



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

SUMMARY REPORT

Virtual Event

16th October 2020

3:30 PM — 5:00 PM CEST

Side event to the Ministerial Roundtable
on Central Sahel 20th October 2020

Gender Based Violence (GBV) is a critical health, protection, power, and life-threatening issue in the Sahel. Conflict and displacement are driving escalating levels of sexual violence, intimate partner violence, child marriage, exploitation and abuse towards girls and women in the Sahel.

Plan International, Care International, UNFPA and the GBV AoR¹ organized a virtual event on 16 October 2020 at 3:30 PM CEST prior to the Ministerial Round Table on Central Sahel. The event aimed to (i) amplify the voices and priorities of girls from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger offering an unique opportunity to learn from first-hand-experience and receive recommendations from the affected girls², (ii) draw attention to the critical challenges to preventing and responding to GBV from women local groups³ and advocate for global solidarity around GBV, (iii) motivate governmental actors and donors⁴ to commit to strengthen the prevention, risk mitigation and response to GBV, raising the profile of the Call to Action on the protection of GBV in emergencies (CtA GBV) and ensuring the rights of women and girls are central to humanitarian action and across the triple nexus.

Opening Session

Ms. Mette Thygesen opened the session by recalling the need to focus on GBV and gender equality in the overall response in the Central Sahel. From January 2021, the Danish government is leading the **Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies** and its leadership will pursue innovative ways to prevent and respond to GBV, promote gender equality and empower girls and women.

Girls Speak Out! Key Messages and Recommendations

Three Sahelian girls presented their personal stories and experiences with GBV and they delivered a clear message: Actions to address GBV are undertaken but they are insufficiently leading to meaningful improvements of girls' rights. The fight against GBV is vital for girls' future and it is not sufficiently prioritized by relevant stakeholders. Girls' perspectives should be included when trying to eliminate GBV.

1 Area of Responsibility

2 **Sahelian Girls** - Nene from Mali, Sandra from Burkina Faso, Yasmina from Niger

3 **Ms. Kalmaram Madou Gadji** - Representative from Mata Masu Dubara de Malné, Niger, **Ms. Mariam Kouyate** from Association "Jigiya", Mali;

4 **Speakers: Ms. Mette Thygesen** - Head of Department, Humanitarian Actions, Civil Society, and Engagement, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Denmark, **Ms. Anrea Koulaimah** - Director, Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America and Pacific, Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO), European Union, **Ms. Bintour Founé Samake** - Minister for the Promotion of Women, Children and the Family, Mali, **Ms. Bolanle Adetoun** - Acting Director for the ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, Dakar Sénégal.

SAHELIAN GIRLS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- The governments of Sahel have committed to a range of international laws protecting children and girls. However, the laws are not integrated into national laws and are not sufficiently enforced. The governments need to **establish strict jurisdiction, hasten the adoption of all laws and international commitments against GBV, provide severe penalties and high fines for GBV offenders.**
 - The Sahelian governments need to defend Sahelian girls' rights by **harmonizing ratified national and international legal instruments in favour of human rights, provide special and urgent attention to ending child marriage, and secure Sahelian girls' access to school as safety measures towards GBV.**
 - The governments of the Sahel need to **create income generating activities for parents with low/no income, facilitate the socio-economic reintegration of girls and women survivors of GBV, popularise targeted laws in local languages to inform local populations about girls' rights.**
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SAHELIAN GIRLS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONORS

- The donor states need to **motivate and support the Sahelian governments in the implementation of policies for the promotion and protection of girls' and women's rights. Including harmonizing their international commitments and intensify programs to end GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage.**
 - The donor states should further support the **creation of income-generating activities for parents with low or no income as well as the socio-economic reintegration of girls and women survivors of GBV.**
 - Donor states engaged in the Sahel should **put young people, especially girls, at the centre of priorities and support young people and youth groups in their actions against GBV and on the development of advocacy messages against the practice of child marriage.** They should support **integrating actions that strengthen the self-esteem of girls through intergenerational dialogues or role models.**
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SAHELIAN GIRLS' RECOMMENDATIONS TO DEVELOPMENT AND HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

- Partners working in Sahel countries should **listen to and amplify girls' voices, opinions and rights in their humanitarian, peacebuilding and development response and ensure that information is accessible, age and gender responsive.**
- Partners should support **initiatives led by young people and for young people by injecting innovative funding, measures to address GBV and child protection in COVID-19 response and recovery plans and ensure that plans are gender and age responsive and multi sectoral.**
- Partners should ensure **sexual and reproductive health services remain prioritized, funded and accessible, particularly for adolescents,** to support those at risk of experiencing violence and survivors to mitigate the risks of exploitation, child, early and forced marriage etc.

Prevention and Responding to GBV in Central Sahel

Dedicated programming on GBV prevention and response, interventions towards gender equality and supporting the rights of girls and women are insufficiently integrated in the overall humanitarian response in the Central Sahel. Moreover, women and girls are frequently left behind and excluded from participation in decision-making structures. Ms. Kaimaram Madou Gadji and Ms. Mariam Kouyate as GBV practitioners drew attention to critical challenges in delivering a comprehensive response to GBV and advocated for global solidarity around women and girls' rights. Both speakers shared their experiences on GBV prevention and response that focused on rapes, eliminating early marriage and on school dropout among girls. They shared everyday bottlenecks associations and women-led groups face in responding to GBV as well as expectations vis-à-vis humanitarian coordination and the GBV sub-cluster and from specific GBV actors as CARE, Plan and UNFPA. Ms. Gadji and Ms. Kouyate shared the following recommendations:

- Donor states should **dedicate more resources to humanitarian organizations and women's local groups to reduce the risk of gender-based violence for women and girls**. This recommendation was grounded in GBV case management experience and the story of a young girl who took refuge around Diffa. For lack of food and clothes, she was exposed to multiple rapes and eventually became pregnant, upon which she undertook an unsafe abortion. The care at the hospital avoided tragic consequences.
- Donor states should **consider to further support groups that will lead community and intergenerational dialogue**. The recommendation was justified by the life story of a 15-year-old girl from a town in Ségou who fled her village when her parents decided to give her in marriage to a young man she didn't know and had never met. Food insecurity and the consequences of conflicts in central Mali can force parents to marry their daughters to access financial resources.
- The GBV sub-clusters and key humanitarian actors such as Plan, CARE and UNFPA **should support grassroots community organizations led by women like JIGIYA to access funding, to access strategic information and to be involved in decision-making fora**. Women-led organizations are the best placed to respond due to **proximity to the affected communities and to security challenges hampering humanitarian access of international organizations in particular**.

Collective Accountability to GBV Survivors

The last segment of the day explored solutions in scaling up GBV prevention, response and risk mitigation efforts and increased accountability of various stakeholders operating in the Central Sahel. Under the moderation of the UNFPA Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Dr Mamadou Kanté, the Minister in charge of gender from Mali, the ECOWAS Commissioner and the Africa Director of DG ECHO were invited to share their vision towards the elimination of GBV in the region.

Her Excellency Ms. Bintou Founé Samake from Mali acknowledged that as the risk of violence, exploitation and ill-treatment continues to increase, the national and community systems, as well as social networks, continue to weaken. She underlined that **mitigating the risks associated with GBV are a responsibility of all humanitarian actors**. She called for collective efforts to address the **climate of impunity for GBV perpetrators**. Mali has established three **one-stop-centers offering multi-sectoral survivor-centered care for GBV in Mopti and Gao**, and the government is further **scaling up this kind of intervention in other areas of the country**. The strategy adopted by Mali aims to ensure the application of the **GBV guiding principles of confidentiality, security and non-discrimination, while increasing accessibility and uptake of services and reducing the trauma the survivors experience**.

Ms. Andrea Koulimah (DG ECHO) echoed the voices of Yasmina, Nene and Sandra who so eloquently addressed the impact of the humanitarian crises and the pandemic in further increasing the vulnerabilities of women and girls and exposing them to heightened risks of GBV. She stressed **the importance of the centrality of protection; that protection is placed at the core of the humanitarian response.** To do so, **all the affected people should have their voices heard and humanitarian actors should work to mitigate the risks they are exposed to, specifically, when working in GBV prevention and response and to mitigate GBV related-risks.** Ms. Koulimah took the opportunity to congratulate Canada on achievements as CtA GBV lead and thanked Denmark for taking over the role, recalling their similar role prior to Canada and their **support for the new 2021-2025 Road Map. She highlighted that DG ECHO committed to continue to respond and prevent GBV, through protection, health, and education interventions. DG ECHO currently supports 10 partners responding to GBV in Burkina Faso, Niger and Mali.** In its conclusion, DG ECHO emphasised that eliminating GBV requires a collective effort and that Humanitarian Country Teams must ensure disaggregated data is integrated in their analysis and that **GBV must be mainstreamed across sectors of humanitarian action** to avoid leaving women and girls invisible.

The last panelist, Dr. Bolanle Adetoun from ECOWAS Gender Development Centre, opened her speech indicating the commitment of ECOWAS Commission and Member states to prevent and respond to SGBV and to address its impacts on the survivors' lives and well-being, families and society. Ms. Adetoun indicated the measures that are being taken by ECOWAS and the member states for the strengthening of the legal and institutional framework; improvement of responses and addressing survivors issues etc. In the first week of October, 2020 ECOWAS organized Experts and Ministerial meetings on Sexual and Gender-based Violence, and following that meeting a civil society regional working group on SGBV was established. During the ECOWAS Ministers in charge of Gender, Women and Children's meeting, they made a Declaration on Zero Tolerance to SGBV and **to reduce the level of impunity on issues on GBV, to protect vulnerable persons and to create an environment for adequate victim support.** Dr. Adetoun underlined that the **nature and pattern of violence change according to age group and so must collective actions address specific needs of children, girls and women.** ECOWAS Response strategies **will engage the whole of society and the whole of government in promoting a holistic multi-sectoral impactful strategy to prevent and respond to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence within ECOWAS countries.**

Closing Remarks

Mr. Mabingue Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa closed the event firstly thanking all partners and organizers for participating in the event held on the sidelines of the Ministerial Meeting on the Central Sahel. He reinforced the importance of this high level meeting for all partners, for the people of the Central Sahel, for the entire Sahel, and beyond. Mr. Mabingue Ngom praised the active participation of all, including DG ECHO, Denmark, the countries of the Central Sahel and the actors of the international community, civil society and the UN. He reminded participants that the collective work in the areas of peace, demography and security shows that **the occurrence of GBV and child marriage is one of the factors that accelerate the crisis.** He continued to say that **to restore peace, ensure security and create the conditions for sustainable development in a just society where women and girls are treated with dignity, everyone should engage towards the elimination of GBV.** He closed the event calling on all stakeholders to **work together collectively to ensure the centrality of GBV in the humanitarian response and in the construction of a resilient Sahel.**

