict should focus on improving governance (access to- and quality of public services, justice and natural resources) and protecting civilians' lives through a combination of military and non-military responses.
7. **Sahelian leadership over regional responses to the climate and security crises in the Sahel should be better recognised.** This applies to the implemented actions, and the knowledge production that informs them. Diverse Sahelian actors including facilitators, researchers and local innovators should drive responses to the crisis, as they are far better placed to navigate this complex environment. Different forms of joint programming and research exist and can lead to promising results that recognise Sahelian agency.

Introduction

In the Central Sahel, and in particular in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, the effects of climate change are expected to intensify over the next decades. Experts' analysis and data suggest the region will see more severe and frequent extreme weather events (droughts, floods) but also more pronounced slow-onset effects, such as more variable rain patterns, higher temperatures and humidification, amongst others (IPCC. 2019, IPCC. 2021). These climate change effects are already affecting land degradation, loss of biodiversity, and alteration in the availability and quality of resources, notably water and arable land, with the effects expected to become worse over the next decades. These climate change effects directly affect people's livelihoods (especially those based on agriculture, pastoralism and forestry) and food security in the Central Sahel. They put pressure on the resilience capacities of communities, which differ among individuals depending on various factors, including gender and age (Desmidt et al. 2021).

The Sahel is also marked by a myriad of conflicts. Insecurity in the Sahel is fuelled by structural problems including governance and poor progress in human development. Operations by state security actors and activities by various types of armed groups including terrorist groups, foreign military actors (e.g. Wagner group in Mali), and self-defence militias have compounded the violence and lack of human security in the region. In some areas, armed groups, including terrorist groups affiliated with religious violent extremist groups (such as the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda), are seen as alternatives to the state in providing order and justice. Organised criminal networks and armed bandits also feed into the violence and theft faced by communities, and allow armed groups to access weapons. Increasingly, climate change effects interact with security dynamics. In some areas, competition over natural resources is being instrumentalised by armed groups.

In the Central Sahel, both the climate and security crises are acute. Strengthening the resilience of local communities and actors, understood here as the ability to respond and adapt to shocks, but also improve the capacity to do so, is primordial. Regional, national and local actors are applying a range of activities to support this aim, with varying degrees of success. Jointly, increasing insecurity, the effects of climate change, but also deepening socio-economic exclusion (particularly affecting youth, women and girls, remote rural areas, and certain ethnic groups) are eroding people's resilience. This is undermining the effectiveness of efforts to (re-)build or strengthen resilience. In some cases, this combination of pressures can make certain population groups (including youth) more vulnerable to violent extremist rhetoric.

This paper presents the main takeaways from research conducted in the Central Sahel, on the impact of climate change and conflict on local resilience, called OKP-RESCOM.³ It brings together two main research components, i.e. learning from local level research in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger; and a regional-level analysis. The first component was the research conducted at the local and national level to better understand how exactly climate change and insecurity are affecting resilience in the region; and how local communities and local and national actors are responding to these challenges. This research was conducted by research teams at the Universities of Joseph Zikerbo in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, the University of University of Legal and Political Sciences in Bamako, Mali, and the University of Abdou Moumouni in Niamey, Niger. This research is summarised in three country reports (Amadou et al. 2022; Zoungrana et al. 2022; Sow et al. 2022) and a synthesis report (USJPB, UAM et UJKZ 2022), which have helped inform and enrich this paper with new insights and concrete examples. To highlight this highly relevant local level research, we include boxes with detailed examples and observations from the three country reports and the synthesis report. The second component of our research focused on the approaches developed by regional and subregional organisations⁴ to respond to these combined challenges in the Central Sahel. In the next

³ See Box 1.

⁴ Regional organisations looked at during this research include the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre

section, we present six sets of findings from this research. In the concluding section, we discuss six ways forward to overcome current challenges.

la Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS), the Liptako Gourma Authority (ALG), the Niger Basin Authority (NBA), the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), the G5 Sahel, West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL).

Key findings

1. Regional responses to address climate change and insecurity in the Sahel

Key messages:

- *Regional responses are crucial to support the resilience to climate change and insecurity of populations in the Sahel, considering that the origins and effects of climate change and conflicts do not stop at borders and require sustained coordination and collaboration.*
- *Some regional organisations have aimed to set up partnerships in this direction in the Sahel, but many areas of complementarity remain under-explored. Border areas are fragile and insufficiently addressed by regional actors. Promising cross-border cooperation initiatives provide entry points to develop regional responses.*

Regional organisations increasingly recognise the linkages between climate change and conflict but are struggling to develop holistic responses to the crisis in the Central Sahel. It is increasingly recognised across the region that reinforcing people’s socio-economic resilience, for instance via climate change adaptation, helps farmers and pastoralists improve their production in difficult climate conditions. Where there are strong pull factors from armed groups, strengthened resilience can make them- less vulnerable from attacks but also in certain cases to recruitment by terrorist groups. It can also allow people to stay in their communities rather than migrate to urban areas where tensions are growing between host communities and newcomers. Climate change adaptation can be an indirect response to insecurity (among others), a perspective incorporated in the concept of "climate-related security risks"⁵. The Lake Chad Basin Commission has been the most explicit in recognising the need to address the negative security impacts of climate change in the Lake Chad Basin. This is influenced by the Boko Haram crisis, marked by a narrative emerging in the 2010s that the shrinking of Lake Chad fuelled violence by encouraging idle farmers and fishermen to join Boko Haram This trend has given increased visibility to the potential links between change and security (Skah and Lyammouri 2020). In contrast, ECOWAS does not explicitly recognise the links between insecurity and climate change in its policies, but makes links between insecurity and environmental challenges related to natural resources.

Some regional organisations have set up dedicated partnerships to address these challenges. For example, ECOWAS, CILSS and UEMOA signed a tripartite agreement to address climate change and environmental degradation in the Central Sahel (Salzinger et al. 2022). However, there are areas of complementarity between regional organisations which could be utilised more. For example, the Liptako-Gourma Authority has developed a less militarised, more localised security approach (*“sécurité de proximité”*) while the G5 Sahel’s approach has been informed predominantly by a militarised perspective (though with increasing efforts to find complementarity with development approaches).

Climate change and insecurity have compounding effects on peripheral and border regions in the Sahel. As a result of their relative distance from centres of power and decision-making and generally poorer socio-economic conditions, these areas (often badly connected rural areas) are more vulnerable to the effects of insecurity and climate change. In addition, border areas function as “passerelles” for trade, (circular) migration but also arms and

⁵ Organisations such as the UN or the Global Security Initiative often use the term 'climate security'. There are several definitions for this term, see Salzinger et al. (2022) (internal) for a presentation and discussion of this term. For this report, we prefer to use the formulation 'climate change risks' as it better expresses that climate change is one of several risks that put pressure on human security.

weapons. International organised criminal actors and groups use these trading routes and border crosses. The circulation of arms in the region is not new, and strong links have been established between the ongoing war in Libya and armed groups in the Sahel (Amadou et al. 2022). Trafficking of drugs and natural resources also takes place along these same routes, which have become increasingly militarised and securitised in recent years yet still lack proper, effective regulation (Salzinger et al. 2022).

Regional organisations recognise that priority has to be given to reinforcing the resilience of peripheral and border areas. But in practice, the majority of their resilience-building measures do not take place in these zones, with the exception of some promising examples (see section 4). This is often due to the fact that these areas are remote, with low population density and with restricted access due to insecurity.

A challenge in the Sahel is to address urgent needs linked to the security context, while also supporting people's resilience to insecurity and climate change as objectives with the potential to reinforce each other. This calls for caution and reflection on how to best use resources, in the support of activities that can build opportunities at both short and long-term. For instance, supporting and connecting solidarity networks and local authorities can help them build more effective direct responses to insecurity, and set the stage for longer term collaboration to improve community livelihoods. A good example is the support given by the G5 Sahel and UEMOA to local authorities. They have placed a strong emphasis on infrastructure and connectivity (see the PATI program) and also support cross-border cooperation between local authorities (C3 Sahel).

2. The need for fine-grained and locally grounded context analysis

Key messages:

- *Regional organisations increasingly recognise that youth and women play essential but diverse roles in conflicts and climate adaptation efforts in the Central Sahel. However, responses still do not integrate the challenges they face enough, including structural barriers to participate effectively in peacebuilding, climate adaptation and resilience-building activities.*
- *Efforts to strengthen community resilience remain overly technical and lack conflict sensitivity. International actors insufficiently take into account the inherently political nature of climate adaptation, and the complex interactions between local communities and security actors. In their heavy focus on the fight against (international) terrorism, they de-prioritise important local factors that fuel insecurity like poor governance, socio-economic inequalities and conflicts over natural resources.*
- *Psychological factors also merit more attention including in PCVE and peacebuilding responses, which could better acknowledge the profound impact of enduring stress and violence on local communities.*

2.1. Gender and youth in the Central Sahel

Responses to the Sahel crisis increasingly take into account gender and youth. Research from the region shows that while women and young people are heavily impacted by both climate change and insecurity in the Central Sahel, they also hold considerable adaptation capacity and knowledge (Salzinger et al. 2022). According to the OECD, women in the Sahel contribute to "40% of agricultural production, 80% of agricultural processing, and 70% of agricultural distribution work at the regional level" (McOmber 2020). For example, in certain areas, women and young people conduct land restoration or environmental protection activities during the dry season when most of

the men are away, and when women and the few young people constitute the bulk of the workforce (see also Box 2) (Amadou et al. 2022). Because these agricultural and land management activities are highly dependent on natural resources, women are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Box 2: Example from local level research in Filingué (Niger)

Surveys and interviews conducted during field research in Filingué, Niger highlight the essential roles women play in resilience and climate adaptation strategies. Land restoration activities such as half-moons, benches, zaï (Amadou et al. 2022)⁶ or environmental protection activities like the opening of strips by fire are generally carried out during the dry season when most of the men are on seasonal mobility. As a result, the women and the (few) young people who remain in the village constitute the main workforce during this time. Women's groups are also involved in a particular set of initiatives, such as fattening, managing off-season crops, agri-food processing and land reclamation activities.

When it comes to dealing with conflict and building peace, women and girls play important roles within their families and communities. (Young) Men are more likely to experience physical violence and die in conflict, and women to become single caretakers for their children and be displaced by conflict. This gives both genders a critical stake in peacebuilding efforts. In certain villages including in Mali, village and communal committees that organise community dialogues are mostly run by women leaders, precisely because women and children tend to be particularly vulnerable groups during conflicts (Sow et al. 2022). Women have also mobilised to support security responses, for instance by raising 50.000 FCFA to help the state's Antiterrorist Special Forces (FORSAT) recover after an attack in Tominian, Mali (USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022). Young people too, as the first group to be affected by widespread unemployment, food insecurity, and a sense of social exclusion, can make a difference in PCVE and conflict resolution efforts because they understand the grievances that push people to resort to violence.

Yet, women and youth face structural barriers to participation, such as exclusion from local (and national) decision-making, peace processes and natural resource management. Such barriers are compounded for young girls, who are faced with structural gender inequalities (such as restricted access to land, credit and insurance, and more limited mobility and migration) on top of challenges related to their age. These inequalities also affect women's resilience capacities in the face of climate change and its impacts on their livelihoods. Moreover, the exclusion of young people from economic and livelihood opportunities, decision-making and natural resource management further amplifies their vulnerability to climate risks. Particularly in rural areas, livelihoods based on traditional agriculture and livestock are becoming less viable for new generations due to environmental degradation and difficult access to natural resources, which are factors also exacerbated by climate change and related natural disasters (Salzinger et al. 2022). Disability is another factor of marginalisation and vulnerability which can compound inequalities based on gender and age (USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022).

In the Central Sahel, regional organisations increasingly recognise that youth and women are important actors in conflict situations, but their integration into security and climate adaptation responses remains limited. In addition, there is little evidence and information available on how the regional bodies are able to integrate **the many complex roles women** play in conflicts and peacebuilding. Generally, most programmes are inclined to integrate a perspective of women as victims and inherently peaceful and/or vulnerable, obscuring structural factors such as unequal access to (natural) resources or decision-making structures (USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022). Women's climate adaptation knowledge, too, remains under-recognised and under-utilised.

⁶ A cultivation technique that consists of placing manure, water and seed in pockets.

These are political issues which cannot be solved by purely technical, “tick the box” approaches to gender and age mainstreaming. Rather, measures like supporting and connecting women and youth advocacy groups and platforms can help them fight for more land rights and inclusive governance processes in their communities. This will help make sure that the experiences of women and youth and their potential to strengthen approaches to natural resource management (NRM) and climate adaptation are integrated into local mechanisms and structures. Efforts should be strengthened to make sure such responses are conflict sensitive and rooted in the demands of populations affected by insecurity and the effects of climate change.

Certain gendered, ethnic and socio-economic assumptions and stereotypes can hinder effective responses to crises. For instance, there is a tendency to equate the experiences of women and youth, whereas young women and young men face some distinct challenges that require differentiated approaches when seeking to support their resilience. To mitigate the risk of bias (i.e. the tendency to systematically see women or young people as the most vulnerable groups), solutions can be anchored in local experiences and realities and look at which specific factors of exclusion are stronger in certain communities, to better ensure context-specific approaches. This includes looking at ethnic groups or socio-professional groups, young migrants, and other groups that may face a particular set of challenges and risks while being underrepresented in peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes at the local and national levels (USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022). Further, looking at how multiple factors of disadvantage and exclusion may intersect in different contexts, can help develop better targeted and effective solutions to climate change impacts and insecurity in the Sahel that prioritise the most vulnerable.

2.2. Conflict sensitivity that recognises complex drivers and actors

Approaches to climate change and security challenges lack conflict sensitivity. Conflict sensitivity is key to ensure that activities can adapt to escalating conflict in implementation areas by changing implementation modalities or redeploying elsewhere, which requires flexible procedures. Instead, some organisations have reacted to the spread of insecurity in an ad hoc manner, and have therefore accumulated delays in implementation. This was the case, for instance, in the implementation of the AGIR regional resilience initiative by the CILSS.⁷

Conflict analysis also helps ensure climate programmes do not reinforce existing conflict dynamics. Climate responses have at times been presented as technical solutions. Yet, access to natural resources depends on governance structures which are defined by a range of political and economic factors, and where (historical) processes of exclusion shape access to resources and influence decision-making. For instance, herders’ shrinking access to land in the Sahel can be linked to public policies and land laws that favour other types of exploitation (agriculture, mining, etc.) and to herders’ exclusion from political decision-making processes (RBM and Pellerin 2022). Therefore, in contexts marked by communal tensions, violent activities by armed groups and growing competition over resources, responses to climate change which enable increased access to (natural) resources for part of the population become contentious. Field level research showed that respondents raised ancient rivalries and access to land resources as factors that have facilitated the infiltration of armed terrorist groups and the advent of insecurity. In various places these actors have been able to manipulate rivalries between different ethnic groups and/or between different professional categories (e.g. farmers and pastoralists) (Zoungrana et al. 2022).

Most responses to insecurity in the Sahel have focused on halting violent attacks by armed groups in the short term. This is understandable but fails to address structural issues of access to resources and socio-economic inequalities that feed into the conflict. Responses to insecurity by state actors especially, and to a certain extent by local actors, in the Central Sahel to insecurity are heavily militarised, and focus on pushing back violent terrorist (extremist and/or jihadist) groups as quickly as possible. Some of the measures to respond to insecurity, like

⁷ Interview, regional organisations, 8 June 2021. From: Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

curtailing mobility or installing curfews, affect livelihoods and hamper the ability of local communities to deploy coping and resilience measures. For example, restricted mobility limits the possibility to move to other parts of the region or to capital cities in search of alternative livelihoods (e.g. through circular or seasonal mobility). This risks trapping communities in situations of heightened vulnerability to both climate change and insecurity. Military responses also tend to put more focus on targeting the leaders of terrorist groups than on protecting the civilian population (ISS 2022), which is approached by security and defence forces with suspicion of duplicity, and in a number of cases, with violence.

In particular, Western donors have tended to adopt a narrow focus on “islamist terror” rather than a human security approach in the Sahel, despite the myriad forms that violence and the conflict take. Inter-ethnic and inter-communal tensions and violence (for instance related to natural resources) are affecting communities and are being instrumentalised by armed groups. In addition, violent actors perform a wide array of activities and functions. Violent groups driven by religious motives commit attacks against civilians and security forces, and finance their activities through smuggling, banditry and theft (for instance, the theft of livestock) as part of local and international organised crime (ISS 2022). Therefore, security responses could put more focus on reducing the revenue flows of the terrorist groups which finance themselves via illicit trade (for instance, the theft of livestock) and international organised crime (ISS 2022). Some violent groups also perform social services (justice, education) and provide forms of protection to local communities. It is also important to note that there is a wide spectrum ranging from more active to more passive support of community members towards terrorist groups, as communities try to survive in difficult living conditions.

Other actors engaged in military and violent activities include foreign military actors (such as special military operations by France⁸ and the U.S.), **mercenary groups** (e.g. the Russian Wagner group is active in Mali, and possibly soon in Burkina Faso) (ACLED 2023), as well as the **self-defence militias** or armed self-defence movements (for example the koglweogo) (Zoungrana et al. 2022) which sometimes rely on the use of traditional hunters such as "Dozos". These militias are active in all three countries despite communities adopting various resilience strategies to deal with insecurity (see Box 3 on Mali). The number of self-defence groups are on the rise, funded by local groups including for example women’s associations, who wish to defend their community against terrorist groups. Some women also contribute to terrorist activities or to the operations of violent groups by providing their members with information, food, health care, protection and sometimes even encouraging young people to join these groups (Amadou et al. 2022).

Most analyses do not give full justice to this complexity of the conflict and conflict actors (Assanvo et al. 2019). The research conducted under this project at the local level describes the interplay of actors in areas subject to chronic insecurity: “It is as if the orchestration of actors leaves no empty space for local and external actors. Each actor plays his or her part, whether voluntarily or not, contributing to the sinuosities of insecurity in the area.”(USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022) Yet, local armed militia groups are insufficiently taken into account compared to terrorist or ‘jihadist’ groups in most analyses of the conflict (Sow et al. 2022; Amadou et al. 2022; Desmidt et al. 2021). The interlinkages between various drivers of conflict and instability (including between climate change and security challenges), but also between various actors, need to be better understood and navigated by policy makers. This is especially important in a context of loss of trust between state, security and defence forces, and local communities, where different perceptions of conflict actors complicate peacebuilding efforts. For example, across the Central Sahel, many communities think terrorist and armed groups are mainly foreign actors from Mali. In other

⁸ Some sources indicate that a number of civilians have been killed by French Forces since the beginning of France’s military engagement in Mali, while the French army has shown little willingness to investigate these deaths (see Freudenthal et al. 2021).

regions, state security forces assume local communities are complicit in attacks, leading to reprisals and violent attacks, including in many cases, grave human rights abuses (Zoungrana et al. 2022; Sow et al. 2022).

Box 3: Examples of various actors involved in communities' security responses in Mali

Field level research in the different '*cercles*'⁹ around Ségou, Mopti and Gao in Mali show a diversity of actors involved in community level resilience strategies to deal with the security crisis. In various towns in Ségou, monitoring committees for peacebuilding and reconciliation have been set up and include different socio-professional groups, including fishers and farmers. Village councillors aim to involve community actors in restoring peace in town or within the wider '*cercles*', through regular meetings supported by (International) NGO such as the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and the Centre National de Promotion du Volontariat au Mali (CNPV). Local families too, support these initiatives financially.

Around Gao, communities have set up conflict management mechanisms and intra- and inter-community consultation frameworks, and have trained local mediators. To some extent, this is contributing to restored trust between communities, and with the security and defence forces. In certain cases, NGOs are re-establishing themselves and financing different projects, including for rural women and youth.

Still, in many localities, armed forces have not been able to increase their presence. Around Mopti, self-defence groups remain key actors local communities rely on. Clashes between different groups including self-defence groups, also remain prevalent. Several inter-community peace agreements - for instance for example between the Peulh and Dogon communities - have been signed, facilitated by the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) under the auspices of the State, with the support of NGOs and associations. However, these agreements and other mediation efforts have not led to sustained stabilisation and peace in Central Mali, with the state and armed forces still largely absent in these areas.

⁹ A '*cercle*' is a local-level administrative unit in Mali. Mali is divided into eight regions and one capital district (Bamako); the regions are subdivided into 49 *cercles*. These subdivisions bear the name of their principal city.

2.3. More attention for psychological factors is needed

Psychological factors deserve more attention in considering responses to climate change and insecurity in the Sahel. In particular, programmes and interventions on preventing and countering violent extremism tend to stress the importance of religious ideology, lack of jobs and unemployment and the prospect of poverty as a key driver for radicalisation and recruitment in violent and/or extremist groups. Aspects of low morale and low psychological resilience also need to be taken into account, as well as emotional vulnerability or distress, linked to loss of employment or family/community members, exposure to violent attacks, gendered responsibilities under pressure, etc. (Amadou et al. 2022). The research conducted in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger shows that **communities live in fear of violence by militias, terrorist groups or security and defence forces**, leading to a form of “psychoses” (more explanation, see Box 4).

The terror experienced by communities where violent groups are active is compounded by- and contributes to other dynamics. **Frustration, resentment and fatalism** arise in part from perceptions of social injustice and corruption of state actors (USJPB, UAM et UJKZ 2022). In certain areas, refugees and displaced people, and certain ethnic or socio professional groups (e.g. herders) are stigmatised, which contributes to tensions between local communities and newly arriving groups.

Frustration about the lack of protection by the state and a loss of trust between communities and the state perpetuate this vicious cycle and leads to a **normalisation of violence**, with more youth going into small banditry and some becoming complicit with terrorist groups. Therefore, if responses to insecurity do not engage with such psychological and perception issues, they risk addressing only part of the problem.

Box 4: The importance of taking into account psychological factors

Local level research in the three countries stressed the importance of psychological factors. In Filingué, Niger, field respondents referred to a lack of faith and a loss of shared values due to the combined effects of security, governance and climate challenges, which **undermines social cohesion**.

The frequency and unpredictability of attacks is seen as having reached such a threshold, leading to a general state of fear and “psychosis” amongst local populations. According to several interviews, communities in Filingué live in daily fear, also fed by rumours about pending attacks. This **sense of fear, frustration and powerlessness** was also evoked across interviews in Mali, creating a heavy psychological burden on local communities.

In Burkina Faso, interviewees evoked the trauma of being forced to leave their village, birth place and homes. This leads to high levels of **stress and uncertainty** about prospects in the new destinations but also about the family and belongings left back home. Such concerns are further compounded by the **challenges and stigmatisation encountered by internally displaced people (IDP)s** like physical attacks, rape, theft, exclusion and marginalisation.

Conflict sensitivity that recognises complex drivers and actors

ecdpm



The key to conflict sensitivity is to ensure that activities are **adaptable** to escalating conflict in implementation areas with **flexible procedures**.



To inform crisis responses, **psychological factors** deserve more attention. These include feelings of abandonment, emotional vulnerability or distress, which can be linked to the loss of employment or family members, violent attacks, increased gendered responsibilities, etc.



Responses should recognise that access to natural resources **depends on governance structures** which are defined by a range of political and economic factors, and where (historical) processes of exclusion shape access to resources and influence decision-making.



Conflict analysis helps to ensure climate programmes **do not reinforce** existing conflict dynamics.



Responses to insecurity by states, and at times by local actors, are **heavily militarised** and focused on pushing back against **terrorist groups**.



Western donors too, overly focus on “Islamist terror” instead of taking a **human security approach** that recognises the different drivers, effects and actors involved in the conflict.



Most responses to insecurity in the Sahel have focused on halting violent attacks by armed groups in the **short term**. Yet, structural issues of inequalities that feed into the conflict are not addressed.



Conflict responses should give full justice to the **complex interplay of conflict actors** beyond terrorist groups. Understanding the different roles and perceptions of foreign militaries, mercenaries, self-defence groups, criminal networks but also women and young people, is key to building peace in a context of loss of trust between the state, security forces and communities.

3. Donor dependency and its effects

Key messages:

- *Not enough resources are geared towards building sustainable resilience in the Central Sahel, at the local and regional level.*
- *Financial contributions to regional organisations by member states from the region are low or even missing in certain cases. This prevents them from developing a long-term approach that goes beyond temporary, project-based interventions.*
- *This situation has created an unsustainable reliance on donor support and has led to suboptimal responses marked by short-termism, limited funding flexibility, and a lack of systematic anchoring in local processes.*

3.1. Financing responses: an enduring challenge

To address both the conflict and the impacts of climate change, the lack of financing is a major barrier in the Sahel.

At the local level, communities need resources to sustain and scale up climate adaptation and resilience techniques, while security forces struggle to cover the whole territory due to a lack of human and financial resources (also affecting their equipment) (Sow et al. 2022). In addition to limited resources, local level research shows that local decision-makers also do not always set appropriate mechanisms in place to manage investments and ensure they are right-sized and adapted to the needs of affected communities. At times, there are strong political incentives to invest in other areas, coupled with a low political will to address certain security and climate issues (Salzinger et al. 2022).

Insufficient investment in gender-sensitive climate and security interventions is, at least in part, a reflection of the low prioritisation of gender equality objectives by governments and local authorities (Salzinger et al. 2022). Regional organisations funded by West African and Sahel states may formulate ambitions to integrate gender in their programmes but without adequate resources to back it up, the feasibility of such commitments remains in question. This was the case for the Niger Basin Authority's Plan d'Investissement pour le Renforcement de la Résilience au Changement Climatique (PIC) and its programme PIDACC, which had objectives to integrate gender but limited budget available to make this happen at the organisational level (Green Climate Fund 2019; Vaucelle 2015).

More broadly, the scale and quality of regional interventions are impacted by limited resources. National contributions to regional organisations are low and even missing for certain organisations.¹⁰ This poses related challenges, with organisations like ECOWAS being forced to hire consultants under project-specific, temporary contracts which prevents building internal technical expertise like fundraising from global climate funds (which are deemed very difficult to access by Sahelian actors, both national and local)¹¹, or topical expertise that is internalised and institutionalised across the organisation, for instance on the nexus between climate change and security.¹² For organisations like the Liptako Gourma Authority who are seeking to expand their role to peace and security, having the resources to build new expertise is crucial but largely absent for the moment (Salzinger et al. 2022).

¹⁰ Interview, International NGO, 1 June 2021; Interview, Regional civil society organisation, 21 June 2021; Interview, Regional Organisation, July 2021. From: Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

¹¹ This refers in particular to the Green Climate Fund, the Global Environment Fund, the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF). USJPB, UAM and UJKZ (2022) (*internal*).

¹² Interview, Regional organisation, 28 May 2021; Entretien, International NGO, 1 June 2021. Regional report ECDPM.

3.2. Effects of donor dependency on regional responses

Because of limited resources and low investment by governments in regional organisations, regional organisations have very limited core funding and are often forced to rely on international donor funding, which is most often project-based and relatively short term. Various Sahel member states do not systematically live up to their financial commitments and planned contributions to the regional organisation they have set up. As a result, regional organisations are incentivised to design projects that appeal to international donors in terms of duration, structure and focus areas. This is problematic because such projects may be better aligned to donors' than regional priorities and interests. For instance, donors may have selective preferences as to which countries they want to 'invest' in, which hinders the development of regional programmes that benefit all countries equally (Salzinger et al. 2022). At the national level too, there is a strong inclination to focus on short-term, "emergency solutions" rather than long-term solutions that address structural issues. Even if the effects of national or local-level initiatives are tangible and relevant, international partners tend to support these short-term measures rather than structural solutions (Amadou et al. 2022).

Regional programmes are incentivised to satisfy rather superficial donor criteria to obtain funding or to monitor success. The criteria may focus on direct inputs and outputs rather than outcomes and impacts (for instance, the number of workshops on reconciliation given rather than changes in community behaviour and the decrease of community conflicts). Therefore, a number of regional programmes seem to share the shortcomings of international programmes, like **short-termism, limited flexibility, and a lack of systematic anchoring in local processes**. As a result, promising regional initiatives like WASCAL or the G5 Sahel Collège Sahélien de Sécurité exist but their sustainability is highly uncertain because of their dependence on international funding (Amadou et al. 2022).

3.3. Effects of donor dependency on local initiatives

Although international funding can support local and national responses to insecurity and climate change, the risks that arise from aid dependency are well documented (Moyo 2010). At the local level, community initiatives and local dynamism may be partly stifled because the population expects, and "waits" for external support (Amadou et al. 2022). At the same time, international support may not be as effective as hoped, which creates frustrations.

Donor dependency can also hinder innovation within local CSOs. Some analysts argue that many CSOs in the Sahel have become too close to donors' way of working and are no longer vectors of innovation (Sardan 2022). This is because local innovators able to critically assess problems and think of context-relevant solutions need to operate flexibly. But local CSOs often lack the experience and internal capacities to apply for international funding. Their approach to change, which is gradual and based on "try-fail-improve" is largely incompatible with most donors' bureaucratic constraints. Some organisations based in the region (for instance, LASDEL in Niger) are trying to identify local innovators and link them up in sub-regional networks, which could stimulate cross-learning and strengthen their shared capacity to respond and engage critically with donors (Sardan 2022).

Acknowledging that it will take time for governments and international organisations to adopt locally-led approaches and embrace local innovations, Sahelian organisations also increasingly advocate for **changes in large interventions to make them more effective and aligned with local needs**. This may include, for instance, measuring local perceptions more, and rethinking planning, procedures and logical frameworks to build in more flexibility and opportunities for continuous learning (Amadou et al. 2022). Another promising avenue is making (international) climate finance more accessible to local governments, to ensure these funds go to actions which are in line with local priorities. For instance, the Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL), which is hosted by UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and has already engaged in the three Central Sahel countries, delivers flexible grants

for climate adaptation as well as technical support and capacity building to manage such grants and apply to international climate funds like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) (UN 2023).

4. Coordinated and integrated responses

Key messages:

- *There is a lack of coordination between various actors working on climate adaptation in the Sahel, including NGOs, governments, local actors, technical services, and regional organisations. Multiple regional organisations are working on climate and security issues without a common- agenda.*
- *Siloed approaches to climate change adaptation, (human) development and security persist, with few regional organisations setting up fully integrated approaches to these issues.*
- *Still, a few promising examples exist within the region such as the projects PRAPS and FREXUS. These can form an evidence base for regional organisations and other actors seeking to develop integrated responses to complex climate-security challenges.*

4.1. Coordination challenges

Efforts to support climate adaptation are overall not coordinated enough in the Sahel. Local communities are applying a range of traditional and new techniques to respond to the impacts of climate change.¹³ Research in Burkina Faso shows that these practices and their application have been strengthened in some cases thanks to the support of NGOs and government technical services (Zoungrana 2022). However, there is an overall lack of coordination between NGOs, international projects and government technical services that support climate resilience. The actors who respond to the climate and security in the Sahel tend to adopt different approaches in different places and at different moments in time, leading to confusion amongst the population. A related issue is that some NGOs focus their activities on areas that are easier to reach, leaving out areas that are difficult to access but where needs are even higher (Amadou et al. 2022). To sustain long-term results, there is a need to coordinate to ensure the most vulnerable areas receive support, and to strengthen operational consultation frameworks for different stakeholders. Such consultation frameworks could help better target needs and plan responses, especially in rural areas where the target populations are very vulnerable (Zoungrana 2022).

At the regional level too, coordination is a challenge. In the Sahel, the African Union (AU) has launched and promoted its own flagship initiatives - for instance, the Great Green Wall - in response to climate and security related issues.¹⁴ Our research suggests that these programmes are not well-coordinated with regional actors and not well anchored within local contexts. Better coordination with regional organisations in the Sahel could have strengthened the implementation of AU projects at the local level. The sense among regional interlocutors across various regional organisations is that while regional organisations should be in the driving seat in formulating regional initiatives, the AU could have done more to coordinate with ROs, and to promote regional initiatives, for example in multilateral forums. At the same time, coordination mechanisms that could support better coordination by the AU in the Sahel, such as MISAHHEL, have not been sufficiently funded by AU member states. ECOWAS has pushed back on a stronger

¹³ These include for example, increased exploitation of fodder plants and establishing fodder stocks (crop residues, hay, straw); traditional short-cycle seeds and improved drought-resilient seeds; stocking of watercourses and the development of aquaculture perimeters (fish farming, etc.) but also the generalisation of zaï (a cultivation technique that consists of placing manure, water and seed in small pits dug in the soil).

¹⁴ This includes for example the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI), and the Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience Strategy (SRR) for the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin.

role for the AU in the Sahel, and other actors have shown a preference towards supporting other regional bodies such as the G5 Sahel (for example France).

Coordination is a challenge *amongst* regional organisations in the Sahel too. There are multiple organisations active in the field of security, climate change and development in the Central Sahel. These different ROs do not follow a common strategy in the Sahel even though they are working on similar issues. International actors show some reluctance to follow coordination dynamics in which they would not play a major decision-making role. With regard to climate-related security risks, a growing number of actors (especially international ones) are interested in developing responses in the Sahel despite the lack of a common framework to guide this approach that has been initiated, or at least appropriated, by the regional organisations. Given these difficulties of coordination, there is a risk of duplication on the one hand and a lack of shared analysis, lessons learned, and synergies on the other.

4.2. Siloed regional responses

In regional bodies and their institutions, siloed approaches persist between departments responsible for climate change adaptation, (human) development and security, despite the growing recognition that climate change and security challenges are interlinked. This poses the risk of regional policies being incoherent. Within regional bodies, narrowly defined expertise linked to specific positions and administrative burdens slow down reforms and contribute to the persistence of these siloed approaches.

The challenge of silos seems to be particularly high in the security sector, which tends to be more insulated from other sectors due to lesser transparency and more entrenched national security interests (Salzinger et al. 2022). For instance, the G5 Sahel's main policy framework, the Security and Development Strategy (SDS, G5 Sahel, 2016), plans various interventions on pastoralism, food security, climate change adaptation, social cohesion etc. all developed with the aim of fighting insecurity (Salzinger et al. 2022). Yet, in practice, there seems to be limited coordination between the G5 Sahel's governance, security and resilience departments. Some interventions seek to include a climate focus, for instance the Collège Sahélien de Sécurité de Bamako (CSS), which offers training on "environmental infringements". But this remains rather small-scale, while the major security interventions like the G5 Sahel Joint Force are military responses that do not seem to integrate climate-related security risks.

On a more structural level, our research suggests that the G5 Sahel remains primarily seen as a security actor whose actions are focused on the priorities of heads of state and are therefore more concerned with- the fight against insecurity through the Joint Force and infrastructure than climate resilience. International donors are also seen as prioritising security funding to the G5 Sahel (Salzinger 2022).

ECOWAS, too, tends to approach climate and security issues separately even though its work on climate-related security issues is evolving. For instance, ECOWAS produces separate early warning reports on security and climate change for member states.¹⁵ So, while institutional silos are persistent and cannot be changed overnight, working to address them may help regional actors ensure they are formulating coherent responses and approaching insecurity from different entry points including natural resource conflicts.

Important to note is that several regional organisations have not traditionally worked on security issues (such as the CILSS, the Niger Basin Authority, UEMOA, or the LGA) and are still building up experience, capacity and internal resources to address the security implications associated with climate change impacts. In the case of the African Union, efforts have focused primarily on establishing an institutional structure that takes into account the interdependence between climate change and security.

¹⁵ Interview, Regional organisation, 25 June 2021.

4.3. Promising examples of integrated regional approaches

Still, there have been regional attempts at developing integrated responses to tackle joint challenges like conflict and the impacts of climate change. Such projects provide an evidence base on which regional organisations and other actors can draw to develop future integrated responses, and they can help address some of the uncertainty attached with responding to complex climate-security linkages.

Some regional organisations are favouring research projects to foster a better understanding of climate related security risks and how this impacts people's resilience in the region. For instance, ECOWAS and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) are looking at the challenges and possible responses to climate-related security risks, with the support of research institutions and think tanks. For example, since 2015, ECOWAS has been working with the Lake Chad Basin Commission on the REWARD project ("Reacting to early warning and response data"), funded by USAID. This project develops risk, vulnerability and resilience analyses, integrating climate-related security issues for the 15 member countries and in the Lake Chad Basin.¹⁶

Promising examples of interventions on climate-related security challenges also exist, such as PRAPS and FREXUS. **PRAPS** (Projet Régional d'Appui au Pastoralisme au Sahel) aims to improve the productivity, sustainability and resilience of pastoralist livelihoods through pastoralists' access to key markets and services, and to improve their resilience and responses to pastoral and emergencies, including climate-related crises. This project implemented by CILSS and funded by the World Bank entered its second phase in 2021.

The FREXUS project, implemented under the lead of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, and the Niger Basin Authority with technical support provided by German cooperation and funded by the EU. FREXUS aims to put in place measures to enhance security and resilience by working at the water-energy-food security interface. In particular, it supports more conflict- and climate-sensitive management of land, natural resources and ecosystems, taking into account the needs of vulnerable groups (ABN 2021). As such, this project can be considered one of the few regional projects working at the interface of climate, security and resilience, starting from a particular ecosystem type (river basins) and working in cross-cutting ways (energy, water, (food) security).

Such projects provide an evidence base on which regional organisations and other actors can draw to develop future integrated responses, and can help address some of the uncertainty attached with responding to the complex climate-security linkages.

¹⁶ Ibid.

5. Finding the right balance between people’s resilience and state responsibility

Key messages:

- *Communities in the Sahel have developed resilience mechanisms to deal with climate impacts and insecurity, but these are not sufficiently understood, supported and used by regional and international actors to improve their own responses to the crisis. For instance, mobility and pastoralism tend to be seen as suspicious rather than resilient practices, which can lead to incoherent policy responses.*
- *In a context of continued high insecurity, the space for community resilience is very limited, and some are forced to adopt (potentially) negative coping mechanisms like forming self-defence militias and compromising with terrorist groups. Improved support for locally-led, non-militarised responses to insecurity such as community dialogue or village committees might allow community members to avoid using negative coping strategies.*
- *While strengthening community resilience to climate and security risks remains beneficial, communities cannot be expected to adapt to unliveable situations. That is why they are calling for improved governance and stronger state accountability as primary solutions to the current crisis.*

5.1. Limited use of local resilience mechanisms

Communities in the Sahel have adapted to changing circumstances linked to climate change and insecurity. They have developed various forms and mechanisms of resilience. For instance, in Mali, several communities have adapted to some of the effects of climate change by forming cooperatives. This allows them to pool resources for buying improved seeds and join forces and skills to adopt new, climate-smart ways to cultivate their crops. Being part of women’s cooperatives facilitate women’s access to land, credits and markets (Sow et al. 2022). In Niger and Burkina Faso too, communities are adapting agriculture and livestock production methods to an increasingly erratic climate. This includes market gardening to diversify production, improved seeds but also updating and spreading traditional methods like “zai”¹⁷ and “boulis” (Sow et al. 2022; Zoungrana et al. 2022).

Despite these techniques, people still leave agriculture or pastoralism behind and start a new activity in search of more stable revenues and better living conditions (USJPB, UAM and UJK 2022). This is, however, not an option for all, since the most vulnerable households face the risk of remaining trapped in dire conditions, as climate change too affects their incomes and hence their ability to move (Puig et al. 2021). Furthermore, insecurity and poor governance reduce communities’ ability to develop resilience strategies to climate change by triggering displacement, mobility restrictions and increased pressure on natural resources (Puig et al. 2021).

The scale of violence and disruption caused by the conflict has made it much harder for communities to “adapt”, as will be explained in the following subsection. Strategies have emerged, with more or less success. For instance, communities have set up dialogue mechanisms within and between communities aiming to include various groups (farmers, elders, women, etc.) and have at times sought to negotiate with terrorist groups to end hostilities, as mentioned already. In Gao, Mali, conflict resolution mechanisms have been developed (Sow et al. 2022; Zoungrana et al. 2022; Amadou et al. 2022). Some of these efforts have been supported by NGOs, state and international actors, although on a limited scale.

One challenge is also that certain forms of resilience are not always well understood by states and international actors. Notably, **human mobility is not sufficiently recognised as a way pastoralists and people use to cope or**

¹⁷ ‘Zai’ consists of digging holes in the soil during the pre-season to capture water and concentrate compost, with the aim of restoring degraded drylands and increasing soil fertility. A ‘bouli’ is a pond used to collect and store runoff water to ensure water supply for market gardening activities.

adapt to difficult situations. Due to climatic stress and changes in available resources like water and fertile land, pastoralists change their transhumance patterns - sometimes across borders - in search for greener pastures and water, while rural communities who can no longer sustain their agriculture and rearing-based livelihoods (also due to the expansion of commercial farming.) move to cities to work in other sectors like services (Zoungrana et al. 2022). However, governments and intergovernmental organisations including the EU may follow incoherent policies, simultaneously restricting mobility and promoting human resilience. ECOWAS for instance, has adopted key policies promoting freedom of movement and pastoral mobility like its Transhumance Protocol (1998) yet its Action Plan on livestock (2011-2020) approaches pastoralism as a problematic trend. These incoherencies reflect political tensions within ECOWAS between Central Sahel and Coastal states who see pastoralism largely as an opportunity, or a nuisance, respectively (Puig et al. 2021; Salzinger et al. 2022).

Overall, efforts to capitalise on communities' existing resilience mechanisms remain rather limited in regional and international programmes implemented in the Central Sahel (Salzinger et al. 2022). With such limited support from state and external actors, communities face many challenges to scale up their resilience practices because they have few technical, material and financial resources, and because urgent needs may trump investments into longer-term production practices (Sow et al. 2022).

Still, there are promising developments of regional actors supporting community-level development and cooperation. For instance, as mentioned above in section 1, the G5 Sahel, UEMOA and Liptako Gourma authorities work with local authorities to support the socio-economic development of border areas. The G5 Sahel supports the C3 Sahel (an association of border communities and their local authorities) and works with this cooperation initiative to implement infrastructure and territorial planning projects in the three-border region (Salzinger et al. 2022). This can inspire other programmes to scale up these efforts and strengthen other adaptation and resilience mechanisms adopted by communities.

5.2. From short-term coping mechanisms towards long-term resilience

Communities in the Sahel are impacted heavily by both the climate change and security crises, but these impacts differ in scale and timing. Overall, the effects of insecurity and conflict are more visible, immediate and life-altering. Community members lose peers or family members, live in fear and their freedoms (mobility, social interactions, dress, etc.) are restricted. This affects their morale and livelihoods, as access to fields and markets becomes more limited. When the situation becomes unbearable, people flee and become displaced. Their choice of options and their mental and material space to think of medium to long term solutions is therefore very limited.

As a result, communities have achieved forms of resilience to climate change by changing the way they manage natural resources and produce crops and livestock, but have struggled to develop resilience mechanisms in the face of continued insecurity. Research conducted in Tougan and Kongoussi, Burkina Faso highlighted relatively effective community responses to the climate crisis as opposed to the security crisis. Indeed, in response to the security crisis, people's alternatives were perceived as being much more curtailed, and often limited to moving to areas that were less insecure (see Box 5 in subsection 5.3). The massive flows of displacement in this region of Burkina Faso is deemed to be primarily an effect of the security crisis, not of climate change. In response to climate change, mobility is also an adaptation and resilience strategy, but on a smaller scale and as part of a wider set of adaptation practices.

Certainly, some communities have developed mechanisms to address security challenges that do not necessarily include the use of violence. **Non-military resilience measures** include (inter)community dialogue, where village and canton chiefs, but also youth and women's organisations and religious leaders, meet to discuss ways to solve local problems (Amadou et al. 2022; Zoungrana et al. 2022).

Still, in many cases people have been forced to adopt **negative coping methods** like restricting their own mobility to avoid attacks, not denouncing terrorist groups to authorities to avoid reprisals, fleeing their homes and negotiating with terrorist groups, with mixed results (Sow et al. 2022; USJPB, UAM and UJKZ 2022). While providing a form of protection for civilians in the short term, these methods also allow terrorist groups to gain ground and influence. In Burkina Faso for instance, agreements with terrorist groups had some negative side-effects (such as giving terrorist groups more freedom to impose their rules in communities) and did not lead to sustainable peace (Zoungrana et al. 2022). In addition, in all three countries, diverse self-defence militias ultimately contributed to escalating violence and harassment of civilians. For instance, some militias indiscriminately targeted herders and members of the Fulani ethnicity, based on the assumption that they were complicit with terrorist groups (Sow et al. 2022; Zoungrana et al. 2022; Amadou et al. 2022).

Negative coping mechanisms are not in line with the transformative aspect of resilience. In theory, resilience should give communities the ability to develop long term solutions to the crises they face. More support for non-military responses like community dialogue to complement (not replace) military measures could help reduce cases where communities feel forced into cooperating with terrorist groups, by lack of other alternatives.

It remains a question whether achieving community resilience to the very acute conflict situation in the Sahel is possible, and whether resilience to climate change can be sustained while basic services and security are not in place. What is clear is that promoting conflict-blind climate adaptation and resilience responses risks having little concrete impact, because communities' experiences with climate change are intertwined with their experiences of conflict and poor governance.

5.3. The state's primary responsibility to respond to the crisis

Resilience cannot be achieved under every circumstance, as we have just seen, and there are responsibilities that lie primarily with the state, not communities. For instance, while communities have shown solidarity towards displaced persons and helped them access housing and basic services, it is the state who should be at the frontline to provide these necessities (Zoungrana et al. 2022). At present, the governments in Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso are not ensuring adequate access to food, water, education, official identification, justice and protection from harm to their civilians, in part because their resources are under pressure and largely going to military responses to the conflict. This situation contributes to the loss of trust in the state and therefore fuels insecurity, with part of the population turning to other actors to provide these services. Still, despite damaged trust, communities continue to expect the state to respond to their needs and protect them. For instance, this is the case in Tougan and Kongoussi, Burkina Faso (see Box 5).

Communities in the Sahel are already facing the brunt of the climate and conflict crises. While highlighting their agency in developing adaptation and resilience mechanisms can be empowering, it risks shifting attention and resources away from addressing poor governance in the Sahel, which is recognised to be a central underlying factor of the conflict. Regional and international actors still largely prioritise technical responses to the crises and do not sufficiently explore the options to dialogue with communities and states on the difficult questions of governance and even corruption. There is a risk that supporting resilience may encourage a further disconnection with the state, with communities fully relying on themselves and external funding, and rejecting state support despite it being essential to overcome big shocks like terrorist attacks and extreme weather events.

Box 5: Community responses to security challenges in Burkina Faso and perceptions of state responsibility

Community responses to the security crisis

Community responses to insecurity in Burkina Faso include, in addition to displacement: moving to urban centres, adapting to (some of) the rules and regulations of terrorist groups; conducting inter-community dialogue on local security issues facilitated by villages and canton chiefs; and/or dialogue with armed groups; setting up self-defence groups (koglweogo groups or voluntary groups like the *Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP)*); and people self-restricting their mobility, with a negative impact on agriculture, other livelihoods, and in turn food security.

Some of these responses have had **mixed results** in Burkina Faso. Dialogue with armed groups has led to some temporary improvement in security but **no sustainable stability and peace**, with communities being subjected to an obstructive new order, and restricted mobility and freedoms. Displacement to urban zones also leads to new challenges in receiving localities and urban centres. Further, rural-urban migration with the perspective of finding better security and services in urban areas puts a significant pressure on urban populations and further aggravates rural-urban disparities, frustrations and tensions. Lastly, communities with VDP have also been targeted more deliberately by armed groups. Most often, the VDP are insufficiently armed and trained and sometimes contribute to violence against civilians, leading to a further deterioration of security.

Responsibility of the state

Research findings from Burkina Faso also point to the need for a state-led response, currently perceived as insufficient. Interlocutors pointed to the state as being responsible for providing solutions, including better collaboration between armed forces and local populations, ensuring a larger and stronger presence of armed forces in conflict affected areas, and creating specialised units to fight terrorist groups. Communities and local respondents rarely referred to economic opportunities as a first way out of the security crisis. Finally, they also called on the state to take more responsibility in providing security for women and children in particular, in the face of kidnapping, and providing better protection for internally displaced women and children.

6. Sahel-led responses and knowledge production

Key messages:

- *Current responses to the Sahel crisis insufficiently allow for local and regional leadership. Diverse local actors can play a growing role, like universities which can help set up mobile clinics to provide conflict resolution and legal assistance to communities.*
- *Collaboration between regional and international organisations exists but is marked by a power imbalance, in part because international actors have financial leverage to influence programming and assumptions about the capacities of regional organisations.*
- *The imbalance extends to knowledge production, where Sahelians are underrepresented in the research and discussions that concern them.*

6.1. New types of local partners and initiatives

Local actors tend not to be consulted enough and given leadership over the responses to the Sahel crisis, despite their knowledge of local dynamics and endogenous resilience strategies. Local actors also have legitimacy, connections and access to people and places which international actors may lack. These are critical entry points in a context of growing insecurity where the areas most affected by the conflict (which are often the same areas heavily impacted by climatic stress) have become very difficult to access or inaccessible, especially for international actors. In fact, in Niger, NGOs tend to focus their work in communities where the needs are less dire, because of easier access (Amadou et al. 2022).

Diverse local actors play - or have the potential to play a growing role in responding to the crisis. The NUFFIC project has supported universities to respond to governance and security challenges, by producing policy-oriented research and by setting up mobile legal caravans and clinics (“caravanes and cliniques juridiques”) where paralegals and law students can inform and support communities with their justice grievances. This is a promising initiative which relies on the legitimacy, connections and mobility of universities while simultaneously preparing a future generation of Sahelian students to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding in their country (see Box 6). Such alternative means of delivering justice and solving conflicts are getting more recognition. For example, Mali’s new draft bill (Art. 130) for Constitutional Reform authorises alternative and traditional justice mechanisms (Baché 2022).¹⁸

Box 6: Legal clinics and caravans: promising practices for the Sahel

Legal clinics and caravans¹⁹ are developing in North Africa (where they are more advanced) and West Africa and constitute new forms of legal assistance and advice to improve community access to justice. They come in various forms, for example, run by universities, NGOs or associations. The main benefits are the **educational value for students and the response to a growing need for legal assistance** in the region, especially in rural and remote areas (Lanaani 2022). The legal clinics and caravans thus play a key role as **intermediaries between citizens and the courts, on often sensitive and contentious issues** related to family, inheritance or land (Lanaani 2022).

In the Sahel, the universities of Niamey, Bamako, and Ouagadougou have established legal clinics and plan to expand them in the future. In Mali, for example, access to justice is facilitated through the **activism of the DEME SO legal clinic on gender inequalities and access to justice for women**. Paralegals are made available to communities and attempt to address inequalities in land distribution and ownership that particularly affect women and youth (Diallo et al. 2022).

Women, youth, pastoralists and people living in cross border areas also carry knowledge and insights on how the climate and conflict crises impact them and their communities and what potential solutions may be. These are regional initiatives that seek to give women more say in the decisions, policies and peace processes that affect their lives (Salzinger et al. 2022). For instance, the Network of African Women in Conflict Prevention and Mediation officially referred to as FemWise-Africa (African Union) has a branch in West Africa (Ange 2019) and a G5 Sahel Women’s Platform has been set up. Pastoralists have also formed groups and platforms to represent and disseminate their perspectives, such as the regional network Réseau Billital Maroobé (RBM). The RBM is supported by ECOWAS and EU funding to analyse causes, potential solutions and political advocacy surrounding the (economic,

¹⁸ Republic of Mali, [Avant Projet de Constitution de la République du Mali](#), October 2022.

¹⁹ Legal clinics and caravans are legal assistance structures. A legal clinic is usually integrated within a university and allows law students to be exposed to real cases while offering their legal assistance services to the most disadvantaged people. A legal caravan is distinguished by its mobility, allowing it to disseminate the law and provide legal assistance even in remote areas and communities.

security) crisis faced by pastoralism and pastoral communities in the Sahel (Inter-Réseaux 2022 and 2021). Support for such diverse local actors can help make sure that responses to the Sahel crisis better reflect the realities of different groups within conflict affected regions.

6.2. Regional leadership over regional responses

International actors have not been sufficiently aligned on regional priorities to address climate change and conflict in the Sahel. They have developed regional-level programmes to address climate change and insecurity in the Sahel, increasingly in collaboration with regional actors like ECOWAS, the G5 Sahel, CILSS and the Liptako Gourma Authority. To promote coordination, streamline efforts and mobilise additional funding, international actors have also established wider regional partnerships focused on the Sahel region. These include for example the Sahel Alliance (Alliance Sahel 2021), the Coalition for the Sahel (Coalition pour le Sahel 2023), and the Peace and Security Partnerships for the Sahel (P3S), initiated by France and Germany (Élysée 2019). However, experts have noted that these initiatives have not achieved their goal of improving coordination and coherence so far, but rather have added an additional layer of complexity to an already crowded landscape of actors, contributing to the overall “confusion” among national and international stakeholders alike (Lebovic 2020). More fundamentally, the involvement of regional organisations in these alliances and international partnerships is rather shallow, with little direction or leadership coming from regional actors themselves.

However, this collaboration is not always substantial and on an equal footing. For instance, working with international actors seems to influence the type of responses regional actors develop due to financial dependency, as already mentioned in section 3. There is also an assumption that Sahelian structures systematically need “capacity building” and that they should aim at resembling Western institutions and security systems. One reason is the perception by international actors that regional organisations operating in the Sahel are overly bureaucratic and lack flexibility and reactivity.²⁰ It seems that collaboration with regional actors has been more focused on technical aspects than strategic decisions and the co-development of actions.

In addition, cooperation may only go so far in practice. International actors express a will to align with regional strategies. But in some instances, they have reportedly been reticent to accept regional leadership, because of concerns about regional organisations’ institutional capacity and ability to implement programs and strategies.²¹ One example mentioned during our interviews referred to the cooperation challenges in the response to the Lake Chad Basin crisis. The multiple international organisations active in the area were supposed to coordinate their actions with the Lake Chad Basin Commission, in accordance with the Lake Chad Basin Commission’s Security and Resilience strategy (SRS). Eventually, most international actors followed their own approach with little coordination with the LCBC.²² This is detrimental for setting up effective partnerships that adhere to regional leadership over responses and that are able to achieve synergies, a division of labour and a smart use of resources among actors.

The concept of climate-security, specifically, is getting increased traction by international actors. But in the region and at the local level, this issue may be perceived and addressed differently. Climate change is not often perceived to be a key driver of conflict by communities as opposed to governance problems like corruption and lack of basic services (Boko 2022). The linkages between climate change and conflict are indirect, which poses questions of prioritisation on national and regional agendas when dealing with a security and humanitarian crisis. Regional

²⁰ Interview, International financial institution, 6 September 2021; Interview, Regional organisation, 17 June 2021. From: Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

²¹ Ibid; Interview, National development agency, July 2021. From: Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

²² Interview, International organisation, 12 July 2021. From: Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

organisations address the nexus in different ways²³ but do not necessarily use the term “climate security” and seem to invest more resources in other measures (military cooperation, infrastructure, socio-economic support, etc.) (Salzinger et al. 2022). While taking into account the effects of climate change on security may have allowed some interventions to hit “two birds with one stone”, it is debatable whether Sahel actors have been the ones leading the response and deciding where the nexus should stand on the agenda, relative to other issues like governance.

6.3. Sahel-led knowledge production

At the moment, a significant portion of analyses and responses to the Sahel crises are developed outside the region. Sahelians and even Africans (women even more so) are often underrepresented in public events (online or offline) that analyse the crisis in the Sahel and discuss solutions. More broadly, researchers from the African continent are underrepresented in influential climate science publications. Only 3.8% of global funding for climate change research is spent on African topics, and when looking at who receives this funding for climate research on Africa, institutions based in Europe and North Africa get 78% while African institutions only get 14.5% ([USDA 2022](#)). This poses an ethical question but also one of quality of the resulting knowledge, and therefore responses. As mentioned in section 1, the complexity of the multidimensional crisis in the Central Sahel is not always well-understood and well-conveyed in international analyses and programmes.

Just like conflict-affected areas are hard to reach for implementing organisations, they pose challenges for researchers to collect data and produce quality analysis. Researchers may find it difficult to access conflict-affected areas, have a representative sample for data collection, obtain updated data on the number of displaced persons and refugees in an area and include them in the sample when their number is significant. Among other difficulties posed by working in conflict-affected areas, there is the limited ability to adapt the data sample when a sudden event forces people to move away from an area under study, and to protect local and international researchers and interviewers, as well as respondents, from security risks (Deb and Baudais 2022).

Some research organisations partner with local facilitators and researchers to access conflict-affected areas, train local interviewers and in particular, get well-informed advice on how to adapt the research process in case of changes in the security situation.²⁴ Such forms of collaboration can put the safety of local partners at risk, so risk mitigation measures are particularly important.

An example that seems promising and can be replicated or built upon is the partnership between SIPRI, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and three Sahel-based organisations, the Centre for Democratic Governance (CGD) in Burkina Faso, Point Sud in Mali and the Laboratoire d'Études et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local (LASDEL) in Niger. The research focused on local perceptions, needs and priorities, and worked with local facilitators or interviewers from diverse backgrounds (university students, community members, CSOs, etc.) and languages (Deb and Baudais 2022).

²³ For instance, ECOWAS reports on farmer-herder conflicts in its early warning system ECOWARN. The G5 Sahel promotes an integrated approach to addressing insecurity in its Security and Development Strategy. This aims to combine actions to improve governance, security, development, and resilience to climate change. Salzinger et al (2022) (*internal*).

²⁴ For instance, experts recommend the following mitigation measures: collecting data anonymously (for instance using the KoBoToolbox on tablets or smartphones), conducting interviews privately and, if the respondents or local partners assess the risks to be too high, delaying or cancelling the interviews. Source: Deb and Baudais 2022.

7. Ways forward

This briefing note brings together local level research and policy-focused analysis on how regional, national and local actors address climate change and insecurity in the Sahel. Looking ahead, we see **seven key ways forward** to better support resilience and crisis responses in the region.

1. **Regional responses are needed with a strong, specific focus on border areas to strengthen peace and stability, connect peripheral communities to urban population centres, and restore economic activities and public services.** Interventions aiming to **reinforce community resilience to diverse challenges** (insecurity, economic shocks, climatic stress, etc.) should be considered, like supporting and connecting solidarity networks and local authorities, including at the cross border level.
2. **More context-, conflict- and gender-sensitive responses can support more effective and sustainable responses in the Sahel.** Efforts to mainstream gender in responses should ensure that the compounding identities, experiences and difficulties of different groups are assessed in each context, and that the potential of women and young people for peacebuilding, climate adaptation and community resilience is used. Regional and international actors should better take into account the complex political, economic as well as psychological factors that play into the conflict, and recognise the diverse landscape of actors involved. These have varying levels of- violence, links with terrorist groups and also include self-defence militias. To address this complexity, responses will need to ensure they follow a conflict sensitive approach, and are informed by an accurate picture of the crisis. This requires Sahelian leadership over the analysis and stepping away from a singular focus on combating islamist terrorism.
3. **Financial resources, including from within the region, to address the climate and security crises in the Sahel, should increase and be targeted towards resilience in a more effective manner.** While international funding can support Sahelian responses, **donor dependency** risks stifling local innovation and incentivising underfunded regional organisations to develop interventions more aligned with donor priorities than regional- priorities and programming approaches. That is why Sahelian states need to hold up to their commitments of funding and coordinating the regional organisations they have set up to address their joint challenges. Furthermore, funding and interventions (including at the regional level) can benefit local resilience efforts more if they become **more flexible on criteria, planning and procedures**, so that regional actors, local CSOs and local innovators can develop responses gradually and based on their needs and priorities, and ensure a systematic anchoring in local processes and realities.
4. **Regional coordination challenges persist amongst the multitude of actors addressing the climate and security crises in the Central Sahel,** including regional organisations which do not have a common agenda to tackle climate and security challenges. There is a case for rethinking and simplifying coordination mechanisms (Sahel Alliance, Coalition for the Sahel, P3S etc.), making sure they do not duplicate efforts and are led by Sahelian regional organisations. **Integrated responses are better suited to the crisis in the Sahel because they can bring multiple dividends** in a context of strained resources. Siloed approaches in regional responses to security and climate change may hinder the development of integrated responses, but **avenues to address such siloes** exist. These include adopting and supporting conflict-sensitive approaches to natural resource management and climate adaptation at the local level, and building on emerging experiences with regional programmes that promote integrated approaches, such as PRAPS and FREXUS.

-
5. **Community resilience strategies should be better understood, supported and capitalised on by national, regional and international actors.** Communities in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger adapt to the climate and security crises in various ways, although resilience strategies to insecurity have had more mixed results in a context of heightened conflict and displacement. National and international actors should ensure their approaches to human mobility are coherent, and recognise their potential for resilience. They should also provide more support for peaceful community dialogue initiatives that can allow populations to avoid resorting to negative coping strategies like compromising with terrorist groups.
 6. **The state and national actors remain primarily responsible for ensuring people's protection, justice and access to basic services.** Overly focusing on strengthening community resilience shifts attention away from state accountability and poor governance, which is a central underlying factor of most conflicts in the Central Sahel. In a context of growing distrust towards the state, supporting resilience should not encourage communities to further rely on themselves and forgo state support. The latter remains essential to withstand shocks like terrorist attacks and extreme weather events. Responses to the conflict should focus on improving governance and protecting civilians through a combination of military and non-military responses centred on state responsibility, with support for community resilience as a complementary measure.
 7. **Sahelian leadership over knowledge production and regional responses to the climate and security crises in the Sahel should be better recognised.** Sahelians and especially women remain underrepresented in (policy) discussions. **Sahelian facilitators and researchers are far better placed to navigate this complex environment thanks to their knowledge of the evolving context.** Different forms of joint programming and research which recognise Sahelian agency exist, obtain promising results and should become the norm.

Seven ways forward to better support resilience and crisis responses in the Central Sahel

ecdpm



- 1 Regional responses focused on border areas:** Based on their comparative advantages, regional organisations should combine security and socio-economic measures in border areas, support local authorities and local solidarity networks.



- 2 Responses sensitive to complex conflict-, gender, and psychological factors:** Responses should be localised, recognise diverse conflict actors of both genders beyond terrorist groups, and communities' feelings of fear and abandonment.



- 3 More financing, especially from Sahel states towards their regional organisations:** Increased national and international funding, and more flexible procedures would be better adapted to local resilience needs.



- 4 Simplified coordination and integrated responses to climate, security and governance challenges:** Less coordination mechanisms would reduce confusion. Integrated responses like conflict-sensitive climate adaptation can bring multiple dividends from limited resources.



- 5 Stronger, coherent support for community resilience:** national and international actors should address incoherences like supporting resilience while restricting human mobility. They should support peaceful community dialogue more, so communities are less vulnerable to terrorist groups.



- 6 State responsibility first:** Support for community resilience is complementary and should not supplant state responsibility to protect from violence and climate disasters. Responses should prioritise governance and protecting civilians through military and non-military measures.



- 7 Sahelian leadership:** Diverse Sahelian actors including local researchers should be recognised as leaders to develop knowledge and drive responses to the crisis. Joint programming and research that centre Sahelian agency should become the norm.

References

- ABN. 2021. [Atelier régional de démarrage des projets Nexus eau-énergie-sécurité alimentaire et Frexus dans le bassin du Niger](#), March 2021.
- ACLEDE. 2023. [The Sahel: Geopolitical Transition at the Center of an Ever-Worsening Crisis](#).
- Alliance Sahel. 2021. [Presentation Brochure](#).
- Amadou et al (2022) Changement climatique, sécurité et état de droit au Sahel: Quelles actions pour renforcer la résilience des communautés. Etude de cas Niger: Rapport Provisoire, Université Abdou Moumouni. April 2022 (internal).
- Ange, A.M. 2019. [Afrique de l'Ouest: CEDEAO - Le Réseau des femmes pour la prévention des conflits lancé](#), AllAfrica, 5 November 2019.
- Assanvo, W, Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni, L-A. et Maïga, I. 2019. [Extrémisme violent, criminalité organisée et conflits locaux dans le Liptako-Gourma](#), ISS, 10 December 2019.
- Baché, D. 2022. [Mali: un avant-projet de nouvelle Constitution présenté à Assimi Goïta](#). RFI. 12 October 2022.
- Boko, B.A. 2022. Stockholm Forum on Peace and Development. [Recording accessible here](#). GIZ. 23 May 2022.
- Coalition pour le Sahel. [La Coalition](#). Accessed January 2023.
- Desmidt et al. 2021. [Climate change and resilience in the Central Sahel](#). CASCADES Policy Paper. June 2021.
- Diallo et al. (2022), Rapport d'Étude Mali : Projet Orange Knowledge Program Sahel (OKP-SHL-104897). NUFFIC. August 2022 (internal).
- Deb, S. and Baudais, V. 2022. [The Challenges of Data Collection in Conflict-affected Areas: A Case Study in the Liptako-Gourma Region](#). SIPRI. October 2022.
- Élysée. 2019. [Plan d'action du Partenariat pour le Sahel](#).
- Freudenthal, E. et al. [Uncovering the civilian toll of France's anti-jihadist war in Mali](#). The New Humanitarian. 16 June 2021.
- Green Climate Fund. 2019. [Gender action plan for FP092: Programme for integrated development and adaptation to climate change in the Niger Basin \(PIDACC/NB\)](#). 10 January 2019.
- Inter-Réseaux. 2021. [Entendre la voix des éleveurs au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest : Quel avenir pour le pastoralisme face à l'insécurité et ses impacts ?](#) 2 November 2021.
- Inter-Réseaux. 2022. [Conférence de l'InfoPoint: Pastoralisme et insécurité au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest – la voix des éleveurs](#). 29 November 2022.
- IPCC. 2019. [Chapter 2: "Land-Climate interaction"](#). Special report on Climate Change and Land. GIEC.
- IPCC. 2021. [Sixth Assessment Report, Working Group I – The Physical Science Basis](#). GIEC. August 2021.
- IPCC. 2022. [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#) on [Carnegie](#).
- ISS. 2022. [Past lessons crucial to stemming Sahel's tide of violent extremism](#). PSC report. 30 November 2022.
- Laanani, K. 2022. Rapport d'Étude: Capitalisation des expériences de Cliniques et Caravanes Juridiques dans certains pays d'Afrique du Nord et d'Afrique de l'Ouest, NUFFIC, Mai 2022 (internal).
- Lebovich, A. 2020. [Disorder from Chaos: Why Europeans Fail to Promote Stability in the Sahel](#) ECFR. August 2020.
- McOmber, C. 2020. [Women and climate change in the Sahel](#). West African Papers, No. 27, OECD Publishing, Paris. March 2020.
- Moyo, D. 2010. [Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa](#). 2 March 2010.
- Puig, O.C. et al. 2021. [Climate Change, Development and Security in the Central Sahel](#). CASCADES. July 2021.

-
- RBM and M. Pellerin. 2022. [Presentation during InfoPoint conference](#). Pastoralisme et insécurité au Sahel et en Afrique de l'Ouest – la voix des éleveurs. 29 November 2022.
- Salzinger et al. 2022. Rapport d'Étude: Cartographie des engagements régionaux sur le changement climatique, la sécurité et la résilience au Sahel Central, NUFFIC, ECDPM, June 2022 (internal).
- Salzinger, M. and Desmidt, S. 2022. [COP27 can do more for women bearing the brunt of climate change and conflict](#). ECDPM Commentary. 7 November 2022.
- Sardan de, J-P O. 2022. [Conférence: Construire de la résilience dans des États fragiles : quelle coopération pour le Sahel ?](#) Direction générale Coopération au développement et Aide humanitaire (DGD) et Enabel. 17 March 2022.
- Skah, M. and R. Lyammouri. 2020. [The Climate Change-Security Nexus: Case study of the Lake Chad Basin](#), Policy Center for the New South, 2020.
- Sow et al (2022) Changement climatique, sécurité et état de droit au Sahel: Quelles actions pour renforcer la résilience des communautés. Etude de cas dans trois régions du Mali: Rapport Final, Université des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques de Bamako, August 2022 (internal).
- United Nations (UN). 2023. [The Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility \(LoCAL\)](#). UN LDC Portal website. Accessed 13 February 2023.
- USJPB, UAM et UJKZ. 2022. Synthèse Académique, 'Changement climatique, sécurité et Etat de droit au Sahel : quelles actions pour renforcer la résilience des communautés ?' December 2022. (internal).
- Vaucelle, S. 2015. [Le fleuve Niger et son bassin : aménagements, gouvernance et stratégies d'adaptation au changement climatique](#) in Stratégies territoriales d'adaptation aux contraintes démographiques et environnementales : le Niger, no. 270: 243-270, April-June 2015.
- Zoungrana et al (2022), Résilience communautaire face aux défis du changement climatique et de l'insécurité dans le Sahel burkinabè, Rapport General Axe 1, July 2022 (internal).

About ECDPM

ECDPM is an independent 'think and do tank' working on international cooperation and development policy in Europe and Africa.

Since 1986 our staff members provide research and analysis, advice and practical support to policymakers and practitioners across Europe and Africa – to make policies work for sustainable and inclusive global development.

Our main areas of work include:

- EU foreign and development policy
- Migration and mobility
- Digital economy and governance
- AU-EU relations
- Peace, security and resilience
- Democratic governance
- Economic recovery and transformation
- Climate change and green transition
- African economic integration
- Sustainable food systems

For more information please visit www.ecdpm.org

This publication benefits from the structural support by ECDPM's institutional partners: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden.

ISSN1571-7577