Coming together? Social Network Analysis of humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso

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THE HUMANITARIAN LEADER:
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Abstract

The deteriorating security situation in Burkina Faso has meant that humanitarian assistance programs have now been operating in the country for several years. Over the course of the response, emergency education and child protection interventions seeking the well-being of children and their rights to quality education have been prioritised. To achieve the best possible results, the humanitarian community has put in place a coordination mechanism and a 'big deal' to ensure synergies and maximise impact. The objective of this study is to draw out the operational dynamics between the actors in the response and to reflect on the results. We have found that this push for coordination has had mixed results—only a few organisations in Burkina have extensive networks with significant centrality for state services. Our study indicates that humanitarian organisations in the fields of protection and education must establish more connections with each other, and especially with local organisations, in line with the Grand Bargain's mission to strengthen and optimise responses.

Leadership relevance

This paper discusses how good networking in humanitarian settings is important in achieving better results around the world, especially in new crisis zones such as Burkina Faso. This paper contends that to achieve the best possible results in crisis responses, the humanitarian community must take the lead in putting in place coordination mechanisms to ensure synergies between organisations and projects and increase effectiveness and impact.

Introduction

Since 2016, Burkina Faso has been marked by armed violence and insecurity. This crisis has caused massive population displacements and worsened the living conditions of many communities, often the most vulnerable in the country. These attacks multiplied in 2021 and have now reached almost the entire country, whereas in 2020 they affected only six regions.

In October 2021, the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation (CONASUR) counted 1,407,685 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), with the Sahel and North-Central regions leading the way with 493,708 (35.07%) and 466,314 (33.13%) displaced people respectively (CONASUR, 2021). The same report highlights the high proportion of 0-14 year-olds who have been displaced—54.12%. Burkinabe are not the only people being displaced, the Sahel region also hosts more than 19,000 Malian refugees, mainly in or around Dori. In addition to armed conflict and security threats, other natural hazards such as floods, droughts, and epidemics make the humanitarian situation complex and increase the suffering and vulnerability (economic, food, physical, and psychosocial) of IDPs and host populations.

In this crisis, one of the most affected areas is undoubtedly education, with a total of 2,641 schools under attack.

In this crisis, one of the most affected areas is undoubtedly education, with a total of 2,641 schools under attack, according to the October 2021 Nationale de l'Education en Situation d'Urgence (ESU) report. Since October 2021, the number of schools closed has increased from 2,244 to 2,877—an additional 633 closures. This represents 11.01% of the 26,123 schools in the country. These closures affect 344,363 students (159,751 girls, 184,612 boys and 9,221 teachers, including 3,161 women) in the eight regions with high security challenges, compared with 304,564 students (148,046 girls, 156,518 boys and 12,480 teachers, including 4,568 women) in the six affected regions to May 2021.

To address the important issue of education in the areas most affected by the humanitarian crisis, Burkina Faso has developed a national strategy for education in emergencies, Nationale de l'Education en Situation d'Urgence, abbreviated to SN-ESU. This strategy prioritises six of the most affected regions, including the Boucle du Mouhoun, the Central-East, the East, the Hauts-Bassins, the North and the Sahel.

In this article, we focus on two of the most affected regions since the beginning of the security crisis in 2015, namely the North-Central region and the Sahel region. It should be noted that the first incidents occurred in the Sahel region, with immediate effects on population movements inland in communes such as Dori, Djibo, Gorom-Gorom and further inland in Kaya, Yalgo, Tougouri and Barsalogho. With the government's call for assistance to IDPs, organisations have committed themselves to emergency shelter, food security, health, protection, and education.

Before security deteriorated, the Sahel zone was already an area under the assistance of non-governmental organisations, although their work was of a developmental nature. Among those already present were Humanité et Inclusion (HI), Medécins du Monde (MdM), Helvetas, Vétérinaires Sans Frontière (VSF), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), among others. After the call of the government for emergency assistance came the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Plan International (which was already in the country elsewhere), Enfants du Monde, and more. These international organisations do not work alone. They have always been accompanied, preceded, or partnered with local organisations. Although not all these local organisations work in education and protection, many of them have children at the heart of their strategies. What is most noteworthy is the change in the agendas of many of these organisations to emergency engagement rather than development responses.

The objective of this study is to highlight the connections between these humanitarian actors in order to help gauge the effectiveness of their work in responding to the needs of affected populations. In particular, it aims to focus on emergency education and protection in Burkina Faso and how organisations involved in these areas are (or are not) linked, and what strengths and potential gaps in an effective response to the needs of people affected by disaster this reveals.

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Conceptual and contextual framework

Education in Emergencies (EiE)

Education in general and education in emergencies are recognised as having an intrinsically protective role. Save the Children International describes education in emergencies (EiE) as a set of conceptual activities that enable learners to continue learning in a structured way, even in situations of emergency, crisis or long-term instability (ReliefWeb, 2021). The Interagency Network on Education in Emergencies (INEE) describes Universal Primary Education (UPE) as an opportunity for quality learning at all ages in crisis; including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational, higher education, and adult education, which provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection to sustain and save lives. In the humanitarian sector, the crucial role of education in sustaining and saving lives (INEE, 2009) is recognised. Education is important to meet the basic needs of children and communities in the short term, while in the long term, it helps them reduce their vulnerability and provides them with the tools to build their 'new' lives.

Child protection in emergency situations

According to Swiss children's relief agency, Terre des Hommes (TdH), humanitarian crises expose children to specific situations of violence. Depending on whether it is an armed conflict or a natural disaster, the brutal and prolonged deprivation of the necessities of life, displacement and refuge, family separation, physical violence, sexual violence, armed violence and recruitment, torture, and trafficking may occur. When they do not lead to death, these situations have devastating effects on children, the most striking of which are injury and/or disability, psychological distress, physical, moral and sexual abuse, malnutrition and health problems, family and community violence and/or exclusion, recourse to dangerous survival activities, physical, sexual or labour exploitation and arbitrary detention.

The Child Protection Interagency Working Group (CPWG) defines protective intervention in humanitarian crises as the prevention of and response to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence against children.

TdH defines the programmatic goal of child protection actors in a humanitarian crisis as working to strengthen protective factors that build children's resilience and address vulnerability factors that expose them to risk and violence. Protection programs restore skills and relationships among children, families, and communities.

Education and child protection, two complementary sectors in emergency situations

Education plays a fundamental role in enhancing the protection of vulnerable groups of children in emergencies, including that of girls, children with disabilities, members of ethnic or linguistic minorities, unaccompanied and separated children, and children associated with armed forces and groups. Learning that takes place in a safe environment facilitates the work of teachers and non-teaching staff who supervise and protect at-risk children and who intervene to protect and support them (Galloway et al, 2020).

It is therefore essential to have a protective environment in which teachers can identify protection and gender-based violence risks, so that they can act safely and confidentially through child-centred intervention and referral systems to access assistance. Within this framework, schools and learning spaces can be a fundamental starting point for providing essential support beyond the education sector, such as protection, health, nutrition, and WASH services. Psychosocial interventions for children, youth, and teachers can help restore individual capacities and build confidence for the future. Thus, psychosocial support to children and youth in emergencies as part of an ESU response requires an integrated approach that takes into account children's survival and protection needs, while emphasising the importance of family, community, and local beliefs and traditions in helping children cope with the consequences of the emergency.

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The WWWWW

The 5W (Who does What Where When for Whom?) monitoring and reporting tool helps collect information on the operational presence, activities and results achieved by organisations working in the field of child protection. Analysis of the data collected provides information on the progress of the response, geographic targeting, risks of gaps and overlaps, and allows the response strategy of the area of responsibility to be adapted for better results (Martel, 2014). The 5W tool addresses a number of objectives, including clearly understanding the interventions of organisations working in the field.

Utilising the 5Ws allows organisations to:
- Coordinate intervention activities and resource allocation,
- Undertake strategic planning and decision-making based on comprehensive and meaningful information,
- Improve coverage of needs by highlighting duplication of activities and uncovered areas,
- Monitor progress and results and adjust intervention planning accordingly,
- Report to funders and beneficiaries on results achieved,
- Provide real-time response analysis for effective planning and monitoring.

Thus, the 5W system has come to be the tool most used by clusters today to collect data from member organisations' interventions, process them, and inform the humanitarian world. When we talk about the humanitarian world here, we mean the entire humanitarian community, from donors to beneficiaries, including organisations working in all sectors of intervention. Its relevance lies in the fact that it answers these five major questions about the person or entity, the type of achievement, the place of achievement, when the achievement took place and for whom.

In the context of Burkina Faso, it makes it possible to know, at the end, how many people benefited from the action and how much it cost. This allows the clusters to identify the types of actions that are missing, the concentration of actors by zone, and the gaps in the responses, in order to guide the mobilisation of resources, the content of the future response and, above all, the zone in which to implement these responses so as not to 'forget anyone' (Manset et al, 2017).
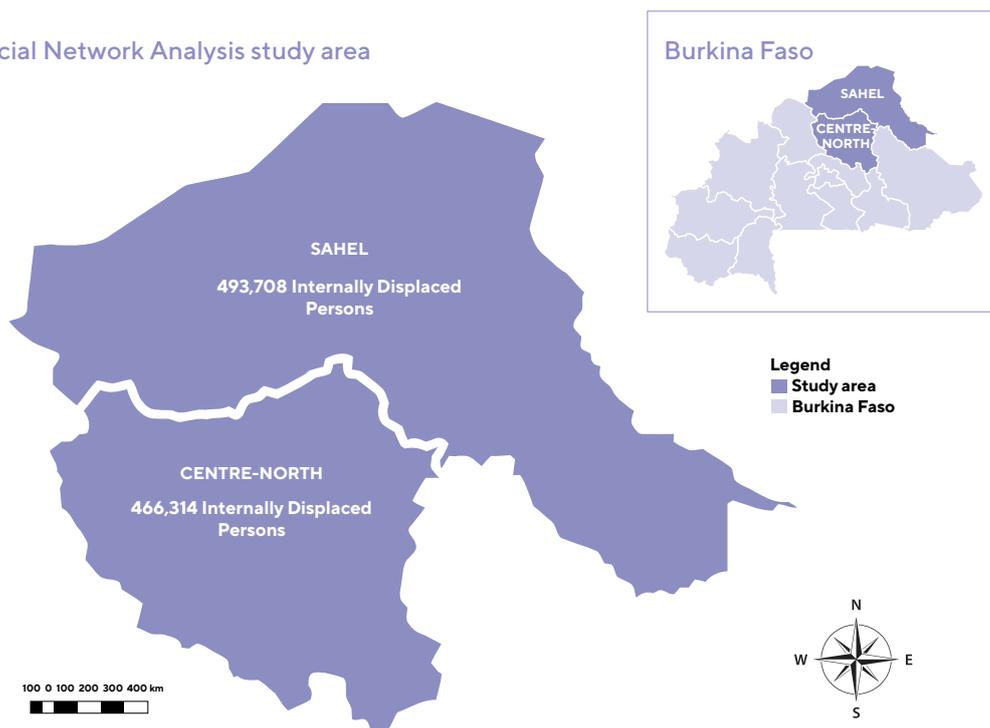
Materials and methods

Presentation of the study area

The crisis, which began in the north, has spread to almost the entire country, including the capital, which has experienced terrorist attacks. But it has affected six regions more severely, of which we choose to focus on two: the Centre-North region and the Sahel region. For the reader's understanding, we devote this passage to the description of these two regions.

The Centre-North region covers an area of 18,212 km²—or 6.6% of the national territory, and ranks seventh in the country in terms of surface area. It comprises three provinces: the province of Bam (4,092 Km²), the province of Namentenga (6,379 Km²) and the province of Sanmatenga (7,741 Km²). The capital of the region, Kaya, is located approximately 100 kilometres from Ouagadougou. The Centre-North region is bordered to the north by the Sahel region, to the south by the Central Plateau and Centre-East regions, to the east by the Eastern region and to the west by the Northern region.

Located in the extreme north of Burkina Faso, the Sahel region covers 36,166 km² or 13.2% of the national territory. It is bordered to the north by the Republic of Mali, to the northeast by the Republic of Niger, to the south by the Eastern and Centre-North regions, and to the west by the Northern region. The Sahel region, within its international boundaries, shares more than 1,500 kilometres of borders with Mali and Niger. The capital of the region is Dori. The Sahel is a desert region with a high potential for livestock production.

Social Network Analysis study area

SAHEL
493,708 Internally Displaced Persons

CENTRE-NORTH
466,314 Internally Displaced Persons

100 0 100 200 300 400 km

Burkina Faso

SAHEL

CENTRE-NORTH

Legend
Study area
Burkina Faso

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Data source

The data used in this study came from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) database. They were collected as of 4 November 2021 from https://data.humdata.org/dataset/burkina-faso-presence-operationnelle. The database was first cleaned to remove missing values and to standardise the names of organisations in the different clusters. It was then formatted before being imported for processing and analysis in kumu.io software.

Methodology of the study

The Social Network Analysis (SNA) method was used in this study. A social network is defined as a finite set of actors connected to each other through social ties. SNA can be defined as "a set of methods, concepts, theories, models, and investigations (...), which consist in taking as their object of study not the attributes of individuals (their age, their profession, etc.), but the relationships between individuals and the regularities they present, in order to describe them, to account for their formation and their transformations, to analyse their effects on individual behaviour" (Burt et al, 2013). It is therefore a process of network exploration aimed at extracting relevant knowledge and exploiting the information.

Data processing and analysis

SNA uses types of measures called 'centrality' to determine the place of an actor in a network (for example, information dissemination, prestige, resource circulation, sociability, etc.) (Borgatti et al, 2009). For our study, we have taken four measures of centrality:

- The degree of centrality is measured by the number of links established between an actor and others; the more central an actor is, the more active they are in the network. Actors with a high degree of centrality are often considered powerful, because they are surrounded by many other actors.
- Closeness centrality is measured by the number of steps that an actor must take to reach the other members of the network. Centrality here refers to proximity, a central actor can quickly get in touch with the others.
- The centrality of the 'betweenness' type is measured by the number of shortest paths on which the actor is an obligatory passage between two other actors; such a central actor controls the interactions between other actors. This centrality captures the gatekeeping, bridging and bottleneck functions of an actor in the network.
- Eigenvector centrality "indicates whether actors are central because they have ties to other central actors. Actors with high eigenvector centrality are well connected to the parts of the network that have the greatest connectivity" (Walther, 2015, p. 5).

We used these centrality measures in the online software kumu (https://kumu.io/). For each centrality measure, we created a map by scaling the size of the elements according to the results of the active metric.

Results and discussions

Education and protection actors in the study areas

	Education projects	Protection projects	Total
Centre-North	**176**	**17**	**193**
Plan International (PI)	82	2	84
Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	37	-	37
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	27	8	35
Central government	10	-	10
OXFAM	-	6	6
Initiatives de Coopération et d'Appui aux actions Humanitaires et de Développement (ICADH)	6	-	6
World Food Programme (PAM/WFP)	4	-	4

Initiative Instruire & Impacter la Nouvelle Generation (2iNOG)	4	-	4
Centre Diocésain de Communication (CDC)	3	-	3
Abba's International Healing Center (AIHC)	2	-	2
Coalition Nationale pour l'Education Pour Tous du burkina Faso (CN-EPT/BF)	1	-	1
International Organisation for Migration (OIM)	-	1	1
Sahel	**163**	**16**	**179**
Humanité et Inclusion (HI)	78	-	78
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)	39	10	49
Save The Children International (SCI)	18	-	18
World Food Programme (PAM/WFP)	14	-	14
Central government	6	-	6
OXFAM	5	-	5
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	-	4	4
Centre Diocésain de Communication (CDC)	2	-	2
International Organisation for Migration (OIM)	-	2	2
Coalition Nationale pour l'Education Pour Tous du burkina Faso (CN-EPT/BF)	1	-	1
Total	**339**	**33**	**372**

The above data from the 5W matrix of the education and protection clusters provides an overview of the organisations present in the North Central and Sahel regions as well as their achievements during the reporting period. These data cover the period from January to June 2021. They show 339 types of actions in education and 33 types in child protection for this period. Separately, the North Central region received 176 education interventions and 7 protection interventions. When we look at the actions of each organisation, we realise that Plan International is in the lead with 82 actions in education and two in child protection. It is followed by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) with 37 and 27 actions in education and zero and eight in child protection respectively. Government institutions came fourth with 10 interventions in education and zero in child protection. The same data collected in the Sahel show other organisations according to the volume of achievements. In the two areas of intervention, there are 163 in education and 16 in protection. There is a strong presence of Humanité et Inclusion (HI), which leads in education with 78 projects, followed by DRC with 39, Save the Children (SCI) with 18 in education and zero in protection, World Food Programme (WFP) with 14 and the government with six projects. What is noteworthy in both the North Central region and the Sahel is the low volume of achievements by certain organisations that are known to be major contributors to the response to the crisis.
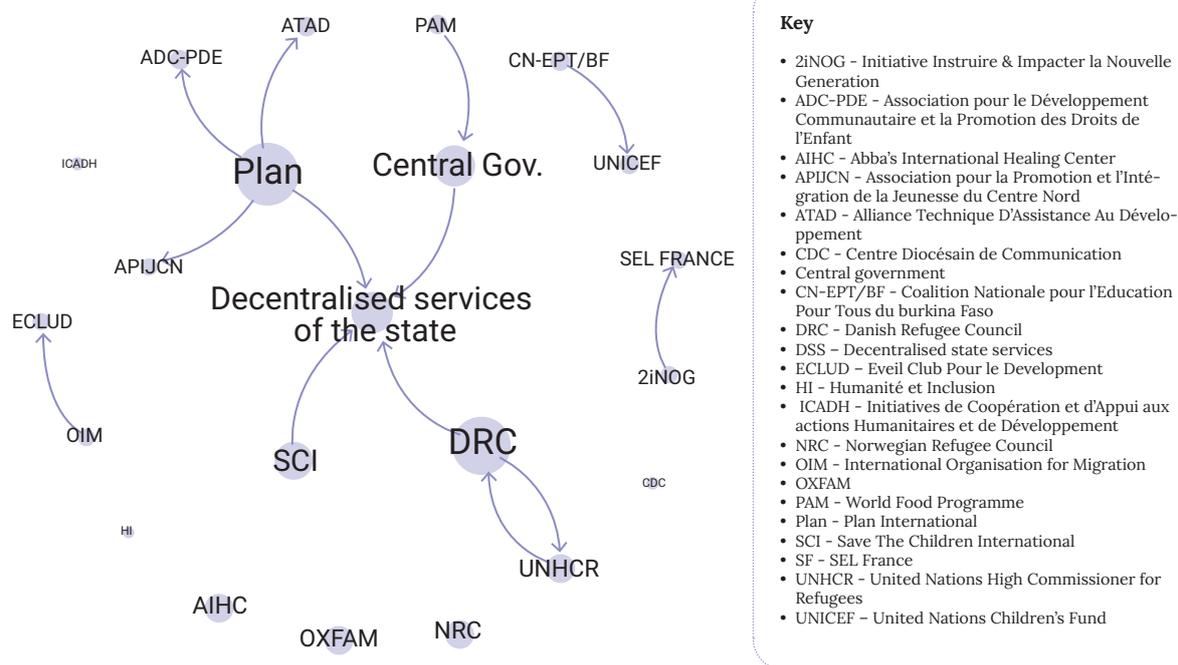
Social Network Analysis

The table below gives the ranking of actors according to centrality measures. The first two centralities measure the power of the actors in a network. The last two measure the connections and influences of the actors.

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Social Network Analysis centrality measures

Betweenness		Closeness		Eigenvector		Degree	
DRC	0.00238	Plan	0.190048	DRC	0.44721	Plan	6
Central Gov.	0.00238	DRC	0.095524	UNHCR	0.27639	DRC	5
		PAM	0.07143	Decentralised services of the state	0.27639	Central Gov.	4
		UNHCR	0.07143			Decentralised services of the state	4
		CN-EPT/BF	0.04762			SCI	3
		2iNOG	0.04762			AIHC	2
		Central Gov.	0.04762			NRC	2
		OIM	0.04762			OXFAM	2
		SCI	0.04762			UNHCR	2

Connections and influence of actors in the network

Key

- 2iNOG - Initiative Instruire & Impacter la Nouvelle Generation
- ADC-PDE - Association pour le Développement Communautaire et la Promotion des Droits de l'Enfant
- AIHC - Abba's International Healing Center
- APIJCN - Association pour la Promotion et l'Intégration de la Jeunesse du Centre Nord
- ATAD - Alliance Technique D'Assistance Au Développement
- CDC - Centre Diocésain de Communication
- Central government
- CN-EPT/BF - Coalition Nationale pour l'Education Pour Tous du burkina Faso
- DRC - Danish Refugee Council
- DSS – Decentralised state services
- ECLUD – Eveil Club Pour le Development
- HI - Humanité et Inclusion
- ICADH - Initiatives de Coopération et d'Appui aux actions Humanitaires et de Développement
- NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council
- OIM - International Organisation for Migration
- OXFAM
- PAM - World Food Programme
- Plan - Plan International
- SCI - Save The Children International
- SF - SEL France
- UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
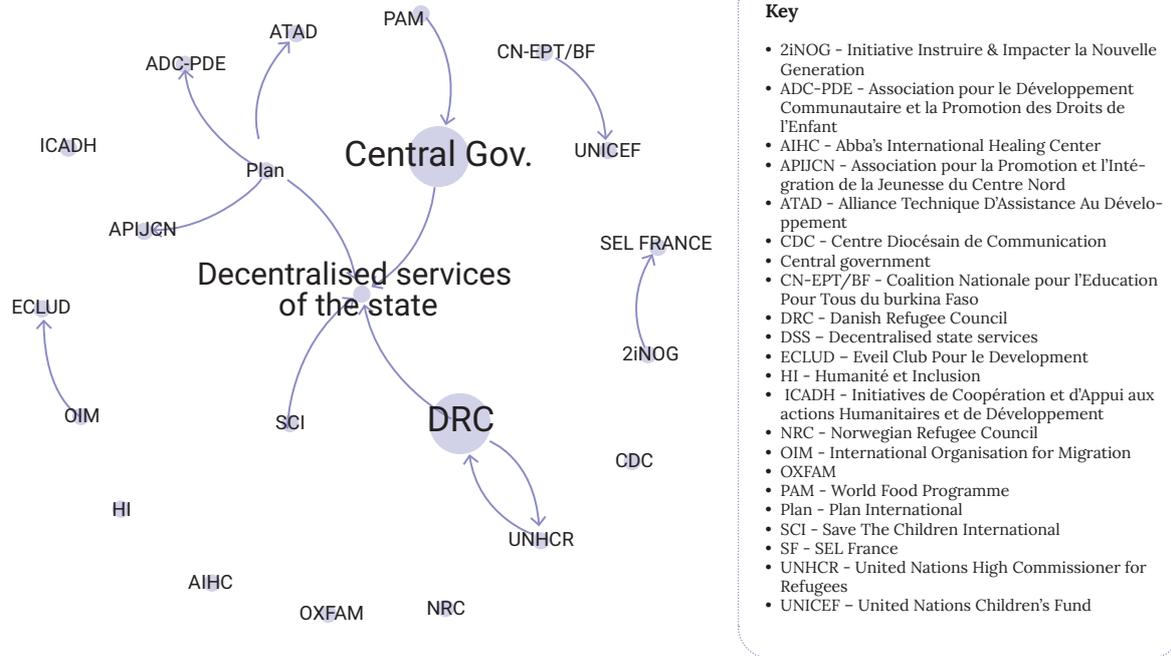- UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

The network analysis reveals that four organisations occupy the first place among the actors with more connections (centrality degree) in the study area. These are respectively the NGO Plan with six connections, followed by the NGO DRC with five connections. These two international organisations are followed by the central government and the decentralised state services. The decentralised services of the state have four connections, but all these connections are incoming. The two international organisations that are the best connected in the network have more outgoing connections.

In terms of influence (eigenvector centrality), the NGO DRC occupies the first place in the network. It is followed by UNHCR and the decentralised services of the state.

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- SF - SEL France
- UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

The NGO DRC and the central government are positioned as the most essential actors in the network. They have the highest 'betweenness centrality'. This means that they are an essential passage (a bridge) in the network of education and protection actors in the study area. International NGOs such as Plan International and DRC have the highest closeness. These two NGOs therefore have a global vision of the interventions in the network (information power).

Discussion

In times of crisis, humanitarian assistance is essential to save lives and relieve suffering. Thus, based on the principles of humanity, local and international non-governmental organisations act under the leadership and invitation of the government to assist affected populations in disaster-affected areas when it feels unable to do so (Corbet, 2014). But this intervention, if it is done according to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, independence, and to complement fundamental humanitarian principles, should aim towards effective coordination to promote transparency, avoid duplication and allow the maximum needs of the maximum number of affected people to be covered. Humanitarian clusters therefore justify their importance by providing support for governments and organisations, avoiding waste, and maximising the benefits of each action (Martel, 2013). This study reveals several aspects of interest to organisations, clusters, the government and financial partners in the humanitarian response.

Our objective was to highlight the connection networks between organisations working in education and protection in order to analyse the inter-organisational dynamics and draw the consequences of the humanitarian response in a given time and area. The data shows that several organisations are active in the North Central and Sahel regions and the analysis reveals a medium level of connection with clear leadership zones. When we look at the position of Plan International, it is clear that this organisation has an extensive network and interacts with a large number of response actors, both at the governmental level and at the level of local non-governmental organisations, something that is highly desired by the humanitarian community and that responds to the philosophy of the Grand Bargain on two levels. First, at the level of the coordination of forces between international and national organisations and governmental agencies to best address needs (Principle 4); and second, at the level of strengthening the skills of governmental institutions and local NGOs (Principle 2) (IASC, 2016).

The analysis shows that state institutions in Burkina Faso play their role as repositories of authority and guarantors of the coordination and orientation of humanitarian assistance, given their central position in the network. Other organisations are catalysts for the activities of others and the government. This is the case with the WFP and the DRC, which remain in permanent connection with the central government and the decentralised government services. This is because the WFP works through state services or INGOs and local NGOs to implement its activities in the field, while the DRC serves as a link between larger organisations such as UNHCR and the technical services of the state through which it implements its actions.

At the same time, the network analysis shows that large organisations such as the NRC, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Oxfam do not have a large social network and are therefore on the periphery of the epicentre of humanitarian aid in Burkina Faso. A few clues could explain the isolation of these actors: either they implement everything directly, or their partners, if any, do not report sufficiently well on the 5W matrix. This results in a significant loss of data, which leads to a low visibility of interventions and a high risk of redundancy and being left behind.

It must also be considered that the data used is taken from the OCHA database, which is official and was used for the period indicated to inform the humanitarian community. However, it shows a disparity in the levels of intervention, which is certainly linked to the capacity of the actors, but which also raises questions. Did all organisations fill out the matrix for the period under review? If so, was it filled comprehensively? If not, does this mean that some organisations still do not know how to fill it in? In any case, we have noticed that large contributors such as the WFP, UNICEF and some local organisations have a weak presence in the network. They might not have done anything for the period, but the matrix is cumulative since previous actions not completed are also reported on.

Finally, the demand aspect also emerges in a telling way. The data from the two intervention areas used here shows that demand is higher for education than for protection, or that education actions are more reported on than protection actions. This is understandable because when a crisis occurs, some needs appear more pressing than others, and also because their nature makes them more graspable than others (Landa et al, 2021). This is the case with education, where the closing of a class means that at least 60 children run the risk of not having the right to go to school, while the physical or psychological violence suffered by a child will be drowned in the silence of makeshift shelters and in the confusion of families who are often looking for a simple explanation of why the crisis occurred. Finally, given the link established with the importance of education for child protection in times of crisis, we can assume that many protection actions have evaporated in the education data. If this is the case, it implies that the actions are not sufficiently discriminatory to be captured in the matrix.

Conclusion

The vocation of humanitarian organisations is to provide assistance to populations affected by a crisis. A successful humanitarian response requires great efforts at the strategic level, hence the development of Humanitarian Response Plans, but also at the practical level, with the establishment of clusters, and the OCHA and the Operational Coordination Group (GCCOR) present to advise, supervise and coordinate the actions of actors in the field.

For a long time, these were the concerns of the international humanitarian community. Nowadays, we are witnessing the rise of local civil society actors who are increasingly capable of helping populations without resorting to foreign partners, and who are positioning themselves for broader purposes than just post-crisis or post-disaster intervention. They are, for example, working in the fight against poverty, in social solidarity, or in the context of replacing a failing public sector. The most experienced among them have the contextual knowledge, whether political, social or cultural, to give them a significant advantage over external actors. Some of these local actors base their interventions in general, but also in crisis or disaster situations, on a purpose and operating methods that refer more or less explicitly to religion and are therefore part of a cultural referent widely shared by the populations assisted.

But the results of our study have shown that INGOs and UN agencies still do not take these local actors into account in their programming or networks—a key element of the Grand Bargain. What is needed to make humanitarian assistance more effective should be more complementarity between stakeholders to increase synergy, as well as more connection between clustered organisations, in order to expand access and leave no one behind.

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Coming together? Social Network Analysis of humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso