

REPORT

Roundtable “Engaging with international security actors on people-centered security in Niger and Burkina Faso”

27 September 2022, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso



Participants of the roundtable (photo: PAX)

On Tuesday 27 September 2022, a roundtable was held at the Royal Beach Hotel in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso for an exchange of views on challenges and opportunities to civil society engagement with the EU with regards to peace and stability in the Sahel¹. The event was organized by PAX, represented by the following teams: Protection of Civilians (Utrecht, the Netherlands), Public Affairs (Brussels, Belgium), Strengthening Civil Courage Sahel Program (Ouagadougou and Utrecht). Sixteen (16) representatives of CSOs from Burkina Faso and Niger, active in the domain of peacebuilding and human rights, took part in the event. They were asked to share their experiences on engaging with the EU and other international stakeholders, and to join an open and frank conversation on the challenges to this interaction. This document summarizes the key takeaways which will be used as input for forthcoming lobby and advocacy initiatives.

Goal of the meeting

The main objectives of this meeting were:

1. Gain better insight into the main challenges to the interaction between Niger and Burkina Faso based CSOs and international actors (focus: EU)
2. Discuss concrete suggestions as to what the EU and CSOs can do to improve this engagement

¹ Note: This roundtable took place two days prior to the day Ibrahim Traore overthrew Paul-Hanri Damiba, hence no references are made to the second coup of '22 in this report.

The objectives feed into the development of the 'Civil Society Engagement Facility', an initiative created by PAX that is about to enter a pilot phase whereby the gap between Sahelian CSOs and the EU is intended to be reduced.

Introduction to the Civil Society Engagement Facility

The roundtable kicked off with a brief presentation by PAX to familiarize participants with the scope and objectives of the Civil Society Engagement Facility (CSEF). This introduction also served as a brief survey of participants' level of awareness of the EU's security engagement in the Sahel. A show of hands demonstrated that none of the participants had any prior awareness of the European Peace Facility (EPF). A summary of its key features served as an illustration of the growing role of the EU as a significant security actor in the region. The fact that the EPF was not known to any of the participants suggested that the EU's strategic communication towards local communities as it pertains to the EPF is lacking. The perception of shortcomings in strategic communication can also be extended to the EU's wider CSDP activities in the region.

Several questions were put to PAX at the end of the introductory presentation. These related to the content of and planning around the CSEF project. One question that received broad support from the participants was why Mali was not included in the project. Underlying the question was the observation that Mali is a hub for the EU's security engagement with the Sahel, and that even EU officials might wonder why Mali was left out of the project's scope. The explanation that was given was that PAX had chosen to focus first on the countries in which it currently has a partner based through its Sahel Programme. Forthcoming lobby and advocacy actions at Brussels level will not be confined to Burkina Faso and Niger alone, and the project's pilot phase might in time lead to outreach to Malian CSOs.

Main challenges

Further to the above, most of the participants indicated that their general knowledge of the EU and its overall strategy in the Sahel is limited and they (personally) have not engaged much with the EU. When describing their experience with interacting with the EU and other international actors and their ambition to work on this (or not), the following issues came up:

No participation in international debates on the Sahel

Most of the participants have not been part of international debates on the Sahel. They have not received speaking requests and/or were part of roundtables in Brussels or European countries. Also, the participating organizations have not been involved in strategy and evaluation of interventions by the EU or other international security actors. All participants indicated that they would like to be part of international debates on the Sahel and are willing to work more proactively on this, including working on gaining more access to international platforms.

Resources and funding

Some of the participants pointed out that despite noticeable efforts towards improvement, there is still unclarity on access to EU funding, and application procedure are tiresome. Also, some feel like most of the EU funds are going to the larger (I)NGOs, who have more resources and capacity and can meet the requirements for monitoring and reporting.

Operational context

Representatives from NGOs working in remote areas in Niger and Burkina Faso mentioned that shrinking civic space and the worsening security situation make it hard to conduct consistent advocacy work, including towards international institutions such as the EU. This makes working with international stakeholders and investing in this relationship less of a priority.

Reputation

Several participants from Niger were more or less positive about the EU's security engagement in the region. They pointed out that security forces having been trained by EUCAP are performing better and appreciated by civilians. Nevertheless, the EU does not enjoy an overall positive reputation in the region. Rightly or wrongly, this is increasingly conflated with deepening anti-French sentiments. CSOs that work with communities mentioned that this makes engaging with the EU challenging. Some participants mentioned that CSOs critical of the role of the international community in the Sahel are quickly branded as 'anti-French', sometimes to the point of being excluded from political meetings or funding. Participants underlined the importance for the EU to maintain relationships with local CSOs to avoid reputational harm. Some participants also observed that the EU should not be too quick to throw its weight behind partner governments in the region. The EU has a tight relationship with the government of Niger but underestimates the popular anger against the persons in power. In contrast to the United States, the EU's reluctance to take a firm stance on (corruption) cases involving Nigerien officials harms its reputation among the Nigerien population. Participants moreover remarked that the EU's perception simply suffers from a lack of (visible) results. There was apparent consensus among participants that the EU's reputation remains relatively positive, such that it can be leveraged to push for transparency on the part of partner governments.



Group discussions CSOs and PAX team (photo: PAX)

Improving interaction

During the breakout sessions, the participants discussed in smaller groups concrete actions CSOs and INGO partners can take to improve the interaction with the EU and other international actors. (See Appendix II for flipcharts with a complete overview of the results.) The three main questions that were discussed were: 1) What can, or would you like to do yourself, 2) what would you like to do/develop more and do you need to supported on and 3) What role do you see for the international NGOs you work with?). During the group discussions and presentations many things came up, including recommended actions different stakeholders can and/or should take.

Actions CSOs can/should take:

- Work on more synergy and coordination networks in Burkina Faso and Niger to make it easier for international stakeholders to find and work with local CSO networks
- Better monitor security incidents in Burkina Faso and Niger and set a list of main priorities to provide to international stakeholders

Actions INGOs can/should take:

- Move away from bureaucratic development programming
- Prioritize a participatory approach to lending assistance and put local civil society in charge of conducting their own context analyses and defining their own priorities
- Transfer knowledge & capacities related to advocacy and lobby on EU and other international actors
- Facilitate interaction between local civil society and international security actors such as the EU (both HQ and country level).
- Participate in existing coalitions and join national and international campaigns to strengthen the current CSO landscape in Burkina Faso and Niger

Actions the EU can/should take:

- Better inform local CSOs on the overall EU strategy and specific mechanisms in the Sahel
- Move away from bureaucratic development programming in favor of a participatory approach (e.g. enabling CSO instead of donor to select partners and beneficiaries)
- Ease accessibility to EU funding and simplify application procedures (including criteria to favor smaller CSOs)
- Involve local CSOs in context analyses and priority-setting
- Issue stronger statements on inclusive institutional and political reform

Final remarks

Though group discussions were mainly about challenges to the interaction between local CSOs and the EU, it must be noted that all participants made it very clear that they are interested to engage with the EU and other international actors. PAX and the participants will continue the conversation on relevant follow-up activities to advocate improved EU-CSO engagement.

For questions and/or more information about this roundtable, the PAX Strengthening Civil Courage Sahel Program and Civil Society Engagement Facility please contact Roger Minoungou, PAX Project Lead Sahel (minoungou@paxforpeace.nl) and/or Selma van Oostwaard, PAX Project Lead Civil Society Engagement Facility (vanoostwaard@paxforpeace.nl).

APPENDIX I – List of Participants

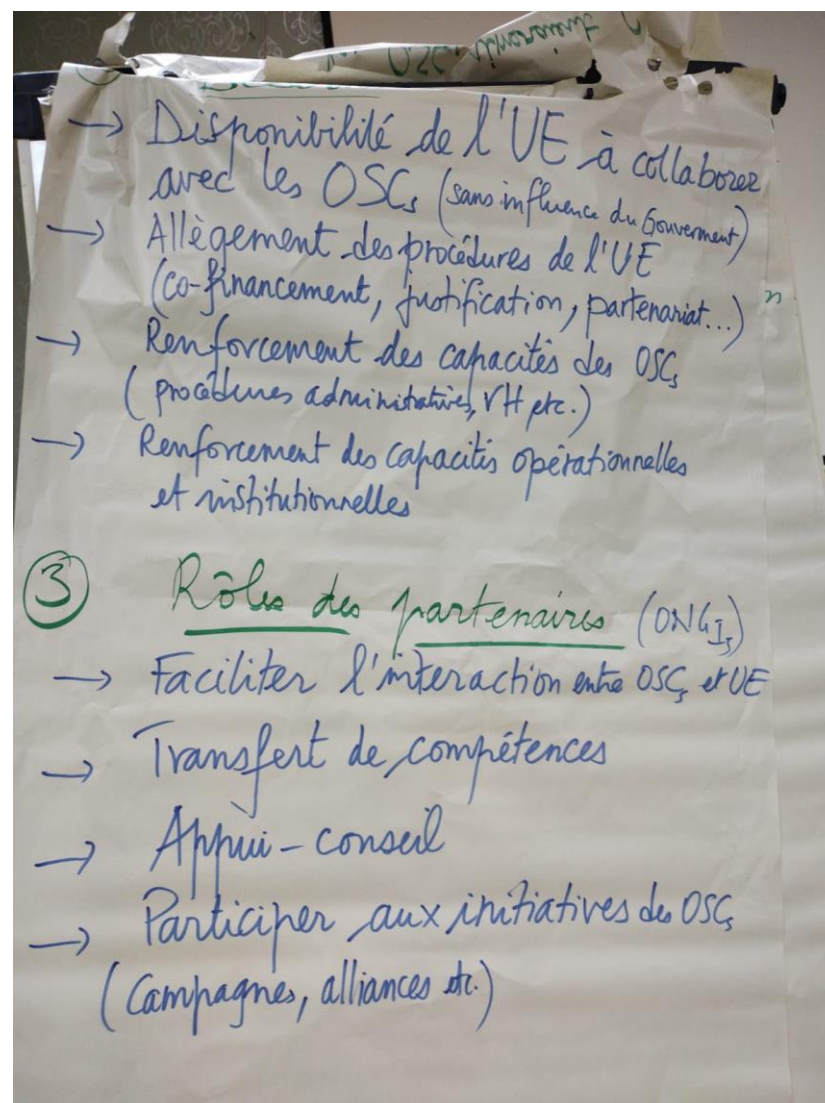
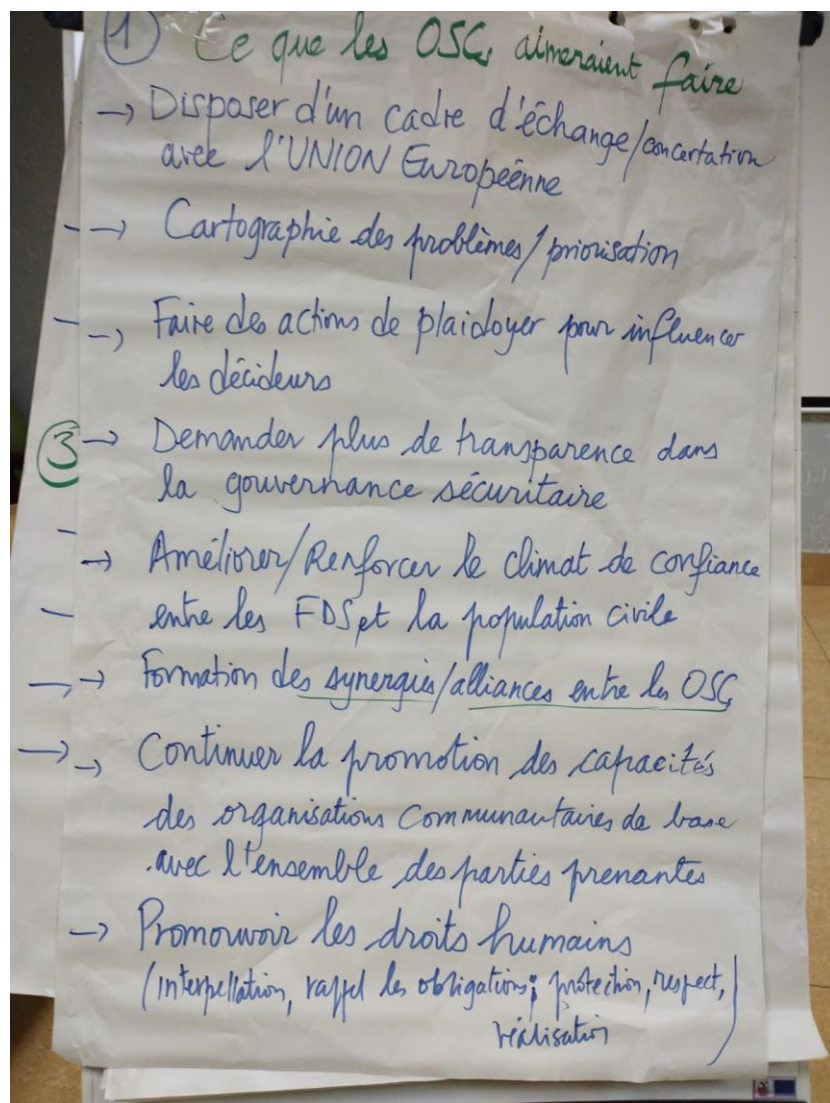
	Name	Country	Organization	Position
1	Diallo, Douada	Burkina Faso	Collectif contre l'impunité et la stigmatisation des communautés (CISC)	Secretary General
2	Kafando, Inoussa	Burkina Faso	Centre d'Information et de Formation en matière de Droits Humains en Afrique (CIFDHA)	Executive Director
3	Ouedraogo, Christian	Burkina Faso	Freedom House Burkina Faso	Senior HR Officer
4	Ouedraogo, Sosthène	Burkina Faso	Centre pour la Qualité du Droit et la Justice (CQDJ)	Chairman of the Board of Directors
5	Sama, David Lionel	Burkina Faso	International Development Law Organization (IDLO)	Field Program Coordinator
6	Some, Y. Olivier	Burkina Faso	Centre d'Information et de Formation en matière de Droits Humains en Afrique (CIFDHA)	President
7	Traore, Ali	Burkina Faso	Groupe de Recherche-Action sur la Sécurité Humaine (GRASH)	President
8	Waerzaren, Moussa A.G.	Burkina Faso	Appel de Genève	Program Coordinator
9	Yaranangoré, Cheickna	Burkina Faso	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) Burkina Faso	Country Director
10	Abdou, Yohanna	Niger	Réseau nigérien pour la gestion non violente des conflits (Genovico)	Coordinator
11	Adamou, Sita	Niger	Association Nigérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (ANDDH)	President

12	Adamou Yacouba, Abdoul Aziz	Niger	Réseau Panafricain pour la Paix, la Démocratie, et le Développement (REPPADD)	Head of the Peace and Security
13	Aissami Tchiroma, Mahamadou	Niger	Organisation for Transparency and Budgetary Analysis (ROTAB)	Director of Programs
14	Fanna, Boukar Waziri	Niger	Femmes Action Développement (FAD)	Project Lead
15	Kanni, Abdoulaye	Niger	Réseau National de défense des droits de l'homme (RNDDH)	Coordinator
16	Liassou, Algabride	Niger	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) Niger	Early Warning and Rapid Response Program Officer
17	AbdulShafi, Wael	Belgium	PAX (Brussels)	EU Advocacy Advisor
18	Koppen, Lucas	The Netherlands	PAX (NL)	Senior Project Officer Sahel
19	Minoungou, Roger	Burkina Faso	PAX (BF)	Project Lead Sahel
20	Oostwaard, Selma van	The Netherlands	PAX (NL)	Project Lead Civil Society Engagement Facilit
21	Tanggahma, Mbiko	The Netherlands	PAX (NL)	Team Assistant Protection of Civilians

APPENDIX II – Outcomes break out session

Break-out session: *Actions CSOs and INGO partners can take to improve the interaction with the EU and other international actors*

(1. What can or would you like to do yourself, where would you like to do/develop more and do you need to be supported and 3) What role do you see for the international NGOs you work with?)



GROUPE 1

Q1: Qu'est-ce que vous aimeriez faire par vous-même?

- 1- Sensibilisation / Education / Formation
- 2- Interpellation
- 3- Plaidoyer
- 4- S'approprier des mécanismes et procédures UE
- 5- Auto-évaluation des OSC Labs
- 6- Re de Validité

Q2: Quels sont vos besoins?

- 1- évaluer / améliorer / créer cadre de concertation entre OSC-UE
- 2- Renforcer la coordination (coordination entre OSC)
- 3- Renforcement des capacités / accompagnement
- 4- Appui institutionnel
- 5- Se conformer aux exigences du bailleur

Rôle envisagé avec les ONG
Q3: Partenaires

- 1- Partage d'expériences et expertise
entre bailleurs internationaux et OSC
- 2- Plaidoyer pour alléger les
procédures
- 3- Renforcement des capacités
— Compréhension des procédures
de l'UE