



PARTNERING FOR SOCIAL COHESION IN THE SAHEL: LESSONS FOR DONORS

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BACKGROUND

Protracted crises, fragility and geopolitical uncertainty define the current global context. Against this backdrop, development cooperation is under increasing pressure to deliver effective, context-responsive interventions. As a result, strengthening the evidence of what works has become a strategic priority for donors.

In 2026, Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) reaffirmed peace, stability, integrated security and support to the United Nations system as core priorities. Amid a constrained fiscal space, Germany's 2026 development policy emphasizes evidence-based policymaking as an overarching principle for ensuring effectiveness and sustainability.¹ The Sahel is one of the BMZ's four focus regions.

Supported by BMZ, SIPRI and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ) have created an evidence partnership to generate policy-relevant learning at the interface of research and implementation. It studies the BMZ-funded Sahel Resilience Partnership (SRP), an initiative that brings together GIZ, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. The evidence partnership focuses on the peace component of this integrated, multi-agency, multisectoral humanitarian–development–peace (HDP) nexus initiative. A concrete example of BMZ's priorities, the SRP brings together strategic implementation and research partnerships that integrate security and peace objectives with a strong commitment to evidence-based policymaking.

Embedding applied research into programme implementation, alongside structured learning and policy dialogue, helps drive continuous evidence-informed adaptation. This policy brief distils key lessons from SIPRI's publication *From Silos to Synergies* to contribute to more coherent, adaptive and effective approaches to resilience, peacebuilding and nexus programming.²

SUMMARY

● This policy brief is intended for donors seeking to strengthen humanitarian–development–peace nexus programming by drawing on lessons from SIPRI's research on the Sahel Resilience Partnership.

The brief argues that donors should fund collective outcomes rather than institutional silos, supporting complementary humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts. Effective programming requires multi-level governance, stronger geographic and programmatic convergence, shared data systems and coordinated implementation at community level. The brief also emphasizes mainstreaming social cohesion across sectors such as education, food security, climate adaptation, governance and service delivery, rather than treating them separately.

Key recommendations for donors include a focus on multi-year and flexible funding, complementary partnerships, joint learning systems, conflict-sensitive multisectoral approaches and embedded research. Overall, the paper calls for financing adaptive, evidence-informed programming that enhances resilience through stronger capacities, trusted social relations and increased service legitimacy.

¹ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), 'Shaping the future together globally', Jan. 2026.

² Bunse, S., Delgado, C. and Blair, R., *From Silos to Synergies: Partnering for Social Cohesion in the Sahel*, SIPRI Policy Paper (Stockholm: SIPRI: Oct. 2025).

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STRATEGIC TAKEAWAYS FOR INCREASING SOCIAL COHESION AND LOCAL RESILIENCE

The SRP is an operational example of an HDP-nexus initiative designed to strengthen social cohesion and local resilience. Four strategic takeaways emerge from its inception and design.

Fund collective outcomes

The SRP demonstrates the value of joint programming between humanitarian and development actors that is built around collective outcomes. In this case, such programming integrates food and nutrition security, climate-resilient ecosystem restoration, access to social services, and local conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Donors should finance frameworks that incentivize complementarity across humanitarian, development and peace sectors and collective outcomes.

Invest in multilevel governance structures

Among the SRP's strongest design elements are its multilevel governance structure, which combines regional strategic coordination, country-level management and local implementation flexibility. This structure helps manage differences in mandates, timelines and institutional cultures across agencies at the same time as it bridges regional, national and local contexts, knowledge and expertise. Donors should treat effective governance structures as a fundable programme component. Multi-agency nexus programming requires human resources, joint steering committees, shared decision protocols, avenues for resolving interagency bottlenecks and clear accountability for collective results.

Deepen the level of geographic and programmatic convergence

Agencies often align at regional or national levels, yet interventions can remain fragmented at the local level because of different budgets, reporting cycles and procurement systems. Donors should structure funding to incentivize alignment at the point of implementation, prioritizing both geographic and programmatic convergence. This means rewarding integrated local interventions that pursue common objectives in shared geographic areas, joint data collection and shared data systems, and joint field presence where feasible.

Mainstream social cohesion across sectors

The SRP places social cohesion at the centre of resilience building, defining it in terms of trust, solidarity, equal opportunity and improved citizen-state relations. For deeper and lasting impact, the SRP seeks to strengthen both horizontal cohesion (trust across individuals, communities and identity groups) and vertical cohesion (trust between citizens and authorities). SIPRI's research has shown that cohesion outcomes can be embedded inside service delivery, livelihoods, climate adaptation and governance program-



ming. Donors should ensure that the peacebuilding efforts they fund are integrated. Programmes across sectors (e.g. education; water, sanitation, and hygiene; health; social protection; food security; natural resource management and local governance) should include explicit cohesion objectives, links to broader peacebuilding and ways to trace progress. This requires intentional, conflict-sensitive approaches across sectors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DONOR FUNDING STRATEGIES

Integrated, multi-agency, multisectoral approaches are a promising, albeit not exclusive, way to operationalize the HDP nexus in complex crises settings.

Recommended donor actions for operationalizing the HDP nexus include:

- Adopting multiyear funding windows to allow trust-building effects to emerge.
- Using flexible financing instruments that allow partners to rebalance activities during insecurity spikes or access constraints.
- Prioritizing partnerships among actors with complementary sectoral and humanitarian, development and peacebuilding mandates operating in the same geographic areas.
- Allowing for an inception phase to clarify roles and lay the basis for cooperation.
- Requiring evidence of programmatic convergence, strategic complementarity and joint field missions at the local level.
- Rewarding conflict-sensitive delivery models that intentionally strengthen horizontal and vertical cohesion.
- Supporting joint data sharing, learning and embedded research partnerships.

Due diligence questions for donors when evaluating nexus funding include:

- Where and at what level will partners converge geographically and programmatically?
- How will local-level interventions be integrated in practice?
- What systems will be created for shared data and joint learning?
- How are political shocks and access disruptions built into contingency planning?
- How will social cohesion outcomes be planned, achieved and jointly measured over time?

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CONCLUSIONS

When donors finance complementarity, joint programming, geographic convergence, flexible time horizons and shared evidence systems, the HDP can move beyond rhetoric. To do this, donors should strategically shift from supporting unconnected projects or programming to financing collective resilience outcomes—such as stronger resources, capacities, institutions and systems, improved service legitimacy and more trusted social relations. In the Sahel's volatile environment, this offers a credible path to generating peace dividends and reduced reliance on recurrent emergency aid.

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