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Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue

Mediation for peace

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK



The voice of youth in the Sahel

A dialogue between youth organisations and state institutions

A strategic problem with structural solutions

There are about 50 million people under the age of 30 living in the Sahel region today, representing approximately 65% of the combined population of the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger). Prospects for their future, however, have become limited due to poor overall levels of education from school systems clogged by rapid population growth, restricted freedom of movement because of insecurity, sluggish job markets, as well as increasing poverty. This generation's potential is also hindered by a growing generational gap – the ideas of an increasingly globalised youth are challenged by the conservatism of older generations, creating among the youth a feeling of exclusion from political decision-making processes. As a result, the youth are increasingly drawn to violence, organised crime and migration.

For the youth to become more active in communal or political activities, youth organisations need to strengthen their capacity to express their grievances and needs in a constructive and participative manner. Mechanisms for structured dialogue have to be set-up to support the development of youth policies that the youth themselves can relate to, can help implement and whose impact they can measure. As the Sahel countries enter into a new election period, the role of the youth has once again become a major political issue.

A bottom-up approach to breaking down information barriers

To address the generational gap that threatens the Sahel's social and political cohesion, this project promotes dialogue between youth organisations and the region's state institutions. It aims to encourage the youth to develop social and economic policies at the local, national, regional and international levels. A network of 1,250 representatives from over 1,000 youth associations across the G5 Sahel countries was set up to represent the hundreds of thousands of youth living across the region. The Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) took particular care in ensuring balanced representations between young men and women, people from rural and urban areas, elites and vulnerable communities, and majority and minority groups.

Since May 2017, structured spaces for dialogue have been set up in all five countries around the following issues:

- academic and vocational training;
- access to the job market;
- civic engagement by young people;



- the temptation to migrate;
- and religious radicalisation.

Debates on these issues are held sequentially on four levels, namely between:

- local and national youth associations;
- youth associations and their local traditional, civil and religious authorities;
- different ministries involved in managing youth policies; and
- delegates from youth associations and their respective national governments.

The conclusions and recommendations from these dialogues feed into developing an *Integrated Strategy for Youth in the G5 Sahel Countries*. The project also aims to foster dialogue between the G5 Sahel governments and their international partners to develop North–South cooperation programmes that better reflect the needs of the region’s youth.

Creating a new dynamic to sustain dialogue

Since 2017, this project has generated momentum through simultaneous activities at multiple levels:

- 25 local dialogue frameworks have been set up across the G5 Sahel countries. At least five meetings have been organised within each local framework, and 129 meetings have been held in total.
- Five national dialogue frameworks have been set up, where least eight meetings have been held in each national capital. 42 meetings have been held in total.
- One regional dialogue framework was set up under the auspices of the G5 Sahel countries, and a first regional meeting has been held in Nouakchott.
- In June 2017, in the margins of an EU–G5 Sahel conference held in Bamako, a meeting was facilitated between 75 delegates from youth associations from the Sahel, the Maghreb, Europe and the Sahelian diaspora, together with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the G5 Sahel Foreign Ministers.

Ensuring representativeness

To date, the project involves:

- 1,250 young people, consisting of 250 per country (with 50 from each of five participating regions per country), who represent 1,000 formal or informal youth organisations in the Sahel region;
- 50 young people of the diaspora, living in the European Union’s States;
- 75 ministries and institutions such as national employment agencies (with about 15 from each country); and
- all five national youth councils of the G5 Sahel countries as well as their regional counterparts.

‘Young people hold the authorities responsible, but what about their own responsibilities?’

Towards structural impact

The project has already enabled:

- youth organisations to formulate clear and structured messages for their respective national authorities;
- the establishment of local mediation mechanisms to prevent and manage inter-generational conflict;
- the establishment of dialogue frameworks between emerging youth organisations and their respective national and regional youth councils;
- inter-ministerial dialogue on youth policies between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad;
- links between the G5 Sahel countries and national dialogue frameworks, enabling them to feed into the development of an Integrated Strategy for Youth in the G5 Sahel Countries;
- the initiation of a dialogue involving 50 young people from the Sahel diaspora in to relay their ideas to address the challenges in each of the G5 Sahel countries; and
- the creation of an online discussion forum to allow a greater number of young people in the G5 Sahel countries to contribute to discussions.



This project is implemented by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD) and co-funded by the European Union and the Kingdom of Denmark. It is managed in close coordination with the national authorities and the G5 Sahel organization.