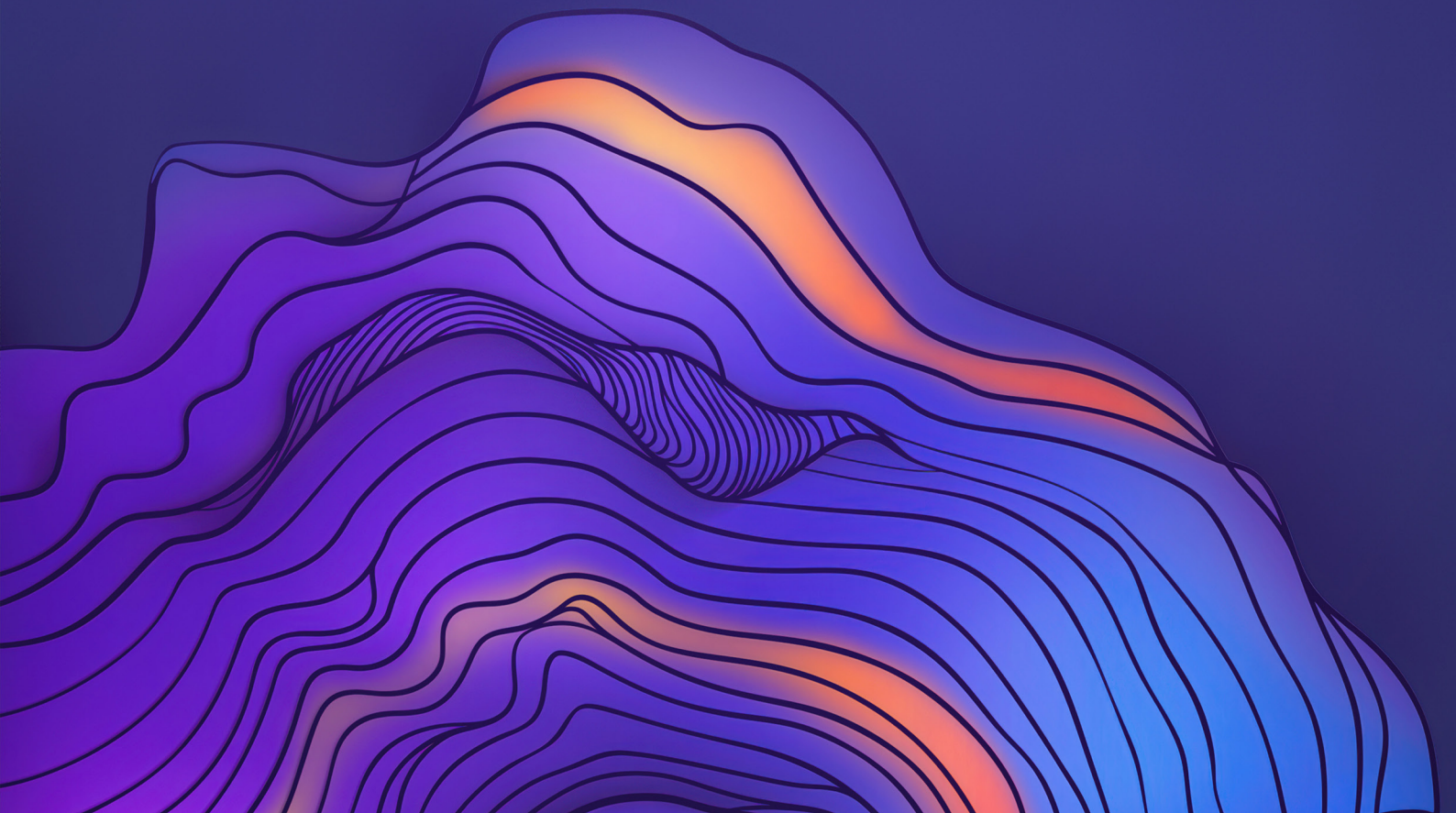
THE FUTURE OF GOVERNANCE IN THE SAHEL

(Re)building Social Cohesion and Public Trust



Acknowledgements

We extend our profound gratitude to all those whose invaluable contributions made this volume possible. Special thanks to the editors, Njoya Tikum, Nebila Abdulmelik and George Mukundi Wachira for their leadership and vision throughout the process. We are equally indebted to our senior content and process advisors, Dominic Sam (former UNDP Resident Representative in DRC) and Ozonnia Ojielo (UN RC Rwanda), for their expert guidance.

Project Coordinator: Nadine Rugwe

We also wish to acknowledge the invaluable insights and expertise provided by our reviewers and resource persons: Dr. Matthias Z. Naab (UNDP Regional Service Centre for Africa); Semiha Abdulmelik; Gbaka Ernest Acho (Barrister); Niagalé Bagayoko (ASSN); Kehinde Bolaji (UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre); Blerta Cela (RSF, UNDP); Chika Charles Aniekwe (UN Somalia); Ayangafac Chrysantus (UNDP Chad); Aissata De (RR, Cameroon); Moudjib Djinadou (UNOWAS); Maurice Engueleguele (International IDEA); Prof Ibrahim Jibrin (Center for Democracy and Development); Dominique Kabeya (UNISS); Kamil Kamaluddeen (UNDP RR, Chad); Ibrahima Kane (OSF); Josephat Kilonzo (Strathmore University); Nirina Kiplagat (UNDP, RSC); Ozonnia Ojielo (UN RC Rwanda); Nadine Rugwe (UNDP WACA); Dominique Sam (former UNDP); Dr Bakary Sambe; Fatou Jagne Senghore; Prof. Landry Signé (Stanford University); Prof. Antonia Simbine.

Finally, we are grateful to the UNDP WACA project support team: Doris Agazie; Jonathan Madaki; Carole Modobe; Sylvia Senu; Ugochukwu Kingsley Ahuchaogu

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Acronyms

ACDEG	African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Government
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AfDB	African Development Bank
ADFC	African Diaspora Finance Corporation
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
AFSIT	Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMU	Arab Maghreb Union
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
ARII	African Regional Integration Index
AROs	Africa Regional Organizations
ASS	Alliance of Sahelian States
AU	African Union
BRVM	Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières
BVMAC	Bourse des Valeurs Mobilières de L'Afrique Centrale
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CEMAC	Communauté Économique et Monétaire L'Africaine Centrale
CEN-SAD	Community of Sahel-Saharan States
CRCs	Community Resource Centers
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DDI	Diaspora Direct Investment
DPA	Data Protection Authorities
DPI	Diaspora Portfolio Investment
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECCAS	Economic Commission for Central African States
ECF	Extended Credit Facility
ECOWAS	Economic Commission for West African States
EU	European Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FSRB	FATF-Style Regional Bodies
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FNDC	National Front for the Defense of the Constitution
GABAC	Action Group Against Money Laundering in Central Africa
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GGW	Great Green Wall
GIABA	Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFF	Illicit Financial Flows

Acronyms

IGOs	Inter-Governmental Organizations
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara
ISWAP	Islamic State West Africa Province
JNIM	Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen
LCBC	Lake Chad Basin Commission
LGA	Liptako-Gourma Authority
MENAFATF	Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali
MNJTF	Multi-National Joint Task Force
MPs	Members of Parliament
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise
MTOs	Money Transfer Operators
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NGX	Nigeria Exchange Group
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPSS	Pan African Payment and Settlement System
REC	Regional Economic Community
RSF	Regional Stabilization Facility
RS-SRR	Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region
RUBI	Rural Broadband Initiative
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SKC	School Knowledge Centers
SSE	Social and Solidarity Enterprise
UCGs	Unconstitutional Changes of Government
UEMOA	Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNISS	United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
WACA	West and Central Africa
WAEMU	West African Economic Monetary Union
WAMZ	West African Monetary Zone
WANEP	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding

Foreword



by **Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan**

President, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2010-2015) and Founder of the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation

This Future of Governance in the Sahel: (Re)building Social Cohesion and Public Trust report is groundbreaking, timely and strikes a chord with many of us who call the Sahel home. I am deeply honored to offer personal reflections as a preface to this report. I do so as a citizen of the region, as well as one who had the privilege to serve my country Nigeria as its President and, since leaving office, as one who continues to play an active role in supporting governance in this region as well as across the continent.

The report provides a true reflection of the contextual reality of the Sahel, laying out its challenges as well as opportunities to creatively rethink the future of governance. As the report notes, we have one of the most diverse and well-endowed regions in terms of natural and human resources, yet our people have yet to optimally reap the benefits.

Where did things go astray one may ask?

There is neither a single narrative for the Sahel crisis nor a simple answer solution. As the report finds, central to the socio-economic, security and political challenges facing the region are governance deficits, neglect of the people and their well-being, and an inability to transform our rich resources for the benefits of the people. With the benefit of hindsight and several years of reflection and introspection as a former President – it is clear to me that leadership crises, a disconnect between the people and those who govern, leading to unaccountable governance coupled with external interference have played significant roles in the poor state of affairs we are witnessing across the Sahel.

I can attest to the veracity of the findings in the report having lived through the Sahel reality as a leader and citizen. During my tenure as President of Nigeria between 2010-2015, the crisis in the parts of country with extremist groups and acts of terrorism exacerbated. We spent significant technical, human and financial resources using a securitized approach to redress the challenges, recording reasonable success at that time. The security crisis, criminality and acts of terrorism remain unabated to this day, as much as there are pockets of progress to downgrade the threats. Without the concerted efforts of regional actors, the collaboration of various levels and arms of government as well as addressing the structural root causes of the crisis – socio-economic injustice, marginalization and exclusion of communities especially in borderlands – no amount of investments in security and military can offer durable security.

Without romanticizing Nigeria, I would like to cite it again to corroborate a key finding of this report on the role of peaceful transitions of power on governance. When my party lost elections in 2015, I was deeply disappointed but knew it was in the country's best interest not to cling to power. I willingly ceded, a testament to how far we have come as a country and region. Nigeria which was once infamous for military coups, has today become a bastion of peaceful transfer of power and with it, guarantees of stability. For peace and stability to thrive in the Sahel, the legitimacy and credibility of democracy processes are central. When we have safeguards and institutional and normative frameworks that guarantee the rule of law, separation of powers, protection and promotion of fundamental human rights, justice and constitutionalism, the region stands to reap the rewards of its abundant resources.

I have spent time since leaving office thinking, writing and exchanging with former and current leaders on what we need to do to save our region and continent from pervasive crisis. I recently served as a special envoy of ECOWAS in Mali which is amid a transition. Mali's leadership and people all agree that a return to democracy and constitutionalism is necessary. The concerns raised by several countries of vested external influence and interference resonate not just in our region but beyond. It demands a rethink of governance frameworks, financing and priorities as evident in the increased agitation by citizens for accountable, inclusive and responsive governance that delivers and an end to engaging actors who drain our resources while fronting and manipulating some of our leaders to the detriment of citizens and the national interest. Our regional institutions including the AU, ECOWAS and other regional mechanisms should be emboldened to organize for African solidarity and for the interests of their citizens.

The primacy of citizens cannot be overstated. We can no longer afford to pay them lip service, but must listen to their demands and act in their best interests. Young people who are the majority, women and citizens have not only increasingly exercised their agency, they are demanding better governance. The Occupy Nigeria protests against the withdrawal of the fuel subsidies that took place during my time as President is cited in this report as a case in point. Through dialogue, open communication and feedback loops as is proposed in this report, we convened a national conference in 2014, the first of its kind, to debate and discuss key socio-economic issues bedeviling the country. I would suggest this approach is adopted across the Sahel to facilitate dialogue and adopt and implement the recommendations that emerge from such national conversations and dialogue.

I would like to congratulate UNDP, UNOWAS and UNISS for putting together this report, recognizing the stellar efforts of all the contributors who made this report possible. I encourage leaders, policy makers and all stakeholders in the Sahel and beyond to review its contents and implement the key policy options that are proffered for consideration. On my part, I commit to continue to work to address some of the leadership challenges raised in this report, through our foundation, The Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and the West African Elders Forum, through a multi-disciplinary approach and tailored support including mentoring, advisory and mediation to advance democracy promotion, governance and peace and security.

I believe we can and we must work together for a better future for the Sahel.

Foreword

by **Ahunna Eziakonwa and Abdoulaye Mar Dieye**

This inaugural report is the culmination of joint efforts, close collaboration, partnership and co-creation by the UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa and the UNISS Secretariat. Inspired by the clarion call for the UN to deliver as one, the conceptualization of the report was informed and guided by decades of working to advance sustainable development in the Sahel. The report is the result of extensive consultations, engagements and research by leading experts who researched, questioned and analyzed emerging trends, challenges, opportunities and lessons learnt on governance in the Sahel. The focus of the inaugural issue – (re)building social cohesion and public trust - was borne out of a collective recognition and concession that at the heart of the persistent crisis lie governance deficits. This has led to a rise in popular protests, military coups, insecurity, criminality, and extremism.

We acknowledge that while significant progress has been made, the impact of our investments to redress these challenges have fallen short of citizens' expectations. The report's findings resonate with our institutions' experiences. We concede that our support and those of partners including Sahelian states have significantly tilted towards a security-heavy and military approach. As demonstrated in the report, at the heart of recurrent conflicts, insecurity and rising levels of poverty and marginalization, are unaccountable governments that have inadequately delivered socio-economic goods and services to their people. The solutions lie in rethinking governance as core to a sustainable future hinged upon rebuilding social cohesion and public trust. Inevitably, that entails building (back) trust through (re)centering citizens, advancing justice and addressing impunity, ensuring sound economic governance, exploring digital opportunities, revitalizing the social contract, pushing for term limits and addressing military coups, and a greater appreciation for multi-level governance, regionalism and cross-border cooperation.

We are honored on behalf of UNDP and Secretariat of UNISS to bring together our convening leverage, skills, capacities and resources to produce this inaugural report. It is a timely and useful contribution to ignite and deepen reflections, consolidate knowledge and explore policy options on rebuilding social cohesion and public trust in the Sahel.

The experts and contributors to the report mirror the diversity of the region and the continent. The contributors were carefully selected based on their grounded expertise and contextual knowledge of the region's governance trends, challenges, gaps and opportunities. With vast practical experience of governance at national, regional and global levels, the findings and policy proposals made are not only applicable to the Sahel but would equally offer replicable comparable lessons for other similarly situated regions of the continent facing democracy regression, insecurity and socio-economic governance deficits.

We acknowledge and are grateful for the contributions of the chapter authors, editors, reviewers and technical staff members of the three organizations for the incredible task that made this report possible. We commit to work in concert with Member States in the Sahel, relevant Regional Economic Communities, Regional Mechanisms, the African Union, citizens and development partners to pursue the policy suggestions that have been tabled for consideration. We are confident that the report will contribute to rethinking the future of governance in the Sahel for sustainable development. We invite and encourage policy makers, development partners and researchers to critically examine and study the report and consider the policy options proffered to rebuild social cohesion and public trust in the Sahel. Beyond the usual crisis narrative, the region offers a plethora of opportunities, which if harnessed, could transform its trajectory. We commit to working together, now better informed, to advance this agenda, for a prosperous and progressive future for the Sahel.



by **Abdoulaye Mar Dieye,**
UN Under Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for the Development of the Sahel



by **Ahunna Eziakonwa,**
UN Assistant Secretary-General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa

Foreword



by **Leonardo Santos Simão**

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS)

Reviewing governance practices and projecting models for the future, in the context of the Sahel, a dynamic resource-rich region facing formidable challenges amidst a period of profound change, would seem to be a daunting task with uncertain outcomes. It is in this spirit that I congratulate the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for launching this complex study, bringing together experts from varied backgrounds, including from the United Nations, academia, and think tanks, as well as legal, public service and governance practitioners, civil society actors and former political leaders, to produce a study of immense scholarship and foresight. I appreciate that my office was invited to participate in shaping the report and its recommendations.

The review rightly points out the centrality of security as a key component of good governance. Ensuring the safety and security of populations is a core imperative for governance, which cannot be effective if the authority of the state is restricted to capitals and major population centers, allowing extremist and other armed groups to control hinterlands. Governance is a hollow instrument if it does not provide basic services to people and their communities, and if it does not yield the promise of prosperity, socioeconomic development and inclusivity.

The promotion of good governance is at the heart of the work of the United Nations. However, the UN does not promote prescriptive approaches to governance. While the UN holds to the importance of governance models that are pluralistic and inclusive, in line with human rights standards, there is equal understanding that models must reflect the historical, economic, sociocultural and political realities unique to every nation state.

I appreciate the emphasis the report places on economic development through meaningful regional integration and cooperation, including by invigorating the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFTCA) and supporting Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocols in support of the free movement of persons, goods and services across the region. The fact that despite its vast mineral and other natural resources, the Sahel is home to countries that continue to feature on the lower echelons of development indices, deserves further reflection and remedies.

In a region where youth represent the vast majority of the population and increasingly demand their agency, the exposure of African youth to technological advancements and social media has been a key driver of political and socio-economic shifts, both positive and negative. Technology transfer and access to information has boosted the development of both informal and formal sectors of economies in the region, but it has also ushered in an era where traditional media outlets have been supplanted by readily accessible social media platforms, where disinformation, misinformation and fake news play outsized and often negative roles in citizen perceptions of governance.

This study raises important questions for the United Nations regarding its role in supporting sustainable development and positive political change in the region. I hope it will offer opportunities for dialogue with stakeholders around the future of governance and democracy in the region, providing pointers for UNOWAS to more effectively play its advocacy and good offices role in in the region.

UNOWAS commits to support the next steps of the process and the implementation of the recommendations as a manner of giving value to the immense intellectual inputs made by the contributors, to whom I am grateful. On behalf of all UN entities in the Sahel, I wish to thank UNDP and all contributors for their efforts and commitment to decipher the complexities of the Sahel region.

Editorial Note

by **the Report Editors**

Njoya Tikum, Nebila Abdulmelik and George Mukundi Wachira

It gives us great pleasure to present you this first volume titled; **The Future of Governance: (Re)building Social Cohesion and Public Trust** authored by 14 authors and 4 editors from across the Sahel and beyond. This volume, evidenced by the number of authors, a technical and process strategic adviser, resource persons and peer reviewers brought on board to help review, refine and fine tune the thought process and analysis for the chapters, has been a collective effort and a labor of love.

Authors of the substantive chapters that make up this volume were deliberately selected as experts in their fields, as well as due to their lived experiences being from the region. This volume is the product of over a year of consultations, deliberations, research, analysis, write-ups, peer reviews, rewrites, further critiques and numerous revisions. Two in person workshops were held with the authors, resource persons and peer reviewers, one in Dakar and the second in Yaoundé to flesh out the topics covered in this volume, strengthen the arguments and analysis put forth. Each chapter has undergone numerous revisions, enriched by review from the editors as well as from peer reviewers and resource persons, culminating in the versions in this volume.

The Sahel is the point of reference and focus for this Future of Governance volume, therefore all data, analysis, policy prescriptions, unless stated otherwise, are for the Sahel. Sub-regions as well as specific countries of the Sahel are provided as case studies to illustrate the points made. Other regions in Africa may be mentioned for purposes of comparison.

While this volume is by no means exhaustive or comprehensive, we envision that it will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and ignite debate, reflection and action. We also anticipate subsequent volumes on the Future of Governance to delve deeper and explore topics not addressed in this volume. With this volume, we seek to spur a rethinking of governance in the Sahel and help shape policies and practices that will center the people and (re)build social cohesion and public trust, which are foundational to sustainable development in the region and beyond.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Future of Governance: (Re)building Social Cohesion and Public Trust Report is a collaborative initiative of the United Nations Development Programme Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa (UNDP WACA), United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) and the Coordinating Secretariat of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS).

The focus of the report is prompted by an appreciation that at the core of governance challenges in the region, is erosion of public trust and social cohesion. Efforts at addressing persistent socio-economic, political and environmental challenges have largely prioritized a security-heavy approach. Acknowledging that these measures have not yielded the desired impact and results, the report forecasts the future of governance. Trends, research and evidence suggest that such a future is hinged upon (re)building social cohesion and public trust.

The report is a culmination of twelve months of deliberations, conversations, research, analysis, write ups, critique, peer review, rewrites and further revisions. Nine substantive chapters by leading governance experts make up this volume, covering a range of topics providing conceptual framing and context with a historical trajectory of the Sahel as well as citizen perspectives and trends; building (back) trust through (re)centering citizens, advancing justice and addressing impunity, and ensuring sound economic governance; rethinking governance by exploring digital opportunities, revitalizing the social contract, pushing for term limits and addressing military coups, and a greater appreciation for multi-level governance, regionalism and cross-border cooperation. Each chapter proffers policy prescriptions to help shape a future governance that is just, people-centered, socially cohesive and one in which the public deeply trust in their institutions and government.

The report begins with a historical lens, looking back from precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times to better understand the impact of and glean lessons from past policies and practices. These lessons are proposed to address current and emerging challenges, using a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Through the historical approach, it is evident that some of the challenges faced by the Sahel are not new, and likewise, some solutions are not novel, but rather require a revisit to past practices, including the values of dialogue, tolerance, hospitality, and non-violence that informed community relations during the precolonial period. Addressing contemporary challenges requires drawing on the strengths of historical practices prior to modern state formation and adapting them to contemporary contexts to create more resilient and cohesive societies.

“Addressing contemporary challenges requires drawing on the strengths of historical practices prior to modern state formation and adapting them to contemporary contexts to create more resilient and cohesive societies.”



> **Acute political, socio-economic, environmental and development challenges faced by the region cannot be addressed without economic governance.**

Extensive Afrobarometer surveys paint a picture of citizen's perceptions and experiences across the Sahel, enabling a mapping of democratic governance trends. Despite the myriad challenges facing the region, and widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of their governments, support for democracy and commitment to the norms and institutions of democratic and accountable governance remains steady among ordinary citizens. Additionally, horizontal social cohesion, measured by attendance at community meetings and gathering with other community members to raise issues of collective interest, are relatively high in the region compared to the rest of the continent, although much of it is driven by men and older people. These trends present opportunities for building collective action towards strengthening democratic and accountable governance and advancing socio-economic progress. However, vertical social cohesion – the extent to which citizens engage state and governance institutions as well as elected leaders – is low, presenting a significant challenge to promoting democratic and accountable governance.

The report proceeds to make a case for (re)centering the people and their well-being, particularly those most at the margins, as a critical first step towards a prosperous and sustainable future for the Sahel. Not doing so will continue to erode social cohesion and public trust, making the future of governance unviable. Specific proposals in this regard are proffered, including implementation of quotas, sanctions for non-compliance, conscientization programs, devolved governance, as well as making space for civil society as well as traditional and religious leaders.

Acute political, socio-economic, environmental and development challenges faced by the region cannot be addressed without economic governance. Despite institutional weaknesses, the various layers of economic governance structures are already in existence, as are structural opportunities, including: the well-established national, regional and continental frameworks, which can be improved; participation in regional and international monetary regulatory regimes, as full members with all de jure rights and powers; medium-level economic integration, which can be accelerated. The attainment of inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development requires improvements, innovations and operational excellence in the practical implementation of existing policies and frameworks, which are adequate to produce transformative outcomes. What is required is refocusing efforts and resources on prioritization, innovation and new approaches that would enhance socioeconomic development irrespective of the prevalent disabling factors.

Justice plays a pivotal role in promoting security and governance and is a cornerstone of social, economic, and political stability. The rule of law, constitutionalism, and the protection of human rights hinge on effective justice mechanisms. Empirical evidence indicates that where justice is absent or compromised, democratic systems falter, giving rise to authoritarianism, state repression, and a surge in conflicts and human rights abuses. A consistent failure to address justice—through accountability and redress—leads to the perpetuation of impunity, particularly in post-conflict and crisis regions. Without justice, efforts at peacebuilding and reconciliation are undermined, with social cohesion and public trust, the very bedrock of sustainable development, left in peril. Lessons from over a decade of crisis management in the region reveal the limitations of security heavy and military-led approaches, which often exacerbate human rights abuses while failing to address underlying governance issues. Instead, there is a critical need to prioritize justice and governance-based solutions that emphasize accountability and the rule of law. Justice is the foundation of efforts to strengthen social cohesion, reconcile and reconstruct conflict-affected regions.

Over the years, the Sahel has experienced democratic transfers of power as well as the recent upsurge in both (un)constitutional changes of government through military coups as well as attempts, sometimes successful, to preserve power through manipulation of term limit provisions or changes to the constitution. These two phenomena are resulting in political instability and an erosion of social cohesion and public trust. Relevant regional organizations should ensure consistency and coherence in the treatment of cases of military coups and other forms of (un)constitutional changes of government and attempts to preserve power to avoid claims of double standards that may

weaken their standing in popular perceptions. In the current situation where some Sahel countries are under military transitions, the report makes a case for consensually agreed transition roadmaps to help them restore constitutional order.

Y'en a marre in Senegal, Balai Citoyen in Burkina Faso, and Occupy Nigeria in Nigeria are but a few examples of youth spearheading governance reforms and public engagement across the Sahel region, using popular protests, technology, and the digital tools and platforms at their disposal. A range of policy options can foster public trust and social cohesion, including digital inclusion strategies, data governance frameworks, cybersecurity initiatives, universal service funds, human capital development, support for tech start-ups, and promotion of technology-driven solutions. Transforming educational systems to better align with the digital era is crucial in equipping the youth with skills essential for thriving in a digital economy. Without capitalizing on these opportunities, and building an innovation-friendly ecosystem, as well as the desire of young people to engage in processes that affect them, efforts to engage youth and enhance service delivery may be stifled. Engaging youth effectively through forward-thinking policies and the use of digital means can lead to improved public services and a more inclusive, participatory approach to governance.

The Sahel's development challenges are exacerbated by weak state presence and a fragile social contract. By improving public service delivery, including infrastructure and social welfare, the government can restore state presence in conflict-affected areas. Revitalizing the social contract can drive community development through a coordinated societal response, underpinned by political legitimacy, inclusive governance, and community participation. Revitalizing the social contract requires a comprehensive commitment from governments to improve citizen well-being through inclusive governance, effective decentralization, economic opportunities, and robust security measures.

The evolution of regional cooperation among Sahelian states has deep roots in geography, history, economic ties, and societal interactions. Over time, African states have continued to establish or join many African Regional Organizations (AROs), equipping them with additional collective political leverage, policy tools, resources and capabilities. Yet, all regional mechanisms covering the Sahelo-Saharan region face similar political, institutional, financial, technical and human resource challenges. Indeed, despite the proliferation of regional initiatives, sustainable impact and results remain elusive. The underfunding of AROs, the influence of various external forces, and the persistent decline in regional security and governance have weakened member states' ability to inspire confidence in their leadership at national and regional levels. Regional actors should go beyond traditional perception of borders and build cross border ecosystems that address the intricate sociopolitical complexities of the Sahel, ensuring the increased involvement of women, youth, marginalized groups and civil society. Actors should also balance geopolitics with regionalism, advocating for the collective interests of member states on the global stage.

(Re)building social cohesion and public trust is a long-term endeavor that requires the deliberate and concerted efforts of state and non-state actors working in concert. An understanding of the historical trajectory of the region, analysis on current and emerging trends, citizen's perspectives and experiences, as well as identification of progress made, challenges faced, and available opportunities is crucial to diagnose the ailments and come up with possible solutions. Revitalizing the social contract through centering people and their well-being, advancing justice and addressing impunity, ensuring sound economic governance, devolved governance, addressing efforts to unconstitutionally change government or preserve power, enhancing regionalism and cross-border cooperation are all pathways to revitalizing the social contract and ensuring a future Sahel that is well-governed, just, peaceful and prosperous. This volume aims to contribute to shape policy and practice to make this a reality.

“(Re)building social cohesion and public trust is a long-term endeavor that requires the deliberate and concerted efforts of state and non-state actors working in concert.”

7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMING & CONTEXT

Chapter 1

The Future of Governance in the Sahel: (Re)building Social Cohesion & Public Trust

Njoya Tikum, Nebila Abdulmelik and George Mukundi Wachira

Abstract

The Sahel depicts the typical narrative of a rich region, but whose people are poor. A region of vast natural and human resources, states in the region have not effectively translated their wealth to the benefit of their citizens. Several decades since most countries gained independence, the majority are still beholden and dependent on external actors for support. While there is a heightened sense of agency and shifts in the governance of the Sahel, concerns have emerged over what appears to be reversion to unconstitutional and authoritarian rule with Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger. In what could be termed as democracy under threat, it has reignited debates and reflection on the future of governance in the region. This chapter provides a contextual background to the report. It reflects upon the rationale, focus, scope and overall content of the report. The report seeks to examine the future of governance in the Sahel from the lens of rebuilding social cohesion and public trust. It makes a case for the need to prioritize social cohesion and public trust, centering the well-being of the people by Member States, regional actors and development actors for a sustainable future.

Introduction

The Sahel region is at a critical crossroads. While it is endowed with vast natural and human resources, the region grapples with socio-economic, political, security, and humanitarian crises. Conflict, poor governance and the impact of climate change have hampered attainment of socio-economic development. This has resulted in erosion of public confidence in governments to deliver and undermined social cohesion. This has in effect widened the gap in state-society relations. In response to these challenges, states in the region have adopted a security-heavy approach. These efforts have not borne impactful results to turn the tide to foster democratic governance, sustain peace and attain sustainable development.

This report examines the future of governance in the Sahel by adopting an approach which goes beyond the 'Sahel crisis narrative' to exploring the possibilities of leveraging opportunities provided by Sahel's abundant natural resources, human capital, and rich history and culture. This is informed by a rationale that the prospect for a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Sahel is hinged upon rebuilding social cohesion and public trust.

The report is a collection of nine substantive chapters that cover the following aspects: conceptual framing from a historical lens; governance trends from citizens perspectives; centering citizens; new approaches to economic governance, advancing justice and addressing impunity; unconstitutional changes of government and preservation of power; technology and digitization; revitalizing the social contract for community development; and promoting multi-level governance in addressing transnational challenges.

Context and Background

Spanning ten countries and three regions,[1] the Sahel occupies a geostrategic belt wedged between the desert to the north, and tropical forests and savannah to the south. According to the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), the Sahel consists of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.[2] For the African Union (AU), the Sahel is "the geographical area of the Sahelo Saharan zone [that] comprises all the countries located on the Sahelian strip separating North and Sub-Saharan Africa. This includes Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and the Sudan. There are, on the other hand, countries that are outside this area but who deserve, all the same, special attention, including Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria and Senegal".[3] This report adopts and limits the operational scope of the region to the 10 countries identified by the UNISS while appreciating that it is not exhaustive. Indeed, while several case examples in the report are of countries identified by the UN, in some instances, Sudan and Libya are cited to illustrate the complexity of the challenges and opportunities in the region.

The region is endowed with vast natural and human resources as well as opportunities but fraught with significant challenges.[4] It is a melting pot of different cultures and is hailed as the cradle of-long distance trade.[5] Its precolonial history is marked with relative peace among its communities anchored on cultural ties, exchanges, trade and cohesion.[6] Over the years it has become a theatre for experimentation on how to secure peace, democracy and stability by multiple actors. Governance challenges in the region include democracy deficits, lack of accountability, impunity, conflict, limited socio-economic opportunities for its youthful demography, transnational crimes, extremism, climate vulnerability, food insecurity, displaced populations, jihadist insurgencies, and contested statehood. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger are epicenters of violent extremism and insecurity in the region. Fragile transitions in Chad, Libya, and Sudan,[7] and the risk of spill-over of governance and security challenges to periphery states in West Africa bring to the fore questions about the legitimacy, credibility and sustainability of interventions. Rapid increase in extremist threats, unconstitutional changes of government especially proliferation of military coups as well as dangerous involvement of new foreign players, invite renewed attention to the region, and the future of its governance.

Since the 2012 crisis in Mali and the consequent spread of violent extremist conflict in neighboring states of Niger and Burkina Faso, Sahel states have been beneficiaries of a growing number of bilateral and multilateral aid and external military engagement.[8] Stabilization efforts have mainly adopted a securitization-heavy approach to address the various manifestations of the crisis.[9] Although strengthening governance is part of the stabilization strategy, development partners and Sahelian states have accorded it lesser prominence than meeting security benchmarks.[10]

Granted, significant investment in military and securitized interventions have largely failed to stem the spread of insurgency and destabilization.[11] As insurgency has continued to spread, a wave of unconstitutional changes of government has been following in its wake. For instance, the October 2022 coup d'etat in Burkina Faso, was the 7th in about 26 months, extending the region's challenges of failing governance, violent extremism, and civil wars.[12] The 26 July 2023 coup in Niger, a country seen as 'the last bastion of democracy in the Sahel region', is an enormous setback for international and regional efforts to tackle development and peace and security challenges. [13]Evidently, the heavy military interventions have proven wanting and inadequate in addressing the contemporary changes to the nature, scale, and geographic extent of the crisis in the Sahel.

As destabilization, extremist violence, and geopolitical rivalries escalate, there has been a gradual erosion of public confidence in Sahelian governments coupled with increased resistance to Western interventions in the region.[14]

1. Central, North and West Africa

2. As above.

3. The African Union Strategy for the Sahel, PSC/PR/3(CDXLIX) Para 1.

4. Africa Renewal, The Sahel: Land of Opportunities https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sahel accessed 29 August 2023.

5. As above.

6. Economic Commission for Africa, Sahel 2043 px.

7. Sudan is currently experiencing a war between the Army and the Rapid Support Forces.

8. See International Crisis Group, A Course Correction for the Sahel Stabilization Strategy Africa, Report Number 299, 1 February 2021. See also Malte Leirl, Growing State Fragility in the Sahel: Rethinking International Involvement, German Institute for Global and Area Studies (2020) https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publications/giga-focus/growing-state-fragility-in-the-sahel-rethinking-international-involvement accessed 05 June 2023.

9. As above.

10. As above.

11. As above.

12. United States Institute of Peace, Another Coup in the Sahel: Here's a Way to Halt This Cycle, 20 October 2022 https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/10/another-coup-sahel-heres-way-halt-cycle accessed 03 June 2023.

13. Mared Gwyn Jones, What Does the Niger Coup Mean for Europe's Relationship with the Sahel? Euro News 04 August 2023 https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/08/04/what-does-the-niger-coup-mean-for-europes-relationship-with-the-sahel accessed 05 August 2023

14. See International Crisis Group, A Course Correction for the Sahel Stabilisation Strategy Africa, Report Number 299, 1 February 2021 p7.

Public trust has eroded, increasing resentment and discontent by citizens,[15] a useful pretext for coup leaders who come in promising to deliver the dividends of good governance.[16] Due to these challenges, democratic institutions and public order are progressively becoming difficult to sustain as states are being pushed to collapse, with violent extremist groups exploiting the absence of the state especially in border lands, leading to extreme vulnerability.[17]

The Sahel is facing the increased effects of political instability, amplified geopolitical strains and use of hard counterterrorism measures, all of which are creating fault lines between governments and the people and weakening social relations among citizens. Relations between external actors, some of which are former colonial powers, and the public, are at an all-time low. This report explores the future of governance in the Sahel with a focus on (re)building public trust and social cohesion as key. It begins by tracing the historical and contextual basis for the importance of public trust and social cohesion for the future of governance. By appreciating the region's challenges, it underscores the opportunities and prospects to restore public trust and rebuild social cohesion.

This report is a forward-looking contribution to the body of knowledge on the Sahel, aiming to shape policy and practice for better outcomes in the region. The overall framing and recurrent themes – (re)building public trust and social cohesion – are inspired and informed by an appreciation that central to the future of governance is an imperative to accord primacy to citizens and their well-being. Active inclusion and participation of citizens in affairs and decisions that impact upon and affect them, is therefore emphasized. The future of governance is thus hinged upon centering citizens; addressing impunity and advancing justice; respect to constitutionalism including term limits; localizing governance for community development; embracing technology and digitization; and adopting multi-level governance to address transnational challenges. The various chapter contributions to this report are structured to address each of these aspects of governance in the region.

Key Terms and Concepts

The Sahel is described as the region of Africa that extends from Senegal eastward to the Sudan – or basically from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea.[18] However, based on common development challenges, the UN limits the Sahel region to 10 states, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Chad.[19] On the other hand, the AU see Sahel as including Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and the Sudan.[20] Thus the AU excludes Nigeria, Guinea, the Gambia, and Senegal but includes Algeria and Sudan. Considering that the states considered by both UN and AU fall within the geographical area between Senegal eastward to the Sudan, and face almost similar development and governance challenges, this report recognizes Sahel as constituting all of them.

Conflict prevention entails actions that have both a direct and operational focus of intervention before large-scale violence happens as well as a strategic and structural focus of addressing structural causes of conflict.[21] UNDP engages in prevention of conflict and peacebuilding by: 'promoting an integrated approach, linking conflict prevention, social cohesion and peacebuilding, informed by in-depth analyses of local root causes, factors of risk and resilience and drivers of conflict and peace; supporting long-term development solutions for preventing violent extremism; and fostering confidence and healing tensions in communities living in protracted conflict situations.[22] In the Sahel, conflict prevention can be seen as various actions and strategies that entail both direct and operational focus on addressing root causes of conflict, risk factors, fostering confidence and social cohesion, and addressing tensions in communities affected by protracted conflict situations.

Future of governance entails the prospects of governance beyond the 'Sahelian crisis narrative' that adopts a wholesome approach that recognizes challenges and leverages on opportunities presented by abundant human, cultural, and natural resources to enhance the likelihood of a prosperous, peaceful, secure, stable, and democratic Sahel.

15. Malte Leirl, Growing State Fragility in the Sahel

16. Chinedu Asadu, Niger adds to growing list of countries in the Sahel run by the military, Associated Press 29 July 2023 https://apnews.com/article/niger-coups-bazoum-sahel-military-democracy-d1614b14baff6571b7d3766c2cbd8ba1 accessed 07 August 2023.

17. Malte Leirl, Growing State Fragility in the Sahel.

18. Economic Commission for Africa, Sahel 2043 px.

19. As above.

20. The African Union, Strategy for the Sahel Region 2014.

21. AU's Continental Structural Conflict Prevention Framework (CSCPF).

22. UNDP, Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding https://www.undp.org/eurasia/our-focus/governance-and-peacebuilding/conflict-prevention-and-peacebuilding#:~:text=supporting%20long%2Dterm%20development%20solutions,living%20in%20protracted%20conflict%20situations. accessed 04 September 2023.

Social Cohesion refers to a state of society's convergence, or the 'common bonds' that unify different people and groups that share space or territory. It reflects the quality of relationships between individuals and groups in a society (horizontal aspect) and between people and the institutions that serve them (vertical aspect).[23] It is a key determinant of a peaceful, democratic and prosperous nation. It establishes stronger bonds within and across varied groups, and fosters greater trust in government institutions.[24] A socially cohesive society is one in which all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition, and legitimacy.[25] Such societies do not have demographically homogenous people,[26] rather, they harness the potential in the society's diversity (i.e. ideas, opinions, skills, etc.).[27] Thus, the risk of slipping into destructive patterns of tension and conflict when different interests compete is mitigated.[28] Considering that Sahel is a melting point of different cultures and people, Arabic, nomadic, religious, traditional etc., social cohesion should be perceived from the capacity of these cultures to converge and establish common bonds as well as how they relate to state institutions.

Trust may be defined largely as a sentiment or personal attribute (trusting an institution or someone) or as a rational expectation of exchange or reciprocity (trust that mutual commitments will be made).[29] Trust may be viewed in political life, as in acceptance of the legitimacy of institutions or policies (such as taxation).[30] This may also be viewed in features of everyday social life, such as markets.[31] In the case of Sahel, trust can be demonstrated in the way citizens perceive institutions of governance, participate in political life, and are keen to follow laws and policies that their governments have put in place.

Challenges, Opportunities and Prospects

Challenges

For many decades, the Sahel has been in the global spotlight largely as a region that is faced by a plethora of challenges that have undermined governance, security, and development. This section outlines some of the key challenges that inordinately continue to shape the region's political, governance, security, and economic landscape.

Conflict in the Region

Armed conflict has been one of the most prominent challenges in the Sahel. Since gaining independence in the 1960s, many states have been experiencing different forms of violence due to a confluence of factors including weak and poor governance, deterioration of economy, competition for resources, and worsening impact of climate change.[32] Over the last decade, conflict, violence, and crime have been on the increase, transcending national borders and creating enormous challenges to states both within and beyond the region.[33] In the Sahel, the epicenters of conflict, violence, and humanitarian disasters are currently in the Liptako-Gourma and Lake Chad Basin sub-regions.[34]

Despite increased international engagement, violent extremism has been on the rise across the Sahel. Multi-year security trends in the Lake Chad Basin and the Central Sahel (Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger) indicate that security has dramatically deteriorated in the region.[35] From 2015, the number of security incidents surged sixteen-fold in Central Sahel – with the number of casualties also surging over ten-fold, and security incidents doubling in the Lake Chad Basin.[36]

23. UNDP, Social cohesion brief (2020) https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/social-cohesion-brief accessed 09 August 2023.

24. UNDP and Search for Common Ground (2015). Social Cohesion Framework: social cohesion for stronger communities. UNDP and Search for Common Ground.

25. UNDESA, Social Inclusion: https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/issues/social-integration.html accessed 09 August 2023.

26. As above.

27. As above.

28. As above.

29. UNDP, Strengthening social cohesion: Conceptual framing and programming implications (2020) p30.

30. As above.

31. As above.

32. Council on Foreign Relations, Violent Extremism in the Sahel, 10 August 2023, https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/violent-extremism-sahel accessed 02 September 2023.

33. As above.

34. As above.

35. UNOCHA, "Sahel Crises Leave Devastating Impacts on the Most Vulnerable", 3 January 2022, https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/west-central-africa/card/3EJsed29Gq/. Accessed 02 September 2023.

36. As above.

In addition to the fatalities, armed conflict and other violence has led to limited access to essential services and humanitarian assistance. The surge in armed attacks on communities, schools, medical facilities, and other infrastructures have significantly affected access to social services.[37]

As pointed out by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), it is estimated that

1.5 MILLION

people in the Sahel are living in regions that have become 'virtually impossible to access humanitarian aid and essential services.[38]

Due to armed conflict, more than

6,000

schools are either closed or non-operational, leading to more than 7 million children remaining out of school[39]

In Central Sahel alone, more than

4,975

schools are closed or non-operational due to violence – over half of them in Burkina Faso, and

7,312

health centers are closed or non-operational leaving millions of people without access to adequate critical services.[40]

This puts into jeopardy the future of millions of people in the Sahel including women, children, and young people.

Political Instability

Across the Sahel, insecurity and socio-political instability continue to reach new heights,[41] resulting in increasingly repressive regimes. Unconstitutional changes of government have been on the rise as seen in Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sudan. The various crises, which has been ongoing for more than a decade, does not seem to be either ending or improving,[42] and threatens to erode democratic gains made not just in the Sahel but in the broader region of West Africa.[43] In addition, increasing political instability 'makes the situation on the ground much more volatile and unpredictable', which also undermines regional stability.[44] Between 1960 and 2022, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have experienced a combined 25 successful unconstitutional changes of government, often resulting in the overthrow of democratically elected civilian governments.[45]

Moreover, with unconstitutional changes of government, political instability has led to friction between various governments and their international or regional partners.[46] For instance, the relationship between France and states such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has become very frosty,[47] with the growing unpopularity of France further exacerbating tensions.[48] As in Mali, back-to-back unconstitutional changes of government in Burkina Faso in 2022 caused the ties between the country with France to deteriorate.[49] The same is being witnessed in Niger.

37. As above.

38. ICRC, "After Ten Years of Armed Violence in the Sahel, There is Still Time for Humanity", ICRC Statement, 10 February 2022 https://www.icrc.org/en/document/after-ten-years-armedviolence-sahel-there-still-time-humanity accessed 02 September 2023.

39. UNOCHA, "Sahel Crises Leave Devastating Impacts on the Most Vulnerable (note 34 above).

40. As above.

41. Kamissa Camara, It Is Time to Rethink U.S. Strategy in the Sahel, United States Institute of Peace April 15, 2021 https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/04/it-time-rethink-us-strategy-sahel accessed 03 June 2023.

42. See International Crisis Group, A Worrying New Phase in the Sahel Crisis, 24 July 2023 , https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel-niger/worrying-new-phase-sahel-crisis accessed 24 July 2023.

43. Chinedu Asadu, Niger adds to growing list of countries in the Sahel run by the military.

44. As above.

45. Council on Foreign Relations, Violent Extremism in the Sahel.

46. Paul Stronski, Russia's Growing Footprint in Africa's Sahel Region, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 28 February 2023 https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/02/28/russia-s-growing-footprint-in-africa-s-sahel-region-pub-89135 accessed 12 August 2023.

47. As above

48. As above

49. As above

State Fragility

All states in the Sahel suffer from state fragility and deficient administrative capacity.[50] Individually, none of the states can respond to the myriad of challenges that they face.[51] State fragility has been both a cause and a consequence of jihadism in the region.[52] The border areas of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, long neglected by central governments, were predestined to be a target of jihadists, who take advantage of remote and neglected areas.[53] For many decades, the governments in Niamey, Bamako, and Ouagadougou relied on local strongmen as proxies, while corrupt officials colluded with organized crime networks to get a share in illicit revenues.[54] Long before the violent extremists' involvement, illicit trade in the Sahara – which entails smuggling of drugs, arms, and counterfeit medicine – already had significant economic and political influence in the region.[55]

In the peripheral areas of the Sahel region, there has been a void that neither states nor international interventions have been able to address.[56] The situation has been exacerbated by the multidimensional character of the crisis,[57] confronting the international community with great challenges. The weakness of states means that they do not have institutional response capacities required to make traditional large-scale external crisis responses effective.[58]

To date, there seems to be little appreciation of the complex nature of the crisis.[59] While the main security threat in the region stems from terrorist groups, one of the most significant threats to stability remains fragile state structures coupled with poverty and lack of prospects for an extremely youthful and growing population.[60] Among experts, there is almost unanimous agreement that the major problem lies in the Sahel's state structure, i.e. their fragility or complete absence in certain areas, combined with their reputation of inefficiency and corruption.[61] The effects of this reach beyond the challenge of security and question the overall governmental and social cohesion of these states.[62]

Climate Change and Environmental Challenges

While Sahelians are some of the least contributors to climate change, the Sahel is one of the regions that is worst hit by climate change.[63] The Sahel region is climatically the most vulnerable in Africa with extreme weather conditions including drought and floods happening on average every five years.[64] The regular droughts and floods have had a devastating impact on the people as well as their ability to earn livelihoods. In 2018, the above-average precipitation resulted in destructive floods that affected 2 million people.[65]

The Sahel is 'one of the most environmentally degraded regions in the world with temperature increases projected to be 1.5 times higher than the global average.'[66]

After years of land clearing and poor agricultural practices, the Sahel has experienced widespread desertification and extensive soil erosion. In Burkina Faso, a third of the country's land, more than 9 million hectares of once productive land, has become degraded.[67] As land becomes degraded, the ability to produce crops and raise cattle becomes difficult, posing a great challenge to the Sahel states considering that agriculture is one of the major sources of income and employment.[68]

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50. Morten Bøås, The Sahel – Fragile States and Weak Political Orders, Australian Institute of International Affairs 01 April 2021 https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/the-sahel-fragile-states-and-weak-political-orders/ accessed 13 August 2023.

51. As above.

52. Malte Leirl, Growing State Fragility in the Sahel pp4 -5.

53. As above.

54. As above.

55. As above.

56. Morten Bøås, The Sahel – Fragile States and Weak Political Orders .

57. As above.

58. As above.

59. Thomas Schiller, The Situation in the Sahel Consequences for International Engagement in the Region, Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung International Reports no.2 2020.

60. As above.

61. As above.

62. As above.

63. Adama Dieng, The Sahel: Challenges and Opportunities (2021) 103 (918) International Review of the Red Cross p 765.

64. Economic Commission for Africa, Sahel 2043.

65. As above.

66. Africa Renewal, Building climate resilience and peace, go hand in hand for Africa's Sahel – UN forum https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/building-climate-resilience-and-peace-go-hand-hand-africa%E2%80%99s-sahel-%E2%80%93-un-forum accessed 01 September 2023.

67. Institute for Economic & Peace, The Sahel Faces 3 Issues: Climate, Conflict & Overpopulation (2023) https://www.visionofhumanity.org/challenges-facing-the-sahel-climate-conflict-and-overpopulation/ accessed 01 September 2023.

68. As above.

Climate change and environmental degradation are and will remain key phenomena compounding already fragile conditions, leading to food insecurity, poverty, human vulnerability, and social unrest.[69] Vulnerabilities associated with climate change and environmental degradation continue to fuel community conflicts, terrorism, migration, and trafficking of all forms.[70]

Displacement

Regardless of the location and parties to various armed conflicts and effects of climate change, one fact has been constant: millions of people have been displaced from the places they call home and forced to flee the harsh conditions across the region.[71] The drivers of displacement – such as armed conflict and adverse climatic conditions – are closely interconnected, make it difficult to ascertain a single or proximate cause of displacement of people and instability.[72]

The impact of displacement has increasingly become more prominent in or on the outskirts of cities and towns where vulnerable people seek refuge.[73] The humanitarian condition of millions of displaced people across the region has slowly but steadily deteriorated.[74]

In Central Sahel, as insecurity worsened, displacement increased by **30%** between 2020 and 2021, resulting in **2 million** internally displaced persons (IDPs). [75]



Many of the displaced persons have been forced to flee multiple times, further increasing their vulnerabilities.[76] The increase in displacement leaves millions in need of humanitarian services in a difficult environment.

Geopolitics

From a geopolitical perspective, the world is at a critical juncture. While the outcome of the conflict in Ukraine, Sudan, Palestine and surrounding states will be significant, the Sahel region has become an important stage between world powers.[77] As a key arena for geo-economic and geopolitical contestation, the Sahel presents both opportunities and challenges for various traditional and new players.[78] The region is rich in natural resources and has great potential for renewable energy.[79] Because of these and other converging dynamics, the potential of the Sahel is intensifying the strategic rivalry between the West, China, Russia, and ambitious regional players such as Turkey.[80] The geopolitical interests at play are likely to be a challenge to the future of governance in the Sahel.[81]

The competing and conflicting agendas by various actors are likely to influence the future of governance and may potentially escalate tensions in the region. So far, despite interventions by multiple actors, the Sahel continues to experience political instability, great human suffering, spread of violent extremism, poor governance, and state fragility. Multilateral collaboration and a change of approach by actors involved is necessary to ensure positive outcomes that inform the future of governance in the Sahel.

Despite the challenges outlined above, there are many opportunities that can be harnessed to improve the future of governance as discussed below. These do not often make the news, yet if properly harnessed, they present a chance to change the future of the region and its people.

69. Economic Commission for Africa, Sahel 2043.

70. AFDB, In the Sahel, the African Development Bank Group helps the region push to its potential 10 May 2022 https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/sahel-african-development-bank-group-helps-region-push-its-potential-51438 accessed 29 August 2023.

71. Adama Dieng, The Sahel: Challenges and Opportunities p774.

72. As above.

73. ICRC, "After Ten Years of Armed Violence in the Sahel.

74. As above.

75. UNOCHA, "Sahel Crises Leave Devastating Impacts on the Most Vulnerable.

76. As above.

77. Teresa Nogueira Pinto, The Sahel trilemma, Geopolitical Intelligence Services 28 April 2022 https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/sahel-trilemma/ accessed 13 August 2023.

78. Mohammed Ahmed Gain, Conflicting agendas and strategic rivalry in the Sahel, Middle East Institute 16 November 2021 https://www.mei.edu/publications/conflicting-agendas-and-strategic-rivalry-sahel accessed 13 August 2023.

79. As above.

80. As above.

81. As above.

Opportunities

Youth Bulge and Democratic Dividend

With

64.5%

of people below the age of 25 years, the Sahel has one of the most youthful populations in the world. [82]

The region's persistently young and high-fertility populations indicate no signs of declining, with birth rates 3 to 4 times higher compared to other parts of the world. [83][84]

It is projected that the total population is likely to double by **2050** and the global trend of urbanization will reach the region, with about

50%

of its population living in urban areas by **2045**.[85]

While Sahel's youthful population may be seen as challenge, it represents an opportunity that can be harnessed to positively shape the future of governance. The high population growth rate and increasing number of youths offer an important opportunity for states and development partners to seize this demographic dividend and to address inequalities and other challenges that the region faces. Young people are energetic, innovative, dynamic and an asset that can promote development, security, and democratic governance. Sahelian governments and development partners should acknowledge and invest in young people as critical players in the attainment of a prosperous Sahel.

Abundant Natural Resources

The Sahel is one of the richest regions in the world, endowed with abundant natural resources including gold, natural gas, oil, precious woods, solar energy, and ground water resources.[86] Extractives, and particularly gold play an important role in Sahel economies.[87]

In 2018, the share of extractive rents in Gross Domestic Product (total of gas, oil, mineral, and coal rents) amount to about

20.1%	14.9%	9.6%	8.2%	1.7%
in Chad	in Mauritania	in Burkina Faso	in Mali	in Niger [88]

The Sahel has some of the largest aquifers in Africa as well as surface water which constitute key sources of livelihoods and regional cooperation.[89] At about 2.38 million square kilometers, the Lake Chad Basin is one the largest sedimentary groundwater basins on the Continent.[90] The basin has regional aquifers of enormous quantities of good quality and adequate groundwater to meet demands for drinking and agricultural use.[91] In addition, the region is endowed with great potential for renewable energy, with more solar energy production capacity compared to other regions of the world.[92] Its solar energy potential constitutes 'about 13.9 billion kWh/year compared to the world's electricity consumption of 20 million kWh/year in 2016.[93] If these natural resources are managed equitably and in a sustainable manner, they present an opportunity to turn Sahel's fortunes around including in governance and security.

82. Wilson Centre, Converging Risks: Demographic Trends, Gender Inequity, and Security Challenges in the Sahel https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/converging-risks-demographic-trends-gender-inequity-and-security-challenges-sahel#:~:text=Birth%20rates%20are%20three%20to,in%20urban%20areas%20by%202045. accessed 30 August 2023.
83. Africa Renewal, The Sahel: Land of Opportunities
84. As above.
85. As above.
86. UN integrated Strategy for the Sahel, Land of Opportunities, https://unis-sahel.org/land-of-opportunities/ accessed 03 September 2023.
87. OECD, Natural resource governance and fragility in the Sahel (2022), OECD Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD Publishing, Paris.
88. As above.
89. As above.
90. As above.
91. As above.
92. Africa Renewal, The Sahel: Land of Opportunities
93. UN integrated Strategy for the Sahel, Land of Opportunities.



Digital Technology

Access and use of digital technologies present a critical opportunity to promote economic development, peace, and democratic governance. In the current digital age, the Sahel is experiencing a technological dynamic which is supported by a significant penetration of mobile services.

In 2018, the region's mobile cellular telephone subscription per 100 inhabitants was estimated at



against **76%** in Africa.[94]

If effectively harnessed, digital technology has the potential to drive socio-economic transformation, increase efficiency in production of and access to goods and services, open-up new opportunities for income generation for millions of people including women and youth, and enhance connectivity and social cohesion between communities. In addition to enhancing access to services, digital technology can also promote democratic governance, address inequalities, and facilitate the government's reach to the most marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Rich History and Culture

The Sahel has a rich history where relations between communities are intertwined. The region's rich history and culture is demonstrated by the historical Trans-Saharan trade routes that crisscrossed it, great centers of civilization (Gao, Timbuktu, and Djenne), and the emergence of powerful empires such as Songhai and the Sokoto Caliphate.[95] Notably, the interactions between the Arabic, Nomadic, Islamic, indigenous, and traditional cultures present a unifying opportunity drive development, security, and governance.[96]

The interconnections and interdependence among people is evidenced by their history of movement along trading routes and transhumance routes.[97] However, Sahelian states have not been able to effectively adapt to this rich history that is characterized by ancestral practices, socio-cultural and economic exchanges.[98] Despite this shortcoming, there is an opportunity to harness the rich history and culture to enhance organic connections between Sahelian people, promote social cohesion, address challenges and positively shape the future of governance.

With enormous natural resources, great potential for renewable energy, rich culture and heritage, and a youthful population, the Sahel offers many opportunities for investment, growth, and development despite its challenges.[99]

Future of Governance in the Sahel

The image of the Sahel as a region facing insurmountable challenges has overshadowed the enormous potential and prospects for socio-economic development, possibility of democratic governance and the region's prosperity.[100] This is because little spotlight has been put on the opportunities available to address the challenges.[101] The future of governance in the region looks at these opportunities as pathways towards peace and security, economic development, and democratic governance in the region.

The foundation of a different narrative is appreciating Sahel as having opportunities including youth, people, women and natural resources that can contribute to sustainable peace, security, prosperity, and democratic governance. Developing these opportunities requires harnessing democratic dynamics, generating and diversifying labor market systems, enhancing access to critical services such as healthcare, education, clean water, and social protection. Moreover, the prospects for economic development, peace and stability, and democratic governance call for civic and democratic participation, inclusive and sustainable economic trajectories, technology and digitization, localization of governance, justice governance, sound security governance, cross-border cooperation, and rebuilding social cohesion and public trust in institutions.

94. Economic Commission for Africa, Sahel 2043

95. UNECA, Conflict in the Sahel region and the developmental consequences (2017) p2.

96. UN integrated Strategy for the Sahel, Land of Opportunities

97. UNECA, Conflict in the Sahel region and the developmental consequences (2017) p12-14.

98. As above.

99. Adama Dieng, The Sahel: Challenges and Opportunities p777.

100. Cheikh Mbow, Mark Halle, Rabih El Fadel and Ibrahim Thiaw, Land resources opportunities for a growing prosperity in the Sahel (2021) 48 Science Direct 85-92.

101. As above.



Understanding the challenges that Sahel faces and seizing the opportunities can open the door for a prosperous Sahel characterized by democratic governance, peace and security, and economic development. This approach is likely to herald a renaissance, ushering a period of economic development, social cohesion, and democratic governance.

Rationale for the Report

Instability, fragility, and conflict are the major lenses through which the Sahel has often been viewed.[102] This perception and the debates around it, as real as they are, has led to a narrowing of analyses and focus on security issues which has overshadowed the region's opportunities and prospects for economic development and democratic governance.[103] Most key players have adopted a security-heavy approach based on the narrow perspective of the Sahel.

This security-heavy approach has not managed to address the challenges faced by Sahelian states. Therefore, international development actors including UNDP should seek a rethink and explore opportunities and options that are innovative, agile and unconventional beyond stabilization efforts. Because the existing approach has not addressed Sahel's security and governance challenges, citizens are increasingly frustrated with their governments.[104] It is not surprising that in the recent past, despite the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) condemning military coups in Mali, Guinea, and Burkina Faso, 'rather than resist the coups, sections of the populations took to the streets in mass demonstration to support the putschists, thereby bolstering their actions with a veneer of legitimacy.'[105]

While acknowledging the Sahel's challenges, this report adopts an approach that argues that Sahelian states and development partners should seize the opportunities and prospects for a future that is hinged upon democratic governance and sustainable socio-economic development. While leveraging on the numerous opportunities presented by the Sahel's abundant human, cultural, and natural resources, Sahelian states and the international community should prioritize addressing the interface between governance, security, and development through enhancing social cohesion and public trust in the state. The question that follows is why focus on rebuilding public trust in state institutions and social cohesion?

Although there may have been a show of support to or tolerance of military takeovers, Sahelians citizens demand, and are committed to supporting democratic and accountable systems and institutions of governance. For instance, Afrobarometer surveys shows that while there have been profound shortcomings of democratic governments in Mali, Malians (75%) 'remain committed to democracy as a system of government and reject military rule as a long-term solution to the country's problems.'[106] It is therefore necessary to support the creation of credible, democratic, and accountable institutions capable of effective service delivery thereby leading to increased public trust in state institutions. This is critical considering that in the 2021/2022 Human Development Index, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Chad rank among the last 10 states out of 191 states.[107]

In addition, social cohesion remains at the core of addressing the crisis in Sahel. This is because the key asymmetric threats are civilian-driven, with individuals and groups involved having major ties to communities within the region.[108] Violent extremist groups have frequently taken advantage of divisions between communities to promote their agenda, with dire consequences for social cohesion and stability.[109] Although community rivalries are at the center of insecurity, they have become an often-forgotten critical factor contributing to security and related challenges.[110] Importantly, continuous engagement with communities will improve adaptability and implementation of governance and peace and security strategies.[111]

To this end, efforts should focus on supporting the creation of credible, democratic, and accountable institutions capable of effective service delivery thereby leading to increased public trust in state institutions; and supporting rebuilding of social cohesion, addressing inter-community, inter-ethnic, and interreligious conflicts and dissonance. In doing this, this report argues that Sahelian states and the international community should move beyond the 'crisis narrative', to leveraging on the opportunities presented by the region's abundant human, natural, historical, and cultural resources.

102. Yasmine Osman, In the Sahel, real economic and social development (2021) Agence française de développement (AFD).

103. As above.

104. International Crisis Group, A Course Correction for the Sahel Stabilisation Strategy Africa, Report Number 299, 1 February 2021.

105. UNDP, Sahel Governance Report p28.

106. Afrobarometer, Malians, though eager for change from failing state and economy, still demand democracy, Dispatch No 386 24 August 2020.

107. UNDP, The 2021/2022 Human Development Report 2022.

108. See Institute for Security Studies, Community rivalries at the heart of Sahel insecurity, 16 May 2023 https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/community-rivalries-at-the-heart-of-sahel-insecurity accessed 05 June

109. As above.

110. As above.

111. As above.

Chapter 2

Looking Back to Get the Future of Governance Right

Chukwuemeka B. Eze and Festus Kofi Aubyn

Abstract

This chapter examines the intricate dynamics of social cohesion and state-citizen relations in the Sahel, tracing their historical roots and the impact of colonization and state formation. It examines contemporary sources of societal harmony and disharmony, and the state of public trust or citizens mistrust of the state. It argues that ensuring a cohesive and inclusive governance systems requires a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that considers the historical foundations of the evolution of society, as well as the transboundary and regional socio-economic trends. By focusing on historical perspectives and contemporary challenges, the chapter identifies key policy options and programmatic interventions including constitutional reforms that lead to a people-centered model of governance to support the process of rebuilding social cohesion and public trust.

Key words: social cohesion, public trust, state-citizen relations, governance systems, future, people

Introduction

Threats to social cohesion and public trust in West Africa include economic inequalities, social exclusion, ethno-religious/political conflicts, and mutual mistrust among social groups in multi-ethnic societies.[112] The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development acknowledges these threats, and pledges to promote inclusive growth, equality, peaceful, and inclusive societies.[113] The Sahel region has endured rising tensions and conflicts based on ethnicity, religion, politics, and class. Societies are drifting apart and are faced with complex challenges including violent conflicts, violent extremism, organized crimes, poor governance, and socioeconomic challenges. These tensions have placed considerable strain on state-citizen relations.

According to the 2023 Global Terrorism Index, the Sahel was the most affected region in the world, accounting for almost half of all deaths from terrorism and 26 percent of attacks in 2023.[114] In addition, five of the ten countries most impacted by terrorism were in the Sahel. Burkina Faso had the highest impact from terrorism, with deaths increasing by 68 percent to 1,907.[115] Countries in the region have consistently ranked at the bottom of the Human Development Report. In the 2023/4 report, out of the 193 countries and territories worldwide, Niger ranked 189 with HDI value of 0.394; Mali ranked 188 with HDI value of 0.410 and Burkina Faso ranked 185 with HDI value of 0.438.[116] Unconstitutional changes of government through military coups between 2020 and 2023 also mostly occurred in the three countries, further aggravating existing challenges.[117]

112. For more information see WANEP. (2023). West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2023: Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region. Available at https://wanep.org/wanep/west-africa-early-warning-outlook-2023-potential-flashpoints-and-simmering-conflicts-in-the-region/; WANEP. (2021). The Limits and Pitfalls of Multilateral Regional and National Responses to the Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel and Cote d'Ivoire. Accra: WANEP.

113. United Nations. (2023). Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

114. Institute for Economics & Peace. (2024). Global Terrorism Index 2024: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, Sydney. https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf

115. Ibid, p.4

116. UNDP. (2024). Human Development Insights. https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/country-insights#/ranks

117. Aubyn, F. (2023). The Perils of Military Action: Why Diplomacy Must be Given a Chance in Niger. https://dialogueinitiatives.org/the-perils-of-military-action-why-

These challenges reveal a breach of the social contract and horizontal inequalities (identity-based differences) especially in the distribution of political opportunities and power, economic opportunities, access to public services and competition over natural resources. Inadequate citizen engagement and participation in governance, human rights violations, over centralization of the state, elite capture especially in politics and management of state affairs and external interference have equally exacerbated the situation. This has manifested in secessionist rebellions and inter-communal conflicts between diverse groups due to perceived marginalization, exclusion and agitation for self-actualization and self-government. The recurrent Tuareg rebellion in Mali, violent clashes between the Fulbe, Bambara and Dogon ethnic groups in central Mali, the Fulbe and Hausa in Northern Nigeria, and the Mossi and Fulbe in Burkina Faso are classical examples.[118] The failure of Sahel states to address the root causes of these complex challenges has contributed to the erosion of social cohesion and undermined state-citizen relations, with dire implications for social cohesion, public trust and stability.

Building cohesive societies and enhancing state-citizens relations has become a key priority in development policy and peacebuilding to resolve the Sahelian crisis.[119] While policymakers have underscored its importance in public discourse, it has become a major agenda for development partners, inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) and regional organizations responding to the Sahel crisis. These actors have stressed the imperative of social cohesion and public trust in fostering peace and prosperity. It is critically important in giving a sense of belonging and identity to all citizens irrespective of their ethnic, religious, or other socio-cultural affiliations.

This chapter explores a range of policy options, actions, and recommendations that support the process of rebuilding social cohesion and public trust as a foundation for sustainable peace, good governance, and development in the Sahel.

The chapter is guided by four main research questions namely: What was the nature of social cohesion prior to modern state formation? How did the process of colonization and state formation impact on social cohesion and state-citizens relationship? What are the current dynamics of social cohesion and state-citizens relations? And what policy options and programmatic interventions can be implemented to support the process of rebuilding social cohesion and public trust?

The chapter is structured in seven sections following the introduction. The first section assesses the nature of social cohesion prior to colonialism. The objective is to appreciate the evolution of intra- and inter-communal peace, harmony, and cooperation before the advent of colonialism and how this has changed over time. The second and third sections examine how colonialism and the process of state formation impacted on social cohesion and state-citizens' relationships. Of relevance to the analysis is how colonial and post-independence governance structures and policies created societal cleavages and alienated citizens from the state by violating the social contract. The emerging dynamics, influencers and disrupters of societal disharmony, conflict, and mistrust are interrogated in the fourth and fifth section. The sixth section concludes by exploring the strategies, policy options and programmatic interventions that can be harnessed to support the process of rebuilding social cohesion and public trust in the Sahel.

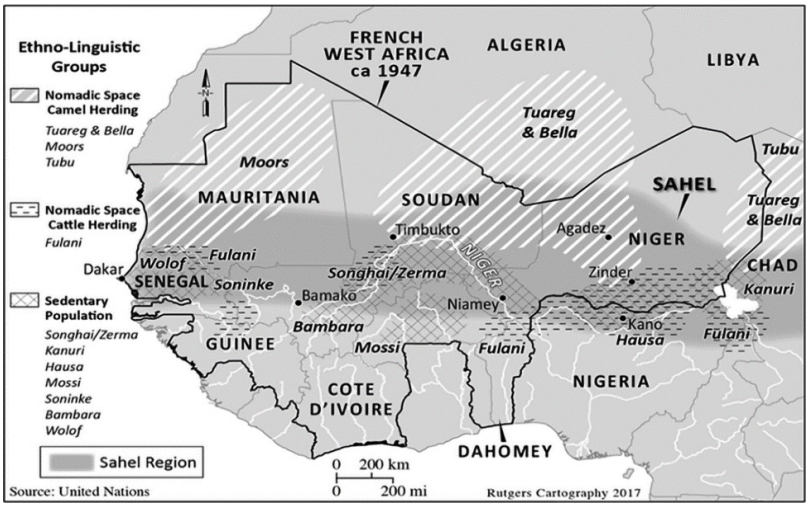
118. Bruijne, K.D. (2022) Self-Defence Groups, Politics and the Sahelian State. https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda https://www.clingendael.org/publication/self-defence-groups-politics-and-sahelian-state; ISS. (2023). Community rivalries at the heart of Sahel insecurity. PSC Insights https://issafrica.org/pscreport/psc-insights/community-rivalries-at-the-heart-of-sahel-insecurity

119. United Nations. (2019). United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS): Progress Report 2018-2019. New York: Implementation Support Unit and Pillar Working Groups; UNDP. (2021). A Regeneration: Implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS): UNDP's contribution. https://www.undp.org/africa/waca/publications/regeneration-implementing-united-nations-integrated-strategy- ; European Union. (2021) New EU strategic priorities for the Sahel: Addressing Regional Challenges through better governance. Briefing, European parliament.



Nature of Social Cohesion in the Sahel Prior to Colonialism

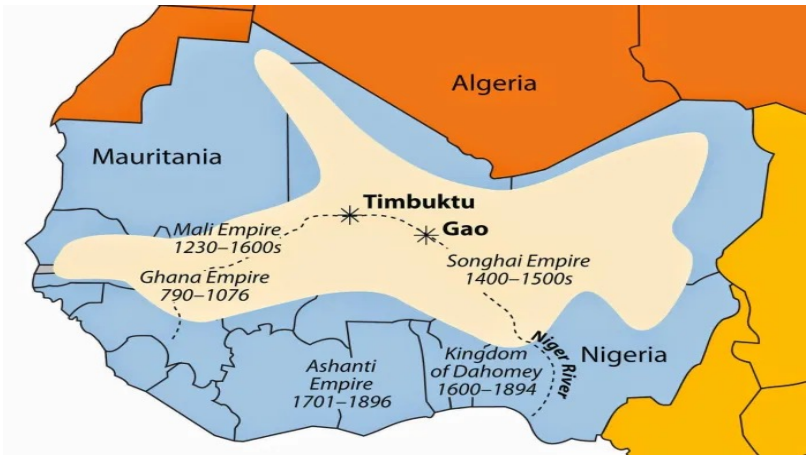
The Sahel region is home to a wide range of ethnic groups including the Bambara, Dogon, Fulbe, Gur, Hausa, the Kanuri, Lobi, Malinke, Mande, Senufo, Soninke, Tuareg, and the Bedouin Arab peoples as well as religious communities such as Muslims, Christians, and those practicing traditional indigenous religions.[120]



Map 1: Geographical spread of various ethnicities in the mid-20th century[121]

Due to colonial policies, current laws, and rapid increases in population density, there have been significant changes in demographics and societal relations. For instance, the Fulbe group and their pastoral livelihood has undergone changes including sociopolitical changes due to among other factors stiff competition over land and water resources with farming communities.[122] Before colonialism most of these communities co-existed and cooperated for prosperity and survival. It is however imperative to note that all was not well as periods of conquests, conflicts, and slavery did exist among these Kingdoms and Empires, leading to their rise, fall and demise.

Prior to colonialism, the Sahel was not organized into states, with fixed boundaries and a nominal national identity. Instead, there were kingdoms and empires with rulers and subjects.[123] These included the Ghana Empire, Mali Empire, Songhai Empire, Benin Empire (13-19 Century), Oyo Empire (14-19 Century), and Sokoto Empire (see figure 2).[124]



Map 2: Empires and Kingdoms in West Africa

Source: FolukeAfrica[125]

120... Britannica. (2023). Western Africa. https://www.britannica.com/place/Africa/Western-Africa

121. Molenaar, F., Tossell, J., Schmauder, A., Idrissa A., and Lyammouri, R. (2019). The Status Quo Defied: The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger, and Libya. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/leg /

122. An example is that the Fulbe have transformed from a purely nomadic lifestyle of permanent seasonal migration with their herds and families to a semi-nomadic lifestyle where they sometimes return to their previous settlements after transhumance seasons. In addition, they have adopted a more sedentary community lifestyle. Turner, M.D. Fulani Pastoralism in West Africa locked. https://oxfordre.com/africanhistory/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-

123. Campbell, J. (2019). The Origins of African States, and Their Names. https://www.cfr.org/blog/origins-african-states-and-their-names

124. Exploring Africa. (n.d.). History of Africa During the Time of the Great West African Kingdoms. http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/activity-3-history-of-africa-during-the-time-of-the-great-west-african-kingdoms-expand/

125. FolukeAfrica. (2016). A Short History of West Africa. https://folukeafrica.com/a-short-history-of-west-africa/

The nature of social cohesion during the period of these Empires and Kingdoms varied. However, there were some common factors and inherent values of dialogue, tolerance, hospitality, and non-violence that contributed to social cohesion in the Sahelian societies. The most important of these factors is the lineage and kingship ties which formed the basis of social organization and provided a sense of identity and belonging for individuals and groups.[126] Most Sahelian communities were organized around kingship ties, clans, tribes, or ethnic groups with strong emphasis on communal living and collective responsibility. Individuals had obligations and responsibilities towards their kin, clan and ethnic groups and those groups also provided support, protection, and assistance to their members.

Communal labor and resource sharing depicted this sense of interdependence and solidarity. In some communities, members worked together in areas such as agriculture, construction, defense, and pooling of resources for the benefit of the entire community. Social cohesion was rooted in these traditional social structures, and social networks promoted by chiefs/kings/village heads to foster unity, trust, and cooperation among different groups and individuals. While modern state systems have affected and impacted upon these traditional social structures, they have also provided opportunities for adaptation and integration. Modern Sahelian states have thus tended to centralize power, often diminishing the authority of traditional leaders to enforce societal norms and practices.[127]

In the context of hybrid governance models, a blend of both traditional and modern practices has allowed for adherence to both local customs which resonate deeply with the people[128] and national laws to enhance political authority. Therefore, the future of governance will be hinged upon finding a balance that respects traditional authority in enhancing these social structures while promoting democratic principles and accountability.[129]

Cultural exchanges between and among different societies and shared religious beliefs equally contributed to social cohesion. There was relative tolerance for people of different ethnicities and religions. Although the different Empires consisted of diverse ethnic groups, they had shared cultural values, norms, practices, rituals, and religious practices that promoted a sense of identity and belonging. Cultural exchanges through intermarriages, language diffusion, and spread of religious beliefs provided opportunities for social interactions and strengthening of community bonds.[130] Rituals and ceremonies such as festivals, birth, marriage, initiation and death served as occasions that brought communities together to either celebrate or mourn and reaffirm social bonds.

Traditional political structures and systems of governance also contributed to social cohesion. Prior to colonization, Ayittey[131] posits that two main political systems of governance existed to help generate stable communities and foster prosperity, namely centralized and non-centralized societies.[132] Centralized political systems were governed by emperors, kings, or chiefs, who carried out executive, legislative, and judicial functions with the help of councilors.[133] The Empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai were examples of such centralized political systems. In contrast, the non-centralized systems did not have a system of Chiefs and were mainly ruled by a “headman” or council of elders or lineage groupings with law-making, social control, and allocation of resources.[134] Some of these societies included the Igbo of Nigeria. They lived in small-scale, egalitarian societies in which governance was more a matter of consensus among the entire adult population than rule by an elite.[135]

These two political systems of governance provided a sense of unity and order with the leaders serving as a unifying figure.[136] They helped to maintain social cohesion by enforcing laws, resolving conflicts, and providing a sense of collective identity. Traditional leaders such as kings, village chiefs, family heads and council of elders were responsible for mediating disputes, controlling access to lands, upholding societal norms, and ensuring the well-being of community members.

126. Lutz, G. and Linder, W. (2004). Traditional authorities and local governance, University of Berne; Molenaar, F., Tossell, J., Schmauder, A., Idrissa A., and Lyammouri, R. (2019). The Status Quo Defied: The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger, and Libya. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/leg /

127. Mamdani, M. (1996). Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

128. Ake, C. (1996). Democracy and Development in Africa. Brookings Institution Press.

129. Aubyn, F.K and Aning,K. (2018). Challenging Conventional Understanding of Statehood based on West African Realities. In K. Aning, M. A. Brown, V. Boege, & C. T. Hunt (eds.), Exploring Peace formations: justice and security in post-conflict states. London: Routledge.

130. Boggs, P.S (2008). AFRIQUE : Résolution traditionnelle des conflits au Mali. https://larevue.squirepattonboggs.com/afrique-resolution-traditionnelle-des-conflits-au-mali_a641.html

131. Ayittey, G 2006, Indigenous African Institutions, Transnational Publishers, Inc, Ardsley, NY.

132. Kisangani , EF 2005, ‘Development of African Administration: Pre-Colonial Times And Since’ Public Administration and Public Policy, Vol. I.

133. Aubyn, F.K and Aning,K. (2018). Challenging Conventional Understanding of Statehood based on West African Realities. In K. Aning, M. A. Brown, V. Boege, & C. T. Hunt (eds.), Exploring Peace formations: justice and security in post-conflict states. London: Routledge.

134. Crowder, M and Ikime, O (eds) (1970). West African Chiefs: The Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence. New York: Africana Publishing Company.

135. Aubyn, F.K and Aning,K. (2018). Challenging Conventional Understanding of Statehood based on West African Realities. In K. Aning, M. A. Brown, V. Boege, & C. T. Hunt (eds.), Exploring Peace formations: justice and security in post-conflict states. London: Routledge

136. Falola, T and Fleming, T. (n.d). African Civilizations: From The Pre-Colonial To The Modern Day. https://www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c04/e6-97-09.pdf



These actors still act as local courts (addressing matrimonial issues, inheritance, land disputes, debt claims, theft, quarrels, etc.) in several communities and their decisions are often more respected than those of judicial authorities.[137] Given their direct influence over people's daily lives, coupled with their relatively accessible nature, traditional authorities were often seen as more legitimate governance actors.[138] To date, the traditional leadership in some countries have continued to sustain public trust even in contexts where democratically elected leaders have lost trust. Indeed, some have proven to be guarantors of unity and cohesion. An example is the Mogho Naba (Baongo II), the reigning monarch of the Mossi ethnic group who has played key roles in brokering peace during political crisis in Burkina Faso.[139] [140]

Trade, migration, diplomatic relationships, and alliances between communities fostered social cohesion in many communities. Trading in goods such as gold, salt, and ivory not only led to development of economic ties between societies but facilitated the exchange of goods and ideas across vast distances. A typical example was the Trans-Saharan trade which was a web of commercial interactions between the Arab world (North Africa and the Persian Gulf) and sub-Saharan Africa.[141] The market centers where these trading activities took place were not only business but also provided a space where interpersonal and inter-community relations were forged. However, the slave trade had detrimental consequences on social cohesion including ethnic fragmentation, political instability, corruption of judicial institutions, and weakening of political structures.[142]

Migration also played a significant role in inter-societal relations. People moved from one region to another, leading to the blending of cultures, ideas, and beliefs. The formation of diplomatic relationships and alliances based on mutual interests, such as protection against external threats, provision of military support, and trade privileges was a key factor that fostered social cohesion between communities. However, it is imperative to note that the relationship within and between communities was not always peaceful and harmonious. Conflicts and warfare between communities were common and this was often driven by competition over resources such as land.[143] The consequences of these wars were often the conquest and incorporation of one society by another, leading to the formation of larger political entities. Some of these conflicts were often resolved using traditional conflict resolution methods (mediation, negotiation, conciliation, reconciliation and community dialogues) by chiefs, kings, council of elders, palace courts, village councils, priests, and priestesses.[144] This helped to restore relationships between communities and groups, promoting peace and harmony.

Impact of Colonialism and State Formation on Social Cohesion

The scramble for Africa by European powers – Belgium, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain and the subsequent partition of the continent after the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 divided many closely related ethnic groups into various modern states.[145] The partition was done without consideration of the geography, history, and ethnic composition of the region. After independence, Sahelian states were left with no alternative but to accept these inherited colonial boundaries, leading to the creation of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural states with limited national cohesion.[146] Creating a genuine national identity among different ethnic groups remained a challenge, with ethnic groups that had co-existed dispersed across different countries. The Tuaregs who shared a common culture, similar way of life, and religion had to live as separate citizens of Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali and Niger.[147] In some instances, ethnic groups like the Fulbe who previously were very powerful with a large population, became a minority in their new nation-state.

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137. Boggs, P.S (2008). AFRIQUE : Résolution traditionnelle des conflits au Mali. https://larevue.squirepattonboggs.com/afrique-resolution-traditionnelle-des-conflits-au-mali_a641.html

138. Molenaar et al. (2019). The Status Quo Defied: The legitimacy of traditional authorities in areas of limited statehood in Mali, Niger, and Libya. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/leg /

139. BBC. (2015). Mogho Naba: Burkina Faso's mediator monarch. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-

140. BBC. (2015). Mogho Naba: Burkina Faso's mediator monarch. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-

141. Kehinde, M. (2014). Trans-Saharan Slave Trade. Encyclopedia of Migration. https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-94-007-6179-7_30-1

142. Nunn, N (2008). The Long-Term Effects of Africa's Slave Trades. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, February 2008.

143. Paine, J. (2019). Ethnic Violence in Africa: Destructive Legacies of Pre-Colonial States. International Organization, 73(3), 645–683. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26758061

144. Ajayi, A. Buhari, T and Oluwafemi, L. (2014). Methods of Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Society. Africa Research Review, Vol. 8 (2), Serial No. 33, April 2014:138-157.

145. Craven, M. (2015). Between law and history: the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 and the logic of free trade. London Review of International Law, Volume 3, Issue 1, pp. 31–59; SAHO. (2024). The Scramble for Africa: late 19th century. https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/grade-8-term-3-scramble-africa-late-19th-

146. Ibid; Herbst, J. (1989). The Creation and Maintenance of National Boundaries in Africa, International Organization, 43, no. 4; Gashaw, T. (2017). Colonial Borders in Africa: Improper Design and its Impact on African Borderland Communities. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/colonial-borders-in-africa-improper-design-and-its-impact-on-african-borderland-communities.

147. Ibid

Another outcome of the colonial legacy was that it led to ethno-political struggle over the state after independence as different ethnic groups vied for political power, resources, and representation.[148] Political leaders who wanted to seek or consolidate their power capitalized and manipulated the existing ethno-political inequalities and divisions accentuated by French colonial policies of "direct rule," and "assimilation". The French policy of assimilation forced the loss of social norms, identity and instigated separate/uneven development amongst different ethnic groups to entrench colonial rule.[149] Post-independence governments and political elites used these divisions for political means to consolidate their power.

Over time, the political dominance of one ethnic group over the other led to the exclusion and marginalization of other groups from political power and decision-making processes. Inadequate representation, participation and ethnocentrism generated feelings of alienation and exclusion, which undermined social cohesion and state-society relations. It specifically impacted on the unity and legitimacy of the state, leading to distrust by groups who felt marginalized politically and economically.[150]

Some ethnic groups attempted to carve a new state after independence through secessionist wars.[151] The Tuaregs, for example fought off French colonial occupation and sought to secede from the Malian State which they viewed as occupiers of their homeland called Azawad.[152] The repression of the rebellion by different governments after independence and the failure to address the root causes of the crisis has facilitated its recurrence to date.[153]

Another consequence of the imposition of artificial borders was the restrictions placed on pastoral and nomadic livelihoods. Prior to colonization, groups like the Fulbe, who are a widely dispersed group of nomadic herders, moved freely within and across the region in search of pasture and water for their livestock. The artificial borders did not only affect their traditional lifestyle but forced them into resource competition and confrontation with other groups including the Hausa, Kanuri, and Songhay. This situation persists to date. Additionally, the creation of artificial boundaries has also accounted for the territorial claims and counterclaims by states since independence.

Given the risks of non-cohesive societies, many newly independent Sahelian States embarked on massive nation building after decolonization to promote collective national identity, patriotism, and unify the people for national development. Various nation building policies were adopted including changing the name of the state, changing the education curriculum, the creation of one-party states, provision of equal access to education, healthcare, infrastructure, and other public services.[154] Nonetheless, the success of these interventions have faced significant challenges such as corruption, bad governance, and the legacies of colonialism.[155] In envisioning the future of governance, it is important to reflect on some of these issues from the past to inform how citizens, local communities and CSOs, are engaged to respond to the complex challenges confronting the region.

148. Adedeji, Adebayo, A. (1993). Comparative strategies of economic decolonization in Africa. In Mazrui, A.A. and Wondji, C (eds). General history of Africa, VIII: Africa since 1935: Califonia: UNESCO.

149. Gashaw, T. (2017). Colonial Borders in Africa: Improper Design and its Impact on African Borderland Communities. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/colonial-borders-in-africa-improper-design-and-its-impact-on-african-borderland-communities; Oyabebefa, M. F. & Buku, H. B. (2016). The linguistic consequences of French colonial policy of assimilation in West Africa: Implications for national growth and development. Journal of Linguistics, Language and Culture Vol. 3 No. 1.

150. Ibid

151. Alesbury, A. (2013). A society in motion: the Tuareg from the pre-colonial era to today', Nomadic Peoples, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 106–25.

152. Oumar, B. (2014). Tuareg Nationalism and Cyclical Pattern of Rebellions: How the past and present explain each other. Sahel Research Group Working Paper No. 007

153. Chauzal, G and van Damme, T. (2015). The roots of Mali's conflict: Moving beyond the 2012 crisis. CRU Report. https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2015/the_roots_of_malis_conflict/

154. Ibid; Makumbe, J. M. (1998). Is there a civil society in Africa. International Affairs, vol. 74, issue 2. https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/2980288.pdf

155. Nwune, U. (2021). Neo-colonialism and Terrorists Activities In Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria. Thesis, Georgia State University; Ali, M., Fjeldstad, O.D and Shifa, A. B. (2021). The Colonial Legacy of Corruption Among Local Elites in Africa. https://www.aehnetwork.org/blog/the-colonial-legacy-of-corruption-among-local-elites-in-africa/.

Impact of Colonialism and State Formation on State-Citizens Relations

State–citizen relations in most Sahel countries are characterized by predominantly adversarial dynamics between governments and citizens, leading to mutual mistrust.[156] The historical antecedent of this strained relationship can be traced to the colonial experiences and the post-independence period. During colonialism, the various administrative styles adopted by the European powers had a profound impact on state-citizens relationships. Both the French system of direct rule and the British system of indirect rule were characterized by power imbalances, exploitation, repression of local people and cultural assimilation.[157]

Sahelian countries that were under French colonial rule, were characterized by a highly centralized system of administration. The effect was that French rule was imposed on the population regardless of the existing ethnic stratifications and political relationships. Meaningful political participation was denied, and political discourse was not nurtured. The colonial administration regarded the people as subjects rather than citizens and ruled by suppressing them through excessive use of force. Massive exploitation was carried out in terms of resource depletion, labor exploitation, and unfair taxation.[158] Colonial authorities also ensured that no civic groups would emerge to challenge them for violating people's rights, imposing authoritarian governance, and pillaging human and natural resources. This sowed discord and public distrust, largely due to the high levels of inequity, exclusion, and disconnection of the people from decision-making processes. This problematic historical and political foundation adopted by the post-colonial elites who succeeded colonial governance has largely continued to shape state-citizens relationships.

In the post-independence period, the relationship between the state and citizens who often organized themselves into citizen movements, pressure groups and activists, was sometimes antagonistic, chaotic, and confrontational.[159] Most authoritarian and military regimes viewed them with suspicion because they feared that they could mobilize citizens against them. Active citizen participation and inclusion in governance and socioeconomic development was suppressed by circumventing the norms and institutions meant to support basic liberties and freedoms.

The attitude of most post-independence political leaders remained one of paranoia that translated into the militarization of the state, backed by the establishment of arbitrary and fragmented national institutions and rules.[160] Emphasis was placed on national security defined largely in terms of regime survival over and above the overall well-being of the citizenry. As a result, many dissenters were detained, killed, maimed, or forced to go into exile.[161] For the most part, most Sahel States functioned as a pyramid structure through which only the interests of a few ruling elites were articulated and secured, in a vertical, top-down, hierarchical manner, while the interests of the majority were circumvented.[162] This meant that the majority of the population remained alienated from their states, state institutions, and leaders.

Citizens consequently grew increasingly distrustful of government and its institutions as most regimes were seen as extensions of colonial masters and puppets of external actors, keen to preserve and safeguard the interests of a few elites. It is thus not surprising, the emergence and rise in miliary coups has been buoyed by a deep sense of frustration and anger against the perceived chokehold by colonial and external actors on Sahelian States. The introduction of multiparty democracy, and new constitutional reforms following the wave of democratization that spread across the African continent and especially the Sahel in the 1990s guaranteed previously denied civil rights such as freedom of expression.[163]

156. WANEP. (2023). West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2023: Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region. https://wanep.org/wanep/west-africa-early-warning-outlook-2023-potential-flashpoints-and-simmering-conflicts-in-the-region/; Lyammouri, R. (2019). Tribal Dynamics in the Sahel. Policy Center for the New South. Policy Brief, October 2019, PB-19/31

157. See "Colonialism and the African Experience". https://www.pearsonhighered.com/assets/samplechapter/0/2/0/5/0205208606.pdf

158. Killingray, D. (1986). The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa African Affairs, Vol. 85, No. 340.

159. UN ECA. (2001). African Civil Society Participation in Development and Governance in Africa: Revisiting Process and Practice. https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/390,

160. Kome, F. N. (2007). The nature and character of the post-colonial African state. In GOOD COUPS AND BAD COUPS: The limits of the African Union's injunction on unconstitutional changes of power in Africa (pp. 18–29). Institute for Global Dialogue. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07759.7

161. Makumbe, J. M. (1998). Is there a civil society in Africa. International Affairs, vol. 74, issue 2. https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/2980288.pdf

162. Kome, F. N. (2007). The nature and character of the post-colonial African state. In GOOD COUPS AND BAD COUPS: The limits of the African Union's injunction on unconstitutional changes of power in Africa (pp. 18–29). Institute for Global Dialogue. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07759.7

163. For more information see Villalón, L.A (2023). The Politics of Democratization and the State of the State in the Sahel. In Harbeson, J.W. and Rothchild, D. (eds), Africa in World Politics: Sustaining Reform in a Turbulent World Order. 7th Edition. New York: Routledge

The reforms, however, failed to curtail the alienation of citizens from their states and governments. Part of the reason for this failure was how the new constitutions were developed. In most cases, the focus of the new constitutions was dominated by the governing party or preserving elite group interests.[164] This explains why in most of the Sahel, there are calls for constitutional reforms to put citizens at the center of governance and development in the transition to civilian rule. The introduction of multi-party democracy led to the rapid politicization of nationality and identity issues by the political elites to reach their goals.[165] This resulted in the political, economic, and social marginalization and exclusion of some by groups that control political power.

Current Dynamics of Social Cohesion and State-Citizens Relations

Several dynamics continue to weaken social cohesion and state-citizens relations in the Sahel. Security challenges and vulnerabilities continue to impact negatively on the quality of life of the population, including violent extremism, chronic inter-communal violence, outbreak of health pandemics, high levels of youth unemployment, climate change impacts, and human right violations.[166] Violent extremism by groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and intercommunal conflicts usually over land and power have contributed to a sense of fear and mistrust among communities and resulted in displacement, loss of life, and destruction of properties.[167] This has led to the rise of self-defense groups, such as those in Mali and Burkina Faso who have emerged to protect local communities against insecurity.

In Mali, the Dogon self-defense group, Dan Na Ambassagou (DNA) and the Fulbe have frequently engaged in conflict over the latter's alleged cooperation with jihadists affiliated with Katibat Macina.[168] Similarly, in Burkina Faso, the Volontaires pour la Défense de la Patrie (VDP) which consist of existing self-defense groups like the Dozo and Koglweogo who are mostly Mossi people and the Fulbe's have engaged in violent conflict over similar reasons.[169] Efforts by states to stop abuses, extrajudicial killings and violence has been slow to bear fruit, undermining social cohesion in affected communities.

Inter-communal violence mainly caused by competition for control, access and ownership of land and water resources between farmers and herders have undermined people's livelihood and social cohesion, leading to tensions and divisions among communities.[170] The situation is exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation due to its socioeconomic impacts including food scarcity, displacement, and conflicts over natural resources.[171]

In Mali, the situation has manifested in the violent clashes between Fulani/Fulbe pastoralists and Dogon farmers.[172][173] While the violence has roots in the wider political-economic and historical context, access and control over land and natural resources has been one of the key casual factors. This has further been exacerbated by climate change and population growth with negative consequences for livelihoods and migration.

164. Tukumbi lumumba-Kasongo, T. (2002). reconceptualising the state as the leading agent of development in the context of globalization in Africa. African Journal of Political Science, 7(1), 2002, 88.

165. Ibid; Kome, F. N. (2007). The nature and character of the post-colonial African state. In GOOD COUPS AND BAD COUPS: The limits of the African Union's injunction on unconstitutional changes of power in Africa (pp. 18–29). Institute for Global Dialogue. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep07759.7

166. WANEP. (2021). The Limits and Pitfalls of Multilateral Regional and National Responses to the Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel and Cote d'Ivoire. Accra: WANEP.

167. WANEP. (2023). West Africa Early Warning Outlook 2023: Potential Flashpoints and Simmering Conflicts in the Region. https://wanep.org/wanep/west-africa-early-warning-outlook-2023-potential-flashpoints-and-simmering-conflicts-in-the-region/

168. International Crisis Group.(2020). Reversing Central Mali's Descent into Communal Violence. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/mali/293-enrayer-la-communautarisation-de-la-violence-au-centre-du-mali;

169. International Crisis Group (2020) 'Burkina Faso: Stopping the Spiral of Violence', Available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/burkina-faso/287-burkina-faso-sortir-de-la-spirale-des-violences; ACLED. (2024). Actor Profile: Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP). https://acleddata.com/2024/03/26/actor-profile-volunteers-for-the-defense-of-the-homeland-vdp/; Human Rights Watch. (2020). Burkina Faso: New Massacres by Islamist Armed Groups. https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/23/burkina-faso-new-massacres-islamist-armed-groups

170. Bøas, M. (2019). The Sahel Crisis and the Need for International Support. Policy Dialogue, No. 15. Nordic Africa Institute. Uppsala University

171. Adams, A.E., Thill, A., Kuusaana, D, E. and Mittag, A (2023). Farmer–herder conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa: drivers, impacts, and resolution and peacebuilding strategies. Environmental Research Letter 18.;

172. Brottem, L.(2021). The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa. https://africacenter.org/publication/growing-complexity-farmer-herder-conflict-west-central,

173. Benjaminsen, T. A., & Ba, B. (2021). Fulani-Dogon Killings in Mali: Farmer-Herder Conflicts as Insurgency and Counterinsurgency. African Security, 14(1), 4–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2021.1925035

Another dynamic which has impacted on social cohesion and state-society relations is the deficits in governance and economic development. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger are among the world's poorest countries and are at the very bottom of the UN Human Development Index.[174] Weak governance, impunity, lack of accountability, human rights violations, corruption, high levels of poverty, deepening inequalities, weak institutional capacities, poor service delivery, underdevelopment and lack of inclusive politics has blocked the Sahel's potential for democratic governance and transformative growth. The situation is even more dire in the borderland regions where the presence of the state is weak, and the provision of basic services and infrastructures such as healthcare, electricity, water, housing, and employment is lacking.[175] The governance and development challenges facing the Sahel have eroded public trust in state institutions, undermined the legitimacy of governments, and fostered a sense of injustice and inequality. This partly explains why citizens clamor for change irrespective of the constitutionality or unconstitutionality of such changes as witnessed with the expressed celebrations that heralded the military coups in Burkina Faso and Mali[176] as discussed in greater in chapter 7.

The role and influence of external actors has also contributed to the erosion of public trust and confidence. Sahel has become a scene for international actors including the UN, EU, AU, ECOWAS, France, Russia, China and the United States.[177] Several initiatives have been implemented by these external actors to address the region's most pernicious challenges, including the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), the French-led operation Barkhane together with European Union (EU) Training Missions and Takuba task forces.[178] Despite significant financial investment and heavy international presence, the socioeconomic, political and security situation continues to worsen, leading to military coups and expansion of terrorist networks.[179] This has resulted in mistrust, local contestation and protest against the continued presence of these forces, culminating in demands for their withdrawal by the military transitional authorities in Mali[180] and Burkina Faso.[181] Curiously, while some have called for and expelled external actors including the US, France and UN, it has also witnessed the welcoming and arrival of new actors such as Russia, which could suggest shifting geopolitical reconfigurations.

New Influencers and Disrupters of Social Cohesion

There are new dynamics which are serving as influencers and disrupters of social cohesion. One such dynamic is new technology and social media which is covered in greater depth in Chapter 8 of this report. New digital media including social media platforms are contributing to social solidarity and community cohesion by increasing access to information, promoting open dialogue, facilitating political participation and mobilization.[182] Citizens are increasingly using online spaces to demand for public services, accountability of political officials and critiquing government policies and actions/inactions. It is providing an impetus to the youth to demand economic opportunities and inclusion in policy development and governance.[183]

Nonetheless, the growth in digital access and usage has also created new social challenges including disinformation, misinformation, hostile confrontations, political manipulations,[184] radicalization, and polarization. Violent extremists'

174. For more information see https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22,

175. WANEP. (2021). The Limits and Pitfalls of Multilateral Regional and National Responses to the Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel and Cote d'Ivoire. Accra: WANEP.

176. Aubyn, F.K. (2023). Beyond Sanctions and Use of Force: How ECOWAS can Negotiate a political solution to the Niger's Coup. Conflict Resilience Monitor https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-resilience/conflict-; Aubyn, F.K. (2022). ECOWAS Sanctions Against Mali Necessary But May be Counterproductive. IPI Global Observatory. https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/02

177. Wilén, N. (2020). A logic of its own: the external presence in the Sahel. https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/a-logic-of-its-own-the-external-presence-in-the-sahel/

178. Aubyn, F. K., Ziblim, I and Apau, R. (2022). Coup d'etat and Political Instability in Western Sahel: Implications for the Fight against Terrorism and Violent Extremism. AU/PAPS/ACSRT/PP/002. AU Policy Paper; Ziblim, I., Apau, R. and Aubyn, F. K., (2022). Implications of Unconstitutional Changes of Government on Violent extremism and Terrorism Interventions: What More Could ECOWAS and AU do. African Journal on Terrorism, Special Edition-October 2022

179. Fiifi Edu-Afful, F., Tchie, A. E.Y., Aubyn, F.K., Diallo, O. A. and Zabala, M. L.(2022). Shifting from External Dependency: Remodeling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future. EPON Series, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

180. Fiifi Edu-Afful, F., Tchie, A. E.Y., Aubyn, F.K., Diallo, O. A. and Zabala, M. L.(2022). Shifting from External Dependency: Remodeling the G5 Sahel Joint Force for the Future. EPON Series, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI).

181. Aubyn, F.K. (2023). Beyond Sanctions and Use of Force: How ECOWAS can negotiate a political solution to the Niger's Coup. Conflict Resilience Monitor https://www.accord.org.za/conflict-resilience/conflict; Aubyn, F.K. (2022). ECOWAS Sanctions against Mali Necessary But May be Counterproductive. IPI Global Observatory. https://theglobalobservatory.org/2022/02

182. González-Bailón S. and Lelkes, Y. (2023). Do social media undermine social cohesion? A critical review. Social Issues and Policy Review. Volume17, Issue1. Pp 155-180

183. Bangura, I. (ed). (2022). Youth-Led Social Movements and Peacebuilding in Africa. London: Routledge

184. Yue, J., Bako, H., Hampton, K., and Smith, K. (2022). Conflict and Online Space in the Sahel: Challenges and Recommendations. Issue Brief. Search for Common Ground.

groups for example not only exploit the digital space for online recruitment but also manipulate existing dissatisfaction and frustration with political elites, lack of economic opportunities, inter-ethnic violence, and security.[185] Social media has also fueled the migration aspirations of the youth to seek economic opportunities which sometimes create tensions with receiving societies. While social media is changing the discourse on democratic governance, states have attempted digital repression, resulting in popular resistance by citizens and civil society. In Burkina Faso, the fight against terrorism and fake news has resulted in laws that violates people's liberty, brutal repression of demonstrations, internet blackouts, suspension[186] of limitations on access to information and intimidation of journalists. Similar laws were passed in Mali to control press and publications.[187]

Multiple levels of distrust have also emerged between and within communities due to influx of irregular migrants, economic migrants, and displaced populations.[188] The presence of these migrant populations has sometimes created competition with residents for jobs, social services, land, and water resources, leading to social divisions and conflicts. Moreover, cultural differences, weak societal integration and language barriers have also often led to misunderstandings, stereotyping and prejudices against migrant groups like the Fulbe's. Over time, migration has exacerbated existing economic disparities within communities as migrants face poverty and unemployment, leading to resentment and tensions between diverse groups.

Climate change is another disrupter of social cohesion in the Sahel. Countries in the region are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. According to the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) country vulnerability and readiness Index to climate change, three Sahel countries (Chad, Mali, Niger) rank among the 20% most vulnerable and least ready to climate change in the world.[189] The effects of the climate crises are disrupting the social fabric of communities, leading to increased tensions, inequalities, and violent conflicts due to intense competition over scarce land, food, and water.[190] The psychological impact of this resource competition on individuals and communities has often undermined social cohesion by creating divisions, distrust, and barriers to communication and cooperation. Additionally, the climate crisis is intensifying forced migration, as communities facing economic hardship seek safety and opportunities elsewhere. As migration pattern occurs, it disrupts social networks and relationships as well as community cohesion.

Policy Options for Consideration

The contradictions between the historical legacy of modern Sahel States and the basis for their local legitimacy lie at the heart of dwindling social cohesion and weak state-citizens relationships. Changing the status quo would require a comprehensive and multidimensional approach that considers the historical foundations of the problem and the current/emerging trends.

First, while there is no single and/or easy solution to the problem, constitutional design can offer avenues for rebuilding social cohesion and state-citizens relations. The process should ideally begin with reforms of the legal order and normative dispensation that guide the exercise of power, political governance, enhance accountability and electoral processes, which is the national constitution. As the cornerstone of democratic governance, the constitution is critical to promoting more inclusive political processes and entrenching national unity and stability. There is a need for a range of constitutional, legal and policy reforms to build strong, inclusive, accountable, responsive, and representative governance systems that can deliver results on various aspects of society and promote social cohesion through a people-centered governance model that minimizes excessive executive powers.[191] The ongoing political transitions in the central Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger offer an opportunity to reimagine the state by reviewing the constitutions through national and local dialogues, in an open, transparent, and inclusive process to promote active citizens participation in the affairs of the state and governance.

185. Elise Vermeersch, E., Coleman, J., Demuynck, M., Dal Santo, E. (2020). The Role of social media in Mali and its Relation to Violent Extremism: A Youth Perspective. UNICRI and ICCT. https://www.icct.nl/publication/social-media-mali-and-its-relation-violent-extremism-youth-perspective

186. MFWA. (2022). Burkina Faso: Warning against fake news triggers intense reactions. https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/burkina-faso-warning-against-fake-news-triggers-intense-reactions/

187. MFWA. (2021). Mali: Transitional Authorities announce liberticidal measures. https://www.mfwa.org/issues-in-focus/mali-transitional-authorities-announce-liberticidal-measures/

188. IFPRI and WFP. (2023). Sahel Social Cohesion Research in Burkina Faso and Niger. Research Brief. https://cgspace.cgiar.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5fb1073b-

189. University of Notre Dame (2023). Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) Country Index -Vulnerability and Readiness. https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/

190. SIPRI and NUPI (2021). Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet. https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/NUPI_Fact_Sheet_Sahel_LR5.pdf

191. Ndulo, M. (2019). Constitutions and Constitutional Reforms in African Politics https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1324

Second, it is incumbent upon governments to promote, establish, and safeguard strong institutions, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in governance and public administration. This entails a wide range of legal, policy, institutional and reforms that ensures that ministries, departments, and agencies of states operate with integrity, accountability, efficiency, and efficacy. For instance, the institutional capacities and accountability mechanisms of public institutions must be strengthened to enable them to implement and enforce the law without fear or favor and be accountable under the law. Appointments and recruitment into public institutions should be based on merit and competence and not favoritism, nepotism, or political affiliation. Deliberate efforts should be made to promote the participation and representation of all citizens especially marginalized groups such as women and youth in leadership, governance, and decision-making processes.

Third, it is instructive for governments to enhance access to public information, communication and feedback with the public to build trust and promote transparency. Use of traditional and new media including radio, telecommunication, radio, television, print media and social media platforms should be deployed and employed to disseminate information, provide regular feedback and updates on government initiatives, and engage in dialogue with the public to overcome any misperceptions. Laws on access to information should be adopted and/or strengthened to promote a culture of transparency, accountability and public participation. Lessons and good practices could be drawn from countries that have adopted and implemented such laws, such as Ghana's 2019 Right to Information Act (ACT 989) and Nigeria's 2011 Freedom of Information Act, which provides constitutional right to access information held by public institutions and officials. Moreover, mechanisms and platforms for public consultation and engaging the wider civil society must be established and/or strengthened to ensure that the voices of citizens are taken into consideration in decision-making processes. Especially for members of the legislature, it is vital to regularly engage constituents through various mechanisms including digital platforms, dialogue sessions, town hall meetings and community forums to receive inputs/feedback on specific issues and share information on government policies and decisions. Equally, arts, sports, theatre, and music such as musical contests, traditional wrestling, horse, and camel races should be explored to help bring communities together and forge alliances.

Fourth, political power needs to be decentralized to the local levels to ensure representation of minority and marginalized groups, traditional and religious authorities as well as civil society in decision-making processes and development. While decentralization and devolution of public services is no miracle cure of the failures of the unitary centralized governance systems, it promises more inclusive governance and better service delivery, while bringing elected representatives and local administrations closer to citizens. Lessons from past decentralization reforms in the Sahel show that local government authorities often suffer from lack of autonomy, as well as financial and human resources (weak technical and administrative capacity) to fulfil their mandate.[192] Governments should thus make deliberate efforts to provide genuine autonomy and sufficient, predictable and sustained financial and human resources to promote development and enhanced service delivery at the local levels.[193] More significantly, it is crucial to strengthen the technical and managerial capacity of local governments, while increasing accountability mechanisms and citizens participation in resources management.

Fifth, improving service delivery (access and quality as well as addressing inequalities between urban and rural areas) is crucial for rebuilding social cohesion and state-citizens relations. Enhancing the delivery of public services such as healthcare, clean water, education, infrastructure, and sanitation in marginalized communities can help to alleviate poverty and improve the overall well-being of the population. By investing in quality service delivery with the support of development partners, millions can gain essential skills, knowledge, and opportunities. This can increase their ability to contribute to the economy and reduce susceptibility to violent extremism and other social vices.

Sixth, addressing the socioeconomic inequalities, climate crisis and irregular migration is also important to build trust in governments' commitment to improve citizens' well-being. Sahel states' governments should consider implementing innovative development projects that directly benefit the local communities, such as eradicating poverty and job creation. Investments in youth, women's and minority rights are particularly important in this respect. It is important to address the systemic and structural challenges that prevent those rights from being realized. In addition, existing systems, structures and policies that reinforce discrimination, marginalization and inequalities must be reformed. Young people must be meaningfully engaged and empowered through education, vocational skills training, and business opportunities. This will help prevent their recruitment into armed groups and provide them with alternative pathways for their future.

Seventh, strengthening the rule of law, promoting and protecting human rights and reforming the justice system is critical to restore public trust and social cohesion. The rule of law must be upheld and equal access to social justice for all citizens must be ensured irrespective of gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic strata, political and religious affiliation to enhance accountability. Achieving this entails reforming the judicial system to expedite the adjudication

192. Bisson, L. (2020). Decentralisation and Inclusive governance in fragile settings: Lessons for the Sahel. CRU Policy Brief, May 2020.

193. Ibid, p.10

of cases and eradicate corruption, as well as the persistent training of legal professionals, establishment of courts in rural areas and ensuring that laws are enforced impartially and without discrimination to address grievances and provide social justice for all. Anti-corruption institutions should be strengthened to address all forms of corruption and illicit financial flows.

Eight, closely related to the above is the need to strengthen security provision and law enforcement especially in the volatile regions especially marginalized and borderland communities where state presence has been weak since independence. This can involve security sector reforms to professionalize the defense and security forces. This may include the training and capacity-building for security forces to respond adequately to new threats, enhance their professionalism and loyalty to the state instead of their ethnic groups, provide the requisite logistics and ensure prevention of and accountability for human rights abuses. This is necessary to protect the population from violence and insecurity.

Ninth, Sahel states need to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue and reconciliation to address the historical divisions and tensions to promote a peaceful and harmonious existence. The peace generating factors including the institutions, processes and values of societies that promote and sustain healthy social relations, justice and peace must be identified and reinforced. Programs such as interfaith events, community forums, and dialogues, cultural exchanges, and educational programs that bring together different ethnic, religious, and cultural groups at both national and community levels must be prioritized. Such events highlight common values and shared history to foster understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Tenth, given the fragility of border areas where state presence is often limited, promoting social cohesion in these areas will increase the resilience and solidarity among border communities. More importantly, trading opportunities, intercultural exchanges, and social movements within and across borders could be encouraged through cross-border frameworks and policies that draw on the immense potential of national, regional, and continental programs such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement. The AfCFTA has the greatest potential to spur the Sahel's economic progress and advance the SDGs and the AU Agenda 2063. It is important to prioritize investments in women and youth in all facets of the AfCFTA implementation arrangements by advancing their meaningful participation in cross-border trading opportunities.[194]

This chapter has highlighted the weakening state of social cohesion and state-citizen relations in the Sahel, occasioned by the deepening fault lines and increasing polarization along ethnic, religious and political lines. The findings have reaffirmed that a society that is united fosters peace and prosperity and gives a sense of belonging, identity, and hope to all its members. The sense of national unity, interrelatedness, and interdependence between the various social groups is declining with implications for the peace and stability of the region. The current spate of insecurity, violent extremism, governance deficits, military coups, harsh economic conditions, a growing trust deficit, deep-rooted perception of inequality, marginalization and exclusion, and spiraling unemployment have added another layer to the conundrum. Nonetheless, the origins of the current dynamics of social cohesion and state-citizens relations have deep roots dating back to the colonial era and post-independence period during the modern state formation process. Any solution to the problem should therefore take into consideration the historical antecedents as well as the current dynamics.

It ought to begin with an overarching constitutional reform that leads to a people-centered model of governance that can deliver results for the people and promote strong institutions, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability in governance and public administration. The gap in the implementation of constitutional frameworks should equally be addressed. The ongoing political transitions in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger can serve as entry points for a more comprehensive constitutional review process to help create a sense of belonging, promote trust, foster good governance, and provide a conducive atmosphere for citizens to thrive and fulfil their life aspirations. Strengthening public service delivery, equitable social justice and addressing the socioeconomic challenges including poverty and unemployment are also paramount to improving social cohesion and state-citizens relations. Additionally, there is a need to strengthen security provision and law enforcement especially in the volatile regions and communities where state presence has been weak. It is also imperative to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue and reconciliation to address historical divisions and tensions. Rebuilding social cohesion and building public trust is a long-term process that requires sustained commitment and collaboration, as well as transparency and accountability from governments, citizens, civil society organizations, bilateral and international partners.

194. Ngom, M. (2023). AfCFTA: Reaping the benefits of the world's most youth and women-friendly trade agreement. Africa Renewal. https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/february-2023/afcfta-reaping-benefits-

Chapter 3

Democratic Governance Trends in the Sahel: Citizen's Perspectives

Joseph Asunka, Daniel Armah-Attoh, and Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny

Abstract

The socioeconomic, political and security challenges in the Sahel have reversed many years of democratic governance and development gains. While the context remains difficult and uncertain, data from Afrobarometer surveys in the region highlight opportunities for positive change. Citizens' clamor and commitment to democratic and accountable governance norms and institutions remains strong despite notable decline in the last decade. Moreover, levels of horizontal social cohesion are relatively high, presenting opportunities for mobilizing citizens to exercise agency and act collectively to address these challenges and position the region for a better future. Empirical and anecdotal evidence suggests that the region would reap benefits from effective control of public sector corruption and increased government accountability - a growing aspiration of a majority of citizens in the region.

Introduction

When countries across Africa began embracing democratic forms of government in the 1990s, many observers and scholars were highly skeptical about the prospects of democratic development on the continent. Pointing to the modernization theories of the 1950s, analysts believed that the survival of a democratic system of government was inextricably linked to economic wealth and argued that low-income societies could not sustain it. Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi,[195] for example, argued that "the richer the country, the more likely it is to sustain democracy. ..." Others[196] echoed these arguments,[197] postulating that Africa's democratic transitions faced a high likelihood of reversal.[198]

Many African countries, including those in the Sahel[199] region initially seemed to defy these dire predictions as they embraced multiparty elections and ruling parties in several countries lost elections and handed over power to opposition parties. In the past decade, however, the wind of democratic decline has hit Africa and the rest of the world hard. Since 2020, soldiers have pushed out democratically elected governments in six countries, most of them in the Sahel region – Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, Niger, and Sudan – as well as Gabon in a spate of coups that have at times appeared to enjoy a measure of public support. The optimism that greeted the 1990s wave of democratic transitions on the continent appears to have dissipated as regional and global governance indicators and public opinion data point to declining quality of governance and democracy in most countries.[200]

Granted, there is a lot more to this narrative than doom and gloom. In some countries, citizens and institutions have successfully fought back against anti-democratic efforts. Amid public outcry at the prospect of a "constitutional coup," Senegal's Constitutional Council blocked President Macky Sall's effort to postpone the presidential election, which ultimately resulted in a win for the opposition. The commitment of citizens to resist the winds of democratic decline gives reason for optimism, especially given the fact that community engagements and galvanizing collective action are relatively high across the region.

195. Przeworski, A., & Limongi, F. (1997). Modernization: Theories and facts. World Politics, 49(2), 155-183.

196. Mbaku, J. M. (2020). Good and inclusive governance is imperative for Africa's future. Brookings. 8 January.

197. Norris, P. (2016). Are poor societies stuck with dictators? Conversation. 11 April.

198. Bigman, D. (2011). Poverty, hunger, and democracy in Africa. Palgrave Macmillan Books.

199. In this chapter, the Sahel region includes the following 10 countries that were covered in the 2021/2023 Afrobarometer surveys: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan. It is important to note here that these are the same countries apart from Sudan considered by the UN as constituting the Sahel which also includes Chad.

200. Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, "Freedom in the World: Democracy Under Siege," Freedom House, 2021, freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/FIW2021_World_02252021_FINAL-web-upload.pdf; "The Global State of Democracy Initiative," International IDEA, 2021, www.idea.int/gsod/; Richard Wike and Shannon Schumacher, "Democratic Rights Popular Globally but Commitment to Them Not Always Strong," Pew Research Center, February 27, 2020, www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/02/27/democratic-rights-popular-globally-but-commitment-to-them-not-always-strong/; and Robert Mattes, "Democracy in Africa: Demand, Supply, and the 'Dissatisfied Democrat'," Afrobarometer Policy Paper no. 54, February 2019, afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Policy%20papers/ab_r7_policypaperno54_africans_views_of_democracy1.pdf.

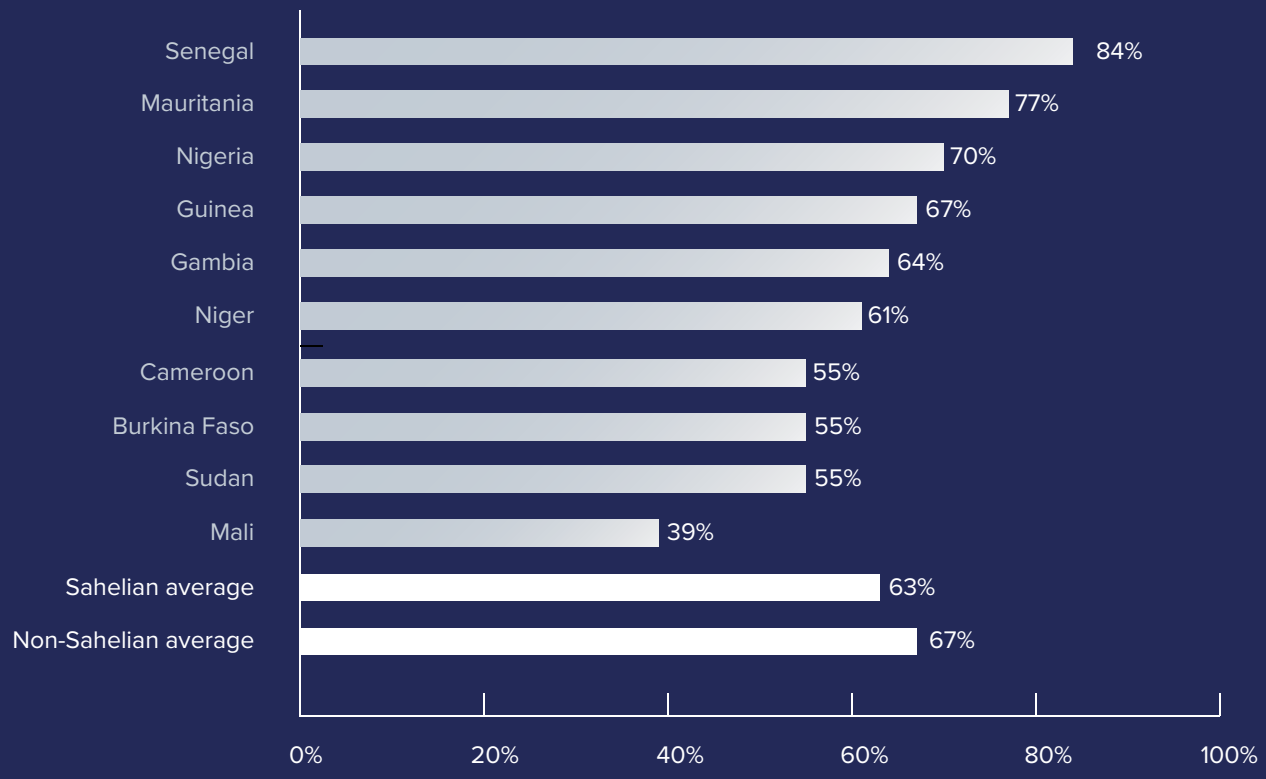
This chapter draws data from Afrobarometer, a pan-African survey research project, to track and analyze democratic governance trends in the Sahel region from the perspective and experience of citizens. In some cases, data from countries outside the Sahel are included to provide a comparative perspective.

Demand and Supply of Democratic Governance

Demand for democratic and accountable governance

What do ordinary citizens perceive as the state of democracy and democratic institutions and norms? On the demand side, there is a great deal of good news: preference for democracy and commitment to democratic and accountable governance norms and institutions are very high. Almost two-thirds (64%) of citizens in the ten Sahelian countries surveyed in 2021/2023 said they prefer democracy to any other system of government, which is almost at par with the average in the rest of Africa (67%). Preference for democracy is a majority view in all Sahelian countries surveyed except Mali where less than 4 in ten respondents (39%) said democracy is preferable (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Preference for democracy | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[201]

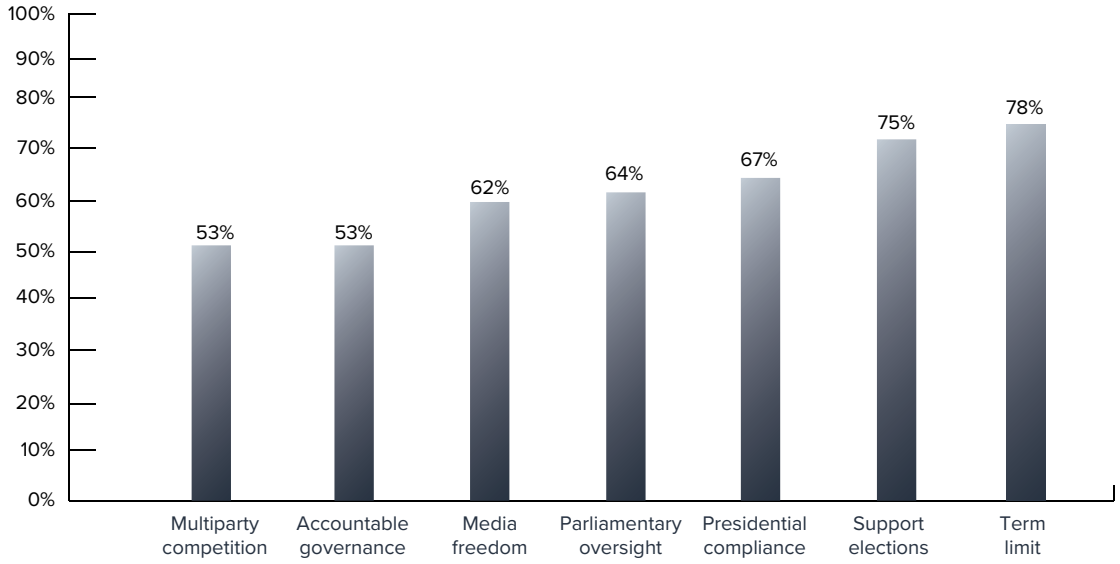


Respondents were asked:
Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
(% that chose Statement 1)
Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

More encouraging is the fact that citizens in the region evince strong support for the norms and institutions of democratic and accountable governance including multiparty competition; accountable governance; media freedom; parliamentary oversight of the executive; presidential compliance with decisions of the courts; elections as a means for choosing leaders; and presidential term limit - discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7 of this report. (Figure 2).

201 Note: While Sudan is not one of the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it has been included in certain analyses in this report due to its geographic proximity, shared governance and security dynamics, and its relevance to regional trends affecting the broader Sahel context.

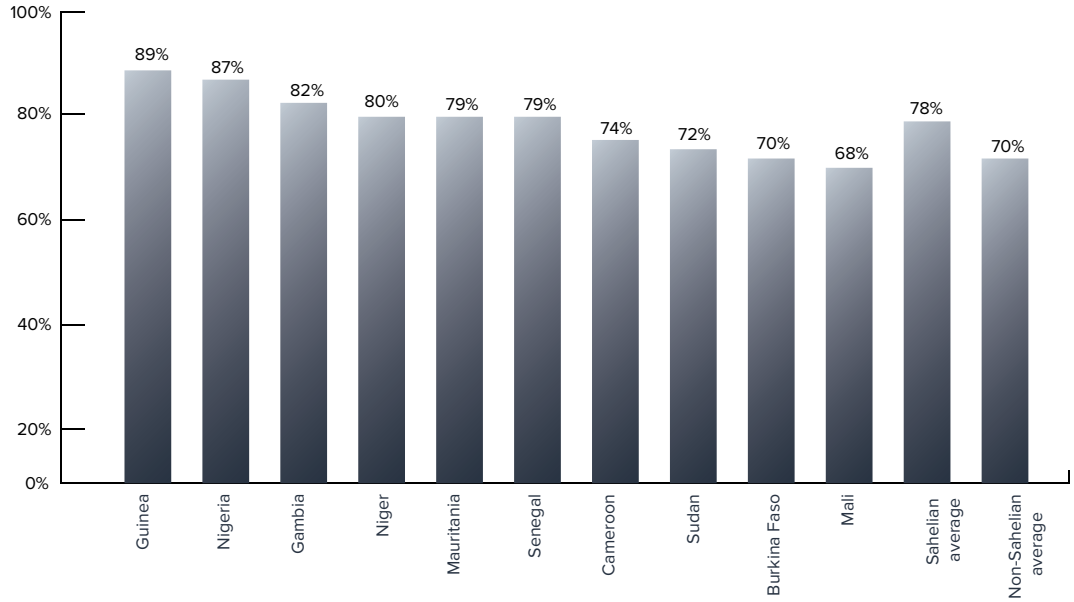
Figure 2: Support for democratic norms and institutions | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021-2023



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2 (% that chose Statement in favor of norm or institution)*

In fact, constitutional limit on presidential tenure is the most widely endorsed democratic norm with nearly 8 in ten citizens endorsing the statement that "the Constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office". This includes nearly 9 in ten respondents in Guinea and Nigeria (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Support for term presidential limits | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[202]



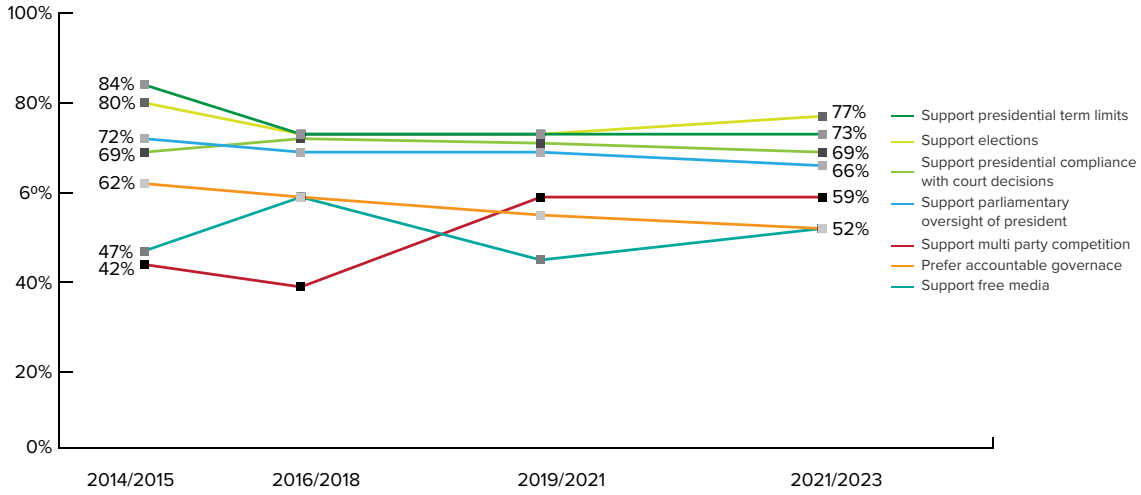
Respondents were asked:
Which of the following statements is closest to your view? (% that chose Statement 1)
Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the [president] to serving a maximum of two terms in office
Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the [president] can serve.

For the eight countries where data is available, support for democratic and accountable governance norms and institutions have remained strong. In fact, such support is growing in some cases, with most citizens endorsing all norms and institutions over time. It is worth noting that preference for accountable government (over effective government) recorded a 5-percentage point increase between 2014 and 2023, signifying growing popular demand for governments that are accountable to citizens.

202 Ibid.

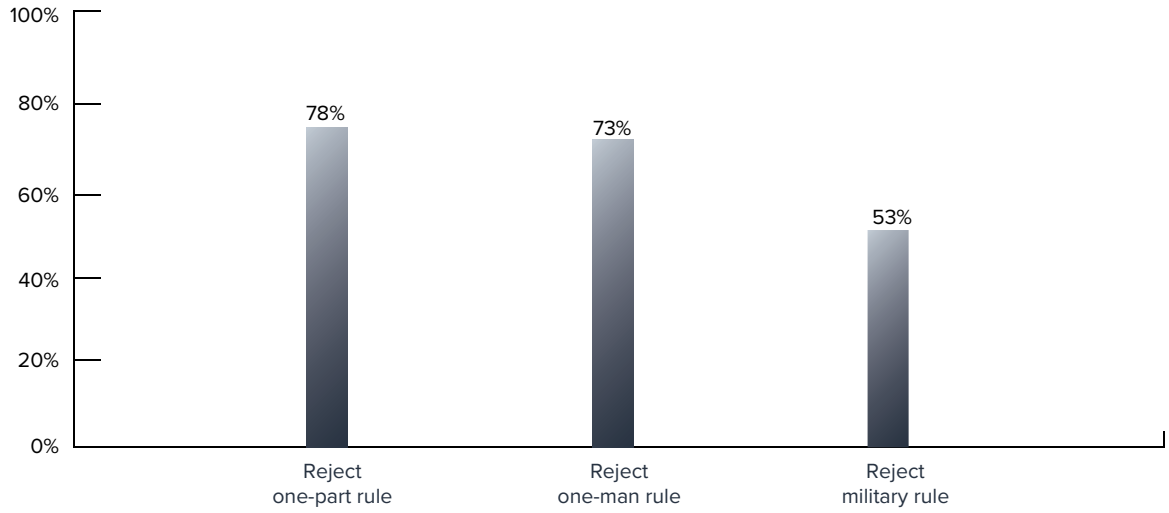
Support for media freedom also increased by 15-percentage points in this period, underscoring the importance that citizens attach to the media in their country's political and development processes. On the other hand, support for elections, multiparty competition, parliamentary oversight of the executive, and support for presidential term limit recorded some declines in this period but all have been consistently endorsed by clear majorities over time (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Trends in support for democratic norms and institutions | 8 Sahelian countries | 2014-2023



This strong popular commitment to democracy and accountable governance is reinforced by a resounding rejection of non-democratic alternatives. Majority of citizens reject one-party rule, one-man rule (more than 7 in ten each), and military rule (a little over half) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Rejection of authoritarian rule | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021-2023



Respondents were asked:
There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% that 'disapprove') Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office. The army comes in to govern the country.Elections and [Parliament] are abolished so that the [president] can decide everything.

Although citizens in the Sahelian region have ostensibly openly celebrated some military coups,[203] the data suggests that this is not necessarily an endorsement of military rule. Most citizens remain opposed to military rule (more than half of citizens reject military rule), even if they welcome military intervention out of frustration with the inability of their elected leaders to meet their democratic governance aspirations (more on this below) and other concerns, notably insecurity and violent extremism. In fact, insecurity, resulting largely from the activities of violent extremist groups is one of the leading concerns of citizens that military juntas have exploited to court their sympathies. But public sympathies for military governments are likely to be short-lived as the record of the military in fighting extremism and maintaining security in the region is no better. For instance, in Mali where the military has been in power since 2020, attacks on communities by extremist groups have persisted[204] and UN Experts report that the Islamic State almost doubled its territory.[205]

203. https://www.wsj.com/articles/what-explains-the-coups-in-africa-gabon-military-continent-democracy-e0aded34
204. https://apnews.com/article/cattle-raiding-mali-jihadi-insurgency-f0ab5344202b07ff36c7bcadfaa88b6e
205. https://apnews.com/article/mali-islamic-state-algaida-violence-un-e841e4d5835c7fa01605e8fd1ea03fcf

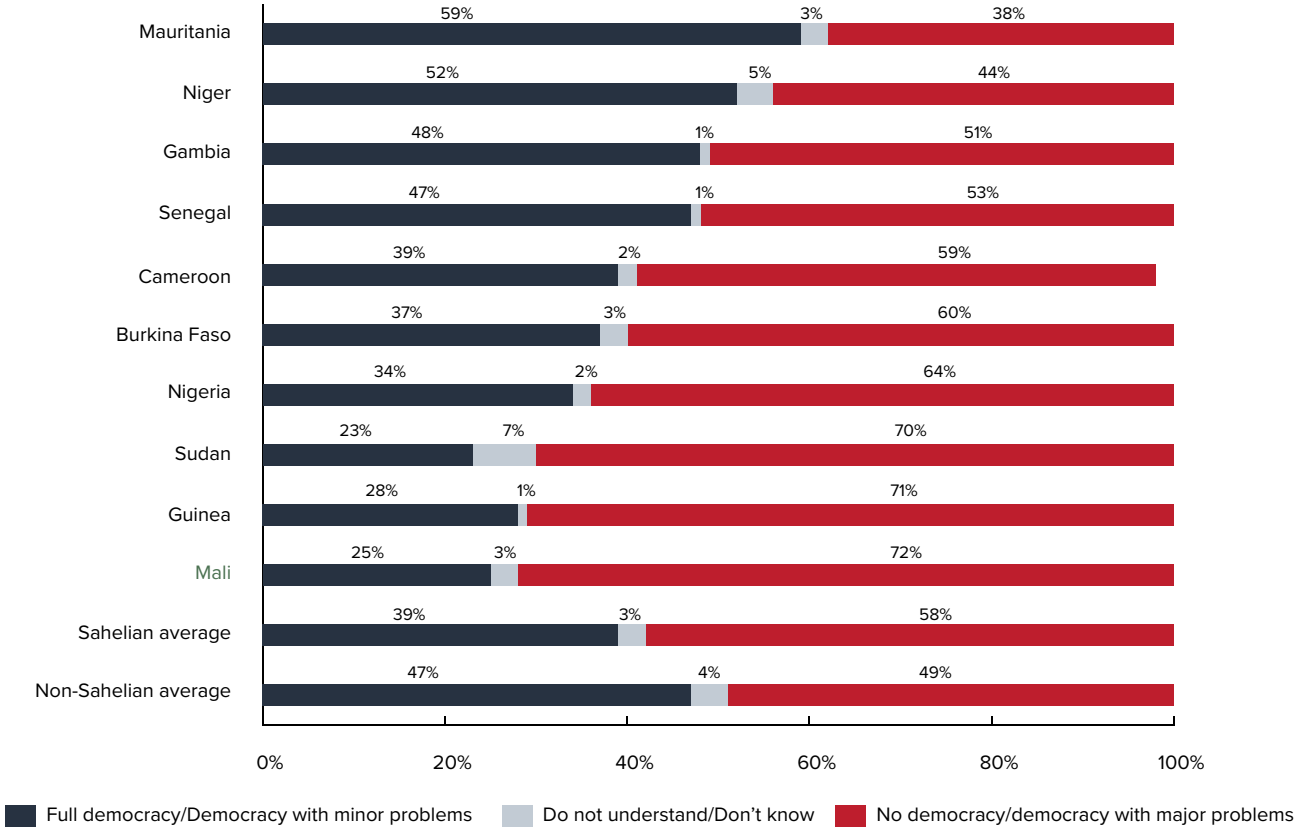
A 2022 perspective on Burkina Faso published by the International Center for Counter-Terrorism also notes that "The number of incidents more than doubled between 2020 and 2021 to over 1,100 attacks—greater than the number of violent events recorded in Mali and Niger together over the same period."[206] These emerging patterns provide an opportunity to counter the budding citizen attraction to military intervention in the region and to reinforce the resilient commitment and desire by citizens to live under governments that are democratic and accountable.

The preceding analysis shows that citizens do not only support democracy, they also strongly endorse the institutions and norms of democratic and accountable governance and reject non-democratic alternatives. Moreover, the significant increase in popular preference for government accountability over effectiveness, and media freedom – a key mechanism for accountability – suggests a much deeper commitment to democratic governance.

Supply of democratic and accountable governance

While citizens prefer democracy and aspire to live under governments that are democratic and accountable, elected leaders have not been successful in meeting these popular aspirations. Across the ten Sahelian countries surveyed in 2021/2023, less than 4 in ten respondents rate their country as a "full democracy" or a "democracy with minor problems". In fact, less than 3 in ten Sudanese (23%), Malians (25%), and Guineans (28%) think their country is a democracy; the vast majority (7 in ten respondents or more) in each of these three countries think their country is not a democracy at all (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Country's extent of democracy | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[207]



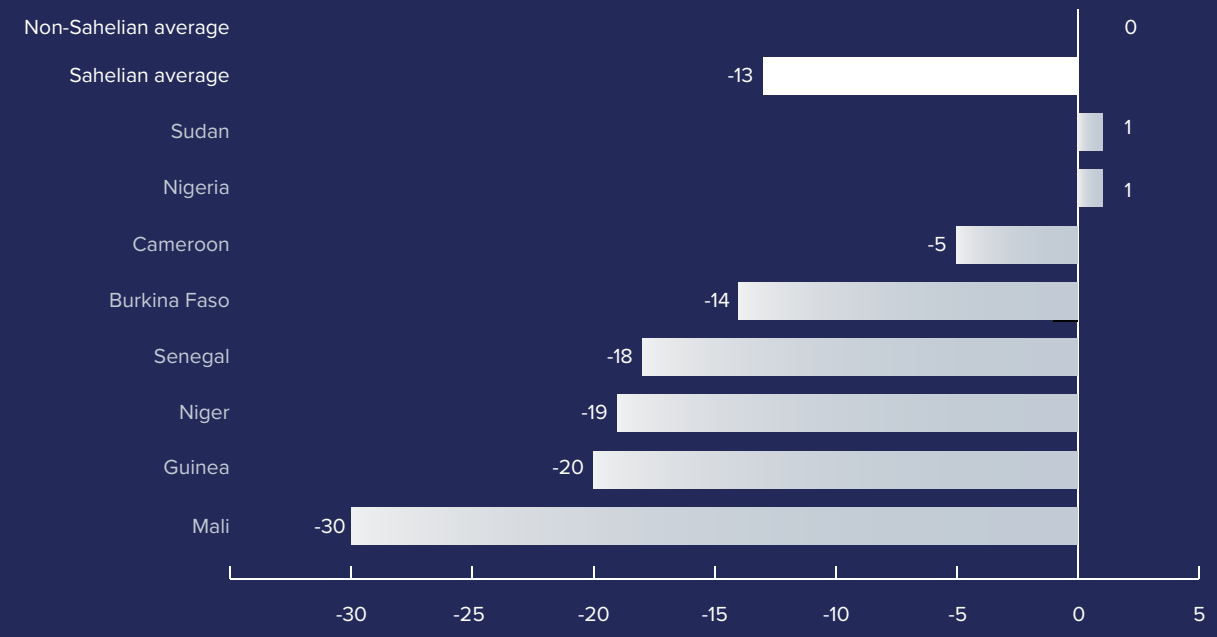
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [country] today?*

For the eight countries where data is available over time, citizens' assessment of the extent of their country's democracy has declined by 13-percentage points on average between 2014 and 2023, with large declines in Mali (down -30 points), Guinea (-20 points), Niger (-19 points) and Senegal (-18 points) (Figure 7).

206. https://www.icct.nl/publication/political-upheaval-and-counter-terrorism-burkina-faso-between-rock-and-hard-place

207 Note: While Sudan is not one of the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it has been included in certain analyses in this report due to its geographic proximity, shared governance and security dynamics, and its relevance to regional trends affecting the broader Sahel context.

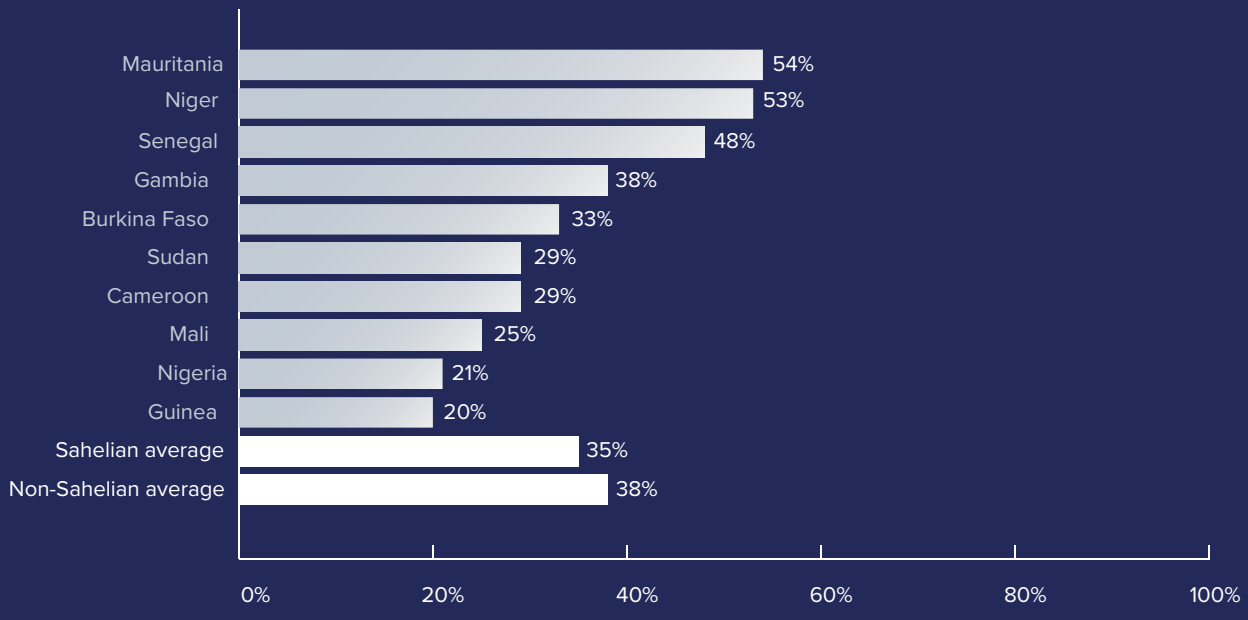
Figure 7: Trends in popular assessment of country's extent of democracy | 2014-2023[208]



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [country] today? (% change between 2014 and 2023 among those who say "a full democracy" or "democracy with minor problems"))*

Similarly, public satisfaction with democracy is low in the region; only about a third (35%) of respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country, with just about a quarter or less in Mali, Nigeria, and Guinea holding this view. It is only in Mauritania and Niger where slim majorities expressed satisfaction with democracy (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Satisfaction with democracy | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[209]



Respondents were asked: *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]? (% that say "fairly" or "very satisfied.")*

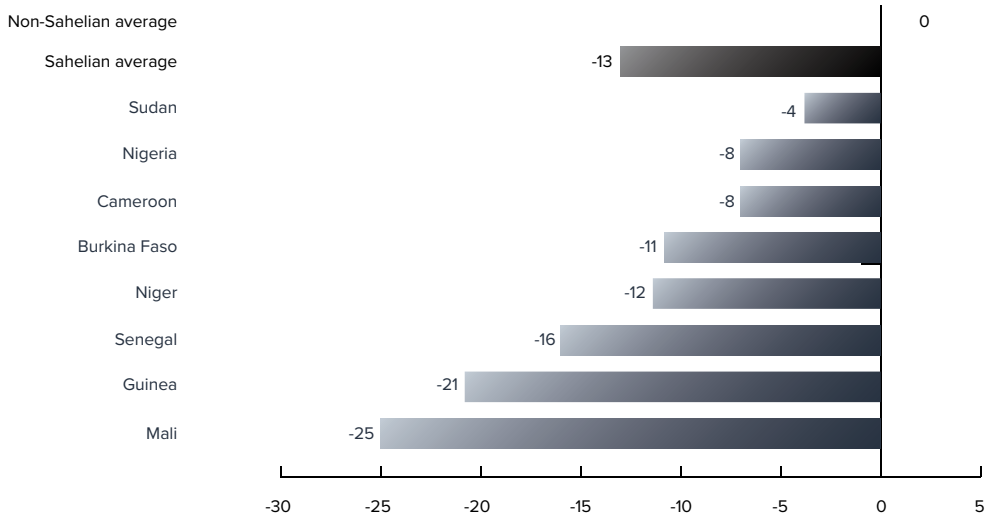
The change over time in popular satisfaction with democracy in the region is equally concerning. Satisfaction with the way democracy works declined in all 8 countries where there is overtime data, recording an average decline of 13-percentage points over the 10-year period (2014-2023). Mali (down -25 points), Guinea (-21 points) and Senegal (-16) recorded the sharpest erosion in popular satisfaction with democracy in this period (Figure 9).

208 Ibid.

209 Ibid.



Figure 9: Trends in popular satisfaction with democracy | Sahelian countries | 2014-2023[210]



Respondents were asked: *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [Country]? (change in % that say "fairly" or "very satisfied.")*

The significant increase in popular dissatisfaction with the delivery of democracy by elected leaders appears to be driving some worrying trends in the region, including the growing attraction to military intervention highlighted above and many others discussed in the following sections.

While citizens express strong commitment to democracy and the institutions of democratic governance, especially accountable governance, their leaders have consistently failed to deliver on these aspirations. This is evidenced by the declining assessment of the extent of democracy and increased dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in the last decade. If these gaps persist, there is a risk that the prevailing strong public commitment to democracy and accountable governance would wane. In fact, signs of waning commitment to democracy are already beginning to manifest in some countries in the region as discussed below.

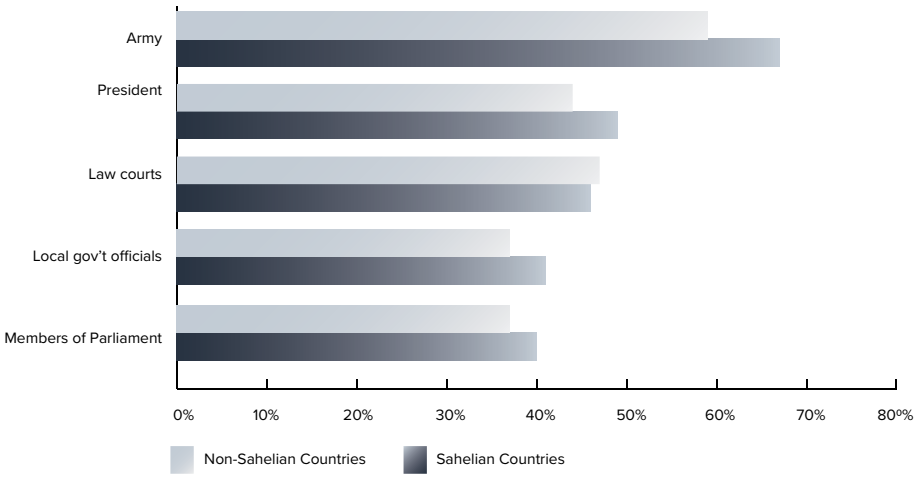
Implications of Poor Supply of Democratic Governance

State of public trust and rating of integrity of leaders and institutions

In a context where citizens are increasingly dissatisfied with the delivery of democratic governance, how do citizens view their governance institutions and elected leaders?

Among the 10 Sahelian countries surveyed in 2021/2023, less than half of the respondents trust their elected leaders and the key institutions of democracy. Members of parliament received the lowest trust rating (only 40% of respondents trust them), followed by local government officials (41%), law courts (46%) and the president and officials in the presidency (49%). It is only the military that received a majority trust rating among citizens in the region (67%), a sentiment that has stayed about the same for more than a decade (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Trust in democratic institutions | 10 Sahelian and 29 non-Sahelian countries | 2021-2023



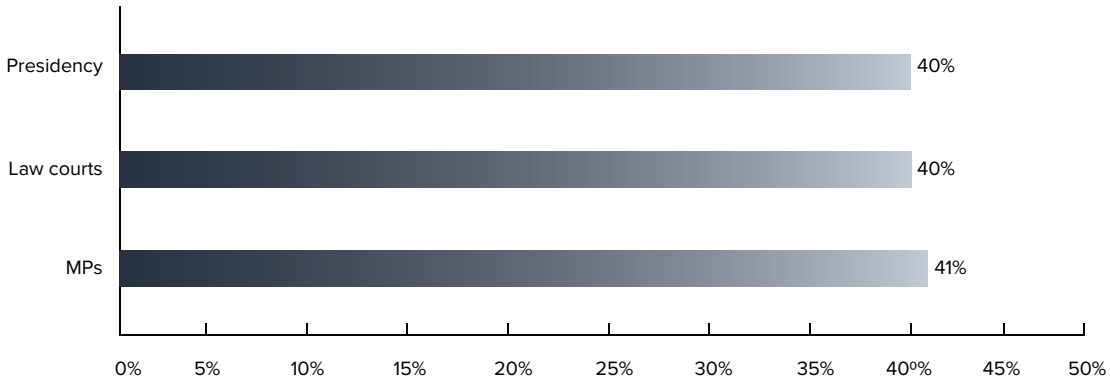
210 Ibid.

Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say they trust "Somewhat" or "A lot")*

Institutional trust is at the core of democratic governance. The fact that less than half of citizens in the region trust the three main branches of government is troubling for democratic development. Moreover, the relatively high trust in the military also presents a significant risk to democracy and may partly explain why citizens in some Sahelian countries have ostensibly openly celebrated military coups.

In addition to the low levels of trust in elected leaders and institutions, public perception of corruption is also relatively high across the Sahel: in the ten countries surveyed, 4 in 10 respondents on average perceive corruption in the presidency and law courts (40% each) and among MPs (41%) (Figure 11). As discussed further below, the data shows a strong association between perceived corruption and institutional trust: those who perceive corruption in governance institutions and among elected officials are significantly less likely to trust them.

Figure 11: Average perceived corruption | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021-2023

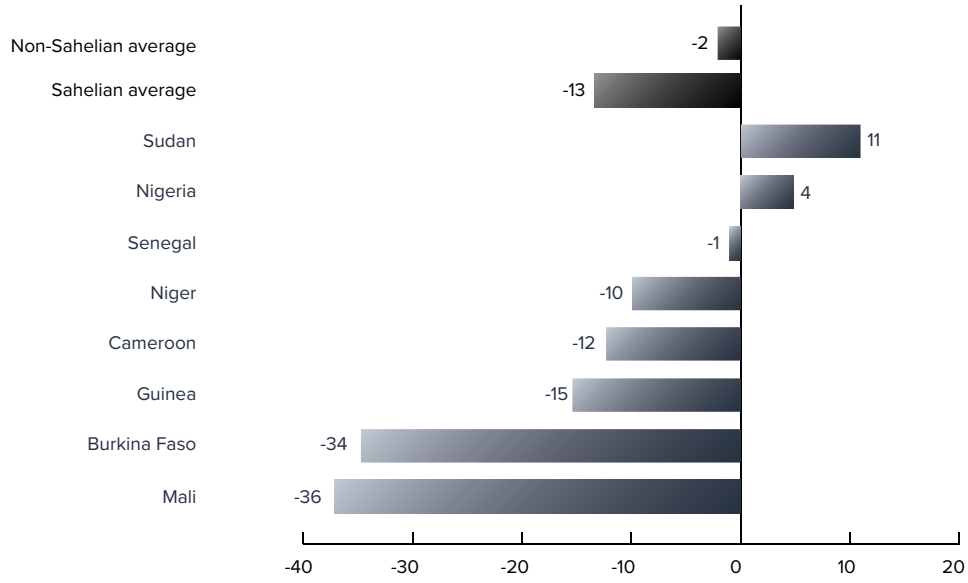


Trends in popular commitment to democracy

Citizen confidence and commitment to democracy and opposition to authoritarian systems of government have also been declining in the last decade.

Preference for democracy has declined significantly, recording a 12-percentage point decline on average, between 2014 and 2023 across the eight countries where overtime data are available. Mali (down -36 points) and Burkina Faso (-34 points) recorded the most drastic declines in popular preference for democracy in this period, resulting in only a minority of Malians (39%) expressing preference for democracy in 2022 compared to 75% who held this view in 2014. It is only Sudan (+11 points) and Nigeria (+4) that recorded increased popular preference for democracy in the last decade (Figure 12). It is worth noting that although support for democracy has declined in the region in the last decade, the majority of citizens in all but one Sahelian country said they prefer democracy. It is only in Mali where support for democracy is a minority view.

Figure 12: Trends in popular support for democracy | Sahelian countries | 2014-2023[211]



211 Ibid.

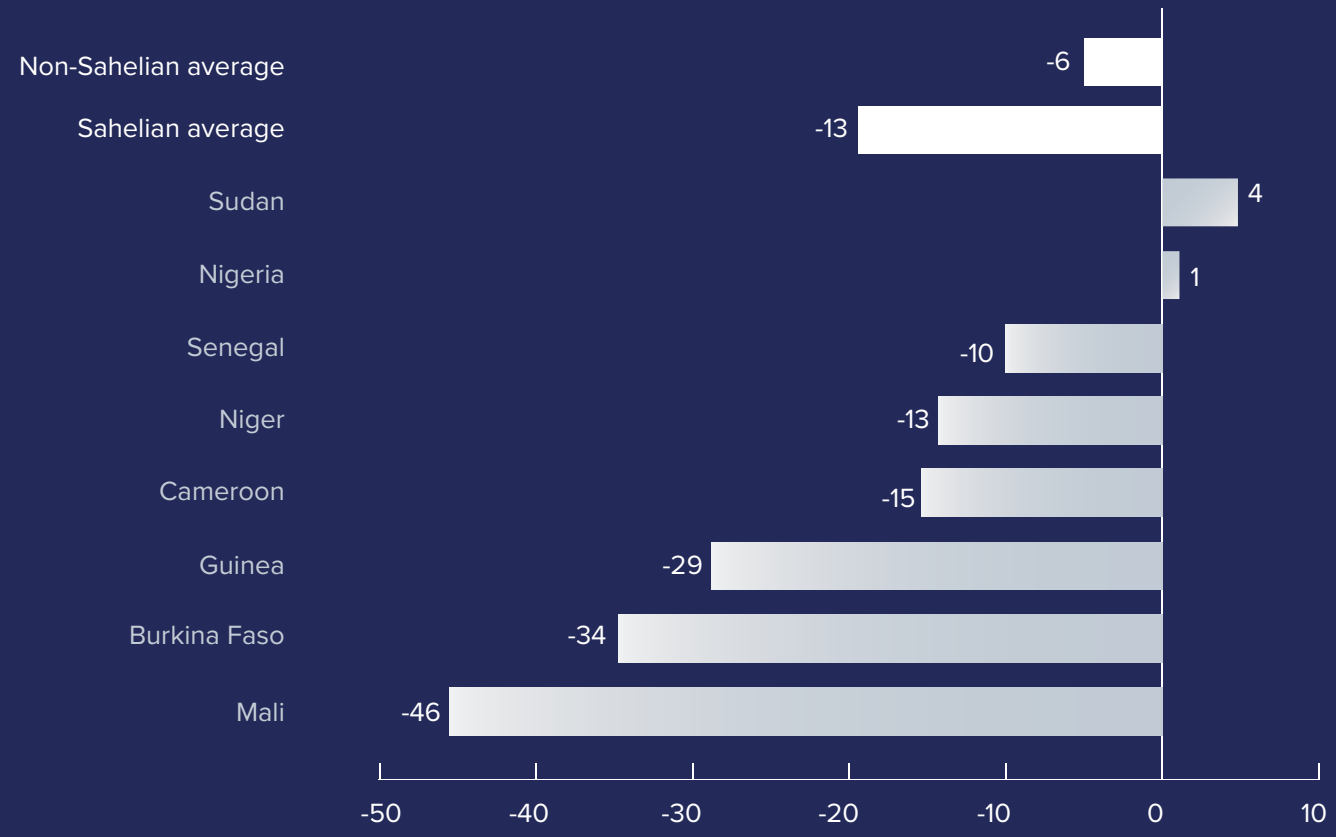
Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (change in % that 'disapprove")*

- Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
- The army comes in to govern the country.
- Elections and [Parliament] are abolished so that the [president] can decide everything.

**The Gambia and Mauritania are not included as these countries were not surveyed in the 2014/2015 survey round, the base year for the trend analysis.*

Popular opposition to military rule has also declined in this period, averaging 18-percentage points drop across the eight countries where overtime data are available. On this indicator, Mali (down -46 points), Burkina Faso (-34 points) and Niger (-29 points) recorded the largest declines in popular rejection of military rule. Rejection of military rule (Figure 13) increased only in Sudan (+4 points).

Figure 13: Trends in rejection of military rule | Sahelian countries | 2014-2023[212]



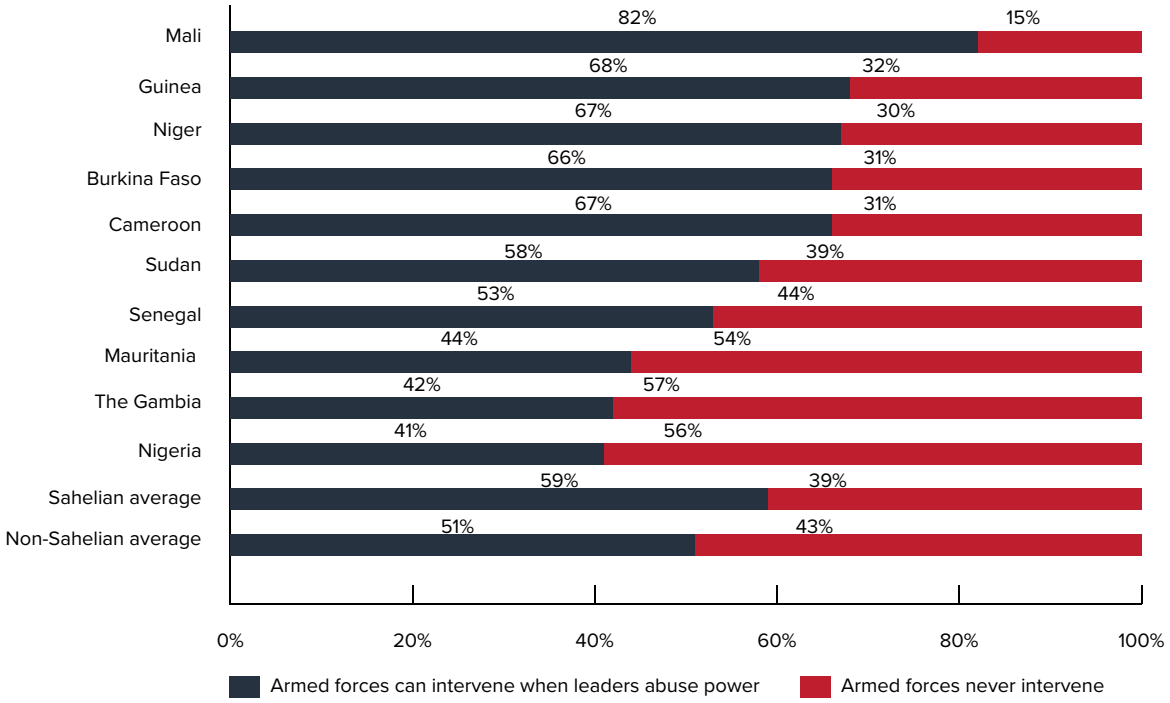
Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (change in % that 'disapprove" military rule)*

- *Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.*
- *The army comes in to govern the country.*
- *Elections and [Parliament] are abolished so that the [president] can decide everything.*

Finally, on military intervention in politics, most citizens in the ten Sahelian countries surveyed (59%) expressed a willingness to tolerate military intervention if elected leaders abuse power. This sentiment is particularly pronounced in Mali, where more than 8 in ten respondents (82%) said the military can intervene in politics if elected leaders abuse power, as well as in Guinea, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Cameroon where more than 6 in ten citizens also hold a similar view. However, a slim majority of citizens in the Gambia (57%), Nigeria (56%), and Mauritania (54%) oppose military intervention in politics (Figure 14).

212 Ibid.

Figure 14: Willingness to tolerate military intervention if elected leaders abuse power | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[213]



Respondents were asked: *Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? (% that chose statement 2)*
Statement 1: [Country name] armed forces should never intervene in the country's political process.
Statement 2: It is legitimate for the armed forces to take control of government when elected leaders abuse power for their own ends.

These trends are concerning and may be driven largely by the poor performance of elected leaders in meeting the democratic and accountable governance aspirations of citizens. The fact that the military is one of the most trusted institution coupled with growing insecurity orchestrated by violent extremist groups may partly explain why some citizens in the region are willing to accept military intervention in politics. In some cases, it could also be the reason some have openly celebrated such interventions. It also highlights a gap that democracy and development stakeholders must pay attention to their efforts to promote democratic and accountable governance and foster socio-economic development.

Strengthening Social Cohesion through Civic Engagement

Active citizen participation in governance processes at local and national levels, including engagement with democratic institutions and elected leaders is necessary for sustainable democratic and socio-economic development. Afrobarometer surveys provide a wealth of data on the state of civic engagement in all surveyed countries, which makes it possible to assess the levels of citizen engagement with political and governance institutions and leaders (vertical social cohesion) as well as inter-personal/community engagements (horizontal social cohesion). Given the challenging political and security context of the region, robust social cohesion could offer a strong foundation for addressing these challenges and fostering sustainable development.

Engagement with elected leaders and state institutions (vertical social cohesion)

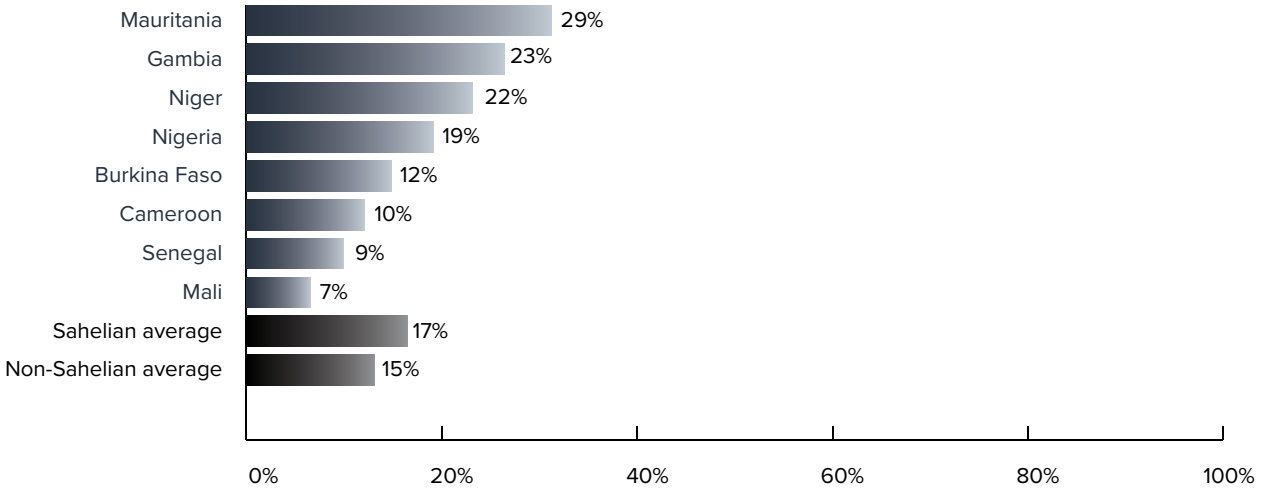
Data from the 2021/2023 Afrobarometer survey show that citizen engagement with members of parliament (MPs) and political parties are key to strengthen vertical social cohesion. In the Sahel such engagement is generally low, which reflects a similar pattern in the rest of the continent. Across the eight Sahelian countries where the question about contact with MPs was asked,[214] less than 2 in ten (17%) responded in the affirmative. Contact with MPs is highest in Mauritania (29%) and lowest in Mali (7%) (Figure 15).

213 Ibid.

214. This question was not asked in Guinea and Sudan.



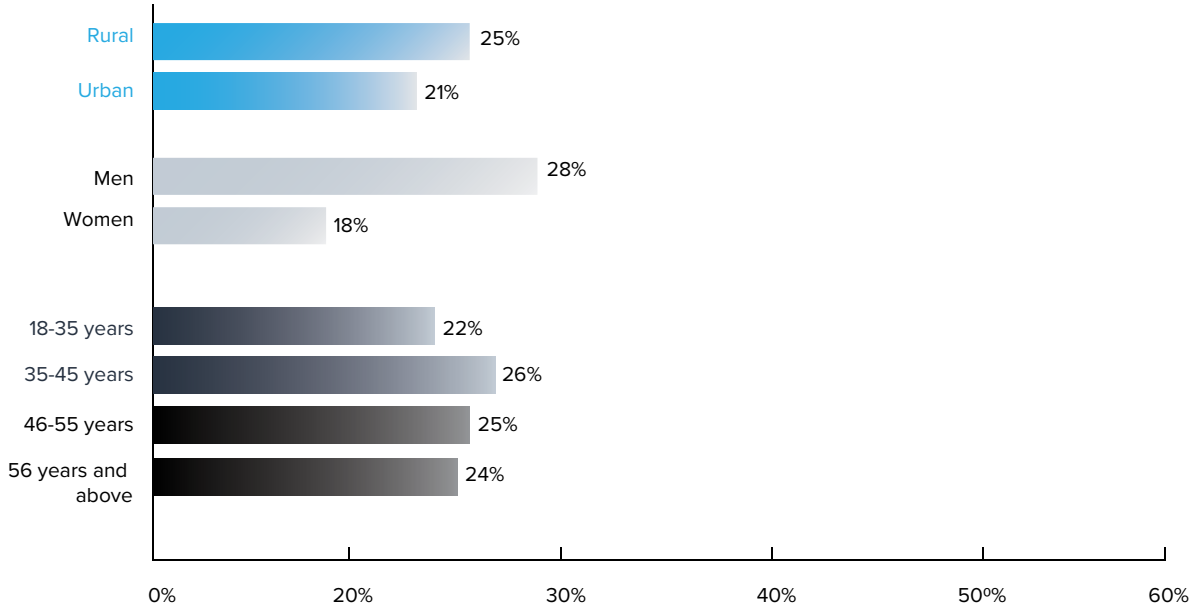
Figure 15: Contact with Members of Parliament | 8* Sahelian countries | 2021-2023



Respondents were asked: *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? Your member of Parliament (% who say "only once", "a few times" or "often").*
*This question was not asked in Guinea and Sudan.

While contact with MPs is very low across the region, data shows that rural residents are more likely to report contacting their MP than urban residents (17% vs. 14%). Similarly, men tend to contact MPs more often (18%) than women (13%). Finally, it is worth noting that there is no generational difference in the rates of contact with MPs: contact with MPs is the same among the younger generation and their elders (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Contact with Members of Parliament | by demographic group | 8* Sahelian countries | 2021/2023

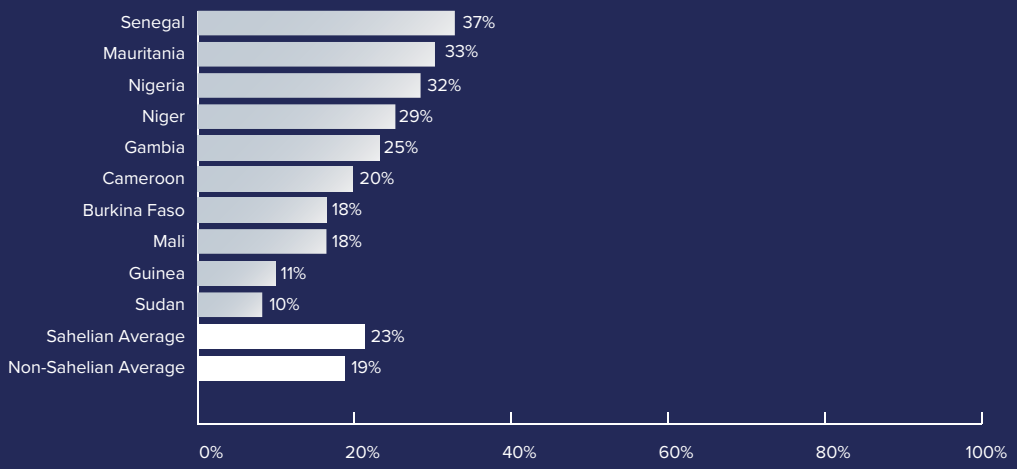


Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? Your member of Parliament (% who say "only once", "a few times" or "often").
*This question was not asked in Guinea and Sudan.

The low rates of contact with MPs underscore the general observation that once elected, MPs spend more time in the capital cities, very often far removed from their local constituencies. This raises an important question: how effectively MPs represent their constituents if they hardly engage or interact with them in-between elections.

Citizens' interaction with political party officials is also very low across the Sahel: less than a quarter (23%) of respondents in the ten countries surveyed reported contacting a political party official at least once during the past year. Contact with political party officials was relatively better, about one-third each in Senegal, Mauritania and Nigeria; and only about 1 in ten in Sudan and Guinea (Figure 17).

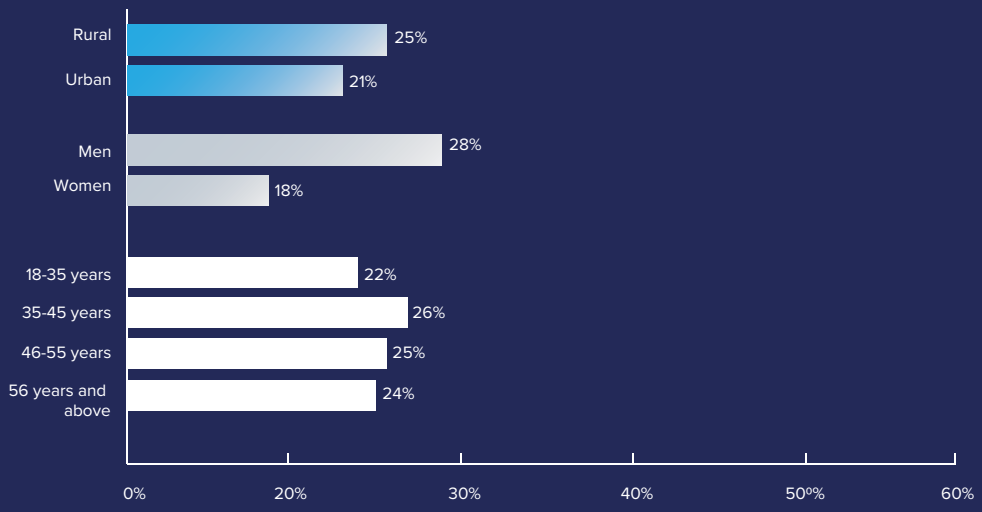
Figure 17: Contact with political party officials | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[215]



Respondents were asked: *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say "only once", "a few times" or "often").*

Like contact with MPs, data shows significant disparities across different demographic groups with respect to their contact with political parties. Rural residents tend to interact more with political parties (25%) than urban residents (21%). The gap is even wider for gender, with men (28%) engaging more with political parties than women (18%). There are hardly any disparities across age, although young people between the ages of 18-35 are slightly less likely (22%) than their elders to contact a political party (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Contact with political party officials | by demographic group | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021/2023



Respondents were asked: *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say "only once", "a few times" or "often").*

What may be driving the low citizens engagement with political and governance institutions and elected leaders? The poor supply of democratic governance norms and institutions outlined earlier, coupled with widespread perceptions of corruption and distrust of elected leaders and institutions may be the leading drivers. Citizen participation and engagement in democratic governance processes can be severely constrained when democratic politics are viewed by citizens as inherently corrupt. For instance, writing on the challenges to youth and women's political participation in the Sahel, Mindzie notes that these experiences and sentiments are widespread in the region, adding that "The breakdown of trust between elected leaders and citizens that pervades state-society relationships across the world has resulted in the rejection of politics by citizens. This is especially true of youth in the Sahel region, where politics is widely perceived as a corrupt activity and, in some cases, as a means to quick enrichment."[216] These findings suggest that any efforts to foster vertical social cohesion, an important mechanism for democratic development, must prioritize fighting corruption in the public sector.

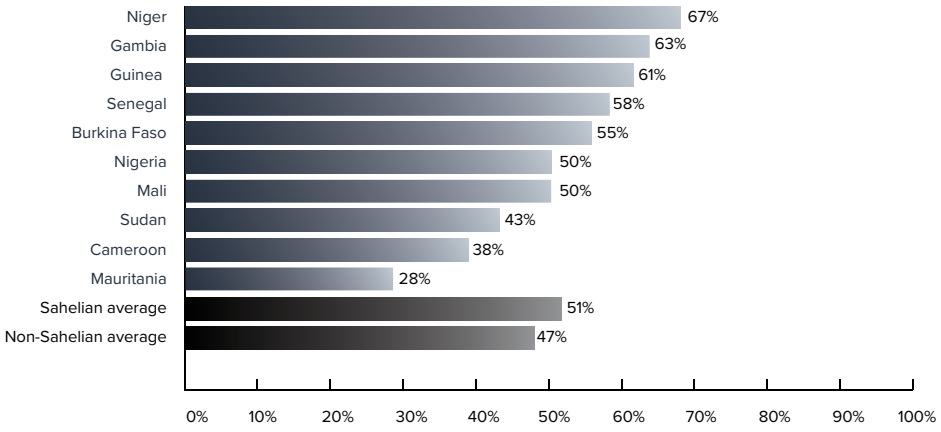
215 Note: While Sudan is not one of the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it has been included in certain analyses in this report due to its geographic proximity, shared governance and security dynamics, and its relevance to regional trends affecting the broader Sahel context.

216. Mireille Affa'a Mindzie, "Building Peace and Development in the Sahel: Enhancing the Political Participation of Women and Youth," New York: International Peace Institute, January 2015. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/187848/ipi_rpt_building_peace.pdf (downloaded: Dec 27th, 2023)

Community mobilization (horizontal social cohesion)

While the state of vertical social cohesion is very low, there is some promising news regarding horizontal social cohesion. On average, a little over half (51%) of respondents in the ten Sahelian countries surveyed (compared to 47% in non-Sahelian countries) said they attended a community meeting at least once in the past year, including more than 6 in ten respondents in Niger, the Gambia, and Guinea (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Attendance at community meetings | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[217]

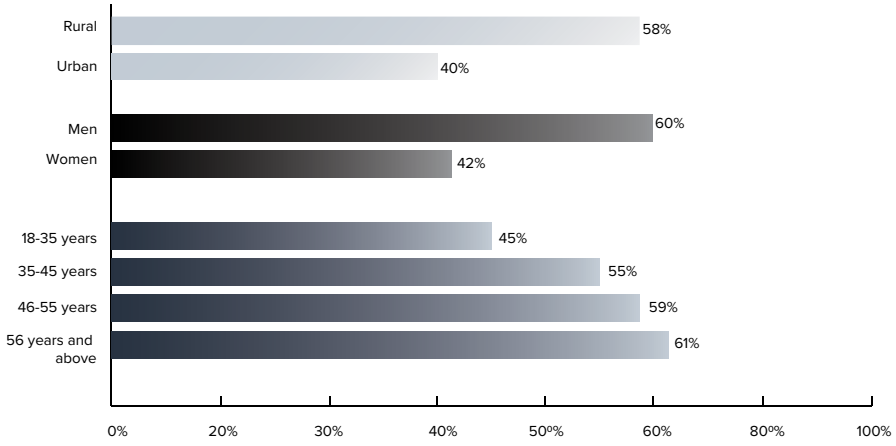


Respondents were asked: *Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [If yes, read]: Was this often, several times or once or twice? [If no, read]: Would you do this if you had the chance? "Attended a community meeting" (% who say "often", "several times" or "once or twice")*

The relatively high levels of attendance at community meetings are highly encouraging. This may signify a good indication that efforts to mobilize citizens for collective action may be easier in the region than elsewhere on the continent. However, it is worth noting that these meetings tend to be dominated by older men and occur more in rural areas. Six in ten men (60%) reported attending a community meeting at least once during the past year, compared to only 42% of women. This may not come as a surprise as research generally shows that traditional gender roles, especially childcare and household chores tend to keep women away from active participation in communal and political activities.[218]

Similarly, older people (those 56 years and older) also participate in community meetings at higher rates (61%) than young people, aged 18 to 35 years (only 45%). These results are also consistent with research that shows that the younger generations engage less in traditional or conventional ways;[219] they are more likely to do so virtually or through alternative and unconventional ways. Any efforts to promote participation of young people in political and democratic processes must thus look to some of the new and emerging mechanisms that appeal to them. Finally, participation in community meetings (Figure 20) is much more robust in rural areas (58%) than urban centers (40%).

Figure 20: Attendance at community meetings | by demographic group | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021/2023



217 Note: While Sudan is not one of the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it has been included in certain analyses in this report due to its geographic proximity, shared governance and security dynamics, and its relevance to regional trends affecting the broader Sahel context.

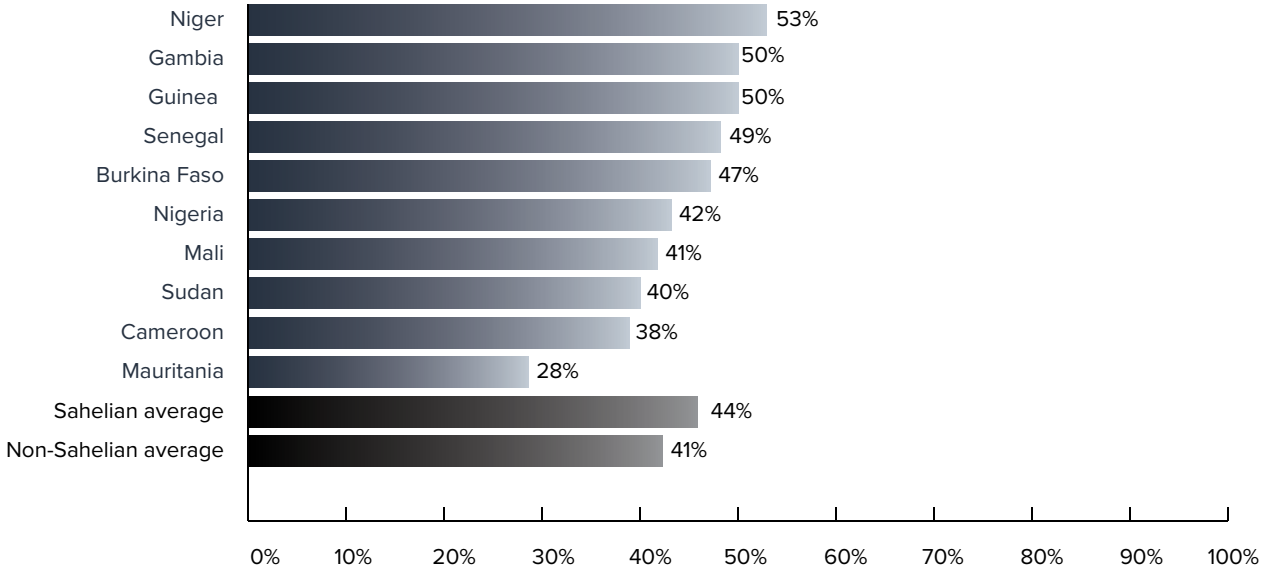
218. https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/onePage

219. https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/youth-in-africa-and-the-future-of-democracy/

Respondents were asked: *Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [If yes, read]: Was this often, several times or once or twice? [If no, read]: Would you do this if you had the chance? (% who say "often", "several times" or "once or twice") [Attended community meeting]*

Turning to other forms of collective mobilization, more than 4 in ten respondents (44%) in the ten Sahelian countries surveyed reported that they have joined others to raise an issue in the past year, including half or more in Senegal, Guinea, and the Gambia saying they have done so at least once (Figure 21). On this indicator, citizens in the Sahel region also do slightly better (44%) than their counterparts in the rest of Africa (41%).

Figure 21: Got together with others to raise an issue | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[220]



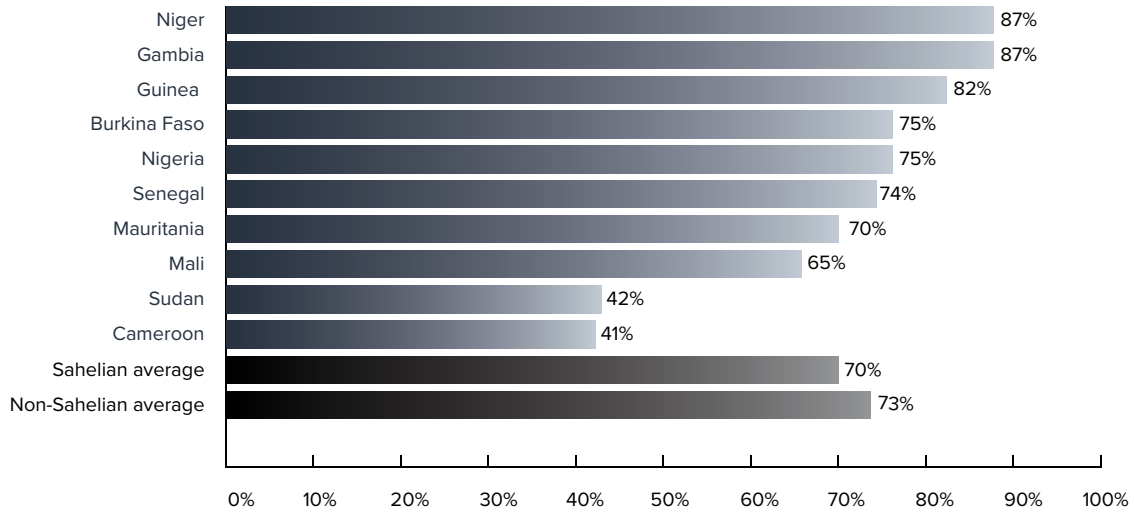
Respondents were asked: *Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [Joined others to raise an issue] [If yes, read]: Was this often, several times or once or twice? [If no, read]: Would you do this if you had the chance? (% who say "often", "several times" or "once or twice")*

The higher levels of horizontal social cohesion in the Sahel region may be due to robust interventions by governments and international development organizations to promote social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. To illustrate, the UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel works with governments in the region (examples from Niger and Guinea) to promote social cohesion in communities; the work of local artists towards the same goal (as in Mali); and interventions by international development organizations such as Mercy Corps (see here and here) and the Food and Agriculture Organization among others. These interventions and the tactics employed are useful examples for strengthening horizontal social cohesion and promoting collective civic action. Future social cohesion interventions would benefit from the lessons learned from these existing initiatives, including the potential for scaling and sustainability.

The favorable environment for civic mobilization is further reinforced by the fact that turnout in national elections is very high. On average, 7 in ten respondents across the ten Sahelian countries surveyed reported that they voted in the most recent national elections. This includes overwhelming majorities in Niger (87%), the Gambia (87%) and Guinea (82%) (Figure 22). The high turnout in national elections underscores citizens' resilient commitment to the institutions of democratic governance and suggests that if high-quality (i.e. free, fair and peaceful) elections can be guaranteed, they will lay a strong foundation for improved democratic and accountable governance.

220 Note: While Sudan is not one of the 10 countries covered by the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), it has been included in certain analyses in this report due to its geographic proximity, shared governance and security dynamics, and its relevance to regional trends affecting the broader Sahel context.

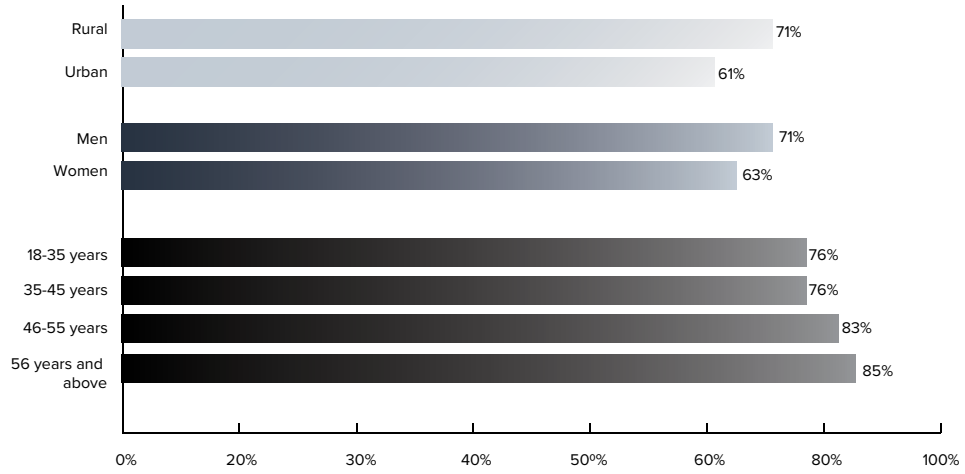
Figure 22: Voted in most recent national elections | Sahelian countries | 2021-2023[221]



Respondents were asked: *People are not always able to vote in elections, for example, because they weren't registered, they were unable to go, or someone prevented them from voting. How about you? In the last national election, held in [YEAR], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% who say they voted)*

While the high voter turnout is encouraging, data shows that elections also tend to be dominated by older men. Men vote at much higher rates (71%) than women (61%) and older people, 56 years and above also vote at higher rates (85%) than young people between 18 and 35 years (76%). The turnout is ten percentage points higher in rural areas in comparison to urban areas. (Figure 23).

Figure 23: Voted in most recent national elections | by demographic group | 10 Sahelian countries | 2021/2023



Respondents were asked: *People are not always able to vote in elections, for example, because they weren't registered, they were unable to go, or someone prevented them from voting. How about you? In the last national election, held in [YEAR], did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% who say they voted)*

The prevailing social context across the Sahel suggests that the prospects for successful civic mobilization to advance democratic and accountable governance as well as socio-economic development are high. However, any such efforts must take into account the gender and age disparities and make them more inclusive of women and young people.

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Policy Options for Consideration

The political, economic, and social volatility of the Sahel region is impacting negatively on ordinary citizens' lives in several ways. Governance challenges persist and remain troubling. This is especially the case evidenced by declining popular rejection of military rule and apparent tolerance for military intervention in recent times. Granted, resilient commitment to the norms and institutions of democratic and accountable governance, especially to elections, is unshaken. In addition, the relatively high horizontal social cohesion gives reason for optimism in the prospect of a democratic and prosperous region in the foreseeable future. However, such a future is attainable only if elected leaders and democracy stakeholders on the continent and globally prioritize the concerns of citizens, particularly insecurity and violent extremism, and their aspirations for democratic and accountable governance as well socio-economic opportunities and decent livelihoods. Promoting public trust and confidence in the integrity of elected leaders and democratic institutions in the region should thus be a top priority for a couple of reasons.

Link between accountability and public trust in government

First, a large body of research demonstrates a strong link between accountability and public trust in government. Drawing from this body of research, Campbell[222] argues that "Even if public service quality is high, if decisions are taken without accountability and according only to the logic of efficiency, trust in government may suffer." As has been illustrated in the chapter, preference for government accountability over effectiveness has increased significantly in the region over the last decade, underscoring the importance that citizens attach to accountability. While the delivery of public services is necessary, especially in the Sahel region where poverty is on the increase, it may not be sufficient for promoting public trust. Demonstrated accountability is thus needed to build and sustain trust in government, which is necessary for sustainable democratic and socio-economic development. With the relatively high horizontal social cohesion and strong turnout in elections, one practical approach to increasing government accountability would be through high quality elections. If elections empower citizens to replace non-performing leaders, it will lay a strong foundation for accountable governance in the region.

Strong inverse association between corruption and trust in government

Second, Afrobarometer data and other research show a strong inverse association between corruption and trust in government e.g. Bianca et. al (2011)[223] ; Andrew Faull (2019)[224] ; Christine Lagarde (2018)[225] In their analysis of Afrobarometer data, Armah-Attoh et al. (2007)[226] note that "corruption is a major, perhaps the major, obstacle to building popular trust in state institutions and electoral processes in Africa". Similarly, in an opinion piece on the (in) security situation in the Sahel, Mathew Steadman (2020)[227] argues that "when security institutions are perceived as corrupt, public confidence in government erodes further".

This body of evidence points to two inextricably linked issues that are key to building public trust in government, a critical factor for democratic and socio-economic progress. These are government accountability and corruption. As the evidence shows, even the best quality public services may not improve public trust in government if decisions are made without accountability. One reason governments may fail to act with accountability is corruption. In addition to improving the quality and efficacy of democratic elections addressing the short-term concerns about insecurity and violent extremism, prioritizing and addressing corruption could reinforce government accountability, inspire public confidence and trust in elected leaders and governance institutions, and set a strong foundation for political, social, and economic progress in the region.

222. Campbell, J. W. (2023). Public Participation and Trust in Government: Results From a Vignette Experiment. Journal of Policy Studies, 38(2), 23–31.

223. Bianca et. al (2011): Corruption and confidence in Public Institution: Evidence from a Global Survey

224. Faull (2019): When corruption stops, trust in government can start

225. Lagarde (2018): There's a reason for the lack of trust in government and business: corruption

226. Armah-Attoh et. al (2007): Corruption and Institutional Trust in Africa: Implications for Democratic Development

227. Steadman (2020): Crisis in the Sahel: Why tackling corruption in defence and security is essential to securing peace

BUILDING
(BACK) TRUST

Chapter 4

Centering the People: An Imperative for a Sustainable Future

Nadia Nata and Emmanuel Odilon Koukoubou

Abstract

Notwithstanding its vast opportunities, Sahel is characterized by significant constraints to fulfilling socio-economic of its citizens. Inclusive participation and inclusion of the people in decisions that impact upon and affect them is e limited. Listening and responding to citizens' voices and perspectives on governance is key for a sustainable future of the Sahel. This chapter provides an overview of the persistent challenges related to the erosion of public trust and social cohesion, as manifested by citizens' growing mistrust of those in power. It explores civic and democratic participation of young people, women, and marginalized groups in the changing context of the Sahel. The chapter seeks to forecast how to build sustainable, robust, and accountable civic space that puts people and their wellbeing at the center. It then proposes ways to strengthen the social contract by placing the people at the core of governance to promote a better future with enhanced public trust and social cohesion.

Key words: Sahel, Citizen's Participation, Responsive Governance, Centering people, Social Cohesion.

1. Introduction

The Sahel is home to

394

million [228] people spread over 7 million square kilometers in the ten countries identified by the United Nations. [229]

With

64.5%

of the population under the age of 25, the Sahel is one of the most youthful regions in the world. [230]



It has the highest renewable energy potential in the world and has abundant natural resources that are critical for powering clean energy technologies.[231]

The region comprises of countries that are exporters of hydrocarbons (Chad, Nigeria, Niger and others); rich agricultural base; and oriented towards the service sector. With such opportunities, the Sahel stands out as a region that can accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by harnessing its vibrant and engaged young and female populations and rich and diverse cultures through innovations such as technology and digitalization as argued in other chapters of this report.

Sahel's socio-political context hinders citizen inclusive and active participation in democratic governance due to several factors. These include financial constraints, limited human and technical resources, overcentralization and ineffective decentralization, problems related to the democratic transfer of powers, and the ambiguous role of traditional chiefs.[232]

228 https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries, 2024 population, consulted on July 15, 2024.

229. United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), 2013.

230. United Nations Africa Renewal, The Sahel: Land of Opportunities, https://www.un.org/africarenewal/sahel,

231. UNDP (2023). A Regeneration. Implementing the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel. UNDP.

232. Maidé Hamit Lony (2023), La décentralisation au Tchad: Une dynamique normative à l'épreuve des réalités pratiques, l'Harmattan, 284 pages.

Unconstitutional changes in government have also become notorious in the region. Indeed, five Sahelian countries are undergoing army-led political transitions following coup d'états (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali and Niger) or assassination of the president (Chad). Regional organizations (AU, ECOWAS, ECCAS, CENSAD and others) have adopted norms that condemn military coups as they are contrary to the principles of democracy. Despite these norms, there are sentiments that citizens seem to be embracing military interventions because they pledge to provide security, offer effective leadership to tackle long-standing socio-economic issues such as corruption and diminish the influence of foreign actors who are seen as supporting unaccountable governments that neglect the people's needs and concern. [233] It is worth noting that six Sahelian countries[234] are in the bottom twenty of the UNDP 2023 Human Development Index, and the others are also in the low human development category,[235] indicators that most citizens across the Sahel have not reaped the dividends of democratization.

In some Sahel countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, and Niger, extremist and terrorist groups, including criminal groups, are spreading terror among local populations already weakened by poverty and social inequality, as well as the adverse effects of climate change. [236] Conflicts and insecurity make it harder for citizens to exercise their fundamental human rights and enjoy attendant freedoms. Limited access to socio-economic resources is another obstacle to political inclusion. Persistent drought exacerbated by the impact and effects of climate change and environmental degradation also threatens the livelihoods of nomadic and farming communities, who struggle to cope due to shrinking traditional pastoral livelihoods. Inadequate socio-economic infrastructure makes it difficult to establish high-quality education, health, and accountable systems. It is depriving citizens of the capacities and tools they need to participate actively in socio-economic and political life. The Sahel region includes countries[237] in the bottom twenty of the Global Social Progress Index (2011-2023),[238] and the others are in the low social progress category. This region is characterized by inadequate emphasis on people's needs and rights, hindering their participation.

In the Sahel, women[239] and youth comprise the majority of the population but remain socially, economically, and politically marginalized. None of the constitutions in the Sahelian countries provide a quota for the representation of youth and/or marginalized groups[240] in any institution. While legislative efforts are being made to enhance the representation of women in particular parliaments,[241] traditional and religious[242] factors or political transitions have hampered these efforts. For example, Burkina Faso's transitional parliament has 16.9%[243] women instead of the 30%[244] as provided for by law. In most countries, especially those in transition, protest demonstrations are repressed or banned, and dissident voices are increasingly inaudible or ignored.

In addition, harmful traditional cultural practices and beliefs, including female genital mutilation, early marriages,[245] caste, slavery, and discrimination between citizens hamper efforts towards effective governance in the Sahel. In some countries such as Mali, Mauritania and Niger, socio-cultural and socio-ethnic inequalities, such as caste systems, persist because they are rooted in tradition and community life. In 2008, through a historic verdict, the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled against Niger in favor of Hadijatou Mani, who was sold into slavery as a child.[246]

233. For more details, see UNDP, soldiers and citizens. Military coups and need for democratic renewal in Africa, 2023, https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/undp-africa-soldiers-citizens-2023-en.pdf, consulted on July 4, 2024.
Carlos Garcia Rivero, "Civilian support for military coups is rising in parts of Africa: why the reasons matter", The Conversation, https://theconversation.com/civilian-support-for-military-coups-is-rising-in-parts-of-africa-why-the-reasons-matter-185448, consulted on January 27, 2024.

234. Chad (189), Niger (189), Mauritania (188), Burkina-Faso (185) and Guinea (185).

235. Gambia (174), Senegal (169), Mauritania (164), Nigeria (161) and Cameroun (151).

236. Vision of Humanity, "Climate, Conflict and Overpopulation in the Sahel", The Sahel Faces 3 Issues: Climate, Conflict & Overpopulation (visionofhumanity.org), consulted on July 4, 2024.

237. Chad (168/170), Niger (161/170), Guinea, Mali (157/170), Mauritania (147/170), Burkina Faso (146/170), Cameroon (143/170), Nigeria (142/170), The Gambia (129/170) and Senegal (122/170).

238. For more details, see https://www.socialprogress.org/2024-social-progress-index/

239. An average of 50,1% of the Sahel population are women per de World Bank database (2023). The details are Niger (49,3), Mali (49,5), Burkina Faso (50,2), Chad (49,8), Senegal (50,8), Nigeria (49,5), Cameroon (50,1), Mauritania (52,1), The Gambia (50,2), Guinea (50,5). See details: https://www.socialprogress.org/2024-social-progress-index/

240. Women not included.

241. Senegal 50%; Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea 30%

242. Mali

243. www.africanintegrityindicators.org

244. Ibid.

245. For example, in Mali in 2023, thanks to the contributions of various civil society actors, 109 girls aged 9-14 were saved from marriage before the age of 18 (46 in Bamako and 63 in Nioro du Sahel) and 32 girls aged 0-9 from female genital mutilation (3 in Bamako and 29 in Nioro). See more details https://www.ihrda.org/2024/04/acerwc-43rd-os-ihrda-statement-on-child-marriage-and-fgm-in-mali/

246. See ECW/CCJ/JUD/06/08 Hadijatou Mani Koraou v. Niger. https://caselaw.ihrda.org/api/files/15247466200936pmq64mcg518qtoxs3iejyvi.pdf



2. Erosion of public trust and social cohesion – citizens' lens

Public trust and social cohesion are deeply intertwined and crucial to the legitimacy of democratic governance and civic engagement. Given widespread insecurity,[247] instability, and rising unconstitutional changes of government, citizen participation and inclusion in governance is limited in the Sahel. Poor and inadequate citizens' participation and inclusion in decision making and on affairs that affect them are at the heart of the challenges of governance in the region. Unresponsive governance institutions, corruption, and lack of transparency and accountability are holding back Sahel's prosperity and undermining public trust and confidence in the state to deliver. This section examines two transversal challenges that are linked to the erosion of public trust and social cohesion and require concerted efforts to redress a sustainable future in the region.

2.1 Limited participation and inclusion of citizens in governance

Citizen participation and inclusion in the Sahel is limited. Several factors lead to this state of affairs: overcentralization of power to the executive; limited decentralization to the local levels; as well as marginalization, and exclusion of citizens voices and perspectives due to unresponsive and unaccountable governance institutions and actors.

While most Sahelian countries (such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger, and others) are in the process of decentralization, they have endured persistent challenges related to security, resource allocation, and political instability. Consequently, decentralization has not been prioritized, with the State focused on addressing security and national issues, neglecting representation and governance issues at the local level. To various degrees, especially in borderland areas and far-flung communities beyond the capitals, the state has been largely absent, creating vacuums and voids that have inevitably been filled by extremist groups, vigilantes and criminal self-help syndicates. When a significant part of the population feels excluded or disengaged from the political landscape, it creates a feeling of disillusionment and distrust in the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic governance. This lack of trust manifest itself in lower voter turnout, skepticism toward political leaders, and a general weakening of democratic foundations.

Young people in the Sahel region advocating or supporting regime change are largely excluded in decision making, even in countries experiencing political transition. Although 74%[248] of the combined population of Western Sahel (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger) is under the age of 30, there are no specific frameworks to ensure their adequate participation in parliament, local government or other decision-making bodies.

Measures in favor of young people often do not go beyond institutional frameworks at regional or national levels and have limited impact despite existing opportunities (such as the African Youth Charter ratified by most countries or the creation of national structures for the promotion of young people). In practice, young people remain on the peripheries, and some social and cultural factors contribute to this situation. For example, "in Niger society, experience and maturity are considered to be the prerogative only of the elderly, which means that the civic space is not easily open to young political leaders, who are often misjudged as unprepared to assume certain positions of political responsibility".[249] As a result, there is a "gap between African political systems - dominated by older men, especially at the highest levels - and African youth [which] is reflected in governance and policies that do not meet the needs and expectations of young people". [250]

The experience and situation of women in decision making largely mirrors that of the youth. All ten Sahelian countries have ratified gender progressive frameworks such as the Maputo Protocol[251] and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, which include provisions for women's political participation, engagement, and leadership.[252]

247. In 2024, Burkina Faso became the country with the highest impact from terrorism for the first time. See: https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GTI-2024-web-290224.pdf

248. United States Institute of Peace, 2024, Senior study group for the Sahel: Final report and recommendations, Page 35, https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/202401019_Senior_Study_Group_For_The_Sahel_Final_Report.pdf, c

249. Amadou Hassane Boubacar, « Les femmes et les jeunes dans la gouvernance démocratique. Repenser leur inclusion et leur participation au Niger », in Gorée Institute, idem, pp 38-69, p. 63.

250. Ibid.

251. https://www.maputoprotocol.up.ac.za/countries/countries-table, consulted on July 5, 2024.

252. Abdulmelik, N., & Belay, T. (2019). Advancing Women's Political Rights in Africa: The Potential and Promise of ACDEG. Africa Spectrum, 54(2), 147-161. https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971881321, consulted on July 5, 2024.

Some such as Mauritania (20%), Niger (25%), and Senegal (parity) – have also introduced specific laws requiring quotas for women on candidate lists.[253] Despite these provisions, the actual representation of women in decision-making remains marginal throughout the Sahel. Apart from Senegal, which is approaching parity (44%), only three Sahelian countries have more than 30% women represented in parliament: Cameroon (32,9%), Chad (33,3%), and Guinea (30,9%). Gambia and Nigeria have the lowest rates, with 8.6% and 4.4% respectively. [254] This under-representation is due to several deep-rooted obstacles. Social and religious constraints play a prominent role in perpetuating discriminatory cultural norms that limit women's access to power.

There is a significant disconnect between the law and enforcement. For example, Chad introduced a quota system issued by the Head of State (Ordinance no. 12/PR/2018), which requires a quota of at least 30% for women in appointed and elective positions. Failure to comply with this requirement automatically invalidates candidate lists for legislative and municipal elections. The Chadian system also has a legislative component in the form of the Law on the Charter of Political Parties, Article 31 which allocates 10% of the annual public subsidy to political parties "in proportion to the number of women elected, in addition to the quota at all levels". The quota provision, which had not been implemented until the coup d'état against President Idriss Deby, did not materialize under his rule. In May 2024, during a ministerial reshuffle, the President ignored the 30% quota for women in his new government composition.[255]

Elsewhere in the Sahel, some attempts to open political space have failed. In Nigeria, for example, the parliament failed in 2021 to establish parliamentary seats reserved for women, who are few (seven out of 109 senators and 22 out of 360 House of Representatives) in political leadership.[256] This demonstrates a reluctance to adopt and implement the necessary frameworks consistently due to many factors, including social and cultural considerations. Moreover, "women face a double hurdle: not only do they face significant barriers in gaining access to leadership positions, but once they do, they may find it difficult to exert any real influence in those positions. The lack of women's full political empowerment, particularly as decision-makers in peace processes, continues to negatively impact the realization of all human rights, economic and social growth, and international peace and security".[257]

In addition, harmful traditional cultural practices and beliefs that cause discrimination between citizens, resulting in castes, slavery, and discrimination, amongst others, persist. Socio-cultural and socio-ethnic inequalities, such as caste systems, endure because they are rooted in tradition and community life. Minority issues, including from an ethnic angle, are of interest due to their impact on society - exclusion, discrimination, manipulation - posing a risk to public trust and social cohesion, and by extension, the stability and security of a country. However, the protection of minority groups is often not addressed by legislation or enforced by the law. Marginalized groups in countries including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have low confidence in state institutions, further fueling conflict. Social hierarchies and marginalization, driven by ethnic and caste divisions, also hinder fair access to resources, political power, social mobility, and social services. This situation affects several categories of groups, such as persons with disabilities and others who face challenges due to ethnicity, religious beliefs, community hierarchy, and other factors.

The deterioration and shrinking of the civic space in Sahel countries - such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and others - because of political instability and rising authoritarianism in recent years - are all contributing to limiting citizen engagement and participation, creating space for unresponsive governance.

2.2 Unresponsive and unaccountable governments

Deeply rooted structural challenges hinder the provision of essential public services. Governments in Sahel often face severe budgetary constraints and over dependence on external aid. In Burkina Faso, for example, the funding gap for priority sectors remains high, with funding meeting less than 5% of the needs for health, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene.[258]

253. In Burkina Faso, Law no. 010-2009/AN, which sets quotas for legislative and municipal elections, "aims to reverse the under-representation of women in decision-making bodies and, to this end, requires political parties and organisations to have at least 30% women on their lists". In Senegal, a law on parity was adopted, thanks to the mobilisation of civil society organisations such as the Women's Caucus. The advent of this law has led to a significant increase in the number of women in the Senegalese National Assembly.

254. Those data are taken from the AFIDEP and Global Integrity's African Integrity Indicators, 2023. For the four other states: Burkina (21,2%), Mali (29,8%), Niger (29,8%).

255. In the new government of 36 members (28 ministries and 8 secretaries of state), only nine posts are allocated to women. In detail, seven ministries and two secretaries of state go to women, who make up 25% of the government". See https://presidence.td/le-gouvernement/ accessed on 20 July 2024.

256. The Conversation, « Nigeria's National Assembly: why adding seats for women isn't enough », 31 may 2021, https://theconversation.com/nigerias-national-assembly-why-adding-seats-for-women-isnt-enough-161514 ; Bukky Shonibare, Dissecting Nigeria's reserved seats bill, https://www.thecable.ng/dissecting-nigerias-reserved-seat-bill

257. Susan Steffen, « Avant-propos », de ONU Femmes, Promouvoir la participation des femmes à la vie politique : des quotas à la parité. Un guide des options juridiques pour la région de l'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Centre, 60 p., p. 3, URL : https://africa.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/20220303_UN%20WOMEN%20legal%20guide_FR_webspread.pdf, consulted 15 November 2023.

258. See the Humanitarian situation report n0 1, (April 2024), https://www.unicef.org/media/155306/file/Burkina-Faso-Humanitarian-SitRep-31-March-2024.pdf

In the G5 Sahel countries, "the maternal mortality ratio varies between 371.0 and 856.0 deaths per 100,000 live births, due to the high prevalence of early marriage coupled with poor access to maternal and reproductive health care when women need and want to use these services".[259] In a climate-affected environment, fragile economies are vulnerable to external shocks which make it challenging to mobilize the necessary resources to invest in public services.

Chad ranked last (180 out of 180) for unsafe sanitation and drinking water and ranked in the bottom ten for climate change adaptation and mitigation (172/180) and climate policy (172/180).[260] As a result, some in the Sahel often find themselves deprived of adequate access to essential public services. Although public policies on education, health, and social protection "are essential, access to them remains unequal between rich and poor, urban and rural populations and men and women, thus limiting the prospects for citizens emancipation and sustainable livelihoods".[261] In the "G5 Sahel region as a whole, the enrolment rate is less than 56% in lower secondary education and between 2% and 10% in pre-primary and tertiary education for the region's primary school-age children, 40% do not attend school".[262]

Ongoing violence fuels instability, and the authoritarian military control in Burkina Faso and Mali, for example, allows space for corruption to fester.[263] The 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index shows that all Sahel countries score below 45 out of 100.[264] This means that endemic corruption and poor management of public funds systematically undermine efforts to improve service delivery. Diversion of funds, bribery, and patronage practices reduce the effectiveness of public spending and hinder the development of essential infrastructure. In several cases, funds earmarked for public services are diverted to private interests or used to finance non-priority projects, leaving vulnerable and marginalized populations further under-resourced.[265] This also feeds into people's distrust of government.

In addition, due to their vast territories (Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania), some Sahel governments often face logistical and operational challenges in delivering services and even "lack a robust private sector with market incentives to provide quality inputs and services broadly".[266] Rural and remote areas, where a significant proportion of the population lives, tend to be neglected regarding access to essential services due to insecurity, lack of infrastructure, and geographical isolation. Despite efforts to extend the coverage of health, education, and water supply services, the disparities in responding to people's needs also undermine social cohesion.

The persistent inability of governments to deliver effective public services has a profound impact on their credibility and legitimacy. Deprived of essential services, populations lose confidence in their leaders and question their ability to govern. This loss of legitimacy leads to expressions of discontent, protest movements, and, in some cases, coups d'état. Disgruntled political actors and military personnel often exploit these frustrations to mobilize popular support and challenge the existing authority. This also gives rise to rebel groups and violent extremist groups who then step in to fill the vacuum and provide services, including security, to achieve their agenda. This shows that unresponsive and unaccountable governments are unable to meet the needs of their population, undermine political stability, weaken public confidence, and increase the risks of civil unrest. The Sahelian context prevents effective participation of young people, women, and marginalized groups and prevents social cohesion.

How can the Sahel build sustainable, robust, and accountable democracies capable of withstanding the resurgence of democracy setbacks?

259. Alliance Sahel, "L'égalité du genre et l'autonomisation des femmes : une opportunité unique pour le Sahel", L'égalité du genre et l'autonomisation des femmes au Sahel (alliance-sahel.org), consulted on July 11, 2024.

260. See the Environmental Performance Index, https://epi.yale.edu/country/2024/TCD

261. OXFAM, "Sahel: fighting inequality to respond to development and security challenges", Sahel: Fighting inequality to respond to development and security challenges (openrepository.com)

262. WATHI, "Livre blanc sur l'éducation au Sahel, la richesse d'aujourd'hui et de demain, La Banque Mondiale, 2021", Livre blanc sur l'éducation au Sahel, la richesse d'aujourd'hui et de demain, La Banque Mondiale, 2021 (wathi.org), consulted on July 11, 2024.

263. Transparency International (2023), 2022 CPI reveals vicious cycle of corruption, violence and instability across sub-Saharan Africa. https://www.transparency.org/en/press/2022-corruption-perceptions-index-reveals-vicious-cycle-of-corruption-violence-and-instability-across-sub-saharan-africa

264. Chad (20/100), Nigeria (25), Guinea (26), Cameroon (27), Mali (28), Mauritania (30), Niger (32), The Gambia (37), Burkina Faso (41), Senegal (43).

265. OXFAM (2019), Sahel: fighting inequality to respond to development and security challenges, 54 pages. See https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620835/bp-sahel-inequality-030719-en.pdf

266. U.S. Department of State (2023), 2023 Investment Climate Statements: Mauritania. See https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-investment-climate-statements/mauritania/

3. Strengthening the Social Contract by placing the people at the core of governance

The mismanagement of the state society contract appears to be one of the main causes undermining public trust and social cohesion in the region. The need to build more inclusive societies with more legitimate governments invites consideration of a new "social contract''[267] between states and citizens. Two policy and practical options that center the people at the heart of governance are suggested below as possible pathways to strengthen the social contract towards rebuilding public trust and social cohesion in the Sahel.

3.1 Citizen participation and inclusion

3.1.1 Policy and regulatory framework

Putting people at the center of governance requires a new social contract with a strong emphasis on an inclusive policy framework. As the case of Senegal shows, the use of binding legal and regulatory frameworks with a minimum quota of 30% and rejection of lists as a sanction for non-compliance is necessary to increase women's representation in elected positions at national and local levels. The extension of the same provisions to key appointed positions for young people has the potential to promote inclusive governance. Targets may include judicial institutions such as the Constitutional Council, the Supreme Court, and the High Court of Justice. The media regulatory authority can be added to these. Due consideration should be made to reduce the number of years of experience needed for some of the members of these institutions or to open a new category of members - notably for the constitutional councils and the regulatory authority - directly appointed by youth associations and women's groups. The inclusion requirement can be applied rigorously in more open institutions such as the government, the parliament, and the Economic and Social Council (ESC).

Benin[268] also illustrate that the ESC in Sahel countries could be decentralized at the local level with reserved seats for economic sectors, minorities, marginalized groups, and groups living at the local level. In the case of parliamentary elections, in addition to elected seats, reserved seats for minorities, marginalized, people with disabilities, and caste groups living in the various constituencies should be made. Rwanda[269] equally demonstrates that direct elections by peers could be used to facilitate the inclusion of these groups in the political space. Citizens who, for various reasons, cannot be appointed or elected can, for example, take part[270] in the legislative work of their parliament by submitting memoranda on bills to be adopted.

As the case of Kenya[271] shows a reinvigorated decentralization process has the potential to empower citizens, enhance democratic governance and bring decision-making closer to people with disabilities, youth, marginalized groups, and minorities by ensuring community and cultural diversity. The level of citizen participation in governance expected in the Sahel, especially among young people, women, and marginalized groups, requires a strong opening of spaces for their growing percentage and demands. Indeed, the social contract should bring the citizens to the core - particularly those who've been on the peripheries.

Another option is to elect Members of Parliament (MPs) based on relevant social categories (i.e. ethnic minorities such as indigenous peoples, group victims of the caste system, labor unions, youth, women, persons living with disabilities, rural dwellers) often underrepresented in parliament. The idea is to ensure that all the necessary individuals, organizations and societies that can drive change and development are represented in the National Assembly so that their interests can be represented. It will be up to each country to find the mechanisms for appointing these representatives by their peers. The social categories indicated should be the subject of public debate, validated by referendum, and subject to updating.

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267. The social contract emerges from the interaction between a) expectations that a given society has of a given state; b) state capacity to provide services, including security, and to secure revenue from its population and territory to provide these services (in part a function of economic resources; and c) élite will to direct state resources and capacity to fulfil social expectations. It is crucially mediated by d) the existence of political processes through which the bargain between state and society is struck, reinforced and institutionalised. Finally, e) legitimacy plays a complex additional role in shaping expectations and facilitating political process. Taken together, the interaction among these factors forms a dynamic agreement between state and society on their mutual roles and responsibilities – a social contract. See: OECD (2008), Concepts and Dilemmas of State-building in Fragile Situations: From Fragility

268. For more detail, see the Organic Law (Law 2024-26) on the Economic and Social Council adopted on 21 June 2024 by the National Assembly of Benin.

269. Art 75(d) of the Constitution of Rwanda provided that: ''one Deputy elected by the National Council of Persons with Disabilities.'' Also, Art 80 on the composition of the senate provided for specific ''seats for various national administrative entities, one academician from publics institutions and one academician from private institution.

270. As provided for in Kenya under Article 118 of the Constitution and State Standing Order 145(5).

271. Article 177 of the Constitution of Kenya, as also reflected in the Electoral Act, includes provisions for special seats members (youth, people with disabilities, minorities groups, marginalised groups) and gender balance (no more than two-thirds of the memberships of the Assembly are of the same gender).

The inclusiveness of parliament means ensuring that the various categories are represented not only in the chamber but also in all parliamentary bodies (Bureau, Conference of Presidents, political groups, committees, etc.). This "participation and dialogue [will] enhance social cohesion and national ownership".[272] Limited civic engagement and poor service delivery also undermine trust. If elected representatives fail to account for their actions, they could be impeached mid-term.

To be effective, democratic governance should be people centered. In the Sahel, the pursuit of inclusive frameworks requires a mechanism to gather citizens' expectations, to which states should adapt their public policies to meet those expectations to the best of their abilities. Indeed, there may be a gap between citizens' expectations and the capacity of these states, however, social inclusion is about creating an environment where everyone feels recognized, respected, and valued. It is also a means of ensuring equal opportunities for all to participate actively in the economic, cultural, and political life of their country. This requires education, and school curricula by incorporating specific courses on active and responsible citizenship and the foundations of democracy. Students then learn about their civic and political rights so that they can confidently exercise their voice when they are old enough to participate actively in political life. Curricula at all levels of the education system should include lessons on fundamental values such as mutual respect, acceptance of differences, and religious and ethnic tolerance. In this way, schools can help to sow the seeds of solid social cohesion that will facilitate inclusion. In addition to theoretical lessons in the classroom, it is also important to organize regular practical sessions including exchanges where pupils can experience first-hand what an inclusive and participatory society is all about.

Simulations and debates between peers would enable young people in the Sahel to learn to listen to different opinions while developing their argumentation skills. School mobility programs, which are currently lacking in the Sahel countries, boarding schools or holiday camps, can also encourage mixing and cohesion between young people from different ethnic, cultural, and social backgrounds. Incubators for young activists can also be created. Within such incubators, young people can learn to monitor local government action on issues that concern them, such as education and the environment. They can form advocacy groups or lobby the authorities to influence their actions in these areas. By adopting these habits at an early age, they can contribute to a stronger democratic society and strengthen accountability.

"Low trust in public institutions is one of the reasons why citizens do not engage, and the lack of citizen participation in government decision-making negatively affects performance and accountability, which leads to a decrease in trust".[273] Indeed, the inclusion of all the required social categories in the composition of national institutions aims to make them feel considered by the governance of matters and affairs that affect and impact upon them. Once they are represented within the institutions, they can contribute to their running and functioning. In this way, they can raise the specific problems of their respective community, cultural, religious, and professional groups in the decision-making institutions. By being present in these institutions, they will be among the decision-makers, have a better chance of convincing their colleagues, and using internal pressure levers to obtain the desired results. Ensuring a reasonable balance of tendencies within the institutions can guarantee relatively objective decisions and a fairer (re)distribution of wealth and privileges. Essentially, this will help prevent policy decisions that favor only one part of the population.

3.2 Responsive and accountable governments

The responses and initiatives to redress security concerns and insurgencies, ethnic and community tensions, economic hardship and poverty, political instability, environmental degradation, and climate change are perceived by citizens as inadequate as highlighted in Chapter 3 of this report based on survey data from Afrobarometer. This has contributed to the erosion of public trust due to what is perceived as unresponsiveness by state authorities to the concerns and demands of citizens. Promoting targeted governance reforms at all levels where citizens and community involvement is central is critically important. Transparency, accountability, human rights protection and promotion as well as adherence to rule of law and constitutionalism are at the heart of building trust between governments and citizens in the Sahel as argued at length in Chapter 6.

Strategic use of information and communication technology (ICT) as exemplified in the case of 'Senegal Numérique 2016-2025'[274] shows, it is possible to improve public and private sector operations, enhance service delivery, stimulate economic growth, and contribute to transparency. In addition to e-governance, there is a need to support reforms of legal frameworks to enable civil society to engage effectively with states and to oblige states to increase their capacity and resources to meet citizens' expectations. Reforms need to be extended to ensure freedom of

272. UNDP, Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility, Concept note, April 2016, p. 17.

273. Saki Kumagai, Federica Iori, Building Trust in Government through Citizen Engagement, World Bank Group, p. 14.

274. The Senegal National Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) system, also known as "Sénégal Numérique 2025" is a comprehensive national strategy based on three pillars (The legal and institutional framework, human resources and digital confidence) designed to support Senegal's digital transformation. See https://www.undp.org/fr/senegal/publications/strategie-senegal-numerique-2025-sn-2025

information and the commitment of the Sahel governments to operate transparently with regular information on their actions and decisions.

One of the key priorities in building responsive governments in the region should be found in the provision of basic services to citizens. As Rwanda's post-genocide health sector reforms[275] illustrate, significant improvements in basic service delivery help to strengthen public trust and rebuild social cohesion among the citizenries. Given the size of some Sahel countries' territories, local governments should be empowered to manage and deliver services to remain close to their communities. Enhancing the capacity and capabilities of local governments, building strong and ethical private sector actors can help deliver basic public services.

The private sector can partner and collaborate with governments as part of corporate social and environmental responsibility initiatives through among other arrangements public-private partnership to facilitate access to basic services. Such outcomes strengthen the legitimacy of governments in the delivery and provision of services and goods to their people. Effective participation of citizens fosters goodwill, understanding and appreciation of opportunities and challenges and thus a willingness to adapt expectations to the capacities and resources of their States. On the other hand, those in leadership should act to increase the capacities of their states and rationally exploit resources to meet citizens' expectations.

Increasing the representation of young people and women in the decentralization processes is equally crucially important. This creates opportunities for youth and women to actively shape policies that directly affect their communities, such as the provision of basic services. Local decision-making bodies, such as municipal councils, are appropriate platforms where these citizens' concerns and aspirations are heard and integrated into governance strategies. If represented in those bodies, they positively influence decisions and feel ownership in decision-making processes. In terms of monitoring institutions, this reinforces their involvement in the composition and operation of institutions. It facilitates various social categories to interact with their representatives, monitor their actions, and hold them accountable for any shortcomings they observe, for example in service delivery.

The essence of a working democracy lies in public institutions, placing people's interests at the center of their existence and being accountable to them. Furthermore, the institutions should reflect their socio-cultural roots that consider local perspectives. Another approach lies in strengthening traditional institutions by giving traditional, religious, and civil society leaders a place in an institution that acts as a "watchdog" for society. This ensures that all laws and policies adopted by their parliament consider the views and perspectives. As is the case with Burkina Faso, alternative dispute resolution mechanisms that involve traditional and religious leaders and consider the socio-cultural realities of the Sahel countries could be set up or enhanced where they exist. Consensual values and patriotic commitment need to be promoted for greater social cohesion and nation-building. Sahel countries should equally embrace and implement development programs that take advantage of innovations such as technology and digitalization, their vibrant and engaged young and female populations, and their rich and diverse cultures.

275. See the World bank, (2009), Evidence from Rwanda on the impact of Results-based financing for Health, https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/824231468147299185/pdf/541030BRI0RBF110Box345636B01PUBLIC1.pdf

Chapter 5

Economic Governance for Sustainable Development: New Approaches

Gibril Faal

Abstract

Given high levels of political instability and violence in the Sahel, it is not surprising that a high volume of literature exists, addressing different aspects of political governance. However, there is relatively little data and analytical information on economic governance, yet the lives and livelihoods of citizens are affected daily by high levels of poverty and prevalent socio-economic challenges. This chapter sets the scene on the nature, status, challenges and opportunities of economic governance in the Sahel. It makes a case for new approaches to address socio economic challenges with a focus on enhancing social cohesion and rebuilding trust between citizens and their governments.

Key words: Economic Governance, Sahel Integration, Operational Excellence, Diaspora Finance

Introduction

In furtherance to a 2013 United Nations Security Council resolution, the interagency UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was initiated. However, its mandate does not equate to a program for economic governance, but the three central pillars of 'governance, resilience and security'[276] affects, and are affected by economic activities, factors and frameworks. As a collection of nation states, economic governance is of direct and indirect relevance to the priorities in the Sahel.

In the ten West and Central African Sahel countries covered by UNISS and elsewhere, the governmental and intergovernmental institutions are the formal bodies responsible for economic governance. However, good governance requires the substantive participation of non-state actors including civil society. This is particularly relevant in the Sahel where important national and intergovernmental institutions are relatively weak, and the structures do not necessarily or actively include and/or integrate external stakeholders.

This chapter gauges the extent to which economic governance frameworks promote inclusive and sustainable development. It begins with a review of the context and evolution of economic governance. It then analyses existing gaps and challenges in policy and practice, focusing on the major factors that impede inclusive and sustainable economic governance and development. The chapter also explores the structural opportunities and feasible prospects for enhanced economic governance, within the prevalent socioeconomic and regional integration circumstances of the Sahel. It concludes by proffering specific, practicable and innovative approaches and actions to expand and enhance inclusive and sustainable development to foster social cohesion and rebuild public trust.

276. UNISS website: https://uniss-sahel.org/uniss-2/ - Accessed 25 July 2024

The Sahel is not a structured economic bloc, it is primarily a geo-climactic region,[277] stretching from the western to the eastern coasts of Africa. The major concerns that prompted and led to multilateral initiatives are not necessarily matters of economic governance. Rather, the urgent priorities relate to the devastating prevalence of terrorism, insurgency and political instability. These political issues trigger and exacerbate a vicious circle of other crises including: degradation of environmental resources and inadequate response to climate change; internal displacements and irregular migration; and decrease in the quality of lives, livelihoods and human development. As such, economic governance and actions are relevant in addressing the acute politico-economic, environmental and development challenges of the Sahel.

Economic governance relates to the institutional policy and implementation frameworks and structures that provide the rules, directives, procedures, protocols and standards that regulate, coordinate and incentivize economic activities, for the achievement of planned and desired socioeconomic and other related development outcomes. Economic governance structures operate at national, regional and international levels, whilst multilateral frameworks have gained greater prominence in the post Second World War period.

The 1944 Bretton Woods agreement and its institutions defined post-war global economic governance. At regional levels, economic cooperation and integration frameworks emerged, with Europe being the most advanced. The 1951 Treaty of Paris, which created the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) defined Western European economic governance. ECSC evolved into the European Economic Community in 1957, and eventually into the European Union in 1993. This background indicates the centrality of multilateral treaties and institutional structures in the field of economic governance.

In postcolonial West and Central Africa, including Sahel countries, economic governance was driven by two major factors, namely, continuity of the 1945 Francophone monetary union structures, and the promotion of regional integration amongst the newly independent states. The former French colonies (except Guinea and Mauritania) maintained a single currency,[278] two supranational central banks, and two regional monetary unions.[279] In West Africa, the Union Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UMOA) was formed in 1962, and reformed into the Union Économique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) in 1994. In Central Africa, the Union Douanière et Économique D'Afrique Centrale (UDEAC) was formed in 1964, and in 1994 it was reconstituted as the Communnauté Économique et Monétaire L'Africaine Centrale (CEMAC).[280]

Over ten years after the formation of UMOA and UDEAC, the Economic Commission for West African States (ECOWAS) was established in 1975 to foster regional economic integration. This was five years before the 'Lagos Plan of Action for the Development of Africa 1980-2000', which can be seen as the forerunner to the 1991 'Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (Abuja Treaty)'. Subsequently in 1983, the Economic Commission for Central African States (ECCAS) was established. In the 1990s, the treaties and governance structures of these Regional Economic Commissions (RECs) were updated to include broader politico-social themes. The RECs in Africa and in the Sahel continue to provide comprehensive economic governance frameworks,[281] even though there are major implementation deficiencies.[282]

Factors that Impede Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Governance

Both the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU) have developed models for assessing economic governance, with the conceptual and policy assumption that higher levels of good governance result in more inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development. In 2020, the UN identified factors such as high spending on health and social protection, reduction of public sector wastage, and transparency and accountability, as important factors for good economic governance frameworks.[283]

277. The UNISS website describes the Sahel as the "semi-arid region of Africa separating the Sahara Desert to the north and tropical savannas to the south" https://uniss-sahel.org/geography/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

278. In 1962, Mali replaced the West African CFA currency but readopted it in 1982; and the former Portuguese colony Guinea Bissau adopted the CFA currency in 1997

279. Pigeaud, Fanny and Sylla, Ndongo Samba (2021), Africa's Last Colonial Currency: The CFA Franc Story, (Translated by Thomas Fazi), Pluto Press, London

280. In English, UEMOA is referred to as the West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU), and CEMAC is the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa; See: Gnanguênon, Amandine (2020), Mapping African Regional Cooperation, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFP), Berlin

281. African Union website: https://au.int/en/organs/recs – Accessed 25 July 2024

282. Lavergne, Réal (Ed.) (1997), Regional Integration and Cooperation in West Africa: A Multidimensional Perspective, Africa World Press (AWP) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa

283. United Nations (2020) Economic Governance: Guidelines for Effective Financial Management, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), New York



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In a similar vein, in 2022, the AU's African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) stated that the "key elements contributing to good economic governance include transparency, accountability, and enabling environment for private sector development and growth and of course institutional development and effectiveness". [284]

Basic Framework of Good Economic Governance (UN DESA 2020)

1. Reduction in **extravagant and unproductive government expenditure;**

2. **Higher spending on primary health and education;** and adequate **social protection** for the poor, the unemployed and other vulnerable under-served sections of the society;

3. The creation of a more **level playing field for the private sector** activity, by increasing the openness, stepping up the privatization process, **reducing the power of monopolies** through appropriate legal and administrative measures, and setting up more **transparent and simpler legal and regulatory systems** and frameworks;

4. **Stronger banking sector** which protects small savers and other depositors, and reduce risks for shareholders and creditors by enforcing **stricter prudential standards and information disclosure requirements;**

5. **Reform of tax systems** to make them more efficient, effective, equitable and fairly comprehensible;

6. Greater **transparency and accountability in government and corporate affairs.**

Extracted by the author from: United Nations (2020) Economic Governance: Guidelines for Effective Financial Management, UN Division of Economic and Social Affairs, New York

Box 1: Basic Framework of Good Economic Governance

284. APRM (2022), Drivers of Economic Governance Performance in Africa: A Cross-Country Analysis February 2022, AU African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), Midrand

Drivers of Economic Governance Performance in Africa (AU-APRM 2022)

1.	**Stable Macroeconomic Environment**
1.1	Inflation (Annual Percentage)
1.2	External Reserves
1.3	Real Interest Rates
1.4	Real GDP per Capita
2.	**Sound Public Financial Management and Accountability**
2.1	Government Expenditure
2.2	Debt as Percentage of GDP
2.3	Budget Balance
3.	**Integrity of the Monetary and Financial System**
3.1	Foreign Direct Investment
3.2	Trade as Percentage of GDP
3.3	Current Account Balance
4.	**Social Development**
4.1	Infant Mortality Rate
4.2	Adult Literacy Rate
4.3	Poverty Rate

Summarized and edited by the author from: APRM (2022), Drivers of Economic Governance Performance in Africa: A Cross-Country Analysis, African Peer Review Mechanism and African Union, Addis Ababa

Box 2: Drivers of Economic Governance Performance in Africa

UN DESA and AU APRM identified ten factors as the basic framework and core drivers of good economic governance (as shown in Boxes 1 and 2 above). The performance of Sahel countries against these factors varies significantly, with evidence of polar differences. For example, Nigeria can be described as having a very strong banking system, with some of its banks operating and holding sizeable market share in other African countries. On the other hand, Burkina Faso with a population of about 23 million has 13 commercial banks, compared to Gambia which has 12 banks and a population about 2.5 million.

The common economic governance challenges in the UNISS countries are closely and intricately linked to the actual and potential destabilizing impacts of insecurity, political instability and climate change, to varying degrees of intensity. The African Economic Outlook 2024 stated that:

"Indeed, climate change poses grave threats to countries across Africa – but especially in transition states in the Horn of Africa and across the Sahel region....a 1-degree increase in temperature is associated with more than a 10-percentage point decrease in the agricultural employment share.....evidence also suggests that recurrent conflicts across the continent, particularly in regions such as the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, have further served as a push factor out of agriculture.....In addition, findings suggest that agricultural production may fall heavily in regions affected by conflict, due to adverse effects on labor supply, access to land, access to credit, and/or direct effects on capital such as theft and destruction".[285]

In the Sahel, the factors that are contrary to the UN and AU frameworks for good economic governance are prevalent. These impediments to inclusive and sustainable economic development are summarized below:

a. High Levels of Poverty: All the countries are categorized as low human development countries, with Cameroon being the exception.[286] The bottom ten countries in the world with the lowest Human Development Index scores include Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger — all of which are affected by terrorism, political instability and climate change. Poverty limits people's capacity and/or agency to engage in and/or advocate for better economic governance.

285. AfDB (2024), African Economic Outlook 2024: Driving Africa's Transformation – The Reform of the Global Financial Architecture, African Development Bank, Abidjan

286. UNDP (2024a), Human Development Report 2023-24: Breaking the Gridlock: Reimagining Cooperation in a Polarized World, United Nations Development Programme, New York

b. Weak Implementation: The countries have the fundamental economic governance architecture in place and are parties to multilateral agreements that provide operational frameworks. However the challenge of insecurity and environmental crisis tend to pose emergency life and death threats, which relegate the prioritization of good economic governance. Weak implementation then reduces credibility and trust in the state, thereby reducing the options and opportunities for economic productivity, output and inclusion. This feeds a vicious cycle whereby precarious economic conditions exacerbate political instability, intensify conflicts, and deepen national insecurity.[287]

c. Marginalized Sectors: Economic governance is dominated by a duopoly of the nation states and multilateral institutions. The private sector, civil society and other non-state institutions are generally marginalized and treated mainly as regulated or supervised entities that need to comply with governance rules and regulations. Unlike in some other regions and countries, regulation is not balanced with proactive and purposeful facilitation to optimize the inherent entrepreneurial and innovative strengths and capabilities of the private sector. These conditions limit the opportunities for the private sector to create and maintain jobs that provide good and sustainable livelihoods.

d. External Rule Making: The most important economic governance frameworks, especially relating to macroeconomics, trade and international financial flows are based on global rather than regional agreements. These frameworks are dominated by countries with large economies, which tend to be the rule-givers, reflecting their priorities and prevailing interests. The actual and emerging priorities of the Sahel are not necessarily reflected in these international frameworks. Consequently, the options and opportunities to reduce poverty and expand economic inclusion and development are minimized and marginalized.

Structural Opportunities for Enhanced Economic Governance

Despite institutional weaknesses, the different layers of economic governance structures are already in existence and are implemented to varying degrees of effectiveness. Furthermore, specific structural opportunities are also in place to develop and enhance economic governance and catalyze inclusive and sustainable development. These opportunities include: well-established national, regional and continental frameworks which can be improved; participation in regional and international monetary regulatory regimes as full members with all de jure rights and powers; medium-level of economic integration (based on the African Regional Integration Index), which can be accelerated by diligent implementation of the new African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

National, Regional and Continental Frameworks

The core economic governance frameworks are the national fiscal and monetary management structures. These include laws, rules, regulations, policies, procedures and standards covering matters such as: annual budgets, taxation, procurement, spending and audit frameworks guided by constitutional and parliamentary procedures; banking, financial services and capital market regulation guided by legislation and overseen by statutory regulators; Balance of Payment (BOP) accounts and related international financial reporting obligations guided by manuals and rules overseen by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Many Sahel countries also regularly access IMF programs such as the Extended Credit Facility (ECF) and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility (RSF), to abate and manage financial crises.[288] Others have sovereign credit rating provided by global rating agencies.[289] These financing programs subject the countries to additional economic governance obligations. Despite the severe economic conditions, and unconstitutional military takeovers, the Sahel countries have maintained core competencies in managing the national economy through the technocratic civil service. This chapter argues that economic inclusion and sustainability is better enhanced by reducing prevalent underperformance and optimizing beneficial outputs from existing structures, before seeking to build new structures.

All 10 UNISS countries are longstanding full members of one of three RECs. The comprehensive and integrationist economic governance frameworks of the RECs are domesticated and incorporated in core national systems and structures. In January 2024, military heads of state of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS. Such withdrawal is a process rather than a single act, so some rights and responsibilities of the states remain in place in the short term. In July 2024, these countries created a confederation of the Alliance of Sahel Sates (ASS), with stronger political and economic governance structures, to replace ECOWAS frameworks.

Furthermore, all UNISS countries except Cameroon are members of the Sahel-specific REC, namely, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). Although CEN-SAD is not fully functional, all the member states have subscribed to a potential Sahel economic bloc. RECs facilitate the harmonization of economic rules and regulations, and expansion of markets beyond national boundaries. This in turn contributes to the expansion and enhancement of inclusive and sustainable development amongst member states and in the region.

287. Oxfam (2019), Sahel: Fighting inequality to respond to development and security challenges, Oxfam International, Oxford

288. IMF Factsheets: https://www.imf.org/en/About/Factsheets/IMF-Lending – Accessed 25 July 2024

289. Economic data portal: https://tradingeconomics.com/country-list/rating?continent=africa – Accessed 25 July 2024

All the UNISS countries are signatories to the AU Agenda 2063 master plan. They have ratified the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community (Abuja Treaty 1991), and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), taking on board the attendant and evolving economic governance obligations of these treaties. The Sahel countries are committed to be part of the African single market, and to eradicate tariffs and non-tariff barriers to boost intra-Africa trade. This is a structured continental approach to unleash the untapped potential of countries and accelerate socioeconomic development for all. All UNISS countries are also signatories to the UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with economic and development obligations, especially relating to: SDG 1 on ending poverty; SDG 8 on inclusive growth and decent work; SDG 10 on reducing inequalities, and SDG 16 on peace, justice and inclusive societies.

Main Economic Governance Frameworks in UNISS Countries					
UNISS Countries	**Sahel Economic Community**	**Regional Economic Community**	**Monetary Union/ Zone**	**Capital/ Stock Markets**	**AML/ CFT Review & Monitoring**
Burkina Faso	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	UEMOA	BRVM	GIABA
Gambia	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	WAMZ	None	GIABA
Guinea	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	WAMZ	None	GIABA
Mali	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	UEMOA	BRVM	GIABA
Niger	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	UEMOA	BRVM	GIABA
Nigeria	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	WAMZ	NGX	GIABA
Senegal	CEN-SAD	ECOWAS	UEMOA	BRVM	GIABA
Cameroon	None	ECCAS	CEMAC	BVMAC	GABAC
Chad	CEN-SAD	ECCAS	CEMAC	BVMAC	GABAC
Mauritania	CEN-SAD	AMU	None	None	MENAFATF

Box 3: Main Economic Governance Frameworks in UNISS Countries in 2024

Monetary and Financial Regulation

There are doubts whether the Eco will be the single currency for all ECOWAS countries by 2027 as proposed, given that: it was previously planned for 2001, many other targeted timelines have been missed and there are new challenges to integration.[290] However, the reality remains that six UNISS countries are part of the two longstanding Francophone CFA currency monetary zones (UEMOA and CEMAC), and are subject to the economic governance of the two supranational central banks. Three countries have been working to achieve the convergence criteria set by the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) since 2000. Mauritania is the only UNISS country that does not operate within an actual or planned monetary union economic governance framework.

The existence and operation of capital markets provide an additional layer of economic governance systems and structures in a country. Nigeria has a mature and active capital market sector. The Nigeria Exchange Group (NGX), formerly the Nigeria Stock Exchange was founded in 1960 and is one of the biggest capital markets in Africa.[291] Four of the UNISS countries within UEMOA (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Senegal) are also part of the regional stock exchange, the Bourse Régionale des Valeurs Mobilières (BRVM), which began operations in 1998.[292] For the CEMAC region, in 2019, the stock exchanges in Cameroon and Gabon were merged to create the Bourse des Valeurs Mobilières de L'Afrique Centrale (BVMAC).[293] The new stock exchange is dominated by Cameroonian stocks, but Chad is part of the economic governance framework created by this merger.

Three of the UNISS countries (Gambia, Guinea and Mauritania) do not have functioning capital and stock markets. Gambia enacted the Capital Market and Securities Act (CSMA) in November 2021 and is currently setting up the required structures, under the supervision of the Central Bank of The Gambia.[294] Guinea does not seem to have any plans to establish one in the short term. Despite an announcement in 2014 by the Central Bank of Mauritania (CBM) that a stock exchange will be set up, the country still does not have capital market regulation or structures.[295] In fact, Mauritania is the only UNISS country not governed by capital market legislation or monetary union regulations.

290. UN DESA (2024), A Current Challenge to Regional Integration in West Africa, Monthly Briefing No. 179, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York

291. Nigeria Exchange Group website: https://ngxgroup.com/about/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

292. BRVM website: https://www.brvm.org/en/node/61597 – Accessed 25 July 2024

293. Kingsley, Kelly Mua and Kouam, Henri (2022), Stock Markets as a Lever for Growth in Central Africa: The Case of BVMAC, Online Blog

294. IMF (2022), The Gambia: IMF Country Report No. 22/195, International Monetary Fund, Washington DC

295. MFWA news report: https://www.mfw4a.org/news/mauritania-create-stock-exchange; and US Dept. Of State country report: https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-investment-climate-statements/mauritania/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

Given that the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) is not fully functional, Mauritania is also not operating with a comprehensive REC framework for economic governance.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was established in 1989 by the Group of Seven (G7), focusing on Anti-Money Laundering (AML). In October 2001 in the immediate aftermath of the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States, Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) was added to the FATF mandate. In 2012, a third mandate was added, namely, Countering the Financing of Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (CFP). All the UNISS countries are subject to the FATF mandate through their membership of the FATF-Style Regional Bodies (FSRB). For the UNISS countries, the relevant FSRBs are: the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), which is an institution of ECOWAS; the Action Group Against Money Laundering in Central Africa (GABAC), which is a specialized institution of CEMAC; and the Middle East and North Africa Financial Action Task Force (MENAFATF).

Practicalities of Economic Integration

The African Development Bank (AfDB) and UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), in partnership with the AU, produce the African Regional Integration Index (ARII), covering a comprehensive range of factors. As a composite index, there are 16 indicators, under the five integration themes of Trade, Production, Macroeconomics, Infrastructure, and Free Movement of People.[296] The 2019 ARII provides a snapshot of the state of economic integration within the RECs.[297]

The 2019 ARII rated CEN-SAD as having low levels of economic integration. It is the least integrated of all the four RECs that cover the Sahel countries. Its highest score was on free movement of people; the lowest score was on the productive dimension, and it was also weak on infrastructure. It scored the lowest on the macroeconomic dimension. The relatively low level of economic integration is corroborated by other institutions, including the Institute for Security Studies, which questioned "what value the body adds since all its members already belong to other RECs".[298]

Although weak, CEN-SAD is still in existence, and its goals and structures were designed to specifically address challenges and opportunities in the Sahel. In addition to an Economic Social and Cultural Council, the economic governance institutions include a Permanent Council for Sustainable Development and a Sahel-Saharan Bank for Investment and Trade. Theoretically, CEN-SAD offers a framework for economic governance, but in practice the REC was moribund for a decade. The decline was due largely to the fact that it was championed and bankrolled by the former Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi, who was killed in 2011.[299]

In recent years, actions have been undertaken to rejuvenate the REC. A revised treaty was adopted in 2013, and Chad hosted Extraordinary Conferences of Heads of State and Government in N'Djamena in February 2013,[300] and in April 2019.[301] In March 2022, the 21st Ordinary Session of the Executive Council was held in Rabat, Morocco, the first since the 20th Session was held in March 2014 in Khartoum, Sudan.[302] The relevance of CEN-SAD for security and economic development in the Sahel was reiterated. A proposal was made to convene a regular Economic Forum to kick-start the ambitious economic goals of the REC, and a return to full functionality.

In recent years, the CEN-SAD leadership and secretariat have resumed their participation in relevant regional and international forums, to re-establish links and create momentum for implementation actions.[303] With the return of the headquarters to Tripoli in 2023, Libya recently hosted the CEN-SAD Conference of Labor Ministers in November 2023,[304] and the Conference of Youth and Sports Ministers in April 2024.[305]

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296. African Regional Integration Index (ARII): https://www.integrate-africa.org/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

297. The most recent 2021 report did not have a detailed and interactive country and regional ratings and rankings similar to the 2019 report; African Union (2021), African Integration Report, African Union, Addis Ababa

298. Louw-Vaudran, Liesl (2022) Africa's mishmash of regional blocs doesn't add enough value, Online Article, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Pretoria

299. Taha, Saeed Ali Ahmed (2016), Efforts of Integration in the African Regional Groupings: The Community of Sahel-Saharan; Africa Perspectives, Vol 13, Issue 44, pp. 17-29

300. CEN-SAD conference final communiqué:
https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/tchad2013-projet-de-communique-final.pdf – Accessed 25 July 2024

301. Nigeria State House daily diary: https://statehouse.gov.ng/daily/sat-13-4-19/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

302. Morocco Ministry of Foreign Affairs report: Accessed 25 July 2024
https://diplomatie.ma/en/mfa-nasser-bourita-morocco-proposes-creation-economic-forum-cen-sad-countries

303. For example, in March 2023, the CEN-SAD Executive Secretary attended the 49th Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and had a bilateral meeting with the OIC Secretary General https://www.oic-oci.org/topic/?t_id=38693&t_ref=26322&lan=en – Accessed 25 July 2024

304. Libya Herald news report (28 November 2023): Accessed 25 July 2024
https://libyaherald.com/2023/11/sahel-saharan-summit-in-tripoli-discusses-challenges-of-labour-migration-and-ways-to-confront-them/

305. Libya Observer news report (25 April 2024): Accessed 25 July 2024

As CEN-SAD moves towards rejuvenation, ECOWAS witnesses extraordinary divisions. Of the five original G5 Sahel countries,[306] Mali withdrew in May 2022; Burkina Faso and Niger withdrew on 2 December 2023; and Chad and Mauritania proposed the dissolution of the alliance on 6 December 2023.[307] Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger which are all ruled by military regimes announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2024, and on 6 July 2024 they signed a confederation treaty, forming the Alliance of Sahel States.[308] It should be noted that the trio of countries have withdrawn from G5 and ECOWAS, but not from CEN-SAD. Whether CEN-SAD's attempt to regain momentum will succeed is an open question, but its revised treaty set out ambitious goals for economic inclusion and sustainable development,[309] which remain highly relevant, especially for the countries with the lowest HDI scores.

The 2019 ARII rated ECOWAS as moderately integrated. Its highest score was on free movement, being the highest of the four Sahelian RECs. Its lowest score was on the productive dimension, being the lowest of the four. Its average was pulled down because seven of the 15 countries had very low scores on both the productive and infrastructure dimensions. ECOWAS is a vibrant and active REC, and its UNISS members include Nigeria, which is one of the largest economies in Africa. The withdrawal of the three landlocked countries on its northern borders will have economic impacts given the relatively high rates of regional trade.

The 2019 ARII rated ECCAS as moderately integrated. Its highest score was on macroeconomics, being the highest of the four Sahelian RECs, with 10 of the 11 members scoring high or very high (Angola scored low). Its lowest score was on the productive dimension. Of the four RECs, it also had the lowest score on the trade dimension, although its infrastructure was better than that of CEN-SAD and ECOWAS. It is worth noting that only two of the 11 ECCAS countries (Cameroon and Chad) are part of UNISS.

The 2019 ARII rated the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) as moderately integrated. Its highest score was on macroeconomics, and its lowest score was on free movement. Of the four Sahelian RECs, it had the highest score for both the trade and infrastructure dimensions. Although rated in the same category as ECOWAS and ECCAS as moderately integrated, it had the highest average score amongst the three, and is the smallest REC, with only five members. However, AMU is beset with political problems, reflecting the long-term tensions between Morocco and Algeria.[310] The Secretariat is in Rabat, Morocco, but high-level meetings have not been held since 2013. In fact, Morocco had previously sought to join ECOWAS.[311] On the other hand, Mauritania, the only UNISS country that is part of AMU, was part of ECOWAS but left in 1999. The fact that the AMU Secretariat operates irrespective of the absence of high-level deliberations is one of the reasons why the REC has not suffered a terminal decline.

2019 African Regional Integration Index (ARII) - Ranking of UNISS Countries (Scores: 0 to 1)		
UNISS Countries	**Aggregate Score**	**Performance Category**
Cameroon	0.60	High
Senegal	0.51	High
Burkina Faso	0.49	High
Mali	0.42	High
Nigeria	0.41	High
Mauritania	0.41	High
Gambia	0.39	Average
Guinea	0.38	Average
Niger	0.35	Average
Chad	0.29	Low

Box 4: 2019 African Regional Integration Index (ARII)

https://libyaobserver.ly/news/cen-sad-ministers-youth-and-sports-meeting-concludes-tripoli

306. G5 Sahel was formed in 2014 by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger, with the support of France, to facilitate institutional cooperation and alliance on security and development; in 2017,the G5S Joint Force was formed

307. UN Security Council Monthly Forecast (May 2024): Accessed 25 July 2024
https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2024-05/group-of-five-for-the-sahel-joint-force-9.php

308. Karr, Liam (2024), Sahelian Juntas vs. ECOWAS in Africa File, July 11, 2024, Institute for the Study of War (ISW), Washington DC

309. World Trade Institute's Electronic Database of Investment Treaties (EDIT):
https://edit.wti.org/document/show/5dbd7174-6ed3-403d-a5ed-9b1de76cd34e – Accessed 25 July 2024

310. Amirah-Fernandez, Haizam (2023), The Maghreb: Regional Disintegration and the Risks of the Zero-Sum Logic, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Milano

311. Louw-Vaudran, Liesl (2022) Africa's mishmash of regional blocs doesn't add enough value, Online Article, Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Pretoria



The ARII scores of the individual UNISS countries shows that six are high performers on this composite index of regional and economic integration. Three are average performers, and only one (Chad) is rated as a low performer. Most of the countries do relatively well on free movement, and there is diversity regarding the relative economic integration strengths and weaknesses of each country. Many of these Sahel countries have historic economic and trading relationships with neighboring countries, and the populations have strong personal and family connections. The informal socioeconomic relations predate and have survived colonial divide, regional conflicts, environmental disasters and economic competition. Furthermore, having signed and ratified AfCFTA, the Sahel countries have the chance to implement different aspects of the treaty and facilitative frameworks, to positively transform economic performance and inclusive development.

New Approaches for Inclusive and Sustainable Development

This chapter argues that attainment of inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development is key for social cohesion and public trust. To achieve such development requires improvements, innovations and operational excellence in the practical implementation of existing policies and frameworks, not necessarily the reform, overhaul or formulation of new frameworks. As presented in preceding sections, there is a plethora of economic governance frameworks operating at different levels that may not be perfect but are adequate to facilitate and produce far better outputs and outcomes than has been the case.

There have been numerous studies and technical and expert workshops, which have diagnosed the nature and causes of socioeconomic and development failure in the Sahel, using different conceptual and methodological perspectives.[312] There are umpteen sets of recommendations about the need for political will, institutional capacity development, and implementation compliance. Nevertheless, the Sahel is characterized by: severe poverty and low human development; terrorism, insurgency and military dictatorships; desertification and environmental degradation; unfair exploitation of natural resources and illicit financial flows. None of these factors are by themselves unique to the Sahel, together they create the devastating problems and vicious circle associated with the region.

This chapter further argues that there is virtue in refocusing effort and resources on prioritization, innovation and approaches that would expand and enhance socioeconomic development irrespective of the endemic disabling factors prevalent in the Sahel. Inevitably, these new approaches will include non-conventional, disruptive and even experimental practices. Successful adoption of these new approaches will: tap into actual but underused options and opportunities; deliver public benefit in the short term; influence medium term trajectories; and contribute to the attainment of long term inclusive and sustainable development.

The proposed new approaches require: focus on practice-based operational excellence for development impact, rather than endless policy analysis and reviews; creative support of the informal sector to increase the creation of decent jobs, rather than the continuance of formalized structural marginalization of small businesses; support to new and innovative forms of environmental, social and solidarity enterprises to address challenges and stimulate public benefit in the face of market failure; provision of new financial products to access the untapped diaspora resources including savings held abroad; and improvement of advocacy competencies to reflect Sahel priorities in international economic regulations.

Focus on Operational Excellence

There are many aspects of economic governance whereby the policy frameworks are well established and adequately understood, whilst their implementation, results and impact are well below the ambitions of the letter and spirit of the frameworks. This is evident in areas such as free movement of goods and services, and monetary union. To attain higher development impact, the approach to implementation requires a seismic mind shift amongst policymakers and technocrats, and real change in performance. As argued: “We cannot be serious and credible about ushering in change for greater effectiveness by doing things in the same way that have failed in the past. Aristotle stated that: ‘virtues are formed in man by his doing the actions’, from which Will Durant elaborated, stating that: ‘Excellence is an art won by.....habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit’.....we have normalized mediocrity and by default entrenched ineffectiveness and inefficiency. It need not be this way”.[313]

312. See: Gambarotta, Hector (1980), The Sahel Region: Splendour Yesterday, Famine Today, What Will Happen Tomorrow?; ‘ CODESRIA Africa Development/Afrique et Développement’, Vol. 5, No.1 (Jan-Mar 1980), pp.5-38; UNECA (2019), Sahel 2043: Towards a Resilient, Inclusive and Prosperous Sahel Region, United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa; Devermont, Judd and Harris, Marielle (2020), Rethinking Crisis Responses in the Sahel, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Washington DC; Dieng, Adama (2022), The Sahel: Challenges and Opportunities, in ‘International Review of the Red Cross’, 103 (918), pp. 765–779

313. Faal, Gibril (2017), Overprincipled and Underperforming: Why We Need a Practice-based Global Compact on Migration, in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, IOM, Geneva

For the Sahel and other regions with implementation deficits, foundational action points are needed. Firstly, at all levels, a binary posture needs to be taken, namely, 'to do or not to do; that is the only question'. Secondly, only minimal time and resources should be spent on new diagnoses of policy failure. Instead, resources, innovation, technology and promotional incentives should be deployed to make implementation beneficial and attractive to diverse consumers, customers and other stakeholders. Thirdly, entities at all levels should extract and demonstrate the benefits and dividends that the policy framework anticipated. Policy success is best demonstrated through actual and beneficial practical results, rather than endless reviews and analyses. Fourthly, the implementing entities should be constant and consistent in their operations and delivery, irrespective of the non-performance and counteractions of others, because the actual operational results and dividends are worthwhile public benefits by themselves.

A boon to operational excellence is technology. For example, there are indeed challenges regarding the implementation of the AfCFTA, but diverse institutions in the Sahel and other African countries can adopt the facilitative fintech tools and instruments, often tech-based, offered by enterprises and development institutions to make mutually beneficial regional and continental trade a reality. For example, Afreximbank offers the Pan African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS) to solve foreign exchange challenges relating to intra-African trade, and the MANSA digital initiative which provides trade due diligence solutions.[314]

Controversies, challenges and allegations abound regarding colonial-type exploitation of UEMOA and CEMAC countries by France, and non-commitment to monetary union in WAMZ. However, some of the major benefits of a single currency can be achieved through innovations and creative use of mobile money products that are already in the market, and facilitative and cooperative regulation of trans-boundary mobile telephony. The plethora of existing economic governance frameworks, bilateral and multilateral agreements is enough for implementation-focused policymakers to expand and enhance this socioeconomic benefit presently.

In the Sahel countries, there is already an emerging practice of businesses and entrepreneurs registering with multiple mobile money companies in neighboring countries to facilitate easier and cheaper business transactions. This and other beneficial economic integration and inclusion practices are happening without state support or despite attempts by states to stop it.[315] When Kenya pioneered the mass usage of mobile money in the world, specific policy or economic governance frameworks did not even exist for the novel sector. It took the enlightened regulation approach and operational focus of the Central Bank of Kenya for MPESA to be realized.[316]

With the pioneering success of MPESA, Somalia, with weak state institutions comparable to some Sahel countries, now has one of the highest rates of mobile money usage per capita in the world. On the one hand, the Central Bank of Somalia has not issued new banknotes since the state collapsed in 1991,[317] yet inclusive economic activities are enabled through private sector driven mobile money transactions. In 2023, 82 percent of adults in Somalia used mobile phones for financial transactions.[318]

The economic inclusion and empowerment created by mobile money in Africa is worth billions of dollars every year. Primary focus on implementation and operational excellence has created a trillion-dollar sector, benefiting hundreds of millions of people, including marginalized groups. In 2023, there were 835 million mobile money registered accounts in Sub Saharan Africa, with transaction value of $912 billion. West Africa, where eight of the ten UNISS countries are located, experienced a 40 percent increase in the transaction value from 2022, amounting to $347 billion, second only to the East Africa region, which at $488, saw an annual decrease of 2 percent.[319]

Incentivize the Informal MSME Sector

In the circumstances of state fragility, political violence and institutional failures, about 90 percent of jobs and livelihoods are provided by the informal economy.[320] Yet the informal Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise (MSME) sector is generally marginalized, undervalued and under-supported.[321] The economic governance structures

314. Afreximbank press statement: Accessed 25 July 2024 https://www.afreximbank.com/afreximbank-launches-africa-trade-gateway-a-single-window-for-digital-services/

315. Seck-Sarr, Sokhna Fatou (2024), Mobile Money in Sub-Saharan Africa: Innovation and Actors' Strategies, in 'Telematics and Informatics Reports', 13 (2024)

316. AFI (2010), Case Study: Enabling Mobile Money Transfer – The Central Bank of Kenya's Treatment of M-Pesa, Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI), Bangkok

317. Interview with Governor of the Central Bank of Somalia by Alliance for Financial Inclusion (AFI, March 2024): https://www.afi-global.org/newsroom/news/country-focus-financial-inclusion-in-somalia-2/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

318. Country Guide by US Government – International Trade Administration: https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/somalia-banking-services-and-financial-services– Accessed 25 July 2024

319. GSMA (2024) State of the Industry Report on Mobile Money 2024, GSM Association (GSMA), London

320. In 2019, the Government of Netherlands stated that in the Sahel, "90% of all jobs are in the informal economy". https://www.government.nl/topics/development-cooperation/work-and-education-for-young-people-in-africa-and-the-middle-east/sahel – Accessed 25 July 2024

321. AUC, ILO and UNDP (2022), Concept Note – Informal Economy in Africa: Which Way Forward? Making Policy Responsive, Inclusive and

tend to marginalize the informal sector because they are not registered with a central authority or pay corporate-linked taxes.

It must be recognized, however, that the informal and MSME sectors pay the mandatory sales, value-added and consumption taxes, in addition to municipal taxes and fees, which are often collected in cash by officials on a weekly or daily basis often breeding corruption and opportunities for self-enrichment. Beyond creating most of the jobs and personal incomes for marginalized people, the sector also boosts productivity, contributes to multiplier effects, and provides resilience in the real economy. It is arguable that the public benefits of a thriving informal sector outweigh the formal advantages of registration and corporate tax collection.

There is merit in Sahel countries adopting an enabling posture for exempting the informal MSME sector from corporate business taxes, to incentivize pathways to formalization. 'Registration without taxation' will increase formalization and access to business support. Instead of business taxes, appropriate small fees may be charged, linked to services that are of direct relevance to the growth and increased profitability of the businesses.

Support Environmental Social Enterprises

The Great Green Wall (GGW) project was launched in 2007 with the ambition of addressing many of the challenges that characterize the Sahel. Seven of the 10 UNISS countries are part of it. According to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCDD), as of 2020, 18 million hectares of degraded land had been restored out of a target of 100 million hectares by 2030, and 350,000 jobs were created out of a target of 10 million. One of the GGW challenges identified is "weak organizational structures and processes for implementation", and one of the recommendations for achieving the economic targets is "investment in small and medium-sized farms and strengthening of value chains, local markets, and organization of exports".[322] Currently the GGW activities are implemented through not-for-profit interventions and facilitation of small-scale agriculture. There is an opportunity to introduce social enterprise approaches to complement and enhance implementation, performance and attainment of sustainable results.

Social enterprises enable private and non-state actors to diligently apply effective business and enterprise tools, techniques and methodologies in pursuit of equitable socioeconomic results such as decent jobs and environmental remediation. The approach promotes achievement of synergies through community and stakeholder cooperation and complementary collaboration, and avoidance of unnecessary duplication or unproductive competition.

In instances of market failure, cross-sectoral collaboration is essential to stimulate and nurture viability in the marketplace. In such instances, enterprises will be able to produce goods and services, create jobs, and enhance productivity, but they may not be profitable due to the absence of enough paying customers and users. Social enterprise structures can receive grants, service-level agreements and other enabling financing to support their medium- and long- term profitability and sustainability. Despite the fact that such grants and subsidies are sometimes derided as antithetical to business, they are routinely used in the developed economies, to regenerate communities, prevent socioeconomic collapse in specific sectors or geographical regions, or abate the negative impacts of crises, as was the case during the COVID19 pandemic.

The African Union, ILO and other institutions are now promoting the adoption of Social and Solidarity Enterprise (SSE) as a mechanism to catalyze job creation and inclusive development.[323] A recent study found that the potential impact of SSEs in the agricultural, environment and job market are high, but that the mechanism needs greater recognition in Africa.[324] SSE is a feasible mechanism to address the environmental and climate change challenges and opportunities in the Sahel, including: fast-track implementation of the GGW project; expansion of the environmental and socioeconomic regeneration projects of the Lake Chad Basin Commission;[325] and capitalization on the sustainable energy opportunities of the Sahel.[326]

Sustainable, African Union Commission, International Labour Organization and United Nations Development Program, Addis Ababa

322. UNCCD report on Great Green Wall Accelerator:
https://www.unccd.int/our-work/ggwi/great-green-wall-accelerator – Accessed 25 July 2024
The author could not find credible GGW performance data for the period after 2020.

323. Moloi-Motsepe, Precious, Okonkwo Nwuneli, Ndidi and Bonnici, François (2023), How social entrepreneurs can drive an inclusive 'Africa's century, World Economic Forum (WEF), Davos

324. ILO (2022), Social and Solidarity Economy: Social Innovation Catalyst in Africa?, International Labour Organization, Geneva

325. Lake Chad Basin Commission Regeneration Projects:
https://cblt.org/category/projects/on-going-projects/ – Accessed 25 July 2024

326. UNDP (2024b), Sahel Human Development Report: Sustainable Energy for Economic and Climate Security in the Sahel, United Nations Development Programme, New York

Unlock the Untapped Potential of Diaspora Finance

The African countries with the highest levels of remittance inflows in volume (Nigeria) and as percentage of GDP (Gambia) are in the Sahel.[327] With armed conflict and humanitarian crises in the region, both Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other military related aid were at high levels. Yet remittances sent by migrants and diaspora from Sahel countries in 2022 was double the amount of international development aid. Similarly, the 2022 remittance inflow to the UNISS countries of $27.21 billion was about 320 percent of the FDI inflows of $8.58 billion. This was the case even without including remittance data for Chad. Although Nigeria experienced net outflow of FDI, there were major capital inflows for mineral extraction and infrastructure projects in Mauritania and Senegal especially.

Development Finance Inflows to UNISS Countries (2022 and 2023)					
UNISS Countries	**ODA and Official Aid US$ (2022)**	**FDI Inflow US$ (2022)**	**Remittances US$ (2022)**	**Remittances US$ (2023)**	**Remittances as of GDP (2023)**
Burkina Faso	1,394,810,060	669,738,241	532,912,791	578,943,726	2.8
Gambia	1,177,569,950	925,681,549	562,660,764	375,321,100	0.8
Guinea	694,120,000	614,018,506	No Data	No Data	N/A
Mali	272,679,990	231,488,000	501,844,380	627,524,533	26.8
Niger	499,630,000	658,300,000	527,275,700	557,808,003	2.4
Nigeria	1,198,290,040	715,469,995	1,110,000,000	1,153,620,000	5.5
Senegal	327,730,010	1,401,620,460	109,289,566	60,000,000	0.6
Cameroon	2,035,040,040	965,976,160	725,240,825	530,000	3.2
Chad	4,443,259,770	-186,792,430	20,130,000,000	20,500,000,000	5.7
Mauritania	1,451,839,970	2,586,179,930	3,010,000,000	2,935,906,982	9.5
Total	**$13,494,969,830**	**$8,581,680,411**	**$27,209,224,026**	**$27,319,124,364**	**N/A**
Compiled by the author from: World Bank Open Data Portal (June 2024)					

Box 5: 2022 and 2023 Development Finance Inflows to UNISS Countries

The actual volume of remittances is significantly higher than what is reported in the World Bank data which excludes informal flows and remittance in kind. These huge sums of money go directly to households and communities thereby enhancing socioeconomic inclusion, even in the absence of structured programs to incentivize or enhance their development impact. These inflows are regular, countercyclical and generally resilient to economic shocks, as witnessed during the COVID19 pandemic. As such, the countries with stable and high volumes of remittances can leverage them to address chronic foreign currency shortages and improve their sovereign credit ratings. [328]

A 2019 study commissioned by the AU established a typology of diaspora finance and investment, including philanthropy, remittances, Diaspora Direct Investment (DDI), and Diaspora Portfolio Investment (DPI). It also provided a conservative estimate of annual diaspora savings held by Africans outside the continent to be $34 billion.[329] Some of these diaspora financial flows are well established, including: private remittances and philanthropic contributions; investments in domestic and commercial real estate; and consumption of cultural products and food produce. Sahel and other African countries can relatively easily apply business and economic incentive schemes to expand these forms of diaspora investment by offering: simplified online processing of licenses and permits; fee waivers and discounts; and tax reliefs and concessions.

For the types of diaspora investment that are underdeveloped, such as DPI, new and innovative schemes are emerging. In February 2022, the African Union Executive Council adopted the framework for an African Diaspora Finance Corporation (ADFC) as an AU legacy project on diaspora finance. This followed extensive studies and consultations starting in 2018, and scrutiny and endorsement by the AU Ministers of Finance in 2021.[330]

327. World Bank (2024), Migration and Development Brief 40, World Bank, Washington DC (page 42)

328. Ratha, Dilip (2023), Back to Basics: Resilient Remittances, International Monetary Fund (IMF), Washington DC

329. Faal, Gibril (2019), Strategic, Business and Operational Framework for an African Diaspora Finance Corporation: GK Partners, London and Addis Ababa

330. African Union Press Statement: Accessed 25 July 2024
https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20220402/african-union-endorses-african-diaspora-finance-corporation-adfc



The Sahel countries can support and participate in ADFC's RemitAid™ innovative finance mechanism and endowment fund.[331] The Gambia is the most remittance dependent country in Africa. It has a diaspora strategy which prioritizes the leveraging of diaspora investment and accessing untapped diaspora savings.[332] To stimulate the DPI sector, attract diaspora savings, and integrate diaspora finance into local resource mobilization, Gambia has already developed and validated a business implementation plan for Diaspora-Targeted Bond (DTB) structured as a local-currency, project-based, government-backed, fintech-enabled debt instrument.[333] This is suitable for most of the Sahel countries as a viable innovative mechanism to complement and diversify public finances, and raise funds to finance pre-identified inclusive development projects and programs.

Reflect Priorities in International Economic Regulations

The main international economic governance frameworks do not necessarily reflect the priorities of Sahel countries. For example, there are no comprehensive and effective frameworks that address the scourge of bank 'de-risking' and Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) in Africa and UNISS countries. The FATF mandate does not include the regulation of the Sahel's major interest in countering IFF; and in some ways it legitimizes and encourages the imposition of restrictions on banking services.

De-risking is the trend whereby international correspondence banks deny, restrict or constantly threaten to deny services to banks in Africa and elsewhere, on the basis or pretext of maintenance of international regulations.[334]Although it is difficult to find verifiable data on the effects of de-risking and IFF in individual countries, the financial significance and negative impacts of these phenomena are well evidenced,[335] and are interlinked. A 2020 study found that: *"De-risking and IFFs both have far-reaching implications for capital flows. Where banks make de-risking decisions, it affects capital flows by limiting the channels through which these flows can be accessed, while the presence of IFFs means that there is less legitimate capital flowing in and out of countries. These two phenomena are interlinked and reinforce each other, meaning that de-risking can lead to a rise in IFFs; and a rise in IFFs can lead to de-risking."*[336]

The $27.3 billion of remittances to the Sahel in 2023 (see box 5 above) comprise millions of small transactions of under $200, sent through a small number of multinational Money Transfer Operators (MTOs) and a much larger number of small MTOs, some of them operating single corridor businesses. Denial of banking services to these small MTOs through de-risking measures disrupts the sector and reduces competition and innovation. Small MTOs are so important to the remittance sector that during the COVID19 pandemic, the government of the United Kingdom: "amended the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) Regulations 2020 to include money transfer organizations as essential service providers, exempted from restrictions during the lockdown period".[337]

Regarding IFFs, these are perpetrated by multinational corporations, international businesses and transborder criminal syndicates through smuggling, tax evasion, aggressive tax avoidance, corruption and other market and regulatory abuses. The IFF channels are prevalent and arguably pervasive in the Sahel. The UN estimated that in 2017, Burkina Faso had potential IFF loss of $6.8 billion, through three sectors, namely petroleum and beverage imports and mineral ore exports.[338] The groundbreaking 2015 African Union report estimated Africa's loss through IFF to be $50 billion[339]. The Pan-African Conference on IFF in June 2024, used the 2020 UNCTAD estimate of Africa losing $88.6 billion per annum through IFFs.[340]

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331. ADFC Information Sheet: Accessed 25 July 2024
https://gkpartners.co.uk/publications/RemitAid%20and%20ADFC%20-%20Jul%202022.pdf

332. See the first ever Gambian Diaspora Strategy: Accessed 25 July 2024
https://gambiandiaspora.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Gambian-Diaspora-Strategy-Jan-2018v2-1.pdf

333. Faal, Gibril (2023), Project Plan for The Gambia Diaspora-Targeted Bonds, (Unpublished) GK Partners, London and Banjul

334. World Bank (2015), Withdrawal from Correspondent Banking; Where, Why, and What to Do About It, World Bank, Washington DC

335. SWIFT Article: 'De-risking in Africa on the rise, according to latest Swift data (24 Aug 2016)'
https://www.swift.com/news-events/press-releases/de-risking-africa-rise-according-latest-swift-data - Accessed 25 Jul 2025
World Bank Brief: 'De-risking in the Financial Sector (7 Oct 2016)'; Accessed 25 July 2024

336. Cooper, Barry et al (2020), De-Risking and Illicit Financial Flows: The Role of Regional Economic Hubs, Center for Financial Regulation and Inclusion (Cenfri), Cape Town

337. This statutory amendment was a result of the direct advocacy of the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD), which is a leading and pioneering diaspora-development registered charity: Accessed 25 July 2024
https://csactioncommittee.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/AFFORD-Advocacy-UK-government-classify-MTOs-as-essential-service-Apr-2020-1-1.pdf

338. UNECA (2023), Counting the Cost: Defining, estimating and disseminating statistics on illicit financial flows in Africa, United Nations. Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa

339. AU and ECA (2015), Illicit Financial Flows: Report of the High Level Panel on Illicit Financial Flows from Africa, African Union and UN Economic Commission for Africa, Addis Ababa

340. See: UNCTAD (2020), Economic Development in Africa Report 2020 Tackling Illicit Financial Flows for Sustainable Development in Africa, United Nations, New York
African Union (2024), Concept Note: Pan-African Conference on Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs); Held in Tunis, 26th – 28th June 2024

For the Sahel, de-risking, IFF and other economic governance issues need urgent reform and action. However, it is self-evident that the state bureaucrats and diplomats who lead technical and international engagements and negotiations have failed to deliver the desired results. The relevant in-house capacity and capabilities of Sahel states are chronically deficient, especially in comparison to the high-income countries which end up being the rule makers. The relevant African national, regional and continental institutions need new and higher levels of advocacy competencies to adequately influence and reform the unfavorable international regulations; and ensure the setting up of new frameworks that optimize regional socioeconomic benefits. States and institutions can supplement and complement their capacity by opening new and untapped strategic partnerships and alliances to capitalize on the skills, resources, networks, competencies and influence of appropriate diaspora experts and global allies.

Over the past few decades, new approaches in diaspora diplomacy have been developed and successfully applied, especially by countries outside Africa.[341] The Sahel states and institutions can adopt and adapt these effective strategies and tap the resources of their nationals abroad and the wider African diaspora. In practice, this will entail amongst other things: focus on a small number of economic governance priorities at any given time, in order to optimize feasibility and operability; identification and engagement with new sets of committed diaspora experts and global allies, to support public sector personnel; joint development of feasible result-oriented advocacy plans with specific short-to-medium term targets; and incorporation of the thematic experts amongst the diaspora and global allies in the official national teams and delegations tasked with the implementation of the advocacy plans.

Furthermore, through partnerships with the private sector, diaspora and local techpreneurs, supported by development institutions, Sahel countries can deploy new fintech solutions to actualize de-risking reforms, and introduce new enforceable IFF regulations within FATF.[342] Such progression will widen the narrow three-prong mandate on money laundering, financing of terrorism, and financing of weapons of mass destruction. It will also be in line with the commitment to use "regulatory technology (RegTech) and supervisory technology (SupTech), both of which can improve the effectiveness of FATF Standards".[343]

In addition to climate change, one of the prevalent megatrends which is likely to affect economic governance in the medium and long term, is the fourth industrial revolution of digital interconnectedness resulting in the "fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres".[344] This is already well evidenced in the global economy through the application of smart technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI), machine learning and other innovations in production, processing, procurement, logistics, distribution, payment systems, crypto-currencies and the emergent fintech sector. Economic governance frameworks in the Sahel and elsewhere need to encompass these emergent realities through both reactive and timely proactive action.

Policy frameworks establish a coalition of the willing, but effective implementation requires the hyperactivity of the devoted. To attain sustainable development, there must be a shift from the current status whereby policymakers and institutions appear to be over-principled and under-performing; often missing the significant fact that: *"whether a member state implements an agreement is not dependent on whether they have signed up or not…..Even for binding global instruments, non-implementation abounds"*.[345]

Change requires omissions, commissions and missions. Simultaneously, stakeholders need to: deliberately omit practices that are demonstrably ineffectual and/or counterproductive; actively commit to new, different, innovative and efficacious practices; and tenaciously maintain the missions of implementing and entrenching the currents of change, irrespective of operational challenges and the exertions of the forces of continuity. To achieve sustainable change, it hardly matters how many times and how eloquently the mischief of prevalent failure and underachievement is described and analyzed; it is essential that the fundamental 'omissions', 'commissions' and 'missions' of change are undertaken. This foundational reality is relevant to economic governance and misgovernance in the Sahel.

This chapter does not deny the reality of implementation challenges such as inadequate political will or limited resources; these facts represent the ingredients one does not have. It is argued that much more can be achieved with what one already has. but is not using or is under-using. These under-used resources include: multidisciplinary operational and enterprising skills of the professionals who are not included in formal processes; financial, technical and networking resources of the diaspora; and new innovative solutions and technological packages to solve intractable economic, development and sustainability challenges.

341. Kennedy, Liam (Ed.) (2022), Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy, Routledge, London

342. Cooper, Barry et al (2020), De-Risking and Illicit Financial Flows: The Role of Regional Economic Hubs, Center for Financial Regulation and Inclusion (Cenfri), Cape Town

343. FATF (2021), Opportunities and Challenges of New Technologies for AML/CFT, Financial Action Task Force, Paris, France

344. Schwab, Klaus (2015), The Fourth Industrial Revolution: what it means, how to respond, World Economic Forum (WEF), Davos

345. Faal, Gibril (2017) Overprincipled and Underperforming: Why We Need a Practice-based Global Compact on Migration, in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, IOM, Geneva

Chapter 6

Advancing Justice and Addressing Impunity

Melvis Ndiloseh

Abstract

This chapter examines the critical role of justice in advancing governance, and addressing impunity as cornerstones for strengthening social cohesion, and public trust, particularly in post-conflict settings like the Sahel. The chapter argues that that neglecting justice leads to democratic decay, authoritarianism, and human rights violations. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the chapter explores governance challenges in the Sahel, drawing on empirical data and case studies. It examines the failure of military-led conflict management and stresses the need for justice-centered approaches to peacebuilding. The chapter employs qualitative analysis of governance frameworks, with recommendations for enhancing accountability, rule of law, and transitional justice.

Key words: Justice, Impunity, Sahel, Social Cohesion, governance

Introduction

Justice is foundational, yet often overlooked in advancing security and governance. It is the cornerstone of social, economic and political governance. It facilitates the rule of law, constitutional order and respect for human rights. Empirical evidence suggests that when justice is neglected, democratic systems swiftly recede, paving the way for authoritarian order and state repression. The frequency of conflicts and human rights violations attest more to the deficit of justice than anything else.[346] States must therefore fiercely guard against all forms of impunity – blatant or covert. This is particularly critically important in post-conflict and crisis situations where peacebuilding and reconstruction initiatives are often derailed by the prevalence of impunity, which fueled instability in the first place. Without effective mechanisms for justice, accountability and redress, hopes for meaningful social cohesion and public trust, which form the basis for sustainable peace and development would remain deferred and the risks of conflict recurrence multiplied.

Protracted and multilayered crisis plaguing Sahel, is fundamentally a crisis of governance[347] of which injustice is a potent indicator. Between the throes of authoritarian regimes, recurrent coup d'états, unrestrained use of force by state forces and international military interventions, inter-communal violence, trans-national crimes, terrorist insurgencies, a broad range of serious crimes and human rights violations such as mass killings, sexual and gender-based violence, torture etc., have been carried out by all actors, with hardly any form of accountability. This situation has been aptly described as a "vicious cycle of impunity,"[348] one which is rapidly cascading and morphing into a separate crisis within the ongoing crises in the Sahel.

346. Cheeseman, Nicholas. The Rise and Fall of Civil-Authoritarianism in Africa: Patronage, Participation and Political Parties in Kenya and Zambia, DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2006; Mattes, Robert, and Michael Bratton. "Learning about Democracy in Africa: Awareness, Performance, and Experience," American Journal of Political Science, vol. 51, no. 1, 2007, pp. 192-217.

347. Clionadh Raleigh and Caitriona Dowd (2013): Raleigh, Clionadh, and Caitriona Dowd. "Governance and Conflict in the Sahel's 'Ungoverned Space'." Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, vol. 2, no. 2, 2013, pp. 1-17. DOI: 10.5334/sta.bp.; Morten Bøås and Francesco Strazzari (2020): Bøås, Morten, and Francesco Strazzari. "Governance, Fragility and Insurgency in the Sahel: A Hybrid Political Order in the Making." International Spectator, vol. 55, no. 4, 2020, pp. 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/03932729.2020.1833561.

348. International Federation for Human Rights. (2022, April 8). Moura, Mali: The vicious cycle of violence and impunity in the Sahel must end [Press release]. https://www.fidh.org/en/region/Africa/mali; United Nations. (2020, June 12). UN expert urges Mali to step up measures to end extrajudicial executions and vicious cycle of impunity [Press release]. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases

Unlike other governance components, justice, including in transitional settings, has not been sufficiently prioritized in national and international responses to the Sahelian crisis. Lessons learnt from over a decade of crisis management endeavors, and the intractability of insecurity highlight the need and urgency to rethink the current, largely military-led approaches to conflict management (which, often, undermine human rights and justice), in ways that increasingly consider and give priority to governance and accountability driven approaches.[349] In this respect, it is particularly important to underscore the clear leadership role that justice must play in the quest to reconcile and reconstruct countries and communities affected by conflicts and repression.

This chapter refocuses attention on the invaluable role that the rule of law and justice play in any holistic reflection on governance in the Sahel given its impact on social cohesion and public trust. It reviews progress, challenges and opportunities for an inclusive, participatory and responsive justice system as the foundation for a strong social governance contract. After an overview of the justice status quo, the chapter examines the progress, issues and dilemmas confronting national and multilateral efforts at tackling injustices. It further explores opportunities and policy options for consideration.

The State of Rule of Law, Justice and Human Rights

Due to long-standing structural challenges, including weak state institutions, ineffective governance, and fragile social cohesion, the Sahel region has faced significant instability. Deep-rooted sense of neglect, marginalization, and limited political participation by women, youth, and other vulnerable groups have contributed to one of the most prolonged, multi-layered crises on the continent. Over the past decade, the region has become the hotbed of an intricate web of crises including state fragility, extreme poverty, food shortages, corruption, political tensions, violent extremism, illicit trafficking, environmental degradation, climate change, and economic shocks, along with the unprecedented external shock of the 2011 Libyan crisis. These have had a dismal and protracted consequence on the respect for human rights, including women rights, and some of them have combined to erode the rule of law, while challenging the efficacy of justice systems and constitutional order in Sahelian countries.

The human rights profile of the Sahel region tells a tale of contradictions: a growing affluence of norms sharply contrasted by acute implementation deficiencies. Despite formal commitment through ratification and accession to core regional and international instruments promoting human rights and the rule of law, and the elaboration of national criminal legislations; weak state institutions, poor human rights track-records, poor governance, gender-based violence, lack of women's participation in decision-making and corruption remain widespread in the justice sector in ways that threaten and undermine the rule of law.[350]

According to the 2023 World Justice Project (WJP) Rule of Law Index, which evaluates the rule of law in 142 countries globally, there is a significant and consecutive justice recession in Sahel countries with most of them positioned near the bottom of the global rankings. This index assesses countries based on eight factors: Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, and Criminal Justice. In the Sahel region, only Senegal (60th) performed near the global median score. The Gambia follows at 85th, and Burkina Faso at 95th. Further down the list are Niger (109th), Guinea (118th), Nigeria (120th), Mali (121st), Mauritania (133rd), and Cameroon (134th). These rankings highlight the region's insufficient operational capacities for law enforcement across various levels of administrative, civil, or criminal proceedings, including information gathering, investigation, and trials. Consequently, many crimes and human rights violations go unpunished, and due process frequently falters. The result is the widescale prevalence of impunity which is, in many respects, the highest form of injustice.

Human rights in the Sahel are deeply concerning, with numerous violations and institutional challenges. In Mali, there are reports of extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and suppression of free expression targeting journalists and activists. Niger faces issues of torture, harsh prison conditions, and limitations on minority and refugee rights. Burkina Faso's security forces have been accused of excessive force and restricting freedom of assembly. In Chad, torture, censorship, and arbitrary arrests are documented. Mauritania struggles with persistent slavery and discrimination despite legal prohibitions. Senegal has issues with detainee treatment and restrictions on freedom of assembly and expression. Guinea has faced significant human rights abuses, including crackdowns on political protests and severe restrictions on freedom of the press. These highlight the need for ongoing efforts to improve human rights in the region.[351]

349. Ndiloseh, M. M. (forthcoming). Rethinking the African Union's approach for the Sahel region: Lessons learnt from a decade of international intervention in the region (2013-2023) [Policy brief]. Institute for Security Studies..; Bagayoko, N. (2024, January 15). The international interventions in the Sahel: A collective failure? Blog Joint Futures, (37).

350. United Nations. (2021). Report of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sahel region. United Nations Human Rights Council. https://www.ohchr.org

351. Smith, J. (2023). Poverty and Access to Justice in the Sahel. Journal of Modern African Studies, 61(2), 140-155.; Dufka, C. (2018). Women's political participation in Burkina Faso. Human Rights Watch.Human Rights Watch (2021): Human Rights Watch. (2021). World report 2021: Events of 2020.



Judicial corruption also remains a significant challenge, undermining the rule of law and the legitimacy of the judiciary. According to Mbaye, Cissé, and Ouedraogo,[352] corruption within the judiciary is pervasive in countries such as Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, where judges are often susceptible to bribery, nepotism and political influence, compromising their impartiality and the fairness of legal processes. In Mali for instance, the judiciary has been criticized for its lack of independence, with reports of judges being pressured or bribed to rule in favor of certain parties. Similarly, in Niger, the judiciary is perceived as corrupt, with allegations of judges accepting bribes to influence court decisions. The involvement of the government in the appointment of Judges in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, and Mauritania are additional examples of political pressure on the judiciary. These issues not only erode public trust in the judiciary, but also impede efforts to combat crime and ensure accountability.

Gender-based violence (GBV) across the region, including in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso is a critical issue exacerbated by ongoing armed conflicts, political instability, and socio-economic challenges. Women and girls in these regions face some of the highest rates of GBV globally. In Mali, the prevalence of sexual violence by armed groups has significantly increased, with reports indicating that such violence is often used as a weapon of war. Niger continues to struggle with pervasive child marriage and female genital mutilation, practices deeply rooted in cultural norms but exacerbated by the instability and lack of enforcement of protective laws. Similarly, Burkina Faso has seen a surge in domestic violence and sexual exploitation, particularly in areas with high displacement due to conflict.[353] Recent studies highlight that the lack of funding for GBV prevention, mitigation, and response remains a significant barrier. For example, nearly half of the local organizations in Burkina Faso reported that their GBV programs are at risk due to insufficient resources. These organizations also face physical and social barriers to accessing affected populations, further complicating their efforts.[354] Moreover, initiatives like those by the Sahel Alliance emphasize integrating gender equality and supporting feminist organizations to bring about lasting changes in societal norms and behaviors, which are essential for addressing the root causes of GBV.[355] Efforts to address GBV in the Sahel need to be comprehensive and multifaceted, involving local and international organizations, adequate funding, and a focus on changing deep-seated cultural norms. This approach is crucial to ensure the safety and empowerment of women and girls in the region.

The situation in the Sahel region has garnered significant international and regional attention, leading to increased efforts to strengthen justice sector reform and capacity building. Multilateral initiatives have been pivotal in this regard, with justice and rule of law priorities being integrated into strategic frameworks such as the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), and the African Union G-5 Sahel Strategy. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has engaged in cases involving several Sahel countries. These cases typically include allegations of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. The fact that these cases are ongoing (after over a decade, for some – like Mali) highlights the persistent challenges concerning human rights and accountability in the Sahel. They also emphasize the complexities associated with prosecuting individuals for serious international crimes and underscore the significance of international justice mechanisms in combating impunity. Additionally, there has been a push to incorporate transitional justice frameworks into national peace and reconciliation processes as in The Gambia, highlighting a growing recognition of the importance of addressing past human rights abuses.

Regional cooperation initiatives, such as the Network of West African Central Authorities and Prosecutors Against Organized Crime (WACAP), play a crucial role in facilitating international cooperation in criminal matters, including combating transnational organized crime and terrorism. However, despite these efforts, systemic injustices persist in the region, underscoring the need for sustained and comprehensive action.[356] These initiatives pale in the light of overwhelming evidence of systemic injustices that persist in the region.

Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021; Amnesty International (2021): Amnesty International. (2021). Annual report 2021: The state of the world's human rights. Amnesty International. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/3202/2021/en/

352. Mbaye, A., Cissé, O. A., & Ouedraogo, M. (2020). Judicial Corruption in Sahel Countries: Analysis and Perspectives. Springer Nature.

353. The Sahel Alliance. (n.d.). Investing to prevent GBV: The Sahel Alliance takes a firm stand!. The Sahel Alliance. https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/news/investing-to-prevent-gbv-the-sahel-alliance-takes-a-firm-stand/;

354. Zullo, C. (2023, December 5). Addressing gender-based violence in the Central Sahel. InterAction. https://www.interaction.org/blog/addressing-gender-based-violence-in-the-central-sahel/

355. Opcit. The Sahel Alliance. (n.d.). Investing to prevent GBV

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Addressing Impunity: Issues and Dilemmas Confronting National and Multilateral Actors

Progress towards curbing impunity in the Sahel remains strangled by a spectrum of theoretical, normative, institutional, procedural and contextual dilemmas that should be acknowledged and confronted.

A. Theoretical Dilemmas

The push for justice and accountability in post-conflict contexts and those experiencing repressive rule is often the subject of two major theoretical debates from which the Sahel is not exempted. The first centers on the justice versus peace dichotomy - the perceived dialectic between justice and peace concerns.[357] This dilemma views the quest for justice as the prolongation of hostilities, and of peace as acquiescence to injustice.[358] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone seemingly endorsed this dissociative vision by stating that: "Those who argue that peace cannot be battered in exchange for justice must be prepared to justify the likely prolongation of conflict."[359] Generally, peace proponents[360] are of the view that transitional justice could derail peace negotiations and undermine post conflict state building; and Rigby[361] argues that societies must give up on all aspirations for justice in order to achieve peace. Interposing both differing perspectives, Monsour and Riches[362] view the peace versus justice debate as a false dichotomy, and argue that justice is integral to peace and that long term peace would not be attained without accountability for mass crimes and root causes of conflict. While this is the theoretical approach envisioned and advocated for in the Sahel, the reality on the ground is marked by a persistent tendency to delay or compromise justice. Thus, in theory, most conceptions of peacebuilding already include justice sector institutions.[363] The bigger challenge lies in practice.

The second predominant theoretical dilemma lies with the split between retributive and restorative justice models in transitional settings.[364] The former favors criminal accountability through prosecution and punishment, while restorative justice esteems inclusion and participation as instruments of repair to mass atrocities. More recently, an integrated approach which reconciles restorative and retributive models is increasingly advocated as a pathway for sustainable peacebuilding,[365] including in the Sahel. This transformative vision of justice is seen to be more victim-centered and forward-looking in terms of its aim to address both the legacies and root causes of conflict, and draw attention to socio-economic rights.[366] However, in the Sahel, as elsewhere across the continent, transformative justice goals are still stifled by the looming tension between retribution and restoration.

The negotiation and signing of the 2015 Algiers Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali between the government of Mali and various rebel groups, including the Coordination of Movements of Azawad (CMA) and the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA); the 2020 Niamey Declaration signed between the government and Tuareg rebel groups, including the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) and the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defense Group (GATIA); the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement in Sudan, signed between the transitional government and several rebel groups, including the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF) and the Agreement on the Cessation of Hostilities, signed on 21 July 1994 in Banjul, The Gambia, between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group were all subject to the scrutiny of both theoretical debates.

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B. Normative Dilemmas

Five main normative hurdles with implications for addressing impunity are worth review : the question of amnesty in peace agreements; presidential immunities in constitutions, separation of powers, gender and youth representation, colonial remnants in constitutions/criminal laws.

Amnesty Questions in Peace Agreements

Amnesty is a recurrent demand in ongoing peace endeavors in Sahelian countries, posing a delicate and contentious issue. To the average citizen, victims, and survivors, amnesty often means exoneration from criminal responsibility. This raises significant concerns about justice and accountability. A key issue is the potential misuse of amnesty provisions by high-ranking military officials or political leaders involved in transitional governments, allowing them to escape accountability for serious crimes, particularly given the often vague preconditions for pardon.

The jurisprudence of various international and regional human rights mechanisms reveals that, in many cases and for several crimes, amnesty represents a violation of international obligations incumbent on states. For instance, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, in the Ajavon vs. Benin (2020) case, emphasized that amnesty "constitutes a major obstacle to the referral to criminal courts or to the continuation of an action brought before criminal courts which adjudicate on the criminal proceedings and, at the same time, rule on civil reparations." Generally, there is an organic view that amnesty laws are inconsistent with human rights obligations. This is evident in the peace processes in Sahelian countries such as Mali and Sudan, where demands for amnesty challenge efforts to address the legacies of armed conflicts and ensure justice for victims.[367]

Presidential immunities in constitutions

Addressing impunity in the Sahel is particularly challenging when broad constitutional provisions for presidential immunities obstruct accountability for regime crimes and violations. For instance, Article 62 of the 1992 Malian Constitution grants extensive immunities to members of Parliament, which, unless revoked by the Parliament itself, can obstruct accountability for crimes or abuses. Similarly, in Niger, Article 133 of the 2010 Constitution provides the President with immunity from prosecution during and after their term, posing significant challenges to holding former leaders accountable for human rights violations. In Chad, the 2018 Constitution includes Article 106, which shields the President from prosecution for acts performed in the exercise of official duties, further complicating efforts to address past crimes. Mauritania's 1991 Constitution, through Article 93, also grants the President immunity from prosecution, creating a barrier to justice for victims of regime abuses. These constitutional provisions create a legal environment where accountability is difficult to achieve.

For example, in Burkina Faso, despite the 2014 popular uprising that led to the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré, efforts to prosecute him for his alleged involvement in the murder of revolutionary leader Thomas Sankara have been hindered by legal and political obstacles. In Mauritania, the persistent issues of slavery and discrimination against marginalized groups have been met with limited accountability due to the protections afforded to high-ranking officials. Similarly, in Chad, efforts to address the human rights abuses committed during the regime of Hissène Habré have faced significant legal challenges, despite Habré's conviction by the Extraordinary African Chambers in Senegal in 2016. These examples underscore the complexities of pursuing justice in the Sahel, where constitutional provisions often impede accountability. Recent academic sources further highlight these challenges, emphasizing the need for constitutional reforms to enhance accountability mechanisms and ensure that no one is above the law. [368]

Separation of Powers

This fundamental principle of effective governance stands compromised in most countries across the Sahel. One important consequence of excessively powerful executive arms of government is the erosion of the powers of both the judiciary and legislative arms of government. This trend undermines the principles of checks and balances among key organs of the state as well as separation of powers. With sweeping presidential powers, regime security is prioritized over the security of their citizens. Power becomes centralized in the hands of the president, and not the people - a direct opposite of the fundamental principle of democracy, which gives more power to the people. Perhaps the problem is not so much a strong executive as its often-excessive abuse.

In the Sahel context of fragile state institutions, blended regimes and state security, where the military still looms large behind a facade of civilian rule (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Niger etc), the probability for abuse is high and this constitutes a major threat to efforts at addressing impunity. In Mali, for instance, the 2020 coup led by Colonel Assimi Goïta highlighted the enduring influence of the military in politics, despite the nominally civilian government. The military's control over the transition process has raised concerns about accountability for past human rights abuses and the impartiality of justice mechanisms.[369]

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367. African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. (2020). Ajavon vs. Benin. Judgment.; Aning, 2019; Bashir, 2017)

368. Bashir, A. (2017). Justice and Accountability in Post-conflict Mali. International Journal of Transitional Justice, 11(1), 146-165.; dris, I. (2020). Addressing Impunity in the Sahel: Challenges and Opportunities. Conflict, Security & Development, 20(3), 315-333.;

369. Bashir, 2017, Opcit.



In Burkina Faso, the ousting of President Blaise Compaoré in 2014 initially appeared to mark a shift towards greater accountability. However, the military's continued influence, as evidenced by the 2015 coup attempt by elements loyal to Compaoré, underscores the ongoing challenges in establishing civilian supremacy and addressing impunity for past abuses.[370] In Chad, the 2021 death of President Idriss Déby, who ruled for over 30 years with substantial military backing, brought his son, Mahamat Idriss Déby, to power through a military council. This transition, bypassing constitutional norms, underscores the entrenched role of the military in governance and its implications for impunity and justice for past violations.[371] Niger also faces similar challenges. The military coup in 2010, which ousted President Mamadou Tandja, and the subsequent political developments illustrate the persistent influence of the military in politics. Despite efforts to establish civilian rule, the military's role in governance continues to pose a threat to efforts at ensuring accountability for human rights violations.[372]

In Cameroon, President Paul Biya's long-standing regime has been marked by significant military influence, particularly in addressing internal conflicts such as the Anglophone crisis. The military's involvement in suppressing dissent and alleged human rights abuses highlights the difficulties in holding state actors accountable in a context where the executive and military are deeply intertwined.[373] The military's involvement in Guinean politics has continued to impact judicial independence, particularly following the 2021 coup that ousted President Alpha Condé. These examples illustrate the significant challenges faced in the Sahel in curbing impunity, where the military's pervasive influence in political affairs undermines efforts at establishing the rule of law and accountability for past crimes. This reality necessitates a reevaluation of governance structures and the strengthening of civilian institutions to mitigate the risk of abuse and foster a culture of accountability.

Gender and Youth Representation

Meaningful gender representation, participation and leadership in politics and decision-making are associated with a lower risk of civil war and a reduced likelihood of state-perpetrated political violence—fewer killings, forced disappearances, torture, and political imprisonments.[374] Despite this, the existing normative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms of countries in the Sahel are not sufficiently enabling of sectoral inclusion. For example, in Mali, despite the adoption of a gender quota law in 2015 requiring that at least 30% of elected and appointed positions be held by women, the actual representation of women in decision-making roles remains dismally low.

Cultural and societal barriers, along with resistance from male-dominated political structures, have hindered the effective implementation of this law, limiting women's participation in politics and governance.[375] In Niger, the situation is similar. Although the country has ratified international conventions promoting gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the representation of women in parliament and other political arenas remains minimal. Traditional norms and practices continue to marginalize women, preventing them from fully engaging in political processes and decision-making.[376] Burkina Faso has made some strides in promoting gender equality, with women holding about 11% of parliamentary seats as of 2020, which is still far from the target of 30% set by international standards. The legal and institutional frameworks in Burkina Faso are not robust enough to support the full participation of women in politics, often leaving them out of crucial decision-making processes.[377]

Chad's political landscape is even more challenging for women. Despite being one of the countries with a legal framework supporting gender equality, the representation of women in the National Assembly is extremely low. The societal norms and lack of enforcement of existing laws have resulted in minimal female participation in politics, exacerbating issues of political violence and instability.[378] In Mauritania, women face significant barriers to political participation, including legal and societal restrictions. Although some progress has been made with women being elected to local councils, their presence in national politics remains limited. The normative frameworks in Mauritania do not provide adequate support for women's political engagement, contributing to ongoing gender disparities in decision-making.[379] These specific examples highlight the gap between the theoretical benefits of gender inclusion and the practical realities The existing normative frameworks are not sufficiently supportive of gender inclusion, which undermines efforts to reduce political violence and promote stability.

370. Ayissi, 2018

371. Idris, 2020, Opcit

372. Smith, 2021, Opcit

373. Ndi, 2020

374. Melander, E. (March 2005). Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict. International Studies Quarterly, 49(4), 695-714.

375. Diallo, A. (2023). Judicial Independence Under Siege in Mali. African Journal of Law and Governance, 15(2), 210-225. Diallo, Opcit.

376. Hughes, M. M. (2020). Gender Quotas and Women's Political Representation in Niger. International Political Science Review, 41(3), 357-372.

377. Dufka, C. (2018). Women's Political Participation in Burkina Faso. Human Rights Watch Report.

378. Ngarmbassa, M. (2019). Gender and Political Participation in Chad. African Politics and Policy, 11(2), 221-238.

379. Keita, 2018

Colonial Vestiges in Constitutions/ Criminal Laws

The constitution and criminal laws of former colonies are rooted in the Gallic system tracing back to pre-revolutionary France. Under this model, the president is the custodian of judiciary independence, implicitly suggesting judicial subordination to the executive. Some inherited colonial laws and concepts hinder peace, justice, and accountability. For example, the police and security forces established during the colonial period were created not to protect citizens but to safeguard the colonial elite from the populace. This legacy has persisted, with postcolonial African police forces often becoming politicized and continuing their role of suppressing political opposition.

In Cameroon, the heavy-handed approach of the security forces, inherited from the colonial era, remains a thorny issue. The Anglophone crisis, where government forces have been accused of human rights abuses against civilians in the Anglophone regions, exemplifies this problem. The security forces have been reported to engage in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture, reflecting a continuation of colonial-era practices.[380] In Senegal, although considered one of the more stable democracies in the region, similar challenges exist. The 2012 elections saw significant violence, with security forces using excessive force against protesters. The legacy of colonial policing practices, aimed at controlling rather than protecting the population, still influences the behavior of security forces. This has impeded efforts to build trust between the state and its citizens and foster an accountable and just society.[381]

In Mali, the police and military have been accused of human rights abuses, particularly during the ongoing conflict in the north. The security forces' role in suppressing dissent and their involvement in extrajudicial killings and torture highlight the need for a fundamental shift in how these forces operate. Moving from a colonial mentality of defense forces as enforcers and tormentors to protectors and service providers is essential for building trust and accountability.[382] In Niger, security forces have been accused of using excessive force against protesters and political opponents. The persistence of colonial-era policing practices undermines efforts to promote human rights and accountability. For example, in the 2019 protests against economic conditions, security forces used live ammunition, resulting in several deaths and injuries.[383] In Burkina Faso, the police and military have struggled with accusations of human rights violations, particularly in response to terrorist threats. The legacy of colonial policing, focused on control rather than protection, complicates efforts to reform these forces and enhance their accountability to the public.[384] In Chad, security forces have been heavily criticized for their role in suppressing dissent and committing human rights abuses. The 2021 elections and subsequent protests saw numerous reports of excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and torture, reflecting the ongoing influence of colonial-era practices.[385]

To address these issues, a paradigm shift is needed. This involves transforming security forces from agents of enforcement and suppression into protectors and service providers. Such a shift would also enhance their accountability and better align with the principles of human rights and justice. Furthermore, integrating traditional justice mechanisms into formal legal frameworks is essential to create a more inclusive and effective justice system. Constitutions in these countries often do not adequately integrate traditional justice systems, despite their significance in resolving disputes and maintaining social harmony. In many Sahelian countries, traditional justice mechanisms are a crucial part of the justice system, yet they are frequently overlooked in formal legal frameworks. This disconnect between formal and traditional justice systems hampers efforts to build just and accountable societies.

C. Institutional Dilemmas

Weak human rights and justice mechanisms are evident in the Sahel, where impunity prevails due to the absence, collapse, enfeeblement, dysfunctionality, gender-blindness, corruption, or wholesale hijack of the justice system. Inadequate human, technical, and financial resources to meet the growing justice demands further complicates this challenge. For instance, in 2023, Mali experienced continued issues with its justice system, including allegations of arbitrary arrests and detentions without trial, particularly targeting political opponents and activists. Human Rights Watch reported that the Malian authorities have failed to address these abuses effectively, highlighting the system's incapacity and corruption.[386] Similarly, in Burkina Faso, 2023 saw numerous instances of extrajudicial killings and torture by security forces, particularly in the context of counterterrorism operations. Amnesty International documented cases where security forces were implicated in severe human rights violations without facing accountability. The report emphasized the systemic weaknesses in the justice system, including a lack of resources and widespread corruption, which hinder the pursuit of justice for victims.[387]

380. Ndi, 2020

381. Diop, M. (2019). Police and Political Violence in Senegal. African Security Review, 28(3), 233-247.

382. Bashir, 2017. Opcit

383. Smith, 2021, Opcit

384. Ayissi, 2018, Opcit

385. Ngarmbassa, M. (2023). Challenges to Judicial Independence in Chad's Transitional Government. Central African Journal of Political Studies, 17(4), 280-298.

386. Human Rights Watch. (2023). World Report 2023.

387. Amnesty International, 2023

These examples from 2023 underscore the ongoing and severe issues within the justice systems of Sahelian countries, demonstrating the urgent need for comprehensive reforms to address impunity and improve human rights protections.

High executive overreach and the lack of judicial independence remain monumental challenges across the Sahel. Despite constitutional guarantees, the practical autonomy of the judiciary is often compromised by the dominance of the executive branch. In several countries, 2023 saw alarming trends in executive influence over judicial appointments and decision-making processes.[388] This interference has taken the form of direct or indirect control over the selection of judges and prosecutors, raising widespread concerns about impartiality, particularly in politically sensitive cases. In some contexts, constitutional courts have been viewed as leaning toward executive positions, especially in matters related to national security or transitional governance.[389]

Across the region, reports have pointed to increasing pressures on the judiciary to align with the interests of ruling authorities, including the prosecution of political opponents and the handling of cases involving civil liberties and dissent. These dynamics have led to growing public distrust in the legal system, as perceptions of judicial bias and impunity for state actors persist. Such patterns reflect a broader risk of institutional capture and legal authoritarianism, highlighting the urgent need for reforms that guarantee judicial autonomy, reinforce checks and balances, and uphold the rule of law as a cornerstone of democratic governance in the Sahel. [390] [391]

International criminal and human rights mechanisms play a crucial complementary role, particularly in contexts where the crimes committed invoke international jurisdiction or when national capacities are notably weak. State cooperation is essential, along with the appropriate timing and sequencing of their interventions. In 2023, the International Criminal Court (ICC) continued its involvement in Sudan, particularly in addressing the crimes committed in the Darfur region. Despite the national authorities' limited capacity to prosecute high-level officials responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity, the ICC's intervention has been significant.

The arrest and surrender of Ali Kushayb, a key militia leader, to the ICC underscored the Court's pivotal role in ensuring accountability where national mechanisms have faltered. However, the effectiveness of the ICC's interventions is heavily reliant on Sudan's cooperation and willingness to facilitate the prosecution of alleged perpetrators (Kendall, 2023). Another example is the involvement of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Mali. In response to the escalating violence and human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture by both state and non-state actors, the UNHRC established a fact-finding mission to investigate these violations. The mission's findings highlighted the severe limitations of Mali's judicial system in addressing these abuses. The international community's pressure led to some national reforms, but the success of such interventions depends significantly on the Malian government's cooperation and the effective implementation of recommendations.[392] Thus while international criminal and human rights mechanisms can substantially contribute to justice and accountability in contexts with weak national capacities, their success hinges on the cooperation of state authorities and the strategic timing of their interventions.

D. Operational Dilemmas

Critical operational dilemmas confronting efforts at enhancing accountability for abuses that require careful reflection include access to justice, entrenched judicial corruption, documenting and addressing abuses and state complicity with organized crime.

Access to justice is the ability of ordinary people to resolve justice problems in a timely, affordable, and fair manner, an entry point for redress and accountability. While equal access to justice is codified in the fundamental law and applicable human rights instruments within the framework of equal protection by the law; poverty, lack of information, bureaucratic inefficiency, patriarchal norms and lack of trust deprive many of this right. In 2023, Burkina Faso faced significant challenges in ensuring access to justice, particularly for women and marginalized communities.

388. Diallo, A. (2023). Judicial Independence Under Siege in Mali. African Journal of Law and Governance, 15(2), 210-225.

389. Zongo, 2023

390. Smith, 2023

391. Ngarmbassa, 2023

392. Baxter, 2023

Despite legal provisions guaranteeing equal access to justice, patriarchal norms and lack of trust in the judicial system severely limited this right. Many women, especially in rural areas, were unable to seek redress for gender-based violence due to societal pressures and fear of retribution. Marginalized groups such as lower castes and formerly enslaved individuals also face significant barriers to accessing justice. For example, in Mali, the "Bellah" (descendants of slaves) are often denied equal legal rights and face social discrimination, making it difficult for them to challenge abuses or seek redress. Similarly, in Mauritania, where slavery persists despite its official abolition, former slaves, or "Haratin," struggle to access justice due to entrenched racial and economic hierarchies that limit their ability to assert their legal rights and challenge systemic abuses. These barriers to justice are compounded by weak legal frameworks and discrimination within the judicial system[393]

Bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption within the judicial system further hindered access to timely and fair justice. These issues were highlighted in a report by the African Journal of Legal Studies, which called for comprehensive reforms to address these systemic barriers.[394] Similarly, in Chad, high levels of poverty and lack of information about legal rights and processes significantly impede people's ability to seek justice. In 2023, a study published in the International Journal of African Law revealed that many citizens, particularly those in rural areas, were unaware of their legal rights and the mechanisms available to them for resolving disputes. This lack of information, combined with bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption, created substantial obstacles to accessing justice. The study emphasized the need for increased legal awareness campaigns and the simplification of legal procedures to enhance access to justice for all.[395] These examples underscore the multifaceted challenges to access to justice in the Sahel. Addressing these issues requires targeted reforms to eliminate bureaucratic inefficiencies, enhance legal awareness, and dismantle patriarchal norms that prevent individuals from seeking redress and accountability.

Entrenched judicial corruption is a significant impediment to the rule of law and security. The justice sector is particularly prone to corruption, characterized by clientelism, justice-buying, and the manipulation of judicial processes. This not only contributes to insecurity but also opens the door to other forms of systemic criminality, often with the complicity of government actors. Mauritania provides a stark example of this. Reports from Transparency International highlighted widespread corruption within the judicial system, where bribery and favoritism were rampant. Judicial appointments and decisions were frequently influenced by political and economic elites, leading to biased rulings that favored those with financial and political power. In 2023, for instance, a high-profile case involving a major business figure accused of embezzlement was dropped after significant sums were allegedly paid to key judicial officials. This attests to how deeply entrenched corruption in the judiciary could obstruct justice and perpetuate a culture of impunity.[396] The manipulation of judicial processes in Mauritania, and elsewhere in the Sahel, has not only undermined legal fairness but also contributed to broader societal insecurity. Citizens often feel that legal recourse is inaccessible or futile, which can lead to increased social unrest and a reliance on extrajudicial means of conflict resolution. This example underscores the urgent need for comprehensive judicial reforms to combat corruption and restore faith in the justice system.

International organizations and national human rights commissions (Niger, Chad etc) have made some endeavors in documenting and addressing abuses, including those carried out during counterterrorism operations. However, these remain insufficient, in the light of the scope and continuous nature of violations. Data shortage means that much of the crimes/violations committed remain unknown, let alone addressed.

State complicity with organized crime, as well as the exactions of armed groups such as in Mali and Burkina Faso, have contributed to the region's high baseline rate of impunity. Examples of high-profile cases security officials and diplomats implicated in transnational drug trafficking etc abound.

E. Contextual Challenges

Ongoing conflict and political instability in the Sahel severely undermine governance and peacebuilding initiatives, particularly in the realm of justice. The region's deteriorating security profile exacerbates challenges to establishing and maintaining effective legal and judicial systems. In Burkina Faso, the period from 2020 to 2023 has seen significant destabilization due to escalating attacks by armed groups. The rise of jihadist insurgencies and intercommunal violence has led to widespread displacement and insecurity, making it difficult for judicial authorities to operate effectively. Courts have been targeted, judicial personnel threatened, and many legal proceedings disrupted. This environment has fostered a climate of impunity, as documented by the African Security Review, which emphasizes

393. Lecocq, B. (2010). The Bellah question: Slavery and emancipation in Tuareg society. The Journal of North African Studies, 15(3), 367–386. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629381003660753; Ould Ahmed Salem, Z. (2013). The politics of slavery in Mauritania: From the French colonial empire to the independent state. Canadian Journal of African Studies, 47(3), 399–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2013.829756

394. Sawadogo, A. (2023). Gender and Access to Justice in Burkina Faso. African Journal of Legal Studies, 15(2), 210-225.

395. Ngarmbassa, 2023

396. Transparency International, 2023

the inability of the justice system to function amidst such turmoil.[397] Similarly, in Mali, the ongoing conflict has severely impacted the administration of justice. Since 2020, the resurgence of violence by various militant groups has destabilized large parts of the country, including regions previously under government control. The Institute for Security Studies reported that the Malian justice system is struggling to address crimes committed during the conflict, including human rights abuses by both state and non-state actors. The lack of security has forced many judicial officials to abandon their posts, further weakening the justice system's capacity to deliver justice.[398] In Niger, political instability has compounded the effects of the security crisis. The 2021 presidential elections were marred by violence and allegations of electoral fraud, leading to widespread protests and unrest. The resulting political instability has distracted from governance and judicial reform efforts, and the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram and other insurgent groups in the southeastern part of the country has overwhelmed the justice system, which is already plagued by corruption and inefficiency.[399] The deteriorating security situation in the Sahel thus creates a vicious cycle where conflict begets instability, which in turn hampers efforts to strengthen governance and the rule of law. Effective justice mechanisms are essential for peacebuilding, but achieving this is exceedingly difficult in a context of pervasive insecurity and political upheaval.

Terrorism in the Sahel, driven by weak governance, deprivation, and marginalization,[400] has surged dramatically, increasing fivefold over the past five years. The region has seen a proliferation of extremist groups, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram, and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). In Burkina Faso alone, terrorist attacks rose from 80 in 2017 to over 400 in 2022, highlighting the escalating threat.[401] Military-led counterterrorism efforts, such as the French-led Operation Barkhane and the G5 Sahel Joint Force, have been pivotal in combating these groups but have also resulted in unintended consequences for human rights. These operations have led to civilian casualties, arbitrary detentions, and extrajudicial killings, undermining trust in the state and exacerbating grievances that fuel insurgency.[402] These developments underscore the complex interplay between security measures and human rights protection, necessitating a more balanced and inclusive approach to counterterrorism that addresses the root causes of extremism while safeguarding human rights.

The ongoing crisis of internal displacement has reached alarming levels, with over 3 million people displaced as of 2023, exacerbating vulnerabilities and creating opportunities for further violations, including gender-based violence.[403] This massive displacement intensifies the burden on already strained justice delivery systems and adds layers of conflicting governance priorities. Over 1.5 million people in Burkina Faso are internally displaced, making it one of the most affected countries in the region.[404] This displacement crisis not only heightens the risk of gender-based violence, as women and children in displacement camps are particularly vulnerable, but also overwhelms local judicial and social services. Displacement exacerbates pre-existing social and economic inequalities, which in turn can lead to increased incidences of violence and exploitation.[405] The justice systems in these regions are often ill-equipped to handle such complex issues, leading to impunity for perpetrators and further erosion of trust in governmental institutions. Consequently, addressing internal displacement is not only a humanitarian imperative but also critical for restoring justice and stability.

Poverty remains a critical issue, with up to 80% of the population living on less than $2 a day.[406] This extreme poverty impacts the standard of living as well as the capacity for individuals and the state to access and deliver justice effectively. In countries like Niger, where over 42% of the population lives in extreme poverty, the lack of financial resources severely limits citizens' ability to seek legal redress and the state's ability to provide adequate judicial services.[407] Furthermore, the high poverty rates reflect entrenched inequalities and social injustices that perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and disenfranchisement. Poverty exacerbates the vulnerabilities of marginalized groups, making it more difficult for them to access justice, reinforcing systemic inequalities.[408] These conditions create an environment where justice is not equally accessible, further entrenching social injustices and undermining efforts to build equitable and fair societies.

397. Ouédraogo, I. (2022). The Impact of Conflict on Justice in Burkina Faso. African Security Review, 31(2), 145-160.

398. Diallo, 2021

399. Smith, 2023

400. UNDP, 2017

401. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). (2023). Rising Insecurity in the Sahel: A Five-Year Overview.

402. Amnesty International. (2023). Sahel: Human Rights Violations in Counterterrorism Operations.

403. UNHCR, 2023

404. International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2023). Displacement Tracking Matrix: Burkina Faso. Retrieved from https://dtm.iom.int/burkina-faso

405. Benjaminsen, T. A. (2023). Displacement and Gender-Based Violence in the Sahel: A Sociological Perspective. Journal of Modern African Studies, 61(2), 98-115.

406. World Bank. (2023). Poverty and Equity Data Portal. Retrieved from https://povertydata.worldbank.org/poverty/home/

407. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2023). Legal Reforms in Niger.

408. Smith, 2023



Long-standing social and cultural norms and gender stereotyping are significant root causes of violence against women and the pervasive impunity for such violence. These norms dictate relationships, roles, and responsibilities between men and women, perpetuating unequal access to power, resources, and privileges. Discriminatory laws, both statutory and customary, further entrench these inequalities.[409] Despite the enactment of national laws aimed at addressing gender inequalities, enforcement remains a substantial challenge. This is due to the deeply ingrained traditional practices and sociocultural norms that reinforce discrimination. In Mali, despite legal frameworks protecting women's rights, societal norms often prioritize male authority, leading to limited real-world impact of these laws.[410] Similarly, in Niger, customary laws that favor male inheritance and control over property perpetuate economic disparities between genders.[411] A patriarchal society has thus fostered deep and worsening gender inequalities, leading to widespread social exclusion, normalized violence, and domination over women. These entrenched practices highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that address both legal reforms and sociocultural transformations to effectively combat gender-based violence and inequality.

Climate change, evolving five times faster in the Sahel than elsewhere in the world, along with environmental degradation, presents severe challenges to the region's governments in delivering prosperity and justice.[412] These issues are compounded by economic constraints and the ripple effects of the war in Ukraine, which has exacerbated food insecurity. The Sahel's reliance on agriculture makes it particularly vulnerable to climate impacts, leading to worsened intercommunal violence as communities compete for dwindling resources.[413] Moreover, the economic fallout from global conflicts has strained Sahelian economies, reducing their capacity to invest in critical areas such as justice and social services. These multifaceted challenges underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that address both environmental sustainability and socio-economic resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic dealt a severe blow to the rule of law and justice delivery. In response to the pandemic, governments assumed de facto emergency powers, enacting states of emergency and instituting broad lockdown measures, including on judicial mechanisms. The consequences have been significant: prolonged pre-trial detentions, human rights violations by security forces, increased sexual and gender-based violence, shrinking civic space, discrimination, and justice delays. In Chad, the lockdown measures led to the suspension of court hearings, resulting in the indefinite detention of numerous individuals without trial.[414] Finally, reports of security forces using excessive force to enforce lockdowns highlight the human rights violations exacerbated by the pandemic. Addressing impunity becomes nearly impossible without ensuring due processes and proportional justice, both of which have been severely compromised during the pandemic.

The above challenges notwithstanding, opportunities abound for strengthening justice in the Sahel. These are explored below highlighting potential pathways and strategies for improving judicial systems and ensuring greater accountability and fairness.

Lessons Learnt and Perspectives for an Inclusive & Responsive Justice System

The integration of justice initiatives within conventional security efforts can mitigate conflict, improve societal resilience, and build a stronger culture supportive of the rule of law. The AU's renewed commitment to constitutionalism and the rule of law, captured in the 2022 Accra Declaration, underscores this approach. Furthermore, the increased activism by Africa's growing youth movement, particularly focused on matters of justice, as seen in Nigeria, highlights a significant societal shift towards accountability and fairness. [415] The post-COVID-19 context offers new development opportunities within which justice and equity can be advanced. Recent transitional justice efforts, such as the Truth Commissions in Mali and The Gambia and the Extraordinary African Chambers in Senegal, provide important good practices for similar initiatives across the Sahel. These efforts demonstrate the potential for regional mechanisms to effectively address past abuses and foster a culture of accountability.

Leveraging the post-coup era for justice delivery and reconstruction: The post-coup era presents a unique opportunity to reevaluate justice delivery systems and undertake comprehensive reconstruction efforts. In Mali, the 2020 coup led to the establishment of a transitional government tasked with organizing elections and implementing reforms. [416]

409. Tripp, A. M. (2020). Women and Power in Post-Conflict Africa. Cambridge University Press.

410. Diallo, 2021

411. Sow, F. (2022). Customary Law and Gender Disparities in Niger. African Journal of Gender and Development, 10(2), 87-105.

412. IPCC, 2023

413. Nsaibia & Van der Heide, 2023.

414. Akinkugbe, 2023

415. Olonisakin, F. (2023). Youth Activism and Justice in Africa: The Post-COVID-19 Landscape. African Affairs, 122(488), 89-112.

416. International Crisis Group, 2021

This period of transition has created a window of opportunity to address longstanding issues of corruption, impunity, and ineffective governance. Transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth commissions and criminal prosecutions, can be established to hold perpetrators of human rights abuses accountable and provide justice to victims.[417] Furthermore, the reconstruction process can focus on strengthening the rule of law, enhancing access to justice, and building institutions that are transparent, accountable, and responsive to the needs of the population (UNDP, 2020). By leveraging the post-coup era for justice delivery and reconstruction, the Sahel countries can lay the foundation for sustainable peace, stability, and development.

Normative and institutional opportunities exist especially at the regional and national levels. The African Union (AU) Transitional Justice Policy embodies a new, innovative, and gender-inclusive vision of transformative justice, serving as a vital tool for reinforcing the role of justice in governance. This policy aims to address the root causes and legacies of abuse—past, present, and future—by promoting a comprehensive approach to justice.[418] AU's Agenda 2063 also lists justice, rule of law, and human rights as necessary preconditions for a peaceful and conflict-free continent. However, African security sectors are not always set up to integrate justice and the rule of law into their approaches, necessitating significant reforms. National and regional frameworks, such as the 344 Resolution on the fight against impunity in Africa (ACHPR/Res.344(LVIII)2016) and the ongoing efforts to elaborate an ACDEG Protocol on unconstitutional changes of government, offer viable tools for addressing governance deficits and impunity.[419]

Maximizing international support momentum for strengthening justice delivery is crucial for addressing systemic challenges and promoting accountability. For instance, in Burkina Faso, the Support Project for the Strengthening of Justice (PAJ-J) is a partnership between the government and international organizations, including UNDP, aimed at enhancing access to justice and improving the efficiency of the judicial system.[420] This project has led to the construction of new courthouses, the recruitment and training of legal personnel, and the implementation of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, all of which contribute to improved justice delivery. International support can also take the form of capacity building for legal professionals and institutions. In Niger, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has been working with the government to strengthen the capacity of judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officers in handling cases related to terrorism and organized crime.[421] This support has led to more effective prosecution of criminal cases and enhanced public trust in the justice system. Finally, international support can play a critical role in promoting transitional justice and reconciliation processes. In Mali, the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) has supported the establishment of a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission (CVJR) to address human rights violations and promote national reconciliation.[422] By providing technical and financial assistance, MINUSMA has helped the CVJR conduct public hearings, document human rights abuses, and make recommendations for reparations, contributing to a more inclusive and transparent justice process.

Policy Issues for Consideration

The strive towards ending impunity is gaining momentum as a direct outcome of international and regional strategies such as UNMIS and AUG5 Sahel Strategy. Notwithstanding, measurable results are yet to gain visibility due to a plethora of challenges, some highlighted above. To reinforce ongoing initiatives, the following recommendations are proffered:

The cardinal role of citizen engagement and social cohesion in justice promotion: In promoting justice, citizen engagement and social cohesion play a cardinal role and should be actively encouraged. This can be achieved through initiatives that foster community dialogue, increase awareness of legal rights and responsibilities, and build trust between communities and justice institutions. In Niger, the "Community Mediation and Justice" program, supported by UNDP, has empowered local communities to resolve disputes through mediation, reducing the burden on formal justice systems and promoting social cohesion.[423] Similarly, in Senegal, community-based organizations have been instrumental in raising awareness about legal rights and facilitating access to justice for marginalized groups.[424] By promoting citizen engagement and social cohesion, governments and international partners can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of justice systems.

417. Thomson, S. (2010). Luc Huyse and Mark Salter, eds. Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences. Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2008. xiv + 203 pp. List of Acronyms and Abbreviations. Notes. References. Tables. $19.95. Paper. African Studies Review, 53(2), 204–205. doi:10.1353/arw.2010.0024.

418. Nmehielle, V. O. (2023). African Union Law and Practice: The African Union Transitional Justice Policy. Oxford University Press.

419. Murithi, T. (2023). The African Union and the Fight Against Impunity: The Role of the 344 Resolution. Journal of African Law, 67(1), 22-45.

420. UNDP Burkina Faso, 2021

421. UNODC, 2021

422. United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). (2023). Human Rights Report.

423. UNDP Niger, 2021

424. Diop, 2020

A common position on impunity, amnesty and pardon: The emerging practice and jurisprudence on impunity, amnesty and pardon should be crystallized into a guiding framework. In approaching this, such a framework should focus on clarity of definition so as to prevent ambiguity of response, articulate a stance on zero tolerance, and provide guidance on mapping vulnerabilities and designing concrete responses. This will provide clarity and consistency for the UN/AU/REC in its management of the crisis of impunity; and serve as a tool of advocacy for civil society watchdogs.

A robust, sustained anti-corruption campaign and advocacy are crucial in the Sahel's judicial sector to enhance transparency, accountability, and trust in the justice system. This approach has been successful in other regions of Africa, such as Botswana, where the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Crime (DCEC) has been instrumental in investigating and prosecuting corruption cases, leading to increased public confidence in the judiciary.[425] By implementing similar anti-corruption measures, the Sahel can work towards a more accountable and effective judicial sector. Exploring alternative measures to detention and incarceration is crucial for promoting justice and human rights while alleviating prison overcrowding. One such measure is the use of community service orders, where offenders perform unpaid work for the benefit of the community instead of serving jail time. This approach has been successfully implemented in conflict-affected countries like Sierra Leone, where the Community Service Act was enacted to reduce prison populations and promote reintegration of offenders into society.[426] By adopting similar strategies, Sahelian countries can address the challenges of their justice systems and promote more effective and humane approaches to justice.

Institutional reforms, particularly the separation of powers, are essential for reinforcing checks and balances within the Sahel's governance structures. Strengthening the independence of the judiciary, legislature, and executive branches can help prevent abuses of power and ensure accountability. In Nigeria, the 1999 Constitution was amended to enhance the autonomy of the judiciary and guarantee its financial independence, thereby reducing the influence of the executive branch (Ojo, 2019). Similar reforms can help build more resilient and accountable governance systems.

Integrating justice and security: Integrating justice and security is paramount as justice and the rule of law are foundational to development and governance, crucial for ensuring security for all. Justice institutions, often overlooked in security sector considerations, play a pivotal role in maintaining peace and security. By ensuring access to justice, upholding human rights, and providing avenues for legal recourse, these institutions contribute significantly to creating stable and secure environments. Failure to integrate justice into security strategies can lead to systemic injustices, erode trust in governance, and ultimately undermine security efforts.

Strengthening the social contract between the government/state institutions and the community: need to build people's confidence that their governments can provide justice and fair resolutions of popular grievances.

A renewed commitment to strengthening human rights and the rule of law requires first the ratification of the regional and international instruments adopted to advance democracy, governance, and human rights. Some countries are yet to ratify the AU Charter promoting democracy, elections, and governance (ACDEG). Beyond ratification, countries must fulfil their treaty obligations by adopting the necessary measures, including legislative, executive and administrative, to ensure the implementation of the principles proclaimed by ACDEG, the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance, as well as all human rights instruments ratified at regional, continental and global levels.

Comprehensive transformative justice processes are essential in post-crisis countries to address past human rights abuses and their root causes. This approach includes truth and reconciliation commissions, reparations programs, and institutional reforms to prevent future abuses. One lesson learned from best practices is the importance of engaging all stakeholders, including victims, perpetrators, civil society, and government, in the design and implementation of these processes. This ensures ownership, inclusivity, and sustainability, leading to long-term peace and stability.[427]

Early warning systems for human rights and justice are crucial, requiring multilateral actors to proactively engage member states in cases of possible or ongoing violations and impunity. Timely intervention can prevent further abuses, mitigate conflict, and uphold the rule of law. By monitoring human rights indicators and swiftly addressing emerging issues, international bodies can help prevent atrocities and promote a culture of accountability and respect for human rights.[428]

Overall, enhancing justice and the rule of law requires a multifaceted approach. This includes conducting needs assessments and providing needs-based technical assistance and capacity building to strengthen justice systems. Increasing the participation of women in the judiciary, transitional justice, and peace processes is also crucial for

425. Sebudubudu, 2019

426. UNDP, 2018

427. International Center for Transitional Justice, 2020

428. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2021

inclusive and effective governance. Addressing gaps in existing normative frameworks, particularly regarding procedure, pre-trial detentions, and obsolete colonial antecedents, is necessary to ensure fairness and efficiency. Elevating the attainment of socio-economic goals in Africa's integration process can prevent challenges associated with access to justice and impunity. Furthermore, addressing socio-economic variables that hinder access to justice, such as poverty and inequality, through targeted developmental initiatives is vital. Lastly, promoting constitutionalism by incorporating core elements like the separation of powers, judicial independence, and Bill of Rights can strengthen governance and accountability.

Addressing impunity in the Sahel is not only a matter of justice but also a cornerstone of effective governance and social cohesion. By strengthening justice systems, promoting the rule of law, and ensuring accountability for human rights violations, countries in the Sahel can build trust among their populations and foster a sense of unity and shared purpose. It is imperative for governments, civil society, and the international community to work together to tackle impunity comprehensively. This includes implementing institutional reforms, supporting transitional justice processes, and addressing the root causes of conflict and inequality. Only through such concerted efforts can the Sahel achieve lasting peace, stability, and prosperity for all its people.

Chapter 7

Unconstitutional Changes and Preservation of Government-Term-limits and Military Coups

Issaka K. Souaré

Abstract

Following three decades of one-party and military rules in most African countries after independence, much of the continent, including in the Sahel, embraced multi-party competitive political systems in the early 1990s. Governance norms, anchored on constitutional ascendence to and preservation of power, contributed to a significant decline in the rate of military coups. However, the continent, and most particularly the Sahel region, has seen an upsurge of military coups in the last five years. This happened against the backdrop of "democratic regression" in many countries of the region, including assaults by democratically elected leaders on term-limit provisions. Some of the military regimes established in this third wave of coups seem to defy established norms, as can be seen in the actions of military leaders in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger through a newly established Alliance of Sahel States. This chapter highlights the dialectics between term-limit provision and military coups and the impact of this on the future of governance, stability and social cohesion in the Sahel.

Key words: governance; term-limits; military coups, social cohesion, stability

Introduction

A few years after gaining independence until 1990, almost all African countries became one-party civilian regimes (de jure or de facto) or non-party military juntas, with the exception of Mauritius and The Gambia. At the end of the Cold War, due to a combination of internal and external pressures, most African countries embraced multi-party competitive political systems. This was anchored on the adoption of constitutionalism and competitive elections as the only legitimate channel to ascend to state power, and the principle of regular alternation at the helm of countries. This latter idea was infused in term-limit provisions in the constitutions of most African countries. It meant that either leaders left office after facing electoral defeat and/or when they exhausted the number of constitutional terms, often two five-year tenures. The combination of these two principles saw many African leaders leave power peacefully, reinforcing the idea that democracy "works", at least in its procedural aspect.[429] This arguably contributed to the decline in the rate of military coups, such that from a high of 25 successful coups in the 1970s, and 15 in each of the two succeeding decades, the rate of successful coups dropped to eight from 2001 to 2010 and further down to six from 2011 to 2020.[430]

One of the arguments often put forth to "justify" the current upsurge of military coups is that there have been many "constitutional coups" that were addressed with finality by African institutions. Whether this governance deficit is the real motivation of military leaders or a mere excuse, there is no denying the fact that its repeated violation or manipulation by civilian leaders provides a pretext to military actors to wage coups and push populations to "applaud" them. Equally, lack of consistency in refusing "coup laundering" (transition of coup-makers into elected leaders) in some countries weakens existing anti-coup norms by exposing African institutions to criticisms of double standards.

429. To date, at least 33 African leaders have left power following electoral defeats. Five of those happened since 2020 (Guinea-Bissau's Josè Mario Vaz in February 2020; Malawi's Peter wa Mutharika in June 2020; Seychelles' Danny Faure in October 2020; Zambia's Edgard Lungu in August 2021 and Liberia's George Weah in December 2023). These numbers do not include those who left power voluntarily in renunciation of further constitutional mandates (e.g. Nelson Mandela of South Africa and Joachim Chissano of Mozambique). Further 33 other leaders have left power in 20 countries after serving their constitutional terms, five of whom did so since 2020 (in Burundi, Cape-Verde, Niger, Kenya and Nigeria). These data are extracted from an original database of the author on leadership changes in Africa since independence. See a full list of these two categories, until December 2016, in Issaka K. Souaré, Les partis politiques de l'opposition en Afrique: la quête du pouvoir (Montreal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2017), pp. 91 and 127.

430. Issaka K. Souaré, « Patterns and Case Studies of Military Coups in Contemporary Africa: 1952-2022," in Adeoye Akinola (ed.), The Resurgence of Military Coups and Democratic Relapse in Africa (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), pp. 113-135.

Indeed, as Afrobarometer surveys show – including as reported in chapter 3 of this volume – the majority of African citizens, particularly in West Africa and the Sahel, consider the term-limit provision an important governance norm that ought to be preserved. This explains why attempts by sitting leaders to manipulate this provision have led to high tensions in most countries and strained social cohesion between citizens supporting and those opposing this act. The crises in Burkina Faso in 1998 and 2014, in Guinea in 2001-2003 and 2020, and in Senegal in 2012 and 2021-2024 are illustrative of this point.[431] Yet, history shows that military regimes, with few exceptions, are not a better alternative to civilian ones, even those that are not so democratic.[432] But as current military regimes seem to defy regional norms and injunctions on the need for a quick return to constitutional order, and regional organizations appear to face difficulties in ensuring that civilian leaders abide by the letter and spirit of term-limit provisions, this begs the important question of the future of democratic governance in the region in the immediate and medium terms.

Complementing the analysis from Afrobarometer surveys and using data on violation and respect of term-limit provisions and on successful military coups in Africa, this chapter is structured into four sections. The first examines the concepts of military coups and term-limits and the state of affairs regarding both phenomena in the region and Africa at large. The second underscores the impact of disrespect of term limit provisions on governance and highlights instances where this has caused tensions and strained social cohesion. The third one looks at the impact of military coups on stability and potential impact of the current trends on future governance in the Sahel. The final section looks at policy implications and offers some recommendations for consideration by various stakeholders, particularly States in the Sahel, ECOWAS, ECCAS and the African Union (AU), and the United Nations which are the most concerned regional organizations.

Conceptualizing term-limits and military coups

Definition of term limit and military coups

This chapter adopts an operational definition of "term-limit" to connote a constitutional provision that restricts the duration that an office holder can remain in position of authority and the number of times this duration or cycle can be repeated with or without interruption.[433] This principle can be observed when the constitution and/or other legal texts of a country limit presidential tenures in terms of their duration in a set number of years. Currently, this oscillates between four (like in Ghana and Nigeria), five (the majority of African countries), six (as in Liberia and, since 2019, in Egypt) and seven (like in Cameroon and Gabon) years. It can be further observed with regard to the number of times this cycle of 4 to 7 years can be repeated. In contemporary Africa, this has ranged from a single (as it was the case for the federal president in Comoros between 2002 and 2018), two (the majority of African countries) or three (the specific case of Seychelles) times. Some countries allow the resetting of the number of terms after at least one tenure out of office (e.g. Cape-Verde), while others strictly limit the number of tenures (like Benin and Guinea), successive or not.

For the purposes of this chapter, a military coup d'état is defined as an illegal overthrow of the actual or prospective holder of the highest level of executive power, and its seizure by a number of defense and/or security officers in a more or less violent or peaceful covert and short operation in which the perpetrators hold power for at least one week or relinquish it voluntarily.[434] This definition and similar ones offered by other authors imply several points. The point on holding power for at least one week is borrowed from Powell and Thyne to distinguish "successful" from aborted coups, but the addition of relinquishing power "voluntarily" is by the author of this chapter.[435] This is because relinquishing power "voluntarily" or after negotiations means that even if coup-makers left office in less than a week, the coup will have been "successful" as they could have held power for more than a week.

The mention of an "actual or prospective" leader takes into account situations whereby the outgoing leader died but putschists moved to prevent the constitutional successor from taking office. This is what happened in Guinea on the passing of Lansana Conté in December 2008, in Togo following the death of Gnassingbé Eyadéma in February 2005, and in Chad when Idriss Déby Itno died in April 2021. In all these cases, the coup prevented the prospective constitutional successor from taking office.[436]

431. While the tension in Burkina Faso and Guinea was about the abolishment of the term limit provision, that of Senegal was about the interpretation of the starting point on the terms of the incumbent leaders, Abdoulaye Wade in 2012 and Macky Sall in 2021-24.

432. Pita Ogaba Agbese, « Soldiers as Rulers: Military Performance, » in G. K. Kieh & P. O. Agbese (eds), The military and politics in Africa: from engagement to democratic and constitutional control (Aldershot and Burlington, Ashgate, 2004), pp. 57-90; John F. Clark, « The decline of the African military coup, » Journal of Democracy, 18 (3), 2007, pp. 141-155; Francis Ikome, Good coups and bad coups: the limits of the African Union's injunction on unconstitutional changes of power in Africa (Pretoria, Institute for Global Dialogue, 2007).

433. See Alexander Baturo and Robert Elgie, "Presidential Term Limits," in Alexander Baturo and Robert Elgie (eds.), The Politics of Presidential Term Limits (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 1-16.

434. Souaré, Patterns of military coups in Contemporary Africa, op cit., p. 115.

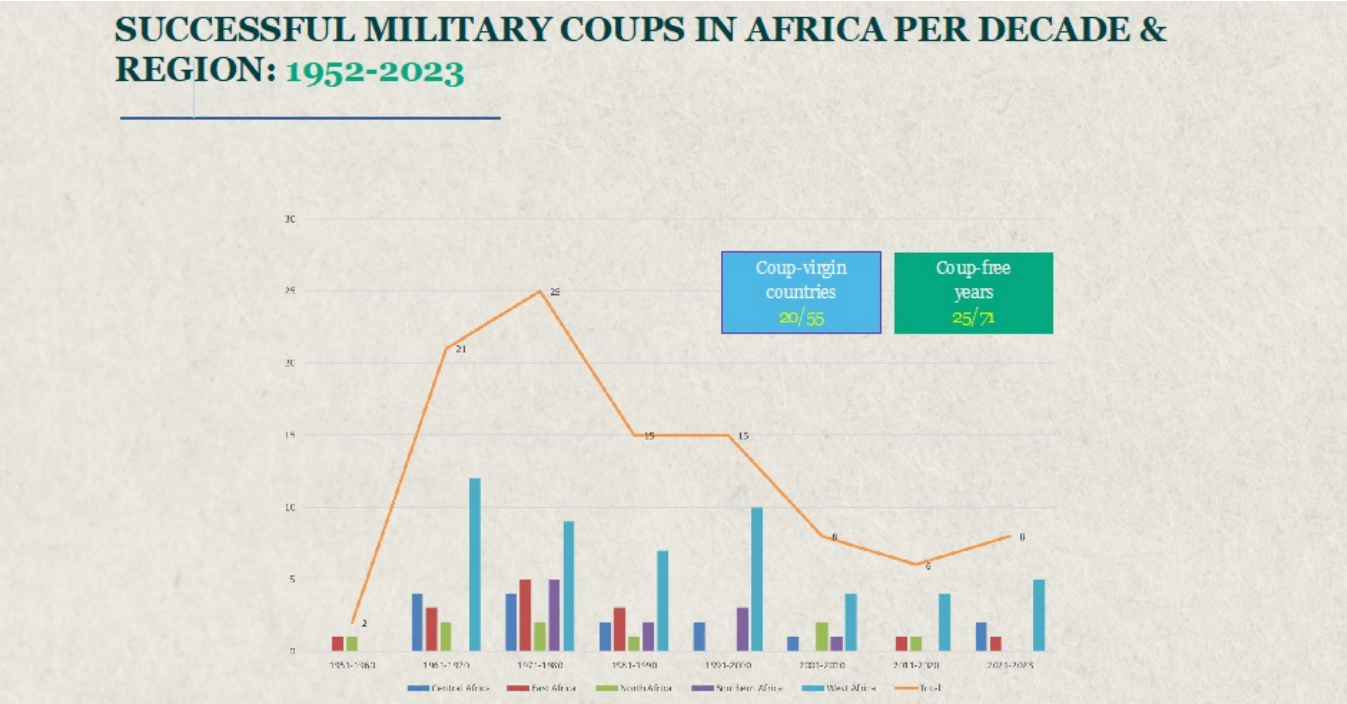
435. Jonathan M Powell and Clayton L Thyne, « Global instances of coups from 1950 to 2010: A new dataset, » Journal of Peace Research, 48 (2): 249-259.

436. Souaré, "Patterns of military coup coups in Africa", op cit.

State of play of term limit and military coups

There has been an upsurge in military coups in Africa in recent years, with the Sahel region being the epicenter of this resurgence since 2020. Since April 2019, seven African countries – Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger and Sudan – have experienced successful military coups. All of them, with the exception of Gabon, are located in what is considered as Sahel in this report. Beyond this short period of time, it is worth noting that Sahelian countries have the largest share of successful coups in post-colonial Africa.[437] The following graphics shows both the resurgent nature of recent coups and the prevalence of the same in West Africa that hosts a majority of Sahel countries.

Graphic 1: Successful military coups in Africa: 1952-2023



Source: Original data and design by the author

Contextualizing these coups in the recent political trajectory of the region – and indeed of the continent – indicates a clear correlation between them and democratic reversals. Indeed, the majority of these coups occurred against the backdrop of a trend of "democratic backsliding" and direct weakening if not regression of democratic process in most of the countries concerned. In other words, the recent coups are both a symptom (as they undermine democratic processes and military regimes do not constitute the solution to bad governance by civilian rulers) and cause of democratic reversals in the region.[438]

One specific democratic principle that has epitomized this "back sliding" has been the assaults on term-limit provisions. This trend of constitutional manipulation has taken two forms. When it started in Burkina Faso in January 1997, leaders proceeded with the outright elimination of the provision, often by removing the term "once" in stipulations that provided, for example, that 'the president is elected for an xx-year term renewable once'. Thus, it just became renewable, at wish. Following the footsteps of Burkina Faso's Blaise Compaoré, this was the process followed in Algeria, Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Togo, Tunisia and Uganda. These countries, apart from Cameroon, Djibouti and Gabon, have now restored the term-limit provision (second year in bracket in Table 1 below).

The second generation of these constitutional manipulations devised a seemingly smarter process. This consists of leaving the term-limit provision intact but carrying out profound changes to the constitution or adopting a brand-new constitution to then argue that the political dispensation has changed. Based on this, they apply the legal principle of non-automatic retroactivity of laws. In other words, they set the clock to zero. This is what was followed in the Republic of Congo (October 2015), Rwanda (December 2015), Côte d'Ivoire (October 2016), Guinea (March 2020) and the Central African Republic (August 2023).[439]

437. The first successful coup in post-colonial Africa was registered in Egypt in July 1952, and the latest one in Gabon in August 2023. See Issaka K. Souaré, 'The African Union as a norm entrepreneur of military coups in Africa, 1952-2012: an empirical assessment,' Journal of Modern African Studies, 52(1), 2014, pp. 69-94; United Nations Development Programme, Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and Democratic Renewal in Africa (Addis Ababa, UNDP, 2023).

438. UNDP, Soldiers and Citizens, op. cit.

439. UNDP, Soldiers and Citizens, op. cit.; Souaré, les partis politiques de l'opposition en Afrique, op. cit., pp. 90-98.



Table 1: Removal of term limit provision by African leaders

BURKINA FASO (JAN. 1997 - 2001)	GUINEA (NOV. 2001 – 2010)	TUNISIA (MAY 2002 – DEC. 2014)
TOGO (DEC. 2002 – 2019)	GABON (JULY 2003)	CHAD (MAY 2004 – DEC. 2020)
UGANDA (SEP. 2005 - 2019)	CAMEROON (APRIL 2008)	ALGERIA (NOV. 2008)
NIGER (AUG. 2009 - 2010)	DJIBOUTI (JANUARY 2010)	

Source: compiled by author

Effects of term-limit suppression on stability and social cohesion

Several leaders have assaulted the term limit provision by either of the two ways mentioned above. This has affected stability and social cohesion in at least three ways:

1. confrontation between those supporting and those opposing the move;
2. election-related violence; and
3. as a midwife of military coups.

Violent confrontations to oppose the move

One way that illustrates the effect of this move on social cohesion is the contestation, by segments of society, of the action targeting the term limit provision. The protest is generally caused by the stand of a segment of the population that this is an important principle for peaceful democratic change and that, for that reason, it should be protected. As leaders seldom lack supporters, the confrontation between "opposition forces" (political parties, civil society organizations and independent media) and supporters of the act often put serious strains on social cohesion in the country. The situations in Guinea (2019-2020), Burkina Faso (2014), and Niger (2009) illustrate this.

In Guinea, former president Alpha Condé's decision to adopt a new constitution to replace the 2010 one in order to have a controversial third term was faced with stern opposition in the country. A National Front for the Defense of the Constitution (FNDC) was established in 2019 when rumors emerged about the project. It is composed of civil society organizations and opposition political parties. They staged protests at times every week. These protests were often met with police repression, with scores of people dying in the process, including security agents.[440]

This affected social cohesion in at least two ways. On the one hand, relatives of those that were killed or arrested became bitter, not only against the government and security officers, but also against other citizens that supported the constitutional reform project. On the other, heated debates that the project generated created a lot of tension between opponents – even those that did not join FNDC protests – and proponents, generally on the democratic or undemocratic character of the project and its potential for instability in the country. These tensions went all the way into Condé's government, as two of his top ministers resigned in protest.[441] These tensions continued after Condé's election for his controversial third term.[442] first weeks after his re-election saw an increased level of crackdown on political opposition figures, with several leaders of FNDC detained. Nightly impromptu visits of police officers and gendarmes in the homes of opposition leaders or individuals suspected of being against the third term also became frequent. It is in this context and against this background that the 5 September 2021 military coup happened.[443]

The case of Burkina Faso is specifically interesting, as it is the first country in Africa whose leader abolished the term limit provision in January 1997. This allowed Compaoré's re-election in November 1998 on the basis of a constitution that did not have a term-limit provision. However, famous investigative journalist, Nobert Zongo, was assassinated the following month in mysterious circumstances that many blamed on the Compaoré regime, because of his criticisms of the regime, including for the constitutional change.[444] This was followed by mass protests which threatened the survival of the regime. In order to partly calm these tensions and acknowledging the correlation between the tensions and the controversial constitutional reform, Compaoré amended the Constitution once more in April 2000

440. Amnesty International, « Guinea: At least 50 people killed with impunity during protests in less than a year," Press Release, 1 October 2020 at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/10/guinee-au-moins-personnes-tues-en-toute-impunite-dans-des-manifestations/ (accessed: 18 July 2024); Aljazeera, "Several killed in Guinea protests against constitution change," Aljazeera News, 14 October 2019 at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/14/several-killed-in-guinea-protests-against-constitution-change (accessed: 17 July 2024)

441. See Diawo Barry, "Guinée : le ministre de la Justice Cheick Sacko a démissionné ," Jeune Afrique, 27 May 2019; Youssouf B. Sylla, "Exclusif : Le ministre Yéro Baldé démissionne du gouvernement Alpha Condé," Guineenews, 27 February 2020.

442. Ilaria Allegrozzi, "The Relentless Crackdown on Guinea's Opposition," Human Rights Watch, 14 December 2020 at https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/12/14/relentless-crackdown-guineas-opposition (accessed: 15 July 2024); Fabien Offner, "Guinea: Defense and security forces killed people in pro-opposition neighbourhoods after presidential election," Amnesty International, 15 December 2020 at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/12/guinea-defense-and-security-forces-killed-people-in-proopposition-neighbourhoods/ (accessed: 14 July 2024); Jeffrey Smith and Jonathan Moakes, "Guinea's Military Coup Was Both Predictable and Avoidable," Argument (Foreign Policy), 14 September 2021 at https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/09/14/guinea-military-coup-abuses-avoidable/ (accessed: 15 July 2024).

443. Foucher, V. and Depagne, R., 'Condé's removal clears the way for army to regain control of Guinea', International Crisis Group, 8 Sep. 2021, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/guinea/alpha-conde-ouvert-la-voie-au-retour-de-larmee-la-tete-de-son-pays (accessed: 15 July 2024).

444. Committee to protect journalists, « Norbert Zongo killed," at https://cpj.org/data/people/norbert-zongo/ (page accessed: 15 July 2024).

by reintroducing the term-limit and reducing the presidential term from seven to five years. This allowed Compaoré to be eligible for two more five-year terms, thus with the possibility to remain in power up to 2015.

However, in 2014, Compaoré wanted yet another amendment of the same clause in order to allow him to stand again after this term, which divided his party and created a lot of tensions in the country, as opposition parties, civil society and youth organizations staged several massive street demonstrations from January 2014 to reject the proposed amendments.[445] These protests continued and climaxed on 30 October 2014, the date set for the National Assembly to vote for the change. On this day, demonstrators stormed parliament buildings, set them on fire and chased away legislators that had gathered there. The whole saga ended with President Compaoré's forced resignation and fleeing from the country to neighboring Côte d'Ivoire.[446]

Another illustration of the effect of this action on social cohesion is the decision of the transition authorities that replaced Compaoré to ban the latter's political party and prohibit it from taking part in the elections aimed at putting an end to the transition, as well as "anyone who supported" the move.[447] Many of the latter deemed this "unfair", as they were ostracized in society. They took the matter to the ECOWAS Court of Justice that asked the transition authorities to reverse the ban.[448]

Box 1: Niger: when ECOWAS sanctioned a sitting leader

In Niger, President Mamadou Tandja's last constitutional term was ending in December 2009. From the beginning of the same year, he initiated a controversial process of constitutional amendment that would have allowed him to stay in office beyond his constitutional term. His supporters dubbed the initiative as "Tazarché", meaning "continuity" in Hausa. It was so divisive and strenuous for social cohesion in the country, as President Tandja dissolved the Supreme Court whose members had ruled against his bid to remain in office. He further dissolved parliament; many members of which were in opposition to his project. He muzzled the press and arrested scores of opposition leaders and supporters.[449] The populations in Niger were sharply divided and polarized, between pro and anti-Tazarché and it strained Niger's relations with many of its international partners, particularly ECOWAS and the AU who had made significant diplomatic efforts to dissuade the president.[450]

At an extraordinary summit held on 17 October 2009, ECOWAS leaders "called on the authorities in Niger to desist from further acts that may deepen divisions within the country and exacerbate the political atmosphere" (italics mine).[451] In the face of Tandja's intransigeance, the West African regional bloc eventually sanctioned Niger by suspending its membership, considering the constitutional change in August 2009 as a case of unconstitutional change – I would say preservation – of government. In its decision, ECOWAS indicated that the suspension will be "in force until constitutional legality is restored in the country".[452] Like in Guinea in 2021, it was in this context that a military coup toppled President Tandja on 18 February 2010.[453]

445. Rémi Carayol, « Burkina Faso : l'histoire mouvementée de l'article 37, » Jeune Afrique, 27 January 2014 at https://www.jeuneafrique.com/165946/politique/burkina-faso-l-histoire-mouvement-e-de-l-article-37/ (accessed : 10 July 2024).

446. Nina-Kathrin Wienkoop and Eloise Bertrand, "Popular Resistance to Authoritarian Consolidation in Burkina Faso," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 16 May 2018 at https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/16/popular-resistance-to-authoritarian-consolidation-in-burkina-faso-pub-76363; ECOWAS, Communiqué of the Extraordinary summit of the conference of heads of states and government on the situation in Burkina Faso, Accra, Ghana, 6 November 2014 at https://www.ecowas.int/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2014-Extra-Nov-2014.pdf; AU-Peace and Security Council, Communiqué of the 465th meeting PSC/PR/COMM.(CDLXV), held in Addis Ababa on 3rd November 2014, and of the 468th meeting PSC/PR/COMM.(CDLXVIII), held in Addis Ababa on 18 November 2014; United Nations, "Secretary-General's message to the Extraordinary Summit of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) [delivered by Mr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa," Press Statement, 6 November 2014 at https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2014-11-06/secretary-generals-message-extraordinary-summit-economic-community (accessed: 5 May 2024).

447. Mathieu Bonkoungou, Joe Bavier and Robin Pomeroy, « Burkina Faso suspends ex-leader Compaoré's political party," Reuters, 15 December 2014 at https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN0JT27T/; David Smith, "Power struggle in Burkina Faso after Blaise Compaoré resigns as president," The Guardian (UK), 1 November 2014 at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/31/burkina-faso-president-blaise-compaore-ousted-says-army

448. ECOWAS Court of Justice, Law Report (2015), CCJELR, "Congrès pour la Démocratie et le Progrès (CDP) & Ors. Vs Burkina Faso," Decision ECW/CCJ/APP/19/15 - ECW/CCJ/JUG/16/15, pp. 295 – 314 at http://www.courtecowas.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/CCJE-LAW-REPORT-2015-ENGLISH.pdf; Reuters, « Court scraps electoral ban on Burkina Faso leader's supporters," Reuters, 14 July 2015 at https://www.reuters.com/article/world/court-scraps-electoral-ban-on-burkina-faso-leader-s-supporters-idUSKCN0PO017/

449. Adam Nossiter, « Niger Senses a Threat to Its Scrap of Democracy, » New York Times, 13 July 2009 at https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/world/africa/14niger.html

450. see "ECOWAS delegation in Niger to deliver message from Chairman of Authority," ECOWAS Press Release no.: 047/2009, 2 June 2009 at: http://news.ecowas.int/presseshow.php?nb=047&lang=en&annee=2009; AU PSC, Communiqué of the 207th meeting at the level of Heads of States and Government," 29 October 2009 at https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/communiquenigereng.pdf; Abdoulaye Massalatchi, « Niger anti-referendum protests turn violent," Reuters, 1 June 2009 at https://www.reuters.com/article/economy/niger-anti-referendum-protests-turn-violent-idUSL185227/

451. See the Communiqué of the extraordinary summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government, Abuja, 17 October 2009.

452. Reliefweb, « ECOWAS suspends Niger from membership of organization," Reliefweb, 21 October 2009 at https://reliefweb.int/report/niger/ecowas-suspends-niger-membership-organisation; "West Africa: ECOWAS Suspends Niger for Defying Election Ban," The Monitor (Nigeria), 20 October 2009 at https://allafrica.com/stories/200910220193.html.

453. AU-PSC, Communiqué of the 216th meeting of the PSC on the situation in Niger, 19 February 2010 at https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/communique-niger-eng.pdf

Similar tensions, at varying degrees, were observed in almost all other countries whose leaders attempted or succeeded in amending their constitution with the aim of scrapping or by-passing the term limit provision.[454]

Election-related violence

The second way in which the suppression of term limit impacts stability and social cohesion is when it contributes to election-related violence, which is often orchestrated by political actors in contestation of real or perceived electoral fraud.[455] When there is election-related violence, social cohesion is a prime victim, because such violence pitches different segments of the society against one another, based on their political support lines, or being caught in the cross-fire. Touching the term limit provision contributes to this because it raises the stakes of the subsequent elections and affects the behaviour and calculus of all the actors.

For the opposition, it removes what can be called the "shadow of the future" and makes the prospect of peaceful change of government difficult. This is likely to generate a situation whereby instead of opposition actors waiting for the next elections to get a peaceful and legitimate regime change, they might be tempted to resort to violence in order to get representation.[456] On the part of the incumbent leaders who will have successfully orchestrated the change, winning the subsequent election becomes a matter of "personal honour" and to win by "all means". The confrontation of these two logics inevitably leads to violence, unless the power balance is overwhelmingly tilted in favor of the incumbent leader.

The widespread violence seen in the run-up and during the 2020 presidential elections in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire and the unprecedented violence seen in Senegal between March 2021 and the March 2024 presidential election are illustrative of this point. In each of these cases, tens of people were left dead and hundreds injured, including among the security forces.[457]

Midwifing military coups

The third way in which tampering with the term limit provision poses a risk to stability and social cohesion is when, considered as part of a pattern of democratic reversal, it creates favorable grounds for coup-makers to justify their enterprise. This does not mean that this action will inevitably and in all circumstances lead to a coup. Nor does it even prove that it constitutes a verifiable motivation of coup-makers, as the latter may only use discontent with overthrown regimes as an excuse for other covert motives, including personal ones. But as seen above, if there had not been a controversial third term for the presidents of Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea in 2020, the coup would most likely not have happened in Guinea. ECOWAS would have been in a better political and moral position to either prevent the coup in Mali or end the military phase of the transition quicker, as it did in 2012 in the same country. Likewise, there most likely would not have been a coup in Burkina Faso.

It is against this backdrop that one can understand the efforts of ECOWAS to review its 2001 Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance to have a region-wide ban on third terms for presidents. Yet this reform has been stalled since 2015 due to resistance from certain leaders.[458] Yet this reform is important in the current context because ECOWAS was able to sanction Niger in 2009 given that the constitutional change engineered by Mamadou Tandja happened within the six-month window provided by the supplementary protocol during which it is prohibited to carry out any substantive changes to the laws related to elections without large consensus among the socio-political actors of the country. Other leaders (such as the Guinean and Ivoirian leaders) learned from this and operated their changes well before the six-month perimeter, thereby rendering the regional bloc "impotent" against their act from a legal point of view.[459]

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454. Daniel N Posner and Daniel J. Young, « The Institutionalization of Political Power in Africa, » Journal of Democracy, 18(3), July 2007, pp. 126-140; Souaré, les partis politiques de l'opposition en Afrique, op cit, pp. 90-98.

455. Jeff Fischer, « Electoral Conflict and Violence: A Strategy for Study and Prevention », IFES White Paper 2002-01, Washington, D.C., International Foundation for Election Systems, 2002, p. 3.

456. Andrew Reynolds and Timothy D. Sisk, "Elections and Electoral Systems: Implications for Conflict Management," in Timothy D. Sisk and Andrew Reynolds (eds.), Elections and Conflict Management in Africa, (Washington, United States Institute of Peace press, 1998O, pp. 11 – 36; Baturo and Elgie, op cit., p. 10.

457. Sebastian van Baalen and Abel Gbala, « Patterns of Electoral Violence During Côte D'Ivoire's Third-Term Crisis, » African Affairs, 122 (488), July 2023, pp. 447–460; Amnesty International, "Côte d'Ivoire: The use of machetes and guns reveals horrors of post-election violence," Press Release, 16 November 2020 at https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2020/11/cote-divoire-use-of-machetes-and-guns-reveals-horrors/; Human Rights Watch, "Guinea: Post-Election Violence, Repression," News Release/Report, 19 November 2020 at https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/19/guinea-post-election-violence-repression#:~:text=(New%20York)%20–%20The%20post,demonstrations%20in%20the%20capital%2C%20Conakry; BBC, "Guinea elections: Alpha Condé wins third term amid violent protests," BBC News, 24 October 2022 at https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54657359; Aljazeera, "UN, AU call for calm as death toll in Senegal violence rises," Aljazeera news, 3 June 2023 at https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/3/un-au-call-for-calm-as-death-toll-in-senegal-violence-rises; Théa Ollivier, "Au Sénégal, la crainte d'une « banalisation de la violence », Le Monde, 3 August 2023 at https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2023/08/03/au-senegal-la-crainte-d-une-banalisation-de-la-violence_6184352_3212.html

458. Aissatou Kanté et al., « Rethinking responses to unconstitutional changes of government in West Africa » West Africa Report 50, Institute for Security Studies, June 2024, p. 23.

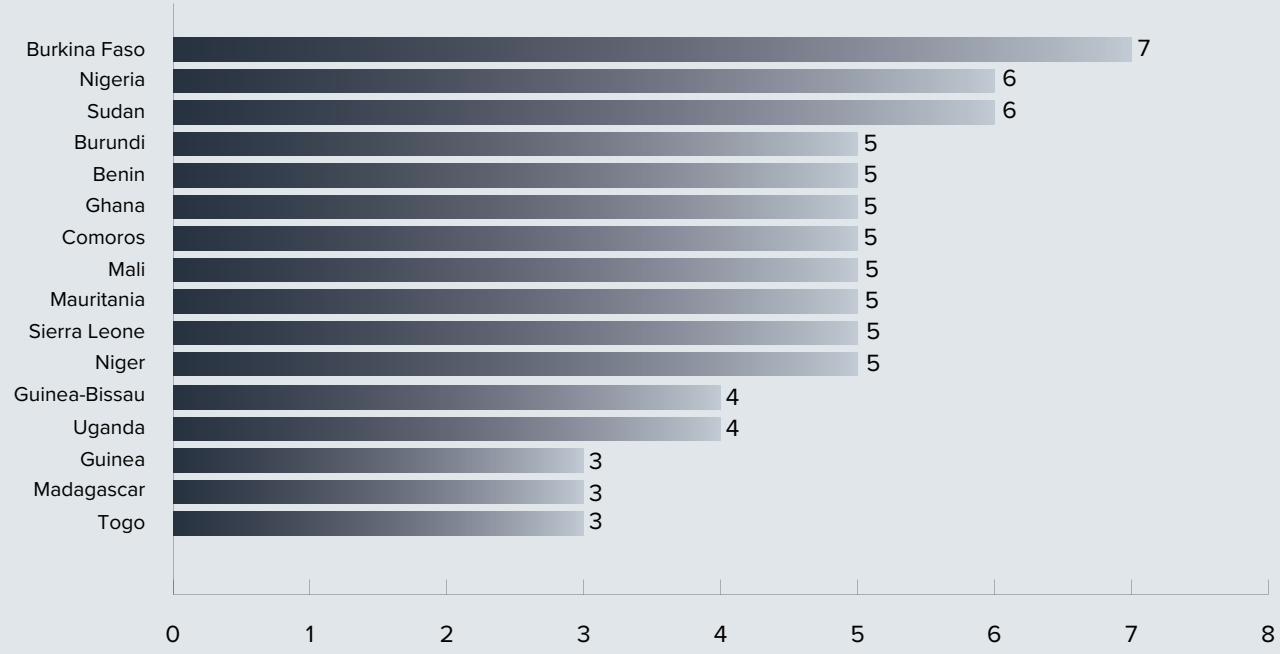
459. Aissatou Kanté et al., op cit, p. 8.


TOYOTA

Impact of military coups on stability and future governance

Sahelian countries constitute the overwhelming majority of the top 16 coup-prone countries in Africa. As it can be seen in graphic 2 below, this list is composed of countries that have experienced three or more successful military coups. Of the nine successful coups that have been registered on the continent since 2020, all but two (Sudan's and Gabon's) were registered in the region. Those are the two coups in Mali (2020 and 2021), the two coups in Burkina Faso (2022), and the coups in Chad (2021), Guinea (2021) and Niger (2023).

Graphic 2: Top coup-prone countries in Africa by 2023



Source: compiled by the author

Impact on economic stability

Military coups affect stability in the region on both political and economic fronts. On the economic one, the effect is particularly felt on business environment and investor confidence, especially long-term investors (both foreign and national) who may be discouraged from investing in the country due to uncertainties with new regimes. In the already cited UNDP report of 2023, it was found that the recent coups and subsequent political responses have discouraged investors and curtailed economic activities.[460] Through a citizens' survey carried out in 2022 in some of these countries as part of the study, it is reported that the majority of respondents in Burkina Faso, for example, "maintained that the coup tarnished the country's international image and disrupted the rebuilding process that had been underway since 2014". One respondent noted that the coup "... has undermined the democratic status of the country and sent Burkina Faso 10 years backwards, if not more". [461]

Impact on political stability

The political impact can first be seen in the disruption of the regular governance system. Notwithstanding the circumstances of their occurrence, it is evident that the coups registered in recent years disrupted the regular functioning of the states concerned.

460. UNDP, Soldiers and Citizens, op cit., p. 59.

461. Ibid, p. 54.

Box 2: Disruption of regular state functioning in Mali and Niger

The coups of March 2012 in Mali and July 2023 in Niger clearly illustrate the subject of this box. In both countries, they overthrew presidents who were democratically elected and were the first to have succeeded another democratically elected president. They broke a tradition that was being established in terms of leadership changes in their respective countries. That tradition is that when a president has respected the term limit provision and left power, succeeding leaders should equally follow suit and respect the term limit provision. It's a tradition that has since crystallized into a precedent across the continent.. In other words, in all the 20 countries where some 33 African leaders have left power in respect of the term limit provision, that precedent has so far been respected since 1990. Only the aforementioned two military coups have broken that. In Mali, Alpha Oumar Konaré had left power after serving his two terms (1992-2002) and his elected successor, Amadou Toumani Touré, was only a few weeks from the end of his last term when he was overthrown by a military coup on 22 March 2012. In Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou had left office after two successive terms (2011-2021) and his successor, Mohamed Bazoum, was only in his second year when he was overthrown in July 2023.[462]

A second instance where the impact of military coups can be seen on political stability is that coups cannot be regulated. Thus, if left unchecked and normalized, countries will be at risk of counter-coups at any time, as was the case prior to the adoption of the first continental anti-coup normative instrument through the Lomé Declaration in July 2000. In fact, data shows that 30 percent of successful coups on the continent were military-on-military coups, or counter-coups.[463]

The combination of these two considerations of the impact of military coups on political stability is what arguably led to the development of continental anti-coup norms. In the preamble of the Lomé Declaration, African leaders state that 'coups are sad and unacceptable developments… coming at a time when our people have committed themselves to respect of the rule of law based on peoples' will expressed through the ballot and not the bullet' (emphasis added). This provision of the Lomé Declaration of zero tolerance for military coups is carried forward in the Constitutive Act of the AU (article 30) and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Government (ACDEG Articles 23-25), as well as in the ECOWAS Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.[464]

In fact, and most compellingly, Article 187 of the new constitution of Mali, adopted in July 2023 under the leadership of a military junta, clearly stipulates: "any military coup or putsch is an imprescriptible crime against the Malian people". This means that even authors of military coups agree that their enterprise is an "anomaly", unless they are in the logic of considering themselves as an emergency vehicle that is exceptionally allowed to pass through red lights.

General Mahamat Idris Déby fielded his candidacy and was declared the winner of the 6 May 2024 presidential election in Chad. Should other military regimes successfully emulate him, thus could have serious impacts on political stability in the region, in general, and in the countries concerned, specifically. If this happens against the backdrop of ignoring the current normative instruments, the risk of instability will be high in the medium to long term. This will be so because the situation would be like someone who managed to poison feared dogs and guards (i.e. current anti-coup norms) that were protecting a throne he wanted to ascend to, but finds himself sitting on a well exposed throne. We know this because experiences show that the dwindling trend of military coups between 2001 and 2020 was arguably due to the combination of the effect of these norms (that were strictly and consistently applied) and the upholding of certain democratic principles, particularly the routinization of peaceful leadership changes, as noted above.

Conclusion and policy recommendations

The central point of this chapter is that political governance in the Sahel is currently faced with several challenges. The lack of respect by some civilian leaders for the principle of peaceful and regular democratic alternation of power and the intrusion of the military in the political sphere are two intertwined and significant elements of these challenges.

462. UNDP, Soldiers and Citizens, op cit., p. 67. If one adds South Africa to this list, given that both Thabo Mbeki (1999-2008) and Jacob Zuma (2009-2018) were recalled by their party just about a year before the end of their final constitutional terms and there were no signs that they want to temper with this provision, then the number of the countries would be 21 and leaders 35. Cape-Verde and Tanzania (and soon Ghana) are champions on this list, with three successive leaders who have left office in each of them in respect of this provision.

463. Souaré, Patterns of military coups, op cit.

464. For an in-depth analysis of the rationale of these normative prescriptions, see Souaré, The AU as a norm entrepreneur, op cit.

The provision of term-limits is an important element of the first challenge, which Sahelian (and other African) countries adopted to facilitate such changes. The problem arises when leaders tamper with this. Opposition to such attempts by segments of society often pitches them against others who support the design of their leaders. Social cohesion, in this regard, becomes the first victim, particularly when confrontations between these two camps become violent. The result of this act and other shortcomings in governance have been used by military officers to justify their intervention in politics. This goes against established norms that military officers seem to acknowledge, as they argue that they were "forced" to intervene supposedly to "salvage" the country's democratic system and its social cohesion. Yet military coups have serious impacts on countries' economic and political stability.

ECOWAS and ECCAS are the two regional organizations to which the majority of Sahel countries belong, but the latter does not yet have any clear legal instruments on the issue of term limits, contrary to ECOWAS. Both have instruments on the military's intrusion in politics and all African countries are bound by the normative instruments of the AU in this regard.

The following policy recommendations are made to contribute to overcoming these two challenges and preserving stability and social cohesion.

On the issue of term limits:

1.

West African leaders who have so far blocked the adoption of the revised version of the ECOWAS supplementary protocol on democracy and good governance should take cognizance of the challenges they are posing to the organization and be persuaded to allow the passing of this reform. Far from being a panacea for all governance issues, this would give a clear legal instrument to the regional bloc to call defaulting civilian leaders to order and protect this important element that Afrobarometer surveys have shown that many West African citizens consider imperative for the quality of democratic systems. This, in turn, and its effective implementation would go a long way to pacifying the region, restoring public trust in the democratic systems and removing an important pretext from would-be coup-makers.

2.

The Gambia is so far the only West African country that does not have a term limit provision in its constitution but is trying since 2017 to introduce it in a new constitution. Other leaders operated changes to their constitutions before the six-month window of the ECOWAS Supplementary protocol, which allowed them to reset the clock on the term limit provision. Côte d'Ivoire and Togo are in this category. This means that the current leaders of these three countries can still vie for further terms in office from a purely legal point of view. Despite this legal standing – though questionable by some – these three leaders and anyone who may want to follow in their footsteps should be aware that their actions would be politically incorrect and can weaken the regional organization in its ambition to promote and protect standards of democratic governance. They should therefore be persuaded against going for any further terms in office, as their ordinary citizens are not aware of these legal technicalities and can only count the number of terms they have served in office.

3.

For the countries in the Central African region, ECCAS should strive to convince its member states to emulate ECOWAS in the spirit of the joint summit both organizations held in July 2018 and in view of the fact that citizens of its member states have the same aspirations as those in West Africa. The same effort requested of individual West African states above applies to their Central African counterparts who are in a similar situation.

On military coups and military transitions:

1.

Chad's transition president stood in the 6 May 2024 elections and emerged the winner, contrary to AU injunctions.[465] This could inspire his counterparts in other Sahelian countries to do the same, resulting in immediate negative consequences on social cohesion in the countries concerned and significant impact on political stability in the short to medium term, including counter-coups. Such leaders should therefore desist from this.

2.

Benin, Ghana and Nigeria were among the top coup-prone countries in West Africa but there has not been any single coup in these countries since October 1972, December 1981 and November 1993, respectively. It does not mean their political leaders do not make mistakes, but their military leaders seem to have come to the conclusion that what happens in the political sphere is not their business. This is the example to be emulated by others.

3.

The AU and relevant regional organizations and other concerned multilateral partners, particularly the UN, should ensure consistency and coherence in the treatment of cases of military coups and other forms of unconstitutional changes of government to avoid claims of double standard that may weaken their standing in popular perceptions.

4.

The AU and regional organizations should ensure their financial autonomy, as rightly highlighted by Amandine Gnanguênon in this volume. This would allow them to make opportune interventions in member states, supporting their socio-economic and security needs. Such actions would give them carrot and stick powers vis-à-vis their member states and avoid situations like the accusations levied by Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger against ECOWAS that the latter focuses on the management of their transitions while neglecting the security challenges they are facing. To do this, ECOWAS should reactivate the community levy that has proven successful in the past, while the AU should push for the effective implementation of the 0,02 percent direct levy on customs fees in member states agreed in 2016. Moreover, capable countries should step in to provide more funds beyond their regular contributions, as Nigeria did so in the past for ECOWAS, and Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Nigeria and South Africa have done for the AU.

5.

Despite their violation of established governance norms, countries in military transitions should be assisted to implement consensually agreed transition roadmaps as a way to help them restore constitutional order. The Africa Facility to Support Inclusive Transitions established in July 2023 by the AU commission and UNDP can be an important instrument in this regard. Some of the decisions taken by the 24 February 2024 summit of ECOWAS go in the same direction.

465. See the communiqués of the 14 May 2021 and 11 May 2023 meetings of the Peace and Security Council of the AU at www.peaceau.org

7 RETHINKING GOVERNANCE

Chapter 8

Digital Opportunities for Youth Engagement and Governance

Gbenga Sesan

Abstract

By 2030, African youth are expected to represent 42% of the global young population,[466] offering unique opportunities for enhanced governance and public engagement. As this demographic grows, traditional policies may fall short, necessitating adaptation to tackle issues such as governance, service delivery, unemployment, skills development, education and leveraging digital opportunities. Failure to address these challenges could lead to discontent and decline in the social cohesion, development and stability trajectory of the Sahel as well as a loss of public trust as is already evident. Digital growth is occurring despite low internet penetration, primarily in urban centers, so integrating digital technologies, especially in the Sahel region, is crucial for Africa's youthful demographic landscape. This chapter explores how to build on existing opportunities to identify policy options and collective action and offers recommendations that emphasize a holistic approach to digital governance in the Sahel, focusing on collaboration, inclusivity, innovation, and human capital development, to ensure sustainable progress and prosperity.

Key words: Governance, Youth, Digital, Opportunity, Sahel, Future

Introduction

Africa has the youngest population in the world, and twenty-five countries with the lowest median age.[467] By 2030, African youth will make up 42% of the total number of young people in the world.[468] This youth bulge has implications for society, including governance and how the public engages in public and development processes including service delivery. As the youth population grows, countries increase their potential while governance may face more challenges in adequately representing and addressing the diverse needs of this demographic group. Traditional policies and structures seem to be inadequate, and require adaptation to address issues such governance, service delivery, unemployment and education in a region which is facing fast population growth and an increased need for modern technology solutions. Inter-generational tensions and cultural shifts are impacting public trust and social harmony and challenging existing norms. Public trust is at stake, with the growing youth population demanding more transparency and accountability from institutions and leaders.

Failure to meet these expectations results in discontent and erosion of public trust, which led to some of the youth-led protests in countries like Nigeria and Senegal, discussed later in this chapter. Addressing youth unemployment, skills development and fostering innovation is therefore crucial for economic stability and growth and in effect fostering public trust and social cohesion. Strategic investments in education, opportunities for socioeconomic development including skill enhancement are imperative to harness the demographic dividend, create a conducive space for inclusive development and unlock the potential of this youthful population. In navigating these challenges, governments should balance the aspirations of the youth with public and societal expectations, fostering communication, trust and adapting policies to ensure relevance and inclusivity in public and development endeavors. The demographic dividend can be transformative if adequately considered and accompanied by proactive governance, innovative solutions, and investments in education. Successfully managing this youth bulge is essential for not only securing social cohesion and public trust but also unlocking the economic and innovative potential inherent in Africa's youthful demographic landscape.

466. Population Reference Bureau, 2019 (https://www.prb.org/resources/africas-future-youth-and-the-data-defining-their-lives/)

467. Statista, 2023 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/1121264/median-age-in-africa-by-county/#:~:text=Africa%20has%20the%20youngest%20population,was%20younger%20and%20half%20older.)

468. Population Reference Bureau, 2019 (https://www.prb.org/resources/africas-future-youth-and-the-data-defining-their-lives/)

Young people in the Sahel have taken advantage of advances in technology infrastructure to build services that have attracted investments. However, this digital growth is happening amidst low digital penetration on the continent, as well as digital connectivity that is largely restricted to commercial cities. Among the key challenges is the limited access to energy in the Sahel where two-thirds of the population do not have access to electricity, with great regional disparities as well as resource and infrastructural constraints. In some Sahel countries such as Senegal, access levels reach up to 70% while only 8% of the population in Chad has access to electricity.[469] The substantial gap in electricity access between Senegal and Chad accentuates regional inequalities but also demonstrates that the Sahel is not a homogeneous region hence the need for diligence in addressing its development needs. This divergence not only impedes the youth's ability to access and leverage technology but also poses challenges to governance, public trust, and social cohesion. The disparity in technological access underscores the need for concerted efforts to address energy and digital literacy inequalities for a more equitable and inclusive development across the region. This creates two parallel worlds of young people moving faster than their governments can appreciate, and struggling governments that need to act fast to bring good governance and opportunities to a digitally savvy youth population, fostering a collaborative environment that can harness the region's full potential.

The Sahel region, a vast expanse stretching across the African continent, has long been a mosaic of resilience and cultural diversity despite the many challenges that it has faced and continues to face. As the world continues an unavoidable journey into the digital age, especially given the acceleration of digitization to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sahel stands at a critical juncture, a land of promise waiting to be unlocked through the transformative power of technology and digitization. It is important to explore the role of appropriate technology – not just popular technology or using technology for its sake – in digitization projects, the potential of eGovernance, and the transformative power of harnessing the human capital of self-taught youth. The Sahel's unique socio-economic and environmental challenges necessitate a nuanced approach to technology adoption. In an era where technological solutions abound, the need to focus on "appropriate technology" becomes important because it is not just about introducing the latest gadgets; but rather about tailoring these innovations to the specific needs and contexts of the region.

Digital Growth and Appetite

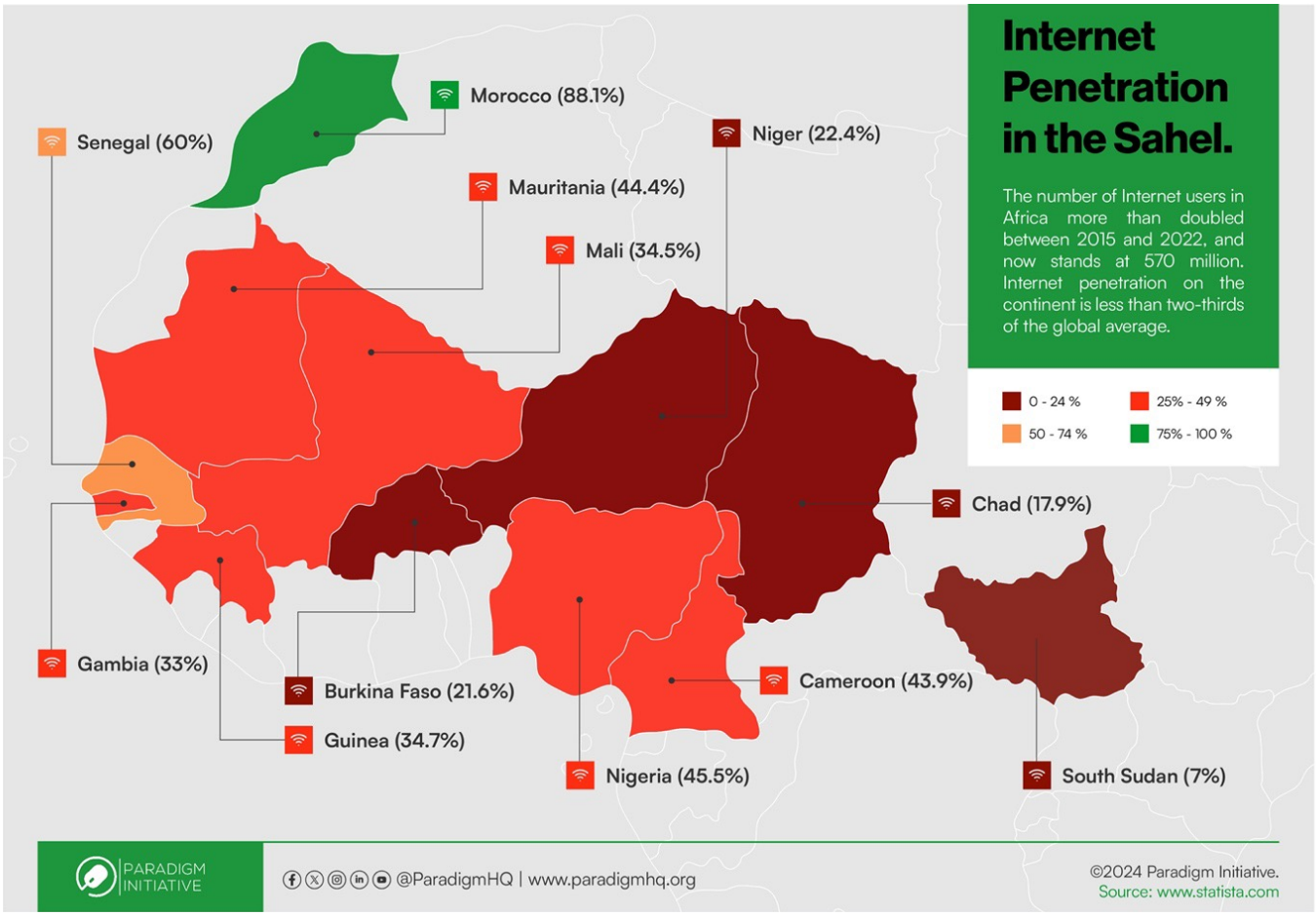
The number of Internet users in Africa more than doubled between 2013 and 2023, growing from only 16% in 2013 to 37% in 2023.[470] Granted, internet penetration on the continent is less than two-thirds of the global average. Within the continent, internet penetration ranges from 7% in South Sudan to 88.1% in Morocco as of January 2023. Apart from Cameroon, Mauritania, Nigeria and Senegal – who all have about half of their citizens connected to the internet – all other countries in the Sahel have very low internet penetration. Burkina Faso has a penetration of 21.6%, Chad 17.9%, The Gambia 33%, Guinea 34.7%, Mali 34.5%, and Niger 22.4%.[471] With a regional average of 37% and global average of 67%, much of the Sahel is missing out on digital opportunities in education, entrepreneurship, and civic participation. The disparity also suggests that regional efforts to enhance internet infrastructure and accessibility are crucial to bridging this gap. Moreover, the significant difference between countries within the Sahel points to uneven development and resource allocation, necessitating targeted policies to ensure more equitable internet access.

469. International Energy Agency, Clean Energy Transitions in the Sahel, https://iea.blob.core.windows.net/assets/e41015b1-4399-4635-a95a-d6769d0f319a/CleanEnergyTransitionsintheSahel.pdf, p12, 2022

470. EcoFin Agency, 2024 (https://www.ecofinagency.com/telecom/2702-45230-africas-internet-use-doubles-in-decade-despite-high-costs-report)

471. Statista, 2023 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/1124283/internet-penetration-in-africa-by-country/)





The integration of digital technologies in governmental processes and services, or e-governance, has emerged as critical for citizens engagement and participation in governance and service delivery which is key for fostering public trust and social cohesion. The growing youth population raises new demands, necessitating innovative approaches to address diverse needs such as access to decent livelihoods, information, feedback, quality and timely services, and education. Traditional governance structures have been inadequate in meeting these demands, requiring adaptation to ensure transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the aspirations of the youth. Failure to engage effectively with this demographic not only risks eroding public trust but also undermines social cohesion, highlighting the imperative for proactive e-governance strategies. As young people in the Sahel increasingly gravitate towards digital platforms, the role of e-governance in fostering inclusive participation and responsive governance becomes paramount in navigating the complexities of the region's demographic landscape.

Moreover, the rapid expansion of internet usage across Africa, albeit with varying levels of penetration, underscores the growing influence of digital technologies on citizen engagement and demands for accountable governance. In the Sahel, where internet penetration remains relatively low compared to other regions, the connected youth represent a potent force driving digital consumption and shaping citizen-government interactions. The rise of citizen movements leveraging digital platforms to advocate for better governance, such as those described in the next section of this chapter, highlights the transformative potential of e-governance in amplifying citizen voices and promoting participatory democracy. As young people increasingly leverage digital tools to articulate their demands and organize collective action, the effective implementation of e-governance initiatives becomes indispensable in fostering trust, inclusivity, and social cohesion.

The Sahel's demography implies that many of the connected are young, which explains the appetite for digital tools and services to fill existing digital opportunity gaps.[472] The connected few drive digital consumption and, by extension, how citizens want to engage with governance. This explains some of the recent and prominent citizen movements in Africa's virtual public sphere, most of which focused on citizen demands for government accountability. Beginning with the prevalence of mobile internet services in many African countries just before 2010, young people took to the virtual public square to ask for better governance, using hashtags on social media and taking advantage of digital tools to coordinate activities offline.

472. UNDP, "'Don't do anything for us without us', youth urge in decisive message at inaugural YouthConnekt Sahel Forum 2021," December 9, 2021 (https://www.undp.org/africa/press-releases/"don't-do-anything-us-without-us"-youth-urge-decisive-message-inaugural-youthconnekt-sahel-forum-2021)

Digital Opportunities for Civic Action

Nigeria saw massive youth-led protests tagged #EnoughIsEnough in 2010, followed by the #OccupyNigeria protests in 2012, and similar technology-enabled activities were happening in other African countries, with virtual public sphere conversations leading to offline action. The proliferation of social media platforms has significantly transformed how citizens engage with politics and protest against government actions. X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and other platforms now provide ordinary citizens with the tools to disseminate information and mobilize like never before. From #YenAMarre in Guinea and Senegal in 2012, to #ÇaSuffit ("that's enough") and #LeBalaiCitoyen ("the citizen's broom") in Burkina Faso in 2014, Nigeria's #BringBackOurGirls in 2014, #FeesMustFall in South Africa in 2015, and #GambiaHasDecided in 2016, citizens used social media to hold governments accountable. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter, #CongoIsBleeding, #ShutItAllDownNamibia, #FixTheCountry in Ghana, #EndAnglophoneCrisis in Cameroon and the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria also demonstrate how young Africans see the relationship between the virtual public sphere and governance.

The #OccupyNigeria movement, which began in 2012, was a response to the Nigerian government's decision to remove fuel subsidies, resulting in a significant increase in fuel prices. This move sparked outrage and led to widespread protests across the country. The digital age allowed activists to coordinate and communicate effectively through social media platforms. Hashtags like #OccupyNigeria and #FuelSubsidyRemoval became rallying cries that united citizens in their resistance to the government's actions. The protests were heavily documented, and real-time updates were shared through social media channels. Protesters used Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to share images, videos, and personal stories, both exposing government actions and mobilizing support. The digital public sphere became a powerful tool for organizing protests and galvanizing a diverse range of voices against a common cause. The protests led to: increased awareness around corruption, the reversal of the increased fuel price, the House of Representatives producing a report following its investigations into the fraudulent fuel subsidy regime, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission prosecuting 20 oil marketers linked to the fraud, and a changed relationship between government and citizens.[473]

In Senegal, the #YenAMarre movement emerged in 2011, protesting political corruption and advocating for youth empowerment. Led by a group of young activists, this movement harnessed the power of technology to mobilize and engage the younger generation in politics. Using social media platforms, they organized protests, shared information, and encouraged voter registration. The movement's name, which translates to "I'm fed up", reflected the frustration of the youth with the political establishment. Through digital tools, they harnessed the collective energy of a digitally connected generation to challenge the status quo and demand change. Macky Sall secured victory in the 2012 elections, subsequently assuming the role of Senegal's new president. The activism of #YenAMarre and its advocacy for change were widely regarded as crucial factors that shaped public opinion and played a significant role in bringing about a political transformation in the nation. The role played by young people in the 2024 Senegalese elections contributed significantly to the victory of 44-year-old Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar Faye and the continued use of the phrase, "pouvoir au peuple!" ("power to the people!"), in popular description of the election outcome.

Burkina Faso's #LeBalaiCitoyen "The (Citizen's Broom) movement represented a call for sweeping out corruption and promoting citizen engagement. Activists used technology to organize, mobilize, and document their actions. The movement even launched a mobile app that allowed citizens to report instances of corruption. Through social media and technology, #LeBalaiCitoyen created a virtual public sphere where citizens could express their grievances, mobilize for collective action, and advocate for transparency and accountability in government. It demonstrated the potential for technology to empower citizens and transform governance. The protests played a major role in the 2014 uprising that led to the resignation of President Blaise Compaoré, who had ruled for 27 years, and this political change provided an opportunity for a new government to address corruption and accountability issues.

The success of these movements in Nigeria, Senegal, and Burkina Faso showcased the evolving relationship between technology and governance. E-governance, or the use of digital technologies in government processes, became a crucial tool for responding to citizen demands and improving transparency. These movements pressured governments to adopt digital solutions for governance, such as online platforms for citizen engagement, open data initiatives, and e-voting systems. In response to the protests, governments started recognizing the importance of digital channels for effective communication and decision-making.

Extending The Virtual Public Sphere

The #OccupyNigeria, #YenAMarre, #ÇaSuffit, and #LeBalaiCitoyen protests exemplify the transformative impact of technology and digitization on political activism and governance. Social media and the virtual public sphere enabled citizens to coordinate and amplify their voices, leading to real change in their respective countries.

473. Ogala Emmanuel and Ben Ezeamalu, "#OccupyNigeria: One year later, the gains, the losses," January 12, 2013 https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/114890-occupynigeria-one-year-later-the-gains-the-losses.html?tztc=1

Moreover, these movements demonstrated the power of social media and the importance of integrating technology into government processes to address citizen concerns. Such integration not only addresses citizen concerns but also fosters transparency, thereby enhancing public trust and social cohesion. The ongoing interplay between technology and activism in the digital age is likely to continue reshaping political landscapes and citizen engagement in the years to come. For a continent of young people, one major lesson African countries can learn from these movements is that the same tools used to voice dissent could also be used to bridge the gap between government and the governed, and to foster public trust.

The opportunity for citizens to engage in governance processes through the virtual public sphere must not be limited to young people with access to social media but must be extended to every citizen and allow them access through all forms of appropriate technology, including those described as low (or simple) technology – such as text messages which do not need an internet connection for exchanges to happen. This provides an opportunity to extend the perimeters of the virtual public sphere, which, rooted in the works of political and social theorists like Jürgen Habermas, is the online space where citizens and stakeholder groups engage in public discourse, deliberation, and the exchange of information and ideas, similar to the traditional public sphere in the physical world.[474]

In the virtual public sphere, people use digital platforms and communication technologies such as social media, blogs, online forums, and other internet-based tools to participate in discussions, express their opinions, share information, and shape public opinion. Scenarios where online content is taken offline to radio discussions or Town Hall conversations present examples of extended uses of these digital platforms for those who are excluded due to lack of access. The virtual public sphere serves as a forum for democratic participation and the exchange of diverse viewpoints, enabling discussions on various social, political, and cultural issues. The virtual public sphere has both its advantages and challenges. On the one hand, it allows for greater inclusivity, enabling people from various backgrounds and locations to participate in discussions, and it facilitates the rapid dissemination of information. On the other hand, it can also be plagued by phenomena such as echo chambers and filter bubbles, where individuals are exposed only to information and perspectives that align with their existing beliefs and preferences. These phenomena can contribute to the proliferation of disinformation and online harassment, ultimately impeding the quality and diversity of public discourse. These challenges are being addressed through Community Guidelines agreed on between platform users, which means that anyone guilty of spreading hate or disinformation could get deplatformed, and with more focus on the regulation of online platforms, they have become more active in reducing online harms.

The opportunities for transparency and inclusion that the extended virtual public sphere offers make it attractive for communities that prioritize public trust and social cohesion. Social cohesion and public trust are foundational elements of a well-functioning society. They underpin the stability, prosperity, and overall quality of life within a community. However, technology and digitization have fundamentally altered the landscape of social cohesion and public trust, with two key aspects of this transformation being eGovernance and the virtual public sphere. They have done this by facilitating new forms of communication and community-building, exemplified by social media platforms, online forums, and crowdsourcing platforms.

eGovernance has the potential to enhance public trust and social cohesion through transparency, accessibility and accountability. Online platforms and digital tools – especially those that are inclusive and embrace the use of diverse languages and forms of participation – make government actions and decision-making processes more transparent, allowing citizens to monitor and understand the workings of their government. eGovernance can also improve access to government services, making it easier for citizens to interact with public institutions and access essential services. In addition, digital records and online platforms can enhance accountability by providing a clear trail of government actions and decisions. The accessibility of information through digital means not only facilitates public scrutiny but also enables more efficient monitoring by relevant oversight bodies. This enhanced transparency contributes to a culture of accountability, as citizens and stakeholders can easily track government activities, fostering trust and reinforcing the principles of open governance in the digital age.

The virtual public sphere encompasses online spaces where citizens engage in public discourse, share information, and discuss matters of societal importance. It plays a significant role in shaping public trust and social cohesion by facilitating civic engagement, information dissemination and fostering connections. Online platforms enable citizens to engage in political and social discussions, fostering a sense of participation and belonging in the larger community, while the virtual public sphere allows for the rapid dissemination of information, which can enhance transparency and accountability in governance. In addition, online communities and social networks provide opportunities for people to connect, share experiences, and form social bonds, contributing to social cohesion. This has changed the way governance happens in the digital era.

474. Jürgen Habermas and the Public Sphere (https://www.media-studies.ca/articles/habermas.htm#:~:text=Habermas%20defined%20the%20public%20sphere,the%20state%22%20(176).)

Policy Options for Consideration

The policy options that governments need to adopt to promote digital governance as an enabler for enhanced public trust and social cohesion include Digital Inclusion policies, Data Governance frameworks, enhancing Data Protection Authorities (DPAs), introducing Cybersecurity Measures, utilizing Universal Service Funds, investment in Human Capital, support for Digital Startups, and promoting technology-driven solutions.

Digital Inclusion Policies

Governing in the digital era involves adapting traditional governance structures and processes to the challenges and opportunities presented by evolving socio-economic, cultural and political contexts. To broaden the reach of governance, governments now work towards ensuring digital inclusion so that as many citizens as possible have access to and can effectively use digital technologies. This is done through policies that promote increased access and digital literacy, bridging the digital divide, and making government services accessible online. Governments are increasingly using digital platforms to make government services more efficient, accessible, and user-friendly by providing opportunities for digital engagement with citizens, including for services such as tax filing, permit applications, and healthcare.

Data Governance Frameworks

In its recent publication, "Donor Principles for Human Rights in the Digital Age,"[475] the Freedom Online Coalition[476] stated that "Digital government and data management systems include digital platforms that facilitate internal government operations and external service delivery... for healthcare, social services, education, taxation, policing, court systems, or electoral processes; physical data centers and onsite and cloud-based databases that organize, store, and manage citizen data and other information; and data exchange platforms that facilitate the movement of data from one platform or database to another." Since the digital era generates vast amounts of data, governments must establish robust frameworks for data governance, addressing issues of privacy, security, and ethical use of data. This includes enacting data protection laws and the establishment of data protection authorities to oversee the implementation of the law that seeks to protect citizen data and ensure mechanisms for responsible data sharing. To date, thirty-six African countries have data protection laws, and sixteen countries have signed the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection. One of the latest countries to ratify is the Sahel's Niger, bringing the total number to thirteen.[477]

In July 2021, Paradigm Initiative published a report on the establishment, independence, impartiality and efficiency of data protection supervisory authorities in the two decades of their existence on the African continent and found that: "With the exception of a very few countries, [Data Protection Authorities (DPAs)] in Africa are seen to have been technically subdued by their appointors or silenced by their innate infrastructural inhibitions, with the attendant effect of stunted growth of data protection laws and enforcement on the continent."[478] While Sahel countries such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal have established Data Protection Authorities, there is more work to be done towards ensuring the independence and efficiency of DPAs, and the data deluge during governments' attempt to curb the COVID-19 pandemic has helped public discourse on this need. This comes with the call for governments to increasingly make data available to the public in machine-readable formats to promote transparency and accountability.

The digital era allows for increased citizen participation in decision-making processes and more governments are using digital platforms for public consultations, crowdsourcing ideas, and engaging citizens in policy discussions, which contributes to a more participatory form of governance. Social media platforms play a significant role in shaping public opinion and governments need to effectively use these platforms for communication, while also addressing challenges such as the spread of misinformation and online disinformation campaigns. These platforms continue to be the best opportunity for some citizens to speak up about governance demands, especially given how other media channels are heavily regulated – and controlled by parties sympathetic to governments. The private sector – including internet service providers, telecommunications companies and online platforms – and civil society have a major role to play in ensuring safe use of online spaces so that they can deliver on governance opportunities instead of becoming spaces exploited by bad actors.

475. Freedom Online Coalition, "Donor Principles for Human Rights in the Digital Age" (https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/donor-principles-for-human-rights-in-the-digital-age/)

476. The Freedom Online Coalition is a group of countries that "work together to ensure challenges and opportunities relating to internet freedom and digital technologies are on the policy agenda"

477. Hogan Lovells, "Recent developments in African data protection laws - Outlook for 2023" (https://www.lexology.com/library/detail.aspx)

478. Paradigm Intiative, "Data Protection Authorities in Africa: A Report on the Establishment, Independence, Impartiality and Efficiency of Data Protection Supervisory Authorities in the Two Decades of their Existence on the Continent" (https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/DPA-Report-2.pdf)



Cybersecurity Measures

Governing in the digital era also means that as more government functions move online, cybersecurity becomes a critical concern. Governments and all stakeholders need to invest in robust cybersecurity measures to protect sensitive information, critical infrastructure, and citizens' privacy.

The future of governance in the Sahel transcends the confines of traditional eGovernance. It converges on a narrative that places technology and digitization at the forefront, not as mere tools for efficiency but as catalysts for societal and economic development, and environmental resilience. The Sahel's trajectory needs to move towards inclusive governance models, transparent practices, and strategic investments in education and innovation. While the road ahead may pose challenges, the promise of a vibrant, technologically adept Sahel holds profound potential for its governance and the prosperity of its people.

Best Practices in the Sahel

There are many examples of how digital innovation is meeting needs in the Sahel. For example, solar-powered digital kiosks in the remotest villages not only provide internet access but also serve as educational hubs, powered by renewable energy. The potential impact is manifold: bridging the digital divide, empowering local communities with knowledge, and establishing the foundation for eGovernance by connecting citizens with governance services and opportunities through digital channels. Here, digital means anything from "low tech" such as text messages or even radio to any form of "high tech" that the communities can access without significant burdens of adoption. This approach to appropriate technology does more than introduce digital tools; it catalyzes progress, fostering a sense of empowerment and self-sufficiency among Sahelian communities. By recognizing the unique challenges and opportunities of the region, appropriate technology sets the stage for a digital revolution that is both sustainable and inclusive.

During the 2011 general elections in Nigeria, a group of volunteers designed a mobile app to help citizens monitor elections. To overcome the barrier to entry, the app worked with text messaging, which was much more accessible than trying to get online. When the electoral commission postponed the elections, users of the app received text messages on the postponement before electoral officers, mostly because text messaging worked faster and better than other more sophisticated channels.

Every form of technology, including "low tech", requires deliberate investment by States. This is why universal service funds, which are typically generated through levies on telecommunication services, are important and have the potential to be transformative if strategically employed. These funds can be a powerful tool for infrastructure development and digital literacy programs, but their impact depends on how they are allocated. Imagine a scenario where a significant portion of these funds is directed towards establishing digital training centers in remote and underserved villages. These centers become not only conduits for essential digital skills but also hubs for entrepreneurship and innovation. By strategically prioritizing areas with limited access to technology, universal service funds can be a powerful force for equitable development. The Sahel's diverse communities, often marginalized in the digital age, stand to benefit significantly from such targeted investments. Digitization is not just about bringing the internet to remote areas; it is about fostering a digital ecosystem where communities actively participate in the digital economy and governance processes.

Utilizing Universal Service Funds

Nigeria and The Gambia are two Sahel countries featured in the 2022 Londa Report by Paradigm Initiative. In discussing Universal Service Funds, the report highlighted that the Nigerian Universal Services Provision Fund "is being managed to facilitate the widest possible access to affordable telecommunications services for greater social equity and inclusion for the people of Nigeria. Some of its projects over the years include Accelerated Mobile Phone Expansion, Rural Broadband Initiative (RUBI), School Knowledge Centers (SKC), and Community Resource Centers (CRC), among others..." but despite its potential, the Fund "has not been transparent in its dealings despite a 2019 Senate report noting it has a total recurrent expenditure of 1.9 billion Naira." The Gambia's Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy signed an agreement with the Alliance for Affordable Internet in June 2022 "to work together with stakeholders in the ICT sector to review the Universal Service Policy" but "the implementation has not yet commenced."[479]

Improved digital access in the region will strengthen human capital, especially young people who are already in pursuit of digital opportunities. In the heart of the Sahel, a vibrant demographic of young and self-taught technology enthusiasts is emerging as a force to be reckoned with. Wave, a Dakar-based financial technology service provider,

479. "Paradigm Initiative, Londa Report 2022 - The Gambia" (https://paradigmhq.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/The-Gambia-Londa-2022.pdf)

has a valuation of $1.7 billion and in 2023, it had 6 million users in Senegal and 4 million additional users across Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali, Uganda and Gambia. The company recorded 12 billion transactions in Senegal alone in 2022 and is the second other Sahel-based financial technology company that has a valuation that earned it the term unicorn. Flutterwave, its Nigerian counterpart, is valued at $3 billion and has demonstrated a huge impact in the region, including helping small businesses make money during the COVID-19 pandemic. Navigating the digital landscape with an insatiable hunger for knowledge, these young minds represent an untapped well of potential. Maximizing the human capital of the Sahel means recognizing and harnessing the skills of these self-taught individuals.

Investment in Human Capital and Supporting Digital Startups

Governments and organizations can play a pivotal role in this transformation by investing in programs that identify and nurture these talents. Apprenticeships, mentorship programs, and incentives for entrepreneurial efforts can provide the necessary support to unleash the latent expertise within the youth. By integrating these self-taught individuals into the governance dynamics, the Sahel can leverage their creativity and passion for technology to drive sustainable development.

A self-taught programmer from a small village could become an integral part of a government-led initiative to develop a local eGovernance platform. This brings a fresh perspective to governance dynamics and ensures that the Sahel's digital transformation is driven by its own people. We can already see many such young people, many of them participating in hackathons to win prizes or actually building technology-enabled startups to solve social problems and/or attract financial gain. In the vast expanse of the Sahel, a wave of startups are emerging as beacons of hope. These innovative ventures, often spearheaded by young entrepreneurs, are leveraging technology to address local challenges in unprecedented ways. From agriculture to healthcare, these startups are not simply business ventures; they are catalysts for positive change.

Consider the success story of a digital platform connecting local farmers with markets. By leveraging data analytics and mobile technology, this startup optimizes the agricultural supply chain, boosting farmers' incomes and enhancing food security in the region. This is not just a business success; it is a testament to the transformative power of technology when harnessed by local ingenuity. The success of startups goes beyond economic prosperity, it represents a paradigm shift in how the region perceives and engages with technology. These startups become trailblazers, inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs and challenging traditional notions of development. They are not just creating businesses; they are creating a narrative of hope and possibility.

Chafi Sani Laouali, a young entrepreneur from Niger, set up IPREN as a company that specializes in providing farmers with digital climate adaptation solutions to make their farmland more resilient and profitable, despite the consequences of climate change. On why he started IPREN, Chafi stated: "Climate change has greatly impacted African countries, especially in the Sahel, with the disruption of rainfall patterns. Our rainy season used to last four to five months but today it is very short, and water levels are decreasing year after year. In addition to this, desertification is advancing day by day in the region. As a result, soil fertility is poor and agricultural production low, significantly impacting the local population… This is why I decided to combine technology with agriculture by creating the Smart-O solution, which is a remote irrigation control kit."[480] IPREN already works in Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire and aims to be the leader in digitizing the agricultural sector across Africa.

A Call for Collective Action

As the Sahel region navigates digital opportunities, it becomes clear that the key to success lies in a comprehensive and integrated approach. The seamless flow of appropriate technology strategically allocated universal service funds, the harnessing of self-taught youth, and the pioneering spirit of start-ups converge to create a holistic digital strategy for the region. The region's future must include the opportunity to ensure digital literacy is a cornerstone of education. Universal service funds must go beyond financial mechanisms to serve as powerful tools for bridging the digital divide. Self-taught youth must be active contributors to governance and economic development. Startups and social enterprises must be engines of innovation and societal change.

This vision of the future requires collaboration on multiple fronts. Governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector must come together to create an ecosystem that fosters innovation, supports local talent, and ensures that the benefits of digitization are felt by all. It is important to stress that this is not just about technology; it is about leveraging technology as a means to an end – the end being a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous Sahel. The region's digital journey is not just a technological revolution but a socio-economic transformation, a journey that demands the adoption of digital tools and a fundamental shift in how the region perceives and engages with technology. It requires a commitment to inclusivity, sustainability, and the harnessing of local talent. The Sahel's

480. Green Innovation in the Sahel: How Youth-led Enterprise IPREN is Driving a Digital Agriculture Revolution (https://gca.org/green-innovation-in-the-sahel-how-youth-led-enterprise-ipren-is-driving-a-digital-agriculture-revolution/)

digital future is not a destination but a continuous journey, and the path forward is illuminated by the collective efforts of those who believe in the transformative power of technology for the benefit of all.

The journey through the intricacies of technology and digitization in the context of eGovernance and the Virtual Public Sphere is multifaceted, revealing the profound impact these advancements could have on the region's socio-political landscape. As this chapter is concluded, it is essential to synthesize the key insights gained from these discussions on the demographic dividend, youth activism, virtual public sphere dynamics, eGovernance implementation, technological appropriateness, data protection, and the future prospects of the Sahel.

One of the central themes that emerged was the demographic dividend, an inherent advantage the Sahel possesses with its youthful population. The youth demographic not only represents a significant labor force but also a dynamic and tech-savvy cohort. Harnessing this demographic dividend involves empowering the youth with the right tools and opportunities, thereby channeling their energy towards constructive activities. As has been seen in various instances, technology has become a catalyst for youth-led movements and protests, highlighting the potential of the young population to drive positive change.

In the Sahel, the virtual public sphere becomes a crucial space where citizens can engage with governance, voice their concerns, and participate in shaping the narrative of their societies. It also serves as a bridge between the governors and the governed, fostering transparency and accountability. eGovernance has emerged as a critical tool for enhancing governmental efficiency and responsiveness. Since governance is a means towards an end, including socio-economic prosperity in the region, the IPREN case study illustrates the potential for innovation and entrepreneurship to drive positive change. Startups and social enterprises, often led by young entrepreneurs, showcase how technology can be harnessed to address local challenges, create job opportunities, and contribute to economic development. The success stories of these initiatives underscore the importance of fostering a conducive environment for technological innovation and entrepreneurship in the Sahel.

However, the implementation of eGovernance comes with its own set of challenges, particularly the need for appropriate infrastructure and technology. The Sahel, characterized by diverse linguistic, cultural, and infrastructural landscapes, requires solutions that are tailored to its unique context. One-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to succeed, and policymakers must prioritize the development and adoption of technology that is both contextually relevant and inclusive.

Moreover, the issue of data protection and privacy emerged as a crucial consideration in the era of digitization. As the Sahel improves on its eGovernance adoption, it must navigate the delicate balance between harnessing the power of data for public good and safeguarding the privacy rights of its citizens. Robust legal frameworks, technological safeguards, and public awareness campaigns are essential components of a comprehensive approach to data protection.

Looking ahead to the future of the region, it is evident that cohesion and trust will be pivotal in sustaining the positive momentum generated by technological advancements. Building trust between government, civil society, citizens and the private sector – including small businesses and bigger businesses – is essential for successfully implementing eGovernance initiatives. It requires transparent communication, inclusive decision-making processes, and a commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.

Human capital must be at the center of the Sahel's technological journey. Investing in education and skill development, particularly in terms of digital literacy, is paramount to equipping the youth and governments with the tools needed to thrive in the digital age. Governments, in collaboration with civil society, the private sector and educational institutions, must prioritize building a skilled workforce capable of navigating the complexities of the digital landscape. The region stands at a critical juncture and the trajectory it chooses will significantly shape its future.

Chapter 9

Revitalizing The Social Contract for Community Development

Philip Attuquayefio and Linda Darkwa

Abstract

Effective mitigation of development shortfalls in communities in the Sahel requires an integrated societal response - underpinned by the legitimacy of the political class and effective inclusion and participation of the people through community engagement. Revitalizing social cohesion and public trust is possible through participatory community development and collaborative governance. However, trust between the people and governments in most countries in the Sahel is fragile. Using the Lake Chad Basin as the primary case study, this chapter offers pathways for revitalizing the social contract to catalyze development in communities across the Sahel.

Key words: Sahel, Social Contract, Collaborative, Governance, Sustainable Development

Introduction

The Sahel region is marked by complex conflict and insecurity terrain. While some of the causes of the insecurity, are linked to competition of scarce water resources among communities, the emergence and rise of extremist and terrorist groups has exacerbated the situation. Nuanced reflections on the Sahel further provide other considerations underlying the insecurity. A synthesis of these points to the mobilization of discontent caused by governance and development deficits, livelihood-disrupting environmental threats, including a decline in the economic utility of Lake Chad and the inability of communities to implement climate adaptation or mitigation measures due to insecurity.

Exclusionary governance systems have been critical contributors to the challenges facing the region. Elite capture and skewed development constrict wealth creation and distribution opportunities to a connected few. Much of the population remain in the peripheries, sowing discord, discontent and heightened citizen agitation and demands for change. This holds true in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and other countries in the Sahel, where the inability of governance actors to comprehensively address inequity in resource and service utilization has undermined the political legitimacy of the ruling class. Investments and efforts to stabilize the region over the years have focused on a security approach, which looks at the challenges through a security and conflict lens, without addressing the structural root causes of the crisis.

This chapter argues that while security is critical, and a priority for most communities, sustainable solutions lie in an approach that engages and addresses structural and foundational challenges. This can be done using a whole of society approach, which seeks to include all sectors of the community to drive community development. Such an approach necessitates the substantive legitimacy of the political class and the leveraging of collaborative governance. Collaborative governance manifests generally as the effective inclusion and active participation of the people. These factors are incubated within well-functioning social contracts.

The social contract is a foundational concept in governance manifesting as an agreement between the government and the people. The government commits to providing public goods and services such as security, infrastructure, healthcare and education. In exchange for that responsibility, the people offer their loyalty through their obedience to the laws of the land including the payment of taxes and the participation in civic activities. A critical analysis of the evidence of state responsibility in the context of the social contract has, for instance, resulted in an attribution of Boko Haram's emergence to a failure of state policies, inefficient and wasteful state parastatals and endemic corruption, among others. Research points to a "collapse of the social contract between the Governments and peoples of Boko Haram-affected communities".[481]

481. Oyosoro, F., Tayimlong, R., & Pikirayi, I. (2021). The Nexus between Bad Governance, Ungoverned Spaces and Terrorism: Analyzing the Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin through the lenses of the Social Contract Theory.

Long-term structural barriers, including lack of access to basic services, weak governance, and socio-economic exclusion, among others, can also be deemed responsible for fueling a general sense of dissatisfaction with government institutions.[482]

Since 2017, the UNDP Journey to Extremism in Africa research, that gauges the vitality of the social contract vis a vis recruitment for violent extremism, has documented a downward slide in the social contract between the state and citizens. The 2023 edition of this report highlighted a notably severe fracture in the social contract between the state and the citizens.[483] Recent Afrobarometer studies in the Sahel also find that the social contract between the State and Citizens has waned, as discussed elsewhere in this volume. This is particularly true of results regarding the perception of governmental accountability and trust in institutions. It is instructive that citizens demonstrate more trust in traditional and local leaders than their elected representatives. This shift in where citizens find reliability, preferring local structures over formal representatives, underscores the urgent need for the state to address issues of accountability to rebuild the social contract with its citizens. The deeper trust in traditional and local leaders also suggests that efforts to rebuild the social contract may need to incorporate these local structures and leaders.

This chapter reflects on the relevance of the social contract and provides some pathways on how it can be revitalized to incubate substantive legitimacy of political leaders and collaborative governance needed to drive community development. It is important to point out from the onset that reference to 'community development' is not without criticism. Significant among these is the claim that it bears the potential to transfer the responsibility for development from central governments to rural communities. Critics argue that positioning the community as a core actor in development can absolve governments of their duties under the social contract, placing the burden of development on individual communities. In context, however, community development can be beneficial, especially within a whole-of-society approach. Many governance arrangements in Sahelian countries are de facto exclusive due to structural marginalization, citizen disengagement or civic passivity among communities. Emphasis on community development can push for participation and inclusivity in determining community development priorities. This approach does not in any way suggest an abdication of responsibilities by central governments. Rather, it emphasizes the necessity of and sets the tone for collaborative efforts between central governments and local communities. Central governments are therefore expected to continue to mobilize resources, set broader policy frameworks and align local development efforts with national goals. This approach ultimately leverages the strengths of both central authorities and local communities enabling a more balanced and effective development process that is responsive to the needs of the people while still benefitting from the support and guidance of the central government

The State of the Social Contract

The vitality of the social contract depends on the trust that citizens have in their governments to act in their best interest leading to their active support and engagement with government. This foundational trust that underpins the social contract cannot be assumed or taken for granted; it must be earned through sound implementation of policies such as compulsory universal basic education, public health insurance, affordable housing, and other forms of support systems and affirmative action measures that give people a sense that the state cares about them. The tragedy is that many communities in the Sahel are steeped in conditions that inhibit the development of that trust in political leadership.[484]

Persistent long-term structural barriers, including weak governance, inadequate access to basic services, limited market accessibility, limited connective infrastructure and socio-economic exclusion, stand out as significant barriers to political, economic and social inclusion of the estimated 30 million people in the region. With fertility rates recorded as among the highest in the world, the total population in some countries are projected to double over the next 25 years,[485] thus increasing demand for the already stretched resources and access to social services, preventing people from living dignified and decent lives.

In addition to the perennial development deficit, the Sahel region is also characterized by the harsh effects of climate change on livelihoods and food security and its implications on conflict. Poor fishing and farming practices by farmers and fisherfolk over the years, for instance, contributed to diminishing biodiversity and soil fertility. This has intersected with climate volatility to induce food insecurity and stimulate competition over dwindling resources. The overarching effect of this is reflected in intra and inter-communal violence, including agro-pastoral conflicts in vulnerable communities.

482. ogelio Granguillhome, Marco Hernandez, Samantha Lach, Takaaki Masaki, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán (2021). Lake Chad Regional Economic Memorandum: Development for Peace. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank. P. xvii

483. United Nations Development Programme (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement. P.

484. Chapter three of The UNDP Sahel Human Development Report 2023 (January 2024) documents persisting challenges with education, health, malnutrition and unemployment among others. Report available at https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-02/undp-hdr-sahel-report-eng_web_0_1.pdf

485. UNFPA (2017). The term Lake Chad Basin countries is used indistinguishably with Lake Chad region countries throughout the report to denote the four countries of the study: Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Cited in World Bank page 2



Rising temperatures and increasingly erratic rainfall patterns have also rendered precarious the livelihoods of farmers and fisherfolk who rely critically on uncertain water resources. Coupled with growing population pressure, the increasing frequency of climate induced anomalies (e.g., rainfall shortages, rising temperatures, and aridification) has impacted upon the adaptive ability of populations living in some communities. A country assessment of "vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges in combination with its readiness to improve resilience", ranks some of the countries in the Sahel among the very lowest in the world with Cameroon at 146, Nigeria at 158, Niger at 176 and Chad at 182 out of 182 countries assessed.[486]

Climate volatility has also increased contestation over natural resources contributing to the rise in conflict activities in the region.[487] In mid-2021, for instance, 60,000 Cameroonians were reported to have sought refuge in Chad following eruption of violence over climate-induced contestations between herders, farmers and fisherfolk.[488] However, more problematic for the region's conflict profile is the spread of radical narratives and violent extremist activities. Decades of underdevelopment in some communities have seen the emergence of radical groups and radical narratives. Energized by the deplorable living conditions in the area and the genuine perception of marginalization, these groups and narratives have persisted.

The effects of armed groups' activities include massive displacement, an increase in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons, a reduction in cross-border trade activities that in many cases constituted the foundation of economic activities, never-ending humanitarian crises including a heightened need for psychosocial support and high levels of food insecurity within affected populations. Additionally, insurgencies have led to the proliferation of illegal small arms and light weapons and overwhelming pressure on governments to maintain the integrity of national borders and the security of individuals and communities. Counterinsurgency measures, such as border and road closures, restrictions on farming and fishing, and the movement of goods and people, have not only dampened economic activity,[489] but have also hindered the maintenance of social ties that form the foundation of social cohesion among affected communities.

The Sahel is inhabited by communities that are frequently under strain from instability, poverty, climate-induced food insecurity, and inadequate access to basic amenities such as housing, education, health facilities, and jobs. Decades of neglect by governments have not helped matters. Perception of corruption, lack of accountability and gross distrust for state institutions are also contributors to the suppression of the legitimacy of governments in affected areas. The existing status quo presents a clear depiction of the failure of the state to provide for communities - a veritable justification for the weak social contract manifesting in communities in the Sahel.

Reinvigorating Community Development

In a peacebuilding and conflict prevention context such as the Sahel, a whole-of-society approach contributes a practical dimension to ownership, local peace and hybridity, trust-in-peacebuilding, and local agency and dynamics by suggesting strategies to configure external and local resources and initiatives.[490] The approach points to a complete project cycle including monitoring and evaluation that reflects in the deepest possible way, consultation, inclusion and participation. Thus, at the core of the whole-of-society approach is inclusive participation - reaching at every level in society from grassroots through midrange to elite and, in that manner, broadening and deepening approaches to peacebuilding efforts and initiatives.

The importance of a whole-of-society approach is even more pronounced and critical in the Sahel given the context of the enormous challenges faced by its inhabitants relative to human security. By recognizing the multiple threats to the vital core of the people, it is imperative to ensure that security concerns and threats are addressed in a multidimensional fashion. Achieving this requires a widening of security sector actors to include government, civil society, private sector, the faith community, affected communities and the media among others in addressing demands for sustainable community development.

Far from being cliché, the whole-of-society approach is fast gaining leverage as a pragmatic approach to implementing development programs in a variety of contexts. In the Lake Chad Basin, the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RS-SRR) of Boko Haram-Affected Areas in the Lake Chad Basin, adopted by the Lake Chad Basin Council of Ministers in August 2018 and endorsed by the African Union Peace and Security Council

486. Alexander Lamarche, "Climate-Fuelled Violence and Displacement in the Lake Chad Basin: Focus on Chad and Cameroon", January 2023, Refugees International Page 9.

487. Rogelio Granguillhome, Marco Hernandez, Samantha Lach, Takaaki Masaki, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán (2021). Lake Chad Regional Economic Memorandum: Development for Peace. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank. P. 4

488. Alexander Lamarche, Op. Cit. Page 4.

489. UNDP and OCHA (2018). World Bank page 3

490. Martin, Mary and Bojicic-Dzelilovic, Vesna and Benrais, Linda (2018) Mind the gaps: a whole-of-society approach to peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Peacebuilding. ISSN 2164-7259 (In Press) DOI: 10.1080/21647259.2018.1491668

in December 2018[491] prominently features as one of its cross-cutting principles, the whole-of society approach.[492] Through this approach, challenges relating to leveraging the agency of multi-stakeholders in the affected communities from political elite to grassroot organizations are being surmounted. The Lake Chad Basin Governors Forum and the Lake Chad Basin Civil Society Forum are two platforms that manifest the recognition of the utility of multiple sectors in efforts to drive stabilization, recovery and resilience. With the MNJTF having made gains in degrading the activities of terrorist groups in the region, extensive efforts by stakeholders to implement the RS-SRR through the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) have yielded critical inputs supporting the return of IDPs to their ancestral homes.[493] These include the revitalization of economic activities and the provision of basic social services in liberated communities. The UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility, a funding mechanism anchored on the RS-SRR, has been most instrumental in driving change in the region. The reasonable successes registered have been instrumental in convincing UNDP to replicate the RS-SRR in the Liptako Gourma Area.

In the Sahel, where the underlying difficulties instigating instability stretch from pervasive underdevelopment to governance inadequacies, the spread of radical narratives, terrorism, violent extremism, massive displacement and other urgent humanitarian concerns, and climate-related insecurity and its ancillaries, a meaningful approach to community development must strive to engage affected populations including marginalized communities and informal governance institutions, humanitarian and development actors, and vulnerable groups. Equally important is the inclusion of the military and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. The whole-of-society approach recognizes that none of these actors can singularly address the development needs of the region and, therefore, emphasizes the importance of collaboration, coordination, and partnership to achieve common goals.

In addition to inclusive participation, stakeholders must coordinate actions and resources to achieve common goals and avoid duplication of efforts. A variety of actors representing humanitarian, development, and peace clusters are working across communities in the Sahel. Each actor's strengths can be leveraged, and resources can be maximized by collaborating and coordinating their activities towards a common goal. To deepen shared responsibilities, the whole-of-society approach also requires stakeholders to share information about their respective sectors and how they contribute to achieving the overall goals. Such information sharing, when accompanied by open communication among field personnel, fosters trust and collaboration.

The Sahel's complex set of challenges necessitates the active participation of all stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, the private sector, and local communities. This can lead to the development of integrated and coordinated policies and programs to address the root causes of instability. Through a participatory vulnerability analysis process, the whole-of-society approach can also deepen the inclusion of vulnerable and affected communities in the design and implementation of development programs. This can encourage community involvement in the determination of solutions, increasing their sense of ownership and participation without usurping the role of the state in these initiatives. This will drive sustainability in the long run. The whole-of-society approach can also impact governance by promoting inclusive and transparent governance processes that promote accountability and the rule of law.

Many countries in the Sahel are rich in minerals but among the poorest in the world.[494] Since the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region in 2017, countries outside the region have dominated financial investments for development. The UNDP Regional Stabilization Facility, a multimillion-dollar fund driving stability and development in the Lake Chad Basin Region, is led by Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. The World Bank and the African Development Bank have also made sizable investments in the region.

While the private sector is also considered critical in channeling investments, critics have argued that the focus of the sector to profit making mostly skewed development to only spaces and areas where they can optimize profits which could lead to even more inequitable development. Nonetheless, it still bears enormous potential to support states transitioning into stability through creating markets. More profoundly, it has been suggested that the private sector can lend legitimacy to the state by delivering "tangible dividends to the wider population through investments that not only create jobs but also provide basic and new services, introduce innovative approaches to development, and generate tax revenues for reconstruction efforts."[495]

491. https://www.peaceau.org/en/article/the-816th-meeting-of-the-au-peace-and-security-council-on-the-renewal-of-the-mandate-of-the-multi-national-joint-task-force-mnjtf-against-boko-haram-and-the-regional-strategy-for-the-stabilization-recovery-and-resilience-of-the-boko-haram-affected-areas

492. Lake Chad Basin Commission & African Union Commission (2018) Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-Affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region. Page 23.

493. United Nations Development Programme (March 9, 2024) "Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad Basin – Regional Annual Report 2023". Available at https://www.undp.org/africa/waca/publications/regional-stabilization-facility-lake-chad-basin-annual-report-2023

494. https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/paradox-of-africas-sahel-rich-in-minerals-but-in-the-grip-of-grinding-poverty/3015838

495. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/887641468163482532/pdf/620590WP0The0R0BOX0361475B00PUBLIC0.pdf p. 8

The African Development Bank for instance considers the private sector as a top priority area to lift transition countries out of fragility. Similarly, the International Finance Corporation underscores the agency of the private sector in fragile and conflict-affected areas,[496] outlining seven principles for engaging the private sector in such contexts. Telecoms, energy, and infrastructure are examples of key sectors that can be opened up to private sector investment and participation. Questions regarding the assurance of profit and safety of investment, while genuine, may be overrated. Evidence from Somalia and DRC have, for instance, shown thriving private sector participation in telecommunication despite instability.[497]

Ultimately, a whole-of-society strategy can assist in driving the necessary transformation to reverse the Sahel's decay. However, as described previously, the approach is predicated on inclusive participation woven around the political legitimacy of the ruling class. This implies that the people must have faith and trust in the leadership of the political class in order to support development initiatives. The concept of the social contract, which embodies the relationship between the people and the government, provides a clear picture of the relationship.

Revitalizing the Social Contract: Pathways for Consideration

Enhancing Service Provision

One of the fundamental pillars of the social contract is state presence. Restoring state presence in affected communities is therefore critical to revitalizing the social contract. To make state presence more meaningful, however, it is important to enhance those services provided by the state to communities in the Sahel. This is because the lack of services and its repercussions are attributed to the existence of government agency or the lack thereof. For communities in the Lake Chad Basin, for instance, the absence of these services has been a source of disquiet among governments in the region. According to a 2022 Baseline Assessment on Conflict Analysis and Territorial Perception Study for the Lake Chad Basin, some of the areas worst affected by the activities of Boko Haram showed generally low rates of satisfaction with government services overall among respondents. With the exception of Borno State in Nigeria (54 per cent) and Diffa Region in Niger (68 per cent), all the areas showed rates under the 40 per cent mark, with Hadjer Lamis region in Chad showing the lowest satisfaction rate of nine per cent.[498] Improving the delivery of government services, including essential infrastructure that enables the functioning of society and providing social welfare programs to support vulnerable groups, is seen as an important part of the social contract because they are necessary for the functioning of society and the well-being of its citizens. This can be done through resourcing local governments, fostering private sector partnerships, investing in local-level social enterprises and supporting contextually workable startups, which have driven local-level service provision in some communities across the continent. Majik Water,[499] a water management startup in Kenya is one of such startups. Given the centrality of water stress to some conflicts in the Sahel, efforts to explore alternative water resource management and conservation modules including rainwater management could enhance the reputation of governments in the region.

In exchange for these services, citizens are expected to recognize the government's legitimacy by paying taxes and abiding by the laws and regulations put in place by the government. There is nothing complex about this strategy. In fact, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), one of the active insurgent groups operating in the Lake Chad Basin, are known to exploit the absence of government actors by providing necessities to some of these affected communities and, in the process, obtain some level of acquiescence for their presence. With some of the counterinsurgency tactics of the region's military forces, including the the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), impede the economic activities of locals and the capacity to legitimately obtain some services, the government's role in enhancing service provision can support the revitalization of the social contract.

Sustaining Efforts to Enhance Safety

Insecurity in the Sahel is one of the sore points for communities. For most of these communities, the disappointment with the security status quo is even more profound when government officials are involved. Documented responses from aid workers and displaced people, for instance, accuse high-ranking Cameroonian and Chadian officials of active involvement in violent control of water points and grazing pastures in Cameroon's Logone Birni commune in the Extreme North Region.[500] Ongoing efforts by the respective states in the Lake Chad Basin and MNJTF have the tendency to set the path for the restoration of legitimacy in affected communities. Nevertheless, efforts must go beyond improving public safety to restoring trust in government officials and agents of the security services. With the MNJTF degrading the capacity of terrorist groups and liberating several communities, there is a need for

496. https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/887641468163482532/pdf/620590WP0The0R0BOX0361475B00PUBLIC0.pdf

497. Konkel, Agnieszka and Heeks, Richard (2009) 'Challenging conventional views on mobile telecommunications investment: evidence from conflict zones', Development in Practice, 19: 3, 414 — 420

498. Lake Chad Basin Commission/ African Union RS-SRR Baseline Assessment on Conflict Analysis and Territorial Perception Study. (2022).

499. Majik Water is a Kenya-based social enterprise specializing in creating clean water for water-stressed communities through an air-to-water technology. See https://www.weforum.org/videos/start-up-majik-water-from-air-kenya/

500. Lamarche, Alexandra. "Climate-fuelled Violence and Displacement in the Lake Chad Basin: Focus on Chad and Cameroon." Refugees International (2023).

governments of affected communities to invest in robust and accountable policing to take over security arrangements within communities. Community policing initiatives can further build trust with residents serving as bold manifestations of the state's mandate to protect the people from threats and will, therefore, have some legitimizing capital for the governments of the affected areas.

Addressing the problematic absence of a robust terrorism early warning system could further deepen state legitimacy. With communities being vulnerable to the effects of climate change, there have been attempts to establish early warning systems to reduce the risk of water-related disasters. The World Bank-led efforts to develop a hydrological monitoring and early warning system in the Lake Chad Basin is one of such efforts. While this is critical for environmental security, a robust early warning and response system must be put in place to detect and respond to threats confronting the safety of communities, especially those arising out of terrorist action. A community-based early warning and response mechanism can be explored in the most vulnerable communities. This could empower local communities to define early warning triggers based on the local context and knowledge and explore response mechanisms. With most of the threats in communities depicting some homogeneity, the effectiveness of such mechanisms could result in intercommunal sharing of knowledge. Promoting collaboration with local authorities in this venture can enhance perception regarding government commitment to safety provision.

Promoting Human Rights, Justice and Accountability
Human rights abuses, heavy-handed security responses to crime, adverse fallouts from counterinsurgency activities, marginalization and discrimination, have instigated grievances in many communities in the Sahel. Some of these grievances have fueled violent conflict and motivated people to join violent extremist groups. Ensuring the protection of human rights and the expeditious delivery of justice for victims of violence and abuse can rebuild trust between governments and citizens and promote social cohesion and stability. Furthermore, holding perpetrators of human rights violations accountable sends a clear message that impunity will not be tolerated nor covered up. This can act as a deterrent to future human rights violations and help to prevent the recurrence of conflict and violence. More profoundly, it underscores one of the core pillars of the state's responsibility under the social contract – protection. The May 2022 Territorial Perception Survey on the Lake Chad Basin,[501] for instance, shows a lot of reliance on community-based justice systems to adjudicate disputes. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms are useful as they tend to be less costly and focus on mutually agreed outcomes. Governments need to commit to ensuring that such community-based measures are formally recognized and impartial and manifest robust accountability measures. To this end, states can invest in enhancing local institutions' capacity through training on human rights and local governance. Setting up institutional platforms to monitor human rights abuses arising out of violent extremism and efforts to counter such threats could reinforce states' commitment to accountability and deepen a positive perception of accountability among citizens.

Promoting Inclusive Governance and Strengthening Governance Institutions
The revitalization of the social contract is inextricably linked to the efficacy of political governance. It is, therefore, essential to invest in a governance framework that inherently upholds the tenets of accountability, political transparency, and decentralization, coupled with the cultivation of robust political engagement at the grassroots. Justice and the observance of the rule of law across all societal segments, along with inclusive participation in decision-making processes, are fundamental to this framework. By ensuring consistent and impartial application of the law, every individual, regardless of socio-economic or ethnic background, can obtain equal access to opportunities and protection. For those from historically marginalised communities, this opens the door for deeper engagement with the government, broadening the level of inclusion. Regrettably, the state of inclusivity in governance in parts of the Sahel is particularly challenging. Results of the May 2022 Territorial Perception Study noted that the highest percentage of respondents believing that decision-making is inclusive and responsive is 33% in the Far North region of Cameroon. All the rest produced results under 20 per cent, with Diffa (Niger) showing 19 per cent, Borno (Nigeria) at 15 per cent, Yobe (Nigeria) six per cent, Hadjer Lamis (Chad) at eight per cent and the Region du Lac (Chad) posting only seven per cent.[502]

To address this advancement of inclusive governance structures, it is imperative to broaden the scope of citizen involvement in setting developmental agendas, tailoring initiatives, and executing them. This approach is likely to yield a collateral enhancement in the respect accorded to governmental institutions and, subsequently, their perceived legitimacy.

Promoting Community Relations and Trust
Communal trust and cohesion—which underpin the social contract within the Sahel—have been significantly undermined by pervasive insecurity. The resultant deepening of societal fissures impairs collective action. A pivotal policy objective should be the restoration and reinforcement of social solidarity. This can be achieved

501. Lake Chad Basin Commission/ African Union RS-SRR Baseline Assessment on Conflict Analysis and Territorial Perception Study. (2022).
502. Ibid.

via state-sponsored and community-driven initiatives that endorse local governance, empowered by substantive decentralization, thereby transferring decision-making authority to local entities. Mandating that such decisions are derived through participatory methodologies could enhance communal interaction and fortify social ties. Additionally, fostering inclusive dialogues across inter-communal and religious lines, between the community and local government officials as well as the community and security officials is crucial for rebuilding social cohesion and mending the already frayed social fabric.

Promoting Alternative Livelihood Options
Fostering alternative livelihoods is a critical strategy for enhancing economic opportunities, reducing poverty, and curtailing unemployment. Demonstrating a commitment to addressing the fundamental drivers of conflict and enhancing the welfare of the citizenry can positively influence perceptions of governmental accountability and care for its people. Leveraging indigenous community expertise in formulating and executing climate adaptation strategies, especially to bolster agriculture and aquaculture as cornerstones of community economies, will enable a rejuvenation of household income sources. Additionally, diversification of livelihoods can diminish community dependence on natural resources, which are often exploited by extremist factions as financial conduits. This approach has the potential to undercut the appeal of aligning with such groups and is pivotal in cultivating a more resilient and sustainable local economic structure.

Projecting Ownership and Leadership of Recovery Efforts
Effective leadership can help to build trust and confidence in the government's ability to respond to the needs of citizens, and to deliver on its promises of recovery and stabilization. This can include developing and implementing comprehensive plans for reconstruction and rehabilitation, promoting social and economic development, providing essential services such as healthcare, education, and security and building feedback loops into programs for citizens to participate in rating services and performance of government offices. Moreover, effective leadership can help to foster cooperation and coordination among different actors, including international partners, civil society, and local communities. This can help to ensure that efforts are targeted, efficient, and effective and that resources are used in a transparent and accountable manner. Some of the region's preeminent actors in project implementation, such as UNDP, provide partnerships that are critical to the success of development efforts, yet maintain branding strategies, including the use of logos, that could inadvertently undermine the ownership and leadership claims of the political leadership in the region. Thus, beyond the commissioning of development projects, it is important for political leaders to engage key partners to rethink branding guidelines by prioritizing the visual effects of such branding on perceptions of ownership and leadership. Implementing a zero-logo policy on recovery activities can be contentious as aid sponsors may seek visibility for their contributions to affected communities through the emplacement of logos. There is evidence, however, that in situations where the sensitivity of engagement has required sponsors such as UNDP to avoid logos, concessions have been made to sidestep possible social or political fallouts from such branded aid. Beyond zero-logo efforts, co-branding can also be explored, allowing shared space for both sponsors and the leadership of affected communities to share visibility, ownership and leadership of the recovery efforts.

From the foregoing it is evident that when the government is perceived as legitimate, it can better mobilize the population to support development initiatives. A legitimate government can also promote trust and cooperation among different stakeholders, which are essential for the success of the whole-of-society approach. Consequent to the prevailing instability, pervasive development deficit, and climate-induced challenges pervading the Sahel, the manifestation of the social contract is, at best, weak. The resulting degrading of the legitimacy of the governing elite and the apparent lack of participation of the people in stabilization and development initiatives restricts the effectiveness of the whole-of-society approach.

A revitalization of the social contract will encourage the active participation of the people and stimulate the legitimacy of the governing class. This will, however, require the government to demonstrate its commitment to promoting the well-being of the population, including addressing the root causes of instability, promoting inclusive governance, investing in social services such as education and healthcare, and creating opportunities for economic growth and job creation. At the same time, it is important to foster an environment where the population feels empowered to hold the government accountable for its actions. This can involve promoting transparency and participation in decision-making processes, promoting freedom of expression and association, and ensuring access to justice. By addressing the root causes of poverty, improving security, strengthening institutions, promoting citizen participation, addressing corruption, and fostering regional cooperation, it is possible to rebuild trust between the government and citizens and create a more stable and prosperous region. Overall, the revitalization of the social contract can be an important step towards promoting the legitimacy of the governing elite and fostering the active participation of the people to drive community development in the Sahel.

Chapter 10

Addressing Transnational Challenges: Multi-level Governance, Regionalism(s), and Cross-Border Cooperation

Amandine Gnanguênon

Abstract

A focus on borderland regions is key to addressing transnational challenges in the context of changing economic, political, social, and environmental dynamics, all of which influence social cohesion and public trust. The limited presence of effective and capable state institutions serving people equitably, particularly in peripheral areas and regions, often leads to the emergence of alternative non-state governance systems, shaped by criminal and extremist groups. Cross-border interactions among various actors linking conflicts across countries have profoundly impacted regionalism. Since the early 2000s, governments have struggled to manage migration, securing territorial sovereignty, and protecting their populations. That is despite increased investments in regional cooperation frameworks, including state coalitions to tackle politico-security issues. Proliferation of regional agreements has brought to the fore a complex mix of political, institutional, financial, and human challenges. It also highlights the failure to align regional cooperation with the complex sociopolitical realities that span borders. The prevailing security-centric approach contrasts sharply with the dynamic nature of cross-border interactions that offer potential for advancing a human security agenda, incorporating social cohesion, public trust, and governance.

Key words: Regional security, conflict, cross-border cooperation, coalition

Introduction

The Sahel region is endowed with vast natural and human resources. Granted, the region remains underdeveloped especially in borderland areas and communities who continue to endure violent conflicts that is manifest in popular uprisings, local insurgencies, attacks, hostage-taking, coups d'état, crime, violent extremism, vigilantism and political protests.[503] These forms of violence are not entirely new and are interconnected through a multitude of processes. They are marked by disenfranchisement of communities and citizens, proxy wars, cross-border ethnic or religious alliances, as well as smuggling and trafficking networks involving medical products, fuel, firearms, gold, and drugs.[504]

Cross-border interactions link conflicts across different states into what is termed a "regional security complex". It depicts a scenario where the primary security concerns of a group of states are so closely linked that their national securities cannot be realistically separated from one another.[505] This security complex emerges prominently in regions where social dynamics involve numerous actors engaged in illicit or informal networks that cross national boundaries, often referred to as transnational actors.

Two regional spaces illustrate these dynamics in the Sahel with security challenges inherently crossing national borders. After Mali plunged into armed conflict and imminent threat to state collapse from 2011–2012, the Liptako-Gourma region, situated in the borderlands of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, emerged as an epicenter of conflict that spawned violence across the area. Similarly, the Lake Chad Basin region, intersecting Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, witnessed deadly attacks by the terrorist group Boko Haram.

503. Walther, O., J. Guerres et conflits au Sahara-Sahel, Paris, OCDE Publishing, Notes ouest-africaines, n° 10, 2017, p. 6. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/guerres-et-conflits-au-sahara-sahel_04bdd7aa-fr

504. On these different issues, see United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (ONUDC), project Transnational Organized Crime in the Sahel https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/Tocta_Sahel.html

505. Buzan, B., (1983): People, States and Fears, The National Security Problem in International Relations, Brighton, Harvester Press, pp. 105-115.

Border regions play a growing and decisive role in the evolution of the security situation in the Sahel. Border regions witness growing political discontent due to state inability to meet the expectations of local basic needs — providing protection for people, goods, ensuring justice, and delivering basic social services and economic opportunities especially for the youth and women. Among the region's larger states, the relationship between violence and borders is particularly visible in Niger and Cameroon, where insurgencies are focused on border regions.[506] Insurgencies emerged when peripheral communities feel marginalized and the state is unable to maintain social cohesion, like in the Lake Chad Basin region.

The absence of effective and capable state institutions that serve people equitably across the national territory fosters a sense of exclusion and marginalization. Border regions are usually poorly connected to their respective national territories. It is worth noting that more than 60 years after the independence of Chad, Mali, and Niger, there are still no paved roads linking Bardaï, Kidal, Timbuktu or Bilma to the rest of the country.[507]

In regions where governments are absent or not felt and have limited access to basic services and livelihood opportunities, public trust and social cohesion is low. Consequently, central governments in these regions, often remote, weak, or repressive, have been displaced by alternative forms of governance, including traditional authorities, community-based structures, extremist groups, vigilantes, and criminal networks. These non-state actors, especially criminal and extremist groups, have succeeded in exploiting local ad hoc governance systems by aligning with local powerbrokers' concerns to establish a foothold.[508]

Political violence primarily centers around a power struggle rather than a vacuum of power, and there are no 'ungoverned' spaces[509]; rather, spaces are governed, differently though by a variety of non-state actors. These expansive 'multi-governed' spaces, hosting identity groups and networks crossing national borders, coexist with weak public institutions and low human-development indicators, further complicating efforts toward achieving public trust and social cohesion.[510]

Social cohesion is manifested in the reduction of disparities, inequalities, and social exclusion within or between societal groups, as well as the strengthening of social relations, interactions, and trust.[511] Damaged social cohesion can be repaired by the process of negotiating a social contract, focused on social security systems, healthcare, and fair distribution of economic and social resources. Despite promises of state-led development since independence, a mutual understanding between state authorities and border populations regarding the terms of their engagement remains elusive in most Sahelian states as illustrated by data from Afrobarometer and discussed in Chapter 3 in this volume.

Paul Nugent highlights three variants of social contracts in some West Africa boundaries – "coercive", "productive", and "permissive" – which can coexist and influence each other, leading to periods of consolidation and time for renegotiating the terms of engagement.[512] This recalibration moment provides an opening for non-state groups portraying themselves as agents of change, countering perceived abuses by certain local and state elites. Nugent gave the example of Senegal from independence to the early 2000s as a country where the social contract came under acute strain when economic adjustments failed to produce a significant reversal in economic fortunes.[513] The implementation of structural adjustment programs in Sahelian countries significantly eroded public trust in government institutions. These programs often resulted in reduced public spending on essential services, leading to widespread dissatisfaction and a perception that authorities prioritize external interests over local welfare. Extremist groups, for instance, employ rhetoric centered on defending marginalized communities, leveraging this narrative to recruit from these groups and expand their influence.[514]

506. OECD/SWAC (2022), Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/borders-and-conflicts-in-north-and-west-africa_6da6d21e-en

507. OECD/SWAC (2019). Businesses and Health in Border Cities, West African Papers, No. 22, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/fr/development/businesses-and-health-in-border-cities_6721f08d-en

508. See Crisis Group (2015). The Central Sahel: A perfect Sandstorm, Report n°227, 25 June 2015. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/niger/central-sahel-perfect-sandstorm

509. Raleigh, C. and Dowd, C., (2013). 'Governance and Conflict in the Sahel's 'Ungoverned Space'', Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 2(2).

510. United Nations Programme for Development. (2023). Soldiers and Citizens: Military Coups and the Need for Democratic Renewal in Africa Soldiers and Citizens | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

511. UNDP, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) (2016). Engaged Societies, Responsive States: The Social Contract in Situations of Conflict and Fragility. Concept note.

512. Nugent, P., (2019). Boundaries, communities, and state-making in West Africa: the centrality of the margins. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., p.30

513. Nugent, P., (2010). States and social contract in Africa, New Left review, n° 63, pp.35-68

514. Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni L.-H., Maïga, I. (2019). Violent extremism, organised crime and local conflicts in Liptako-Gourma, Institute for Security Studies, Research Report. https://issafrica.org/research/west-africa-report/violent-extremism-organised-crime-and-local-conflicts-in-liptako-gourma



Beyond transnational and cross-border challenges, the evolution of regional cooperation among Sahelian states has deep roots in geography, history, economic ties, and societal interactions. Geographically, social contracts differ, implying that state-provided public services catering to specific regions or groups within a country might not extend to others. Any recalibration of the social contract on one side of the border inevitably affects the agreements and arrangements on the other side. While historically, social contracts were assumed to be confined within national territories, questions of affinity and belonging often transcend physical borders, challenging established norms.

Since gaining independence in the 1960s, states sought to foster regional integration, particularly concerning economic development and the free movement of goods especially across West Africa. While there have been marked progress on regional integration in West Africa states which includes Sahelian states, challenges to realize sustainable socio- economic development and integration persist. Violent conflict among several Sahelian countries endure,[515] underscoring the limited political, social, and economic capacities and ability of states and regional institutions to exert influence within their neighbourhoods without resorting to overt use of force.[516] Several ad hoc initiatives have been launched that include: the Regional Cooperation Initiative Elimination of the Lord's Resistance Army in 2011, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) to counter Boko Haram and the G5 Sahel Joint Force in 2017.[517] While there was an increasing trend toward developing a security heavy approach and tools, adopting a regional approach that includes broader governance and socio-economic issues is not merely a bureaucratic or technical choice but fundamentally a political decision. The regional landscape remains a pivotal arena where state security and sovereignty are both threatened and need to equally be protected.[518]

Interestingly, African regional organizations (AROs) are often implicitly perceived as being closer to population and societies affected by conflicts, seemingly better positioned due to their good knowledge of local cross-border culture and traditions and offer adaptive solutions compared to other actors such as the United Nations (UN), European Union (EU), or former colonial powers.[519] However, a persistent gap exists between the human security objectives of these AROs, alongside the possibility to develop public trust and social cohesion, and their actual capacity to address governance challenges. Despite its endorsement by Member States at the regional level, adopting the human security framework proved problematic due to national-level challenges. Human security increasingly served as a pretext for a more militarized approach to security.[520] Assessing the impact of ARO's policies on social cohesion and public trust poses a significant challenge. Most existing studies predominantly employ a top-down perspective on regional governance, leaving the relationship between AROs and populations largely underexplored. Yet, the crucial question this chapter wants to explore is: How can regional organizations and mechanisms contribute to designing a more effective social contract and foster public trust and social cohesion?

This chapter is structured along three sections. The first section outlines some of the transnational challenges jeopardizing public trust and social cohesion focusing on the multi-level governance that continues to shape the regional political, security, and economic landscape. The second section examines how to mitigate counterproductive effects of various forms of regionalism to better address the issue of governance in the Sahel. Finally, the third section explores some concrete options to (re)build social cohesion and public trust among Sahel actors, along with potential drivers for renewed cross-border cooperation.

Regional challenges and threats to border security

While transnational challenges erode public trust and social cohesion, conflict is sometimes an opportunity for change. Looking at cross-border dynamics is crucial to understand that while social contracts are often viewed within national discourses, their sustainability hinges upon developments across international borders.[521]

515. Walther, O., J. « Guerres et conflits au Sahara-Sahel », Paris, OCDE Publishing, Notes ouest-africaines, n° 10, 2017, p. 6

516. Clapham, C. (1996). Africa and the international system: the politics of state survival, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., p.122

517. Tchie, A. E. Y. (2023). How Do Ad-Hoc Security Initiatives Fit in Africa's Evolving Security Landscape? International Peace Institute, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/06/how-do-ad-hoc-security-initiatives-fit-in-africas-evolving-security-landscape/

518. Ibid., p.120.

519. Schnabel, S., Witt, A., Konkobo A., (2022), The "Clubs of Heads of State" from Below: Local Perceptions of the African Union, ECOWAS and their 2014/15 Interventions in Burkina Faso. F Repot, n°14, 2022, p.272. https://www.prif.org/fileadmin/HSFK/hsfk_publikationen/prif2214_interaktiv_barrierefrei.pdf

520. Vlavonou G. (2019): The APSA and (Complex) International Security Regime Theory: A Critique, African Security, 12 (1), pp. 87-110.

521. Nugent, op. cit.

Cross-border challenges that affect public trust and social cohesion

The intersection of evolving economic, political, and social factors, coupled with environmental changes, pose risks to social cohesion in the region. The Sahel is one of the world's poorest regions, marked by weak state institutions deeply intertwined with endemic underdevelopment and poverty.[522] States like Chad, Mali, and Niger are ranked among the bottom twenty-five on the Fragile States Index, with Mauritania and Burkina Faso ranking slightly higher.[523] External actors also play a role in shaping social cohesion. The cooperation agreements linking France to its former colonies, which ostensibly keep these countries under the yoke of their former colonizers, have been decried for their continuing stranglehold on these countries' ability to develop and function effectively without political and economic dependence on France. This has led many leaders of French-speaking Sahelian countries to navigate the delicate balance between seeking French support and addressing the growing anti-French sentiment among their people. While countries in central Sahel have opted for a break with the past, others, like Senegal, are seeking to maintain an open dialogue while remaining firm about their intentions to regain control. The absence of effective state authority, deficiencies in citizenship[524] and border control, compromised justice systems, pervasive corruption, and the prevalence of arms have facilitated the proliferation of transnational trade networks, illicit economies, and security threats associated with extremist groups.[525] These challenges contribute to further undermining the authority of the state, providing an ideal environment for various transnational threats, all compounded by the impacts of climate change.[526]

The region is among the worst hit by climate change, further exacerbating already fragile humanitarian conditions.[527] Historically, populations have adapted to environmental challenges through various means, including changes in mobility among pastoralists, diversification of agricultural and livestock activities, innovative agroecological practices, income diversification, and water management techniques. Yet, the effects of climate change have triggered cascading risks for local livelihoods (especially agriculture and pastoralism), food security, and communal and state-citizen relations. The ongoing hostilities and food insecurity, fueled by both armed conflicts and climate change, have also led to displacement and large-scale migration of Sahelians both within the borders of the states and throughout the region. The last two years have witnessed escalating violence in the Central Sahel region, leading to a stark rise in displaced individuals, with 4.2 million people displaced across the region as of 2023.[528]

Recent years have seen an increased emphasis on security, intensifying tensions and fostering numerous initiatives aiming to control and restrict cross-border mobility in Sahelian countries, purportedly to stem migrant flows and curb the spread of terrorism.[529] Traditionally, the Sahel-Sahara region has served as a trade and migration route. Sahelian migration draws upon deeply rooted cultural practices and the lived realities of the people, often transcending country borders, which do not always align with the social and cultural fabric of society.

Governance as a negotiation process

Governance plays a pivotal role in the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation, dwindling resilience, grievances, and conflict. The competition for arable land as a critical natural resource further underscores the imperative for political authorities to regulate competition over increasingly valuable resources—particularly land and water.[530] Agricultural policies favoring certain groups result in marginalization of others, such as pastoralists in Burkina Faso, and Mali.[531] Local authorities often exploit competing interests in natural resources to perpetuate conflicts over land. Amid uncertainties regarding climate scenarios, the crucial question remains unanswered: will communities engage in conflict over these scarce resources or choose cooperation? [532]

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522. Mbaye A. M., Signé, L. (2022). Climate change, development, and conflict-fragility nexus in the Sahel, Brookings Global working Paper, n°169, March 2022. Climate-development-Sahel_Final.pdf (brookings.edu)

523. United Nations Programme for Development. (2023). op. cit.

524. Deficit in civic responsibility or non-recognition and non-enforcement of citizenship duties by the state

525. Tagziria, L., Bird Ruiz Benitez de Lugo, L. (2023). West Africa Organised Crime Resilience Framework Assessing threats and resilience - Foundational report. ECOWAS Commission. Report n°8, November 2023. https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/2023-11-28-ocwar-t-resilience-foundational-report.pdf

526. World Bank Group. (2022). G5 Sahel Region Country Climate and Development Report. CCDR Series. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/50936c70-3771-5618-8b3e-52e7c01be5f8

527. International Energy Agency (2022). Clean Energy Transitions in the Sahel.

528. See https://www.unrefugees.org/emergencies/sahel-crisis/

529. Venturi, B. (ed) (2019). Governance and security in the Sahel: Tackling mobility, demography and climate change. Foundation for European Progressive Studies, p.15 https://feps-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/downloads/publications/governance%20and%20security%20in%20the%20sahel.pdf

530. Crisis Group, The Central Sahel: Scene of New Climate Wars? Crisis Group Africa Briefing n°154 Dakar/Niamey/Brussels, 24 April 2020. The Central Sahel: Scene of New Climate Wars? I Crisis Group

531. See Nassef, M., Eba, B., Islam, K., Djohy, G., Flintan, F. (2023) Causes of Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Africa: A systematic scoping review, Report. SPARC and CGIAR. https://www.sparc-knowledge.org/sites/default/files/documents/resources/causes-of-farmer-herder-conflicts_-report.pdf

532. Benjaminsen, T. A. (2021). 'Climate Change and Human Conflict in the Sahel', in Leonardo A. Villalón (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of the African

Governance encompasses a framework of rules, institutions, and practices.[533] Beyond a discourse that highlights weaknesses or deficiencies, governance is also an ongoing negotiation process between states and the populations they seek to govern. Extremist groups present themselves as a force for change to counter the practices of certain local and state elites that are considered abusive.[534] For instance, by 2016, the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara was positioning itself as the defender of ethnic Peul herders in the borderlands between Mali and Niger.[535] Any given country may have numerous social contracts between the state and multi-level governance structures, including community-based ones, which mediate the relationships between individuals and the state.[536] The absence of state presence, disorder, and uncertainty does not preclude the role of human agency, involving a multitude of actors.[537]

Border regions are invariably pivotal strategic areas. As an example, insurgent movements have long understood the advantages of establishing their bases in forests and conservation areas, which are usually sparsely populated and offer conducive environments for their activities.[538] The interventions in the W-Arly-Pendjari (WAP) complex, a transboundary area shared by Benin, Burkina Faso, and Niger, have sparked frustration and dissatisfaction due to conservation measures (such as evictions, arrests, mistreatment, livestock killings, and crop destruction) that infringe on community rights and the broader necessity for accessing available resources.[539]

When viewed from a border-centric perspective, achieving a mutual understanding between state authorities and border communities on the terms of their engagement proves challenging. Governing through force and violence, non-state actors also contribute to shaping alternative forms of governance, defining boundaries, and creating conditions that make them acceptable to local populations.

Transnational nature of conflicts

Geographical conflict spill-over is not new. The 1990s witnessed Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea as an initial illustration of this pattern,[540] — not excluding Somalia, and the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The conflict in Darfur also further illustrates how conflicts originating from diverse (local, national and regional) grievances interact, evolve, and proliferate[541]. In the Sahel, jihadist groups also capitalize on the sociopolitical characteristics of borderlands—areas frequently overlooked and marginalized, where state authority is commonly delegated to traditional leaders, militia groups, and smugglers. [542] The spread of violence beyond national borders is thus often the result of alliances and networks formed among individuals from varied backgrounds.[543]

The relationships that states form with border communities are influenced by various factors, including political, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and historical ties. In the border areas of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the narratives of jihadist groups also resonate with cross-border ethnic and linguistic ties, fostering solidarity and a sense of belonging to multiple identities. The 2023 UNDP report, "Journey to Extremism in Africa", emphasizes the deeply damaged relationship between states and their citizens, highlighting the risk of a further expansion of violent extremism.[544] The Liptako-Gourma region exemplifies the complex interplay of political, economic, and social factors.

Since 2015, the Liptako-Gourma area has witnessed a surge in armed violence, linked to violent extremist groups, escalating local conflicts, and the persistence of transnational organized crime.[545] The informal economy in this area involves a blend of licit and illicit trade, often entwined to the extent that distinguishing between legal, illegal, or

Sahel, Oxford Handbooks (2021; online edition), Oxford Academic, 8 Dec. 2021. Climate Change and Human Conflict in the Sahel | The Oxford Handbook of the African Sahel | Oxford Academic (oup.com)

533.

534. Assanvo, W., Dakono, B., Théroux-Bénoni L.-H., Maïga, I. (2019). Op. cit.

535. Thurston, A. (2020). Jihadists of North Africa and the Sahel: local politics and rebel groups. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020,

536. UNDP, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF) (2016). Op. cit.

537. Nugent, op. cit., p.15

538. Promédiation, Nord des pays du Golfe de Guinée : La nouvelle frontière des groupes djihadistes?, avril 2021

539. Gnanguenon, A. (2023). La gouvernance des frontières du parc W-Bénin à l'épreuve des défis sécuritaires et fragilités sociopolitiques, Agence française de développement, rapport technique, n°73. https://www.afd.fr/fr/ressources/la-gouvernance-des-espaces-frontaliers-du-parc-w-benin-lepreuve-des-defis-securitaires-et-des-fragilites-sociopolitiques

540. See "Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinée: la régionalisation de la guerre", Politique Africaine, n°88 (December 2002), pp.5-102.

541. Mémier, M., Luntumbue, M., (2013). Systèmes de conflits et enjeux sécuritaires en Afrique de l'Ouest, Gorée Institute.

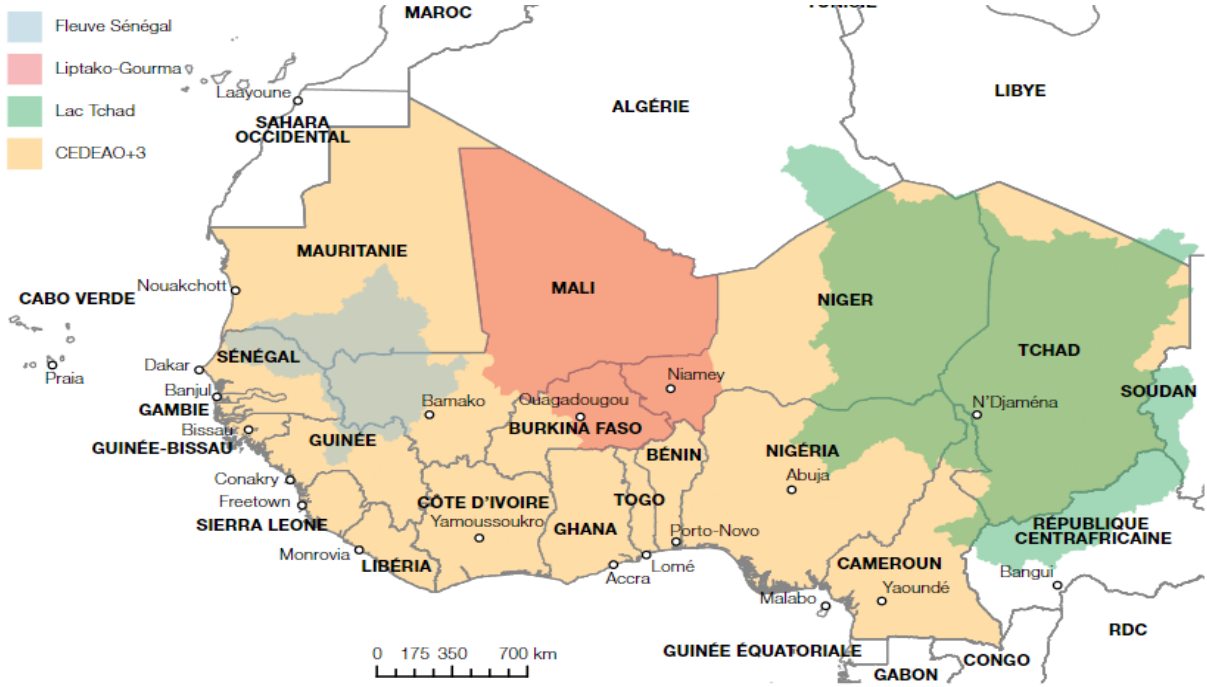
542. Thurston, A. (2020). Op. cit.

543. OECD/SWAC (2021), Conflict Networks in North and West Africa, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris. https://www.oecd.org/development/conflict-networks-in-north-and-west-africa-896e3eca-en.html

544. UNDP. (2023). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Pathways of recruitment and disengagement, https://journey-to-extremism.undp.org/content/v2/downloads/UNDP-JourneyToExtremism-report-2023-english.pdf

545. Assanvo, W. and al., op. cit.

criminal activities becomes challenging.[546] Due to largely porous borders and significantly ineffective national border controls, rebel and extremist factions found safe havens to launch cross-border actions. Attacks attributed to violent extremist groups have not only increased but have also spread across Mali and spilled into Niger and Burkina Faso.[547] The deteriorating security situation has led to the emergence of vigilante groups and militias, primarily formed along community lines.[548]



Source: OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club (2017), OECD Publishing, Paris, p.43

The challenges faced by states in controlling movement, securing territorial sovereignty, and protecting their populations had a significant shift in the nature of the social contract. This shift is instrumental in defining and shaping emerging concepts of social cohesion and public trust. Rebel groups, extremists, and militants have capitalized on the growing sense of marginalization within populations due to government neglect of peripheral regions. Additionally, the reliance on personal, occasionally criminal, clientelist alliances rather than the development of democratic institutions has further exacerbated these sentiments.[549] Borders are often seen as artificial legacies of colonization and viewed as constraints. However, they harbor opportunities for Sahelian actors given the region's significant potential for cooperation.

Potential for cooperation around borders

Cross-border interactions hold immense promise in enhancing mutual understanding among border communities, bolstering food security, enhancing livelihoods, and creating income prospects, especially for women and youth. This potential is exemplified by border markets that foster the creation of areas with strong internal cohesion shaped by the interactions among socio-economic players on both sides of the border. As an example, the concentration of markets along specific borders enables small traders to capitalize on local differences and provides an advantageous location for large-scale trade, encouraging the growth of transnational routes.[550] In August 2019, Nigeria took a significant step to curb the smuggling of prohibited goods by closing its national borders with Cameroon, Chad, Benin, and Niger. This action became even more complicated with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to stricter border closure enforcement. This had severe effects on the livelihoods of many communities and the economies of several cross-border countries, as well as undermining the regional integration process.[551]

546. Idem

547. See Africa Center for Strategic Studies, Burkina Faso Crisis Continues to Spiral, August 2023, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/burkina-faso-crisis-continues-to-spiral/

548. Idem

549. Crisis Group (2015), op. cit.

550. OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club (2014), Borders, cross-border co-operation and freedom of movement in the Sahara Sahel, in An Atlas of the Sahar-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security, OECD Publishing, Paris Borders, cross-border co-operation and freedom of movement in the Sahara-Sahel | An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel : Geography, Economics and Security | OECD iLibrary (oecd-ilibrary.org)

551. Golub, S., Mbaye, A., A., Golubski C. (2019). The effects of Nigeria's closed borders on informal trade with Benin https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-effects-of-nigerias-closed-borders-on-informal-trade-with-benin/



Borders delineate the physical boundaries where exercise of state sovereignty ends and are closely tied to state practices. For governments, they represent not only security constraints but also a revenue source through transit taxes.[552] This perspective on borders as opportunities follows from the first generation of regional agreements among Sahelian states in the 1960s and 1970s focused on facilitating the free movement of goods and people, along with economic development.[553]

Borders remain pivotal in the dynamics of political instability that have impacted the region. In the 1990s, conflicts originating from and affecting cross-border regions slowed down economic integration. Conflicts between communities arose from the differing and often competing approaches used by political leaders to secure their positions. These approaches were a blend of personal preferences, domestic political ideologies and needs, and external alliances.[554]

Conflict as an opportunity

Conflict dynamics, influenced by transnational and cross-border factors, have reshaped the relationship between the state and its population. Root causes of conflicts are often linked to governance deficits encompassing matters of state authority, the consolidation of democracy, resource management, adherence to the rule of law, transparency, and accountability.[555] Social exclusion and human rights violations further exacerbate these challenges.

Given the interwoven social, economic, and political connections within the region, a crisis in one state weakens its neighbors and escalates the risk of conflict.[556] In this volatile environment, opportunistic groups and individuals manipulate fear and ethnic animosities to create and control militias, establish parallel economies, and seize control over populations and territories.

Extremist groups are generally pragmatic and opportunistic in their engagement in illicit activities, primarily aimed at sustaining their troops, operational capabilities, and influence. They intervene as benefactors, service providers, or mediators in local conflicts. However, they are not the sole actors in this landscape acting this way. Sahelian stakeholders, including representatives of the state, often respond opportunistically and promptly to transnational challenges.[557] The management of trafficking by central governments in peripheral areas does not adhere to a binary control/non-control analytical framework.

Governance approaches can differ between the central regions and peripheries or from one region to another, but the state is never entirely devoid of instruments.[558] During Amadou Toumani Touré's regime in Northern Mali for instance, trafficking, like other income streams, was wielded as a political instrument. Significant national security concerns and their transregional effects have highlighted the necessity for the state to invest in regional organizations to manage the risks associated with conflict spill-over effects across borders.

A patchwork of regional organizations and mechanisms

Over the last two decades, the proliferation of regional agreements has brought forth a complex array of political, institutional, financial, and human resource challenges. This section delves into the institutional patchwork of regional organizations and mechanisms, pinpointing issues such as the social and political costs arising from overlaps between them and analyzing how they impact on public trust and social cohesion.

Mapping cross-border and regional cooperation

The institutional landscape comprises a diverse array of regional organizations and mechanisms, each rooted in specific historical and social contexts. Their mandates and objectives do not consistently prioritize the strengthening of public trust and social cohesion. Yet, their agendas mostly refer to human security, emphasizing non-military aspects of security. This concept was notably introduced in the 1994 UNDP Human Development Report, which emphasized

552. For more details, see UNECA. (2021). Enhancing the quality of informal cross-border trade in the Economic Community of West African States https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/46372/b1199650x.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

553. Khadiagala, G. M., (2011). Institution Building for African Regionalism. Asian Development Bank, Working Paper Series on Regional Economic Integration, n°85. https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/29155/wp85-khadiagala-institution-building-0.pdf

554. Clapham, op. cit., p108

555. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, (2019). Sahel 2043: Towards a resilient, inclusive and prosperous Sahel region. https://repository.uneca.org/bitstream/handle/10855/43654/b11981854.pdf?sequence=7&isAllowed=y

556. Francis, D.J. (2009), 'Peacekeeping in a bad neighbourhood: The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in peace and security in West Africa', African Journal of Conflict Resolution, 9(3), pp. 87-116. Peacekeeping in a bad neighbourhood : the economic community of West African States (ECOWAS) in peace and security in West Africa | African Journal on Conflict Resolution (journals.co.za)

557. ENACT (2023). s Africa Organised Crime Index 2023. Increasing criminality, growing vulnerabilities. https://africa.ocindex.net/assets/downloads/english/enact_report_2023.pdf

558. OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club (2014), Trafficking economies in the Sahara Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security, OECD Publishing, Paris, p.236 https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/agriculture-and-food/un-atlas-du-sahara-sahel_9789264222335-fr#page161

the importance of prioritizing individuals over states in security strategies.[559] This comprehensive approach to security integrates political, economic, social, agricultural, health, and environmental dimensions. A decade later, the 2004 Declaration on the Common African Defense and Security Policy by African states acknowledged the interconnection between 'security, stability, human security, development, and cooperation' as a fundamental principle and value.[560]

Over the past two decades, security challenges have morphed into transboundary and transregional issues. Growing insecurity has had a significant impact on the economy and the lives of people, interfering with their economic activities (mostly agriculture and trade), disrupting access to services and mobility.[561] Rather than reviving the perspective of human security, the situation has resulted in a proliferation of security-oriented regional cooperation agreements.

Multi-level governance can cover different realities, lending itself to institutional settings in which state and non-state actors at the global, regional, national, and subnational levels coordinate their actions in multilevel formal and informal networks.[562] The question of multi-level governance is most obviously manifested in the overlapping AROs. Yet, it can also be raised within AROs, as most of them are characterized by a vertically organized distribution of power, tasks and competencies, including hierarchy between different internal structures (Authority of Heads of States and Government, Secretariat or Commission, Parliament, etc.).

In the evolving regional context of the Sahel, where the agendas of AROs continue to be politically driven, prioritizing the defense of national interests and the protection of sovereignty, meetings between heads of state and government remain the prime arena for governance. This is the case with the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CENSAD), established in 1998 in Tripoli,[563] and the Nouakchott Process created in 2013.[564] Regarding their institutional and organizational structures, these organizations prioritize representing and supporting the interests of their respective member states, rather than providing opportunities for public participation in policy or activity decisions.

While placing member states in a prime position, some AROs have developed more flexible, non-hierarchical modes of governance, often including both public and private actors. The Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum is one tangible example of how local stakeholders can be involved in taking stock of progress made in implementing strategy and advancing stabilization, recovery, and resilience across the region.[565] The Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) [566] was initially created in 1964 to promote the common management of water and environmental resources. The organization has been supported by external actors to deploy the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and to play a lead coordinating role in implementing Strategies focused on the security-development nexus to strengthen the social contract.[567]

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

Since its inception, ECOWAS emerged to address the post-independence economic challenges, serving as a platform for economic integration. It became the continent's pioneer in implementing the free movement of people, goods, and capital.[568] In the 2000s, Malian President Alpha Oumar Konaré introduced the concept of "border country", emphasizing regions sharing common physical and human characteristics, later adopted by ECOWAS.[569] Cooperation hinges on securing agreement and backing from the governments of the involved countries, aiming to improve

559. UNDP. (1994). Human Development Report: New Dimensions of Human Security. https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1994

560. African Union. (2004). Solemn Declaration on the Common African Defence and Security Policy. Sirte (Libya). https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/declaration-cadsp-en.pdf

561. Mamadou, B., Tobie, A., Marending, M. (2020). The Challenges of governance, development and security in the central regions of Mali. SIPRI, Background Paper N2020/4. https://www.sipri.org/publications/2020/sipri-insights-peace-and-security/challenges-governance-development-and-security-central-regions-mali

562. Panke, D., & Stapel, S. (2024). "Chapter 19: Multi-level governance". In Handbook of Regional Cooperation and Integration. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

563. See Institute for Security Studies, African Future. (2023) https://futures.issafrica.org/geographic/recs/cen-sad/

564. African Union (2014). Report of the Commission of the African Union on the implementation status of the Nouakchott process and the modalities for its enhancement, 4th ministerial meeting of countries participating in the Nouakchott process. Nouakchott, Mauritania. https://www.peaceau.org/uploads/auc-report-summit-nktt-18-12.pdf

565. UNDP. (2023). 4th Lake Chad Basin Governors' Forum Concludes with Commitments to Scale Up Joint Stabilisation, Recovery and Resilience Efforts in the Lake Chad Basin. https://www.undp.org/africa/press-releases/4th-lake-chad-basin-governors-forum-concludes-commitments-scale-joint-stabilisation-recovery-and-resilience-efforts-lake-chad

566. See Galeazzi G., Medinilla, A., Marclint Ebiede, Desmidt, S., (2017). Understanding the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) Water and security at inter-regional crossroads, European Center for Dvelopment and Policy Management (ECDPM) https://ecdpm.org/application/files/1516/6134/0837/LCBC-Background-Paper-PEDRO-Political-Economy-Dynamics-Regional-Organisations-Africa-ECDPM-2017.pdf

567. See https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP-OCHA-Lake-Chad-%20Resilience_spreads-EN.pdf

568. Member states signed the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment in 1979, supplemented by subsequent agreements

569. Trémolières M., Walther, O., J. (dir.), (2017). Coopération transfrontalière et réseaux de gouvernance en Afrique de l'Ouest, Paris, OCDE.

living conditions in marginalized border areas and foster tangible regional collaboration. Additionally, ECOWAS has leveraged its institutional mechanisms, norms, and standards to address peace, security challenges, and regional threats effectively. The adoption of ECOWAS Protocols in 1999 and 2001 signaled potential progress in democracy, good governance, and conflict prevention and resolution.

ECOWAS has developed a broad array of governance mechanisms to be inclusive in representing diverse state and non-state interests and to avoid political stalemates. Some programs and regulations target the inclusion of the media and civil society organizations. The organization has developed a strategic partnership with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) since 2002, broadened to the AU in 2015, to operationalize early warning systems.[570] The ECOWAS Parliament, operational since 2000, is another layer of the ECOWAS governance architecture.

However, ECOWAS encounters limitations in advancing the human security agenda. First, its human agenda is limited by the conflict between its supranational authority and member states insisting on national sovereignty.[571] This tension has impeded ECOWAS from compelling adherence to regional norms and standards beyond informal appeals. Second, the organization's ability to implement policies faces obstacles due to entrenched local dynamics influenced by non-state actors and manipulated by state actors. Third, essential tasks and political discretion related to the process of political steering are not delegated to non-state agents. This becomes a key issue as ECOWAS aims to be "people-centered" rather than "state-centered".[572]

ECOWAS thus illustrates how the combination of different modes of governance leads to a high complexity of the political system, which may contribute to citizens becoming increasingly disengaged from the projects promoted by AROs, ultimately challenging the permissive consensus. Criticized for its handling of unconstitutional changes of government (UCGs) in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, ECOWAS's legitimacy and its capacity to defend its regional integration project demand scrutiny. Some are questioning the organization's commitment to regional integration at a time when ECOWAS sanctions are hurting civilians more than the putschists' interests.[573] ECOWAS, which has benefited from the principle of subsidiarity in relation to the AU, now has no leverage to influence its member states decisions.

In January 2024, the decision by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger to withdraw from ECOWAS sent shockwaves through the region. Yet, this move is not unprecedented. Mauritania, an original signatory of the ECOWAS Treaty in 1975, opted to pull out of the organization in 2000 to pivot towards the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU).[574] The lingering question is what terms could be negotiated if the three departing states proceed with their exit in January 2025. As ECOWAS approaches its 50th anniversary, the withdrawal requests often seen as a challenge to the organization's established order, offer a pivotal chance to enhance the multi-level governance of the regional bloc in a constantly evolving institutional landscape.[575]

A changing institutional landscape in the Central Sahel

In 2012, Mali was thrust into a profound political and security crisis[576] and the intensification of local conflicts has significantly impacted social cohesion and impeded humanitarian efforts in the region. The succession of events set the stage for the French military intervention in January 2013. The domino effect of the situation reverberated over the next decade, significantly impacting regional organizations and influencing the formation of inter-state alliances. The Central Sahel region, encompassing Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, exemplifies the challenges arising from the proliferation of regional agreements in a volatile security context. These challenges span political, institutional, financial, and human dimensions, marked by sporadic cooperation, limited joint initiatives with ECOWAS, and

570. Eze, C.B., Frimpong, O.B. (2021). Contributions of Early Warning to the African Peace and Security Architecture: The Experience of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). In: McNamee, T., Muyangwa, M. (eds) The State of Peacebuilding in Africa. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. Available at : https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-46636-7_11#citeas

571. Musah, A.-F. (2009) 'West Africa: Governance and Security in a Changing Region', Africa Program Working Paper Series. New York: International Peace Institute. Available at: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/west_africa.pdf.

572. West African Civil Society Institute (2009). 'Towards an ECOWAS of peoples', Paper presented at the 3rd East African CSO Forum, March, Arusha.

573. Crisis Group (2023). ECOWAS, Nigeria and the Niger Coup Sanctions: Time to Recalibrate, Commentary, 5 December 2023. ECOWAS, Nigeria and the Niger Coup Sanctions: Time to Recalibrate I Crisis Group

574. After experiencing the AMU's slow progress and seeking to revitalize its connections within West Africa, Mauritania negotiated its way back into ECOWAS's economic and trade frameworks in 2017. Notably, by staying outside ECOWAS's political structures, Mauritania avoids regional pressures on governance issues. See Mauritania's Unfolding Landscape: Elections, Hydrocarbons and Socio-Economic Change. 52019). Chatham House, Research Paper. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/04/mauritanias-unfolding-landscape/2-straddling-maghreb-and-west-africa

575. Proposed ECOWAS exits leave West Africa at a crossroads. (2024). Institute for Security Studies, ISS Today. https://issafrica.org/iss-today/proposed-ecowas-exits-leave-west-africa-at-a-crossroads

576. The year began with the Malian army's defeat in January, followed by the coup d'état that ousted President Amani Toumani Touré in March. In April, the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) declared Azawad's independence. By June, the north of the country fell under the control of armed, narco-jihadist groups including Ansar Eddine, Mouvement pour l'Unification et le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM).

disagreements on formalizing temporary arrangements like the G5 Sahel or the newer Alliance of Sahelian States (ASS).[577] Over time, African states have continued to establish or join many AROs, equipping them with additional policy competencies. Yet, all regional mechanisms covering the Sahelo-Saharan region face the same challenge: generating output, outcomes, and possibly impact for their member states, societies, and economies, as well as providing common or public goods.

The heavy investment in military responses has increased competition for scarce financial and material resources among regional mechanisms. Despite the EU's purported security-development nexus approach, which advocates that security and development policy goals are interconnected and should be harmonized, violence in the Sahel has continued to escalate.[578] This growing insecurity severely affects the regional economy and people's livelihoods, particularly in agriculture and trade, while also hampering access to essential services and mobility.[579]

The Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA)

The Liptako-Gourma Authority (LGA) operating in the tri-border zone among Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, is the first regional organization to be significantly affected by the regional security dynamics. Since its inception in 1970, the LGA adopted a border-region approach, aiming to foster regional governance with the goal of enhancing mining, energy, water, agricultural, pastoral, and fishery resources.[580] It seeks to facilitate sub-regional integration, connecting neighboring, landlocked areas that rely on each other due to geographical continuity, despite the presence of borders inherited from colonization.[581]

As the Liptako-Gourma region became an epicenter of the Sahel security crisis, the LGA incorporated into its mandate efforts to prevent radicalization and resolve intra- and inter-community conflicts. The revision of its treaty in 2017 expanded its mandate to include peace and security, leading to the decision to establish a Liptako-Gourma Multinational Security Force, drawing inspiration from the MNJTF.[582] However, the creation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force in the same year ended this initiative, as Liptako-Gourma's geographical location falls within the cross-border G5 mandate area.[583] Drawing from the experiences in the Lake Chad Basin region, since 2022, the organization is supported by UNDP to develop a Regional Stabilization Strategy. This initiative sought to enhance coherence and synergy among the numerous interventions being carried out.[584]

G5 Sahel

Despite the spotlight on its joint force deployment in 2017, the G5 Sahel is more than a military coalition.[585] Founded in 2014, the G5 Sahel sought to foster development and stability within its member states, establishing a strategic framework that combines development with security initiatives.[586] The G5 Sahel represented a shift from reliance on bilateral agreements towards a multi-level regional governance approach. The strong backing from external entities, like France and the EU, to establish the G5 Sahel as an institution has also led to overlapping with the ECOWAS agenda[587] and inconsistent support from external development actors in a landscape marked by limited resources and financial constraints.[588] Despite the necessity of investing in security and development, external actors have not fully grasped the nuances of multi-level governance and the complexity of reforms in the supported countries.[589]

577. Dieng, M. and Frowd P. M. (2024). Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have a new defence alliance: an expert view of its chances of success. The Conversation.

578. ACLED. (2023). The Sahel: Geopolitical Transition at the Center of an Ever-Worsening Crisis, Conflict Watchlist, https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2023/sahel/?__cf_chl_tk=.V4URR7jbzm.hM8Q5c9DljPcl6aKKWRYa1MGNmEF3js-1708875465-0.0-4071

579. Mamadou, B., Tobie, A., Marending, M. (2020). op.cit.

580. Liptako-Gourma Authority, official website, https://liptakogourma.org/mission-et-objectifs/

581. Ba-Konaré, D. A. O. (2018). Le rôle de l'ALG dans la lutte contre l'insécurité entre le Niger, le Mali et le Burkina Faso, African Security Sector Network. Factsheet. Le rôle de l'ALG dans la lutte contre l'insécurité entre le Niger, le Mali et le Burkina Faso I ASSN (africansecuritynetwork.org)

582. Burkina-Mali-Niger: "une force multinationale" contre l'insécurité. (2017). BBC News Afrique, https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-38743053

583. Bagayoko, N. (2019). Le multilatéralisme sécuritaire africain à l'épreuve de la crise sahélienne. Centre Francopaix. Rapport_Bagayoko_Multilateralisme_Securitaire_Africain.pdf (uqam.ca)

584. Regional Stabilization Strategy for the Liptako-Gourma Region (2022), Information Brief. https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-09/RSS-LG%20INFORMATION%20BRIEF.pdf

585. Desgrais, N. (2018). Le G5 Sahel, en réaction à la mutation de l'environnement stratégique sahélien Politiques régionales de coopération et niveaux d'engagement des États membres, Fondation pour la recherche stratégique. https://www.frstrategie.org/programmes/observatoire-du-monde-arabo-musulman-et-du-sahel/g5-sahel-reaction-mutation-lenvironnement-strategique-sahelien-politiques-regionales-cooperation-niveaux-dengagement-etats-membres-2018

586. Communiqué final du Sommet des chefs d'État du G5 Sahel, Nouakchott, 16 février 2014. https://www.g5sahel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/images_fichiers_FEV_2014_COMMUNIQUE_FINAL_SOMMET_DU_G5_SAHEL.pdf

587. Grebe, J. (2018). Cooperation or Competition? Security in West Africa between ECOWAS and the G5. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Perspective. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/14998.pdf

588. Carbone, G. Casola, C. (2022). Sahel: 10 Years of Instability. Local, Regional and International Dynamics, ISPI, Report. https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/sahel-10-years-instability-local-regional-and-international-dynamics-36174

589. Jezequel, J.-H., Ero, C. (2020). « L'UE doit faire de la gouvernance le cœur d'une stratégie de stabilisation du Sahel à long terme », Le Monde,



Amid ongoing insecurity and the spread of violent extremism in several Sahelian countries, a series of unconstitutional changes of government in Mali, Chad, and Burkina Faso have significantly influenced the regional dynamics. The justifications provided by the coup leaders in these countries share common themes: rampant insecurity, lack of engagement and consideration of citizens views and perspectives in governance, corruption, nepotism, and the failure of previous political leaders to deliver social economic goods and services and stabilize the economy or protect the population from terrorist threats. Decades of development aid have left citizens questioning its real-world impact and any potential hidden agenda of Western partners to explain the lack of progress. Following calls for the removal of French, US and EU military presence in Mali and Niger, the exit of the UN from Mali, and the rejection of ECOWAS for its perceived allegiance to external agendas, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have opted to exit the G5 Sahel.[590]

The Alliance of Sahelian States

With the ratification of the Liptako-Gourma Charter in September 2023, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger formalized a new military alliance, moving from the G5 to the G3 framework. This move was initially perceived as a reaction to the shortcomings of the G5 Sahel in security matters and to the diplomatic standoff involving ECOWAS member states, threatening to deploy a military intervention in Niger.[591] However, the Alliance of Sahelian States (ASS) aims to extend its objectives beyond counterterrorism efforts. ASS embodies a narrative of emancipation and sovereignty that resonates with a significant segment of the population, seeking to rebuild the relationship between the population and their leaders. The military governments have also pledged to pioneer a novel approach to economic integration, even proposing the establishment of a monetary union to meet the aspirations and well-being of the people.[592]

The emergence of ASS is a notable shift in regional institutional frameworks, deriving its legitimacy from the capacity of three military leaders—who assumed power through coups—to persuade the population of their unified efforts towards addressing their needs, including security, economic development, and political freedom. The use of sovereign and Pan-Africanist rhetoric not only galvanized public support for a governance model, outside the electoral system, but also underscored the challenges in delivering basic services and building public trust. Sahelian countries allocated significant state funds to military expenses. Between 2019 and 2022, military expenditure in Mali almost doubled, rising from FCFA 299.080 billion in 2019 to FCFA 476.378 billion in 2023. The year 2023 represented another staggering 49% year-on-year increase on 2022, peaking at 657.7 billion CFA francs.[593] All these elements represent an enduring historical trend in the trajectory of political and military powers in the Sahel. Governments grapple with unresolved conflicts, with security forces at times resorting to violent measures, consequently fueling public discontent.

Eventually, these states will have to confront the practical implications of their governance approach oriented more towards a discourse of producing public goods and delivering services without implementing the previous legally binding rules. The three regimes' strategies are to develop partnerships with alternative external actors such as Russia, Turkey or Iran. Yet, the scramble for exploiting their mineral resources[594] such as oil, gold and uranium, still perpetuates a situation of grievances, marginalization, deprivation and social exclusion.[595] In Niger, an armed group opposed to the ruling junta has been regularly attacking a section of the country's pipeline funded by PetroChina.[596]

In sum, despite numerous regional initiatives, the accomplishments of the Sahel's regional organizations and mechanisms often starkly contrast with the vibrancy of cross-border interactions.[597]

Tribune. https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2020/11/09/sahel-l-ue-doit-faire-de-la-gouvernance-le-c-ur-d-une-strategie-de-stabilisation-a-long-terme_6059136_3212.html

590. Koné, H. (2022). Options for reviving security cooperation in the Sahel, Institute for Security Studies, ISS Today, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/options-for-reviving-security-cooperation-in-the-sahel Options for reviving security cooperation in the Sahel - ISS Africa

591. Ajala, O. (2023). Niger coup: why an Ecowas-led military intervention is unlikely. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/niger-coup-why-an-ecowas-led-military-intervention-is-unlikely-211136

592. Le Monde (2024). Le Niger évoque la possible création d'une monnaie commune avec le Burkina et le Mali pour sortir de la « colonisation » https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2024/02/12/le-niger-evoque-la-possible-creation-d-une-monnaie-commune-avec-le-burkina-et-le-mali-pour-sortir-de-la-colonisation_6216069_3212.html

593. BBC Africa (2023). Conflits armés : voici ce que coûte la guerre au Sahel et comment elle impacte l'éducation et la santé des populations.

594. Mali is Africa's third-largest gold producer and has other natural resources as well. Niger has uranium but also other resources such as coal, gold, gypsum and oil. Burkina Faso also has vast mineral wealth ranging from gold, diamonds and zinc to copper, manganese, phosphate and limestone. Chad is equally rich in oil and has the 10th largest reserves in Africa.

595. Akinyetun,T.,Ogunbodede,N.,Ahoton,S. & Alausa,J.(2023).The Rise of Autocracy in the Sahel of Africa: Insights from Resource Curse Theory. Research in Social Change,15(1) 27-39. https://sciendo.com/article/10.2478/rsc-2023-0002?tab=article

596. Reuters (2024). Niger group claims attack on China-backed pipeline, threatens more

The primary challenge lies in aligning a regional entity with grassroots integration and the intricate sociopolitical complexities that transcend borders.[598] Presently, two processes coexist as AROs increasingly focus on security concerns, contributing to a growing disconnect between dynamic cross-border interactions and regional organizations serving state interests.

Organizations centered more on institution-building than people

To tackle transnational challenges, AROs play pivotal political and operational roles. Supported extensively by international donors through institutional capacity-building programs, their expanded mandate in peace and security exposes their limited human resources, logistical, and financial capacities. Furthermore, their security-centric focus tends to undermine their legitimacy in addressing the enduring issues of social cohesion and public trust within many states. This section aims to outline the challenges stemming from the proliferation of regional organizations and their inability to effectively address the human security vacuum.

Social cost of overlapping affiliations

The Sahelian States are members of multiple overlapping regional, economic and cross-border organizations, resulting in a complex institutional landscape characterized by overlapping memberships. For instance, the three countries that comprise ASS - Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger - have departed from the G5 Sahel and announced their intention to withdraw from ECOWAS. They are also members of LGA, CENSAD, Nouakchott Process, West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU), and the Accra Initiative. Additionally, Niger is a member of the LCBC.

This multiplicity of mandates and overlapping competencies, particularly in peace and security initiatives, did not support a well-grounded multi-level governance system but, conversely, led to duplicative activities. ECOWAS, the LGA, and the G5 Sahel addressed similar cross-border issues within an overlapping geographical area, intensifying the burdens on member states. They not only bear multiple financial obligations but also grapple with organizing meetings, executing policy decisions, adopting instruments, revising procedures, and aligning schedules, all within limited staffing and time constraints. Instead of serving the organization's objectives, bureaucracy becomes an end in itself. The question then becomes how effectively ASS, should it fulfill its stated ambitions, can avoid these pitfalls.

Efforts have been made to limit institutional overlap, duplication, and legitimacy disputes between regional institutions, and a process of rationalization. Bilateral memorandums of understanding were established, such as the agreements between the LGA and ECOWAS in 2013, and the LGA and the G5 Sahel in 2018. Despite these endeavors, sporadic cooperation, a lack of joint activities, and conflicts over formalizing ad hoc arrangements persist. Indeed, the influence of charismatic regional leaders remains central for leveraging AROs, where personalities and interpersonal relations continue to play a critical role. Political leaders have thus favored short-term debates over long-term reflection on implementing a human security agenda, resulting in an overemphasis on immediate threats. National elites mostly engage in regional cooperation to secure their interests for the survival of their autocratic regimes and manage their mutual animosities.[599]

The rationalization process remains unsuccessful due to African states position to do Forum shopping, i.e. to select the organization that aligns with their interests in each specific situation. Consequently, tension remains between the official promotion of shared objectives and the informal practice of 'à la carte' cooperation', where leaders engage with AROs based on personal agendas and national interests.[600] ARO's agendas are thus primarily influenced by defending national sovereignty when heads of state meet, often at the expense of other critical aspects to strengthen their local anchorage, such as investing in Parliament or giving more space to civil society organizations (CSOs). This selective approach has a clear social cost for regional organizations as it directly impacts their legitimacy, including in a context of dependence on external support.

Counterproductive effect of external actors' support

The heavy reliance of most AROs on financial support and institutional capacity building from external partners remains a major challenge for regional cooperation. This reliance is partly inherited from long-term formal and informal political, economic, and personal networks among Western countries and African leaders sharing the same agenda. As an example, the possibility for France to retain a sphere of influence after decolonization and the opportunity for its francophone allies encouraged ruling elites in these newly independent countries to align their policy choices with those of France. From the outset, Nigeria expected that ECOWAS would weaken francophone West Africa's link with

598. Bach, D. (2016). Regionalism in Africa: genealogies, institutions and trans-state networks, Routledge.

599. Debre, M. (2021). The dark side of regionalism: how regional organizations help authoritarian regimes to boost survival. Democratization, 28 (2), pp. 394-413.

600. Gnanguenon, A. (2020). Mapping African regional cooperation: How to navigate Africa's institutional landscape. https://ecfr.eu/publication/mapping-african-regional-cooperation-how-to-navigate-africas-institutional-landscape/

France. ECOWAS's economic integration objectives have thus been largely overruled by geopolitical considerations. In recent times, external partners have been especially preoccupied with security matters and their potential knock-on effects for other parts of Africa and Europe. The creation of the G5 Sahel illustrates how the development of a peace and security agenda by Sahelian states enhances their international visibility and facilitates easier access to donor's support. The substantial financial reliance of AROs on donors might suggest, at the least, that their programs are not a top budgetary, but also political, priority for their member states. Alternatively, it may indicate a lack of long-term vision.

Detached from the economic and social dimensions of integration, organizations have become recipients of highly technical external support. The predominant focus on security matters often centers AROs priorities around technical deliberations, such as authorization, financing, resource types, and capacity-building discussions. As has often been pointed out, the Sahel became a laboratory of experimentation for the EU's common security and defense policy, and more specifically the security–development nexus.[601]

Closely linked to the Sahel's geostrategic relevance to global security priorities, international organizations and governments formulated strategies and appointed Special Representatives, regularly lamenting the lack of coordination between them. The emphasis on state reconstruction and countering cross-border terrorism often overlooks the intricate web of internal and external conflict dynamics. Consequently, the presence of foreign military operations appears to have had a counterproductive effect, reinforcing the local narrative of a neo-colonial occupation by Western powers, a narrative extremist groups and African autocrats leverage to gain local support.[602]

Limited performance from a local perspective

Assessment of ARO interventions primarily revolves around their concrete implementation practices and the outcomes they achieve.[603] The human security narrative was increasingly used because of the inability of national institutions and regional mechanisms to deliver on economic integration. Additionally, the difficulty in constructing an architecture of the social contract at the supranational level remains problematic because regional cooperation depends on both capacities at the national level and the nature of inter-state relations.

Practices highlight African states' reliance on coercion and violence rather than leveraging political, social, and economic instruments to formulate peaceful policies that could earn public trust. AROs face a significant challenge in gaining local credibility as troop deployments primarily address conflicts rooted in African state fragility, with governments and challengers vying for state power. Actions by defense and security forces in border regions have escalated tensions, leading to increased armament among certain communities. In the Lake Chad Basin, regional armies also deploy vigilantes to sharpen campaigns against Boko Haram insurgents.[604]

In terms of outcomes, despite institutional rhetoric emphasizing human security and a people-centered agenda, security and governance indicators have continued to deteriorate, marked by frequent large-scale attacks against civilians. The credibility of these institutions is at risk, as their legitimacy is further eroded in the eyes of African citizens. This is particularly tangible in ECOWAS' attempt to manage UCGs while popular frustration at government underperformance has driven risk of coups, and in part fueled support of incoming military juntas.[605] One cost for AROs is that their efforts to uphold norms and principles, such as democracy and elections, face challenges due to insufficient investment in human security[606] and support from countries such as United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Russia are creating an enabling environment for Africa's autocrats.

In essence, the underfunding of AROs, the influence of various external forces, and the persistent decline in regional security and governance have weakened member states' ability to inspire confidence in their leadership at national and regional levels. Most of the AROs are equally out of touch with the citizens' needs and demands and clamor for inclusion, participation and inclusion on governance, and tend to align with the interest of those in power thus losing public trust, confidence and credibility. This perpetuates the prevalent perception that AROs are simply 'clubs of

601. Venturi, B. (2017). The EU and the Sahel: a laboratory of experimentation for the security–migration–development nexus, IAI working paper no. 17/3, Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali.

602. Cold-Ravnkilde, S. M. (2019). Providing Security in the Sahel: A 'Traffic Jam' of Military Interventions. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. 5 September 2019. https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/providing-security-sahel-traffic-jam-military-interventions-23852

603. See Olapade, M., Selormey, E. E., Gninafon, H. 2016. "Regional integration for Africa: Could stronger public support turn 'rhetoric into reality'?". Afrobarometer Dispatch no. 91, May 2016. Accra: Afrobarometer. https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad91-regional-integration-africa-could-stronger-public-support-turn-rhetoric-reality/

604. International Crisis Group. (2017). Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram, Report. https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/244-watchmen-lake-chad-vigilante-groups-fighting-boko-haram

605. UNDP, op.cit.

606. Vlavonou G. (2019): The APSA and (Complex) International Security Regime Theory: A Critique, African Security, 12 (1), pp. 87-110.

heads of state',[607] with regional norms and policies manipulated by political elites, backed by international allies, to assert and challenge power.

Policy options for consideration

To mitigate the risks associated with the spill-over effects of conflicts across borders, states need to invest in fostering social cohesion and building trust, yet many potential strategies for achieving these goals remain underexploited. In light of this, AROs should consider several recommendations:

Beyond physical borders, investing in cross-border ecosystems

To enhance the effectiveness of regional organizations and mechanisms in fostering public trust and designing a more robust social contract, it is essential to go beyond traditional perception of borders and build cross border ecosystems that address the intricate sociopolitical complexities of the Sahel. Increased involvement of women, youth, marginalized groups and civil society is crucial in this endeavor. For instance, initiatives like the Project launched by the Mano River Union, supported by the African Development Bank, focus on building inclusive business ecosystems in Liberia and Sierra Leone. By empowering women traders in cross-border value chains, such projects aim to foster resilient economic growth and social cohesion.

Furthermore, regional institutions should be realigned with local ecosystems and allocate resources towards digital and green economy initiatives to overcome current challenges effectively. Recognizing the digital literacy and aspirations of the youth population in the Sahel, which constitutes 65% of the demographic, it is imperative to adapt strategies to the changing landscape.

Navigate emergent geopolitical landscape

Amidst escalating tensions among Sahelian states, AROs find themselves navigating divergent interests, hindering consensus-building on geopolitical issues. Beyond mere affirmations of sovereignty and Pan-Africanism, AROs have struggled to assert themselves as key drivers of regional geopolitics and geo-economics. The focus of states appears to be on resource control, particularly valuable commodities in the global market.[608] However, it is imperative to carefully balance geopolitics with regionalism.

To foster public trust and design a more effective social contract in the complex geopolitical landscape, AROs need to effectively address human security challenges, promote multi-level cooperation, and advocate for the collective interests of member states on the global stage. There are clear indications of African actors gaining geopolitical influence and asserting greater autonomy. This emergence of diverse international actors has expanded the options available for partnership. In this context, interpersonal relations remain pivotal, with coalitions of individuals sharing common values and interests becoming crucial for states to exert influence in regional security diplomacy.

Desecuritize the agenda to enhance cross-border trade and investment opportunities

Regional organizations and mechanisms should prioritize desecuritizing their agendas and focus on enhancing cross-border trade and investment opportunities. Despite numerous attempts at regional integration since decolonization, there remains a notable deficiency in economic and commercial integration, with regional groupings often prioritizing political and military-strategic interests. Across Africa, NGOs, CSOs, and businesses possess the capacity to drive transformation and to promote cross-border trade and investment.

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade area encompassing 55 AU member countries, represents another significant opportunity to revitalize cross-border cooperation and overcome AROs competition in the Sahel. By facilitating greater regional collaboration and delivering essential public goods such as transport corridors and digital connectivity, the AfCFTA has the potential to remove longstanding barriers to progress.

The AfCFTA can play a pivotal role in aligning national policies and regulations with regional and continental protocols and treaties, particularly in areas such as labor mobility, infrastructure development, and the digital economy. By promoting harmonization and cooperation at the regional level, the AfCFTA can foster a more conducive environment for cross-border trade and investment, ultimately contributing to the development of a more effective social contract and building public trust in regional institutions.

607. Schnabel, and al. op. cit.

608. Mahmoud, S., Taifouri, M., The Coups d'État of the Sahel Region: Domestic Causes and International Competition. Arab Center Washington DC, 27 September 2023. The Coups d'État of the Sahel Region: Domestic Causes and International Competition (arabcenterdc.org)

CONCLUSION

Chapter 11
Conclusion

Njoya Tikum, Nebila Abdulmelik and George Mukundi Wachira

A wide range of policy proposals to help (re)build social cohesion and public trust were presented throughout the volume, as contributions to rethinking the future of governance in the Sahel.

The nine substantive chapters covered a range of topics, providing conceptual framing and context with a historical trajectory of the Sahel as well as citizen perspectives and trends; building (back) trust through (re)centering citizens, advancing justice and addressing impunity, and ensuring sound economic governance; rethinking governance by exploring digital opportunities, revitalizing the social contract, pushing for term limits and addressing military coups, and a greater appreciation for multi-level governance, regionalism and cross-border cooperation. The chapters reviewed progress and regress made, challenges faced and identified available opportunities to advance a transformative future for the region.

Charting a future for the Sahel is not possible without looking back to glean lessons from history to ensure that mistakes are not repeated and what worked can be adopted and adapted to the current context. It is for this reason that this volume begins with a historical overview of the Sahel, to better understand its trajectory and the roots of and the remedies for some of its current ailments. **Building a sense of cultural identity, belonging, unity and community cohesion through shared values and practices can inform future governance, as was done in the past. This can foster cooperation, reduce conflict and marginalization** in leadership, governance, and decision-making processes. This can be facilitated through **conscientization via educational curricula as well as through sports, arts, and other creative initiatives.** This will also help to address discrimination against women, young people, those with disabilities and other minorities and populations relegated to the margins.

In addition to conscientization, this report calls for the adoption, strengthening and implementation of binding legal and regulatory frameworks calling for a minimum quota of

30%

with the aim for gender parity, and **sanctions for non-compliance** to increase youth and women's representation and leadership in elected and key appointed positions at national and local levels.

Centering the people is a central theme of this report and why an entire chapter is dedicated to better understanding citizen perspectives gathered from extensive Afrobarometer surveys across the region, over time. These perspectives and experiences provide revealing data on citizens' continued commitment to democratic governance norms despite their dissatisfaction with their governments, their levels of participation and cohesion with each other, as well as with institutions and their governors. Given the weak state-citizen relationship evident in much of the Sahel, future governance should prioritize **strengthening transparency, accountability, justice delivery, rule of law, access to information, open communication, feedback and information sharing** with the population to help rebuild trust in state institutions and legitimacy of political leaders.

By **strengthening justice mechanisms and addressing impunity,** the Sahel can foster public trust and social cohesion, paving the way for lasting peace and stability. This requires comprehensive collaboration among governments, civil society, and the international community to tackle impunity and promote long-term governance reform. Only through these collective efforts can the Sahel achieve sustained peace and development for its people.

The importance of **decentralized governance structures** as a way of bringing the state closer to its people was reaffirmed in several chapters.[609] Due to their proximity, they have a greater ability to make decisions suited to the needs of their people, as well as be more accountable to them. Decentralized or devolved systems tend to be more inclusive, responsive and representative, promoting social cohesion and public trust.

Improving the **quality and efficacy of democratic processes as well as embracing flexibility and adaptability** by creating systems that can evolve and respond to the needs of the population and emerging challenges is crucial for effective governance, social cohesion and sustainable development. Sound service delivery that is reliable and accessible, particularly to those at the peripheries is crucial to (re)build trust and dampen support for vigilante and extremist groups as well as military regimes who promise to fill the vacuum. Ensuring feedback loops to allow citizens to give feedback on the services, as well as for government to respond to the concerns and needs of citizens will further cement this trust.

Support to the informal sector, to environmental, social and solidarity enterprises, financial products that tap into diaspora resources, and improvement of advocacy to reflect Sahel priorities in international economic regulations will contribute to **sound economic governance** and the attainment of long term inclusive and sustainable development.

Regional actors should build **cross border ecosystems** that address the intricate sociopolitical complexities of the Sahel, and facilitate cooperation, trade and investment across borders. The **promotion of regionalism** will also facilitate advocacy for the collective interests of member states on the global stage.

(Re)building social cohesion and public trust is a long-term endeavor that requires the deliberate and concerted efforts of state and non-state actors working collaboratively across a range of issues. As the authors have demonstrated throughout this volume, an understanding of the historical trajectory of the region, analysis on current and emerging trends, as well as citizen's perspectives and experiences is crucial to diagnose gaps and challenges and proffer possible solutions. Revitalizing the social contract requires centering the people and their well-being, advancing justice and addressing impunity, ensuring sound economic governance, devolving power, addressing efforts to unconstitutionally change government or preserve power, enhancing regionalism and cross-border cooperation. These are all pathways to ensuring a future Sahel that is well-governed, just, peaceful and prosperous. This volume aims to contribute to shape policy and practice to make this a reality. Readers and policymakers are invited to provide feedback and commentary and where possible, consider its key policy issues for consideration for further research, analysis and implementation.

609. Chapter 2, Chapter 4, Chapter 9 and Chapter 10.

AUTHOR & EDITOR BIOS



Dr. Amandine Gnanguênon

A Senior Fellow and Head of Geopolitics Program at the Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI) in Berlin. Before joining APRI, she worked as a senior independent advisor to governments, think tanks, German foundations, African organizations, the European Union, and the United Nations. She also held several positions in think tanks, including at European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), the Institute of Security Studies (ISS) in Dakar and the Institute of Strategic Research, Ecole militaire (IRSEM) where she set-up and led the sub-Saharan Africa programme.



Dr. Chukwuemeka B. Eze

The Executive Director of West Africa Network for Peacebuilding and manages the strategic partnership between AU, ECOWAS and WANEP by which WANEP provides early warning data, analysis, assessments and recommendations. In 2016, he served as Senior Adviser on Mediation to the SRSG in Guinea Bissau. He developed the Early Warning System of the Government of South Sudan. He holds a PhD in Peace and Strategic Studies and a life Governing Council member and Deputy President of Institute for Chartered Mediators and Conciliators, Fellow of Society for Peace Studies & Practice, and Fellow of the Danish Fellowship program.



Daniel Armah-Attoh

He is the Afrobarometer's project manager for anglophone West Africa and North Africa with project management oversight and technical support responsibilities for data collection, analysis, and results dissemination in all Afrobarometer countries in the two regions. He also doubles as Senior Research Manager and Research Team Lead at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development. Daniel is an economist by training. He holds a master's degree in Economics from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. Daniel is a proficient researcher with over two decades of experience in both quantitative and qualitative research. His research interest is in democracy and governance, including public official responsiveness, transparency, accountability and anti-corruption, and public expenditure tracking.



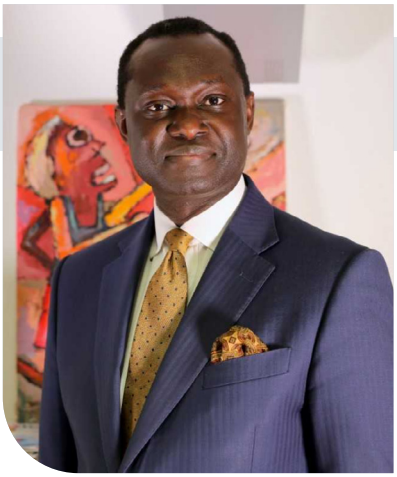
Emmanuel Odilon Koukoubou

A political scientist at the Civic Academy for Africa's Future (CiAAF). His research focuses on political, security and electoral governance in the Sahel and Gulf of Guinea countries. He is the author of several publications on these topics.



Dr. Festus Kofi Aubyn

A Senior Researcher and Lecturer, focusing on conflict, peace and security in Africa. He is currently the Regional Coordinator, Research and Capacity Building at the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) regional office in Accra, Ghana. Before joining WANEP, he worked with the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana as a Research Fellow for almost a decade. He has several scholarly publications to his credit in the form of book chapters, journal articles, policy briefs, policy papers and working papers.



Professor Gibril Faal

A multi-disciplinary business and development executive. He is: co-founder/ director of GK Partners; visiting professor in practice at the London School of Economics; council member of Carnegie African Diaspora Program; lead consultant to the African Union Commission on innovative and diaspora finance; founder of RemitAid™ and the Migration and Sustainable Development (MSD) project. In 2001/04, he helped develop UK's social enterprise business support structures and served previously as: vice chair of Bond; chairman of AFFORD-UK; board member of DFID and EC-UN grant schemes. He worked as technical expert for the United Nations, World Bank, European Union and many governments across the world. In 2017, he served as overarching expert for the UN Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and has addressed the UN General Assembly several times. In 2014, Prof. Faal was appointed OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honors List for services to international development.



Gbenga Sesan

He is the Executive Director of Paradigm Initiative, a pan-African social enterprise working on digital inclusion and digital rights, with offices in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia and Zimbabwe. 'Gbenga, a 2001 ITU Africa 2001 Youth Fellow, has served on Nigeria's Presidential Committees for Harmonization of the Information Technology, Telecommunications and Broadcasting Sectors (2006) and the Roadmap for the Achievement of Accelerated Universal Broadband Infrastructure and Services Provision (2013). He was appointed to the inaugural High-Level Leadership Panel of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in August 2022 and is a member of the International Panel for the Information Environment's Scientific Panel on Global Standards for Artificial Intelligence Audit.



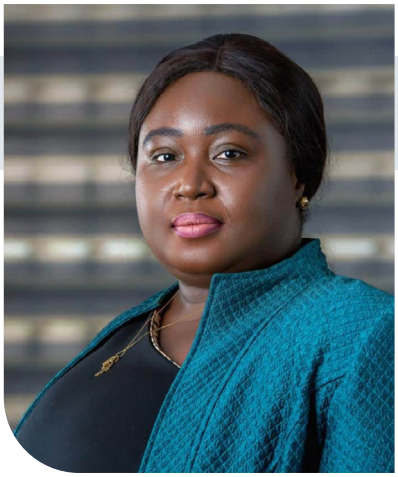
George Mukundi Wachira

He is is the CEO of Maendeleo Group, an Africa focussed strategy, development and advisory consulting firm. He leads and specialises in strategy development, policy formulation, negotiations, mediation, political risk analysis, and high-level stakeholders' dialogue facilitation. He serves as an Adjunct Professor of Public Law at the University of Cape Town and Strathmore Law School, Kenya. Mukundi was the founding head of the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Secretariat at the African Union Commission in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Issaka K. Souaré

He is an expert on governance, mediation and conflict resolution in Africa. Since 2017, he is a lecturer in political science at General Lansana Conté University at Sofonia-Conakry (Guinea) and, since 2018, Senior Research Associate with Rhodes University (South Africa). He served on the UN Standby Team of Senior Mediation Advisors from 2016 to 2021 and as Special Advisor to the AU High Representative for Mali and the Sahel from 2013 to 2016. He is the author of several publications on issues of governance, peace and security in both English and French.



Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny

She is the Afrobarometer's acting director of communications. She is a bilingual communications practitioner credited with cutting-edge communication strategies across Africa. She has authored research publications on several themes including youth, migration, media freedom, violent extremism, and public service delivery. Josephine holds a master's degree in communications studies from the University of Ghana. She is an accredited member of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana and a member of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, UK. She was adjudged the Public Relations (PR) Discovery of the Year 2020 and named among the Top 10 Women in PR Ghana for three consecutive years.



Joseph Asunka

The CEO of Afrobarometer, a pan-African survey research organization that conducts public attitude surveys on the continent. He was previously Program Officer at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation where he managed a portfolio of grants to increase government transparency and accountability around fiscal policy. Before joining Hewlett, Joseph was a lecturer in political science at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Joseph holds a PhD in political science from UCLA.



Dr. Linda Darkwa

She is an academic practitioner in peace, security, governance and gender. A Senior Research Fellow of the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy (LECIAD) at the University of Ghana, Dr Darkwa also provides strategic advice on norms relating to Peace Support Operations and Post Conflict Reconstruction and Development, among others, to the African Union's Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security under the umbrella of the Training for Peace program. Dr. Darkwa is a member of the Technical Committee of the Tana Forum, an advisory board member of the Swedish Armed Forces International Centre and a co-convenor and senior fellow of IFG 9 – Sustainable Regional Peacebuilding of the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa.



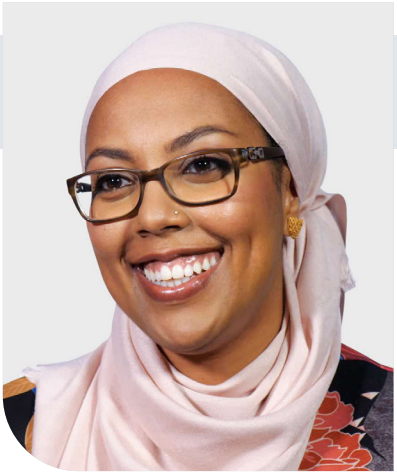
Professor Melvis Ndiloseh

An Associate Professor of International Studies and Law. She has over twelve years of experience in teaching, research, consulting, policy analysis/advisory and program management with international and research institutions like The Carter Center, International IDEA, AU, UN, SIPRI, OSIWA, Social Impact and others. Her areas of specialization are democratic governance, human rights, transitional justice, peace and security. She was a 2017 Yale World Fellow and holds a PhD in Politics, Human Rights and Sustainability.



Nadia Nata

An independent consultant in African political analysis and peace and security since 2019. For the past years, she has worked for various Institutions such as the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the European Union (EU) Commission, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), International IDEA and others. Nadia is an electoral conflict prevention consultant with UNDP. She previously worked as the lead consultant for UNOCHA's climate security project and as a senior policy officer at the AU Commission's Peace and Security Department. Nadia Nata joined the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) in 2011 as a political governance program Officer for five years. Before, she worked as the Head of Mission for Avocats Sans Frontières-France (Lawyers Without Borders) in Abuja, Nigeria in early 2011. Throughout her career, Nadia has worked as a researcher, a civil society leader, and a policy and program officer for various institutions across the Continent. Nadia is on the rosters for Peace Operations and Elections for the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).



Nebila Abdulmelik

Has an MA in African Studies, with an emphasis on Gender and Development, as well as a BA in International Development Studies from UCLA. She has worked in academia, with civil society as well as with multilateral institutions. She worked with one of the oldest and largest women's rights organizations in Africa - FEMNET -- as well as with the Department of Political Affairs at the African Union. She is currently a freelance consultant working in the areas of strategy development, documentation and governance focused on women's rights.



Dr. Philip Attuquayefio

A Senior Research Fellow at the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy at the University of Ghana, where he teaches graduate courses on security in African States. Between 2018 and 2022, he coordinated the African Union's support for developing and implementing the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of Boko Haram-Affected Areas in the Lake Chad Basin. He has also designed and facilitated several training modules on Human Security Management and Countering Violent Extremism in Africa. He is a member of the Technical Committee of the Tana High-Level Forum on Security in Africa.

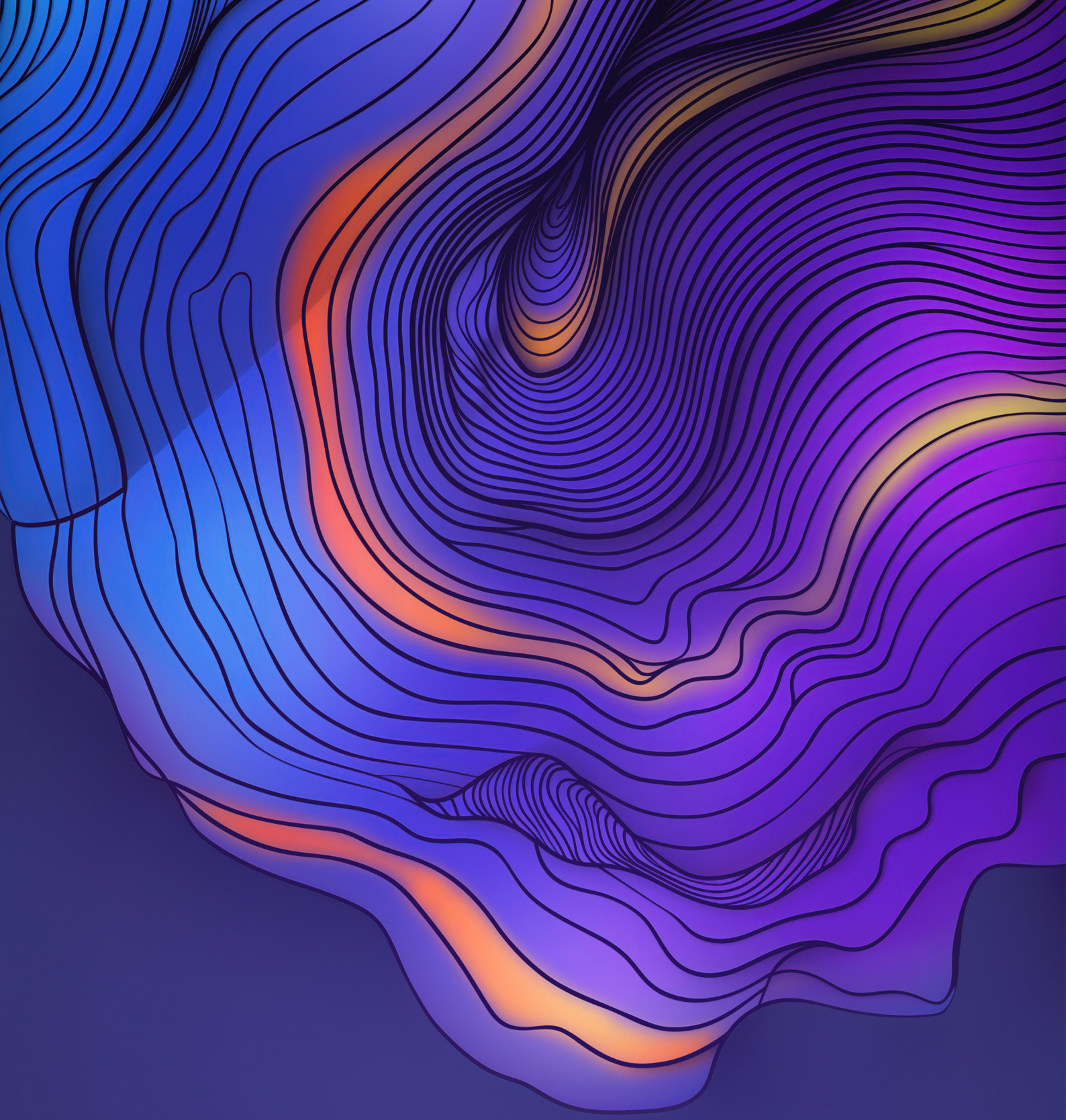


Njoya Tikum

Is the Director of the UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa (UNDP WACA) and Resident Representative of UNDP Senegal. He leads and coordinates UNDP's regional policy and programmatic efforts, fostering collaboration among regional institutions and development partners and providing dedicated support to 24 country offices in the region.

For decades, Njoya has championed initiatives that foster good governance, peace and security, anti-corruption, regional cooperation and sustainable development.

He is a Maurice Greenberg World Fellow at the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, Yale University, USA and holds an LLM in International Contracts and Human Rights Law from Columbia University School of Law, an LLM in International Business Law from the Central European University, and a Licence and Maitrise en Droit from the University of Yaoundé II SOA.



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