



**WATCHLIST**  
**WATCHLIST**  
**INSIGHT:**

**CLIMATE AND HUMANITARIAN  
CRISIS IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL**

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This paper was published on June 5, 2023. It is the first in a new series of analyses produced by the IRC's Global Crisis Analysis team to examine trends in humanitarian crisis globally. The report would have been impossible without the input of colleagues across the IRC who were generous with their time and expertise.

The report was authored by Marwan Safar Jalani with support from Amanda Catanzano, Tara Clerkin, Katharina Davis, Sam Duerden, Samantha Felman, Hannah Gibbin, Naomi Omwebu, Felipe Ramos, George Readings, Amsel Saleem, Aditi Shetty, Ken Sofer and Vanessa Willems.

**Cover:** An aerial view shows a part of the Bozo village on the outskirts of the Malian capital Bamako, flooded by the Niger river waters following heavy rain. Photo: Michelle Cattani/AFP via Getty Images

**Right:** Adiara Doumbia and her 20-month-old daughter Rokia Doumbia in front of their home in Mali.





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Women carry supplies on their heads in a refugee camp in Awaridi village in Niger.

A compound crisis of armed conflict and climate change is driving unprecedented levels of humanitarian need, displacement and food insecurity in the Central Sahel: Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. But these impacts are distributed neither equally nor randomly across the region.

This report examines how political decisions dating from the French colonial rule through the early 2000s have marginalized peripheral areas of the Central Sahel states both economically and politically. As a result, the populations of these regions face widespread poverty, are particularly dependent on sectors vulnerable to climate change and are more likely to be exposed to armed conflict. They therefore suffer a disproportionate burden of the compound crisis.

Addressing this compound crisis requires:

- 01** Tackling immediate humanitarian needs by investing in humanitarian access and supporting households to anticipate and recover from shocks, with particular attention to the distinct impact on women and girls.
- 02** Dismantling the vicious cycle of climate change and armed conflict.
- 03** Funding climate adaptation initiatives that suit the needs and challenges of Central Sahel and similar contexts where governance is fragmented and both international and local parties politicize aid.



**THE CENTRAL SAHEL  
REGION OF AFRICA  
INCLUDES BURKINA  
FASO, MALI AND NIGER.**



## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL?

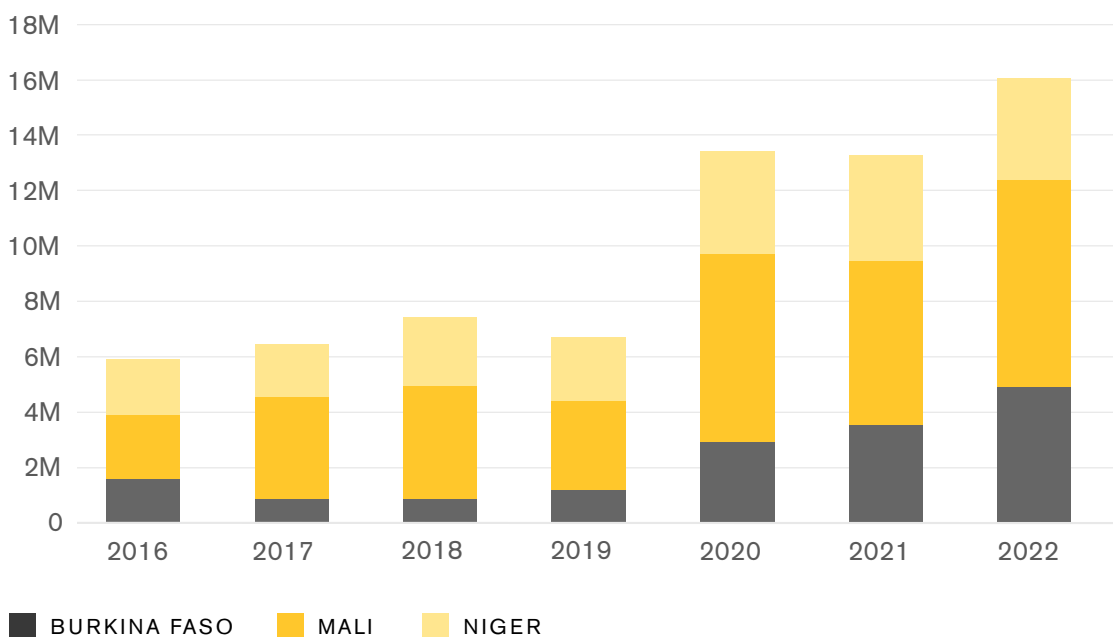
Bilikisu Saley, 18, stands in front of the place in Nigeria where her family house was destroyed by floods. ©UNHCR/Sylvain Cherkaoui

Levels of humanitarian need have grown rapidly in the Central Sahel (Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso), reaching record levels in 2023.

» **HUMANITARIAN NEED:** More than 16 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in the Central Sahel, a **172%** increase from 2016. The three countries account for just 0.9% of the global population but 5% of global humanitarian needs.

### GRAPH 1: UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF HUMANITARIAN NEED IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN NEED OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE OVER TIME



Source: OCHA data analyzed by IRC Global Crisis Analysis team



Women and children prepare food outdoors at an IDP camp near Kaya in northern Burkina Faso. Photo: Giles Clarke/UNOCHA via Getty Images

» **FOOD INSECURITY:** Around 5.4 million people in the Central Sahel are experiencing Crisis (IPC 3) levels of food insecurity or worse, up by **532%** since 2014. At these levels, families lack enough food to meet their needs, a growing number of children are malnourished and diseases spread. The 5.4 million include more than 418,500 people experiencing Emergency (IPC 4) levels of food insecurity in the three countries and at least 22,480 people in northeast Burkina Faso at Catastrophe (IPC 5) levels of food insecurity, facing daily risk of death due to starvation and disease.

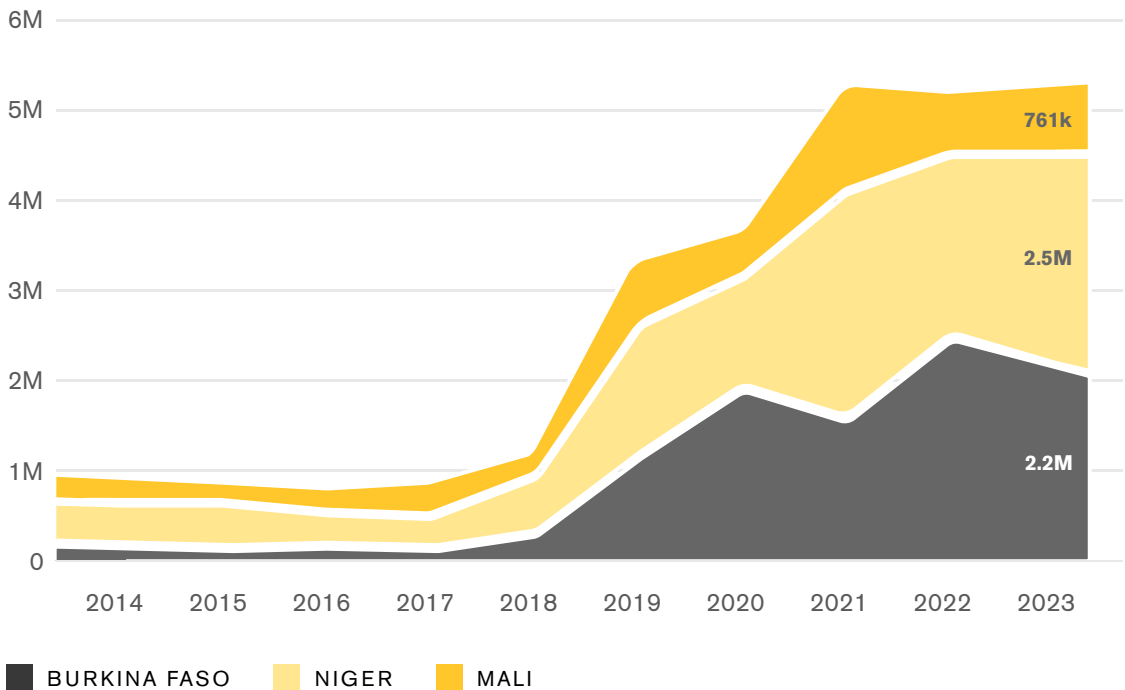
**SINCE 2014, LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY HAVE RISEN BY**

**532%**



**GRAPH 2: UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL**

**NUMBER OF PEOPLE FACING CRISIS (IPC 3) OR WORSE LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY OVER TIME**

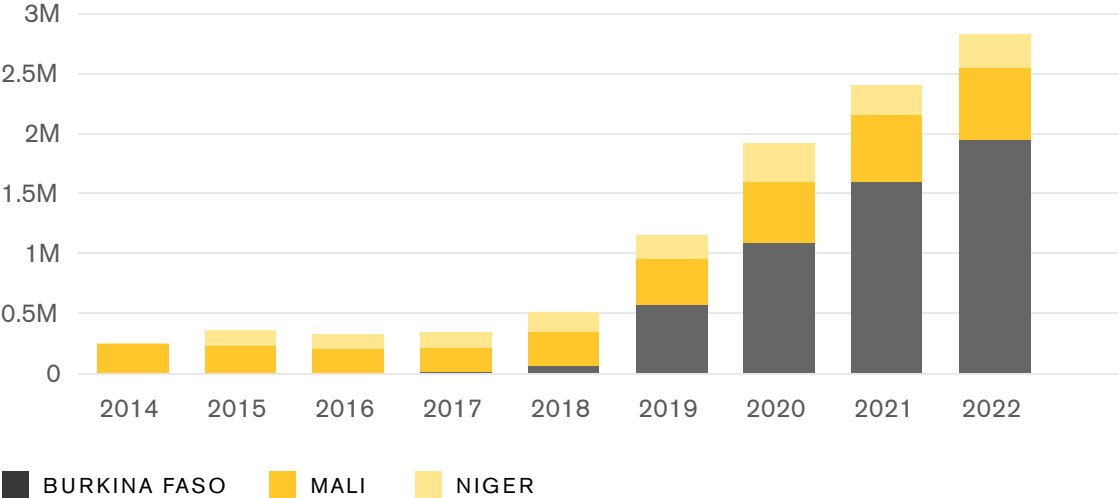


Source: **Cadre Harmonisé** data analyzed by IRC Global Crisis Analysis team

» **DISPLACEMENT:** Almost 3 million people are forcibly displaced either internally or externally, accounting for 4% of the population in the Central Sahel. The number of people who are internally displaced increased **2,446%** since 2014, and the majority of this increase occurred since 2018.

### GRAPH 3: UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF DISPLACEMENT IN CENTRAL SAHEL

NUMBER OF PEOPLE DISPLACED OVER TIME



Source: UNHCR data analyzed by IRC Global Crisis Analysis team



Fifteen-year-old Maryama Alhaji Kiari (right) attends school in Dubai, Niger.

### DISPROPORTIONATE AND DISTINCT IMPACT ON WOMEN AND GIRLS

The compound crisis has a distinct and disproportionate impact on groups that already face discrimination, violence and unequal opportunities, particularly women and girls. For example, **78%** of refugees and asylum seekers in 2021 in Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Niger are women and children. The damage caused by the climate crisis on land, water and resources has a particular impact on women because they make up **over half of the labor force** in the agriculture sector in Central Sahel, reaching nearly 70% in Niger.

With lack of access to water during drought seasons, women and girls in the Sahel are **forced to travel** to more distant and unfamiliar places to collect water and firewood, exposing them to greater risks of exploitation and gender-based violence. In northern Mali, IRC staff report more frequent sexual violence against women and girls by armed men during drought seasons as distances grow between communities and water points. IRC staff also report that girls drop out of school in order to help their families by collecting water and wood during economic hardships. Girls are also subjected to **early marriage** in exchange for money as families struggle to meet their needs during climate crises.



## WHERE ARE NEEDS MOST SEVERE IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL AND WHY?

Women queue at the water pump in Goudebou, a camp that welcomes more than 11,000 Malian refugees in northern Burkina Faso. Photo: Olympia De Maismont/AFP via Getty Images

Across the region, the impacts of both armed conflict and climate change are compounding one another, driving an ever-deeper crisis. This is not a coincidence. The political conditions that left parts of these countries less prepared to cope with climate change are the same ones that have left them at risk of conflict—a connection discussed more in the following section. Moreover, the risk of conflict grows further in some cases because of indirect, often economic, impacts of climate change. The worst impacts of this compound crisis are in peripheral areas of the three Central Sahel states, away from major cities and towards the borders with neighboring states, as the maps below illustrate.

Two key features of these peripheral areas—both of which are a consequence of being economically and politically marginalized over a period of decades—help explain the severity of the compound crisis they are experiencing:

### **Lack of economic development has left residents dependent on climate-vulnerable industries like agriculture and livestock.**

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger are three of the most under-developed countries globally. All three rank in the bottom ten of UNDP's **Human Development Index** for 2021 (Niger at third, Mali at sixth and Burkina Faso at eighth lowest of 191 countries). On average, **78%** of the labor force in the Central Sahel relies on agriculture, including the livestock sector. This number is **significantly higher** than the average in the world (27%), sub-Saharan Africa (53%) and fragile and conflict affected states (47%). These are the principal activities outside major cities, although goldmining also takes place in parts of Burkina Faso and Mali and uranium extraction in parts of Niger.

Most of the Central Sahel is highly exposed to changes in climate. Temperatures are rising **1.5 times faster** than the rest of the world and a rise of between 2.0 and 4.3 °C is **projected** by 2080. But dependence on agriculture means that residents of peripheral areas are particularly affected by the following impacts of climate change:

- » Shocks like droughts and floods that disrupt agriculture are **expected to intensify** due to **more intense and erratic precipitation**. For example, Niger is among the **top 10 countries** in the world in terms of the number of people who have been affected by disasters, including floods and droughts.

- » **Dry seasons are becoming longer** in some parts of the Sahel, reducing agricultural output, increasing pressure on pastureland and causing livestock deaths.
- » Changes in precipitation also **degrade soil quality**, reducing agricultural output and contributing to both long-term water scarcity and desertification, which force herders to relocate to find water and pastureland for their cattle.

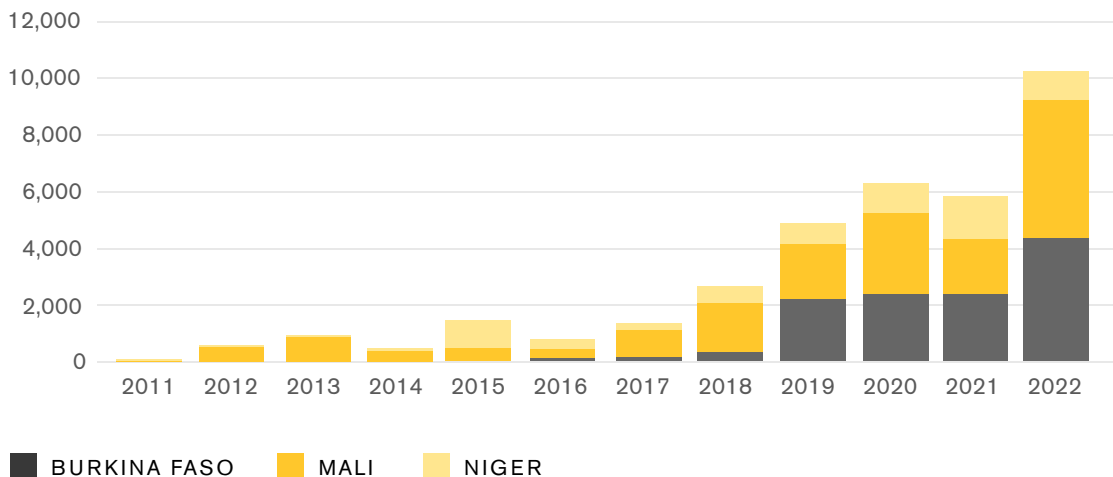
These changes drive up humanitarian needs in two key ways. Firstly, more frequent shocks force people to leave their homes and destroy their sources of income, forcing them to compromise on their food consumption. And secondly, the slower-acting changes to the seasons and soil quality leave communities with less resilience to new shocks, increasing the human cost when new droughts, flooding or conflict occur.

**Weak state capacity has allowed insecurity to take hold in the peripheral areas already affected by the climate crisis.**

Central governments’ influence in peripheral areas of the Central Sahel states varies significantly between—and within—the three countries. Nonetheless, there is a pattern of fragmenting state control and influence that has left these regions lacking in social services and governance and left government security forces unable to maintain security. Nonstate armed groups (NSAGs) have proliferated, with some effectively administering territory and others exploiting the weak capacities of the state and grievances about lack of social services and justice to build influence and carry out attacks on state forces, other nonstate groups and civilians. As of 2022, Malian state authorities are present in as little as **15%** of the country while the government of Burkina Faso controls no more than **60%** of the country. NSAGs also have considerable influence in large swaths of the Tillabéri and Diffa regions of Niger.

**GRAPH 4: UNPRECEDENTED LEVELS OF CONFLICT FATALITIES**

**NUMBER OF CONFLICT-RELATED FATALITIES OVER TIME**

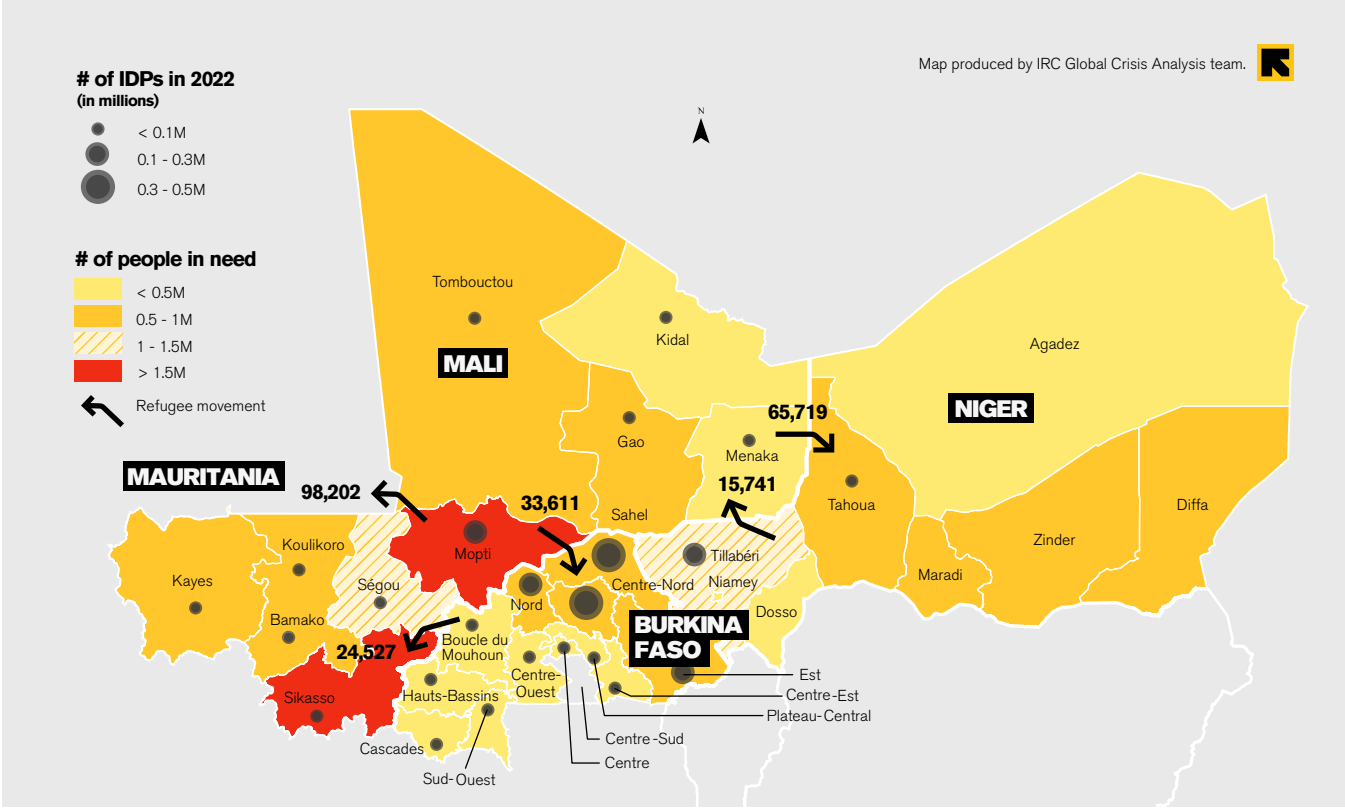


Source: **ACLED** at [acledata.com](https://acledata.com) on 4 April 2023.



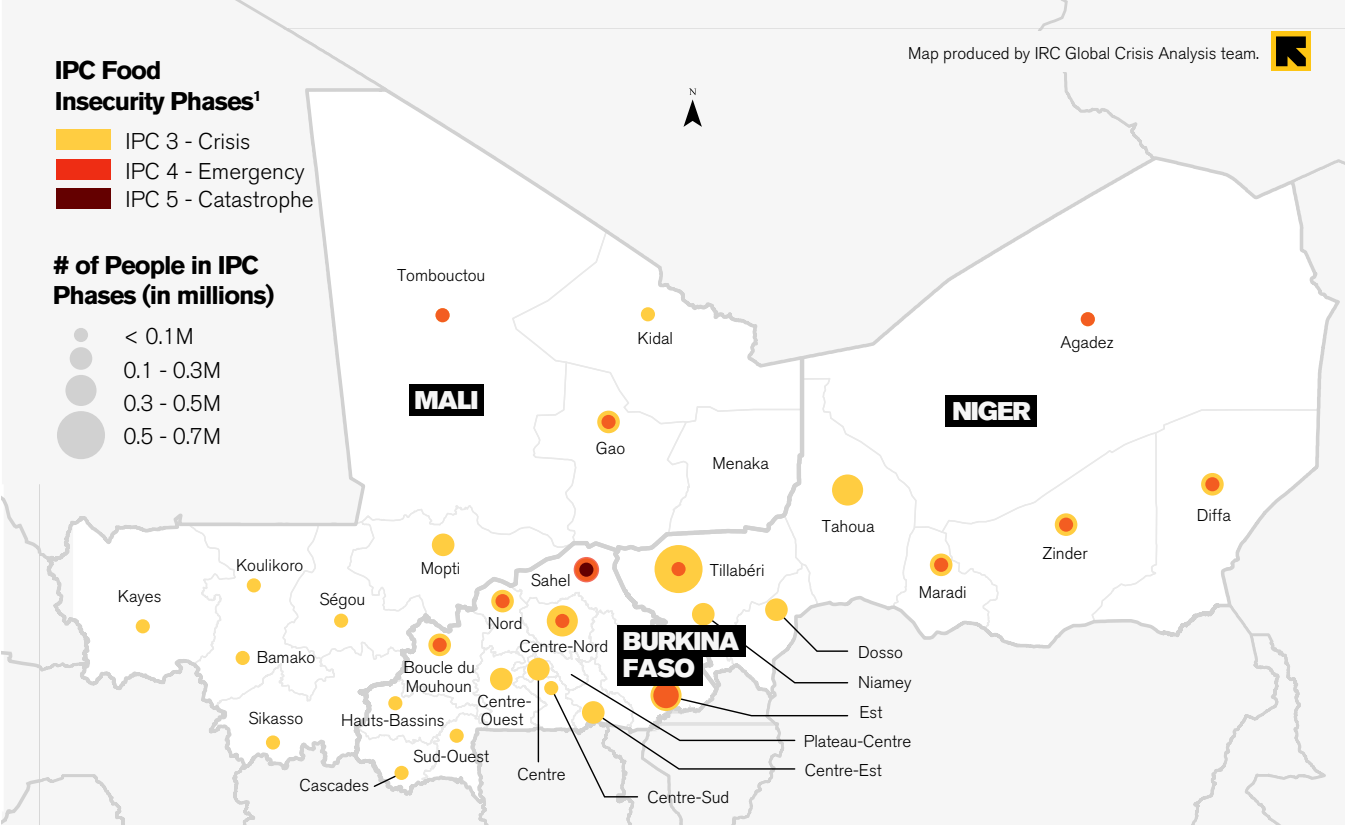
- » At least **41 nonstate armed groups** have sprung up in Mali over the past decade, competing and forming rapidly-changing alliances to control populations, territories and resources. These groups range from state-like entities that build and maintain their legitimacy in the local community by providing some basic **public services**, such as land and water management and justice systems, while other groups maintain their presence through **looting resources**. Both the state and NSAGs are embedded in structures of illicit income-generation. A recent **Brookings** report found that drug traffickers have co-opted networks of NSAGs, police and local officials, as well as traditional leaders, to facilitate their operations.
- » Burkina Faso has seen a dramatic increase in conflict since 2018, with conflict-related fatalities increasing **13** fold. The state has now lost control of around **40%** of the territory of the country, particularly in the periphery. Even in Niger, where state control is less threatened by NSAGs, the lack of state authority and control over its own officials in remote provinces has allowed human smuggling to become **entrenched**.
- » Across all three countries, communities and local governments have turned to vigilante groups as the state security forces have been stretched and overwhelmed, but then the activities of these groups often contribute to a spiral of rising violence. Members of the Djerma group in northern parts of Niger's Tillabéri have formed vigilante groups to defend themselves after ethnic Fulani members of the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) targeted them in **two massacres**.

**MAP 1: CONCENTRATION OF HUMANITARIAN NEEDS AND DISPLACEMENT IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL**



Sources: IOM and OCHA

**MAP 2: CONCENTRATION OF IPC 3 OR WORSE LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN THE CENTRAL SAHEL**



Source: Cadre Harmonisé

**NIGER LOSES**

**100,000 to 120,000**

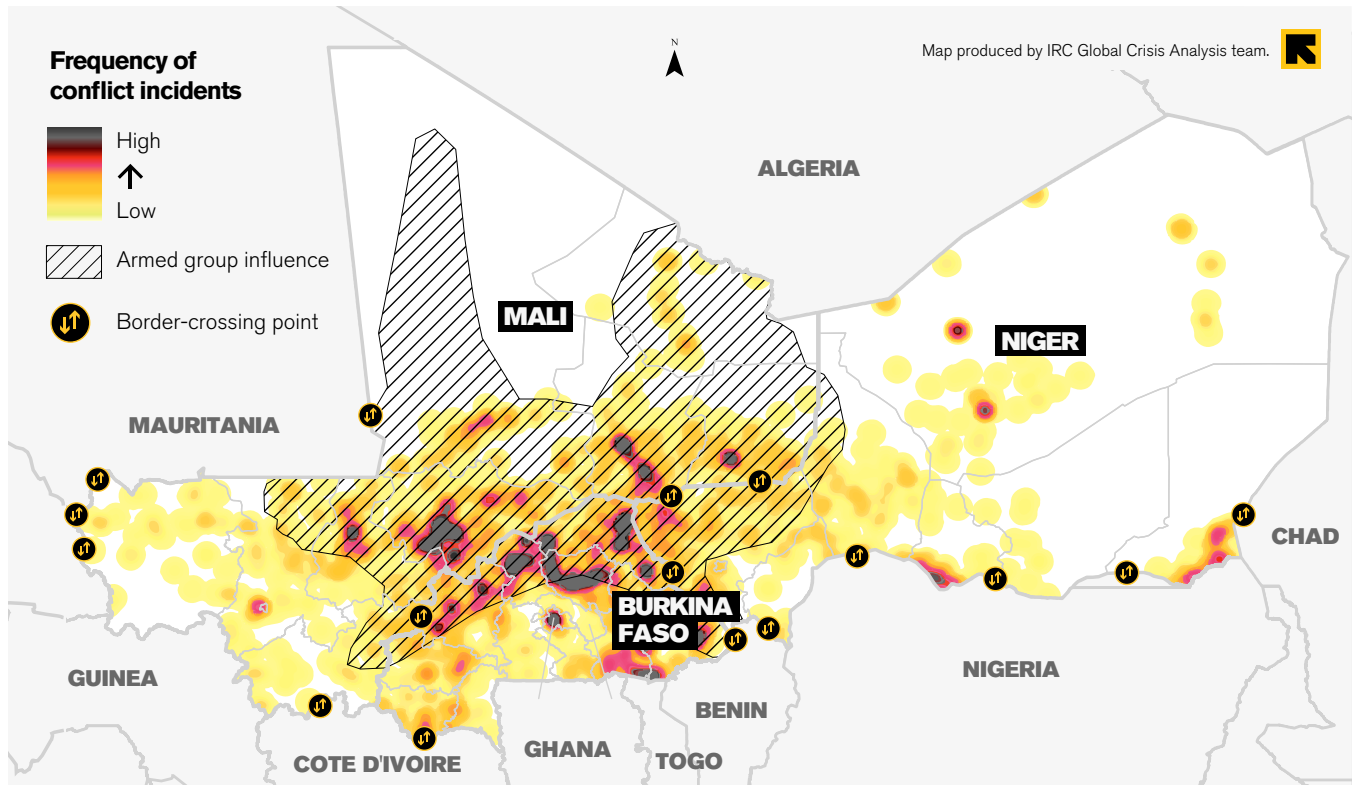
**HECTARES OF ARABLE LAND TO SOIL EROSION AND DESERTIFICATION EACH YEAR, REDUCING THE AREAS AVAILABLE TO BOTH FARMERS AND HERDERS.**



Right: Tumbleweed and temporary shelters in a refugee camp in Awaridi village in Niger.

<sup>1</sup> **The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification** describes the severity of food insecurity crises from 1 (none/minimal) to 5 (catastrophe). At IPC 3 (Crisis), up to 1 in 5 families cannot buy enough food to meet their needs. They are forced to make impossible decisions about how to cope, for example by skipping meals or swapping out the nutritious food that children need to grow healthily for cheaper alternatives. Once food insecurity reaches IPC 4 (Emergency), urgent action is required to save lives because some people are going days without food. IPC 5 (Catastrophe) represents the worst extremes of food insecurity. People are starving to death every day. Death rates also rise because people, especially children, are so weakened that their bodies are less able to fight off common diseases like measles, malaria or diarrhea.

## MAP 3: AREAS OF NONSTATE ARMED GROUP INFLUENCE AND CONFLICT INCIDENTS, APRIL 2022–MARCH 2023



Sources: [ACLED](#) at acleddata.com on 17 March 2023 and [Agence France-Presse](#)

### How did we get here?

The compound crisis of armed conflict and climate change affecting peripheral areas of the Central Sahel is neither a coincidence nor inevitable. Political decisions and developments over time have left the periphery economically underdeveloped and politically marginalized. As a result, these areas are unable to cope with the impacts of climate change and are at greater risk of insecurity than other parts of the Central Sahel. These trends developed in different parts of the Sahel at different times, so no single individual or government holds responsibility for the situation emerging. Rather, it is a result of decisions taken by various political leaders over decades:



**French colonial authorities** (in power until 1960 for all three countries) neglected developing peripheral areas and sometimes divided territories into **“utile” or useful areas** and **“inutile” or useless** ones on the periphery, particularly in Mali. Resources and investments were concentrated in the “utile” capitals. Moreover, the French authorities introduced border controls that disrupted cross-border migration and trade.



**Post-independence governments** focused on controlling peripheral areas through security measures and extracting tax payments from them rather than promoting economic development. The post-independence government of Diori in Niger **extracted 65%** of earnings on groundnuts, for example. At the same time, the government invested in uranium production—a strategy which, along with the long-term impoverishment of the

peasantry, backfired when drought in the 1970s and 80s coincided with a drop in global uranium prices. This left the government unable to address the food insecurity crisis and growing poverty.



More recently, weak **governments prioritized investment opportunities that consolidated resources and power in capitals**, rather than diversifying the economy and reducing dependence on climate-vulnerable sectors. Even when they attempted to do so, they failed at directing returns of resource extraction to peripheral areas. In Burkina Faso, IRC research shows that governments in the early 2000s failed to match the investment in gold mining with economic development of the peripheral areas where these resources were being extracted, leading to conflicts between local populations, mining companies, landowners and the state.



**Frequent military coups** have disrupted economic policies, preventing long-term investment in development. There have been 17 successful coups in the Central Sahel since independence in 1960 (eight in Burkina Faso, five in Mali, four in Niger) for an average of one every 3.7 years. Not only do coups disrupt economic policies, but they also sometimes encourage incoming governments to focus on “coup-proofing” by spending more on defense and security forces. In Mali, between 1968 and 1991, the military government spent **22%** of its revenue on defense, **double** the world's average percentage spent on militaries in 1991.

## The creation of a vicious cycle

Over time, these decisions left the populations of peripheral areas impoverished and dependent on sectors that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. But this alone cannot account for the scale and severity of needs currently seen in the Central Sahel. Ultimately, **economic and political marginalization has allowed a vicious cycle to take hold**. Poverty, grievances against the state and economic consequences of climate change all combine to increase the risk of conflict. Then, armed conflict increases both poverty and vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.

There are three key ways in which this vicious cycle has taken hold:

» **Political decisions and climate change have destabilized relations both between and within farming and herding communities:**

Disputes between farmers and herders are near-inevitable, given their competing uses of land. In the Sahel, a tradition of **collective land ownership** and conflict resolution through traditional and religious leaders at the local level meant that tensions between farming and herding communities were largely managed. These systems have broken down as state-building efforts starting from the era of French colonialism have changed perceptions of land ownership and reduced the influence of traditional local leaders. On top of that, climate change has increased the risk of conflict because herders are adapting to constrained resources through new strategies, including by traveling farther to find pastureland and water for their animals. Niger loses **100,000 to 120,000 hectares** of arable land to soil erosion and desertification each year, reducing the areas available to both farmers and herders.

» **Political decisions and climate change have fed marginalized groups' sense of grievances and victimhood:**

When large swaths of the populations are deprived of their methods of subsistence and lack access to social services, they develop grievances towards the state and look for other sources of subsistence and protection, such as participating in criminal activities or by supporting and joining NSAGs. Degradation of land due to climate change, combined with state policies that forced some traditionally mobile populations to settle in one place, have heavily affected the Tuareg and

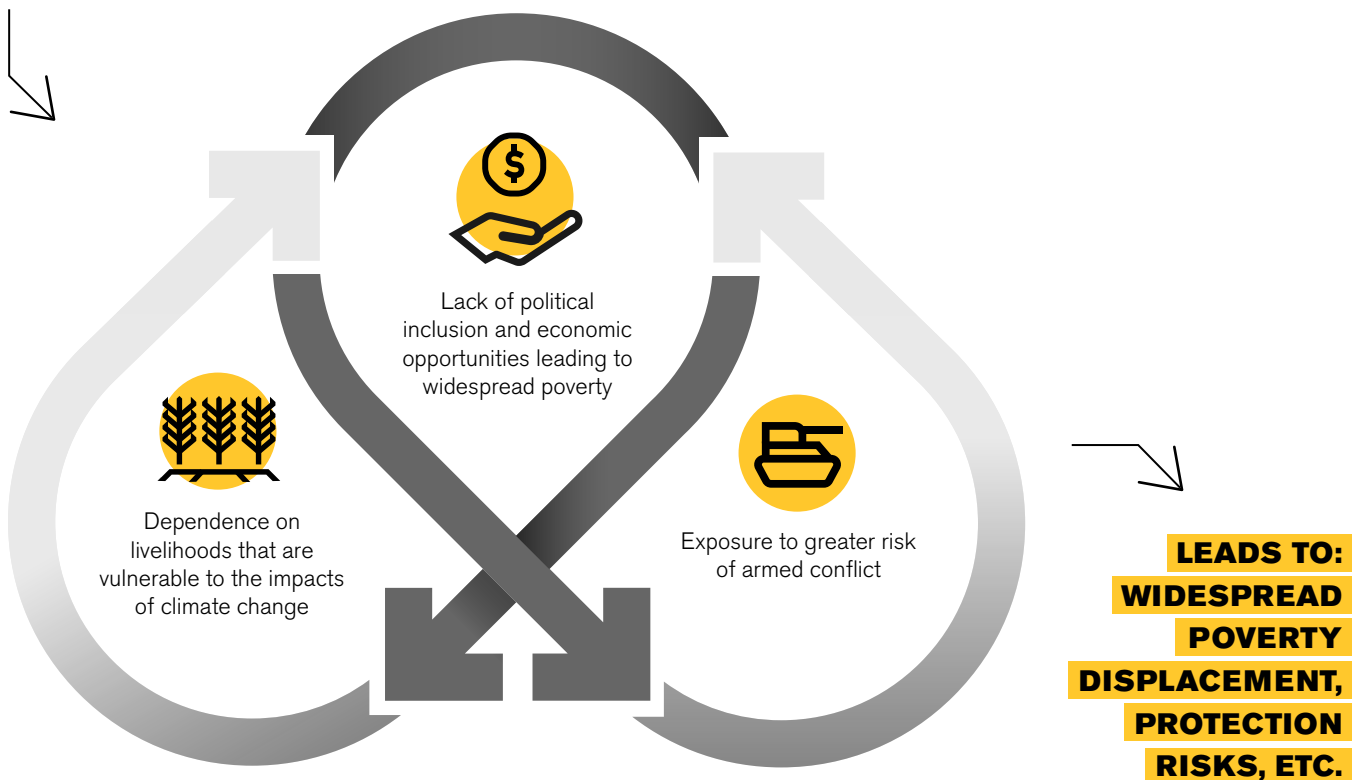
Fulani ethnic groups in Mali, who historically relied on trade, migration and livestock farming. A Tuareg rebellion in 2012 helped spark the crisis that currently engulfs the Central Sahel. Soldiers dissatisfied with President Touré's response to the Tuareg rebellion ousted him in March 2012. This created a level of instability across the country that allowed a largely Tuareg group with links to al-Qaeda, Ansar Eddine, and other NSAGs to gain support and influence. **One of the ways** in which these groups later expanded was by exploiting ethnic Fulani and other herders' sense of marginalization and grievances about degradation and land management.

» **Armed conflict has discouraged investment, damaged infrastructure and left communities more dependent on climate-vulnerable industries:**

Food insecurity and poverty inevitably grow as conflict forces people to flee their homes or prevents them from tending crops. Conflict discourages both states and private individuals from making investments that could reduce communities' dependence on climate-vulnerable sectors like farming and herding. It also leads to the destruction of water, power and other infrastructure that are critical for managing the impacts of climate change. Moreover, international donors have **proven unwilling** to fund activities aimed at responding to the climate crisis in fragile and conflict-affected states.

**GRAPHIC: THE VICIOUS CYCLE**

**POLITICAL DECISIONS OVER TIME  
LEAD TO POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC  
MARGINALIZATION OF  
PERIPHERAL AREAS**





## WHAT CAN BE DONE?

In Niger, Kelou Kiari, 25, feeds her 16-month-old who was diagnosed with acute malnutrition and treated at a nearby hospital with support from the IRC.

**Solutions to the compound crisis of climate change and armed conflict must address its origins and nature.** Combating the impacts of the humanitarian crisis in the Central Sahel requires three levels of mutually supporting efforts.

### 01 ADDRESS IMMEDIATE HUMANITARIAN NEEDS.

The analysis above suggests three priorities for ensuring immediate assistance in the Central Sahel to offer populations the basic services that allow them to build long-term livelihoods:

- » **Invest in humanitarian access.** The IRC and other humanitarian actors are already operating in the Central Sahel but constraints on access (due to movement restrictions imposed by authorities and NSAGs, safety and security threats, and logistical issues like limited infrastructure) are limiting the reach and capacity of humanitarian organizations. IRC teams in all three countries highlighted that both governments and NSAGs are restricting where humanitarians can travel and the ability of civilian populations to reach humanitarian assistance. Humanitarian access also has a wider significance for responding to the compound crisis. Without access, it is impossible to understand needs as well as power and crisis dynamics in the area and thus to identify what solutions would look like and who to work with. The IRC's Project Frontline on humanitarian access is therefore supporting teams in all three countries.

### EXAMPLE OF AN ANTICIPATORY ACTION PROJECT IN NIGERIA:

Over the last two years, the **IRC has partnered** with think tanks and the private sector to implement an anticipatory climate resilience project to help farming communities in northeastern Nigeria prepare and recover from floods. The project consists of an early warning system to forecast floods, as well as pre- and post-cash transfers that communities can use to temporarily relocate and fortify their houses from flooding. The philosophy of the project is that when households access information and resources to prepare for extreme weather events, they avoid negative coping strategies and build diversified climate resilient livelihoods.

- » **Identify and address the specific risks facing women and girls.** In Northern Mali, the IRC has built water and wood provision points to minimize the distance that women and girls have to travel to source these materials, reducing the chances of their exposure to gender-based violence and exploitation.
- » **Support anticipatory action.** There may also be opportunities to use forecasting to deliver cash-based assistance before a natural shock occurs. However, it should be noted that such approaches are not yet effective for addressing conflict-related needs, and that armed conflict is the key factor that pushed humanitarian needs to such extreme levels in the Central Sahel.

## 02 DISMANTLE THE CYCLE OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ARMED CONFLICT.

The compound crisis in the Central Sahel is so intractable because of how conflict dynamics and the climate crisis have become intertwined. Deliberate effort is required to break down these connections.

- » **Reduce the economic effects of climate change that fuel conflict over resources.** For example, the IRC has participated in building and maintaining water infrastructure in the Central Sahel in ways that reduce the risk of conflict over water and pastureland during movement of herders and their cattle. Designing and delivering such projects effectively requires stable access as well as careful conflict sensitivity analysis to maximize their impact and avoid doing harm.
- » **Combat negative coping strategies by supporting livelihoods programming.** Supporting and finding livelihoods options for populations can mitigate some of the factors that contribute to recruitment into armed groups and that allow climate change to fuel armed conflict. Across Africa, “hope for employment” was the primary reason cited for recruitment into armed groups in a recent **UNDP** study. The IRC in Niger has provided farmers with bags in which to store their grains throughout the year and avoid selling their products in the period after harvest when supply is high and prices are low. Supporting livelihoods certainly helps to secure people’s safety and income, and it may also help to mitigate their risk of recruitment to NSAGs to secure protection and income.
- » **Center social cohesion in peacebuilding efforts.** This can help create conditions in which efforts to build resilience to climate change will be possible. In Burkina Faso, IRC research and programs highlight existing systems of local conflict resolution in the forms of friendship pacts between different clans, religious communities, ethnicities and castes that operate outside of the state’s auspices. In Niger, the government established the **High Authority for the Consolidation of Peace** to prevent conflict and manage crises when they erupt, particularly through supporting reconciliation and dialogues that strengthen social cohesion in the country.

## 03 ADVOCATE FOR FUNDING THAT SUPPORTS ADAPTATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE TAILORED TO THE SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FACING CONTEXTS LIKE THE CENTRAL SAHEL.

There is a growing gap between conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected states in the allocation of global climate finance (from all sources: bilateral, multilateral and private). The Central Sahel states now receive less than **50%** (per capita) of what non-conflict-affected states receive in climate finance, despite scoring well below average on their readiness to adapt to climate change according to the **ND-GAIN Index**.

Moreover, most global climate finance is directed towards mitigation (efforts to limit emissions of greenhouse gases) rather than to adaptation (efforts to reduce the risks of climate change). The Central Sahel states have contributed very little to climate change—**0.3% of GHG emissions**—but are particularly affected by it. Investment in adaptation is therefore what is most needed for the Central Sahel and other fragile and conflict-affected states.

However, even if greater climate finance can be directed to the Central Sahel and countries experiencing comparable crises, deploying it effectively faces multiple obstacles:

- » **Lack of stable governance** limits the intent and capacity of some governments to deliver the kinds of long-term projects required to adapt to climate change, particularly in the peripheral areas where traditional delivery partners that rely on a “government-first” model do not exist. Most adaptation funds are channeled through **public finance**, from donor governments towards UN agencies and national governments. Of just over USD 1 billion in funding committed to Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger for climate adaptation (from all sources) in 2020, 38% was debt and 62% was made up of grants.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, a majority of the World Bank’s development projects for Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, including for climate resilience, are funneled through national governments. For example, **all of the 26** active projects of the World Bank in Mali today are directed to ministries of the government or affiliated agencies. Only five of these projects are funded entirely through grants.
- » **Parties to conflicts may neglect climate adaptation at best and view it as a threat** to their existing sources of income and/or their opportunities to recruit new fighters at worst, particularly if the assistance is clearly directed towards the government. IRC staff report that NSAGs usually have limited incentives to cooperate with and facilitate climate adaptation projects. To the extent that governments are embedded in illicit economies, they may also hinder the development of climate adaptation initiatives.
- » **Aid is increasingly becoming subject to politicization as the relationship between Central Sahel and Western actors becomes increasingly fraught.** The post-coup governments in Mali (2021) and Burkina Faso (2022) have distanced themselves from the EU and France, moving towards security cooperation with Russia. Although humanitarian funding and action should be insulated from politicization, France cut **92% of official development assistance (ODA) funding**, including climate resilience funding, to Mali over the course of two years, with the remaining 8% reserved solely for humanitarian aid.

The IRC’s experience of delivering effective humanitarian programming across the Central Sahel suggests that it will be most effective to **provide climate funding at-scale to frontline actors**, particularly local NGOs and community-based organizations, who are best able to sustain access in a complex environment and manage relations with various stakeholders. Doing so would make programs more effective, particularly in areas where the central government lacks the intent or capacity to meet humanitarian needs. It may also help to reduce the risk of NSAGs seeing climate adaptation projects as supporting the government and of projects being held hostage to diplomatic tensions.

Lastly, the compound crisis in the Central Sahel is tied to a political economy that has emerged over the course of decades and has caused the economic and political marginalization of peripheral areas of Central Sahel states. If this political economy remains in place, then climate adaptation is unlikely to be effective. **Projects aimed at shifting the political economy**, for example by promoting greater inclusion of local communities in decision-making, will increase the chances of an effective response to the compound crisis in the Central Sahel.

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<sup>2</sup> Calculated from OECD figures for climate-related development finance committed between 2000 and 2020 where targeting the environment was identified as a “component,” a “principal” objective or a “significant” objective of the project funded. <https://oe.cd/development-climate>





## CONCLUSION

A Malian mother belonging to the West African ethnic group Bozo holds her baby in her village flooded by heavy rains in Niger. Photo: Michelle Cattani/AFP via Getty Images

The dynamic of central governments neglecting peripheral areas both economically and politically, and this leading to a concentration of humanitarian crisis in the periphery, is not particular to the Central Sahel. Similar dynamics have left the peripheries of other fragile and conflict-affected situations lacking economic development and political inclusion, heightening the risk of exposure to conflict and climate change. So while this report is focused on the Central Sahel, its insights are likely relevant to other countries experiencing a compound crisis of conflict and climate change.

In **northern Nigeria**, particularly the northeast, long-term economic and political marginalization fueled resentment against the state and gave Boko Haram grounds for recruitment and support in peripheral areas already struggling through a rise in temperatures and drop in precipitation. In Ethiopia, the resentment of the Oromo population towards their historical political and economic marginalization by the state has spread conflict across **rural areas** of Oromia since the 1970s, the same areas that have been experiencing recurring cycles of drought for **40** years.

**1.5 billion** people currently live in fragile and conflict-affected states. As of July 2022, **175 million** people live under the control or significant influence and reach of nonstate armed groups, many of them in fragile and conflict-affected states. Without addressing the economic and political marginalization of these areas, armed conflict and climate change will continue to drive spiraling compound crises to which humanitarian action alone will always be an insufficient response.