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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 2022/349, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its 2023 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 2022/350 on sustainable development in the Sahel, the Council requested the Secretary-General to report to it at its 2023 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”.

II. South Sudan

A. Country context

2. South Sudan is the youngest nation in the world, having gained independence from the Sudan in 2011. However, since independence, the country has faced multiple and complex challenges. These include political instability, protracted violence with disastrous effects on food security and livelihoods, flooding in the past four years, and escalating humanitarian and economic crises.

* The present report was submitted late in order to reflect the most recent information.



3. There have been positive developments. For instance, net cereal output by smallholder farmers, which is critical for food security, reached an estimated 936,200 tons in 2022, 11.5 per cent above the 2021 output and 15.8 per cent above the average of the previous five years. This increase was due mainly to security improvements, which prompted some displaced households to return to their places of origin to engage in agricultural activities and encouraged farmers to expand plantings to fields further from their homesteads.
4. The political, peace and security environments continue to face challenges, however, as the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan lags behind schedule and intercommunal violence continues to persist in the country.
5. The balance of power in the country continues to exist along ethnic lines, with various groups vying for power and control over land and other resources. Security forces and other actors have been accused of human rights violations, including extrajudicial killings, torture and rape. There are delays in the establishment of the Hybrid Court for South Sudan and constitution drafting, as well as in passing the anti-corruption bill, the National Audit Chamber bill, the public financial management and accountability bill and the petroleum revenue management bill. There is limited transparency in the management of oil resources, and the national budget is often delayed, in some cases by up to 12 months.
6. The humanitarian situation remains dire, with millions of people in need of assistance. About 9.4 million people in the country are projected to need humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter and health care, in 2023. The humanitarian crisis has also resulted in significant displacement: over 4 million people are either internally displaced or seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, a struggling health system and the war in Ukraine exacerbated these challenges.
7. The climate emergency is having increasingly significant impacts in South Sudan. The country is heavily exposed and vulnerable to extreme weather events, including floods and droughts. It has been dealing with the aftermath of severe flooding for the past four years, which has displaced thousands of people, destroyed crops and infrastructure and affected food security.
8. Some 80 per cent of livelihoods in South Sudan depend on traditional rain-fed agriculture, crop farming, pastoralism or animal husbandry. Climate shocks continue to exacerbate the already fragile food security situation. Food consumption gaps are extreme, and people have largely exhausted their emergency coping strategies. During the peak of the lean season (April–July 2023), 7.76 million people (62.7 per cent of the population of South Sudan) are expected to face severe acute food insecurity (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification phase 3 or above).
9. The economic situation remains challenging, with the country's heavy dependence on oil exports, rising inflation, a depreciating currency and high levels of debt. Oil exports account for almost the entirety of the country's export revenues, contributing to over 90 per cent of government revenues.¹ The country is also heavily dependent on imports of essential goods and commodities, including food and refined petroleum. The COVID-19 pandemic also had an impact on the economy, with reduced oil prices for a period and disruptions to supply chains. The Government is working to diversify the economy and attract investment, but progress has been slow.

¹ In 2021, the top exports of South Sudan were crude petroleum (\$455 million), refined petroleum (\$84.9 million), forage crops (\$9.75 million), onions (\$2.1 million) and sheep and goat meat (\$1.99 million).

B. Key development issues

10. South Sudan continues to face significant challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Its progress towards all 17 Sustainable Development Goals is severely hindered by conflict and violence, as detailed above. Of the estimated 12.2 million people living within the country's borders, over 8 million are estimated to be living in extreme poverty (Goal 1) and in need of some sort of humanitarian assistance. As detailed above, there are major challenges in terms of food insecurity and malnutrition, with children showing stunting and wasting (Goal 2).

11. Little or no progress has been made on Goals 3 to 6 over recent years. Life expectancy at birth remains one of the lowest in the world at 56.4 years for men and 59.4 for women in 2019. The maternal mortality ratio is the highest in the world at 789 deaths per 100,000 live births. Most of the population does not have access to safely managed water sources or sanitation facilities, which contributes to poor health and nutrition outcomes. The country also has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world at 34.5 per cent of the adult population (28.9 per cent for women) according to the World Bank, while an estimated 2.8 million children are out of school (59 per cent of all children aged 3–17 years, 53 per cent of whom are girls). There are limited opportunities for technical and vocational education and training for young people, with demand exceeding supply.

12. Gender-based violence, discrimination, child marriage and early childbearing continue to hinder socioeconomic development for women and girls. These are perpetuated by conflict, weakened community and social support systems, and cultural norms coupled with limited availability of and access to prevention and response services. In addition, there is weak capacity and investment for addressing gender-based violence. There is also scant national investment in social protection, with most conditional and unconditional cash transfers, food for assets and some livelihood support provided through donor funding.

13. The high dependence of South Sudan on oil has provided few opportunities for decent, formal employment, with approximately 80 per cent of the population engaged in subsistence farming. It has also left the country overexposed to fluctuations in global markets and vulnerable to regional instability.² Displacements and insecurity have prevented access to farmlands for many households (in particular for female-headed households) during planting, growing and harvesting periods. Despite the Land Act of 2009 allowing all citizens to own and access land irrespective of their sex, ethnicity or religion, many women continue to experience discrimination due to patriarchal laws and practices.

14. The energy infrastructure is underdeveloped, with limited grid connectivity and low levels of investment. Less than 8 per cent of the population has access to electricity. The majority relies on traditional biomass fuels for cooking and heating, which contributes to deforestation and indoor air pollution. This dependence is due to a lack of investment in the energy sector, including renewable sources. Only 1 per cent of the 20,000-km road network in South Sudan is paved. This is a major barrier to trade and market integration, reducing the ability of the economy to respond to supply and demand and contributing to the high cost of delivering humanitarian assistance. The poor transport and communication infrastructure has led to persistent marginalization and inequitable access to social and economic opportunities for many.

² South Sudan is bordered by Ethiopia, the Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Kenya. All of these countries have experienced or are experiencing threats from violent extremism and/or conflict.

15. The national budget cycle can be characterized as having weak oversight and not being gender-responsive, with allocations, execution and spending out-turns showing divergences.

16. Law enforcement agencies are underresourced, with low capacity to apprehend and arraign suspects in court. Meanwhile, the limited number and capacity of statutory courts to adjudicate cases means that prisons and detention centres are overcrowded, with many inmates enduring long periods of detention without trial.

17. The long-term progress on the Sustainable Development Goals in the country will require greater inclusion of marginalized groups and increased accountability in the political and governance spheres. It is also necessary to address the justice and reconciliation needs of the people, as well as the historical (and more recent) grievances that underpin several intercommunal tensions and violence.

C. United Nations approach and response

18. The 2023–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework agreed between the Government of South Sudan and the United Nations country team articulates the collective offer of the United Nations in support of the country's national priorities. It is guided by the 2021–2024 revised national development strategy and aims to support the national priorities in the Revitalized Agreement. It also includes an emphasis on the interlinkages between humanitarian, peace and development activities, as detailed below.

19. The Cooperation Framework has four mutually dependent and reinforcing strategic priorities: (a) consolidation of peace and transparent, accountable and inclusive governance (in support of Goals 5, 16 and 17); (b) sustainable economic growth and diversification (in support of Goals 2, 8, 9 and 13); (c) social development with protection of the most vulnerable (in support of Goals 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6); and (d) women and youth empowerment for sustainable development (in support of Goals 5, 10 and 16).

20. The United Nations is working to enhance partnerships to support collective priorities and work more closely with the Government at the national and state levels. To this end, improved, joint understanding and management of risks, analyses and opportunities have been prioritized.

21. The United Nations is prioritizing support for sustainable development as humanity's ultimate prevention tool. This means addressing the root causes of conflicts to prevent violence, mitigating the negative effects of climate change while meeting the life-saving needs of the most vulnerable, and supporting resilience-building and longer-term development approaches. Collaboration and coherence between peace, humanitarian and development activities ensures that immediate humanitarian needs are met and risks and vulnerabilities are reduced.

22. In this regard, the United Nations and its partners have agreed on collective action programmes in three areas: climate action, including flooding; food security and agriculture; and support for durable solutions to internally displaced persons. These three initiatives are anchored in the Cooperation Framework and the humanitarian results framework.

23. Women's participation and leadership are vital, not only to the achievement of Goal 5 but also across all Goals. In this respect, the United Nations hosted the first ever International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership in South Sudan from 13 to 15 February 2023. A total of 430 participants attended the Conference, including three female former Presidents, as well as parliamentarians, ministers of gender and other gender experts representing 15 African countries. The

Conference contributed to the signing of seven pieces of legislation that had been anticipated for several years, including the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the disability and inclusion bill.

24. A key feature of ensuring coherence and impact is strengthening coordination with stakeholders, including the Government at the national and state levels, to reduce duplication on development-related dialogue. In this regard, special attention has been paid to the modalities and approach of the Office of the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, with the objective of facilitating better coordination within and between development and humanitarian actions, including at the subnational level.

25. On the cross-border agenda, the senior leaders of the United Nations system in South Sudan and the Sudan have been coordinating to build a joint programme in Abyei across the peace, humanitarian and development pillars to address conflicts and build community resilience and cohesion. So far, a joint project was initiated on promoting spaces for conflict prevention and reduced vulnerability in Abyei (about \$2.5 million). The overall objective of the joint programme is to mitigate conflict, maintain stability, foster intercommunal reconciliation and facilitate the return of displaced persons through reduced inequitable access, both real and perceived, to basic services, create conditions for an inclusive environment for peace and enhance resilience for women, young people and vulnerable communities across Abyei. The coordination system is being strengthened with the establishment of the Resident Coordinator Office in Abyei. The impact of the conflict in the Sudan on this joint programme is being assessed.

D. Way forward for future United Nations work and support in South Sudan

26. The United Nations development system in South Sudan will continue to advance the implementation of the Cooperation Framework in partnership with the Government of South Sudan and United Nations partners. This will include prioritizing investment in sustainable development as humanity's ultimate prevention tool, with sustained collaborative action on the part of peace, humanitarian and development actors.

27. The delivery of integrated, coherent and coordinated United Nations support for South Sudan will include assistance to the revitalization of the partnership for peace, resilience and recovery agenda, focusing on food security, climate/flood action and support for durable solutions for internally displaced persons, with a focus on expanding to less secure locations and hard-to-reach areas. As it delivers life-saving humanitarian assistance, the United Nations will also support the creation of durable solutions, the delivery of basic social services and the creation of conditions for the return of displaced populations.

28. The United Nations will give emphasis to building and strengthening coordination mechanisms at the national and state levels with the aim of leveraging synergies and avoiding duplication of interventions. This will involve continuous engagement to strengthen collaboration among stakeholders, including donors, the Government, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

29. Finally, the United Nations system will continue to advocate for the access of South Sudan to resources, technology and support for investing in the transformations needed to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes drawing upon the convening role of the United

Nations to establish multisectoral and multilevel partnerships across the Government, development partners, regional institutions and the private sector.

E. Conclusion

30. In support of efforts to ensure integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan, the international community is encouraged to explore common solutions that place people and communities at the forefront. This requires flexible and long-term funding (including financing for results), collective communication strategies and sustained community engagement.

31. I encourage Member States and international financial institutions to support South Sudan in addressing fiscal and debt challenges, including the strengthening of public financial management, economy diversification to increase domestic non-oil revenue mobilization and financing for basic service delivery, infrastructure development and the data ecosystem.

32. I invite Member States to build on recommendations from the successful International Conference on Women's Transformational Leadership held in South Sudan in February 2023 in support of efforts to ensure that women and young people are empowered and meaningfully engage and participate in political, social and economic processes and decision-making, especially as the country prepares for elections in 2024.

33. I encourage the international community to support the development of a long-term, comprehensive and inclusive approach to tackling the energy challenges in South Sudan and moving towards a successful energy transition.

III. Sahel region

A. Context

Sustainable development

34. There have been uneven results in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Sahel, with some promising achievements in some areas; however, the context remains challenging. Estimates suggest that aggregate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals improved across the region in 2022, after a reversal in 2021. Perhaps most promisingly, hunger levels decreased by almost 10 per cent in 2022, according to the Global Hunger Index.³

35. The socioeconomic situation in the Sahel remained uneven and dynamic, however. Sahelian economies consolidated the 2021 recovery with average gross domestic product (GDP) estimated to have grown by 4.3 per cent in 2022, higher than the post-pandemic growth of 3.3 per cent in 2021. This growth is expected to consolidate in 2023, increasing from 4.36 per cent to 5.28 per cent. However, the war in Ukraine and the instability in the region are having repercussions on Sahelian countries, which directly reflected on their GDP in 2022.

36. During the reporting period, millions of children, adolescent girls and young women faced crises in nutrition, education, protection, and social and community systems. For instance, increased attacks on schools and threats of violence in 2021 and 2022 disrupted the education system, with girls constituting the majority of the

³ The 2022 *Global Hunger Index* report identified progress against hunger, with the Global Hunger Index improving from 27 to 24.5 in 2022.

over 12 million children aged 6–18 years out of the school system in the Sahel (9 million in the central Sahel alone), out of the 57 million such children in the West and Central Africa regions.

37. Despite improvements in the Global Hunger Index mentioned above, the food and nutrition security situation remained concerning in the Sahel region owing to rainfall deficits, socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and subregional conflicts. According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 12.7 million people were food insecure in the central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger) and some 9.7 million people were acutely food insecure in 2022.⁴

38. Nearly 3 million people from the central Sahel have been displaced owing to conflict, including farmers, herders and traders. Cross-border attacks, especially in the Liptako-Gourma region, and uncertain political dynamics in several countries are preventing the full achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of Agenda 2063.

Political and security situation

39. In 2022, the political environment in the Sahel continued to face challenges, including (a) unconstitutional changes of government in some countries; (b) curtailment of civic space; and (c) increased insecurity, with reports of human rights abuses by non-State actors in the context of their efforts to expand their activities from the central Sahel to coastal countries, notably Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

40. Nevertheless, some Sahelian countries experienced positive developments in political governance. In January and July, respectively, Senegal held peaceful local and legislative elections. In the Gambia, the Government relaunched democratic reforms and transitional justice processes following the successful legislative elections held in April. In September 2022, the Government of Mauritania made progress on elections by signing a political agreement with 24 out of the 25 officially recognized political parties to hold local, regional and legislative elections in 2023. The Niger made advances on political dialogue through the participation of opposition representatives in a session of the National Council for Political Dialogue held in September 2022, which had been boycotted by the opposition since 2016.

41. The security situation in large parts of the Sahel continued to deteriorate, especially in the central Sahel. The number of victims and casualties of violence, including women and children, has increased.

42. The Liptako-Gourma region remains a concern owing to recurrent confrontations between the Al-Qaida-affiliated Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara over territorial control and access to resources. Fighting and attacks between armed groups have intensified in parts of Burkina Faso and Mali, particularly for control of the cross-border regions of Gao and Menaka. This has led to hundreds of civilian casualties and the increased involvement of the local armed groups in recent months. At the same time, in the Niger, attacks have increased in the western regions of Tahoua and Tillabéri. Insecurity concerns remain in north-western Nigeria.

⁴ Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, "Conflict remains the dominant driver of Africa's spiralling food crisis", 14 October 2022; WFP, "Responding to the 2022 food crisis in the Sahel: leveraging and strengthening social protection to mitigate the impact of current and future crises", August 2022.

Climate change

43. The Sahel region is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change owing to high levels of poverty and dependence on agriculture. The region has experienced significant changes in rainfall patterns and increased frequency of droughts in recent decades, which have significant impacts on food security and the livelihoods of millions of people.

44. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, temperatures in the region have risen by 1.5 degrees Celsius over the past century and are projected to continue to rise in the future. This warming is expected to lead to more frequent and severe heatwaves, as well as longer and more intense dry spells.

45. In addition to these climate impacts, the Sahel is facing a range of other environmental challenges including desertification, deforestation and land degradation, which are exacerbating the impacts of climate change.

Humanitarian situation

46. In 2022, approximately 31.8 million people in the Sahel needed humanitarian assistance and protection, compared with 28.7 million in 2021.⁵ Notably, by December 2022, countries covered by the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel hosted some 10.2 million forcibly displaced people. According to the latest available government figures,⁵ Burkina Faso has experienced one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in the world, with the number of internally displaced persons reaching 1.8 million. The number of refugees from Burkina Faso continued to rise, with more than 34,000 having fled to Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger and Togo by the end of November.⁶

47. In the Lake Chad basin countries, almost 5 million internally displaced persons and 1.4 million refugees were dispersed across Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and Nigeria owing to violence by non-State armed groups.⁶ Nigeria registered nearly 1 million internally displaced persons in the north-western and central part of the country. Since mid-2019, more than 73,000 Nigerians have fled from north-western Nigeria to the regions of Maradi and Tahoua in the Niger, including around 30,300 new arrivals since January 2022.⁶ The Far North Region of Cameroon hosts around 385,000 internally displaced persons and almost 172,900 refugees, while the Lac Province of Chad hosts around 406,570 internally displaced persons and almost 42,600 refugees. Violence in the Lake Chad basin is perpetrated by violent extremist groups whose actions overlap with intercommunal violence between various groups, including farmers, herders and fishers, amid decreasing natural resources. Renewed intercommunal clashes in the Far North Region of Cameroon were high in December 2021 but stabilized somewhat in 2022, which enabled the spontaneous return of approximately 12,600 internally displaced persons and refugees in 2022.⁶

48. In 2022, the worst flooding in years affected 2.5 million people in the region. Heavy rains and floods took a significant toll on human life, property, farmlands and livestock, killing 560 persons, displacing 438,000 people and destroying some 184,000 houses.⁷

49. The impacts of climate change and the war in Ukraine further exacerbated food and fuel price increases, with impacts on refugees, internally displaced persons and

⁵ Humanitarian-related figures refer to the following countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon (Far North Region only), Mali, Niger, Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe States).

⁶ Data from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

⁷ Flooding figures refer to the following countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Cameroon (Far North Region only), Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria (Borno, Adamawa, Yobe States), Senegal.

vulnerable communities. In June 2022, the Government of Chad declared a national food and nutrition emergency because of its worst lean season (the period between harvests that lasts from May to August) in a decade. The further deterioration of livelihoods also continued to drive migration from northern Chad, in particular to Libya.

50. During the reporting period, women and young people were affected by conflict in the region. These include children, adolescent girls and young women who faced crises in nutrition, education, child protection, water and sanitation, health, and social and community systems. For instance, more than 10.1 million children needed immediate humanitarian assistance in 2022. Increased attacks on schools and threats of violence during 2020 and 2021 disrupted the education system. By October 2022, more than 12 million out of the 57 million children aged 6–18 years out of the school system in West and Central Africa, with girls making up the majority, were from the Sahel (9 million from the Central Sahel alone). This is because of the significant closure of schools (a total of 12,000, more than 5,000 of them in the Central Sahel alone).

B. United Nations support for the Sahel

51. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel works closely with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the special political mission mandated by the Security Council to, inter alia, support efforts in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, sustaining peace and mediation in West Africa and the Sahel. The Office of the Special Coordinator also works closely with the resident coordinators who lead the United Nations country teams throughout the region, ensuring a coherent United Nations approach at the national level.

52. In 2022, the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel focused on the provision of basic social services, the promotion of stability and the restoration of State authority. It also strengthened partnerships among United Nations entities at the country level and with subregional and regional institutions to reinforce a coordinated approach across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. While the realization of the full potential of the integrated strategy was limited by economic, political, security, humanitarian and social development factors, achievements were noted on various thematic priorities of the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel. The annex provides an overview of key activities and achievements in the implementation of the integrated strategy for 2022.

Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel

53. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel has significantly improved the coherence of programmes under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and substantially coordinated the establishment of a project bank⁸ in line with the priorities of Member States and the emerging needs of the populations and in coordination with partners. To ensure the coherence of the programmes under the integrated strategy, the Office led the co-creation of programmatic workstreams, which resulted in programmes on: (a) climate resilience and sustainable agriculture; (b) renewable energy offer for the Sahel; and (c) peace and security. An additional programme on governance and social services is being finalized. These workstreams are fully coherent and aligned with the three pillars of the integrated strategy, six priority areas of the United Nations Support Plan, the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063. They have mutually reinforcing interlinkages, synergies and complementarities between and among them. For its part,

⁸ See <https://unis-sahel.org/>.

the strategy's project bank, a living tool that currently contains 15 vetted projects, covers the three pillars of the integrated strategy and six priority areas of the United Nations Support Plan, with an approximate value of \$390,047,552.

54. Despite the increasingly difficult global economic situation and the war in Ukraine, the Office has successfully raised funds for projects in the region. This includes additional resources for a joint United Nations project on stabilization with the Liptako-Gourma Authority and a transition support project in Guinea. The Office signed three memorandums of understanding in support of programmes under the integrated strategy with the Islamic Development Bank, the Global Green Growth Institute and the Singapore Cooperation Enterprise, aimed at advancing the 2030 Agenda in the Sahel. The overall intended result is emphasis on (a) increased resilience to climate change in the Sahel through the expansion of social protection to the groups most affected by climate change, with a focus on young people and women; (b) the expansion of climate-smart agriculture to vulnerable groups; (c) strengthened conflict sensitivity in climate adaptation; and (d) enhanced coherence between climate policy and programmes through a shared evidence base, to enhance understanding of and tackle the linkages between climate change, fragility, conflict and forced displacement in the targeted areas.

55. To ensure the centrality, relevance and strategic position of the integrated strategy at the global, regional and national levels, the Office commissioned studies and research to generate knowledge, evidence and data for the Sahel region to inform the development of policies, programmes and interventions. These knowledge products include: (a) *Sahel Vision Paper: Transformational Change in the Sahel – Managing Transitions*; (b) *Moving from Reaction to Action: Anticipating Vulnerability Hotspots in the Sahel – A Synthesis Report from the Sahel Predictive Analytics Project in Support of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel*; and (c) *A Narrative of the 5W Mapping of the United Nations Geographic and Operational Presence in the Sahel (2018–2020)*.⁹

56. The Office has significantly pivoted the narrative on the Sahel beyond the prevailing doxa of crisis to also embrace an operative discourse of the region's richness, potential and opportunities. This was accomplished through a comprehensive communication and advocacy strategy, underscoring a path towards transformation, innovation and prosperity of the region.

57. To date, the Office has facilitated the integration of the strategy into the United Nations Cooperation Frameworks of Cameroon, the Niger and Nigeria, with the strategy also embedded in the common country analysis of eight countries (Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal). The Niger is the first country to align its new development plan with the strategy, while work is ongoing to ensure the strategy's integration into the national development plans of the remaining countries covered by it. This highlights the strong commitment to and ownership of the strategy by the United Nations country teams, led by the resident coordinators and national Governments.

Peace dividend and development: political instability

58. The politicization of peacebuilding and development processes, and restrictions of civic space and fundamental human rights are of increasing concern in several countries in the region. Consequently, UNOWAS has been working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, the United Nations system in the region and the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, as well as government institutions and communities, to

⁹ See <https://unis-sahel.org/reports/policy-papers-or-knowledge-products/>.

contribute to the restoration of the social contract and State authority at the national and local levels, including in cross-border areas.

59. The United Nations system, including through UNOWAS, worked with national stakeholders and partners, regional organizations and international partners to support efforts towards the restoration of constitutional order in Burkina Faso, Guinea and Mali.

60. Meanwhile, as part of its actions in support of the political transition in Guinea, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) supported the integration of human rights elements into the resolutions and recommendations of the inclusive and sovereign political dialogue and national reconciliation. This was done through the implementation of the recommendations of the national human rights forum organized in April 2022 by the Government and following consultations with sociopolitical leaders at the local level. In Chad, where the political and institutional transition continued in 2022, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and OHCHR provided support for the inclusive and sovereign national dialogue, a key transition milestone, to promote its inclusiveness and alignment with international human rights standards.

Prevention and resilience

61. As part of its efforts in support of resilience-building in the Sahel within the framework of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the United Nations system has used a more innovative approach to preventing violent extremism and youth radicalization and provided support for the improvement of cross-border relations and social cohesion within communities, as well as for the stabilization, promotion and protection of human rights, access to justice, and adherence to the rule of law. The Peacebuilding Fund was instrumental in operationalizing this vision. Within the framework of a United Nations joint project in the Liptako-Gourma region, United Nations entities, funds and programmes implemented activities on (a) the promotion of cross-border cooperation for stability and development; (b) the prevention and resolution of conflict, violent extremism and crime; and (c) the promotion of access to justice, human rights and the rule of law in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

62. United Nations entities also continued to support efforts of the authorities to prevent violent extremism in the Sahel by providing support to the ministries of religious affairs, worship and customs for the development of a communication strategy to curb extremism among the populations, the implementation of the consultation framework of organized religious actors and the adoption of a sermon guide. Targeted groups are networks of religious leaders, both men and women, young peace activists and local authorities who are key players in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

63. Prevention grounded in inclusive sustainable development remains the most effective approach to countering terrorism in the Sahel. Addressing its deep and multifaceted drivers yields more impactful and long-lasting results. Multifaceted solutions implemented through a whole-of-society approach are needed. In this connection, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, coordinated by the Office of Counter-Terrorism, has delivered impactful, cost-efficient and sustainable “all of United Nations” capacity-building support to Sahel countries in various areas. Targeted areas include countering terrorist travel through the use of passenger data, border security and management, prevention of kidnapping for ransom under its counter-terrorism investigations programme, parliamentary

engagement and the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of persons associated with terrorist groups.

64. In 2022, United Nations entities implemented three joint projects, including life-saving multisectoral gender-based violence response services, prevention and protection delivered through a survivor-centred approach. Some 2,150 women were trained in small-scale trades, entrepreneurship, women's rights promotion and empowerment, gender equality and female leadership.

Climate change

65. The United Nations has been working with the Governments of the Sahel region to develop national adaptation plans and integrate climate change considerations into development planning. The secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has provided technical support and capacity-building to help countries in the region to develop and implement these plans.

66. UNDP has been supporting countries, including Sahel countries, in ensuring that their nationally determined contributions are more technically robust. This support includes strengthening mitigation targets, enhancing climate resilience (adaptation) and communicating their actions to build trust and facilitate effective implementation.

67. In addition, the United Nations has been supporting efforts to improve the collection and analysis of climate data in the Sahel. For instance, the World Meteorological Organization has been working with national meteorological agencies to improve weather forecasting and climate services in the region.

Coordinated frameworks in the Sahel

68. The thirteenth meeting of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel steering committee took place in N'Djamena on 5 and 6 May 2022, co-chaired by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and the Assistant Administrator, Assistant Secretary-General and Regional Director, UNDP Africa Bureau. Participants reflected on the engagement of the United Nations in countries undergoing transitions, the impact of sanctions by ECOWAS on Mali and the impact of the geopolitical context on the Sahel region. The committee agreed to prioritize the following strategic areas as development accelerators for the region: (a) water; (b) governance; and (c) industrialization.

69. On water, the steering committee, at its thirteenth meeting, tasked the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel together with the Co-Chairs of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel with leading the development and adoption of a Sahel regional action plan on water, to include: (a) development and protection of water infrastructure; (b) support for States for governance of water at all levels; and (c) expansion of partnerships to establish a knowledge-based digital platform.

70. On governance, the steering committee re-emphasized the centrality of good governance, respect, protection and promotion of human rights and the rule of law as a prerequisite for sustainable development, peace and addressing people's expectations. Governance of transitions must encompass political processes, including democratic and demographic aspects.

71. On industrialization, it was agreed to (a) enhance the promotion of youth and women-led/created industries in the region; (b) support the inclusive and sustainable industrialization of Sahelian countries through the development of industrial policies, strategies and transformation projects (industrial parks and agro-poles); (c) mobilize Governments, the private sector and development partners to finance industrial development, in the framework of the African Union Summit on Industrialization and

Economic Diversification, held in Niamey from 20 to 25 November 2022; and (d) build on key initiatives such as the 1,000 Digital Villages initiative of the African Union and establishment of agro-poles to boost the capacities of communities through the integration of information and communications technologies and industrialization, respectively.

72. The steering committee also emphasized the importance of a multisectoral approach to these priorities, taking into consideration their related impact. The committee affirmed the importance of supporting transitional Governments in the Sahel to resume the democratic trajectory for the benefit of the population and to consolidate sustainable development gains and ensure that vulnerable populations are protected and that adequate investments are made for the delivery of humanitarian and basic social services.

Perspectives for future work

73. Integrated, coherent and coordinated support for the Sahel region will be guided by the following principles for a peaceful and prosperous region: (a) a sense of urgency; (b) scale; (c) peace, development and humanitarian interlinkages in programming; and (d) a culture of anticipation.

74. This will involve close engagement to devise solutions with Governments in the Sahel and adjoining coastal States, as well as with regional organizations, including ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States, the African Union, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Mano River Union and the Group of Five for the Sahel, among others. Collaboration and strategic partnerships will be intensified, particularly with the special envoys to the Sahel, the private sector, foundations, civil society and other influential actors with strong interest in joining efforts to implement the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

75. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel will give special attention to expanding the strategy's project bank, which at present comprises programmes totalling \$390 million. The Office will solidify the investment thesis, engage with the multilateral development banks with which memorandums of understanding have been signed, and take steps to engage potential investors.

76. Attention will be given to accelerating and scaling up efforts towards resource mobilization and investment in the region by leveraging the United Nations partnership through the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel with the Islamic Development Bank, in support of programmes under the integrated strategy. Similarly, the memorandums of understanding signed with the Global Green Growth Institute and the Government of Singapore will provide opportunities for growth and development, with particular focus on energy and climate, as well as water, food security and capacity development.

77. The Office will continue supporting youth programmes aimed at fostering innovation, building capacity and preventing the outmigration of Sahelian youth talent under the frameworks of Generation Unlimited and YouthConnekt Sahel.

78. The Office will reinforce support to United Nations country teams in continuing to embed the integrated strategy into regional and country-level partnerships and frameworks, including national development plans, United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and country programme documents of United Nations entities, as well as into the regional frameworks of the Group of Five for the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Liptako-Gourma Authority.

79. The Office will also expand strategic communication on development in the Sahel, guided by the opportunity-based narrative on the region, through the newsletter and website for the integrated strategy, with a strong focus on social media and

strategic positioning at national, regional and international forums. The Office will further engage with the populations of the Sahel, particularly young people and women, through a series of “Sahel conversations” with multiple stakeholders.

80. The United Nations will also engage stakeholders for the roll-out of the “accelerators” identified at the thirteenth meeting of the steering committee, namely water, governance and industrialization, including the ongoing operationalization of the humanitarian, development, peace and security interlinkages as well as completion of the draft programmes on resilient social services and governance and an accelerated implementation of the new offer of the peace and security pillar of the strategy.

C. Recommendations

81. Integrated, coherent and coordinated support for sustainable development, humanitarian and peacebuilding purposes remains imperative in the Sahel.

82. United Nations entities will continue to strengthen coordination and coherence, particularly through cooperation frameworks as the default engagement platform between the United Nations and Member States. United Nations entities will support community-based development approaches that enable the transitions necessary to accelerate development progress under the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. Further work will be undertaken to strengthen mutual accountability and transparency mechanisms alongside the use of broad community-based approaches that ensure both the participation and consideration of the needs of the target groups, as well as their sustainability.

83. I call upon the international community to intensify the mobilization of resources for investment in the transitions needed to accelerate sustainable development in the Sahel. This includes advancing just energy transitions, transforming food systems and reshaping education. It also includes making investments that address economic and gender inequalities, lack of access to basic services, political instability, terrorism, violent extremism, the human rights situation, the climate emergency, including early warning systems, and the need for climate-resilient infrastructure, among others.

Annex

Key United Nations activities and achievements in the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel for 2022

Peace and development

1. Within the framework of the United Nations joint project in the Liptako-Gourma region, the United Nations system implemented activities using an integrated approach for the promotion of cross-border cooperation for stability and development; prevention and resolution of conflict; violent extremism and crime; and promotion of access to justice, human rights and the rule of law in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger. Hundreds of regional and local stakeholders in the above-mentioned countries were sensitized about local mechanisms to improve access to justice for victims, involving over 300 participants, with 42 per cent women's participation, in cross-border zones, including the empowerment of 104 community members, local authorities, civil society organizations and women's organizations.

2. In Burkina Faso, a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) project in support of the promotion and protection of young peacebuilders and human rights defenders engaged 500 human right defenders in the Sahel, east and north of Burkina Faso in conflict prevention and provided training on Security Council resolutions [1325 \(2000\)](#) and [2250 \(2015\)](#). These capacity-building and outreach efforts using local radio and round tables contributed to increased trust between young defenders and law enforcement officers (police and gendarmes), and religious and customary authorities. This intergenerational rapprochement had a further positive impact on social cohesion.

3. In Chad, where the political transition continued, UNDP, UNFPA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) advocated for an inclusive national dialogue, a key transition milestone, and committed to promote its inclusiveness and alignment with international human rights standards. Logistical and technical support for the organization of the national dialogue ensured the participation of women, young people and persons with disabilities. This resulted in recommendations on the promotion and protection of human rights and the restoration of good governance, justice and truth, as well as army reform. Technical support enabled the operationalization of a commission for the verification of unlawful detentions, and 100 per cent of protests were monitored by both national and international human rights experts.

Governance

4. On strengthening cross-border and regional cooperation for stability and development, including youth, the United Nations system contributed to the training of nearly 1,370 young people (944 young men and 426 young women) outside of school in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger on cross-cutting skills (including entrepreneurial and digital skills) in 2022. In the same vein, it organized three youth camps in Mopti, Mali, Ouagadougou and Niamey with the participation of around 101 young women and men. Young people were equipped to use the training platform developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for their communities.

5. With regard to women's empowerment, in collaboration with other United Nations entities and partners, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) piloted several gender-responsive and

market-led innovations to strengthen the resilience of rural women in the Sahel. In Senegal, as part of its programme entitled “Transformative approaches for recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work in women’s economic empowerment”, UN-Women worked with the National Agency for Universal Health Coverage to adapt its services to the needs of rural women and facilitate their access to a social protection system to better redistribute their care work and address their risks of income loss. As a result of awareness-raising and capacity-building, 900 women members of the Network of Women Farmers of the North signed up for health insurance for the first time, for themselves and their households, reaching nearly 7,000 people.

6. Regarding institutional capacity-building for citizen engagement and the fight against corruption, in Mali the United Nations system continued to support the Ministry of State Reform in charge of relations with institutions for the development of a national strategy for the prevention of and fight against corruption. A corruption diagnostic document was finalized in September, and the draft strategy was validated. Support was also provided to civil society to build its capacity to monitor cases of corruption and human rights violations. A network of focal points and civil society organizations has been set up in 22 circles in Mali. An application and a web platform called Kenekanko have also been developed, allowing people to report incidents which are then verified by partner organizations and transmitted to the competent State authorities for the purposes of redress. Since the launch of the project, more than 500 alerts have already been reported and processed by partner organizations.

7. On the rule of law, in Mali the United Nations system, together with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, continued to provide strategic support to the Commissioner for Security Sector Reform and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights to monitor the implementation of policies of the security and justice sectors. Support was provided to the Ministry around institutional communication through technical and logistical strengthening of its communication unit, the development of a communication strategy and communication training for 116 judicial and prison staff. The support included the strengthening of the presence and effectiveness of security and justice actors through the provision of infrastructure and construction or rehabilitation works for security and justice actors in the circles of Nara, Macina, Yorosso and Koro. Regarding human rights and transitional justice, the programme also continued to provide technical and logistical support for the regional offices of the National Commission for Human Rights located in Gao, Mopti, Ségou, Sikasso and Kayes to strengthen monitoring of places of detention and setting up a network of partner civil society organizations.

Resilience

8. Upon agreement by the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel steering committee in 2021, 11 United Nations entities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), OHCHR, UNESCO, UNFPA, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN-Women, United Nations Volunteers programme, World Health Organization, UNICEF, UNDP, and WFP) jointly developed a new integrated strategy programmatic offer on resilient social service under the joint leadership of UNICEF, WFP and FAO in 2022. The offer covers five critical social sectors: (a) resilient primary health-care services; (b) resilient education services; (c) protection continuum; (d) nutrition care continuum; and (e) risk-informed governance.

9. On strengthening resilient health systems and services, in 2022 UNICEF connected 50 health centres and more than 200 schools to newly constructed solar-powered water systems in 11 regions targeted by resilience initiatives in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. UNICEF has also mobilized the regional solar hub to

provide technical assistance to hospitals and health-care facilities, including reviewing designs of solar-powered water systems for hospitals and health-care facilities and providing on-site solar-powered water systems evaluations in hospitals. In the Niger and Nigeria, UNICEF supported cholera regional surveillance and cross-country alerts during the reporting period.

10. Regarding strengthening resilient water, sanitation and hygiene services, United Nations entities, funds and programmes made progress in providing access to sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene services for children and communities across Sahelian countries. A total of 253,856 additional people, including 35,540 children under 5 years of age, in both development and humanitarian situations have access to improved and sustainable water sources. The UNICEF country office in Guinea provided 174,714 people in development contexts and 79,142 people in humanitarian situations with access to safe and sustainable drinking water facilities. In addition, 129,388 people in humanitarian situations, including 18,114 persons with disabilities, had access to temporary water facilities through water trucking and distribution of water treatment kits.

11. The construction of water infrastructure was prioritized by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in 2022. The “1 million cisterns for the Sahel” project, an integrated rainfall water management for agriculture and social protection approach, was implemented in the Sahel by FAO and its partners throughout the reporting period. FAO initiated the construction of 152 cisterns in the Sahel region for agriculture and domestic uses. This went a long way to improve the quantity and quality of yields for vegetables in arid areas while strengthening the resilience of the beneficiary communities. Likewise, in Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, UNICEF constructed 273 climate-resilient water systems, which served more than 330,000 people.