



Oxfam Denmark hearing response

Sahel Future Generations Programme (SFGP) 2026–2029

Oxfam Denmark welcomes the Sahel Future Generations Programme (SFGP) as an important expression of Denmark’s continued commitment to the populations of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger in an increasingly fragile and complex operating environment. At a time marked by protracted conflict, shrinking civic space, displacement and accelerating climate impacts, sustained Danish engagement in the Central Sahel is relevant and needed.

We appreciate the programme’s focus on protection of civic space – including women and youth led CSOs, youth and women’s economic opportunities and community resilience and cohesion, as well as its alignment with national and regional priorities related to civil society support, youth and women’s livelihoods and empowerment, climate resilience and sustainable natural resource management, with links to social cohesion and peacebuilding. We also appreciate the humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach the programme applies. We also welcome the continuation of established funding mechanisms and programmes such as FAMOC, FACEJ and Pro-ARIDES, which provide continuity and predictability in a volatile context.

Oxfam Denmark and its partners stand ready to contribute to the effective implementation of the SFGP and to continued dialogue with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The observations and recommendations below are offered in this spirit, with the aim of strengthening the effectiveness, risk management and contextual relevance of the SFGP.

Observations: risks and clarifications

1. Terminology and risk exposure of partners

The programme’s choice of language and framing raises concerns in the current context of shrinking civic space and heightened scrutiny of civil society organisations (CSOs).

The use of terms such as “democratic change agents” as well as inconsistent references to current authorities (e.g. junta, military regimes, authorities), may unintentionally increase security and reputational risks for programme partners by reinforcing perceptions of political interference.

Recommendation:

To reduce risks of political pushback and partner exposure, we recommend harmonising terminology and replacing such terminology with more neutral and rights-based language, such as “rights-based actors” or “civic and community actors” when referring to CSOs and



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other rights holders, and using terms like “authorities” when referring to public duty bearers, to mitigate risks while maintaining the programme’s substantive intent and relevance.

2. Engagement with authorities

We acknowledge the programme’s intention to avoid supporting national authorities in the current political context. However, the current programme document does not fully reflect the operational realities faced by civil society organisations in this context. While avoiding direct bilateral financial or political support to authorities is appropriate, engagement with authorities at national and local levels remains unavoidable for access, coordination, approvals and duty of care. This engagement increasingly also includes mandatory project registration processes where project budgets must cover the participation of relevant line-ministry personnel and local authorities.

Recommendations

We recommend clarifying that the programme distinguishes between:

- direct financial or political support to regime authorities, which should be avoided; and
- necessary operational engagement and coordination with authorities, which is a *sine qua non* for civil society actors to operate effectively in the Central Sahel.

To further avoid undermining programme objectives and partner security, we encourage the document to adopt a more pragmatic tone and approach towards current authorities, aligned with Denmark’s Africa Strategy and African-led regional approaches, including that of ECOWAS as outlined in the programme annexes.

Such an approach would enable principled engagement aligned with existing Danish and African-led approaches, while avoiding the creation of additional risks or tensions that would undermine partners’ access and coordination required for effective operations.

3. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) framing

The inclusion of violent extremism and PVE-related language in the programme’s framing raises concerns. Oxfam’s global policy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism emphasises development, peacebuilding and empowerment as ends in themselves, rather than as instruments for security objectives.

PVE frameworks can expose partners to increased security risks, and shift focus away from poverty reduction and inequalities, rights and long-term resilience.



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We recommend avoiding explicit PVE labelling and encourage grounding the programme consistently in rights-based, needs-based and peacebuilding language, informed by local analyses and consultations with partners.

4. Civil society, women’s leadership and local agency

While the programme correctly identifies increasing constraints on civic space, the description of programme scenarios risks underrepresenting the continued engagement and agency of women mediators, civil society organisations and youth-led groups in peacebuilding, social cohesion and conflict prevention at local level. Despite national-level restrictions, such actors continue to play meaningful roles, as reflected in UN Women analysis and ongoing operational experience across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

We recommend a more balanced representation of existing local capacities and leadership, particularly of women’s organisations, to reflect lived realities and avoid an overly restrictive reading of civic engagement opportunities.

Overall recommendations

To ensure the effectiveness, risk management, and contextual relevance of the SFGP, Oxfam Denmark offers the following overall recommendations, based on operational experience and long-standing partnerships in the Central Sahel:

1. Protection and safety of civic actors

Given the increasingly restricted civic space and heightened risks faced by civil society organisations, women and youth actors, we see value in more explicitly integrating protection considerations across all programme components.

This could include safeguarding, digital security, gender-responsive conflict sensitivity, gender mainstreaming and GBV risk mitigation, and Do No Harm approaches, in order to mitigate risks for implementing partners and participants and to support sustained civic engagement in highly volatile environments.



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2. Rights- and needs-based programming

While the programme rightly addresses key structural drivers of fragility, we see a need to further strengthen the framing of the SFGP through a rights-based and needs-based lens. A stronger emphasis on protection, livelihoods and access to services may help reduce potential sensitivities associated with security- or migration-focused narratives and reinforce local ownership and acceptance of programme interventions.

3. Women, youth and displaced populations

We welcome the inclusion of gender, youth and LNOB as cross-cutting priorities, and note that these should be further operationalised to ensure they translate consistently into targeting and implementation choices. Additional attention to displaced women and girls, rural youth, and populations in hard-to-reach or blockaded areas would help ensure that those most affected by conflict and climate shocks are effectively reached.

4. Alignment with national priorities and flexibility

The authorities in the three countries are increasingly requiring, and ensuring, that all new projects contribute specifically to nationally determined strategies and priorities. For instance, we want to highlight that the authorities have a strong focus on physical investments that are perceived as having a larger impact for civilian populations. This focus is reinforced by the introduction of mandatory budget ratios between functioning costs and investments, that all new projects must respect. In our experience these dynamics require donors and CSOs to have a high degree of flexibility. We therefore recommend that the Programme reflects the operational need for flexibility to adapt to new developments and requirements. This should include a specific commitment from the SFGP to engage with partners in a manner that allows projects to align to national strategies and changing administrative requirements, throughout project periods.

5. Nordic Sahel Facility: localisation, accessibility and flexibility

The Nordic Sahel Facility presents a promising opportunity to support locally led and partnership-based engagement in the Central Sahel. However, based on the current



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programme document, it remains unclear how the Facility will ensure meaningful and equitable access for national and local CSOs, or how decision-making will be structured across regional and country levels.

To realise the potential of the Facility, we recommend clarifying how it will operate in practice, including decision-making arrangements, eligibility criteria, and funding modalities and windows, as these aspects remain insufficiently defined in the programme document.

Particular attention to accessibility for national and local CSOs, especially women- and youth-led organisations, as well as to transparency and flexibility, would support locally led partnerships and context-adapted implementation.

Avoiding centralisation of decision-making outside the countries of operation would help ensure responsiveness to local priorities and rapidly evolving contexts.

Oxfam Denmark appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Sahel Future Generations Programme and commends the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for maintaining strong engagement with the populations of the Central Sahel under very challenging circumstances. We look forward to continued dialogue and collaboration to ensure that the SFGP is implemented in a way that is safe, rights-based, locally grounded and responsive to the lived realities of people in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

15 December 2025