

Burkina Faso: Over a quarter million people victims of new “water war” in peak dry season

Thirty-two water facilities have been destroyed so far this year, impacting nearly 300,000 people according to a group of 13 national and international organisations providing humanitarian and development assistance in the country. Targeted attacks have ranged from direct hits on water points and water trucks, purposeful contamination of water resources to sabotaging public water network’s generators.

“These repetitive attacks on water services and their severe impact on hundreds of thousands of vulnerable civilians are unprecedented in Burkina Faso and have not been seen elsewhere in the Central Sahel region either,” says Hassane Hamadou, Country Director for the Norwegian Refugee Council in Burkina Faso. “Disrupting civilians’ access to water is no longer a mere by-product of the conflict, it has become a weapon of war and marks a new, despicable turn in violence. For the sake, dignity and survival of an already exhausted population, this war on water must stop.”

Most destructions occurred in Djibo in the Sahel region, a city that hosts more displaced people than any other in the country. Civilians there have access to less than three liters of water a day to cover all their needs from drinking to hygiene and cooking, compared to roughly twice that amount before the attacks - an already critical level.

While Europeans use on average 150 liters of water daily, the World Health Organization considers people in emergency situations need at least 15-20 liters. Seven liters is the “minimum survival allocation,” viable only for a few days. Residents in Djibo are now forced to sustain themselves with less than half that amount.

“I went through hell to get my family here safely,” says Fatoumata. “But once in Djibo, I found that the ordeal was not over. It continues for us here.” “We struggle to find enough to eat and drink since we’ve arrived,” says Dicko. “Often, we spend the entire day at the water point only to leave with one jerrycan, and sometimes with nothing. We pay for and drink water that’s very dirty and impure. We can’t even dream of having enough to wash clothes, or ourselves.”

Distance to fetch water and time spent queuing are not just excessively long, they can also expose civilians to more violence. Beyond attacks on water facilities, civilians on their way to or waiting at water points are being intimidated and threatened by armed individuals. On 11 March, unidentified gunmen fired warning shots to disperse a crowd queuing near a borehole in Djibo resulting in a woman dying from her wounds after being hit by a stray bullet.

“Djibo has been a flashpoint of the humanitarian crisis for over three years and now finds itself on the frontline of a new type of war,” says Rebecca Bouchet-Petersen, Country Director for Solidarités International in Burkina Faso. “The conflict is now putting at risk the very thing no one can live without: clean water. Civilians in Djibo were already facing alarming shortages of food and medicine, now they are going thirsty too. Considering all the health risks associated with drinking unsanitary water, temperatures averaging 40C and challenging road access, Djibo sits on the brink of humanitarian disaster.”

Attacks on water have recently spread to other regions as well. On 15 April, gunmen set fire to a water truck on its way to the town of Barsalogho, in the Center-North region. Assaultants allegedly told drivers

they did not want to see water trucks on that road again. All water trucking activities, currently the only way to provide emergency water assistance to the residents, have been halted as a result.

The full list of signatories includes:

Association pour la Gestion de l'Environnement et le Développement (AGED)

Association pour la Paix et la Solidarité (APS)

Action pour la Promotion des Initiatives Locales (APIL)

Experts-Solidaire

Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action pour le Développement en Afrique (GRAD-A)

Group for Research and Technology Exchanges (GRET)

Handicap International — Humanité & Inclusion

La Salle – Association Frères des Ecoles Chrétiennes (AFEC)

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Self Help Africa

Sauvons l'Environnement, l'Eau Potable et l'Assainissement pour Tous (SEEPAT)

Solidarités International

Facts and figures:

- 290,000 people are impacted by direct attacks on water facilities, and over 520,000 are impacted when including indirect interruption of water services due to destruction of electricity infrastructure (Source: [WASH Cluster](#))
- 235,000 of the 290,000 people directly impacted live in the city of Djibo, while 55,000 people reside in other localities (Source: [WASH Cluster](#))
- Djibo residents used to have around 6 liters of water a day at their disposal. Since the attacks and destruction of water facilities, it is estimated they now have less than 3 liters (Source: WASH Cluster)
- 15 liters of water a day per person is considered the minimum to cover basic needs for domestic use in emergency contexts (drinking, cooking, washing, personal hygiene). 7 liters is the "minimum survival allocation" for drinking and food preparation (sustainable for only a few days) (Source: [WHO](#))

- The city of Djibo hosts 283,428 internally displaced, including 178,238 children, which is the highest number of IDPs in a single locality in Burkina Faso. Kaya hosts the second-largest (123,610 IDPs). (Source: [CONASUR](#))
- Burkina Faso counts 1,814,283 international displaced people as of February 28, 2022, representing almost 10% of the country's population (Source: [CONASUR](#))

For more information or to arrange an interview, please contact:

- NRC global media hotline: media@nrc.no, +47 905 62329
- Tom Peyre-Costa, Regional Media Adviser in West and Central Africa: tom.peyrecoستا@nrc.no, Whatsapp: +33 658 518391
- Marine Olivesi, Advocacy Manager in Burkina Faso: marine.olivesi@nrc.no, Whatsapp: +33 650 300 154