

Local authorities moving from being passive victims receiving aid to being active players in assistance delivery in Burkina Faso

TerresEauVie Burkina Faso

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has seen a rise in violent attacks by jihadist groups that have led to a loss of lives, the destruction of people's livelihoods, and diminished food and nutrition security. Record-breaking numbers of people are forced to flee within the country because civilians are increasingly being targeted. As of September 30, 2021, [the Government of Burkina Faso](#) counted 1,423,378 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 37% higher than [the number in September 2020](#) and staggeringly higher than the 81,964 IDPs recorded in [January 2019](#).

When this kind of disaster strikes, many actors rush to provide assistance. Ensuring that this assistance is provided to the right people in the right places is very challenging. In Burkina Faso, this is the responsibility of the Departmental Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation¹ (CODESUR) but they struggle to fulfill this role because they lack the adequate skills and tools.

USAID TerresEauVie Activity, as part of the RISE II Initiative, is working to bridge this skill gap and breaking the cycle of local authorities being passive recipients of aid. With the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (SP/CONASUR, the national structure in charge of this issue), TerresEauVie is building CODESUR's capacity to better manage risk and disaster by supporting the development of their communal multi-risk contingency plans to better prevent and handle communal risks such as drought, floods, terrorist attacks, epidemics, epizootics, economic crises, etc. TerresEauVie then helps them promote these plans to their partners and implement them, including running a flood simulation to help the relevant actors get practical experience managing a crisis response.



After the armed attacks, the youth of Seytenga mobilized to hand over food and equipment to CODESUR, which was then handed over to the displaced persons. This was both a strong expression of solidarity and proof that they knew which structure to turn to so that their contribution could go to the victims.. Photo: Prefect of Seytenga, May 2021.

As of September 2021, 15 Burkinabè communes in the Centre-Nord, the Sahel, and the East—three regions with the largest concentration of IDPs in Burkina Faso—have developed their multi-risk contingency plans. Thanks to these documents, the communes are prepared to respond to varied risks with the necessary tools. They also know to what extent they can rely on locally available human and financial capital. The plans clarify the relationships and responsibilities between the different communal actors, technical services, and the humanitarian partners..

The commune of Seytenga in the Sahel region, which finalized its contingency plan in 2020, exemplifies this success. During its development, terrorist attacks were listed third in the potential risks. At that time, it was only a hypothetical risk because the commune had not yet faced

¹ The Council brings together the prefect, the mayor, and social action services

this issue. "Unfortunately, the risk became reality in April 2021," recalls Sylvain Bicaba, Prefect of Seytenga and President of CODESUR. "On 27 and 28 April, we suffered several armed attacks, which killed nearly 20 people and caused the displacement of populations from affected villages to downtown. They arrived completely destitute and traumatized by the violence they had witnessed or suffered. It was a sad first. We are now in the most catastrophic scenario we had planned in our contingency plan: on 31 August 2021, we had 8,274 internally displaced people and the number continues to grow."

"As soon as the attacks occurred, the CODESUR summoned a crisis meeting, because the training we had received from TerresEauVie indicated that we must always first assess the situation following the disaster, before planning the response," Mr. Bicaba explained. "This allowed us to take stock of the displaced populations with the social action service, whose head also happens to be the CODESUR reporter and impacts on livestock (an essential component of local livelihoods). Following the instructions given by the Ministry of Humanitarian Action, IDPs were placed in host families, rather than creating camps for displaced persons that could present other challenges. Nine schools also had to close, leaving more than 650 pupils out of school. We identified hosting sites, focal points in villages affected by the crisis, and premises that could serve for food storage."

"This shock was serious, but we organized ourselves," continues Mr. Bicaba. "We were able to coordinate the interventions, we had the data and the various partners relied on the CODESUR to have this information and plan the responses. This is because we have a good command of our role and we have mastered how to deal with a shock, thanks to training and the contingency plan. We were operational, not just in theory, but in reality. All CODESUR members carried the same message of coordination and acted in synergy. We have moved forward together. This allowed us to show partners where there were needs and to follow the delivery of food and materials donated by state services, humanitarians, and individuals so that the distributions went well. We have also succeeded in ensuring that, in terms of health, pregnant women and malnourished children receive care."

Contingency plans have the potential to make emergency funds more efficient by strengthening the planning, collaboration, and compatibility between the various

stakeholders willing to develop responses to shocks, thus reducing the impact of crises. Local authorities are now active players, at the very heart of this preparedness and coordination system. According to the World Bank², "for each \$1 invested in prevention, about \$16 is saved down the road." Therefore, TerresEauVie seeks not only to inspire new actors to provide this type of support to other communes, but also to encourage organizations active in the areas of preparedness, early response, and recovery to align with these existing plans to save more lives. As Benjamin Franklin famously advised fire-threatened Philadelphians in 1736: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

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Sylvain Bicaba, Prefect of Seytenga, President of CODESUR

² "Investing in Prevention: World Bank Group Takes a New Approach to Prevention Crises", July 26, 2018

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/investing-prevention-new-world-bank-group-approach-crisis>