

## **DIGNITY’s hearing response to the Sahel Future Generations Programme (SFGP) 2026–2029**

DIGNITY welcomes and acknowledges that the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to prioritise engagement in the Sahel region through the Sahel Future Generations Programme (SFGP). In a context marked by deepening insecurity, shrinking civic space, climate pressure and widespread poverty, Denmark’s continued commitment is both timely and necessary. The programme’s emphasis on democratic voices, youth opportunities, and resilience is highly relevant.

At the same time, DIGNITY recommends that the SFGP systematically integrates human rights, mental health and survivor-centered protection as mutually reinforcing foundations for achieving the programme’s objectives.

### **1. Human Rights and Safe, Resilient Civic Action**

The SFGP rightly acknowledges the deteriorating security and governance context in the Sahel, where widespread human rights violations, impunity and shrinking civic space undermine trust between populations and authorities. In such environments, development and stabilisation efforts risk being ineffective or inadvertently reinforcing harm if they are not anchored in strong human rights safeguards and protection of civic actors (World Bank/Nordic Trust Fund 2020).

In line with Denmark’s Strategy for Development Cooperation, DIGNITY recommends integrating human rights and safe civic action across relevant programme components. This includes:

- **Systematic integration of human rights across all thematic areas** as a precondition for accountability, inclusion and sustainable peace.
- **Strengthening institutional and organisational capacities of local civil society actors** to navigate legal frameworks and regulatory reforms and establish robust risk mitigation measures, thereby reducing operational risks and enhancing long-term resilience.
- **Flexible and adaptive funding modalities**, allowing partners to adjust activities in response to rapidly changing political and security contexts.

### **2. Cross-cutting focus on mental health, psychosocial wellbeing and protection**

Violence, displacement, and chronic insecurity have profound consequences for mental health and psychosocial wellbeing, affecting not only individuals but also community resilience, social cohesion, civic engagement and the ability of local organisations to operate safely. Untreated trauma can erode trust, reduce participation in collective and civic life, and hinder the effectiveness of recovery, development, and stabilisation efforts (Mckinsey report & Vesco et al, 2025).

In line with the Danish development policy's priority to mental health, DIGNITY recommends that the SFGP adopts mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) as a cross-cutting focus across all specific objectives, including:

- **Community-based psychosocial support and trauma-informed approaches** embedded across sectors
- **Capacity strengthening to reduce harm, stress and burnout** among civil society actors operating in insecure and repressive environments.
- **Psychosocial support as part of broader protection efforts** for local organisations and human rights defenders facing threats, harassment or violence.

### **3. Survivor-centered support, documentation and access to justice**

The SFGP rightly notes the widespread human rights violations in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, including abuses committed by both armed groups and state-affiliated actors. Survivors of torture, sexual violence, and other serious abuses are often left without support, recognition, or avenues for justice, contributing to impunity and further cycles of violence. A survivor-centered and trauma-informed approach is essential to avoid further harm, restore dignity, and support longer-term recovery and social cohesion.

DIGNITY therefore recommends that the SFGP more clearly incorporates:

- **Basic support and referral pathways for survivors of torture, violence and abuse**, including community level support and referrals to psychosocial, medical and legal assistance adapted to highly constrained contexts.
- **Safe, ethical and survivor-centered and trauma-informed documentation of human rights violations**, carried out by trusted local actors aligned with international standards and with clear safeguards against re-traumatisation and reprisals.
- **Facilitated access to legal aid and community-based justice mechanisms** as part of broader efforts to promote accountability for perpetrators and justice for survivors.

#### **Specific suggestions:**

To take the above recommendations into account, DIGNITY suggests:

- 1) That the promotion of Human Rights is included in specific objective 1
- 2) That the following paragraph is added to section 5.1.:

*Programming under this objective will be guided by a human rights-based approach. Engagement will take into account the operating environment of civil society, human rights defenders and community actors and integrate protection, safety and organisational resilience considerations, including risk mitigation measures, basic MHPSS, and context-appropriate and survivor-centered and trauma-informed documentation of human rights violations as well as referral pathways to relevant psychosocial, medical and legal assistance. Together, these measures provide a necessary foundation for democratic participation, community resilience and social cohesion, while supporting long-term efforts to strengthen accountability for perpetrators and access to justice for survivors in highly volatile contexts.*

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