



1. Introduction

Following a discussion with the IASC Emergency Directors Group (EDG) and the Humanitarian Coordinator for Mali, the Senior Transformative Agenda Implementation Team (STAIT) carried out a mission¹ to Mali from 13 to 20 February 2017.

In Mali, the 7-member team focused on:

- Assessing working relationships between the HCT, the inter-cluster coordination (ICC), the clusters as well as sub-regional coordination;
- Identifying challenges and support the development of an HCT Action Plan with a focus on leadership, coordination, gender mainstreaming, protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and accountability to affected populations (AAP);
- At the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator and considering the integrated nature of the United Nations mission in Mali, address issues related to access, the centrality of protection, and the humanitarian/development nexus.

2. Highlights of outcomes

Despite progress and collective achievements by humanitarian teams, notably in defending and advancing humanitarian principles, resource mobilization and the presence of working aid coordination structures, the following challenges were highlighted by responders:

- The ‘triple hatting’ of the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in such a complex context calls for more support to the HC role. This may potentially be addressed through the creation of a Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator (DHC) post.
- The lack of conceptual clarity on strategic issues such as the centrality of protection, humanitarian access or the humanitarian/development nexus hinders a common understanding of these concepts, a common vision and clear division of roles and responsibilities.
- The collectively response remains low in terms of speed and quality. Further obstacles include the lack of common needs analysis, strategic monitoring, as well as the absence of an HCT resource mobilization strategy.
- The interaction between different levels of the response, including HCT / ICC / sectors must be strengthened, building on each’s comparative advantage. At the sub-regional level, the lack of seniority of representatives hampers their ability to weigh in decision-making. In addition, only a few clusters have dedicated coordinators, meaning that those are often stretched across various agencies’ responsibilities to the detriment of collective coordination.

Humanitarian access: Access, especially for UN actors, was the single most important challenge identified by the STAIT team. Despite progress such as the roll out of an access reporting and monitoring framework (ARMF) in 2015, engagement of local actors, improved communities’ acceptance and constructive and open dialogue with local authorities, the access of UN agencies to population in need is severely constrained by safety rules. The security framework being applied in Mali is not adapted to the humanitarian situation and is currently limiting response operations. The increased transfer of risk to local actors represents a divisive point between UN and NGOs. The lack of deep-field operational presence of UN agencies bears high reputational risks.

¹ STAIT missions are conducted based on countries’ request and consist of peer support review and are not a formal evaluation. Only when system-wide L3s are declared, formal STAIT reviews are compulsory following the 90-days mark. STAIT mission teams report to the IASC EDG and comprise of UN and NGO members

Further challenges include the lack of reliance on field assessments and lack of analysis. Partners agreed that the system must be pushed and that better investment in local actors is needed.

ECHO's regional representative noted that despite INGOs being represented in the HCT, the coordination was perceived as UN-centric. ECHO further noted that coordination between donors and the HCT remained ad hoc, due to the low engagement of other humanitarian donors.

Protection: The protection cluster is currently revising its strategy and is about to release a guidance on the centrality of protection. A PSEA initiative is underway and a harmonized referral system for gender-based violence (GBV) is in place. Challenges reported include the lack of joint cluster analysis on protection, common understanding of key concepts, absence of a collective strategy and priorities, as well as of operational mechanisms to take consider feedback from affected population.

Humanitarian / development nexus: Despite a functioning early recovery working group, the weak engagement and capacities of local authorities and a lack of common understanding of the concept within the UNCT and across actors remain key obstacles. As in many other contexts, the roll out of a genuine multi-annual response plan is challenged by the low opportunities for multi-year financing. In the discussions, partners noted that the multiplicity of platforms to 'bridge the humanitarian/development gap' has led to more confusion and low accountability. A strong steer from humanitarian and development agencies' is essential.

3. Next steps

The above analysis was presented, discussed and validated by the Mali HCT. The HCT is currently working on an Action Plan addressing outstanding gaps, to be finalized by second week of March following an HCT retreat. The STAIT mission report, including the Action Plan will be shared with the HCT for comments. It is expected that the HCT delivers on the action plan and/or mobilize support from global platforms within the coming 6 months following the visit. However, the HCT in Mali will need support in order to be able to address the challenges that have been highlighted.