



WOMEN'S VOICES

AT THE HEART OF

STABILIZATION

Stories of Women Leading Stabilization Efforts
Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma Regions



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FOREWORD

In the midst of conflict and crisis, and amidst the shadows of uncertainty, people's stories of resilience serve as sources of empowerment, lighting the path towards progress. The journeys of remarkable women that are gathered in this book are testaments to the unwavering strength and steadfastness that resides within the Sahelian spirit, even in the face of the most daunting challenges.

In the heart of the Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma areas, where turmoil has cast its shadow, the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) has emerged as a beacon of hope, extending its reach to those who have borne the brunt of violence and displacement. Through initiatives aimed at promoting security, justice and social cohesion, RSF has become a catalyst for transformation, offering a glimmer of hope in communities once engulfed by despair.

Women and girls have played essential roles in advancing the RSF's goals, yet their invaluable contributions often remain overlooked. This selection of stories highlights outstanding and inspirational examples of determination and illustrates how each of these women is making a difference in their communities.

During my visits to countries in the Sahel region, I continue to encounter resilient women who embody determination, leadership and innovation in navigating ongoing crises. One striking

observation has been the impact of conflict on gender dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma areas, where women — often single and without stable incomes — are shouldering the responsibility of heading large families. It is evident that in such contexts, it is imperative to empower women because they are key stakeholders in discussions surrounding peace and stability within their communities.

I firmly believe that collaborative efforts can surmount these barriers and empower women to take on more prominent roles in shaping the Sahel's future. Together, we can address systemic

inequalities and ensure the implementation of policies and initiatives that promote gender equality and uphold women's rights. Our stabilization programming has enabled more than one million women in areas shattered by conflict to have direct access to justice and security services, schools, markets and health care facilities, and expanded economic opportunities.

Central to these endeavours is the promotion of inclusivity and respect within political and social institutions. It is by recognizing and valuing women's voices and contributions that we will create an environment that is conducive to their active involvement. By amplifying their stories, we highlight the critical work that these exceptional individuals undertake on a daily basis.

Haoua Sakhairoun's journey, for example, echoes the transformative power of collective action and community resilience. As President of the Stabilization Committee in Gite, Chad, she embodies the spirit of perseverance, leading her community towards a brighter future. Through RSF interventions, Sakhairoun and fellow women have found avenues for economic empowerment, reclaiming their autonomy and shaping their destinies amidst the remnants of conflict.

Similarly, Yabaraye Banou's story bears witness to the indomitable spirit of survival and renewal. Emerging from the depths of domestic violence and societal rejection, she found solace and support in the refuge provided by organizations like Yam Giribolo Tumo. Through empowerment initiatives, Banou discovered newfound strength and purpose, paving the way for economic independence and self-determination.

These are only two of the many narratives of courage and determination showcased in this book. Each story reminds us of the transformative potential inherent within each individual, even in the most adverse circumstances. These stories also highlight the strength of community-driven initiatives and international

cooperation in fostering sustainable peace and development.

As we navigate the complexities of protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises, let us draw inspiration from these stories, recognizing that even in the darkest of times, the human spirit of the Sahelian people remains unbroken — it is always ready to rise and rebuild, one resilient step at a time.

During the fourth Lake Chad Governors' Forum in July 2023, many participants committed to rising up and taking action against the harmful stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality; this served as a poignant illustration of the collective power of political and community leaders.

As we collectively challenge the systemic hurdles women encounter, UNDP and our partners remain committed to integrating women's voices and priorities into all our programmes. The restoration of the social contract between citizens and the state hinges on empowering women as leaders across all facets of stabilization endeavours.

I hope you enjoy reading some of the remarkable journeys of women driving our stabilization efforts. Each story offers invaluable insights and perspectives that are crucial for achieving lasting and transformative results. Let us unite and heed their call for inclusion and empowerment, affirming the pivotal role of women at the forefront of our joint pursuit of peace and prosperity in the Sahel.

Yours Sincerely,



Ahunna Eziaakonwa

UN Assistant Secretary-General,
UNDP Assistant Administrator and
Regional Director for Africa



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Global evidence continues to demonstrate that women and their voices are invaluable in ensuring successful and lasting peace processes. Women often lead change in protracted conflicts, fighting for the safety, dignity and well-being of their families and communities. Supporting these efforts requires being fully respectful of equality of opportunities in education, sustainable economic growth and social development, inclusive participation in governance and decision-making, and equal participation and leadership in political and public life. Further, women's movements are at the forefront of demanding protection and the realization of women's and human rights, delivering humanitarian assistance, and leading dialogue, negotiation and peacebuilding efforts.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 and other Women, Peace and Security resolutions affirm the importance of including gender perspectives in peace negotiations. In positioning gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to peace and security, women of the Sahel region must be seen as agents of conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding and be meaningfully engaged in all stages of peace and stabilization processes. Sahelian women and girls must also be protected from war and violence with effective justice and accountability mechanisms.

The Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma regions has witnessed clear evidence that despite immense challenges, women both participate in and lead community stabilization committees, work as engineers to rebuild destroyed infrastructure (including houses, schools, police stations, health clinics, water points and market stalls), ensure community safety, and actively engage in decision-making processes related to rebuilding communities and areas shattered by violence and conflict.

Working in challenging contexts, the Regional Stabilization Facility for Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger and Nigeria collaborates closely with national and local governments, community-based organizations, women's and youth groups and regional institutions such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Liptako-Gourma Authority. These partnerships aim to facilitate significant on-the-ground results, positively impacting women, men, girls and boys alike.

The Regional Stabilization Facility has provided over a million women and girls with essential access to water, schools, health centres and marketplaces. Over the past three years, the number of women feeling safe and secure in crisis-affected areas has nearly tripled.

Facility results, however, are more than just numbers and reports. Behind every achievement is a woman's face, a life and

a unique story — a story often marked by an experience of extreme violence, but also a story of hope, bravery and resilience. These women's experiences show that despite their immense challenges, they hold remarkable strength to rebuild their lives and work towards a safer future for their families, nations and the world.

As we celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March 2024, these pages illustrate a few of the inspirational stories of women who have engaged in or been impacted by the United Nations Development Programme's Regional Stabilization Programme. These stories share how we and our partners are striding forward to realize a better region for women and girls — one of equality and empowerment because when women participate and lead, communities thrive, and sustainable peace and stability become a lived reality.

We hope these stories — and many more untold stories — will serve as a reminder that for a prosperous and peaceful region, Sahelian women of today are paving the way for the next generation to live a safer and more secure life. For this, the women of today must continue to be at the centre of all peace and stability efforts.

Women of the Sahel region are the driving force of our efforts. They are the face of stabilization solutions. They are the inspiration on which our hopes for a peaceful and prosperous Sahel depend.

[Click Here](#)

UNDP Gender Guidance for the Regional Stabilization Facility

THE REGIONAL STABILIZATION FACILITY IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN AND LIPTAKO-GOURMA REGIONS

The Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) is a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) funding mechanism that is supported by international donors and local, regional and national partners.

Launched in 2019 in the Lake Chad Basin and in 2021 in Liptako-Gourma, RSF intervenes in conflict-affected areas to support government and community efforts to reduce the risk of violence and to implement longer-term peacebuilding, recovery and development programmes.

The main implemented activities have focused on the following areas:



Promoting security and justice



Strengthening infrastructure for essential social services



Creating livelihoods



Promoting peace and social cohesion



Strengthening cross-border cooperation

The Lake Chad Basin region, which includes Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has been in crisis since 2009, with around

3.6 million

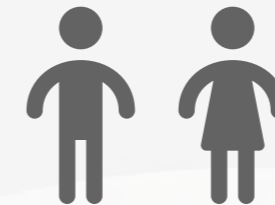
people internally displaced. Deteriorating security has hampered access to livelihoods and basic services.

The 14 years of violence have left more than

11 million

people in need of protection and humanitarian aid. Communities have also been affected by climate change, with unprecedented flooding and damage to crops and property during the rainy season.

The Liptako-Gourma region, which straddles Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is experiencing a complex multi-dimensional crisis caused by prolonged conflict, the negative effects of climate change and weak or absent state institutions. This has been compounded by political instability in all three countries. As of August 2023, the crisis in central Sahel has internally displaced over 2.6 million people.



To date, RSF contributions have reached over

1.6 million

people in the Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma regions. Our work has had direct impacts on the lives of many women and girls.

Some of these impacts include:

Approximately **1.1 million** women in 61 conflict-affected localities across Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma have benefitted from services, including schools, health centres, marketplaces and clean water. Independent evaluations have reported higher enrolment and retention rates for female students than ever before.

We have seen a big change in school attendance, especially in the number of girls being enrolled.

School principal in Baroua, Niger

Our school has 368 students, of which 212 are girls. We have 10 classrooms: two are made of permanent materials, and the rest have half-tarpaulins and are shaded under trees with a kindergarten and an alternative education centre.

School director in Garin Dogo, Niger (Mid-term review of Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad Region 2024)

Our hospital's maternity ward was regularly suffering from electrical interruptions due to load shedding. Conditions during night shifts were extremely difficult, particularly for women in labour who used to suffocate from the heat. With the installation of a solar system, **we can now use the fans and lights without any interruption, and our hospital is also energy efficient.** With electricity available 24 hours a day, we can ensure the continuity of maternal care, which was not the case before.

Salimata Talata Midwife Seytenga, Maternity, Burkina Faso. Liptako-Gourma Annual Report 2022

According to community perception surveys, more than **630,000** women in programme sites in the Lake Chad Basin region now feel safe and secure (only 280,000 women reported feeling safe and secure in 2020).

“ **The solar streetlights installed in the community** have made it possible for people to go about their economic and social activities in the evening and into the night. **These streetlights have been more beneficial to women** — they have enhanced women’s safety and security, making them more comfortable and confident if they have to go out after dark. ”

Mayor of Fotokol (Mid-term review of Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad Region 2024)

Women make up **20 percent** of the members of the community stabilization committees established or supported in the Lake Chad and Liptako-Gourma stabilization sites. These committees play an essential role in implementing stabilization activities and promoting peace, tolerance and social cohesion.

“ Before the committee, we couldn’t speak up about issues impacting us as women. We couldn’t report issues related to the military or security personnel. We did not trust them, and we were afraid of what would happen to us if we spoke out. We lived in silence with these challenges over the years. **Now we confidently raise our voices and report our concerns and issues**, and demand committee members to find adequate solutions for our justice. ”

Yagana Ibrahim, a member of the stabilization committee in Banki, Nigeria

44,000 women in the Lake Chad and Liptako-Gourma regions have benefited from livelihoods programmes in the form of cash-for-work, short-term training and subsidies for productive and commercial assets.

“ Employment opportunities and the supply of goods are increasing in the market. **More women are engaged in and benefitting from income-generation activities**, and young people are selling basic necessities. Livelihoods are being resumed, **our incomes are going up, and people are looking forward to living again because there is hope around us**. In addition, more women are sending their children to school, and widows have received support to take better care of their families. ”

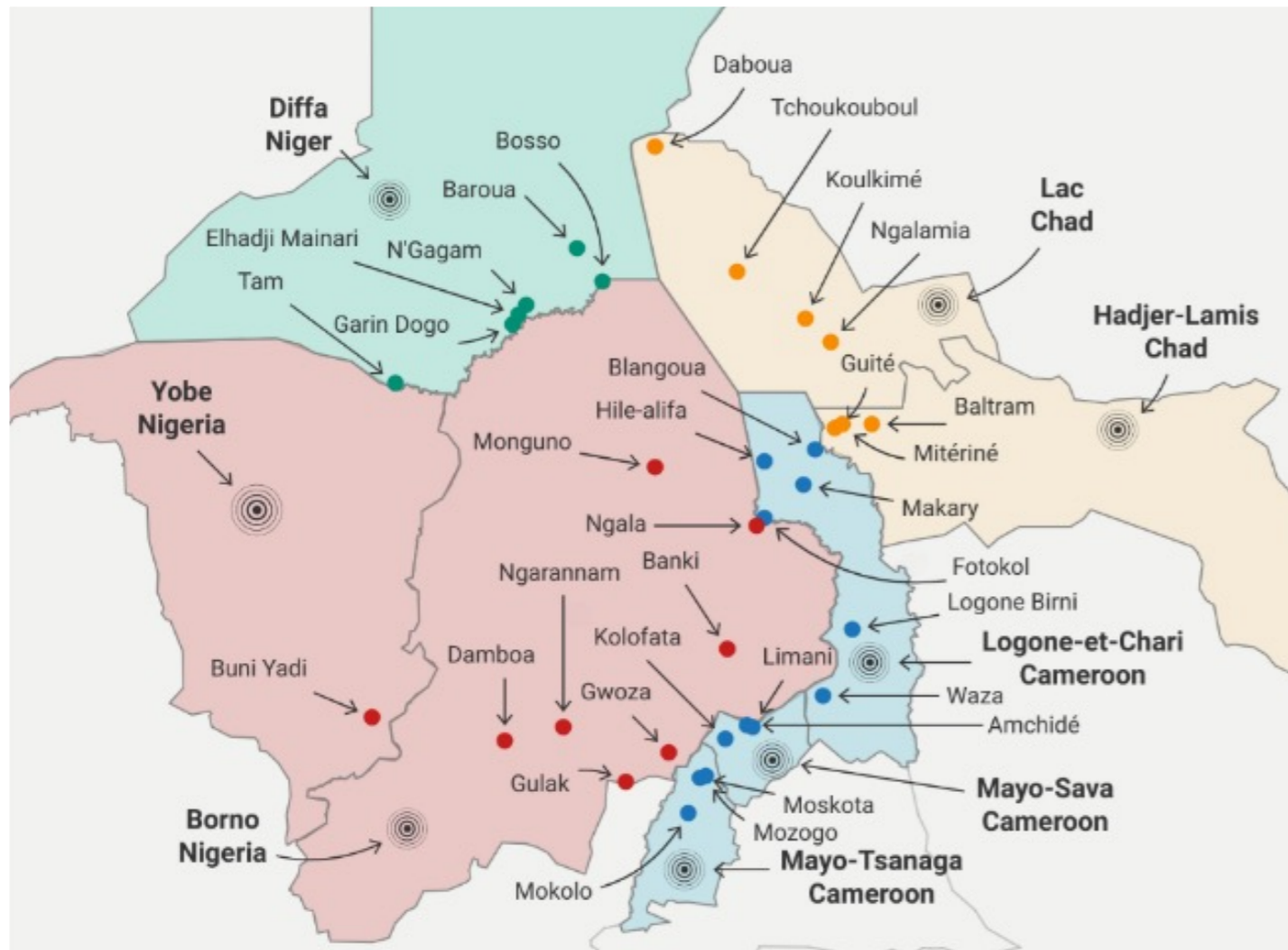
Women, Men and Youth of Koulikimé and Guité, Chad (Mid-term review of Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad Region 2024)

In both regions, the programme engaged with local human rights and justice actors to lay the foundations for a more accountable justice system. The programme reached **5,248** security force members (including about 500 women) through a training programme on human rights and the prevention of gender-based violence.

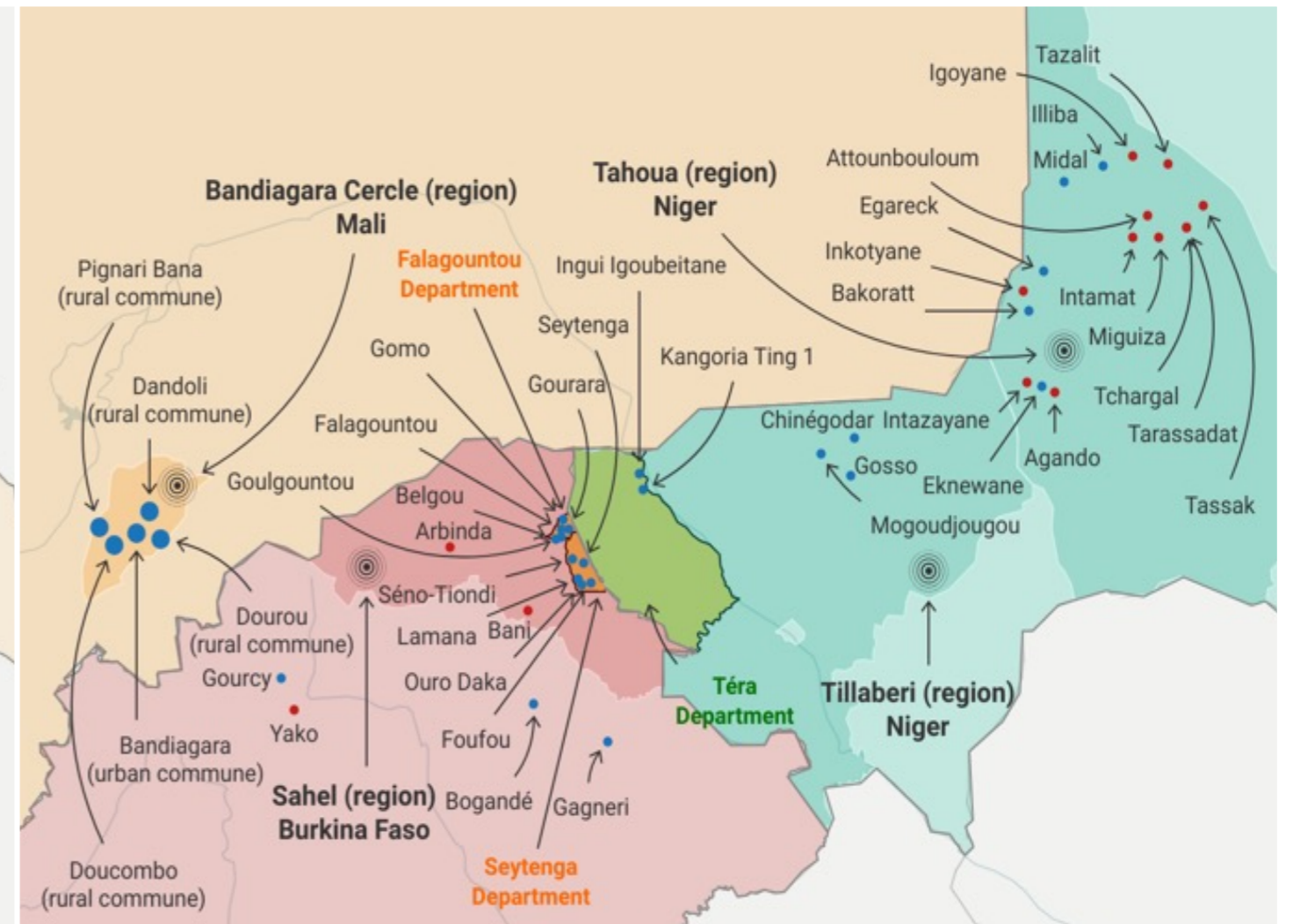
“ Human rights are increasingly respected, and more **young girls are being enrolled in schools**. Before, people used to inflict violence on women and girls widely, a terrible misdeed that was widely accepted. This attitude — for us — has changed due to the information we received. **With more respect for human and women’s rights, incidents of gender-based violence have decreased a lot.** ”

Administrative Authorities of Mani, Chad (Mid-term review of Regional Stabilization Facility in the Lake Chad Region 2024)

STABILIZATION INTERVENTION LOCATIONS IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN AND LIPTAKO-GOURMA REGIONS

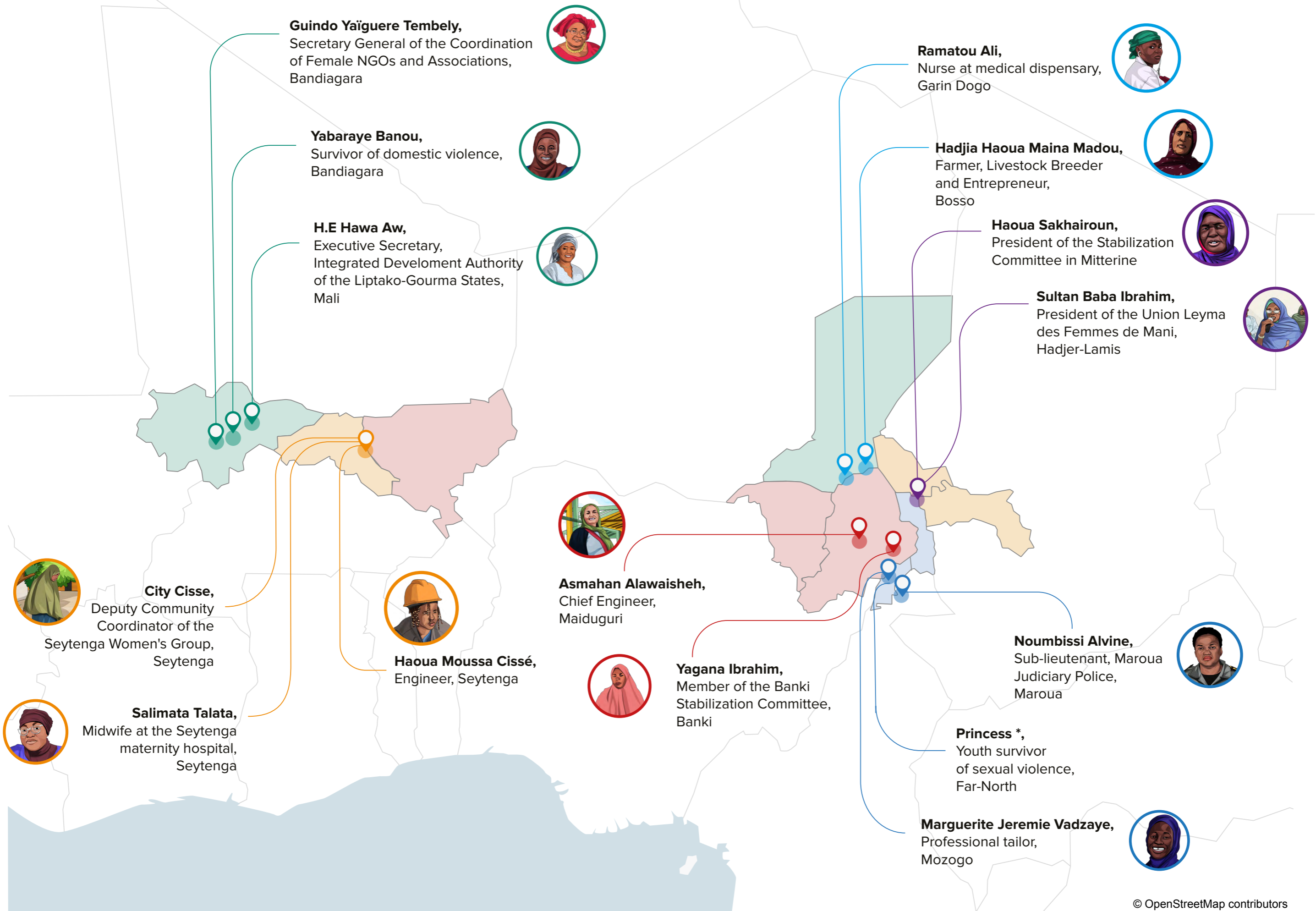


Lake Chad Basin



Liptako-Gourma

Stories of women leading Stabilization Efforts



© OpenStreetMap contributors

HAOUA SAKHAIROUN

President of the Stabilization Committee in Mitterine

The Stabilization Facility changed many things in the lives of people in Mitteriné, especially for young people and women. Thanks to this programme, we can better organize ourselves as a society and develop common interests at the economic and social levels.

Social conflicts used to leave us feeling destitute. Having benefitted from human rights and civil-military capacity trainings, we have learned to live together without fear. Now, we see the future differently;

we have hopes for lasting peace and see improvements in our daily activities, such as fishing and farming. Through the Stabilization Facility programme, women have been benefiting from activities such as cash-for-work. This has enabled us to revive the local economy by trading in fresh, smoked and dried fish; selling products at weekly markets or in Ndjamená; and even farming and livestock breeding. As a result, women have begun to regain their autonomy.

Moreover, we can confidently speak to our children on the importance of peace, thanks to training workshops on social cohesion. Many of us have noticed that our relationships with our husbands have also improved.

My hope is that within the next three to five years, our children can study in schools — at all levels. We need the literacy rate to increase and reach at least 80 percent. This is essential so that we can write our names, participate in administrative structures and even read medical prescriptions. Unfortunately, we do not presently have a secondary school in our community, and our children have little motivation to study. For us and for our community, we are hopeful that this will change.

Through cash-for-work activities, one of my sisters was able to save enough money to take our mother to hospital. My other sisters are now able to take better care of their children's needs, such as paying school fees and accessing health services.



Haoua Sakhairoun



Gite, Chad, Hadjer Lamis region



President, Stabilization Committee in the Joint Action Plan of Gite



Informal Religious Education



58 years old



YABARAYE BANOU

Survivor of Domestic Violence, Bandiagara

I was forced into marriage at the age of 13 after my grandmother died. She had always looked after me. I fell pregnant with my first son soon after getting married. I was still a child bride, and now I was going to be a mother!

My husband worked in the artisanal mining sector in the Kayes region. He was an alcoholic and beat me every day, often threatening to kill me.

In addition to the daily violence I suffered, there was psychological violence, such as insults and yelling. I was also deprived of resources, and my husband forbade me to continue my studies.

During the 17 years I spent in my husband's house, I worked many different jobs to support my two children. One day, I could no longer bear the pain and suffering of my husband returning home drunk and then beating and strangling me. My life changed in that moment; I found the courage to leave my husband and return with my two children to my parent's home in Bandiagara.

Unfortunately, I didn't get the support I had hoped for; I was rejected by my family members. Instead, they told me that I was a disgrace to the family and ordered me to leave.

I was shattered, and did not know where to go. Thankfully, I found a local shelter in Bandiagara for women survivors of gender-based violence, run by the Yam Giribolo Tumo organization. My children and I were welcomed. During my three months there, I received psychological support and joined a group of women being trained in food processing.

Along with 10 other women, I received equipment and the necessary training to process dried onions. This opportunity has helped me to become economically independent and provide for myself and my children. Overall, I feel so much better.

My ambition is to find the necessary support to open a groundnut paste-processing unit and to also open a large shop in the agri-food sector.



Yabaraye Banou



Bandiagara, Mopti region, Mali



Completed basic studies diploma and then enrolled in a vocational school



31 years old

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Gender-based violence is a pervasive human rights violation. Gender-based violence tends to increase during periods of conflict and uncertainty and presents a significant barrier to human development in West and Central Africa. Its repercussions extend far beyond individual victims, affecting families and entire communities and imposing substantial psychological, social and economic burdens. While both men and women experience gender-based violence, women disproportionately bear its consequences.

Gender-based violence encompasses various forms, including femicide, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation. According to the Gender-based Violence Area of Responsibility, approximately

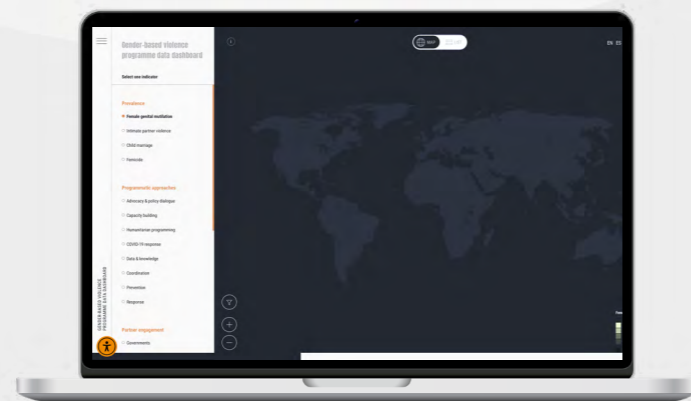
5.7 million

people in West and Central Africa require some form of gender-based violence assistance.

Gender-based violence often goes unreported due to a multitude of factors, including deeply ingrained sociocultural norms, fear of disbelief, stigma, discrimination, shame, guilt, humiliation and the fear of retaliation from authorities and perpetrators.

Comprehensive data and coordinated response mechanisms are indispensable to effectively address this critical issue.

Resources such as the [UNFPA gender-based violence programme data dashboard](#) offer invaluable insights and facilitate the development of targeted interventions to combat gender-based violence and provide support to survivors throughout the region.



YAM GIRIBOLO TUMO:

Empowering Women and Addressing Gender-based Violence in Mali

Yam Giribolo Tumo (YA-G-TU) in Dogon is a dynamic Malian civil society organization that is dedicated to advancing the socio-economic development of communities.

The organization actively implements strategies to amplify women's contributions through diverse promotional and multisectoral activities. With an unwavering commitment to addressing gender-based violence, YA-G-TU manages impactful projects and programmes across regions including Koulikoro, Mopti, Ségou and Tombouctou. Select initiatives relate to savings and credit, health, nutrition, agriculture, advocacy and the promotion of women's rights and citizenship.

YA-G-TU extends an invitation to individuals to join their mission and help contribute to increasing women's empowerment, fostering local development and building a more inclusive community. For additional information, please visit yagtu.org

NOUMBISSI ALVINE

Sub-lieutenant, Maroua Judiciary Police

I have dedicated four years to working with the Judiciary Police in the Far North of Cameroon. In my role as the police focal point for combating gender-based violence in the Mokolo Council, I cover the Mayo-Tsanaga Division, an area significantly affected by the armed crises in the Lake Chad Basin. I'm also an active member of our region's Gender-based Violence Case Management Group, which collaborates with stakeholders such as social affairs workers, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, lawyers and community leaders.

Gender-based violence cases have surged in this crisis context; nine or more cases are occurring each month, especially during celebration periods. My responsibilities include investigating these cases, assisting victims/survivors — and also perpetrators — to access the legal system and ensuring peace and order as a police officer.

We receive complaints from survivors directly and from their families, institutions like the Delegation of Social Affairs, humanitarian organizations and civil society groups. When complaints are received, it falls upon me to lead the investigations, gather necessary information, refer cases to the court and ensure that survivors receive the vital support they need.

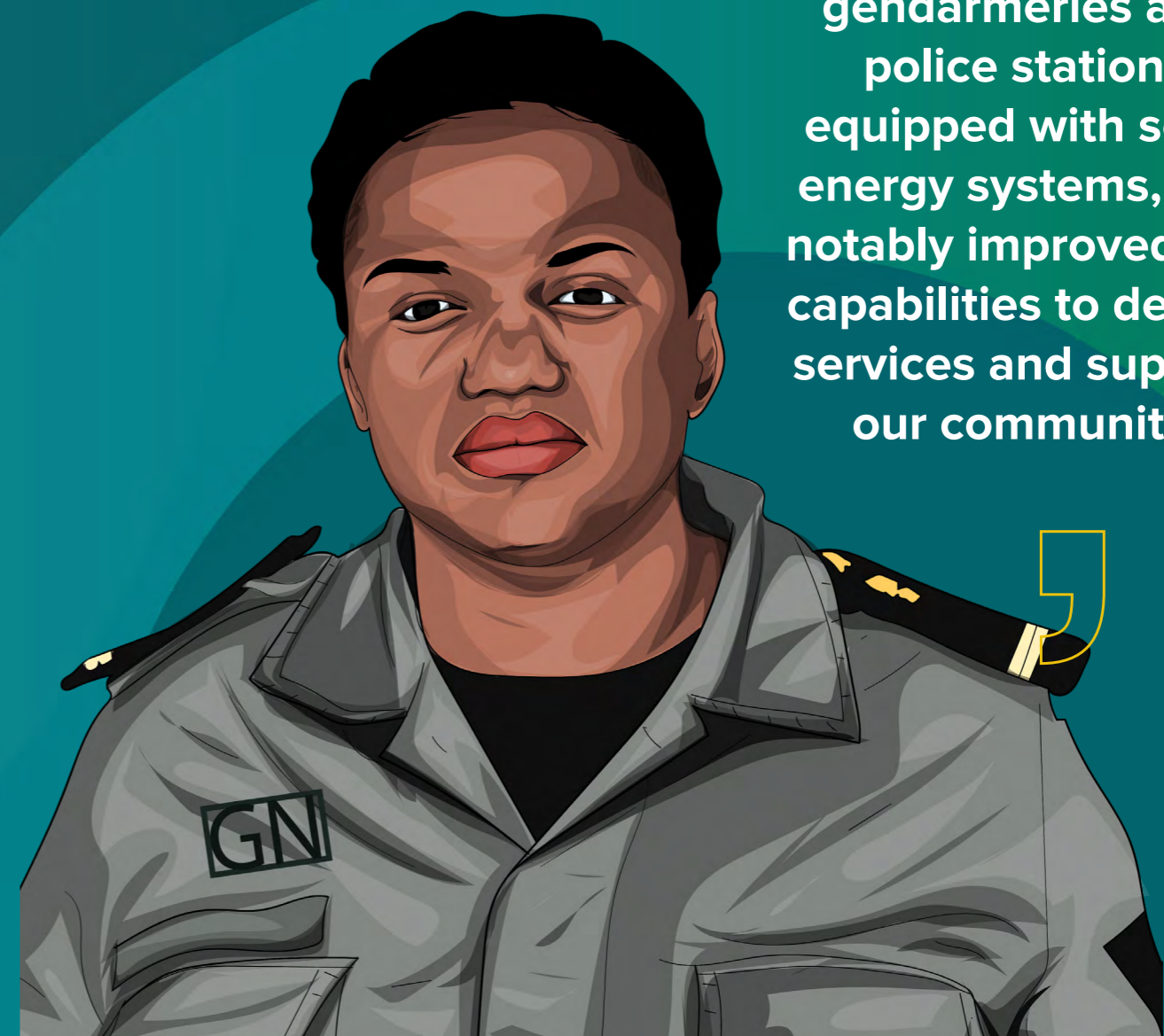
Two particularly impactful cases I've handled involved a 9-year-old girl coerced

into marriage by her father for financial gain and a mentally impaired girl who fell victim to repeated rape and impregnation by young men in her community. I referred both these girls to specialized social services and NGOs so that they could receive much-needed psychosocial support. I also conducted thorough investigations into the suspected perpetrators and forwarded the cases to the court for prosecution (and potential imprisonment). These actions were taken in accordance with the legal framework, including the Cameroon penal code and penal procedure code, established to protect survivors of gender-based violence.

Participating in the UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility's capacity-building workshop was enlightening. It equipped me with valuable skills to enhance my work, particularly through its focus on observing the penal code, streamlining procedural aspects, ensuring safety management and maintaining administrative and judicial order in the context of extremism.

While my happiest moments come when I successfully resolve cases, it is crucial to acknowledge the ongoing challenges we face. Many victims and their families hesitate to speak out, or sometimes, they actively hinder the case management process. In some instances, I have even received threats aimed at discouraging an investigation.

Stabilization Facility infrastructure support, including administrative buildings, schools, gendarmeries and police stations equipped with solar energy systems, has notably improved our capabilities to deliver services and support our community.



Alvine
Noubissi



Maroua, Far
North Region,
Cameroon



Advanced level
A4 (high school)



39 years
old



CITY CISSE

Deputy Community Coordinator of the Seytenga Women's Group

I am a single mother of five children, including three daughters. We were living and working peacefully in Seytenga before the deadly attacks in June 2022, which forced us to move to the town of Dori, 45 kilometres away. Without a job during this difficult period, my life was an ordeal.

The return of the police and gendarmerie forces to Seytenga was a blessing. They restored the much-needed relative calm, which increased feelings of safety and security and paved the way for my family and I, along with other displaced residents, to return home to our commune.

Having returned, we had to rebuild our lives and livelihoods. The cash-for-work project in support of vulnerable women and young people benefitted me and 308 other women from the commune. We worked to rehabilitate public infrastructure and restore degraded land. When the work was finished, I received my full payment on my mobile phone.

The payment enabled me to buy a ram and two goats. Today, I feel I am successful at livestock breeding; in addition to my one ram, I now have five goats. Beyond the money aspect, I feel that I am more helpful to my community as we rebuild together; this has helped me motivate other women to return home to Seytenga.

With the income received from the sale of my livestock products, I now run a small business selling galettes at Seytenga's central market every three days. This provides me with additional profits that I can use for family expenses such as food, schooling and health care for my children.



Today, I feel fulfilled, my children have what they need for their well-being, and I feel socially respected within my community.



City
Cissé



Commune de Seytenga,
Sahel region, Burkina Faso



Deputy Local Coordinator,
Seytenga Women's Group



French-Arabic school,
Informal school system



31 years
old

WHAT IS CASH-FOR-WORK?

RESTORING INDEPENDENCE, DIGNITY AND HOPE IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Cash-for-work is a widely used approach in stabilization and early recovery programmes. It provides immediate livelihood support in crisis-affected settings, especially to vulnerable households, including women and unemployed youths. Most often, participants carry out labour-intensive work, such as rehabilitating small-

scale community infrastructure, cleaning roads or providing sanitation-related services. In addition to restoring community infrastructure and improving access to key services, cash-for-work programmes improve household income, inject cash into the local economy and enhance the purchasing power of affected communities.



In Burkina Faso,

1,500

people took part in the cash-for-work programme, which enabled them to generate income and sustain themselves and their families.



In 2023

88%

percent of people participating in economic-related stabilization activities reported an improvement in their livelihoods.



PRINCESSE *

Young Female Survivor of Sexual Violence

In October 2022, I was raped by a soldier who was seconded to my municipality. He took advantage of my husband's absence to rape and then threaten me. I was forced to keep silent because I was afraid.

But then I got pregnant. When I found out, I had to tell my family. Some members of my family wanted to contact the Action for the Respect of Human Rights and Human Dignity (ARDHU) association.

When the ARDHU team learned of my situation, they immediately offered me psychological support. They explained that I was in a post-traumatic state and that I was still feeling fear, aggression and depression. Even worse than the stigma and shame that I felt was my husband wanting a divorce and

being rejected by members of my family. ARDHU offered me treatment in a hospital. I was looked after for over six months, right up until the birth.

Over time, I've learned to accept myself. I've kept the child, and I'm looking forward to the future. We now live with my uncle in another town. Family relations are better, too, thanks to ARDHU support.

*A pseudonym



LEARN ABOUT ACTION FOR THE RESPECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY (ARDHU), A CAMEROONIAN CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION

ARDHU is a non-profit Cameroonian civil society organization dedicated to providing psychosocial support and monitoring cases of human rights violations. Key activities conducted by ARDHU include reporting on and monitoring of violence and human rights violations occurring in the Far North region of Cameroon, conducting trainings for civil society organization members on the protection of human rights defenders, and sensitizing activities on themes linked to the psychosocial, child protection and gender-based violence. Target audiences include men, women and young girls.

More information can be found on their [Facebook](#) and [X](#) (formerly known as Twitter) pages.



Princesse*



Far North region of Cameroon



Up to the fifth year of secondary school



20 years old

SULTAN BABA IBRAHIM

President of the Union Leyma des Femmes de Mani

My organization has come a long way since its inception. It initially supported 156 women. Today, with the Regional Stabilization Facility support, we have been able to change the lives of 439 women.

In the beginning, women had very little information on gender-based violence or female genital mutilation. My organization, the Union Leyma des Femmes de Mani, took a clear stance on ending female genital

mutilation; our messages have been well received by the community. More people in the community now understand the negative consequences of female genital mutilation and early marriage.

Women in our society are often treated unequally. We have little space to express ourselves and take the issues that affect us to court when we feel wronged. We have no access to justice.

In response to these challenges, workshops and awareness-raising campaigns on preventing sexual and gender-based violence were organized. As a result, more people in the community understand that women have rights. Today, many more women are behind me, supporting this work.

A priority for my organization for the next three to five years is for women to be able to take charge of things in a different way. I want women to be more independent and to be able to take decisions for themselves (such as applying for a loan or microcredit) without their husbands' permission.

Teaching women to read and write is also a priority, because education is the basis of all development.



LEARN ABOUT UNION LEYMA DES FEMMES DE MANI (CHAD)

In the Mani sub-prefecture, part of Chad's Hadjer-Lamis province, a group of 223 women are actively combating sexual and gender-based violence. They provide a safe space, report incidents to the authorities and unite against injustice. Their determined efforts have a real impact on the community, demonstrating their solidarity and determination.



Sultan Baba Ibrahim



Chad



President, Union Leyma des Femmes de Mani, Head of the sub-prefecture in the Hadjer-Lamis province



Started secondary school but was unable to finish



57 years old

ASMAHAN ALAWAISHEH

Senior Civil Engineer and Head of Engineering Unit, UNDP Nigeria

As a female engineer, I bring a woman's perspective to projects in a direct way. For example, I can accurately anticipate gender-related issues. This is highly relevant to UNDP's work, as we are involved in projects that directly affect the empowerment and well-being of women and children.

Over the years, I've seen many cultures across Africa, Asia and the Arab States. I empathize with different women and, professionally, I ensure that our projects effectively address their concerns. Women make up half the population; they must be considered during stabilization!

In times of conflict and instability, women and children are more vulnerable to gender-based violence and are often targeted by insurgent groups. Moreover, conflict increases the number of female-headed households; women's leadership is

required to put these communities on the road to recovery. The educational, cultural and economic empowerment of women has an exponentially positive impact on society. Stabilization cannot be sustainable without women's active participation.

Women bring creativity and a unique perspective to projects; they should not be dissuaded if men dominate the profession!

For many years, I was the first female engineer to join the Public Security Directorate of Jordan — and I reached the high rank of Colonel! I was also the first female engineer who worked as a police adviser in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Sudan. Despite challenges, I made my mark in the male-dominated security sector by leading departments and demonstrating inclusive leadership.



My advice to young girls is to live their dreams and pursue them without any reservations, irrespective of the gender bias in their chosen profession.



Asmahan Alawaisheh



Country of origin: Jordan
Currently based in: Nigeria, Maiduguri



Senior Civil Engineer and Head of Engineering Unit, UNDP Nigeria



Master's degree in Civil Engineering/ Water and Environmental



57 years old

STEPS TO ENSURE GENDER-RESPONSIVE CONSTRUCTION

Asmahan Alawaisheh, Chief Engineer at UNDP, Nigeria

Asmahan's method for gender-responsive construction follows a strategic process with distinct stages:

- 1. Community engagement to understand needs**

The process begins with in-depth community engagement sessions that actively seek the views of women, community leaders and the local community stabilization committee. This lays the foundation for a project that is closely aligned with the community's vision.
- 2. Cultural sensitivity in design and planning**

Ngarannam's housing units are meticulously designed with cultural sensitivity in mind. For example, they involve the creation of separate spaces for women's and men's activities and the incorporation of features such as shaded verandas to enhance women's well-being.
- 3. Transparent communication and visualization**

Architectural plans and cost estimates are discussed openly with authorities and community members at information meetings. 3D drawings are also shared, fostering a sense of ownership.
- 4. Promote women's employment as part of the construction**

Asmahan and her team require local women to be hired for public works contracts, which also helps to increase women's participation in construction activities, promote economic empowerment and break down gender barriers.
- 5. Gender-sensitive distribution of resources**

In the distribution of housing units, priority is given to female-headed households, thereby addressing gender disparities and promoting equal access to resources.

Inclusive Construction in Action in Ngarannam, Northeast Nigeria



Sixteen lock-up shops and 382 gender-responsive market stalls have been built and benefit the whole community.



Established in 2022, Ngarannam Primary School currently educates 500 students, with an enrolment of 283 girls.



In Ngarannam, 360 two-bedroom permanent houses were constructed, with 63 allocated to women, benefiting a total of around 2,250 people.

HAOUA MOUSSA CISSÉ

Engineer based in Seytenga

My interest in the planning and construction of essential infrastructures traces back to my formative years in elementary school. I often accompanied my paternal uncle to his engineering projects. After completing my baccalauréat série D, I pursued a degree in civil engineering at the Institut Supérieur de Technologie.

In February 2022, I embarked on a challenging yet fulfilling journey as a field engineer in Seytenga, dedicated to stabilization efforts in Burkina Faso's Sahel region. I initially faced unique challenges, particularly as a female supervisor in a predominantly male-dominated field. I have overseen the construction of infrastructures, including the rehabilitation and construction of essential social infrastructures, including the Seytenga maternity ward, public latrines and water boreholes. These projects engaged 500 community members, including 300 women, through cash-for-work initiatives to address their basic needs.

The main obstacle I faced proved to be insecurity. A defining moment occurred in April 2023 when, on a journey from Dori to Seytenga, I was stopped by eight unidentified armed men at a checkpoint. I faced a series

of questions probing my intentions and background. With unwavering resolve, I transparently answered each query. They finally permitted me to continue my journey. Despite the initial fear, I pressed on to Seytenga, undeterred, and successfully pursued my goals for the day.

Navigating the security challenges required strategic measures. Despite being a local, the situation compelled me to adopt a disguise, dressing like the women of Seytenga in veils and socks. This camouflage allowed me to blend into the crowd, avoiding any unwanted attention that could arise from standing out as a potential target for armed groups.

Today, my role in the stabilization project enables me to support my community while earning a livelihood in a field I am passionate about, contributing to diversifying a historically male-dominated sector with the fresh perspectives that women can provide. The challenges may persist, but with each passing day, I discover new ways to overcome them, ensuring that the stabilization efforts continue to benefit the community and its residents.



As this crucial role continues, my journey has been a testament to resilience, adaptability and a deep commitment to making a positive impact in Seytenga.



Houa
Moussa
Cissé



Burkina Faso,
Seytenga, Sahel
region



Engineer based in Seytenga,
for the UNDP regional
Stabilization Facility



Bachelor of Civil
Engineering



24 years
old

SALIMATA TALATA

Midwife at the Seytenga Maternity Hospital

I am a midwife working at the Seytenga Maternity in Burkina Faso.

Before the installation of the solar power system, we faced regular power cuts that made working conditions very difficult; we used to have an average of three hours of electricity per day. Women in labour were particularly affected by the heat, and it was particularly hard to provide adequate care in the dark. During night shifts, we had to rely on solar lamps or phone torches for consultations and deliveries.

Since the installation of the solar power system, we have noticed an increase in the number of prenatal consultations and deliveries. Further, with the new solar power system, we can use fans and lights, which have greatly improved

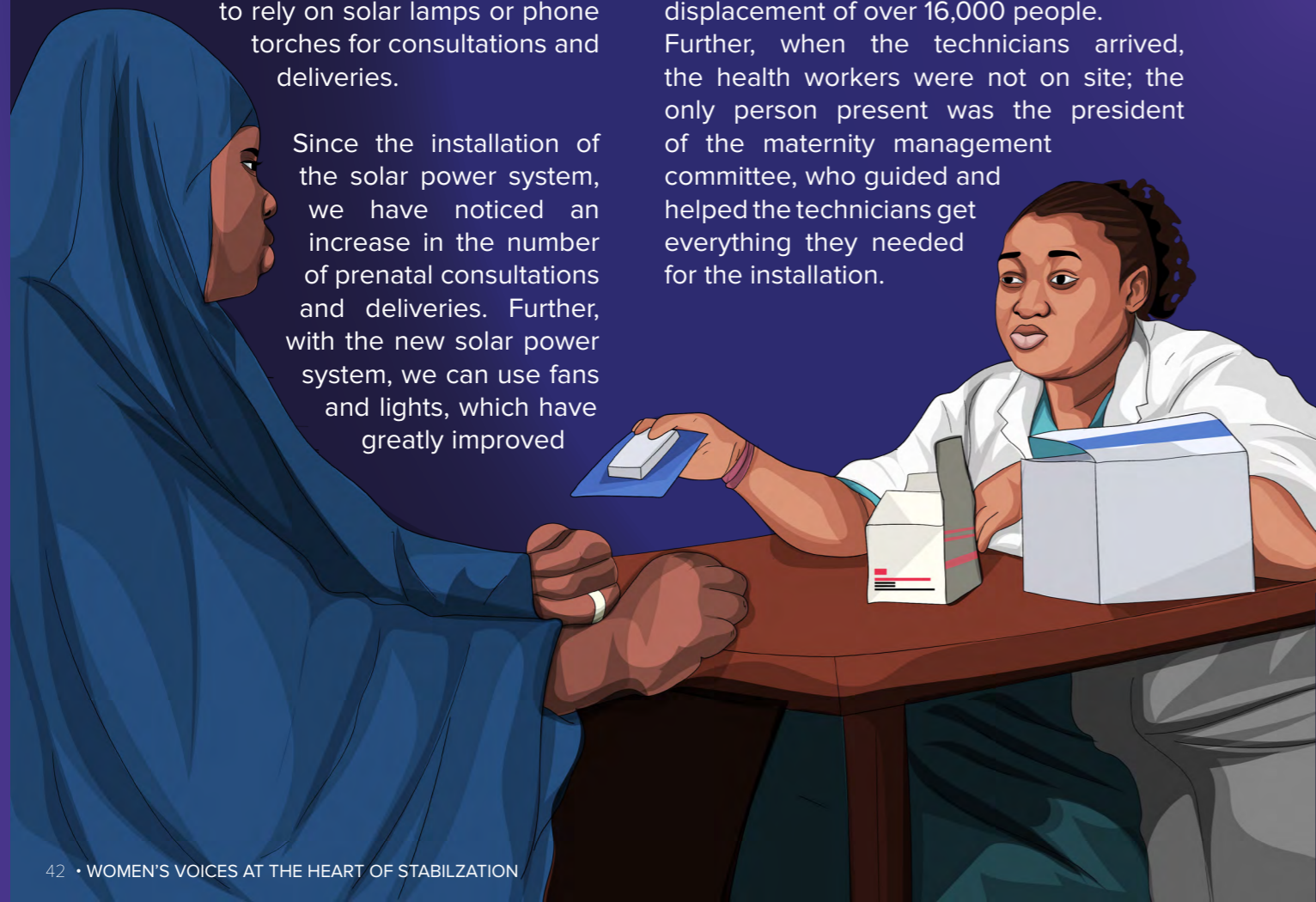
our efficiency. We now have access to electricity 24 hours a day, which ensures continuity of care, something that was not possible before.

The installation of the solar power system was not without its challenges. The installation was done in September 2022, a time when the town was a bit empty and fragile due to the 11 June 2022 attack that killed about 80 people and forced the displacement of over 16,000 people. Further, when the technicians arrived, the health workers were not on site; the only person present was the president of the maternity management committee, who guided and helped the technicians get everything they needed for the installation.

The solar power system has improved the functioning of the maternity ward as well as overall health centre operations. Patients, their families and health centre staff can now charge their phones, torches and even computers without any problems.

While there are currently no plans to expand the utilization of solar energy to other public services or facilities in the region, midwives and management members of our maternity unit are actively advocating for local authorities and the stabilization programme to consider extending the solar power system from the maternity ward to the dispensary.

Women in the community are happy with the installation of the solar power system; it has made life much easier for those who come for prenatal consultations and deliveries.



Salimata
Talata



Seytenga,
Burkina Faso



Volunteer Midwife at
the Seytenga Maternity
hospital



Diploma in
Midwifery



29 years
old

RAMATOU ALI

Nurse at Garin Dogo Medical Dispensary, Niger

I am a mother of three children and a nurse. I was assigned to the Mother and Child Hospital in Diffa from 2015 to 2017, then to the Nursing Care Centre in Diffa from 2018 to 2021, and then to the Garin Dogo medical dispensary.

From 2015, I witnessed numerous tragedies, including women and children traumatized by attacks from armed groups and cases of infant malnutrition and premature births. Displaced pregnant women often experienced complications due to their movements and life conditions.

The workload was immense, with working days often extending from 8am to 8pm due to the influx of

refugees and internally displaced persons in Diffa. In September 2021, upon the return of displaced populations to their villages, I was reassigned to the Garin Dogo medical dispensary, where many of my colleagues were hesitant to work due to the tense situation. Eventually, however, the presence of security forces brought tranquillity.

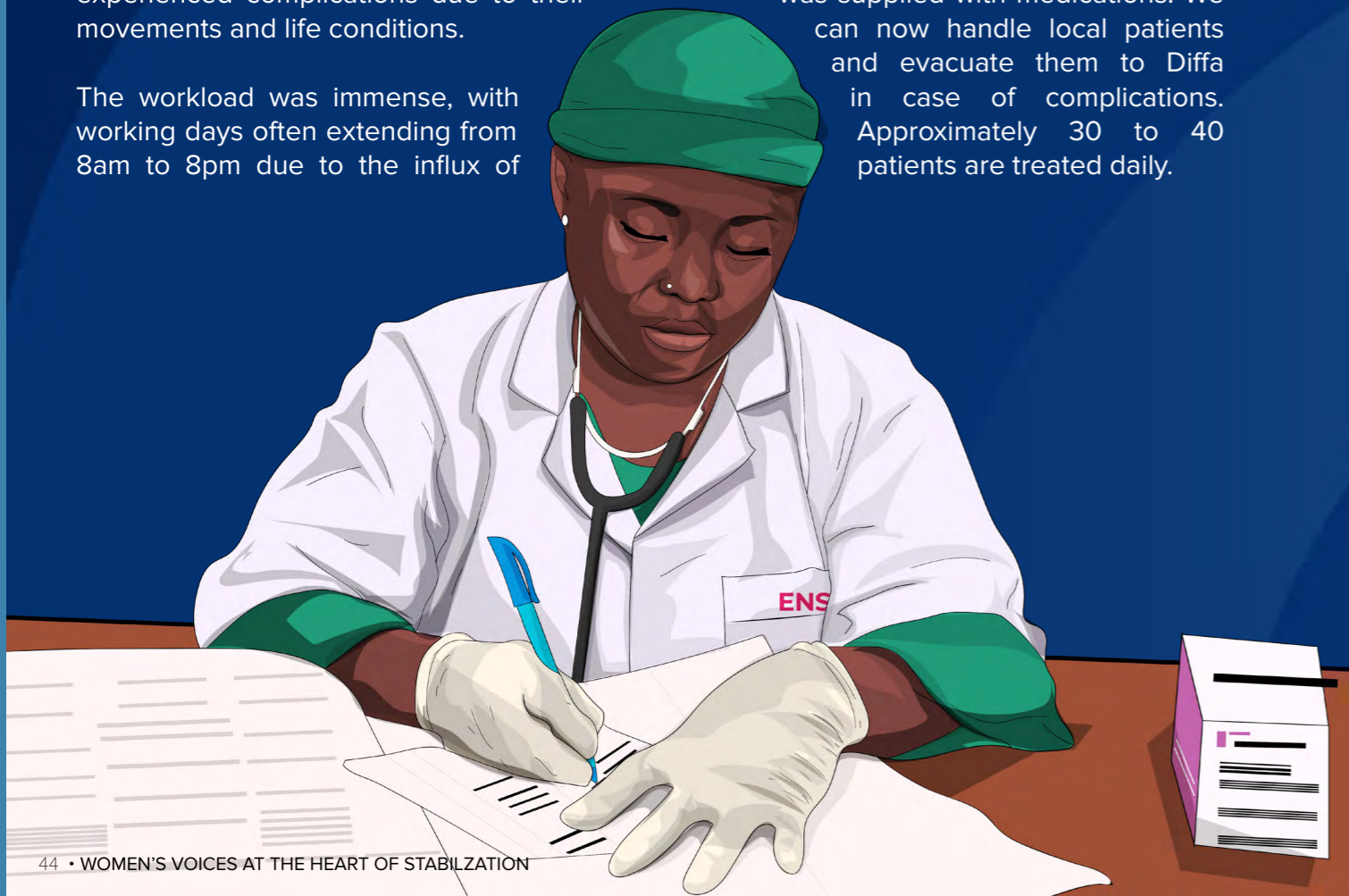
Thanks to the Stabilization Facility, Garin Dogo underwent comprehensive renovations, received an ambulance and was supplied with medications. We can now handle local patients and evacuate them to Diffa in case of complications. Approximately 30 to 40 patients are treated daily.

Before the Stabilization Facility's intervention, the clinic was closed for over two years due to insecurity. Today, it operates normally, with a functional ambulance at all times, even at night. We continuously receive support from non-governmental organizations and agencies such as Action Contre la Faim, Agence Pour le Bien-Être, Cooperazione Internazionale, Help, the International Development and Early Learning Assessment, Save the Children and UNICEF.

The installed lighting creates a sense of security for nighttime staff.

Life in Garin Dogo has almost returned to normal with the resumption of economic and social activities. To further improve health-care services, I wish for the rehabilitation of the well to ensure water autonomy. Enhanced training for health-care personnel and team strengthening are also necessary to meet the constant increase in consultations.

The Garin Dogo medical dispensary has improved the health of the population by reducing infant mortality and ensuring safer childbirths.



Ramatou Ali



Diffa Region, Niger



Nurse at Garin Dogo Medical Dispensary



Bachelor's Degree with three years of study



37 years old

GUINDO YAÏGUERE TEMBELY

Secretary General of CAFO (Coordination of Female NGO's and associations) in Mali

Thanks to the Liptako-Gourma Stabilization Facility, a generation of women and girls have been able to change social and cultural gender norms. They are confident and convinced of their abilities and are more daring entrepreneurs. Much of this is due to the activities of the Stabilization Facility in Bandiagara. We have also noticed that the community is more open to women's entrepreneurship and that women's organizations are given more consideration when bidding for contracts.

The UNDP Gender Seal has increased the level of trust placed in these organizations. Women and girls were crucial to achieving this change. Their willingness and determination to participate as agents of change in the socio-economic development process was outstanding, despite the presence of social-cultural obstacles. After UNDP-supported capacity-building initiatives, the women gained skills in negotiation and peacebuilding techniques, project development, advocacy and lobbying and operating accounts for income-generating activities.

One thing I'm particularly proud of is that women's organizations increased their production of soap, driving the price of soap down from 400 CFA to 300 CFA. This is essential because soap is used in so many activities around the home that women are responsible for.

This is essential for them to grow their enterprises, for example, to acquire modern production and processing units to further increase the sustainable production of soap.

In addition, the construction of a women's centre in Bandiagara will be crucial to providing safe care to survivors of gender-based violence and supporting their socio-economic reintegration into the community. The centre could also provide a space for mutual, cross-sectoral and cross-border (Mali-Burkina-Niger) learning, with the aim of expanding markets and enhancing the value of female entrepreneurship. To achieve this, we must ensure that more women are elected in local, regional and national elections and that they receive the necessary support to achieve this.

I have big dreams for the near future. In the upcoming five years, I would like to see that women's organizations can easily access credit.



LEARN ABOUT THE COORDINATION OF WOMEN'S ASSOCIATIONS AND NGOS IN MALI (CAFO)

CAFO, a leading Malian non-governmental organization, operates nationally and internationally. Dedicated to uniting women's associations and NGOs, CAFO focuses on advancing women's and children's rights, promoting sustainable development and advocating for good governance. With a commitment to enhancing coordination, CAFO conducts a national general assembly every five years to renew leadership and activities across Mali's 20 regions.



Guindo Yaïguere Tembely



Bandiagara, Moti Region, Mali



Secretary General of the CAFO (Coordination of Female NGO's and associations)



Master II in Project and Programme Management



55 years old

MARGUERITE JEREMIE VADZAYE

Professional Tailor in Mozogo

My name is Marguerite; I am a 19-year-old professional tailor in Cameroon. The third child of seven, I live with my mother. Unfortunately, my father passed away. Our family was doing well before the conflict disrupted our farming income.

The regular attacks by Boko Haram meant that we had to abandon our fields, which were near the border with Nigeria. We settled for the small plots we had around the house, but their yield was not always good. When I was forced to drop out of school due to the conflict, I lost hope for the future.

I stayed at home to take care of my siblings; I could barely have a square meal. I was so scared to go to the farm, fearing that I might be killed. It was a difficult time for my family — we cannot explain how we survived that period.

When the Government Vocational Training Centre was revitalized with the support of the Regional Stabilization Facility, I was one of the lucky ones to be selected for training. They provided me with equipment, and I graduated as a professional tailor.

Now, I make enough profit to take care of my needs and assist my family. I feel fulfilled that I can now take care of my siblings' schooling and our daily food.

Before the conflict, my family was doing well because we met our needs through field work. After I had to drop out of school, I still liked learning to read and write like other children. I used to dream of becoming a grande dame someday.

I chose tailoring for my training because it is a job that many women do, and I found it easy to learn. I enjoy making different models and seeing the final product. My income now takes care of my siblings' schooling, health care and our housing. It's a huge improvement from our previous situation.

It is important to train others to fight against youth unemployment. By doing so, we can grow our village and create more job opportunities. With the gradual return of security, I believe things will be better; I am looking forward to a brighter future.

I am sure that I can become a big designer someday and even train other vulnerable girls.



Marguerite
Jeremie Vadzaye



Mozogo, Far
North region,
Cameroon



Graduated from a
vocational training centre



19 years
old



YAGANA IBRAHIM

Member of the Banki Stabilization Committee

As a mother of four from Banki, in the Bama Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria, I never imagined that I would have a significant voice in community decisions. My community has been severely affected by the conflict that has raged in the north-east of the country since 2009. Of the many losses I have suffered, the most devastating was that of my beloved sister.

Time has brought personal changes for me and my community. Thanks to the effective support of humanitarian and development efforts, Banki has slowly recovered and is returning to a more normal daily life. A key element in our community's recovery has been the creation of local stabilization committees made up of community leaders, security agencies, religious leaders, stakeholders and representatives of the traders' and other associations, including the Civilian Joint Task Force.

Driven by my passion for defending the rights of women and girls, I became an active member of the Banki Stabilization Committee. This was an important turning point for me, giving me the opportunity to openly discuss the specific challenges faced by women in the community and to propose viable solutions to improve them.

Before the Stabilization Committee's creation, we weren't able to express our concerns as women. We didn't feel comfortable reporting problems to the army or other security forces. We didn't trust them and we feared the potential consequences of speaking out. For years, we endured these difficulties in silence.

However, with the creation of the Stabilization Committee, the women and girls of the community gained a new sense of autonomy. The Committee has given priority to women's issues, which were previously neglected.

We are now working together to rebuild Banki and make it the beloved place it once was.

We were able to voice our concerns and encourage other Committee members to take appropriate action and find solutions that address them.



Yagana Ibrahim



Banki, Nigeria



Member of the Banki Stabilization Committee



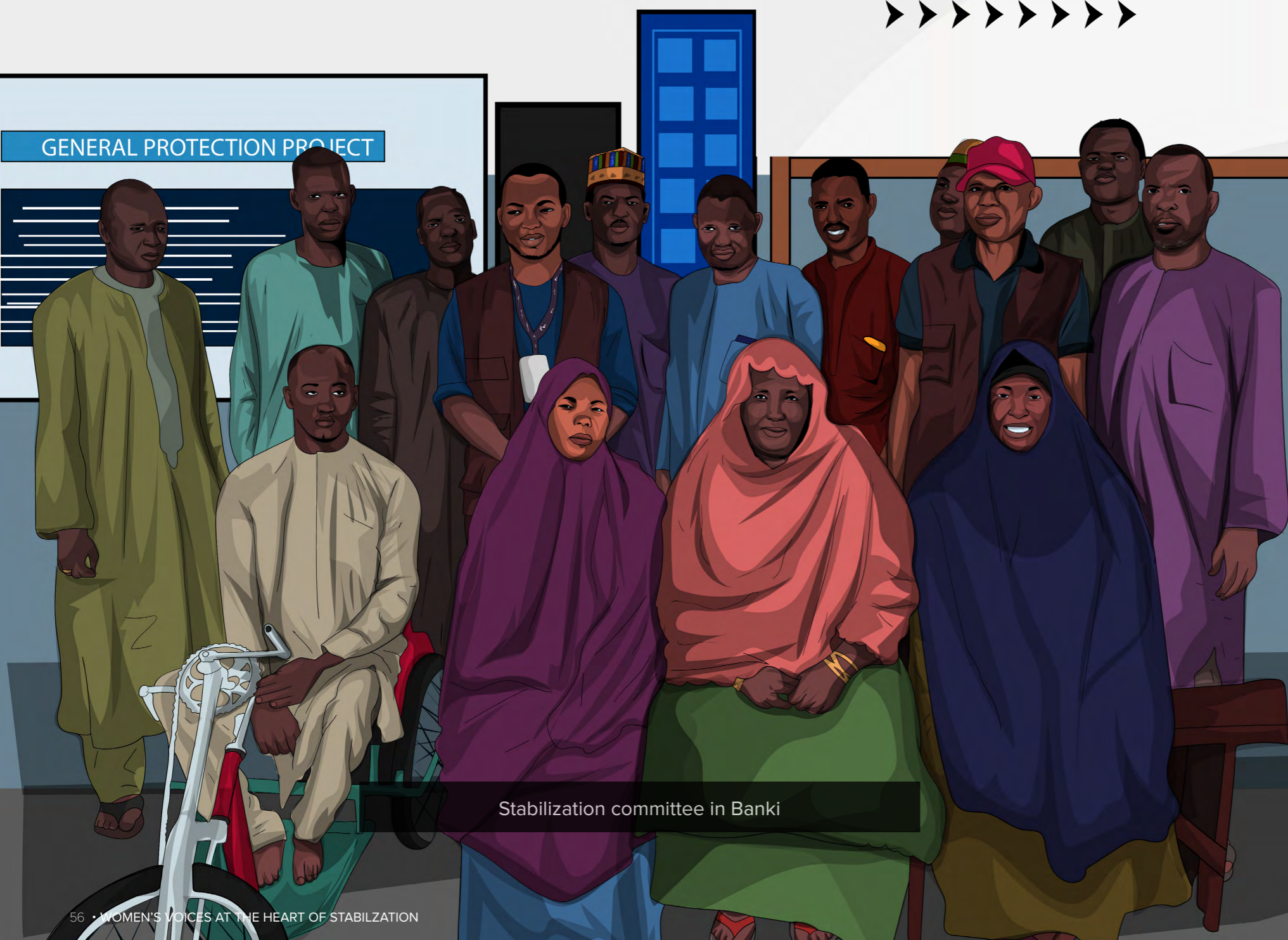
Never attended school



32 years old



COMMUNITY STABILIZATION COMMITTEES



Stabilization committee in Banki

Established and operational in many of the stabilization programme's designated areas (referred to as Joint Actions Plan locations), stabilization committees comprise individuals of diverse ages and genders that actively promote citizen engagement in community governance, security planning, human rights monitoring and economic and social development. The Committees' pivotal roles lie in ensuring that programme interventions consider the concerns of all community groups. Additionally, the committees are instrumental in generating proposals to address local challenges, participating in the oversight of community facilities, liaising with administrative authorities and facilitating community engagement in the development of Territorial Action Plans.

Taking steps to ensure that more women become active members of stabilization committees is one way in which UNDP amplifies women's leadership. By representing the entire resident population within the locality, these committees facilitate robust community involvement in both the planning and execution of stabilization interventions.

HADJIA HAOUA MAINA MADOU

Farmer, livestock breeder and entrepreneur
in Bosso, Niger

I'm a mother of two; we currently live in Bosso, which we returned to after fleeing the conflict. Bosso is a town located in the Diffa region, near the Nigerian border. I'm a widow, as I lost my husband in a Boko Haram attack. Due to the 2014 security crisis in Nigeria's Borno State, our parents, who resided there, lost everything and sought refuge in Bosso, Niger, to escape the Boko Haram attacks. But Bosso was also attacked, and the town was abandoned, giving way to the military and Boko Haram fighters. So we were forced to move temporarily to Yébi before returning to Bosso.

For two precarious months in Yébi, life was difficult, as the entire population of 14,000 people from Bosso, 8,000 refugees from Nigeria, and the local population of 2,000 people had to rely on just one traditional water well. Access to clean water was a constant challenge. Women bore the brunt of family responsibilities, and some were victims of violence or turned to prostitution to feed themselves. The dire situation left thousands homeless. On 9 April 2015, with the support of Chadian soldiers, we returned to Bosso and then benefited from stabilization interventions.

My mother and I received support in the agricultural sector, enabling me to set up a small business making incense and processing traditional cosmetics. Employing two girls in incense production and four boys in my farming projects, I now earn around 300,000 CFA francs a month, contributing to my empowerment and my family's needs. Bosso is undergoing a huge change. We are seeing an increasing number of wedding celebrations in the community, and cultural and sporting activities have resumed. I organized the weddings of my daughter and my sister, thanks to stabilization efforts. What's more, the increased income has enabled me to buy household equipment for both brides, which is a real source of pride.

Today, in Bosso, our children have all returned to school after a long period of disruption. Access to health care, especially for deliveries, has greatly improved. The whole town is now lit by solar-powered streetlamps, contributing considerably to our safety.

I also hope that women's groups will be trained in associative life and cooperative management.



My current wish is to see women supported in acquiring skills in agri-food processing or entrepreneurship with sewing, knitting or incense making, as I did.



Hadjia Haoua
Maina Madou



Bosso,
Niger



Quranic School



38 years
old

OUR PARTNERS

Stabilization programming and creating positive changes in the lives of women, girls and their communities has been possible thanks to valuable contributions from our partners.

Lake Chad Regional Stabilization Facility Partners



Lake Chad Basin Commission



Cameroon



Chad



Niger



Nigeria



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UN Women

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Burkina Faso



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Germany



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The Netherlands



UNDP

H.E HAWA AW

Executive Secretary, Integrated Development
Authority of the Liptako-Gourma States

Unfortunately, women are usually the first victims when crises strike. Women suffer disproportionately from insecurity, instability, violent terrorism, climate change, gender-based violence, unequal access to resources, illiteracy, lack of access to health care and social services, absence from decision-making processes and much more.

Notwithstanding the impacts of all these crises, women continue to play crucial roles in promoting peace, reconciliation, conflict prevention and ensuring food security for their homes and communities in the Liptako-Gourma region. As mediators, women have found their place alongside community leaders and authorities as peacemakers. The resilience of women has held families and societies together.

That is why, in the Regional Stabilization Strategy developed for the Liptako-Gourma region, we have adopted a holistic approach that places women firmly at the centre of our activities through their economic, social and political empowerment and, above all, through their participation in all levels of decision-making processes.

I am more convinced than ever that by giving women the space and the means, they will be the standard bearers for the consolidation of peace and the strengthening of social cohesion for the sustainable development of our region.

On this occasion, I appeal to all to join us in enabling these brave women to make the Liptako-Gourma region a place of lasting peace and prosperity!



**Stabilization of the
Liptako-Gourma**

**Women = more than
50 percent of the
population
We are the solution,
not just a number!**



ULLA ANDRÉN

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Former Head of Regional Development Cooperation in Africa, Sweden Embassy in Ethiopia

Women's active participation in conflict resolution and resilience and in peace processes is critical for the well-being of the entire community. Traditionally, this means women often have to stay in the local community to take care of children and the elderly and for animals. Consequently, women — half of the population — are responsible for the welfare of the majority of people, even in conflict zones. These women have important views, experiences and needs, and their voices are crucial for the development of peaceful and inclusive societies.

Women must be heard at all levels, from community to local to national to regional to international levels. They should be able to participate equally in decisions that affect their lives. Importantly, women must be empowered to lead in peace processes, as structural gender issues often inhibit women from being in the forefront.

Sweden is committed to peace, which does not mean the absence of war but rather democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law and gender equality; these are the foundations of good governance and sustainable peace.

We support regional initiatives for inclusive peace processes and development, both politically and through development cooperation initiatives.



IN CLOSING:

BLERTA CELA

Director of the Regional Stabilization Facility,
UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa

First and foremost, I hope you enjoyed reading these stories with as much enthusiasm and passion as I did! The stories are a testament to the resilience of the women and girls who survive and thrive in fragile and crisis settings.

On a visit to one of our programme sites in the Lake Chad Basin region, I was inspired by the sheer determination of the women I met. Hearing their stories and how they are coping with violence, loss and multiple traumas on a daily basis took me back home to Albania. Having personally witnessed gender-based violence and inequality on a daily basis, as well as the dire consequences of war on women and children in refugee camps in Kosovo, I empathized with their fear, grief and struggles. They were all incredibly brave, calling for lasting peace and stability — just like the women in this booklet.

In Chad, I witnessed how UNDP's Regional Stabilization Facility has ensured the progress of women's participation and leadership in community stabilization committees. The Women's Multifunctional Platform in Guité particularly caught my attention, providing not only a safe space for women but also enabling their active participation in community decision-making and economic activities.

These stories show the female face of our stabilization efforts. Women are at the forefront of driving peace and stability in each location. In empowering women to live up to their full potential, much more still needs to be done to support their unique leadership qualities and create greater opportunities for — and with — them so that they can continue to serve and lead their communities. Because when women lead, communities thrive.

I am extremely privileged to work with partners who have demonstrated a strong commitment to the cause of women's empowerment and gender equality. The progress we have made to date owes a great deal to the core values that we share.

If you were as touched and inspired as I was by the stories, I encourage you to read them to your daughters and sons, share them with families and friends and talk about them with your colleagues. Together, we have an opportunity to play a humble part in contributing to an irreversible wave of positive change and inspire the future generation — one action at a time, one person at a time, and one change at a time.



I have deep admiration for the women and girls in this booklet and who are at the heart of stabilization efforts. Their determination in tackling patriarchy and changing gender norms is an inspiration for everyone.

For any further information, please contact **Ms. Blerta Cela**, Director of the Regional Stabilization Facility at blerta.cela@undp.org

WOMEN'S VOICES

AT THE HEART OF

STABILIZATION

Stories of Women Leading Stabilization Efforts
Lake Chad Basin and Liptako-Gourma Regions



United Nations Development Programme
Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa Point E,
Complexe Citamil, Immeuble E
Dakar - Senegal



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