



SRHR in the Sahel

Local civil society is a constant in times of instability

2023

A crisis of instability and insecurity

The Sahel region¹ is in a state of deep instability, driven by climate change, armed conflict, and poverty.

Population growth driven by high fertility has rapidly increased the demand for services, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). In 2020, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that the number of people in need of SRHR services in the Sahel had increased by 20% since 2017. Insecurity due to conflict and political crises, especially in the countries known as the G5 Sahel,² has made sexual and reproductive health service delivery challenging and exacerbated conservative opposition to sexuality education and other sexual and reproductive rights.

Countries in the Sahel are experiencing the effect of climate change through increased drought and famine. Desertification has reduced fertile soil for agriculture, a cornerstone of income for the majority of people. Restricted job opportunities has become the leading motivation for people to join extremist groups. Social



and political exclusion means young people are increasingly turning to religion as a refuge and fostering opposition beliefs rooted in radical religious ideology.

The countries of the Sahel are faced with increased violence from jihadist forces. These conditions have proved fertile ground for a series of coup d'état in Mali, Sudan, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad. These coups have disrupted the relationship with Europe and North America. Consequent sanctions, including those imposed by regional and international institutions, have followed with severe consequences on vulnerable populations. Governments in the Sahel are establishing new relationships with emerging regional influences – Russia, China, Turkey, Arab and Gulf states – which do not prioritise human rights, let alone sexual and reproductive rights.

¹ The Sahel region commonly includes the countries of Senegal, The Gambia, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, and in some classifications, parts of Sudan and Eritrea.

² The G5 Sahel is a regional coordinating mechanism between Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, and Niger, focused on security and development. Mali was a member up until May 2022.

The 'Sahel crisis' of persistent violence and **conflict over recent years has redirected local priorities away from gender equality and SRHR policies amidst worsened human rights** in the region, particularly for women and girls.

- Over 9,000 schools have closed, leaving 1.7 million children out of school, in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger due to terrorist activity. The closure of schools, often a place of protection for young people, brings increased risk of SRHR violations.
- The humanitarian crises resulting from terrorism and fighting between state military and extremist groups have led to increased sexual violence, unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and maternal deaths.
- As people's livelihoods are affected due to soaring temperatures and reduced access to land, many families turn to child marriage as a means of supporting their families, which is often accompanied by an increase in FGM/C.
- For people fleeing their homes as a result of climate change, access to SRHR services decreases while risk of violence increases.

Progressive civil society is working in an increasingly contested arena

In the context of political and social turmoil, ejection of human rights values is growing. The relationship of Sahel-based SRHR organisations with Europe and North America is both a source of strength – providing resources, skills and access – and an increasing vulnerability in the face of increased opposition to European and North American influence. The pushback against this relationship is found in both public opinion and in the operating regulations of governments in the region. In Mali, for example, civil society organisations are forbidden to receive funding from the French government.

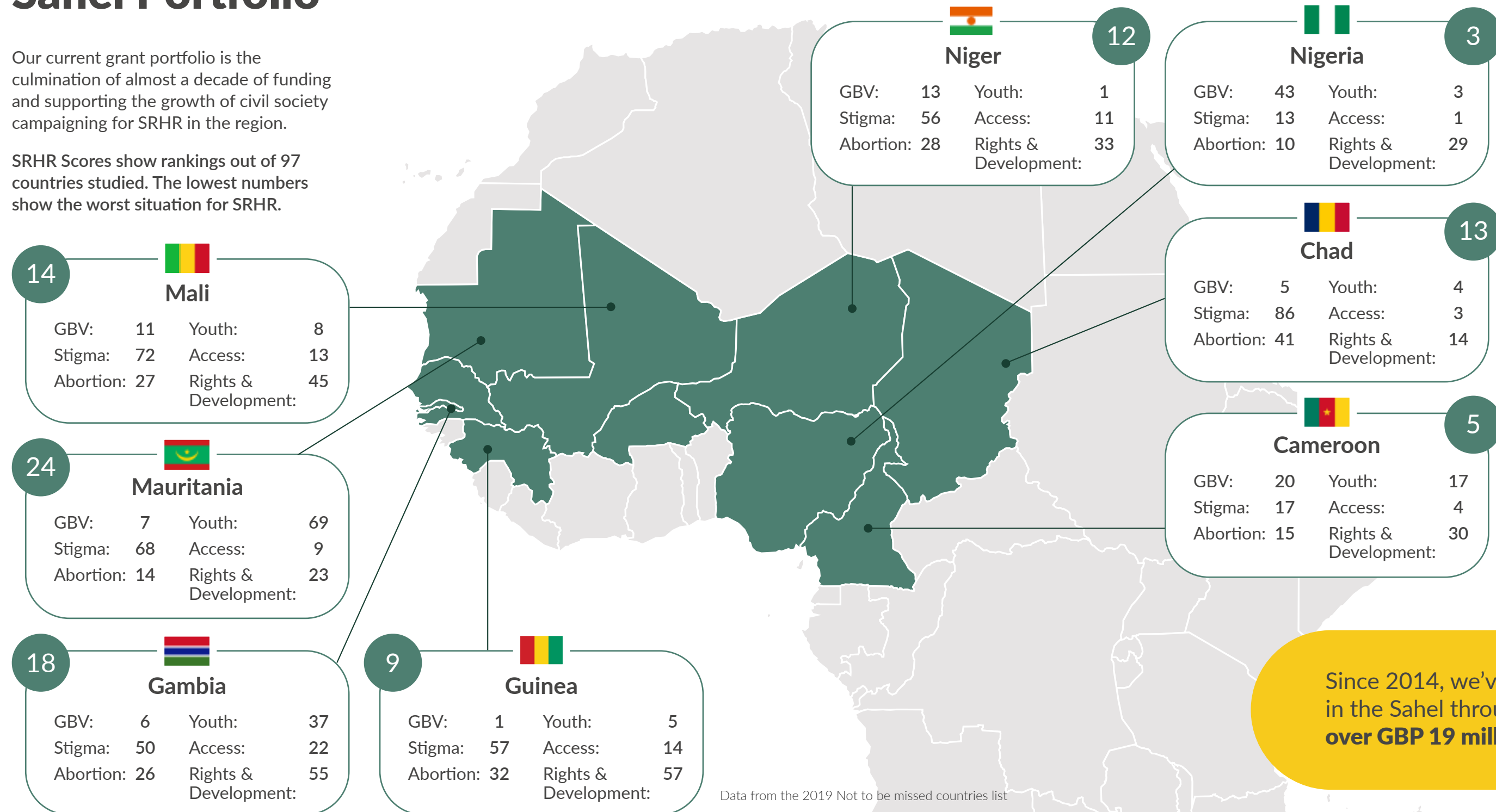
AmplifyChange has extensive grant-making experience in this region.

Since our founding in 2014, AmplifyChange has been an accessible and reliable source of funding to civil society in the Sahel. Recognising that SRHR-related outcomes in the region are weaker than elsewhere in Africa, our first Strategic Advisor was recruited in Senegal and our first fund outreach events were held in Mali and Niger. Most countries in the region are recognised by AmplifyChange as 'not to be missed' countries. Funding round after funding round, our insight and reach within the Sahel has grown through grants awarded to organisations in every country in the region.

Sahel Portfolio

Our current grant portfolio is the culmination of almost a decade of funding and supporting the growth of civil society campaigning for SRHR in the region.

SRHR Scores show rankings out of 97 countries studied. The lowest numbers show the worst situation for SRHR.



Data from the 2019 Not to be missed countries list

Since 2014, we've supported 112 groups in the Sahel through **200 grants valued over GBP 19 million.**

We believe that supporting local civil society is critical to maintaining SRHR in times of significant political upheaval and transition. The political instability in the Sahel region has disrupted many established models and assumptions about supporting women, girls, and marginalised communities in the region. But local civil society remains a constant and are best placed to maintain progress on SRHR. Supporting local civil society offers a number of opportunities to maintain momentum for improved SRHR in the Sahel. These include:

- Increased trust and credibility with communities
- Deeper understanding of local needs and priorities
- Greater flexibility and responsiveness to change
- Increased ownership and sustainability of programs

Key policies to improve SRHR have already been strengthened from the local to national levels.

In Niger in 2019, with funding from AmplifyChange, the municipalities of Damana, Tera and Sherkin-Hausa included a budget line for SRHR in their budget thanks to campaigning by Lafia Matassa.

In the same year, Association Songui Manegre/ Aide au Développement Endogène (ASMADE) supported a coalition of organisations in Burkina Faso to establish a government commitment to provided free family planning services nationwide.





Shifting Power to the Sahel

Access to funding for small organisations from marginalised communities needs to be expanded, especially those in rural areas or in disadvantaged neighbourhoods of large cities. This requires adaptation of grant management models that are easier to access and tailored to local languages and conditions.

Fundamentally, local civil society organisations need more control over the allocation and management of resources to strengthen their own capacities.

AmplifyChange has almost a decade of experience supporting networks of civil society organisations to access larger grants. As part of our commitment to strengthen grant-makers in the Global

South to bring about positive change in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), **we launched our first Partnership funding round in April 2021.**

Partnership Grants are a new funding mechanism aimed at embedding locally driven advocacy. The support enables grant-making to smaller groups through established organisations based in low- and middle-income countries, alongside organisational strengthening tailored to smaller civil society organisations within their local movement. It strengthens solidarity and linkages between groups working on the same topic in the same region.

Strengthening SRHR movements for change

Conseil et Appui pour l'Education à la Base (CAEB), based in Mali and working across the Sahel, supported country-level networks advocating for improved SRHR policy and law, including implementation and increasing awareness amongst stakeholders and the general population. CAEB's partners have made significant progress:

With their Partnership Grant, CAEB launched its first funding round in 2023 through their newly established grant making mechanism, Dambe Funds Sahel. Dambe Funds Sahel provides local civil society groups across West Africa with funding to better strengthen grassroots advocacy for improved SRHR. 30 smaller CSOs were selected for funding out of 508 applications, including 15 community-based organisations, 10 local and national NGOs, and 5 local and national umbrella CSOs in Mali, Guinea, Niger, and Senegal.

Mali

In December 2022, Coalition des organisations de la société civile pour le repositionnement de la planification familiale (COSC-PF) organised a digital advocacy campaign to disseminate key facts about the sexual and reproductive health law, highlighting provisions supporting marginalised groups, adolescents, and women, as well as the gaps that still exist in the legal framework. The campaign reached more than 100,000 people, including 18,679 young people via social media. Several thousand viewers watched a televised debate in Bambara between Namory Traoré, head of advocacy at Marie Stopes Mali, and Professor Youssouf Traoré, president of the Société malienne de gynécologie obstétrique (SOMAGO), who discussed the details of the law and next steps to ensure even stronger SRHR policies. The debate was also aired on the radio in Mali and around the world.



Niger

The Coalition société civile engagée pour la PF au Niger (CAR-PF) engaged members of the Association des femmes juristes du Niger (AFJN) and the Association des sages-femmes du Niger (ASFN), to bolster advocacy on the reproductive health law and its application decree. The coalition trained 25 members on key SRHR concepts, such as sexual versus reproductive rights and gender social norms related to SRHR. Twenty then went on to analyse the legal documents to support an advocacy session at the National Commission for Human Rights in December 2022. They identified key advocacy issues and gaps in the current law, such as discriminatory provisions against unmarried couples and individuals in accessing SRHR services, which will inform their future advocacy efforts.



Mauritania

A campaign to implement l'éducation à la vie familiale (EVF) (in English: 'family life education') in the national school curriculum at all education levels is underway, led by the Coalition ENEM (Ensemble espaçons nos naissances en Mauritanie). The key subjects in the curriculum are reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, STIs, and FGM/C. Currently, EVF classes are only available at secondary level, but the coalition is building advocacy messages and campaigns to improve its availability. They are working closely with a technical working group of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Youth, civil society, religious leaders, and parents' associations.



Amplifying voices and changing social norms for SRHR

Réseau Africain pour l'Éducation et la Santé (RAES), a Senegal-based social change and communications NGO, has implemented a wide range of social communication approaches while integrating the training of local actors into the core of its work. Many lessons have been learned in the course of this work and are shared with partners to refine intervention strategies.

Between 2012 and 2022, RAES produced a flagship television programme, *C'est la Vie*, which takes place focuses on the local health centre in a fictional town called Ratanga. The show explores topics around SRHR, maternal and child health, and community health. It played across nine countries in the Sahel on 23 television stations. A radio version of the series broadcast across Mali and Niger on 38

radio stations. In 2017 alone, 40 million television viewers watched at least one episode of *C'est la Vie*, and 155 million listeners tuned into the first season of the radio series. The series has had a notable impact in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.

A unique 360° education-through-entertainment training programme based on the series promoted the empowerment of adolescent girls and women through behavioral and social change in sexual and reproductive health, addressed gender-based violence and promoted better maternal and child health. More than 3,000 youth leaders and 400 teachers were trained to promote SRHR and gender rights issues to support young people in and out of school. Additionally, digital campaigns reaching audiences across Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube had high-level impact: 30 million video views on YouTube and 210 million views of media on Facebook.

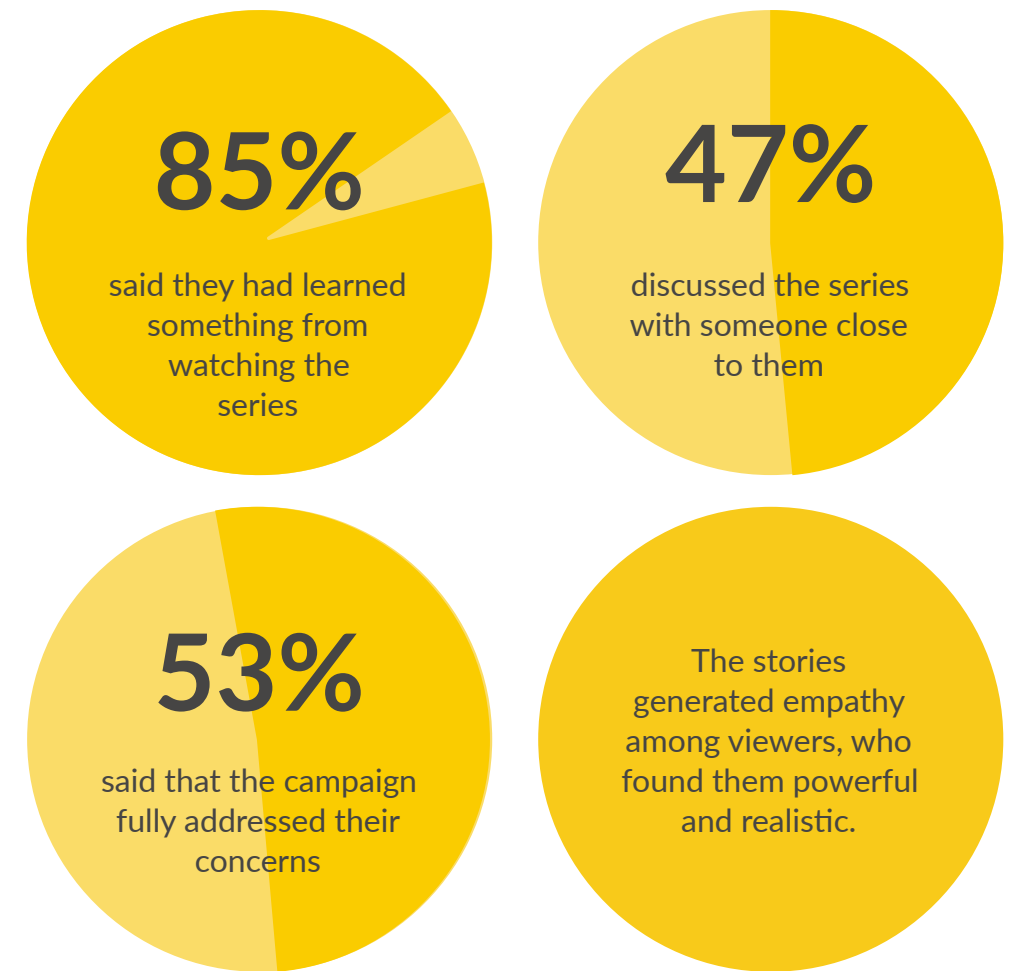




The direct impact³ of C'est la Vie shows the importance of social and behaviour change communication in promoting SRHR in challenging contexts

- Almost all C'est la Vie viewers trust the accuracy of the information conveyed in the series (99%) and would recommend C'est la Vie to others (98%). More than half of online viewers (56%) who watched the story about emergency contraception told someone about it.
- Nearly six out of ten online viewers (59%) who watched the story about the trial of the young girl who underwent genital mutilation in the series told someone about it.
- 98% of those who watched the story about sexual violence would help report an assault to the police.
- 79% of viewers said they had changed their beliefs about sexual violence after watching Aicha's story about sexual violence.

A specific campaign seeking to break the taboo around unsafe abortion saw equally important impact:



RAES continues to support communications and social norm change campaigns across the Sahel, investing in training and follow up for key stakeholders to meet the needs of young people.

³ Results of an online survey conducted by Drexel University and the University of Dakar in Senegal.



Funding locally drives stability for the Sahelian SRHR movement

Local civil society organisations in the Sahel are playing a critical role in **defending sexual and reproductive health rights** and achieving key wins despite the increasingly unstable context.

In so doing they are easing the drivers of instability, insecurity and poverty today and for generations to come.

However, the work of local civil society cannot be sustained without continued financial support. The potential of the organisations that AmplifyChange support continues to be limited and difficult allocation choices restrict the reach of funding across the breadth of civil society.

Despite the challenging moment for Sahelian countries, it is crucial that European and North American funders continue to invest directly in local civil society and provide them with the resources they need to fulfil their potential. This is a time to increase support to local civil society, not to scale back, especially as new mechanisms to expand the reach and impact of grant-funding emerge.

By supporting local civil society, we can ensure that progress on sexual and reproductive health rights is maintained in the Sahel region, even in times of significant political upheaval and transition.



With thanks to Conseil et Appui pour l'Education à la Base (CAEB) and Réseau Africain pour l'Education et la Santé (RAES) for their contributions.





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