

CIVIL SOCIETIES IN THE SAHEL: A REASONED CARTOGRAPHY From understanding contexts to sup- porting social change (Mauritania, Mali, Niger)

SUMMARY OF THE FINAL REPORT

16 novembre 2023

Public

Coordination: Christophe Courtin
Scientific support: Philippe Lavigne-Delville

Country teams:

Mali: Abdoul Sogodogo, Mamadou Keïta

Mauritania : Marta Alonso Cabre, Ramatoulaye Sow

Niger : Hamani Oumarou, Baharou Sarinou, Makama Oumrou Bawa

Burkina Faso: Abdoul Semde

Senegal: Selly Ba

The opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of AFD, its partners or funders.

Please quote this work as follows:

Scientific support: Philippe Lavigne-Delville, Christophe Courtin, Countries teams Mali: Abdoul Sogodogo, Mamadou keita Mauritania :Marta Alonso Cabre, Ramatoulaye Sow , Niger Hamani Oumarou, Baharou Sarinou, Makama Oumrou Bawa, Burkina Faso: Abdoul Semde, Sénégal: Selly Ba , 16 th november 2023 CIVIL SOCIETIES IN THE SAHEL: A REASONED CARTOGRAPHY From understanding contexts to supporting social change (Mauritania, Mali, Niger) "civil societies in Sahel: reasoned cartography from understanding contexts to supporting social change (Mauritania, Mali, Niger) Summary of final report, Plateforme d'Analyse du Suivi et d'Apprentissage au Sahel, Production Pasas.

<https://pasas-minka.fr>

[Mali, Mauritania, Niger]

[Civil society, politics, Associations, NGOs]

SOMMAIRE

1 - INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY.....	4
2 - CIVIL SOCIETY, A POLYSEMIC AND UTILITARIAN CONCEPT	5
3 - THE SPACE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF 'CIVIL SOCIETY'	6
4 - FEMININE AND FEMINIST DYNAMICS.....	8
5 - THE EIGHT "ECOSYSTEMS" OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS	9
6 - THE DYNAMICS OF CSOS IN SAHELIAN COUNTRIES	13
7 - CSOS IN MAURITANIA:	14
8 - CSOS IN NIGER:.....	14
9 - STRONG SOCIAL MOBILISATION.....	15
9.1 - THE PROBLEM OF CONTEXTUAL KNOWLEDGE.....	15
9.2 - THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL PROXIMITY.....	15
9.3 - THE PROBLEM OF SUSTAINABLE FUNDING.....	16
9.4 - THE ISSUE OF ACCOUNTABILITY	16
9.5 - THE ISSUE OF AID VISIBILITY	17

1 - INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The concept of "civil society" is polysemous in both its theoretical and practical meanings. However, the expression "civil society" is useful for describing and analysing the phenomena it covers. Several crisis situations are superimposed on one another in the Sahel. These crises are deepening in a context where the traditional thinking and tools of development aid are being challenged and called into question in depth. This new context for official development assistance requires AFD to review its relations with civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Sahel countries. This involves questioning its doctrine on the notion of civil society, which takes the form of a cartographic approach to understanding the many forms of organisation and action of actors in the field of civil society, particularly the place of women in the forms of organisation of civil society.

The study does not idealise 'civil society', nor does it denigrate it, but aims to provide a realistic picture of complex and often contradictory social and political dynamics. It took place between July and December 2022, mobilising a team of twelve researchers, both for the bibliographical research¹ on the whole of the Sahel except Chad, and for the fieldwork in Niger, Mali and Mauritania. Over sixty interviews (AFD, SCAC, NGOs and associations, ministries) were conducted in the three fieldwork countries. However, the deterioration in relations between France and Mali made it difficult to carry out the research in that country. Given the broad spectrum covered by the concept of civil society, the extent of the research field (three countries) and the growing number of players claiming to be part of civil society, this study is not a directory and does not aim to identify all the players in what is known as civil society: it proposes a reasoned cartography and analyses 38 case studies.

2 - CIVIL SOCIETY, A POLYSEMIC AND UTILITARIAN CONCEPT

This descriptive, non-normative study of 'civil societies' in the Sahel (Mauritania, Mali and Niger), based on eight categories of actors known as 'ecosystems', reveals a profusion of differentiated social dynamics that the concept encapsulates in a 'whole' that does not facilitate analysis or operational thinking. The importation of the concept into Africa and its contemporary use by institutional and associative actors reveal collective organisations that are heterogeneous in their trajectories, objectives, sizes, structures and means, but which are part of the history of the countries studied, particularly around and since independence.

The dynamics of civil society in the Sahel are part of the long historical construction of the Sahel region and the countries that make it up. The colonisation of the Sahel was both a break with and a continuation of the long history of West Africa. The countries covered in this study belong to the same Sahelian region, and share common features, but each country also has its own specific characteristics. A sort of return of the repressed, or even a desire to put the colonial past behind them, partly explains contemporary identity-related phenomena, and even anti-French disengagement. Knowledge of the Sahel's long-term history enables us to analyse a number of current situations that are having an impact on the social and political life of the countries covered by the study.

What we also need to remember about the concept of civil society is that its contemporary use in the world of development is not simply a technical statement: it is also a political and ethical statement, reflecting a way of thinking about society and its relationship with the State where the dimensions of the rule of law, emancipation, democracy, and open public space are corollaries of the concept of civil society.

3 - THE SPACE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF 'CIVIL SOCIETY'

In very general terms, we can consider that the field of civil society corresponds to the collective players in the social life of a country who, beyond the domestic sphere, promote societal values, produce services for given social groups (their own members or third parties), seek to renegotiate social relations and relations between the State and citizens, and who belong neither to the sphere of the State and its institutions nor to the economic sphere (market players).

The range of actors and forms of collective mobilisation is not confined to the NGO sector, but also includes community organisations, religious movements, pre-colonial traditional organisations, coalitions, and social protest movements that are also part of this space between the State, the market and the domestic sphere. The liberal definition of civil society (the triptych SC/Market/State) does not cover all the forces at work in society, and in particular the movements challenging liberal globalisation. Religious movements that challenge state institutions and the model of the rational-bureaucratic state also carry a social critique of elites.

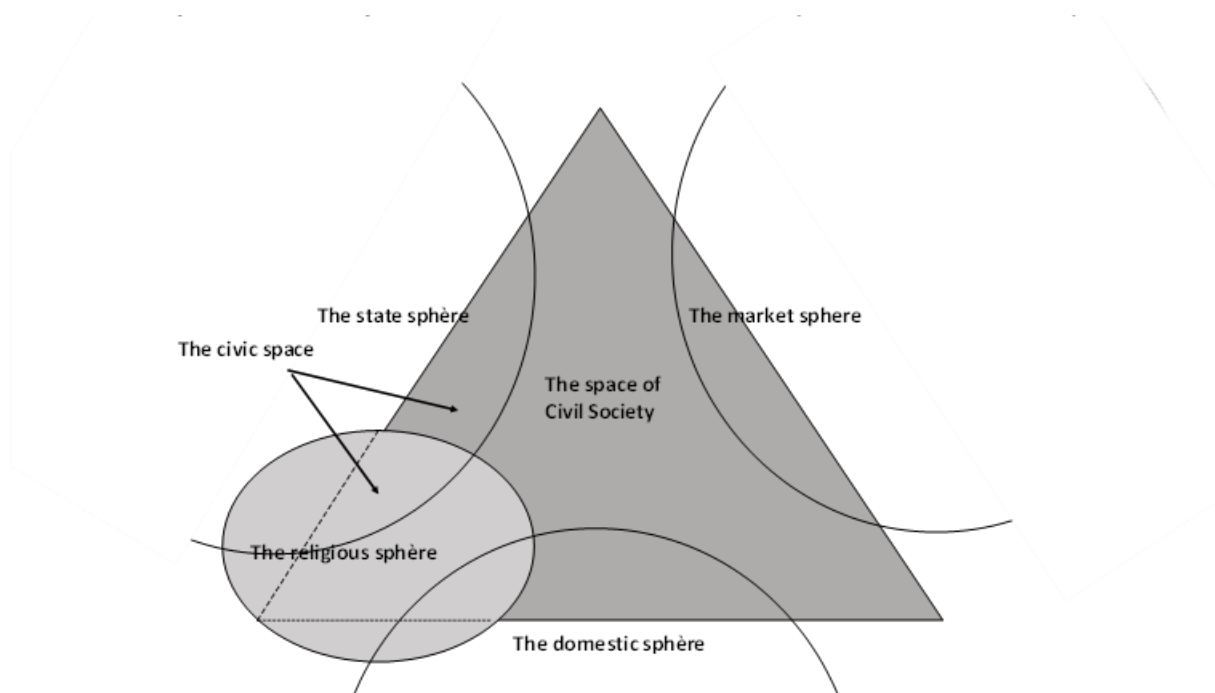


diagram 1: civil society organisations and movements

What we call civil society is represented by the space contained in the dark grey isosceles triangle. It is bordered by the domestic, state and market spheres. The religious sphere, present in the space of civil society, also overlaps the other spheres. The boundaries between these spheres and the space of civil society are porous: the trade unions of state employees and large formal companies (public or private) overlap the space of civil society and the sphere of the market. The social economy sector has to do with the market and associations.

The latter, along with coalitions and social movements in confrontation with the state and its institutions, and in complementarity (or even substitution) with political parties, operate in a common space with political actors, which we will call the civic space (see below).

4 - FEMININE AND FEMINIST DYNAMICS

What is known as civil society has also been the space where women began their struggles for equal rights. It has enabled them to expand their political space and organise around feminist issues. In Africa, women's movements in their current form are a recent creation, but they used to have other forms of organisation, coming together to work and support each other. After independence, when the first women's movements were set up by the new regimes, the feminist movement exploded in the 1980s and 1990s, stimulated in particular by the United Nations Decade for Women. But this NGOisation of women's movements within the UN framework is now being criticised as an attempt to institutionalise and legitimise feminist movements in a new liberal world order. Women have long been involved in social movements, particularly in the struggle for independence. Since independence, African states have set up women's organisations as part of the decentralised structures of single parties. From the 1970s onwards, the developmental dynamic and Third World thinking contributed to the creation of women's associations structured into large networks. Numerous women's groups, structured around income-generating activities, were created, leading to the emergence of women leaders who were often involved in local politics. The new generations of women have expanded their space by no longer confining themselves to issues considered to be feminine, where women's place was certainly central, remaining, even collectively, focused on domestic issues, subsistence, health and children's education, and complementary income-generating activities, but incorporating these into broader political struggles in the civic space and challenging the social order. This shift from women's to feminist organisations has led to debates within women's associations about the priorities of their activities and struggles. The former, the most numerous, remained within the religious and cultural framework of their social and political environment. The latter are involved in international debates on women's rights, gender, and intersectionality. The issues of gender-based violence, reproductive health or financial empowerment, the fight against early marriage or civil registration, remain priorities for most women's associations. Gender relations are changing in Africa, girls' school enrolment makes progress and women are beginning to gain access to power, but the fact remains that women in the Sahel live in patriarchal, highly unequal societies, even if some women are investing in the contemporary cultural sphere to get their message across.

5 - THE EIGHT "ECOSYSTEMS" OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

The metaphor of the ecosystem, used to describe each of the eight categories of stakeholders in civil society, belongs to the vocabulary of ecology. Stakeholders may belong to several ecosystems that intersect and influence each other. This metaphor is intended to be descriptive. It is a flexible and functional grouping of stakeholders based on criteria derived from their own vision of the issues they have identified, are confronted with and are trying to respond to. Although the media and influencers are not included in these ecosystems or even in the notion of civil society, they are studied in section 7.

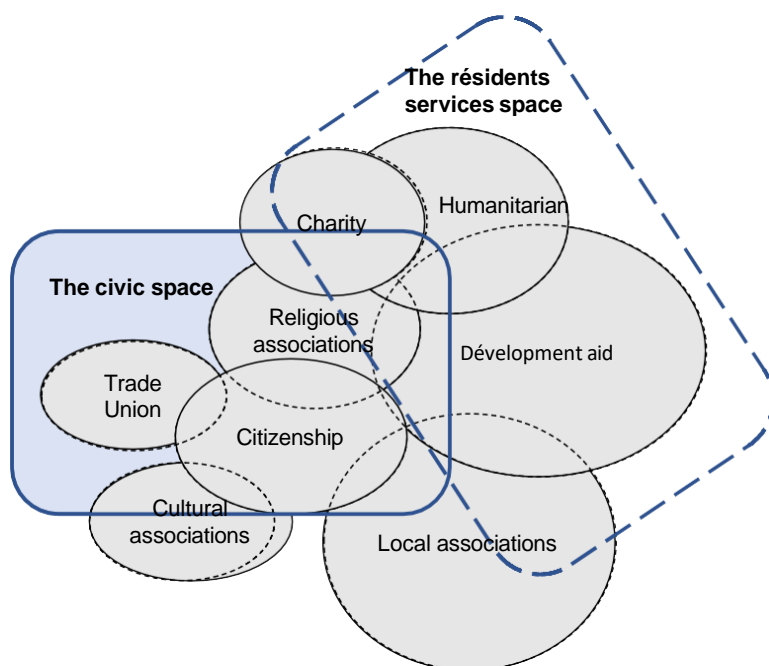


Diagram 2: The "eight ecosystems" of civil society and their relationships

- The citizenship ecosystem is home to associations, activist networks and NGOs that aim to bring about social change by working on citizenship, political issues (corruption, political mandates, prices, democracy, gender equality, etc.) and access to rights. Their methods of action are less consensual than those of other collective actors. They use advocacy, investigative and legal techniques, but also more readily resort to visible forms of protest in the public arena.

Political parties aiming for state power have lost the legitimate voice of society's demands. Certain actors corresponding to a new generation of urban activists, aiming for social transformation, are more "noisy" and are making themselves heard in the public arena, at the cost of new repression by the public authorities. The State is finding it difficult to control these movements, which are using social networks and becoming increasingly transnational.

- The development aid ecosystem includes all the players (local, national, and international) who aim to achieve autonomy and emancipation by taking action to structurally improve the economic and social living conditions of local people, and to support the organisations they set up. It comes under what are conventionally known as "NGOs" or "development associations". These organisations are particularly dependent on international aid to carry out their activities, but they are not the only ones.

A number of major international NGOs were set up as early as independence, as part of the Third World movement. It was with the opening up of democracy in the 90s and the concomitant weakening of the State's role in basic social services that the number of these organisations increased significantly. The concept of NGO is neither a sociological nor a legal concept. It refers to organisations with associative status that work on behalf of other people and receive donations or subsidies for this purpose. These organisations are particularly dependent on international aid to carry out their activities.

- The charitable ecosystem brings together all the associations and players that distribute aid on a charitable basis to improve the daily lives of beneficiaries. The great famines in the Sahel in the 1970s triggered a wave of solidarity in the form of donations in kind and money. Churches and Muslim associations around the world were the main vectors. This ecosystem is the one with the vaguest perimeter. Often starting out with a charitable vision, organisations are moving towards a development aid approach.

This ecosystem has an impact on a very large number of people in countries where living standards in terms of income, health and education are among the lowest in the world. It includes all the organisations that provide additional resources to the most vulnerable people. They range from small local initiatives, founded by an individual who wanted to respond to situations that were of concern to him or her, to international structures or solidarity initiatives between the diaspora and families back home. As with the other ecosystems, there is great diversity in terms of size and resources. The compassionate, charitable approach (on a religious or humanitarian basis) towards donors is a common denominator for all the players in this ecosystem, an approach that is also found in the major international charitable organisations.

- The trade union ecosystem. There are several types of trade union (civil service, large companies in the formal sector, students, schoolchildren, farmers). They are all concerned with social rights, and their specific feature is the right to strike. Their central structure, their history since the colonial period and their contribution to the struggle for independence shed light on the contemporary situation in the public arena. Trade unions are often the blind spot in the civil society approaches of technical partners and donors.

Trade unions played a central role in the transition to independence. They regained their operational autonomy when authoritarian regimes were challenged in the early 1990s. In each country there is a historical trade union centre, born out of the single party. One of the specific features of trade unions is that they can strike. As in France, the representativeness of trade unions is based on their results in professional elections. In each country, a few dominant central organisations can be identified, but there is a proliferation of unions by sector of activity (banking, education, health, mining, public sector, transport) and by socio-professional category.

- The cultural ecosystem encompasses both committed musical creation (rap, local rhythms) that circulates on social networks, as well as artistic groups and cultural or identity-based associations. This ecosystem targets imaginary worlds and deals with divisive social issues. The roots of this ecosystem go back a long way, but it has only gained notoriety and real visibility in the public arena with the development of social networks. It mainly affects urban youth, who are sensitive to new artistic forms and contemporary rhythms shared with other young people around the world. By drawing on shared imaginary worlds, and by targeting young people, artistic expression, particularly rap, makes it possible to address issues of gender equality in the public arena (identity, decolonisation, corrupt elites, the place of religion) that CSOs in other ecosystems do little or nothing to address.

- The emergency/humanitarian ecosystem. This ecosystem mainly concerns international (borderless) organisations, but also local NGOs. They have been very active in the Sahel for a long time, from the great famines of the 1970s to the camps for displaced people today. The relationship between their methods of intervention and the logic of development has been central and debated for a long time, as has the question of their work with local associations and NGOs. In a liberal economy, NGOs are in commercial competition in the development aid market, and more specifically in the humanitarian aid market. The presence of humanitarian actors has increased with the war. The debate on the link between emergencies and development emerged from the very first humanitarian interventions. The importance of emergency humanitarian aid raises the question of the role of the state in these systems.

- The ecosystem of local associations and their local collectives, particularly women's groups. The characteristic of these associations is that they act for their own members, and not for general causes or other categories of actors. They are both rural and urban in their neighbourhoods. Some are organised into large national or international networks. A large part of community life takes place on the outskirts of city centres, around local associations that work with local authorities. In this ecosystem, there

is a dense and continuous network of social initiatives aimed at defending the rights of their members and providing them with services and goods. They are very diverse in terms of size and objectives.

- The ecosystem of religious associations. Most of them are Muslim, with the various spiritual, political and ideological currents, but the Christian churches also often play a significant role. They promote orthodoxy (right thinking) and orthopraxy (good worship). Some also have a developmental vision, while others are more proselytising, although the two are not necessarily distinct. Christians represent active, well-integrated minorities in the three Sahelian countries. But this ecosystem is first and foremost dominated by Islam, which is the religion of 95% of the inhabitants of the three countries in the study. African Islam has become a major resource for Sahelian societies in building a differentiated modernity. Proselytising by the Gulf States has helped to make Islam visible in the public arena, as part of a process of "re-Islamisation".

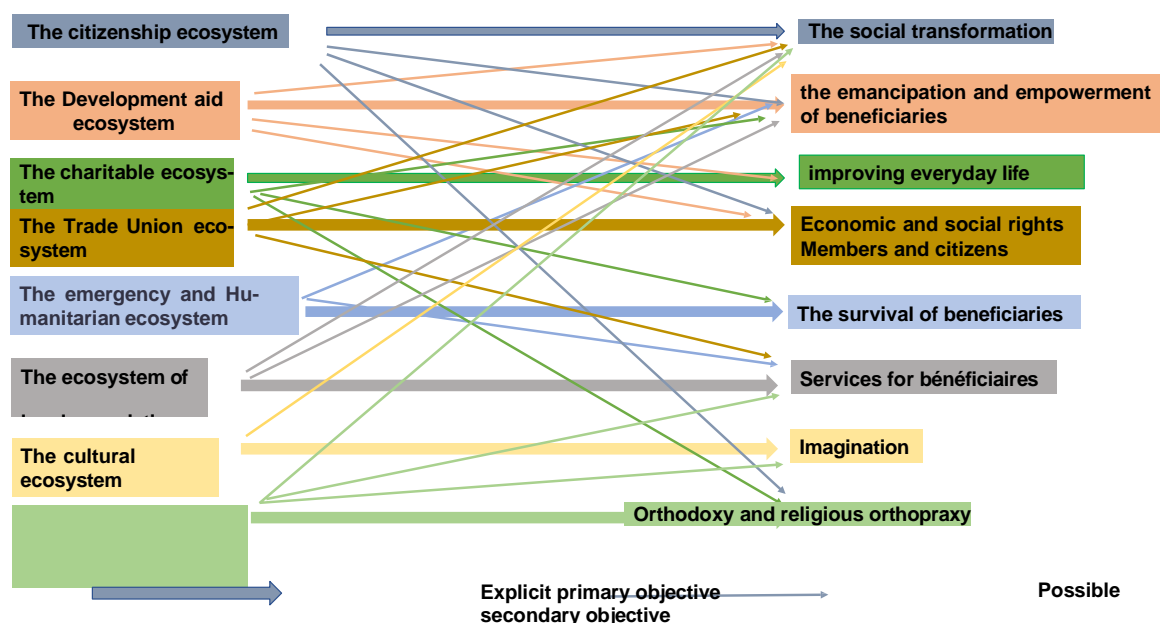
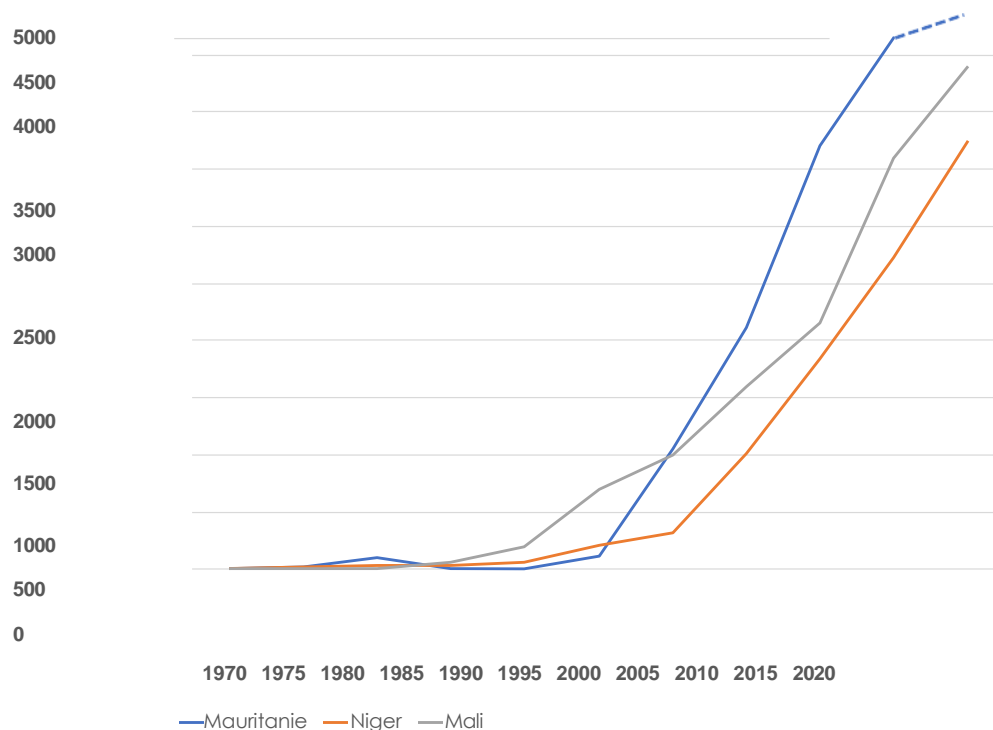


Diagram 3: Cross-objectives of stakeholders by ecosystem

6 - THE DYNAMICS OF CSOS IN SAHELIAN COUNTRIES



SOURCES

Mauritanie UE mapping 2016

Niger ONG profile GAP 2022 MTADC NGO/AD Direction **Mali** SC program Aga Khan Network Groupe URD 2018

Figure 4: Comparative trends in the number of NGOs/associations in the three countries studied

7 - CSOS IN MAURITANIA:

- A **civic citizen space** versus a religious public space.
- A country between Morocco and the Senegal River region.
- A colonised country with little administration.
- Civil society is **strongly community-based** around the Arab-Berber population and Mauritanian traders, with a very pronounced freedmen: former masters dimension.
- Arabic as a source of tension between communities.
- Humanitarian liabilities.
- Slavery and its aftermath.
- Classic development issues along the Senegal River valley.
- A law on associations, open in its wording, closed in its implementation.

8 - CSOS IN NIGER:

Social mobilisation in the face of a state that holds its ground.

- A geographical area centred around two poles: the river and the Chad basin.
- A marginal colony.
- Political instability but institutional stability (internal dynamics).
- The famines of the 1970s.
- A trend over time for civil society players to come together.
- Professional" and non-specialist CS players.
- Linked social and political spaces.
- Imported insecurity?

9 - STRONG SOCIAL MOBILISATION.

The issues and methods of support depend on the type of organisation and the purpose of the support. They differ depending on whether we are dealing with the public services sector or the civic sector, whether the aim is to enable organisations to take action or to encourage debate and collective learning. In particular, the **appropriate instruments** differ. More concretely, by way of summary conclusion, we suggest the following developments grouped around five issues:

9.1 - The problem of contextual knowledge

- Given the diversity of national trajectories, any support strategy must be rooted in **a political analysis of the dynamics of civil society and** its relationship with societal problems and the State. Legitimacy and capacity to intervene.
- In phases of deep crisis and strong questioning of political models, CSOs **need spaces for debate on social issues**, the place of women, governance, the relationship with the State and sectoral policies.
- AFD promotes a human rights-based approach to development (AFDH) (AFD, 2022). It is important in the practical arrangements for implementing support for CSOs that AFD **puts economic, social and cultural rights first** and integrates them fully into infrastructure and equipment projects.

9.2 - The issue of social proximity

- **The main challenge of supporting civil society players** is to support CSOs in their ability to be in tune with social problems, to build a political vision based on experience and roots in society, to **influence public policy** and social relations on these issues, and, for some, to become part of the social and solidarity economy.
- The charitable ecosystem is one of the gateways for religious associations that promote a vision of society that is often far removed from the principles that AFD defends. We need to regain a foothold in aid to the poorest communities. It is the feeling of absence of the State that fuels the success of these associations. The eradication of poverty, which appears in the first paragraph of Article 1 of Law 2021, must therefore be taken seriously. It is necessary to put aid to the poorest communities, via basic social services, back at the centre of the support arrangements for CSOs and to

rebuild public services.

9.3 - The problem of sustainable funding

- This requires **long-term, adaptable, and highly targeted support**, to deal with specific situations and to foster a societal base and proven know-how, whether operational or in terms of studies, leading local or national public debate, or advocacy.
- The perverse effects of short-term project financing have been widely highlighted by research.
- **The call for projects tool (right of initiative) needs to be carefully considered.** It entails a risk of insecure funding, and presupposes technical, financial, and administrative capacity to meet the requirements of project formulation and monitoring, as well as a foundation to ensure the structure's sustainability through a series of contracts.
- Federative organisations and women's associations, those involved in citizenship education, human rights, and public debate, particularly need to be able to **take long-term action**.

9.4 - The issue of accountability

- All organisations in the social economy sector are caught in a dilemma between **two responsibilities**: to the people they are trying to support (who do not always have the means to influence the services they are offered) and to their resource providers.
- **The mobilisation of CSOs as subcontractors in projects cannot a priori be considered as a form of support**, as funding is the counterpart of the execution of predefined tasks, which leaves little room for original proposals and learning.
- In the current political context, AFD's direct support for **organisations involved in societal issues can be delicate**, even for these organisations. Indirect support, via discreet European NGOs, may be more appropriate.
- Medium-term collective projects focused on solving specific problems can encourage cooperation and mutual learning. Collective support should promote reflexivity and self-assessment, to help CSOs increase their relevance and effectiveness and avoid the logic of benefit sharing.

9.5 - The issue of aid visibility

- **Good visibility** for AFD aid must be based on its vision of aid in specific contexts. It should not be a generic "France" visibility but should be more modestly structured around **aid goals that speak to beneficiaries in a practical way: reconstruction of basic services, security, daily life, proximity.**

pasas-minka.fr

Ce rapport a été élaboré dans le cadre d'un financement du Fonds Paix et Résilience Minka.

Le Fonds Minka, mis en œuvre par le groupe AFD, est la réponse opérationnelle de la France à l'enjeu de lutte contre la fragilisation des États et des sociétés. Lancé en 2017, Minka finance des projets dans des zones affectées par un conflit violent, avec un objectif : la consolidation de la paix. Il appuie ainsi quatre bassins de crise via quatre initiatives : l'Initiative Minka Sahel, l'Initiative Minka Lac Tchad, l'Initiative Minka RCA et l'Initiative Minka Moyen-Orient.

La Plateforme d'Analyse, de Suivi et d'Apprentissage au Sahel (PASAS) est financée par le Fonds Paix et Résilience Minka. Elle vise à éclairer les choix stratégiques et opérationnels des acteurs de développement locaux et internationaux, en lien avec les situations de crises et de fragilités au Sahel et dans le bassin du Lac Tchad. La PASAS se met en œuvre à travers d'un accord-cadre avec le groupement IRD-ICE après appel d'offres international dont le rôle est double : (i) produire des connaissances en réponse à nos enjeux opérationnels de consolidation de la paix au Sahel et (ii) valoriser ces connaissances à travers deux outils principaux : une plateforme numérique, accessible à l'externe, qui accueillera toutes les productions et des

conférences d'échange autour des résultats des études. La plateforme soutient ainsi la production et le partage de connaissances, en rassemblant des analyses robustes sur les contextes sahéliens et du pourtour du Lac Tchad.

Nous encourageons les lecteurs à reproduire les informations contenues dans les rapports PASAS pour leurs propres publications, tant qu'elles ne sont pas vendues à des fins commerciales. En tant que titulaire des droits d'auteur, le projet PASAS et l'IRD demande à être explicitement mentionné et à recevoir une copie de la publication. Pour une utilisation en ligne, nous demandons aux lecteurs de créer un lien vers la ressource originale sur le site Web de PASAS, <https://pasas-minka.fr>.