

# Strengthening Democratic Control and Oversight of the Security Sector in the Sahel

## Introduction

Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger share a geographical area, the Liptako-Gourma, which has been an epicenter of security threats for the region due to violent extremist and terrorist activities in the Sahel region. The nascent democracies also face internal difficulties in reorganizing relations between the armed forces and civilians that have been marked by decades of mistrust and mutual suspicions. They struggle to institute effective security sector reforms for more transparency and improved civilian oversight. Many elected representatives lack experience in tackling the often complex security issues and are unfamiliar with concepts of democratic oversight, including advocacy and oversight by civil society organizations (CSOs).



*Members of the Defense and Security Commission of Burkina Faso's National Assembly meet members of the armed forces during an informational visit to a military base in Kaya*

In July 2014, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched a program to strengthen democratic control and oversight of the security sector in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, funded by the governments of Denmark and Norway. The program, which in its initial phase was conducted in partnership with the Center for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF), aims to foster effective civilian oversight of the security sector and productive civil-military interactions, help improve the institutional framework governing the security sector, and promote greater understanding of security sector institutions' roles and obligations in a democratic society. Given the transnational nature of the security challenges in the Sahel, the program emphasizes regional approaches and seeks to strengthen cross-border collaboration. In November 2016, NDI organized a regional forum in Ouagadougou with members of parliament (MPs), civil society leaders and executive branch representatives to facilitate interaction, promote dialogue and sustain cooperation on security matters.

## Program Partners

Since then, the Institute has provided technical assistance to MPs serving on defense and security committees to identify opportunities for engagement, and critical needs to improve their involvement. NDI has trained MPs on defense and security budgeting and budget oversight, and on the intersections of gender and security. The program has produced a guide to facilitate legislative committees' oversight and budget control for the defense sector. Through site visits, MPs have gained firsthand knowledge of challenges faced by members of the defense and security services and by citizens in critical areas. In February 2018, during a regional forum in Bamako, the parliamentary defense and security committees of the three Liptako-Gourma countries created a Permanent Consultation Framework to facilitate the exchange of security related information among parliamentarians and to promote cooperation.

As part of this program, four CSOs -- one in Burkina Faso, two in Mali and one in Niger -- have received financial and technical assistance to build their capacities to monitor government security-related activities, report security incidents, conduct studies on security issues, serve as sources of expertise for decision makers, and act as intermediaries for sharing information between officials and populations in unstable regions of the respective countries. In February 2018, simultaneously to the creation of the parliamentary framework, the CSOs engaged in this program created the CSO Platform for Democratic Governance of the Security Sector in the Liptako-Gourma Region, whose members have begun a joint security monitoring initiative.



*Representatives from the Malian government, signatories to the peace accord, and members of defense and security forces at a workshop on the intersection of gender and security in Bamako*



*Nigerien CSO leaders detail how human rights and security intersect, and how citizens can be involved in security governance at a workshop in Tillabéri*

In partnership with DCAF, the Institute has assisted security agency officials to reinforce their capacity. For example, in Burkina Faso, NDI provided guidance to executive branch officials to amend the legal framework governing small arms so as to curtail the spread of such weapons. In Mali, the Institute helped launch the National Council on Security Sector Reform, a body responsible for setting and implementing security sector reform policy, and works to bring a diverse array of citizen voices into the reform process. In Niger, DCAF worked with the National Police to develop a guide to the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct, and to train and monitor the police force on its implementation.

Going forward, the Institute will continue to support the parliamentary Permanent Consultation Framework as members harmonize legislation, address legal gaps, exchange best practices and meet with citizens and defense and security agents to inform the content of new legislation. NDI will support the CSO Platform for Democratic Governance to publish the results of its regional security monitoring, and to conduct advocacy towards decision makers. The program will also engage with strategic security study centers in the three countries to contribute to a regional security approach where policy is based on research that takes citizens' needs and perspectives into account. A regional workshop to share best practices, identify lessons learned and plan future regional initiatives will convene program partners from all three countries.

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