

Humanitarian- Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence

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MALI



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ABOUT IDEAL

IDEAL is an activity funded by the USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) that works to support the United States Government's goal of improving food and nutrition security among the world's most vulnerable households and communities. IDEAL addresses knowledge and capacity gaps expressed by the food and nutrition security implementing community to support them in the design and implementation of effective emergency and non-emergency food security activities.

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Aly Traoré, CDC/Comms Focal Point - ADICOM Tombouctou (2023). Training of GSAN/VSLA members in the Timbuktu urban district on the craft of mat-making.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BHA	Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance	KII	Key Informant Interview
CMC	Conflict Management Consulting	RFSA	Resilience Food Security Activity
HDP	Humanitarian-Development-Peace	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
IDEAL	Implementer-Led Design, Evidence, Analysis and Learning Activity		

Executive Summary

North and Central Mali sit at the crossroads of chronic vulnerability, food insecurity, and armed conflict. Rising poverty rates, escalating levels of food and nutrition insecurity, diminished trust within and between communities and authorities, and displacement jeopardize the well-being of the most at-risk households and undermine the resilience of local systems.

In this context, the Albarka resilience food security activity (RFSA) works to advance humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) coherence by layering the delivery of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions. By responding to sudden-onset and recurrent crises amid protracted conflict, Albarka offers practical examples for operationalizing several principles identified in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) *Programming Considerations for Humanitarian-Development-Peace Coherence*. This practice note focuses on three principles: sequencing, layering, and integrating (Principle 4), conflict integration (Principle 6), and strengthening local systems and actors (Principle 7).

Albarka layers the delivery of humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions by providing humanitarian cash assistance to households also participating in livelihoods and nutrition development interventions, some of which also play an essential role in social cohesion.

The activity's institutionalization of conflict sensitivity is essential given the complexity of the conflict-affected areas where it operates. Interventions focused on peacebuilding to complement humanitarian and development interventions illustrate the potential of an integrated HDP nexus approach when sufficient time, contextual understanding, and community-level relationships are present.

Albarka demonstrates that decentralizing implementation to local partners and community platforms can promote the continuity of humanitarian and development programming in conflict-affected settings with restricted access. Further, engaging local partners and communities in analyzing and adapting social behavior change interventions promotes cultural and contextual relevance and facilitates acceptance by both communities and conflict actors.

Overall, Albarka's experiences in Mali highlight how actors can operationalize the HDP principles into practical strategies in contexts affected by recurrent crises and protracted conflict.

Introduction

USAID's Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence Principles

In January 2022, following extensive internal and partner consultations, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published its working document *Programming Considerations for Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Coherence: A Note for USAID's Implementing Partners*. The document identifies seven core principles, one cross-cutting commitment, and programming examples to improve HDP coherence and achieve common objectives. The principles are:

- 1 Uphold and respect humanitarian principles to ensure humanitarian assistance remains unhindered and effective.
- 2 Plan jointly and seek a common agenda.
- 3 Create and strengthen communication, coordination, and learning platforms across different kinds of assistance.
- 4 Strategically sequence, layer, and integrate humanitarian, development, and peace assistance where appropriate.
- 5 Promote shock-responsive programming and data-driven adaptive management.
- 6 Champion conflict integration and opportunities for enabling or building peace where possible.
- 7 Ensure programming is with, by, and through local partners and systems.

Underpinning each of these key principles is USAID's cross-cutting commitment to gender equality and inclusive development. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and access are at the heart of USAID's mission.

About this Series

IDEAL's HDP Coherence Practice Note Series responds to a demand among food and nutrition security practitioners for clear examples of HDP coherence in practice. The series aims to increase knowledge and capacity and create inspiration among USAID implementing partners and other organizations by providing practical examples of how USAID's HDP coherence principles are being operationalized to maximize food and nutrition security outcomes. Rather than comprehensive case studies, each practice note presents a concise and operationally focused example of one or more of the HDP coherence principles "in action" and draws out lessons learned that may be applicable in other contexts. Examples include HDP coherence approaches within a single activity (intra-activity), between separate humanitarian and development activities (inter-activity), or within a single organization (intra-organization).

About this Practice Note

This practice note outlines key HDP coherence practices and lessons within a single activity (intra-activity), focusing on the Albarka activity in Mali. It highlights lessons related to three HDP coherence principles: strategically sequence, layer, and integrate humanitarian, development, and peace assistance where appropriate (Principle 4); champion conflict integration and opportunities for enabling or building peace where possible (Principle 6); and ensure programming is with, by, and through local partners and systems (Principle 7). This qualitative learning review draws on team members' experience supporting the Albarka activity, which is implemented in some of Mali's most volatile, food insecure, and at-risk regions. The review examines: (a) how the activity was designed and implemented to improve the resilience of individuals, households, and communities; and (b) practical lessons for operationalizing these approaches.

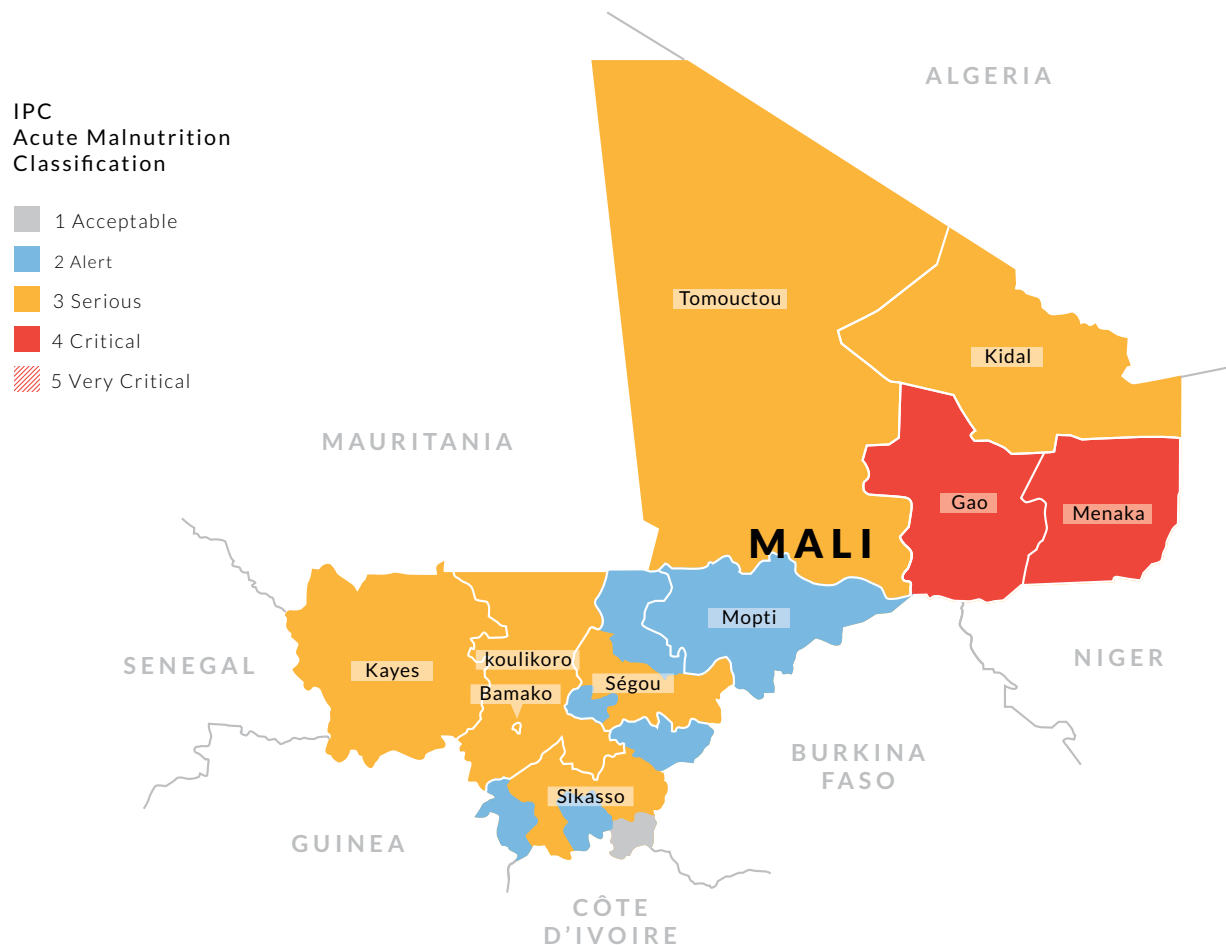
Methodology

IDEAL collected the content for this practice note in August 2023 through thirteen 60-minute key informant interviews (KIIs) with members of the Albarka consortium. This included Mali- and headquarters-based staff from consortium lead Save the Children, as well as Mali-based staff from partners ADICOM, Conflict Management Consulting (CMC), G-Force, and Tassaght. KIIs were held using Microsoft Teams and were recorded and transcribed with the consent of participants. In addition, a range of secondary literature was reviewed, including the Albarka proposal; the *Fiscal Year 2024 Pipeline and Resource Estimate Proposal*; the *Fiscal Year 2022 Annual Report*; quarterly reports from fiscal year 2023; the conflict sensitivity strategy; conflict sensitivity staff training guides; and the water, sanitation, and hygiene conflict sensitivity integration guide. IDEAL analyzed the data to identify practical examples that illustrate the HDP coherence principles in practice. These were validated with interviewees during a workshop in September 2023.

Context & Background

Background, Recent Context, & Aid Architecture

The Gao, Timbuktu, Bandiagara, and Duentza regions in North and Central Mali grapple with severe poverty, conflict, and food insecurity. Since 2012, ongoing conflict involving armed groups has disrupted livelihoods and basic services and displaced over 375,539 people, mainly women and children.¹ Climate change and agro-ecological challenges continue to erode food and nutrition security, with areas of all three regions experiencing crisis or worse levels over the past 3 years (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 3–5). Service availability is limited; many financial service providers have left the area and healthcare (including nutrition) and education have been disrupted due to attacks by armed groups, curbing access to these essential services. Furthermore, government technical services such as agricultural and health outreach face difficulty in regularly accessing conflict-affected areas. Mali's decentralization plans have encountered challenges, hindering effective governance at the local level.



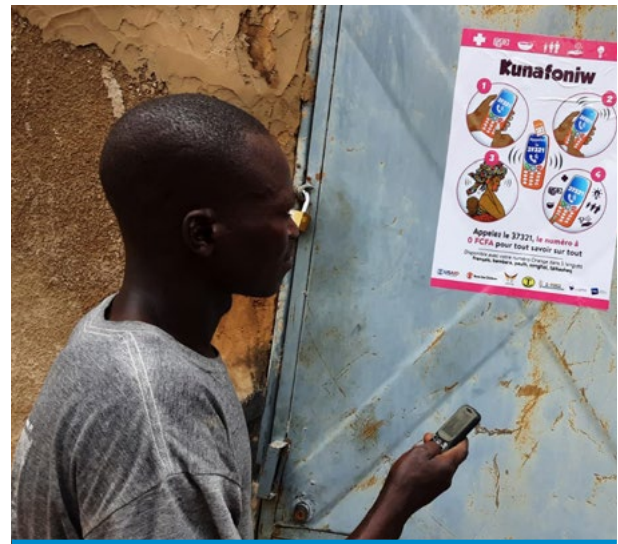
Mali: Acute Malnutrition Situation for June–October 2023 adapted from Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. [IPCinfo.org](https://www.ipcinfo.org). In 2021, Mopti was divided into two new regions, Bandiagara and Duentza. This map depicts the former boundaries.

1 FEWS NET. (2023). *L'insécurité maintient l'urgence (Phase 4 de l'IPC) dans la zone de Ménaka jusqu'en Octobre*.

Albarka

Albarka is a 5-year (2020–2025) USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA)-funded resilience food security activity (RFSA) that seeks to sustainably improve food and nutrition security and resilience among poor and chronically vulnerable households and communities in the Gao, Timbuktu, Bandiagara, and Duentza regions of Mali. The activity is designed to improve the resilience of communities in conflict-affected areas through local systems strengthening and community participation. It layers interventions implemented with community platforms and service providers, households, and individuals using social behavior change and conflict-sensitive approaches, leveraging local solutions for long-term impact. The activity has three objectives: (a) to stabilize vulnerable households by reducing the impact of shocks and connecting households to basic services; (b) to empower young women and men to lead the economic and social development of their communities; and (c) to facilitate an environment where communities drive approaches to manage natural resources and community assets peacefully, sustainably, and productively. At the proposal stage, the activity was co-created with BHA; this was followed by an initial refinement year to launch operations, conduct community consultations and mapping exercises, carry out formative research, and pilot key interventions. Based on these learnings, Albarka further contextualized its approaches and put forward design adjustments, which BHA agreed to. This practice note was developed as implementation was ramping up, approximately 18 months after the end of the refinement year and prior to the midterm evaluation.

Albarka is implemented by a consortium of five organizations led by Save the Children, which provides strategic, technical, compliance, and program management leadership. Three Malian organizations with strong community ties form the core of Albarka's implementing team: ADICOM in Timbuktu, Tassaght in Gao, and G-Force in Bandiagara and Duentza. The activity is also supported by two technical partners: CMC leads the institutionalization of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding, while VIAMO leads mobile monitoring, information dissemination, and feedback and accountability mechanisms. Albarka's implementation approach is built on an innovative community-based model, delivered in collaboration with seven pre-existing platforms: community food security and early warning committees; community nutrition support groups; cooperatives/producer groups; women-led village savings and loan associations; commune youth councils; village councils;² and water management committees. Albarka also supported the creation of an eighth platform, husbands' schools, which engage allied men to act in support of gender equality, helping to change behaviors and improve the enabling environment for Albarka's nutrition and food security outcomes.



A young beneficiary from the village of Barapireli in Koro cercle, Bandiagara region uses the VIAMO poster for Kunafoniw 37321 services.

Noé dit-Amadigué Sagara, CDC and Comms Focal Point, G-FORCE/Albarka (2022)

² Any citizen recognized as a head of household by the municipality may be a member of the village council. Village council representatives are appointed during a meeting of all the heads of households in the area that they will represent (village/fraction/neighborhood) in the presence of the mayor and a representative of the state.

Strategically sequence, layer, & integrate humanitarian, development, & peace assistance where appropriate

This section explores a key practice and corresponding lessons that demonstrate how Albarka layers humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding within its interventions to achieve maximum impact. These include setting common expectations for reach at the design stage and developing advanced management information systems to track layered participation and outcomes.

Key Practice:

Deliver layered humanitarian, development, & peace interventions to the same individuals & households

To achieve HDP coherence, Albarka layers humanitarian cash transfers with development and peace activities for participating individuals and households. This lays the foundation for complementary and compounding benefits that meaningfully contribute to participants' resilience.

DISCUSSION

Albarka's shock-responsive cash transfers enable households to meet basic food needs while also supporting nutrition and livelihoods recovery. Notably, these cash transfers can be applied to different types of shocks—both chronic and punctual. For instance, the activity supported displaced individuals in Gao fleeing violence between armed groups. The activity provides these same households with the opportunity to participate in development interventions that build resilience, such as training on improved agricultural production, transformation, and processing. In some cases, Albarka further layers peacebuilding interventions that support conflict resolution and social cohesion. All interventions are implemented with a strong conflict-sensitive approach.

“We hope that the more people who we reach through more than one activity, the better the chance will be that we achieve our desired goals—that people will adopt the desired behaviors that make it possible for them to improve their agricultural production or their household nutrition status.”

— KII respondent

Layering shock-responsive, unconditional humanitarian cash transfers and livelihoods development interventions

Shock-responsive cash transfers are unconditional cash transfers that provide households with the flexibility to meet their basic food needs while also facilitating livelihoods recovery following a shock. This is key in a context where households regularly experience various natural hazards (e.g., flooding, drought, etc.) and conflict. The value of the shock-responsive cash transfers is calculated as approximately 60% of the Mali Minimum Expenditure Basket,³ which includes all staple foods, some foods of high nutritional value, and some essential non-food items. This is meant to sufficiently cover basic food needs and facilitate consumption, while simultaneously allowing households to protect their productive assets and reduce the use of negative coping strategies. Recipients also participate in development interventions that facilitate livelihoods strengthening, such as training and support for cooperatives and producer groups on agricultural production, transformation, and processing. For example, participants have received training on improved agricultural practices through the adoption of climate-resilient inputs, as well as technical training to improve soil productivity, including composting, seed conservation, and the use of mineral fertilizers.

Layering nutrition cash transfers, malnutrition prevention, and social cohesion interventions

In accordance with the learnings of the refinement year, Albarka adapted the activity's design to include additional unconditional cash transfers to address the significant gap for households to achieve a nutritious diet. In addition to the shock-responsive cash transfers, households with pregnant and breastfeeding women as well as mothers of children under 2 years of age also receive nutrition transfers. These participants also take part in mother-to-mother groups, which are subgroups of the community nutrition support groups. Meanwhile, social behavior change interventions, such as the community meals approach, teach mothers how to prepare nutritionally diverse meals using local ingredients. This combined approach promotes social cohesion by enabling women from different communities to connect on shared experiences and dispel any perceived differences. By combining nutrition and shock-responsive cash transfers, these households can better withstand shocks, grow a variety of nutritious foods, and increase their income through engagement in agricultural value chains.



Nutritional demonstration session on the preparation of enriched porridge using local products for mother-to-mother support groups in Pétaka.

Djènèba BORE, CDC Pétaka (2023).

³ World Food Program. *The Development of a Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) in Mali.*

Monitoring reach and impact

In its proposal, Albarka presented the number of unique participants (i.e., the total number of individuals who would participate in the activity as a whole) rather than the total number of non-unique participants (i.e., total number of individuals participating in each intervention, where one individual may participate in multiple interventions). This set realistic expectations for the activity's reach and clearly communicated its aim to provide in-depth support to the most at-risk participants, as compared to reaching the greatest number of participants through wider, more shallow interventions. In addition, Albarka created a mechanism to monitor participation across various interventions to avoid overburdening participants—especially those already facing time constraints, such as women. Tracking this layered participation at both individual and household levels requires investing significant time and resources into an effective management information system. The activity is currently establishing a system to track individual and household participation by issuing Albarka identification numbers. The system will rely on community platforms for routine attendance data collection, while Albarka will enter, clean, and analyze the data. Beyond this system to track participation across interventions, additional resources and technical capacity are needed to evaluate the impact of layering interventions on participants' food security and resilience outcomes, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Impact of community-led participant selection on layering

The activity design assumed that supporting the same households over the course of multiple years would result in increased benefits for those households; community-led participant selection in the majority of locations reflects this premise. However, team members observed that some communities selected different households to receive shock-responsive cash transfers in the third year than were selected in the first and second years. The team hypothesizes that some community leaders may perceive that supporting the community as a system, rather than households as individualistic entities, increases resilience for the whole community. This could stem from the community's understanding of vulnerability and resilience, the cultural practice of inter-aid between households, as well as the importance of fairly distributing resources to reduce the risk of intra-community conflict. This phenomenon requires further exploration to better understand the intricacies of community-based participant selection and how these intersect with a layered approach.

Noé dit Amadigué Sagara,
CDC and Comms Focal Point, G-FORCE/Albarka (2023)



Awareness raising session on good handwashing practices and promotion of the tippy tap handwashing device for recipients of the nutrition transfer at the Barapireli distribution site in Koro Cercle, Bandiagara Region.

Champion conflict integration & opportunities for enabling or building peace where possible

This section explores two key practices and corresponding lessons that demonstrate how Albarka integrates conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding approaches into development and humanitarian programming to protect development gains. Investing sufficient time in building relationships and understanding the context has contributed to the success of this approach.

Key Practice:

Include peacebuilding elements to enrich & sustain humanitarian and development interventions

Peacebuilding is understood as measures implemented in the context of emerging, current, or post-conflict situations and explicitly guided by a commitment to the prevention of violent conflict and the promotion of lasting peace. This includes efforts to build social cohesion and promote peaceful coexistence; prevent, reduce, and mediate conflict; and promote good governance and citizen participation in advocacy, decision making, and action. Development gains are fragile in crisis-affected contexts, especially where governance systems are eroded and where social cohesion is weak. Both humanitarian and development investments risk exacerbating conflict dynamics if they are perceived as privileging one group over another or are antagonistic to conflict actors. However, Albarka's peacebuilding interventions focus on social cohesion and conflict resolution, promoting the sustainability, relevance, and acceptance of its humanitarian and development interventions.

DISCUSSION

Community-level natural resource management agreements

Throughout 2023, Albarka has supported communities to develop management agreements for natural resources, including forests, pastures, agricultural land, and water. These agreements set out terms for when and how natural resources can be used. For instance, some communities established specific grazing areas and movement corridors for pastoralists, mitigating conflict with crop farmers. Importantly, these agreements were developed using the Community Action Cycle approach,⁴ where communities define their current status, identify the changes that they seek to achieve, and determine how to make those changes happen. At the time of interviews, most of the management agreements had been approved by the regional governments and the Albarka team was supporting village councils to raise awareness of the agreements in their communities. In the coming years, Albarka will continue to reinforce village councils' skills to negotiate, update, and enforce the management agreements and coordinate with other villages to share experiences.

⁴ The Community Action Cycle approach is a social behavior change model that was originally developed by Save the Children for use in health programs and has been adapted for various sectors. More information about the Community Action Cycle approach is available [here](#).

Community members exploring their village's challenges using the village mapping tool during a community meeting to initiate the Community Action Cycle approach in Gorobouro, Koro Commune.



Noé dit-Amadigué Sagara, CDC and Comms Focal Point, G-FORCE/Albarka (2022)

Conflict mediation and negotiation training

Like the training provided to the village councils, Albarka has provided tailored conflict mediation and negotiation training to various community platforms. The commune youth councils, for instance, learned effective communication, conflict negotiation, and mediation as part of their life skills training, while the community food security and early warning committees received conflict negotiation and mediation training with respect to their role preparing for and mitigating crises. One of these committees put their training to use after being alerted that several households had been displaced and over a thousand cattle stolen in Koro Commune in Bandiagara. The committee leveraged their negotiation and conflict management skills to secure the return of the cattle and continue to negotiate the return of the displaced households.

Peacebuilding is also a component of Albarka's rehabilitation of community assets through cash-for-work. Village councils participate in rapid assessments to determine which asset to rehabilitate, analyzing conflict dynamics surrounding that asset and the risk of conflict emerging due to rehabilitation. If conflict does occur, village councils can draw on their training to reach a peaceful resolution. Additionally, by using cash-for-work labor to rehabilitate assets, the intervention injects humanitarian cash into the hands of the most at-risk households while also improving community well-being through collective assets. Successfully incorporating social cohesion initiatives into any type of intervention, whether humanitarian or development, requires investing considerable time to understand the context, dynamics, and relationships within the community.

Key Practice:

Institutionalize conflict sensitivity approaches throughout implementation

During the refinement year, Albarka developed a conflict sensitivity strategy that seeks to provide strong contextual understanding through conflict analysis, identify potential risks and develop mitigation strategies, build internal conflict sensitivity capacity, and monitor the evolution of the context and update the conflict analysis accordingly. The strategy formalizes the conflict sensitivity approaches that local partners incorporate routinely in their work, which is strongly informed by their profound endogenous knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Conflict analysis

Inputs from local partners and community platforms form the backbone of Albarka's conflict analysis. Team members noted that conflict analyses can often be too high level, general, and fail to provide insights into the contextual realities and power dynamics at the community level. However, by utilizing local partners, Albarka can document the root causes of conflict, power dynamics, existing tensions, and social norms that have the potential to impact implementation. Consortium members regularly apply the conflict analysis when implementing interventions. For example, it informs participant selection for the shock-responsive cash transfers, providing information regarding stakeholders to engage, community dynamics to take into consideration, and the potential impact of conflict actors. It is updated periodically (monthly, quarterly, and annually, depending on location) and when a major event occurs, and is fundamental to developing the annual detailed implementation plan.

“There are localities where the authorities and communities do not speak to each other ... or where the mayor and his deputy are not from the same political party, and so they do not speak to each other. ... We need to understand these dynamics. Our role is to work so that we don't make conflicts worse. Or better yet, so that at the end of our program, there is improved cohesion between the people with whom we work.”

— KII respondent

Developing sector-specific conflict sensitivity integration guides

Albarka developed sector-specific conflict sensitivity guides, which identify the risks of exacerbating conflicts (or creating new ones) and ways interventions can contribute to peace. These are validated with consortium partners and subsequently used to inform implementation. As of the activity's third year, sector-specific conflict sensitivity guides have been completed for the water, sanitation, and hygiene and youth components. The guides provide a brief analysis of the types of unintended negative impacts that may emerge in connection with interventions, potential conflict “connectors” and “dividers,” and specific

recommendations as to how conflict sensitivity can be incorporated into each stage of the program management cycle. For example, the water, sanitation, and hygiene guide discusses potential unintended negative impacts of rehabilitating a water point, such as armed groups opposing the water point or wishing to use it, or conflict between community users who do not follow the water point's rules of operation. The guide suggests best practices for avoiding these situations, for instance maintaining an up-to-date conflict analysis, working with community leaders to agree to rules of operations that work for everyone, and ensuring that all users are aware of the rules of operations and their importance.

Formalizing and structuring local approaches to conflict sensitivity

The Albarka team observed that formalizing and structuring conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding within the activity's approaches, including regular capacity strengthening, was key to their successful institutionalization. Many—especially those from local partner organizations—bring strong endogenous knowledge and skills in conflict sensitivity. The conflict analysis and conflict sensitivity strategy were heavily informed by local partners' knowledge of their communities' and past practice working in these complex contexts. In addition, Albarka conducts tailored training for consortium staff—including technical experts, field coordinators, field agents, and trainers—who are key liaisons with platform leaders and community members, ensuring they are well versed in the activity's approaches to conflict sensitivity. Albarka further provides training to community platforms such as the village councils, the commune youth councils, and the water management committees on conflict sensitivity, so that these principles guide their contributions to Albarka.

“We have been involved in several projects that touch on conflict, but such a structured approach to conflict sensitivity is really our experience in the Albarka consortium. The difference with Albarka is that we have a dedicated structure who supervises [conflict sensitivity], who trains our staff on it, and who supports its implementation in the field.”

— KII respondent

A rehabilitated pond in Ardjebech, Tilemsi Commune in the Gao Region.



INSIGHTS & LESSONS FOR HDP PRINCIPLE 7:

Ensure programming is with, by, & through local partners and systems

Albarka centers local partners and community platforms to ensure conflict-sensitive and context-appropriate humanitarian and development programming despite frequent security-related challenges. Best practices include engaging with local partners to maintain more consistent access, and an implementation approach where community platforms play a strong role in delivering interventions to promote continuity when crisis or conflict strikes. Local partner and community platform leadership on adaptations to the social behavior change approach ensures responsiveness to the local context, including conflict and cultural dynamics.

Key Practice:

Decentralize implementation to local partners & community platforms to ensure the continuity of humanitarian & development programming

In a shock-prone context, Albarka employs a dual-scenario operational approach to ensure implementation continues during periods of reduced access. Trust and strong relationships with community platforms enable the transmission of vital information, ensuring operational continuity with up-to-date, grassroots-level insights.

DISCUSSION

Ensuring operational continuity during periods of reduced access for international actors

Given ongoing security concerns, Albarka was aware that its international staff would likely encounter reduced access to implementation areas at times. In light of this, Albarka decided to make the Malian consortium organizations responsible for implementation, rather than international partners. The team also developed a dual-scenario operational approach where each intervention area has two implementation modalities: one that is applied when communities are consistently accessible (“consistent-access scenario”) and one that is applied when communities are inaccessible to the team (“low-access scenario”). In the low-access scenario, a reduced portfolio of interventions would be implemented, led by the community-based platforms and local partner staff, where possible. As a secondary strategy, Albarka originally planned to identify a fixed number of additional communes for interventions should some of the initial communes become permanently inaccessible. However, given the success of the dual-scenario approach and the activity’s heavy investment in community platforms, Albarka has not yet needed to apply this approach. Albarka attributes this to the trust that they share with community platforms and community members. Pivoting to the secondary strategy would require establishing new relationships in new areas, leaving current participants behind and risk delaying or failing to successfully implement interventions. The team

found it more advantageous to invest in communities currently receiving interventions even in times of reduced access, when support is needed most. Local partners, who originate from and have strong ties to communities, are essential to the success of this approach.

Formal and informal transmission of early warning and security information

Albarka closely monitors the security situation, and local Malian organizations and community platforms provide key information. This, alongside more formal sources of security information, enables Albarka to assess whether it is possible to return to a consistent-access scenario. Additionally, the community food security and early warning committees transmit information on emerging conflicts and disaster conditions via mobile phone, which is then disseminated to humanitarian and development agencies. This up-to-date and grassroots-level information is essential to ensuring the continuity of operations.

Training members of livestock breeders' and agro-pastoral cooperatives on improved livestock feeding techniques (straw treatment with salt) in the urban district of Timbuktu.



Aly Traoré, CDC/Comms Focal Point – AD/COM (2023)

Key Practice:

Engage local partners & community platforms in design & adaptation in response to the context

Across the three Malian Albarka member organizations, staff originate from the communities of implementation and therefore have strong relationships and a profound understanding of the cultural and contextual dynamics of their communities. They have been essential in facilitating the community platforms' active role in shaping their own development and peacebuilding processes.

DISCUSSION

Community-led participant selection for shock-responsive cash transfers

Importantly, communities choose who is selected for shock-responsive cash transfers and cash-for-work activities. This is done through a ranking scale consisting of socio-economic status (based on the household economy approach) and food security indicators plus additional vulnerability criteria related to gender, age, disability, nutrition, membership in marginalized groups, and other criteria as informed by the gender, youth and social dynamics analysis and conflict assessment. Many Albarka staff reported that the community-led selection process is fundamental to the activity's conflict sensitivity approach; it fosters engagement and ownership of the activity, facilitates the participation of those most in need, ensures transparency, and averts potential unintended consequences such as exacerbating tensions between households. Marginalized community members are intentionally included in these decision-making and community-development opportunities. In addition, Albarka has also established community-based accountability mechanisms, through which community members can submit their feedback or complaints for resolution by a community-led committee; this provides an additional avenue for conflict mediation. These community-led processes are among the activity's most important ways to mitigate the potential for conflict throughout all stages of implementation.

Local engagement in design for social behavior change interventions

Local partners, whose staff originate from the communities where Albarka operates, have immense insight into on-the-ground realities, including when and how these are influenced by conflict dynamics. For instance, Albarka was able to mitigate potential opposition to husbands' schools by working closely with village councils. As some armed groups in Albarka's area of operation believe that education in formal schools is a western concept imposed on their communities, Albarka and village councils decided to remove the word "school" from the intervention, determining an appropriate alternative in every community's local language. Similarly, Albarka engaged trusted, respected local resource people to successfully facilitate acceptance of literacy interventions, which also faced opposition from armed groups. Rather than reactively acting to unforeseen conflicts, Albarka is able to use the community platforms and the insights of local actors to proactively mitigate problems before beginning implementation.

Distribution of cash to a recipient of Albarka's unconditional, shock-responsive cash transfer in Koro, Bandiagara Region.



Conclusion

Albarka demonstrates how implementing partners can layer humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding interventions in crisis and conflict-affected contexts to achieve maximum impact. Ensuring that these interventions reach the same participants has the potential to maximize outcomes.

Institutionalizing conflict sensitivity into their activity design and implementation is critical to Albarka's success. Leveraging the endogenous knowledge of local partners and employing a robust, locally informed, and regularly updated conflict analysis have been key. Implementing partners should consider incorporating conflict prevention and social cohesion into humanitarian and development interventions to ensure that any conflicts that do arise are resolved effectively and immediately and do not jeopardize investments made or gains achieved.

Albarka's experience highlights the central role of local partners and community platforms in HDP coherence programming as they can ensure interventions are culturally relevant and will not inflame conflict dynamics. Decentralizing implementation to local partners and community platforms also ensures the continuity of interventions when communities become inaccessible to international actors. Most importantly, this meaningful community involvement strengthens ownership and success of programming.

Noé dit Amadigué Sagara,
CDC and Comms Focal Point, G-FORCE/Albarka (2023)



Child tasting enriched porridge prepared from local products (e.g., millet, beans, baobab) during a training for women leaders from mother-to-mother groups on the production of infant flour.