



# Self-Defence Armed Non-State Actors in Central Sahel

Constraints or Opportunities for humanitarian access?





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NOTE FOR THE READER. In July 2022, Geneva Call adjusted its terminology regarding the actors it engages, who are now referred to as Armed Groups and *de facto* Authorities (AGDAs). The research reflected in this report was carried out during the first semester of 2022, hence it refers to the former terminology used by Geneva Call (ANSA).

# Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>ANSA</b>	Armed Non-State Actors
<b>IHRL</b>	International Human Rights Law
<b>IHL</b>	International Humanitarian Law
<b>DSF</b>	Defence and Security Force
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced People
<b>VDH</b>	Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland
<b>CMA</b>	Coordination of Azawad Movements
<b>CMI</b>	Coordination of Inclusivity Movements
<b>MNLA</b>	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad
<b>HCUA</b>	High Council for the Unity of Azawad
<b>MAA</b>	Arab Movement of Azawad
<b>MSA</b>	Movement for the Salvation of Azawad
<b>GATIA</b>	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defence Group and Allies
<b>ASS</b>	Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel
<b>CMCoord</b>	Civil-military coordination





# 1. Executive Summary

**The Central Sahel region is facing an unprecedented security and humanitarian crisis. Triggered in northern Mali in 2012, this crisis gradually spread to the centre and the south, and then to Burkina Faso and Niger.**

In Mali, the crisis was characterised by the resurgence of armed groups known for the cyclical nature of their rebellion (1963, 1992, 2006 and 2012), the appearance of so-called “radical” Armed Non-State Actors (hereafter ANSA) and the emergence of several self-defence ANSAs in the north and centre of the country. In Burkina Faso, the crisis manifested itself in a series of attacks attributed to so-called “radical” ANSAs which first targeted the positions of the Defence and Security Forces (hereafter DSF) and the symbols of the State, then more and more civilian populations and infrastructures. In response to these attacks, the already existing self-defence ANSAs - including the Koglweogo and the Dozo - reorganised themselves by integrating a self-defence dimension into the attacks of the so-called “radical” ANSAs. Niger, while recording attacks attributed to so-called “radical” ANSAs along with Mali and Burkina Faso, has not seen a “visible and official” expansion of self-defence ANSAs. However, these groups operate with a low profile on the ground, particularly in the regions of Tillabéry, Tahoua and Diffa.

This porosity of actors and ANSAs with different profiles and objectives that change according to the evolution of the context and their actions on the ground, has generated massive population displacements, violations of human rights and most alarming humanitarian needs in the Central Sahel region. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees, there are more than **1.1 million** internally displaced people in Mali, **1.8 million** in Burkina Faso and nearly 570,000 in Niger. In this context, just as it is urgent to deploy humanitarian aid to alleviate the suffering, it is equally important to carry out **studies to better understand the context, the conflict dynamics between these actors, and the humanitarian access constraints** linked to their operations. It is in this spirit and to fill the lack of data and analysis on the dialogue and humanitarian engagement of self-defence ANSAs that Geneva Call initiated this preliminary and introductory study, at the request of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). This document aims to enrich the analysis of the relationship between self-defence ANSAs and humanitarian actors, more specifically on the conditions of access to areas under the influence of these ANSAs.

This study is **preliminary** and **introductory** in that it focuses exclusively on self-defence ANSAs and lays the groundwork for a much more in-depth and comprehensive study of all armed groups operating in the Central Sahel. The study targeted regions where Geneva Call has already begun a process of humanitarian engagement with ANSAs, particularly in the regions of Gao and Mopti in Mali, Tillabéry and Tahoua in Niger, and the North, Centre-North and East of Burkina Faso.

While self-defence ANSAs are commonly perceived as “accessible” and “less problematic” by some humanitarian actors [1], analysing their profiles, perceptions and behaviours remains important in order to anticipate their potential reactions in response to attacks by so-called “radical” ANSAs, and therefore prevent the risk of violence against civilian populations. The main points to remember are:

- Following interviews conducted with Self-Defence ANSAs, it was noted that there is a misunderstanding of humanitarian principles among them. **“In my opinion, these NGOs put forward their principles when it suits them with us and put them forward when it suits them with enemy groups”** stated a member of a self-defence ANSA in Burkina Faso.
- During the interviews, members of self-defence ANSAs particularly mentioned their uncertainty about the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors. This feeling of doubt about humanitarian principles was mentioned in all three countries, and is linked to the interventions of humanitarian actors in areas under the control of so-called “radical” ANSAs. These places are difficult to access due to the nature of the ANSAs that occupy them, which raises questions for self-defence ANSAs about how humanitarian actors can maintain close ties with such dangerous actors. **“The more NGOs there are, the worse the crisis in the country becomes. It spreads disorder in our region”**, stated a member of a self-defence ANSA in Mali.

[1] This observation was particularly noted during the event with humanitarian actors organised by Geneva Call in Burkina Faso.

- The fact that they do not have enough information on humanitarian actors reinforces this mistrust; "If they could warn us in advance within a reasonable time of any actions or activities in our areas, we would have more confidence".
  - Some humanitarian actors, particularly those active in Mali, have pointed out that it is paradoxically sometimes easier for them to **dialogue and negotiate** humanitarian access with so-called "**radical**" ANSAs than self-defence ANSAs". According to them, this is due to the fact that the latter are unstructured, perceived as "less reliable" and show a poor understanding of humanitarian aid compared to the so-called "radical" ANSAs. "Humanitarian access is easier for us in areas under the control of so-called 'radical' groups than areas under the control of so-called self-defence groups", stated one humanitarian actor. This point was mentioned much more in interviews with humanitarian workers in Mali than in Niger or Burkina Faso.
  - In these three countries, although they are armed and operational and do not come under an DSF hierarchy and command - with the exception of the Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDH) in Burkina Faso -, self-defence ANSAs are part of a paradoxical logic of "continuity" of the State in securing the population and its property in the localities they control. "We are not against the state, we are here to protect and secure our community from enemy groups. This is why the population supports us", boasted a member of a self-defence ANSA in Mali.
  - Despite the doubts they expressed about the neutrality of humanitarian actors during the interviews conducted, most members of the self-defence ANSAs interviewed in the three countries said they were **open to dialogue** with humanitarian actors in order to facilitate their access to areas they control. "If they really open up to us with sincerity about their goals and don't expose us or compromise our operations on the ground, we will work with them. But is this the case?", said a member of a self-defence ANSA in Mali.
- This negative and sceptical perception of self-defence ANSAs about humanitarian actors, coupled with their modus operandi and the changing nature of their focus and profile as the context evolves, makes humanitarian access even more constraining. Interviews with humanitarian actors indicate as follows:
- The checkpoints set up by the self-defence ANSAs along the main roads constitute real access difficulties for humanitarian actors. "An ambulance transporting a patient was stopped at a self-defence group checkpoint in the Mopti region. Members of the group refused for hours to let the ambulance through because the patient was of a different ethnicity from theirs. It took the involvement and negotiation of another NGO with a humanitarian negotiation mandate for the members of the group to finally allow the ambulance to pass", stated a humanitarian actor in Mali.
  - Some humanitarian actors consulted during this study mentioned that self-defence ANSAs demand taxes when passing through checkpoints (Mali) or during their patrols (Burkina Faso) on the main roads. According to them, self-defence ANSA members do not violently demand these taxes, but subtly do so in the form of "tea prices" or "chicken prices". Therefore, they can complicate humanitarian access if humanitarian actors do not pay the tax.
  - Interviews with humanitarian actors revealed that some self-defence ANSAs in Mali and Burkina Faso discriminate based on the community affiliation of humanitarian personnel, during irregular checks or at checkpoints. "At the checkpoint, members of the vigilante group put me aside from the other passengers and asked me where I was from and if I knew any members of so-called 'radical' groups. I was scared during the exchanges. They finally let me through, but told me they don't like to see people from my community in the area", said a humanitarian worker in Burkina Faso.
- The study did not raise any constraints **related to the interpretation of a regulation that would prevent or reduce the scope** of negotiation and dialogue with self-defence ANSAs, as may be the case with so-called "radical ANSAs" with the anti-terrorism regulations.
- Drawing on all the lessons learned from this analysis, the study led to the formulation of several key recommendations.**
- **First, it is imperative to revitalise and strengthen community mechanisms in the prevention and management of inter- and intra-community conflicts caused by rivalries between self-defence ANSAs.**
  - **The humanitarian community should invest in strengthening coordination between the different humanitarian actors in the three countries, so as to share common messages when raising awareness on humanitarian principles and in negotiations.**
  - **Consider a deconfliction mechanism similar to the one adopted within the CMCoord platforms in relation to the DSF, which would include notification of the movements of humanitarian actors, training on humanitarian principles and their implementation.**
  - **Increase the involvement of communities in methods for selecting vulnerability criteria and beneficiaries of humanitarian aid, to increase understanding of aid distribution systems.**
  - **Finally, based on the results of this preliminary study, it is recommended to conduct another more complete and in-depth study that targets both self-defence ANSAs and so-called "radical" ANSAs, in order to identify measures to prevent the non-expansion of violations by self-defence ANSAs in response to the constantly fragile context.**

## 2. Introduction

Central Sahel has experienced an escalation of conflicts in recent years. The presence and activities of armed actors have had a growing impact on civilian populations in terms of respect for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and human rights. Geneva Call, a neutral, impartial and independent international humanitarian organisation, has been providing its expertise since 2018 in the commitment of self-defence ANSAs in the Sahel to respect international humanitarian standards in order to improve the protection of civilians.

As part of the SHARE (Safeguarding Humanitarian Access in Central Sahel) project, in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council, and funded by UK Aid, Geneva Call conducted this study in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on the theme: "Self-Defence Armed Non-State Actors in Central Sahel: Constraints or Opportunities for humanitarian access?". This document focuses on the comparative analysis of the perception of humanitarian actors by self-defence ANSAs in Central Sahel in order to identify the constraints to humanitarian access that they may pose, but also the opportunities for engagement and dialogue that the humanitarian community could tap into.

According to Geneva Call's definition, an actor is considered ANSA if the following three criteria apply: it is armed; it is organised (e.g. it has a command/control structure, has the ability to access weapons, recruits and military training, and can conduct military operations); it is non-state [2] (e.g. a state does not exercise effective control over the ANSA).

ANSAs encompass a variety of entities, including insurgent movements, rebel groups, dissident armed forces, paramilitary groups,

vigilante militias, armed gangs, national liberation movements as well as de facto government authorities and unrecognised organisations. Those who oppose them often describe them as "terrorists" or "bandits", while the groups often present themselves as "freedom fighters". Depending on the perspective, different labels may apply to the same ANSA.

Human rights and humanitarian organisations have therefore tended to use less controversial terms, such as "armed non-State groups" or "armed non-State actors", neutral designations which also take into account the variety of these groups. This study specifically targets self-defence ANSAs, excluding so-called "radical" ANSAs for two reasons. First, for their close ties with the communities, often as opposed to the so-called "radical" ANSAs, which rather constitute a "nebula" with international ramifications. The perception of humanitarian organisations by self-defence ANSAs is strongly linked to the acceptance of populations and therefore important to better understand. Then, due to their multiplication and the complexity of the context, self-defence ANSAs present a certain number of different characteristics depending on the context and their geographical origin. Depending on the context, self-defence ANSAs engage in a variety of behaviours that can severely limit humanitarian access, and their perception of humanitarian actors also varies. Finally, to limit the constraints to humanitarian access linked to the presence and activities of ANSAs, some humanitarian actors have succeeded in establishing a dialogue and setting up deconfliction mechanisms, which this study wished to address in order to analyse their potential reproducibility in other contexts. The action of self-defence ANSAs requires, in fact, in-depth

research, so as to better inform and guide humanitarian organisations in identifying concrete solutions to improve humanitarian access.

### 2.1 Purpose

The purpose of the study is to:

1. make a comparative analysis of self-defence ANSAs, in Central Sahel, particularly the area of the three borders or Liptako Gourma, as to their perception of humanitarian actors on the nuances, similarities and differences;
2. determine opportunities for humanitarian dialogue between humanitarian actors and self-defence ANSAs, to facilitate access when needed, particularly in the event of a crisis;
3. formulate recommendations for humanitarian actors, in particular the humanitarian coordination dedicated to access (OCHA, Humanitarian Access Working Groups, civil-military coordination mechanisms), and the administrations of the countries concerned, in order to facilitate the humanitarian access.

[2] Geneva Call follows the notion of "overall control" as described by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia: "[t]o attribute the acts of a military or paramilitary group to a State, it must be proven that the State wields overall control over the group, not only by equipping and financing the group, but also by coordinating or helping in the general planning of its military activity. Only then can the State be held internationally accountable for any misconduct of the group." ICTY Appeals Chamber, The Prosecutor v. Duško Tadić, Judgement, 15 July 1999, IT-94-1-AR72, paras 131 and 137.



## 2.2 Methodological approach

The methodology of the study was built around a qualitative and participatory approach which made it possible to collect the points of view and perceptions of self-defence ANSAs on humanitarian actors in the three countries, on the one hand, and on the access constraints encountered by humanitarian actors due to the action of self-defence ANSAs, as well as the ways in which the latter can engage in improving access, on the other hand. This methodology also made it possible to collect the current practices of civil-military coordination mechanisms (CMCoord) to facilitate access, at the level of the three countries.

Two methods were used:

The so-called documentary research method: It consists of a review of available documentation and other documents specific to Geneva Call on self-defence ANSAs in Central Sahel, the issue of humanitarian access and CMCoord practices in the three countries covered by the study.

The participatory method: It consists of conducting individual interviews and focus groups with members of self-defence ANSAs and humanitarian actors. Active listening, choosing the wording of questions or reformulating questions are all techniques that have been used to capture the opinion of respondents and understand their logic.

## 2.2 Study limitations

The time allocated to the project to carry out this study proved to be limited, given the large size of the study area and the large and diverse number of ANSAs in Central Sahel. However, the workshops organised for the restitution of the preliminary conclusions [3] allowed the collection of additional data from the humanitarian actors and to complete the elements already gathered.

This study focused exclusively on self-defence ANSAs operating in Central Sahel, although other so-called “radical” ANSAs are also present, and their actions have a significant impact on humanitarian access. Therefore, the results of this study are preliminary and introductory, and one of the small number of initiatives that have focused on the impact of these ANSAs on humanitarian access.

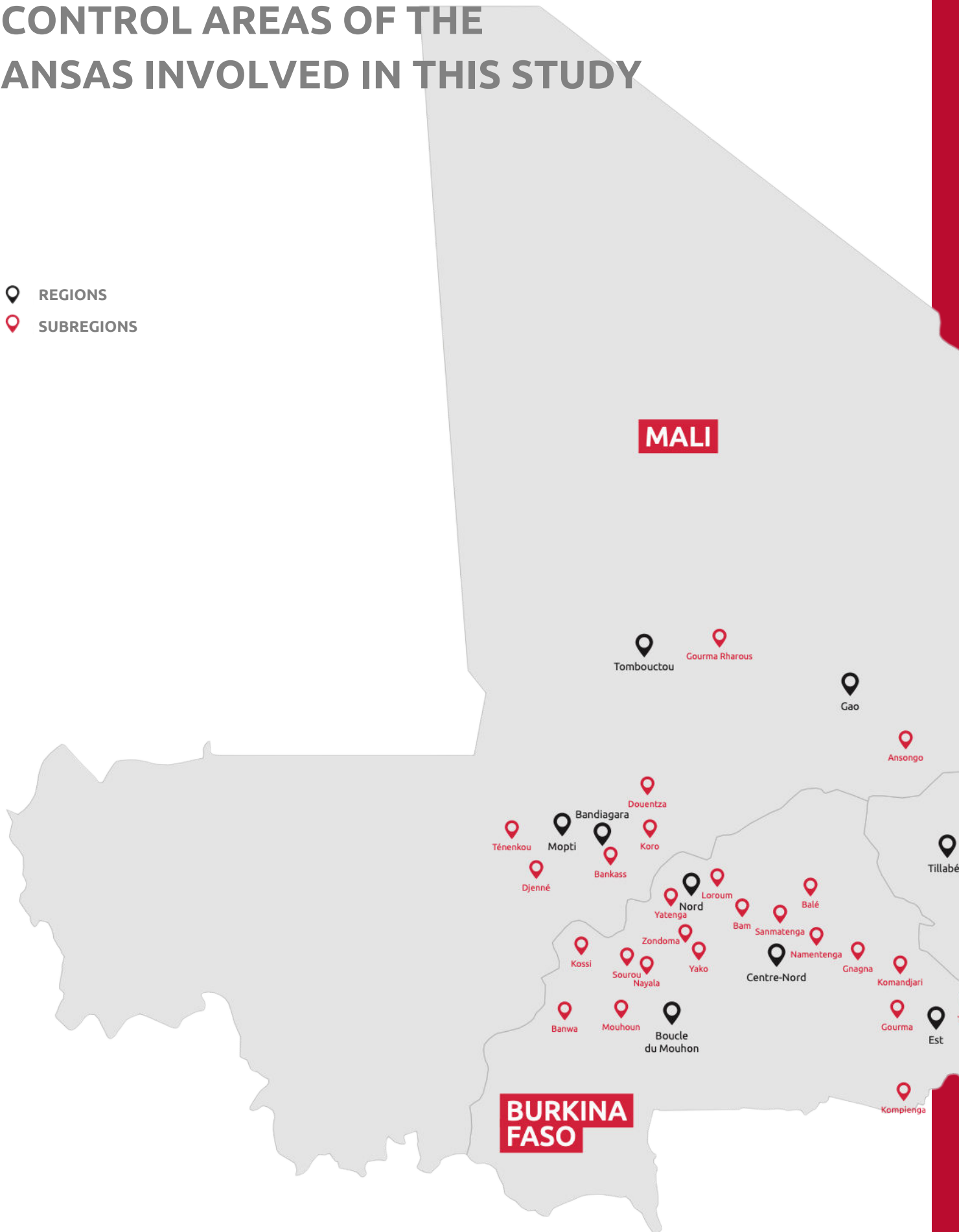


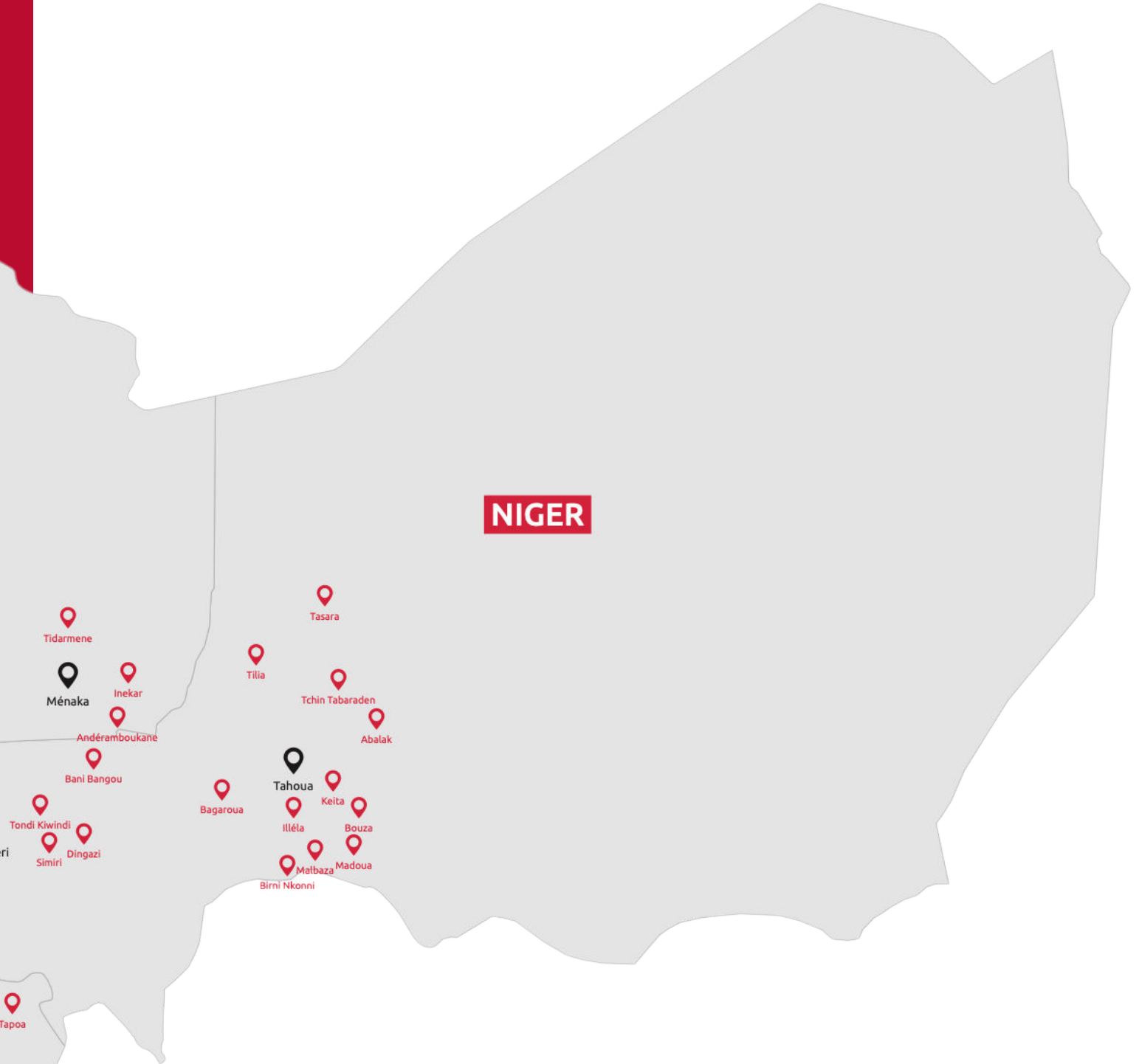
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[3] Two workshops were organised by Geneva Call; first in Bamako (22 March 2022), then in Ouagadougou (25 March 2022). The workshop in Bamako brought together humanitarian actors from different regions of the country. The workshop in Ouagadougou included participants from Burkina Faso and Niger.

# CONTROL AREAS OF THE ANSAS INVOLVED IN THIS STUDY

- 📍 REGIONS
- 📍 SUBREGIONS





## 3. Study results

In order not to compromise the ongoing process of humanitarian engagement with ANSAs, the study did not integrate certain sensitive allegations collected, namely implicating certain self-defence ANSAs. Geneva Call's approach advocates a constructive, dynamic and flexible process of dialogue, with whistleblowing as a last resort.

### 3.1 Comparative analysis of the perception of humanitarian actors by self-defence ANSAs.

#### Typical examples in the three countries.

The Central Sahel region is characterised by a **difference between ANSAs** in terms of presence, profile, circumstances, creation objective, area of intervention and evolution over time. In addition, it should be remembered that the **position of the authorities** with regard to ANSAs is specific to each country. The perception analyses are therefore presented by country with the inclusion of comparative elements of the three countries by location. In addition, a summary has been included at the end of this chapter to present the dimension of cross-border influence.



## Mali

Perceived as the epicentre of the crisis in Central Sahel, Mali is experiencing the presence of a mosaic of self-defence ANSAs with most often divergent agendas, profiles and interests. These ANSAs can be categorised according to their geographical coverage in the country, their date and circumstances of creation. The categorisation according to their geographical presence highlights two main groups: armed non-state actors from the North and those from the Centre.

Self-Defence ANSAs in **Northern Mali** operate in all five regions: Gao, Kidal, Ménaka, Taoudéni and Timbuktu. This region of Mali is characterised by the Tuareg-Arab tendency which is a signatory of the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement made up of the MNLA, the HCUA and part of the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA-CMA). To these is added the ANSA GATIA which is not a signatory of the peace agreement, but fights regularly alongside the regular forces. ANSAs with Tuareg-Sonrai tendencies, also non-signatories to the peace agreement, are represented by the MSA, Ganda Izo, CJA-G, Ganda Lassalizo, CJA-E, FPA, MPSA, CMFPR-3, ACRTG. Some of the Tuareg-Arab groups have their origins in the various cyclical rebellions that have taken place in Mali since 1963, while others have emerged as a result of inter-community tensions arising from these rebellions or from the deterioration of the security context due to the multiple attacks by so-called "radical" ANSAs.

The porosity of these ANSAs makes humanitarian access difficult. A humanitarian actor said: "Each time an area is occupied by a different ANSA, negotiations must be resumed to gain access to the same area for the implementation of activities.

**We sometimes put activities on hold while we wait. "**

Concerning the self-defence ANSAs of the **Centre of Mali**, they mainly operate in the Mopti region (flooded and exposed part). These are Dan Na Ambassagou predominantly Dogon, Ganda Izo predominantly Sonrai and the Alliance for the Salvation of the Sahel (ASS) predominantly Fulani. The first ANSA, made up mostly of Dozo members, has existed for a very long time, but has adapted and restructured to deal with attacks from so-called "radical" ANSAs. The second ANSA is an extension of Ganda Izo de Gao, set up in Mopti in Sokoura. The third was created in 2018, in response to attacks on Fulani villages in the circles of Koro and Djenné. It is mainly made up of members of the Fulani community, and is active in the Mopti region with a concentration in the circles of Djenné, Douentza and Koro. During the interview, one of the members of this self-defence group said: "Our group was formed to fight against the abuses committed against the Fulani, because there is a lot of confusion between the Fulani and the members of so-called 'radical' groups". He continued by insisting on the feeling of abandonment of this community by the Malian State and the other self-defence ANSAs in these terms: "Everyone is against us, including the Dozo and the Dogon", referring to Dan Na Ambassagou.

These self-defence ANSAs are characterised by their community or territorial affiliation. This leads them to ask the community to contribute to the "war effort" either by giving them a "good arm", or a contribution in kind or in cash. "As a young man from Bandiagara, I was forced to join [Dan Na Ambassagou] to help in the defence and protection of the population. There are villages that have preferred to donate millet from their harvest".

In the North as in the Centre of Mali, the self-defence ANSAs approached claim to work for the peace of the communities and their well-being. **"It has been a long time since the state has protected us when there are attacks. This is why we have come together to defend and protect our people"**, shared a member of a self-defence ANSA of the North.

However, according to the information collected, they would also contribute to the deterioration of security, leading to collateral damage to civilians, displacement of communities, violence and abuses against the most vulnerable. These self-defence ANSAs, who initially claimed to have been created to defend their villages, and perhaps anticipate imminent attacks by so-called "radical" ANSAs, have often been implicated in abuses against communities. Numerous testimonies collected for this study attest to this: **"I had to leave Koro to settle in Bandiagara camp to flee [from ANSAs] (...). I was suspected of helping the Fulani (...)"**. **"We have always lived together but when things got worse, I helped them move to Ouahigouya [(Burkina Faso)]"**. **"Neighbours reported me. When they [ANSA] arrived at my house, they did not find me, but they threatened my wife and my children. We had to leave the village the same day."** Dan Na Ambassagou has notably been the subject of several allegations of human rights violations, the most emblematic of which is linked to its involvement in the attack on Ogossagou in March 2019, characterised by the massacre of more than 150 civilians belonging to the Fulani community

Just as the signatory ANSAs of the peace agreement maintain relations with the State in accordance with the content of the agreement and have put in place a monitoring mechanism to ensure the continuity of the quality of their relations, the self-defence ANSAs such as Dan Na Amabssagou and GATIA, claim to be close to the State to secure the population and its property. Regarding their perception of humanitarian actors these self-defence ANSAs expressed divergent

opinions. For some, the actions of humanitarian organisations are part of a real desire to satisfy populations in need and confronted with the consequences of armed conflicts. This discourse, specific to the signatory groups, is most often held by the representatives of the political wings of self-defence ANSAs whose mission is to build an image of these armed movements by justifying their actions. **"They [humanitarian actors] are helping our people. They bring food for those in need and food for our children who are malnourished. They also make water points for us"**.

Others, on the other hand, perceive humanitarian actors as working on behalf of the state or Western countries to infiltrate ANSAs (self-defence and so-called "radicals"), as illustrated by the response of one civil servant close to these movements: **"ANSAs are often hostile to humanitarian organisations which they consider to be allies of the State which is their enemy"**.

Along the same lines, a village authority told us: **"Every time you [humanitarian actors] come, we are attacked by armed men. They think that you come to see things to report them and then it is us [the villagers] who are accused of giving you information"**.

According to one member of a self-defence ANSA, the fact that they do not have enough information about humanitarian actors reinforces this mistrust: **"If they [humanitarian actors] could warn us in advance within a reasonable time of any actions or activities in our areas, we would have more confidence"**. Humanitarian actors have also been criticised for their perceived lack of neutrality towards armed actors, for their poor targeting of beneficiaries and for disrespecting customs and the dignity of beneficiaries when distributing aid. According to a member of a self-defence ANSA:

**"You say you come to help people when you don't give to everyone. Why do you decide to give to X and not to Y when both have needs?"**

**Then you gather people in the public square for your distributions. Everyone sees you. Isn't it better to do it discreetly?"**

Self-defence ANSAs' distrust of humanitarian actors is said to be due, on the one hand, to their poor understanding of humanitarian action and its principles, as well as to their feeling of "non-involvement" in the delivery of humanitarian aid in general and in the process of selecting beneficiaries in particular. On the other hand, this mistrust would be due to the fact that humanitarian actors have access to areas that are difficult to access under the control of so-called "radical" ANSAs, and to the fact that they believe that humanitarian actors negotiate and dialogue a lot more with the latter than with them.

Another specificity of Mali lies in the confusion of self-defence ANSAs between humanitarian workers and security forces who also carry out humanitarian actions spontaneously. According to a member of an ANSA, **"We no longer know who is doing what in the end because whether it is the humanitarians or the military, everyone says they are doing something for the population. Let whoever is there for security do security and whoever is there for [humanitarian] aid do humanitarian aid"**. A humanitarian actor, for his part, clarified: **"There are many Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) implemented by local actors with financial support from MINUSMA. Even if they respond to an urgent or important need, the implementation of these projects feeds confusion between humanitarian, development and security actors in the field"**, shared a humanitarian actor.

For example, the project to reduce community violence and empower women in the urban municipality of Gao, funded by the DDR-RSS section of MINUSMA to support 500 people, including 230 women. With such an arrangement, it becomes difficult for the communities to differentiate these actions from those included in the framework of humanitarian action.

## Burkina Faso

Compared to Mali, where a large number of self-defence ANSAs operate and coexist, Burkina Faso only has two groups – at the time of the study – namely the Koglweogo and the Dozo. According to interviews with members of these two groups, neither of them covers the Sahel region (Burkina Faso). This area does not have a self-defence ANSA presence, although it is important to note the presence of the Rugga, an unarmed herding association that many consider as a self-defence ANSA even though it is not one. While the Koglweogo are active in eight regions out of the thirteen in the country, mainly in the Mossi Plateau [5] and the Gulmu (eastern region), the Dozo are present in the four regions of the far west [6] of the country. **“To avoid conflicts between us and the Dozo, we do not act in their areas and they do the same for our areas”**, shared a Kogleweogo member.

The Koglweogo - “guardians of the bush” in the local language - emerged during the 2000s in the Mossi Plateau and in 2016 in Gulmu (eastern region) as localised groups set up to protect the property of their community in areas where the state had difficulty maintaining a permanent presence. In their current organisation, the study has found that it is subdivided into two: the Koglweogo with Mossé tendency (older) and those with Gourmantchè tendency (recent). **“I have observed the Koglweogo of the Mossi Plateau extensively, their modus operandi and their results in reducing banditry in their locality. I then entered into discussions with the customary Chiefs of Gulmu who authorised me to set up Koglweogo called 'Tin Kubi udogu' in the Eastern region in 2016”**, stated the Chief of Kogleweogo operating in the Eastern region.

The two tendencies of Koglweogo were therefore able to maintain a community anchorage in the protection of people and property in

certain regions. **“We are quick and efficient in our interventions and we do not charge travel expenses unlike the police. This is why the communities trust us”**, shared a member of the Northern Kogleweogo. However, their way of dispensing justice and the allegations of abuse to which they are subjected would be the basis of their rejection in certain localities according to the discussions during the focus groups with them. **“The thieves' accomplices and their relatives are doing everything to tarnish our reputation. They accuse us of using terror, beatings to get thieves to confess their crimes”**, shared a Koglweogo member.

It is necessary here to know the difference between the Koglweogo and VDHs. Although they are recruited within the Koglweogo and the Dozo, the VDHs do not have ANSA status because they were instituted by law no.002-2020/AN of 21 January 2020 and act under the supervision and the DSF command of Burkina Faso. They are therefore auxiliaries of the DSF, voluntarily serving the security interests of their village or area of residence, under a contract signed between the volunteer and the State. The duration of the commitment is one year renewable and the re-engagement results in the signing of a new contract. Consequently, VDHs no longer meet the ANSA criteria considered in the context of this study. However, it can be difficult for a humanitarian actor in the field to tell the difference between a VDH and a member of Koglweogo because there are no external signs of differentiation. It is only by exchanging with them that it is possible to identify them, hence the confusion within the community on the VDH-Koglweogo issue.

As in Mali, self-defence ANSAs in Burkina Faso have been accused of committing wrongdoings that amount to human rights violations. For example, the Koglweogo were the subject of allegations in the armed attack in the province of

Yatenga, in the north of Burkina Faso, in March 2020. Homes and property reportedly burned, people killed indiscriminately [7].

The quality of the **relationship between the Koglweogo and the DSF** depends on the circumstances and differs from one locality to another. It emerged from discussions with the Koglweogo that before the deterioration of the security situation and the multiplication of attacks by so-called “radical” ANSAs, their relationship with the DSF was better, both in Gulmu and in the Mossi Plateau. **“We had a perfect collaboration with the regal state forces at the local level, whether it was the police or the gendarmerie. During our patrols, if we apprehend someone suspicious, or whose situation is beyond our understanding, we transfer them to the local police station for questioning”**, shared a member of Koglweogo operating in Gulmu.

However, with the expansion of the so-called “radical” ANSAs and their different positioning in the fight against them, relations between the Kogleweogo and the DSF deteriorated, particularly in Gulmu where the Koglweogo decided not to engage in the fight against so-called “radical” ANSAs. The selection of some members of Koglweogo as Volunteers for the Defence of the Homeland (VDH) also contributed to this degradation.

It emerged from the discussions that members who have not been selected as VDHs feel less valued by state forces: **“I set up the Koglweogo in all the villages in the Eastern region. We have regional and provincial coordination. I cannot understand that it is others who are taken as VDH and not my elements”**, said a Koglweogo member. The interviews also raised hopes that their relationship with the DSF would return to the way it was.

On the other hand, the brotherhood of traditional **Dozo** hunters also plays the role of self-defence ANSA

[5] (Nord/Ouahigouya, Centre-Nord/Kaya, Plateau Central/Ziniaré, Centre-sud/Manga, Centre-Est/Tinkodogo, Centre-Ouest/Koudougou and Centre/Ouagadougou)

[6] Sud-Ouest (Gaoua), Cascade (Banfora), Hauts-Bassins (Bobo Dioulasso), Boucle du Mouhoun (Dédougou)

[7] <https://www.amnesty.org/fr/latest/news/2020/03/burkina-faso-witness-testimony-confirms-armed-group/>, Amnesty International, 10 March 2020

in the western part of Burkina Faso. To be a Dozo (Dozoya) means to possess considerable knowledge in almost every aspect of life. It is a way of thinking, of living, and of tradition. The most important of the federations of brotherhoods of Dozo hunters in Burkina Faso is the **National Union of Dozo**, comprising 17,000 members from 142 brotherhoods. **The Confrérie des Dozo sans Frontières**, formerly the *Union nationale des Dozo tradipraticiens de la Santé du Burkina Faso*, also plays a key role. In September 2020, during the General Assembly of the Dozo of Burkina Faso, the representatives present decided to create a **High Council of the Dozo of Burkina Faso**, intended to be the common interlocutor within the brotherhood, in a context marked by the fight against so-called "radical" ANSAs. Therefore, these three brotherhoods represent the Dozo, depending on the localities of intervention, and make commitments to facilitate humanitarian access.

It emerged from the discussions with the Dozo that the Dozoya spirit and action is structured around four dimensions.

The first dimension is hunting and protecting the population - and it is precisely in this dimension that they bear arms. Their original purpose was to hunt for food and to use weapons only when necessary to protect the population. Their Dogon membership could suggest that this self-defence ANSA has links with Dan Na Ambassagou, which is not the case. However, with the deterioration of the security situation and the attacks of the so-called "radical" ANSAs, the same reaction was noted, when the Dozo took on a role of self-defence and support to the DSF in securing people and their property, including in the fight against so-called "radical" ANSAs. **"We cannot remain indifferent to the current security situation. It is our country to all of us and we must act for its protection. In this struggle, more than 65 of us have fallen. All the more reason to launch this appeal to all the Dozo so**

**that we can speak the same language for the security of our country"**, shared a Dozo member.

The second dimension concerns the preservation and transmission of traditional, social and moral values specific to the Dozoya. The third dimension is linked to traditional therapy based on natural medicine and pharmacopoeia and the therapeutic virtues of plants. **"Our action cannot be reduced to the use of weapons alone"**, shared another Dozo member who specialises in traditional medicine.

Similar to the self-defence ANSAs in northern and central Mali, the Dozo have a **good and stable relationship with the DSF**. **"We collaborate with the DSF. We share information with them as part of the fight against poaching and the fight against so-called 'radical' groups"**, said a Dozo member.

This good relationship between the Dozo and the DSF, compared to the Koglweogo, is due on the one hand to the Dozoya spirit, which advocates good collaboration with all components of society, and on the other hand, to the lull in the security situation in the western regions where they operate, compared to areas under Koglweogo control. Indeed, the more precarious the security situation, the more complex the involvement of self-defence ANSAs, which can influence their relationship with the DSF.

**On the question of their perception of humanitarian actors**, members of Koglweogo and Dozo mentioned their lack of understanding of the methods used to target beneficiaries, their doubts about the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian actors, and their suspicions about the existence of possible agreements between humanitarian actors and the so-called "radical" ANSAs, which would allow them to access the areas under their control. **"We don't know how humanitarians select and distribute food to IDPs. We only see them at sites with their colours calling people and distributing food to them"**, shared a Koglweogo member on the

issue of distributions and beneficiary selection.

Burkina Faso's two self-defence ANSAs also mentioned the fact that humanitarian actors accord them little legitimacy. **"The humanitarians don't consider us. Only one or two NGOs are used to interacting with us and are interested in us"**. This perception was particularly mentioned by the Dozo operating in the Boucle du Mouhoun, which is the region most affected by the crisis in the Grand Ouest, and which has a large number of humanitarian actors compared to the other regions (Hauts-Bassins, Cascades and Sud-Ouest).

The interviews conducted with self-defence ANSAs mainly raising doubts and suspicions about humanitarian actors would be based on a **poor understanding of humanitarian principles**. This could be due in particular to a **lack of a framework for exchanges between** the Koglweogo and humanitarian actors or a lack of training sessions on humanitarian principles. It may also be due to a lack of **pooling of messages aimed at ANSAs** in general, and self-defence ANSAs in particular.

Given the opposition between so-called "radical" ANSAs and self-defence ANSAs, the more humanitarian actors increase discussions with so-called "radical" ANSAs to the detriment of self-defence ANSAs, the more the latter will develop a negative perception of humanitarian actors. **They must ensure that they have the same intensity in the discussions with the two types of armed group** (so-called "radicals" and self-defence), and in general, with all the parties to the conflict in order to preserve neutrality.

## Niger

While in Mali and Burkina Faso self-defence ANSAs are identified by a hierarchy, areas of intervention, and benefit from recognition by state authorities of their existence as self-defence ANSAs; in Niger, self-defence ANSAs are in a “low profile” posture and are concerned that their emergence and eventual public recognition as ANSAs could challenge the authority of the state. **“A self-defence group is not meant to last. Its creation is an immediate and short-term response to insecurity. It must not act in such a way as to compromise the authority and the return of the State. We are and act in this posture”**, said a member of Tillia’s watch and vigilance committee. This ANSA decided to call itself a “watch committee”, precisely to avoid underlining the armed nature of their presence. According to the same testimony, this posture has earned this ANSA to maintain good relations with the DSF and the authorities in place. However, this group meets the ANSA definition criteria, as defined by Geneva Call, that is: a group with armed members (access to weapons and recruits), organised (with a command/control structure and capable of carrying out military operations), and non-state in nature (not being formally integrated into state institutions). So, as part of the study, two self-defence ANSAs agreed to discuss with Geneva Call.

**The Tillia Watch and Vigilance Committee** is a self-defence ANSA present and active in the Tahoua region. Although they are armed, they advocate the character of watch and vigilance to ensure the protection and security of populations in areas where there is a weak presence of the DSF, hence their name. **“The term ‘armed group’ does not suit us”**, they insisted. The members of this “committee” are from the municipality of Tillia, or are former residents of Libya, having fled the country after the fall of

Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The peculiarity of this self-defence ANSA is that it was created in response to attacks against the civilian population. Indeed, it was set up following the attack of 21 March 2021 in the municipality of Tillia, which caused the death of more than 200 civilians, including women and children.

This group has a **good working relationship with the DSF; “500 of our members have been recruited into the defence and security forces. They have been deployed in nomadic areas to secure populations and their property”**. This collaboration revolves around the sharing of intelligence, the organisation of patrols and their participation in hostilities against so-called “radical” ANSAs.

Like the Tillia Committee, the **Batama Gonda Koy** group - “his master's domain” in the local language - was created in 2020 following violent attacks by so-called “radical” ANSAs against civilian populations in the Tillabéry region, municipality of Banibangou, located on the border with Mali. The members of the group are mostly Zarma. The goal of the self-defence ANSA is **“to guarantee peace and security for people and property in their village”**. The ANSA operates as a formal association with a status signed and legalised by the Town Hall of the municipality of Banibangou, and internal regulations. They do not yet have a high profile in the country like the Tillia Watch Committee, and most of their members are in their first experience as self-defence ANSA members, unlike the Tillia Watch Committee which includes members who participated in rebellions in Niger and combatants from Libya. **“We talk a lot with our brothers from Tillia to learn from their experience because we face the same problem and the same enemy”**, a member of the group told us. Unlike the self-defence ANSAs of Burkina Faso and Mali, those of Niger have not been the subject of allegations of human rights violations against civilian

populations.

For the **little contact they have with the DSF, they describe their relationship as “good”**. **“We respect the authority of the state and communicate with the DSF. But since they don't have a permanent presence in our municipality, we are forced to organise ourselves to defend ourselves”**. The ANSA members also raised the possibility of the State recruiting within their group, as was the case with the Tillia Committee. They say they have had discussions with the authorities in this direction and that if this happens, their relationship with the DSF would be even better and more productive for both parties. The **perception of humanitarian actors** reported by these self-defence ANSAs was not as negative as that of ANSAs in Mali and Burkina Faso, particularly on the issue of doubt about neutrality and impartiality. They spoke of their lack of understanding of beneficiary targeting methods. According to members of Batama Gonda Koy, humanitarian actors very often make duplications and do not always assist the most vulnerable people.

The members of the Tillia Committee particularly deplored the fact that humanitarian actors are not present in the areas heavily affected by the crisis and that they are all concentrated in the main towns. **“These humanitarian actors base their security analyses on information from the media and social networks while the situation on the ground is totally different. Until they change that, they won't go any further than the regional headquarters”**. The same ANSA also perceives few frameworks for exchange between its members and humanitarian actors. **“It is true that we are keeping a low profile, but it is also true that the humanitarian actors have not given us the opportunity to exchange”**.

Some members mentioned that it would be difficult - if not impossible - for them to work with humanitarian



actors if the latter have to work at the same time with the so-called “radical” ANSAs. “We will never accept being put on the same level as so-called ‘radical’ groups. They can't talk to them and talk to us. Humanitarian actors must understand that so-called ‘radical’ groups have no regard for human rights and humanitarian principles. Their ideology is diametrically opposed to it”.



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## Summary and Regional Analysis

Although they are neighbours, share many socio-cultural similarities and face practically the same security crisis characterised by the fight against so-called “radical” ANSAs, the countries of the Central Sahel region present many internal and contextual specificities. While Mali remains the country with the largest number of self-defence ANSAs and has emerged as the epicentre of the Central Sahel crisis since Muammar Gaddafi's fall from power in 2011, the number of self-defence ANSAs in Burkina Faso remains limited and the recognition of the latter is less important in Niger.

In all three countries, relations between self-defence ANSAs and state authorities are described as “good”, despite the fragility of these links expressed by the Koglweogo in eastern Burkina Faso. Indeed, this relationship is due to the particularity of Burkina Faso, where these ANSAs have obtained **national status**(VDP) and close ties with state forces. This shows an accountability of these ANSAs which remains limited by training and minimal control, which does not provide better protection of the civilian population. On the other hand, the authorities of Niger show a certain caution with regard to the formation of self-defence ANSAs. This could lead to criticism from the population,

who demand protection in the absence of the authorities.

A more general and regional analysis of the data from this study shows that, as long as the security and humanitarian situation in Mali remains unstable and precarious, the situation in Burkina Faso and Niger will remain fragile. This should encourage humanitarians to develop more regional actions and programmes that would meet the humanitarian needs and internal specificities of each country, but according to a regional strategy.

Apart from the members of the signatory movements, all the self-defence ANSAs approached in this study raised a perception of humanitarian actors that is not positive, in particular because of doubts about respect for the principles of neutrality and impartiality, particularly in Burkina Faso and Mali. The issue of self-defence ANSAs would therefore deserve more attention from humanitarian actors in the preparation and implementation of their intervention for several reasons, including; i) the high risk that these misperceptions translate into a negative influence on the perception of communities; ii) the risk of further impeding humanitarian access, beyond the constraints discussed in this report.

Although cross-border interactions and **potential influences** between

self-defence ANSAs were not raised in this study, the risk of a “contamination effect” cannot be excluded. The case of Dan Na Ambassagou in Mali, composed mainly of Dozo members and based on the same initiation process as the Dozo of Burkina Faso, is an example to remember. Having undergone a significant restructuring, moving from a group of “traditional hunters” to a self-defence ANSA profile following the resurgence of attacks by so-called “radical” ANSAs, the involvement of this self-defence ANSA in certain allegations of rights violations in Mali could influence the Dozo of Burkina Faso to adopt hostile and violent practices towards the civilian population and humanitarian actors. This observation is retained for preventive purposes.

In addition, the high level of **inter-community** tensions caused by the deterioration of the conflict in Central Mali, which led to the formation - or the integration - of new orientations within the self-defence ANSAs, could also extend in Burkina Faso. This is particularly true in areas where the Koglweogo operate, areas where allegations of attacks on Fulani villages have also been raised [8]. So, the allegations of Dan Na Amabssagou's involvement could have an influence on the practices of the Koglweogo in Burkina Faso.

### 3.2 Access constraints and mitigation and adaptation measures adopted by humanitarian actors.

Humanitarian access is a prerequisite for humanitarian aid. During armed conflict, IHL governs humanitarian access, and humanitarian organisations are authorised to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians in need, acting impartially and without adverse distinction, and seeking the consent of the parties.

According to IHL, the parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief supplies to civilians in need, subject to their right of control. Humanitarian personnel and goods are considered civilians and as such must be respected and protected from attack [9]. In addition, prohibitions include:

Destruction, embezzlement or looting of humanitarian goods, as well as harassment, intimidation, physical violence, kidnapping, hostage taking and the arbitrary detention of humanitarian personnel. Deliberate attacks against humanitarian personnel and goods with civilian status constitute a war crime.

Geneva Call, in accordance with IHL, maintains that humanitarian action is guided by the four humanitarian principles, namely:

- **Humanity:** the imperative to protect human life, health and dignity.

- **Impartiality:** no discrimination should be made on the basis of race, political beliefs, nationality, religion or class and aid should be provided on the basis of need only.

- **Neutrality:** relief workers must avoid taking sides during an armed conflict or engaging in political or religious controversies.

- **Independence:** the imperative to maintain autonomy from governments and other actors.



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#### 3.2.1 Access constraints

The strong feeling of **doubt about neutrality and impartiality** noted during interviews with self-defence ANSAs has resulted in the creation of real access constraints for humanitarian actors in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The manifestation of these constraints is different from country to country, but also shows some similarities.

- **Access constraints related to the establishment of checkpoints by self-defence ANSAs:**

This constraint was mentioned more often by humanitarian actors in Mali, particularly in the Mopti region. The Dan Na Ambassagou checkpoints in Central Mali were the most cited by the humanitarian actors surveyed. **“We get irregular checks at these checkpoints. Even if we manage to explain the objectives of our mission, the reaction will depend on the mood of the members of the group present at the checkpoint. We could spend hours waiting for access”**. In Burkina Faso, the constraint manifests itself in the form of patrols carried out particularly by the Koglweogo along the main roads in the Nord, Est and Centre-Nord

Therefore, this constraint was not mentioned by the humanitarian actors of this country, which does not exclude that, with the evolution of the context, it could appear.

- **Access constraints related to the payment of taxes on the main roads:**

This constraint was particularly reported by humanitarian actors in Mali and Burkina Faso, but was not raised in Niger. In Mali, these taxes are claimed at checkpoints and in Burkina Faso during patrols organised by self-defence ANSAs. Here too, Dan Na Ambassagou and the Koglweogo were the most cited. **“We give the tea money out of our own pockets to get access. I know it's not a good thing but until all organisations agree and have the same practice, I don't see any other solution at the moment”**, shared a humanitarian actor in Mali.

In relation to this constraint, it is interesting to note that the heads of zone of the various self-defence ANSAs are not all in phase with the main chain of command. This was mentioned for the municipality of Petaka, in the circle of Douentza (Mopti, Mali), where the head of zone of a self-defence ANSA did not

[9] Rule 55 of customary international law applicable in both international and non-international armed conflicts: The parties to the conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction, subject to their right of control. ”

have the same information on the facilitation of humanitarian access as in Mopti. “We had this problem in Petaka. The head of the zone was not aware that we had had access through his hierarchy in Bandiagara”, explains a humanitarian actor. “He refused us passage until we gave the price of the tea”.

- **Complication of humanitarian access depending on the “community receiving aid”:**

Interviews and discussions with humanitarian actors revealed that self-defence ANSAs make humanitarian access more difficult or easier depending on the community receiving aid. When an assistance or distribution mission has to pass through a self-defence ANSA checkpoint to deliver aid to another village that is not from their community, access is often denied.

This was mentioned mainly in Mali. “An ambulance transporting a patient was stopped at a self-defence group checkpoint in the Mopti region. Members of the group refused for hours to let the ambulance through because the patient was of a different ethnicity from theirs. It took the involvement and negotiation of another NGO with a humanitarian negotiation mandate for the members of the group to finally allow the ambulance to pass”, shared a humanitarian actor in Mali.

- **Complication of humanitarian access for “ethnic considerations” of the humanitarian actor:**

This constraint would result from the “communitarisation” of self-defence ANSAs and the inter-community tensions generated by their presence and their actions on the ground. It was mentioned in Mali (Mopti) and

Burkina Faso (Nord, Est). In addition to denying or complicating access, humanitarian personnel of a different ethnicity than members of a self-defence ANSA occupying an area where they are to be deployed, face serious risks to their own security.

“For security reasons, there was a time when we did not send Fulani [Peul] personnel on mission to Dogon localities”, shared a humanitarian actor responsible for security management. Another humanitarian worker from the Dogon community shared: “I’m from the area but I’m not better perceived. It happened to me that I was told that I am not a real son of the Dogon country. This happened to me at a checkpoint on the fish route. All this because our organisation intervenes both in Dogon villages and in Fulani villages”.



### 3.2.2 Risk mitigation and adaptation measures through civil-military coordination mechanisms

#### 3.2.2.1 Risk Mitigation and Adaptation Measures by CMCoords:

At the time of this study, CMCoord mechanisms were operational in the three countries of Central Sahel. At different levels of progress and in accordance with their tasks, roles and objectives, as described in the guidance note [10] of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the CMCoords play the role of interface between humanitarian actors and the military, as well as sometimes self-defence ANSAs. The actions carried out by the CMCoord in coordination with self-defence ANSAs and humanitarian actors illustrate mitigation initiatives and lessons learned for better coordination, especially in countries where the CMCoord has been in place for less time.

In **Mali**, the CMCoord was created in 2013 with Bamako as its first coverage area; subsequently regional units in Mopti, Timbuktu and Gao were set up to support operational coordination and feedback information. During this year (2022), cells should be established in Ménaka and Ségou. The CMCoord has taken several mitigation measures in relation to the constraints posed by self-defence ANSAs. These measures are adapted each year according to the evolution of the context:

- The development and periodic update of a **mapping of ANSAs**, with a focus on self-defence ANSAs: this mapping is shared with humanitarian actors and allows them to better understand the dynamics of the most active ANSAs and their impact on humanitarian access. This cartography is also accompanied by the map of axes and areas of difficult access [11].

- Negotiating access to self-defence ANSAs: the multiple checkpoints set up by Dan Na Ambassagou on the RN15 road in Mopti considerably limited access for humanitarian actors. In July 2021, at the request of humanitarian actors in Mopti, a **negotiation action was undertaken by the CMCoord with the self-defence ANSA** in order to improve access to the “snake route”. The negotiation was followed by a training session on humanitarian principles and action organised by the CMCoord, during which the ANSA pledged to reduce controls on the movements of humanitarian actors. **“We no longer have a checkpoint on the road to Gao and Timbuktu, go ahead, check for yourself. And even if you find blockages, it will be our young people (...). If the Fulani attack them, they will continue to block the roads. Tell the Fulani to stop (...) and things will change”**, shared a member of Dan Na Ambassagou.

- In September 2021, the CMCoord in Mopti organised a second **training session** for members of the signatory groups of the peace agreement and those of the Dan Na Ambassagou group. The training focused on humanitarian action, its principles and civil-military coordination. The participants of Dan Na Ambassagou were encouraged and accompanied to restore the knowledge acquired to other members of their group. **“I received this training on humanitarian principles by the United Nations and I try to make sense of things. I am committed to sensitising young fighters not to attack schools, health centres, women, and children. But you should know that we are not attacking these categories. Our problem is the traitors”**, shared a member of Dan Na Ambassagou.

Unlike Mali, the CMCoord in **Burkina Faso** is relatively recent. It has existed since 2020 with focal points in Kaya (Centre-Nord) and Ouahigouya (Nord). It is currently managing to create a framework for exchange between humanitarian actors and military authorities. This is the first challenge, given that the

humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso is recent compared to Mali. The DSF and self-defence ANSAs have little past experience in civil-military coordination. The measures taken by the CMCoord in Burkina Faso are as follows:

- Support for the **Working Group on Access** to ensure better sharing and pooling of information and access strategies. The limit of this working group, according to a humanitarian actor, is that it is much more focused on the analysis of security than on the practices of dialogue and negotiation of access. According to this same witness, the people who participate in the group are generally responsible for security within their organisation.
- Efforts and **reflections** to better structure and consolidate the CMCoord in the country. In this sense, the CMCoord strategy, currently being developed, provides for an axis that will particularly target VDHs (who are not listed among armed non-state actors).
- The CMCoord has organised training on humanitarian action, humanitarian principles and civil-military coordination. It strives to integrate VDHs into the participants of future trainings.

Being more recent in Burkina Faso, the CMCoord could draw inspiration from the actions and lessons learned from the nine years of intervention of the CMCoord of Mali to engage in access negotiations in relation to the constraints cited, resulting from the actions of self-defence ANSAs, notably the Koglweogo and the Dozo.

In **Niger**, the position of the authorities regarding self-defence ANSAs does not allow the CMCoord

[10] [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Guidance%20Note-CMCoord%20Support%20to%20Protection%20CMCS\\_Dec2020.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/Guidance%20Note-CMCoord%20Support%20to%20Protection%20CMCS_Dec2020.pdf)

[11] <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/operations/mali/infographic/mliaxes-et-zones-d%E2%80%99acc%C3%A8s-difficiles-dans-la-r%C3%A9gion-de-mopti17112021>

to engage in discussions with self-defence ANSAs. However, it can carry out analyses on the dynamics of the conflict and the risks associated with the presence of self-defence ANSAs although they are not publicly acknowledged. It could start a self-defence ANSA mapping exercise. Operational since 2020, the CMCoord is available at the operational level in the regions of Tillabéry, Tahoua, Maradi and Diffa, although the organisations participating in it have a variable level depending on the humanitarian and military actors. There are representatives of the United Nations system, representatives of NGOs, the military, and the Ministry of Humanitarian Action.

### 3.2.2.2 Ongoing mitigation and adaptation measures by humanitarian actors

To cope with **staffing constraints**, humanitarian actors often resort to local recruitment. In Mali, the choice of community and religious profile of personnel to be sent to the area (Bandiagara, Koro, Bankass, Djenné, Douentza) is important. But this does not guarantee a definitive solution to this problem, nor is it unanimously accepted. According to a humanitarian actor present in the Mopti region in Central Mali: **"It is even better to bring someone from Kayes here than to take someone from the locality. At least they will tell themselves that the person is not from the area and does not take sides"**.

On the constraints related to checkpoints, some discussions raised the importance of preparing staff on how to behave and on key messages to present the organisation, its mandate and the purpose of the mission. It is also important that humanitarian actors take the same approach to the issue of crossing fees. **"If one of us gives the price of the tea, all the others will be forced to give it too. If we refuse while others will be forced to give it too. If we refuse while others do, they [ANSAs] will deny us access "**. The discussions also revealed that humanitarian actors rely on local

resources (relays) for local actions in difficult sectors in order to have information and alerts on each axis of the intervention area.

### 3.2.2.3 Possibilities of dialogue with self-defence ANSAs

Despite the negative perceptions and constraints raised, discussions with self-defence ANSAs indicate that **dialogue and negotiation are not closed or impossible**. For their part, the humanitarian actors met underlined that the negotiation of access also depends on the relations that the organisation maintains in the area and with the ANSAs. **"Each of us [humanitarian actors] has our contacts and entry points. Resource people or community leaders help us facilitate this dialogue. But outside of our security procedures, we don't have a harmonised approach to how to do this"**, stated a humanitarian actor.

Humanitarian actors mentioned that negotiations are mainly limited by sometimes unreliable interlocutors who want to use or divert humanitarian action for political or economic purposes. They also said they were faced with the temptation, on the part of some ANSAs (mainly self-defence ANSAs in the Mopti region), to impose conditions for humanitarian access. These conditions regularly imply the need for these ANSAs to present themselves as providers of humanitarian aid for the populations in their areas, hoping to derive an economic or political advantage from it. In addition, some of these conditions imply the requirement that humanitarian action be directed to particular communities or localities, to the detriment of those targeted by the organisation concerned.

Organisations like **Geneva Call** implement self-defence ANSA capacity building actions on IHL and international humanitarian standards. The scope of these formations should not, however, be limited to ANSA coordination members, to the detriment of combatant wing bases. Therefore, Geneva Call was able to benefit from

its **humanitarian commitment with Dan Na Ambassagou** in Mali to facilitate access of two humanitarian actors in the Mopti region, and to negotiate access to health care and the transport of logistics equipment from another organisation.

Paradoxically, it emerged during interviews with humanitarian actors that access is easier in areas under the control of so-called "radical" ANSAs than in areas under the control of self-defence ANSAs. **"I think it's a matter of image on the part of the ANSA itself. Some want people to see them as the ones giving them the help that the state has been unable to give them, and others because they need to regain popularity with their community"**, said a humanitarian actor in Mali.

Some humanitarian actors also believe that very influential people could influence the position of ANSAs, both self-defence and so-called "radicals", and help improve humanitarian access for populations in distress. **"We have leaders in our areas of intervention who are very influential and listened to by ANSAs. They are also involved in our activities such as early warning groups. They facilitate discussions between us and them (ANSAs)"**.

The analysis of these aspects of negotiation and dialogue shows that ANSAs are multiple and, in some cases, poorly structured. Therefore, for humanitarian actors, negotiating access requires adapting **strategies**, developing **knowledge** of the context and maintaining continuous **communication** with all the actors.

Even if the self-defence ANSAs met during this study have different approaches and reactions to humanitarian access, they all say they are open to dialogue, and remain potential negotiation interlocutors to gain access to certain areas outside the control of the State. Although self-defence ANSAs claim to be "protectors of the civilian population", they have practices that expose these civilian populations to the risk of violation of their rights.

## 4. Practical recommendations

These recommendations are based on the lessons of the study but are also drawn from the discussions organised during the workshops to present the first results of the study, in Burkina Faso and Mali.

### To humanitarian actors and the CMCoord

1. Strengthen coordination between the various humanitarian actors within the countries in order to adopt common positions in terms of humanitarian access and operational responses to certain constraints, and in order to transmit the same messages. Humanitarian actors should, as far as possible, harmonise certain dialogue practices with ANSAs, including self-defence ones, and avoid the withholding of information by certain humanitarian actors which can undermine aid effectiveness.
2. Conduct additional studies: a more in-depth study extended to all ANSAs (self-defence and so-called “radicals”) on their perception of humanitarian actors, access constraints and avenues for engagement and negotiation to facilitate humanitarian access. A more in-depth study to analyse the relations of self-defence groups with the authorities (integration into the military, formalisation, logistical and military support, etc.), and to better understand how humanitarian organisations can use dialogue with the military authorities to gain humanitarian access.
3. Rely on the lessons learned from the practices of humanitarian actors and the CMCoord, particularly in the initiatives taken in terms of dialogue and negotiation with self-defence ANSAs, and security risk mitigation measures, including through the creation of a deconfliction system, after a con-

text analysis to ensure the relevance and feasibility of such a system.

4. Refer to the desire shared by self-defence ANSAs to coordinate with humanitarian actors to: i) further explain the humanitarian principles in order to remove their doubts and confusion about humanitarian action (notably through training sessions); ii) facilitate access negotiations in areas under their control using the same techniques applied in negotiating with so-called “radical” ANSAs.
5. Develop actions to revitalise and strengthen community mechanisms for the prevention and management of inter- and intra-community conflicts caused by rivalries between self-defence ANSAs.
6. Analyse the adaptation of the security protocols and procedures of the different organisations to the evolution of the context and the dynamics of the conflict in order to reduce the risks for the security of the humanitarian personnel.
7. Communicate more constructively about protection activities, in particular protection monitoring and conflict early warning activities. These activities include collecting data on incidents and rights violations, also involving self-defence ANSAs. Positive communication would present information in a way that does not expose protection staff.

### To donors

8. Advocate for the mobilisation of funds directed to humanitarian actors specialised in dialogue and awareness-raising with self-defence ANSAs to respect international humanitarian standards, including the facilitation of humanitarian access.





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