

Building Productive and Protective Communities in the Sahel

Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger | Duration: December 2021 - May 2024 | Implementing partners: Groupe de Recherche et d'Appui pour l'Autopromotion des Populations en Afrique (GRAAP-Afrique), Organisation Appui au Développement Local (ADL), Association Malienne pour la Promotion des Entreprises Féminines (AMAPEF)

The Challenge

In the Sahel region, internally displaced persons (IDPs) face limited access to basic social services while experiencing multiple displacements due to terrorist activities, community conflicts, climate change, and economic pressures. According to UNHCR statistics, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger collectively recorded 2,752,550 IDPs at the end of 2023, with 75% in Burkina Faso alone. Host communities experience strong demographic pressure affecting resources like health, education, water, sanitation, and energy. Despite these challenges, international support has predominantly focused on security issues and humanitarian interventions rather than development initiatives that benefit both IDPs and host communities.

The Solution

The project pioneered a cross-border, multi-country approach using South-South cooperation between local NGOs to restore hope for vulnerable displaced people and host communities sharing similar cultural backgrounds. Rather than treating displacement solely as a humanitarian crisis, the initiative adopted a development-oriented strategy implementing complementary activities simultaneously across three countries. This approach focused on building sustainable livelihoods, improving service access, and strengthening protection mechanisms, with special attention to climate-smart agriculture and the specific needs of youth and women.

What Made This a Promising Practice?

This initiative stood out through its innovative South-South cooperation model extending beyond state-to-state interactions to include partnerships between local NGOs from different countries. By addressing displacement as a development rather than purely humanitarian challenge, the project fostered sustainable integration and social cohesion. The approach worked simultaneously across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus while maintaining an integrated, development-oriented focus, leading to increased buy-in from local authorities and communities. Additionally, the effective integration of environmental protection with social cohesion initiatives created multiple pathways to stability and resilience.

The Response

- **Security concerns and limited access:** The project adapted to increased volatility in target locations by strengthening partnerships with local authorities and community stakeholders, enabling work to continue despite security challenges.
- **Environmental degradation:** By incorporating agroecology training and creating eco-citizenship clubs, the project addressed environmental concerns while building social cohesion.
- **Limited local governance capacity:** The project invested in training municipal councilors and updating local development plans, ensuring sustainable governance structures that continue beyond project implementation.

Lessons Learned

The project demonstrated the effectiveness of South-South regional partnerships for addressing cross-border displacement challenges, highlighting the importance of local NGO cooperation when state-level collaboration is challenging. The multi-country approach revealed opportunities for stronger cross-border programming in future initiatives. Working with Village Savings and Loan Associations proved to be a sustainable microcredit strategy for women's economic empowerment. Additionally, the holistic approach to youth education complemented by environmental awareness created stronger social bonds between displaced and host communities, while capacity-strengthened farmers' groups provided effective platforms for social integration.

Key Results

Economic Livelihood Development:

- Strengthened professional capacities of vulnerable out-of-school displaced individuals
- Improved women's abilities to create and manage income-generating activities
- Integrated displaced persons into existing small farmer groups and cooperatives
- Established 618 secure and equipped vegetable gardening areas
- Trained 647 women in business development and integrated them into Village Savings and Loan Associations

Integrated Service Provision:

- Facilitated access to primary education for 900 children
- Provided secondary education access for 300 children
- Delivered reproductive health information to 1,944 displaced women
- Established eco-citizenship clubs for young persons
- Supported WASH initiatives using an agroecology approach

Protection in Development:

- Trained 265 municipal councilors to respond to displaced people's specific needs and vulnerabilities
- Updated 7 local municipal action plans to include displacement issues
- Strengthened knowledge on protecting displaced people
- Built capacity for conflict prevention and management
- Raised awareness on environmental protection among 26,189 people



LiD Lives in Dignity GRANT FACILITY

The Lives in Dignity (LiD) Grant Facility was an EU-funded initiative managed by UNOPS that promoted development-oriented approaches in forced displacement settings. With €24 million allocated between 2021–2025, the Facility supported 14 innovative, multi-stakeholder projects across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its flexible funding model empowered local actors, strengthened partnerships, and fostered integrated programming across five key areas: livelihoods, service delivery, housing and spatial planning, protection, and disaster- and climate-related mobility. The Facility prioritized community-led solutions, localization, and social cohesion, advancing sustainable development for both displaced populations and host communities. **Find out more at** https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/programming/programmes/lives-dignity-grant-facility_en