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SOCIAL PROTECTION
PROGRAM



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LINKING HUMANITARIAN CASH ASSISTANCE AND **NATIONAL SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This study looks at the current (2020-2022) alignment and links between social protection programs on the one hand and humanitarian assistance provided by donors and agencies on the other in six countries in the Sahel region: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. The study aims to identify the most effective ways to align the two forms of assistance and the key factors that either enable or constrain this convergence and to provide strategic, policy, and operational reflections on the potential for harmonizing the two kinds of assistance and the value that this could add to the countries of the region.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Of the six countries, this alignment is strongest in Senegal and Mauritania, the countries with the most developed social assistance sectors in the region. This is in keeping with the trend in other parts of the world whereby the convergence is usually stronger in those places where social protection systems are more mature and trusted by the development and humanitarian community.

MAURITANIA

The most durable progress has been made in Mauritania, where humanitarian and social protection actors have worked together to jointly pilot various initiatives, such as the drafting of a common objective to be included in the National

Response Plan, the common use of the social registry, and the harmonization of certain parts of the design of programs and their delivery chain. At least in the case of responses to mitigate the lean season, there is the beginning of the creation of a nationally led government system in which all stakeholders participate and to which they contribute.

SENEGAL

In Senegal, a 2018 case study of an effort to link social protection and humanitarian cash transfers found that the use of cash was one way to successfully achieve greater alignment. However, the momentum behind the effort did not last long, as in 2020 the government opted to give out food kits during the COVID-19 pandemic rather than leveraging the social protection system. Nevertheless, there is a vigorous policy debate on the potential for further

harmonizing the two systems, and clear efforts have been made to move in this direction. However, progress has proven to be fragile and reversible, and the full potential of building a government-led shock-responsive social protection system has not yet been realized.

MALI

In Mali, European Union-funded emergency safety nets in 2014 were the first steps taken toward converging humanitarian aid with a nascent social safety net. However, while harmonized transfer amounts and an agreement on convergence for recurrent and predictable shocks remain, other gains have been lost. The national social protection system has successfully established some basic building blocks, but high levels of instability in the country are hindering any further progress.

BURKINA FASO

Burkina Faso has a long history of attempting to harmonize the humanitarian and social protection approaches, but these efforts have tended to falter. For example, joint contracting of financial service providers was piloted but proved to be short-lived. Also, a 2018/19 study by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the national Permanent Secretariat of the National Council on Social Protection (SP/CNPS) examined the possibility of harmonizing ways to deliver cash assistance, but its recommendations were not adopted because the country's security situation deteriorated. Nevertheless, the nascent building blocks of a national social safety net exist, and some elements – such as the fully digitalized payment

system – could be leveraged more effectively.

NIGER

In Niger, there are generally few signs of convergence, with the two systems working largely in parallel. However, the COVID-19 crisis acted as a catalyst for the systems to co-design and jointly implement an emergency cash program.

CHAD

In Chad, similarly, humanitarian cash assistance programs have hardly any connection with the national social safety net system.

Overall, it can be said that, across the six countries, there is widespread agreement that responses to predictable and recurrent shocks can and should be integrated into a government-led shock-responsive social protection program, which would free up humanitarian capacity and financing to respond to unforeseen needs and crises. However, the feasibility of turning this into a reality is dictated by each country's context, which is one of the most important factors that influence the likelihood of achieving greater convergence. Convergence is more feasible in places where there is political and economic stability and a fairly well-developed social protection system that is coherently implemented across government departments and is ideally financed at least in part by the national government. However, a conducive context is not a sufficient pre-condition for this to happen. Other key factors must be in the mix such as combined and participative processes and approaches, functioning coordination structures, and resilient relationships



between institutions and key individuals.

WAYS OF WORKING THAT CAN HELP OR HINDER CONVERGENCE

The different ways used to deliver safety net and humanitarian assistance can influence the likelihood of harmonizing the two systems. These fall on a spectrum from enabling to constraining convergence, as shown in the figure below.

As can be seen in **Figure 1** below, the most important factor for enabling convergence is having pre-established relationships between the systems and agencies with a history of collaboration and collective learning, such as that fostered by the annual *Cadre Harmonisé* proceedings,² which bring together governments, development partners, and humanitarian actors to assess the current and future food and nutrition situation in the Sahel, or the regional learning event that was organized by the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) in Dakar in 2014.

Similarly, the familiarity of international humanitarian and development actors with the state system can be important. For example, in Senegal and Mauritania, these entities have known each other and cooperated for many years. In contrast,

convergence between the two systems is hindered by incompatible data systems, differing policy approaches to data protection, and political economy factors such as actors trying to preserve their influence over key program decisions or budgets or to ensure an agency's predominance in a particular country.

In between these two extremes lie those factors that could enable convergence but do not yet do so. For example, some global policy commitments related to strengthening convergence are not yet being fully implemented in the region, such as the World Food Programme's (WFP's) Social Protection Strategy, which directs the agency's country operations to find out whether their responses could be implemented through existing government systems. Other factors can either help or hinder convergence depending on how they play out in a particular context, for example, how donors set their funding policies and use their influence on program design and implementation, government leadership, and the government's institutional arrangements. If there is competition for power or resources between different government entities, this will hinder convergence, whereas stable government institutions that implement agendas over a long period of time and that develop ownership for building



2 The *Cadre Harmonisé* was created by the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (*Comité permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte contre la Sécheresse dans le Sahel* or CILSS) to analyze and identify areas at risk and populations affected by food and nutrition insecurity in the Sahel and West Africa.



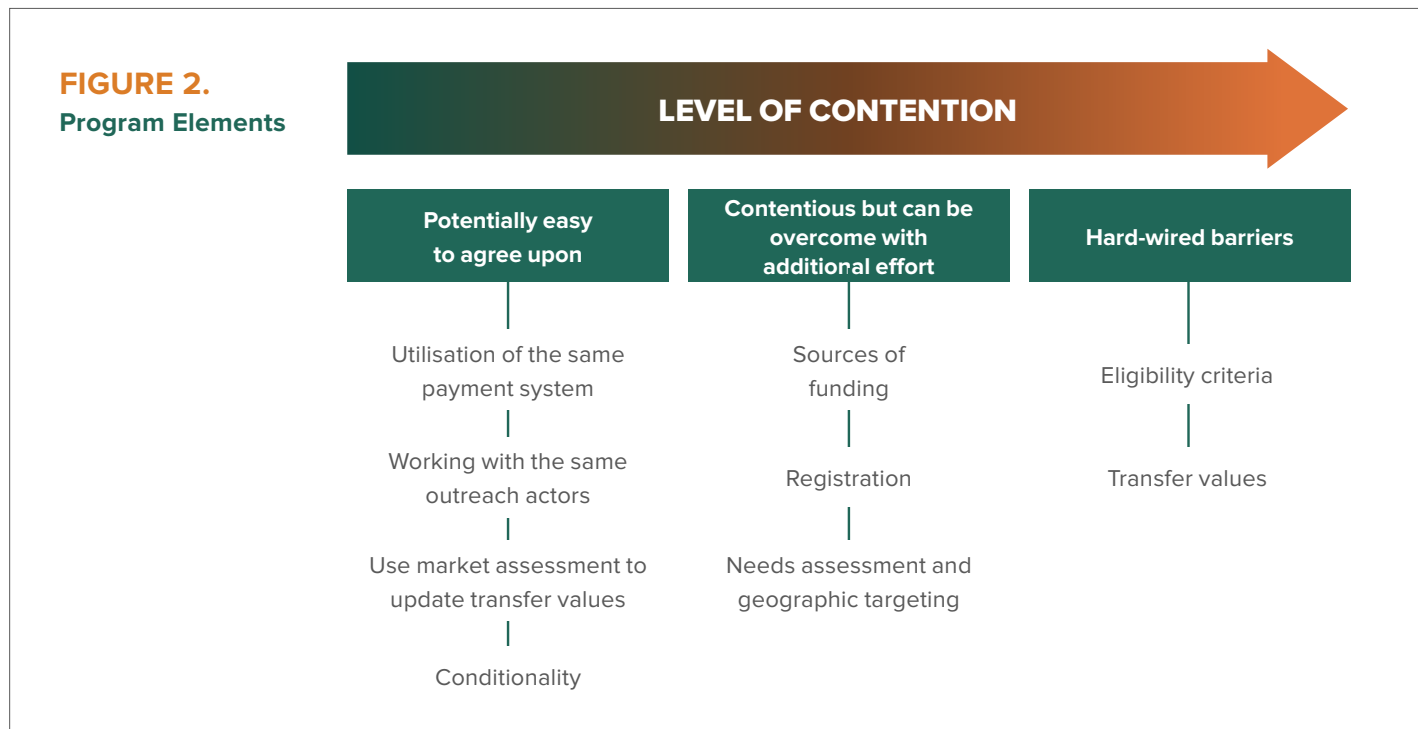
links with other actors help to create and sustain convergence.
HOW EASY OR HARD IS IT TO ALIGN DIFFERENT PROGRAM ELEMENTS?

Converging humanitarian and social protection systems often involves bringing together different existing programs, but it is easier to align some elements of programs than others, as summarized in **Figure 2** below.

At one end of the spectrum, it can be fairly easy for programs to agree to use the same payment system (particularly if government and humanitarian agencies are already using the same payment providers as is the case in Chad) or to use conditionality (in most of the studied countries, the different programs are either aligned on using conditionality or, where they do not, conditionality is not contentious).

At the other end of the spectrum, some elements are much harder to align because they are hard-wired into the programs. For example, eligibility criteria are often central to the identity of a given program and also touch on issues of sovereignty, so are likely to be difficult to align. Also, the value of transfers, which is a recurrent topic of dissent between social safety nets and humanitarian cash programs in the region and beyond.

In between these two poles, there are some elements that are contentious but where disagreements can be overcome with additional effort. These include issues related to sources of funding such as differing budget lines and degrees of predictability, the registration of beneficiaries (which raises issues of data protection and interoperability), definitions of vulnerability (which tend to differ between social protection and humanitarian actors), and how to divide or share geographical zones of interventions (which is a



recurrent issue in most of the six countries).

CONCLUSION

Convergence is essential: Spending money on parallel systems is an ineffective way of working that the Sahel region cannot afford. The challenging resource situation means that partners must learn to work together more efficiently, and donors should advocate for this to happen.

Establish the objective of convergence first: It is necessary to start by establishing a shared and clear vision of what convergence will mean in each country and what gains can be had from convergence. Only then should efforts be made to investigate how it should look.

Keep in mind political factors and develop common ground: In order to overcome the hard-wired barriers to convergence, it will be necessary to understand any political factors that may be driving structural divisions. These are usually manifestations of adherence to fundamental principles or unwelcome trade-offs such as those between mounting a timely response or investing in systems building or between benefit adequacy or coverage. To overcome these barriers, policymakers could consider the following approaches:

- **Bring actors together** physically, technically, and ideologically. Various practices and mechanisms can be used to develop common ground, collective end goals, and shared ways of working that leverage actors' comparative advantages.
- **Build knowledge to break down barriers:** Having little knowledge of how "the other side" works or limited experience of alternative ways of working can be a barrier to convergence. However, this can be overcome by, for example, building mixed teams of staff with a combination of humanitarian and social protection competencies and/or upskilling existing staff.
- **Develop shared objectives:** This proved successful in the COVID-19 response where there was a joint focus on the desired outcome (supporting those in need) that leveraged the strengths of both the humanitarian assistance and social protection systems and creating a coalition of allies who worked toward the common goal.

Tread carefully in situations where institutional interests create barriers: By definition, vested interests are at stake in convergence efforts since each program has its own staff, delivery system, and budget, which can be threatened by moves toward greater convergence. There can thus be a disincentive

to align for fear of losing jobs, funds, and/or influence.

Be mindful of risks that can jeopardize convergence efforts: Internal factors such as changing political intentions, a waning of will or guidance from national governments, or the loss of key enabling factors such as coordination bodies or technical capacity can jeopardize the progress made toward convergence.

When tackling barriers related to country context, do not divide and rule: Barriers related to specific country contexts cannot be overcome unless all actors involved try to speak with one voice and find common ways to navigate the challenges posed by these issues.

Be prepared for the long haul: Setting up common tools and procedures for the two systems increases efficiency. However, this is almost inevitably a long-term endeavor as it requires the development of a consensus on the best ways to proceed among humanitarian and development agencies and actors, who tend to have different opinions about how to operate.

Go after quick wins by focusing on opportunities that are currently being missed: Examples of such opportunities in the six countries include: (i) identifying when different agencies partner with the same local NGO in their outreach efforts; (ii) leveraging shared payment mechanisms; (iii) making efforts to ensure that global policy commitments are reflected at the country level; and (iv) enforcing donor commitments to reducing (and eventually ending) funding for costly parallel delivery where this is not justified.

Concurrently, invest in other preparedness activities to speed up responses: Two examples of such activities are Mauritania's recently created National Mechanism for Preparedness and Response to Food and Nutrition Crises and the mapping of the presence, products, and prices of financial service providers in Senegal that has been recommended in the evaluation of the African Risk Capacity (ARC) Replica program.

Join forces to increase the available resources: The World Bank's funding to support refugees in Chad is one example of a joint commitment by humanitarian and social protection donors. Similarly, humanitarian resources can be freed up by increasing efficiency along the delivery chain or by handing over recurrent crisis response activities to national social safety nets. However, in the latter case, it is necessary to be cognizant of the trade-off between the broad coverage that a sustainable social transfer system can provide and the need to ensure that it remains affordable for the government in the long term.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AAP Accountability to affected populations	CSP Country Strategic Plan	OCHA Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	RNU Régistre National Unique (Social Registry)
ACF <i>Action Contre la Faim</i> (Action Against Hunger)	CWG Cash Working Group	ODA Official Development Assistance	RSU <i>Régistre Social Unique</i> (Unique Social Registry)
AFD <i>Agence Française du Développement</i> (French Development Agency)	DIZA <i>Développement Inclusif dans les Zones d'Accueil</i> (Inclusive Development in Hosting Areas)	OS <i>Opérateur Social/Opérateurs Sociaux</i> (Social Operator/ Operators)	SASPP Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program
ARC African Risk Capacity	ECHO European Commission Humanitarian Office	PARCA <i>Projet d'Appui au Réfugiés et aux Communautés d'Accueil</i> (Refugees and Host Communities Support Project)	SP/CNPS <i>Secrétariat Permanent au Conseil National de Protection Social</i> (Permanent Secretariat for the National Social Protection Council)
BMZ <i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i> (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development)	HEA Household Economy Approach	PDU <i>Programme de Développement d'Urgence</i> (Emergency Development Program)	UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
BRC Burkinabé Red Cross	HRP Humanitarian Response Plan	PFS <i>Projet Filets Sociaux</i> (Safety Net Projects)	UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund
CaLP Cash Learning Partnership	IDP Internally Displaced Person	PMT Proxy Means Testing	WFP World Food Programme
CFA West African francs	KfW <i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i> (German Development Bank)	PNBSF <i>Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale</i> (National Stipend Program for Family Security)	
CFS <i>Cellule des Filets Sociaux</i> (Safety Net Cell)	M&E Monitoring and evaluation	PNR <i>Plan National de Réponse</i> (National Response Plan)	
CSA <i>Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire</i> (Food Security Commission)	MEB Minimum Expenditure Basket		
	MIS Management information system		
	NGO Non-government organization		

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1. Background to the Research

1.1

Context of the Overall Research

The Sahel region is one of the poorest in the world and faces multiple complex crises. The region, comprised of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, struggles with the combined effects of climate change and recurrent climate-related shocks, widespread chronic and seasonal food insecurity, high rates of malnutrition, conflict, and forced displacement.

Since the 2000s, the countries of the region have implemented various kinds of social protection policies and programs including: long-term, regular cash transfer programs for extremely poor households; seasonal cash transfers; long-term, labor-intensive public works programs; school feeding programs; health fee waivers; and initiatives to set up health insurance. Even as national social assistance systems are being built, countries often experience crises that require the delivery of humanitarian assistance. Both kinds of initiatives can address similar needs and can be delivered by the same organizations.

³ Grand Bargain 2.0 (2022).

⁴ The SASPP aims to help poor and vulnerable households to become more resilient to the effects of climate change and to expand the reach of shock-responsive cash transfer programs in six Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal. It includes a learning to inform political dialogue and to support the convergence between the humanitarian and development arenas.

Development and humanitarian agencies are committed to joining forces in the effort to provide assistance, especially to particularly vulnerable groups. To support this effort, research is being carried out globally on the relationship between humanitarian cash transfers and national social protection systems. The agencies are also committed to strengthening their policy and operational collaboration, most recently by agreeing on new ways to coordinate the provision of cash assistance, including its links with social protection.³

This study focuses on what links humanitarian cash transfer programs and social safety nets and how to promote convergence between the two in the Sahel region and seeks to provide operationally relevant and practical analysis on ways to enhance the collaboration between the two kinds of interventions. The analysis and conclusions are based on case studies of each of the six countries in the region. The research has been funded by the Sahel Adaptive Social Protection Program (SASPP) Multi-Donor Trust Fund.⁴

1.2

Objective and Scope

This study seeks to:

- Identify the most effective ways to align the goals and provision of social safety nets and humanitarian assistance, specifically related to cash-based assistance
- Identify the key factors that enable or constrain this alignment
- Provide strategic, policy, and operational guidance on the potential for this alignment and the value that it can add to the countries of the region.

This study is based on six detailed case studies, one for each country in the region. Each case study systematically identified and analyzed any existing or potential links between humanitarian cash assistance (cash transfers provided by humanitarian and non-government actors) and social safety nets (i.e. cash transfers provided by the government). This flagship report also draws from several recently concluded research programs⁵ and some that have just started⁶ and adds its voice to the global call for more in-depth and country-specific research on the topic as stated in Longhurst and Slater (2022): “Further research, especially conducted in-country with operational practitioners, is needed to understand what is being attempted around SRSP [shock-responsive social protection] in FCAS [fragile and conflict-affected states].”⁷

The six country case studies bring together er experiences from very different contexts. The Mauritania and Senegal case studies focus on recurrent seasonal food insecurity, while the case study on Chad focuses on support to refugees and host communities. The studies on Burkina Faso and Mali describe situations in which food insecurity and forced displacement occur at the same time, and the Niger case study focuses on COVID-19 related assistance in the context of a highly complex protracted crisis.

5 Such as the Social Protection Approaches to COVID-19 (SPACE) expert advice helpline, the EU-funded Social Protection across the Humanitarian–Development Nexus (SPaN), and the Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection.

6 Such as the Better Assistance in Crises (BASIC) Research program undertaken at the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex.

7 Longhurst and Slater (2022, forthcoming), p. 30. See also Cherrier (2021) and Barca (2019).

8 O’Brien et al (2018).

9 Seyfert et al (2019), p. 5.

1.3

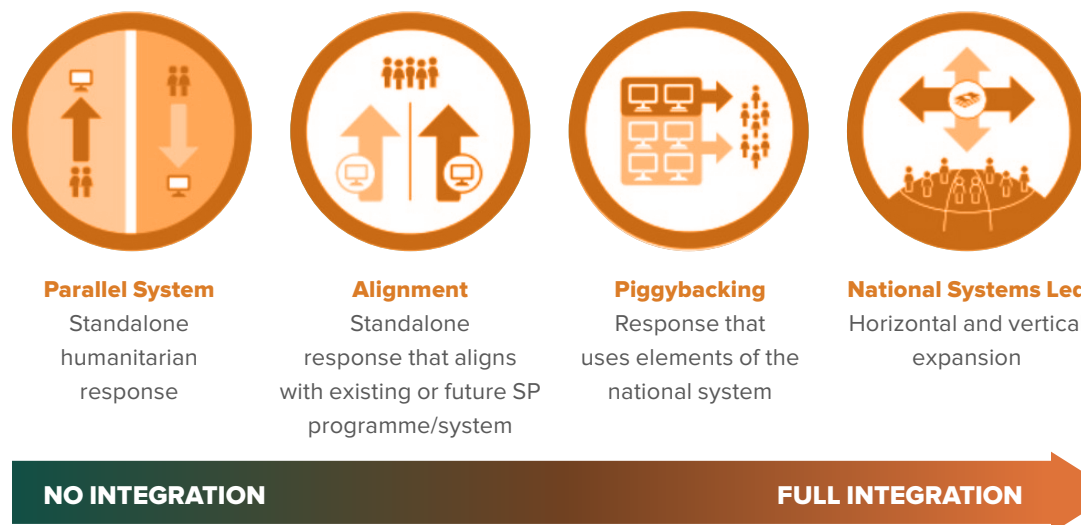
Analytical Framework

There are several different ways to deliver cash assistance to very poor and vulnerable people.⁸ At one end of the spectrum, humanitarian and national safety net programs can deliver support entirely independently of each other. In the middle of the spectrum, these programs can be delivered in parallel but mimic each other in important elements or can use some of the same delivery mechanisms (piggybacking). At the opposite end of the spectrum, when all cash assistance programs are operated and delivered by national social protection systems, full convergence has been achieved.

It is not necessary to choose one approach over another. Different options can be selected and combined to deliver social assistance programs. For example, actors can choose to align transfer values and use the same payment system but run separate grievance processes. Instead of framing the humanitarian-social protection choice as “either/or,” actors can consider adopting the framework developed by Seyfert et al (2019), which “unbundles the variety of ways and options... for connecting humanitarian and social protection approaches.”⁹



FIGURE 3.
Continuum of
delivery options



Source: Adapted from O'Brien et al (2018) and Seyfert et al (2019)

The case studies used this framework to describe the choices made about the delivery of benefits in the different programs studied in the six countries. The framework defines three key domains: (i) social safety nets (including those put in place in response to shocks); (ii) lean season assistance; and (iii) support for refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs). Each country report presents an overview of the extent to which humanitarian aid converges with the national social safety net system or, where no such system exists, those elements of national guidance set by government that exist.

The programs studied in each country are analyzed with regard to 16 different elements grouped into four different categories: (i) national policy; (ii) program objectives; (iii) program design; and (iv) program implementation. Each case study provides practical and actionable recommendations for next steps, which are specific to the context in each country and thus are not reproduced in this flagship report.

The analysis in the case studies and this report acknowledges that convergence is not a goal in itself and that it does not always result in better outcomes. Convergence is conceptualized as a long-term ideal goal and any actions taken in that direction need to be appropriate for the country context and need to serve the overall purpose of improving responses to the fast-growing needs in the region. As stated by Smith (2021b), “Evidence shows that linking HA-SP [Humanitarian Assistance – Social Protection] presents

benefits and limitations when compared to delivery through parallel systems, and that the operational context and the manner of linking HA-SP both influence these.”¹⁰ This flagship report discusses themes that recur in the six case studies and identifies common risks.

1.4

Methodology and Limitations

Since the focus of this research is on the links between humanitarian cash transfer programs and social safety nets, the emphasis in the analysis is on the extent of convergence between the two systems (or parts thereof) rather than on their performance. The humanitarian programs that have been analyzed are not judged on their quality or on how well they reach their objectives but rather are examined for their potential – as a whole program or in parts – to converge with government-led social protection systems.

Each case study analyzed several different programs categorized as social safety nets, lean season assistance, and support for forcibly displaced people. The analysis focused on the cash assistance components of these programs and did not take into account any accompanying measures (such as support for improving nutrition, hygiene messaging, or income generation activities). A total of 29 programs was

¹⁰ Smith (2021b), p. 11.

studied, ranging from two in Niger to seven in Burkina Faso. Some were delivered by the government, while the others were delivered by, for example, a UN agency, an international NGO, a Red Cross Society, or a consortium that includes local partners. The programs differed in size (the smallest supported 1,792 households, while the largest reached 315,000 households), though one selection criterion was that, in principle, all programs should support at least 5,000 households and provide cash assistance for at least three months. Most of the studied programs were implemented in 2020 or 2021. In some countries such as Senegal and Mali, previous programs were included when they were of specific interest in that country context.

Each case study was conducted between June 2021 and January 2022 by an international consultant who worked remotely but was paired with a national expert based in the country. The in-country expert made it possible to engage in targeted, direct interactions with key stakeholders. The first step was the presentation of the goals of the case studies and the synthesis analysis to a group of key actors, both governmental and non-governmental, at the country level. The team then carried out a review of both published and unpublished reports relating to individual programs and to the social protection system in the study country. Where available, formal program evaluation reports were also consulted. The literature review was complemented by interviews with 25 to 30 key informants in each country with experience of the system and the programs themselves.¹¹

The report is structured as follows:

▶ CHAPTER 2

Presents an overview of country-specific programs and the state of convergence in each program.

▶ CHAPTER 3

Reflects on the history of convergence in the region and presents an overview of the current level of convergence in each of the six countries.

▶ CHAPTER 4

Discusses how different ways of working facilitate or hinder convergence.

▶ CHAPTER 5

Debates how some program elements lend themselves easily to greater convergence, while others are highly contentious.

▶ CHAPTER 6

Concludes the analysis by reflecting on where the debate on convergence currently stands in the region, the resource implications of increasing convergence, and how further momentum on stronger convergence could be built based on these findings.



¹¹ A list of key informants is included in the annex of each case study. The stakeholders who were consulted came from the governments, United Nations agencies, local and international NGOs, donors, and financial service providers. In each country, the team made sure to also interview local actors who work at the community level. Most of the interviews were conducted remotely, mostly on a bilateral basis. However, some were conducted as focus group discussions in-country. Some requests for interviews remained unanswered.

2. Country-specific findings: Convergence context and current state

Table 1 presents a list of the programs that were analyzed in the six countries.

TABLE 1. Overview of analyzed programs

Burkina Faso	Chad	Mali	Mauritania	Niger	Senegal
Focus: Seasonal drought response and IDPs	Focus: Refugee support	Focus: Seasonal drought response	Focus: Seasonal drought response	Focus: COVID-19 response	Focus: Seasonal drought response
<p>Programs: <i>Projet Filets Sociaux</i> (Safety Net Projects, PFS) (funded by World Bank)</p> <p>PFS (funded by <i>Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau</i> (German Development Bank, KfW))</p> <p>PFS (funded by the <i>Agence Française de Développement</i> (French Development Agency, AFD))</p> <p>UNICEF FAO* PROGRES (NGO PDU Consortium)* WFP* Red Cross* Oxfam*</p>	<p>Programs: <i>Projet d'Appui au Réfugiés et aux Communautés d'Accueil</i> (Refugees and Host Communities Support Project, PARCA)</p> <p>WFP support to refugees DIZA Sud and <i>DIZA Est Développement Inclusif dans les Zones d'Accueil Sud</i> (Inclusive Development in Hosting Areas)*</p>	<p>Programs: <i>Jigisèmèjiri</i> horizontal expansion PRESA WFP emergency response*</p> <p><i>Programme de Développement d'Urgence</i> (Emergency Development Program PDU) implemented by NGO consortium*</p>	<p>Programs: <i>Tekavoul</i> program Elmaouna shock-response program</p> <p>WFP* Oxfam* ACF*</p>	<p>Programs: Scale-up of <i>Projet Filets Sociaux Adaptatifs</i> (funded by World Bank)</p> <p>WFP and UNICEF * response funded by <i>Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung</i> (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ)</p>	<p>Programs: World Bank-funded shock-responsive pilot for lean season 2017</p> <p>Start Network's ARC Replica* (2020 response)</p> <p>WFP lean season response 2021*</p>

*Represent humanitarian and / or non-governmental programs

2.1

Summary of Findings

Previous research has found that humanitarian cash assistance typically has most convergence with national social safety nets in those countries with mature and trusted social protection systems.¹² The emergence of strong social protection systems is the outcome of many other underlying factors such as strong economic growth, healthy public finances, political stability among others. In keeping with this finding, the case studies for Senegal and Mauritania – countries with social assistance sectors that are still being built but are the most developed in the region – found greater levels of convergence than were found by the other case studies. Indeed, these countries have benefited from some of the underlying factors needed for strong systems- though they still have some ways to go. In Mali, high levels of instability have hindered convergence, despite the fact that policymakers have successfully established some basic building blocks of

a national social protection system and there have historically been high levels of cooperation between humanitarian and social protection actors. In Burkina Faso, there is a long history of harmonizing approaches that have been prompted by both systems. However, only a few nascent building blocks of the national social safety net exist and are used by different actors to varying degrees, but some elements, such as a fully digitalized payment system, are well-developed and could be leveraged more effectively in support of convergence. In Niger, both the national safety net and the humanitarian system are well-established but are working largely in parallel rather than together. However, the COVID-19 crisis acted as a catalyst for convergence, with various actors co-designing and jointly implementing an emergency cash program. In Chad, the national system that supports refugees and host communities is nascent, and there are hardly any connections between humanitarian cash assistance and the national social safety net. The following sections present a summary of each case study.

2.2

Burkina Faso

The Burkinabé case study found that cash responses to climate-related shocks are delivered at the same time as but separately from support for IDPs, often in the same regions. Burkina Faso is experiencing one of the fastest-growing IDP crises globally, mostly affecting remote and already disenfranchised areas. Although there is no flagship national social safety net, existing programs provide the building blocks for a nascent national social safety net and are used by humanitarian cash assistance actors as well as by other cash programs.

There are a number of social safety net projects, some of which explicitly support the construction of a national social protection system. The biggest is the government program funded by the World Bank through the Social Safety Net Project (Projet Filets Sociaux -PFS), which is closely coordinated with funding from the German Development Bank (KfW) and the French Development Agency (AFD). UNICEF runs the largest safety net project of all of the UN agencies.

¹² Gray Meral and Both (2021), p. 17. See also The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection (2021), p. 7: “The stronger and more institutionalized the social protection systems, the more links can be made with humanitarian cash approaches which will facilitate systems’ ability to be shock-responsive.”

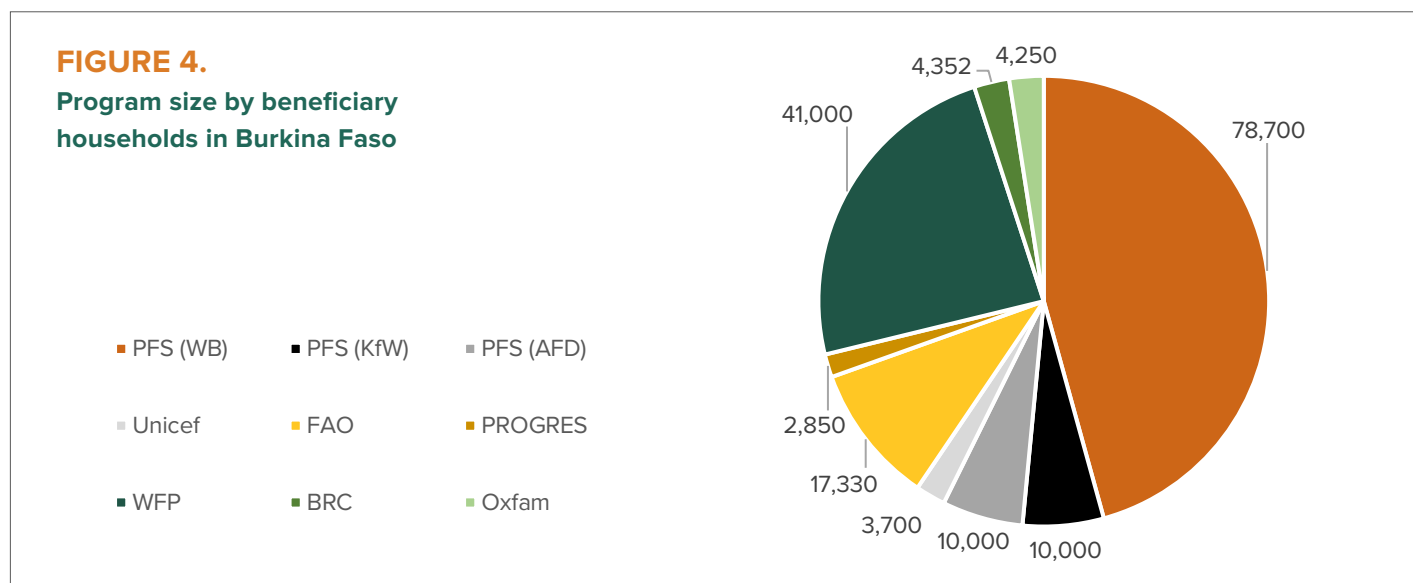
TABLE 2. Cash Assistance Programs in Burkina Faso

Social safety nets	Lean season assistance	Support for IDPs
Projet Filets Sociaux (World Bank) FAO	PROGRES (NGO consortium)	WFP
PFS (KfW)		Oxfam
PFS (AFD)		Burkinabé Red Cross
UNICEF		

Humanitarian actors mostly work in the traditionally food-insecure north and north-east of the country where armed violence causes widespread displacement. Some cash transfer projects are implemented during the lean season (June/July to August/September) while others focus on displaced populations throughout the year, concentrating their operations in the most affected areas.

The case study analyzed the following cash assistance programs, the largest being the World Bank-funded safety net PFS followed by WFP’s assistance to IDPs as seen in **Table 2**. **Figure 4** shows the relative size of the programs in terms of the number of their beneficiary households.¹³

There is wide agreement among key stakeholders in Burkina Faso that there is no national social safety net program. However, various aspects of the safety net program are being developed with the support of international actors, and the government has also produced some guidance on how social transfers¹⁴ should be implemented. **Table 3** shows the extent to which the various elements of the country’s cash assistance programs (such as their financing or governance) are following this national guidance. There is some harmonization among programs of the same type (social safety net, lean season assistance, or support for IDPs).



Note: PFS: Projet Filets Sociaux ; PFS AFD : Projet Filets Sociaux funded by AFD ; FAO : Food and Agriculture Organization; UNICEF: United Nations International Children Emergency Fund; WFP: World Food Program, PROGRES: Programme de Resilience et de Cohesion Sociale au Sahel; BRC: Burkinabe Red Cross

¹³ The PFS supports all women in a household who qualify according to certain criteria. Thus, the number provided for the PFS represents the number of recipients of aid whereas the total number of households might be lower.

¹⁴ Social transfers also refer to cash transfers but are referred to as such to highlight their social objective and the additional accompanying measures

TABLE 3.
Current state of convergence
in Burkina Faso



Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework				●
Financing	●			
Governance		●	●	
Coordination		●	●	
Program objectives			Safety nets	Lean season/ IDPs
Poverty/vulnerability assessment		Safety nets	Lean season	IDPs
Price and market analysis		Only IDPs		
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria	●	●	●	●
Transfer value, frequency, and modality	●	●	●	
Conditionality				●
Beneficiary management information system (MIS)	●			
Outreach and communication	●			
Registration and enrollment	●	●	●	
Payment and delivery	●			
Accountability to affected populations (AAP)	●	●		
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)	●			

At the national level, there is a high degree of harmonization of policy and objectives. The different programs broadly follow compatible objectives, which is one point of convergence, but seek to reach them by different means, partly due to donor preferences (such as giving different degrees of emphasis to nutrition or to specific target groups). This constitutes a barrier to greater convergence as these priorities determine, for example, in which geographic areas to intervene.

Social safety nets, lean season assistance, and support for IDPs all follow their own governance structures and have

their own coordination mechanisms. Coordination programs and actors has been identified as essential during the field interviews but is currently not being pursued sufficiently.

The design of most lean season and IDP support programs tends to be based on the Cadre Harmonisé¹⁵ and the humanitarian response plan (HRP), but there is no similar shared reference for the safety net projects. There are design differences both within the three groups and across them in terms of their targeting processes, transfer values, frequency, duration, and modality.

¹⁵ The cadre harmonisé is a consensual tool used to analyze current and projected food and nutrition situation in the Sahel and West Africa. It classifies the severity of food insecurity based on the international classification scale. It leverages several ministries and actors in each country and makes use of field observations and questionnaires for its assessments. It is the currently relief on early warning system for the region.



There is strong agreement in principle among all programs that a national social registry is a key building block for a national social protection system and a useful instrument for humanitarian programs, especially in the context of continued insecurity and protracted crisis. Nevertheless, the exact method of managing the registration of potentially eligible beneficiaries has been, and continues to be, a contentious subject. Registration is the only topic within the delivery chain where the government has provided some guidance.

A key strategic shift would be to aim for greater complementarity between interventions, for example, by sharing territories and caseloads of affected populations between agencies. Implementers usually delineate their geographical zones of intervention, seeking to avoid the same household receiving assistance from different programs. While this logic makes sense within the group of similar programs, it is not helpful in layering immediate humanitarian support on top of longer-term assistance or vice versa. Taking a layering approach, with several programs

acting to top up each other's benefits in crises, would provide an incentive for operational convergence.

The current fragmentation of actors and programs is a very costly way of operating. If further harmonization of transfer values is achieved based on a recent minimum expenditure basket (MEB) study,¹⁶ the costs per beneficiary will increase, at least in the short term, particularly in the case of support for IDPs. Therefore, it is even more important to ensure that the transaction costs decrease.

In their interviews, some key informants expressed concern about the continued political independence of safety net projects if they are further scaled up. The country's safety nets are currently largely protected against political interference because government bodies are coordinated at the local level but not at the national level. Some actors are worried that one overall national safety net, under which all available financing would be grouped, would come under much higher political pressure than the current smaller programmes.

¹⁶ Cash Working Group (2021b, forthcoming).



2.3

Chad

The Chad case study analyzes safety net and humanitarian cash assistance targeted to refugee and host communities.

Chad has experienced recurrent political violence and is in a protracted socioeconomic crisis. It is one of the main host countries for refugees in Africa, and there are currently more than 523,439 refugees in the country.¹⁷ Social services and resources in refugee-hosting areas are under strain, and the presence of refugees is putting considerable pressure on natural resources.

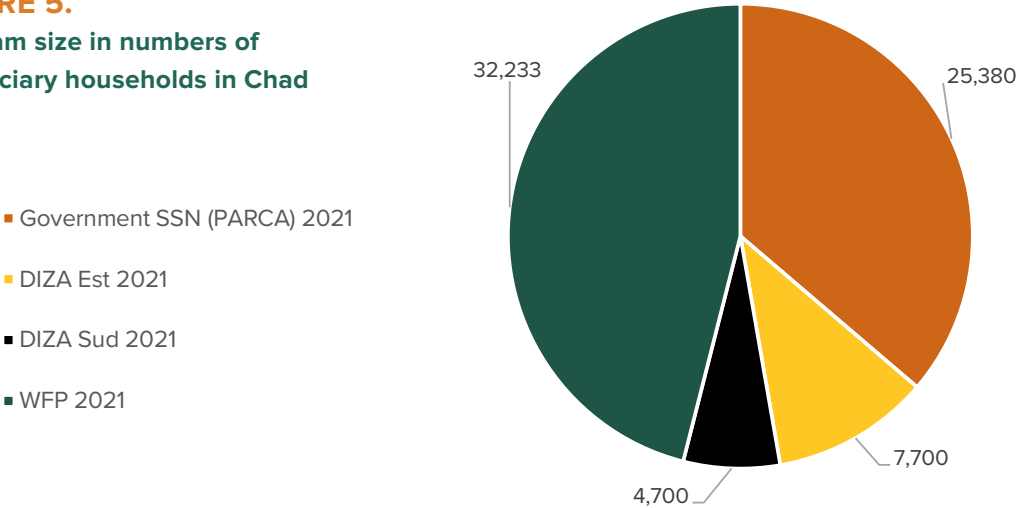
Chad’s social protection system is in the early stages of development.

Despite policy commitments from the government, scaling up social protection coverage has proved challenging. The World Bank is the main donor supporting the government in building a social safety net and funded a pilot project from 2016 to 2018. Since 2018, the World Bank has

supported a new safety net program in refugee-hosting areas called the Refugees and Host Communities Support Project or PARCA (*Projet d’Appui au Réfugiés et aux Communautés d’Accueil*). In addition to PARCA, the case study analyzes three humanitarian programs, WFP’s support for refugees and two programs funded by the European Union (EU), *DIZA Sud* and *DIZA Est (Développement Inclusif des Zones d’Accueil)*, both of which provide cash transfers to refugees and host communities.

Figure 5 shows the size of the programs in terms of their numbers of beneficiaries.

FIGURE 5.
Program size in numbers of beneficiary households in Chad



17 UN OCHA (2021)

TABLE 4.
Current state of
convergence in Chad



Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework				●
Financing	●			
Governance	●			
Coordination		●		
Program objectives		●		●
Poverty/vulnerability assessment	●	●		
Price and market analysis			●	
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria	●			
Transfer value, frequency, and modality	●			
Conditionality	●	●		
Beneficiary MIS	●			
Outreach and communication	●			
Registration and enrollment	●			
Payment and delivery	●		●	
AAP	●			
M&E	●			

At the national level, there are two distinct policy frameworks, one for social protection and one for refugee protection and management. The policy framework for supporting refugees is progressive and includes the strategic objective of achieving the socioeconomic integration of refugees with the local host communities. All of the studied cash programs align with that objective, with only WFP’s cash for refugees program being a short-term crisis response. However, as humanitarian resources are dwindling in Chad, previous high levels of support for refugees in what has become a protracted displacement situation are no longer sustainable. This has led to the impetus to attempt to integrate refugees more systematically into the socioeconomic development of host communities and, potentially, into a government-led social safety net. This would mean that the level of support provided to vulnerable

refugees would be similar to the level that is provided to vulnerable nationals. However, refugees currently do not yet enjoy the same rights as nationals and therefore have more limited livelihood opportunities.

The coordination framework is complex. There is one for social protection, one for humanitarian coordination, and a third for refugee support. The social protection coordination framework is seen as weak as evidenced by feedback from key informant interviews, with coordination between implementers being ad hoc at the national level but more regular and consistent at the local level, especially in the refugee camps.



The strongest point of convergence is the commitment by almost all programs to providing cash benefits, although the WFP still delivers the bulk of its assistance in kind. On the other design elements, the picture is more mixed. In particular, the targeting approach, transfer value, frequency of payments, and conditionality mostly vary between programs.

The case study's analysis of the delivery chain found that, with the exception of a harmonized questionnaire used to collect beneficiary data for the social registry and the use of the same payment provider,¹⁸ most delivery steps are conducted through parallel systems. Convergence comes at a cost, and the majority of the interviewed humanitarian actors were critical of the burdensome and lengthy beneficiary registration process. Data sharing remains a sensitive topic and, for the time being, only the databases of WFP and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are interoperable.

Additional resources by the World Bank enables an expansion of longer term social protection funding which

can allow for the freeing up the very limited humanitarian funding available for more acute emergency relief operations elsewhere in the country. Humanitarian funding is currently constrained and both development and humanitarian funding are insufficient to adequately meet the needs. Thus, there is an ongoing debate about how to achieve the best balance between the humanitarian imperative that is guiding humanitarian actors and the longer-term development goals guiding the World Bank's strategic orientation.

The planning documents for the different programs dating from 2018 express a high level of ambition for strategic alignment and for building a national social protection system that is inclusive of refugees. However, it has proven challenging to make this ambition a reality. The separation of programs in terms of operating in different geographical areas has led to 'cohabitation' rather than complementarity. Nevertheless, the phasing out of humanitarian funding for cash assistance may enforce a situation where national social safety nets take over parts of the support to the population.

¹⁸ PARCA, DIZA Est, and WFP share the same FSP (at least in certain regions) with the same conditions and processes

2.4

Mali

Like the Senegal and Mauritania case studies, the Mali case study focuses on the response to predictable and recurrent climate-related shocks, specifically seasonal drought. Mali is also affected by conflict and political crises, and this insecurity makes for a complex environment for delivering humanitarian assistance and supporting medium- to long-term national development policies.

Cash-based transfers are used by a variety of programs but not always at the same scale, and in-kind food assistance still plays an important role in the seasonal response.

The case study focuses on the national social safety net program (*Jigisèmèjiri*) on the one hand and a sample of seasonal cash-based programs on the other hand. The latter are implemented by the government, specifically the Food Security Commission or CSA (*Commissariat à la Sécurité Alimentaire*) and partners such as the WFP and NGOs during the lean season. *Jigisèmèjiri* started in 2013 with World Bank support and provides quarterly or bimonthly

unconditional cash transfers to more than 91,000 poor and vulnerable households for three years. In 2018, it included a vertical expansion- i.e. an additional cash transfer to existing beneficiaries- in response to seasonal food and nutrition insecurity through one additional cash transfer. The cash component of the government's National Food Security System Strengthening Program or PRESA (*Programme de Renforcement du Dispositif National de Sécurité Alimentaire*) is implemented by the CSA and contributes to the seasonal food and nutrition insecurity element of the annual National Response Plan (*Plan National de Réponse*). In 2021, PRESA provided three unconditional cash transfers, in association with the CSA's in-kind food rations. The WFP emergency response, the EU-funded Emergency Development Program or PDU (*Programme de Développement D'Urgence*) consortium of 17 NGOs and Save the Children's Albarka program all provide unconditional cash transfers during the lean season. **Figure 6** shows each program's size in terms of numbers of beneficiary households.

FIGURE 6.

Program size in terms of numbers of beneficiary households in Mali

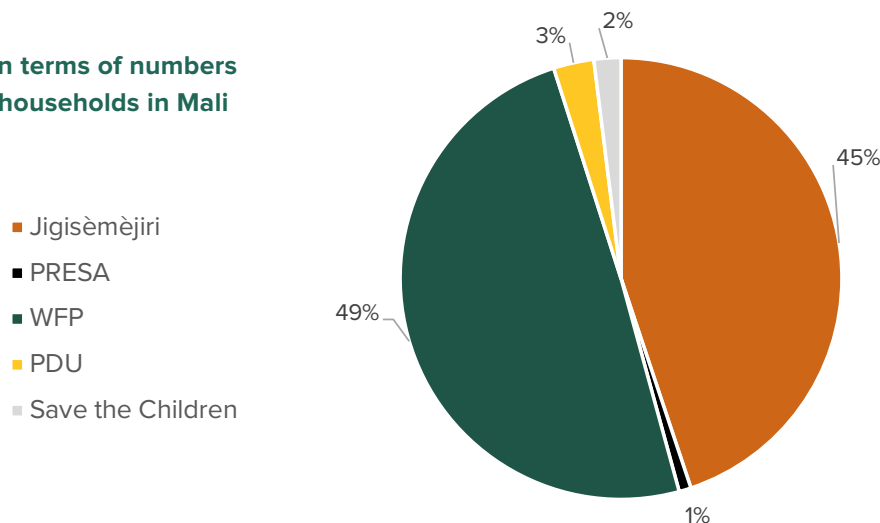





















TABLE 5.
Current state of
convergence in Mali

 Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework				
Financing				
Governance				
Coordination				
Program objectives				
Poverty/vulnerability assessment				
Price and market analysis				
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria				
Transfer value, frequency, and modality				
Conditionality				
Beneficiary MIS				
Outreach and communication				
Registration and enrollment				
Payment and delivery				
AAP				
M&E				

At the policy level, new humanitarian aid and social protection policies have been adopted in Mali over the past 10 years. They remain distinct but both policy documents express an ambition to link social protection and humanitarian assistance and aim to expand predictable and shock-responsive social safety nets, at least for responding to recurrent shocks.

The governance of social protection in Mali is made up of a variety of stakeholders and mechanisms, with an increased number of actors since the 2012 food and security crises. *Jigisèmèjiri* is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance, which coordinates with the National Direction for Social Protection and Solidarity Economy, which anchors the division in charge of safety nets. PRESA

falls within the National Response Plan, which is managed and overseen by the Food Security Commission (CSA). Humanitarian assistance is also under the jurisdiction of the CSA but is governed by each donor organization’s principles and mandates. Most stakeholders recognize the need for a coherent and simplified coordination architecture to facilitate greater convergence. Many bodies exist for coordination and interaction, such as the forums planned under each national policy, the sectoral working groups, and the humanitarian coordination clusters. However, ministerial changes, staff turnover, political instability, and a lack of funding have led to discontinuity in leadership and interruptions in interactions between the social safety net, shock response programs, and humanitarian cash transfer programs.

At the financing level, different planning horizons and different donors' objectives hinder the move towards greater convergence.

Different calendars for mobilizing resources and disbursing funding may be the biggest constraint. The funding cycle that supports the building of the national social safety net follows a timeframe that is longer than the often very short-term humanitarian funding cycle, in which resources are mobilized to support the provision of short-term or seasonal cash transfers. *Jigisèmèjiri* has mainly been supported by the World Bank with some contributions from the government and remains highly dependent on international support. Thus, *Jigisèmèjiri* and seasonal lean season assistance programs are financed from different sources and have different resource mobilization timeframes. However, if multi-year financing were provided by donors for seasonal cash transfers implemented by WFP and NGOs, this would create an opportunity to partly align humanitarian financial planning with that of *Jigisèmèjiri*.

With regard to objectives, Jigisèmèjiri's goal differs from that of lean season humanitarian assistance.

Jigisèmèjiri's focus is on reducing poverty, while lean season assistance focuses on reducing seasonal food and nutrition insecurity. They are nevertheless complementary because both aim to build the resilience of beneficiaries.

In relation to program design, the alignment picture is mixed.

Jigisèmèjiri, WFP's program, and the EU-funded cash transfers have gradually moved toward harmonizing the amounts that they each provide to each household. All of the studied programs provide unconditional cash transfers. In 2018, *Jigisèmèjiri's* vertical expansion used the same approach to geographical targeting (based on the results of the *Cadre Harmonisé*) as humanitarian cash transfers. The duration and timing of the transfers differ because they are dependent on the different objectives and specifications of the programs. How the transfers are delivered varies by partner – and more precisely by location. Cash transfer delivery modalities need to be constantly adapted to the context in which they are being delivered and also to take into account any insecurity and technical/operational constraints. The Food Safety Commission's (CSA) heavy reliance on in-kind assistance also shows there is still some way to go to expand the use of cash as part of the National Response Plan. Despite efforts to harmonize targeting, a patchwork of targeting criteria and methodologies remains.

Some joint initiatives, such as on the social registry or the construction of a common methodology to define the value of transfers, are underway and could support future convergence.

Most elements of the delivery chains of Jigisèmèjiri and of humanitarian cash transfers remain separate and parallel.

Most stakeholders who were interviewed recognized that harmonization would reduce confusion among beneficiary communities and would increase efficiency. They also identified challenges related to the different mandates and expertise of organizations (and donors) and the sensitivity of the information that is collected on beneficiaries. The local context, particularly insecurity, difficult access conditions, and logistical constraints, also influences the choices made about how to implement programs and deliver transfers

Stakeholders in Mali tend to agree that, in principle, responses to predictable and recurrent shocks can and should ultimately be integrated into the government's shock-responsive social safety net.

Humanitarian assistance would then be focused on unexpected emergencies or growing needs that exceed the government's capacity to respond. The 2018 vertical expansion of *Jigisèmèjiri* to support the seasonal response to food and nutrition insecurity was a first step in that direction. Building convergence would strengthen the country's response to seasonal and recurrent needs and could enable humanitarian donors to gradually phase out their responses to recurrent shocks. However, the remaining challenges will not be overcome in the short term. Mali's political instability and ongoing conflicts are influencing the process of convergence by limiting the presence of the state, and its social safety net, in certain areas. Thus, although convergence may lead to a transition from humanitarian assistance to social safety nets in some locations, complementary actions will still be needed in areas where the state is entirely or mostly absent.

2.5

Mauritania

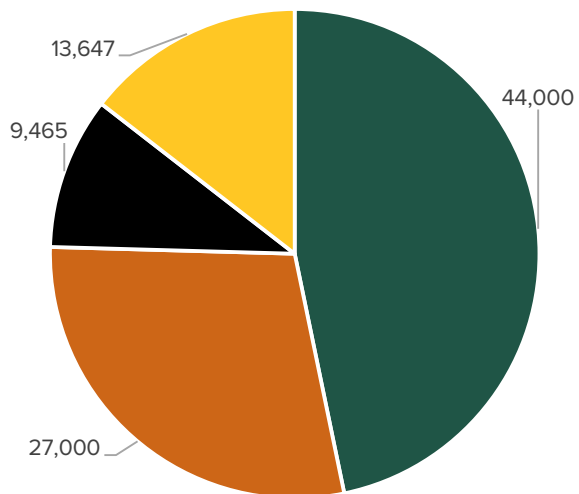
The Mauritania case study focuses on the response to predictable and recurrent climate-related shocks, specifically seasonal drought and discusses the extent to which humanitarian cash transfer programs are aligned with two national safety nets. *Tekavoul* is the regular national social safety net that provides quarterly conditional cash transfers to households in extreme poverty over a five-year cycle.¹⁹ The program currently supports about 93,000 extremely poor households with the ambition of reaching 100,000. It is implemented by the *Taazour* agency (the General Delegation in Charge of National Solidarity and the Fight Against Exclusion), which manages the government's social safety net programs for the vulnerable population, supported by the World Bank's Social Safety Net System Project. *Tekavoul-shock* is a pilot expansion of both the value and coverage of the *Tekavoul*. It supported 9,465 households during the 2021 lean season.

Elmaouna is the national shock-responsive safety net and provides annual unconditional cash transfers to households affected by severe food and nutrition insecurity during the lean season. It is delivered by the CSA and is overseen by *Taazour*. *Elmaouna* covered 27,000 households during the 2021 lean season. WFP, Oxfam, and Action Against Hunger (ACF) also respectively provided unconditional cash transfers to 9,572, 2,825, and 1,250 very poor households affected by severe food and nutrition insecurity during the 2021 lean season.

Figure 7 shows the relative proportion of the programs in terms of numbers of beneficiary households.


FIGURE 7.
Program size in terms of numbers of beneficiary households in Mauritania




























- Government SSN (*Tekavoul*) 2020
- Government shock-response (*Elmaouna*) 2021
- *Tekavoul Shock* 2021
- WFP/ACF/Oxfam 2021



¹⁹ These are soft conditions of attendance at and participation in human development accompanying measures.

TABLE 6.
Current state of convergence
in Mauritania

 Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework	TEKAVOUL 	ELMAOUNA 		
Financing				
Governance				
Coordination	TEKAVOUL 	ELMAOUNA 		
Program objectives		TEKAVOUL 	ELMAOUNA 	
Poverty/vulnerability assessment	TEKAVOUL 		ELMAOUNA 	
Price and market analysis				
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria	TEKAVOUL 		ELMAOUNA 	ELMAOUNA 
Transfer value, frequency, and modality	TEKAVOUL 			ELMAOUNA 
Conditionality	TEKAVOUL 			ELMAOUNA 
Beneficiary MIS				
Outreach and communication		TEKAVOUL 	ELMAOUNA 	
Registration and enrollment	TEKAVOUL 		ELMAOUNA 	
Payment and delivery				
AAP	TEKAVOUL 	ELMAOUNA 		
M&E				

There is less alignment between the non-governmental humanitarian programs and the regular social safety net Tekavoul, which can be explained by the difference in their objectives. However, the objective of the pilot *Tekavoul-shock* is aligned with that of the humanitarian programs.

At the national level, the Social Protection National Strategy is the government’s framework for its social safety nets. The National Mechanism for Preparedness and Response to Food and Nutrition Crises (*Dispositif*) provides the policy basis for the national response to seasonal shocks. *Elmaouna*, *Tekavoul-shock*, and humanitarian cash transfers fall within this *Dispositif*. Humanitarian cash transfers are also guided by humanitarian principles and humanitarian’s own policies.

The financing sources for Tekavoul, Elmaouna, and humanitarian cash transfers are separate and have different planning horizons. Humanitarian funding from donors is mobilized and disbursed in a different timeframe than financing for *Tekavoul*. In addition, humanitarian funding has not always been available in time for the start of the lean season, which sometimes causes alignment issues with the planning cycle of the *Dispositif*.

Each program has its own governance: Tekavoul is under the jurisdiction of Taazour, while Elmaouna is overseen by Taazour in coordination with the CSA. WFP, Oxfam, and Action Against Hunger (ACF) have their own mandates and governance structures. There is an evolving coordination structure for the shock response

along with the establishment and operationalization of the *Dispositif*. Humanitarian cash transfer programs, *Elmaouna*, and *Tekavoul-shock* used to coordinate their responses at a food security sectoral group and are now supporting the transition toward bringing this coordination under the jurisdiction of the *Dispositif*. The participation of *Taazour*, which oversees *Tekavoul*, in the *Dispositif* helps to facilitate dialogue and to harmonize the various shock responses.

A common vision of the need for collective learning and a participatory and iterative process has facilitated progress toward convergence between humanitarian cash transfer programs and the two government social safety nets.

This vision has encouraged a constant dialogue between actors, which has been critical to building harmonization. *Elmaouna*, *Tekavoul-shock*, and humanitarian cash transfer programs have aligned their objectives in line with the National Response Plan that is implemented each year during the lean season. As mentioned above, *Tekavoul* and the humanitarian cash transfer programs have distinct but complementary objectives through the link between reducing poverty (the goal of *Tekavoul*) and reducing food and nutrition insecurity (the goal of humanitarian agencies).

At the program design level, *Elmaouna*, *Tekavoul-shock*, and the WFP, Oxfam, and Action Against Hunger's lean season programs have several points in common. They all base their needs assessments and geographical targeting on the *Cadre Harmonisé* results. They all use common food security indicators to complement the data from the Social Registry that they use for household targeting. Also, they all set the value of their transfers at the same level, calculated according to the effective number of people living in a household, and they all provide unconditional monthly payments four times during the lean season every year. In contrast, *Tekavoul* has a different transfer value, and its cash transfers are conditional and are paid quarterly for five years.

With regard to targeting, two elements of *Elmaouna* and *Tekavoul-shock* on the one hand and of the humanitarian cash transfer programs on the other hand remain partly distinct. First, humanitarian cash transfer programs do not adhere to the government's principle of national coverage (geographic continuity) as they target the most severely affected households in areas that are most food insecure or at risk of severe acute malnutrition. Second, humanitarian partners continue to carry out complementary targeting

exercises to identify any potentially eligible households who are not registered in the Social Registry.

The most effective similarities between *Tekavoul* and the humanitarian cash transfer programs is their shared use of the Social Registry for beneficiary targeting and the inclusion of those *Tekavoul* beneficiaries who meet the eligibility criteria in the lean season programs. This is an encouraging step toward convergence. Although humanitarian programs have not yet opted to use only data from the Social Registry because they have concerns about whether all vulnerable people are included. However a plan of action to strengthen the use of the Social Registry by increasing its accuracy is in place.

Most parts of the delivery chains of *Tekavoul*, *Elmaouna*, *Tekavoul-shock*, and the humanitarian cash transfer programs remain separate. The government's consolidated management information system (MIS) is used by both *Tekavoul* and *Elmaouna* but has not been expanded to humanitarian organizations. Each program has different tools and methodologies for outreach and communication. *Tekavoul* uses its centralized system for registration and enrollment, which is distinct from the registration processes used by the shock response programs. The same platform and financial delivery system has been used by *Tekavoul*, *Tekavoul-shock*, and *Elmaouna* but humanitarian programs use their own system (cash in transit). A discussion is underway between the government and humanitarian partners about whether it would be possible in future for humanitarian programs to use the *Tekavoul* platform. While various programs use similar tools for grievances and feedback mechanisms, they are not consolidated, and each program has its own M&E framework.



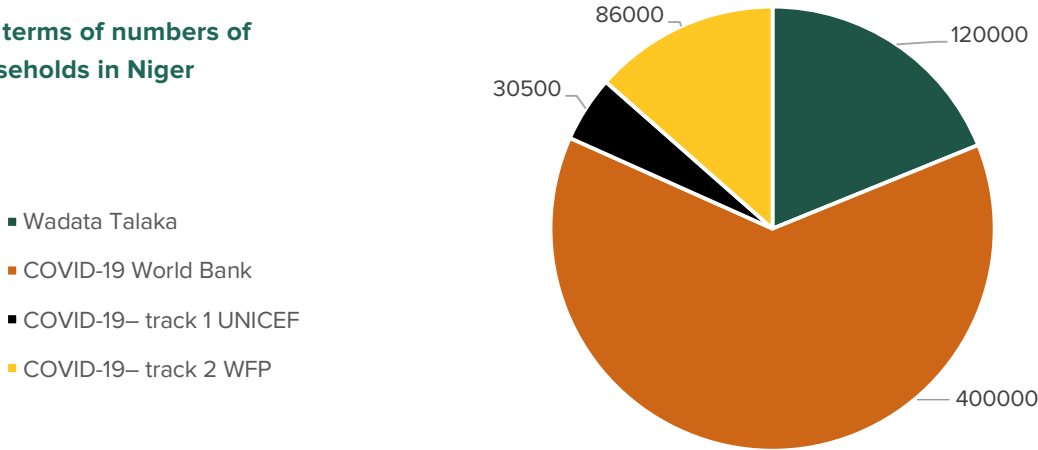
The Niger case study examines how the response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catalyst for increased levels of convergence in a country where humanitarian lean season support is delivered largely separately from the national safety net. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the national Social Safety Net Cell (*Cellule des Filets Sociaux* or CFS) took the lead in devising a joint response to the crisis. Before that time, there had been little dialogue between the humanitarian food security and social assistance fields on, for instance, delivery protocols or instruments.²⁰

The World Bank supported the scale up of the government’s safety net to provide a COVID-19 emergency cash transfer to 400,000 households. UNICEF and WFP aimed to jointly

cover 116,500 households with a separate emergency cash transfer through a two-track approach,²¹ of which 86,000 households by WFP (in track 2 i.e. using its own delivery system) and 30,500 by UNICEF (in track 1, i.e. using the government’s delivery system). Note that the 25,000 households who will receive the productive safety net top-up from UNICEF fall under the same funding umbrella and are part of the COVID-19 response.

Figure 8 shows the relative proportions of the programs in terms of numbers of beneficiary households.

FIGURE 8.
Program size in terms of numbers of beneficiary households in Niger



20 BASIC Research (2021)

21 Track 1 is a cash transfer made through the national delivery system, run by UNICEF; Track 2 is a cash transfer made through the WFP’s delivery system, in areas where the government is unable to deliver transfers

TABLE 7.
Current state of
convergence in Niger



Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework				●
Financing	●			
Governance	●			
Coordination				●
Program objectives				●
Poverty/vulnerability assessment		●		
Price and market analysis				●
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria		●		
Transfer value, frequency, and modality		●		
Beneficiary MIS	●		●	
Outreach and communication	●			
Registration and enrollment	●			●
Payment and delivery	●			●
AAP	●		●	
M&E	●			

Another COVID-19 emergency cash transfer program was implemented under the leadership of the Social Safety Net Cell through the national *Wadata Talaka* program supported by the World Bank. This was funded by the German BMZ (Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development) and was implemented by UN actors (WFP and UNICEF), which also deliver separate humanitarian programs in the country. The BMZ-funded COVID-19 emergency program aligned with the similar COVID-19 program being delivered by the World Bank. The World Bank, UNICEF, and WFP worked together on the needs analysis, agreed on a division of geographical areas, eligibility criteria and targeting methods, a shared payment mechanism, and M&E instruments.

The key government institution for social protection is the *Dispositif National de Prévention et de Gestion des Crises*

Alimentaires (National Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Food Crises), which includes the *Cellule des Crises Alimentaires* (Food Crisis Cell) and the CFS, which is in charge of long-term safety nets. The two units are not always sufficiently collaborative. International stakeholders usually build a bilateral relationship rather than agreeing on a multi-partner governance model and thus follow the policies and frameworks issued by the unit in question.

It was agreed by the government and its partners (WFP, UNICEF, and the World Bank) that the value of the one-time COVID-19 transfer should be CFA 45,000. This decision was in accordance with the national COVID-19 response plan and a consideration of adequacy versus coverage. The one-time transfer was equivalent to three months of *Wadata Talaka* assistance.

All of the COVID-19 programs used multi-stage targeting, where the first stage was geographical targeting.

However, there were important differences in how targeted geographical areas were selected. The targeting approach used by UNICEF was based on the one used by the World Bank's COVID-19 program, where target areas were selected based on the estimated severity of the impact of COVID-19, of food insecurity, and of poverty. In addition, UNICEF used a malnutrition and child vulnerability criterion to identify target areas.²² The WFP also used the severity of the impact of COVID-19 as a targeting criterion in addition to a more complex set of indicators related to food security and exposure to climate hazards, based on the findings of the early warning system to identify target communes. WFP did not use any poverty estimates.

The Wadata Talaka program set up a technical working group to discuss preparations for a unified social registry.

The technical working group includes representatives of WFP, UNICEF, and the EU-funded NGOs. The COVID-19 programs implemented by the World Bank and UNICEF used this World Bank-supported registry, while the WFP used its own database.

The COVID-19 programs were a first attempt at coordination and convergence between humanitarian and national safety net systems.

A number of elements of convergence will persist beyond the COVID-19 programs, namely efforts to build the single registry as well as the use of the same or very similar registration questionnaires. The coverage and adequacy of these routine safety net and lean season response programs remain low. In a context of fragile government capacity and overwhelming need, the focus should be on increasing their coverage, adequacy, and efficiency.

²² UNICEF was under the impression that this additional targeting criterion would apply to the entire COVID-19 program, but it appears to have been implemented only in the UNICEF part of the program.



2.7

Senegal

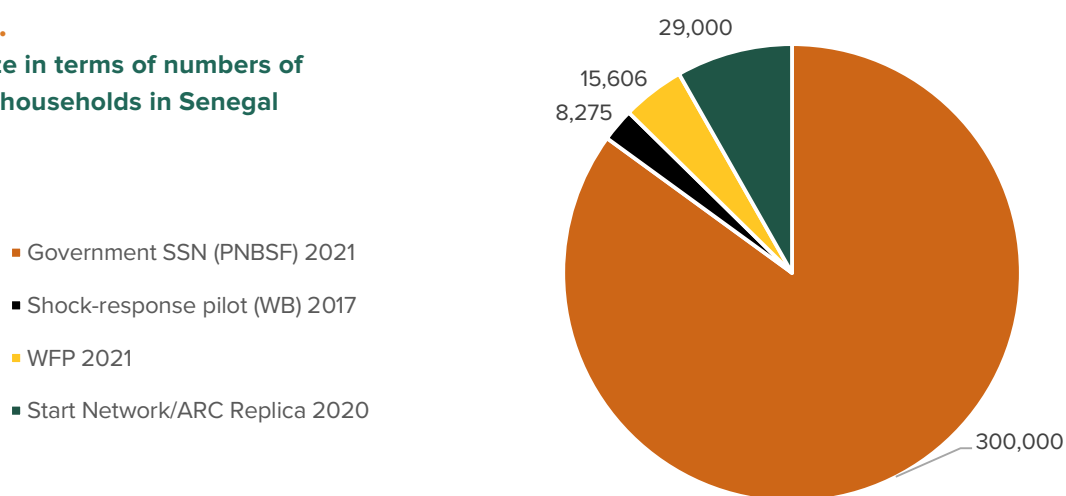
The Senegal case study focuses on the response to predictable and recurrent climate-related shocks, specifically seasonal drought. The cash programs that were analyzed aim to provide assistance to households facing severe food insecurity during the lean season.

The context in Senegal is favorable for linking humanitarian cash transfers to social safety nets. Political stability and healthy (pre-pandemic) public finances, a medium-level risk of humanitarian disasters, strong international partnerships, and an active, high-capacity civil society characterize the country. These favorable conditions were conducive for piloting alternative models of disaster response that diverged from the annual cycle of externally funded short-term action toward a model based on existing social protection tools and the introduction of alternative funding models, such as insurance-based financing.

Senegal's flagship social assistance program is one of the largest social protection programs in sub-Saharan Africa, covering approximately 300,000 households or 16 percent of the population. The *Programme National de Bourses de Sécurité Familiale* (National Stipend Program for Family Security or PNBSF) started in 2013. The case study analyzed three seasonal assistance programs: (i) the World Bank-funded shock-responsive pilot project for the lean season that began in 2017; (ii) the Start Network's ARC Replica²³ cash assistance provided in 2020; and (iii) WFP's lean season assistance for 2021.

Figure 9 below shows the relative size of each program in terms of numbers of beneficiary households.

FIGURE 9.
Program size in terms of numbers of beneficiary households in Senegal



²³ The program provided unconditional cash assistance in 2020, using a pay-out from the ARC insurance scheme. For more information, see <https://startnetwork.org/new-financing>.

TABLE 8.
Current state of convergence
in Senegal



Darker colors indicate that most programs chose the same strategy, while lighter colors indicate more divergence in strategy.

	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework	Light beige		Dark orange	
Financing	Light beige	Dark orange		
Governance	Dark orange			Light beige
Coordination	Light beige	Light beige	Light beige	
Program objectives				Dark brown
Poverty/vulnerability assessment				Dark brown
Price and market analysis	Light beige	Light beige		
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria		Dark orange	Light beige	
Transfer value, frequency, and modality	Dark brown			
Conditionality	Dark brown			
Beneficiary MIS	Dark orange		Light beige	
Outreach and communication		Dark orange	Light beige	
Registration and enrollment			Dark brown	
Payment and delivery	Dark brown			
AAP	Light beige	Light beige		Light beige
M&E	Dark orange			Light beige

Humanitarian actors and programs such as the WFP and the ARC Replica²⁴ program converge with the PNBSF in several ways, as shown in Table 8. The darker shades indicate that a larger number of programs chose the same approach as the PNBSF, while the lighter shades indicate a divergence of approaches.

The policy debate about further harmonizing the two systems is very developed, and clear efforts have been made by all actors to increase convergence. However, no explicit policy shift has yet been made by humanitarian partners toward working entirely through a government-led system. Progress has proven to be fragile and reversible,

hampered by a fragmented institutional set-up with unclear roles and responsibilities on the government side. For instance, the legal and policy framework for the seasonal response to food insecurity is distinct from the framework that governs the national social safety net. While all seasonal programs align around a jointly developed planning document, there is very limited connection between these programs and the social safety net. Furthermore, the national ARC insurance mechanism has its own separate policy framework, financing, and coordination system.

24 A network of six non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all members of the Start Network's African Risk Capacity (ARC) Replica initiative, which is a replica of the Senegalese Government's participation in the ARC insurance

Needs assessments and the social registry, which is used by all four programs for targeting, are the strongest points of convergence. The three seasonal programs are almost completely harmonized in terms of transfer values, the frequency of payments, conditionalities, and payment modality. However, their design is different from that of the PNBSF. In addition, all three seasonal programs use their own targeting criteria to select beneficiaries.

The uncoordinated layering of different cash assistance programs has resulted in an inadvertent vertical expansion of the government system. Different programs sometimes support the same households. Stakeholders see this as a layering of two kinds of assistance, but communities tend

to see it as unfair “double-dipping.” However, it is not yet clear what impact this extra support has on the beneficiary households, and this needs to be monitored. Moreover, funding humanitarian actors to produce an unintentional vertical expansion of the government system is costly as it results in a duplication of operational costs.

The lack of institutional clarity in government policy and in the institutions responsible for organizing relief operations is a key constraint to further convergence.

A key risk for humanitarians of aligning their relief efforts with the government system relates to how politics and the political economy can influence the support provided to vulnerable people.





3. Findings: The History and Current Levels of Convergence Across the Region

This chapter reflects on the history of efforts in the region to achieve more convergence and presents an overview of the current levels of convergence in the six countries.

Convergence is a desirable goal due to its many benefits in many cases, but there are many different choices about how to achieve it, with no option being either “right” or “wrong.” However, choices made should be based on a thorough understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of a specific approach.²⁵

3.1

Overview of the history of convergence across the region

The research revealed several examples where stronger levels of convergence had already been attempted in the past. Some initiatives never gained traction, some brought about temporary convergence that has partly been sustained, some were reversed by subsequent developments, and some resulted in durable changes.

As early as 2014, there was a strong will among stakeholders in Mali to encourage convergence. Two consecutive EU-funded emergency safety nets in northern Mali aimed

to harmonize emergency targeted cash transfers, which was the first step toward building a national social safety net. The funded programs converged their approaches to policy, governance, and coordination, established common objectives, coordinated their respective geographic zones, carried out joint market assessments, and harmonized their targeting and registration methods, transfer amounts, and delivery modalities. Overall, the experience was considered by those interviewed and the literature to have been positive in producing an implicit alignment²⁶ that facilitated the rapid and flexible implementation of the programs, an effective transfer of competences, and the complementarity of expertise.²⁷ However, this progress was not fully sustained in a systematic manner, and further harmonization efforts remained largely donor and program driven. Some of the achievements have been maintained, such as the partially harmonized transfer amounts in practice and a continued agreement between stakeholders that convergence is justified when responding to recurrent and predictable shocks. Other gains have been lost over time or as a result of the country’s rapidly evolving context.

Burkina Faso has a history of inconclusive attempts to harmonize the delivery of cash assistance. The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), together with the Permanent Secretariat of the National Council on Social Protection

²⁵ Smith (2021b), p. 11.
²⁶ O’Brien et al (2018b).
²⁷ URD (2020).

(Secrétariat Permanent du Conseil National de Protection Sociale or SP/CNPS) launched a study²⁸ in 2018/19 to examine the potential for harmonizing delivery approaches for cash assistance with regard to targeting, transfer values, frequency of payments, and coordination structures. Unfortunately, the study got little attention, and because of a massive deterioration in the security context, which brought in a large number of new actors, its recommendations were not put into practice. Other practical initiatives, such as piloting the joint contracting of financial service providers, have been short-lived.

In Senegal, an earlier case study on linking social protection and humanitarian cash transfers in 2018 identified the use of cash as one of the success factors for achieving greater alignment. The study enthusiastically concluded that cash transfers “are now fully recognized as an emergency mechanism,”²⁹ but the momentum did not last long. In 2020, the government “opted for the distribution of food kits (rather than leveraging the social protection system) to provide shock-responsive assistance, and the implementation process revealed errors in the [Social Registry], such as duplications, missing households, incomplete information, or inclusion/exclusion errors.”³⁰

Mauritania is an example where the joint piloting of approaches has brought social safety nets and humanitarian actors closer together in a positive and lasting way. For example, the use of the Social Registry to identify potential recipients of shock responses was tested by Oxfam and WFP in 2017. This test was documented, and lessons learned from it were used to inform the production of a guidance note on how to use the Social Registry in shock responses. Many of the achievements in terms of harmonization and integration – at least between the shock-responsive social safety net and humanitarian cash transfers – have been realized. For example, a common objective was agreed between social safety net and humanitarian policymakers and included in the National Response Plan, and both sides use the social registry and have harmonized their targeting criteria, transfer values, transfer duration, frequency of payments, and outreach tools.

28 Prime Minister of Burkina Faso and FAO (2019).

29 CaLP and Cissokho (2018), p. 14.

30 World Bank (2020), p. 21. This confirmed earlier research. “Stakeholders should not assume that a government’s position on shock-responsive social protection is unchanging.” O’Brien (2018), p. 47.

31 “The humanitarian sector has systems and tools that can be offered as a common service to support an SRSP approach (whether integrated or operated in parallel). This can include market assessments and supply chain analysis, accountability functions (including feedback and complaints mechanisms), management information systems (MIS), last mile solutions, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, and third-party monitoring.” Longhurst and Smith (2020), p. 14.

32 Smith (2021a), p. 22.

3.2

The current level of convergence across the region

In all of the case studies, the key concern was how best to respond to and meet the needs of the vulnerable population by increasing the complementarity of social safety nets and seasonal or emergency humanitarian support. Interviews have revealed that there is, in principle, some agreement among stakeholders in each of the countries that responses to predictable and recurrent shocks can and should be integrated into a government-led shock-responsive social protection program. This would allow humanitarian capacity and financing to become available to fund responses to unforeseen needs or to provide specialized assistance along the “last mile” of delivering assistance.³¹

The different case studies showed that complementarity can be perceived and designed in different ways. In Mauritania, for example, there has been an important evolution in the last decade from humanitarian responses that were separate from and independent of social safety nets to a gradual blending of social safety nets and humanitarian delivery systems. At least in the case of lean season shock responses, this process is close to becoming a nationally led system in which all stakeholders participate. The policy debate in Senegal on further harmonizing the two systems is very developed, and clear efforts have been made to advance in this direction. However, it is not yet clear what impact convergence has on beneficiary households. Progress has proven to be fragile and reversible, and the full potential of harmonizing all responses under a government-led shock-responsive social protection system has not yet been realized.

Analysts have identified a country’s context as the most important factor in fostering or hindering greater convergence. According to Smith (2021a), “Experiences suggest that influential contextual factors include geographical scale and scope; the humanitarian landscape in the country; and the extent of fragmentation in and maturity of the social protection system.”³² Contextual



factors that foster convergence include political and economic stability and a fairly well-developed social protection system that is coherently implemented by all government departments and, ideally, is (co)funded from the government budget. Within the Sahel region, Senegal is a prime example of a country where a nationally led, relatively predictable shock-response system should be possible. The country has political stability, some fiscal space (at least before the pandemic), a medium level of risk, strong international partnerships, and a capable civil society, which are all favorable conditions for convergence. Thus, there is strong potential for Senegal to break away from the annual cycle of externally funded short-term action and to pilot alternative models of disaster response that use existing government systems.

However, contextual factors alone are not sufficient pre-conditions for convergence. They need to be complemented by other features, such as combined and participative processes and approaches, functioning coordination structures, and resilient relationships between institutions and key individuals. The relative power and influence of the government institutions in charge of social protection, lean season assistance, and disaster relief is also an important factor in either encouraging or hindering convergence, as is the relative power of international agencies in their respective domains.

However, convergence is not an end in itself, and the “urge to converge” must take into account contextual factors. Also, it takes time to achieve convergence as the case studies have shown. Gains in convergence can be lost when the country context changes or when key enabling factors such as well-functioning coordination structures weaken or technical capacity decreases over time (as was seen in Mali, for example). This has been confirmed by research in other countries.³³ A study from 2021 stated, “Remember ‘it’s a marathon, not a sprint.’ Linking these different coordination structures or even the operational systems is likely to be

challenging and frustrating at times. It could take months, more likely years, to see major developments/ success or to measure impact.”³⁴

Table 9 on the following page shows the current degree of convergence for each of the studied programs along the delivery chain in all six countries. The table indicates the extent to which humanitarian programs are aligned with safety net programs. A key safety net program in each country was identified as the national benchmark, and the table shows the degree to which humanitarian programs converge with the different elements of that program. Darker shades indicate that a majority of humanitarian programs have been aligned with the benchmark program, while lighter shades indicate that different strategies were chosen by different programs.

Taking the example of Niger, the dark red oval in the “Transfer value, frequency, and modality” row indicates that all COVID-19 programs aligned with the transfer values and frequency of the national safety net. Meanwhile, for “Registration and enrollment,” the two light red shaded ovals indicate that one COVID-19 emergency program worked through the government registration systems, while another was delivered using a different registration system.

Only a few elements were consistently government-led, mostly the legal and policy framework, program objectives, conditionality, and, to some extent, needs assessments. Other elements were delivered in parallel, such as financing, governance, the beneficiary MIS, payment systems, AAP, and M&E. The picture across the rest of the delivery chain is mixed.

³³ For example, The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Assistance and Social Protection (2021), p. 8.

³⁴ CaLP (2020a), p. 7.

TABLE 9.

The state of convergence across the region

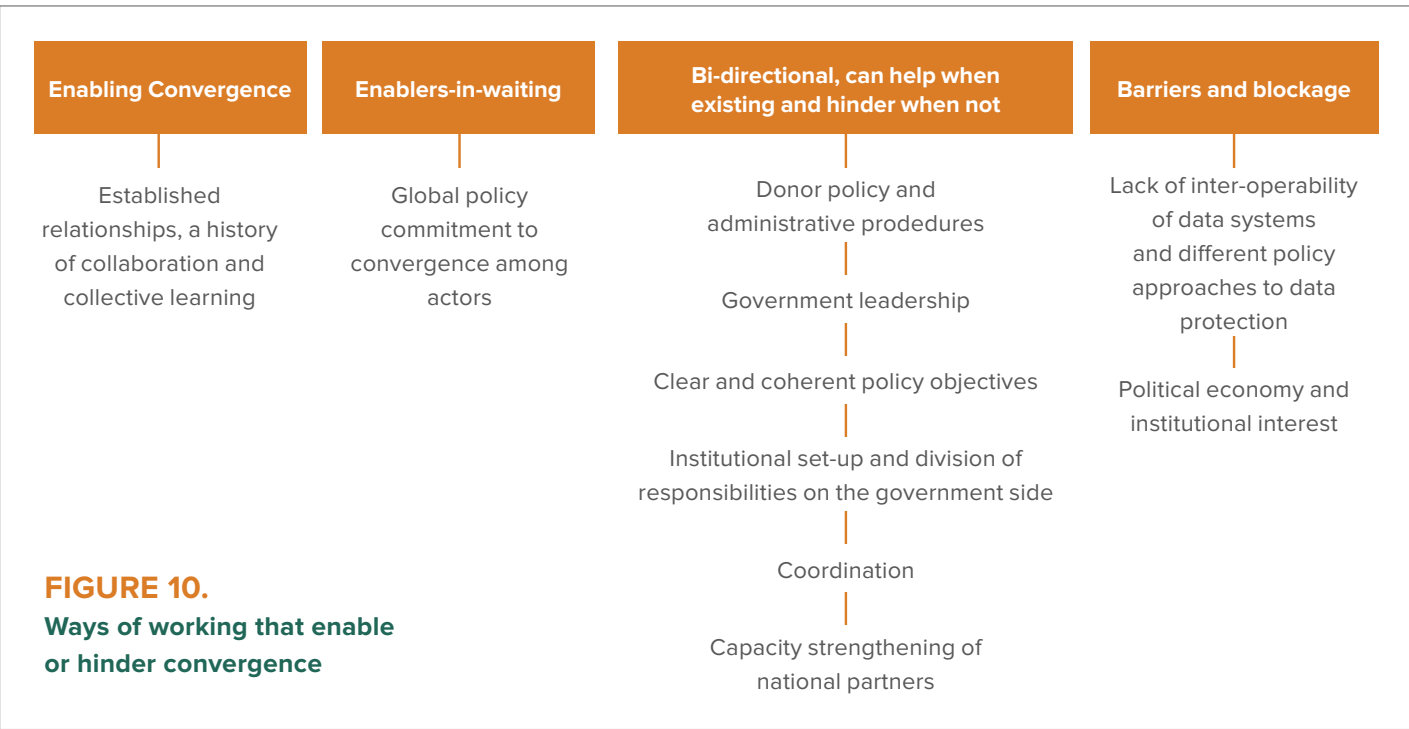
	Parallel system	Alignment	Piggy-backing	National system
Legal and policy framework	MAURITANIA SENEGAL	MAURITANIA (E) MALI	SENEGAL	BURKINA FASO CHAD NIGER
Financing	BURKINA FASO MAURITANIA NIGER SENEGAL CHAD	SENEGAL	MALI	
Governance	MALI MAURITANIA NIGER SENEGAL CHAD	BURKINA FASO	BURKINA FASO	SENEGAL
Coordination	MAURITANIA (T) SENEGAL MALI	MAURITANIA (E) SENEGAL CHAD	SENEGAL BURKINA FASO	NIGER
Program objectives	MALI	MAURITANIA (T) MALI CHAD	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO	CHAD BURKINA FASO SENEGAL NIGER
Poverty/ vulnerability assessment	MAURITANIA (T) MALI CHAD	CHAD BURKINA FASO MALI NIGER	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO	BURKINA FASO SENEGAL
Price and market analysis	SENEGAL MALI MAURITANIA	BURKINA FASO SENEGAL	CHAD	NIGER
Targeting design, eligibility, and qualifying criteria	MAURITANIA (T) BURKINA FASO CHAD	SENEGAL NIGER BURKINA FASO	SENEGAL MALI MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO
Transfer value, frequency, and modality	MAURITANIA (T) BURKINA FASO CHAD SENEGAL	BURKINA FASO NIGER	MALI CHAD	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO
Conditionality	MAURITANIA (T) CHAD SENEGAL	CHAD		MALI MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO
Beneficiary MIS	BURKINA FASO MAURITANIA NIGER SENEGAL MALI CHAD		SENEGAL NIGER	
Outreach and communication	BURKINA FASO NIGER MALI CHAD	MAURITANIA (T) SENEGAL	MAURITANIA (E) SENEGAL	
Registration and enrollment	MAURITANIA (T) BURKINA FASO MALI CHAD NIGER	BURKINA FASO	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO SENEGAL	NIGER
Payment and delivery	BURKINA FASO MAURITANIA NIGER SENEGAL MALI CHAD			
AAP	BURKINA FASO MAURITANIA (T) NIGER SENEGAL MALI CHAD	MAURITANIA (E) BURKINA FASO SENEGAL	NIGER	SENEGAL
M&E	BURKINA FASO MAURITANIA NIGER SENEGAL MALI CHAD			SENEGAL



4. Process Analysis: Which Ways of Working Facilitate or Hinder Convergence?

This chapter discusses how different ways of working adopted by the key actors for delivering safety net and humanitarian cash assistance enable or hinder convergence between programs. The global push to pursue convergence is strongly felt by stakeholders across the region. However, ambitions need to be consonant with the prevailing circumstances in the country in question, and beneficiaries' interests must be given the highest priority. Many of the challenges that have been encountered across the region – and beyond – are not conducive to technical solutions alone but require the building of relationships and agreements on ways of working.

The following analysis clusters the ways of working (or process elements) on a spectrum, ranging from factors enabling stronger convergence to factors that hinder further convergence (see Figure 10). These factors include elements that are necessary but not sufficient for further convergence to take place as well as existing opportunities that have not yet been fully leveraged. Another group of factors can act as either a help or a hindrance to convergence, while the last group are factors that act as barriers to convergence.



The case studies identified two key enabling ways of working: (i) the existence of established relationships and (ii) a history of collaboration and collective learning.

ESTABLISHED RELATIONSHIPS AND A HISTORY OF COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE LEARNING

The long-term presence in the country of relevant actors and a shared history of collaboration and learning are important enabling factors for building trust. The longstanding practice of the annual *Cadre Harmonisé* proceedings in the region are an important process that over the years has helped to build positive working relationships between government and development and humanitarian actors, all of whom participate regularly in this recurrent exercise. Key informants interviewed for the case studies identified the *Cadre Harmonisé* as being a well-established and well-respected process under clear government leadership that results in a shared framework for all actors responding to seasonal food insecurity. It acts as a technical forum that draws on the professional experience of the participating agencies and on longstanding relationships between participating staff. Key individuals take part every year and thus build a network of personal contacts that spans the governmental, non-governmental, national, and international realms. Mauritania is a good example of a place where relationships are being built over time that make it possible to put convergence into practice.

In the Mauritania case study, key informants pointed out that repeated interactions and mutual learning between different actors created trust and promoted convergence. For example, in 2017, Oxfam and WFP tested the use of the safety nets' social registry for shock responses. Lessons learned from this test informed the development of a joint guidance note on how to use the social registry in

shock responses. Since 2018, government agencies and humanitarian partners have been holding annual collective learning workshops with the aim of reviewing programs, identifying lessons learned, and making recommendations about the modalities and content of the next National Response Plan. These workshops have been complemented by monthly coordination meetings in which work plans are discussed and progress is reviewed. This participatory process based on collective learning helps to enable further convergence by building trust and better understanding between diverse stakeholders with varying mandates. The convergence success stories that have come out of these interactions include the fact that social safety net and humanitarian policymakers agreed on a common objective that was included in the National Response Plan and have harmonized their targeting criteria, transfer values, transfer duration, frequency of payments, and outreach tools. Several of those interviewed pointed out to the case study team that this process of convergence took time and many discussions, since the different partners come to the table with varying approaches and points of view.

Adjusting ways of working based on lessons learned from collective learning can be a very practical way of enabling convergence. A regional learning event organized by CaLP in Dakar in July 2014 highlighted that it was “the right time to consider the possibility of improving links between emergency cash transfer programs and national social (cash) transfer programs, with a view to strengthening the resilience of the Sahel’s populations.”³⁵ Two consecutive EU-funded programs in Mali made collective learning an explicit objective and implemented it through common reviews of practices, workshops on lessons learned, and the building and dissemination of knowledge.

A 2021 study identified another factor as “the level of familiarity of international humanitarian and development actors with the state system and pre-existing working relations.”³⁶ This was confirmed, for example, in Senegal, where actors have known each other and cooperated for many years. The same is also the case in Mauritania.

³⁵ CaLP (2014).

³⁶ Gray Meral and Both (2021), p. 38. See also The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021).

Ways of working that have the potential to be enabling

Actors at the country level could use global policy commitments towards convergence as a way to enable convergence within the country, but these are not fully leveraged yet.

GLOBAL POLICY COMMITMENTS TO CONVERGENCE

Several key global institutions are committed to systematically seeking stronger convergence, but these commitments have not yet been fully put into practice in the Sahel region. In its Social Protection Strategy, WFP directs its country Program to consider whether using government systems would be possible and proclaims that “we will ensure that assistance delivered under our own programs – whether as an emergency or longer-term response – is made with a clear intent to contribute to improved national social protection where possible.”³⁷ However, such opportunities at the country level are not always fully leveraged, as can be seen in the example of Senegal.

The Collaborative Cash Delivery Network, a network of 14 of the largest international NGOs,³⁸ recently published its principles for responding to shocks using social protection. It committed “to systematically considering whether it is possible and appropriate to engage with existing SP [social protection] systems” and to “assessing the feasibility of engaging with existing formal SP systems in every context and engaging wherever appropriate and feasible.”³⁹ This included explicit commitments to align transfer values and other design features to make systems interoperable and to sign data sharing agreements.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies provides guidance to its National Societies on working with national social protection systems. In this guidance, it states that they “need to decide when and to what extent the engagement with the SP [social protection] systems is appropriate”⁴⁰ but recommends that links with social protection “should be mainstreamed in the ordinary activities [that] the NS [National Societies] implement’.⁴¹

37 WFP (2021a), p. 50.

38 Its mission is to increase the efficiency, scale, and speed of cash and voucher assistance by amplifying the impact of NGOs through inter-agency collaboration. For further information, see www.collaborativecash.org

39 Collaborative Cash Delivery Network (2021), pp. 2 and 3.

40 International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2020), p. 8.

41 International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2020), p.15.

42 Common Donor Approach to Cash Programming (2019), p. 2.

43 Grand Bargain 2.0 (2022), p. 10.

The Common Donor Approach to humanitarian cash programming was produced in 2019 and signed by Australia, Canada, Denmark, EU/DG ECHO, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the USA. It establishes that “donors expect to see cash programs use, link to, or align with local and national mechanisms such as social protection systems, where possible and appropriate. Donors will prioritize programs which complement and are well coordinated with national and local systems. [...] Humanitarian donors will engage with their development counterparts from the outset and seek to ensure complementarity between humanitarian cash programming and predictable, long-term funding for safety net approaches.”⁴² In Chad, for example, the EU and the World Bank strongly aligned their planning for their respective assistance programs that were implemented in 2018. In Niger, the BMZ funded WFP and UNICEF to deliver a COVID-19 emergency cash transfer through the national safety net, the *Wadata Talaka* program. In this case, the commitment of donors and UN agencies to convergence promoted a design that aligns with and to some extent piggy-backs on existing safety net systems. However, while UNICEF delivered its part of the program through the national system, the WFP program continued to use separate structures. The reasons why WFP chose to opt for parallel delivery mechanisms were first that the Nigerien safety net system lacks capacity and second that delivery through government systems takes more time, despite over a decade of capacity-building activities in Niger.

The latest global level policy commitment is contained in the outcome document of the Cash Coordination Caucus, which discusses reforming the way in which humanitarian cash coordination is organized. The document sets out 11 principles for cash coordination. Principle 10 reads: “Cash coordination should consider linkages with social protection systems where relevant and appropriate” and makes the Cash Working Group at the country level responsible for providing “a clear and predictable entry point for linkages to social protection to the extent appropriate for the response.”⁴³

These global policy commitments, while limited in their ability to enforce certain practices, are a starting point for stakeholders to examine the feasibility of pursuing further convergence and to identify practical ways to do so. Key informants at the country level who were interviewed for this research were not always fully aware of the global policy commitments made by their own organizations. Thus, it is incumbent on agencies to follow through these commitments at the country level. These global policy commitments represent principles to adhere to rather than binding commitments, nonetheless, serve as tools that can foster and encourage greater convergence. Additional global commitments are not needed but rather the focus and implementation of current ones.

4.3

Ways of working that can help or hinder convergence

Various ways of working can either enable or hamper convergence depending on how they play out in the different contexts. The areas in which this is most frequently the case are donor policy and administrative procedures, government leadership, policy objectives, relationships between government institutions, and coordination and capacity strengthening of national partners.

DONOR POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

How donors set their funding policy and influence the design and implementation of programs can play a major role in fostering convergence. Several examples in the region showcase how donors set up key programs in a way that enabled convergence. For instance, in Senegal in 2017 the World Bank financed a pilot for a seasonal shock response implemented by the General Delegation to Social Protection and National Solidarity (DGPSN) that piggy-backed on the government-led National Safety Net Program. In Mali, cash-based programming began to happen around 2014, notably through EU-funded emergency safety nets between 2014 and 2016 and resilience responses to seasonal food and nutrition insecurity between 2016 and 2020. In Chad in 2018, different donors that were funding cash assistance programs pushed the implementing agencies to align the design of the various programs. In Niger, the BMZ funded a COVID-19 relief program and mandated that it should be built on the structures of the existing *Wadata Talaka* program, which in turn led to subsequent additional convergence. Donors can also

proactively tackle specific barriers to convergence, for example by urging for the creation of common financing platforms, initiating and funding common grievance mechanisms, and funding experts on data sharing and data protection to support convergence efforts in that area.

However, donors do not always leverage their potential for encouraging convergence, and actual financing practices often constitute a barrier to further convergence. Although the context in Senegal is favorable to convergence, some implementers still opt to have their own program delivery mechanisms. There is a contradiction in the fact that donors fund these parallel delivery systems while also supporting long-term government efforts to build national systems. Funding parallel systems undermines these system-building efforts.

The brevity of humanitarian funding cycles means that they do not tend to align with the timeframe of government budgeting or of strategic planning for shock responses. This means that some humanitarian funding can hinder efforts at convergence. Setting up social safety net programs can take a long time. Humanitarian funding is not always available in time for the start of the lean season and within the national annual planning cycle. However, government funding does not always come on time either, as experiences in Mali and in Senegal show. This is a recurrent challenge that makes it difficult to provide timely assistance during the lean season and to coordinate with humanitarian actors, which was identified as a problem in Mauritania, for example. In Burkina Faso, key informant interviews pointed out that setting up the administrative procedures for financing safety nets takes a long time, often more than a year or even two, whereas humanitarian financing is still often provided on an annual basis only.

The Mali case study highlighted an example of how this barrier could be overcome. The mobilization of multi-year financing for seasonal cash transfers – as happened, for example, in the EU-funded PDU, the USAID-funded *Albarka* program, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation's support for PRESA – creates an opportunity for converging these programs with *Jigisèmèjiri's* three-year timeframe. The multi-year option could overcome the challenge of parallel mobilization and disbursement timeframes, if the programs coordinate with *Jigisèmèjiri* planning. This is particularly relevant given the recent reductions in humanitarian funding for seasonal food and nutrition insecurity, as humanitarian donors prioritize support for refugees and displaced persons in their funding.

Donors' priorities and different risk appetites can also be a disincentive for convergence. In Burkina Faso, for example, donors prefer not to fund development programs in areas affected by conflict as they see this as unlikely to yield sustainable poverty reduction. This geographic prioritization is a barrier to convergence. When different donors deliver programs in different parts of the country, this reduces the opportunities for day-to-day exchanges and for joint initiatives such as shared assessments and limits the extent of their interactions in coordination forums. The same is the case when different donors map out separate geographic zones for their interventions, even within broadly similar regions. In Mali and Burkina Faso, for example, the EU's PDU program only covers border areas. This approach is intended to foster coordination between the affected countries but limits the flexibility of actors to adjust or extend their intervention zones within the country in question.

GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP

Government leadership is essential for driving the implementation of a social safety net and for setting policy directions. Stable government leadership on social protection, food and nutrition security, and dealing with displacement is a key enabling factor where it exists, as it often also leads to clear policy objectives being set that guide international actors.⁴⁴ Disengaged governments translate into the absence of an arbiter, and can result in a lack of engagement of humanitarian actors in policy debates and in the implementation of social protection strategies.

The case studies in the Sahel region found that governments showed more leadership on food security and nutrition than on social protection. This leadership is shown in the governments' National Response Plans to seasonal food insecurity and undernutrition, which set the priorities that are then jointly implemented by government actors and international agencies. However, these response plans are often institutionally separate from the national social protection program, as in Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali, which adds a layer of complexity to the push for greater convergence. The lean season response in Mauritania is gradually moving toward a nationally led system in which all stakeholders participate and to which they contribute. Initially, attempts were made to harmonize the response to shocks

– first among humanitarian organizations implementing cash transfers and subsequently between these humanitarian cash transfer programs and the shock-responsive government-led safety net.

Greater convergence tends to be more feasible in countries where the national social protection system is comparably more established. The Government of Senegal implements a flagship social safety net program that started in December 2013 and has grown over time into one of the largest social protection programs in Sub-Saharan Africa. The program draws its beneficiaries from a national social registry, and the targeting system established through this program is also guiding the targeting of humanitarian assistance programs. The government also provides policy leadership in other sectors such as food insecurity and disaster management, but there is limited coherence within these different areas of government policy, which reduces incentives for international actors to converge their interventions with government programs. The Government of Chad, on the other hand, still has very limited capacity to take an active leadership role in the social protection sector which can in part explain some of the limited efforts and incentives toward convergence, particularly by the humanitarian actors.

CLEAR AND COHERENT OBJECTIVES

The case studies showed the importance of setting clear and coherent policy objectives. The majority of the governments in the region set clear and coherent objectives for their responses to seasonal food insecurity as part of their National Response Plans to the lean season needs. The plans also establish priority areas for intervention based on the severity of need, list programmatic options for support packages, define roles and responsibilities, and often establish a monitoring framework. While these elements are not always followed in detail by all actors, as shown in the example of Burkina Faso, they do nonetheless facilitate convergence by providing strategic guidance. Another example of clear policy objectives is the Chadian policy that guides all actors supporting refugees toward investing in their socioeconomic integration into host communities.

⁴⁴ The importance of government leadership has also been found in case studies on other parts of the world. See The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Aid and Social Protection (2021), p. 8. See also CaLP (2020c), p. 8.

The situation is more complex with regard to the social protection strategies in the different countries. In several countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal), the policy framework is complex because different policies are developed, coordinated, and implemented by distinct ministries and partners. The social protection strategies in some countries are very broad and do not all clearly spell out how different activities should or will contribute to the set objectives. In Burkina Faso, for example, the strategy does not specify how the objectives should be achieved. The Mali case study identified how the various policy and strategy frameworks could be aligned in support of targeting the most vulnerable households and strengthening their resilience, although the programs are being implemented through different ministries, at least for the time being.

Similarly, Senegal has separate policy and legal frameworks for social protection, for the seasonal response to food insecurity, and for using the ARC insurance mechanism.

While there are points of interaction among these three frameworks, they fall under different institutional jurisdictions and, thus, different policies, which is hampering convergence. Mauritania faces a similar challenge with its multitude of legal and policy frameworks for both emergency response/humanitarian assistance and social protection (including social safety nets). The two government social safety nets that were analyzed in the case study have interlinked but also distinct policy frameworks, which have not yet been fully combined in one updated national reference framework. Furthermore, the national social protection strategy has yet to be reviewed to reflect the evolution of the social protection and social safety net environment over recent years. However, for the moment, humanitarian actors still need to take into account two different policy frameworks, which is a barrier to increasing convergence.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE

Each government's policy framework defines the way in which humanitarian and development actors engage with government actors. Policy frameworks outline governments' sectoral priorities and provide the mandate and legal authority for institutions to carry out their tasks. They assign which agencies or departments work in social protection, lean season response, and disaster relief, with what roles and what level of responsibility.

⁴⁵ Sabates-Wheeler and Longhurst (2020), p. 3.

Stable government institutions that implement these frameworks over a long period of time are a key enabling factor for sustainable convergence. Stable institutions that reflect the government's commitment to social protection and to building links between safety nets and humanitarian responses to shocks are a pre-requisite for getting partners to rally behind the drive for convergence. Reliable, repeated, and longstanding interactions can build trust among different partners. This is easier in countries with a stable social and political context and a more established social protection system, where there is little reshuffling of institutional responsibilities and less turnover of staff on the ground and where key actors and individuals have collaborated over a long period of time.

When the roles and responsibilities of government institutions are unclear or when they are fragmented by design- i.e., organized in a way that obfuscates or overlaps clear roles and mandates,⁴⁵—this hinders convergence.

If institutional arrangements are changeable and staff turnover is high, it is harder for international actors to establish relationships and know to whom they need to report to. Frequent reshuffling of institutional responsibilities, as has been seen in Senegal, can weaken key actors on the government side and poses a challenge to establishing the long-term institutional relationships that are an important enabler of convergence. Lean season assistance often comes under the jurisdiction of a different department than the safety net program, which is an outcome of historical processes that situated responsibility for food relief elsewhere than general safety nets. As a result, international actors build bilateral relationships with these specific departments in each country instead of with the whole social protection system. NGOs in particular often have uneven interactions with governmental social protection institutions, principally in countries where different institutions are involved in disaster relief than those governing social protection.

Humanitarian actors tend not to provide support for long-term systems building. These actors prioritize short-term, rapid delivery of assistance and emphasize agility and speed, of which government systems in most countries are not yet sufficiently capable. Collaboration and relationship-building is jeopardized by competition between institutions (including for political space and funding), not only among government institutions but also among international agencies. In Burkina Faso, the key informants interviewed for the case

study highlighted the risk that both social safety nets and humanitarian cash programs could lose their independence if they were converted into one big program. When countries have a weak political and governance context, such as those in Chad or Mali, this gives humanitarians even less of an incentive to pursue the goal of convergence. It is also more difficult in countries where instability restricts access to parts of the country, where there is a high turnover of actors and staff, and particularly where government troops are engaged in active conflict.

The institutional landscape in a country plays an important role in the convergence of implementation arrangements.

The power struggle between government institutions but also with humanitarian actors over building a social registry in Burkina Faso has demonstrated that institutional issues can block efforts to harmonize tools of the delivery chain. Senegal has a similarly complex landscape where social protection is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Community Development while disaster relief is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior, thus complicating efforts to bring the different systems together. The same situation exists in Mali, where the responsibility for social assistance is divided between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Health and Social Development. The Ministry of Agriculture also plays a key role in any action related to food and nutrition security.

Insufficient intra-governmental coordination can also be a disincentive for humanitarian actors to harmonize their ways of working, as shown in Senegal. The ARC Replica initiative, implemented by the Start Network, has a separate governance framework to social protection, hence there is very little institutional coordination. The ARC Replica Initiative's efforts to converge with the national social safety net have been limited and have been dependent on individual staff members working across rigid institutional boundaries.

COORDINATION

When coordination is absent, dysfunctional, or interrupted, it contributes to disorder and jeopardizes efforts to reach stronger convergence, whereas working in a well-coordinated way can foster convergence.

Coordination is a way of working that is open to and ready for dialogue and discussion, welcomes exchanges of experiences, and seeks out joint experiences and learning. Coordination requires investments of time and effort by actors, as well as the availability of financial resources and dedicated staff.

The importance of coordination that was found throughout the case studies reflects very similar findings from other research done on the subject.⁴⁶ This finding relates to

coordination within government, coordination between social protection, lean season assistance, and support for IDPs and refugees, and coordination between the central and regional institutions, and among donor agencies. The case studies found that coordination has enormous potential to foster convergence but that it can also be challenging to put into practice. Other research has also come to this conclusion. "The challenge in coordinating shock responses linked with social protection can be summed up as one of bridging silos: put simply, it is difficult to bring together a multiplicity of actors, from different disciplines, and with different mandates, guiding principles, visions, and interests" Smith (2021a).⁴⁷ Coordination works when it is resourced consistently, when key actors regularly participate in meetings, when discussions are structured in such a way as to provide clear added value to participants, and when coordination forums span the traditional silos of development actors on the one hand and humanitarian actors on the other. The willingness of actors in some countries to coordinate was confirmed by the Mauritania case study, whereas in Chad coordination has fallen short of expectations, and stakeholders have expressed a need for coordination efforts to be re-energized, particularly at the national level.

The example of Mali shows that capacity for coordination is a critical element for sustained convergence.

In Mali, a space was created for dialogue, coordination, and collective learning (through the Cash Working Group and the initial consultations about establishment of the social registry), and this facilitated initial progress toward alignment between *Jigisèmèjiri* and the EU-funded seasonal cash transfer programs. However, due to a mix of insufficient funding and leadership, the space was not maintained, which meant that progress toward convergence was reversed. The Cash Working Groups in other countries, such as in Burkina Faso,

⁴⁶ Smith (2021a).

⁴⁷ Smith (2021a), p. 10.

also struggled to maintain momentum when key positions remained vacant over a long period of time.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a catalytic effect in Niger by bringing donors and international actors from the social and humanitarian assistance field together to discuss how to best complement each other's interventions.

The COVID-19 program implemented by WFP and UNICEF and a separate program financed by the World Bank and implemented by the national *Wadata Talaka* safety net program are example of this coordination. Key stakeholders from the government (the CFS), the World Bank, WFP, and UNICEF worked together on the needs analysis and agreed to provide the same transfer amount and on each program's geographical remit. They also coordinated on targeting methods, although they implemented slightly different versions.

In almost all of the case studies, key informants mentioned that the international aid coordination architecture can be a barrier to increasing coordination.

Humanitarian actors often design their cash assistance as food security interventions and mainly coordinate them through the food security cluster, even in countries such as Burkina Faso, where the Humanitarian Response Plan advocates strongly for the concept of multi-purpose cash assistance. A Cash Working Group exists in all of the studied countries except in Senegal. However, how well each one functions highly depends on the availability of staff and the dedication of individuals, on the participation of key actors, and the influence that the group has on operational decision-making. Few of these forums systematically include representatives of government agencies, although in several countries (such as Burkina Faso), they are supposed to play a co-convening role. In other cases, they do not sufficiently participate in the national coordination structures for the National Response Plan. Local NGOs sometimes struggle to find their space in these groups, especially if they only meet at the national level where community-based organizations are not always represented. In Senegal, with its well-developed social protection system, there is a strong sector working group for social protection where international actors – including donors and UN agencies – regularly meet, but this group does not discuss matters of linkages with humanitarian actors.

The recent conclusions of the Cash Coordination Caucus, which reviewed humanitarian cash coordination arrangements, recognized siloed coordination as a bottleneck.

The Caucus agreed that, in the future, “cash coordination should systematically identify entry points for social protection linkages, both with government-led social protection systems and with safety net programs led by development actors. Coordination may include, where feasible: coordinating transfer values, joint 4Ws [mapping of Who is doing What, Where and When], joint planning (e.g. in preparation for drought, lean season, joint or coordinated delivery mechanisms).”⁴⁸ This new model will take some time to be implemented, but it is a promising development. The fact that government and local actors should be co-chairs of the Cash Working Group will help as well, but only if the government institution selected for this task is also the one in charge of coordinating – and ideally implementing – the social safety net. In countries with fragmented institutional arrangements, this might be a challenge.

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

Strengthening the capacity of government institutions can enable convergence if done jointly by development and humanitarian actors but can also become a hindrance if international actors each pursue their own objectives and ways of working with government.

When the World Bank, WFP, and other actors committed to supporting the Government of Mauritania in setting up a national social safety net system, they also committed to carrying out a capacity assessment and to devising a plan to build additional capacity. In Burkina Faso, WFP and the World Bank have signed a common action plan that includes activities to jointly reinforce the country's institutional capacity for disaster risk management, disaster financing, and adaptive social protection. However, there is also a parallel capacity-building project implemented by UNICEF and the International Labour Organization, partly aiming at supporting the same government institutions.

⁴⁸ Grand Bargain 2.0 (2022), p.12.

In Niger and Senegal, international partners are building the capacity of different actors but not always for joint purposes.

Capacity strengthening has been an element of the activities of both humanitarian and development partners in Niger for over a decade, albeit to different entities. The World Bank has been supporting the Social Safety Nets Cell, while WFP has mostly worked with the food security cell and the early warning system. The current BMZ-funded COVID-19 initiative similarly includes a system strengthening component, led by UNICEF. These capacity-strengthening activities are not always coordinated and are seen by some as vehicles for donors to support their agendas rather than to support the government in implementing its agenda. The ARC Replica initiative in Senegal wanted to show what NGOs could contribute to the government's ARC initiative, for example, by strengthening the gender-orientation of interventions, reinforcing monitoring mechanisms, and strengthening accountability procedures. However, individual member organizations of ARC Replica wanted to either build the capacity of their own local partner organizations (as part of the global push for a stronger localization of humanitarian aid) or strengthen their internal capacity (for example, in contingency planning). As a consequence of these fragmented goals, capacity-strengthening efforts continue to be implemented in a parallel and uncoordinated way.

In conflict-affected countries such as Mali, the context makes capacity strengthening particularly complicated.⁴⁹

After partners funded by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) handed over the population census database to the Ministry of Solidarity and Social Protection, lack of capacity at the Ministry meant that little use was made of the data.⁵⁰ Insecurity in the north and the center of the country has meant that local services are not always effective or available in the areas where a humanitarian response is taking place, even when the return of these services was supported by development programs. This complicates not only coordination but also capacity building and the delivery of interventions that are led by local administrations.

4.4

Barriers and blockages

Some factors consistently came up as barriers or blockages across the case studies. Among ways of working, the blockages that were most frequently mentioned were problems with protecting and sharing data and political economy issues.

LACK OF INTEROPERABILITY OF DATA SYSTEMS AND DIFFERENT POLICY APPROACHES TO DATA PROTECTION

None of the existing beneficiary data management systems used by humanitarian aid organizations in the case study countries were interoperable with the government system.

The exchange of beneficiary data between humanitarian organizations and government agencies is seen by many humanitarian actors as problematic,⁵¹ particularly in areas where tensions are high and where government troops are party to conflict.

Data sharing is a technically complex undertaking even in stable contexts where the government agency in charge of the social registry is able to adhere to high standards of data protection.

Even in Senegal with its relatively strong social protection system, this barrier exists. The informants who were interviewed there frequently mentioned that the first step should be to focus on the interoperability of the different databases used within the Ministry of Community Development before tackling the question of making the ministry's MIS interoperable with the IT systems of the country's humanitarian partners.

Humanitarian actors stated in the case study interviews that the standards for data protection that exist in the Sahel countries with low administrative capacity are insufficient for their requirements.

In Chad, the national statistics institute that manages the social registry systematically signs data sharing protocols with partners before any data sharing starts. So far, 10 such protocols have been signed. However, for the time being, none of the partners' information management tools are interoperable with the Chadian registry. Key informants highlighted that data sharing will require both further policy

49 See also Wylde (2022, forthcoming), p. 21: "In FCASs [fragile and conflict-affected states], trade-offs related to investments in state capacity have fewer easy answers but are no less relevant, and the specific answers will depend entirely on the context."

50 European Commission (2020).

51 For a full literature overview of the risks associated particularly with registration data, see Faith et al (2022), p. 17.

and technical work to ensure that core data protection and privacy principles are respected, which is a particular challenge for nascent social protection systems such as Chad's.⁵² Furthermore, beyond the technical improvements to data privacy laws, there is also a mind-set barrier among the various actors that would have to be overcome to achieve further convergence on data management.

The data protection issue is particularly sensitive in countries affected by insecurity. Humanitarian interviewees in Mali and Burkina Faso cited concerns over humanitarian principles and protection risks.⁵³ In Mali, various humanitarian partners are looking at ways of supporting the registry's expansion and its use for the seasonal response while keeping in line with their own global data protection policies. The National Direction for Social Protection and Solidarity Economy (*Direction Nationale de Protection Sociale et Economie Solidaire*) recognizes that the conflict limits the extent to which the registry can be used and the need to try to make systems partially rather than fully interoperable. Donors in the country are calling for technical solutions that allow for the exchange of information for coordination purposes without putting any beneficiary groups at risk. Humanitarian agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross⁵⁴ have already developed comprehensive guidance that could be used to find an acceptable context-specific solution.

POLITICAL ECONOMY AND INSTITUTIONAL INTERESTS

Government actors and international humanitarian and development agencies have institutional interests that can be barriers to convergence. Some actors may want to preserve their own influence over key program decisions, to maintain their own budgets and related overheads, or to guarantee their own footprint in country. These interests may be well known but remain unsaid, meaning that these barriers to convergence are not discussed or addressed. The Senegal case study recommends carrying out a political economy analysis to understand why the government in 2020 decided to change the modality of its ARC/COVID-19 response back to

in-kind assistance, after having agreed on the advantages of cash two years earlier. A similar recommendation is made in the Burkina Faso case study to better understand who is winning and who is losing from the recent government decision to give responsibility for the new social registry to the Ministry of Gender, National Solidarity, and Humanitarian Action.

However, the question of who is winning and who is losing from further convergence is not limited to government actors alone and needs also to be discussed between international partners. This problem has been highlighted in many other studies, including Smith (2021a): "Bringing together stakeholders, and systems, from different disciplines can imply the rationalization and streamlining of these functions or systems. While this may well make sense for the efficiency and effectiveness of the response, it goes against the interest of any individual actors as their "system" stands to lose out as a result – whether in terms of budget allocation, prestige or influence, resource mobilization potential or market share."⁵⁵ Competition between agencies undermines trust and impedes further harmonization of efforts even among cash assistance programs. It also affects their readiness to work toward further convergence along the delivery chain. If they decide to use government systems, this may mean that they lose control over implementation arrangements and associated funding, including overhead budgets. This is also an underlying issue in the debate over the localization of aid, which is the commitment to deliver humanitarian aid as locally as possible and to strengthen the capacity of national governmental and non-governmental responders.⁵⁶

52 It is generally agreed that low- and middle-income countries face additional challenges regarding the development and operationalization of data protection and privacy and policies for social protection systems." GIZ (2020), p. 10.

53 This has also been confirmed by other research. "Sensitive information on a country's citizens, such as that stored for social protection purposes – potentially including their ethnicity, religion, and more – can be swiftly put to wrong uses in cases of conflict and violence." Barca and Beazley (2019), p. 29. See also CaLP (2021) and CaLP (2018), as well as, more generally for data protection across safety nets, GIZ (2020).

54 For more information, see the ICRC Handbook on Data Protection.

55 Smith (2021a), p. 20-21. See also, for example, Barca (2019), p. 69.

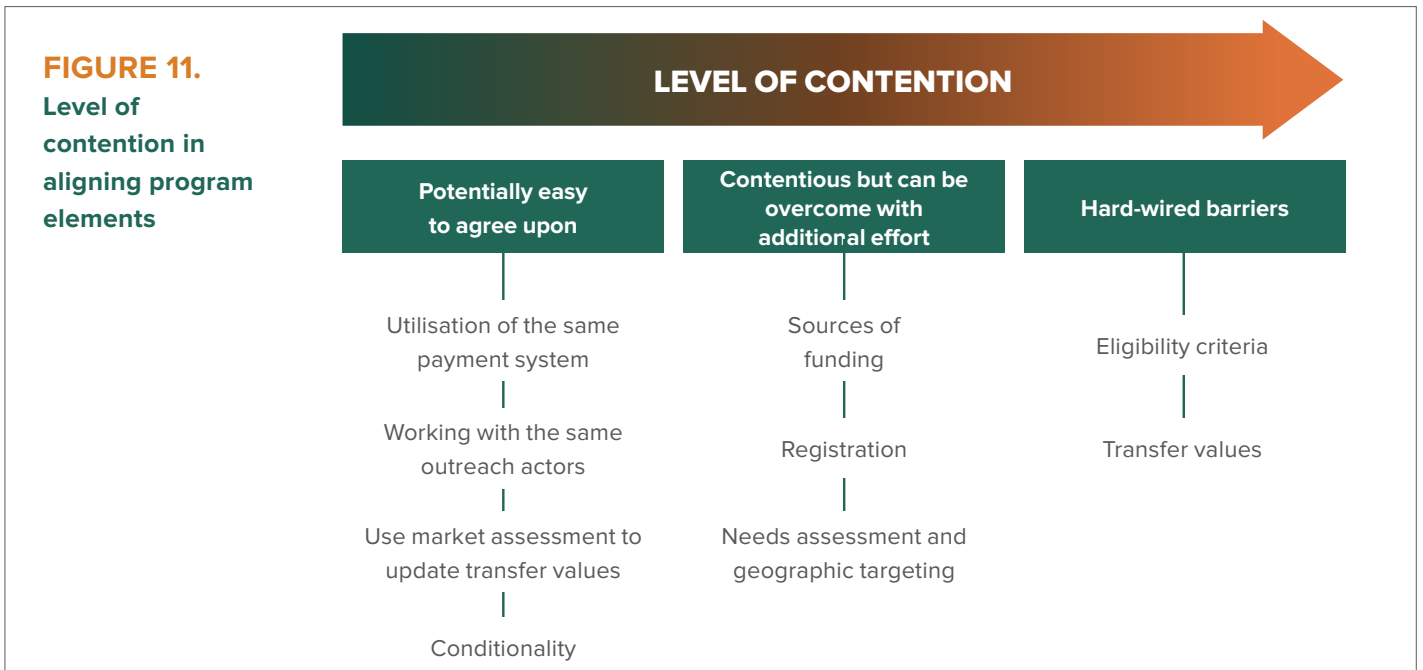
56 The localization of aid is part of the Grand Bargain agreed upon at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and signed by 63 donors, United Nations agencies, and NGOs (www.interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain). It is enshrined in the Charter4Change, endorsed by over 510 national and local organizations from 57 countries across the world, and 39 international NGOs (www.charter4change.org).



5. Program Analysis: How Easy or Contentious is it to Align Different Program Elements?

After the preceding discussion of the intangible ways of designing and implementing assistance programs, this chapter looks at more tangible elements of these programs. It discusses the extent to which different program elements

lend themselves to convergence. Some elements are likely to be relatively easy for actors to agree upon, whereas others are likely to be more contentious.





5.1

Program elements that are potentially easy to agree upon

PAYMENT SYSTEMS

The case studies found no example within the Sahel region of different actors using a unified payment platform.

However, there are a number of examples of actors using the same payment provider, which is a good starting point for exploring the possibility of moving toward a shared payment system.

In many case study countries, using the same financial service providers seems to be the easiest first step to take on the path to convergence. In Chad, for example, most of the humanitarian cash assistance programs that were studied use the same financial service provider as the government safety net program but they all use separate contracting procedures.

The main reason why agencies chose to use that provider was because of its high-quality service. However, the country case study did not find any attempts by these agencies to join their collective negotiating power to achieve better terms and conditions or to reduce the fees charged by the provider. This would be a way to save money and would be a first step toward increasing convergence in Chad.

The Burkina Faso case study also found that several of cash transfer programs shared the same financial service provider without necessarily being aware of it. Numerous agencies implement cash programs, which has encouraged more financial providers to enter the market, and this increased competition has lowered fees. For instance, the World Bank-funded safety net project was able to negotiate for a fee reduction because of its financial weight. Moreover, the advanced level of digitalization of payment systems in Burkina Faso would be conducive for setting up a joint payment platform, which would be a great stride toward convergence similar to what has been done in other countries.⁵⁷

TABLE 10. Use of selected financial service providers in Chad

	PARCA	DIZA Est	DIZA Sud	WFP
Modality	Cash in transit	Cash in transit	Cash in transit	Cash in transit ((80%) Mobile money (20%)
Financial service provider	Express Union	Express Union Tigo FINADEV	Tigo (initially) Salama (currently)	Express Union (cash in transit) Airtel (mobile money)

⁵⁷ See, for example, the experience of with setting up common payment platforms in Lebanon and Jordan.



In Mauritania, the same platform and electronic financial delivery system has been used by all government safety net programs. Humanitarian cash transfer programs use their own systems, but they are currently discussing the feasibility of using the national platform. WFP piloted its use in 2018, but it did not meet WFP’s internal requirements at the time. Discussions are ongoing about organizing other potential tests. In Senegal, humanitarian agencies largely use the same payment provider but again with a separate contracting procedure for each, all of which are different from the provider used by the national safety net. In Niger, payments from UNICEF’s part of the COVID emergency program and UNICEF’s medium-term COVID-19 cash plus program were made using the same payment provider and the same payment processes as the ongoing *Wadata Talaka* program. WFP’s part of the COVID emergency program used a different payment mechanism.

OUTREACH, COMMUNICATION, AND ACCESSIBILITY TO AFFECTED POPULATIONS

Outreach to and communication with affected populations is a key element of any program. Each of the studied programs interacts with local authorities on the ground, and many programs establish a network of local partnerships with local civil society organizations. In several countries, these local partner organizations already work with various

programs, but there is rarely a systematic mapping of these overlapping relationships. The case studies frequently observed local actors playing a pivotal role, particularly in the last-mile delivery of benefits, such as accompanying beneficiaries to receive their payments and receiving and handling complaints (particularly in relation to double-dipping and exclusion errors). These actors often fulfil this function for several programs and, as such, are a point of de facto convergence. The studies also found various degrees of recognition from government and humanitarian partners for the added value of these local entities, as well as varying interest in assessing their capacity or identifying their capacity-strengthening needs.

When different programs rely on the same frontline delivery staff, this can enable convergence if they are used to disseminate joint messaging, to consolidate and harmonize the programs’ communication with communities, and to apply an integrated community feedback mechanism for all of the programs.⁵⁸ Frontline delivery staff are often employees of the local social services. This is the case in Burkina Faso, where interviewees from all programs highlighted the close involvement of the local social services, though only a few programs, such as the UNICEF program, explicitly provide any capacity support to these services. In Senegal, local civil society organizations help the government to implement the social safety net on the ground and work with multiple other

⁵⁸ This finding has also been confirmed by other research. “The COVID-19 response has underlined the importance of actors at the local / district level in delivering essential goods and services, yet these actors are traditional overlooked and under-supported by the international community.” Longhurst and Slater, 2022, forthcoming), p. 32.

TABLE 11. Partnerships for outreach and communication in Senegal

	PNBSF	2017 pilot	WFP	ARC Replica
Outreach during beneficiary selection	One OS per region	OS	WFP recruits temporary staff for enumeration	Different members have different models: (i) partially sub-contracting social operators (ii) partially working through their own community agents (iii) partially working through long-term local partners
Outreach during ongoing program implementation	One OS per region	OS	In partnership with World Vision: through its own community development agents In partnership with the ACF: through established local NGO partners	Different members have different models: partially sub-contracting OS, partially working through their own community agents, and partially working through long-term local partners

cash assistance programs. Research conducted in Senegal prior to this study identified these social operators (opérateurs sociaux or OS) as a key enabling factor for convergence, and the shock-response pilot project in 2017 implemented by the Ministry of Community Development relied on this network of outreach workers. This ensured that there was one consistent interlocutor communicating with communities on behalf of both programs, providing information, disseminating messages, and collecting feedback. However, there are other countries where social operators facilitate the implementation of the government safety net but are not consistently used as implementing partners by other cash assistance programs in the same areas.

Social operators for some of the humanitarian cash transfer programs in Senegal are used when it suits the responsible organizations or when they see it as a pragmatic way to speed up the targeting process and collect feedback rather than as a strategic decision to converge. Also, some humanitarian actors prefer to work through existing partnerships with other local organizations. The same phenomenon of local organizations partnering with several different international programs also occurs in Chad.

The localization of aid is a key global policy commitment based on the recognition that local actors play essential roles in delivering cash assistance. The key informant interviews highlighted the importance of these organizations and their added value in terms of acting as conduits for including the perspective of local communities into policy discussions. This has been confirmed by research done in other countries. Smith (2021a) observed, “Discussions and actions on HA-SP [humanitarian assistance – social protection] and SRSP [shock-responsive social protection] are dominated by bilateral and multilateral donors and UN agencies, working with a limited number of central government representatives, and that other actors such as sub-national authorities and organizations representing civil society and disadvantaged groups risk being excluded.”⁵⁹

There is a question about potential financing for local capacity for outreach and communication with communities. In Senegal, for example, the government might not be willing to continue funding the social operators, who have played a key role in liaising with local communities. Removing them would weaken one of the enabling elements of convergence and would in turn weaken the crucial local interactions

⁵⁹ Smith (2021a), p. 10. The Cash Coordination Caucus came to the same conclusion: “Participants agreed that current coordination arrangements are not sufficiently inclusive of and valuable to local actors.” Grand Bargain 2.0 (2022), p. 11. See also Longhurst and Slater (2022, forthcoming), p. 27.

between programs and their beneficiary communities, which is a comparatively low-cost intervention.⁶⁰ In some of the case study countries, such as Senegal and Burkina Faso, there has been no systematic mapping of these local partnerships or of the capacity of these partner organizations, which would be a helpful first step towards sub-contracting with them to work with multiple programs as an explicit point of convergence.

An important task of a local outreach network is to make people aware of how to provide feedback and log complaints. Harmonizing complaints and feedback mechanisms would be a way to increase accountability to affected populations (AAP) across the sectors and across governmental and non-governmental programs.⁶¹ In 2020, WFP in Senegal found that only 20 percent of the beneficiaries had a clear understanding of the program, while only 10 percent of the beneficiaries reported knowing the hotline number, and only 7 percent used it.⁶² In Burkina Faso, a survey found that only 18 percent of the interviewed women and 29 percent of the men knew how to log a complaint if needed.⁶³ A 2019 study recommended harmonizing the complaints mechanisms of different safety nets and humanitarian cash programs in the country.⁶⁴ A working group on community engagement and accountability has been set up with the aim of coordinating ways to engage with affected communities. A particular area of concern is the need to find a way to confidentially and securely report attempts to sexually exploit and abuse affected populations, especially women and girls.

The best accountability procedures are those that are straightforward for the population to use and are cheaper for the implementing agencies and institutions. In Mauritania, both government safety nets (*Elmaouna* and *Tekavoul*) use the same feedback mechanism, but it is not shared with the humanitarian lean season assistance programs. In Chad, one of the NGO consortia established a common database for all logged complaints about the member organizations, but it did not share the database outside the consortium. WFP in Chad launched a joint interagency feedback mechanism, but it is not clear whether this has come to fruition. In the refugee camps, the camp management structure often works as the common structure for handling complaints about different

programs. The Start Network in Senegal tried to establish a single hotline that could be used by consortium members, but the call center provider felt unable to handle the high level of expected calls. The case study for Mali also recommended identifying opportunities for sharing feedback mechanisms and encouraged further harmonized approaches, such as having one common strategy for feedback, and one set of common tools for communication and outreach.

MARKET ASSESSMENTS AND MARKET MONITORING

Market assessments are another opportunity for convergence that is not yet used to its full potential. In Chad, for example, WFP carries out systematic market assessments in collaboration with a national institution. These data are important in order to understand the real value of the transfers and changes in markets and prices over time, including in different locations. As stated in McLean et al (2021), “Social protection actors often do not have the capacity to do this but can be supported by humanitarian counterparts to develop pre-planned strategies to monitor and adjust transfers when thresholds are passed.”⁶⁵ While WFP’s market assessment data are systematically shared, often through the food security cluster and/or the Cash Working Group, they are often not systematically or collaboratively used. This is because tight budgets mean that actors cannot increase their transfer values in reaction to the findings. Also, when the assessment find that a certain payment modality is leading to losses in the purchasing power of the transfer, agencies can be reluctant to make the necessary changes as the administrative procedure for changing the payment system is cumbersome.

In some countries, such as Burkina Faso and Chad, different actors each undertake their own market assessments and use their own methodologies, which is a costly way of operating and makes it harder to use the data to underpin joint analysis. The example of Mali where EU-funded partners carried out joint market assessments effectively in the past, shows that it can be done

60 Wylde (2022, forthcoming), p. 22.

61 “Ultimately, there is a clear rationale for complementarity, capacity building, and lesson-sharing in grievance redress and complaints mechanisms.” The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021), p. 33.

62 WFP (2021b), p. 14.

63 Ground Truth Solutions (2020), p. 19. Also, other research has found that grievance and redress mechanisms in social protection programs are often used only infrequently (Zaman et al, 2022, p. 20).

64 Prime Minister of Burkina Faso and FAO (2019).

65 McLean et al (2021), p. 15.



CONDITIONALITY

In most of the studied countries, the different programs are either aligned in terms of their conditionality or, where they do not, conditionality is not contentious (except in Chad). In Burkina Faso and Mali, all programs – whether they be safety nets, lean season assistance, or support to IDPs – provide unconditional cash transfers. In fact, this is the only way in which all cash transfer programs in these two countries are fully in line with government practice. In Mauritania, the humanitarian programs converge with *Elmaouna*, the shock-responsive safety net, in being fully unconditional. The regular safety net, *Tekavoul*, on the other hand, is conditional on beneficiaries’ taking part in social promotion sessions designed to inform them about important

issues such as hygiene, nutrition and child protection – which is very similar to the conditions applied by the Senegalese national social safety net but which are not required by the humanitarian cash transfer programs in the country. As attending the sessions is a soft condition in both Mauritania and Senegal, the case studies found no controversy about them at the community level. The only country where the case study identified conditionality as a source of contention was Chad, where some of the humanitarian cash assistance programs require some of the beneficiaries to work in return for their transfers. Because the reasons for this practice are not well understood by the communities, key informants raised concerns in their interviews about the harm that this could cause. **Table 12** summarizes the differences between programs in terms of their conditionalities in Chad.

TABLE 12. Application of conditionality in Chad

	Social safety net (PARCA)	NGO consortium DIZA East	NGO consortium DIZA South	WFP
Conditionality	Unconditional	Unconditional / conditional	Unconditional / conditional	Unconditional
Application to the caseload	100% unconditional	50% unconditional 50% conditional	9% unconditional 91% conditional	100% unconditional

5.2

Program elements that are contentious but where this can be overcome

Certain program elements, such as sources of funding, registration, and needs assessments, have the potential to cause contention between humanitarian actors and social safety net providers. However, there are some examples of cases when additional efforts made by donors and implementing actors helped to overcome these differences.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

The different sources of funding for each social assistance program tend to result in differing budget lines and levels of predictability, which are obstacles to harmonization that can only be overcome through a deliberate effort. On the other hand, when more development resources are available in a protracted crisis, this may free up some humanitarian resources to be used elsewhere.

Many donor institutions have separate budget lines for humanitarian assistance and development programs.

Humanitarian cash transfers are normally funded from the former while support for the government social safety net is funded through the latter. Sometimes different parts of the government manage the different budget lines, which can hamper the smooth interaction between the two funding sources. Humanitarian funding is highly unpredictable and is subject to annual changes, which makes it difficult for government institutions and development partners to rely on it to fund the implementation of any agreed strategies.

Especially in recurrent or protracted crisis contexts, donors coming together to support people can be an important way to overcome this separation.

In Chad, for example, the significant amount of safety net program funding contributed by the World Bank to support refugees is a key element of sharing the responsibility for displaced population. This kind of support can help to turn ad hoc emergency support for refugees into a more sustainable – though less comprehensive – kind of support based on the national safety net. This would make it possible for humanitarian actors to focus their very scarce resources on the most acute and immediate needs elsewhere in the country.

Developing a financing strategy for a government-led social safety net as well as a sustainable strategy for financing shock responses will enable convergence by making it easier to plan for in a coherent and coordinated way.

In Mauritania, the World Bank is supporting the government in taking initial steps towards developing a sustainable financing strategy as a way of improving response planning and of facilitating resource management. Developing a disaster risk financing strategy has also been a key element of the World Bank's policy dialogue with the government of Senegal. Having such a strategy would make it possible to plan for a predictable response to disasters that is commensurate with the need and would use a risk-layering approach to reflect the annual variation in the occurrence of shocks and their impact. Using disaster risk insurance opportunities, such as ARC, can be one element of this strategy. Increasing the predictability of the government's own budgetary funds would also be useful for estimating the gap between available resources and needs, thus giving humanitarian actors an idea of the

resource gap that will need to be filled. However, the potential of such a strategy to foster stronger convergence between humanitarian actors and the PNBSF, Senegal's flagship social assistance program, will remain limited as long as the government maintains parallel governance and coordination mechanisms for social protection and for disaster response.

REGISTRATION

Social registries can be a means for furthering convergence, but they can also be contentious.⁶⁶

Social registries are first and foremost a tool for registering people who are potentially eligible for safety net programs. Ideally, only one national registry in a given country would manage beneficiary eligibility for all cash programs, including humanitarian cash assistance programs. However, humanitarian actors require a faster registration process, better quality data, and data on different indicators than registries in the Sahel can currently provide. The case studies also identified data protection and the interoperability of databases as problems in all of the countries studies.

There is strong principled agreement among the studied programs that a national social registry is a key building block within a national social protection system and can potentially be a useful instrument for humanitarian programs as well.

In countries where registries are a connecting point, such as in Mauritania, they were often developed in a participatory and transparent and iterative process, which allowed different actors to provide input, voice concerns, and influence the process. A registry is especially useful in the event of recurrent shocks, continued insecurity, and a protracted crisis.

When there is tension over the registry, this is often caused by diverging technical opinions on the methodology and a perception that the process for developing the registry lacks transparency.

How the registration of potentially eligible beneficiaries is managed, what kind of data should be collected, and how and how often can be contentious subjects.⁶⁷ There can also be concerns about the registry requiring cumbersome procedures that cost time and money, while occasionally there are allegations of political influence or the existence of other vested interests.

66 "The varied nature and quality of social protection registries and broader information systems means that their role and use in emergencies can only be identified with reference to the particularities of the registries in the country and context under review." UNICEF (2021), p. 12.

67 The role and use of registries in emergencies depend on six factors: (i) completeness, (ii) relevance, (iii) currency, (iv) accessibility, (v) accuracy, and (vi) data protection. "There is a trade-off between the first two (completeness and relevance) and the other four. In other words, the more information is held on more people, the harder (and more expensive) it is to keep that data accurate, up to date and secure, and the more complex the access arrangements." TRANSFORM (2020), p. 78.

In Senegal and Mauritania, the national social registries benefit from the buy-in of humanitarian actors and are used by programs beyond the national social safety net.

The development of Mauritania's registry was iterative and participatory, and this collaborative approach fostered its wide use. Different partners in the country can use the registry and apply their targeting criteria to the existing database. However, humanitarian organizations have not yet opted to make exclusive use of the data contained in the registry. The reasons for this are that the registry's coverage is unclear, the data need updating, and the methodology and captured data do not make it possible to fully assess different levels of food insecurity. In Senegal, the national social registry was created in August 2021 by a Presidential Decree. It is now mandatory for all social programs to use it for selecting beneficiaries. It is viewed by key stakeholders as a way to save time and to reduce the costs involved in targeting beneficiaries for the lean season response. However, numerous interviewees highlighted the importance of keeping the data up to date to maintain the registry's credibility and relevance. In Niger, a technical working group has been set up to develop a social registry, which includes representatives of the World Bank, WFP, UNICEF, and EU-funded NGOs. This will build on the beneficiary registry of the ongoing *Wadata Talaka* programme. Beneficiaries of UNICEF's COVID-19 response will be integrated into this registry. However, WFP continues to use its own system for all programming.

In Mali, use of the registry has the potential to facilitate convergence and limit any duplication of assistance to the same households. However, beneficiary data have not been consistently transferred from seasonal cash programs to the registry, and no programs other than the national social safety net are yet using it. Humanitarian partners argue that the registration process is too burdensome and time-consuming,

making it inappropriate for the quick and efficient registration of a disaster response caseload. Also, the absence of a defined budget to support the maintenance of the registry is an obstacle to its timely and useful implementation. These constraints would need to be overcome for the registry to become a way of furthering convergence.

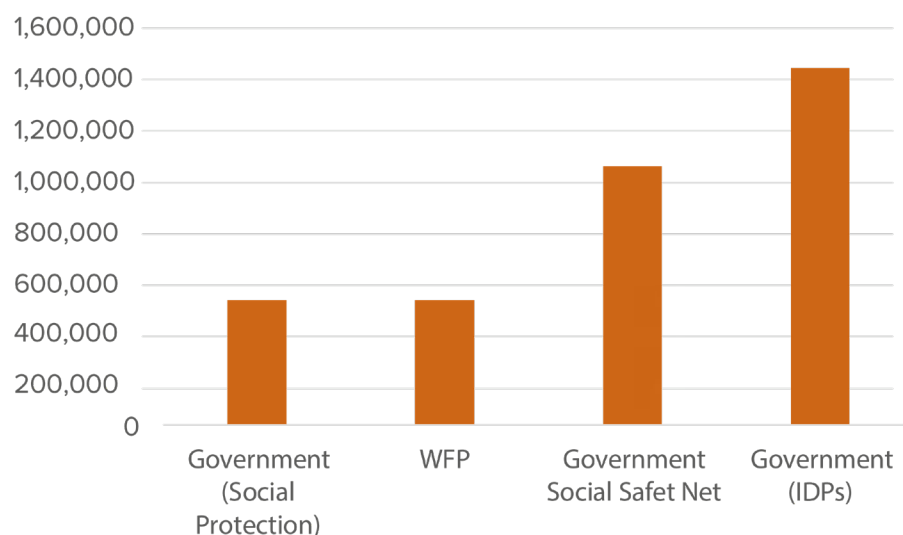
In Chad, key actors also acknowledge the usefulness of having a national social registry but share the concerns voiced in Mali regarding the burdensome nature of the process and associated costs.

This is the case even though the household questionnaire that is used to collect the data for the registry was developed through a collaborative process with some humanitarian partners. Following a request from donors, humanitarian actors took a census approach to registration in their region of work, instead of only applying the questionnaire to those households pre-identified by the communities as highly vulnerable. As a result, the costs of the exercise increased, it took a long time, and it created high expectations among communities, as people often did not understand the difference between the registration process and the beneficiary selection process. From the perspective of humanitarian actors, the long delays caused by the process reduced the value of taking a joint approach, and thus reduced the commitment of humanitarian actors to using the registry as the starting point for their targeting in the future.

In some countries, such as Chad, Mali, and Mauritania, donors have asked humanitarian actors to collect data on the entire population in their respective zones of operation rather than only on their prospective beneficiaries. They made this request to widen the coverage of the registry, build a bigger dataset, and, thus, to strengthen the value of the registry as one building block of a national social protection system.



FIGURE 12.
Existing
databases in
Burkina Faso
and number
of registered
individuals



In Burkina Faso, the process of building a registry has a long history and has been highly contentious. Parallel approaches to registration have resulted in the creation of four major databases, each owned and managed by a different institution. The reasons for this unfavorable development are partly technical, for example, differing opinions about the best methodological approach to take to registration, and partly institutional, for example, the view that owning a database was a major asset for attracting funding. Other reasons are related to power dynamics between institutions, overlapping mandates, and political economy issues.

The Government of Burkina Faso has long recognized the need to harmonize the registration process and has recently laid out the next steps for doing so. The key informants interviewed for the case studies welcomed the fact that the longstanding problem of institutional ownership of the registry has been settled and believed that the process of building the new registry could bring the different actors together. To ensure that future users will engage with the registry, the harmonization process will have to be transparent and inclusive, so that it can lead to convergence rather than entrenching division.

NEEDS ASSESSMENTS AND GEOGRAPHIC TARGETING

In each program, decisions have to be made about how to assess poverty and vulnerability in order to decide where to intervene. Poverty analysis and needs assessments are needed to prioritize the geographical areas where needs are greatest and to select the communities where registration and/or targeting will be done. When actors have different priorities, this can be a source of contention. The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection described the problem as follows “The different approaches to defining, measuring, and interpreting vulnerability and poverty across humanitarian and social protection sectors – reinforced by different mandates – has historically led to different programmatic decisions on who should receive the benefit (targeting design).”⁶⁸ In addition, geographic prioritization is influenced by factors not related to need, such as the program objectives, donor priorities, administrative presence, the ability to access the population, and the capacity of government actors.

How to divide – or share – zones of interventions has been an issue in almost all of the case study countries. Both humanitarian and development actors have to reconcile the available resources with the degree, distribution, and intensity of need across the country and to find a balance between

68 The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021).

providing an adequate transfer amount to individuals and covering as many affected people as possible. To avoid duplication of support, actors often choose to serve a specific geographic area that is not being served by any other program, thus increasing coverage, but this can result in the creation of multiple delivery systems among many cash transfer programs operating in the same country.

Social protection and humanitarian actors often have different definitions of vulnerability and use different methodologies to determine needs and to prioritize geographic areas for intervention. National social safety nets use national poverty surveys to assess need, while some international agencies also conduct their own ad hoc poverty assessments. In the case of lean season assistance, need is defined as food insecurity, and these programs conduct their geographic targeting using the *Cadre Harmonisé* process. Programs supporting IDPs and refugees usually carry out ad hoc multi-sectoral needs assessments in the areas most affected by displacement, or, in the case of protracted crises, regularly repeated parallel surveys that assess the vulnerability of specific groups (such as displaced populations).

National household surveys designed to identify poor and vulnerable households collect information on a large number of variables. These surveys measure chronic poverty and its trajectory across the country at different times, within different income groups, and across households with different demographic characteristics. They tend to be comprehensive assessments that are costly and take months, if not years, to complete, as in Burkina Faso and Chad. As a result, these surveys cannot be repeated annually, and their data can sometimes be somewhat out of date. The case studies found some examples of international actors undertaking their own poverty assessments. In Burkina Faso, the German Development Bank (KfW) carried out needs assessments in those regions where other German cooperation projects were already being implemented in accordance with its geographic priorities. In other cases, surveys are determined based on the agency's specific target group. For example, also in Burkina Faso, UNICEF conducted a survey of poverty among children before implementing its safety net.

Both humanitarian seasonal cash assistance programs and shock response safety net initiatives use the *Cadre Harmonisé* for their needs assessments. In Mauritania,

Senegal, and Burkina Faso, these types of programs use aspects of the *Cadre Harmonisé* methodology in their needs assessments. In Mauritania, both the national shock-responsive safety net, *Elmaouna* and humanitarian actors use the results of the *Cadre Harmonisé*. In Senegal, the lean season assistance converges around the prioritization of needs established by the *Cadre Harmonisé* process. In Niger, the *Cadre Harmonisé* estimates are further updated after six months.

In Mauritania, Niger, Mali, and Senegal, both surveys and the *Cadre Harmonisé* methodology are used for different programs. In Mauritania and Niger, the geographic targeting established by the *Cadre Harmonisé* is used for government-led seasonal food assistance (such as the *Elmaouna* in Mauritania or the *Distribution Générale Ciblée* in Niger) but is not used by the routine safety nets (the *Tekavoul* programme in Mauritania and *Wadata Talaka* in Niger), which use their own geographic targeting instead. Similarly, in Mali, the needs assessment for *Jigisèmèjiri* is based on a national poverty survey, but the needs assessment for seasonal cash assistance is based on the *Cadre Harmonisé* and an additional annual. The PNBSF in Senegal does not use the *Cadre Harmonisé* results, but even though the PNBSF and the humanitarian cash assistance programs each have their own program-specific eligibility criteria, they often end up supporting very similar – or even the same – households in practice.

In Mali and Niger, efforts have been made to harmonize the targeting of shock response assistance and safety net programs. In Mali, during the 2018 lean season, beneficiaries of the regular *Jigisèmèjiri* transfer who were located in areas identified by the *Cadre Harmonisé* as being in critical stages of food insecurity received an increase in the amount of their benefit. This vertical expansion of the routine program combined lean season assistance with the safety net program. In Niger, the medium-term COVID-19 cash-plus program implemented by UNICEF and the World Bank was also effectively an increase in the transfer provided by the ongoing *Wadata Talaka* program.

In Niger, the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the government to bring together all major cash partners to conduct a joint needs assessment. Based on the assessment, the government developed a COVID-19 response plan for those households that were likely to be hardest hit by the

lockdowns due to the spread of COVID-19. However, despite the jointly agreed response and overall targeting approach, partners continued to have differences on targeting. The *Wadata Talaka* COVID-19 emergency response, funded by the World Bank, used poverty, food insecurity, and shock exposure as geographic targeting criteria. UNICEF added child vulnerability considerations to this list, while WFP used only food insecurity considerations.

In the countries of the Sahel, the needs of displaced people are assessed in a variety of ways. In Chad, UNHCR and WFP conduct regular needs assessments in refugee camps and base their level of support on the results. In Burkina Faso, the situation of IDPs is often assessed ad hoc by agencies that are present in the area and collectively on an annual basis, through the needs overview process of the humanitarian system, which identifies and prioritizes the regions that are most affected. Humanitarian actors then largely follow that joint guidance. However, as in Niger, the Burkina Faso case study also found examples of the priorities of individual agencies taking precedence over the results of that process.

Agencies sometimes apply other geographic selection criteria that are not related to the severity of need. These include the presence of other actors, the institutional history of a specific region, government presence, and, particularly when a fully government-financed safety net exists as in Senegal, the political priority of equitably covering all parts of the country. In Chad, the social safety net, PARCA, is currently only implemented in refugee-hosting areas because it is funded by the World Bank's window for refugee support. However, almost all of the ongoing humanitarian cash assistance in Chad is supporting internally displaced populations because funding is severely limited, and the agencies have assessed that those needs are greater among IDPs than among the rest of the population. These additional factors can hamper convergence as they introduce elements into the decision-making process that are not related to the severity of need.

5.3

Program elements that are hard-wired barriers to convergence

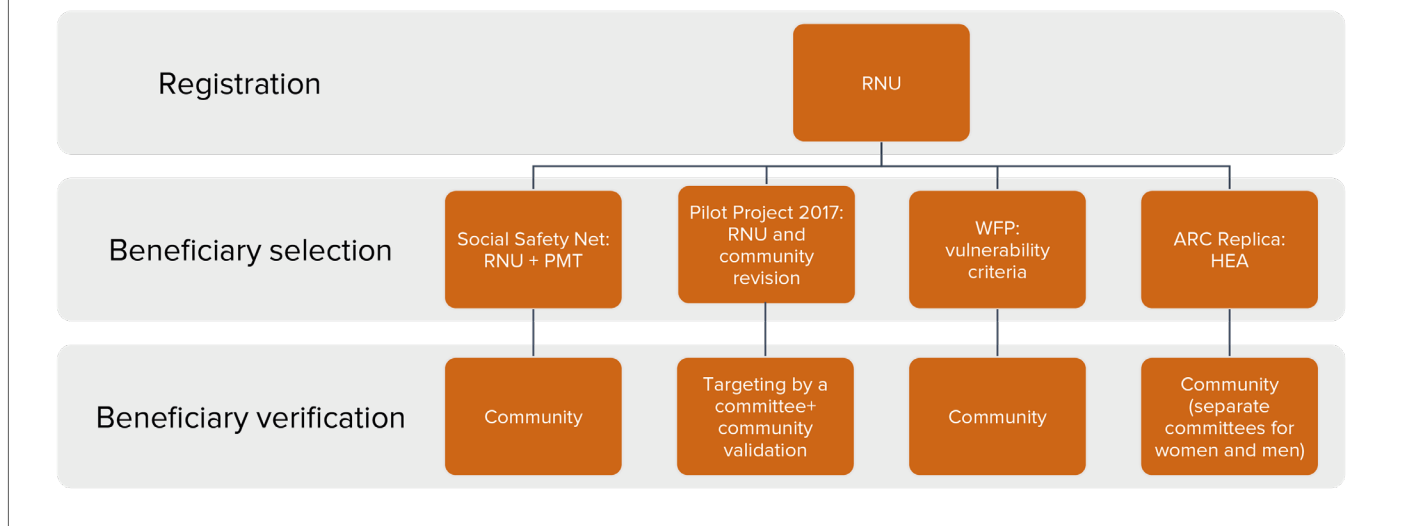
ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Targeting is one of the most difficult design elements to address when aiming for convergence as it involves program identity and sovereignty. When adopting unconditional cash as a modality, agencies hand over decision-making power over the use of the assistance to the recipient. However, when designing their targeting approach, they still want to decide who receives the aid. While these decisions can and have been shown to differ between government programs and humanitarian programs and are based on different principles (political economy), they are not impossible to overcome. However, significant more outreach and effort is needed on both sides to reach common ground.

Cash transfer programs apply different sets of criteria to select beneficiaries, which differ between humanitarian programs and social safety nets. Humanitarian programs aim to support households affected by a particular disaster or external shock that impedes their ability to meet their basic needs without resorting to negative coping strategies. Their aim is thus to use criteria that are “shock-sensitive” and that minimize any exclusion errors. Social assistance is generally designed to reduce chronic poverty and vulnerability and has to balance coverage with the program's long-term affordability. Social assistance also has to respect political considerations, even if this creates trade-offs on the extent to which the program can target only the poorest within the population.

The appropriateness of all programs using the same targeting methodology to select beneficiaries is dependent on the correlation between chronic poverty and vulnerability and disaster vulnerability. Oxford Policy Management's research on shock-responsive social protection in 2018 found “general agreement that the poor are often some of the most vulnerable to disaster, meaning some degree of overlap can be expected. The emergency context, and the scale of the disaster, can influence the extent of overlap. Our findings suggest that there is a higher degree of alignment of target groups between social protection and

FIGURE 13.
Targeting procedures in Senegal



humanitarian interventions in slow-onset food security crises since chronic and seasonal food insecurity are often due to poverty and livelihood characteristics - than in rapid-onset emergencies which cause widespread damage to property and livelihoods.”⁶⁹

The World Bank and all of the programs that it supports in the region use proxy means testing (PMT) to select beneficiaries.

When PMT is used, program recipients are selected by collecting data on observable proxies for household income such as ownership of certain assets.⁷⁰ Most humanitarian organizations in the region use a targeting methodology inspired by the Household Economy Approach (HEA) for their lean season assistance, sometimes coupled with other criteria. The HEA framework analyzes how people in different circumstances get the food and cash that they need as well as their opportunities, the constraints they face, their options at times of crisis, and whether they can cope on their own or are in need of external assistance and should thus be targeted by an aid program. O’Brien (2021a) summarized the relative merits of the HEA and PMT methodologies as follows, “The HEA tends to be better at identifying food-insecure households and the PMT tends to be better at identifying chronically poor households.”⁷¹ Humanitarian actors question the ability of

PMT to predict the consumption of a household, and have expressed concerns about PMT’s inflexibility in terms of being able to identify people who become newly poor as a result of an external shock.

In Senegal, all cash assistance programs start their targeting process by using data from the social registry.

However, they go on to apply their own selection criteria at the second stage and then implement similar, but not identical, ways of validating the preliminary lists.

Burkina Faso is a particularly good example of how widely beneficiary selection processes can differ, both between and within the domains of social assistance programs and humanitarian programs.

69 O’Brien et al (2018a), p. 62.

70 “The proxies are selected by running correlations of national household survey data to identify a relationship between household characteristics and wellbeing (usually either consumption or income). The proxies selected are those that, together, have the strongest correlation with wellbeing. In addition, the indicators should be observable, so that they can be verified by enumerators.” Kidd et al (2021), p. 6.

71 O’Brien et al (2018a), p. 62.

TABLE 13. Beneficiary selection for social safety nets in Burkina Faso

	Government reference	Safety net (World Bank funding)	Safety net (AFD funding)	Safety net (KfW funding)	Safety net (UNICEF)
Beneficiary selection criteria	Consensual methodology: criteria related to household characteristics, composition, habitat, livelihood assets, and access to social services	PMT and threshold → all pregnant women/women with children under 15 years living in households that are within the threshold	Ouagadougou: PMT and threshold → all pregnant women/women with children under 15 years in households that are within the threshold East: takeover of safety net (World Bank) beneficiaries; possibility to add IDPs	PMT and threshold → all pregnant women/women with children under two years in household that are within the threshold	Government criteria; exclusion of beneficiaries receiving support from another safety net
Validation of beneficiary lists	Community	Community	Community	Community	Targeting committee

TABLE 14. Beneficiary selection for lean season assistance in Burkina Faso

	Government reference	PFS (World Bank) seasonal top-up	PROGRES (Terre des Hommes/ ACF)	FAO
Beneficiary selection criteria	IDPs: CONASUR Host communities: SP/ CNPS 'consensual methodology' (the same as for social safety nets)	PMT and threshold → all pregnant women/women with children under 15 years and persons fulfilling additional criteria, such as relating to old age and disability, living in households that are within the threshold	HEA: Very poor and poor house-holds; if needed, subcriteria related to age of children	IDPs: status Host community: HEA 'light'
Validation of beneficiary lists	n/a	Community	Community	Resource persons in villages

TABLE 15. Beneficiary selection for assistance for IDPs in Burkina Faso

	Government reference	PFS (World Bank) IDPs	WFP	Oxfam	BRC
Beneficiary selection criteria	Status • IDP • hosting IDPs	Adapted PMT and additional categorical criteria (disability, old age)	Hybrid criteria (HEA+PMT), starting from Food Security Cluster list but further adapted	IDPs: status / HEA light after three months of displacement Host community: HEA 'light'	Own set of criteria → scoring based on weights → ranking
Validation of beneficiary lists	None	Village assembly	n/a	Village assembly	Verification of a sample; village assembly validation

The advantages of the different methodologies were analyzed in the contexts of Senegal in 2017⁷² and Mali in 2018.⁷³ The accuracy of each methodology depends on a number of factors, starting from the accuracy and coverage of the registry being used as the underlying dataset. Coverage can be limited by quotas – for example, in Senegal, local quotas determine how many people can be included in the registry, thus increasing the risk of exclusion errors. It can also be limited if there is a ceiling on the total number of people who can be included in the registry.

Mauritania is the Sahel country with the greatest degree of convergence on eligibility criteria, though only among programs providing responses to seasonal shocks. These actors agreed *ex ante* on a set of targeting criteria to be used for the annual response to seasonal food insecurity. This agreement includes some flexibility for humanitarian actors to meet donors' requirements in terms of geographical prioritization and to add potentially eligible households that are not registered in the Social Registry.

The Mali case study found a complex picture in terms of targeting. *Jigisèmèjiri* and the EU-funded seasonal cash transfers initially looked at ways of harmonizing their targeting. The use of the social registry as a common registration tool by both the social safety net and the response to shocks is widely considered to be a strength and an encouraging way forward regarding convergence. However, using the social registry for program targeting differs has resulted in a patchwork of targeting criteria and methodologies, even within the same programs. The Niger case study identified an example of alignment where three partners (the *Wadata Talaka* program, WFP, and UNICEF) aligned their targeting approaches. UNICEF used the safety net's targeting mechanism but decided to add a child nutrition component, hoping this would also be implemented by the safety net, though in the end it was only applied to UNICEF's caseload. In 2017, the shock-responsive pilot in Senegal piggy-backed on the targeting of the PNBSF in the aftermath of a drought.

Support for IDPs and refugees often follows a completely different process. This kind of support is largely targeted based on status – whether a person is displaced or not (or sometimes whether a household is hosting IDPs) and being eligible for support often depends initially on the duration of

the displacement, followed by the application of vulnerability-based criteria. Humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso tend to provide blanket support (support based on the expectation that everyone is affected) only during the first three months of displacement, while the government aims to continue blanket support as long as possible, arguing that all displaced people need assistance. The Burkina Faso case study found that these programs used a broad range of targeting criteria, all of which are different from those used for the country's social safety nets and lean season assistance. In Chad, the humanitarian programs that were studied developed their own set of targeting criteria that were derived from the HEA approach but were also based on indicators of status. This targeting approach is completely different from the PMT targeting used by the social safety net, and initial efforts by one humanitarian actor to converge the criteria were dropped as the PMT procedure was perceived not to be transparent enough.

All actors, regardless of the type of their program, use community-based approaches to validate their beneficiary lists. This is an important step in the targeting process and requires good grassroots communication efforts. However, as documented in all of the case studies, the exact way of doing this differs from program to program, except in Senegal where validation is done in a very similar way by all of the actors. While this step itself is a point of connection between programs, there is a risk of creating confusion at the local level when the same committees are asked to validate lists that have been put together using different methodologies. Furthermore, various actors might intervene in the same community without necessarily coordinating their approaches – as was reported in Mali.

TRANSFER VALUES

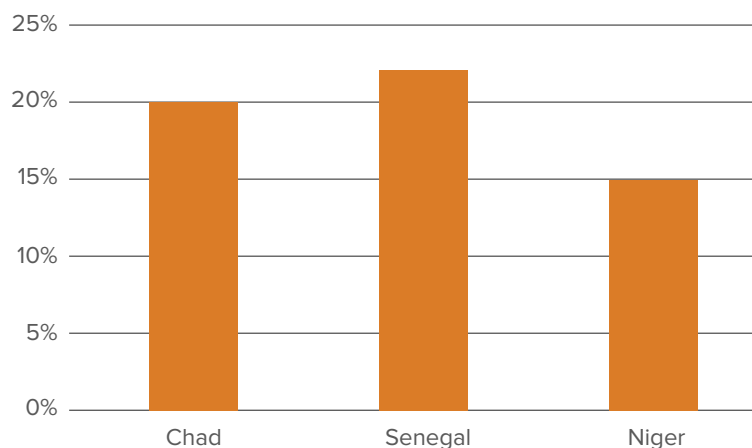
How transfer values are calculated and adjusted is a recurrent topic of dissent between social safety nets and humanitarian cash programs in the region and beyond.⁷⁴ Because households discuss with each other and compare the benefits that they receive, differences in the values and frequency of transfers can be major sources of tension within communities.

72 Diagne (2017).

73 Kameli et al (2018).

74 The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021), p. 23 and IFPRI and Sabates-Wheeler et al (2021), p.19.

FIGURE 14.
Transfer values of government safety nets as a percentage of the poverty line



Humanitarian actors decide on the value of their transfers based on the objective of helping households to meet their basic needs without having to resort to negative coping strategies, when the transfer is added to the income that a household is able to achieve on its own. A minimum expenditure basket (MEB) can be used as a way to calculate the amount of money that a household lacks in order to meet certain basic needs, but most humanitarian seasonal cash transfers use the food-related income gap instead. In several countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Chad, the Cash Working Group has started the process of calculating an MEB, but this often serves only as a recommendation as the Cash Working Group lacks the power to force programs to adhere to the proposed value. Very frequently, transfer values are also influenced by budget constraints.

For social protection programs, on the other hand, setting the value should be seen as a process that finely balances government constraints, existing evidence, and policy objectives so as to progressively protect people from lifecycle risks and other shocks. As one study put it, “it is not a technological and technocratic decision.”⁷⁵ As social protection programs usually aim to mitigate poverty, they take as their reference the national poverty line or average consumption, calculated using national survey data. The value of the transfer is then set as either the gap between the average beneficiary household’s income or a certain percentage thereof. In Chad, the value of the PARCA transfer represents 20 percent of the poverty line, while in Senegal, the

value of the PNBSF transfer represents between 14 percent and 22 percent of the poverty line.⁷⁶ The latter has remained at the same level since 2017, which has reduced the adequacy of the amount provided over time. The value of the safety net transfer in Niger is equal to 15 percent of the poverty line. All of the one-off emergency cash transfers related to COVID-19 in the country were aligned in terms of value, which was equal to three months’ worth of *Wadata Talaka* transfers.

As there are never enough resources to support all of the people in need in an adequate way, each country and each actor faces a trade-off between coverage and adequacy. However, the difficulties involved in solving this equation are different for governments than for international humanitarian actors. Governments are under more pressure to prioritize coverage and often follow the principle of equity. They also have to ensure the fiscal sustainability of the transfers, especially in countries where they bear the brunt of the costs, as in Senegal. In countries such as Senegal and Chad, key informants also voiced the concern that setting too high a value on a transfer can foster dependency and mean that people will be discouraged to work. Political economy factors can also influence governments’ decisions on social assistance spending.

Humanitarian actors, on the other hand, tend to prioritize adequacy over coverage and accept that they can only help a limited number of beneficiaries as their resources are finite. This is the reason why they pay such careful attention to

75 McLean et al (2021), p. 6.

76 FAO/IRAM (2017), p. 50. When the value was first set in 2014, it aimed to meet 15 to 25 percent of the poverty line, but it has not been adjusted since.



the beneficiary selection process, as described above. They frequently design their cash assistance programs as sectoral programs – in the Sahel region, this involves focusing mostly on meeting food security and nutrition needs. Therefore, they set the value in reference to food consumption and the gap that households experience when trying to meet their food needs. This means that the value of the transfer is set at different levels for different groups within the same areas. Agencies often defend this divergence by referring to their differing objectives or operating procedures. Some of the interviewees for the case studies pointed out that some beneficiaries also received other kinds of assistance, such as in-kind or accompanying livelihood measures. The different duration or number of transfers between programs can also justify varying transfer values. While these explanations are all coherent from a program management perspective, they are often not well understood by communities.

Local authorities in all countries expressed concern that different values cause tensions at the community level.

The affected populations mostly compare the actual value of the transfers being received by households and often do not take any differences in the frequency of payments into account. In contexts of insecurity and tensions, these differing values can lead to conflict within a community and to animosity against aid agencies. In contexts of widespread corruption, there can also be a suspicion that a lower value means that the staff of the aid agency are “stealing” the rest of the money. Research in Mali has shown that, when there are several different transfers being delivered in the same area using different tools and in an uncoordinated way, the risk of security incidents increases.⁷⁷ Such tensions can also have a negative effect on social cohesion.

77 CaLP (2018).

78 The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021), p. 23.

79 McLean et al (2021).

Harmonizing values is a complicated process, but there is more than one way to do it.⁷⁸

The Cash Working Group is often the forum in which discussions about transfer values take place, but social protection actors do not tend to consistently participate in these groups. Hence, discussions about setting transfer values often take place in parallel. McLean et al (2021)⁷⁹ suggested three ways of harmonizing: (i) aligning social protection payments with humanitarian transfer values during a crisis; (ii) aligning humanitarian transfer values with social protection levels; or (iii) implementing a layered and complementary approach.

Across the region, there are a few examples of seasonal increases of the regular transfer amount.

In Burkina Faso, the transfer value of the PFS has recently been revised upwards, though with no specific reference to the MEB calculated by the Cash Working Group. Discussions in the group on harmonization are ongoing and have intensified since the MEB study was finalized, but no agreement has yet been reached. The seasonal increase provided by the World Bank-funded PFS is aligned with the value that was recommended by the National Response Plan for the lean season. Mauritania’s shock-responsive safety nets, *Elmaouna* and *Tekavoul-Shock*, and its humanitarian cash transfer programs have harmonized all elements related to the value (of their transfers as well as their duration, frequency, and delivery modality). They all provide transfers of the same amount, which is calculated to cover 70 percent of kilocalorie needs per person multiplied by the effective number of people living in a household. They all pay their transfers monthly and provide four transfers in any given year or crisis.

FIGURE 15.
Transfer values in
Chad (in XFA)

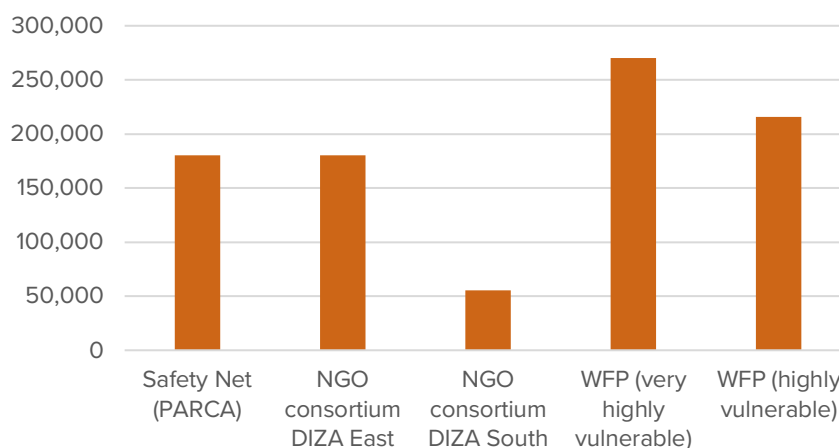
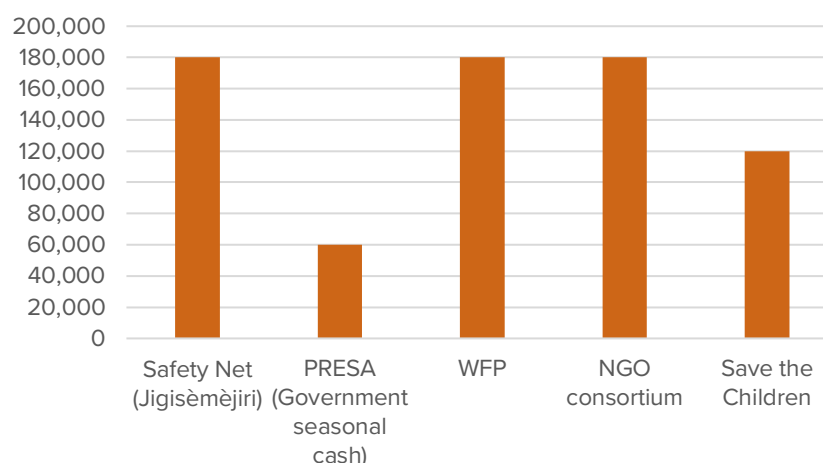


FIGURE 16.
Transfer values in
Mali (in FCFA)



In Chad and Mali, humanitarian actors have chosen the second model. In Chad, DIZA Est, an NGO consortium, adopted the same value as PARCA, the government safety net, for its transfer program, though it changed the frequency from quarterly (as under government safety net) to monthly. Other program transfers have different values.

In Mali, efforts to encourage the harmonization of the seasonal cash transfer value with that of Jigisèmèjiri have been effective. As a result, there is a partial convergence of the transfer value particularly in terms of the methodology to determine the MEB rather than the value itself.

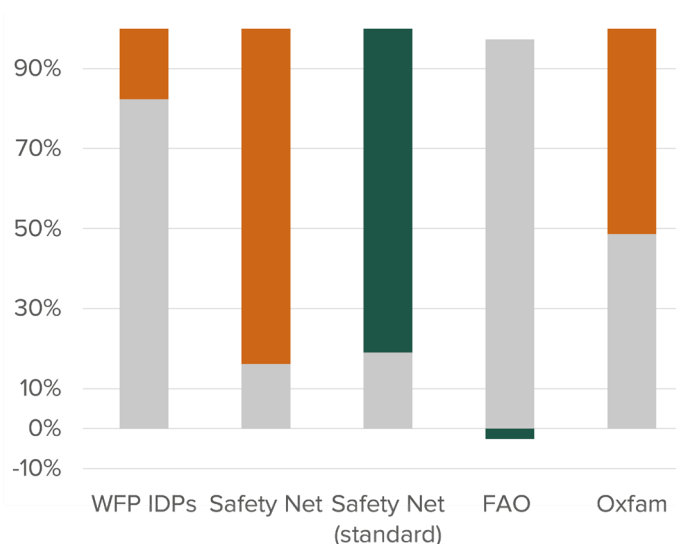
Aligning humanitarian transfer values with those of social protection programs is not without risk, as has been highlighted throughout the literature on this topic. If the support provided to crisis-affected people by humanitarian programs is lowered to the level provided by safety net programs, it may no longer be adequate to meet the needs of the recipients.⁸⁰ This risk is also recognized in the recent report of the Cash Coordination Caucus, which reviewed cash coordination arrangements in humanitarian setting and concluded: “The impact of humanitarian cash should not be overly diluted by aligning [it with] social protection systems, such as harmonizing transfer values to a level whereby basic needs are not being met.”⁸¹ An example for this risk is the support provided by the PFS to IDPs in Burkina Faso, which

⁸⁰ See for example O'Brien et al (2018a), p. 70; McLean et al (2021), p. 13; and Gray Meral and Both (2021), p.30.

⁸¹ Grand Bargain 2.0 (2022), p. 13.

FIGURE 17.
Current transfer values and gaps in comparison to MEB in Burkina Faso

■ current value
 ■ gap residents
 ■ gap IDPs



is set at the same level as ongoing safety net transfers and is thus far below the amount needed by this group. **Figure 17** illustrates how transfer values in Burkina Faso differ from the value set in the MEB for residents and IDPs.

In Burkina Faso and Mauritania, actors are also actively discussing how programs can complement each other.

The PFS in Burkina Faso already provides additional seasonal support in areas identified as being at a crisis level of food insecurity. Discussions are currently being held about how to expand that approach and use it more systematically across the different regions and safety net programs to ensure that different actors complement each other’s work instead of overlapping. The 2021 National Response Plan in Mauritania is testing an adjusted value for eligible *Tekavoul* beneficiaries to promote equity between beneficiaries. Eligible *Tekavoul* beneficiaries will receive a top-up rather than the full value of the lean season transfer. This will be an improvement over the 2020 situation when some people received three types of transfer while others received none. It would also address the limitations imposed by the relatively low value of the regular program’s transfer, especially during a crisis, by raising it closer to humanitarian standards.

In Senegal, some key informants reported that some beneficiaries receive support from international actors in addition to the money provided by the social safety net, thus receiving a much higher amount than others.

However, the degree of that overlap between programs is not systematically reported. In 2020, WFP found that 22 percent of their beneficiaries also received the government safety net transfer. Key informants saw this as a legitimate layering of support (or an implicit vertical expansion), but several of them reported that the local communities perceive this as unfair double-dipping. This concern has also been highlighted in earlier research by O’Brien et al (2018a) “Delivering top-ups to some social protection beneficiaries leads to a scenario where some program beneficiaries receive more than others, and where some households receive even more support than usual while non-beneficiaries continue to receive none from that program. This can be very confusing and [can] breed ill-feeling if it is not clearly explained.”⁸²

In order to counter impressions of unfairness and to discuss the layering concept with local communities, more effective outreach will be necessary.

In addition, actors will need to invest in more monitoring capacity to understand the impact of this double assistance. For example, it is important to find out whether receiving two transfers makes a positive difference to the supported households, and how households that only receive one single support – or no support at all – cope. With this more nuanced understanding of the impact at the beneficiary level, avoiding overlaps would no longer be a reason to keep programs geographically separate, which is a barrier to convergence. Instead, they could be harmonized in a systematic, complementary, and evidence-based way.

82 O’Brien et al (2018a) p. 28.

Uncharted territory: Monitoring and evaluation

Harmonizing approaches to M&E is largely uncharted territory in the Sahel region, but it certainly offers some potential for convergence, as demonstrated in Senegal and Mauritania. The case studies found only a single example, the 2017 shock-responsive pilot in Senegal, where a program piggy-backed on the government's existing M&E system for a social safety net. In Mauritania, *Tekavoul* and *Elmaouna* both rely on a third-party provider for collecting monitoring data, and there was one attempt in 2019 by a group of ECHO-funded NGOs to compile their data. A renewal of this initiative is planned by all partners for 2021/2022. Overall, Mauritania is the country where there have been the most attempts to use monitoring to inform the subsequent initiatives, which has led to positive outcomes in terms of the convergence of objectives, processes, and tools.

Across the region the case studies found that the M&E systems of the national social safety nets are still being developed. The World Bank provides support to government institutions implementing social safety nets, but their capacity still needs to be strengthened. A stock-taking exercise in Burkina Faso in 2019, funded by the World Bank, found that, “few programs are designed with an M&E component, and

no harmonized M&E system exists.”⁸³ In addition, no joint logframe has been agreed among the three main donors that are implementing their safety net projects through the same project implementation unit. There are some positive examples where consortia of NGOs are working on harmonizing the M&E tools of their member organizations, such as the PDU-funded consortia in Mali, the DIZA consortia in Chad, and the ARC Replica consortium in Senegal. This is a first step in the direction of harmonization. On the other hand, it should be noted, that convergence on M&E can be challenging due to donors' requirement for individual attributable results for fiduciary purposes. This can impact the ability to undertake joint M&E or can end up making joint M&E cumbersome.

However, as has been described in the section on targeting above, the case studies also found missed opportunities in terms of monitoring arrangements. For example, while WFP conducts comprehensive outcome monitoring in all of the case study countries, it does not consider whether a beneficiary receives only one type of support or several. This kind of cross-analysis would provide useful insights into the strategic complementarity of programs across sectors and domains. The case studies did find some positive examples of evaluation practice, but only within individual programs or consortia and not yet across domains.

83 Vandeninden et al (2019), p. 79.





6. Conclusion

The global debate on harmonizing aspects of humanitarian and social safety net cash assistance is very lively and has gained significant momentum over the last few years. This debate is part of a broader and longer-term debate about linking humanitarian assistance and development work in general. The response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which leveraged social protection systems in many countries, has been another milestone. The Syria crisis in the Middle East has also yielded many practical examples of links, although these have had a particular focus on integrating refugees into national social protection schemes and have taken place in countries with relatively mature social protection systems.

The specific added value of this research in the Sahel region lies in its detailed analysis of the state of convergence in each country, which has filled in some of the practical and operational information gaps identified by other research pieces. It also adds insights from the Sahel region where not much research is undertaken, with the probable exception of Niger. This research also adds insights from Sahel countries with much less developed national social protection systems than in many other research contexts, particularly Chad and Burkina Faso but also even Mali and Niger.

The case studies have shown that there are compelling strategic reasons in all of the Sahel countries to aim for stronger convergence. However, the key question is how to translate the agreement in principle that working together will bring better results for affected people into practice. The strategic added value of convergence is not yet being sufficiently and inclusively debated at the country level. Some operational discussions focus on tools as an end, rather than on their contribution to an agreed and shared overall goal.

Thus, the first requirement for all of the Sahel countries is to establish a shared and clear vision of what convergence means for that country and what it should look like.

The scarcity of resources in the region should oblige partners to work more efficiently together, and this should be encouraged more explicitly by donors. Delivering assistance to largely the same population along parallel delivery channels is a costly way of operating. Spending money on such ineffective parallel systems is a luxury that the region simply cannot afford as this money is being spent on program administration instead of on supporting people in need. A stronger sense of urgency about finding better solutions is needed and could be encouraged by both humanitarian and development donors.

Reducing overhead costs is an important added value of stronger convergence.⁸⁴ This can be done either by leveraging government social protection delivery systems or, where this is not possible, by negotiating better terms and conditions, for example, with financial service providers. This can also be achieved by carrying out joint assessments such as market assessments and studies of the feasibility of cash, consulting communities on how they prefer their payments to be delivered, joining together to carry out post-distribution monitoring surveys, or by jointly setting up a toll-free phone line to allow beneficiaries to raise grievances.

Using common delivery tools can be a way of increasing efficiency, but it is often a long-term endeavor to set them up and humanitarian and development actors tend to have different ideas about how to go about it. As discussed above, humanitarians need tools that can work quickly, while

⁸⁴ Although the assumption is widely shared, research so far has found limited evidence of this occurring (CaLP, 2020c; Gray Meral and Both, 2021; and Wyde (2022, forthcoming).

development actors have a longer-term goal of building government systems, even if the return on that investment will take a long time. This diversity of opinions has been apparent, for example in Chad and in Mali, where humanitarian partners agree on the usefulness of a social registry in principle but have voiced concerns over the cost implications. In Mali and Mauritania, humanitarian partners who were interviewed highlighted the registry’s potential to increase the timeliness of a crisis response if the data in the registry are up to date, are readily available to users, and fulfil users’ needs in terms of the dataset’s coverage and completeness.

Having preparedness activities in place in advance of crises would also allow for timelier responses, not only in the case of a sudden onset disasters but even with regard to recurrent food insecurity. Two examples stood out in the case studies. Mauritania recently created a National Mechanism for Preparedness and Response to Food and Nutrition Crises (called the *Dispositif*), the aim of which is to provide an inclusive and permanent coordination framework for shock response under the leadership of the government. This goal is supported in the annual National Response Plan, which advocates for the harmonization of cash transfer programs operated by the government and its partners. The collaborative approach to working together toward the *Dispositif* (as well as other aspects of the SP system) was identified by stakeholders from all sides as a key success factor in increasing convergence. Next, the governance and coordination architecture set up for the *Dispositif* needs to become fully operationalized, with the aim of increasing efficiency, strengthening coordination, minimizing the risk of duplication, and maximizing the coverage and sustainability of future shock responses. In Senegal, the evaluation of the ARC Replica program recommended that a mapping should be done of presence, products, and prices of financial service providers. The case studies did not analyze any other preparedness activities, and this is an area that would merit further study.

Joining forces can make more resources available. The World Bank’s contribution of funding to refugee support in Chad is an example of donors sharing funding responsibilities. The limited amount of humanitarian funding that is available in Chad is having to be reserved for the new waves of (internal) displacement in the west of the region, which is made possible by the World Bank providing funding to mitigate

the protracted refugee situation in the east and the south. If humanitarian resources can be freed up, either by handing over recurrent crisis response activities to the national social safety net or by increasing efficiency in the delivery chain, then this can enable humanitarian agencies to increase the coverage and/or adequacy of their relief efforts. Achieving this however will require sustained coordination and a collaborative approach between all partners on the ground, through inclusive working groups or other mechanisms.

However, there will continue to be a trade-off between the extent of coverage that a sustainable social transfer system can provide and the need to remain affordable for the government in the long term. This also raises the important question of the amount of sustainable long-term support that will be needed to finance a shock-responsive social safety net. These types of considerations influence policymakers’ decisions on how comprehensive national programs should become and are very real concerns for governments. Humanitarian actors, on the other hand, are concerned about upholding minimum standards of emergency response, which can be costly, especially in situations of conflict where the greatest needs are often in the most remote areas to which access is the most difficult. While this is a complicated topic, it is important to address it. As a 2021 study put it: “Squaring the trade-off is not easy of course, and incentives may be different for social protection and humanitarian practitioners. What matters here is addressing the issue jointly, and with transparency, justifying choices of prioritizing one over the other and setting measures in place to address emerging risks.”⁸⁵

While trying to find better solutions for working together, actors need to remain mindful of the risks. In particular, the most appropriate convergence model will vary depending on a country’s changing context. Internal factors, such as changing political intent and will and guidance from national governments, can also hinder the permanent achievement of stronger convergence. A common risk mentioned in all the case studies was the exclusion of the most marginalized groups and the need to ensure that convergence makes assistance more inclusive.

Research has found that documenting the reasons behind decisions taken to harmonize approaches “is important to better understand the opportunities and barriers facing

85 McLean et al (2021), p. 15.

international humanitarian actors” (Gray Meral and Both, 2021).⁸⁶ The opportunities have been highlighted as well as the constraints. There is no easy way to overcome the barriers to convergence. Compromises are easier where the barriers consist of one side having insufficient knowledge of the ways in which the other side works⁸⁷ or having limited experience of alternative ways of working, leading to some path dependency which can be overcome. It is recommended that knowledge management and learning efforts should include staff with both humanitarian and social protection competencies and upskilling existing staff. Participatory and learning-by-doing approaches should be used to tackle various topics for which safety net and humanitarian actors are interested in creating greater alignment. This requires intentional commitment from all parties and can be achieved sometimes through MoUs but also can be informal.

There are some opportunities that are currently being missed that should be seized promptly. For example, it would be an easy task to map how different programs partner with the same local NGO for their outreach efforts. Using shared payment mechanisms is an equally valuable next step that is fully under the control of operational actors. Global commitments to convergence, including to the very new model of cash coordination, are not being implemented at the country level, and agencies need to invest more time and energy in ensuring that their commitments are reflected in their country operations. This could also take the form of donors reducing – and eventually ending – their funding for costly parallel delivery where this is not justified by the context.

Barriers related to a country’s context are very situation-specific and cannot be overcome by operational actors alone. In particular, agencies having a low appetite for risk and donors not being ready to share the risk between funders and implementers are barriers that need to be jointly addressed by government, development and humanitarian actors. Unclear and/or fragmented division of responsibilities between government institutions is equally beyond the direct control of operational actors and should be the focus of longer-term joint advocacy work, such as has been undertaken by actors in Senegal. In the short term, operational actors from both

sides should seek to speak with one voice and find common ways to navigate the challenges posed by the institutional structure to avoid a divide and rule scenario.

Two kinds of barriers are particularly difficult to overcome: those related to the principles of operating and a program’s identity and those resulting from underlying institutional interests. In particular, the latter “are not amenable to technical fixes. They also require an understanding of [the] political factors that drive structural divisions” (Sabates-Wheeler and Longhurst, 2020).⁸⁸

Most of the hard-wired barriers described in Section 5.3 are manifestations of trade-offs and relate to fundamental principles of the humanitarian sector, which while not immovable, is challenging to shift. The trade-offs between being able to respond with speed and the need to make long-term investments in building systems or between the adequacy of benefits and their coverage are relevant in every country in and beyond the Sahel region. As described by Smith (2021a), “Humanitarian actors are guided by humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality, while development actors by principles of national ownership. These are not necessarily contradictory, but they do create tensions, especially when it comes to views and approaches to engaging with governments. Overcoming this problem means finding ways to bridge these silos, to bring actors together physically, technically, and ideologically – which is simply not easy to do. It requires practices and mechanisms, and leadership, to develop common ground, collective end goals and shared ways of working that leverage comparative advantages of each.”⁸⁹

The literature recommends focusing on developing shared objectives as a way to make progress on difficult topics. Approaching the question of how to share caseloads among different actors in the most strategic way is relevant both within the region and beyond and is an area where the Sahel region could benefit from looking at examples that have been tried and tested elsewhere. A 2021 study that summarizing lessons learned from the COVID-19 response in other countries concluded as follows: “A common ‘success

86 Gray Meral and Both (2021), p. 3

87 Forty-four percent of the practitioners surveyed for the Cash Learning Partnership’s “State of the World’s Cash” report in 2020 selected “Humanitarian practitioners lack expertise in SP” as being among the top three main challenges to linking humanitarian cash assistance and social protection (CaLP, 2020c, p. 11).

88 Sabates-Wheeler and Longhurst (2020), p. 5.

89 Smith (2021a), p.10.



factor’ was a joint focus on ultimate outcomes (supporting those in need), leveraging the strength of each humanitarian assistance and social protection systems, and creating a coalition of allies working toward a common goal.”⁹⁰ These coalitions need to include more actors than just the World Bank and the big United Nations agencies. As the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) was told during interviews for its State of the World’s Cash report in 2020, there are “concerns that certain international actors (bilateral and multilateral donors and UN agencies) are dominating discussions and actions in this space at global and country levels and others risk being excluded.”⁹¹ These concerns were also voiced during the key informant interviews conducted for the case studies in the Sahel, particularly in Senegal and Chad.

Barriers related to institutional interests are difficult-though not impossible- to resolve. While the costs of all actors can be reduced by moving towards stronger convergence along the delivery chain, vested interests are

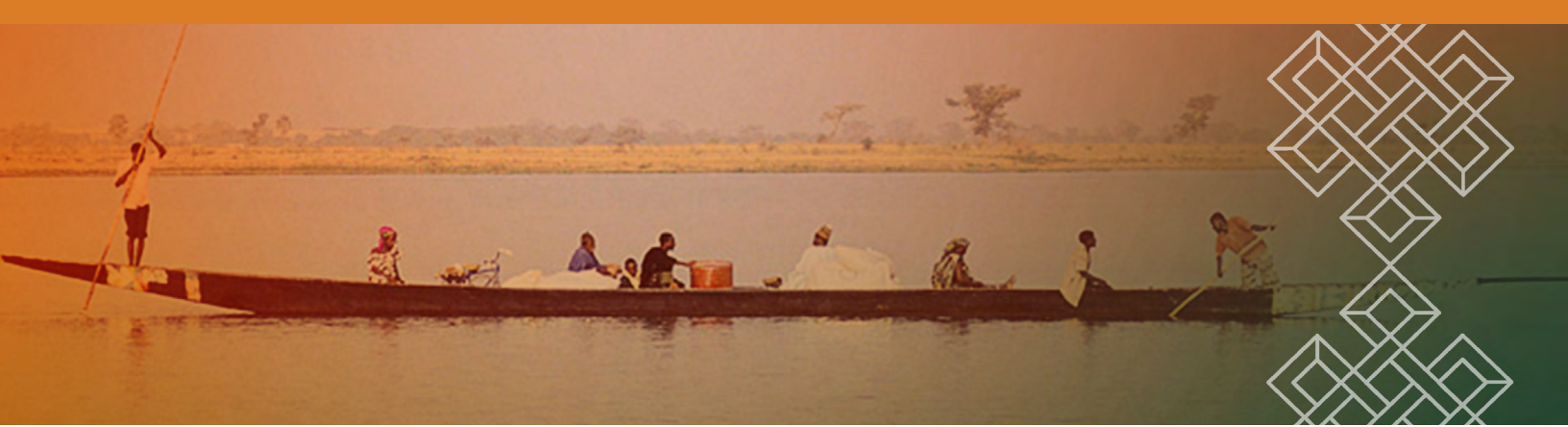
at stake, as parallel program delivery is associated with donor or government budgets, including overhead costs. They can have a disincentive to align if they perceive that it would lead them to lose influence and funding. Hence there is a political economy question linked to the convergence debate that has not yet been fully explored,⁹² even in these case studies. At the very least, humanitarian cash assistance should not undermine social protection systems or jeopardize long-term social assistance. In other words, it should do no harm.

Some countries may have good reasons for not pursuing greater convergence at all costs, at least not at this current stage. In these places, the immediate focus could be put on maximizing operational synergies instead. Where barriers to stronger convergence are solid, progress can still be made at both the strategic and operational levels, while actors working in the Sahel countries continue to keep in mind the long-term vision and objective of greater national ownership.

90 The Grand Bargain Sub-Group on Linking Humanitarian Cash and Social Protection (2021), p.17.

91 CaLP (2020c), p. 4.

92 Longhurst et al (2020), p. 19.



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