In Africa, the Sahel region polarizes a lot of attention from the international community because of its rich potential, which is in stark contrast to its fragile and worsening security situation - all against the backdrop of a powerful demographic dynamic marked by a considerable proportion of young people.

This publication aims to deepen reflection on the causes of conflict and fragility in the Sahel and potential relationships with Africa’s demography. UNFPA, national statistical institutes and renowned research institutions worked together to combine theoretical and empirical approaches to highlight the potential role of population dynamics in the occurrence of security crises in the Sahel.

The report aims to provide policy makers and development partners with data and evidence that can contribute to the design of better policies which enable far more effective and sustainable responses to current and future challenges in the Sahel.

*Mabingué Ngom* has been UNFPA’s Regional Director for the West and Central Africa region since January 2015. An economic planner by training, a public policy specialist and an expert in organizational change management, he has more than 30 years of national and international experience. Mr Ngom has promoted important programmes favoring the emergence of Africa, including the demographic dividend, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Committed to the empowerment of young people, he launched the #PutYoungPeopleFirst campaign in 2016. Nominated as one of the 100 Most Influential Africans of 2019 in the New African Magazine, he led the work on a seminal book titled “GOAL 17, Partnership: UNFPA’s approach for the transformation of Africa and the world” on the importance of strategic partnerships for Africa.
DEMOGRAPHY, PEACE AND SECURITY
Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel
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Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel

Foreword by H.E. Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou,
President of the Republic of Niger

Afterword by Mr. Saïdou Oua,
Director-General of the Integrated Development Authority
of the Liptako-Gourma Region (ALG)
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The Sahel security crisis is not only ongoing, it is getting worse. So for understandable reasons, strategies devised to contain the problem have been the subject of many a meeting. These meetings have highlighted the need to go beyond treating the symptoms and it is increasingly recognized how important it is to understand the complex phenomena underlying the crisis and find ways to remedy the harm blighting this part of Africa.

For those who, in this particularly vulnerable region, are keen to move beyond the management of emergencies, the urgent need is for a far more detailed analysis of the many factors compounding the fragility of the Sahel in order to take better action against them.

However, actors and partners in the region, always searching for radical and lasting solutions to a crisis which all agree has its roots in the ancient past, often come up against considerable barriers: the inadequacy of quantitative and qualitative data and evidence that could be used to establish a new narrative, and strategies capable of reversing current trends.

In order to overcome these barriers and expand the frontiers of knowledge and understanding, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has chosen to mobilize researchers, experts, political decision-makers, development practitioners, Sahelians and non-Sahelians to reflect on the demography, peace and security (DPS) nexus in the central Sahel. And that is the subject of this work.

From the start of the project, UNFPA decided to stimulate and facilitate an initiative for the co-creation of a DPS agenda rather than being locked into a more regular process. Then, with the firm
conviction that an empirical, observations-based approach would enrich this process, UNFPA chose to listen to people on the ground, with all the difficulties this entails. This approach seemed necessary as a way to avoid the temptation to sacrifice scientific rigor over emotional considerations. A firm commitment to the facts was, therefore, from the outset, established as a sacrosanct principle of this wonderful intellectual odyssey which spanned several months and which my office had the pleasure of facilitating.

The exercise was a long and tranquil process, all the more reason why I must thank all those who contributed to its success. Accordingly, on behalf of the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) of the United Nations Population Fund, I wish to extend my gratitude to Professor Alioune Sall, Director of the African Futures Institute and to Dr. Bakary Sambe, Director of the Timbuktu Institute. Without their generous understanding and constant support, this work would never have seen the light of day. Their assistance in editing the study Understanding the Sahel through its history, geography and sociodemographic and security challenges provided the foundation for examining the relationship between demography, peace and security in the Sahel.

This experience of statistically modelling and conceptualizing the relationship between demography, peace and security would not have been nearly as enlightening without the support and commitment of the Peace Research Institute OSLO (PRIO), and especially Professor Henrik Urdal and Ms. Bintu Zahara Sakor, to whom I would like to extend my sincere thanks. I must also acknowledge Mr. Abdou Diouf as well as Dr. Souleymane Diakité and Mr. Oumar Sène, all experts from the National School of Economic Analysis and Statistics (ENSAE) in Senegal, for their unwavering dedication.
I would also like to express our appreciation to the experts and consultants of the National Statistics Institutes (INS) of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, whose efforts – combined with those of PRIO and ENSAE – enabled a clearer understanding of the socio-demographic and security context of the Central Sahel and the causal relationships between demography, peace and security there. Convinced of the significance of this study, they successfully paired their curiosity with scientific rigor to contribute effectively to debates in this region and elsewhere.

Throughout its preparation, the work has benefited from the contributions of an international scientific committee bringing together officials and experts from renowned research institutions, senior officials in national statistical institutions and specialized researchers from a range of backgrounds. Members of the scientific committee¹ made a major contribution to the collection of scientific studies that fed a series of fascinating meetings. This made it possible to refine the conceptual, methodological, analytical and research frameworks. Committee members’ meticulous readings of individual stage studies, with many observations and recommendations, made the final text clearer and more impactful. I greatly appreciate each and every one of you.

The final drafting of the publication owes a great deal to the efforts of Professor Alioune Sall and Mr. Ruben Djogbenou, to whom we also express our gratitude. They brought real accuracy and precision to the use of the range of materials provided by national and international experts and to the contributions made by scientific committee members themselves.

¹ A list of members of the scientific committee is provided at the end of the report.
Finally, I must thank all of my colleagues at the UNFPA regional office for devoting their talent, effort and time to this assignment over the course of several months. The following deserve special mention: Dr. Mamadou Kanté - UNFPA Deputy Regional Director, Dr. Édouard Talnan - Regional Adviser on Population and Development, Mr. Waly Sène - Population and Development Programme Analyst, Ms. Gilena Andrade - Population and Development Programme Specialist, Mr. Moussa Fall - Operations Manager, Mr. Habibou Dia - Media Specialist, Mr. Jacob Enoh Eben - Regional Communications and Advocacy Adviser, Mr. Jocelyn Fenard - Regional Resource Mobilization and Partnership Adviser, Ms. Sarah Belmir - Special Assistant to the Regional Director, Ms. Sophie Sène-Kane - Personal Assistant to the Regional Director for West and Central Africa; Ms. Awa Dia - Consultant; Ms. Catherine Senghor - Programme Assistant, Ms. Lauren Knipping Bolinger - Procurement Specialist, Ms. Sarra Hassouni – Resource Mobilization and Partnerships Analyst, Mr. Auguste Jean Marie Kpognon - UNFPA Resident Representative in Burkina Faso, Dr. Dalomi Bahan - Monitoring and Evaluation Manager at the UNFPA office in Burkina Faso, Dr. Eugène Kongnyuy - UNFPA Resident Representative in Mali, Mr. Mohamed Moussa Ould Lemine - Monitoring/Evaluation and Smart Data Programme Manager at the Mali UNFPA office; Mr. Ismaïla Mbengue - UNFPA Resident Representative in Niger, and Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Ndiaye - Technical Adviser in Prospective Analysis and Population and Development in UNFPA Mali.
Overall, the publication is a summary of consultations, discussions and analyses conducted during the last few months and the content does not necessarily represent UNFPA’s point of view.

The report is available from Harmattan and a free e-book version is available from the UNFPA website: wcaro.unfpa.org

For further information about the publication, please contact the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) of UNFPA:

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Foreword by H.E. Mr. Mahamadou Issoufou, President of the Republic of Niger

*Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel* is a publication I greatly enjoyed reading, for the following reasons.

The first is that this study examines a vital issue, that of demography in the Sahel. However, ‘demography’ as discussed here goes far beyond the general use of the term, encompassing the impact of population factors on peace and security. The report seeks to address the burning question of whether demographic dynamics promote development, peace and security or, on the contrary, jeopardize them. No problem is more pressing in the Sahel, where violent extremism is summarily attributed to the young population, forgetting that the demographic variable, while important, is not an independent variable, in the Sahel and elsewhere. The value of this study lies in its ‘reframing of things’ by highlighting non-demographic determinants of peace and security, such as economic, social, political, environmental, cultural and even technological factors. Thus, it appears that identity-related tensions, one expression of which is jihadism,
have far less to do with the fertility of Sahelian women than with the difficulty of certain social groups adjusting to the rise of multicultural societies and the plurality of opinion that comes with everything this transition brings, whether opportunities or threats. In essence, this study goes beyond traditional approaches, offering a new analytical framework to this issue, on which the Sahel requires clarity.

The second reason why Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel captured my attention is that, unlike so many other studies on the Sahel, this analysis is based on the reality, or should I say the ‘roughness’, on the ground in the Sahel, which – I cannot emphasize enough – is all about nuance. Due to a variety of factors, the Sahel exhibits a degree of diversity that warrants speaking of not just one, but rather of multiple Sahels. In addition, a monodisciplinary approach cannot do justice to the nexus of demography, peace and security. Further, the diversity of the sub-areas and the complexity of the relationship between demography, peace and security do not lend themselves to hasty generalizations or rigid disciplinary boundaries, for any analyst really aware of what’s going on in the Sahel. It is particularly heartening that the authors of Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel understood this, and adopted a multidisciplinary approach as the only way to do justice to the complexity of the subject matter and the distinctiveness of the different areas.

I would also like to note that the quality of the writing did not fail to impress. I am particularly moved by the professional detachment of the authors when dealing with topics that can be unsettling. This should earn the study a warm reception amongst many Sahelian, thus contributing to the democratization of knowledge, to which I am particularly committed.
Beyond these questions of form, the publication also interests me with its political message, which may be summarized with two statements. The first is that the Sahel can and will win the war on insecurity and “silence the guns”, to paraphrase the African Union. It will achieve this not merely by investing more in security measures, but also through its determination to create a demographic dividend through original and sustained policies to develop our most valuable capital: human capital, which in the Sahel more so than elsewhere, we know to be mostly young and female. The second statement is that victory in this war would be better, and above all, more sustainable, if it comes through combining all our efforts.

The report’s political message reflects my deeply held belief, bolstered by the past decade in service to the people of Niger as their Head of State, that solutions to the Sahel’s problems will be found in the lands of the Sahel, with the primary responsibility resting with the Sahelians. We, the people of the Sahel, must forge our own broad frameworks, find our own ways, to stay the course on the ambition – a more critical one than ever – to center our strategic thinking around the needs of all of our populations. Why? Because this is our clearest path to a future of peace and security.

That said, we Sahelians cannot close ourselves off because, far from being an isolated corner of the world, the Sahel is fully immersed in it, sharing in its ups and downs while also suffering from the effects of the latter. Thus, we must collaborate with anyone and everyone who wants to act as a partner. Thankfully, we have no shortage of such partners, among them, of course, UNFPA.
I would like to extend my utmost gratitude to this United Nations agency for its intellectual leadership, the quality of its advocacy and the strategic value of its operations. Yet while I certainly appreciate its actions, I am even more thankful it chose to prioritize a partnership-based approach in its interventions.
Preface by Mr. Mabingué Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa

Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel is a report that convincingly sets out empirical facts, data and results from studies and analyses establishing, in the clearest possible terms, links between demography, peace and security in the Central Sahel. After reading this study it would be difficult to hide behind an alibi of ignorance. Indeed, a single thread runs through the publication from start to finish: a preference for analyzing specific situations over ideological positions, and making realities on the ground the ultimate test, but without rejecting important theoretical insights.

This methodological approach gave rise to two choices: This first consisted in limiting the study to the Central Sahel region – comprising Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger – for a practical reason: this area has effectively become the epicenter of the Sahel security crisis. Here, the impact of climate threats, which in many places have become a humanitarian drama, have been exacerbating the instability and insecurity caused by various belief movements, ranging from jihadi combatants and weapon traffickers to human traffickers and community-based militias. Totally ignoring other parts of the Sahel, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, would, however, have been inexcusable given that perpetrators of violence know no borders and expand the range of their activities every day. For this reason, the authors drew from numerous and diverse documents from countries we may refer to as ‘out of scope’, though this does not mean they are sheltered from insecurity, in order to gain a picture that is as complete as possible of the unity and diversity of the Sahel.
Another implication of this methodological approach is that the perspectives offered on these Sahelian lands cannot help but be pluralistic: contrary to toxic knowledge hierarchies to which we have grown accustomed in certain traditions, the authors of this study gave all disciplines equal weight, due to their equal importance. Thus, in contrast to sector-based approaches that tend to slice reality up, they have opted for a decidedly multidisciplinary approach because, as President Issoufou says in his foreword, that is the only way to do justice to the complexity of the reality on the ground in the Sahel, which is all about nuance. That is why the project’s founders commissioned the services of all kinds of experts including anthropologists, demographers, geographers, economists, historians, statisticians and military service members.

If a key objective was, naturally, to shed light on the present situation, how would that be possible without looking back on a region so steeped in history? It was vital to question a past that in many respects was a flourishing time, its traces still evident in memories and social behaviors, even under the difficult circumstances spreading through the region. How could we have kept our minds, occupied with escaping the tyranny of so many emergencies, which unfortunately inspire so many strategies, from exploring the possibilities of the future and discovering it is not set in stone? It is fortunate that the conceptual framework devised by the authors allows us to link the present to both the past and the future, as this trio is, of course, at the heart of the human adventure everywhere.

Another positive and inspiring aspect is that these wide-ranging perspectives line up well with many of the points arising from the United Nations 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063 of the African Union, to take just two examples of references widely cited in Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel.
My office is honored to have been a partner in this effort to shed light on realities on the ground in the Sahel, enabling large-scale scrutiny of certain concepts and notions at the heart of our day-to-day work in advocacy, planning and programming. *Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel* brings a Sahelian approach to these notions, known as the demographic dividend and the demographic transition or emergence, etc. which would not have been possible without the support of numerous and diverse researchers, stakeholders and decision-makers sharing in common a demand for scientific rigor and a respect for Sahelian communities.

However, the report would never have been born without the support of political leaders in the Sahel, especially President Issoufou, to whom we owe our sincere thanks for having confidence in us throughout the process. We at UNFPA have resolved to spare no effort in continuing to earn his trust and support and also the trust and support of his peers in the current phase: the implementation of approaches the people and their leaders decide to move forward with.

In his foreword, where he expresses his appreciation for the report, the President of Niger is clear: it is the primary responsibility of Sahelians to create favorable conditions in the region and organize their resources, including themselves, in peaceful and secure environments. To support stakeholders and decision-makers of the Sahel in this effort, the West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is committed to giving them all the data and evidence collected in the study, which attest to the need, for all those seeking to build a resilient Sahel, to take a holistic approach to demography.
### List of abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AfDB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>CILSS</td>
<td>Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td>United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECOWAS</td>
<td>Economic Community of West African States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DD</td>
<td>Demographic Dividend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPS</td>
<td>Demography, Peace and Security</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICRG</td>
<td>International Country Risk Guide</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>OMVS</td>
<td>Senegal River Basin Development Authority (Organisation pour la Mise en Valeur du fleuve Sénégal)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPP</td>
<td>Purchasing Power Parity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRIO</td>
<td>Peace Research Institute Oslo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TFP</td>
<td>Technical and Financial Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>Secretary-General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNS</td>
<td>United Nations System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
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<td>AU</td>
<td>African Union</td>
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<td>UEMOA</td>
<td>West African Economic and Monetary Union Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine</td>
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<td>AMU</td>
<td>Arab Maghreb Union</td>
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<td>UNISS</td>
<td>United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>USD</td>
<td>United States Dollar</td>
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**Introduction**

This report summarizes the developments and conclusions of multiple studies on the triad of ‘demography, peace and security (DPS) under the aegis of UNFPA’s WCARO. These empirical studies are the subject, in this work, of efforts to capitalize on the state of play and diagnosis of the long-term outlook, in the form of various scenarios, for the Sahel.

In a context where the issue of the so-called DPS nexus brings together a number of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies as well as the UN system, this publication aims to help analyze the various components of the Sahel’s issues and improve the understanding of the associated challenges. The report was written by the maxim that a well-formulated question is half the battle. In addition to the first objective, involving conceptual and analytical clarification, we have a second, more operational goal: the work aims to contribute to improving the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), whose threefold mission is to (i) improve inclusive and effective governance in the region, (ii) reinforce national and regional security mechanisms to meet increasing cross-border threats and (iii) integrate humanitarian and development plans and interventions to bolster long-term resilience.

Ultimately the report is an intellectual contribution to understanding the DPS nexus in order to define a conceptual framework to guide efforts to build resilience in the Central Sahel. The publication is part of an operational perspective, in the sense that it refines and improves the orientation of policies implemented towards a resilient Sahel.
This analysis is both theoretical and empirical, but it is also systemic in that it sheds light on the different variables that make up the system and also on the links between them.

Aside from this introduction, the report features four parts and a conclusion. The first part covers the background, the definition of the concepts, the problem and the methodology applied. The second part deals with perspectives on the DPS nexus in the Central Sahel. The third part details and presents scenarios for possible futures for the region. Finally, the fourth part sets out the implementation strategy for the best, preferred scenario.
I. Background, definition of concepts, problem and methodology

Background and rationale: Demography, Peace and Security, a complex nexus

_The Sahel: troubled present, open future_

_A region in transition_

The analysis provided in this work covers a region, the Sahel, whose borders shift about from one document to the next, for reasons we’ll soon discuss. In this publication, the overall Sahel region is that defined by the Security Council\(^2\) (and see Figure 1). Amongst these countries, the focus here is on three in particular. These are Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, which make up the Central Sahel.

---

\(^2\) It stretches from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea and comprises 11 countries. These countries are, from east to west: Senegal; the G5 Sahel countries of Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad; the four countries bordering Lake Chad, i.e. Niger and Chad (already mentioned), Nigeria and Cameroon; and Sudan and Eritrea, as well as the southern part of Algeria. According to this definition, in 2020 the Sahel region had a total population of 427 million, or 5.5 % of the population of the world, and for sub-Saharan African countries, 383 million, or 35 % of the population of that region.
This region has a troubled present in terms of several socioeconomic indicators, as shown in Table 1.
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<td>Senegal</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>42,8</td>
<td>5,3</td>
<td>67,7</td>
<td>315,0</td>
<td>45,3</td>
<td>3 536</td>
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Things were not always this way: the region enjoyed a prosperous past that lives on in the memories and heritage of Sahelians today. But it’s not written in stone that the difficulties faced nowadays will continue for years or decades to come. On the contrary, the future is open given that the region is undergoing a series of transitions. These are multidimensional – semantic, ecological, sociocultural, politico-administrative, demographic, security-related and economic – and closely intertwined with economies, societies, social systems, ways of life, ecosystems and politics in the Sahel. Indeed, they help to shape it. The part on strategic diagnostics (Chapter II) will also discuss and analyze all of these. However, as it is likely that they will largely determine the future of the region, the prospective analysis section will revisit them to examine possible developments.

Multiple perspectives

In addition to the various transitions, the region features not only multiple Sahelian social groups, but also numerous outside players known as technical and financial partners (TFPs). Many of these have their own agendas and have developed their own intervention strategies based on their interpretations of the realities in the Sahel. These are, of course, related to their assessments of what is at stake, the challenges of development in the Sahel, their institutional positioning and their resources. Thus, in the Sahel today, we can count no less than 17 strategies\(^1\) that have been proposed and/or implemented by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies, with all that entails, including

\(^1\) According to the field study report ‘Etudes prospective Sahel’ (Prospective studies on the Sahel), UNDP 2015
the risk of competition between these organizations and difficulty coordinating their plans of action. All of the strategies roughly address the DPS nexus, but they do so from conceptual, methodological and analytical frameworks that do not necessarily line up together.

Linking these strategies is all the more difficult in view of the various uses of the concepts **demography, peace and security**, as well as **uncertainty around their relationships**.

The DPS nexus is problematic because of the **different uses** of the concepts themselves.

**Demography**

Demographic problems, especially the relationship between population and economic growth, were the subject of intense debate long before the birth of demography as a scientific discipline. And there was a mountain of literature long before the creation of organizations dedicated to dealing with such issues. Various schools of thought flourished, some of them rather impressive and inspired by the works of thinkers like François Quesnay, Thomas Malthus and even Karl Marx. Several hugely important international meetings were held on the matter, including the 1974 World Conference on Population in Bucharest, the 1984 International Conference on Population in Mexico and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

Several theories inform the field of population studies, with arguments drawing their legitimacy from observations and assumptions as well as from prospective analysis. We will soon
cover the main theories, which are populationism, Malthusianism and Neo-Malthusianism, Marxism and demographic transition theory⁴.

The 1990s marked a key turning point in population studies. Since then, a degree of consensus seems to have taken shape around the importance of developing the idea of the demographic variable treated as a dependent variable, and no longer as an independent variable. For example, based on the correlation between a rapid drop in fertility in developing countries and the emergence of their economies over the preceding three decades, many studies have highlighted the importance of a rapid decrease in fertility, and associated changes in the age structure, in the acceleration of economic growth. Many researchers have discarded older theories, taken stock of the complexity of the relationships between these different variables and decided to adopt population policies instead of prevailing natalist or Malthusian policies. This is the context in which the concept of the demographic dividend made its debut and quickly flourished in certain environments.

Thus, the demographic dividend has become a topic of particular interest in debates around the implementation of different national and international development agendas. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 to 10 can attest to this.

The demographic dividend translates into faster economic growth following changes in the age structure of a population. Indeed, the continuous decline in fertility has led to more people of a working age and a decrease in the number of dependent populations (children and the elderly). The demographic

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⁴ The status of theory, which is sometimes attributed to the demographic transition, is often questioned, with some preferring to consider it a general process of the evolution of human populations.
dependency ratio is declining and a *window of opportunity* has appeared to boost productivity and economic growth. If the economic environment is conducive to the creation of a greater number of decent and sustainable jobs, this will boost personal income and government revenues. And this, in turn, will allow for more investment in healthcare and education. Overall, there’ll be far more investment in the well-being of future generations. However, nothing should be considered automatic in the demographic dividend: it is merely a unique opportunity that can be seized upon, as in Asia, or missed, as seen in the demographic development of the Maghreb countries.

This concept of the demographic dividend is inseparable from that of the demographic transition, but is not a question that is exclusively or even mainly demographic, strictly speaking. That’s because it covers aspects related to the ‘quality’ of human capital (individual profiles, level of education, health, employability, etc.), not just quantitative aspects. Thus, the demographic dividend also stems from public policies that develop this human capital. It appears from all of the theoretical and empirical works and discussions that the issue of making the most of the demographic dividend, including the development of human capital, is absolutely critical to the Sahel region when taking its sociodemographic profile and fragility into account.

However, the demographic variable alone cannot explain the dynamics of development in a region that we may characterize as *fraught with paradoxes*. Indeed, if the Sahel is one of the poorest regions in the world despite its rich national (eg gold and uranium) and human potential, this is because it has fallen prey to political instability, insecurity and crises of governance. These social and political variables do appear to exert some weight in the development of the region, even more so than demography does.
Peace

Peace is a very difficult concept to pin down and, as with demography, there are various features specific to the Sahel.

From a simplistic point of view, peace is first and foremost about an absence of war. From this point of view, up until the 1990s while the Sahel was regarded as a poor region, it was also generally seen as one at peace, unlike southern and central Africa where civil wars and wars of liberation raged. There were some tensions around border disputes, such as the 1985 conflict between Mali and Burkina Faso, but overall peace reigned. This understanding of what peace basically rings true amongst all local, national and international actors in development. UNESCO’s slogan “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”, or more recently “silence the guns”, as the AU formulated its objective for 2020, is a rough translation of this approach to peace. However, this is all far too simplistic.

Examined through another, more ambitious lens, peace – like health – would be a permanent state of physical and emotional, even spiritual, well-being amongst individuals and their communities and with other species. This state of being, this kind of peace, is not innate. It is the fruit of struggle and is expressed in behaviors resulting from education. The term culture of peace does justice to the complexity of the concept. It is inseparable from the concept of solidarity that features so prominently in SDG 17.

Another approach to peace comes to us from China, expressed in a slogan that sounds rather self-contradictory to Western ears: “peace through winning without fighting”. Chinese leaders talk about ‘peaceful development by reforms and opening up while
preserving stability’. In other words, peace is a dividend of development, in contrast to the prevailing view elsewhere that development is a dividend of peace.

Finally, we must mention the approach to peace popular with members of religious/spiritual communities. According to them, peace follows from the ability of believers to fight obstacles within themselves, preventing them being close to the divine or preventing them from worshipping properly or enough. In the Islamic spiritual world, peace follows from the jihad, understood not as a holy war against non-Muslims and other so-called heathens, as some Islamic extremists would have us believe, but rather as an internal struggle a faithful Muslim wages against his or her own impulses.

**Security**

As with peace, security is another word with varying and multidimensional uses, encompassing the internal and external security of the State (particularly border controls), as well as human security, understood as the development of groups and individuals and their protection from various vulnerabilities, such as:

- economic vulnerability, when, as in many countries, half of young people of working age are neither employed nor in training;

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5 *China's Peaceful Development*, Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, September 2011, Beijing
6 2010 report from the Secretary-General to the General Assembly
● environmental, food, nutritional and health insecurities for people and their livestock, which all countries in the Sahel region are facing as the climate crisis takes hold;
● administrative vulnerability, where a civil service is not operating properly and where obtaining identification documents is a veritable obstacle course;
● identity or even existential insecurity, where religious, ethnic and/or sociocultural differences lead to the denial of rights, and sometimes to full exclusion from the national community;
● insecurity due to terrorism and violent extremism. This insecurity is particularly acute in the Sahel countries, which are caught in an arc of violence that some agencies view as marking the boundaries of the region.

What about the Demography, Peace and Security nexus?

The three concepts of demography, peace and security, which appear independent at first glance, actually exhibit complex interdependencies. Focusing on demography in understanding matters of peace and security is a topic of extensive debate. Variables related to demography (including median age, fertility rates, population growth rates, urbanization, unequal access to basic social services, level of education, healthcare, employment) clearly make it a vital component when trying to explain the dynamics of peace and security.
In their 2020 study\textsuperscript{7} Bakary Sambe and Alioune Sall show that the DPS issue exhibits \textit{several divergences in approaches}.

With regard to \textit{demography} in general, the study notes distinct differences between \textit{populationist theories}, which say population is the foundation of all wealth, and \textit{Malthusian/Neo-Malthusian thought}, which views population as a brake on development with all the associated consequences.

Populationists assume population growth by births and/or immigration stimulates growth in wealth, and also assume the foundation of a State’s wealth lies in its population density. Ester Boserup (1910-1999) was an economist who talked about "creative pressure"\textsuperscript{8}. It is indicative of this particular line of thought. Other authors from this school of thought contend that population increases tend to be consistent with increases in consumption and employment. This populationist theory appears to be in line with the traditional view on population in Africa supported by many during the 1970s.

Opposing the populationist approach is Malthusianism, which asserts that population increases exponentially, i.e. very rapidly, whereas resources only increase linearly. This means the former outpaces the latter. In this regard, poor resource management can cause famines, wars and epidemics further down the road. This theory therefore suggests controlling births in order to avoid an uncontrollable population boom and maintains this can be

\textsuperscript{7} Démographie, Paix et Sécurité, Comprendre le Sahel à travers son histoire, sa géographie, et ses défis sociodémographiques et sécuritaires, Bakary Sambe and Alioune Sall, 2020.

\textsuperscript{8} The Conditions of Agricultural Growth, Ester Boserup (1965).
accomplished with policies discouraging multiple births, such as a tax on birth, aid for childless couples and an end to social assistance for the needy.

The ideas of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) have been heavily criticized by various authors who oppose his anti-democratic vision with its sociological approach to population. This is the case, for instance, with Karl Marx (1818-1883), who shows that there is no natural law independent of production conditions that shape socioeconomic relationships. He criticized Malthus for glossing over the development of production conditions and advocated for the equal distribution of wealth to meet the needs of the population, even during extreme growth. He also explained that a large population provides abundant labour, ultimately, an ‘industrial reserve army’. This argument finds favor in the Sahel-Saharan strip, where according to some authors, relatively strong population growth can generate vital labor, both for the formal sector (business) and the more informal one (homestead agriculture, livestock farming and services). Marx is certainly not alone in criticizing Malthusianism. One example of another critic is Ester Boserup, mentioned previously, whose studies in the 1970s on the links between population density and economic innovation held sway for many years.

With regard to security, we should note that theoretical and empirical studies conducted on the relationship between trends in demography, peace and security offer several lenses that prioritize different things at different times, sometimes demographic, sometimes sociological and sometimes political aspects.
Sociologist Jack Goldstone, for instance, attempts to explain (1991, 2001) how *demography* can trigger violence and conflict\(^9\). He says population growth increases pressure on the environment, due to increasingly intense use of limited available resources. As resources become scarce, struggles to control them become a source of conflict and violence that may pose a serious threat to social cohesion. Other authors, such as Henrik Urdal in 2006 suggest that as populations grow denser and increasingly young and urban, the risk of civil war increases. He says countries will have to develop and/or adapt resources management policies and boost their local and national capacities to minimize any risk of civil war.

With regard to explanations that give a certain priority to demographic variables, we will also mention authors who evoke the *youth of the population*. They view age as being a key factor in Africa’s security problem in general, and in the Sahel region in particular. Indeed, several studies show a correlation between the *demographic weight of youth* and the *risk of political violence*. Studies have found high percentages of young people amongst the ranks of jihadist groups throughout the Sahel countries. The prevalence of youth in those societies could suggest a correlation between the variables of *age* and *jihadist involvement* and help explain the numerous security challenges facing the Sahel region (in particular Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, with median ages of 17.6, 16.3 and 15.2 in 2020, respectively).

Some authors go beyond purely demographic questions and look to **economic factors** to explain conflict and its relationship with demography and peace. This viewpoint considers three main types of economic analyses:

(i) utilitarian analysis based on the economic rationality of the agents;

(ii) analysis based on the interaction of economic interests and power whereby it’s believed conflict can be caused by failure to meet certain conditions\(^\text{10}\). For example, interaction between economic interests and a *weak* power can make it impossible to meet the *social contract* as defined by Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan* (1650) and John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government* (1690);

(iii) analysis that considers war a systemic risk (as in, it’s considered an event that can trigger the collapse of an economy) and that is inspired by Keynesian and Freudian concepts of representations of depression and irrational behaviors associated with radical uncertainty. This approach sees conflict as a consequence of an uncertain future and/or a lack of trust in a given system.

We can also apply this economic category of factors to one of the more remarkable theories in the literature on civil war: that of *political opportunity*, also known as *greed theory* (Collier, 2000). Drawing from economic theory, this approach is interested in

\(^{10}\) Defined by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), English philosopher and precursor to ‘social contract’ theory. He sets out his theory of the social contract in his work entitled *The Leviathan* (1650). His theory is about a State being strong enough to ensure security and prevent internal wars because, in his view, a strong and impartial authority is necessary to maintain peace.
“structural conditions that give a rebel group the opportunity to wage war on a government” (Urdal, 2006: 609). As the author states, these structural factors are conditions that reduce the cost of rebellion, thanks to the low costs involved when recruiting participants. Over the years, several researchers, including Collier (2000), have confirmed that a large population of youths likely means an abundant and cheap supply of rebel labor, thus increasing the likelihood of security threats, in particular violent conflict.

Other factors are also mentioned to help explain insecurity in the Sahel. For instance, a study conducted by PRIO\textsuperscript{11} in the form of a literature review, shows that the high unemployment rate, economic and political marginalization, poor governance and a decline in basic social services are amongst the structural reasons why countries with an exponential growth in the youth population are more susceptible to armed conflict and terrorism (Kuzio, 2006). Such studies highlight that countries with young people are generally not only less democratic (Weber, 2012), but also less developed and subject to higher risks of armed conflict. The question of the strong correlation between population structure and political violence has come up in several works. For instance, Greece had rapid growth of its youth population but those young people were only a small portion of its adult population in 2011 (12 %), giving the likelihood of a non-violent uprising there of just 0.008. For Yemen, though, with youths accounting for a whopping 39 % of the adult population, the figure stood at around 0.042. In contrast Japan’s youth accounted for only 13 % of its total adult population in 2009, meaning it had a 0.009 chance of a

\textsuperscript{11} A Demographic Threat? Youth, Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel, PRIO, 2020
non-violent uprising. But Zimbabwe, with a youth ‘bulge’ of 41\% , had a likelihood of 0.048 of experiencing a non-violent uprising.

In simplified terms, taking into account the age of the youngsters (15 to 24 years) compared to the total adult population (15 years and older), whilst also controlling for other factors, these figures indicate that Yemen and Zimbabwe have a risk of non-violent uprising that is more than five times that of Greece and Japan.

In his thesis, the *Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington (1996) stresses that youth in general, but males in particular, are a key cause of political turmoil. Other factors, including a weak government and an inability to repress mobilization, may also increase the likelihood of rebellion (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). This argument is echoed by Goldstone (2002), highlighting that a regime has to be vulnerable, either politically or economically, in order for popular discontent to transform into large-scale conflict.

Addressing the question of the limited political aspect of the capacity of the State, Chenoweth and Stephan (2014) highlight that *divisions amongst elites* can be another major cause of rebellion, as this may indicate the vulnerability of a regime to any form of internal challenge, whether non-violent mobilization or armed conflict. Consequently, we can confirm that people are more likely to join a rebel group if membership of such a group can bring more benefits.

While Collier’s assertion (2000), regarding the opportunity to easily recruit, can shed light on mechanisms by which the exponential growth of the youth population can trigger armed conflict, Urdal in 2006 stressed that most theoretical frameworks on the youth bulge and political upheaval are rooted more in
grievance theory. This is the view that outbreaks of political unrest are “a rational means to redress economic or political grievances” (Urdal, 2006: 609). In other words, motives for committing political violence can be economic, like poverty, economic recession or inequality, or political, like a lack of democracy (Schwartz, 2010; Sambanis, 2002; Gurr, 1970; Tilly, 2003; Goldstone, 1991; 2001; Braungart, 1984). This theory maintains that large groups of young people “facing institutional bottlenecks and unemployment, lack of political openness, and crowding in urban centers may be aggrieved, increasing the risk of political violence” (Urdal, 2006: 610).

Although addressing grievances may be perceived as a public good even if dealing with collective action can be a challenge, it’s clear that grievances alone may not be enough to spark violent conflict. That is because the likelihood of these being addressed by political turmoil increases under conditions like low recruitment costs and government vulnerability (Sambanis, 2002). This means that while it is important to identify different explanations of the impact of large youth cohorts on security challenges such as armed conflict and terrorism, the difference between these competing theories should not be exaggerated. They are most likely interrelated and give rise to similar verifiable predictions.

Some authors have also identified sociological determinants. This is the case with Heinsohn (2003) who examined the security impact of a large youth population. He found that the risk of rebellion, whether violent or not, increases when males between 15 and 29 years of age account for over 30% of a country’s population. According to Heinsohn, security issues are almost inevitable for a community with a lot of young people. Taking a somewhat less determinist view, while maintaining the general
position, Droogan, Guthrie and Williams (2012) stress that the mere size of a group of youth has proven to be a relevant factor in explaining the appearance of various forms of insecurity. They note that in 2003 there were 67 nations around the world experiencing youth bulges, with 60 of them affected by some kind of civil war or experiences of mass killing.

According to the ‘cohort size’ theory, “other things being constant, the economic and social fortunes of a cohort (those born in a given year) tend to vary inversely with its relative size” (Easterlin 1987, quoted in Urdal, 2006: 610). This suggests that those belonging to larger groups are more likely to face adverse conditions in areas like labor markets, compared to those belonging to smaller groups (LaGraffe, 2012). Using wage data for smaller country samples, Machunovic (2000) noted that an increase in relative group size reduces male incomes and also fertility. At the same time, Urdal (2006) highlights the importance of properly measuring the youth bulge, as it can have implications on security problems such as armed conflict and terrorism. Consequently, he states that the proper operationalization is the size of the group of youth (15 to -24 years) compared to total adult population (15 years and up) (Urdal, 2006).

In addition, a study by Korenman and Neumark (1997) suggested that a large youth population is statistically associated with low employment rates. As noted by LaGraffe (2012), “compared to adults, youth are approximately three times as likely to be unemployed”. Like Campante and Chor (2012), Amin et al. (2012) also note that the combination of high unemployment and a disproportionately large youth population causes political turmoil in a society. LaGraffe (2012) also notes this fact and affirms that youth unemployment not only contributes, in most cases, to a feeling of alienation in society, but that it may also
create hostility towards regimes in place and, consequently, give rise to political turmoil and recruitment into terrorist organizations. Urdal (2006) again emphasizes the issue of terrorism, commenting that under conditions of *educational and economic marginalization*, the exponential growth of the youth population may increase the risk of terrorism. Furthermore, in their book entitled *A Convergence of Civilization: The Transformation of Muslim Societies Around the World*, Youssef Courbage and Emmanuel Todd affirm that the rapid youth population growth phenomenon helps explain the Arab spring uprisings in 2011.

Aside from group size and economic marginalization, various studies on armed conflict have established a link between the rapid expansion of higher education and political violence. According to Goldstone (2002), the combination of higher education and youth unemployment may sow political discontent. Literacy plays a key role because it allows young people who were formerly politically inactive to access ideologies and concepts that may be used to undermine the current political authority, thus creating instability (Goldstone et al. 2002). In the view of Courbage and Todd (2011), the youth bulge phenomenon does not become a problem merely because youth make up an increasingly large portion of the population, but rather because unlike their parents, these young people have acquired the ability to read and write – factors that enable them to view themselves as politically active individuals. As remarked by Droogan, Guthrie and Williams (2012), the expansion of higher education is often due to a process of ‘demographic modernization’, which contributes not only to democratization, but also to lower fertility rates, less endogamy (the custom of marrying within a community, clan, or tribe) and the disappearance of traditional family structures. Researchers use the case of the Arab spring to support their
arguments and note that when political turmoil collides with increases in youth populations, and with other forces already cited, civil conflicts are likely to break out.

Austin (2011) and Lia (2005) also confirm the link between the expansion of educational institutions and political challenges. Lia finds that the inability of labor markets in most of these States to absorb these young people has caused not only violent conflict, but also radicalization and the recruitment of young people into local militant jihadist groups. In short, the inability to integrate highly educated young people into a national economy can undoubtedly cause grievances of an economic nature that can ultimately stimulate civil conflict and other forms of insecurity (Goldstone, 2001). However, attempts to assess the impact of education on the link between young people and conflict has found very little evidence to support the notion that the development of higher education amongst the young poses an additional security risk (Barakat and Urdal, 2009; Urdal, 2006). On the contrary, young societies appear to be particularly susceptible to conflict if educational opportunities for these groups of young people are sparse.

This also highlights the inadequacy of training systems, which appear to be a key variable when trying to explain the situation in the Sahel. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor suggests this in its 2017/18 report. According to its authors, “between 40 and 60 % of these Sahelian youth are excluded from training systems”. The report says these young people are a favored target for jihadist groups in the region who have developed strategies to recruit them (as discussed below). For now, we will simply note that the

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process consists of weaponizing both socioeconomic vulnerabilities and latent conflicts to control resources depleted due to unsustainable exploitation.

Thus, in terms of theoretical approaches to the DPS nexus, it appears that the DPS nexus web is made up of threads in which political determinants are mixed with social determinants and demographic variables, although we cannot always clearly pick apart the links and relationships between these various types of determinants and their potential influences on transformations within the Sahel countries. Thus, clarifications from the field can be useful in pinning down the issues of demography, security and peace.

With regard to all of the literature attempting to explore the DPS nexus, it is necessary to be precise and, for each of the concepts, propose truly useful content and anchor it to specific strategies and categories of players. This creates synergies in the efforts of players and decision-makers in the Sahel region, both public and private, Sahelian and non-Sahelian. We will take this up in the second part of the document.

Thus, the Sahel appears, really, as multiple realities, almost as an impressionist painting on which each group applies its own brushstrokes. Some have evoked the image of Sleeping Beauty when discussing the region.

A convergence of cyclical and structural interests

The DPS nexus is widespread in Sahel studies, but the underlying reasons for that are varied. While some are cyclical, others are more chronic, even structural.
With regard to the *cyclical reasons*, we will note that the Sahel has developed various forms of political expression in recent decades that have upset the secular social balance and peace and security. These political shifts have been chaotic in many countries, with bullets prevailing over ballot boxes. Due to the serious insecurity caused by terrorism and violent extremism, areas we may call *security hotspots* are spreading. That has dramatic repercussions for economic and social activity, which are on the decline in many countries, resulting in worsening and more widespread poverty, with rates ranging from 40% to 50% in the region. Thus, the Sahel has become a zone vulnerable to political shake-ups and a place where security concerns have come to the fore, sometimes overshadowing human development priorities.

Yet as much as the current situation alarms Sahelian leaders, it also alarms non-Sahelian players. The foremost of these is Europe, which is grappling with an immigration crisis in which the Sahel is involved, as migrants often pass through or originate from the region. Sahelian politicians and their European counterparts regularly say that the Sahel is a dam, and if it were ever to break, it would leave the field wide open to migrants hoping to reach Europe via the Mediterranean. Clandestine migration routes would flourish in the Sahel if its countries were unable to exercise their sovereign rights to do things like fight poverty, unemployment and social exclusion and manage national borders. Thus, insecurity in the Sahel has actually become an *internal* political issue in many European capitals.

In terms of *structural reasons*, it should be noted that the Sahel has been of interest for hundreds of years due to its resources and geo-strategic location.
The area was visited and studied from the Middle Ages by Arab explorers attracted by its abundant natural wealth, the quality of its human resources, the richness of its civilization and its thriving economy – all praised in the *Tarikh al-Sudan* and the *Tarikh al-Fattash chronicles*. The extravagance and grandeur of the procession of Mansa Musa, 13th-century emperor of Mali which crashed the price of gold as it made its way to Mecca through Cairo, has undoubtedly helped to spawn this idea in the Arab world of a Sahel rich in gold, at a time when the precious metal served as money. Gold meant Europeans also developed a keen interest in the region, starting in the 15th century, when Portuguese caravels (light sailing ships) replaced Arab caravans. Europe’s interest was also piqued by the relative accessibility of the area and its ease of colonization compared to other regions of Africa fraught with tropical diseases and dominated by forests that complicated travel.

Even now, the Sahel’s resources continue to draw the gaze of many economic powers. They’re interested in not only its gold, uranium, bauxite, iron and phosphate but also its ample fresh groundwater.

*Why is the Demography, Peace and Security nexus of interest to UNFPA?*

The issue of DPS concerns UNFPA for three main reasons.

First, UNFPA has made the demographic dividend a development issue. Indeed, the organization defines the demographic dividend as “the rise in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita that can result from an increasing proportion of effective income-earners relative to the number of consumers in a
population due to shifts in the population age structure and to enhanced productivity resulting from investments in health, empowerment, education and employment”\textsuperscript{13}.

According to this definition, capturing the demographic dividend can help accelerate development, which is obviously in the interest of the West and Central Africa region, and particularly the Sahel, which continues to lag behind on development issues, especially the overall improvement of human development. Driven by its conviction, UNFPA has played a key role in political dialogue around the demographic dividend in Africa for several years\textsuperscript{14}. Thus, the regional office for West and Central Africa conducts outstanding advocacy work on an ongoing basis around this idea. It has regularly provided multifaceted support to a variety of players and stakeholders working to achieve the demographic dividend, in particular decision-makers in politics and civil society organizations, the private sector, youth movements and academia. This integrated UNFPA approach is consistent with the approach adopted in the 2017 \textit{AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth}. In fact, this document states that: “[…] to harness the demographic dividend, it is critical to make strategic investments that would improve health outcomes, especially as relates to access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, to ensure that women can decide on the number and spacing of their children”.

\textsuperscript{13} Programming the demographic dividend: from theory to experience, UNFPA, July 2018
\textsuperscript{14} Demographic Dividend in West and Central Africa: Lessons for Following this path, Mabingue Ngom, 2019
The second reason is that the demographic dividend serves as a common thread running through the three concepts of demography, peace and security. Indeed, when large parts of the population – such as women, young people and informal workers – do not get a suitable response to their problems, their frustrations can easily boil over into socio political crises. Such crises have been a major source of insecurity in numerous countries. Yet in the Sahel, even more so than elsewhere, insecurity is really not compatible with peace.

The third reason why the issue of the democratic dividend is critical is that the Sahel exhibits special features with regard to demographic dividend variables (such as education, healthcare, development of human capital for employment), which the report discusses further later on. These factors prompt the need for a study to take stock of the knowledge available on the relationship between demography, peace and security. This need is particularly acute for the UN system in the context of the ‘One UN’ initiative promoted by the Secretary-General.

Methodology

The production of this publication involved various methods.

**General review of the literature on the Sahel, and the Central Sahel in particular**

An abundant body of literature is available on the Sahel, although the quality varies. Much of it stems from academic studies, but it also comes from analyses prepared by national and international, public and private, development agencies.
Specific studies on Demography, Peace and Security

Thanks to the initiative of the UNFPA, the past two years have seen six new papers on the DPS nexus. These were the fruits of (i) efforts by three national statistics institutes (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), each of which conducted a study on the issue of the DPS nexus; (ii) an educational institution, the National School of Economic Analysis and Statistics (ENSAE) in Dakar, which drafted a report on Modelling the relationship between demography, peace and security; iii) an international research institute: The Peace Research Institute, Oslo (PRIO), which wrote A Demographic Threat? Youth, Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel; and iv) the study Understanding the Sahel through its history, geography and social, demographic and security challenges. This collection of written material can be used as a foundation for further research and help to build a new narrative for a better future for the Sahel.

Global and sector research analysis

This step analyzed global and sector research as well as guidance notes and periodic reviews issued by ministerial departments tasked with development planning, employment, education, healthcare and governance in countries studied in the region. Within this category, we should mention the many studies by UNS agencies as well as bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies.
Contributions from the Scientific Committee

UNFPA/WCARO set up this committee. Made up of a dozen public decision-makers, researchers in national and international groups and directors from civil society organizations and the private sector, the committee met three times to review documents.

Regular formal and/or informal communications between consultants and experts

The authors studied the DPS nexus in the Sahel with a **systematic approach**. This views the region as having an array of variables (economic, cultural, technological) at play, intermingling and shaping/reshaping one another under the influence of both internal and external forces.\(^\text{15}\)

Two characteristics distinguish this approach from other methods used to analyze the realities of the Sahel. The first is its multidisciplinary nature, involving the likes of history, demography, geography, sociology, economics and political science, each contributing towards understanding the evolution of these variables. The second distinctive characteristic is that the systematic approach gives just as much (if not more) attention to relationships between the variables as it does to the variables themselves. That’s because it is the relationships between them that steer the system, not the variables on their own. This all means the systematic approach goes beyond merely scratching the surface. It enables an understanding of the forces that shape the Sahelian system and its various components.

\(^{15}\) See: African Futures, A methodological guide to conducting futures studies in Africa, Éditions Khartala, 2003
II. The Central Sahel: perspectives on the Demography, Peace and Security nexus

This section is intended to take stock of the situation to answer the question of where the Sahel stands in terms of the DPS nexus. We can answer this question with a snapshot of the region at the time of this report. A variety of organizations issue both regular and ad-hoc publications providing such snapshots on various topics of interest to decision-makers and stakeholders, including food production, healthcare and security. Yet a snapshot, however thorough, always has a significant drawback: it’s static, while the Sahel is, of course, a dynamic environment with multiple processes and transitions unfolding, at different rates. To keep pace with this, we must go well beyond snapshots and examine the forces at play. We can accomplish this with a systematic analysis because it identifies and analyzes factors that explain the situation, the players, their strategies, the uncertainties around these strategies and the interactions between the different elements. This is a tool that ultimately enables a strategic diagnosis, to gain as clear a view as possible of the system.

The diagnosis just below is based on a description of the sociodemographic and security context of the region. Empirical studies conducted specifically on the DPS nexus in the Sahel, particularly so-called monographic studies (specialist and detailed pieces of writing) produced on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, statistical modelling studies, and the study Understanding the Sahel through its history, geography and social, demographic and security challenges were used in this section.
The Sahel system and the Demography, Peace and Security nexus: a bottom-up approach

If we step out of the ivory tower of academia to try to examine the real roughness of the terrain, we see that the Sahel is characterized by processes that analysts call changes, transformations, crises, shifts or transitions.

Ecological transitions

The Sahara Desert lies at the origin of the name ‘Sahel’, which means ‘shore’ in Arabic. For geographers, the Sahel is an area between the 200 and 800 millimetre isohyets on a map. Its borders span 11 countries stretching from the Cape Verde Islands, an arid archipelago in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, to Djibouti on the Red Sea coast. Because it borders the Sahara, the Sahelian region is prone to a number of climatic hazards including dryness. It is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and will be even more vulnerable in the future, if certain trends are confirmed. That’s because it has few ways to fight what is expected to come, especially rising sea levels, increased desertification, floods, the erosion of coastal areas, drought, rising temperatures and less access to drinking water. This vulnerability will have major impacts on production processes and therefore, on human beings. For example, a big reduction in arable land will affect food production, a key factor in human security.
This would especially affect small family farms, both irrigated and rainfed, as they are a key source of income for the majority of people in the Sahel.\(^\text{16}\) It would also affect herding, which is not only a nomadic way of life, but also brings money to more than 100 million Sahelians.

However, while we have seen broad agreement on how serious these risks are, the *institutional* responsibility for climate vulnerability and its impacts have varied over time. The boundaries of the Sahel have evolved too, along with the shifting understanding of the various ecological challenges.

An informed observer cannot help but recognize that in reality, there is not just one but rather *multiple* Sahels, depending on the criteria used to demarcate this vast region.

For many agencies, the primary marker of the Sahel is its *vulnerability to desertification*. The designers of the Great Green Wall initiative, now a New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) project, applied this criterion in their ambitious project involving some countries\(^\text{17}\) in the Sahel region.

A less ambitious but nevertheless vital objective is to go to war against *the effects of drought*, which inspired the creation of the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) in 1973. This organization originally consisted of six member States. The CILSS would later expand to include nine\(^\text{18}\),

\(^\text{16}\) Between 25.2 % of jobs in Burkina Faso and 76.6 % in Chad were in the agricultural sector in 2019, according to World Bank data on World Development Indicators.

\(^\text{17}\) Algeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Chad, Cape Verde, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, The Gambia and Tunisia

\(^\text{18}\) Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal.
then 13 States\textsuperscript{19}. This gradual expansion took into account not only the climate but also food insecurity, which was also affecting countries that were not Sahelian. This prompted the development of programmes for food autonomy, or even food security. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), by way of the Sahel Club founded in 1976, has long been an ardent supporter of this vision, which helped expand the Sahel to include countries on the West African coast.

Today, while climate vulnerability and food insecurity criteria still factor into the demarcation of the Sahel, they are certainly not the only factors considered: political/military insecurity has entered the picture too. We will return to this below.

\textit{Sociocultural transitions}

As a crossroads between multiple civilizations (Arab, Sudanese, black African), the Sahel region is a true cultural melting pot. We have seen the spread of Islam and Christianity in the area but these religions, accounting for the views of 80 to 90 \% of the population, have not dislodged even older and more traditional views. And in terms of language, the region is rich there too. While foreign languages, bolstered by their official status, are a legacy benefiting elites, who often treat them like spoils of war, the numerous indigenous languages remain important vehicles to express rich cultures.

It is in urban areas that this melting pot of cultures is most felt, with some experts talking about a decline in autochthony (i.e. being connected to a certain place by virtue of birth) and a

\textsuperscript{19} Eight coastal States (Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal, Togo); four landlocked States (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, Chad) and one island State (Cape Verde)
detribalization of societies and, at the same time discussing the "birth of the individual". Young people and women play a key role in these cultural transformations, especially since these are the demographic groups often targeted by local or foreign soft power brokers: state or private, national or international mass media, educational institutions, cultural industries, and so on.

But while cultural diversity can be very enriching, it can also pose a vulnerability if not properly managed. For example, several countries are seeing the development or resurgence of identity-related tensions as well as the rise of religious fundamentalism. In particular the conservative Wahhabi movement, within Islam’s Sunni branch, has come to the fore in a region where most Muslims are Sunni. Such intercommunity conflicts also attest to the fragile sociocultural balance and its possible weaponization.

**Politico-administrative transitions**

The Sahel region is a vivid and deeply layered set of political and administrative cultures inherited from precolonial history and colonization by Portugal, France and Great Britain. The influence of these former colonial powers is still evident in the administrative and political organization of the Sahel countries today, which in many ways amounts to counterproductive imitations. For example, the harm caused by presidential regimes and centralising Jacobinism are amongst the legacies often denounced as bringing obstacles to political democratization and the decentralization of power and decision-making structures.

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20 See Jean-Marc ELA, theologian, sociologist and anthropologist of Cameroonian origin, the author of several books.
Demographic transitions

This subsection uses the Monographic studies on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger to draw up a demographic profile of those countries. An overview of population and fertility trends over the last four decades allows us to map out the demographic forces particular to the region.

The Sahel exhibits numerous special features in its demography. Three of them warrant special mention. First, a brief survey of the situation in the Sahel reveals a population characterized by strong demographic growth, high fertility rates and a mostly young population. These all help to explain the limited impact of economic growth on poverty.

In Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, and by extension in other countries in the region, we observe rapid population growth between 1960, the year of independence, and 2020: almost a fourfold increase in Burkina Faso and Mali and an eightfold rise in Niger. This demographic vitality is a reason to be confident in the future but is also a reason for much tension between social classes (for instance, between Mali’s rich and poor or between settled and nomadic groups). This may increase competition for access to land, posing a real challenge in agro-pastoral societies, and intensify rivalries between farmers and herders. This can have serious consequences for both security and ecology, because if these social groups do not alter their extensive production systems, they may find themselves forced to literally devour their own ecological capital.

Strong demographic growth in recent decades is mainly because of the fertility level, i.e. the average number of children per woman, which remains historically high in the region. In Mali and Niger, the average number of children per woman has rarely
fallen below five in the last 60 years. In Niger, the main reasons for the high fertility rate are the prevalence of early marriage (in 2012 76.3 % of women aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18, and 28 % before the age of 15), low contraceptive use (12.2 % in 2012) and relatively unsuccessful efforts to educate young girls: in 2016, the school enrolment rate for girls was 70.2 % for primary, 28.8 % for junior high school and just 5.7 % for high school. Overall, across the Sahel region, the high fertility rate can also be explained by highly natalist mindsets amongst the population, particularly the widespread belief that children are a gift from God and that a large number of children is desirable.

Aside from generally contributing to rapid population growth, consistently high fertility levels explain the fast rejuvenation of the population. Some 60 % of the population in the region are under 25 years of age. This is certainly an asset but also presents possible risks and challenges. This is particularly the case with employment, as this segment of the population is generally out of work more than average, due in part to a mismatch between skills acquired in the education system and those actually needed in the workforce. It is, therefore, vital to deal with youth unemployment and make this issue a significant factor in the struggle for development and innovation, in order to establish peace and harmony in the Sahel countries. However, the extreme poverty compounding regional challenges limits the capacity for large-scale investments in human capital such as healthcare and education.

The viewpoints shared in the monographic studies on Sahel countries show that potential population growth remains very high in the region, with an even more pronounced rejuvenation of the population. This trend drives up social demands, which are
essential to satisfy to avert deeper fractures in already tenuous conditions for security and peace in the region.

In addition to these quantitative factors related to the demographic dividend in the Sahel region, other qualitative factors related to an inability to provide social services in the areas of education, healthcare, employment and housing must be addressed. For instance, Sahel economies are generally characterized by the inability of their education systems to retain students for as long as possible. Students who stop studying early, before the official end of their schooling, have few, if any, qualifications and are forced to turn to low-productivity and low-wage activities.

Finally, migration dynamics are unique in the Sahel in that the region is a place people leave, a place people come to and also a migration route, due to its proximity to Europe.

**Security transitions**

The Sahel was, for a long time, regarded as a relatively peaceful area. Arab chroniclers in the 14th and 15th centuries attest to this, as do tales from 19th-century European explorers. The Sahel was also sheltered from the wars of liberation that swept Africa after World War II, with only Guinea-Bissau seeing an armed struggle, in that case against Portuguese colonialism. The Sahel was spared the inter-State wars that gripped other regions of Africa as well.

In recent decades, though, the Sahel developed various forms of political expression that upset the social balance and peace and security. After independence, there was the war of the poor which saw fighting between Burkina Faso and Mali in 1985; there was an ethnic conflict between Mauritania and Senegal in 1989; and
there were clashes between Cameroon and Nigeria over the Bakassi peninsula, resolved in 2002 by the International Court of Justice. The region has also experienced civil wars in Côte d'Ivoire and Chad, as well as unconstitutional power grabs. With the exception of the Cape Verde Islands and Senegal, all ECOWAS member countries have experienced coups d'état and military regimes. Secessionist movements have also shaken Mali, Nigeria and Senegal, although none triumphed. In essence, compared to other parts of Africa, the Sahel has been relatively peaceful but this is certainly no longer the case.

For the past two decades, the Sahel has been the scene of numerous asymmetrical wars, characterized by escalating violence. Several terrorist groups operate in the Sahel, attracting attention to the region, especially from the international community. They view it as a soft underbelly – a weak link in the war on terror, waged since the events of 11 September, 2001. Thus, informed by the work of B. Sambe and A. Sall, we can identify three main hotbeds of tension in the region:

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21 Démographie, Paix et Sécurité, Comprendre le Sahel à travers son histoire, sa géographie, et ses défis sociodémographiques et sécuritaires, Bakary Sambe and Alioune Sall, UNFPA/ WCARO 2020.
The G5 Sahel countries

The G5 Sahel countries are Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania. The violent extremism raging in this region receives a great deal of media attention and tends to overshadow other conflicts happening in other parts of Africa. Northern Mali, for instance, is the theatre of operations for several terrorist groups including Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad. The central region has also become active in extremism since the Islamist-allied Amadou Koufa established bases there. And the area has become a hotbed of intercommunity tension between ethnic groups too such as the Dogon and the Fulani. 2019 saw multiple massacres, with one in the Malian village of Ogossagou being particularly deadly. The situation in central Mali illustrates the complexity of security issues in the country. It highlights the links between various important issues, such as governance, legitimate violence, justice, land rights, intercommunity divisions, regional integration, the climate crisis, development and even patriarchal institutions.

Source: Connexions entre groupes djihadistes et réseaux de contrebande et de trafics illicites au Sahel (Gaye, 2017)
Box 1: The security situation in Burkina Faso

For the past two years, Burkina Faso appears to be suffering the same fate as Mali in terms of the number of attacks. For a long time spared these troubles, the nation is now experiencing a dangerous and deteriorating security situation. Between April 4th, 2015 and 5th February, 2019, Burkina Faso had 201 terrorist attacks, with 120 of them against defense and security forces (DSF). The problem has a particular impact in rural areas, where 80% of the population lives off the land.

Late 2018 was marked by a spate of violence by unidentified armed groups and an increase in inter community conflicts, particularly in the Sahel, Center-North, North and East regions of the country, with their populations acutely affected.

In these areas, violence caused displacements that are unprecedented in the history of the country. According to the National Council for Emergency Relief and Rehabilitation, as reported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), around 220,000 people have been displaced since June 2019.

Terrorist attacks, which so far have affected the regions of the East, the North and the Sahel, are now spreading to the regions of the Center-North, the Boucle du Mouhoun, with major impacts on economic activity, particularly education, health, tourism and transport. The attacks also create new difficulties for the State’s finances, not least on the operating expenses of the DFS and the need to pay for better equipment.

In terms of the social situation, Burkina Faso has been through a difficult period in recent years, characterized by two phenomena: ubiquitous grievances in socio-professional sectors and an erosion in social cohesion. The last three years have seen social grievances around living and working conditions, especially in the education, security, healthcare and finance sectors. To address rising social tensions, the government concluded a series of agreements with various social partners, the financial implications proving quite significant.

At the community level, Burkina Faso, once renowned for the relative social cohesion of its sixty different ethnicities, is experiencing more and more open conflicts within and between communities, based around religious affiliation. This rise coincides with the gradual deterioration in security.

Source: Monographic study on Burkina Faso, 2020
**Liptako-Gourma**

This is where the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger meet. Still called the three-borders zone by locals it is normally an area where livestock are moved around to graze. However, it is still feeling the effects of the droughts of the 1970s/1980s, in addition to emerging security issues. Indeed, in this zone, where various ethnicities come together, the loss of grazing land and water has created tensions between socio-professional groups. Exacerbating the situation is the rise of the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA), the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) and militias sometimes associated with communities, giving rise to a foothold for violent extremism.

**The Chad Basin**

The Chad Basin is subject not only to the drying up of Lake Chad, which indirectly creates tension, but also to the thorny issue of Boko Haram, a terrorist group playing a major role in the deterioration of the security situation.

By way of conclusion to this section, while the demographic consequences (migrations, internal displacements, gathering in camps) and the political consequences of the deterioration in the security situation are well known, they are not the only repercussions to deserve attention in this strategic diagnosis. We should also mention changes in priorities around the allocation of funds as throughout the Sahel countries, we are witnessing an explosion in military spending. This comes at the expense of funding for education and healthcare, which, of course, play a crucial role in the development of human security.

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Box 2: Fallout of demographic and security changes on funding for human capital

The deterioration in security conditions has prompted national authorities in the Sahel region to devise new programmes for internal and external security and to reinforce the law enforcement system.

Thus, most countries find themselves caught up in an arms race, massively increasing their spending on defense and security.

For example, in Mali, from 2010 to 2018, government spending on the military skyrocketed, rising by 233%, with an average annual increase of 14%.

However, this all unfolded in a context where State funds saw no significant increase, and sometimes no increase at all. Mali, like many Sahel countries, faces particular constraints when trying to mobilize funds to cover its budget. These include low government revenue, high levels of debt and lukewarm growth. Over this same period (2010-2018), the overall State budget only grew by an annual average rate of 7%, while tax revenues only went up by an average of 6%.

It’s no big surprise that the increase in military spending has meant less money available to spend on sectors like education and healthcare. The latter is the biggest loser in Mali. Between 2010 and 2018, the portion of the State’s budget for public healthcare averaged less than 5%.

Niger is another country where security spending has enjoyed a major boost in recent years. In 2010, it accounted for 10.3% of internal State spending. By 2017 this figure had reached 15.3%. At the same time, though, internal resource mobilization has been modest since 2015. The reasons for these moderate performance figures vary, including: security incidents, a decline in prices of mining and petroleum products, the prevalence of low-tax activities (agricultural and informal work) and an increase in duty-free trade, especially for importing military equipment.

Starting in 2015 (the year of the first atrocities committed by Boko Haram), security expenditure exceeded those for all social sectors, with the exception of infrastructure spending.

In essence the data indicates that in the three countries for which monographic studies are available (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger), prioritizing security has led to reduced funding for social sectors, sectors which are so vital to national development.

Source: Monographic studies on Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, 2020
We should note that despite their significant growth, investments intended to improve the security and political situation are far from delivering the expected results, as seen in the continuing sociopolitical crises, the most recent of which culminated in a coup in Mali on 18 August 2020. This means that the effectiveness of the *law and order* approach, popular amongst certain counterterrorism agencies, is far from established. The section on scenarios will revisit this topic.

**Economic transitions**

Due to its variety of ecosystems, the Sahel region is home to multiple production systems: livestock farming, subsistence and agriculture income, semi nomadism pastoralism.

Biomass (plant and animal material) still provides energy to most populations in the Sahel. But this biomass is highly vulnerable to climate change threats characteristic of the region. This is because industrialization there is very limited despite the rich heritage of natural resources/non-renewable raw materials (oil and natural gas, gold, phosphate, diamonds, iron, bauxite, precious wood) and renewables (solar energy, water resources, arable land, forests, rich biodiversity, wealth of historic places for tourists to visit, etc.). Some of these riches have not yet been exploited or developed; for example, this is the case for places with underground aquifers (layers of permeable water-bearing rock), overflowing with large quantities of fresh water in the Sahara. But while the area has such a wealth of natural resources, it only gets a small share of the bounty it’s due, in line with the rentier economy (whereby a country derives a substantial portion of revenue from rent paid by foreign individuals and governments). The Sahel’s lack of integration in the global
economy and value chains means it sees its raw materials sold off for very little return, judging by their minimal contribution to funding the development of the region.

Having enjoyed little participation in the old economy, the Sahel appears ill-equipped to participate in the new economy. Due to the infrastructure deficit and unskilled workforce, as well as the weakness of political regimes and the absence of national private sector champions, the Sahel is not a destination of choice for foreign direct investment (FDI), which accounted for between 0.5% and 5.9% of the region’s GDP in 2018, according to World Bank data. When foreign money does set its sights on the Sahel, it heads for the extractive sector, removing natural resources with little or no thought of replenishing them, reinforcing the rentier economy.

**The DPS nexus in the Sahel: empirical findings**

This section mainly provides an overview of modelling studies looking at the interdependencies between demography, peace and security. This includes two empirical studies on the interrelations between demography, peace and security.

The ENSAE study, *Modelling the relationship between demography, peace and security*. It’s based around three central hypotheses: (i) taking spatial dimensions into account significantly improves measures of peace and security, (ii) a causal link exists between the demographic dependency ratio on the one hand and peace and security on the other, and (iii) the Sahel countries exhibit special features in terms of peace and security.
These hypotheses are the starting point for analyzing three main areas of concern. These are the multidimensional nature of peace and security in Africa, the modelling of determinants of insecurity, and the identification of sociodemographic factors that contribute to insecurity in the Sahel.

The results of the multidimensional analysis show that the Global Peace Index\(^\text{23}\) in a country is \textit{positively} correlated with certain factors, such as level of education (measured by secondary school enrolment), the urbanization rate and the level of development measured by agricultural performance. Moreover, a country’s level of security is \textit{negatively} correlated with certain other factors such as demographic dynamics, measured by the demographic dependency ratio, the level of economic inequality and youth unemployment. The 167 countries in the sample fall into three main groups. The first is countries with a high level of security, mostly Western countries. The second group is countries with a medium level of security (no West African country falls into this category). The third group is made up of countries with a low level of security. These exhibit higher demographic dependency ratios (75 %, compared to the global average of 47 %) and a youth unemployment rate around 10 % higher than the global average (27.71 %, compared to 17.86 %). Finally, their level of secondary school enrolment is half that of the global average (36.94 % compared to 72.18 %). Most Sahel countries fall into this category.

\(^{23}\) The Global Peace Index is an attempt to rank countries based on their degree of pacifism, "a ranking established by The Economist magazine and a jury of experts from peace institutes, or think tanks, as well as the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Sydney in Australia" (https://planuncteur.acontresens.net/classement_par_pays/global_peace_index.html)
In addition, this ENSAE study used a meticulously deployed methodology and advanced spatial modelling techniques to arrive at five key findings.

1. The lack of employment opportunities makes young people vulnerable to human trafficking, and can make them easy targets, at the mercy of armed groups seeking recruits.

2. Insecurity and adverse social conditions in the region often spur people to emigrate to better destinations. In addition, increasing insecurity makes a country considerably less attractive to prospective residents.

3. A high literacy rate, especially when combined with a lack of job opportunities, is a factor contributing to insecurity in the Sahel. This counterintuitive finding goes against initial hypotheses that higher literacy rates lead to less insecurity. We need to remember that every year, universities and vocational schools pour new graduates onto an already saturated job market, driving up youth unemployment, a factor adding to insecurity.

4. This particular finding echoes conclusions from Hewitt et al. (2003) and Leahy et al. (2007). The demographic dependency ratio, measured by the average number of dependents per person of working age, contributes to jihadism and insecurity.

5. In the Sahel, insecurity reduces the portion of GDP allocated to healthcare spending. Such spending plays a major economic and sociopolitical role by helping to reduce socioeconomic inequality and poverty in general. It also leads to lower maternal death rates, thus avoiding social problems stemming from orphaned children fending
for themselves. Therefore, investing in healthcare systems in the Sahel is an opportunity to make progress towards peace, save lives and reduce inequality and socioeconomic hardship.

From this study, we can conclude that investment in human capital through public policies around healthcare, employment, education and training is critical to addressing the DPS nexus in the Sahel.

Meanwhile, in its study *A Demographic Threat? Youth, Peace and Security Challenges in the Sahel*, the PRIO homes in on the exponential growth of the youth population and security challenges in the Sahel. Drawing on recent studies, demographic data and information about conflict, PRIO analyzed the correlation between population growth, peace and structural security. It shows how large cohorts of young people can pose a threat to national security. To understand how the exponential growth of the youth population can exacerbate insecurity problems such as armed conflict, terrorism and other forms of violent behavior, the study examined the role of African youth age structures in the risk of violent conflict, with particular attention paid to the Sahel region.

Factors like poor governance and political, social and economic marginalization, combined with a lack of access to resources including employment and education and marriage, have made it more likely for young people in the Sahel to engage in violent behavior. Consequently, to really address conditions promoting instability and armed rebellion in the region, effective demographic policies and inclusive political, social and economic reforms must be implemented.
However, the PRIO study also shows that large populations of youth need not necessarily be a security issue. In fact, such populations can offer opportunities to boost prosperity and enhance security for the State. The *Asian Tiger Economies*, including Singapore and South Korea, are perfect examples of countries that managed to effectively and significantly reduce fertility rates while making the most of the labor resources offered by large groups of youths (Birdsall and Sinding, 2001; Kelly and Schmidt, 2001). Thanks to rapid demographic transitions, these countries successfully captured the demographic dividend, revived their economies and promoted overall long-term social and economic development. In fact, the decrease in fertility resulted in a lower demand for resources for dependent children, enabling governments to benefit from these cumulative effects and reallocate resources to other activities more useful to national economic development, such as education and public investment. Thus, one policy recommendation from this study on addressing insecurity in the Sahel would be for governments in the region to intervene to reduce fertility again, but also tackle economic and political difficulties facing young people. Not only can these kinds of policies boost youth confidence in political institutions, they can also reduce youth unemployment, which would stem their outmigration, involvement in armed conflicts and recruitment by terrorist groups.

The violent conflicts seen in Mali can only be resolved by better governance and suitable demographic transition policies that do not jeopardize resources (land or water) or basic social services (employment and education). However, current demographic structures are also linked to persisting harsh economic constraints, which means the youth bulge is highly likely to continue having a major adverse impact on general development in the country (Ikelegbe and Garuba, 2011:107). Therefore, it is *vital* to draw
from research in order to develop demographic, political and economic policies tailored to meet the *enormous* security challenges present throughout the Sahel.

Another interesting finding from the PRIO study is the *predictive* analysis on the risk of conflict in West Africa, and more specifically in the Sahel (Figure 2).
Figure 2: Results of simulations of the risk of conflict in West Africa

Panel A: Predicted probability of conflict risk (Sahel) - countries with higher value $p(\text{conflict})$
Panel B: Predicted probability of conflict risk - comparison

Source: Is Demography a threat to Peace and Security the Sahel? PRIO, 2020
As seen in Figure 2 (Panel a), Nigeria, compared to other Sahel countries, appears to have a far more pessimistic trend, followed by Niger, then Mali (two of the Central Sahel countries). However, despite a high average risk of conflict breaking out, these figures appear to decline over time for all States. In other words, the simulation indicates a steady decrease in the risk of internal armed conflict in these different countries. Panel b of Figure 2 shows the expected risk of conflict and, as we can see, a significant difference between Sahel countries like Burkina Faso and neighboring countries in West Africa, such as Senegal and Guinea. In fact, Burkina Faso appears to have a risk of unconventional conflict breaking out that is higher than the other countries in this category, with its conflict risk peaking at around 2031. This is undoubtedly a reasonable prediction based on upward violent trends observed in recent years in the country. The trends projected for the other countries shown in Figure 2 are considerably lower. To varying degrees, then, and to sum up, the projected overall trend shows a decreasing risk of conflict. This is despite taking into account the history of serious conflict in States such as Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Altogether, though, the simulation predicts a net increase in the risk of conflict for certain Sahel countries. For most of these countries, an estimated increase in the risk of conflict could stem from factors related to lower levels of socioeconomic development. Demographic projections by the UN point to strong population growth in numerous African countries from now until 2050. Thus, variables like demography, such as a rapid growth of population size can be regarded as a predictor of a higher risk of conflict. Consequently, the forecast implies that increased population growth is associated with a higher risk of conflicts. In short, the more a country is underdeveloped, has a large
population, high infant mortality, low levels of education and shares borders with other States at high risk of conflict, the higher its own risk of conflict.

**Variables describing the Sahel and their dynamic relationships**

The various factors mentioned above affecting the dynamics of system transformations in the Sahel can be divided into three categories of **variables**, which we will call ‘fixed variables’, ‘prevailing trends’ and ‘seeds of change’ in the system in question.

**Fixed variables**

These are variables that affect the DPS nexus and that have not changed and will not change during the timeframe in question, i.e. by 2050, or even beyond. We should note that few of the relevant variables are fixed. This category includes **dryness**, a structural phenomenon in the Sahel, as well as **global warming**. These fixed variables are essentially ecological.

**Prevailing trends**

This means all manner of variables at play that give shape, meaning and/or direction to transformations/developments in the area in question. Several prevailing trends are evident from an analysis of the Sahel system.
Order and caste societies

In Sahel societies, access to resources is determined by variables like age, sex, blood and/or rank. These variables also guide the division of labor in agricultural and pastoral production systems. In these societies, the demographic majority does not coincide with the political or sociological majority: these are unequal democracies where women and young people are treated like inferiors, even though they form the majority of the population. This gap/mismatch is a source of tension.

A high demographic dependency ratio

Production systems have not undergone significant changes, but rather merely adjustments, leaving these systems essentially extensive, due to the slow evolution of social systems, mindsets, systems of values and moral touchstones. This means the demographic dependency ratio remains high.

In Burkina Faso, the dependency ratio for persons aged under 15 years\(^{24}\) rose steadily between 1960 and 1990. In fact, this figure increased gradually from 73.3 % in 1960 to its peak of 95.5 % in 1990. From 1990 to 2020, this dependency ratio fell steadily, reaching 83.4 % in 2020. The same trend is evident in Mali and Niger.

Indeed, in Mali, the dependency ratio of under 15s increased significantly during the period 1960-1990 (from 71.7 % to 94.5 %). It remained relatively stable between 1995 and 2010 (between 93 and 95 %), peaking in 2015 (96.8 %) before falling back to 93.1 % in 2020. Similarly in Niger, the dependency of 0 to 15

\(^{24}\) The ratio between the population aged under 15 and aged 15-64 (working age population).
year-olds has not declined since the country’s independence. It actually rose considerably from 95.5% in 1960 to 104.1% in 2020. Overall, the main concern/uncertainty at play, which poses a major strategic challenge, is determining whether the Sahel will succeed in reducing the demographic dependency ratio, and if so, when.

**Urbanisation**

Until independence, the Sahel was not very urbanized and did not have any cities of one million people or more. The weighted average regional urbanization rate in the Sahel\(^{25}\) of 45.6% in 2019 is heavily influenced by Nigeria, as they make up over half the total population of the region. The urbanization rate varies in the region, with Niger being the least urbanized country with a rate of 16.5% in 2019. Figure 3 shows the 2019 urbanization rates in nine Sahel countries.

\(^{25}\) Algeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal
In this region, the urbanization rate went from 15.8 % in 1960 to 48.6 % in 2019, with no indication that will let up.

In Burkina Faso, the phenomenon of urbanization is, of course, marked by history and by social, political and economic life. The country’s network of towns and cities incorporates both precolonial and colonial centers. These underpin a form of urbanization in a context of the drawing and redrawing of territorial boundaries, against a backdrop of decentralization. The urban population increased from 110,000 in 1960 to 362,610 in 1975, 1,011,074 in 1985 and 3,181,967 in 2006, a 29-fold increase in less than half a century. As shown in Figure 4, over the same period the share of city dwellers increased steadily from 2.5 % in 1960 to 22.7 % in 2006. In 2019, 30.9 % of the nation’s population was estimated to be living in towns and cities, amounting to 6.2 million urban dwellers.
Figure 4: Urbanization rate from 1960 to 2020

For a long time, Burkina Faso did not put in place true urban policies. As a result, a combination of uncoordinated sector-based interventions, reflecting a centralized state, tried to fill the void. Under such conditions it’s clear towns and cities have experienced (and still experience) much difficulty in consistently meeting the needs of growing and increasingly demanding populations over the long term.

In addition, the country’s urbanization rate will pass the 50% mark by 2050, primarily due to the two main cities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Social cohesion in urban areas in Burkina Faso is one of the challenges for the future, given that urbanization is not always associated with job growth.

The urbanization rate in Niger has not grown significantly since independence, rising from 5% to 16% between 1960 and 2012. Although weak, this trend has made for a heavily
concentrated urban population and, as in any town or city, anywhere, creates a need for housing and other basic social services. This is combined with the need for urban employment due to the rural exodus. The lack of jobs gives rise to an environment that promotes delinquency and criminal activity.

With regard to Mali, we note that in half a century, the urbanization rate quadrupled, rising from 11% in 1960 to 44% in 2020. This led to many problems including a proliferation of shanty towns, various land disputes and also organized crime. Moreover, the rise in the urban population obviously triggered a massive increase in the need for housing, with the resulting dissatisfaction when that need was not adequately met fuelling both individual and collective frustration.

Based on the three monographic studies, we may conclude that urbanization in the Sahel region exhibits special demographic, economic and sociological features.

In terms of demography, urbanization has not come at the expense of rural population growth. While urban areas are booming, rural areas are filling up too. This is not how the process unfolded on other continents, particularly South America and Asia, where rural populations saw significant declines.

In terms of economics, urbanization is taking place in a context of weak economic growth and productivity stagnation. Urbanization accelerated in the 1980s when productive activity was quite limited in the Sahel countries, with some of them even undergoing a deindustrialization process. Consequently, young people could not find jobs in the industrial sector, which formerly offered opportunities. Those urban dwellers unable to find work in other sectors therefore turned to the informal sector, which quickly grew. However, the informal sector is characterized by
weak productivity. All told, with or without industrialization, urbanization did not bring about the boost in productivity seen on other continents.

**With regard to sociology**, urbanization did not bring an end to the dominance of relational mindsets, whereby people have the view ‘we are all in this together’. Urbanization did not bring about any radical shift in the mentality of *lineage* societies, which prefer investment in social relations over investment in material goods, and collective security over individual security.

**Persistence of gender inequality**

The closure of the gap between boys and girls in primary education led some to believe that gender inequality was on the retreat in the Sahel. This impression was/is mistaken, though, as gender disparities still persist at other education levels. In terms of enrolment at all three levels (primary, secondary and university), the gender equality index largely still favors males in almost every Sahel country, with wider gaps in university (low rate hovering around 0.5 for most countries in 2017). Marital habits (early marriages, social pressures on young girls to marry and reproduce) and the drudgery and time commitment needed for so-called female tasks in the sexual division of labour explain the ongoing gender disparities in education. Yet this is not the only field where inequalities persist. They are also present in areas like paid employment, political life, governments and parliaments, credit access, access to land ownership and access to parental rights.
In addition, according to the UNDP gender inequality index, the five countries of the G5 Sahel were amongst the bottom 12 in 2018, out of 162 countries. These are Burkina Faso (147), Mali (158), Mauritania (150), Niger (154) and Chad (160). The index measures the lack of progress on gender inequality in the following three areas: (i) reproductive health (maternal mortality rate and adolescent fertility rate); (ii) empowerment (percentage of women in parliament and percentage of women to attain secondary or higher levels of education); and (iii) labor market access (rate of women’s participation in the labor force).

According to data from Demographic and Health Surveys\textsuperscript{26}, between 7 and 45 % of married women aged between 15 and 49 work without pay.

\textit{Persistence of inequalities between town and countryside}

One of the major characteristics of the countries of the subregion, and in particular those of the Sahel, is the significant discrepancy in the level of development between urban and rural areas. This explains, to a large extent, migration to the city and the temptation to join radical movements. Despite progress in recent decades in amenities, the unequal distribution of resources and services, whether social (access to education and health) or economic (employment opportunities), remain enormous. For example, looking at urban-rural differences in education: a recent analysis based on data from population and health surveys of the mid-2010s shows that in some West African countries the difference in school attendance between urban and rural areas was

\textsuperscript{26} Data from between 2000 and 2018 according to G5 Sahel countries
significantly greater in Mali and Niger (urban/rural ratio of 1.6 and 1.8 respectively), than in coastal countries, notably Benin and Ghana (urban/rural ratio of 1.1).  

Persistence of economic inequalities

Another major challenge remains the persistence of economic inequalities. Despite their downward trend in several countries of the subregion, they nevertheless remain at high levels. The Gini index or coefficient - which measures the level of economic inequalities within the population - showed, for the period from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, a downward trend in economic inequalities in Sahelian countries, unlike the coastal countries of West Africa. In fact, in Burkina Faso, the Gini coefficient fell from 43.3 % in 2003 to 35.5 % in 2014; in Niger, it went from 44.4 % in 2005 to 34.3 % in 2014 and in Mali it dropped from 39.9 % in 2001 to 33.0 % in 2009. In coastal Benin, though, the coefficient increased from 38.6 % in 2003 to 47.8 % in 2015 while in Ghana it remained relatively stable, falling slightly from 42.8 % in 2005 to 42.4 % in 2012.

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27 Analyses conducted as part of the five-year review of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (2018).
28 The Gini index (or coefficient), also known as the concentration index, measures inequalities in the possession of goods which reveals the discrepancy between the distribution of these products and what would be a perfectly fair distribution. The closer the Gini coefficient is to one (or 100%), the wider the economic inequalities. The closer it is to zero, the less unequal the society.
With the decade-long rise of the security challenge, and the corollary of the cessation of several economic and social activities, it is feared progress will be erased and economic inequalities exacerbated. This will undermine prospects for development in the region.

**Growth in research and development disparities between the Sahel and other parts of the world**

The problem lies in the quality of teaching. Demand for education remains high in the Sahel, perhaps as a hangover from a time when education was indeed the key to upward social mobility, as seen in early Sahel governments dominated by persons referred to as ‘lettrés’ (lettered) or ‘évolués’ (evolved), all educated in colonial schools. Even if education is no longer as much of a social elevator as it was in the early days of independence, it nevertheless remains attractive and in high demand, in addition to being enshrined in the constitution. Leaders are trying to meet this demand in different ways, in particular with remedial strategies\(^{30}\). Yet we are seeing a decline in the quality of teaching, resulting in poor results, particularly in scientific and technical subjects. The main question, then, is: will it be possible to meet this challenge in the education system (if the population growth rate remains unchanged) with current means, or will methods need to be used that consume less human capital, like remote learning?

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\(^{30}\) A. Sall, Regards sur l’édication en Afrique subsaharienne à l’horizon 2040 (Insights into education in sub-Saharan Africa by 2040), Revue Internationale d’Éducation, Paris, 2020
The seeds of change

The terms *fracture points or seeds of change, also known as weak signals*, refer to variables that, if they were to develop further, could alter the prevailing trends (noted above) at some point in the future, including those that appear the most entrenched. Three of these seeds of change warrant our attention: (i) mounting insecurity and new manifestations of insecurity, (ii) a reshuffling of local players due to new entrants such as returning migrants, young student and leaders of castes or the taking on of new roles, and (iii) paradigm shifts and the emergence of new narratives.

Mounting insecurity and new manifestations of it

Analysis of the monographic studies and other research also sheds light on the increasing insecurity. Indeed, a number of national and international agencies believe that the *vulnerability* of the Sahel is no longer merely related to climate, but increasingly to *security* as well. And with this recent development, the borders of the Sahel seem to be both receding and expanding. For example, some agencies think the word ‘Sahel’ should be reserved for the five countries considered the most vulnerable to terrorism, known as the G5. That is not the view, though, of some pan-Africanist movements and think tanks including the International Crisis Group, the Institute for Security Studies, the Pan-African Institute of Strategies and the African Futures Institute; they say the Sahel cannot be limited to the G5. For these organizations and for States affected by terrorism, the Sahel must also include Senegal, Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroon and Nigeria as well as Algeria and Libya to the north.
We also see new manifestations of insecurity taking shape and uniting around different demands, primarily religious, social and political in nature.

In terms of religious demands, the strongest and the most significant movements advocate for Sharia law. They claim adherence to Salafism, tying them to theocracies in the Middle East and Far East and setting them apart from Sunni-inspired sectarian groups that traditionally held sway over the Sahel countries. However, differences between a violent Salafist movement and a pacifist or even quietist Sunni movement should be taken with a large pinch of salt. On many matters (family code, heritage, Koranic instruction, etc.), they are similar and form a united front against secular powers considered to be Western.

As for social demands, the education system and the issue of youth unemployment are highly criticized. Faced with the inability of the State to meet employment needs and decisively reduce poverty, with the weakness or even disappearance of traditional management mechanisms and relief strategies for poverty, such as seasonal migration, disadvantaged groups are more inclined than ever to join terrorist groups in order to meet their basic needs. Although States in the Sahel region are making considerable efforts to invest in social sectors (with substantial boosts to education and healthcare budgets), national spending and a large portion of foreign aid are increasingly diverted to military responses to the security crisis.

With regard to political demands, these religious movements denounce secularism, centralizing Jacobinism and the management of rents and pensions. They also have a transnational aspect, due to their affiliation with groups based outside Africa.
It is no longer any secret that the security threat is now regional and cannot be separated out from the demographic forces of countries in the region. Thus, Algeria and Libya, although in the Maghreb, are considered major players in understanding the security situation in certain Sahel countries; some of the people who destabilized northern Mali, the epicenter of the Sahel security crisis, originated from these two nations. We also know that many groups operating in Mali are affiliated with ISIS, Al Qaeda or the Islamic State.

**Their economic cost is enormous.** The explosion of military spending in budgets in the Sahel countries has already been noted, as has their crowding out of social investment. In addition to the costs covered directly by national budgets, there are also the costs of operations funded by the international community, whether or not these count as official development assistance. For instance, it takes around 600 million euros\(^{31}\) a year to fund the UN’s peacekeeping mission MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane, which provide 15,000 foreign soldiers based in Mali to fight terrorism in the Sahel.

Still on the topic of the economic costs of the war, we must also note the decay of certain sectors, such as tourism, traditional crafting and transport, and the near total drying up of investment in affected areas.

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A reshuffling of players and their roles

We also observe a reshuffling of the players and their roles. Social demands, spurred by intense demographic pressure in the Sahel countries, have long gone unsatisfied in the region, as seen in low primary school enrolment rates, the underdevelopment of educational infrastructure, poor performance in key indicators of health, high youth unemployment and rising poverty. This has all pushed young people in particular to devote themselves to activities and behaviors that have chipped away at social cohesion, peace and security in the region: irregular migration to Europe, drug and arms trafficking, theft and organized crime, in addition to joining violent extremist movements. In a 2016 study, based on a survey of marginalization factors that can lead to youth radicalization, the Timbuktu Institute, a think tank, estimated poverty, unemployment and exclusion to be the main forces pushing young people to join terrorist organizations.32

Interventions by religious leaders in the sociopolitical sphere are certainly not unheard of in the Sahel, which is aware of the impact of the jihads of the 19th century on the current makeup of the Sudan/Sahel area, and the place of its leaders Usman Dan Fodio, Omar Saidou Tall and Samori Ture in the remembered heritage of residents. What is new, however, is that contemporary religious leaders are often younger and more urbanized. They generally have a dual culture: Islamic culture acquired in Madrasas (religious schools) and Western culture through school. They wear a number of ‘hats’: i) religious leaders proposing, or not proposing, new interpretations of the Koran or the Bible on social matters such as the civil code, family well-being, intervals

32 Timbuktu Institute ‘Facteurs de radicalisation et perception du terrorisme chez les jeunes de la banlieue de Dakar’ (Factors in radicalization and the perception of terrorism amongst suburban youth in Dakar), October 2016
between births; ii) political leaders capable of concluding agreements with political parties, whether or not these are recognized; and iii) military leaders in asymmetric wars in which they have clear advantages.

Since the structural adjustment period, private sector intervention has been appreciable in healthcare and education, two areas where the State is no longer the only player. And the private sector has started intervening in other sectors too, ones that have long been the preserve of civil society. For example, whistleblowing and anti-corruption activities, and advocacy for improving economic and political governance frameworks.

Breaking free of the all-powerful theories from *Leviathan*\(^{33}\) around the beginning of independence, in the 1980s and 1990s Sahel States undertook such drastic downsizing that they became unable to fulfill some of their normal duties, particularly the provision of basic social services. Today they are attempting to resize and revisit their duties, to become, in contemporary terms, *strategic States*.

While problems facing the Sahel States, whether related to migration, peace or security, are increasingly global issues, the international community has different views on how to address and respond to them. However, while the international community is starkly divided on certain points, such as the management of migration and the climate crisis, on others it is united. This is the case with fighting terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel: the UN Security Council unanimously approved the continuation and expansion of the MINUSMA missions in Mali and the presence of 15,000 foreign troops there. A certain consensus has

\(^{33}\) Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Or the Matter, Form and Power of a Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil, 1651
also settled around the importance of the recurring but always topical question of the effectiveness of official development assistance, which plays a major role in development in the Sahel. The international community, in fact, agrees that the Sahel is a textbook case showing the limits of the effectiveness of aid. These limits are associated with:

The prevailing economism

For a long time, the dominant approaches in this area sought to improve macroeconomic frameworks (free trade, management of aid, debt and investments) or political frameworks (democratization, human rights) and gave very little thought to social or societal issues. Demographic questions only received limited attention, the rare exception being initiatives supported by UNFPA, USAID and its RAPID project, the Netherlands, and the OECD with a scheme focusing on migration from the Senegal river basin.

The technocratic, sector-based approach

Despite the clear preference for improving macroeconomic frameworks, sector-based projects have also received aid, such as: village and pastoral water supplies, the fight against major endemics like leprosy as well as river blindness, schistosomiasis and Guinea worm disease, the last three all caused by parasitic worms, Expanded Programmes on Immunisation (EPIs), the development of irrigated crops, combating the effects of drought, and family planning. The Sahel has benefited from funding to cover recurring expenditures for major projects in these sectors. However, while the importance of such schemes is undeniable, in
that they meet real needs, their implementation has suffered from their lack of connection to one another. A far more holistic approach is needed.

The short-term approach

The time frames for these major initiatives did not go beyond five years, as with the first-generation programme (PPG) by the CILSS. Yet all of the prospective studies conducted on the Sahel have stressed the need for long-term perspectives for development activities in the region, in particular the study entitled *The Sahel facing the future*. It was conducted in 1983 with financial support from several donors (France, Canada, the US) through the Sahel Club, part of the OECD, or the Synergy project under the AfDB in the wake of the Long-Term Perspective Study of Sub-Saharan Africa study conducted in the 1970s. Otherwise, development activities have rather been short-term.

The supremacy of the State

Whether for development or security, the State was seen as the main player, and the people as passive beneficiaries. Other players were also involved: civil society and the private sector.

Paradigm shifts

In addition to being incomplete, the prevailing approaches to development were technocratic and sector-based. Barring rare exceptions, demography played a merely marginal role in analyses around development, and even more so in matters of security. But the early 1990s saw the start of a shift, with the
concept of human development. Highly influenced by the work of A. Sen on capabilities, this UN concept is defined as the process of enlarging people’s choices. “In principle, these choices can be infinite and change over time. But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. In the absence of these fundamental possibilities, many other opportunities are unattainable.” UNDP is a major player in this shift, and has contributed by developing a Human Development Index (HDI) to evaluate the efforts of developed countries as well as developing ones. In addition to GDP, this composite index takes into account life expectancy at birth and level of education amongst the population. This means demography made a grand entrance into the evaluation of development, formerly measured by GDP, an approach whose inadequacies are now well known. Several agencies, in particular UNICEF and UNFPA, will work with the HDI’s reports, prepared annually by UNDP since 1990, as advocacy tools for other development. These three UN agencies are the central core of what will be called the New York Consensus, as they are headquartered in New York, in contrast to the Washington Consensus, referring to the headquarters of the World Bank and the IMF. Based on the HDI, Sahel countries will rank particularly low, appearing at the bottom of the scale. They will then become a close partner/objective for adherents to the New York Consensus, who will view their role as supported by the underlying principle of the SDGs, which is to leave no one behind. Thus, the Sahel will enjoy particular attention, as affirmed

34 UNDP, Human development report, 1995, p. 13-14
by the visit of the United Nations Secretary-General to the Sahel in 2013, accompanied by the President of the AfDB and the President of the World Bank.

Well before this, the conceptual progress offered by human development had garnered vital support and involvement from Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then United Nations Secretary-General, for the agendas for peace (1992), development (1994) and democracy (1996). The issue of development, and its institutional handling, has undergone a renewal. Previously, issues of peace, security and development were treated in a separate, fragmented manner. Peace and security fell under the Security Council and the Department of Political Affairs of the UN Secretariat, while development matters were handled by the agencies for technical cooperation and development. The human development approach was intended to take on these separate issues together. The issue of development in the Sahel could then be brought under the more general issue of human development understood as the intersection of economic (growth in revenues measured in GDP, poverty reduction), social (reducing inequality with inclusive healthcare and education policies) and political (democratization of societies, promotion of human rights) needs.

These conceptual and operational/paradigm shifts enabled a new focus on the Sahel. This would draw on a new narrative, whose main elements are discussed below. It is not natural resources, but rather human resources that are the most valuable capital in the Sahel; the development of human capital must now be prioritized, as delays in this area compromise overall development.
The demographic dynamics in the region exhibit unique features (very low median age, for instance) which prompt specific demands, such as an acute need for investment in social sector development. Thus, the issue of demography cannot be swept under the rug in the Sahel. This issue has been at the core of discussions on the region since the 1992 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo. Several UN agencies are particularly interested in questions of development and populations (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, etc.). In this context, women and young people deserve particular attention, as their full participation in development processes is one condition for their economic, social and political sustainability.

Rational, just and equitable management of natural resources, in particular biomass, on which large social groups rely, is an economic, ethical and political imperative. This offers the best way to reduce the vulnerabilities of food insecurity, poor sanitation and an inability to create productive jobs. Disadvantaged social groups, especially women and young people, should be the main beneficiaries of this resource management approach, without which it will be difficult or impossible to meet the human security goals set by Sahelians and the international community.

*Peace* is not simply the absence of war: it is another name for development, and there are no better systems for promoting it than those set up by the State for law, justice and democracy under principles of governance.

Following this process of identifying fixed variables, prevailing trends and seeds of change, we can summarize the possible strategic diagnosis of this issue as follows: **having experienced a prosperous past, the Sahel is facing a difficult present and its future is uncertain.**
Compared to the DPS nexus, the uncertainties relate to several types of variables: i) **demographic**: the demographic dependency ratio; whether or not it will decrease in the next 25 years; whether or not there will be a significant decline in fertility and the number of annual births; ii) **economic**: the proportion of natural resources in the national economy; rentier economy or structural transformation; weak productivity in the informal sector; tight labor markets, the endemic nature of unemployment; iii) **political**: the State's steering capacity, the State's presence in the territory and its capacity to carry out its sovereign missions; management of representative democracy; the weight of money in politics; the share of social sectors in national budgets; the State’s capacity to reinvent itself and become a strategic state, maintaining new relationships with other actors such as the private sector and civil society; changes in the external environment of the Sahel; and iv) **sociological**: the place of scientific, technical and organizational innovation in Sahelian societies; inequalities of order and caste; conflict between relational logic and economic approaches.
III. What futures are possible? Exploration with the scenario method

Scenario design

This chapter presents several different scenarios but first of all it may be helpful to precisely state what a scenario is. According to French academic Michel Godet, “a scenario is the set formed by the description of a future situation and the course of events that enables one to progress from the original situation to the future situation”.

In this definition, a scenario has two elements: a plausible picture of the future of the region or community in question, and a path to reach this future.

Scenarios come in two types. First, exploratory scenarios depart from the current situation, past and present trends, and make hypotheses around uncertainties related to the environment and drivers of change. This scenario type provides pictures of possible futures for the system in question. The second type are normative scenarios, which are made up of different possible pictures of the future.

The scenarios described in this document fall under the first type. They are exploratory and, as such, are free of value judgements. With this kind of approach, it falls to decision-makers to choose, from all plausible scenarios identified and created, the ones that best meet the aspirations and ambitions of the community in question and their vision/s for the future.

The scenarios presented below were developed to answer the question of what could happen by 2030/2040 in the area examined in this report, i.e. the DPS nexus in the Sahel. These scenarios are
built on a common framework that will highlight the factors at play in the evolution of the issue and the players involved in this evolution. There will also be an analysis of the relationships between the different players, as well as critical uncertainties associated with them. Section two of the report can be used to provide a detailed description of the different stakeholders in addressing issues of development, peace and security (the public sector and other State powers, the private sector, civil society, political organizations, rebel movements, UN system agencies, etc.), and to examine the nature of existing institutional arrangements in order to benefit from one another’s input.

Scenarios were quantified wherever possible. One area where these efforts proved particularly useful was demography. This framework made extensive use of current data and demographic projections from the UN.

Before developing these scenarios, the authors identified key questions and also formulated hypotheses on key variables.

They applied two main criteria when selecting the key questions. Their influence over the dynamics of the system, requiring their consideration in forecasting; and their indeterminacy, i.e. their status is not predetermined over the timeframe in question and they feature a wide range of possible evolutions.

Based on prior analyses, and more specifically on a reshuffling of players and their roles, it is possible to pinpoint two basic questions that can serve to formulate hypotheses, whose combination informed the selection and description of the scenarios. These questions were posited based on the behavior of two main players, the State and society.
1. Will the State be able to take on a new role in nation-building while also promoting economic and social development, the two main projects of the era of independence for all Sahel countries?

2. Will society be able to reinvent itself and acquire the capacity to innovate around socialization (for example, through family, community, school, religion, different age groups, associations, civic, political and cultural engagement), or will it rely on currently contested norms?

With regard to formulating the hypotheses, two variables based on analyses in the strategic diagnosis were factored in.

Firstly, all scenarios take the *demographic variable* into account. This comes as no surprise, as the issue of demography has always been a battleground in the debate around its correlation with the issue of economic development. Thus, several theories inform this field of study, with arguments drawing their legitimacy from observations and assumptions as well as from prospective analysis.

Population growth appears to pose a significant risk in that it amplifies pre-existing dynamics that could spark conflict. In particular, this would be what is referred to as *horizontal inequalities*, inequalities between the economic centers and peripheral areas of different countries, between men and women, between religious groups and social structures resembling a caste or ethnicity. It is vital to give particular attention to inequalities between *age groups* in a context where young people are the largest social group) and generally face the most acute socioeconomic problems. The *role of States* and their various
possible futures, in particular their capacity to predict and manage the needs of young people, will be the main factor in the future security of the region.

This is true in both the near and the more distant future, with regard to economic, educational, healthcare and employment challenges. At the end of the day, security challenges facing the Sahel countries stem from stagnation phenomena, whose growth must be curbed. In this regard, policies that could provide a demographic dividend appear critical, as they enable the optimization of resources to meet the current and future needs of the population. However, the success of policies of this kind will need to involve processes intended to revive the legitimacy of the State and will require investment in both security and socioeconomic development, in physical infrastructure as well as public services. It goes without saying that no one being left behind is critical to success. This poses a formidable challenge, as methods of socialization and organization are rapidly evolving, often in directions that are unexpected and difficult to predict.

In view of all this, it is undoubtedly warranted to think that the attractiveness of extremist groups is due to social innovations, even if these are actually stagnant because they stem from organizations that make no secret of their desire to replace the established order with a new one based on very different legal and moral principles. In any case, these different methods of socialization and organization conceal a political dimension, because what is really at stake is the practice of democracy, representation in democratic spaces and their long-term development. Of course, what is also at stake is the role of the State and its potential impact, both positive and negative, on the region’s sociodemographic situation.
Main scenarios selected

Based on previous hypotheses of various developments in demography, peace and security, three scenarios produced by the African Futures Institute\(^{35}\) in 2018 seem relevant. The first is a trend scenario, the second an adaptation scenario, the third an imbalance deterioration scenario in which current imbalances and dysfunctions are aggravated.

**Trend scenario**

Highlighting the strong correlation between security pressures and the strategic focus of investments in the region’s States, Mabingue Ngom talks about countries getting caught up in vicious circles, with harmful consequences to stability. “Social demand is growing exponentially against a backdrop of youth unemployment. In the region, half of the population under 15 years of age and half of children are not attending school. They will be adults in 2040. Security spending has risen to 30 %, 24 % and 18 % of the budgets of Chad, Mali and Niger, respectively, crowding out funding for education and healthcare”\(^{36}\).

This particular scenario is based on two hypotheses of the behavior of two major players: the State and society. In this scenario, neither reinvent themselves. We can call this a trend scenario because it is a continuation of prevailing trends observed over recent decades.

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\(^{35}\) African Futures Institute : Perspectives socio-économiques de la région du Sahel (Socioeconomic perspectives on the Sahel region), October 2018
\(^{36}\) [https://blog.mondediplo.net/la-demographie-au-coeur-des-reflexions-sur-la](https://blog.mondediplo.net/la-demographie-au-coeur-des-reflexions-sur-la)
Over a 20/30-year time frame, the steering and management capacity of the State has not changed significantly to how it was at independence in 1960; in most countries, it is characterized by overlapping and conflicting powers between different departments, all poorly equipped to fulfill their duties. They appear to have love/hate relationships with non-State players. The State continues to interfere where it should not, and fails to intervene where it should, seemingly too big for the little things, and too little for the big things. Struggling with diverging and sometimes conflicting expectations, from multiple players, it fails to fully please any of them, in its attempts to please them all.

This means it disappoints cooperation agencies and multinationals, which criticize its timid reforms. This is the case on population matters where the State does not truly address the issue of shifting norms around fertility. Instead it focuses its efforts on improving maternal and infant health and on birth spacing. These are two distinct and acceptable areas which have come to the fore because of new constraints in daily life related to urbanization, such as mandatory schooling for children up to 16 years of age, paid work for women and the increased cost of living.

In this trend scenario, the State is also woefully failing disadvantaged groups, who often have the impression that the State will use its powers to meet their political goals and protect the interests of their supporters. The label of ‘parasite-State’ or ‘predator-State’ sometimes given to political groups called ‘significant’ is not entirely unwarranted, in view of the pervasive corruption that some of their particularly high-placed agents carry out and/or benefit from. Sadly, some parts of society have a huge amount of experience of this kind of dishonesty, that affects
morale and values everywhere. The State has penalized some notorious lawbreakers, but many people still have the impression that these punishments are cosmetic or politically motivated.

The internal security of the Sahel region remains a point of concern too. According to this scenario, a strong sense of insecurity spreads in towns and in the countryside based on certain indicators. These are: the national security indicator by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, with 2017 scores ranging from 50.4 (out of 100) in Nigeria to 87.2 in Guinea; the government stability indicator of the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), with an average of 7.08 out of 12 in 2017 for the region; the ICRG’s internal conflict indicator, with an average of 7.45 out of 12 in 2017 for the region; the ICRG’s military in politics indicator, recording an average of 2.06 out of 12 in 2017 for the region; the ICRG’s religious tension indicator, seeing an average of 3.38 out of 12 in 2017 in the region; the ICRG’s ethnic tension indicator, with an average of 3.25 out of 12 in 2017 in the region.

The powers that be may retort that although internal insecurity is certainly beyond anecdotal, it is still within acceptable limits compared to the havoc being wrecked in other parts of Africa. Yet security considerations play a big role in the trend scenario in architecture development in towns, which have seen strong population growth (with a weighted regional average urbanization rate of 45.6% in 2019). The proliferation of private security firms is a further testament to this.

The presence of the State throughout the territory has improved considerably, following infrastructure development programmes launched in the 2020s, often funded by emerging countries whose stake in cooperation programmes has seen a marked increase, a development which is of some concern to ‘traditional partners’.
Moreover, in very large countries such as Mali, Niger or Mauritania, where geography poses a real challenge, communication technologies help to bridge the divide between the urban zones of the capital cities and zones that were still on the fringe of the State in 2015. ICT developments have been harnessed to bring new forms of socialization, such as affordable social networks. However, this ICT brings a mixed bag of messages, both modernizing and conservative ones. Meanwhile external security, just as in 2015, is a cause for concern because border controls are not good enough and are also spotty, especially where borders are long and/or numerous.

This Sahel of the 2040s is not lacking in social and organizational innovations, affecting all economic and social spheres: the region has e-commerce, restaurants, home deliveries of merchandise. Although such activities are often carried out informally, they nevertheless play a major role in urban life. The key players in these kinds of innovations are mostly young people and women with relatively high levels of education, as well as migrants returning from Europe, the Americas or other African countries. These innovations are, however, not powerful enough to change societal dynamics because the players are not adequately equipped and are not accepted by their elders (the decision-makers). Plus, they are not sufficiently organized to influence political or decision-making processes. The influence of young people and women is also limited by the gerontocratic (meaning leaders older than most of the adult population) and patriarchal nature of society. Returning migrants, some of whom are quite affluent, often lack the social legitimacy needed to influence the system. Thus, they attempt to integrate into the social system and be in a more favorable position, rather than actually transform it. Researchers use the term ‘migrant remittances’.

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Within this trend scenario *democratization* is under way in the Sahel but electoral processes continue to create anxiety; they are still marred by disputes and even violence. The process of democratization is also distorted by the growing sway of money over politics. A class of political entrepreneurs has sprung up since democratization in the 1990s, made up of men and women involved in the business world and skilled in political horse-trading. This causes a collapse in the ability of citizens to mobilize around programmes, and/or disillusionment that pushes certain social categories away from normal politics and towards other forms of political expression, particularly violence.

In the social sphere, we see a slight dip in fertility, which combined with high numbers of workers reaching reproductive age results in an increase in the number of annual births. In the G5 countries, this figure goes from 3.4 million a year in 2020 to 5.7 million a year in 2040, an increase of over 60%. As a result, the population of the G5 countries, which passed 86 million in 2020 and 196 million in 2050 (and should reach 254 million by 2063), is young. The demographic dependency rate also remains high. The populationist idea that a large family is a source of wealth and a promise for a better future continues to hold sway in society. This is seen in the average fertility rate, which is 3.5 children per woman by the end of the 2040s for the five G5 countries and the three other countries. This rate has certainly declined since 2020, but not enough to accelerate the demographic transition. The same applies for the population growth rate. While it has certainly decreased a bit, it also remains high, still at 2.2% by the end of the 2040s. Many analysts conclude from this that the conditions for the G5 countries to quickly enjoy the full benefits of the demographic dividend are not yet in place.
We also note that in this trend scenario Sahel of the 2040s, political power shifts have not curbed the worsening inequality, quite the contrary. In the context of continued high population growth, these inequalities are related to education, healthcare and access to training. The State has certainly dedicated significant resources to these sectors, as recommended by the SDGs, but this has only a minor impact due to the persistence of gender and urban/rural inequalities. The urban centers have suffered worsening inequality, giving rise to what some have not hesitated to call a ‘spatial apartheid’. This refers to the gap between neighborhoods whose level and quality of services are as good as any in emerging or Western countries, and other, more numerous neighborhoods where education and health indicators only see modest gains, and where access to certain basic services (drinking water, sanitation, electricity, housing) remains difficult. This stems from a level of poverty that has gone unchecked, both in its severity and in its geographic spread. Due to the rentier nature of the economies, economic growth trends are uncertain and subject in part to fluctuations in the prices of exported goods on international markets.

In this context, employment, especially for young people, is a key concern of decision-makers. This is because demand is disproportionate to the absorption capacity of the modern sector and production systems in general, due to low productivity in various economic sectors. The informal sector, which plays a major role in job creation, also remains a low-productivity sector and therefore cannot absorb all job seekers.

Furthermore, in this trend scenario two different mindsets/approaches coexist, neither one truly dominant over the other. These are the elite preservation approach and the social balancing act approach. In the latter, typically amongst less affluent
classes without a social foothold, social mobility is only rarely the outcome. Moving from one approach to the other is a requirement of daily life, in an attempt to control risks, but it’s never easy to merge them. In other words, minimizing risks specific to lineage and rentier societies results in limited progress in small, calculated steps.

While this trend scenario is certainly not desirable for all, it remains highly plausible. In this scenario, balances are quite fragile: the ecological balance between population and resources, the social balance between different social groups (particularly elders and juniors, whose roles are well defined) and the political balance between supporters of different political systems. If these balances are overturned, due to internal and/or external conditions, the Sahel may slide into a scenario far less favorable to development. The lesson to draw from this trend scenario is that while the State may want to shift paradigms rapidly, it cannot do it alone, even if foreign aid is abundant. It cannot be the sole driver of the transformation. The State must therefore understand other forces and their roles, and establish suitable ways to collaborate with them. This collaboration holds the key to sustainability. Thus, we see that the old proverb ‘if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together’ continues to ring true.

**Adaptation scenario**

In this adaptation scenario, the main hypothesis is that the State and society (the latter comprising non-State players), reinvent themselves and develop a new ‘contract’, based on a win-win partnership. While the market economy is accepted in this scenario, society refuses to be ruled by the market alone. Yes to the market economy; no to the market society: that is the message.
By the late 2040s, the average fertility rate for the G5 countries is around three children per woman. This trend is due to a convergence of factors, amongst which analysts cite urbanization, increased schooling, paid work for women and the increased cost of living. The relative success of ongoing awareness campaigns (both public and private) around this since the 2020s, women’s awareness of their reproductive rights, and adoption of contraception methods by most married women also play a role in this trend.

Despite the drop in fertility, the population of the G5 countries passed 86 million in 2020 and 181 million in 2050 (and 230 million in 2063). It remains relatively young, with 35% of people less than 15 years of age in 2050, compared to 47% in 2020. Consequently, the demographic dependency ratio goes from around 100 dependents less than 15 years of age and over 64 years of age per 100 persons aged 15 to 64 in 2020, to just 60 in 2050. According to this adaptation scenario, the population growth rate also falls, from 3.3% between 2015 and 2020 to 2.0% by the late 2040s (and 1.4% in 2063). The conditions for the G5 countries to capitalize on the demographic dividend fast enough and in the coming decades are met, provided that the fertility transition, resulting in the age structure shift, is coupled with the implementation of ambitious policies for economic diversification and major improvements in the quality of human capital.

Economic growth is amplified and is more inclusive and sustainable. From the 2030s, the four G5 countries categorized as low-income in 2020 (Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali) enter the category of lower middle income per capita, i.e. between US$1,036 and US$4,045 per capita. By 2050 four other West and Central African countries in the Sahel manage to join the category of upper middle income per capita, i.e. over US$4,046 per capita.
After several years, the Sahel has finally become an emerging region. The international community has upheld the principle of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ and decided to apply it to the SDGs. Venerable aid and cooperation agencies withdraw from some social sectors to focus on key areas such as statistical information, strategic planning, regional integration, trade, and the ‘green’ and ‘blue’ economies. The national and multinational private sector prefers this development and prioritizes investment in productive sectors and in services, hoping that a ‘big push’ in this area will give rise to national and regional ‘champions’.

In the political arena, the democratization process is under way and appears irreversible thanks to the creation of strong institutions; a multiparty system remains a legal rule, but clientelism (where a person votes for someone in exchange for a special privilege or benefit) has imposed its iron law. Corruption has not entirely disappeared but has been reduced, which has a positive effect on the efficiency of the public sector. The State nevertheless continues to promote the effective accountability of communities and affirm its availability to support private initiatives to make them one of the main drivers of growth, the other being public investment. A number of indicators are therefore in the green, and revenue from the exploitation of the Sahel’s mineral resources are put to good use and reinvested in other economic sectors. The Sahel capitalizes on its considerable agricultural, forestry and pastoral potential. Modernized crop and livestock farming, with better insertion into the formal economy, creates numerous well-paid jobs. Ambitious spatial planning policies have enabled better distribution of the fruits of growth and driven down poverty and income inequality. The new innovation paradigm is underway and supports technological development and industrialization, guaranteeing long-term well-paying jobs for young people and women. In addition, this also
reinforces social peace and security in both urban and rural settings. Sociospatial disparities have largely been corrected by the development of medium-sized towns better connected to the surrounding countryside and by the development of economic activities in both urban and rural environments. All Sahel countries have been involved in the process of institutional, economic and social transformation that is radically changing the image of the region.

In the adaptation scenario, certain things are vital to a State’s capacity to steer and manage, and essential to ‘emergence’: streamlining, effectiveness, efficiency and accountability. Synonymous with more technocratic management of the State apparatus, these offer a prominent role to younger players, who are better trained and also used to an entrepreneurial and managerial culture. The State will have demonstrated its undeniable capacities to set its own course. Reformed into a facilitator rather than a regulator, the State has become strategic. Its relationships with non-State players are based on a new social contract rooted in decentralization. This, in order to be effective, relies on a strong and legitimate central power and increased planning and management capacities for the decentralized entities. Social and organizational innovations, both technical and political, have been deployed throughout the chain of public policy decision-making and during implementation and review, to ensure greater accountability.

In the social sphere, these social and organizational innovations have also contributed to forging win-win partnerships between States and societies. The demographic transition that had been identified as a major constraint is addressed without major problems in discussions involving all social forces, including religious leaders. In this regard, family, school and religion
reinforce their adaptation to innovation and their part in the socialization process in order to prepare people to be less vulnerable and more productive, combining sociocultural values and modernity.

Dialogue will have also been the preferred means of addressing any mismatch between training and employment. This dialogue stemmed from large-scale reforms in education systems towards the promotion of individual employability and better links between formal and informal sectors. Together, these steps harness the full benefits of the demographic dividend. Again, thanks to dialogue, consideration for the need to assert identity results in the development of formulas to reconcile the ideal of a national identity with the actual plurality of identities. The gradual retreat of the spectre of civil war, contributing towards the peace dividend, comes at the cost of developing pluralist systems, relying on informed economic transformation policies.

Dialogue also enabled resolution of the border control issue. If internal security has improved, this is due to the decreased intensity of seasonal migration, associated with the prominence of rainfed agriculture in rural economies, because young people now know how to make the most of the dry season and develop irrigation where possible. With the support of civil society organizations as well as public agencies involved in the promotion of green economies and decision-makers willing to listen to them and find appropriate solutions to their problems, rural youth have opted to remain on their lands and landscapes to try and manage them.
In this adaptation scenario Sahel, by the late 2040s the minimum conditions are in place to enable every citizen to participate in the definition and implementation of projects that will underpin the transformation of society. ICT infrastructure has made major contributions towards this accomplishment, as it favored observable changes in modes of production and consumption in Sahel communities, in particular the middle classes.

We should bear in mind that the two main players in this particular scenario - the State and non-State players - are aware of the untapped opportunities and aware they must join forces to tap into them. The idea of a common good and an open future takes shape in the minds of all players.

This adaptation scenario is plausible for the Sahel as a regional entity, on four conditions. First, most countries in the region must already meet, or be well on their way to meeting, the SDGs. This is why the central question of the United Nations System is, ‘what support can it provide to these States so they can meet their 2030 goals’? Second, they must find the political and technical means to accelerate African decentralization and integration, which are two key levers in this scenario. Third, this scenario also assumes greater capacity for domestic resource mobilization, industrialization and access to employment for young people, the emergence of new means of development financing and reduced State dependence on official development assistance. Fourth, collaborative governance with effective management and rigorous control mechanisms, and partnerships between State and non-State players in all sectors must serve as the foundation for all reforms.
Imbalance deterioration scenario

“...we cannot continue [...], to keep our heads in the sand [...] to convince ourselves that the ship could pitch but would never capsize. It can capsize and it will capsize if we keep on rocking it.”

Those were the words of Mr. Bah Ndaw, Mali’s transition President, to describe the situation in the country in September 2020 during his inauguration ceremony. He affirmed that the scenario of a capsized Sahel is plausible and we should acknowledge that fact. So what does the Sahel look like in this scenario? We will now endeavor to describe it. Despite the new constraints of daily life, natalist norms persist in Sahel societies, particularly in the absence of any real engagement from the authorities and civil society organizations on how to change reproductive behaviors.

The ideal average number of children that couples want to have in the G5 and the three other Sahel countries in question remains high at more than four children. By the late 2040s, though, the average is a little lower at four children per woman, with a minority of married women practising contraception.

This modest decline in fertility, combined with large numbers of young workers reaching reproductive age, prompts continuation of the strong growth in the number of annual births, which nearly doubles in the G5 countries between 2020 and the late 2040s, going from 3.4 million a year to 6.4 million. Consequently, the population of the G5 countries, rising from 86 million in 2020 to 211 million in 2050 (and nearly 290 million in 2063), remains very young in 2050, with 40 % being less than 15 years of age, still not too far from the figure of 47 % in 2020. Of
course, the demographic dependency ratio has fallen, but only moderately; the decline in the population growth rate is also moderate - from 3.3% in 2020 to 2.7% by the late 2040s. Accordingly, increased healthcare and education spending did not result in better quality of care and services, and practically no positive benefits come from the massive investments in secondary, higher and professional education, economic diversification and job creation.

In this scenario, then, the State remains sluggish and out of touch because it is still too big for the little things, and too little for the big things, as previously noted by advocates of decentralization and modernization. It is out of touch because it has been hijacked by various interest groups resistant to the reforms needed to go from a rentier State to a strategic State. It appears to be crippled by the obstruction of communication channels between its branches (executive, legislative and judicial) and society, which conventional remedies cannot resolve. This reduces the State’s scope for action.

By the late 2040s, the steering and management capacity of the State is a distant memory. A failure to productively use resources drawn from agricultural and mining revenue inhibits economic performance. Population growth outpaces wealth creation. The resulting picture is sobering: per capita income remains low and inequalities between town and country and between the affluent and the rest of the population are worse. The level of poverty is not only higher, but also more widespread. Infant and maternal mortality remain sky-high, and stagnation or even deterioration in indicators of access to education, healthcare, water and sanitation are the result of limited investment in these sectors and State mismanagement of these investments. We have also witnessed the impoverishment of the middle classes, several segments of which
have joined the ranks of traditional migrants. So, in addition to the massive emigration of young job seekers to Europe and the Americas, the Sahel countries suffer a major brain drain to these continents.

In this truly sobering scenario, the State never stops promising to take suitable measures to promote development. However, economic growth trends remain sporadic, subject to fluctuations in the prices of export goods on international markets. The four G5 countries categorized in 2020 as low-income, i.e. between US$1,036 and US$4,045 per capita, have no opportunity to break out of that category.

The promised significant steps forward do not materialize and State announcements no longer bear any weight with disillusioned citizens. Governments lose their standing, credibility and legitimacy. And when anger is heard and the clamor of desperation reaches its ears, the State tends to barricade itself in and lash out with intimidation measures, even when it does not simply deploy troops. The international community does no better, with no real policies in Europe other than security, anti-migration, anti-terrorism and anti-narcotics, and the diversion of official development assistance cash into military intervention.

In this scenario, demographic pressures, community violence, chronic and sustained emigration, development inequalities, economic decline, the deterioration of public services, human rights violations and hardline interventions by armed forces are increasingly less supported by a civil society that is not lacking in energy, but fails to peacefully reverse this course. A schism opens up – a gulf between society and the State. The latter can no longer push anything in terms of public policy, and society has learned to develop itself without the involvement of the State. Nothing is
more indicative of the acute and spreading lack of social/ethical standards than the breakdown of secular intercommunity relationships. This affects relationships between nomads and those who settle in one place, relationships between nomadic factions and clans, nomad/State relations, and relations between populations in border areas. The proliferation of self-defense brigades, with some members becoming proactive bandits, is a spectacular manifestation of this process. No one suffers more under this deteriorating situation than women and young people. Idle youth are a windfall for counter movements or even insurrections; they are often turned into feared combatants. As for women, they pay a heavy price as victims of rape, forced marriages and various other crimes.

Thus, a variety of disputes breaks out against this backdrop. Some disputes are prevalent in peripheral rural areas as well as in the suburbs, with philosophical/mystical inspirations calling for radicalism, including holy war on the notion that ‘If war is not holy, man is nothing but antic clay’. According to numerous studies on the topic, four factors explain the formation and subsequent radicalization of terrorist groups: “For some, radicalism is an opportunity to settle old scores with real or imagined enemies; for others, it enables access to weapons to protect oneself and one’s property. It is seen by parents whose children are unemployed as an opportunity to find work. Finally, there is a last motivation which is that of escaping the Sharia imposed by the jihadists”\textsuperscript{37}. These radical groups, originally underground by necessity, increasingly show their presence in this

\textsuperscript{37} Studies of perceptions of the factors of insecurity and violent extremism in the border regions of the Sahel, under the supervision of Réda Benkirane. Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue/United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016
deterioration scenario with attacks whose brutality is only equalled by their precision, making the attacks by Boko Haram in the 2000s look almost amateurish.

In this Sahel, seemingly devoid of hope, the organic link that existed in the past between the army and the nation\textsuperscript{38} is unravelling. The army, like all other groups, is plagued with corruption. Enlistment is still a means to make a living for many young people shut out of the job market, but this comes at a price that some families agree to pay, just as they have done for prospective illegal migrants for decades. In this army, promotions are purchased, with long-term impacts on the morale of those with neither money nor patrons. This weakens the State, which struggles all the more to fulfil its primary sovereign duty of protecting its borders, people and property, for which it depends in part – especially in crises – on foreign security forces offering fire power as well as significant strategic and geopolitical intelligence.

Faced with the State's difficulty in guaranteeing security, private security companies flourish in this scenario, but households that cannot procure their services must live under a cloud of fear because crime in some areas has become more than a livelihood: it is a \textit{way of life} for some groups of young people. For them, drugs often go hand in hand with crime.

The big takeaway from this particular, disastrous scenario is that it is just as possible as the two preceding possibilities. The conditions for its materialization are both internal and external. With regard to the main external factors, we can see current and future geopolitical shifts. However, this scenario is utterly at odds

\textsuperscript{38} ‘Armée-Nation’ (Army-Nation) was the title of a popular radio program in Senegal in the early years of independence.
with development, and it is critical for economies in the region to implement the suitable and necessary mechanisms to avert it. To do otherwise may well lead to catastrophe.
IV. Which public policies make for a resilient Sahel?

How do we enable what is desirable in terms of DPS? This chapter will attempt to answer this question. This involves identifying strategic focuses that Sahelian decision-makers and players, along with their partners in the international community, can adopt to create optimal conditions for the preferred scenario.

First, there needs to be agreement on the future that Sahelians want for themselves and future generations. This means choosing a preferred scenario from the three presented in the preceding chapter. This part of the report is based on the idea that the scenario preferred by Sahelians is the one in which the region equips itself with the means of initiating and controlling changes, rather than simply undergoing them. The scenario that meets this requirement is the one that should enable three particular things to happen: increased security, the creation or consolidation of conditions for lasting peace, and a contribution to the generation or capture of a demographic dividend. This is the adaptation scenario. This chapter reviews the main challenges and stakes associated with these issues in the Sahel region.

And, this section also offers answers to strategic questions related to those challenges and stakes, drawing from a ‘SWOT’ analysis for the Sahel region: to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses as well the opportunities and threats in its regional and global environment. The strengths are levers that can balance the Sahel system to seize on opportunities, avert threats and address weaknesses in order to remove obstacles to the overall vision.
Review of main challenges and issues for the DPS nexus

This section summarizes the main challenges. These reflect the shared concerns of all stakeholders, especially in the DPS nexus, even if they address them with approaches and definitions that appear different at first glance, but which converge completely in the final analysis. Addressing these challenges should enable the region to achieve the optimal future described in the adaptation scenario.

Here we clarify the concepts from the viewpoint best suited to arriving at coherent strategic focuses. These are inspired by perspectives from the different monographic studies.

These challenges fall into three categories: those related to demographic dynamics and human capital, those related to security dynamics and peacekeeping in the region, and those related to the lack of an integrated approach to the DPS nexus.

**Review of main challenges associated with demographic dynamics**

As laid out in preceding chapters, demographic dynamics in the Sahel region are characterized by high population growth, high fertility rates and a very young population struggling to access economic opportunities and participate in the organization and management of society.

In fact, the current situation in the Sahel is also distinguished by rapid population growth due to high fertility and a significant drop in mortality. Thus, the Sahel may be described as an area in the process of being populated. Between 1960 and 2020, the populations of the countries in the region increased between fourfold and sevenfold (the latter for Niger), corresponding to an
average growth rate of around 2.5 to 3.0% per year, which is exceptional over the long term. The latest estimates for the period from 2015 to 2020 indicate that this growth will continue. Annual growth for all countries in the region is still greater than 2.5%, with Mali and Chad having rates of 3%, and Niger nearly 4%.

Infant and juvenile mortality has declined sharply since the 1960s in the Sahel, which contributed to the acceleration of demographic growth. Today approximately one child in ten dies before the age of five, compared to one in three in the 1960s. These advances, following more discoveries in health technologies and the fight against major endemic diseases, have increased life expectancy at birth in all countries. However, mortality rates, in particular child and maternal mortality, remain high in the Sahel, and figures for life expectancy at birth are lower than elsewhere. Thus, the latest estimates for the period from 2015 to 2020 indicate life expectancies of less than 60 years for five of the eight countries examined here, with 54 for Chad and Nigeria, and 67.5 for Senegal.

The fertility of Sahelian women (as measured by the total fertility rate or average number of children per woman) has also declined in recent years, but only slightly. After peaking at almost seven children per woman in the 1980s and 1990s, between 2015 and 2020 it settled to 4.6 in Senegal and Mauritania, nearly six in Mali and Chad and seven in Niger.

Overall, while reproductive behavior is starting to change, the process remains rather slow in the Sahel, for three main reasons. The first relates to the low levels of development in these countries due to continued use of extensive family-based production systems, which favor risk minimization over productivity maximization. The second factor is the persisting
nalistic attitude of Sahelian societies due to the mortality rate, which is still high, and the weakness of social security systems. Finally, the third reason is the weakness of family planning programmes. According to the latest data from the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Sahelian women still report high figures for the ideal number of children they would like to have: between five and nine (the latter in Niger) with an average of six for the G5 countries. Men would still like more children than women.

Persistently high fertility over the past 60 years, coupled with lower child mortality, has caused a significant rejuvenation in populations throughout the Sahel. Thus, in 2020, 47% of the population of the G5 Sahel countries was under 15 years of age, and 80% under 35 years of age. Young people aged 15-34 years accounted for a third of the total population of these five countries, and made up 71% of the population over 15 years of age. These high numbers of young people naturally have a variety of political and social repercussions. The overall median age in the Sahel is around 17-19 years, which is very young.

These rather unusual features of the region raise several major concerns in terms of security, economics and politics, largely discussed in previous sections of the report. With regard to security, for instance, the demographic vitality of the region is the source of a lot of tension between social groups, making coexistence difficult. Coexistence requires increased defense and security funding, in particular for weapons and logistics to enable troops to properly protect people and defend national territories. Another security aspect affected by regional demographic dynamics is the capacity of the region to ensure food security for its rapidly growing populations. In Mali, for instance, 21.9% of
households suffered moderate food insecurity in 2016, and 3.1 % severe food insecurity. These figures rise to 23.6 and 3.3 % if we do not count the capital of Bamako in the statistics.

As for economic and social matters, the marked vitality of Sahel populations has not been accompanied by equivalent economic vitality. The average standard of living for Sahel populations remains low. With gross national incomes per capita ranging from around US$800 to US$1500 a year, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali are amongst those countries on the lower levels of the spectrum. Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritania and Nigeria are categorized amongst the lower middle per capita income countries. In fact, despite the progress achieved in recent years, the latest available data indicates around 40 to 50 % of people live below the national poverty line, except in Mauritania, where the figures is 30 %. World Bank estimates of the percentage of people considered to be living in extreme poverty (i.e. with less than US$1.90 PPP a day) are little different. However, poverty is not only monetary; it also covers various deficits around access to healthcare, education and sanitation, as well as the comfort of housing.

On the subject of education, starting from very low school enrolment rates in the 1960s, the Sahel countries had to strive towards the goal of universal primary enrolment as well as increased secondary and higher education enrolment, while the school-age population doubled almost once every 20-25 years. We must acknowledge and commend the massive efforts by these countries towards accomplishing these goals. However, the results achieved remain inadequate.
First, the gross enrolment rates include, notably in primary and secondary schools, a significant number of late and repeating students who are above the normal school age. The 100% rates achieved in Mauritania and Cameroon must therefore be put into perspective. In other countries, not all children are enrolled in primary school. The gross secondary school enrolment rates of some 20% in Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon are notoriously insufficient. As for higher education, even the best enrolment rates, such as 13% in Senegal and Cameroon, are still too low to provide these countries with sufficient quality and quantity of human capital to support development in these countries.

With regard to employment, the inability of the modern economy since the 1960s to create enough jobs to keep pace with strong population growth prompted the rapid development of informal activities and jobs and a sharp rise in unemployment and migration. The urban informal sector, with agriculture and livestock activities outside of the modern sector, likely account for between 70 and 90% of the workforce in Sahel countries, with jobs generally vulnerable and subject to low and often precarious pay. Thus, young people are faced with limited opportunities and a choice between long-term unemployment while awaiting a job in the modern sector (although this assumes they can rely on family support), accepting precarious, low-wage, subsistence work in the informal or agricultural sector while waiting for something better, or abandoning the job search and falling into the ‘inactive’ category. Low wages amongst the employed and idleness amongst young people who are either unemployed or ‘inactive’ (neither employed nor in education or training) threaten social stability and can lead to conflict, particularly in urban environments where young people (both graduates and others) have higher expectations. And, as with unemployment, inactivity requires support. In the context of extreme poverty, this support
often comes from engaging in illegal activities. Other reports on this topic have stressed that after having been places of social advancement, African towns are now places of exclusion, particularly from the job market, which has facilitated the increasing criminalization of urban economies on the continent.

All of these problems can be grouped under the thorny issue of trying to capture the demographic dividend in the region. Thus, meeting the challenges of demographic dynamics in the Sahel means taking up not just purely quantitative population issues, but also more qualitative considerations related to human capital.

**Review of main challenges associated with security dynamics and peacekeeping**

As already described, the Sahel region faces several kinds of security challenges. These may be summarized as physical, moral and psychological harm and property damage, as identified in the specialist study on Mali. They include:

- organised crime characterized by trafficking in all manner of weapons and drugs, as well as human trafficking, terrorism, bombings and economic and cybercrime;
- increased radicalism and violent extremism in numerous areas poorly controlled by the State;
- banditry, such as hold-ups and violent extortion, robbery with light arms, illegal possession of weapons of war, theft, intimidation, etc.;
- human rights violations (murder, rape, other sexual violence, abduction, etc.);
- increased consumption of drugs and other substances harmful to health;
- displacement of populations fleeing the atrocities of armed conflict;
- extreme poverty amongst populations affected by conflict, youth unemployment, desperation of displaced populations, fear, hopelessness, isolation, abandonment, crises of community confidence, misunderstandings, disgust or even hate towards the other (persons, ethnicities, colours), social exclusion and inequality;
- worsening crime and delinquency, especially amongst young people;
- increased precariousness related to the food crisis in numerous locations facing insecurity;
- economic migrations and exoduses.

These various forms of insecurity are divided across three hotbeds of tension: the G5 Sahel countries, the Liptako-Gourma region and the Chad Basin, with distinctive patterns of internal conflict, drought and terrorism.

Of course, this precarious security situation, coupled with the challenge of border management, is closely connected to issues around demography (prevalence of youth categories in the population, migrations, etc.), governance, and social structures (stratification into classes, castes, races, etc.).

In view of the fragility of the region and major cross-border security risks, the Sahel must take a cross-sector approach to security in order for it to be effective. Strong synergies in activities between different economic sectors should ensure that all security concerns for the region take into account social, economic and political parameters.
Review of main challenges associated with the lack of an integrated approach to the DPS nexus

As previously described, a large number of players are active in the Sahel region, which has seen the deployment of a variety of strategies. According to the field study report *Prospective studies on the Sahel, UNDP 2015*, intergovernmental organizations active in the region include the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), the Mano River Union (MRU), the *Conseil de l’Entente*, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Senegal River Basin Development Authority (OMVS) and the Gambia River Basin Development Organization (OMVG). Organizations collaborating in the Sahel include the United Nations System (UNS) with a strong presence via its many agencies (the main ones active around the DPS nexus being UNFPA and UNDP) as well as development banks such as the African Development Bank (AfDB).

There are no fewer than 17 strategies proposed by bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies\(^{39}\). All of these strategies roughly address the DPS nexus. Yet their deployment is not coordinated, nor easy to coordinate, as they do not share any common conceptual or analytic foundations or time horizons. For the most part, they share the feature of *being born of emergency*, in that they were developed in response to crises (food, humanitarian, security) and were often intended to curb their immediate adverse impact.

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\(^{39}\) Sahel prospective studies, UNDP 2015 and CEA 2017
The institutional landscape tasked with coming up with strategies resulted in disorganized intervention in the region, involving unnecessary competition, a massive waste of energy and a bill that States cannot afford to pay. It therefore appears critical for the region to take on a common and integrated approach to the DPS nexus, with the aim of promoting synergies between the different actions taken.

**Strategic focuses to meet the main challenges**

In response to the main challenges covered in the preceding section, we can identify *four* key strategic focuses. The first two are motivated by the need for a shared vision on the DPS nexus in the Sahel region and the need to ensure the vision’s coordinated implementation. The two others pertain to the main aspects of the DPS nexus: capturing the demographic dividend and promoting peace and security in the region.

1. **Define a shared and integrated vision of the DPS nexus**

   Do the Sahel countries have a strong shared vision for capturing the demographic dividend? Are coordinated strategies available to guarantee stability and security and restore social cohesion in the region? Is there overall coherence between all regional and national multistakeholder initiatives intended to benefit from the population boom and its wealth of opportunities?

   These are some key questions closely related to and underpinning this first strategic focus.
The variety of strategies and methodologies around the issues of demography, peace and security requires unification of the different approaches/interventions in the region.

In this category, a review of the various studies conducted suggests a need to first clarify the shared vision of the Sahel and its stakeholders around the triad of demography, peace and security.

Moreover, the governments of all other stakeholders must make the necessary trade-offs to set or restore priorities and rank strategies and actions according to the contribution they make towards capturing the demographic dividend, ensuring a better response to security issues in the region.

2. **Ensure proper operational planning**

The second focus is really about effective logistics. Once the shared vision is clearly defined and proper planning is in place, it is vital that decision-makers and all other stakeholders ensure coordinated and efficient implementation. Indeed, a lofty vision and great programmes alone are not enough to achieve demographic benefits to further security and peace in the Sahel region. Each party must also apply itself at its own level of intervention to achieve set objectives. At this stage, synergy between actions taken is vital. In some cases, it is not unusual to see certain stakeholders who originally had a supporting role finding themselves to be major players. In the Sahel region, a proper distribution of roles is critical to ensure each party works within its means and its strategy, and in coordination with others.
To guarantee the optimal implementation of all initiatives, several challenges must be overcome, the two primary ones being (i) the ranking of actions to be performed and the coherent mobilization of different stakeholders and (ii) financing the implementation of all initiatives by the various stakeholders.

Decision-makers are quite often torn between pressing forward on demographic, population development and regional challenges versus security issues. This is a holdover from a not-so-distant past when the challenges facing the Sahel were approached from two different angles: (i) the security and border control angle, with a focus on illegal migration and military and security responses being favored and (ii) the humanitarian and developmental angle, focusing on issues of population, social well-being and the war on poverty and prioritizing these over security to a certain degree.

Once the links between demography, security and peace are established, it is crucial to reconcile all these approaches: hence the need to *rethink* the actions to be implemented, in terms of links between them, prioritization and institutional arrangements for their management. The variety of economic, social, healthcare, environmental, demographic and security challenges require trade-offs that will not always be easy, due to competing biases and conflicting interests, but will nevertheless be required.

The Sahel region has limited public resources, which tends to hinder or even prevent the implementation process. Moreover, mobilization of funding from bilateral or multilateral international partners, both public and private, requires proper management and oversight, in order to build and maintain a bond of trust with these institutions to safeguard long-term funding at favorable interest rates. A number of players advocate for the mobilization of public/private partnerships as a solution to demographic and
security problems. Yet although this method of development financing and management appears appropriate in certain interventions around clear development objectives, it proves to be problematic in political and diplomatic interventions, and even more so if these interventions involve security.

A key part of this second strategic focus is monitoring/evaluation to ensure effective implementation. Indeed, for all projects and programmes identified in all relevant domains (demographics, education, healthcare, employment, economics, security, etc.), the implementation stage must be monitored and evaluated, primarily to verify progress on all initiatives.

More specifically, the monitoring and evaluation of programmes and projects aimed at harmonizing interventions in issues of demography, peace and security are intended to enable the following at all times: (i) the assessment of progress on all project and programme activities, (ii) the availability of periodic summaries of partial or overall results achieved, (iii) the guarantee to fully capitalize on the experiences of the different stakeholders, particularly with regard to the variety of players in the Sahel region, (iv) the reduction of uncertainty in different interventions through identifying constraints and bottlenecks that may slow progress.

A proper monitoring/evaluation system first requires a suitable definition of the logical framework for intervention with a set of key indicators to enable the effective implementation of this step. Several categories of indicators are available. The most common include risk, input, activity, output and impact indicators.

Beyond indicators, the evaluation system also warrants some attention. How can we make it participatory, i.e. how can we make it so the populations involved in the various initiatives are no longer merely an object of external evaluation, but rather participants in
monitoring/evaluation activities? This question is all the more critical because if properly conducted, monitoring/evaluation activities can offer a solid foundation for informed and constructive dialogue between different players.

All public policy is conducted by men and women whose interests can vary and interfere with its objectives. Thus, it is necessary to identify mechanisms and actions to facilitate public policy ownership and buy-in amongst the various stakeholders. Reconciliation between demographic objectives and security priorities therefore requires a fundamental change process to re-educate all stakeholders on the links between demography, peace and security. Governments must understand that it is about more than just massive investments in security programmes – we must also look at the demographic dimension of the problem. And strategies should be based on what can be worked out by, and coordinated between, different stakeholders. Their specific ownership of changes related to the integration of demographic problems into the struggle for security will require sustained efforts in communication and awareness as well as training for all players.

3. Develop human capital and transform the age structure to help capture the demographic dividend

This third strategic focus is about the broader perspective of the issue of the demographic dividend and the development of human capital in the Sahel region. Thus, this involves addressing both aspects of the issue: quantitative (demographic dividend) and qualitative (quality of human capital).
Public policy must first focus on all components of the demographic dividend, i.e. health, fertility, education, training and employment, as these are indispensable to the development of human capital and dealing with demographic dynamics in the Sahel. These three key variables are vital to improving the capacities of the region’s countries to access human capital of adequate quality and quantity for a structural transformation of economies and societies.

In addition, public policy should also focus on access to basic social services such as drinking water, sanitation infrastructure and reinforced social protection systems, all of which are needed to truly reap the benefits of the demographic dividend.

In practice, the development of human capital requires addressing both quantitative needs (more actual resources for the education sector, construction of new classrooms, etc.) and qualitative needs (increased effectiveness of the education system, better training programmes, etc.). Another priority is to improve teaching, perhaps through better/harder qualifications, and improve recruitment and promotion systems to help boost education levels overall. It is also important to strengthen and develop vocational education.

Another key project to enable the education system to flourish is the supervision of Koranic schools, because of their importance in the Sahel region. Such schools should, within frameworks defined within States, be encouraged to introduce vocational training and training on civic engagement and moral values into curriculums.

With regard to employment, very high unemployment in the Sahel region, mainly amongst young people, compromises the ability of populations to participate actively in and fully benefit
from the wealth creation process. It is therefore critical for public policies to focus on promoting initiatives to support the empowerment of young people and on developing entrepreneurial competence and training throughout life. Such schemes will encourage and support them in private endeavors of starting businesses of their own. In connection with education and training, government policies should tackle several major challenges common to the job and education markets in Sahel countries. The most pressing needs are: to align training with employment and supply with demand on the labor market, to shift formal and traditional education systems to educational frameworks geared towards vocational training and qualifications to meet actual market needs, and to understand the urgency of seizing the growing opportunity and integrate this into an innovative and competitive educational offer.

The change in the population structure and training must go hand in hand with structural investments to create productive jobs for trained young people and the restructuring of the economy by organizing the informal sector to absorb excess labor from rural areas and/or the modern economy.

Capturing the demographic dividend also requires population management and the implementation of a low fertility policy. These are crucial if insecurity issues in the Sahel region are to be solved.

In this regard, controlling fertility rates (and therefore also controlling population growth) mainly requires ambitious family planning and reproductive health programmes. These include reproductive health communication, education and awareness for the population, especially young people; more effective measures to curb early marriages; keeping girls in school by means of
affirmative incentives; the involvement of religious leaders to introduce family well-being into their sermons (already under way in Chad) because high fertility is also explained by the strong natalist mindset amongst Sahel populations, whereby people believe children are a gift from God.

Naturally, all of these initiatives must fall under the operational, financial and budgetary processes of parties tasked with implementation (the State, community institutions, local authorities, funders, etc.).

4. **Promote peace, security and good governance**

A peaceful Sahel, working democracies and a well-governed region. These should be the guiding principles for the promotion of peace, security and good governance in the region, the fourth of the strategic focuses.

In terms of security, most studies are silent on the public policy options needed to ensure security for people and property and to consolidate peace and social cohesion in connection with regional development goals. However, several concerns remain at the center of public policy in the Sahel region and require particular attention to make the most of the population boom and the opportunity to benefit from the demographic dividend.

Amongst these concerns, the control and management of migration flows and border security appear to be a clear challenge to which public policy must respond. In the same vein, targeted security programmes should emphasize combating terrorism and ethnic, tribal and religious violence. These programmes should also look at conflict prediction, prevention and management, as well as fight all forms of trafficking. However, one of the
structural weaknesses in security policies is their frequent failure to holistically incorporate issues of demography and the demographic dividend. If they had done so, public policies around security would have taken into account the major issues raised by regional demography, starting with the rapid growth of the youth population in the region and the need to prioritize this for national and international security. If this had occurred, the capacity of governments to incorporate youth into the definition and implementation of security strategies would have received more sustained attention at both national and international levels. Then public policy would have focused on raising awareness of security challenges amongst young people in order to involve them more actively in conflict resolution processes. They’d be given the means to act while being educated on the meaning of patriotism.

Moreover, because conflict around land accounts for most disputes between rural populations and fuels armed disputes, addressing security challenges requires reorganization of the rural world, which, despite increasing urbanization, is still home to a large portion of the region’s population. The case of Niger is of interest here. While the country has experienced several droughts, associated with major shortages and famines, these have become more frequent in recent years due to increasingly irregular rainfall and demographic pressures. Rapid population growth has prompted the expansion of farmland, the further cultivation of marginal land and a reduction in, or even elimination of, soil restoration through fallow land. This in turn increases erosion, accelerates desertification and deforestation and exacerbates recurring conflict between farmers and herders.

Consequently, public policies should help modernize methods to improve agricultural productivity, organize rural management and encourage the gradual adoption of new technologies amongst
farmers. They should also take women into account and organize their effective participation in land management, organize and structure the coexistence of all players in the rural economy and develop strategies to adapt to the climate crisis. Finally, the strategic planning stage should not examine the issues of demography, peace and security as isolated entities. On the contrary, other realities must be factored in, both socioeconomic and those of internal forces (sociocultural, sociological, economic, etc.) and external forces (all manner of external shocks).

Players in the future of the Sahel, and their strategies

To meet the challenges around this issue, several development initiatives are already in the planning or implementation stages. They aim to boost the capacities of Sahel countries to deal with demographic dynamics, capture the demographic dividend and establish peaceful and secure societies. The objectives of these initiatives are in line with one of the major concerns of the international community: achieving the SDGs, and more particularly SDG 16, which is to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Who are the stakeholders in these initiatives and what are their strategies? The next section below will deal with these questions.

A wide array of key players and stakeholders are involved in addressing problems related to demography, peace and security. Each player has its own identity, project/s and means of action, which this section will attempt to describe. Here we also explain
the strategic stakes related to the behaviors of each player in capturing the demographic dividend and maintaining a secure environment. The main players may be divided into four categories previously identified by UNFPA in *Goal 17 - Partnership: UNFPA’s approach for the transformation of Africa and the world*, published in September 2019 in conjunction with the United Nations General Assembly. These four main categories of players are: the public sector and other State powers, the private sector, civil society and United Nations System agencies, and international and regional organizations.

*The public sector and other State powers*

This is undoubtedly one of the most important categories when addressing matters of demography, peace and security and includes governments and governance systems, local authorities and legislators.

*Governments and their governance systems*

The main role of governments and governance systems is to develop and implement public policy to enable the achievement of development goals, including capturing the demographic dividend, maintaining internal and external security and creating peace. Education, healthcare and employment policies and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups are the preferred means for achieving the desired results. The same applies for investments in family planning and reproductive health programmes that promote the necessary demographic shifts and programmes that stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life for populations.
The role of governments is also dominant in the issue of security, which is one of the key aspects of governance. In this regard, the capacity of the State to fulfill its role, particularly in managing security and dealing with demographic dynamics, is also vital.

Yet a government alone cannot provide all of the responses to development challenges. Any analysis of the strategy of this key player therefore includes consideration of its relationship with public or private players in addressing matters of demography, peace and security.

**Local authorities**

These mainly work on behalf of governments at the local level and play a major role in operational implementation of public policies, as well as averting security risks. In well-organized societies, local authorities implement local policies consistent with State policy in order to accelerate the capture of the demographic dividend and maintain security. The need for consistency between State interventions and those of local authorities affirms the codependent or rather complementary relationship between these two public sector entities.

**Legislators**

Legislators are one of the three branches of government that can also be grouped under this category of public partners. They play a decisive role in the relationship between demography, peace and security. In fact, in fulfilling their duties, legislators are tasked with drafting laws and regulations that frame the mandate, function, organization and powers of the executive in its
population and security policies. They are also tasked with adopting, amending or rejecting the various budget proposals for State intervention in the sectors in question. From this perspective, legislators play a critical role in ensuring a degree of balance and making trade-offs between different government priorities. This is particularly vital in a context where, due to the dominance of the executive branch, of which the defense and security forces are a key pillar, the defense budget is rarely questioned when military spending comes at the expense of investment in other sectors. Legislators are also responsible for monitoring and verifying State intervention in the various sectors. This is in accordance with the constitution, laws and regulations and policies applicable to public action. Legislators can review, adopt or reject certain high-level appointments, particularly in the security sector, advocate for populations and even offer them a platform to voice their views on topics related to demography, peace and security. This facilitates political consensus through dialogue and transparency. Thus, the independence of the legislative branch from the executive branch is critical so it can play its role perfectly in order to help capture the demographic dividend and maintain security.

Taken on the whole, the public sector holds a prominent position in defining national development strategies, including aspects related to demography, peace and security. For several years, efforts have focused around defining a strong State response to the deteriorating security situation. This brings States to the forefront in their strategic role of maintaining both macroeconomic fundamentals and the security of people and property.
However, the Sahel region faces several problems that impede State action and/or dampen its impact.

*Competition between different branches of government:* the separation of powers that guarantees sound democracy by creating a system of checks and balances may also, under certain conditions, become a source of dysfunction. For instance, competition between the State and local authorities may prove counterproductive and compromise service delivery. Conversely, removing parliamentary oversight from the executive due to a security emergency may create dysfunction and weaken democracy.

*Competition with other players:* conflict with civil societies is widespread, but we also see conflict with the private sector and with aid agencies which may result in reduced investment in basic social services and the loss of State control in certain parts of the national territory.

*Conflict between those with authority and those with power:* In numerous places, we see disillusionment with the State due to irresponsible and chauvinistic community behavior on the part of its agents. Because its behavior is not always exemplary, the State has lost some of its authority. It is no longer regarded as an institution, but merely a power that can be resisted by various means, ranging from direct confrontation to various methods of circumvention.

**The private sector**

This second key player, comprising all non-State enterprises, is the backbone for growth as well as wealth and job creation in the economy, encompassing companies in both the formal and
informal sector, as well as banks and private investment funds, and for-profit mutuals and cooperatives. Thanks to the resources it can mobilize, the private sector can be a major partner in capturing the demographic dividend. The dynamism of the private sector largely depends on opportunities provided for private initiatives and on the richness of the ecosystem of players and services for economic operators, whether for active businesses or aspiring entrepreneurs. Moreover, the long-term development of drivers of growth and sectors that support the economy depends on the quality and depth of this private sector ecosystem. Sahel countries are generally characterized by a rather poor private sector ecosystem. So, capturing the demographic dividend and ensuring lasting security require substantial private sector investments in development in the Sahel. The private sector can also be significantly mobilized in the training and qualification of human capital, while relying on and respecting the identities of local communities and contributing to the long-term development of the country.

**Civil society**

This third category of key players covers several stakeholders, who are united by their shared values. The following organizations belong to this category.

**Youth associations**

Young people make up the largest segment of the population in the Sahel region, and are one of the most critical aspects of its development. Thus, they are the most relevant group in matters of demography and security. The studies conducted under the DPS
initiative have largely shown that the rapid growth of the youth population helps explain the mounting security issues in the region.

In fact, young people are easy prey for criminal organizations because they often face precarious social conditions. Their difficulties generally relate to the imbalance between population growth, weak economic development and the inability of States to offer them adequate opportunities.

The main challenge for youngsters is how to access employment, which hinges on several factors, such as inadequate education and vocational training, a lack of economic diversification, and an economic climate that is not favorable to saving or investment. Banking on young people to capture the demographic dividend and maintain security is a good bet.

Several factors can promote greater youth involvement in the development process. For any Sahel country, one would be a strong and diversified economy supported by sound social and economic infrastructure. Another requirement is inclusive development, understood to mean greater social justice and the fair redistribution of the fruits of growth. Other ways to get young people more engaged are extensive social integration with improved and participative governance, positive action towards marginalized social groups and easier access to property.

**Women’s associations**

Women play a central and critical role in DPS issues. Their substantial contribution to the development of social and cultural dynamics is now well established. Women are a social group at the heart of problems related to healthcare, demography,
education, the environment, the economy, etc. Public policies in areas such as family planning, reproductive health management, fertility control and women’s empowerment cannot be effective without collaboration from the main women’s associations relevant to these matters. The importance of fertility in the advent of the demographic transition and, consequently, the start of the process towards the demographic dividend, shows the need to include the important demographic group of women, in analyses of the DPS triad.

**Faith based organizations and religious leaders**

In the sociocultural context of the Sahel region, this category of stakeholders plays a leading role in issues of demography, peace and security.

The key role of this category of actors is to train, educate, challenge and advocate. They have a central role in the three dimensions of education: imparting knowledge, know-how and life skills. This community is not immune to controversy in areas relevant to the DPS nexus. Thus, in certain Sahel countries, religious groups advance the argument of *divine providence* to discredit attempts to implement responsible population policies. Other groups support family welfare programmes, including birth spacing, in the name of the same Koranic message and the same prophetic tradition. The same is true in matters related to peace, with some leaders promoting a climate of peace, social cohesion and coexistence between the different religions, while others are susceptible to the virus of intolerance. In any case, their role certainly cannot go without mention in the Sahel; 80 % of the population claims religious affiliation.
Researchers and universities

The role of researchers and universities is mainly to produce and disseminate knowledge. Unfortunately, research on the relationship between demography, peace and security is currently underdeveloped. Thus, public policy is rarely informed by theoretical, analytical or empirical frameworks from academia, unlike many industrialized countries, where think tanks are valued resources for DPS decision-makers.

Other civil society organizations

The role of other civil society organizations is to provide citizen oversight for public action – a key competence to ensure balance in power relationships.

Their ability to produce new ideas, while encouraging populations to take charge and proposing less costly and sometimes more efficient forms of action, is decisive in taking action to capture the demographic dividend. Non-State players such as political parties and associations may be grouped under this category.

Traditionally this category encompasses political parties and associations affiliated with the dominant powers and also legal opposition parties. They are all regarded as private and recognized associations. Their role is to influence the powers that be. They participate in political life by moulding the policy preferences of the public, helping shape public opinion, taking part in the exercise of power and mobilizing populations around ideas and values.
However, it appears that legal political parties no longer have a monopoly over political expression. In many Sahel countries, these monopolies are being contested by rebel movements or organizations acting on the fringes of law and the constitution. These players, disputing the prevailing order, mainly in areas of religion, economics, the constitution and politics, have become part of the landscape in the Sahel. In essence, the biggest rebel movements currently generally reject secular democracy, which they claim pushes human laws as opposed to the divine laws of Islam. They therefore consider violence and intimidation to be legitimate means of making demands, changing the prevailing order and contesting the ‘monopoly’ that the current powers claim over ‘legitimate violence’ in the Weberian sense. On the topic of population issues, this category of players generally pushes a highly natalist demographic vision.

*United Nations System agencies, and international and regional organizations*

The three topics of demography, peace and security are amongst the main areas of interest of the United Nations System (UNS). The demographic dividend lies at the core of the concerns of UNFPA, which is highly involved in attempting to capture it in West and Central Africa, and more specifically in the Sahel region. In fact, UNFPA provides a degree of leadership in guiding and facilitating political dialogue and strategic communication around the issue of the demographic dividend in Africa. The West and Central Africa Regional Office has managed to mobilize political players, civil society organizations, the private sector and young people around advocacy to try to capture the demographic dividend in the region.
Several other UNS agencies are active in various aspects of this issue. For instance, UNESCO is noted for its management of problems related to the culture of peace, UNDP has made human development its pet project since 1990, and ILO has developed critical competencies around issues of decent employment. State security is the central mission of certain United Nations bodies, such as the Security Council. Outside the UNS, other bilateral and multilateral cooperation agencies are also present in the region and are interested in the DPS nexus to varying degrees. As mentioned already, the Sahel is a field in which a host of strategies relating to demography, the fight against terrorism, regional integration, security, development, poverty, employment, health, etc. are being deployed.

The 2015 field study report, *Sahel prospective studies*, UNDP and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa identified 17 such strategies being implemented by international cooperation and development agencies. The other sign of interest from the international community in the matter is illustrated by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressing the main global challenges, such as poverty, inequality, education, healthcare, peace, security, etc. SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions is particularly relevant to the DPS nexus.

It should be noted that this proliferation of strategies is not without its problems. On the one hand, they arise from different understandings of the challenges of development in the Sahel, and suffer from ambiguity in respect of the DPS concept. On the other hand, the State sorely lacks the capacity to coordinate implementation on the ground even if it has the political will to do so. Therefore, we often see wasted energy, overlapping activities and inadequate collaboration between government services and private sector or civil society organizations, rather than
coordination between different national and international players and agendas. Yet it is acknowledged that only concerted action by all stakeholders – national and international, public and private – will enable the demographic dividend to be achieved and guarantee security and peace for the Sahel.
Conclusion

This publication has attempted to present the Sahel in all of its complexity and diversity; a cursory glance or monodisciplinary treatment cannot do justice to this region. Only an in-depth and systematic approach can highlight the contours and underlying variables and allow us to understand the various relationships that guide the development of the system.

This systematic approach is all the more justified because the issue that this report examines, i.e. the links between demography, peace and security, is also extremely complex. Not only due to the disparate uses of each of these terms, but also to the variety of conceptual, methodological and analytical frameworks applied to approach, explore and address them.

Analyses show that the Sahel, which enjoyed a prosperous past, now faces a present that may be characterized as more than a little difficult, according to many indicators. The changes that are under way, whether called transitions, shifts, or crises, can lead to starkly different futures. This report has presented three of these futures, highlighting the factors involved in these possible evolutions, along with the key players, their strategies and the associated critical uncertainties.

Of the three scenarios set out, the adaptation scenario is preferred by the decision-makers of the Sahel, and certainly by their technical and financial partners. In addition, this report has examined the conditions of its implementation, before formulating the associated recommendations.
The objective of this report will be achieved if it brings about a deeper discussion of this issue which is vital to both the present and future of the Sahel. It will be even more useful if this discussion leads to well-designed actions to draw a common thread through the issues of demography, peace and security, which have received fragmented treatment in the past. If this is accomplished, UNFPA, which commissioned this work, will have consolidated its role as a pioneer in this area.
"The Sahel can and will win the war," proclaims President Issoufou in the foreword to this report, to which I am honored to have been invited to contribute. The war in question is the one to achieve peace and security in a Sahel reconciled with itself, and whose development benefits its citizens first. This scenario, in which swords will return to their sheaths and drones will be put to peaceful use, this scenario where poverty will recede while democracy will rise, certainly brings to mind the image of a Sahel finally engaged in a process of sustainable development, balancing strong and inclusive growth with the needs of social justice.

In the view of President Issoufou and his peers, this scenario is within the reach of the communities of the Sahel. ‘Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel’ expresses a similar conviction, based on data drawn from the nations in question. It also makes clear that Sahelian communities should be the builders of this peace that they seek and/or consolidate, and should also be its first beneficiaries. I
am pleased to add my voice to those with more authority, to the voices of President Issoufou and the report’s authors, to highlight that the main strength of the Sahel certainly lies in its human capital. It is thanks to the strength and creativity of these millions of women and men, who have in fact often been ill-served by nature, that the Sahel is still standing, and it is thanks to these human resources that it will rise again. In the future, we must show more respect for these people, who must contend with the hardships and roughness of their land every day, and who despite everything, continue to innovate, to imagine other futures and to work to make them possible. We must act with them.

How do we prepare them for the task ahead, for the challenges they must meet in order to accomplish such an historic mission? How can we support them more decisively in their struggle, and above all more strategically? How do we provide groups susceptible to the siren songs of jihadism or illegal immigration networks with the means and reasons to stay in their communities and develop them for the common good, rather than setting off on adventures without a future? To these questions and more, ‘Perspectives for a resilient Central Sahel’ provides some answers for us to sift through.

One that particularly caught my attention involves employment. The high unemployment rate, mainly amongst youth in the Sahel region, prevents the active participation of these youngsters in the process of creating wealth and reaping its full benefits. To meet this challenge, it is critical for public policy to focus on promoting initiatives to support the empowerment of young people and developing entrepreneurial competence and training throughout life, to encourage and support them in private endeavors.
In this regard, there needs to be proper transitioning from formal and traditional education systems to professional training and qualifications that link up with real market needs. On top of that, digital technologies must be integrated into innovative and competitive educational opportunities. The same is true for the organization of the so-called popular economy, still incorrectly referred to by many as the ‘informal sector’, which is now absorbing surplus workers who cannot find jobs in rural environments or in the modern sector. We must set to work immediately so we do not have to rush to catch up in the future because, as a Sahelian proverb tells us: “Those who rush will only catch the wind”. So, let’s stay ahead of the game and move proactively, to arrive at a place where peace reigns in a Sahel in which life is good.
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In Africa, the Sahel region polarizes a lot of attention from the international community because of its rich potential, which is in stark contrast to its fragile and worsening security situation - all against the backdrop of a powerful demographic dynamic marked by a considerable proportion of young people.

This publication aims to deepen reflection on the causes of conflict and fragility in the Sahel and potential relationships with Africa’s demography. UNFPA, national statistical institutes and renowned research institutions worked together to combine theoretical and empirical approaches to highlight the potential role of population dynamics in the occurrence of security crises in the Sahel.

The report aims to provide policy makers and development partners with data and evidence that can contribute to the design of better policies which enable far more effective and sustainable responses to current and future challenges in the Sahel.