



**Case study:**  
A localized approach to  
nexus programming





# The context

The Liptako-Gourma region is affected by a new and complex crisis, brought on by insecurity linked as much to the weakness of the state presence as to the multiplication of armed groups with diverse motivations and modes of action, as well as community clashes and the rise of violent extremism that are forcing thousands of people to move. The region has become the epicenter of the Sahelian crisis, at the crossroads of the three borders of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Widely impacted, the displaced populations as well as the host populations suffer from insecurity which forces them to adapt but the multiple needs are constantly growing.

Fueled by the instability generated by the Libyan crisis and the conflict in northern Mali, the violence and the deterioration of security also respond to purely local logics and only increase vulnerabilities and reinforce the protection crisis of the populations. Added to this are difficult agro-climatic and environmental conditions, aggravated by visible climate change and desertification. This landlocked area is home to a population with a high level of poverty that is highly food insecure.

Due to the complexity of the causes that reinforce the multiple vulnerabilities of the populations, a multi-sectoral response is required in the Liptako-Gourma region. Fragmented responses that are solely security, humanitarian or developmental cannot bring about lasting change given the interdependence of the dynamics. It is therefore necessary to address the issues at hand with a holistic approach, anchored in a long-term vision, and to facilitate synergies between international and national actors, building on existing local skills.





# The civil society landscape

In the Liptako-Gourma region, there has historically been a rich and diverse civil society, rooted in development issues and involved in the dynamics of democratic governance. The recent crisis has changed that landscape and forced local civil society organizations (CSOs) to develop new skills and expertise in the humanitarian field. Many local CSOs have been created with the crisis and it is difficult to map this flourishing sector. Other large national CSOs or local associations have continued their activities, changing their focus, integrating humanitarian programs, or specializing in emergency responses. This change in positioning has led them to integrate new approaches to interventions and the application of humanitarian principles. Local CSOs have also seen the opportunity for new funding and giving new perspectives on existing interventions.

In the Liptako-Gourma region the value add local CSOs bring to partnerships with international non governmental organizations (INGOs) include: knowledge of the socio-cultural context – including social dynamics, community trust, wide reaching access, cooperation of and relationships with local authorities, commitment, expertise, resilience and adaptability.

*“We are from here, the communities we support are our parents, we can’t fool them like some organizations do, because we feel more accountable” local CSO, Burkina Faso*

While local CSOs have a long history of partnering with INGOs, some key challenges that persist in these partnerships identified through this case study include:

- **Lack of trust:** lack of confidence by INGOs in local CSO’s structures, management, and systems is reciprocated with a lack of confidence by CSOs in contextually inappropriate program interventions that INGOs bring. This is compounded by criticisms of INGOs failing to identify existing local CSOs and their initiatives, resulting in duplication and waste of resources. This lack of trust has a negative affect on the perceived credibility of local CSOs and their ability to secure partnerships, as well as the potential negative reputation of INGOs to take localization agenda seriously.
- **Lack of inclusion:** one of the key challenges central to the partnership is a lack of collaboration, starting with joint planning, with INGOs arriving with projects already designed, soliciting CSOs as providers on specific activities, without leaving room for discussion and input. CSOs feel under-utilized and express frustration with unbalanced power relations.
- **Complicated procedures:** The internal procedures local CSOs have in place are often ignored. It is therefore up to CSOs to adapt existing internal procedures to meet INGO requirements, which seem to them sometimes more complex than those imposed by donors. This emphasis on control mechanisms inevitably results in more emphasis placed on following procedures than with quality and ownership of the project. Furthermore, CSOs express frustrations regarding the demands of INGOs for their local partners to deliver to a scale and quality that would require the same resources that an INGO has.

*“Whatever we do, INGOs have more resources and capacity. Even if we have the will to do, the lack of means can block us. INGOs have the tools and regulations. We use our small local means.” local CSO, Burkina Faso*

- **Limited funding:** A recurring challenge is the insufficient funding for local partner structural costs. Budgets are mostly targeting the implementation of specific activities without taking into account the structural costs involved.
- **Limited capacity development support:** capacity support from INGOs is mostly limited to project based capacities required for the CSOs to implement the project, often ignoring organizational level support
- **Power imbalance:** local CSOs feel dependent on the willingness of INGOs to work along and fund their activities. This posture hinders a CSO’s ability to raise critical issues, to question proposed approaches, and to advocate for more equitable relationships. Thus, CSOs have a tendency to accept that INGOs define the terms and conditions of the partnership, without negotiations.

*“For us, partnership must be done as equals and not in disdain, not by being underestimated” local CSO, Burkina Faso*









# DRC 's approach

The Danish Refugee Council's (DRC) ambition for engaging with civil society places emphasis on increasing our engagement in more equitable and strategic partners – longer term partnerships, established on more equitable footing, working together towards more impactful objectives. This means a shift away from contractual, supplier-type relationships towards longer-term rather than one-off engagements, ensuring that CSO partners gains more from partnering with DRC than a one-off sub-grant agreement. These more equitable and strategic partnerships are guided by fundamental principles that DRC strives to adhere to in our partnerships – equality, transparency, complementarity, results oriented, responsibility<sup>1</sup>. It is also within these partnerships DRC prioritizes partnering with civil society organizations that are legitimate representatives of rights holders affected by conflict and displacement; ensuring that there is adequate diversity in representation and voice across our CSO partnerships in any given context where we operate.

When it comes to nexus programming, DRC 's displacement mandate and our central and long-standing focus on advancing durable solutions provides the key entry point to our nexus engagement. Based on long experience and in line with guiding international durable solutions frameworks, we recognize that the process of obtaining durable solutions is often long and complex, involving human rights, humanitarian, development and peace building challenges, and that our response needs to take this into account<sup>2</sup>. DRC's Response Framework captures the full spectrum of our engagement with persons of concern from the very beginning to the very end of their experience in displacement, working to address both short-term and long-term needs.

---

<sup>1</sup> These principles have been endorsed by the Global Humanitarian Platform in 2007. All organizations participating in the Global Humanitarian Platform agree to base their partnerships on these principles.

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) framework on durable solutions for IDPs, 2010



# Nexus programming with local civil society partners

In the Liptako-Gourma region, DRC has been implementing regional programming<sup>3</sup> which both programmatically and operationally are promising examples of Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) “triple” nexus programming through a localization lens. Despite the security context and the strong need for emergency interventions, the projects integrate various aspects of development and peace actions to provide holistic responses. The multiplicity of needs and causes of vulnerability are taken into account and respond to through adapted interventions.

Programming is implemented through a consortium with longer-term partnerships with local CSOs – partnerships that have been established beyond the parameters of a single projects in which strong communication and trust has been established over time, making these equitable and strategic partnerships.

Overall accountability for a project is shared among partners, each of whom bring expertise in their area of intervention thereby complimenting one another. The partners work towards common and cross-cutting objectives, and their interventions are supported by joint context and vulnerability analyses. In one of the projects, DRC’s role has been one of leading participatory coordination processes that engage all partners, respects their roles, and encourages joint ownership of project outcomes. Partners have expressed appreciation of the approach, which has been inclusive, sincere and constructive since the design phase where all partners contributed in building a common vision for multi-year programming. This includes sharing analysis of the needs, risks, vulnerabilities and root causes of conflict amongst partners and other stakeholders - an important step towards increased coherence and supports collaborative efforts across the triple nexus. In another project, DRC has the role as a technical support partner, thereby breaking down the traditional power imbalances that go along with implementing partnerships based on sub granting.

In order to sufficiently meet needs identified by the partners, cross-cutting skills (security, gender, conflict sensitivity) are embedded into the consortia, supporting all partners with technical advice, tools, and guidance. This transfer of knowledge also ensures the sustainability of actions that will continue through local CSO interventions. Sharing work space amongst consortium partners also contributed to informal knowledge and expertise sharing. In addition, sharing work space reduced costs, improved coordination and communication, and enhance opportunities for participatory process among partners. For more formalized capacity development, dedicated and sufficiently budgeted capacity development is included in the project budgets.

<sup>3</sup> Regional programming for this case study focuses on the RECOLG (“Resilience and social cohesion of cross-border communities in Liptako-Gourma”) and SHIFT (“Supporting Host communities and IDPs to facilitate sustainable Transition towards inclusive solutions”) projects.



# Lessons learned

- Pursuing localization as a strategic choice requires a real investment by the INGO that commits to it - budget, human resources, and relevant skills are needed to drive the agenda forward. If this investment is not sufficient, teams on the ground will not be adequately supported to develop and apply the approach in practice resulting in superficial or limited change.
- To succeed in developing real collaboration and co-ownership of programming between partners, INGOs need to accept sharing of power. Shared responsibility and decision making starts at the design stage but needs to continue through implementation to close out.
- To implement a localized approach to triple nexus programming, projects must be sufficiently long in duration to allow time for partners to build trusting relationships with communities and duty bearers, and for interventions to respond to the changing needs of the populations. In order to have a real and measurable impact, the integration of resilience and social cohesion issues is not always possible in short term projects.
- While several local CSOs interviewed for this case study were unfamiliar with the term “triple nexus”, once unpacked they gave examples of programming that combines development, crisis response, and integrating social cohesion across intervention areas. The majority of local CSOs active before the Sahel crisis organically adapted their activities to the new context by targeting IDPs, adjusting access capacities, and intervention approach. Almost all CSOs interviewed confirmed the absolute necessity to maintain development activities, working on peace building and social cohesion while responding to urgent needs. CSOs recognized their actions are already in line with the triple nexus, even though they had not labelled it as such.
- Local CSOs expressed challenges in navigating the space between humanitarian, peace and development actors. With each operating in distinct silos in terms of values, principles, funding, and stakeholders; local civil society spoke of frustrations in seeing international actors creating an obstacle to developing common objectives. The need to speak a common language was identified as an essential step in deconstructing the silos that exist between these actors. This challenge of navigating space was also noted in coordination forums. Many local CSOs, historically focused on development actions and consultation around these approaches, have not been able to find their place in these humanitarian forums where a development perspective is not integrated. There is a marked willingness on the part of local CSOs to better integrate into these forums, which is supported by the drive for increased localization. While local CSOs are ready and willing to adapt, so must the international community to support in making the space for meaningful engagement.
- While INGOs have both the means and the technical experts to engage in advocacy, local CSOs’ understanding of a community’s issues and proximity to the community positions them to carry local voices into relevant advocacy forums. At the same time, advocacy efforts of local CSOs are often not substantiated or supported by tangible evidence and analysis. Moreover, local CSOs largely rely on invitations from and participation of duty bearers to move forward advocacy agendas, lacking means and resources to invest in advocacy strategy.

*“INGOs have tools and strategies, implementation plans, but they rely on civil society actors who have more legitimacy to carry the messages,” local CSO, Niger*









**DRC** DANISH  
REFUGEE  
COUNCIL