



SURVIVORS AND HEROINES

Women in the Crisis in Burkina Faso

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Cover photo: Displaced woman in Kaya 'As I speak, we need everything, water, food, shelter' © Sylvain Cherkaoui/Oxfam

SUMMARY

Burkina Faso is currently experiencing one of the most rapidly deteriorating humanitarian crises in the world, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By April 2020, the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) had risen to almost 848 000; 84% of whom are women and children. 2.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance. Women find themselves at the heart of this crisis and the tensions running through Burkinabè society. This study describes the impact of the conflict on women and looks at their role in strengthening social cohesion and building peace.

This report focuses on two key areas:

1. The impact of the current crisis on the protection and security of women and girls and their basic needs:

In its current form, the humanitarian response is not sufficient to meet the scale of the needs of displaced populations and host communities. The women we spoke with identified several priority needs, such as access to water, security, food, shelter and education. In addition, they told us that they are exposed to violence in their villages of origin, during their exodus, and within sites hosting IDPs. Women are also harassed when registering for humanitarian assistance. Insecurity is permanent. All the actors and women consulted confirm the extent of the psychological trauma resulting from the conflict and amplified by forced displacement, as well as the extreme degree of deprivation that ensues. Negative coping strategies (resorting to survival sex or recruitment into non-state armed groups) are already a reality. Finally, the country is ill-prepared to deal with COVID-19: the saturation of public services, particularly in the health and education sectors, deprives women and girls of access to essential public services and the opportunity to protect themselves.



2. The role of women in social cohesion and peacebuilding in Burkina Faso:

Burkinabè society recognizes the decisive role of women in social cohesion, but that role must be continuously strengthened and supported. At the local and community levels, even though women are often absent from mediation and conflict resolution structures, rural and displaced women are seen as playing a key role in maintaining social cohesion through their daily efforts to build trust and participate in society. This involves the education of children, the adoption and active dissemination of positive moral values, involvement in community activities, and participation in solidarity actions, especially transgenerational ones. At the national level, women benefit from the support of a dynamic civil society and favorable legislative developments, which are particularly reflected in their greater participation in governmental, inter-community and inter-religious bodies promoting social cohesion.

On the basis of this research, the main recommendations made to the Government of Burkina Faso, as the lead actor in the humanitarian response, and to humanitarian actors, including NGOs, the United Nations and donors, are as follows:

Provide a direct and immediate response to women's needs and build their resilience

- Urgently fund the humanitarian response, focusing on the following priorities: WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), food security and nutrition, shelter, health and protection. Scale up funding to meet the sheer size of needs, with a focus on flexible, multi-year funding to respond to the significant and rapid increase in humanitarian needs.
- Prioritize funding for cash transfer programmes and income-generating activities that reduce women's dependence on humanitarian assistance, reducing their vulnerability and increasing their resilience.
- Encourage comprehensive care for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors: protection of survivors, health care, psychosocial support, access to justice and socio-economic reintegration.
- Promote initiatives at the local and community level towards durable solutions in order to reduce tensions and contribute to social cohesion between host communities and displaced populations through the establishment of public socioeconomic infrastructures.
- Provide mixed (humanitarian and development) funding to sustain humanitarian initiatives and empower the most vulnerable populations. It is crucial to ensure that these mixed projects respect humanitarian principles to address vulnerabilities, regardless of political or security agendas.

Promote the active participation of women in governance and peacebuilding structures at the local, regional and national levels

- Continue efforts to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325. This includes taking the necessary measures to protect women from acts of violence and to ensure that women actively and meaningfully participate in peace initiatives and that their voices and needs are heard in the formulation and implementation of peacebuilding interventions.
- Support community forums and structures that enable women to voice their concerns and contribute to peace in their communities.
- Develop and support training initiatives for women leaders in peacebuilding, particularly in non-violent conflict transformation (mediation, negotiation, non-violent communication, etc.), at the community level in particular, but also at national level.

The COVID-19 pandemic increases the urgency of resolving the current crisis in Burkina Faso and ensuring sustainable peace. To this end, the experience, concerns and priorities of women are crucial in formulating the response. A peaceful society requires the meaningful participation of women, gender justice, and the transformation of power relations.

