Negotiating Humanitarian Access and Civil-Military Coordination in Highly Non-Permissive Environments

Authors: Alexandria J. Nylen, Maggie Murphy, Hannah Reale, Annie Schwerdtfeger, Dea Omerovic, Farren Fuquea, Mathieu Greco, Adam C. Levine

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Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs
BROWN UNIVERSITY

CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN STUDIES

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Introduction

Due to the growing number of entrenched global conflicts, the effects of global climate change, and a variety of different economic factors, global humanitarian need has reached its highest level in decades. An estimated 300 million people worldwide required emergency aid and protection in 2024. Yet as humanitarian needs have been growing, the humanitarian space has been shrinking. In many complex emergencies around the globe, states and civil society actors have limited access to vulnerable populations in need, while direct and indirect targeting of aid workers is on the rise. Between 2020-2024, there were 1,164 major attacks against aid workers, with the number of resultant deaths rising by 135 from 2022 to 2023.[1]

This increasingly perilous environment underscores the importance of effective civilian-military humanitarian coordination. Civilian-Military humanitarian coordination deals with the dialogue between "humanitarian organizations, state security forces, and non-state armed groups" in crisis settings (UN OCHA, 2023) in order to engage and sustain relationships to influence decision making that facilitates humanitarian operations. The interactions between these groups span from coexistence to cooperation with the goals of protecting and promoting humanitarian principles, avoiding competition, minimizing inconsistency, and when appropriate, pursuing common goals (UN-CMCoord, 2023). Given the significance of this practice during humanitarian crises, several international guidelines have attempted to standardize its use in the field.

UN General Assembly Resolutions 46/182 and 58/114 provide guidance for the delivery of humanitarian aid. Passed in 1991 and 2004 respectively, these resolutions stress the sovereignty of host nations and their responsibility to protect their citizens. Thus, the delivery of aid, and the civil-military coordination that it involves, must occur while respecting these rights of nations. The UN MCDA Guidelines divide humanitarian aid into three categories: direct aid, indirect aid, and infrastructure support.[2] They also offer guidance on carrying weapons, uniform differentiation, and separation between international militaries and humanitarian aid organizations.

While these guidelines provide a framework for traditional military involvement in humanitarian efforts, the obligations and roles of nonstate armed groups (NSAGs) under international humanitarian law remain less clearly defined. NSAGs in some cases effectively act as a government, providing services within the territories that they control, including bureaucratic measures like court systems and distribution of aid to people in need. However, international humanitarian law provisions do little to protect civilians under the control of NSAGs. Similarly, humanitarian aid organizations must grapple with managing NSAGs and humanitarian needs within those territories.

Governments hostile to the delivery of external aid are also responsible for the present closing of humanitarian space. This includes states that use foreign humanitarian assistance primarily as a

[1] Aid Worker Security Database. Accessed 15 July 2024. https://www.aidworkersecurity.org/
[2] Guidelines on The Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets To Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies March 2003 - Revision I, January 2006

tool to advance their foreign policy objectives rather than to genuinely support humanitarian efforts. This approach often involves using aid to reinforce influence and counter international humanitarian actions.[3] These assertive states can also restrict the flow of international aid in whole or in part within their territories, oftentimes with the goal of depriving a certain portion of their population of lifesaving support.[4]

The interplay between NSAGs and assertive state governments creates an increasingly complex global operating environment, complicating the mission of humanitarian actors. To support international humanitarian action and contingency planning in both the short and long term, there is a critical need for new empirical research combined with a review of lessons learned from a variety of recent conflicts around the globe. This research study focuses on key challenges and best practices of humanitarians on the ground who came face-to-face with access dilemmas, often caused by either structured armed actors (SAA) and/or non-state armed groups. The case studies are also intended to deepen and expand understandings of the critical role civilian-military coordination plays during humanitarian responses in contexts with restricted access.

This covering document is meant to orient the reader to the aims and methodology of the overall project as well as present key themes that overlapped all three case studies. This product can be read as one cohesive document or as standalone case reports on access negotiations in specific humanitarian responses.

Research Questions
The research team designed the study to answer the following questions:

1. How are assertive states and/or non-state armed groups impacting humanitarian access in emergency response contexts?
    a. What methods are assertive states and/or NSAGs using to limit humanitarian access?
    b. Which types of aid or which types of humanitarian actors are most likely to be impeded by assertive states and/or NSAGs?
    c. What impact do these limitations have on population access to basic needs (food, water, sanitation, shelter, health, protection) as well as humanitarian outcomes?
2. What best practices have been implemented by humanitarian actors on the ground to gain access to vulnerable populations when operating in highly non-permissive contexts with an assertive state government and/or NSAGs, and what role has civil-military coordination played in achieving access?

Case Selection
In collaboration with the UN World Food Programme, researchers selected three cases in which the key variables of assertive state governments and/or nonstate armed groups were present.

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[3] Robinson, Jonathan (2023) "Exploring Russia's Views on Humanitarian Aid in Syria," Fikra Forum, Washington Institute for Near East Policy. 4 January 2023.
[4] Myanmar: Junta Blocks Lifesaving Cyclone Aid Restrictions on Humanitarian Access, Supplies, Movement Threaten Millions. Human Rights Watch. June 20, 2023.
https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/20/myanmar-junta-blocks-lifesaving-cyclone-aid

Response	Selection Rationale
Ethiopia	● The Ethiopian government's blockade of humanitarian access into Ethiopia's Tigray region ● Involvement of NSAGs in policing access ● Siphoning of aid by military forces
Western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger)	● Slow onset emergency (drought) ● NSAG presence in the form of Islamic insurgency ● Complex emergency complicated by military coups and assertive military states ● Militarization of aid
Haiti	● Heavy involvement of NSAGs in controlling humanitarian access and siphoning humanitarian aid ● Haiti is particularly at risk of extreme weather events and cascading crises, including severe food insecurity

Methods and Analysis

The research team collected a total of 30 key informant interviews from humanitarians over the course of 15 months for this project. In each country context, the team tried to recruit interviewees across UN offices, INGOs, and NNGOs. This project did not interview members of NSAGs or aid receiving state governments. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes and was semi-structured in order to allow interviewees to share their experiences and insights as well as alight on topics they viewed as important. The interview script was structured around four substantive question categories: Interviewee background; general case information; access considerations; and lessons learned/innovations.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom and Whatsapp, recorded, transcribed, and anonymized. The interviews were conducted in English and French. The French interviews were translated and transcribed into English prior to analysis. This study was exempt from human subjects' approval under US Federal guidelines. Researchers followed the Brown University Institutional Review Board's guidelines on human subject ethics regarding data collection and storage. Interview transcripts were de-identified and anonymized prior to analysis.

The interview transcripts were uploaded into three separate NVivo projects according to country context. The interviews went through iterative rounds of coding, including consensus coding, to create three separate codebooks. After the analysts reached saturation - meaning no new themes were emerging during the analysis - the team merged all the interviews and codebooks together

into one NVivo project. This allowed analysts to compare themes across cases as well as within cases. The major categories of themes included topics such as 'key innovations,' 'key challenges,' 'humanitarian principles,' 'types of access constraints,' and many more. Humanitarian access challenges were grouped together according to OCHA's Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework.[5]

This project was funded by the UN World Food Programme. The interview data and analysis were independently conducted by researchers affiliated with the Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Studies at Brown University. The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Table 1: Interview Data

Case	**Number of Interviews**	**Institutional Type**
Haiti	10	UN (4) INGO (2) International Govt (2)
Ethiopia	11	UN (5) INGO (2) NNGO (4)
Western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali)	9	UN (1) INGO (8)

Limitations

Researchers made efforts to collect an equal number of interviews from each country context. Interviewee recruitment was particularly challenging in the Western Sahel region. Notably, INGO interviewees are overrepresented in the Western Sahel and Haiti cases. All interviews are time bound to the recent/ongoing crises in each context in order to draw current insights and lessons. While the researchers argue that the findings of this project as a whole are broadly generalizable to similar highly non-permissive complex emergency settings, each individual case study involves its own unique context and considerations. Interviews are by nature about individual perspectives and experiences rather than those of organizations or governments and should be read and considered as such.

Humanitarian Access Challenges

Neutrality

The data in this report demonstrate stress tests of the Humanitarian Principles. While the humanitarian principles may always be difficult to uphold operationally, they come under extreme pressure in contexts where both assertive state governments and nonstate armed actors are present. This is because humanitarians are often contending with warring parties in these situations and it becomes increasingly difficult to appear as neutral to both sides simultaneously, especially when the vulnerable populations are supporting an insurgency.

The Haiti humanitarian response faced significant challenges in maintaining neutrality due to the presence of non-state armed groups (NSAGs) and the reliance on armed escorts for aid delivery.

[5] "Humanitarian Access | OCHA," accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.unocha.org/humanitarian-access.

Humanitarians were often forced to navigate complex ethical dilemmas to ensure the safety of their personnel and the delivery of aid. For instance, the use of armed escorts was deemed necessary to protect aid workers from gang violence, yet it compromised the principle of neutrality by associating humanitarian actors with armed groups.

In the Tigray crisis, maintaining neutrality was also a significant challenge due to the complex relationship between humanitarian organizations and the Ethiopian government. Some interviewees accused the humanitarian response of being too pro-government, stemming from long-standing relationships between Euro-American actors and the Ethiopian government. This led to a perception that humanitarian aid was not impartial and favored government-controlled areas. Furthermore, the entrenched development culture within humanitarian organizations in Ethiopia posed additional challenges. This culture, which had been accommodating to the federal government during peacetime, struggled to adapt to the new conflict context, resulting in decisions that compromised neutrality.

Assertive state governments

In both Ethiopia and the Western Sahel, interviewees described significant challenges posed by national governments that hindered effective aid delivery. In these regions, governments frequently accused humanitarian organizations of diverting resources to finance armed groups, impeding their access to vulnerable populations. They imposed bans on communication and certain types of aid, and restricted mobility by creating security enclaves.

In Ethiopia, humanitarians faced visa restrictions, accusations of aiding terrorists, and a general atmosphere of hostility from the government. Issues included the creation of communication dead zones and selective Persona Non Grata designations. The military's significant suspicion toward humanitarians often led to accusations of collaboration with non-state armed groups, resulting in threats of expulsion and the suspension of humanitarian organizations.

While the Haitian government did not impede aid delivery as directly, interviewees noted that the government sometimes prioritized optics and ease of accessibility over humanitarian need.

New or fragmented non-state armed actors

NSAGs operating in and around areas of interest to humanitarians posed several challenges such as creating insecurity and communication barriers. NSAGs create highly insecure environments for humanitarian workers, with threats ranging from vehicle theft and explosive devices in the Western Sahel to militia theft and checkpoint harassment in Ethiopia.

In the Ethiopia case, NSAGs and third-party armed forces - including regional defense forces and Eritrean forces - posed significant threats to humanitarians. The lack of access to the command-and-control structures of these groups further complicated the security environment. Gangs control large portions of Port-au-Prince and major highways, necessitating armed escorts for safe travel. This environment posed threats to the safety of humanitarian personnel. In all cases but Haiti, the national governments used accusations of complicity with NSAGs as an excuse for impeding humanitarian access.

Community resistance

Community members can either facilitate or hinder access based on their perception of humanitarian activities. While localization is listed as a key innovation, community resistance cropped up in cases where the international humanitarians failed to communicate their missions and purpose to local populations; as well as when NSAGs or assertive state governments were more influential in their anti-humanitarian messaging. In Ethiopia, the government saw some success in spreading disinformation about the humanitarians' purpose in the country. In Haiti, some interviewees described that community misunderstanding of the principle of impartiality – and that aid must go to the neediest populations first – led to perceptions of unfairness and convoy looting.

Internal humanitarian issues

Interviewees across cases also noted several issues internal to the humanitarian response structure – either in their own organization or in the response more broadly – that hindered access. Many of the interviewees in Ethiopia for example noted that there was a significant disconnect between their headquarters (HQ) staff in the capital and their field staff. Field level employees tended to view their HQ as being too conservative and not allowing them the ability to make decisions on the ground when it came to negotiating access.

Humanitarian Access Best Practices

As demonstrated by the results of these three case studies, humanitarian access can be considered a chapeau for the variety of actions that promote access to those in need and facilitate people's ability to access humanitarian assistance during complex emergencies. This includes direct access negotiations, humanitarian civil-military coordination, humanitarian diplomacy, and addressing bureaucratic constraints on humanitarian operations. While researchers examined three very different contexts, there were several broad themes that cut across cases in terms of best practices for overcoming a wide variety of different access challenges. Despite formidable obstacles posed by both state governments and nonstate armed groups, humanitarians demonstrated adaptability and resilience in reaching vulnerable populations

The importance of the field level

In each case, the field level arose as the most 'flexible' and malleable context to negotiate within. This is especially salient in contexts where interviewees noted a pronounced disconnect between the national government and local governments, as well as between their own organization's HQ and the field office. In both cases, humanitarians on the ground were able to innovate and find more creative ways to deliver aid to needy populations.

In the case of Tigray in particular, some humanitarian organizations collaborated extensively and informally at the field level to overcome the communication ban, sharing resources and information to navigate checkpoints and ensure the safety of their staff. This included carpooling, mapping exercises, and contingency planning for evacuations

Localization as an Access Tool

In each case, interviewees described prioritizing local engagement and leveraging community networks to navigate complex blockages posed by national governments and nonstate armed groups. This included empowering field-based actors, working with local communities, and

informal information sharing networks. Localization emerged as a key principle, emphasizing the importance of building relationships with local communities and engaging trusted community leaders. This approach was highlighted in the Western Sahel, where understanding local cultural orientations and social dynamics proved crucial for gaining access and cooperation from local actors. Additionally, using local brokers and mediators helped mitigate the challenges posed by NSAGs and facilitated smoother humanitarian operations.

Multilevel Negotiation

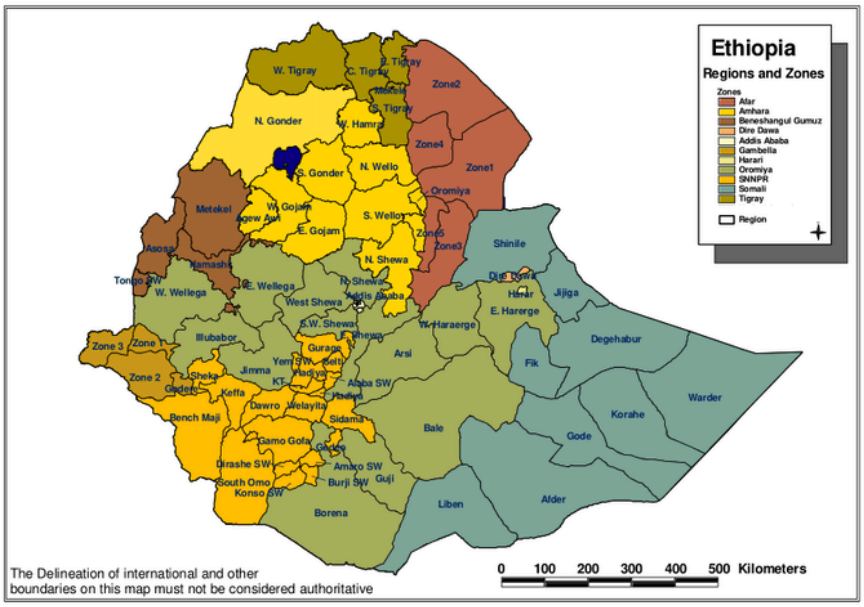
One of the most effective strategies is engaging in multi-level negotiations involving various stakeholders, including local communities, NSAGs, and government representatives. In Haiti, humanitarians successfully negotiated access by involving community leaders, gang leaders, and local authorities. This multi-faceted approach facilitated safer and more consistent access to conflict-affected areas.

Soft Skills Training for Frontline Workers

Interviewees stressed the importance of focusing on the trainable aspects of lessons learned in each case. Negotiation and soft skills such as empathy, trust-building, and cultural knowledge were identified as key learning opportunities that facilitate access in otherwise highly nonpermissive environments.

Case Study: Ethiopia

Situational Overview



Decades of civil conflict in Ethiopia involving ethno-regional militias have garnered the attention of humanitarian actors and regional stakeholders.[6] As a multi-federal system, Ethiopia comprises nine states, including Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somalia, Benishangul-Gomez, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), Gambela, and Haria.[7] Regional instability began in the 1960s with the growth of higher education and the progression of the student movement that led to the formation of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in 1975.[8] The remainder of the decade into the early 1990s saw the evolution of the Ethiopian Civil War motivated by ethnic-based political agendas and an ongoing struggle for political autonomy.[9] TPLF obtained central power in Ethiopia under Meles Zenawi in 1991, who governed Ethiopia as an autocracy until 2012.[10] During his term, Ethiopia established its constitution in 1995 as a multiparty democracy, saw the onset of the Eritrean-Ethiopian War in 1998, secured foreign aid from the US and the UK, and bolstered peacekeeping in Sudan.[11]

Succeeding Zenawi's death in 2012, the African nation remained under TPLF control until 2018, during which far-reaching protests, human rights abuses, and electoral fraud were reported.[12] Oromo native, Abiy Ahmed Ali, was elected that year as the new Prime Minister of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).[13] Abiy received the Nobel Peace

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[6] "Conflict in Ethiopia," Global Conflict Tracker, accessed October 19, 2023, https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ethiopia.
[7] Kjetil Tronvoll, "The Anatomy of Ethiopia's Civil War," n.d.; "Overview About Ethiopia - Embassy of Ethiopia," January 25, 2019, https://ethiopianembassy.org/overview-about-ethiopia/.
[8] Tronvoll, "The Anatomy of Ethiopia's Civil War."
[9] Tronvoll.
[10] "Conflict in Ethiopia."
[11] Tronvoll, "The Anatomy of Ethiopia's Civil War."
[12] Tronvoll, "The Anatomy of Ethiopia's Civil War."
[13] Tronvoll.

Prize in 2019 for negotiating a peace agreement with Eritrea that curbed violence on the Eritrean border that had been ongoing for nearly two decades.[14] In December 2019, a single ruling Prosperity Party (PP) was established to replace the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) that had existed since 1991.[15] This comprises the Oromo Democratic Party (ODF), Amhara Democratic Party (ADP), and Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM) with the TPLF declining to join.[16] Abiy then postponed national elections while Tigray hosted its own separate regional elections, sparking political tension.[17]

The UN reports that war crimes encompassing mass killings, gender violence, starvation, forced displacement, arbitrary detention and the destruction of schools, and medical facilities were among some of the ongoing atrocities.[18] SGBV has been particularly egregious during the conflict in Tigray, with rape being allegedly used as a weapon of war. In an August 2021 report, Amnesty International reported that Ethiopian Government forces and associated forces in the region, like the Eritrean Defense Forces and Amhara forces, subjected Tigrayan women and girls to rape, gang rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation, and other forms of torture.

The regions bordering Eritrea are impassable due to ongoing Eritrean Forces (EDF) incursions in Tigray.[19] These include destruction of civilian infrastructure, looting, large-scale killings, rape, sexual violence, arbitrary detention, attacks against refugee camps, indiscriminate shelling of civilian areas, and the blockade of humanitarian access.[20] Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki denies allegations of violations by EDF, further complicating the scope of the emergency.[21] Rural areas across Tigray lack multi-sectoral services like health, water, education, electricity, communications, and banking– leading to elevated malnutrition rates among children and vulnerable populations.[22] The situation in Tigray is dire as USAID and WFP halted in-kind food assistance in May 2023 after uncovering coordinated aid diversion campaigns [23]. The Health of the Tigray Office of Disaster Risk Management Commission has reported 1,400 hunger-related deaths in Tigray from April to August 2023 demonstrating the severity of the situation.[24] A recent study estimates that around 300,000 civilians have died due to the conflict and humanitarian blockade over the course of two years.[25]

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[14] "Conflict in Ethiopia."
[15] "Ethiopia: War in Tigray - Background and State of Play | Think Tank | European Parliament," accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2022)739244.
[16] UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by All Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia," November 3, 2021, https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3947207.
[17] Tronvoll, "The Anatomy of Ethiopia's Civil War."
[18] "Ethiopia: Mass Killings Continue, Risk of Further 'Large-Scale' Atrocities | UN News," September 18, 2023, https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/09/1140872.
[19] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[20] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[21] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[22] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.
[23] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[24] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[25] Asgedom, A.A., Etsedingl, A., Hailemariam, T.T. et al. Prevalence, causes and outcomes of war-related civilian injuries in Ethiopia's war-torn Tigray region: a community-based descriptive study. BMC Res Notes 16, 352 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-023-06640-4; Plaut, Martin. "Updated assessment of civilian starvation deaths during

The Amhara region faces similar challenges with regards to humanitarian access. In recent years, assistance had been scaled-up to provide for thousands of displaced people, but a resurgence in conflict halted such efforts and resulted in secondary forced displacements.[26] This is coupled with the assassination of the ruling party's regional head that occurred in April 2023.[27] OHCA reports that by July Amhara Fano militia groups supported by Amhara Special Forces began to amalgamate, and campaigns to assassinate senior regional security allowed Fano allied militants to enter and control several towns.[28] Between July and December 2022, there were reports of 12 aid worker killings in the Amhara.[29] Since then, command posts have been implemented across the region, and multiple urban centers including Bahir Dar, Gondar, and Lalibela are under a six-month state of emergency and curfew.[30]

Like the Amhara region, humanitarian access in Afar had been improving, apart from border regions, until the conflict resurgence in August 2023. [31][32] Agencies had previously relied on routes from Semera, Abala, and Mekelle to deploy relief supplies and abet individuals displaced in Afar [33]. Displacement stemmed from Tigrayan force attacks on towns and villages between November 2021 and March 2022 that destroyed civilian homes and public facilities, resulted in casualties from shelling, and perpetrated acts of sexual violence against women and girls.[34] This was coupled with far-reaching livestock raids that raised economic and food insecurity concerns due to limited aid distribution, ongoing malnutrition, and the invasion of desert locusts.[35] Explosive remnants of war (ERW) paired with conflict resumption continue to endanger civilians and impede humanitarian responses.[36]

Conflict in the north and a power transition to armed groups in southern and western regions have impacted the Oromia Region.[37] This is coupled with the re-escalation of political tension between the Federal Government, ENDF, and Oromo Liberation Army after the collapse of negotiations in April 2023 and counterinsurgency operations by the government in May 2023.[38] Aid partners have since suspended operations and blocked the road Addis Ababa – Nekemte - Assossa in Benishangul Gumuz region (BGR) in Western Oromia–leaving several hundred thousand IDPs and refugees without relief supplies.[39] Violence in South Oromia has extended into West Guji, Borana, and Wollaga, zones once deemed stable, which has altered aid targeted at

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the Tigray war." 24 May 2023. https://martinplaut.com/2023/05/24/updated-assessment-of-civilian-starvation-deaths-during-the-tigray-war/

[26] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.
[27] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[28] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[29] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.
[30] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[31] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.
[32] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[33] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.
[34] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[35] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[36] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[37] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[38] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[39] "Ethiopia," January 18, 2023.

drought-ridden areas in the Somali region that have experienced failed rainy seasons since 2020.[40]

Present-day Ethiopia faces a myriad of challenges from ongoing civil, political, and regional instability coupled with climate shocks. Violence has persisted in Tigray and Amhara despite efforts negotiated under COHA.[41] Eritrean forces have raped and sexually violated women and girls in Tigray, while mass arbitrary detention and drone strikes carried out by the State [Ethiopia] have been observed in Amhara.[42] Ethiopia's Humanitarian Response Plan published by OCHA in 2023 outlines the severity and next steps in mitigating the crisis. Currently, there are 28.6 million people, 24% of the total population, that are in dire need of assistance.[43]

Unprecedented droughts in the eastern and southern regions and increased violence concentrated in the west have heightened displacement, food insecurity, malnutrition, and protection concerns.[44] Approximately 9.4 million people are food insecure, and 4.6 million are internally displaced.[45] This generates stark health concerns related to malnutrition and disease outbreaks, particularly in areas with restricted or lack of access to water sanitation and hygiene (WASH).[46] Specific complications that can arise include acute respiratory tract, infection, malaria, cholera, and typhoid fever.[47] These concerns are coupled with tree locust invasions, infrastructure damage from heavy rainfall and flooding, inflation, national debt, currency shortages, increased prices for essential commodities like food and fuel, and limited supplies in affected areas.[48]

Three strategic objectives outlined in the 2023 Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan are to: reduce morbidity and mortality and suffering due to shocks for 22.6 million, provide protection and safe access to critical, integrated and inclusive basic services to 8.8 million, and support 9.4 million vulnerable people to start recovering from the crisis and natural hazards through targeted programming alongside development actors, by the conclusion of 2023.[49] The plan targets 20.1 million for food-related concerns and 4.4 million for multi-sectoral non-food clusters that encompass sectors like agriculture, education, health, and logistics.[50] In total, the Government of Ethiopia, the United Nations, and humanitarian partners are requesting 3.99 billion in financial support for the response plan that will be carried out by a series of humanitarian partners.[51]

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[40] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[41] "The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia: An Analysis - International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (A/HRC/54/CRP.2) - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb," October 3, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/acute-risk-further-atrocity-crimes-ethiopia-analysis-international-commission-human-rights-experts-ethiopia-ahrc54crp2.
[42] "The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia."
[43] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action," accessed October 20, 2023, https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1128.
[44] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[45] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[46] "Ethiopia - Situation Report, 03 Apr 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb," April 3, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-situation-report-03-apr-2023.
[47] "Ethiopia - Situation Report, 03 Apr 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb."
[48] "Ethiopia - Situation Report, 03 Apr 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb"; "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[49] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[50] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[51] "Ethiopia Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 | Humanitarian Action."

Key Actors

Ethiopia has been viewed by the US and European Union as an ally in maintaining peaceful diplomatic relations and security in the Horn of Africa.[52] Allegiance among state and non-state actors has been fluid since the onset of the civil war in 2020, with humanitarian organizations working concurrently to mitigate the complex emergency.[53] Tensions in the region stem from long-standing discordances between Ethiopian communities and the ethnic-based federal system.[54] The result has been human rights and international humanitarian law violations that constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity.[55] There are growing concerns about future atrocity crimes if the current situation remains unaddressed.[56]

KEY ACTORS	
STATE-ARMED ACTORS	***NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS***
1. Federal and regional governments 2. Ethiopian National Defense (ENDF) 3. Eritrean Defense Forces 4. Special forces nominally responsible to each Ethiopian Regional State Government	1. Tigrayan forces 2. Agew and Oromo groups a. Oromo Liberation Army 3. Local and ethnic militias a. Fano Militias 4. Localized, temporary and ad hoc militias

Table 1: Key actors in Ethiopia

State Armed Actors

The state armed actors involved in Ethiopia's complex emergency include federal and regional governments, the Ethiopian National Defense (ENDF), Eritrean Defense forces, Special forces nominally responsible to each Ethiopian Regional State Government, and the Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed.[57] Three constituent parties of the EPRDF including the Oromo Democratic Party, Amhara Democratic Party (ADP) and Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic party merged into a single party referred to as the Prosperity Party (PP); however, the TPLF declined to join.[58]

The Ethiopian Government implemented a "Command Post" system in November 2020 led by joint civilian militaries to create a centralized system under the Prime Minister and ENDF following conflict with TPLF.[59] The signing of COHA two years later in Pretoria, South Africa

[52] "Ethiopia's Civil War Is Raging. How Can It Get on Track toward Peace? | United States Institute of Peace," accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/10/ethiopias-civil-war-raging-how-can-it-get-track-toward-peace.
[53] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[54] "Ethiopia."
[55] "Ethiopia."
[56] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[57] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[58] Rights, "Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by All Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia."
[59] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."

marked a decline in large-scale violence; however the federal government failed to uphold COHA commitments that outlined human rights, transnational justice and territorial integrity.[60] On August 4th, 2023, the Ethiopian Government issued a six-month state of emergency due to heightened security concerns in the Amhara region and instability in the Benishangul-Gumuz, Gambela, Promia, and the Somali regions.[61]

Nonstate Armed Actors

The non-state armed actors involved in Ethiopia's complex emergency include the Tigrayan forces, Agew and Oromo Groups, local and ethnic militias, localized, temporary, and ad hoc militias. The Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was Ethiopia's predominant leader for three decades until the inauguration of Abiy Ahmed in 2018.[62] Abiy brought with him a more liberal perspective that encompassed reforms, anti-corruption, and the desire to ignite a unitary political movement involving the diminishment of TPLF and rapprochement with Eritrea.[63] By 2020, tensions escalated between TPLF and ENDF into the Tigray War that resulted in serious violations of international human rights law, humanitarian, and refugee law.[64] Tigrayan forces played a central role in such violations, and its predecessor, the Tigrayan Defense Forces (TDF), have been in control of Tigray since June 28th, 2021.[65] Other non-armed state actors including the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA) and Amhara forces, affiliated with the fano militia, have committed human rights violations.[66] A state of emergency was issued on August 3rd, 2023 around Gondar, Gojjam and the North Shewa Zone.[67]

Civilian Government and Nongovernmental Actors

Inter-agency and cross-sectoral collaboration are imperative to mitigate the consequences of the complex emergency in Ethiopia. In 2021, the Human Rights Council established the International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), with members appointed by the President of the HRC.[68] The current members include Mohamed Chande Othman, the former Chief Justice of Tanzania; Steven Ratner, a Professor of Law at the University of Michigan Law School; and Radhika Coomaraswamy, former Chairperson of the

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[60] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."
[61] "The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia."
[62] "Ethiopia's Tigray War: The Short, Medium and Long Story," November 17, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54964378.
[63] ecm114, "A Very Ethiopian Tragedy: Tigray, the TPLF, and Cyclical History," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* (blog), January 28, 2021, https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/01/28/a-very-ethiopian-tragedy-tigray-the-tplf-and-cyclical-history/; Jonathan Fisher and Meressa Tsehaye Gebrewahd, "'Game over'? Abiy Ahmed, the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front and Ethiopia's Political Crisis," *African Affairs* 118, no. 470 (January 1, 2019): 194–206, https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady056.
[64] "Conflict in Ethiopia"; Rights, "Report of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC)/Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by All Parties to the Conflict in the Tigray Region of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia."
[65] "Tigray Conflict: Report Calls for Accountability for Violations and Abuses by All Parties," OHCHR, accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/2021/11/tigray-conflict-report-calls-accountability-violations-and-abuses-all-parties.
[66] "The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia."
[67] "The Acute Risk of Further Atrocity Crimes in Ethiopia."
[68] "International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia."

Sri Lanka Human Rights.[69] The International Human Rights Council is included in the national actors because it works in collaboration with the Ethiopian government to mitigate the complex emergency situation.

Alongside these actors, governmental organizations, IGOs, and NGOs are working collaboratively to appropriate the resources needed to address ongoing conflict and climate shocks. As of September 2023, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published a report on the complex emergency and listed implementing partners who have provided funding in Ethiopia for the Horn of Africa.[70] Various partners include the Catholic Relief Services, International Organization for Migration, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Vision, the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).[71] Shortly after the USAID Report, the European Union announced the provision of 650 million euros to Ethiopia after it cut aid three years ago alongside the surfacing of war crimes from the bloody civil war.[72]

Humanitarian Access Challenges

The following section draws on key informant interviews to expand on the access constraints discussed above. Researchers collected eleven interviews with humanitarians from different levels of the Tigray response, including international and national NGOs as well as UN offices. Please refer to the covering document for a more detailed discussion of methodology.

<u>Ethiopian National Government and ENDF</u>

A number of humanitarians we spoke to - ranging from members of NGOs to INGOs to UN employees - described Ethiopia during the Tigray crisis as the most difficult access environment they had experienced in their careers. In the word of one interviewee: "It was the complete reluctance of the central government to assist humanitarians working on the inside." Their reasons centered primarily around various behaviors and policies of the Ethiopian government that led to - directly or indirectly - the stymying of aid delivery.

Key methods of blocking aid by the Ethiopian government included: hostility towards humanitarians; creating an atmosphere of plausible deniability; imposing a dead zone; and relying on a fractured federalist system.

Hostility towards humanitarians

According to respondents, the Ethiopian national government acted in a way that was perceived as hostile to humanitarian processes, principles, and individuals. This included the weaponization

[69] "Members of the Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia," OHCHR, accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/ICHRE-Ethiopa/Members.
[70] "Horn of Africa - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #11, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb," August 22, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/horn-africa-complex-emergency-fact-sheet-11-fiscal-year-fy-2023.
[71] "Horn of Africa - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #11, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb."
[72] "Horn of Africa - Complex Emergency Fact Sheet #11, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 - Ethiopia | ReliefWeb."

of visas, selective designation of Persona Non Grata, stonewalling, and accusations of aiding 'terrorists.'

The Ethiopian government would reportedly restrict some individual humanitarians' visas if they left the country even for a couple of days. When this happened, one interviewee described it as: "You could work on the other side looking in, but you couldn't be on the inside looking at it." This led to a situation where humanitarians forewent their much-needed leaves in order to ensure they could remain in country, which led to a sense of burnout and isolation, as described by one interviewee below:

> If we go out [of Ethiopia], we can't come back in. So, let's see if we can push those holidays forward. It's not ideal working through a situation when the whole program is structured to give you some time off to give your brain a rest. But when the option is that you're not going to be able to come back and do your job, then maybe it's just best to just sit it out. That was the biggest challenge. The sense of isolation, the inability to get in and out.

Relatedly, the national government made use of designating individual humanitarians - generally people who were outspoken against government tactics - Persona Non Grata (PNG). One interviewee characterized this policy of kicking out humanitarians who were accused of meddling in internal affairs as "intimidation tactics," and a way to "belittle humanitarians" who criticized the government's stalling around access negotiations.

According to one interviewee, this threat from the government had its intended chilling effect, in that the very real fear of being PNG'ed (as humanitarians often referred to it) led some humanitarians in the capital to not push the government on the issue of humanitarian access in Tigray. The interviewee describes the situation below:

> I understand that there was fear of being PNG'ed, and you do need to weigh up **how we keep quiet in order to access the populations needed**, etc. I appreciate that all has to be factored in, but by and large, myself and other people from conflict settings came in and **we were quite astonished at how lackluster the initial response was**.

Another interviewee confirmed this sentiment, stating that reporting from the field to the capital had to "be dumbed down and made a little bit more palatable to the host nation."

In addition to blocking visas and kicking individuals out of the country, the national government also accused some humanitarians of aiding and abetting 'terrorists' in Tigray. One interviewee explains that the very act of remaining neutral was purposely misconstrued by the government as siding with the TPLF, as explained below:

> That was part of the Government's communications plan: **to say that the humanitarians were at worst helping - or at best just being neutral - when humanitarians should actually be siding more with the government.** And that once they side with us, all this will go away; everybody will be happy. I think it was just the humanitarian community not wanting to play by the government's comm plan.

These accusations of aiding terrorists were also used to directly interfere with humanitarians' attempts to access cut-off vulnerable populations. As one interviewee noted:

> So the army controls the cities that control the major roads. But then as soon as you left [the major roads], it became basically de facto control of the rebels. **And so for them, by trying to go to these areas, we were helping the rebels.** So it was a bit difficult to sell it as: 'no, we're actually here to help the people who are the population in need, not the actual forces. And it's a difficult dialogue to have because the population in need was supporting the rebels clearly because they are from the same ethnic group and the same political group to a certain extent.

This concern over being accused of aiding and abetting terrorists reportedly affected both humanitarians as well as individual members of the ENDF staffing the checkpoints. This created a situation in which both humanitarians and the ENDF did not want to appear to the Ethiopian national government as aiding the rebels. One interviewee explains an aura of surveillance that made it hard for all actors on the ground to work together; a phenomenon that clearly complicated access:

> **Firstly, we [humanitarians] were perceived as helping the enemy: the TPLF.** That was because all the people were Tigrayan, and the context was quite clear on this one in terms of armed groups, ethnic groups, etc. …
>
> I think it was a case of **the ENDF (individuals, commanders) didn't want to be perceived as supporting the enemy in any way.** And then also, I believe it goes back to that structure where **everyone's watching everybody** and they don't know who's going to report it. Even within an NGO, even within a single NGO, in, let's say, the HR office, **the staff don't trust each other because they're worried who's going to speak to who, about what, and who they're going to be reported to**. I think that mindset goes straight to the top, essentially.

Plausible Deniability

Respondents described frustrations over the Ethiopian national government's use of 'window dressing' - or, doing just enough to be able to claim that they were cooperating with the humanitarian response in Tigray. According to respondents, the government's main modality of portraying this feigned cooperation was through a deft use of social media. Respondents also noted that the government took advantage of its formerly good reputation and relationship with Euro-American powers.

One way the government reportedly did this was by letting a very small amount of aid into Tigray in order to publicly claim that the aid was flowing. For example, one interviewee explained:

> About halfway [or] two thirds of the way through my tenure it became clear what the strategy was of the government. It's not unlike what I can see happening now in the Middle East, where you allow a very, very tiny amount of the aid to go through so that

> you're able to make a statement that you're not blocking aid. But you know very well that the amount that you're allowing in is so small that it will make almost no difference. **So it becomes a social media public affairs position.** That's what we were kind of faced with. I could see what was going on: we were being starved.

Another interviewee from the same UN office explained a similar situation with fuel trucks:

> This goes down to that choreographed ballet of all these federally independent bodies - a lack of command and control in the field. It creates this **bubble of plausible deniability** that the Government could use to its advantage.
>
> A quick example are [getting] the trucks of fuel to get from Semera, which is in the far east of Ethiopia and is one of the border crossings into Tigray. What they [the national government] were trying to do was starve Tigray of fuel. And also, the other thing that was incredibly difficult to get across were medical supplies. They would choke off the fuel supply. No trucks would be permitted to cross. Then UNOCHA, whoever it was, would start banging the drum. That would get a bit of traction. The media might catch on and do an article on it saying that no fuel is getting in and **then they [the government] would release 5 oil tankers just to simply say that 'Fuel is getting in, we have released tankers, so what are you complaining about?.' This cycle would go on and on and on.**

Another interviewee from a different agency described a slightly different tack that the government reportedly took in order to feign support for humanitarians.

> The government set up the side scanner. This is really, really good, you know. When stuff for Ethiopia comes into Djbouti, then it goes through a side scanner. It's all high tech - something takes a quick, quick look at the vehicle going by, and then the vehicle continues to destination. The government said: 'no problem, since we're afraid there might be arms put in some of those vehicles going north, we'll scan them.'
>
> So they bring the scanner up with great to-do, trumpeting: Hey, government! We're here to help! And they set up the side scanner, and it promptly ceases to function. 'We can't get the parts,' or 'it's the heat in that part of the country,' 'it's outside of operating limits.' **And so as a result, then that game was a handful of trucks that the government could say: 'Listen. we're trying. See? 6 trucks got through. But then, unfortunately, the thing broke.'** And yeah, and what that does now is double down everybody's perception of how little interest the Government has in supporting the humanitarian initiative.

Government-created dead zone

The government-imposed blockade on Tigray deeply complicated the logistics of humanitarian aid delivery. Multiple interviewees noted that it was not so much the aid itself, but the restrictions on communications technologies, cash, and fuel that complicated their work.

The aforementioned government distrust of humanitarians' neutrality directly impacted the communications systems on the ground. Interviewees noted the danger of being caught with an unauthorized communication device within Tigray: "You could definitely be arrested. For Satellite phones, you could very easily go to jail, at a minimum that was going to be confiscated." One interviewee described that humanitarian group's insistence on speed and bringing in their own communications technologies, rather than going through the bureaucratic red tape, complicated and deepened preexisting suspicion:

> They [the government] already have this negative perception that they're getting from humanitarian groups that are accusing them of all these things. And then now, under the nature of 'look, we have to go in and deliver humanity to do our work right now, therefore, we need to bypass all the normal walls in Ethiopia and bring in our own satellite communications equipment,' that was a huge red flag for them [the government]. **I know very few organizations that tried to go through the formal process of actually going through the law and by the book, and requesting satellite communications the way we did, and so that may be why we were able to use them and other organizations weren't allowed any.**

The government also heavily restricted the flow of cash into Tigray and hobbled the local banking system, which also complicated the work of humanitarians. One interviewee noted that there were lots of limitations in terms of bringing money in, even for the international humanitarian staff. He viewed this policy as being intentional: "we were under a lot of pressure. It was perceived as trying … to increase the pressure on us so that we voluntarily leave without being forcefully told to do so. So this was one type of the constraint we had to deal with."

One humanitarian noted that at one point, humanitarians were only allowed to bring in around $500, which "goes nowhere" to run a humanitarian delivery program. This policy was apparently rigidly enforced at the field level, as another interviewee stated: "you had to basically produce your wallet, open it up and somebody would go and count all the money before you."

In addition to cash, the government also heavily restricted the transportation of fuel into Tigray. According to one humanitarian working at the field level, this was connected to the other restrictions on communications technologies in that the national government feared that it could easily fall into the hands of the Tigrayan rebels. This individual mused that it was actually more difficult to get fuel and comms equipment into Tigray, rather than the actual aid:

> I think the fear was that we were either we were going to turn it over – the fuel, the electronic equipment, the communications and all that sort of stuff – to the Tigrayans, or that the Tigrayan military at some point was going to confiscate it from us and use it for military purposes. So that's generally what we had trouble with... It wasn't the food and medical supplies and that sort of thing.

Fractured Federalism as a Complicating Variable

The Ethiopian governmental system of ethnic federalism played a unique and key role in complicating the delivery of aid in Tigray. Many of the individuals we spoke to explained that government actors used the country's fractured structure to intentionally stall. For example, one

respondent hypothesized that the national government used the disconnected field, regional, and national levels to feign incompetence when it came to chain of command and communicating downwards that humanitarians had government permission to enter Tigray. This individual stated that given the long history of US security assistance, they believed that the defense forces actually have significant command-and-control structure and that the stalling at field and checkpoint levels was intentional: "This is my personal opinion: Ethiopia has significant capacity for command and control. When and how they choose to exercise it are two separate things."

Whether intentional or just incidental, the fractured nature of the federal system had the same effect of complicating the delivery of aid into Tigray. One field level humanitarian explained the nuanced situation in a way that is worth quoting at length:

> **You've got this little echo chamber in Addis where everything is working on paper, and you get the assurances from whatever minister you need, etc., and life is good.** But then from Addis, you've got your regions, which are the equivalent of states in the United States, and these are federally independent states… You've got your governor, essentially, of Amhara and you've got these Amharan special forces. **They will only act or respond to what's in their benefit. They are going to disregard any and all engagement with Addis, as if they don't see it as purposeful to them.**
>
> Amhara is a good example, because Amhara is on the border of Tigray, so it was their special forces and their border that was at risk. **They had their own motivations that influenced their decision-making which often had nothing to do with what messages we were getting from Addis, absolutely nothing**. You'd speak to the regional governor in Amhara, and you'd mention something about, you know, **"we've got this letter from Addis", and they'd say "you need to speak with Addis about that, that's got nothing to do with us. That's the Federal Government, that's Addis. So you need a new letter from us,**" or whatever the case was.
>
> **So there was not only was there a disconnect from Addis to the field on a Federal level. The Federal Government ceases to exist in these regions.** Really. Again, whatever was said or discussed or approved or denied in Addis has no bearing at the regional level. And then, obviously, once you get into Tigray. Well, that's a whole another ball game, because they've rebelled against the Federal Government. So you know that's a whole other thing.

This reluctance of regional forces such as those in Amhara - again, whether intentional on the part of the federal government or not - threw sand in the gears of the response and deeply complicated access. The same humanitarian observed that the federal government seemed to - at least in part - be capable of peering down to the field level and influence the militias when enough international pressure was exerted on them to act in Tigray:

> **What happens in Addis is only relevant to Addis**. Unless, of course, **there is significant UN pressure, media pressure, some international body that's pushing the right button**. Then you start to see links. But outside of that, nothing.

A field level worker explained a similarly complicated situation navigating checkpoints staffed by Ethiopian national defense force members. Rather than being turned away and told that the government's permission did not matter - as was the case with the militia-staffed checkpoints - troops would instead sometimes stall convoys out of fear getting in trouble with direct superiors. The humanitarian explained how passing through the ENDF checkpoints with federal approval was never a foregone conclusion:

> We would get these letters of access and permissions and all that stuff stamped with the Federal Government level in Ethiopia, and sometimes we would drive through the military checkpoints along the front lines between Tigray and government forces. The Ethiopian Government force would let us through that – the permissions and the papers we have would work.
>
> Other times, it was sort of at the discretion of the soldiers and the commander there on the ground and what they decided to do. **Other times they would say: "No, this paperwork isn't good enough, sure it's signed off by some bureaucrat in Addis, but that doesn't mean that my commander is not going to punish me for letting you through if he finds out."** And so they would prohibit us from going through and hold us up at the checkpoints.
>
> **There were only a couple of times where we were actually turned away just carte blanche at the checkpoint saying: 'you can't come through.' That was fairly rare.** There were times where we were held up for a period of time, and we would have to make a call to someone in Addis Ababa who would then call down to the local commander: 'Hey, there's an issue,' and eventually the word would make it down the chain to let us through, which generally worked.

This individual continued explaining that even when the troops were finally convinced to let their convoy through, sometimes part of their supplies would be confiscated. They describe that because there is no "clear or spelled out" definition of humanitarian aid, "we would be at the mercy of the local military checkpoint" on whether or not the person designated it as military aid and confiscated it.

A separate UN employee working in the field described a similar situation at checkpoints with ENDF troops, pointing out the uncertainty of whether their requests were being correctly relayed. They stated: "sometimes there was a radio call made back, but often it was just whoever we've seen here at the checkpoint make the decision to send us away." They added that the disconnect between the capital and the field was compounded by the embargo on communications technology, as emails were the only means of sending reports and updates during their tenure.

Non-state Armed Groups and the EDF

Tigrayan forces

The interviewees generally agreed that the TPLF did not pose major barriers to humanitarian access. This was because the TPLF clearly had an interest in allowing the free flow of aid into Tigray. In the words of one interviewee:

> The TPLF – we had no problem with them. **They were great hosts by virtue of them being wholly reliant on the international community**. So we didn't have any issues with them at all. I appreciate that doesn't sound particularly neutral or impartial, but you know they had their reasons why they were tolerant of us, and that was it.

Another interviewee described how the appearance of a positive relationship between the TPLF and the humanitarians negatively impacted their relationship with the Ethiopian government. An aid worker explained the situation from their point of view: "the Ethiopian Government itself looked at a lot of that international messaging and viewed humanitarians already as being skewed pro-Tigray and anti-government. So that made things a lot more difficult in terms of humanitarian access because of what the Ethiopian Government was willing and not willing to do."

Subnational Ethnic Militias

Another interviewee expressed frustration at this situation, stating that "there is never a situation where the head truck [in a convoy] - the first truck - should be the one that's trying to talk people into access. And that's where we were. There were so many convoys that were turned around or were held at places like [City], and the places near the border. They were just being held there by local authorities or by local armed forces that were stealing."

This interviewee continued, claiming that while they never heard of Tigrayan forces stealing and repurposing aid, they witnessed the Afar regional militia stealing trucks. They continued, claiming that there was a concern around reporting this theft out of fear that the national government would shut down the entire road. As for the culpability of the national government in this theft by regional militias, the interviewee was uncertain: "I can't say that they were being used by the Federal Government to block aid so the Federal Government looked like they were playing ball, or if they were just legitimately going rogue and blocking aid on their own."

One local responder described that the Amhara regional forces perpetrated war crimes against Tigrayan citizens at around the same rate as the Eritrean soldiers in their opinion: "An equally important culprit [as the Eritrean troops] were the Amhara forces. They have done roughly equivalent accounts of gender-based violence, and they destroy the houses of people, they destroy the crops, they burn the crops."

Eritrean Forces

Interviewees who spoke about the Eritrean soldiers operating inside Ethiopia described the danger they posed to both humanitarians and civilians. One interviewee explained that the Ethiopian government denied the involvement of the Eritrean troops in the conflict for as long as possible, likely to avoid the conflict moving from an intrastate armed conflict to an international

one. An interviewee noted that the presence of the Eritrean troops "played to the advantage of the Federal government," because the Eritreans could be blamed for any atrocities and the government can claim complete independence from their operations. The interviewee continued:

> I can't comment on the command and control structures between the Eritreans and the Ethiopia National Defense Force but we definitely saw them together, and they saw each other. There was no denying that they were operating - at very least - in each other's orbits. That created another layer of an access constraint that could play into the hands of the Federal Government.

Interviewees explained the danger of running into the Eritrean troops in the field. One stated: "Eritrean troops do not distinguish between combatants and humanitarian actors." Unexpectedly coming across Eritrean troops was a harrowing experience: "As far as the Eritreans go, we never had any contact with them. The only time that I'm aware of any contact between the humanitarian response and them was when one of my predecessors happened upon one of the camps that was next to a road and they were told to turn around and leave, or they would be killed."

Another interviewee explained this security situation in more detail:

> **The Eritreans were feared by the Tigrayans and also by a lot of the internationals**. Our international status did give us some protection from the Eritreans and the Ethiopian National Defense Force, but not entirely… **There was a significant number of humanitarian staff that were killed in Tigray**. How that translated into access is that a lot of Tigrayan staff simply wouldn't want to go to certain areas.
>
> And also, because we had no access to the Eritrean command structure, you would roll up onto your checkpoints and they would send you to turn around, and that was it. You turn around. Because there's no way to get past that lowly conscripted soldier. There's no access to the command structure. **That lack of access to command structure and fear were the two biggest access constraints that they would use to deny access to populations.**

An INGO member described attempting to negotiate with an Eritrean commander, and shared their concerns

> We would attempt to negotiate with the local commander. But that was very difficult and tenuous, because at any point in time, if that local commander decided, "hey, I don't want you guys to be here. I'm gonna arrest you all. Take you back into Eritrea," where we have no way to intervene in that sense other than relying on the US Government to intervene on a diplomatic level. **And so that really inhibited access. We did very little, if any, actual work in areas controlled by Eritreans.**

An aid worker mentioned specific concerns for female staff and aid recipients, given the Eritrean troop's records on gender based violence. According to them, avoiding routes where they might come across Eritrean troops was challenging but necessary: "there were days that we were

sitting, trying to map out like, where we can go because whichever area they control, they were raping women."

On this topic, a medical professional in Tigray stated that their patients have "a very lucid understanding" of who perpetrated these acts against them. The accounts from patients are chilling:

> Patients clearly identified them and they also tell their victims who they are so that they are humiliated. They use ethnic slurs, they humiliate them. They identify themselves. They tell them: 'We are Eritreans and we are doing this because of…" several reasons they mentioned. They tell them that 'you have to bear our children so that your blood is purified,' and, 'We have to take you to Eritrea, and you serve as our maids, and your only purpose will be to bear our children, which we will be Eritrean."

Humanitarian Need Exacerbated by Access Challenges

The aid blockages detailed above, coupled with the general conflict dynamics, had a devastating effect on civilians in Tigray. In the words of one NGO worker, "this was a war against the civilians. I mean, they [the national government] were not distinguishing between the civilians and the TPLF."

Medical needs not met

Hospitals were hit particularly hard during the Tigray blockade, having a deleterious effect on public health outcomes. A doctor in Tigray explained that before the war, the hospital they worked in was one of the best-resourced on the continent. At the start of the war, they explained "within a few days, the hospital was not able to provide even the most basic lifesaving interventions like cesarean delivery and stopping bleeding from patients. We were returning patients home to die because we had nothing at our disposal. We tried every improvisation possible." These interventions included using expired drugs and operating on patients by flashlight. Cancer patients went without treatment for 18 months. According to a humanitarian professional, "doctors were washing the gloves and reusing them again and again and again" for delivering babies.

Gender based violence

Civilians suffered high levels of unchecked sexual violence during the war. According to reports, the Eritrean troops had the largest role in perpetrating the assaults. A local humanitarian who works with victims of GBV stated that the level of cruelty in the attacks was "something beyond" war.

The wartime GBV, coupled with the crippled hospital infrastructure described above, made women a particularly vulnerable group of civilians. In the words of a medical practitioner in Tigray: "despite the cause of the war, mothers and girls sustain the steepest price." Women who became pregnant from the assaults then had to deliver the babies in severely under-equipped hospitals due to the humanitarian blockade.

The same medical provider explained that their hospital was "overwhelmed not only with the magnitude but with the severity of the gender-based violence that the victims sustained." They

went on to explain that it was not unusual to see a woman who had been assaulted by 30-40 soldiers for days to weeks. This medical practitioner states that he saw patients ranging from 4 to 90 years old who sustained critical injuries from such incidents. In addition to the stress of not being able to provide general lifesaving care to patients, medical personnel were also traumatized by witnessing wanton levels of cruelty, including foreign bodies lodged in patients with justifications written on them for why the act happened to them.

Compounding these workplace stressors, Tigrayan doctors also went without pay for well over a year due to the government blockade on the local banks. This meant that many doctors either left the country or stayed and worked pro bono, hoping to receive back pay after the conflict.

Food Security

One interviewee accused the national government of using starvation as a weapon of war to turn the civilians against the TPLF and force them to surrender.

> **I think it all came down to the Federal Government not taking it [starvation of Tigray] seriously and sort of being invested in seeing people suffer because they had this idea that the people were going to turn on the TPLF if you starve them enough.** And it just doesn't ever work that way… I've worked in conflict long enough to know you can starve people out, but **they would rather die shooting than die starving.** And that's what happens until they run out of bullets. And that's effectively what happened in Tigray: they ran out of bullets.

An NGO worker described their surprise at the results of a community needs assessment survey conducted after the war ended. They had offered to work on issues of micro-financing and gender equality, but instead "all the women said the same thing, and they were asking for more food, that their families were starving, and the only reason that they were surviving was because they were coming to our feeding centers every day. So that was really hard."

Multiple interviewees pointed to the tactics of the Eritrean troops as exacerbating the hunger crisis among Tigrayan civilians. An interviewee described that because the Eritreans were operating secretly in Ethiopia, they did not have a large number of support trucks. Instead, the interviewee explained that: "they are depending on that land's resources for feeding, eating, sheltering, medical, anything, which are taking these resources from the civilians." Another interviewee stated that the Eritrean troops "feed themselves from what was stolen from Tigray."

In addition to stealing food from civilians to support their troops, the Eritrean forces also reportedly destroyed crops and livestock as a policy to starve civilians. An aid worker describes the situation:

> I do remember speaking to one Ethiopian group on the side of the road, and they said that a couple of days before there was a guy in his field with his livestock plowing in the field; he was shot and killed because he was cultivating his field. **One of the tactics that the Eritreans were carrying out was essentially denying killing livestock and denying people farming their land, because this was at harvest time, and they wanted to deprive them of that season's crop.**

One final interviewee on this topic noted that this strategy was not necessarily new in Ethiopia: "restraining the food supply did not start today."

Perception of unfairness, incompetence, and corruption in the response

The difficult access environment, coupled with the news of aid diversion, led the local humanitarian interviewees we spoke with to be critical of the international response and the wider international community. This included both accusations of incompetence as well as corruption.

Regarding the aid diversion scandal, when asked about it, one local humanitarian simply stated: "this was not news to us. That was news for you. This was not news for us." There seemed to be, at least in one case, a clash of ideas on how to best use resources between local and international humanitarians. While the interviewee was specifically discussing development organizations, this perception of waste and misallocated resources extended to the wider international humanitarian community:

> If one organization prepares training for gender-based violence, another organization will follow and prepare the same. T**hey have their training in the best hotels, they prepare good breakfast, lunch, dinner, and all the money, all the budgets they have will be spent to pay a very good salary to their staff and arrange training.** In the training, the people who are attending the training will get pocket money because they are participating. They eat good breakfast, lunch, and dinner, and all the budget is gone. **I am the living witness that the international development mechanism is not working in conflict zones like Tigray.**

This interviewee described frustration over the layers of bureaucracy that grant money must go through in large organizations. They posited that direct donations to community members from the organizations would be impactful: "They would have been more productive if they give the money just directly to the [people]. The main problem is that there is a long, long, long walk for the money to come from the senders and reach people. Say, a trickle reaches the people… In Tigray, there was no trickle at all."

For another local interviewee, this skepticism extended to the international community due to a perceived lack of interest and outrage towards the Tigray crisis. They stated: "the lack of concern from the international community is just heartbreaking. It made me lose my trust in the humanitarian system. It made me lose trust in humanity." They went on to explain that, in their view, the international community is pushing for Ethiopia to move on without adequate accounting and investigations of the wartime abuses. They continued, making a comparison between the international community's response to Ukraine and their response to the Tigray crisis. From their perspective, they saw a type of racist response fatigue when it comes to the African continent:

> That lack of commitment, that lack of humanity, is just really concerning. It's not that people have lost that humanity because we have seen people get really frustrated when

> the things were happening in Ukraine. **But you add to that racism as well: 'if you're Africans, it's expected, so nobody really cares.' So yeah, it's just really sad.**

Humanitarian Organizational Policy

Interviewees were split on the role that the humanitarian principles played in the Tigray crisis, and the extent to which they were violated. This was especially true of impartiality and neutrality. On the one hand, some interviewees accused the humanitarian response - mostly the HQ offices in Addis - of being far too pro-government. Individuals who shared this opinion cited the long-term relationship that the Ethiopian government had built up with Euro-American actors, which resulted in good will and trust from the humanitarians. A couple of interviewees mentioned that this situation boiled down to the difficulty of switching from a development to humanitarian context. They noted that the development mindset was hard to shake off and caused some individuals seated in Addis to give too much benefit of the doubt to the Ethiopian government. One interviewee explains this phenomenon further in the quote below, which they viewed as creating a barrier to an effective response:

> Ethiopia was previously a development context… To a large degree, the day that the conflict started in Tigray you had this sort of development culture that was very cozied up to the federal government, and because they could be; there was no conflict of interest prior to the conflict starting. **So you had a lot of NGOs and certain staff; they were too quick to accept what the Federal Government asked them to do or not to do, bearing in mind that there's now obviously a massive conflict of interest**.
>
> From day one, you could tell that all these staff overnight were no longer fit for purpose to run these organizations or these programs. **You needed a conflict aptitude mindset to be in there**. Also, certain senior staff in UN organizations were known to previously be quite close to Prime Minister Abiy and other people, and those relationships didn't change during the course of this conflict. **So you had this massive conflict of interest, and it came across as like a lethargy to actually respond in Tigray**, and kick back dirt into the government's face and say, 'look, things have changed, and this is what we need to do.'

In the opinion of some interviewees, the disconnect between the national government and the local level seemed to be mirrored in disconnects between humanitarian organizations' HQs and field offices. The same interviewee as above noted that a designated civ-mil team at the field level who can act as the "ground-pounders" opening access are key for overcoming this national level bias. However, in order for that dynamic to work, the interviewee sees that there needs to be a great level of trust in employees working in the field and less "micromanaging." They hypothesized that the perceived micromanaging from HQ was because "was happening at the fields could have jeopardized the top," or put differently, the "cozy relationships" between HQ and the government.

Other interviewees perceived an anti-government bias amongst the response and reported that it was difficult to stay neutral given the government perpetrated atrocities. This was especially true after the alleged killing of three Médecins Sans Frontières staff by the ENDF, which one interview said: "really colored the humanitarian view of the Ethiopians." They explained this

view of the government in light of the ground realities: “We considered the Ethiopians and the Eritreans to be the bad guys, which is something that you don't want to have creeping into your way of doing business. You know, trying to be as objective as possible. But somebody is essentially starving a population not allowing any aid… It made us consider them to be the bad people.”

Another interview explained that coupled with the government’s preexisting skepticism towards humanitarians, this actual anti-government messaging complicated accessing vulnerable populations further. They explain this sentiment in the quote below:

> What I found really interesting about that response is that in general, the larger humanitarian sector internationally really sided with Tigray. **There wasn't a lot of the neutrality that I've seen that humanitarian ideals are supposed to uphold**. And so it was very much a pro-Tigray in messaging, which is rather unique. And especially after Prime Minister Abiy brought in the Eritreans, and they sort of came in to support Prime Minister Abiy. **I think I saw that shift, and that caused a lot of difficulty in terms of humanitarian access**.

Another interviewee pointed out what they perceived as a lack of nuance in anti-government messaging by humanitarians. They explained that a greater understanding of the security environment and command structures would have led to more accurate messaging on which parties were responsible for which acts:

> **I think the messaging and communication and all that was very skewed, in my opinion, to be anti-Ethiopian Government**, and to really paint the picture that it was Ethiopian Government committing all these atrocities without any distinction between Ethiopian government forces, the Amhara forces that aren't reporting the Ethiopian Government, but are working on behalf of the local Amhara Government, or the Eritreans. And sure, they're there at the request of the Ethiopian Government, but that doesn't mean they're reporting to or are controlled by the Ethiopian Government necessarily. And so there's a lot of these disconnects.

This interviewee continued, explaining that the impact of the Ethiopian government viewing this coverage as unfair further complicated access. They explained that since the humanitarians were serving the Tigrayan people, that in their opinion, “there was almost no mention at all of any atrocities committed by the Tigrayan forces.” Because of that, the interviewee sees that the “Ethiopian government was really put in a difficult position where they **viewed open access to humanitarian actors as basically inviting further criticism of their government internationally** and not really a fair treatment.”

Humanitarian Access Best Practices

<u>Bottom-Up Approach</u>

While many interviewees noted the obstacles that the fractured ethnic federalist system caused for access, several interviewees took advantage of the apparent disconnect between the field and national level in their interviews. They stated that given the national government’s hostility,

working at a very local level and 'keeping it in the field' was sometimes a successful tactic. In the words of one interviewee:

> So we would very politely and very unofficially, **almost disregard Addis**. We needed a good reason to approach Addis. **We would try and troubleshoot and solve problems at a field level without involving Addis at all**. It would often start bottom up, or, of course, simultaneously, if you knew the local community leader: 'you go there. I'll go here.' Kind of like a Scooby-Doo kind of thing, and you'd obviously try and tackle it at both ends. More often than not, you'd start at the bottom. It was always a checkpoint. Most of it was physical access. Then there was obviously the bureaucratic access constraint side.
>
> The bureaucratic access was at the Federal level and the regional level administratively. But once you're in the field, in your land cruiser, you would stop at the checkpoint; generally, they would say: 'thou shalt not pass.' You would say: 'right, who do we need to speak to?' And then they would then point you in the direction of someone more senior that you need to speak to in order to be granted access. **So a bottom-up approach.**

This interviewee did note that there was no guarantee that this tactic would work, but that endurance and persistence was key: "There's certainly sometimes we were permitted to move on to the next checkpoint, and sometimes we weren't. There was no real art or science to getting our way. I think a lot of it came down to who had a bit more endurance to wear the other out."

Another humanitarian echoed a similar sentiment about negotiating at the lowest level and trying to keep access discussions away from the national level. They described the need to map out and interact with a military structure from a "very low level" with military commanders and majors who would control a certain area.

This interviewee also admitted that this approach had a "mixed level of successes," and that in some places they were "literally told to just leave and never come back," or they were threatened. But in other situations, the checkpoint staff would "step away and ignore us, and let us at least be able to provide and deliver in certain locations."

<u>Iterative and Informal Interactions</u>

Related to the above theme, multiple interviewees pointed out the importance of iterative interactions with the individuals they were negotiating access across from. A couple of interviewees used the same language about 'having a beer' with an individual checkpoint commander, and how this action went a long way to humanize themselves and build trust.

One humanitarian described tracking down an Amahara defense force command post leader who was at a local religious celebration. They recounted the interaction as follows

> I started dancing a little bit, but I went to the guy. I was like: 'Hey, how are you doing? My name is [REDACTED] and I work for [REDACTED]. Do you know there is another way that you go to heaven quickly?' He was like: 'How?' And I was like: 'There are 300,000 refugees in [REDACTED]... I need your permission to go there. We are an organization who is already established there; I just want to go back there.

The interviewee stated that the command post leader gave them a letter in Amharic that informed the checkpoint staff to check their passports but to allow them access.

Soft Skills

Interviewees almost unanimously agreed that organizations need to have the 'right person' as a negotiator. Understanding that this is a nebulous category, they refined their answer to something in which individuals can be trained: soft skills and rapport-building. One humanitarian reflected on a colleague of theirs in the response who was particularly skilled at negotiation, stating that they did not let the military troops intimidate them and would instead engage them in their own institutional language:

> "[They] would go into a cafe, meet a bunch of military guys, have a beer with them, be super jovial and friendly, and come out with a ton of information. Those are hard to put into training. You need to have a gift of the gab, to understand what these guys are going through…
>
> At the other end of that, **when you're meeting the military brass as a humanitarian, starting out with a bunch of humanitarian principles is not going to cut it**. They don't really want to hear that usually. **But helping to explain what your structure looks like, what your sort of equivalent ranks are, and who's trying to do what really resonates as an initial discussion, because that's the way militaries work.** Understanding the other structure is super important to them. So if you start out with: "You need to do this to meet international norms," they're going to tell you to get stuffed. But if you were able to explain, 'I'm so and so, this is my area responsibility, the equivalent of X rank, here's the person who's the theater commander equivalent, here's the person who's the chief of staff equivalent,' and **then help explain why it might be useful for them for you all to work together to find some commonality in your mission. That can be helpful, and probably the kind of thing you might be able to train for.**

Another humanitarian recounted a story that shows the importance of framing requests in a way that brings the negotiating partner onto the same team. They told a story about coming up to a checkpoint and making a strategic decision on how to interact with the checkpoint commander:

> I could ask him [one of] two questions: 'Can I go ahead?' And then he is in the position to say 'yes' or 'no.' Or, can I rephrase it and say: 'is it *safe* ahead?' And he was like, "Yeah, it's safe". I was like, 'Oh, that's good. What's your name?,' he was like 'REDACTED.' I was like: 'can I tell the checkpoints ahead that REDACTED sent me?' He was like: 'yeah, yeah…' He was on his walkie [talkie] and he started speaking a little bit: 'allow this guy [to] come.' **Sixteen checkpoints like little dominos; it was all the way.**

The same interviewee noted the importance of cementing institutional knowledge and memory of these interactions with the checkpoints, since any one humanitarian negotiator might rotate out of the country. They did so by clearly articulating which organization they worked with so that in the future hopefully other members of the same organization would be granted access.

Another interviewee noted the importance of building up organizational familiarity with negotiating partners, as well as establishing yourself as a tough but fair negotiation partner.

> This is where I think a lot of access comes. **It's the historical positioning of your organization, and oftentimes, you personally.** How have you managed situations and have you been a fair actor? Have you been somebody who's been discreet? Have you been true to your job? People will respect that, even if you're tough. I had big fights with people in the TPLF twenty years ago but what I found out as I was leaving was that the people around him all respected me for it. It gives you sort of the moral [ground] for you to say, "Yeah we're gonna help in this area, but you know what? We're sorry, guys, we're not gonna feed the military. We're not gonna do certain things. And if you can't allow us to monitor a certain area, we're just not gonna deliver." It works both ways. **It allows you to be both tough and also allows you to have the kind of respect that they're gonna allow you to work in this area.**

Humanitarian Coordination and Informal Information Networks

The information scarce environment in Ethiopia led to significant field-level collaboration between different humanitarian actors that was independent of the normal humanitarian coordination structures. This resulted in an informal information sharing network. For example, one humanitarian interviewee explained that important interactions took place merely by merit of being stuck in the same hotel with other organizations:

> So from the nature of the response, we became very close. We had no other way. Every night there was a curfew at 8pm. It was very dangerous to be out in the streets. So it kind of forced people to socialize and it also affected the collaboration in terms of the humanitarian response because a lot of INGOs were staying in the same hotel with us, and **they would come in and get information from us, it was very unofficial. But there was a lot of collaboration happening.**

In the opinion of some interviewees, this working relationship was useful because it allowed different organizations to play to their strengths. In particular, interviewees noted that certain organizations had lower "risk tolerance" than others, and that some organizations had less flexibility in terms of the field level. They stated that some organizations were "very interested in getting off the beaten track" and finding people who were overlooked rather than delivering to the most accessible populations. The interviewee explained that these ground pounding organizations were helpful to opening access for the overall response, especially for institutions that were not as well connected: "they would hunt out all those locations, and to a greater or lesser degree, share information on where this extra demand was. For people like us who had no connection with the military on a day-to-day, office-working relationship, where we could make a plan and then execute the plan."

They continued, stating that they would collaborate with the ground pounding organizations in order to not only map out which checkpoints were hostile, but also to better understand the physical geography: "Half the driving was not just seeing who is there but seeing what is there: 'Is the road passable for a normal twin axle truck? Or does it need to go by a 4x4?"

Organizations also used this method to pool resources, reportedly carpooling together to certain areas. One interviewee described having a weekly meeting after running these mapping exercises where they would reportedly tell the other organizations: "Listen, would anybody like to go with us to these locations and some agencies would sign up and do that. Others would say that we're too busy addressing the need in town, which was legitimate."

This collaboration occurred in a variety of ways. While an evacuation for humanitarian staff was never necessary in Tigray, another interviewee used contingency planning as an example of fruitful collaboration. They explained how in the wake of the fighting, several organizations realized that they would need a rapid exit plan. A variety of organizations shared information about resources and capabilities with each other in order to circumvent the communications gaps and offer one another help where they could:

> The question was: 'Okay: who's got fuel?' So being able to figure out where all the fuel was - doing the math to figure out how many people had to be moved, and to where and where we actually could go, given the limited number of places that that actually could provide access to or exit from Tigray.
>
> …And even going to other partners to [ask]: 'you have any people? We've got 3 extra seats; Is there anybody you need to have carried? Do you have anybody who is sick that needs to be prioritized?' You know that was probably the most innovating part [of] the actual planning when nobody knew what was going on. No information coming in because of the complete communications gaps and just meeting face to face twice a day to try to get the best and latest information and decide about a course of action.

Duty of Care to National Staff

Multiple interviewees pointed out that national staff members are uniquely vulnerable to violence and retaliation, especially in an ethnic conflict. They noted that while it is crucial to have a diverse team that represents the ethnic and linguistic context, this has to be matched with guidelines to keep national staff members safe. In the words of one interviewee, "your staff is sacrosanct." Ensuring their safety required constant coordination between the civ-mil team and the security team in one organization in order to "make sure you could pull those people out" at any given time.

Another interviewee discussed how they hired both Tigrayan and Amaharan nationals "to negotiate access as best we could." They described having to "really having to sort of look at the individual's risk profile based on their ethnicity and tribal affiliation" and then conduct operations accordingly—for example, not sending a Tigrayan to speak with federal troops or an Amaharan into Tigray.

Conclusion

The access constraints in Ethiopia discussed throughout the interviews can be sorted according to OCHA's Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework.[73] All nine of these access constraints were described in the interviews and desk research.

1. Denial of the existence of humanitarian needs or of entitlements to humanitarian assistance.
2. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods into the affected country.
3. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods within the affected country.
4. Military operations and ongoing hostilities impeding humanitarian operations
5. Violence against humanitarian personnel, assets, and facilities
6. Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities
7. Physical Environment
8. Presence of Mines and UXOs
9. Restrictions on, or obstruction of, conflict affected populations access to services and assistance

The interview data above describes the key challenges and opportunities that humanitarians at all levels of the humanitarian response in Tigray faced. The data on the operational environment details the considerable day to day challenges humanitarians faced as they tried to gain access to vulnerable civilian populations. Humanitarian interviewees noted a pervasive sense of hostility towards humanitarian actors by the Ethiopian government. Tactics such as visa restrictions, selective Persona Non Grata designations, and accusations of aiding terrorists were employed to obstruct aid delivery. This hostility created a chilling effect amongst some humanitarian actors, which reinforced the access issues.

Nonstate armed groups posed obstacles to access for humanitarians as well. Regional defense forces and the Eritrean troops operating in-country endangered the safety of international and national humanitarians as well as civilians. The security threat posed by the Eritrean troops was heightened due to the humanitarians' lack of access to their command-and-control structure. The Ethiopian national government's air of plausible deniability around the presence of the Eritrean troops offers a troubling case study for how third-party actors can complicate an already non permissive access environment.

According to interviewees, the Ethiopian government also attempted to manage public perception about their cooperation with humanitarians, to varying degrees of success. Coupled with the government created dead zone that disallowed communications technologies, this created an environment where humanitarians needed to rely on field-level informal information networks to be able to do their jobs.

A general disconnect between the national, regional, and local governments in terms of command and control as well as political interests complicated coordination efforts. Some interviewees described almost a dual structure on the humanitarian side, with a divide between HQ which sat in Addis and field offices. In both of these cases, the national level and the field

[73] "Humanitarian Access | OCHA," accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.unocha.org/humanitarian-access.

level to certain extents were operating independently and sometimes at cross-purposes. Field level humanitarians noted that the ability to operate more independently and flexibly was beneficial for opening access to vulnerable populations.

Despite the overwhelming challenges posed by this environment, interviewees reported some success in delivering aid to the most vulnerable populations. These strategies include adopting a bottom-up approach, engaging in iterative and informal interactions, leveraging soft skills, collaborating with local and international partners, and prioritizing the safety of national staff.

Researchers asked interviewees to reflect on what made their negotiations successful or unsuccessful and to think about how those tactics might be formalized through training. While a number of interviewees mentioned that it is mostly personality-based and just ‘takes the right person,’ when pushed to think beyond intrinsic traits interviewees identified a variety of trainable skills. Interviewees referred to soft skills (such as adaptability, personability, creativity, active listening, etc) and a ‘social science’ approach to negotiations as highly important. In some of the most successful examples, the ability to connect with the other side on a human level while maintaining a tough adherence to the humanitarian principles made the difference. Several individuals also made organizational suggestions. Chief amongst these was for staff seated in national HQs to trust the competence of their staff on the ground. Another was to specifically train civ-mil officers on access, foster strong bonds between security teams and civ-mil teams, give decision making power to field negotiators, and be more flexible in switching between a development mindset and humanitarian mindset once a conflict begins in-country.

The humanitarian principles played a complicated role in the Tigray crisis response. This case study demonstrates the types of difficult principle-based questions that arise during conflict-related humanitarian responses, especially when the national government is a party to the conflict. Preexisting relationships are oftentimes considered key elements for a successful response, as it reduces opportunity costs of creating the connections from the ground up at the start of a mission. However, the Ethiopian case stands as a warning that preexisting relationships are not value positive or even neutral - depending on the context, they can also complicate humanitarian responses by compromising neutrality.

Case Study: Western Sahel

Situation Overview

French colonization of West Africa began in the 1890s, spanning present-day Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Benin, Guinea, and the Ivory Coast.[74] By 1904, the military territory of Niger was created and encompassed Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger with the capital at Niamey.[75] In 1922, Niger officially became a colony in French West Africa, evolving into an autonomous state by 1958. All three countries included in this case study - Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali - presently face political volatility, economic instability, and climate shocks.

Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is the epicenter of a multidimensional crisis at the intersection of political and economic instability and climate shocks.[76] Political volatility is rooted in colonialism, when France invaded the territory in 1896 and deemed it a French protectorate.[77] The region was engulfed in an anti-colonial rebellion, the Volta-Bani War, between 1915 and 1917.[78] France later established the Upper Volta in 1919, distinguishing the territory from Upper Senegal and Niger.[79] In 1958, the Upper Volta gained self-government, merged with the Franco-African Community, and became independent in 1960 under Marice Yaméogo.[80] The republic underwent political and constitutional transitions over the next two-and-a-half decades, marked by power struggles and coups.[81] In 1984, the Upper Volta was renamed Burkina Faso under Blaise Coparoré, who led the country until a transitional government gained control in 2014.[82] Since then, a series of elections, coups, and Islamic

[74] "French in West Africa," accessed October 31, 2023, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/K-12/French_16178.html.
[75] "Niger Country Profile."
[76] "Burkina Faso: Hunger & Food Security - World Food Program USA," accessed October 10, 2023, https://www.wfpusa.org/countries/burkina-faso/.
[77] "Burkina Faso Country Profile," *BBC News*, April 13, 2011, sec. Africa, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13072774.
[78] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[79] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[80] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[81] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[82] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."

insurgencies by Jihadist groups have occurred.[83] In 2022, a military coup led by Lt Col Damiba seized power from President Kaboré.[84] Soon after, Lt Col Damiba was ousted by Captain Ibrahim Traoré in a second coup.[85] Burkina Faso officially cut long-standing military ties with France in 2023, amidst a turn toward the use of Russian-backed security forces to combat jihadism.[86]

Political volatility in Burkina Faso is aggravated by economic instability. The nation ranks 184th out of 191 on the Human Development Index (HDI) at 0.449.[87] The World Food Programme (WFP) reports that 40% of the population lives below the poverty line of less than two dollars per day, with 80% relying on subsistence agriculture.[88] The incidence of food insecurity is 50.7%, 3.4 million people are on the brink of starvation, and 25% of children below the age of 5 are suffering from stunting.[89] Reports indicate that 14 of the 45 provinces in Burkina are in a state of emergency, with 40% of the overall territory plagued with violence.[90] Deadly attacks by extremist groups in 2022 resulted in hundreds of civilian, government security, and state-sponsored militia deaths.[91] The types of attacks included improvised explosive devices (IEDs), targeted killings and kidnappings, mining site attacks, burning of schools, medical centers, and homes, and theft of cattle, vehicles, and food assistance.[92]

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that 1 in 5 Burkinabè people (4.7 million) need multisectoral humanitarian aid–a 62% increase from 2020 reports.[93] As of December 21st, 2022, 1 in 10 (1.9 million) people were displaced, and 89,000 were in conditions classified as a level 3 disaster according to the Cross-sectoral assessment framework needs[94]. The European Union reported at least 35,000 refugees, mainly from Mali, dispersed across Burkina, contributing to multiple forms of displacement.[95] This is concerning given 197 (14%) health facilities were closed, and 408 (38%) provided only minimum services by the end of 2022–leaving 2.4 million with restricted access to healthcare services amidst cholera and meningitis epidemics.[96] Concurrently, 6,250 schools remained closed, leaving a million children out of school.[97] Mobilization of resources is difficult as Burkina Faso is landlocked. Reports indicate that 64

[83] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[84] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[85] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[86] "Burkina Faso Country Profile."
[87] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb," March 31, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/burkina-faso-plan-de-reponse-humanitaire-2023-mars-2023; "Burkina Faso: Hunger & Food Security - World Food Program USA."
[88] "Burkina Faso: Hunger & Food Security - World Food Program USA."
[89] "Burkina Faso: Hunger & Food Security - World Food Program USA"; "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."
[90] "Burkina Faso," accessed October 10, 2023, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/burkina-faso_en.
[91] Ibrahim Traore, "BURKINA FASO 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT," n.d.
[92] Traore.
[93] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."
[94] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."
[95] "Burkina Faso."
[96] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb"; "Burkina Faso," accessed October 10, 2023, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/africa/burkina-faso_en.
[97] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."

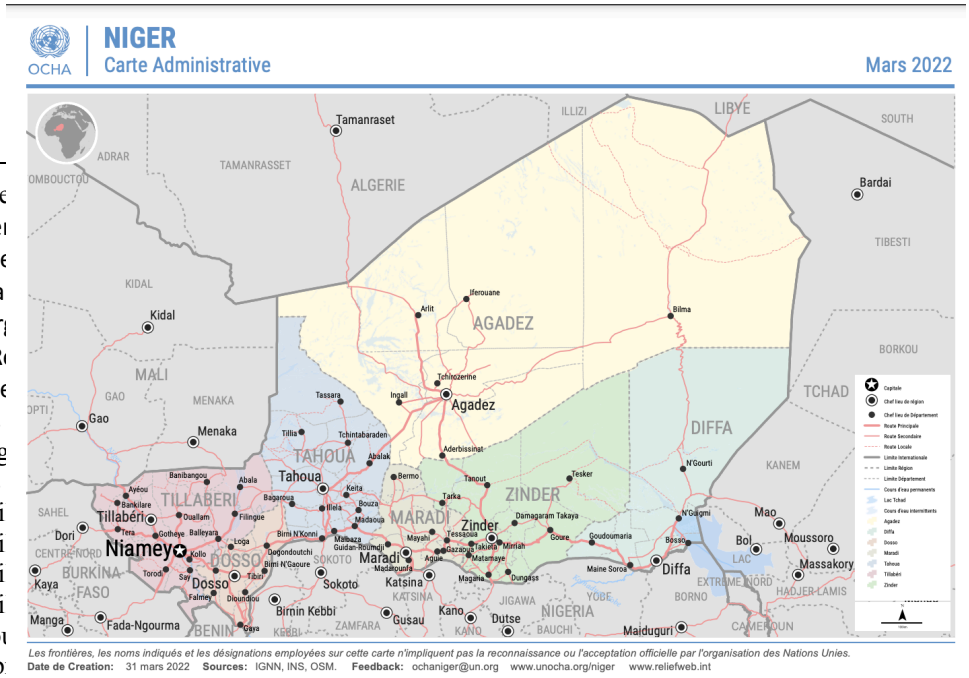
(18%) municipalities faced access constraints, with an additional 60 (17%) only moderately accessible.

WFP reports that 80% of the economy in Burkina Faso depends on agriculture for food and income.[98] Periods of drought followed by intense flooding have desolated the land that is already impacted by desertification and soil erosion from accelerated deforestation.[99] This is compounded with a 59% increase in food insecurity rates in the final quarter of 2022 compared to the same period in 2021.[100] The United Nations Office for the Coordination Affairs (OCHA) and 2023 Humanitarian Response (HRP) plan estimate that $877 million must be mobilized to match access constraints and inflation.[101] This 9% increase from the 2022 HRP accounts for elevated needs in difficult-to-access regions.[102]

Niger

Niger has been under siege since the overthrow of President Mohamed Bazoum on July 26th, 2023, by a military coup led by General Abdourahmane Tchiani.[103] Since 1960, Niger has experienced five successful coups, with the most recent undermining democratically elected Bazoum's presidential leadership.[104]

Like Burkina Faso and Mali, Niger gained independence from France in 1960 and became a one-party civilian regime.[105] Corruption, economic difficulties, food shortages and climate shocks prompted a series of military coups over the next several decades.[106] The development of a new constitution in 2010 sought to "restore civilian rule" and within a year Mahamadou Issoufou became president.[107] However, a failed military coup in 2015 linked to General Abdourahmane Tchiani (who was later exonerated) previewed the coup d'etat in 2023.[108] International actors including the U.S., the European Union, the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have condemned the coup by imposing sanctions and threatening military intervention.[109] Such a collapse in democracy threatens the U.S.-Niger partnership while opening space for



[98] "Burkina Faso: Hunge
[99] "Burkina Faso: Hunge
[100] "Burkina Faso Plan de
[101] "Burkina Faso: Huma
https://www.unocha.org
"Burkina Faso Plan de R
[102] "Burkina Faso Plan de
[103] "The Military Seizes
https://www.cfr.org/blog
[104] "The Military Seizes
[105] "Niger Country Profi
[106] "Niger Country Profi
[107] "Niger Country Profi
[108] "Niger Country Profi
[109] "The Niger Coup Cou
https://www.cfr.org/in-b

Russian interference.[110]

The World Bank classifies Niger as an extremely low-income nation, ranking 189th out of 191 on the Human Development Index with a value of 0.4, lower than neighboring countries of Burkina Faso and Mali.[111] Previous reports from the World Bank indicated that 2023 real GDP growth was projected at 6.9%, based on an average performance in agriculture and large-scale oil production from 2022 end-of-year reports.[112] Sanctions and paused international development funds following the coup d'état have impeded the growth potential.[113] Specifically, ECOWAS trade sanctions and border closures will reduce exports of crude oil through the new pipeline, and imports such as foodstuffs and electricity with non-ECOWAS countries.[114] If the sanctions, pause in international development funding, and below average agriculture performance persist, the World Bank estimates that growth could fall to 2.3% (-1.5% in per capita terms).[115]

Similarly to Burkina, Niger faces a triple threat of climactic, anthropogenic and demographic pressures.[116] Agriculture accounts for more than 40% of the country's GDP, but in 2021 declined by 4.5%. Climate shocks including floods, droughts, and torrential rain threaten the agriculture sector.[117] In 2022, 327,000 people were directly affected by floods and torrential rain, resulting in the loss of homes, food insecurity, livestock destruction and sown fields.[118] This is coupled with a disruption in the supply chain of cereal products; specifically, millet, the primary cereal consumed in Niger.[119] The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates that 3.3 million people, 13% of Niger's population, are food insecure.[120] An additional 7.3 million, 28% of the population, are at risk of dropping into severe food insecurity.[121]

As of September 2023, 700,000 displaced persons including internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and asylum-seekers resided in Niger.[122] The UNHCR reports the arrival of 6,900 asylum-seekers from Chad, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso.[123] Increased migration is linked to widespread instability across the Sahel region, and advancements of extremist groups [124]. The COVID-19 pandemic drastically impacted the living conditions of vulnerable populations with the Niger Humanitarian Response Plan recording an increase of 1.5 million in need of aid between 2019 and 2021.[125]This is concerning given the poverty level is expected to reach 44.1%

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[110] "The Niger Coup Could Threaten the Entire Sahel."
[111] United Nations, "Specific Country Data," *Human Development Reports* (United Nations), accessed October 25, 2023, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data.
[112] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[113] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[114] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[115] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[116] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action," accessed October 30, 2023, https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1145.
[117] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[118] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[119] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[120] "WFP Niger: Situation Report #6, 24 October 2023 - Niger | ReliefWeb," October 26, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/wfp-niger-situation-report-6-24-october-2023.
[121] "WFP Niger."
[122] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[123] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[124] "The Niger Coup Could Threaten the Entire Sahel."
[125] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."

due to negative per capita growth and rising inflation.[126] Deteriorating living conditions and rising poverty levels have given rise to public health concerns. The UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that as of October 2023, a diphtheria epidemic has impacted 19 of the 72 districts in Niger, with 1,440 cases and 69 deaths.[127] This is concurrent to a measles epidemic in 35 restrictions with 1,784 cases and 7 deaths.[128]

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that 583.9 million is needed to reach 2.7 million people.[129] Approximately 154.3 million will target refugee response, 141.2 million for food security, 83.4 million for nutrition, and 73.9 million for protection.[130] The remainder of the funds will be spread amongst various sectors including shelters, health, water, hygiene and sanitation (WASH), education, common humanitarian services, and coordination.[131] Niger was previously positioned as one of the best-funded countries in the Sahel region, but the humanitarian needs are growing as a result of various shocks.[132]

Mali

France colonized present-day Mali in 1898–previously recognized as the French Sudan.[133] By 1958, it was declared the autonomous Sudanese Republic and remained within the French network until 1960, when Mali and Senegal gained independence from France and formed the Mali Federation.[134] Shortly after, Senegal departed the federation, and the Republic of Mali emerged.[135] Modibo Keïta served as president of the one-party socialist state for eight years.[136] However, economic decline led to a coup under Moussa Traoré, leader of the republic, until his 1991 arrest during the March Revolution.[137] Between Traoré's arrest and the 2012 Tuareg rebellion, the legalization of opposition parties and a formal constitution arose.[138]

Mali's development has coincided with political volatility, economic instability, and climate shocks. The multidimensional crisis led to persistent insecurity in the central and northern regions, with the Malian government appealing for support from Paris in 2013.[139] France officially launched Operation Barkhane on August 1st, 2014; a regional counterterrorism mission backed by the United States.[140] The temporary deployment of French troops evolved into France's "forever war", costing one billion annually and five thousand personnel.[141] The U.S. had

[126] "Niger Overview: Development News, Research, Data | World Bank."
[127] "Niger Humanitarian Flash Update No. 5, 20 October 2023 | UNICEF," accessed October 30, 2023, https://www.unicef.org/documents/niger-humanitarian-flash-update-no-5-20-october-2023.
[128] "Niger Humanitarian Flash Update No. 5, 20 October 2023 | UNICEF."
[129] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[130] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[131] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[132] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[133] "Mali Country Profile."
[134] "Mali Country Profile."
[135] "Mali Country Profile."
[136] "Mali Country Profile."
[137] "Mali Country Profile."
[138] "Mali Country Profile."
[139] "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali | Council on Foreign Relations."
[140] "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali | Council on Foreign Relations."
[141] "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali | Council on Foreign Relations."

previously contributed forty-five million annually to Operation Barkhane, but funding was suspended in 2020 under the Trump Administration.[142]

Concurrently, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) launched in April 2013 to advance ceasefire agreements, deliver humanitarian aid, and maintain security amidst a shift to constitutional order.[143] Mali was undergoing a shift in political leadership as Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was elected as president in September 2013. MINUSMA and Keita were key actors in negotiating the 2015 Peace Accord, the "Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali Resulting from the Algiers Process", that guaranteed "genuine national reconciliation" between the government and northern separatist rebels.[144] The intent was to alleviate Tuareg political concerns, disarm rebels, isolate terrorist organizations, and restore control in the north while bolstering economic growth.[145] Three main failures of the Peace Accord cited by the Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) are its ineffective engagement of regional stakeholders contributing to regional instability, narrow geographic coverage, and inconsistent commitment and political endorsement from signatories and guarantors.[146]

Additional regional forces like G5 Sahel gathered five-thousand troops from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Mali in conjunction with support from the African Union to combat insecurity.[147] The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2391 (2017) encouraged the G5 Sahel forces to generate a compliance framework to "establish a robust compliance framework to prevent, investigate, address and publicly report violations and abuses of human rights law and violations of international humanitarian law related to the FC-G5S".[148]

Efforts by the French Military, MINUSMA, the 2015 Peace Accord, and G5 Sahel Joint Force are waning as the complex emergency magnifies in the Republic of Mali. In 2020, a military junta gained control and removed civilian transition leaders.[149] According to a Congressional Research Service report, special forces member, Colonel Assimi Goïta, is the "Transition President" with populist politician Choguel Maïga as the junta-appointed Prime Minister. France withdrew more than two-thousand troops in 2022.[150] In the same year, Mali pulled out of the G5 Sahel, and was suspended from the African Union and Economic Community of West Africa

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[142] "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali | Council on Foreign Relations."
[143] "Mali | MINUSMA," Better World Campaign, March 22, 2023, https://betterworldcampaign.org/mission/mali-minusma.
[144] Judd Devermont and Marielle Harris, "Why Mali Needs a New Peace Deal," April 15, 2020, https://www.csis.org/analysis/why-mali-needs-new-peace-deal; "Product Details IF10116."
[145] "Product Details IF10116."
[146] Devermont and Harris, "Why Mali Needs a New Peace Deal"; "Product Details IF10116."
[147] "What to Know About the Crisis in Mali | Council on Foreign Relations"; "Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework," OHCHR, accessed October 25, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/countries/africa-region/project-supporting-g5-sahel-joint-force-implementation-human-rights-and-international-humanitarian.
[148] "Project Supporting the G5 Sahel Joint Force with Implementation of the Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Compliance Framework."
[149] "Product Details IF10116."
[150] "Mali Country Profile"; "Product Details IF10116."

States (ECOWAS).[151] MINUSMA also decided on June 30th 2023 to conclude its operations by the end of the calendar year in accordance with Security Council Resolution 2690 and Bambko's resistance towards U.N. peacekeeping efforts.[152]

Since the coup, Russia has been chosen as Mali's primary military partner, marking a transition from decades of French alliance.[153] The partnership arose out of the African nation's goals to combat jihadist advances in the region and bolster political support amongst the general public and government actors.[154] The pivot towards Russia has isolated Mali from Western and other regional allies.[155] France removed all of its troops associated with Operation Barkhane that sought to counter jihadist advances and have halted the delivery of development aid.[156] France continues to provide humanitarian aid; however, Malian officials have barred French funding and support.[157]

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that ongoing insecurity has resulted in more than 422,000 people internally displaced in Mali.[158] This excludes the 175,000 Malian refugees harbored in neighboring countries that are expected to return by the end of 2023. Estimates from January 2023 indicate that 8.8 million need humanitarian assistance, representing a 17% increase from the 7.5 million in 2022.[159] Upwards of 1.25 million people were in need of food assistance from June to August 2023, with 1.5 million children under the age of five estimated to suffer from acute malnutrition between June 2022 and May 2023.[160] Over 1766 schools closed, affecting 529,000 children in northern, central and southern regions.[161] This is compounded by large-scale conflict and increased food and fuel prices, impacting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.[162]

The Republic of Mali remains one of the poorest and underdeveloped countries, ranking 149th out of 191 on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a value of 0.428.[163] The economy depends on gold and cotton, with many individuals relying on farming, livestock, and fishing for their livelihood.[164] Climate change is the leading cause of displacement, with droughts, seasonal floods, crop pests, desertification, and erratic rainfall disrupting local economies.[165] The

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[151] Human Rights Watch, "Mali: Events of 2022," in *World Report 2023*, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/mali.
[152] "Mali | MINUSMA."
[153] "Mali."
[154] "Mali."
[155] "Mali."
[156] "Mali."
[157] "Mali."
[158] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action," accessed October 24, 2023, https://humanitarianaction.info/plan/1122.
[159] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[160] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[161] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[162] "Mali | Humanitarian Assistance," U.S. Agency for International Development, August 21, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/mali.
[163] United Nations, "Specific Country Data," *Human Development Reports* (United Nations), accessed October 25, 2023, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data.
[164] "Product Details IF10116."
[165] "World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal," accessed October 25, 2023, https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/.

agriculture regions of Sikasso, Mopti, and Segou in the south have been hardest hit–posing additional challenges for food security in Mali.[166]

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that 751.49 million is needed to reach 5.7 million people across Mali. Approximately 274.49 million will be allocated to food security, 102.3 million for protection, 39.2 million for child protection, and $22.1 million for Gender-Based Violence (GBV).[167] The remainder of the funds will spread amongst various sectors. This plan is in collaboration with the Government Action Plan, the Strategic Framework for Economic Recovery and Sustainable Development, the stabilization strategy for the central regions, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSCDF).[168]

Key Actors

Burkina Faso

The 2022 coup resulted in Burkina Faso's suspension from the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).[169] Multiple state and non-state armed actors are working feverishly to combat regional instability which is proving to be difficult amidst widespread uncertainty.

KEY ACTORS	
STATE-ARMED ACTORS	NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS
1. Burkinabe Military	1. Militias 2. Self-defense groups 3. Islamic Extremist groups a. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) b. Macina Liberation Front (FLM) faction of Jama' at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) c. Ansaroul Islam

Table 1: Key Actors in Burkina Faso

State Armed Actors

State actors involved in Burkina Faso's complex emergency include the Burkinabe Military. Since gaining independence from France in 1960, the country has experienced seven military

[166] "World Bank Climate Change Knowledge Portal."
[167] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[168] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[169] "Burkina Faso Country Profile," *BBC News*, April 13, 2011, sec. Africa, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13072774.

coups.[170] The coup in January 2022 was spearheaded by Interim President Paul Henri Sandogo Damiba.[171] The military regained power after just 8 months of his leadership, and since then appointed Capt. Ibrahim Traoré as Interim President of a transitional government.[172] However, one-third of the country lacks state presence , leaving the territory in the hands of armed militias and rebel groups.[173] Counterterrorism tactics including abuse, detentions, and killings employed by the military have resulted in a series of human rights violations with minimal accountability.[174]

Nonstate Armed Actors

The non-state armed actors in Burkina Faso include armed militias, self-defense groups, and Islamist extremists. Historical ties of non-state actors to government security go back to the 1980s when the Committees for the Defense of the Revolutions (CDR) was developed.[175] President Sankara partnered state with non-state armed actors to provide community-engaged social services. Such partnerships have complicated the delineation between state and non-state actors in conflict zones.

A similar alliance was observed in 2019 when the state created the Volunteers for the Defense of the State to defend northern territories against Islamist groups.[176] The three groups primarily responsible for heightened violence are the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), the Macina Liberation Front (FLM) faction of the Jama' at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) coalition, and Ansaroul Islam.[177] Ansaroul Islam is considered a "homegrown" militant group founded in 2016 by Ibrahim Malam Dicko, who initially worked with state actors to rid the Malian borders of jihadists. This group was primarily locals whose relationship with Bukinabe communities reinforced a narrative of state abandonment.[178] The movement shifted with reports of over half a million Islamist violent events tied to Ansarul Islam in Burkina between 2016 and 2018.[179] This prompted a countermovement from the self-defense militia, Koglweogo. Threats, kidnappings, blockages, and execution-style killings perpetrated by Islamist extremist groups persist in northern Mali and Burkina Faso.[180]

The 2024 Human Rights Watch report indicates that humanitarian needs in 2023 were exacerbated by Islamist armed group attacks from JNIM and ISGS, and violations inflicted by

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[170] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs," accessed October 11, 2023, https://www.saisjournal.eu/article/86-Haadiya-Ahmed-Proliferation-of-Violent-Non-State-Actors-and-Islamist-Activity-in.cfm.
[171] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[172] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[173] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[174] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[175] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[176] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[177] Pauline Le Roux, "Ansaroul Islam: The Rise and Decline of a Militant Islamist Group in the Sahel," *Africa Center for Strategic Studies* (blog), accessed October 11, 2023, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/ansaroul-islam-the-rise-and-decline-of-a-militant-islamist-group-in-the-sahel/.
[178] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."
[179] Roux, "Ansaroul Islam."
[180] "SAIS Journal of Global Affairs."

military forces and pro-government militias during counterterrorism operations.[181] Approximately 50% of the country remains controlled by Islamist armed groups with the transitional military government attempting to regain territory.[182]

Civilian Government and Nongovernmental Actors

As of December 15th, 2022, the Burkina Faso government and Ministry for humanitarian action, generated a Humanitarian Response Plan titled "Transitional Government Humanitarian Response Plan (PRG/GT)".[183] Government agencies have been working in partnership with IGOs and NGOs to provide multi-sectoral humanitarian aid through an inter-cluster coordination approach. Actors include the Rapid Response Coordination Group (RWRG), Cash Transfer Group (CWG), Information Management Group (IMWG), Community Engagement and Accountability Group (CEAWG), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), RPT, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Food Programme (WFP), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), SCI, and the Central American Minors (CAM).[184]

Niger

Under the leadership of President Mohamed Bazoum, international forces from the U.S., France, and Mali worked together to thwart violence by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda militants.[185] However, such efforts ended after Bazoum was forcibly removed from his position by a fraction of the Niger Military on July 26th, 2023.[186] This has resulted in an imbalance of power among state and non-state armed actors which has worsened the pre-existent complex emergency in Niger.

KEY ACTORS	
STATE-ARMED ACTORS	NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS
1. Niger Armed Forces 2. President Mohamed Bazoum	1. Tuareg Militant groups 2. Military Junta 3. Islamic Extremist groups a. Boko Haram b. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) c. Al-Qaeda

[181] Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Events of 2023," in *World Report 2024*, 2023, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/burkina-faso.

[182] Human Rights Watch.

[183] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."
[184] "Burkina Faso Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 (Mars 2023) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb."
[185] "Niger Country Profile."
[186] "The Niger Coup Could Threaten the Entire Sahel."

	d. Jama' at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) coalition

Table 1: Key actors in Mali

State Armed Actors

State-armed actors include the Niger Armed forces further broken down into the military armed forces (Niger Army and Niger Air Force, paramilitary armed forces (National Gendarmeries of Niger and National Guard of Niger) and the National Police.[187] The President of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, was in control of the armed forces after the democratic election in 2021 until the coup d'etat on July 26th, 2023. Power has since shifted to former military general Abdourahmane Tchiani. However, battles with insurgent groups began over a decade ago, and since 2019 resulted in 1,000 casualties and 2.8 million displacements.[188] Military bases occupied by the U.S. and France still exist, but troops have been confined to their bases since the fall of democratic leadership.[189]

Nonstate Armed Actors

The border areas of Niger, including Nigeria, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali are plagued by ongoing violence and insecurity perpetrated by non-state armed actors and acts of banditry.[190] Notable non-state armed actors include Boko Haram, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), the Tuareg militant groups, Al-Qaeda, Jama' at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) coalition, and the military junta.[191] Based on data from the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan, the number of protection incidents increased by 125% between 2019 and 2021. These incidents include the planting of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mines, gender-based violence, kidnappings, cattle rustling, and extortion.[192] The Lake Chad Basin is particularly vulnerable with reports of 3,142 protection incidents that impacted 6,866 people between January and October 2022.[193] The 2023 coup d'etat leaves Niger vulnerable to further incursion of non-state armed actors.

Civilian Government and Nongovernmental Agencies

Support from national government agencies has evolved alongside Niger's fight for democracy. A cross-sectoral analysis was conducted in 2022 by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG) and the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) using the Joint intersectoral Needs Assessment Framework (JIAF 2.0) approach.[194] This revealed that 43% of the population in Niger has severe humanitarian needs that warrant support from internal and external entities. See appendix a.

[187] "Armed Forces of Niger – Multinational Joint Task Force," accessed November 1, 2023, https://mnjtffmm.org/armed-forces-of-niger/.
[188] "The Niger Coup Could Threaten the Entire Sahel."
[189] "The Niger Coup Could Threaten the Entire Sahel."
[190] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[191] "Violent Extremism in the Sahel," Global Conflict Tracker, accessed November 1, 2023, https://cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel.
[192] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[193] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[194] "Niger Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published a report on the complex emergency in May 2023 leading up to the coup that outlined implementing partners critical to achieving humanitarian relief operations.[195] Key organizations referenced were USAID, WFP, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and UNICEF.[196] The International Office of Migration (IOM) also partners with the Ministry of Humanitarian Action Disaster Management (MHA), 'Cadre de Concertation sur les Migrations', and the United Nations Network on Migration to aid crisis-affected populations and vulnerable Nigerien migrants.[197] Other key supporters include the European Commission, and the broader humanitarian cluster system.

Mali

The complex emergency in Mali is exacerbated by declining support from the French Military, MINUSMA, G5 Sahel, the African Union, and regional ECOWAS.[198] At the same time, the Russian Wagner Group have become increasingly involved in counterterrorism efforts with Mali security forces.[199]

KEY ACTORS	
STATE-ARMED ACTORS	NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS
1. The Government and Malian Allied Foreign Security Forces	1. Ethnic Militias 2. Islamic Armed groups a. Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) b. Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) 3. Russian Wagner Group

Table 1: Key actors in Mali

State Armed Actors

State actors involved in Mali's complex emergency include the government and Malian and allied foreign security forces. The Human Rights Watch suggests that counterterrorism operations in the Mopti and Ségou regions have resulted in hundreds of unlawful killings of civilians and suspects.[200] In March 2022, three hundred men, including suspected Islamist fighters, were reportedly executed in the central region of Moura–referenced as the "worst single atrocity in Mali's decade-long armed conflict between government forces and Islamist armed

[195] "Niger," U.S. Agency for International Development, July 13, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/niger.
[196] "Niger."
[197] "Niger Crisis Response Plan 2023 | Global Crisis Response Platform," accessed November 1, 2023, https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/niger-crisis-response-plan-2023.
[198] Human Rights Watch, "Mali," 2023.
[199] Human Rights Watch.
[200] Human Rights Watch.

groups".[201] Further investigations into state-armed atrocities are slow-moving, but expose the human rights abuses at the hands of government officials.

Nonstate Armed Actors

The non-state armed actors in the Republic of Mali include ethnic militias, Islamic armed groups aligned with the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), Al-Qaeda, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), and the Russian Wagner Group.[202] Hundreds of civilians have died at the hands of non-state armed actors. Islamist armed groups have impeded telecommunication towers, implemented religious tax (zakat), and enforced Sharia (Islamic) punishments neglected fair trial standards.[203] Individuals who failed to abide by Islamic law incurred food insecurity through the looting of livestock and blockages.[204]

Civilian Government and Nongovernmental Actors

Despite waning support from operational initiatives like the French Military, MINUSMA, G5 Sahel, the African Union, and ECOWAS, regional, national, and international organizations remain committed to addressing the humanitarian needs in the Republic of Mali.[205] The mandate of the International Expert on the situation of human rights in Mali was established in 2013 under Human Rights Council resolution 22/18.[206] On April 4th, 2023, it was extended under resolution 52/42 which permitted Mr. Alioune Tine of Senegal to serve as the independent expert on human rights in Mali.[207]

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published a report on the complex emergency in August 2023, that outlined implementing partners critical to achieving humanitarian relief operations.[208] These included the USAID, the UN World Food Programme (WFP) and its UN Humanitarian Air Service, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and nongovernmental organization (NGOS) implementing partners.[209] Multisectoral assistance is further emphasized in the Mali Crisis Response Plan of 2023-2024 published by the International Organization for Migration. [210]Key actors include government, nongovernmental organizations, and the Humanitarian Cluster system. The overarching goal is to implement the Triple Nexus (Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus), a policy framework that promotes

[201] Human Rights Watch.
[202] Human Rights Watch.
[203] Human Rights Watch.
[204] Human Rights Watch.
[205] "Mali Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023 | Humanitarian Action."
[206] "Independent Expert on Mali," OHCHR, accessed October 26, 2023, https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-mali.
[207] "Independent Expert on Mali."
[208] "Mali | Humanitarian Assistance."
[209] "Mali | Humanitarian Assistance."
[210] "Mali Crisis Response Plan 2023 - 2024 | Global Crisis Response Platform," accessed October 26, 2023, https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/mali-crisis-response-plan-2023-2024.

coordinated action between humanitarian, development, and peace/security actors, in the coming year.[211][212]

The 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan further outlines coordination efforts between the Humanitarian Cluster System and the Government Action Plan (GAP) in Mali; however, tensions remain elevated as the absence and continual withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces is projected to have detrimental impacts on the stability of the Republic of Mali, and broader Western Sahel.

Humanitarian Access Challenges

State Armed Actors

Several interviewees described a "misunderstanding or manipulation" on the part of the new government of Burkina Faso towards the principles of humanitarian aid. Another interviewee reminded analysts that in the case of Burkina: "it must also be recognized that the government was a bit lost, a bit disoriented, because it was a new phenomenon that the country had not experienced. So, the nation was not necessarily well prepared. Including, when I say the nation, it also includes the technical authorities. So, people were not necessarily prepared for this. So, there were certainly shortcomings in terms of involvement as well that need to be mentioned."

Creating Security Enclaves

In the Burkina Faso case, the government creation of security enclaves posed the largest access for humanitarians' access to vulnerable populations. A humanitarian described it as having woken up one day and the government had decided 20-30% of the country was a zone of military interest and humanitarians could not access it anymore. As an active civil conflict zone, these enclaves had high numbers of vulnerable civilians within them. Civilians are not permitted to enter or leave these zones and since the army is the only supplier, they have become areas of high needs. Interviewees viewed this enforcement of enclaves and blocking of access as a "willingness" from the government "not to allow the NGOs to be neutral" in the civil conflict.

One interviewee explains that the roads became completely blocked, and "this poses major challenges for humanitarians because we cannot have on-site access for responses." According to the interviewee, the "real problem of collaboration with the military" centers around how to bring humanitarian actors on sight to address the population's needs. This interviewee explained that any material aid – food, water, sanitation products, medication – became difficult to deliver and replenish due to the blocked and mined roads. These goods could not be reliably delivered by UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) flights, which meant the only type of aid that could be reliably delivered was "psycho-social support" and capacity building.

The same interviewee described t–e grave danger this put aid workers in, since –he government considered humanitarians military targets if they were found inside the enclave. Another interviewee described that the inability to enter these areas by road "poses real problems for the

[211] "Mali Crisis Response Plan 2023 - 2024 | Global Crisis Response Platform."
[212] Andrea Steinke, "The Triple Nexus in Mali: Coordination, Securitisation and Blurred Lines," *Centre for Humanitarian Action* (blog), accessed October 26, 2023, https://www.chaberlin.org/en/publications/the-triple-nexus-in-mali-coordination-securitisation-and-blurred-lines/.

security of our teams on-site" because "the army does not hesitate to make arrests in these localities."

A third described that the new Burkinabe government was "very pushy on monitoring the intervention" and that they were keenly interested in "who the NGOs are helping, and why." They continued, stating that If NGOs have contacts or even go in zones that are not under direct government control, "often they are questioned at least; sometimes it's worse." The result of this is a concentration of the humanitarian space into the areas that are under government control, such as the cities.

Displacement

Civil conflicts and climate shocks have created large refugee and IDP flows in the Western Sahel. An estimated 3.7 million people in the Western Sahel have been internally displaced, and more than half a million people have sought refuge in neighboring countries. Mali in particular has absorbed a large number of refugees from Burkina Faso and Niger, while Burkina has absorbed refugees from Mali, and Niger has absorbed refugees from both Burkina and Mali. One interviewee explained that Burkina is unique in that its patterns of displacement are "disproportionate to the level of violence" and more of a kind of "preemptive displacement."

In the words of one interviewee, "the displacement situation is one that increases vulnerability." This interviewee described how the length of the conflict coupled with the Burkinabe government's policies of enclavement and ban on cash transfers have made civilians reliant on humanitarian aid:

> **Many communities have reached their limit, start to become dependent on humanitarian aid, because they have no other source of income.** You have to rely on humanitarian responses, there are even some responses that empower them, that allow them to have sources of income and everything. **But if there is no longer the possibility, for example, to provide you with new means, there are responses that are limited, cash transfer is no longer possible.**

According to multiple interviewees, these needs are exacerbated by the policies of enclaves and military operation zones that trap civilians in specific areas without the ability to freely move around. One interviewee from the Burkina Faso context explained that civilians in the enclaves suffer from both a lack of quantity and quality of food:

> It's clear that the lack of aid and support affects the population because to start with, in terms of nutrition, the number of meals that populations used to have per day has inevitably decreased. For populations that were able to eat three times a day, in the morning, at noon, and in the evening, they no longer can. **Many people ended up just looking for one meal a day**. Then, there's the quality of the meal because for populations who were accustomed to local production, which provides very simple, very nutritious products, like milk and others, they no longer have that. They no longer have access to milk, they no longer have meat… We clearly saw it at the level of children.

Another interviewee explained that the knock-on effects of conflict and the siege of civilian zones means that communities oftentimes lack clean water. This is because people are unable to run the generators that pump water due to the strict embargo on fuel into the enclaves. Soap also became scarce. This lack of basic resources has led to what one interviewee observed as a clash between communities that had previously lived peacefully side-by-side before the conflict.

Hostility Towards Humanitarians

One humanitarian described the catch-22 humanitarians working in complex emergencies often find themselves. On the one hand, they describe that if you are working with the state to deliver humanitarian aid, the nonstate armed group might view you as an instrument of the military. On the other hand, merely attempting to access portions of the country under the control of nonstate armed groups to access vulnerable populations can lead the state military to suspect collusion on the part of humanitarians. Below, the interviewee explains the dilemma:

> The problem is that the current conflict pits the military against the non-state armed group. So, each actor tends to be wary of possible interactions between civilians and the other actor. So, there's a whole situation around humanitarians, but not only that. **There are humanitarians, but even ordinary civilians. When there are situations where guards think you're an accomplice of the military, they tend to target you. And the reverse is true t'o, because when the military think you're an accomplice of the non-state armed groups, they tend to target you too**. So, the space of conflict has become at the same time the space of humanitarian action.
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> When you find yourself, for example, in the zone where non-state armed groups are found, **the military tend to think you collaborate with them.** And in the same way, when you're in the zone controlled by the military, and for example, you've gone to the zone of non-state armed groups, they tend to think you're an accomplice of the military too. So, humanitarians find themselves in this situation. **At the military level, suspicions have started to arise that if humanitarians manage to work in complex zones like this, it means they have connections with the groups, and that potentially maybe they even give them money, so that the groups accept that they can work in these zones.**

The interviewee continued, further explaining how such a governmental attitude complicates civ-mil coordination to deliver aid in enclaves. In one case, this suspicion led to the humanitarian coordinator becoming a "persona non grata (PNG)":

> This has led the military to be suspicious towards humanitarians, to the point that in December 2022, **the humanitarian coordinator was, for example, asked to leave the country within 72 hours on the pretext that she made statements that suggested she collaborates with the armed groups, because she was going to [CITY] without escort and all that.** In fact, it's not entirely accurate, but it shows how strong the suspicion is. And so, it complicates relations with the military, coordination between the military and humanitarians**. It complicates collaboration because it's collaboration under tension.** Well, and **the military are wary, thinking potentially that humanitarians have connections with non-state armed groups**.

Another interviewee described their own experience of having their organization suspended by the state government for trying to adhere to the humanitarian principles and being falsely accused of diverting aid to armed groups:

> But we were suspended, basically, because **we're challenging the way in which authorities are working because it was countering international humanitarian law**, because that wouldn't allow us to target independently, and impartially, displaced communities, suspension and threats of expulsion…
>
> We get most accusations, mostly ungrounded accusations of complicity with armed groups of aid diversion… We don't have any proof, we have looked at zillion times inside. Nothing that would point to us diverting, or collaborating or financing armed groups. **And this is the most pervasive type of accusation that complicates access greatly.**

The Prime Minister's Office issued a public press release in order to accuse NGOs and national humanitarian partners of diverting resources to finance armed groups. An interviewee explained their frustration at the government's spread of misinformation:

> "There's no evidence of that whatsoever. There has been forceful aid diversion, which is a different thing under IHL. Have we been held at gunpoint and things taken from us? Yes. But we have never willingly, which is what we're accused of. We have never willingly targeted our response in a way in which it favored armed groups. And so this – I would say – this is the biggest thing. And in Burkina – if you were to ask me – it's the ways in which the government tries to depict the humanitarian community, the leade–shi' of the humanitarian community."

These accusations are connected to a larger state counterterrorism policy which greatly impacts humanitarian access. According to one interviewee, the ban on cash transfer activities (due to the government perception that they fund terrorism) was particularly hobbling:

> In this kind of crisis, the main activity – whatever you are going to implement as humanitarian activities – you will need to add a cash transfer approach to deliver the program and we are not anymore able to have this approach. They decided that we are not going to have these types of activities in the northern part of Burkina Faso when they [nonstate armed groups] arrive into power. **They [the government] just decided to say that: 'okay, we know that you guys from the humanitarian community, you are like spies. You are the ones who are going on the ground taking information**.'

One UN employee told analysts about the difference in levels of hostility towards humanitarians pre- and post-coup. They explain that the pre-coup state – which was still operating more or less according to expected civilian-led state behavior – would not outwardly block access even though they would be suspicious of humanitarians. This changed post-coup. In particular, the interviewee described that the government put up roadblocks to access that they knew were

insurmountable, such as requiring armed escorts for every humanitarian mission even though they did not have enough troops to accommodate the order:

> Before the coup – there were two coups – they say that we assist armed groups etc etc, but as a regular government they cannot tell us 'not to go.' They think that, but they don't explain it.
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> But now, they [the military] are in control of the country. They have the control of the country, so they can speak loud, and they can say what they think. And for example, they write the inter-military decree that makes every transport by road under armed escort. Of course they have not enough troops to conduct escorts everywhere. But they can bring this decree every time, everywhere. So we went trying to obtain a humanitarian exemption of this decree when the humanitarian coordinator was PNG-ed. So we have to rebuild this communication.

Another interviewee described a similar sense of frustration with trying to build formalized civil-military communication channels with the post-coup government. They observed an unwillingness on the part of the newly instated military government to coordinate with humanitarians:

> "There are several coordination points, there is coordination at the level of the capital and there is coordination at the local level as well. So, at the capital level, it doesn't work very well because **since the military authorities came to power, we couldn't identify a spokesperson who could allow us to hold meetings at the capital level**. So, it's the humanitarians who meet among themselves, who discuss issues of blockade with the military and all, but **we do not have the military perspective.**"

This difference in access environment pre and post-coup was similar in Niger, but with different reasoning. Rather than telling NGOs that they cannot enter the military operation areas due to suspected complicity with militants, one interviewee explained that the government was not willing to continue accepting NGO activities in those areas because of safety reasons. They were concerned that because "it will be really bad for them" if humanitarians were accidentally killed, the government "makes it difficult for us to implement the project." It took careful negotiation with the government to negotiate access back into these areas. According to the interviewee, they landed on the satisfactory solution that their organization informs the government of their travels a week before entering the military operation area.

One interviewee described in-depth how the mistrust between the police and humanitarians was particularly pronounced in Burkina. They said that in their mind, "mistrust now between humanitarians and police represents potentially the most difficult challenge that humanitarians have in Burkina… Of course, in the situation of civil war, when things are tense, 'law' often is put into parentheses. But in Burkina the situation is particularly harsh." They gave a hypothetical example of how these arrests happen: "basically, you are doing your job and at one point police come. They take you and you're in jail for one week or two weeks. Then it depends on the

contacts that you can mobilize; how much noise you are able to do; and the ethnic profile counts, also."[213]

This reluctance to speak with police and government authorities in general complicated humanitarian access, since coordinating with state armed actors is essential for aid worker security. On this, the interviewee stated: "On one side, it's always very important to talk to authorities about your activities, where you go, and so on and so forth, because that's a way to protect yourself and preserve yourself. On the other side, you know that you will raise attention, and every information that you give will be potentially exploited."

One interviewee stated that the assertiveness of the government was a driver of constrained access in Burkina, and that in their observation, the blockage "plays on two different levels." According to them, one level is the coordinated attempts at blocking access; and the other is the less coordinated but "very pervasive" negative discourse on humanitarian organizations in-country.

This distrust of humanitarians extended to the viability of this research project. Several interviewees warned researchers about the sensitivity of the topic given the hostile atmosphere towards humanitarians. In the words of one INGO worker: "In Burkina, finding someone to speak with you would be very difficult because today, everyone is convinced that communication networks are no longer reliable. Everyone is being monitored. And it's sensitive."

A humanitarian interviewee described a slightly different issue when it came to operating in Niger. They explained that there were serious implementation constraints due to them not being able to involve the government's Technical Services and hence had no partner in implementation on the government side.

Nonstate Armed Actors

The individuals we spoke with noted that communication and negotiation with NSAGs in the Western Sahel was particularly difficult for several reasons. First, the state governments forbade direct contact with the armed groups. Second, many organizations have mandates against engaging with armed groups. Third, the nonstate armed groups in the region themselves vary in their desire to engage with humanitarians. Lastly, the loosely government-affiliated Volunteer Defense Force members often prevented humanitarians from engaging NSAGs.

One aid worker in Burkina Faso explained that there was no 'official' involvement with NSAGs during humanitarian access negotiations, because the government does not accept the principle of communicating with armed groups. This government ban on communicating and negotiating with the NSAGs for access created a vicious circle of mistrust amongst the nonstate armed groups toward humanitarians, according to one INGO worker. They explained that the ban on communication is a "very perverse mechanism" that creates a "chilling effect on the humanitarian community where we're less willing ourselves to negotiate [with armed groups].

[213] The interviewee gave anecdotal evidence to suggest Fulani NNGO workers were particularly at risk of arbitrary detention, given the association the government makes with the ethnic group and the Jihadists.

Armed groups perceive us as distant, not transparent, unwilling to cooperate, unwilling to be forward-looking and finding solutions. They become more hostile towards us, and so we're really trapped in the middle. And the wiggle space is very, very small." A UN employee seemed to confirm this by stating that the office keeps a "low profile" on the issue of nonstate armed group engagement due to concern for government reaction.

One interviewee described their organization's mandate against negotiating access with armed groups as "a very big challenge" when those armed groups control a large amount of territory with vulnerable populations inside.

Another interviewee noted that they had not heard of NSAGs making overtures to the humanitarians for them to come into the enclaves and serve the civilians in Burkina Faso: "I have''t seen any communications from armed groups saying: 'You humanitarian actors who assist the populations, you can come…' I don't think that these non-state armed groups facilitated access in any way."

An aid worker noted that the armed groups operating across the Western Sahel region have different operating procedures, interests, and willingness to interact with aid organizations. They compared two different groups' approaches to humanitarians: "Some areas where you have al Qaeda in charge, they will let you come and do your activities. But on the other side, where you have ISIS operating, they are just businessmen. And they don't want anyone to be around. They don't want anyone to see what they're doing on the ground. And this is where we have a lot of trouble. And this is where we need to go to the communities to have access."

Another interviewee further explained the different rules NSAGs imposed on humanitarians before they could enter territory they held. One interviewee explained that in Niger, the NSAG they negotiated opposite from did not mind granting them access because the flow of aid bolstered their acceptance amongst community members. However, one redline they drew was that they did not want to see a female aid worker in the field with men.

One interviewee compared Mali to Burkina Faso, stating that the spiral of escalation caused by the Volunteer Defense Forces (VDP) was unique to Burkina. They also noted that the motivations of the NSAGs in Mali and Burkina Faso differed, even if their tactics looked similar sometimes:

> The creation and strengthening of the VDPs basically brought the war to the civil war level [in Burkina], because VDPs basically are civilians. There is a polarization, as I was saying, like a mirror game between the two parts of the conflict – an escalation. The more the VDPs impose themselves as security actors, the more the radical groups respond with the same strategy.
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> So, at least in the region, that's quite new. In Mali it does''t work like that. **Maybe the unique thing in Burkina is the encircled cities and besieged villages and so on**. Not as such, but as a current, normal strategy to put political pressure on the population and authorities. **In Mali, we had some cases of besieged villages, but not on the same scale as in Burkina**, and not for the same reasons; In Burkina i''s more for political bargaining.

The unpredictable and varying interests of NSAGs posed great security risks for humanitarians in the field. One interviewee stated that security is the chief access concern regarding the nonstate armed groups operating in the region:

> In terms of access challenges, the first challenge was the presence of non-state armed groups that indeed created insecurity in these areas. Because as soon as you have a good car, you're threatened, and on the road, your car can be stolen. There were explosive devices, mines on the roads. So for me, tha''s the first challenge. The presence of armed groups, as you said, created a completely unsafe working environment. If it's [the territory] under the authority of armed groups, it's very difficult for a humanitarian actor to go there to work and come back alive. It's very risky.

An aid worker in Niger explained that while the NSAG they have negotiated with have allowed humanitarian workers to serve the populations under their control, the situation became very dangerous if the same NSAG saw them working alongside the military. In their words: "If you are next to them [the state military], it means that you are with them, so they can't accept you. They will be very violent." The interviewee gave this reason as to way the refusal to use armed escorts is a security measure when NSAGs have taken up arms against the government.

Community Members

The humanitarian crises in the region led to some community distrust of humanitarians. One interviewee described a concern that their organization had become "perceived by a local communities or local actors as the key economic actors." They stated that this has led to some community members directly targeting humanitarians, with the widespread availability of weapons making it simpler to attack soft targets like humanitarians.

Another significant challenge for humanitarians in this region was explaining to populations who were in great need how needs assessments work. They stated that in such a situation of precarity, telling a community member that "maybe X may not be eligible while Y is because they don't have the same level of vulnerability" is a "very difficult operational challenge." They stated that cultural understandings dictated that "when there's aid, everyone gets it," but that such an approach "doesn't correspond at all to the assessment grid of humanitarian principles." Another interviewee described this phenomenon as a "very human" reaction on the part of frustrated community members. The interviewee said that sometimes, in the case of Mali and Burkina, that these frustrated elements of the communities will try to "put some constraints to your access in the area as much as they can."

In Burkina, an interviewee connected the public distrust of humanitarians with a general anti-humanitarian state-sponsored discourse. One very public form of this discourse was misinformation spread on Twitter following the killing of two MSF workers in Burkina Faso. The interviewee summarized the tweet storm: "'they deserved what happened to them because they were complicit with armed groups' activities.' That's absolutely false. All of this like, has no grounding whatsoever... But it's so pervasive that and it came also from the government, that then the humanitarian community gets depicted as the enemy of civilians as well, in a way in which for us is very hard to justify ourselves."

Another interviewee explained how the presence of armed groups - especially foreign fighters - can stoke ethnic and religious rivalries that were either dormant or previously nonexistent. They argued that this impacts humanitarian personnel due to the type of misinformation that can easily spread in these types of environments. They explain: “this presence of armed groups sometimes leads communities not to understand each other, and it fosters insecurity. When these communities don't understand each other, these misunderstandings can affect the personnel working for these communities because the situation becomes subject to interpretation, miscommunication, and other issues.”

This was not true across the board, however. One interviewee explained that in Niger, sometimes the regions that were further away from the cities were actually more trusting of the INGOs than the government due to their money and ability to provide services “faster than the government.” The interviewee added that this is unfortunate, since they take great efforts to follow the procedures of the government and let them lead.

Humanitarian Access Best Practices

Cost-Benefit Analysis: Armed Escorts

The use of armed escorts in the Western Sahel is widely debated amongst actors. On one hand armed escorts are often necessary in overcoming access constraints, whereas on the other, they pose security risks and increase the likelihood of compromising on humanitarian principles. In an interview with one respondent, the tension between the military and humanitarians was described in detail.

> It also poses another problem in terms of supplying resources because the military wants everything that enters these localities to follow the armed escort, whereas on the humanitarian side, it's more about seeing how we can have possibilities of supplying without going through the military escort. And apparently, the military does not agree with that. So currently, this is a point of contention: the supply of resources in enclaves. But collaboration with the military is happening.

Particularly in Mali, humanitarian access restrictions are imposed mostly by NSAGs, which also pushes humanitarians to use armed escorts against their better judgment. In the words of one NGO member, “Because in Mali, we don't have these big restrictions. They let us as humanitarian go wherever you want. I do have a recent experience of where, you know, the transition in Mali just decided to put a lot of restrictions regarding humanitarian access. But in mind, the difference is the restrictions are coming from the militants.”

Even when using armed escorts is being pushed by governments, it does not guarantee safety for humanitarians. They may become a greater target amongst armed groups in the region. In essence, humanitarians are at risk whether or not they rely on armed escorts given the nature of the security concerns in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger:

> No, only the military. **But here, when you are in the escort, you are, you are sure to be a target because armed groups target, principally, security forces.** When we say that

> to the military, they are not very happy with that. So they said: 'your trucks sometimes go to the armed group because they keep our trucks.' **But I said to the military: 'we cannot say that we assist armed groups.** Look it's when you fall in an ambush, when they take all your weapons and your ammunitions. I don't say that you assist an armed group.

The tug-a-war between militaries and humanitarians regarding the use of armed escorts is unlikely to end in the near future. Jihadist groups in the Western Sahel, including Boko Haram, have contributed to the worsening security situation. Despite this, an aid worker described their unwillingness to succumb to the pressures imposed by militants and aforementioned jihadist groups. Their general sentiment was that the reliance on escorts will have negative effects on community acceptance which outweigh the potential benefits.

> Sometimes some of them can even tell you that you are the one supporting the militia, the militants on the ground So they just decided you can go. **But you can't go without a military escort.** It's kind. It's a way to tell us that you want to have access because they know that [my NGO] will never ask for military escort. It's not part of our policies. It's not only about [my NGO], it's most of the international organizations. **We don't go with military escorts, armed escorts, because that will have a major impact, a negative impact on our acceptance, and by the way, on our access capability**. So and also, this is where we can go if we need to, if we want to go, we need to go with an escort.

<u>Negotiation</u>

According to key informants, honing negotiation skills in civ-mil officers remains a primary tactic for overcoming access constraints in the Western Sahel. As one respondent put it "**Negotiation is really the most fundamental thing in the humanitarian sector, because everything is negotiation.**" The fundamental goal of humanitarian work is to assist isolated communities in accessing essential resources. This involves routine negotiations with multiple stakeholders amidst external pressures.

> **You don't work for yourself, you work for the people you are helping.** The people you are helping can have priorities that are not the same priorities that your organization has or your donor has, **so you have to negotiate**. In a lot of countries you receive political pressure on which villages you have to choose, which kind of activities you have to put in place…kind of like a supplier. That's a very broad list of potential pressures that an NGO can receive. Again, that's also negotiation.

> **So negotiations go beyond taking your car and going in the mountains and talking with an armed group leader.** That exists, but it's like 10% of all the negotiations that you do. You are at the checkpoint, they ask you to pay; we don't pay, and so you have to negotiate and talk to say why you are not paying. How do you justify that? How can you give some more value to what you do in order for the guy to understand, and let you go? It's a kind of verbal art. **A big part of humanitarianism is verbal art.**

Harnessing negotiation skills does not happen in a vacuum, and those involved must grasp the full 360 perspective because at the end of the day "The goal is not to talk with bad guys, the goal

is to help people. If it's useful, you'll talk with the bad guys… It's important to demystify the negotiation."

When asked about what makes a successful negotiator, one interviewee had a straightforward answer:

> **What makes a successful negotiator? Knowing why you are negotiating.** That can be banal but it's not. Knowing details. So you go to negotiate with the governor - to negotiate about an education program [hypothetical]. When you go there, you need to know exactly what are the activities you are doing with your education program, where we are going to do it, why, how much, how much they are funded, and so on. Y**ou need a strong background in terms of knowledge, because only by knowing what you are doing you can set the goals and have good arguments**. It can be considered banal, but NGOs have lots of projects, lots of activities, so it's not simple to concentrate. **One should really think about it and do it before going to negotiate.**

Oftentimes negotiation is associated with the development of robust hard skills. However, one respondent noted that it is actually empathy that differentiates a successful negotiator: "Establishing this sort of **empathy or trust** with your counterparts because often with these kinds of people you meet them several times." Empathy is a skill that can be improved over time, but it takes routine commitment to practice, according to this interviewee.

> **You don't need a lot of hard skills. It's more a question of empathy.** And fortunately, you can develop empathy by practicing and so that's also the goal of training, but you cannot buy it or teach it - that's a dialogue. You know perfectly how a conversation works. So that's the spirit. So you need to understand, ask questions, and try to drive the conversation without being too pushy or insisting on some points and understanding the points of others. It's very important which points are acceptable and which are not acceptable; the so-called red lines are very useful to think about before going to a negotiation.
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> **Basically, this training we are talking about tries to strengthen this 'empathy' thing.** There are some tools that you can use. There are a lot of books, and things have been created on this. So the iceberg, or way of doing some kind of schematic thing to understand the motivation of the other. These tools are very useful, **but the final goal is to make your ideas more clear, and second, to develop your empathy. By training, by practicing it, you are more used to this sort of situation.**

Employing communication tools like empathy will promote greater acceptance. Its practical use can be observed through one respondent's experience in Burkina Faso. Individuals received negotiation training which was later implemented with the goal of assisting local populations.

> So, for example, we did a training in humanitarian negotiation here in [CITY], and we trained some colleagues from Burkina Faso, and one of them one month later managed to negotiate with [a regional Burkinabe] Governor, to stop the cash ban. He followed the dossier and applied some tools that we presented during the training. You have some

> techniques that are adaptable to the situation, quite flexible. It was very good, because he managed to put himself in a position of good communication with the authority and understand also some of the points that the authorities make that are not false or incoherent.
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> A dialogue is a dialogue because two persons talk, and when two persons talk it's important to get also the point of the other person. That's the first thing. **What humanitarians often don't do is question their own practices.** Is it really useful to have 16 different typologies of cash programs? Can we be responsive to some kind of demands from the authorities to reduce them to 4? That can be a good negotiation: you bring them to 4, you clarify how to do them, and then we give you permission to do it. The final goal is to help people, so we should be in a position where everything we do is to help people. Having this kind of negotiation is very important.

According to the same interviewee, government inflexibility is complicating the landscape of negotiation. One method to overcome this challenge is to unite the humanitarian community when it comes to negotiations: "We're becoming poor … negotiators and communicators, because the government is not changing ideas. It's not changing opinions. **We're not very good at … coming together as a humanitarian community.**"

<u>Development of a robust programming platform</u>

Program development marks one method of combating access constraints in the Western Sahel that interviewees identified. This is underscored by the success of negotiation-related programs observed above. Interview data suggests that a working access group and cluster structure has been somewhat effective in overcoming access constraints in Burkina Faso, despite the challenges associated with inter-agency coordination.

> Yes, in Burkina they have the access working group. They have also the kind of cluster structure, the NGO Forum, the typical institutions that are basically present in all the countries. They work quite well. They could work better, but they work quite well. The point is that you can have some kind of a coordination institution, but if you don't have a clear leadership and a common sense of what is good and what is not good, and even if you have institutions, these institutions will never be very, very effective. I mean, they can be effective. They can help to solve some problems now and then and be good but lacking this kind of common sense and common orientation or practices, maybe.
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> It's complicated to coordinate, of course, and all these kinds of institutions are not binding so they can't impose themselves on individual NGOs. Plus, NGOs are quite jealous. I mean not jealous, but there is a sort of discretion also because, for example, the lists of beneficiaries are sensitive documents so you cannot share them. So you have lots of staff also for legal reasons that you cannot share. Finally, it's complicated to have a big chunk of crucial points of cooperation that are put together.

Another respondent filed in the gaps regarding program development in Mali. In his words, "For example, I just come from Mali and we need to adapt a lot, we need to adapt a lot. And it's not only a security matter, it's about how security is perceiving the changes, but also how programs

are ready and able to navigate through these constraints." The recommendation for how to overcome these gaps were as follows:

> And this is why we try to develop a **remote programming strategy** to make sure that even when we don't have access to our participants, we have … a system that can allow us to continue implementing our programs. And this is a joint work which is done by security programs, and operations together, we will sit and we will design this strategy."

An implementation pitfall within the current response is the lack of coordination amongst humanitarian actors, especially INGOs. This generates uncertainty amongst the general public which is then weaponized by government actors.

> Personal opinion, that the difficulty we have is also that in UN agencies, for example, but also in the big INGO, **we mix development programs**, residence programs and humanitarian programs. **So we create confusion in the population, in the government, and between humanitarians, too**. So all is mixed and creates confusion and with the government, they play with this confusion.

Programmatic development to combat access constraints must factor in national policies and politics. This is already being implemented by one respondent based in the Western Sahel.

> What we used to do together is, you know, when it comes to, to analyzing the situations before, you know, developing the country's strategy, we do it with them to have the right findings. **And also, we relate our project and programs with the national politics, and, you know, the national strategic goal, and documents.** So that makes us work closely with them, and also in the implementation of our projects. **We have the duty to make them supervise the work we are doing on the ground so that they make sure that we are not in line with the government orientations.**

<u>Localization</u>

Many interviewees stressed the importance of localization to circumvent blockages by the state and armed groups. One interviewee from the Niger context stated that "The main lessons learned from this humanitarian crisis are that we should never overlook the importance of local mechanisms; it's the last resort at the local level." They continued: "we should never anticipate or try to predefine a response or a strategy instead of with the community. You can't sit in Oxford or Harvard, for example, and write a nice document to apply in West Niger; it won't work. Evaluations must be very contextualized. It's clear in everyone's minds today that strategies, approaches, and methodologies need to be contextualized."

Especially in contexts where nonstate armed groups control territory that humanitarians need to access, close working relationships with the communities proved vital. Because it is rare for INGOs to have contacts with armed groups such as Jihadist organizations, reliance on brokers from the communities become essential. One interviewee who works in Niger said of the armed groups that "they know more about us than we know about them," precisely because they are imbricated in the local communities. Because members of the armed groups tend to be from the

local communities, they explained that the militias almost have an interest in letting humanitarians come in to avoid losing buy-in from the local communities.

One interviewee described that making connections with the local religious community leader was especially effective in certain cases to circumvent blockages by militants. They relayed the following anecdote:

> We will go directly to the mosque, or we will go directly to see the local imam and tell him who we are, and why we are around and ask for some advice from him, how he thinks that we can do things very well in the area or in the village. Because most of time, when you see a religious leader in the area continue doing his job without any problem - when you see community leaders in place without any problem -, which means he has a link with these armed actors. He can speak with them… He is working as they want. So he will be the link for us, watching us and armed groups. And as much as this guy will tell you: 'no problem you can do you can implement your program. My friend, you can do it without any problem.'

One interviewee shared that they circumvented government blockades in their country of operation by relying on local traders to carry the humanitarian goods into the restricted zone.

Interviewees were also careful to add nuance to the discussion on localization, stating that community members can also act as barriers to access. They explained that these spoilers can potentially be brought on board - or at least convinced to not act as blocks - with careful negotiation:

> So we have two sides, within the community: you have those who will say: 'yeah, guys, you are welcome. We are willing to be working with you, we understand what you are doing.' Even if they are not part of our beneficiaries, they can understand they will accept us. But also we have the other part where whatever you are going to explain to them, they will never perceive you very well. Now you need to go to a lot of negotiation to make sure that they are able to let you implement your program, even if despite the point of view regarding who you are as a humanitarian…

> I think we have something in the Sahel region that is really helping us to have access. Local cultural orientation is very, very important, you know, whatever can be the negotiation, I think that the local culture understanding the social dynamic should be understood before engaging in any transaction in a specific area.

Conclusion

The Western Sahel case presents humanitarians with complex access challenges posed by state governments, nonstate armed groups, and even civilian populations themselves.

The post-coup environment in the Western Sahel countries greatly restricted humanitarian access. Governments became overall more assertive, imposing stricter regulations on aid delivery. In some cases, this includes issuing decrees that require armed escorts for humanitarian missions. Additionally, there is a lack of formalized communication channels between

humanitarian organizations and the government, which hobbles any attempt at coordination efforts. Additionally, the designation by governments of security enclaves posed some of the great challenges to humanitarians' access and also demonstrated the governments' unwillingness to allow humanitarians to operate with neutrality and impartiality in conflict zones.

Interviewees stress the importance of training civ-mil officers in negotiation skills as a fundamental tool for navigating access constraints, with a focus on soft skills such as empathy, trust-building, and deeply understanding the local context. Interviewees generally saw that armed escorts offered only temporary security solutions, and that they ultimately pose larger security risks by compromising the humanitarian principles that keep them safe.

The importance of localization and leveraging local mechanisms emerged as a key principle for circumventing blockages by both state and armed groups in this region. Interviewees who discussed this topic emphasized the importance of building relationships with local communities and engaging trusted community leaders or brokers. The same interviewees are careful to note that local communities can also be leveraged against humanitarian actors by both state and nonstate actors.

Case Study: Haiti

Situational Overview

The protracted emergency in Haiti is a confluence of natural hazards and political, social, and economic instability created by domestic and international misconduct. Haiti was the first black-led republic to escape colonial control in 1804. Even after independence, however, it remained in debt to France from 1825 until 1947, because of 21 billion dollars in reparation payments demanded by France (2023 inflation-adjusted).[214] The World Bank classifies Haiti as a low-income nation, ranking 163rd out of 191 on the Human Development Index with a value of 0.535.[215] Currently, more than 50% of the population lives below the poverty line (US$2.15 per day), positioning Haiti as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.[216] For decades, Haiti has relied on foreign aid packages, with the United Nations (UN) distributing over 13 billion dollars in development and disaster relief between 2010 and 2020.[217] Haiti's remittances from the Haitian diaspora totaled 4.5 billion dollars at the end of 2022, equivalent to 22% of the republic's gross domestic product (GDP).[218] An 87% decline in tourism revenue from 2018 to 2021 has also contributed to Haiti's widespread poverty. [219]

The historical context of Haiti provides some insight into the drivers of national fragility. In 1492, Christopher Colombus arrived on the island of Hispaniola, which includes modern-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and within four years, established the first colony in Santo Domingo.[220] Hispaniola was under Spanish control until Haiti was surrendered to France in 1697.[221] Nearly a century later, revolutionary Toussaint Louverture conquered Haiti in 1801 and

[214] "Haiti Country Profile," BBC News, October 31, 2012, sec. Latin America & Caribbean, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19548810; "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations," accessed November 8, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/haitis-troubled-path-development.
[215] United Nations, "Specific Country Data," Human Development Reports (United Nations), accessed October 25, 2023, https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data.
[216] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations"; "Haiti: Humanitarian Response Plan 2023 At a Glance (April 2023) [EN/HT] - Haiti | ReliefWeb," April 13, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/haiti-humanitarian-response-plan-2023-glance-april-2023-enht.
[217] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[218] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[219] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[220] "Haiti Country Profile."
[221] "Haiti Country Profile."

abolished slavery, becoming a self-proclaimed governor-general.[222] Three years later, a slave revolt led by General Jean Jacques Dessalines defeated French troops and declared Haitian independence.[223] A century later, President Woodrow Wilson deployed Marines to Haiti in 1915 amidst threats of German footing in the Caribbean.[224] U.S. forces remained on the island for nearly two decades until the removal of troops after the Good Neighbor Policy.[225] This period of US occupation was characterized by press censorship, financial control, racial segregation, and the overthrow of oppositional forces.[226]

From 1957 until 1986, Haitian dictator François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude, ruled the nation for nearly 30 years.[227] Corruption, human rights violations, and mass disappearances and deaths tainted their regimes.[228] In 2004, the UN launched a nearly fifteen-year peacekeeping mission, the Brazil-led UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). While the UN peacekeeping mission provided some stability to the country, its popular support was undermined by allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeeping forces and its link to the reintroduction of cholera to Haiti, triggering an outbreak that killed more than 10,000 people.[229] Jovenel Moise was elected president in 2017, though the election was contested following accusations of gang collaboration with oppositional forces.[230] Subsequently, on July 7th, 2021, President Jovenel Moise was assassinated, with charges brought against one Colombian and three Haitian-Americans.[231] Ariel Henry, then prime minister of Haiti, declared himself president soon after Jovenel Moise was assassinated, and remained Haiti's defacto ruler until his own resignation in 2024, when he handed power over to a transitional council meant to organize future elections.[232]

In the aftermath of Jovenal Moise's assassination, violence has extended across Haiti partially due to failed governance. Upwards of 300 gangs currently operate across Haiti, with between 100 and 150 positioned near the capital, Port-au-Prince.[233] Gangs control 60% of the nation, with ongoing battles over the capital.[234] Nine well-known gangs (G9) are led by former police officer Jimmy Chérizeier.[235] According to the Council on Foreign Relations, G9 was responsible for blocking Haiti's largest fuel terminal, which supplies 70% of its gas.[236] Only after negotiations between politician Dr. Harrison Ernest and G9 did the Haitian National Police regain control of

[222] "Haiti Country Profile."
[223] "Haiti Country Profile."
[224] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[225] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[226] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[227] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[228] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[229] "Haiti Country Profile."
[230] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker," accessed November 8, 2023, https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/instability-haiti.
[231] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[232] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[233] "Haiti," April 13, 2023.
[234] "Haiti's Troubled Path to Development | Council on Foreign Relations."
[235] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[236] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."

the port in November 2022.[237] This impeded the provision of foreign aid, leaving many without access to lifesaving supplies in the wake of subsequent natural disasters.

Due to its placement on the Atlantic fault line between the North American and Caribbean plates, Haiti is prone to climatological shocks like earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, cyclones, and droughts.[238] The 2010 earthquake that hit Port-au-Prince killed over 250,000 people and injured more than 300,000 others.[239] Six years later, Hurricane Matthew left many more dead while destroying homes, livestock, and infrastructure and triggering another large cholera outbreak.[240] Insufficient urban planning, widespread deforestation, a subsistence farming-dependent economy, and poor infrastructure increase the vulnerabilities of the Haitian population amidst climate shocks.[241] Most recently, Haiti experienced a 7.2 magnitude earthquake in August 2021, one of Latin America's top ten deadliest earthquakes of the last twenty-five years.[242] This occurred less than a month after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise and in the midst of the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[243]

580,000 people are currently internally displaced in Haiti, with 54% of those being women.[244] Many shelters across the country, particularly near Port-au-Prince, are overcrowded, which increases the risk of cholera transmission.[245] In June 2023, 50,797 cholera cases were reported, with 765 deaths. Due to the collapse of monitoring systems, these numbers are likely a significant underestimation.[246] This has coincided with the reemergence of cholera and provisional closure or reduction in capacity of 21 healthcare facilities by March 2023.[247] Widespread violence and displacement have resulted in 1.2 million Haitian refugees worldwide, primarily in the U.S., Canada, France, the Bahamas, and the Dominican Republic.[248]

Another dimension of the crisis is the heightened presence of food insecurity. UN estimates show that nearly half of Haiti's population of 11.5 million is in dire need of assistance.[249] WFP has reiterated the country is at its "highest concern level." Ongoing violence has complicated the dissemination of humanitarian assistance that would mitigate key needs such as food insecurity, leaving many individuals without access to necessities. The WFP reports that the Southern Peninsula has been blocked off which has resulted in limited access to passage to markets and

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[237] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[238] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[239] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[240] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[241] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[242] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker"; "Haiti," accessed November 8, 2023, https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/where/latin-america-and-caribbean/haiti_en.
[243] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[244] "300,000 Haitian Women and Girls Are Displaced without Basic Safety and Health Services." UN Women, July 5, 2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2024/07/300000-haitian-women-and-girls-are-displaced-without-basic-safety-and-health-services#:~:text=With%20women%20and%20girls%20accounting,sexual%20and%20gender%2Dbased%20violence.
[245] "Humanitarian Access SCORE Report."
[246] "Haiti."
[247] "Product Details R47394."
[248] "Haiti."
[249] Cotrino.

humanitarian services for 3.5 million people.[250] Gangs have nearly total control of all the main entry points, which has resulted in an uptick in reliance on WFP United Nations Humanitarian Air Service.[251] Such factors resulted in Haiti's ranking as "the 11th most fragile state in the world" on the Fund for Peace's 2022 Fragile States Index.[252]

The 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan estimates that $674M is needed to serve 3.6M of the 5.5M in need of humanitarian assistance.[253] Approximately 420 million will target food security; 64.4 million for water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH); 57.8 million for shelter; 50 million for education; and 42.1 million for protection, which encompasses general, child, and migrant protection as well as gender-based violence (GBV).[254] The remainder of the funds will be dispersed amongst the nutrition, health, CCCM, logistics, coordination, and other sectors.[255]Additionally, the UN Security Council approved a multinational mission on October 2nd, 2023, led by Kenya to "protect vital infrastructure, train Haitian police, and assist in targeted operations".[256]

Key Actors

Domestic and international actors are involved in mitigation efforts across Haiti. Gangs have been operating for 20 years, with a growing presence since the 2021 presidential assassination.[257] Ariel Henry has sought support in the form of a military stabilization force from the international community as the Haitian National Police has been unable to contain the violence.[258]

Table 1: Key actors in Haiti

KEY ACTORS	
STATE-ARMED ACTORS	***NON-STATE ARMED ACTORS***
1. The Haitian National Police (PNH) 2. Multinational Security Support (MSS)	1. 300 gangs spread across Haiti a. G9 led by Jimmy Chérizier b. G-pep led by Gabriel Jean-Pierre c. Grand Ravine

[250] "Haiti."
[251] "Haiti."
[252] "Product Details R47394."
[253] "Haiti," April 13, 2023.
[254] "Haiti."
[255] "Haiti."
[256] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[257] "Haiti," April 13, 2023.
[258] Richard Roth John Caitlin Hu,Tara, "UN Security Council Approves Sending Foreign Forces to Haiti," CNN, October 2, 2023, https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/02/americas/un-approves-haiti-military-mission-intl/index.html.

State Armed Actors

The Armed Forces were re-established after the UN peacekeeping missions ended under former President Jovenel Moise in 2017.[259] Recent data suggests the PNH is composed of 9,000 active duty officers, about one active duty PNH officer for every 1311 Haitians.[260] This represents a 40% decrease from the 15,000 officers employed in 2020 .[261] Amidst rising violence in Haiti, acting President Henry appealed for international security support.[262] On October 2nd, 2023, the UN Security Council approved a year-long multinational security support (MSS) force led by Kenya.[263] The African nation vowed to provide 1000 police to direct the mission, and neighboring Caribbean nations like Antigua, Barbuda, the Bahamas and Jamaica have offered additional support.[264] By the end of June 2024, 400 Kenyan police officers had arrived in Haiti, with an additional 200 joining them in July.

Nonstate Armed Actors

The assassination of President Jovenel Moise on July 7th, 2021 resulted in an imbalance of power between state and non-state armed actors.[265] Data from the 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan for Haiti suggests that upwards of 300 gangs are spread across the country, with 100 to 150 concentrated in the Port-au-Prince Metropolitan Area (ZMPP).[266] Since 2021, 80% of Port-au-Prince has been affected by gang activity, which has resulted in recurrent territorial clashes with the PNH.[267] One of the prominent gangs in Haiti is G9, whose members are referred to in English as G-People[268]. Their leader is former policeman Jimmy Chérizier, who created G9 in May 2020.[269] Recent allegations indicate the gang is funded by high-level officials within the former Haitian Government.[270] It also has been linked to opposition members whose overarching intent is to weaken the government.[271]

Protracted gang presence has resulted in an uptick in gender based violence (GBV), forced displacement, homicides, kidnappings, food insecurity, and violence against schools. In 2022, 16,470 incidents of GBV were reported, approximately 128,000 individuals were displaced from their homes, and 72 schools were targeted.[272] Recent reports indicate that over 160,000 people have been displaced by criminal violence and 30% of Haitian women between 15 and 30 years of age have been victims of sexual violence.[273] Data from the April 2023 Security Council indicates that in the first quarter of 2023, 815 homicides and more than 630 kidnappings were

[259] "Haiti PM Turns to Military for Help in Fighting Gangs."
[260] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[261] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[262] John, "UN Security Council Approves Sending Foreign Forces to Haiti."
[263] John.
[264] John.
[265] "Instability in Haiti | Global Conflict Tracker."
[266] "Haiti," April 13, 2023.
[267] "Haiti."
[268] "Haiti | ACAPS," accessed November 29, 2023, https://www.acaps.org/en/countries/haiti.
[269] "Haiti | ACAPS."
[270] "Haiti | ACAPS."
[271] "Haiti | ACAPS."
[272] "Haiti," April 13, 2023.
[273] "Haiti | ACAPS."

documented.[274] This represents increases of 21% and 63% compared to the end of 2022.[275] Meanwhile, the low bandwidth of the PNH and lack of accountability from the Haitian Government have enabled human rights violations to go unreported.[276] Human Rights Watch reports this is intensified by "political deadlock, a dysfunctional judicial system, and long-running impunity for human rights abuses".[277] Data regarding prosecutions or convictions for homicides, kidnappings, and sexual violence has been non-existent since the start of 2023.[278]

Civilian Government and Nongovernmental Actors

Mitigation efforts have involved numerous national government agencies. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) published a report on the humanitarian crisis in June 2023 that outlined implementing partners critical to achieving humanitarian relief operations.[279] These partners include Action Against Hunger (AAH/USA), Concern Worldwide, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Community Organized Relief Effort (CORE), Doctors of the World, GOAL, Humanity and Inclusion, IMPACT initiatives, International NGO Safety Organization (INSO), the International Organization for Migration, Pan American Health Organization, Project Hope, Save the Children Federation, UN Development Program (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), WFP, and World Relief International.[280]

Key organizations that have provided food assistance include USAID/BHA, WFP, and CORE.[281] According to the USAID report, WFP has distributed 6.5 million in cash-based transfers to 285,000 and 46 metric tons of food to around 46,000 in 2023. Simultaneously, CORE has distributed cash vouchers to over 709 households and 2,000 work participants, including 900 women.[282] Regarding protection efforts, ten organizations, including the UNFPA have sought to assist over 60 healthcare facilities spread across Haiti in addition to providing GBV and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS).[283] The organizations that have been designated to logistics and relief commodities include USAID/BHA, WFP, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the logistics nonprofit Airlink.[284] Inter-agency collaborations have sought to provide health and WASH resources to communities plagued by cholera.[285] More specifically, Catholic Relief Services, GoH Ministry of Health, and ACTED are working to install water treatment services for individuals facing access constraints.[286] Doctors of the World and PAHO have targeted their efforts towards bolstering healthcare centers capacities across Haiti.[287]

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[274] "Haiti | ACAPS."
[275] "Haiti | ACAPS."
[276] Cotrino.
[277] Cotrino.
[278] Cotrino.
[279] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance," U.S. Agency for International Development, November 3, 2023, https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/haiti.
[280] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[281] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[282] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[283] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[284] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[285] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[286] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."
[287] "Haiti | Humanitarian Assistance."

However, local and international humanitarian agencies have been directly affected by the ongoing violence in Haiti. The 2023 Aid Worker Security Report notes that Haiti ranked in the top ten for most violent humanitarian contexts in 2022.[288] Data indicated a 150% increase in attacks on humanitarian workers in Haiti following the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021, with violence primarily concentrated in Port-au-Prince.[289] In July 2021, a hospital run by an international organization was attacked near the Port-Au-Prince region.[290] In 2022, eight aid workers were kidnapped, two wounded, and one killed.[291] The 2023 SCORE Report notes that most violence is perpetrated by criminal actors, with International NGO workers followed by the U.N. personnel experiencing the most incidents.[292]

Humanitarian activities have been further limited by a convergence of factors such as deteriorating road conditions, limited funding, restricted access to services, attacks on healthcare facilities, lack of access to active health partners, unavailability of blood products, and severe funding constraints related to emergency preparedness and emergency management.[293] Humanitarian aid such as healthcare, medicine, food, oil, telecommunications, and other essential services is made difficult by a 48% increase in inflation.[294] As a result, purchasing power has declined and worsened conditions for 90% of the population already living in poverty.[295]

Humanitarian Access Challenges

Data for this project was collected prior to the 2024 deployment of the MSS. This case study focuses on the 2021 Haiti earthquake response.

A number of humanitarians we spoke to - ranging from members of NGOs to INGOs to UN employees - described the political, environmental, and social challenges associated with the Haiti response. These challenges included obstruction of aid delivery by various gangs but also obstruction due to physical environment, factors associated with the Haitian government and PNH, instances of aid delivery hindered by affected populations themselves, donor fatigue, limited mobility, and even the security policies of humanitarians themselves.

<u>Non-State Armed Groups</u>

According to nearly all respondents, humanitarian assistance in Haiti has been impeded by the heightened obstruction by gangs, especially in Port-au-Prince, where most humanitarian

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[288] "Aid Worker Security Report 2023 - Security Training in the Humanitarian Sector: Issues of Equity and Effectiveness - World | ReliefWeb," August 17, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/world/aid-worker-security-report-2023-security-training-humanitarian-sector-issues-equity-and-effectiveness.
[289] "Aid Worker Security Report 2023 - Security Training in the Humanitarian Sector."
[290] "Haïti Health Cluster."
[291] "Humanitarian Access SCORE Report."
[292] "Humanitarian Access SCORE Report."
[293] "Haïti Health Cluster: Navigating a Multifaceted Humanitarian Crisis - Haiti | ReliefWeb," September 7, 2023, https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/haiti-health-cluster-navigating-multifaceted-humanitarian-crisis.
[294] "Haïti Health Cluster."
[295] "Haïti Health Cluster."

assistance entered the country through either its deep-water port or its international airport, and the main roads out of the city. As one interviewee reported:

> The whole of Port-au-Prince basically was surrounded by gang warfare- even the suburbs of Port-au-Prince were affected. And this has been happening for months and months, a couple of years before the earthquake happened. In fact, gangs have been a feature of Haiti politics forever. They have become more and more prevalent, and ever since the assassination of the President in early 2021, they ran the country basically - well, **they controlled access to the country**.

Another interviewee described in detail the way they witness gangs blocking humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of the 2021 earthquake in the country's southwestern peninsula and the security challenge it posed for them:

> We very clearly worked out that **there was one main road leading from the airport into the earthquake-affected areas, and this road was controlled by gangs**. We looked at the various tools, levers, supports that we had [at our disposal] and we looked at coordinating from the position that we were in, which was one of **high vulnerability to attack.**

Several interviewees referenced the role of former PNH member, Jimmy Chériziwer, whose pseudonym is "Mr. Barbeque." For instance: "The earthquake happened in the southwest, **so everything had to go down this main road that Barbecue controlled.**" According to another interviewee:

> One of the major players is a guy called Mr. Barbecue - he's an ex-HNP policeman. Barbecue burns people, hence his name. He had a gang consortium, and he basically controlled the road to the south. There's only one major road out of Port-au-Prince to the south and one to the north. **Barbecue controlled the road to the south, and another gang leader controlled the route to the north - so the capital was cut off.**

In areas where humanitarian accessibility is low but need is high, gangs also leveraged the population's desperation in order to gain legitimacy. This was described at length by one respondent who believes that against local communities' better judgment, they are becoming reliant on gangs to meet their basic needs:

> A lot of my experience with nonstate armed actors did not involve such geographical or topological constraints [as Haiti]… Getting into Haiti after an earthquake and having villages completely cut off from main arteries and logistical support lines really amplified – I think, in my opinion – some of the effects that nonstate armed actors and the informal conflict that can result as a matter of fact of it – really made things a lot, lot worse. It felt to me that unfortunately, **a lot of the community most affected didn't have as many resilience options at their fingertips that other communities might have had.** This can be as simple as mobility- access to different areas to remove themselves and family members from hazardous areas.

> It could also be that it's a smaller community - as in a smaller city and a smaller area - where **if you're getting harassed by these folks or you're not receiving access to humanitarian aid providers because of … these conflicts of power and legitimacy, it could get really, really difficult and hairy for them, I believe.** And in some cases, I joined some of our deliveries into some of the most hardest hit and hard to reach areas. And immediately what I noticed on my way out, there was: **'Wow, there is a significant lack of infrastructure allowing us to get to these people.' And if there was a localized level of non-state armed actors there, I'm not exactly sure what that community *could* do, other than try to really grit their teeth and try to make their way navigating the convoluted streams of authority figures trying to amplify their own voice.**

Finally, one humanitarian stressed how organized and powerful the gangs in Haiti had become. "In Haiti, it's particularly difficult because it's notoriously known in Port-au-Prince itself, there's about 8 very defined gangs. Well, which at this point are like highly organized crime, and they all have representation, and they all meet, and there is kind of a lead even within these gangs, so **it's not amateur hour.** It's very, very structured. **A lot of the reason why it also is so structured, I think, is because a lot of them come from the police force.**"

Haitian Government, PNH, and MSS

The dysfunction of Haiti's government, especially in the aftermath of the assassination of President Jovenel Moise, contributed further to access challenges. In the words of one interviewee "you have a situation that is what it is right now - beyond the humanitarian situation - with the gangs, the access issues, and so on and so forth. **It's a bit of a weird situation where you have a government in control but not in control**." This absence of centralized authority has rendered the country especially vulnerable to the proliferation of gangs, increased humanitarian needs, and decreased humanitarian access.

At the same time, the Haitian government may have used international assistance in order to boost its own legitimacy. Some respondents felt aid has been delivered to regions with lower need but higher accessibility specifically in order to portray the Haitian government in a positive light amidst instability. One interviewee cited an experience distributing resources to an island off the coast unaffected by the earthquake as a prime example of selective aid delivery, ultimately undermining the humanitarian principle of impartiality:

> I think some of the sites that were chosen - some were based on need and some were chosen based on just access availability. And I also think **some were based on influence**. We will bring supplies to this area, because **that will look good on the government**. And I'll give you one example: we went to an island off the coast that was not even affected by the earthquake at all, zero damage, and we delivered supplies there. The people were extremely grateful. That is true… I explained to myself: 'there is always need in Haiti; it doesn't matter where you go.' So it wasn't like 'oh, they didn't need this stuff.' No, they *needed* it, but they were not directly affected by the earthquake.

Humanitarians also describe the ways in which the PNH both facilitated and hindered aid access, such as when humanitarian organizations have relied on armed escorts by PNH to deliver aid to

hard-to-reach locations. Given the antagonistic relationship between the gangs and the PNH, this created a unique operating environment. While humanitarians are able to overcome access constraints, it comes at the risk of being targeted by gangs.

> At the time, [UN Agency] was pointing for the UN convoys to go through [Gang Controlled] sector with police escorts. We had interagency convoys going with assistance. **But obviously, you know, when you're using police escorts, it means every convoy is costing you more than if it wasn't**. You also have issues of using police escorts because these are the tasks that are given to you. **But at the same time you might just be even more targeted specifically because you are using police escorts and police is what is targeted by the gangs.** Right? So it's always a **double-edged sword**. There was this kind of security/access constraint, which was tricky because ports are in the capital. The main airport is in the capital, so things need to go out from the capital to the affected area.

The decrease in the overall size of the PNH has also meant that use of armed escorts by humanitarian organizations may leave communities without police to provide them with security. In the words of one humanitarian, their lead told them: "'We don't have resources.' Resources mean two things in that case: **we could pool the police officers but we don't have the cars and the fuel, and we need a form of per diem for the police force**. That's where it becomes a bit difficult to handle these things." These competing demands have driven a wedge between humanitarians and locals who rely on the same resources to mitigate security concerns.

Another respondent detailed the conversations on the ground, driving home the opportunity costs associated with humanitarians relying on police escorts.

> **You bring the police together with the affected population at your peril**- particularly the more dysfunctional a police force is. We had competition between police elements to work for us, both at the operational level and the strategic, so people would come to us and say: 'If you want to talk to [the] police, you gotta talk to me.' Then somebody else would come in. So it also was a driver of this function. **They saw the value potentially being derived from this process**, and they really had to be forced to be structurally engaged with us.
>
> There were NPol (National Police) within the special political mission. We got them to go and talk to the police, like: 'we need a relationship with you to be functional. We can't be having this mercenary activity.' We also had at the field level we had agencies walking into police stations and saying: 'Can you escort us down the road?' And then of course this set up a whole complicated market for escort services. And similarly, then, **we're sucking away security capacity from all the other jobs that the police should be doing**.
>
> There's an **opportunity cost for them working with us vis-à-vis securing of the rest of their jurisdiction.** Certainly, that came with conceptual problems but it's quite hard to prove **that by absorbing the police assets, was a driver of insecurity in other areas.**

Another respondent spoke about the increased use of armed escorts for humanitarian convoys currently compared to prior humanitarian responses in Haiti, leading to a heightened reliance on external military assets and the necessity of UN Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord), provided by OCHA's Civil-Military Coordination Service (CMCS) and WFP's Humanitarian-Military Interaction (HMI) officers.

> I think coming out for folks entering Haiti was probably a little different than it was for even 10 years earlier, as well. And that ended up leading to operational considerations and adaptations, for example, I know [UN agency] was supporting folks in trying to move things by ground in convoys, because everything was just being stopped. And there's diversion happening because of the law - the lack of kind of law and order or control, if you will - from a unified governance due to all the gangs that were dispersed in certain areas, in particular, just in the outskirts of Port au Prince. **And it made it quite difficult, which is kind of where our role was amplified in the civ-mil space, where I think under normal circumstances, we probably wouldn't have relied so heavily on military support.**

According to an interviewee, international governments including the U.S. and Canada have provided support to the HNP in attempts to bolster security. However, these efforts have been largely unsuccessful.

> The HNP have a lot of support. They know the American Government and the Canadian Government equip them and support them. There's a **big FBI presence in the American Embassy training the anti-kidnapping police and the riot Police of Haiti**. **But they're fighting a losing battle**. And yeah, it's got worse and worse.

The international community has attempted to de-escalate the situation through the deployment of the MSS, a peacekeeping mission led by Kenyan forces. One interviewee described MSS as "a police force, but with a very strong security mandate and there is a cap. I think from a humanitarian perspective on the guidance on how do you deal with an entire foreign police force because we are used to military forces, not necessarily police forces." Still, the interviewee felt there may be benefits to this new MSS over current policing practices: "**However, this police force seems to have something on the line of community engagement.** Community policing, that is the most similar thing. In both of the Civic doctrines, they would be mentioned to actors like us, the police wouldn't have that."

<u>Physical and Social Constraints</u>

The difficult geographic terrain of rural Haiti and the lack of basic transportation infrastructure further compounded the security constraints noted above. One humanitarian described this at length:

> We'd have like 2 big issues in terms of access. Not necessarily all of it is overcome with military and civil defense assets. But there were two main issues. **One, was the remote locations of people that had been affected**, so literally like on the top of the hill top of the mountain… There were **infrastructural and kind of terrain damages that were coupled with the remoteness of some of these locations**. So that was a barrier right

> because we had discussions of 'okay, how are we gonna overcome the bridge part? Is it something that we can swim through or walk through? Is there a company that can rebuild a bridge? Can we put a kind of temporary bridge here? What exactly can we do here?' So there were **infrastructural access related issues**…. Then there were **security access constraints** which specifically, at the time, were related to the capital.

Aid distribution is further complicated by the desperation of the Haitian population. As one humanitarian describes:

> **We also had access issues related to the desperation of some of the populations that were affected that were not reached after seven/eight days**. It was difficult to reach and access everyone, and so we had an incident, for instance, where one of our convoys and one of our trucks went to a destination, passed through a village, and was **attacked in that village by the population, who just wanted the truck to stop simply, but that's also access related**. It was **not just necessarily the gangs**. It was also a very, very critical situation. Especially in those first few days, **people are not after medicine; they are after food and water as essential commodities**. So, yes, the food trucks were particularly of a target.

Variability in aid distribution to different communities, even when based on need, has become a point of contention, particularly for communities that are en route to those deemed a higher priority. This was observed by aid workers both along the road and at distribution sites:

> **You bring down the risk levels by having acceptance by conflicting parties and affected populations both in the destination and along the way.** In Haiti, we had a number of **convoys pillaged along the road**. **Public information is the other element to it**: 'Do the public understand what we are doing?' Because of course we are moving values through areas of need towards areas of higher need. **But that doesn't necessarily mean that they have understood.** So both in Port-Au-Prince and along the routes we had convoys stopped and looted, and this was one of the motivations for using the escorts.

> Similarly **at distribution points, we had pillaging**… What we saw in numerous cases was that the distribution would set up, the crowd would gather, they would behave themselves with the first half, and then they would see the dwindling supplies, and then they would think: 'well, I'm looking around at everybody else; there's no way that we're all getting here.' So then, it's basically the young men all run at it, overwhelm the distributors, and make off with half of the distribution. **So what is it that you have in terms of influence? You've got public information, then you also have the information networks that you can mobilize. Go to them and ask if they can communicate on your behalf. They also bring down the tensions; these risk levels.**

<u>Humanitarian Organizational Policy</u>

Several respondents discussed the confinement to hotels and key operating centers by the security policies put in place by their own international governments and humanitarian agencies

as significant barriers to aid delivery. In the words of one interviewee: "We lived in the Hotel [Name], and we worked in the log base down in the airport, and **we didn't go anywhere else**." Restricted mobility impeded coordination and the ability to network with other individuals involved in the response. External factors that contributed to this are cited by the same interviewee: "But also the traffic in Haiti is so bad it can take an hour to get up the hill where all the UN and the NGOs are based. You have a huge logistical challenge, and so **I've never met so few people on the Mission as I did in Haiti.**"

A humanitarian we spoke with encountered similar restrictions, reinforcing this perspective. Specifically, they highlighted mobility issues among individuals based at the U.S. embassy, with citizenship status or lack thereof being a limiting factor to humanitarian coordination. This was because their US colleagues involved in the response were not allowed to leave the embassy, and that it is difficult to get non-US citizens into the US embassy to hold meetings. Additionally, they described that the locations of different coordination meetings sometimes meant sitting in two hours of traffic.

The mobility challenges experienced by humanitarians led to more informal reactions between response members: "So informally, of course, we all drove together to the hotel, and the humanitarians would line up if we would leave, but that was more like it's not an official convoy. I was always unofficial. But you would see that the humanitarians had a security issue and that was also discussed." Security was a major concern that impacted the magnitude of the response, and length of stay for actors in Haiti.

<u>Donor Fatigue</u>

The response in Haiti is complicated by its long history of disaster and conflict. In the words of one interviewee who has been providing assistance for nearly two decades:

> "there was a big landslide in Daniaive in 2004... Ever since then I've been sort of following 'poor old Haiti.' And you know, **it's just so run down, so dysfunctional. No credible government, and it's just so depressing. There's a beautiful country, some lovely beaches, it could be a wonderful place. But you know the poverty, the criminality, the insecurity.**"

Several interviewees cited comparisons between the 2010 and 2021 Haiti earthquake responses, emphasizing the growing response fatigue that has deemphasized the severity of the situation in Haiti among those with extended involvement. This was exacerbated by the broader global landscape, notably the 2021 withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, diverting international attention away from Haiti.

> And it was kind of weird to see that a lot of people were comparing to past responses and saying, **'well, it's not that bad, because it's not like 2010, or it's not that bad, because it wasn't like your x [country].'** If the country has seen so much suffering, there's almost a **certain level of callousness and kind of cynicism,** and I think that does impact the response because it's 'not as bad as once upon a time.' **Or as for me as a newcomer, you know, I kept thinking: 'yes, okay, the scale might be different, but it doesn't**

> **mean it's not that bad for the people that have been impacted now, right?'** So there was a **loss of urgency** because there's so much to compare it to in Haiti…
>
> Afghanistan was happening at the time when we were all there in Haiti, so there were kind of political elements like some military not knowing if they were going to have to kind of redirect their attention and their resources elsewhere.

An aid worker reflected on the contrast between 2021 in Haiti and aid provided in the nearby Bahamas two years earlier. Their perspective is outlined below:

> T**he level of assistance that I saw arrived to [Bahamas] versus the level of assistance that I saw arriving in Haiti was different**, right? Usually in a natural disaster response you have an airport and a port that are congested and just full of assistance, whereas here there was no flooding… Like, I got to the airport, and I was expecting to just see boxes everywhere, and instead it was quite controlled, and **I think that's probably due to the fatigue, but also going back to the scale**. People kept comparing it to the scale of past responses, so less things had been sent in, or maybe it was the one or two pager that had kind of mitigated the response. So that was different. I was expecting to see more congestion, and instead I found a bit more order. So that is something that was different.

Across Haiti, resources including fuel, food, and water are in high demand and low supply. One interviewee emphasized how fuel constraints have impeded humanitarian's ability to deliver life-saving aid in response to the 2021 earthquake and the reliance on support from international militaries like the U.S. Joint Task Force (JTF).

> There was a huge constraint on fuel on the ground for aircrafts**.** And I do recall the JTF, flying in these large portable fuel bladders that they were able to put down on the tarmac and get to work with aircrafts down and up quicker and reducing the amount of time they were on the deck.

While the U.S. JTF has been essential in delivering fuel to humanitarians, their capacities are dwindling amidst donor fatigue and reduced capacity. In the words of another respondent this is "because **people don't care about Haiti, donors don't care.** And you know, if you look at the annual funding for Haiti, it's gone down and down and down. And yeah, the percentage of the annual appeals are never, never very high and just donor fatigue, donor lack of interest."

This same respondent further compared the Haiti responses in 2010 and 2021 in terms of the level of support. Declining support and the inability to move resources throughout Haiti has left many communities deprived of basic necessities.

> The main problem, I think, was the combination of the security challenges, … and the lack of actors. You know, back in 2010, we had a huge toolbox of resources from the Minister. [The] minister had 12,000 troops, at offices all around the country. They had helicopters and trucks, they had engineering squadrons. A lot of resources that you could call upon. **In 2021, We had nothing, absolutely nothing. And so the toolbox was**

> **empty. There were no tools in the pack, apart from the American JTF that deployed for a short period of time.**

One interviewee noted, almost ironically, that a common problem during past Haitian responses – the donation of expired or spoiled medicine and food – was not an issue in the current humanitarian response to Haiti:

> Usually, you have problems in these contexts of food and medicine mostly because it expires, especially food. Or things needing to be in temperature, controlled storage. **But in Haiti we didn't have that issue, first of all, because we weren't swamped with assistance.** So there seemed to be enough storage for what was coming in. I think because at this point people have learned for Haiti not to send things that need to be temperature controlled or need to be cold chains. So most of the things that I saw were being sent was, you know, if it was food, it was things like rice. If it was beverages, it was beverages that could stay out. So I think there's a certain part of the learning curve for Haiti that kind of helps this response for better or worse.

Humanitarian Access Best Practices

<u>Involving Local Populations in Decision Making</u>

Several interviewees referenced the importance of integrating the local population within the response as a method of circumventing humanitarian access challenges. The inclusion of local community actors was essential for successful negotiations and the coordination of humanitarian aid delivery. One respondent described this dynamic at length, citing frustration associated with foreign decision-making that excludes the local perspective and the lessons that should be learned moving forward.

> There are a lot of variables here and we want to know: **'who has a good working relationship with them [local actors]? Who do they trust now, that's a local pastor or a local NGO, or local political leader, there oftentimes are great stakeholders to pull in, to lend credibility, and then to help facilitate communication.**
>
> So, if we want to talk about a waste of resources, **the resources that are not channeled through local actors to strengthen or expand their capacity are wasted resources.** And they actually **delegitimize the local actors**, and they make it more fragile, and they contribute to vulnerability. It is a massive freakin' problem. Massively needs to be addressed.
>
> How do you address it? **You keep it from being a lobbying decision that's made in DC, or by whoever else is more connected there because they have more resources, because they're already winning in a funding system**. And you do it based on who actually is getting shipped down in the country? And who has credibility? Sorry, it is mind blowing. Frustrating. I'm like, 'so they're going to lead it?' And I know exactly the type of work that they do here, and **they don't have any credibility and trust. So good luck with that.**

Leveraging the insight from local populations has bolstered the response in Haiti. This is observed from the experience of the same respondent who stated, "we also understand Haiti significantly better because **we have an indigenous staff of 100**. So there's probably something to be learned from that, even if they don't adapt our power, our process, but the point is that we actually have the vehicles, infrastructure and local knowledge to do all." Multiple respondents referenced the same local actors as pivotal to negotiations with gangs to gain access and coordinate response logistics with local communities. One interviewee described how an NGO employee leveraged his unique contacts with criminal elements to bring an aid delivery into a specific port:

> [NGO worker] spoke to the criminal elements in [City] and said: 'we're going to bring this stuff in but if anything goes wrong, we're going to turn it off and you aren't going to get anything.' There were a lot of reservations; it was briefed to the security officials at the US Embassy. There were just a lot of discussions about things that could go wrong very easily. And so it took some approvals but it went extremely smoothly. I**t was really due to [NGO worker's] pre-negotiations: his people on the street talking with the senior people in [City]. That's a case study where you can leverage the NGO and their local contacts.**

Another instance of coordination was described between the Haitian Government, humanitarians, and the local population. In the words of the interviewee

> One, we spoke with the government and we said: 'Okay, you take care of identifying the population that are the most vulnerable and where we're going through your social protection mechanisms. We will bring all the cargo, and we will rally all the other humanitarian organizations to have joint convoys. **Then, we need the support of the authorities and armed forces to help us with the security, both for the convoys and for the distributions on site, together with the local community**.'

<u>Utility of Civil-Military Coordination</u>

High quality civil-military coordination marks a second method of overcoming access constraints. One respondent we spoke with described the importance of this framework in moving the needle forward when negotiating with the gangs.

> We looked at combining the security coordination, the logistical coordination, the work on armed escorts, the work that was being done with the gangs – because there were mediation projects already taking place in gang-controlled areas – **we looked at leveraging those projects in the interest of advocating to the gangs, but also leveraging them in terms of having a better understanding of where their perceptions were vis-à-vis humanitarian assistance**… If each of these approaches were optimized, would we move from a situation of high access constraints to a situation where we have medium or low access constraints?

Another respondent agreed to the importance of multi-level negotiation in overcoming access constraints.

> So at this point for that location, we went there with several various people from the community leaders, gang leaders, and so on, and did a whole sit-down and negotiated with them to be able to safely access that location a few days later. Thank God, it went extremely well and I wish we would have had more time for the first [locations] as well as we did in that one, but **that shows again that the multiple-level negotiation, and also bringing in the gangs, the communities, the humanitarians, the civil protection, the mayor, and so on, has actually provided with the access that we needed there.**

One primary distribution method cited by several informants to overcome varying levels of access constraints was by leveraging military air assets via UN-CMCoord. The use of military assets is noted as being less contentious during a pure disaster response than a more complex situation such as the one in Haiti during the 2021 earthquake, but still proved very useful in supporting aid delivery.

> I guess an advantage of having, for example, military and civil defense assets in this response was kind of helping us overcome the physical access constraints of reaching some people, **because military assets can usually, especially air assets, can land in places where a commercial air asset can't.** So that is something that helped us overcome kind of a physical or infrastructural challenge, and I think that was really useful. **It is a little bit less contentious to use military assets in a natural disaster, although this isn't necessarily for Haiti,** but usually the rule is it's a little less contentious to use because there is no complex emergency, and because … everybody is on the same side and everyone's working towards the same common goal, right?

Another respondent described the advantages of air leveraging rotary and fixed-wing air assets to overcome logistical challenges imposed by NSAGs. Not only does this protect aid workers from hazardous conditions, but it ensures that hard-to-reach communities receive vital resources. One of the downfalls to relying on this approach is that it is not cost-effective long-term. However, the options for reaching communities on the ground are limited. One interviewee explained:

> Having rotary wing air support, and also fixed wing, it just bubbled up, because then instead of passing through some of these hazardous areas, you were able to kind of just lift off from Port-au-Prince, find that almost last mile service delivery, maybe like a half mile away from the end, and drop off and coordinate with different NGOs, both local as well as international.... **If I looked back on the length of the duration of the deployment there and the amount of work that the military had to do, I think it was amplified by the fact that a lot of non-state armed actors, were there constraining the logistical networks, to having to go with a very expensive and probably unsustainable air delivery system.**

<u>Humanitarian principles</u>

The four humanitarian principles include humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Several interviewees described the ambiguity associated with armed escorts and response logistics relative to the aforementioned principles. In efforts to expedite the delivery of aid, as described above, individuals have relied on armed escorts for protection. Overtime, this creates a

dependency that can be highly problematic as humanitarian organizations are regularly engaging with NSAGs.

> You also **undermine the ability of getting information from the police that is objective**. And it's Haiti, so they're always going to say: 'you need an escort.' So basically condemn yourself to working with escorts in perpetuity and without giving that decision with due care. And suddenly you are **engaging structurally with a highly problematic armed force that has significant human rights violations, significant controversies with the various gangs; and then you are then viewed as being coupled with them – this is an issue.**

Upholding the principle of neutrality is paramount during response efforts, and compromising this principle through the use of armed escorts is a decision not taken lightly by humanitarians. However, the gravity of the situation often left humanitarians in Haiti with no other choice. In the words of one interviewee, "They [the gangs] close down a road and burn tires at the front at the end. And they will go to every car. This is a good target, this is a good time, and they take everybody with them. And it doesn't matter… That's how they earn their money and that's why nobody could travel in Haiti as a humanitarian without [armed escorts]."

To achieve the overarching mission, operational adaptations were implemented. In practice this involves navigating ethical dilemmas while delivering aid in challenging environments. One example of an operational adaptation to better align with the principles is the selection of unbranded vehicles.

> **I'll never compromise on our humanitarian principles. However, practically I had to close my eyes on a couple of occasions**, and even get in the car myself with some of the forces when I went to the bank to get the money, big amounts of money… And so, of course, they weren't civilians, but nonetheless, in principle, I would never do that. **So I will never compromise my humanitarian principles. But at the same time, I had to compromise a little bit**, so I had to tell them basically "We're going in my vehicle. Let's not even talk about whether you have to carry a weapon or not, I'm not looking." **But there was no other way for us to get money to be able to operate, to pay our transporters, to pay the distributions, and so on**. So this is what we call the **operational adaptation**, but always in the respect of the principles.

Interviewees also referenced the humanitarian principles in conversations surrounding response logistics. In one instance, "There were some concerns: 'Are we showing favoritism because we're working with this one NGO?' But we worked with any NGO that presented us with valid requirements." They continued, explaining that having this pre-existing contact with a certain NGO was faster than partnering with a new NGO and building that connection from scratch.

A similar notion is the general sentiment that leveraging resources such as military assets is less problematic in the absence of an actual conflict "because everybody is on the same side, and **everyone's working towards the same common goal.** Right? So there's not a lot of you know, you're on one side, and I'm on the other side. **It's all for the team. We may come from**

different nations, different organizations, different types of work. But you know we're all kind of working on this together."

Conclusion

The interview data describes the key challenges and opportunities humanitarians encountered within the Haiti Response. Occupation of large portions of Port-au-Prince and major highways out of the city by criminal gangs, coupled with heightened violence has complicated the operating environment for domestic and international actors. The data suggests that this is compounded by geographic and infrastructure challenges left by decades of disasters, conflict, and lack of development.

The access constraints in Haiti discussed throughout the interviews can be sorted according to OCHA's Access Monitoring and Reporting Framework.[296] Six of the nine access constraints described in OCHA's framework were noted in the interviews and desk research.

1. Restriction of movement of agencies, personnel, or goods within the affected country.
2. Military operations and ongoing hostilities impeding humanitarian operations
3. Violence against humanitarian personnel, assets, and facilities
4. Interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities
5. Physical Environment
6. Restrictions on, or obstruction of, conflict affected populations access to services and assistance

According to multiple respondents, aid delivery procedures depend on government optics and accessibility as opposed to need alone, compromising the humanitarian principle of impartiality. This notion of "selective aid" was discussed at length with multiple respondents.

Mobility is restricted to hotels and prime operating centers for humanitarians due to security and logistical challenges. Attempts to move around the capital are hindered by both organizational policies and heavy traffic. Additionally, the main roads into and out of Port-au-Prince remained under gang control, limiting humanitarian access to areas outside of the capital. Subsequently, humanitarians are unable to network amongst each other, which further impedes communication given the lack of cellular service. Several respondents noted that many actors have left Haiti earlier than intended because of these restrictions. With long hours, prolonged isolation, and a worsening humanitarian situation, response and donor fatigue are heightened.

One method that humanitarians used to overcome security challenges is the employment of armed escorts–primarily composed of HNP members. This is problematic as the gangs and HNP are in some ways parties to the same conflict, while at the same time overlapping with each other. A prime example of this is ex-HNP member Jimmy Chériziwer who is now a prominent gang leader controlling the roads in-and-around Port-au-Prince.

Despite the overwhelming challenges posed by this operating environment, the interviewees noted several best practices for overcoming access constraints. These include integrating local

[296] "Humanitarian Access | OCHA," accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.unocha.org/humanitarian-access.

populations in humanitarian response planning and furthering the use of UN-CMCoord (including both the use of military air assets and opening dialogue between armed actors and humanitarians), collaboration between UN, INGOS, NNGOs, multi-level negotiation, and the importance of pre-established relationships.

Throughout the interview process the humanitarian principles were discussed at length. Based on conversations with several interviewees there was a delicate relationship between safeguarding humanitarians while simultaneously addressing ethical concerns; specifically, pertaining to the use of armed escorts, selective aid, and broader response logistics. While upholding the principles was a priority for interviewees, there is often a gray area that they had to wade through to overcome access constraints in order to reach areas with the greatest need. The inability to do so would leave communities at risk for further gang influence and a prolonged lack of basic necessities. Ultimately, the Haiti case is a prime example of a response where the presence of NSAGs and a complex history of colonialism, conflict, disasters, and lack of development complicates current day response logistics by humanitarian actors.