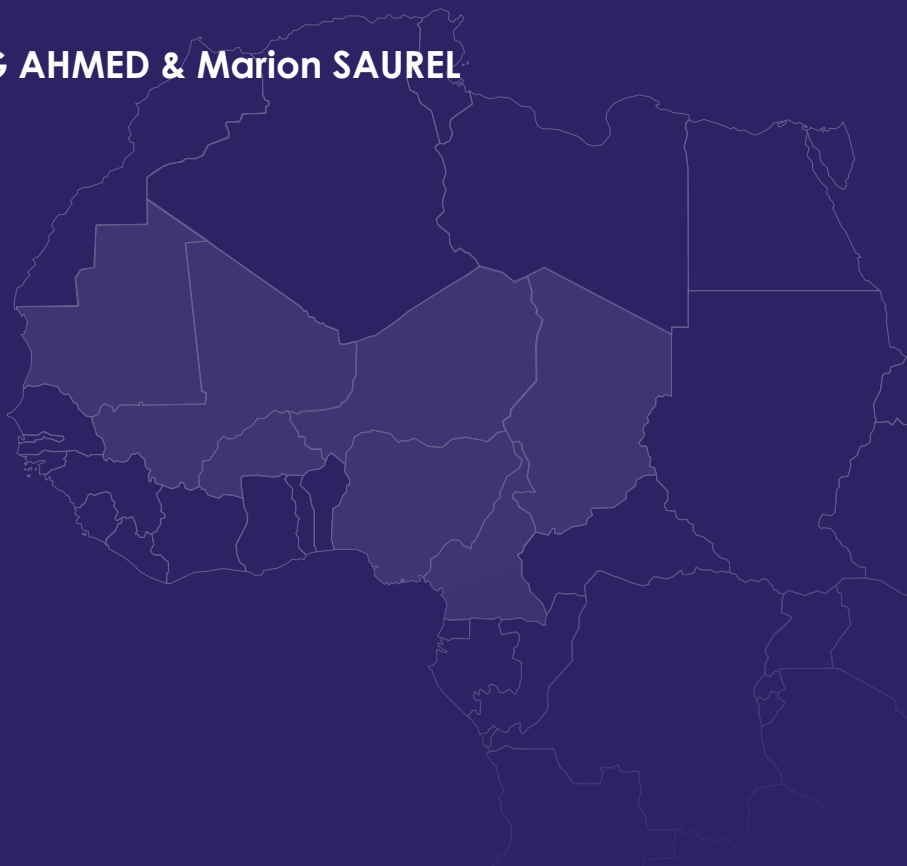


PROTECTION CHALLENGES IN PRO- LONGED CRISIS CONTEXTS AND FRAGILE STATES IN WEST AFRICA: COORDINATING RESPONSES BETWEEN EMERGENCY AND DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY

19 décembre 2024

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

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1 - BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The countries of West Africa, such as Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, and to a lesser extent some of the countries of the Gulf of Guinea, are considered to be fragile areas, facing major challenges such as poverty, violence and political instability. Since 2012, insecurity in the Sahel region has gradually spread, now affecting northern Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo and Benin, where armed groups are gaining influence, prompting development actors to take action to support these countries and prevent a large-scale crisis.

At the same time, since 2013 the protection of human rights has become a priority for humanitarian and development initiatives, particularly in fragile and conflict zones. AFD has joined this trend by investing in actions to build resilience and prevent rights violations in fragile contexts, notably through the MINKA instrument.

However, the experience of the Sahel and its extension to the north of the Gulf of Guinea countries raises questions about the effectiveness and limits of support financed by development donors in terms of protecting the rights of populations in fragile contexts, and about possible adaptations.

2 - STUDY ISSUES

How can AFD and other development donors adapt their approaches to effectively prevent rights violations in fragile contexts such as the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea countries?

To this end, the study explores four questions: (1) how AFD perceives and positions its protection interventions within the humanitarian-development nexus; (2) to what extent do its programmes protect populations in contexts of increasing tension; (3) to what extent do AFD's interventions include the possibility of a worsening context; and (4) what inspiring approaches can guide its future actions to better prevent rights violations.

3 - A COMPLEX CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Protection covers actions aimed at guaranteeing respect for individual rights, particularly in crises. It includes sub-sectors such as the protection of civilians (protection of non-combatant populations during armed conflicts), civil protection (government actions to protect citizens against various dangers, such as natural disasters, often carried out by the emergency services and the Red Cross), social protection (policies aimed at reducing poverty and economic vulnerability, by providing a safety net for populations at risk).

In addition, **the concept of the centrality of protection** that has prevailed for a decade now requires all interventions, whether humanitarian or development, to consider their impact on the security and rights of individuals, and therefore on protection.

Support in terms of protection can be broken down operationally as follows:

- **Protection mainstreaming:** integrating protection principles into all aid programmes to ensure that all sectors contribute indirectly to the protection of rights. E.g. All projects, in all sectors, must be genuinely inclusive and must not exacerbate pre-existing conflicts. E.g. Without an access ramp, most disabled people cannot access the health centre. Without special toilets, young girls refuse to go to school.
- **Integrated protection:** explicit inclusion of protection principles in programmes in other sectors (health, education, etc.), in order to reduce vulnerability. E.g. This means responding to a clear need for protection through support from another sector. E.g. The aim is to respond to a clear need for

protection through support from another sector. Ex. Women are harassed when fetching water far from the camp. Facilitating access to water in the camp reduces the risk of rights/protection violations.

- **Specific protection:** interventions directly focused on protecting vulnerable groups, with specialised actions such as assistance for victims of violence.

Protection is associated with two very similar guiding principles: Do No Harm, i.e. avoiding unintended harmful effects for beneficiaries, and **conflict sensitivity**, i.e. adapting aid actions and programmes to prevent tensions that may arise, even unintentionally, and maximising positive impacts.

4 - STUDY METHODOLOGY AND TIMETABLE

The study is based on an initial documentary analysis including theoretical and technical sources (see study bibliography) and an analysis of AFD's project portfolios in Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as documents specific to the MINKA, SDNM, 3 Frontières, Yéréтали and JUGE projects.

In addition, the data collection, carried out between mid-August and mid-September 2024, consisted of 74 interviews covering global, regional (Sahel and Gulf of Guinea countries) and national issues in Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali. The interviews, mostly individual and conducted in an open-ended or semi-structured format with a guide, were structured in a common database, offering a balanced perspective between national, regional and global levels.

The team selected profiles with experience in the Sahel and/or the Gulf of Guinea, including international donors, international and local NGOs, the UN, the ICRC, local authorities and beneficiaries, to ensure a diversity of perspectives. The interviews included humanitarian and development actors, as well as specialists and generalists dealing with fragile contexts and protection issues. This qualitative methodology aimed to reflect a variety of opinions and experiences.

Minor difficulties such as administrative delays and the reluctance of some NGOs (for fear of reprisals from the authorities, particularly in Mali and Burkina Faso) were encountered. Despite this, the data collection objectives were achieved without any significant impact on the conclusions.

5 - NOTA BENE.

Definition of protection used in the interviews: During the interviews, the term "protection" often proved ambiguous and a source of confusion. A double terminology, inspired by the Sahel Alliance, was adopted to clarify the exchanges: on the one hand, a definition centred on the maintenance of essential services for the basic needs of the population, similar to the protection of civilians in the humanitarian field, and on the other hand, an orientation towards social cohesion, integrating social relations, sometimes conflictual, between populations. This definition is repeated in part II of the study, which is devoted to the results.

The study, commissioned by the AFD, focuses mainly on this institution, while integrating the practices of other development donors to provide a broader analysis of the approaches shared by different players.

The study focuses specifically on the fragile or conflict zones of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, and its conclusions apply only to these contexts.

The study does not constitute an evaluation of AFD's financing or a detailed analysis of contracts. Its aim is to provide elements to enrich the strategic, operational and administrative thinking of development donors, particularly AFD.

6 - FINDINGS

Research Question (RQ) 1: Determine how AFD perceives itself and its position within the spectrum of possible actions in the field of protection.

Sub-Question (SQ) 1.1: How do development programmes targeting the 2030 SDGs contribute to improving the protection of populations?

-C.1.1.1: Most of the projects financed by development donors, including AFD, contribute indirectly to creating or supporting an environment that protects people's rights, without making this an explicit priority. In the region studied, development actors focus on the priority policies of beneficiary countries, where protection is associated more with humanitarian actions than integrated as a central objective. Protection is indirectly addressed through the maintenance of basic services and the promotion of social cohesion, thereby strengthening the link between the State and its citizens. This is an implicit objective, often hoped for in projects as basic protection analyses are absent from projects.

-C.1.1.2: However, a more direct approach to protection issues in fragile contexts, preventing crises and violations, has recently emerged among development donors. These interventions include preventive actions focused on development to anticipate violations and prepare populations (conflict analyses, protection monitoring, and community dialogue); risk management measures, such as contingency plans; increased coordination with humanitarian actors; and post-crisis recovery actions in support of victims. Technically, they incorporate conflict sensitivity analyses and the "Do No Harm" principle, enabling interventions to be adapted to the context to maximise their impact while reducing local tensions. Contractually, this support combines the flexibility of humanitarian interventions with the resources and continuity of development. This hybrid format involves the authorities in strategic decisions, while the operators manage implementation to ensure speed and traceability, with local technical monitoring.

Examples: EUTF - European Union Trust Fund for the Sahel with the **PUS-BF** and **ProGEF** programmes in Burkina Faso, **Key** in Mali. The **Adaptive Social Protection Programme for the Sahel** supported by Switzerland. **"Leave No One Behind"** in Burkina Faso, supported by GIZ. Etc.

At AFD, this dynamic is manifested in the MINKA instrument via: (1) the integration of the "Do No Harm" and conflict sensitivity approaches; (2) NGO projects targeting vulnerable populations, such as the JUGE project by Avocats Sans Frontières in Mali; (3) the contracting of non-state actors adapted to conflict contexts, such as ADELAK on Lake Chad; and (4) teams trained and recruited for fragile contexts. Outside the MINKA zones, this dynamic remains sporadic, due to the lack of a clear strategy and appropriate procedures.

SQ 1.2 How are protection issues addressed by development donors (incl AFD)?

- **C. 1.2.1: Gaps in understanding and mastering the technical challenges of protection, particularly worrying in the fragile contexts of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea.** Protection is a complex field that is difficult to master and generally poses technical challenges for development donors such as AFD, despite the expertise of certain agents (including CCC). While these shortcomings are less of a problem in stable contexts, they become critical in crisis zones such as the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, where technical expertise is essential to avoid serious mistakes. Limited knowledge can not only reduce the effectiveness of prevention and response actions, but also sometimes intensify existing tensions.

- **C. 1.2.2. Poor integration of protection issues in AFD's actions and programmes.** In the absence of a clear institutional strategy, the integration of protection into AFD's programmes remains limited and not given much priority. Despite some progress, as in Burkina Faso, protection is rarely a central objective and remains fragmented, leading to a lack of coherence at regional and national levels. This limits the potential impact of programmes on protection issues, despite significant investment.
- **C. 1.2.3. Insufficient resources and skills mobilised in projects to ensure effective and consistent protection.** Projects, whether they focus on protection or not, often lack the external resources and skills needed to guarantee effective protection. Several critical points have been identified: **context analyses** rarely take account of conflicts, such as those relating to land and resource management in the Sahel, which limits the extent to which they can be taken into account in planning; **targeting beneficiaries** is rarely based on a "protection equation" combining vulnerabilities, threats and capacities for each group, which tends to essentialise the targets (who are inherently vulnerable) and reduces the impact of interventions; Finally, **strategic coordination in the area of protection remains inadequate** at national, regional and international levels, with limited shared objectives and little participation by donors in coordination mechanisms, which hampers the effectiveness of protection responses.

SQ 1.3. In the Sahel and in the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea, how effective are development programmes felt to be in protecting against environmental degradation?

- **C. 1.3.1. Key factors in the effectiveness of development support for protection :**

1. Taking account of the context and agility of support: The effectiveness of projects depends on the integration of "Do No Harm" and conflict sensitivity analyses, which are crucial for adjusting actions to local dynamics and avoiding tensions. These analyses make it possible to anticipate the risk of conflict and adapt projects accordingly. A flexible application of these analyses facilitates adjustments during the course of the project, such as the inclusion of initially marginalised beneficiaries or the introduction of compensation mechanisms to prevent perceptions of injustice.

2. Maintaining administrative, social and legal services: In a crisis, protecting people depends on maintaining essential services. In addition to humanitarian aid, access to justice, education and administrative services guarantees fundamental rights and continuity for populations. Birth registration and legal documents protect against statelessness and facilitate access to aid. Secure land titles reduce tensions and encourage the return of displaced persons, particularly women and vulnerable populations, thereby limiting recruitment by armed groups.

3. Local, integrated and flexible nature of support: The local roots of "nexus" or "stabilisation" programmes (e.g. Key, PDU in Mali) strengthen their effectiveness in terms of protection and social cohesion. By involving local communities and authorities, these programmes increase local leadership and adopt operational methods based on humanitarian standards. However, their sustainability depends on their institutional integration to ensure an autonomous and lasting transition.

4. Coordination and integration into wider initiatives: Isolated protection projects, while often effective, lack lasting impact. By integrating them into broader initiatives, they enhance their sustainability and relevance, thereby increasing the overall impact of interventions.

- **C. 1.3.2. Significant but insufficient efforts to protect people's rights before crises occur.** Despite significant efforts to promote protection and social cohesion in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, **the results of development initiatives often remain diffuse and insufficient to curb crises and rights violations**, due to a lack of structure and coordination with humanitarian aid. For effective protection to be possible upstream of crises, **it is essential to increase support, ensure a strategic commitment** and strengthen funding, with protection and social cohesion as central objectives in all support. **This commitment does not mean replacing sectoral support, but integrating protection into all**

projects in fragile areas, with clear objectives, conflict analyses and a balance between rapid intervention and sustainable programmes.

RQ 2: Determine whether regular interventions by development actors (including AFD) have a protective and, more specifically, a preventive effect on expected violations of rights in a deteriorating context.

SQ 2.1 To what extent do regular development programmes (including those financed by AFD) in fragile and degraded contexts protect against and prevent violations of the law?

- **C. 2.1.1. Mainly preventive support with little tangible impact.** Development support that has an impact in terms of protection is considered preventive, aimed at avoiding violence and violations of rights, rather than anticipatory, i.e. focused on anticipating risks and planning to mitigate the consequences. However, their impact is not very tangible.

SQ 2.2 In fragile contexts, to what extent does development support include the possibility of a deterioration in the context?

- **C. 2.2.1. Limited integration of the risks of deterioration and insufficient flexibility of procedures in donor projects in fragile contexts.** Projects in fragile areas often identify the risks of deterioration. This contrasts with the nexus programmes financed by AFD's MINKA instrument, which integrate these risks more systematically. In addition, **contractual rigidity and a lack of flexibility hamper adaptability**: adjustment clauses and crisis modifiers remain difficult to mobilise due to complex procedures, whereas MINKA projects benefit from greater flexibility, enabling rapid adjustments. In addition, outside MINKA, **AFD's procedures are still perceived as relatively rigid**, although less restrictive than those of other donors. Conversely, GIZ, LuxDev and the European Union offer moderate flexibility, while the Netherlands, Switzerland and the Nordic countries stand out for their much more flexible procedures, facilitating better adaptation to contexts of fragility.

SQ 2.3 Are the protection objectives of projects defined on the basis of common objectives established between humanitarian and development actors at a high strategic level?

As part of the *New Way of Working*, the humanitarian-development nexus encourages actors in fragile areas to work together to achieve common protection objectives. This study shows that **development donors tend to align themselves with national priorities, but sensitive issues such as protection and social cohesion are rarely discussed** explicitly and systematically with the authorities. **Complementarity and strategic coordination around protection often fall short of expectations, which limits the potential impact of interventions.** Finally, **the participation of development donors in humanitarian and protection consultation frameworks remains sporadic**, whereas they are present in those focusing on development, with the exception of Switzerland and the Netherlands, for example, which favour a more balanced approach. Coordination often remains fragmented, leading to isolated interventions.

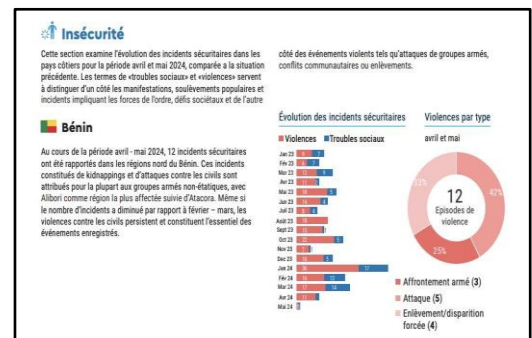
RQ3: What approaches could development donors such as AFD draw on to improve prevention and preparedness in the face of growing risks of rights violations and the deterioration of fragile contexts?

An analysis of the literature, projects and interviews identified **9 thematic areas and 20 operational tools** to better anticipate violence and rights violations in the context of a crisis and provide appropriate responses to protect or restore the rights of affected populations with a view to development.

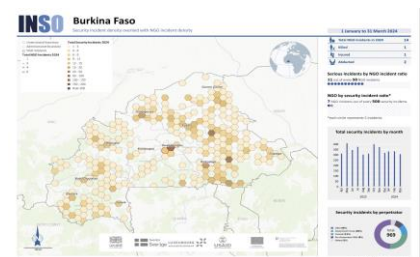
→ Area 1: Supporting contextual protection monitoring

Contextual protection intelligence is **crucial** for development players in fragile areas. The lack of detailed information **on specific risks, such as direct threats to populations or restrictions on access to essential services**, limits the ability of players to anticipate and respond effectively to crises. **A regular, coordinated/common and up-to-date monitoring system** can provide a better understanding of the context and prepare more appropriate responses ahead of crises.

Tool 1: A contextual monitoring system to track macro trends.
A contextual monitoring system, based on a variety of sources (strategic, political and geopolitical studies, social, economic and anthropological surveys, etc.) and supported by players such as the International Crisis Group, Promédiation, IRD, Lasdel, Clingendael, etc., provides an essential basis for understanding conflict dynamics and guiding operational strategies in fragile areas. **However, although these analyses are very useful, they do not always take into account the risks of human rights violations and must therefore be supplemented** by more specific protection tools to anticipate threats more accurately.



Tool 2: Multi-risk monitoring tools and conflict and access analyses
Multi-hazard monitoring tools provide an overview of security, economic and environmental threats, tailored to the specific characteristics of the coastal countries of the Gulf of Guinea. **For example, the GRANIT tool** in the Gulf of Guinea region provides a detailed understanding of threats, documenting security events and helping to coordinate responses in real time. **Conflict and access analyses, provided by organisations such as INSO**, complement this intelligence by tracking access and security problems for local stakeholders.



Tool 3: Protection monitoring

This mechanism collects data on human rights violations in crises, enabling political and humanitarian responses to be adapted. Actors such as UNHCR and INGOs use it to combine perceptions with factual data, producing analyses that are more credible and overcoming the bias of under-reporting or exaggeration. The confidentiality of the data is crucial, as its sensitivity exposes victims to risks and may give rise to reticence on the part of the authorities. The quality of analyses is essential, but various monitoring systems (such as GBVIMS, which is specific to sexual violence) are still not harmonised. A single, credible system would require stable, long-term funding.

Example: Project 21, supported by the UNHCR and DRC, monitors protection trends in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. However, it has been criticised for its focus on perceptions of insecurity, which are insufficiently balanced by factual data, and for the variable quality of the analyses, which limits their impact on programming.

→ Axis 2: Systematise the use of "Do No Harm" and conflict sensitivity analyses to enable operations to be maintained and adapted

➤ Tools 4 & 5: Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity analyses.

"Do No Harm" and conflict sensitivity analyses assess whether an intervention could unintentionally cause negative effects, exacerbating tensions between beneficiaries and posing reputational risks

for the donor and operators. These tools, although initially humanitarian, are also useful for development projects to adjust support to conflict dynamics, maximising positive impacts and reducing negative effects. However, these analyses are often superficially applied, outsourced or limited to a single initial project, which reduces their effectiveness. To be fully effective, they should be carried out internally, iteratively and in a light, clear and visual format, with the results incorporated into regular reports to enable operational adjustments to be made. In the case of budget support and loans, the integration of these analyses is more complex, but it is essential to ask questions about conflict sensitivity in the preliminary studies in order to anticipate potential divisions and plan adaptation measures. In the northern regions of the countries bordering the Gulf of Guinea, where tensions are increasing with the arrival of new populations, this type of analysis is now considered essential to support projects.

→ Axis 3: Cohesion and protection: strengthening impact through a local approach

Adopting a local approach enhances the effectiveness of protection interventions by responding to the specific needs of communities. This approach combines a national strategy with practical action on the ground, involving local players to ensure a rapid response to crises. By encouraging their active participation in the design and monitoring of projects, this approach supports national ownership and is fully in line with the localisation agenda. In addition, the interviews reveal the need to accentuate the local dynamic in the following areas of support:

➤ **Tool / recommendation 6: Continue specific support for protection, focusing on vulnerabilities arising from tensions and crisis risks**

In fragile contexts, specific protection interventions, such as the fight against GBV and the promotion of gender equality, remain crucial and must target specific needs or situations of discrimination linked to the crisis and the vulnerabilities of local populations. Approaches that are too general and detached from the context do not really meet the needs. To ensure relevant support, projects must include a multi-hazard contextual analysis, a beneficiary-centred protection analysis (protection equation), and encourage active participation in local coordination mechanisms.

➤ **Tool 7: Justice: support for access to justice in vulnerable areas**

In the fragile zones of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, tensions over land and resources are exacerbated when unacknowledged injustices persist, exacerbated by the absence of accessible state justice, which is perceived as complex and costly. Traditional justice, although more widely accepted, remains marginalised and inadequate to meet growing needs. Instability often pushes legal actors to leave the region, creating a legal vacuum where unresolved conflicts fuel tensions.



Example: The concept of paralegals, developed by the NGO NAMATI, offers a solution by training community members in basic law. These paralegals, who are not lawyers, facilitate access to justice, mediate in disputes, assist with administrative procedures and raise awareness of rights. This model provides essential access to justice in areas without formal legal systems, offering local services such as mediation and awareness raising.

➤ **Tool 8: Developing and maintaining access to civil legal documentation**

In fragile areas, the absence of legal documents such as birth certificates and land titles deprives people of a legal status, complicating disputes and exacerbating injustices. Modernising the civil registry and digitising the land register helps to secure these rights, even in times of crisis.

Example: NRC's ICLA (Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance) programme provides essential legal support to vulnerable populations through information, counselling and assistance. It helps communities to obtain official documents, such as birth certificates and identity cards, needed to access public services and assert their rights. In areas where there are land conflicts, particularly in the Sahel where



80% of requests concern land issues, ICLA helps to secure property rights. ICLA does not replace the authorities, but complements state services in remote areas, supporting community stability and access to local justice.

→ **Axis 4: Reinvesting more strongly in traditional programmes for integrated local development and for agro-pastoral balance**

➤ **Tool 9. Relaunch integrated local development programmes for a holistic approach to the challenges of land conflicts, access and shared use of resources**

Land disputes, access to resources and conflicts over use are recurring problems in sensitive areas of the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea, exacerbated by competition over natural resources. Integrated local development programmes offer a sustainable and holistic response by tackling socio-economic, environmental and political issues. They aim to improve equitable access to natural resources by supporting sustainable agriculture and local infrastructure, while promoting participatory governance through local committees to prevent conflicts over use. Involving communities in resource management reduces inter-community tensions and promotes fairer distribution, contributing to social cohesion and protecting vulnerable populations despite insecurity and climate challenges.

➤ **Tool 10. Relaunch support for the primary sector with a view to achieving a balance between agriculture and pastoralism.**

In the Sahelian zone and the northern regions of the Gulf of Guinea, the local economy is based on a fragile balance between agriculture and pastoralism, adapted to semi-arid conditions. Historically, public policies and donor support have favoured one sector or the other, creating an imbalance that exacerbates inter-community tensions and insecurity. In West Africa, this imbalance has often marginalised pastoralism, destabilising the Sahel, or, conversely, provoked tensions with farming communities, particularly the Peulhs, who have been accused of supporting armed groups. In a context of scarce resources, these rivalries are intensifying, particularly in the countries of the Gulf of Guinea, where the restrictions imposed on herds accentuate the friction between pastoralists and farmers. Restoring harmonious coexistence between agriculture and pastoralism is therefore crucial to strengthening stability in these fragile areas.

→ **Axis 5: Support national social protection and contingency institutions for a proactive national response to protection issues**

Tool 11: Integrating protection into multi-hazard contingency mechanisms.

Multi-hazard contingency plans, usually focused on natural disasters, can incorporate protection, social cohesion and proactive responses to vulnerabilities such as population displacement. **For example, the Mopti contingency plan (Mali - 2021)** includes protection in emergency scenarios linked to displacement and violence. **The "Support Project for Internally Displaced Persons"** (PDICA) in Burkina Faso proposes temporary access to land for displaced persons, **a "contingency land tenure system"**, promoting their self-sufficiency and reducing pressure on the resources of host communities.

Tool 12: Support the adaptability of social protection mechanisms by increasing the integration of protection.

Since the 2010s, social protection programmes in West Africa, such as the **Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program** and the **Projet Filets Sociaux Productifs** in Côte d'Ivoire, have moved towards adaptive approaches to strengthen the capacity to respond to economic, climatic and social shocks, by increasing benefits for vulnerable populations (vertical integration) and extending coverage to new affected groups (horizontal integration).

Although significant progress has been made, the crises in the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea **call for greater adaptability in the social protection system**, including, for example: (1) rapidly integrating new vulnerable people; (2) guaranteeing flexible aid for displaced people; (3) stepping up vertical integration to ensure access to basic services; and (4) broadening the inclusion of displaced people

and refugees. On this last point, Mauritania has been integrating refugees from the Mbera camp into its Tékavoul social protection programme since 2019, while supporting the host communities.

→ Area 6: Help prevent and reduce conflict at local level

➤ **Tool / approach 13: Reducing sources of conflict at local level. "Community-based prevention.**
In fragile areas, a small conflict can quickly spread, making it crucial to identify and reduce tensions through local participatory approaches. **Community-based conflict prevention** aims to prevent crises by strengthening social cohesion and involving communities in identifying and dealing with risks. This includes: anticipating conflicts by identifying risk factors, using traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, promoting dialogue between groups, and early warning systems to detect violence. Supported by humanitarian actors (UNHCR/DRC/IRC), this approach can also be adopted by development actors.

Example of projects: In Liptako-Gourma in Mali, a combination of three initiatives has helped to reduce local tensions, thereby strengthening community leadership. (1) Community dialogue to identify sources of conflict led to recommendations for targeted investment (Projet de Renforcement de la Cohésion Sociale, Humanitarian Dialogue EUTF). (2) These investments were integrated into communal development plans under local supervision (SDNM & 3 frontières, AFD/EUTF). (3) The funding and concerted management of these initiatives (SDNM, 3 frontières, EUTF Emergency Programme).

➤ **Tool/method 14: Community-based protection**

This approach mobilises local communities **directly** and **free of charge** to identify risks and rights violations, placing local people at the heart of the decision-making process. It ensures that protection solutions are tailored to specific needs, by building human rights capacity and targeting vulnerable groups (women, children, the elderly, etc.) for sustainable inclusion. The aim is to create resilient community systems that can last beyond emergency aid.

Example of projects: The **Community Protection Programme** in northern Mali (DRC/ECHO, since 2014) aims to reduce armed violence, improve access to services, strengthen social cohesion and promote early warning systems to prevent conflict. **The SOLiD programme (DRC/EU)** encourages social and trade union dialogue in several southern Mediterranean countries, while strengthening social cohesion.

→ Axis 7: Maintaining access to essential services, including during crisis peaks: the "integrated multi-sector protection" approach

➤ **Tool 15: Adaptable and integrated multi-sector support programmes.**

In fragile areas, vulnerabilities and risk factors are often multi-sectoral. During crises, access to essential services, a priority need for the population, becomes a major challenge, while the functionality of local institutions is often affected. The integrated multi-sectoral protection approach combines sectoral actions to respond effectively to the varied needs of populations and strengthen the protection of their rights, while consolidating local capacities and the continuity of public services.

Also known as nexus, resilience or stabilisation (H/D) programmes, these initiatives can cover the following sectors (non-exhaustive): livelihood support, health infrastructure strengthening (continuity of care), livelihood development (household economic development), provision of shelter, WASH and NFI services, emergency education, specific protection for victims, support for essential administrative services, social cohesion/community dialogue, etc.

The essential terms and conditions: 1) project promoters with expertise in conflict situations and local development; 2) prior involvement in the area; and 3) flexible contractual terms and conditions to adapt to dynamic situations.

Examples of programmes: **Yéréтали** (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, AFD) improves the living conditions of vulnerable populations through cash transfers, health interventions and support for displaced per-

sons. **The Emergency programme (PDU,EUTF)** stabilises the border areas of the G5 Sahel with emergency actions including cash transfers, health and nutrition. **RESILAC** (Lake Chad Basin,EUTF,AFD) strengthens resilience in the face of the Boko Haram crises and climate change, by promoting social cohesion and youth employment.

→ **Axis 8. Multi-level synergies and political dialogue for a coordinated response**

➤ **Approach 16: Promoting humanitarian-development synergies at national level**

The common vision and strategic synergies between humanitarian and development actors at national level strengthen interventions, by favouring the sharing of contextual information such as macroeconomic analyses and protection monitoring data. Strategic dialogue with national authorities and the active participation of donors, such as AFD, are essential for establishing common priorities.

➤ **Approach 17: Advocacy and policy dialogue for strategic coordination**

Political dialogue on vulnerability and protection can help to align priorities, but encounters obstacles. Development donors and banks can use their influence to facilitate a strategic dialogue, while respecting local political sensitivities.

➤ **Approach 18: Operational coordination and complementarity on the ground**

Operational coordination must go beyond theory to have a real impact on the protection of vulnerable populations, as a lack of coordination increases risks and creates gaps in responses. It is crucial for project sponsors to ensure that their actions complement and are synchronised with those of other players.

➤ **Approach 19: Active participation in "global" protection working groups and strengthening of donor coordination**

Participation in global protection working groups is essential to promote a coordinated approach. An informal group of humanitarian and development donors is harmonising efforts to support the 'centrality of protection' and encouraging development actors to contribute to the Global Protection Cluster's reflections in order to strengthen synergies between humanitarian and development interventions.

→ **Axis 9: Post-conflict, supporting restorative and transitional justice initiatives**

➤ **Tool 20: Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commissions (CVJR)**

In post-conflict contexts, traditional judicial mechanisms are often insufficient to deal with human rights violations and support reconstruction. Restorative and transitional justice helps to punish violations while strengthening social cohesion through various mechanisms, including reparation for victims, reconciliation, mediation, truth commissions and institutional reforms to improve governance. The essential elements include: 1) expertise in transitional and restorative justice adapted to the local context; 2) a community base to ensure the participation of local populations and authorities; and 3) flexibility to adjust approaches to post-conflict realities.

One example is the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) in Mali, set up in 2014, which has enabled victims to testify about violations since 1960, although its mandate ended without finalising its work due to political instability, raising the question of its relevance in other contexts, such as the countries of the Gulf of Guinea.

RQ4: Should AFD's current operational and contractual arrangements be adjusted to support the development of preventive approaches to protection in deteriorating contexts?

SC 4.1 What are the contractual terms and conditions and other factors to be considered in fragile contexts in order to maintain protection support?

The World Humanitarian Summit and the *New Way of Working* emphasize that contractual frameworks/procedures can hamper humanitarian and development interventions in a crisis context. **Based on the experience of donors and operators**, the following procedures are those which, in fragile contexts, enable project operators to maintain projects and support protection.

- **C. 4.1.1. Flexibility: a determining factor** **The flexibility of contractual arrangements is the most crucial point and the one most often cited by the interviewed as being crucial to the continuation of humanitarian and development interventions in fragile/conflict zones.** This flexibility covers the following aspects:

1. Access to flexible contractual terms is often considered insufficient, complex and time-consuming, which limits the ambitions of operators, who are forced to use simpler forms of support to avoid financial risks. To remedy this, it is recommended that **this access be standardised and simplified**, through a number of measures: **the integration of simplified terms and conditions into donor regulations**, allowing access to simplified procedures under specific conditions, without excessive rigidity but with preventive limits; **rapid and automated access**, avoiding complex validations to facilitate the transition to simplified procedures; and **the creation of a guide** detailing the roles of the players, the eligible expenses and the limits of application, inspired for example by the "Practical Guide" of the EU's PRAG. **This flexibility during a contract** should be used to adapt projects quickly if the situation deteriorates, without having to go through lengthy and complex revisions.

2. Flexibility in determining/adapting activities and the associated budget management is crucial in fragile contexts, where changes in the situation can render certain actions initially planned obsolete. However, operators often maintain these actions or do away with them without alternatives, due to review procedures that are deemed too complex and time-consuming. A number of solutions have emerged to remedy this situation: **dynamic redefinition of activities**, enabling rapid adjustments while respecting the initial objectives; setting up **contingency funds** to finance new beneficiaries or one-off actions; **increasing budget fungibility by raising the amendment threshold to a minimum of 50%**; **simplifying procedures** by limiting administrative procedures to major changes and encouraging e-mail exchanges; and speeding up approvals, with a maximum deadline of three weeks, to guarantee a rapid response to changes in the project.

3. Flexibility in project management or the possibility of replacing an operator: In the event of a major deterioration in the context, it is essential to quickly allow an operator to be replaced on a contract, without making procedures more cumbersome, or to reinforce the initial operator with technical support from another player, or via a "surge" mechanism.

4. The agility associated with delays in funding and implementation is crucial, as situations in fragile areas can deteriorate rapidly, requiring immediate/rapid responses. This implies **simplifying and speeding up funding procedures, with rapid disbursement of funds**. Several measures could facilitate this, such as **the eligibility (within certain limits) of expenditure prior to the signing of contracts**, the submission of a concept note two weeks after a triggering event for **immediate disbursement of 5% of the envelope**, or the **pre-identification of local players** and suppliers. **At the same time, however, support in fragile areas should be sufficiently long term to generate a lasting impact**, as short-term interventions, while effective, run the risk of leaving only a one-off effect once the aid has been withdrawn. **A phased approach** would make it possible to initiate immediate action while at the same time devising more structured approaches, thereby ensuring sustainable support tailored to the changing needs of vulnerable populations.

- **C 4.1.2. Anticipating risks, introducing "crisis modifiers" into contracts.**

Risk management is a sensitive issue in contracts, as risks of deterioration are often poorly anticipated, with analyses typically generic and lacking depth, leading to challenges when risks materialize. **The use of "crisis modifiers" is a highly effective tool, offering operational, administrative, and**

financial flexibility with specific funds and actions for crises. Designed for the humanitarian sector but applicable in fragile areas, they enable quick resource reallocation and activity adaptation. Clear trigger criteria and in-depth risk analysis at the project design stage, along with annual reviews, allow thresholds to adjust as contexts change.

First example: triggering the crisis modifier for a specific identified risk. Without an agro-pastoral project in the Sahel region, the massive arrival of displaced populations could trigger the use of the annual contingency envelope to provide rapid assistance, in particular by extending agro-pastoral support activities, such as the supply of seeds and access to water for livestock.

Another example: a multi-sector risk of a general deterioration. A general deterioration in conditions could activate increased budgetary flexibility, allowing 5 percentage points of fungibility between budget lines if two of the three cumulative conditions are met for one month, with a reorientation of activities towards immediate needs, such as food security and community protection.

To sum up, flexibility in access to agile procedures, the determination of activities, budget management, support and implementation timescales, as well as anticipation in risk management, are essential contractual arrangements in fragile contexts, enabling development operators to remain on the ground in the event of deterioration.

Example of a trigger mechanism for a specific identified risk. In an agro-pastoral project in a Sahelian zone, the massive arrival of displaced populations could trigger the use of the annual contingency envelope to provide rapid assistance, through the extension of agro-pastoral activities, such as the supply of seeds and access to water for livestock. **Another example of a multi-sectoral risk of generalised deterioration.** The occurrence of this type of event could activate increased budgetary flexibility, allowing additional fungibility of 5 percentage points between budget lines if several cumulative conditions are met over a given period, with redirection towards immediate needs, such as food security and community protection.

SQ 4.2 Are these aspects already included in AFD's contracts or do they need to be adjusted?

NB The study is not an in-depth technical analysis of the contracts signed by the project operators. The findings are based mainly on the experiences of those interviewed.

- **C 4.2.1. A marked and appreciated effort by partners towards greater flexibility.** The interviews highlight **AFD's efforts to incorporate instrumental flexibility, especially via MINKA projects in the Sahel.** When flexible measures are authorised, they are really applied in a flexible manner, including **rapid access to funds, the existence of contingency funds, flexibility in the definition of activities** while respecting global objectives, and **flexible budget management up to 20% on MINKA (NB: 25% for the EU and 100% for ECHO),** close support from AFD to project leaders to speed up procedures. => Stakeholders emphasise that this flexibility really enables them to maintain and adapt programmes in the face of changes, ensuring greater protection for populations.

- **C 4.2.2. However, the use of flexible procedures is still seen as an exception, even in fragile areas.** Within AFD, **the use of flexible procedures, whether based on the MINKA instrument or not, is possible but remains rare** in global portfolios, with a greater emphasis on the Fragility, Crisis and Conflict Division (CCC). The fact that AFD is subject to strict financial regulations potentially means that the use of flexible procedures may be perceived as a risk to be avoided, thus limiting their use. As this issue was not addressed during the interviews, this study will not draw any definitive conclusions on this subject. Validating the granting of flexible procedures remains **complicated by the need for high-level negotiations and the signature of too many intermediaries,** which hampers their rapid adoption. => Although the use of these procedures is relevant, it remains exceptional and needs to be strengthened to better respond to the specific challenges of fragile areas, particularly regarding protection issues.

7 - RECOMMENDATIONS.

This study outlines recommendations for strengthening the role of development donors, particularly AFD, in protection in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, addressing protracted crises and population vulnerabilities. AFD's recommendations align with France's "Prevention, Resilience, and Peace" strategy. They focus on integrating protection into development programmes, maintaining essential services and social cohesion through a strategic, pragmatic approach. The recommendations are divided into three sections: A) integrating protection into conflict prevention objectives; B) operational measures to ensure effectiveness on the ground; and C) contractual adjustments for flexibility in fragile contexts.

A. Strategic recommendations (SR) to anchor protection as a strategic institutional priority and strengthen AFD's position in France's "Prevention, Resilience and Peace" strategy

SR 1: Make protection a strategic institutional priority in fragile areas : It is recommended that the protection of human rights and social cohesion be made an explicit priority. This integration does not require structural upheaval but should be achieved through a complementary and strategic approach, including awareness-raising and staff training.

SR 2: Support monitoring to anticipate and prevent crises in fragile areas . To help development structures anticipate crises in fragile areas, a macro-level contextual monitoring system is recommended. Based on existing data (e.g., World Bank), it should establish specific allocations like the Prevention and Resilience Allocation to support authorities. Finally, using alternative terms like "facilitated support areas" is advised to avoid negative perceptions linked to fragility.

SR 3: Participate in international strategic and technical dialogues on protection. AFD must be actively involved in international dialogues on protection, for example via the Global Protection Cluster, to strengthen synergies between humanitarian and development actors and integrate best practices to improve interventions.

SR 4: Ensure the integration and mastery of flexible administrative and financial frameworks in AFD's standard procedures to enable rapid adaptation to the realities of fragile zones, including accelerated validation, crisis modifiers, budget fungibility and contingency funds. The aim is to make these practices accessible and institutionally anchored for immediate use as soon as conditions require.

B. Operational recommendations (RO): Strengthen the protective impact of support on the ground with concrete protection actions .

Protection is an eminently local and context-dependent issue. **There is no universal solution or miracle recipe. It requires a change of perspective, taking into account the economic, social, community and ethnic dimensions, as well as the dynamics of conflict.**

RO 1: Strengthen contextual and protection analyses to better adapt responses to national and local dynamics, while identifying the specific vulnerabilities of populations. This includes utilizing and, if necessary, financially supporting multi-hazard surveillance and protection monitoring tools. These analyses must address protection issues and conflict dynamics to precisely target responses, while enhancing donor requirements (quality and technicality) in funding applications.

RO 2: Strengthening protection mainstreaming Systematising Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity analyses is essential to avoid unintended negative impacts and prevent tensions. **These analyses should be carried out iteratively, with an annual review, in a light format, conducted internally and accompanied by a follow-up of their conclusions.** Make these analyses compulsory for NGO projects in fragile zones identified by the AFD, with ineligible expenditures in case of non-compliance.

For national policies, include these analyses in social and environmental surveys with annual reviews. For loans, propose these analyses as incentive recommendations, highlighting their usefulness and ensuring confidentiality to facilitate acceptance.

RO 3: Encourage local and community-based approaches to respond to the realities of populations in fragile areas. Donors should support the social sectors, governance, justice and legal documentation, **right down to local level.** Partnerships with NGOs and local players should be promoted in order to adapt approaches to local specificities, thereby strengthening community capacities and maximising the impact of actions.

NR 4: In agro-pastoral areas, promote resilience through a balance between agriculture and pastoralism. AFD and development donors could promote integrated local development projects that foster peaceful coexistence between livestock breeders and farmers, to encourage community dialogue for the peaceful management of conflicts over use.

RO 5: Support national contingency and adaptive social protection mechanisms for a sovereign response to crises. National contingency plans are essential for crisis management, enabling anticipation and coordination with other players. Regarding social protection, expanding coverage horizontally (including displaced persons) and vertically (adapted services), while enhancing their adaptive capacity, are key supports for a national response.

RO 6 Implement multi-sectoral stabilisation and resilience mechanisms in response to impending crises to rapidly stabilise communities and strengthen their resilience. These projects must guarantee access to essential services, with long-term support that can be modulated according to the context, paying particular attention to social cohesion and community dialogue.

RO 7: Go beyond the limits of project aid, strengthen operational synergies and promote strategic coordination for an integrated approach between stakeholders, authorities and donors. By supporting national guidelines on protection and social cohesion, and by promoting consultation between donors, actions can be aligned to maximise impact. The active participation of AFD and other actors in platforms such as the Protection Cluster strengthens the coherence of policy dialogue with the authorities and consolidates the protection nexus.

C. Contractual recommendations (CR): Adapt contractual, administrative and financial mechanisms to provide greater operational flexibility in fragile areas.

The proposed contractual recommendations aim to adapt tools throughout the project management cycle, from the funding application to administrative and financial management, to clarify protection expectations and strengthen the impact of interventions in fragile contexts. Although these recommendations are targeted at the Gulf of Guinea countries affected by the Sahel crisis, they may also be relevant to other fragile contexts.

➤ In the funding application document

Justification of the request for support, descriptive part of the request: Include a context analysis integrating the **conflict and protection dimensions**, in addition to the necessary sectoral analyses. **Carry out a protection analysis** based on the "vulnerability, capacity, threat" equation to better target the populations and areas to be covered. **Prioritise vulnerable areas** or ensure they are covered. **Confirm the access capacity of project sponsors**, including NGOs: local acceptance, experience, capacity in complex areas, HR, SOP, etc.

Logical framework for the project: National sectoral projects: include a specific result for fragile areas. **Addition of a specific protection and coordination result** containing : **Mandatory activities** (Do No Harm analyses, conflict sensitivity analyses, 1/year.) **Specific protection activities, coordination activities.**

Mandatory appendices: "Do No Harm" and conflict sensitivity analysis + *crisis modifier* scenarios.

➤ Contract and financing agreement

Elements of administrative flexibility: **1.** Define rigid objectives and results, while allowing for flexibility in activities. **2.** Minor changes can be managed by exchanging letters or emails with the project managers, whereas major changes (objectives, areas covered, and operators) require formal amendments.

Elements of budgetary flexibility: provide for specific articles: **1.** increased or even total budgetary fungibility between budget lines, **2.** contingency funds with no predefined objective, **3.** crisis adjustment mechanism ("*crisis modifier*").

➤ **Administrative and financial management of the support by the donor**

Ensure that teams have **access to and understand flexible funding procedures**, that funded projects are rapidly selected with expedited approval, reduced appraisal times, swift validation, and implementation, and that **annual reporting** includes updated situational and conflict analyses, with monitoring of "Do No Harm" adjustments and conflict sensitivity.

8 - CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

Protection, although often perceived as a humanitarian priority, should equally be a strategic focus for development donors, particularly in fragile zones. This study demonstrates that development actors, such as AFD, have a crucial role in supporting partner countries to reinforce the protection and rights of populations, even prior to crises. The centrality of protection necessitates a convergence of efforts between humanitarian and development actors to safeguard populations from crises and rights violations.

Implicit support through social assistance is useful but insufficient to generate a significant impact. It is therefore crucial to make protection an explicit objective, integrated into all development sectors. A clear institutional strategy must be established to encourage constructive and technical dialogue with the authorities on these issues.

In operational terms, protection must become a cross-functional objective in all development projects, with enhanced analytical and technical requirements. This means defining precise protection objectives, increasing analysis capacity and raising staff awareness. It is not a question of changing institutional objectives, but of improving the quality of approaches.

Two technical elements are essential: strengthening contextual analyses (monitoring, protection equation) and systematizing "do no harm" and conflict-sensitive analyses for any intervention in fragile areas, to minimize tensions and adapt responses during the course of the project.

Finally, the contractual framework for projects needs to be made more flexible, so that crisis adjustment mechanisms such as crisis modifiers are systematically incorporated. These arrangements must become standard for operations in fragile areas.

In conclusion, acting on protection in sensitive areas means maintaining development projects even in unstable contexts, constantly adapting approaches to the realities on the ground to ensure sustainable and effective responses.

PASAS

PLATEFORME D'ANALYSE,
DE SUIVI ET D'APPRENTISSAGE
AU SAHEL



PORTÉ PAR



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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.

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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 sahétiens et du pourtour du Lac Tchad.

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