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### Coordination, programme and other questions:

**African countries emerging from conflict**

**Sustainable development in the Sahel**

## **Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2021/242, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its 2022 session for its consideration a report on the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan by the United Nations system, under the sub-item entitled “African countries emerging from conflict” of the item entitled “Coordination, programme and other questions”. Subsequently, in its decision 2021/243 on sustainable development in the Sahel, the Council requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its 2022 session on how the United Nations system was implementing integrated, coherent and coordinated support to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region, within existing resources, under the sub-item entitled “Sustainable development in the Sahel” of the item entitled “Coordination, programme and other questions”. The report also includes an update on the work of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

#### **II. South Sudan**

##### **A. Context**

2. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan in 2018, some progress towards the implementation of the Agreement has been made. The Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity was formed in March 2020. In 2021, the Transitional National Legislative Assembly was reconstituted, with a woman as its speaker – an encouraging development, even if the



Revitalized Agreement goal stipulating that 35 per cent of posts should be allocated to women has not yet been met. In one of its first decisions, Assembly members increased their salaries from 9,400 South Sudanese pounds to 800,000 South Sudanese pounds per month, which created an outcry among members of civil society.<sup>1</sup> By early 2022, most state Cabinets had been formed, and members of parliament been appointed in several states, for example, in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal and Western Equatoria.

3. Despite progress having been made, the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement has been quite slow, and some important pre-transitional tasks remain uncompleted. Critical tasks to be achieved for the conduct of free, fair and credible elections under the Agreement include the unification of forces and their redeployment; the enactment of the permanent constitution; the review of laws relating to political parties and elections; and the reconstitution of the Political Parties Council and the National Elections Commission.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the shrinking of public space for civic engagement, including the arrest of journalists, is having a negative impact on citizens' ability to hold the Government accountable.<sup>3</sup>

4. Political and institutional instability will significantly affect the relaunch of economic recovery and growth, which were already constrained by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Since the second half of 2020, when oil revenue sharply decreased owing to the impact of COVID-19, the Government accelerated the implementation of reforms to increase efficiencies in the management of public finances. That has yielded positive results in the mobilization of non-oil revenue by the National Revenue Authority. The country's authorities also agreed on macroeconomic policies and reforms underpinning a staff-monitored programme by the International Monetary Fund, which included a key decision to reform the foreign exchange market and gradually unify the indicative and parallel market rates, which was achieved.<sup>4</sup> The government has also been trying to attract investments to diversify its economy. Investments in the oil sector have continued.

5. The rate of inflation has moderated in the past year, owing to the reforms undertaken and the very high base (year-on-year inflation as at December 2020 was 58 per cent). However, it does remain a concern, owing to supply chain disruptions, rising oil prices and COVID-19-related restrictions affecting trade: in December 2021, prices grew by 12.7 per cent, driven by food and non-alcoholic beverages, which tend to disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. As at the end of March 2022, the price of oil stood at about \$100 per barrel and could create significant extra revenue relative to the national budget for the 2021/22 period (approved in March 2022), which had been based on an assumed price of \$63 per barrel. The daily oil production of South Sudan is about 150,000 barrels, so the extra revenue should be considerable and should help to increase the country's fiscal space.

6. Despite its fertile soil, South Sudan is a significant importer of food, with limited integration into the global economy. With its poor infrastructure and landlocked status, trade is costlier, and investments to address that have been rare. In March 2022, Kenyan authorities noted that South Sudan was lagging far behind in the

<sup>1</sup> As a benchmark, public civil servants (who are owed several months of arrears) are expected to see their remuneration doubled, from an average of about 3,000 South Sudanese pounds to about 6,000 South Sudanese pounds per month.

<sup>2</sup> Radio Tamajuz, "RJMEC chair briefs UNSC, underscores pending tasks for genuine elections", 8 March 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Wote, "Updated: national security denies detaining journalists at the parliament", Eye Radio, 28 February 2022.

<sup>4</sup> International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Republic of South Sudan: First Review Under the Staff-Monitored Program – Press Release; and Staff Report*, IMF Country Report, No. 21/246 (Washington, D.C., 2021).

northern corridor infrastructure development initiative aimed at boosting trade among the partner States and at forging regional integration (in 2013, Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan launched the Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport corridor project to enable infrastructure interconnectivity, with the aim of facilitating the movement of goods and services between the three countries).<sup>5</sup> Food security in South Sudan is further affected by the dramatic increase in global food prices due to the conflict in Ukraine.

7. Climate change is expected to affect prospects for economic growth in South Sudan, where climate change is particularly severe in the agricultural sector. An estimated 835,000 people were affected by severe flooding between May and December 2021, and 80 per cent of those were from Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile States. Many flood-displaced people, including those who had been displaced by the 2020 flood, were unable to return to their homes until early 2022, if at all. For many, their area of origin remains under water, even during the dry season. Warrap, Northern Bahr el-Ghazal and Jonglei States were the most affected in terms of crop and livestock production.

8. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) reported that, in 2021, a delay in the onset of rain followed by excessive rains that caused floods in some parts of the country affected both crops and livestock: 65,107 hectares of land planted with cereals were damaged, with an estimated loss of 37,624 tons of grain in the flood-affected areas, and more than 10 million head of livestock were affected in 8 of the 10 states. The impact of the floods, through massive displacement and the disruption of livelihoods, especially in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity States, was significant. Despite widespread flooding, the total area cultivated increased by 1 per cent in 2021, which was attributed mainly to improved security, which allowed for returns in some places. Returnees were able to gain access to their farmlands, especially in the Equatoria states and in some parts of greater Bahr el-Ghazal. Despite the relative stability and slight increase in the areas cultivated in 2021, the national cereal gap remains significant, at 541,000 tons, which is equivalent to 40 per cent of the total needs; this gap is 16 per cent higher than the previous five-year average. Consequently, in 2022 an estimated 8.3 million people (as compared with 7.4 million in 2021), including refugees and returnees, are expected to experience severe food insecurity during the months of the lean season (May–July), as shocks appear to be intensifying. There are 13 counties in South Sudan projected to experience extreme levels of food insecurity in 2022, compared with 6 in 2021. In addition, an estimated 2 million people, including 1.3 million children under the age of 5 years and 676,000 pregnant and lactating women, are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2022.

9. Humanitarian needs were dire in 2020 and 2021 and are expected to be higher in 2022. Some of the key drivers of this include climatic, conflict and economic shocks, as well as other household-level stressors and protection risks, such as gender-based violence, child protection violations, lack of access to housing, land, property and documentation and poor water, sanitation and hygiene services. This situation has intensified the existing vulnerability of people: higher poverty rates; limited access to basic services, including health and education; a high prevalence of disease outbreaks; and widespread displacement.

10. In its most recent humanitarian needs overview, issued in February 2022, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reflected that more than two thirds of the country's population of 8.9 million people are projected to need humanitarian assistance in 2022, reflecting an increase of 600,000 as compared with

<sup>5</sup> Eye Radio, "Kenya urges S. Sudan to fulfil its obligation in regional infrastructure dev't", 4 March 2022.

2021.<sup>6</sup> Limited improvements in some areas have prompted some people to return spontaneously; in addition, the Government, with the support of some humanitarian agencies, has facilitated voluntary returns to certain areas. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, some 500,000 refugees have returned.<sup>7</sup> However, some are unable to gain access to their homes owing to insecurity, flooding and other challenges. By December 2021, there were 2 million internally displaced persons in the country (55 per cent of whom were women and girls), up from 1.7 million in early 2021.<sup>8</sup> There were also approximately 335,000 refugees in South Sudan, mainly from the Sudan (92.2 per cent).<sup>9</sup> An additional 2.3 million South Sudanese remain refugees hosted in neighbouring countries.

11. Human rights remain compromised, with severe episodes of violence in Jonglei, Abyei and Akobo, among many other areas of the country, and a very dramatic surge in conflict-related sexual violence in 2022. Such episodes are usually worse at the onset of the dry season, when it is easier to move around, which facilitates common sources of friction, such as cattle raiding and migration for grazing. From June to September 2021, at least 440 civilians were killed, 18 were injured and 74 were abducted during clashes between warring groups. At least 64 civilians were subjected to conflict-related sexual violence, among them a 13-year-old girl who was gang-raped to death. In addition, some 80,000 people were forced to flee their homes to escape fighting. Looting and the destruction of property, child conscription, attacks on humanitarian civilian personnel and facilities, especially against non-governmental organizations and United Nations humanitarian organizations, hate speech and incitement to violence were among other human rights violations uncovered in an investigation carried out by the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).<sup>10</sup> All these violations (and others) are often perpetrated by armed actors with impunity and in a complex web of claims made by opposing factions that are difficult to verify.

12. Pervasive violence and human rights violations also affect humanitarian activities. Between January and December 2021, 591 humanitarian access incidents were reported and recorded. Those incidents ranged from violence against humanitarian personnel and assets to operational interference. In 2021, in addition to many other types of aggression carried out against them, five aid workers lost their lives while delivering humanitarian assistance and services. A total of 322 aid workers were relocated owing to insecurity and threats against humanitarian personnel. Humanitarian warehouses and facilities were targeted during the violence, and humanitarian supplies were looted in some locations. For example, on 28 February 2022, a convoy of 59 trucks, escorted by UNMISS force protection officers and carrying food and nutrition assistance from the World Food Programme (WFP), came under attack by armed gunmen in Jonglei State. The convoy was to deliver essential commodities for 95,000 people ahead of the rainy season, when access becomes heavily restricted. In another example, some humanitarian actors suspended their support for health facilities in Central Equatoria State, following an incident in which

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian needs overview: South Sudan”, February 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “South Sudan: refugee returnee household survey”, October–December 2021.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian needs overview”.

<sup>9</sup> UNHCR, “South Sudan: monthly population statistics”, January 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and United Nations Mission in South Sudan, “Attacks on civilians in Tambura county, June–September 2021”, March 2021.

armed gunmen looted medical supplies and torched two vehicles. All of those incidents hampered humanitarian support activities.

## **B. United Nations support for South Sudan**

13. Dialogue between the United Nations and the Government of South Sudan has improved very considerably relative to years past, favoured by progress made in the peace process, combined with increased institutional stability and improved geographical access in many locations at a decentralized level, where states now have functioning governorates – all of which, taken together, have created conditions for more effective delivery of assistance.

14. The United Nations supported the strengthening of dialogue with national partners in the reporting of the United Nations Cooperation Framework for South Sudan, 2019–2022, to ensure that international support during the transitional period was anchored in national ownership at both the country and local levels. Two tangible results illustrate this: (a) the support provided by the United Nations for the review of the National Development Strategy;<sup>11</sup> and (b) the significantly improved results delivered by United Nations entities in recent years under the Cooperation Framework (for example, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes increased their mobilization of resources from \$172 million in 2018 to over \$200 million in 2021).

15. Progress in forging collaboration between the United Nations and the Government has also been made with a forward perspective, buttressed by a general recognition that the capacity of national institutions must be strengthened, to enable the focus to evolve from perennial humanitarian crises to sustainable development initiatives. For example, United Nations entities, jointly led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNMISS, have increased efforts relating to the linkages between climate change and security. Another example is the completion, expected for September 2022, of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for South Sudan, 2023–2025. Important elements of that process include the completion of a road map, a common country analysis, a vision, strategic prioritization workshops and the United Nations configuration exercise. All of those elements have been undertaken in a spirit of comprehensive, inclusive consultations with all stakeholders, including government and other national partners, donors, UNMISS and civil society. Such widespread discussions have also improved coordination among donors and contributed to the reactivation of the sector working groups that foster aid coordination and collaboration between the Government and stakeholders. As a result, partnerships, information-sharing and collaboration have been encouraged. For example, in January 2022, the African Development Bank signed three agreements with the Government, UNDP, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and FAO for projects on agriculture value chain development, youth and enterprise capacity development and private sector development, estimated at a total of \$46.7 million. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in collaboration with the country's Commission for Refugee Affairs, supported the allocation of resources by the World Bank under the International Development Association (IDA19) window for refugees and host communities in Upper Nile State and the Ruweng administrative area.

16. A vital element of the work of the United Nations in South Sudan continues to be ensuring an integrated response across humanitarian, development and peace activities. This translates into increased localized dialogue to foster recovery and resilience in areas that are stable enough to allow for the inclusive convening of local

<sup>11</sup> Yet to be approved by the Transitional National Legislative Assembly (as at March 2022).

stakeholders willing and able to work to achieve progress. Those dialogues receive support from the United Nations and other international actors, in the form of help to organize meetings and local conferences and support follow-up actions. In addition, the South Sudan reconciliation, stabilization and resilience trust fund remains a strong and transparent coordination mechanism for supporting the partnership and resilience agenda. The budget of the fund increased from \$11,729,287 in 2019 to \$32,636,446 in 2021.

17. The support undertaken jointly by a broad range of non-governmental organizations, donors and the United Nations, through the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience, is aimed at reducing vulnerability and building resilience at the local level, especially by fostering the provision of basic public services such as health care, education and water, sanitation and hygiene. In Juba, another goal, in addition to providing basic public services, is the strengthening of institutions to facilitate the running of basic functions of government, such as public finances to pay civil servants in a transparent and accountable manner.

18. However, considerable challenges for United Nations support for South Sudan remain, such as the slow progress of the peace process, floods and their associated effects hampering mobility (i.e. roads out of Juba being impassable) or the ongoing impacts of COVID-19. Of particular importance is the combination of scarce resources and competing humanitarian crises, further aggravated by violence and insecurity: an estimated 5.3 million people were reached in 2021 by some form of humanitarian assistance. To enable the response to people affected by flooding, humanitarian organizations were compelled to reprogramme in-country support, which resulted in a reduction of food assistance to internally displaced persons, refugees and communities in acute food and livelihood crises. Those unmet needs have increased the vulnerability of populations in 2022.

### **C. Outlook**

19. A successful transition in South Sudan is fundamental for its future, including the holding of democratic elections at the end of the transition period. This requires progress in three broad areas: politics and governance; the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former fighters and security sector reform; and improvements in the humanitarian and human rights situation, with a greater focus on longer-term root causes, with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development serving as a guiding light.

20. Given the slow progress seen to date in fundamental aspects, such as unifying the armed forces, constitution-making or defining electoral laws, elections are unlikely to be held before 2023. It will be necessary to boost progress in these domains, in close coordination and collaboration between and among actors, inter alia, UNMISS, the African Union, the reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission and the United Nations country team.

21. It is critical to protect civilians from violence and human rights violations. The continuation of and increase in subnational violence reported in many states across the country, including Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap (in particular in greater Tonj) and Western Equatoria (notably Tambura), is likely to disrupt livelihoods and trade and contribute to an increase in humanitarian needs in 2022. Access to justice and the rule of law is limited for many people who experience crimes and violations. Gender-based violence and child protection violations remain a threat; women and girls are exposed to risks when carrying out their routine activities, further exacerbated by floods, which limit livelihood opportunities (for example, firewood collection and charcoal production). Feeling unsafe, some women and girls avoid

areas such as water points, latrines, distribution areas, markets and firewood gathering sites. In this context, women, children, older persons and persons with disabilities will continue to be the most vulnerable. Initiatives that prevent and address sexual exploitation and abuse, such as campaigns to raise public awareness, access to targeted services and psychosocial support and the strengthening of accountability mechanisms and access to justice are required and must be supported further.

22. In South Sudan, 95 per cent of livelihoods depend on traditional rain-fed agriculture, crop farming, pastoralism or animal husbandry. Climate shocks are likely to lead to an increase in livestock mortality and a decline in the amount and viability of land farmers' cultivation; it will also lead to the disruption of traditional seasonal migration routes of pastoralists and to less land available for cattle to graze, which may further increase the risk of conflict in affected areas and tension between pastoralists and agriculturalists. As mentioned above, more people are likely to experience severe food insecurity in 2022. Food consumption gaps are extreme, and people have largely exhausted their emergency coping strategies. In 2022, the precarious situation is expected to be further exacerbated by the country's increasing humanitarian caseload, the expected increase in the duration of needs in the most affected areas, and the projected reduction in humanitarian assistance across the country due to declining funding levels and security threats. Food assistance in 2022 is expected to decrease by 10–20 per cent from the already reduced levels seen in 2021. The current crisis is affecting people's ability to gain access to markets, and conflict, flooding and seasonal effects are limiting the flow of both commercial and humanitarian goods and services. In that regard, the decision by the Security Council, in its resolution [2625 \(2022\)](#), to extend the mandate of UNMISS for one year, to 15 March 2023, is welcome. The Council decided that the mandate of the Mission would be designed to advance the three-year strategic vision set out in the resolution, in order to prevent a return to civil war in South Sudan, build durable peace at the local and national levels and to support inclusive and accountable governance and free, fair and peaceful elections in accordance with the Revitalized Agreement. In the resolution, the Council requested UNMISS to carry out tasks in four key areas: protection of civilians; the creation of conditions conducive to the delivery of humanitarian assistance; support for the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement and the peace process; and monitoring, investigating and reporting on violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights. The Council also called for strengthening the mission's sexual violence and gender-based violence prevention and response activities to be strengthened.

23. With a severe humanitarian crisis ongoing and the prospects of the situation being aggravated for yet another year, it will be necessary for stakeholders to contribute to the provision of the most basic services, in line with the National Development Strategy review and the conclusions of the preliminary Cooperation Framework for 2023–2025. In the current context of a global recession triggered by the conflict in Ukraine, inflationary pressures may further be exacerbated, especially for a country such as South Sudan, which is heavily reliant on imports for even the most basic products. It would be useful if the country could boost trade with its neighbours, including through such initiatives as the African Continental Free Trade Area, for which the country has signed but not ratified the agreement thereon.

24. The Government of South Sudan must also continue providing tangible economic reforms in order to pursue transparency and accountability<sup>12</sup> and to be able to pay its civil servants on time and honour arrears. Efforts by development partners

<sup>12</sup> In January 2022, South Sudan was ranked the world's most corrupt country by Transparency International, with a score of 11 out of 100. See Sudans Post, "South Sudan ranked world's most corrupt country again – report", 25 January 2022.

to improve public finances must therefore be further nurtured. The National Development Strategy review may be an opportunity to achieve those aims, if it is approved by the Transitional National Legislative Assembly and operationalized in terms of allocating resources to social sectors and making efforts to reform public financial management. The very high price of oil, while alleviating public finances, could also incentivize corruption – especially in a system with very weak controls.

#### **D. Perspectives for future work**

25. To continue fostering dialogue with government, building national capacity and supporting institutions, the United Nations country team will further strengthen its development support. The extended United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework will help the country team to focus on the development of new initiatives that could be brought to scale; the population estimation survey; the operationalization of a more integrated response through the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience coordination mechanism; and initiatives such as the reconciliation, stabilization and resilience trust fund and other efforts to mobilize additional resources from key pooled funds, such as the Peacebuilding Fund. The country team will continue to coordinate interventions, to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure effective collaboration on peacebuilding and governance initiatives among the United Nations programmes and UNMISS. The ultimate goal of United Nations system integrated development support for South Sudan is to provide consistent and immediate support to build State capacity in economic and social transformation, including policymaking and implementation capacities for longer-term development, as well as the desperately needed provision of basic services for people to support the country's efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and build resilience. In order to do so, the country team will also continue to nurture efficient linkages with other development partners, including international financial institutions such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank and bilateral donors, and to leverage new capacities and tools that are now in place in the context of the repositioning of the United Nations development system.

### **III. Sahel region**

#### **A. Context**

##### **Sustainable development**

26. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a varying impact across the Sahelian countries; however, in 2021, the countries in the region registered significant recovery, as reflected in the growth in gross domestic product (GDP) of the different country groupings. In the oil-exporting countries (Cameroon, Chad and Nigeria), which have suffered deeply from the pandemic, GDP contracted by 2.0 per cent in 2021, owing to a steep decline in oil prices. A recovery of 3.7 per cent is projected for 2022, driven by the increase in oil prices. In the resource-intensive economies (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger), thanks to the rise in prices of natural resources and the increase in exports supported by the recovery of the extractive industries, growth is projected to be 4.8 per cent in 2022, after a contraction of 0.1 per cent in 2020. The non-resource-intensive economies (the Gambia and Senegal), where GDP contracted by 1.6 per cent in 2020, are also projected to experience a 4.1 per cent growth in GDP in 2022.

27. Growth in Sahelian countries has not been inclusive in 2021. Poverty rates remain very high and Sahelian countries are still poorly positioned in the most recent

human development index rankings (most occupying spots in the bottom 30) and, on average, 62.6 per cent of the population is multidimensionally poor.<sup>13</sup> Conflict and desertification in the Sahel contributed to the deterioration of the social situation and led to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

28. In a context of chronic poverty and high population growth, insecurity and adverse impacts of climate change remained key drivers of growing food insecurity in the Sahel in 2021. Repeated shocks, including droughts and floods, have greatly affected the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including forcibly displaced people, giving rise to tensions with host communities who could also be vulnerable.

29. The Sahel region has been increasingly affected by natural disasters and climate change. According to baseline assessment data from the Displacement Tracking Matrix, 134,123 disaster-related internally displaced persons were recorded, distributed as follows: Cameroon (42,912) Chad (652) and Nigeria (90,559).<sup>14</sup>

30. The Sahel region is experiencing some of the most extreme weather events on Earth. The degradation of ecosystems and the consequent depletion of vegetation and biodiversity has undermined critical services, such as the provision of water, and has exposed soil to further degradation. This has severely affected both the local populations and Sahelian agro-sylvo-pastoral landscapes, aggravating food and nutrition insecurity and compromising the sustainability of livelihoods.

31. According to the harmonized framework for the analysis and identification of areas at risk and vulnerable groups in the Sahel (Cadre harmonisé),<sup>15</sup> the number of people who have faced critical acute food insecurity situation (phase 3 or above of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification) increased drastically during 2021, with around 6.5 million people estimated to be acutely food insecure (June–August 2021) in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, of which 2.3 million were in the Liptako-Gourma region. That sharp deterioration is a result of the negative impacts of climate-related shocks, compounded by the effects of the ongoing conflicts and insecurity and the socioeconomic effects of COVID-19. The most recent Cadre harmonisé analysis on food and nutritional insecurity conducted in West African countries (except Cabo Verde and Liberia) revealed that, during the period from October to December 2021, nearly 23.7 million people were food insecure (phases 3 to 4). In addition, 1.6 million children were estimated to have suffered from severe acute malnutrition during that period.

32. The situation described above indicates that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Sahel region remains a challenge, as the insecurity, violence and political crises observed in 2021 are still growing steadily. The COVID-19 pandemic led to reversals of progress on Goal achievement in many countries, requiring increased efforts to expand social protection.

### **Political and security situation**

33. Democratic progress was uneven in the region during the reporting period. In Guinea, popular and political dissent following the re-election of Alpha Condé as

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Development Programme and Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, “*Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste, and gender*”, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Emergency tracking data serve to report on individuals’ displacements by particular events. Baseline data refer to individuals displaced at a particular point in time as a snapshot of displacement.

<sup>15</sup> The Cadre harmonisé food insecurity figures refer to projected situations. During the lean season, from June to August 2022, the number of people affected could exceed 33.4 million, including more than 1.7 million in emergency situations and 13,551 during disaster situations (phase 5).

President in 2020 persisted. In September 2021, following a coup d'état, a transition was announced, and a Prime Minister was appointed in November. In the Gambia, on 4 December 2021, Adama Barrow was re-elected President by a large majority for a second term in office. However, constitutional reforms have failed to move forward. In Guinea-Bissau, political dialogue is yet to resume, despite entreaties by the United Nations. That is expected to build consensus among political stakeholders ahead of the 2023 legislative elections. In Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal, relations between the Government and the opposition remain affected by the absence of established political dialogues. In contrast, transitional justice processes in the Gambia and Liberia prompted national discussions on justice, accountability and reconciliation.

34. Unresolved issues relating to governance deficits, the non-respect of presidential term limits and unconstitutional changes of Government continue to polarize the political climate. Against that backdrop, the commitment expressed by the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to review and update Protocol A/SP1/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security was encouraging.

35. The deterioration of the security environment also revealed the lasting impact of terrorist attacks on the political situation in the region, forcing Governments to step up their response. A series of attacks in Burkina Faso in early 2021 shaped public opinion and opposition criticism against the Government's counter-terrorism strategy. Demonstrations by the civilian population demanding changes in the Government's response to terrorism continued to grow. Against that backdrop, discontent among the armed forces also emerged. Casualties inflicted on the armed forces reached a peak with the attack in Inata in November 2021, in which more than 50 gendarmes were killed. The incident not only shocked the public, it also suggested a lack of financial and material support for the armed forces. In Nigeria, terrorist and other armed groups have benefited from a vacuum in State authority and the proliferation of illicit arms.

36. Violent attacks on civilian settlements in the tri-border region of the central Sahel increased compared with 2021, generating renewed displacements of the population, in particular in the Niger. The issue of civilian volunteers, whose participation in the counter-terrorism response has been institutionalized since 2018 in Burkina Faso, was addressed on an ad hoc basis in the Tahoua and Tillabéri regions of the Niger. This led to several ethnicity-based incidents and cases of retaliation, with implications for respect for human rights. In the Niger, the targeting of civilian settlements has been frequently accompanied by the destruction of crops, harvests and animals, leaving the affected population in urgent need of assistance.

### **Humanitarian situation**

37. In 2021, almost 29 million Sahelians needed assistance and protection, 5 million more than at the beginning of 2020. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs supported the regional humanitarian community in responding and delivering lifesaving assistance through strengthened coordination and advocacy efforts, by sharing focused analysis and providing information management. In 2021, 12.7 million people across the region received humanitarian support.

38. As at the end of November 2021, more than 2 million individuals had been displaced by the crisis in the Liptako-Gourma region. According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix, 68 per cent of that displaced population (1,431,279 people) was in Burkina Faso, 20 per cent in Mali (414,922), 9 per cent in the Niger (197,668) and

3 per cent in Mauritania (72,816).<sup>16</sup> The Lake Chad basin crisis (in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria) has displaced more than 5 million individuals, consisting of internally displaced persons, refugees (both in-camp and out-of-camp), returnees (former internally displaced persons and returnees from abroad) and third-country nationals.<sup>17</sup> In north-western and north-central Nigeria, there is a multidimensional crisis rooted in long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups and involves attacks by criminal groups and banditry. The crisis has accelerated during the past several years because of the intensification of attacks and has resulted in widespread displacement across the region.

## **B. United Nations support for the Sahel**

39. In 2021, the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was implemented under constraining political, security, humanitarian and social development contexts, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, achievements were noted on various thematic priorities as enshrined in the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. That complex landscape led entities of the United Nations development system to rethink and adjust their operational plans to achieve the expected results under the leadership and with the support of the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.

### **Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel**

40. Since the creation of the Office of the Special Coordinator in 2021, implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel has been scaled up through renewed commitments by United Nations entities. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office has succeeded in bringing new impetus to the integrated strategy and convening partnerships aimed at ensuring that the impact of the United Nations in the Sahel is sustainable. The Office of the Special Coordinator, relying on the support of the joint programme entitled “Financing a Green, Inclusive and Sustainable Recovery”, is now adding new partners, creating further momentum in scaling up actions in the Sahel.

41. The Office coordinated efforts that led to a stocktaking of the work of the United Nations in countries covered by the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. In doing so, the Office achieved the following results: (a) the development of an integrated communication strategy for enhanced visibility of United Nations investments, which has resulted in a change of narrative in the Sahel; and (b) the development of policy and analysis frameworks for the integrated strategy to guide and inform collective programming and implementation and to trigger evidence-generation at scale. These included a rapid assessment study of United Nations investments in the Sahel; a policy paper on predictive analysis; “5W” mapping (who does what, where, when and for whom) of the United Nations presence in the Sahel;

<sup>16</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Sahel Central and Liptako Gourma”, Displacement Tracking Matrix monthly dashboard, No. 23, 26 November 2021.

<sup>17</sup> The crisis currently affecting the Lake Chad basin States results from a complex combination of factors, including conflict with non-State armed groups, extreme poverty, underdevelopment and a changing climate, which, together, have triggered significant displacement of populations. As at 26 November 2021, Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria were hosting an estimated 5,418,236 affected individuals, consisting of internally displaced persons, refugees (both in-camp and out-of-camp), returnees (former internally displaced persons and returnees from abroad) and third-country nationals. According to the Displacement Tracking Matrix, 76 per cent of the affected population was in Nigeria (representing 4,100,676 individuals), while 11 per cent resided in Cameroon (607,520 individuals), 9 per cent in Chad (476,943 individuals) and 4 per cent in the Niger (233,097 individuals). For more information, see IOM, “Lake Chad basin”, Displacement Tracking Matrix monthly dashboard, No. 38, 26 November 2021.

and a white paper on an emerging blueprint for transformational change based on a shared de-risking approach to the region and its people.

42. The Office of the Special Coordinator has also been strengthening programme development, coordination and implementation for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which has led to the following results: (a) the co-creation and roll-out of programmatic offers and project banks (governance, renewable energy and climate resilience and sustainable agriculture); and (b) the adoption of the integrated strategy at the country level, through quality assurance and the review of the Cooperation Framework, including by encouraging the integration of the strategy into common country analyses, cooperation frameworks and national development plans. In addition, the Office has been promoting actions on young people and women as true pathways for triggering a change of narrative. Through those actions, several youth initiatives were successfully launched. These include the establishment of the Group of Friends of Women of the Sahel, Generation Unlimited Sahel and the YouthConnekt Sahel Forum, which included platforms for dialogue, such as the month-long conversations with young people and women within the framework of the integrated strategy. This produced a list of strategic priorities that will guide United Nations policy and programmatic responses in the Sahel going forward.

43. The Office of the Special Coordinator has been ensuring the strategic positioning of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through expanded global, regional and national partnerships. In 2021, the Office carried out a series of global, regional and national engagements to build new partnerships around the integrated strategy. The Office developed a strategic and funding partnership framework, which led to a pledge of \$1.6 billion for the Joint Thriving Sahel Fund, as well as \$1 million raised for one of the joint cross-border programmes in the Sahel. The presence of the Special Coordinator has likewise strengthened the governance architecture of the integrated strategy, which, in 2021, helped to ensure the holding of two effective steering committee meetings, two retreats for technical focal points, effective and regular working group meetings and a regular and functioning Advisory Group meeting.

### **Security**

44. In terms of regional response, progress was made in various subregional initiatives. Notably, attendees at the third meeting of the Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum for Regional Cooperation on Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Sustainable Development, held in October 2021, and the third meeting of the Governors of the Liptako-Gourma border regions, held in July 2021, noted progress made in cooperation efforts to address the root causes of insecurity. Meanwhile, there was increased focus and attention on the pressure exerted on neighbouring coastal countries by violent extremists in the Sahel.

45. Noting that the toll of transhumance-related incidents had decreased in 2021 compared with previous years, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the regional working group on pastoralism and conflict prevention continued its monitoring work and agreed on several activities to address analytical gaps, including on gender, youth, extractive industries and climate change. Moreover, UNOWAS contributed to discussions held by ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States, UNDP and others on the prevention of farmer-herder conflicts, focusing attention on cross-border solutions. UNOWAS also facilitated the first steering committee meeting of the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), held in Ouagadougou on 21 and 22 September 2021, at which recommendations were made to integrate women and tap into the capabilities of national research centres.

46. On 30 October, the Ministers of Justice of the G5 Sahel countries met in N'Djamena to discuss the harmonization of judicial cooperation protocols. The meeting concluded with a signed agreement between the Regional Judicial Platform of the Sahel countries and the G5 Sahel to improve judicial cooperation in the region. Several capacity-building events on disarmament and the proliferation of small arms and light weapons were held in the Liptako-Gourma region, attended by security forces and civil society organizations. The events were aimed, among other things, at enhancing the participation of women in peace and security advocacy efforts.

47. Access to and continuous delivery of assistance in the border areas by the United Nations and implementing partners remain hampered by the security threats faced by humanitarian workers. National authorities in the Niger opted to avoid the creation of internally displaced person camps and attempted to resettle the displaced population without delay, despite challenges.

### **Governance**

48. As part of a more innovative approach to preventing violent extremism and youth radicalization, the United Nations, through UNDP, supported the Sahel Youth Ecobrigade tree planting peace initiative. The initiative involved 50 young people, who were selected from two cross-border communities in northwest Nigeria and trained as volunteer youth peace ambassadors to plant and care for tree seedlings. The initiative resulted in 1,000 tree seedlings being planted in both communities at selected locations, to improve cross-border relations and social cohesion within communities.

49. In collaboration with the Government of Senegal, the Office of the Special Coordinator and Generation Unlimited, UNDP launched the YouthConnekt Sahel Forum, a regional platform for young people across the 10 countries covered by the integrated strategy. Through the integrated strategy, the Office and Generation Unlimited also launched Generation Unlimited Sahel. Both forums work together, with a view to enhancing youth capacities and facilitating access to social, political and economic opportunities. The YouthConnekt Sahel Forum had about 1,000 young people from the Sahel in attendance at the launch. The platforms are aimed at creating a generation of transformational leaders in the Sahel who have been enabled to contribute to enhancing peace and prosperity dividends in the region through continuous engagement and the development and application of solutions to recurrent social, economic and development problems.

50. Within the framework of the ECOWAS peace, security and stability mandate, additional regional initiatives have been launched by the United Nations to support ECOWAS in reducing the menace of the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons. Specifically, the Organized Crime: West African Response to Trafficking and the Cross Border Engagement projects, jointly funded by UNDP under the eleventh European Development Fund Regional Indicative Programme (2014–2020) for West Africa, are aimed at sustaining the gains of earlier initiatives on small arms and light weapons in West Africa.

51. Furthermore, the United Nations provided support to various countries in the areas of human rights, justice, and the rule of law, including in Chad, where interventions by the United Nations were aimed at strengthening the penal chain, including digitalization to improve efficiency; in the Gambia, where joint inter-agency support was provided by UNDP and OHCHR to the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission, which facilitated the submission of the Commission's report to the Head of State in November 2021; and in Mali, where clean energy was provided to security and justice services.

## Resilience

52. The United Nations continued to provide integrated resilience support in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger in 2021. At least 2 million vulnerable people, including 1.7 million children, have gained access to essential social services delivered through decentralized government and community services, with a focus on the following sectors: health; nutrition; water, sanitation and hygiene; education; child protection; and social protection. In all, 959 communities were supported through participatory and risk-informed planning approaches, and 2,735 community structures were engaged to support comprehensive social service delivery, including in 335 communities selected to benefit specifically from resilience services. As part of the programme support provided, 1,365 health district personnel were trained, 675 health centres received support to integrate birth registration services, 50 climate-resilient water systems were set up, with diversification of power sources for pumped water through solar panels and other renewable energies, and 756 schools were provided with multisectoral resilience services.

53. The United Nations also supported the Governments of Mali, Mauritania and the Niger by providing critical social assistance to populations affected by the impact of COVID-19, while strengthening national social protection systems. Using a two-track approach, cash distributions supported by the joint project reached almost 1.2 million people, through government social protection programmes to deliver essential support (track 1) and through direct cash transfers where national capacities were saturated, in alignment with national social protection response plans (track 2). WFP provided blanket supplementary feeding to 6,860 children and 5,281 women and, in collaboration with United Nations Children's Fund, provided social behaviour change communication messaging on nutrition to 14,600 households. Both agencies also reached 35,868 households with COVID-19 prevention messaging.

54. In 2021, the three Rome-based agencies (WFP, FAO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)) joined forces with the G5 Sahel, its Member States and Senegal to develop and launch a joint programme for the Sahel in response to the challenges of COVID-19, conflict and climate change. Building on solutions and approaches already capitalized by WFP, FAO and IFAD and their local partners, the programme is aimed at increasing agro-sylvo-pastoral production and the productivity of small-scale producers, especially women and young people, through climate-smart agricultural practices; promoting local and regional economic integration; and strengthening policy dialogue, management and coordination. Agreements were signed between IFAD and the Governments involved during the most recent meeting of the G5 Sahel Council of Ministers, held in February 2021, marking the start of the programme for IFAD. FAO and WFP will cover mainly the following two components: (a) increasing agro-sylvo-pastoral productivity and production; and (b) fostering national and regional economic integration.

## Coordinated frameworks in the Sahel

55. The twelfth meeting of the steering committee of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was held on 3 and 4 November 2021, with objectives to: (a) review and take stock of the implementation of the 2021/22 road map for implementing the integrated strategy and agree on the main parameters to orient and shape the 2022/23 road map; and (b) accelerate the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for development in the Sahel, in the framework of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development and in the spirit of the peace and security, humanitarian and development nexus. Specifically, participants at the meeting sought to reach consensus on the strategic positioning of the integrated strategy in the geostrategic context of the Sahel and to take stock of the integrated

strategy and its implementation as a common chapter that will frame United Nations policy and programmatic responses in the Sahel.

56. Regarding the statement of commitment in line with the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan as the common chapter for guiding various United Nations strategic frameworks, policy support and programme activities in the Sahel region, the following actions were agreed by the steering committee members:

(a) Implementation of the integrated strategy, seen as a common chapter, to be scaled up to support various strategies, policies and programmes in the region;

(b) Resident and humanitarian coordinators and development coordinators to ensure that the integrated strategy is a guiding strategic platform for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and humanitarian response programmes and, in that perspective, that those two frameworks are used to define and inform the implementation of collective outcomes, for greater coherence and collaboration among peace, development and humanitarian activities;

(c) United Nations policy and programmatic support to be aligned with the national, subregional and regional strategies in the Sahel, including the programmes of the G5 Sahel, the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Great Green Wall for the Sahara and the Sahel Initiative;

(d) Work on predictive analytics carried out under the integrated strategy to be continued, with a view to providing integrated guidance on the implementation of short-, medium- and long-term support activities and on the alignment between the integrated strategy and its Support Plan and the 10 Cooperation Frameworks in countries covered by the strategy;

(e) The principle of differentiated contexts in the Sahel to be applied as a guide for United Nations interventions, using a quadruple lens to contextualize those interventions: prevention, stabilization, transformation and sustainability.

57. Concerning the current geopolitical and security situation in the Sahel, including challenges, potential policy and programmatic implications with regard to the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, it was agreed that:

(a) The discussion on geopolitical developments and their impacts on the implementation of the integrated strategy and the preservation of peace, security and stability in the Sahel should be pursued at all subsequent steering committee meetings and be continued at the next Advisory Group meeting (meeting of principals);

(b) Programmes under the integrated strategy should conduct risk analysis and establish mitigation strategies, while considering the impact of geopolitical dynamics on development and stability of the region;

(c) Principals should devise specific strategies, in close consultation with the Secretary-General, in order to promote high-level advocacy aimed at preserving peace, security and stability in the region;

(d) The United Nations should pursue collective and vigorous efforts to dynamize the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel as a viable option for promoting coordination and improving participation and ownership by indigenous regional organizations, Member States, civil society groups, women's organizations and young people as a means of ensuring sustainable development and stability.

### **Perspectives for future work**

58. The United Nations will continue to support the formulation of recommendations relating to mobility and aimed at: (a) building international judiciary cooperation for an efficient response and proper protection of victims of trafficking; (b) assisting with central-level capacity-building, including as it relates to the legal and policy apparatus; (c) addressing smuggling and trafficking, while assisting victims; and (d) supporting evidence-based and holistic migration policies. Future interventions would be aimed at maintaining community stabilization in the Sahel, including by addressing labour migration and environmental concerns, and at strengthening links between the reintegration of returning migrants and sustainable development by leveraging the positive contributions of returning migrants on local development. Particular attention will be given to positioning culture as a factor of resilience, in particular in times of crisis, through enhanced protection of the cultural and natural heritage of the Sahel, and, specifically, to ensuring a more effective fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

59. In the spirit and application of a more coherent response across areas of activity, life-saving aid needs to be accompanied by longer-term interventions focused on reducing need. Complementary humanitarian and development efforts, based on the principles of “do no harm” and community acceptance, will be required to address economic and gender inequalities, the lack of access to basic services, human rights violations and non-inclusive governance, the scarcity of resources and the climate emergency, and the worrying rise in hunger.

60. Emphasis will be put on the development of specific tools for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and its Support Plan and on integrating them at the country level as a guide for all phases of inter-agency projects (project development, implementation, monitoring and reporting). Information gleaned from monitoring and evaluation activities will inform the provision of support for the implementation of the integrated strategy based on evidence-generation and learning.

61. Noting the current international and regional geopolitical dynamics affecting already deteriorating sustainable development trends, the United Nations will update the policy and programmatic content of its three pillars, namely, governance, security and resilience, by ensuring that they take into consideration and reflect an adequate response to the geopolitical repercussions in the region and the recent political and security developments in Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea and their potential repercussions. The United Nations will endeavour to promote greater alignment and congruence of various regional, and the increasing number of bilateral, initiatives with the integrated strategy, in order to leverage their complementarity and enhance their impact.

## **C. Recommendations**

62. With regard to recommendations on the way forward and the 2022/23 road map for the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the following will be prioritized:

(a) Doubling the support provided to the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel and strengthening foundational enablers through energy, transformative agriculture and climate resilience initiatives, including resilient basic social services, the Great Green Wall Initiative and the African Continental Free Trade Agreement;

(b) Pursuing initiatives relating to the change of narrative in the Sahel, which project optimism and hope, based on a revalorization of economic potentials and sociocultural backgrounds;

(c) Considering countries' shrinking fiscal space, in particular due to resources being diverted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and providing financing through promoting and supporting integrated national financing frameworks, by building on the menu of options suggested by the Summit on Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond;

(d) Building on the successful launch of Generation Unlimited Sahel to provide an integrated framework for United Nations support for youth programmes, with a view to increasing empowerment in measurable ways and promoting youth agency;

(e) Ensuring that women and youth are empowered and put in the lead in the design, roll-out and implementation of programmes on the integrated strategy, thereby giving credence to the aspirations of women and young people from the region;

(f) Optimizing the promotion of culture and spirituality as an important aspect of peace, security and development strategies, including support for the development of cultural industries;

(g) Furthering the analysis of the report (white paper) commissioned under the integrated strategy on an emerging blueprint for transformational change based on a shared de-risking approach to the region and its people, with a view to recalibrating the United Nations approach to risk and resilience to address more effectively the root causes of crises in the Sahel; and leveraging existing and emerging opportunities.