**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

**CONSULTANCY ON CIVIC SPACE IN OXFAM WEST AFRICA:**

**Governance, security, and civic space in Sahel States**

**Terms: November 2022 – February 2023**

Location: Based in West Africa (with a geographic focus on Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Tchad and Senegal); work can be done primarily remotely, but some travel is required for meetings and consultations in the region**.**

1. **Background and Context:**

For various years now, West Africa’ Sahel region has been facing a number of multidimensional and interlinked crises. In particular, the security context has triggered an increasing militarization of the region with the support and encouragement of the international community. In a context of already fragile democracies and authoritarian rules, that security-focus approach is not without impact governance, human rights, and civic space in Sahel societies.

The role of civil society, including women and youth activists, has been increasingly challenging. Critics of the authorities are routinely targeted and repressed. Activists, human rights defenders, lawyers are arrested, NGO had their licenses revoked. The security context of the post COVID-19 pandemic or more recently the military coups that taken place in the region, are being used to shrink further civic space, control activists and silence any critical voices. There are also legislative and regulatory frameworks that impede people’s freedoms and further shrink civic space, such as public order and security laws which seek to regulate, but at most times impede, the activities of human rights defenders and CSOs which are supposed to hold governments accountable. While Sahel states have been struggling with governance issues for decades as well as the accountability of institution to the need of citizens, the provision of essentials quality services. This new context is damaging further the construction of transparent, accountable and democratic public institutions.

In its Sahel strategy, Oxfam identified the renewal of social contract in Sahel societies as a key objective to reduce inequalities and get a more resilient, just and peaceful Sahel. To reach that ambition, it is critical to help protect, promote and transform the space for civil societies. Oxfam is convinced that civil societies play a critical role in the development of better governance. But in the Sahel, bad governance has been the norm for too long and is dangerously fueling widespread mistrust between population and authorities and becoming in turn one of the drivers of armed conflict or coups or the shrinking of civic space.

However, the international community has continuously neglected that aspect of the Sahel’ crises. In recent months social discontent has been raising in the region and political turmoil is ongoing, with now four countries being ruled by military junta: Mali, Chad, Guinea and Burkina Faso. If Niger has recently managed to organize peaceful and relatively open national elections, the deterioration of the security context and the further militarization of the state’s response are threatening a fragile civic space. Even Senegal, seen as an island of stability in the Sahel, faces important social and political discontent. While young people mobilize regularly, the response from Senegalese authorities is often disproportionate and dramatically erodes the trust in the social contract of the country as witnessed by the recent repressed protests during the legislative elections.

1. **Objective of consultancy:**

Civil society organizations and networks are key actors in the fight against poverty, inequality and injustice and frequently act as counterbalance of state capture by political and economic elites. Oxfam works with allies and partners on multiple thematic areas to strengthen their capacity to program and influence. It is our responsibility to understand trends, risks, and opportunities for civil society to continue to work legitimately and safely. Therefore, the objectives of the consultancy are the following:

1/ Identify and analyze the drivers of poor governance and the consequences on the deterioration of the social contract between citizens and state and the space civil society must operate legitimately in the Sahel countries’ contexts. The research would cover the Sahel region with a particular focus on Niger, Tchad, Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso. The analysis will also highlight phenomena of militarization and political/military influences from outside, the role and responsibilities of international actors and consequences on civic space trend, security, and conflicts.

2/ Identify and analyze opportunities for influencing policies, practices, and instruments to promote good governance in Sahel region and protect and increase civic space. This analysis will focus on opportunities at the sub regional (Sahel) and national level and look at relevant multilateral sub regional institutions (ECOWAS, AU) and how they engage with Sahel governments on governance and civic space issues. It will also look at the role of non-state actors at the national and sub-national levels, in particular armed groups taking up Governance functions in parallel to Governments.

3/ Develop political and technical recommendations that would support influencing strategies to improve Governance practices and help open civic space for Oxfam and its partners, at sub-regional, national and sub-national levels where opportunities are the most relevant. The recommendations will emphasize the unique value add Oxfam can bring to partners and allies in the Sahel sub-region but also at the country level.

1. **Key Outcomes of the Consultancy:**

1- An analysis of the governance failures and changes in the Sahel region and what that tells us about consequences on the social contract between governments and citizens, the ability of civil society to operate freely and openly, the deterioration of democratic principles and institutions in the countries. The analysis will pay equal attention to the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of these trends.

2- A country mapping of the manifestations of closing space in Niger, Tchad, Mali, Senegal, and Burkina Faso - The mapping would include the various trends, symptoms, and root causes of the shifting of civic space, their linkages with poor governance, the key players involved in closing the space, the entities advocating to protect and expand civic space. New forms of civic action or movements should be highlighted.

3-Formulate recommendations for Oxfam in Sahel in terms of the role it can and should play to support allies (existing and new) at the sub-regional Sahel level and its partners at the national and sub-national levels as relevant to adapt to shifting civic space, and as much as possible protectand /or expand it.

1. **Methodology:**

In coordination with the Steering Group set with Oxfam, the research consultant may propose a suitable methodology, using existing tools on monitoring and analyzing civic space developed by Oxfam[[1]](#footnote-1). It is recommended that the research includes a desk review of existing literature (internal and external to Oxfam), insights on Oxfam work in the Sahel, as well as key informant interviews and focus group discussion (where relevant) with civil society organizations and networks representatives, researchers, Oxfam staff and partners, relevant journalists covering Sahel issues in particular those reporting on human rights, governance and civil society to be identified jointly with Oxfam teams in the region.

1. **Consultant’s profile:**

• Solid understanding of governance, security, and civic space challenges in Sahel, including politics, policies and instruments related to those thematic area.

• 7-10 years of experience in development cooperation and / or human rights work, preferably working with CSOs

• Previous and documented research experience in the field of good governance, human rights, and civic space.

• Working experience on influencing strategies on issues related to civil society strengthening and/or human rights defenders protection.

• Experience in the region and in fragile context is desirable.

• Fluency in English and French

• Comfortable working as part of a multi-lingual, multi-cultural team

1. **Expected Outputs:**

Documents for internal use:

1. Analysis – maximum 20 pages, including an executive summary

2. Mapping – maximum 5-8 pages per country with an executive summary of maximum 5 pages, with all the relevant data in annex

3. Opportunities for engagement based on Oxfam unique value add

Consultation:

1. Interviews and workshops: based on proposed methodology

2. Facilitation of a validation workshop with relevant stakeholders.

1. **Timeline:**

Total of (30-35) working days, with the suggested below timeline to be adjusted based on agreed methodology:

Closing of call for proposals: from **06 to 20 October**

**Tentative dates of implementation**:

Kick off meeting: Week of Nov 7th

Inception phase: 7th Nov 7th – 21st Nov

Research implementation: 21st Nov – 30th Jan

Validation workshop: Week of 06th Feb.

Draft report: Week of Feb 10th Feb.

Final report: Week of 27 Feb

The consultant will be managed by a Steering Group. The key contact person will be the Civic Space Advisor.

1. Oxfam developed an analytical tool identifying 9 dimensions of civic space – It is recommended to leverage that tool as much as possible – see <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/civic-space-monitoring-tool-understanding-what-is-happening-in-civic-space-at-a-620874/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)