

Resilient Local Governance and Community Engagement in Chad: Lessons and Perspectives

Case Study

This case study was conducted by UNICEF, based on data and information provided by UNICEF and its partners in Eastern Chad in March 2026



How does resilient local governance and community engagement contribute to sustainable development outcomes in Chad?

Introduction

This case study details UNICEF's strategic efforts to strengthen local governance and community resilience in Chad in contribution to the Sahel Resilience Partnership (SRP)¹, with a particular focus on the Guéra province. Through the establishment of federated community structures and a Community-Based Management Information System (CBMS) for quarterly monitoring, the SRP is transforming communities from passive beneficiaries into active partners and agents of their own development.

The document review highlights the ongoing decentralization process in Chad, underscoring the importance of fostering inclusive social dialogue that incorporates the voices of women, youth, and marginalized groups. While current initiatives have successfully supported the development of community-led infrastructure and strengthened local budget planning, significant challenges persist, particularly in ensuring financial sustainability, addressing human resource constraints within public services, and enhancing the financial capacity of communities.

Ultimately, the evidence points to the need for a multisectoral approach that aligns community-led initiatives with national governance frameworks and complementary economic resilience efforts, to protect children's rights and ensure the long-term sustainability of programme outcomes.

Context

Within the framework of the decentralization process initiated by Chad's 2023 Constitution and the 2024 local elections, the Sahel Resilience Partnership (SRP), implemented by UNICEF, WFP, and GIZ, aims to transform communities, particularly in the Guéra province, from passive beneficiaries into strategic actors of their own development.

This institutional support focuses on the development of child rights-sensitive Provincial Development Plans (PDPs) and the strengthening of Provincial Action Committees (PACs), multisectoral bodies responsible for coordinating basic services such as health, education, and nutrition.

Although Guéra has strong agro-pastoral potential, it continues to face major structural

challenges, including geographic isolation, the effects of climate change, and a limited capacity to implement previous plans

To address these vulnerabilities, the partnership deploys a "living architecture of local governance" built on federated community structures and innovative tools, such as a Community-Based Management Information System (CBMS) using Kobo Collect, to strengthen social accountability and community cohesion within convergence sites.

Resilience Approach

For UNICEF, resilience-sensitive local governance and community engagement sit at the intersection of five global objectives: strengthening public sector systems; accountability to affected populations; social

¹ Partnership between WFP, GIZ and UNICEF.

accountability; social and behavioral change and social norms; and community systems strengthening. It is linked to governance objectives such as decentralization, transparency, democratization, climate resilience, disaster preparedness, and social accountability.

At the conceptual level, community engagement is framed through UNICEF's own standards. These standards promote a participatory approach that enables communities to take ownership of development initiatives as well as crisis preparedness and response efforts. UNICEF's community engagement standards contribute to strengthening community resilience in the face of shocks, not as a standalone tool, but as an approach to local governance, trust-building, and the collective strengthening of resilience capacities. They transform the community, often regarded merely as a "beneficiary" of interventions, into a strategic actor in prevention, response, and recovery.

Methodology

This case study contributes to informing Outcome 2 of the Theory of Change of the joint Sahel Resilience Partnership (UNICEF-WFP-GIZ), which aims at "improving local governance, strengthening a culture of inclusive social dialogue, and reinforcing community ownership and engagement in local social development processes and humanitarian interventions."

The main research question guiding this case study is: "*What lessons can we draw from ongoing interventions on resilience-sensitive local governance and community engagement in the context of SRP implementation in Chad?*"

The methodology underpinning this case study is based on a qualitative approach combining a comprehensive document review and a 15-day field survey conducted in February 2026 in the Guéra province, while also incorporating lessons from the Kanem province. The objective is to document and draw lessons on capacity strengthening in local governance and community engagement, examining both the horizontal multisectoral approach and the vertical linkages between state and community structures. Conducted by an international consultant with technical support from UNICEF and the NGO ASRADD, the study covered 4 of the 7 convergence sites supported by the project in the Guéra province and interviewed a total of 103 people, including 36 women, through focus group discussions and individual interviews.

Federated Community Structure for Local Interventions

The community engagement model established in Chad aims to: *"enable children and adolescents, girls and boys, particularly the most vulnerable and excluded, to have better opportunities to realize their rights and develop their skills, through integrated, high-quality, climate-resilient services, so that they can grow up in a safe and enabling environment."* One of the key tools introduced to achieve this goal is support for the development of a federated community structure, with the objective of reducing the fragmentation of efforts and ensuring that local priorities are better taken into account.

At the village level, the federated community structure functions as a multisectoral coordination platform. Its core principle is to bring together the interventions, in health, education, WASH, protection, nutrition, and other areas, implemented by existing sectoral community committees. It is made up of 10 to 12 members elected in an inclusive manner (including women, youth, and marginalized individuals) during a village assembly. Members must be drawn from both the main village, which gives its name to the convergence site, and the surrounding villages that make up the site, ensuring equitable territorial coverage.

The structure serves as a single point of contact for authorities and external partners, facilitating the consolidation and reporting of data and reducing the fragmentation of efforts. As a strategic interface, it ensures resource mobilization, local planning, and real-time community monitoring of interventions, so that local priorities are more effectively addressed. Going forward, this federated community structure is designed to serve as the link between the villages within the convergence site, the municipality, the Departmental Development Committee, the Provincial Development Committee, as well as decentralized government services and development partners.

Key Implementation Steps (already implemented across the 7 convergence sites)

- Community mobilization of traditional and religious leaders, and identification of priorities
- Separate consultations with men, youth, and women from the village, and identification of priorities for each group
- Mapping of existing Community-Based Organizations
- Organization of a Village General Assembly and election of 10 members and a bureau
- Development of a multisectoral village action plan
- Training of members on sector understanding and the Community-Based Information System

Ongoing: Implementation of the plan, monitoring, advocacy, and resource mobilization.

Intervention Effects

The interventions of the Sahel Resilience Partnership (SRP) in the Guéra province have produced notable results, marked by a shift in communities from beneficiaries to strategic partners in their own development.

1. Strengthened Community Mobilization

Following the **establishment of Federated community structures**, and **Increased financial autonomy**, the most visible effect is the **ability of villages to finance and build their own basic infrastructure**, filling the gap left by insufficient public investment.

In the village of Bardangal, the federated community structure succeeded in raising the household financial mobilization rate from 20 to 70 percent. This made it possible to collect 5 million FCFA (approximately USD 9,000) to help build three additional classrooms for the local secondary school (Collège d'Enseignement Général).

In the village of Golonti, the community introduced a contribution system, 1,000 FCFA (USD 2) per man and 500 FCFA (USD 1) per woman, to supplement the salaries of community teachers. Funds are currently being collected to build a waiting room for pregnant women at the health center.

In the village of Gadjira, the community is simultaneously raising funds to build a new health center and to increase allowances for community teachers.

In Amdakour, residents are currently building two classrooms and household latrines using durable materials designed to better withstand heavy rain.

2. Modernization of Local Governance and Data-Driven Accountability

The programme has established a "living architecture of local governance" by breaking down the fragmentation of sectoral interventions through the creation of federated community structures.

Community-Based Information System: The use of the digital tool KoboCollect allows village volunteers to collect data on tablets. In Golonti, data collected through the system detected a rise in open defecation and helped direct sanitation response actions.

Multisectoral Coordination: In Gadjira and Bardangal, monthly meetings of the federated community structures have brought together various committees, health, education, and water, enabling the pooling of resources, such as cereal donations for nutritional cooking demonstrations.

Direct Advocacy: In Golonti, the president of the federated community structure communicates directly with the hydraulics department to demand the repair of water points, reflecting a strengthened vertical relationship with the state.

3. Transformation of Social Norms and Women's Leadership

The programme's interventions have triggered meaningful behavioral change, particularly in the areas of child protection and women's empowerment.

Tackling harmful practices: In Bardangal and Amdakour, federated community structures organize weekly village assemblies to persuade families to abandon early marriage and gender-based violence (GBV).

Emergence of female leaders: The example of Ms. Zenaba in Bardangal illustrates this shift. Once largely unheard, she has become an influential voice within the federated community structure, using her personal testimony to make child protection a village priority. In Amdakour, women from the School Mothers' Association (AME) report that they are now listened to more than some men during decision-making meetings.

Innovative local solutions: In Golonti, women's groups produce soap and reusable sanitary pads for schoolgirls, directly addressing school dropout and early marriage, issues often linked to menstrual health. In addition, a woman has been

trained as a mason to produce latrine slabs, responding to growing community demand.

Discussion with two women members of the School Mothers' Association, Amdakour:

"Since the five women joined the village's federated community structure, we have learned a great deal and behaviors are beginning to change within the community, particularly around children's education."

"These five women are sometimes listened to more than the men in village meetings. Their messages are taken on board by the community because they have been well trained by UNICEF and its partners in Mongo, that was not the case before."



Photo 1 Membres de la structure communautaire fédératrice des initiatives locales et leur plan annuel (Village d'Amdakour). @ UNICEF/E Debert/Février 2026

What challenges have emerged in strengthening local governance and community engagement, what lessons have been learned from the experience so far, and what measures are recommended to strengthen its impact and sustainability?

Challenges

The main challenges identified during this case study are as follows:

External Challenges

- **Household financial saturation:** Families, already heavily burdened by health and education costs, find it difficult to increase their financial contributions to community funds any further.
- **Weak public human resources:** A shortage of qualified staff within decentralized government services limits their capacity to provide follow-up and technical support.
- **Natural and climate-related shocks:** Poor rainfall, fires, and floods destroy infrastructure such as latrines and deplete the resources of village groups.
- **Partner fragmentation:** Some external partners find it difficult to integrate into the federated community structures already in place.

Internal Challenges

- **Inclusion gaps:** Women, people with disabilities, and satellite villages within convergence sites remain underrepresented in decision-making bodies.
- **NGO dependency:** The structures rely heavily on local NGOs for facilitation, at the expense of state-led anchoring that would better guarantee long-term sustainability.
- **Lack of strategic coordination:** Insufficient information-sharing and synergy with municipal authorities and key partners such as WFP regarding the role of federated community structures.
- **Weak internal communication:** Difficulties in information flow between government field agents based in villages and the federated community structures, as well as a lack of reporting back from structure members to their respective sectoral committees.

Lessons Learned

Given that federated community structures are recently established, they need to become more inclusive, particularly regarding people with disabilities and the surrounding villages within convergence sites and further strengthen their two-way communication with both government authorities and the existing sectoral committees they represent. This is essential for them to gain greater legitimacy as genuine representatives of those sectors and of the village's needs.

Families' capacity to provide financial support for social services, in a context where the state has limited presence, is already stretched to its limits. It is therefore necessary to strengthen economic support to families by bringing in additional actors, such as WFP, whose mandate focuses on building the economic resilience of villages.

The process by which federated community structure members take ownership of local governance is iterative and learning based. It

requires ongoing accompaniment through sustained follow-up and coaching.

Communities' ability to mobilize local funds and self-finance local initiatives pre-existed the federated community structures but has been strengthened since their establishment. The added value of this new initiative should also build local capacities in external communication and representation, enabling communities to mobilize external funding and improve the recognition of their structures through advocacy.

The priorities put forward by federated community structures, through mass awareness campaigns and village plans, tend to focus primarily on improving access to social services (health, water, sanitation, and education) and, to some extent, on interventions that transform social norms (gender and protection). However, they do not yet sufficiently include:

- Economic development interventions at the village level
- Risk prevention interventions
- Differentiated or targeted interventions for specific social groups, such as youth, people with disabilities, and older people

Contributing Factors and Good Practices

- The legal framework is conducive to supporting local initiatives following the adoption of the 2023 Constitution and the laws on decentralization and local government management.
- The use of the KoboCollect platform enables real-time access to programme monitoring data, and the data collected is actively used to drive social change.
- The Village Assemblies organized by federated community structures are inclusive of all community members and have fostered greater ownership and engagement among men in particular.
- The dynamism of federated community structure leaders, combined with the motivation of canton chiefs and some sub-prefects, notably in Amdakour, are critical drivers of local momentum.
- Project follow-up and the recognition of implementing partners by communities are crucial to the programme's success.
- The training of structure members by UNICEF in Mongo has helped legitimize federated community structure leaders in the eyes of their communities, strengthening their efforts to raise awareness on hygiene, protection, education, and nutrition.



Photo 2 Women from the Golonti women's cooperative, alongside the reusable sanitary pads produced locally by its members. @UNICEF/2026/CHAD

Recommendations

- 1 Strengthen social inclusion:** Federated community structures must be made more inclusive by systematically integrating women, people with disabilities, and representatives from surrounding satellite villages into decision-making bodies.
- 2 Support household economic resilience:** To ease the financial burden on families already stretched by the cost of social services, UNICEF should develop partnerships with actors specializing in household economic strengthening, such as WFP.
- 3 Improve UNICEF-WFP synergy:** The study recommends organizing joint micro-planning meetings by site and integrating WFP into the real-time data monitoring system to enable more coherent and coordinated action.
- 4 Shift from technical support to continuous coaching:** Since local governance is an iterative process, it is recommended to provide regular accompaniment and coaching to village structure members on project management and accountability, rather than relying on one-off training sessions alone.
- 5 Invest in local capacity building:** Priority should be given to strengthening the technical and organizational capacities of federated community structures, including inclusive planning, multisectoral coordination, and community monitoring, in line with the decentralization framework. Capacity building should cover internal and external communication, external financial mobilization, project management, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy. Support should also be provided for the formalization of these structures through statutes, bylaws, and local recognition.
- 6 Integrate risk prevention into planning:** Village and contingency plans should go beyond improving access to basic services and include concrete actions for risk prevention, covering climate and health risks, as well as emergency preparedness.
- 7 Institutionalize community engagement at the national level:** The study encourages advocacy for the creation of a national Task Force or the organization of a national forum on community engagement and Social and Behavior Change (SBC), with the aim of scaling up good practices across the country.
- 8 Consolidate social accountability and citizen participation:** Federated community structures should be used as a lever for social accountability by strengthening their capacity to monitor the implementation of local commitments, engage in dialogue with municipal authorities, and promote inclusive participation among women, youth, and vulnerable groups.
- 9 Institutionalize federated community structures:** These structures should be formally anchored within local governance mechanisms, recognized as legitimate spaces for consultation, community mobilization, and monitoring of basic social services, in articulation with municipalities and decentralized government services, as already outlined in the internal strategy for integrated community approaches.

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