

Understanding the Sahel through its

# **HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC AND SECURITY CHALLENGES**

**WHITE PAPER**



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# INTRODUCTION

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*"The contemporary world has undergone a number of upheavals, perhaps the most significant of which are those relating to population. These upheavals, although a priori falling within the field of demography, have transcended this discipline by questioning the paradigms of economists, political scientists, sociologists and beyond".*

So begins a study by the École Nationale de la Statistique et de l'Administration Économique [National School of Statistics and Economic A – ENSAE].<sup>1</sup>  
Management

There is growing interest in population issues in the Sahel because of the relationship between population growth, the environment and its various components, political governance and economic and social development.

Setting aside the chatter generated by current events and agreed institutional stances, beyond popular opinion and theoretical or even ideological positions, what exactly is the situation in the Sahel? It is this, among other questions, that this document attempts to answer.

## Origin and nature of the study

Dealt with separately, demography, peace and security are problematic notions because there are so many different possible interpretations of them. And yet even more questions arise when they are approached together as a whole; the meaning and intensity of the interrelationships between the three notions are then a vast subject for debate. These problems are amplified in the context of the Sahel because there are several approaches in play that focus on demographics, economics or political relationships, as well as a holistic approach.

Regardless of the prevailing trends, however, the issue of demography, peace and security is crucial for several reasons, three of which are worth highlighting.

(1) First, and as indicated in the preceding paragraph, because of the different interpretations of the constituent notions, a certain ambiguity surrounds their uses and meanings;<sup>2</sup>

2) Second, because this issue is the Achilles heel of African development today. Africa is now a continent where peace has become an issue as well as a major challenge, judging by the presence of United Nations

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2 See Sall-Djogbenou text.

peace missions; as such, the problems of governance, and therefore of peace and security are, in the opinion of many Africans,<sup>3</sup> among the most urgent to tackle because they hinder development.

3) This issue will be even more crucial in the years to come because, if the trends observed in the Sahel continue, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) pursued by the international community will be difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Indeed, sustainable and inclusive development cannot be expected if disparities and inequalities, far from diminishing, are actually growing, and if the political economy is dominated by short-term considerations and interests.

*Clearing the ground and better understanding the problem is therefore an imperative for those who wish to act as strategists, i.e. to participate in the construction of a future which, in accordance with the ambitions of the African Union's **Agenda 2063** and other frames of reference, focuses on development that is "centred on citizens, reliant on people's potential, especially with regard to women and young people, and taking care of children".*

Against this background, UNFPA has decided to embark on a process of reflection, the aims of which are set out in the attached terms of reference.

## Methodology

In the examination of the Demography/Peace/Safety issue in the Sahel, a systemic approach is adopted. It consists in considering the Sahel as a system in which variables of various orders (economic, social, political, environmental, cultural, technological) interact, interlock, form and deform under the action of internal and external forces.

Two features distinguish this approach from other methods used to analyze Sahelian reality: the first is its multidisciplinary character: in the systems approach, several disciplines (history, geography, sociology, economics, political science, etc.) are used to understand the evolution of these variables. The second distinctive feature is that in this systemic approach, attention is paid as much, if not more, to the relationships between the variables as to the constituent variables of the system themselves, because it is the relationships between the variables that make the system evolve, and not the variables taken in isolation. This is the reason why this systemic approach allows to go beyond the foam of the flows and to understand the dynamics which give shape to the Sahelian system and its various components as they are seen.

In order to provide food for thought, this report is based on a review of the literature on the DPS problem in the Sahel, supplemented by a detailed and evaluative analysis of several empirical or theoretical studies commissioned or coordinated by UNFPA.

## Study status

The text presented here is not, strictly speaking, a "white paper" since that expression suggests the idea of rebutting a position and a desire to absolve or exonerate oneself from serious accusations. Far from being an exhibit in a court case, UNFPA views this text rather as a working document, an intellectual contribution

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey published in Heim (10 June 2020 series)

to a debate that is of undeniable importance and that involves a wide range of national and international actors and decision-makers in both the public and private sectors. It presents facts and tries to understand the underlying drivers and dynamics in order to learn certain lessons and offer recommendations.

## Structure

The first part presents a number of facts and attempts to set the scene by highlighting some salient features of the Sahel.

The second part analyses the drivers and underlying dynamics, and sets out four approaches to the realities of the Sahel, each reflecting a particular trend.

The third and final part sketches out possible development scenarios for the next 30 years, focusing mainly on the role of two key players, namely the State and Sahelian societies.



# 1. DESCRIPTION OF THE SAHEL. THE SAHEL TODAY

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## A. Common features

### 1.1. An area with fluid borders

The Sahel covers the area between the Sahara and Central Africa and its borders fluctuate rather than being stable or fixed. The definition of the Sahel used by climatologists is therefore not the one used by cereal market experts. The Sahel of United Nations development agencies is likewise not the same as it is for humanitarian organizations, and theirs is not the definition used by "securocrats" to designate the military intervention forces. There is in fact not one, but several Sahels and the contours of the map are redrawn depending on which agency is involved.



The definition of the Sahel selected for the purposes of this report is that used by UNFPA, which stretches from the Atlantic to the Red Sea and comprises 11 countries.<sup>4</sup> These are, from West to East: Senegal (16.7 million inhabitants in 2020); the G5 Sahel countries – Mauritania (4.6 million), Mali (20.3 million), Burkina Faso (20.9 million), Niger (24.2 million) and Chad (16.4 million inhabitants), i.e. 86.4 million inhabitants in this group; the four countries bordering Lake Chad – Niger and Chad (already mentioned), plus Nigeria (206.1 million), and Cameroon (26.5 million), i.e. a total of 273.3 million inhabitants; and Sudan (43.8 million), Eritrea (3.5 million) and the southern part of Algeria (43.9 million). The total number of inhabitants is thus 427 million by 2020, accounting for 5.5 per cent of the world's population, and for the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, 383 million, representing 35 per cent of the region's population. Regardless of the

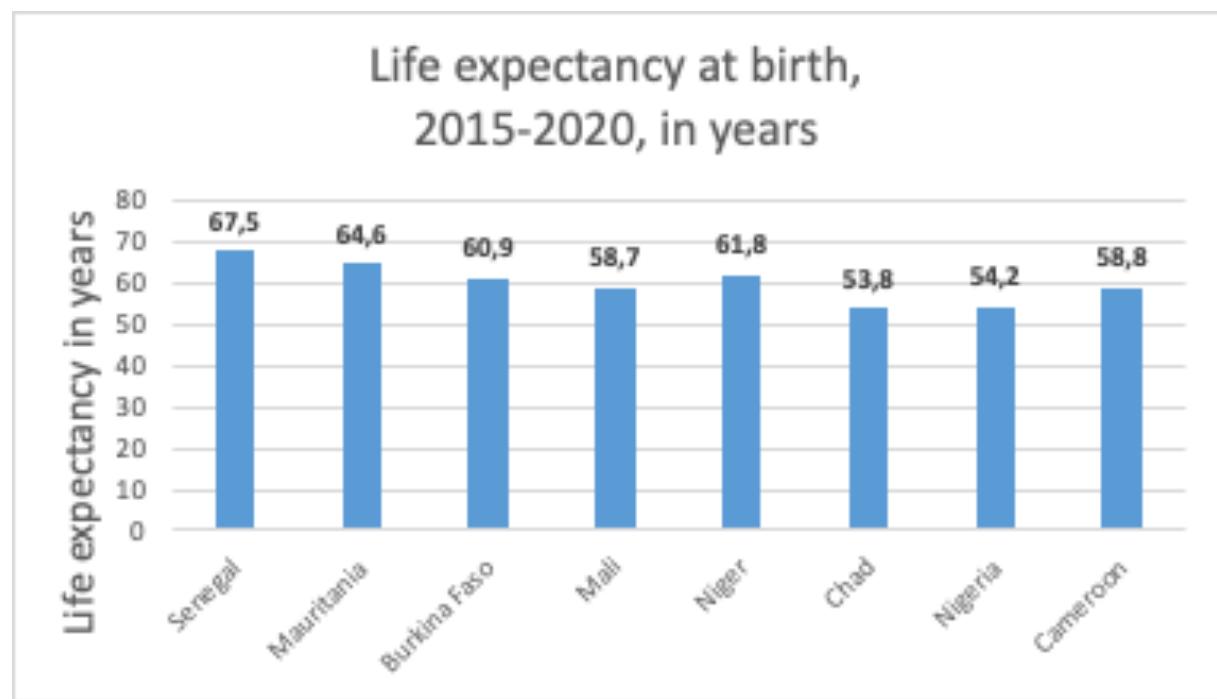
lines chosen to demarcate the Sahel, there are, however, certain characteristics that are widely shared by the countries of this region.

### 1.2. An area characterized by a high rate of population growth and the demographic weight of young people

The current situation in the Sahel is characterized by rapid population growth due to high fertility and a significant decline in mortality.

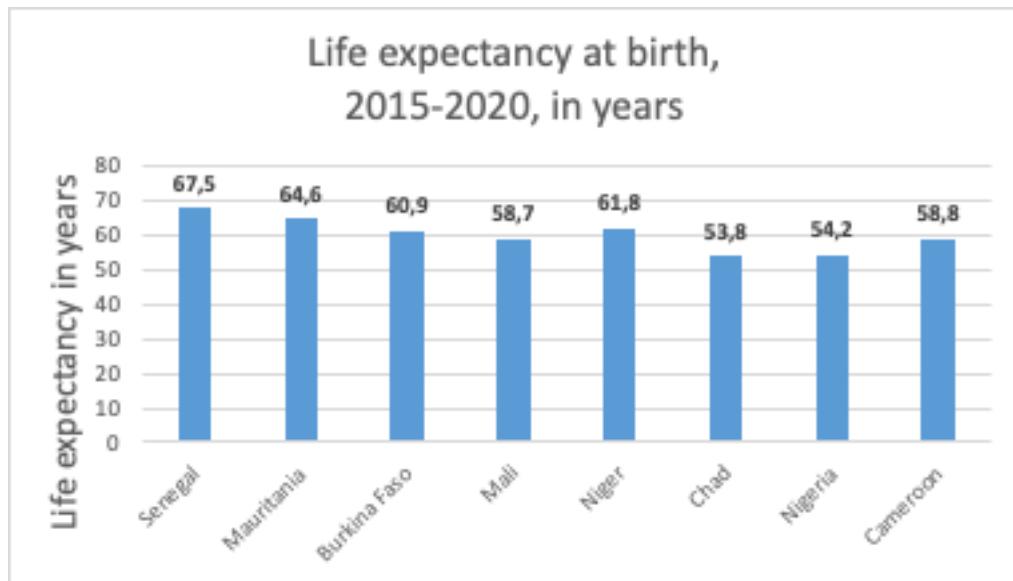
The Sahel can be described as an area in the process of being populated. Between 1960 and 2020, the populations of the region's countries grew four to seven times in size (for Niger), corresponding to average growth rates of between 2.5 and 3.0 per cent per year – exceptional over a long period.

The latest estimates for 2015-2020 indicate that growth is continuing at this level. All the countries concerned still have growth rates above 2.5 per cent per year, with Mali and Chad standing out at 3 per cent per year and Niger close to 4 per cent per year.



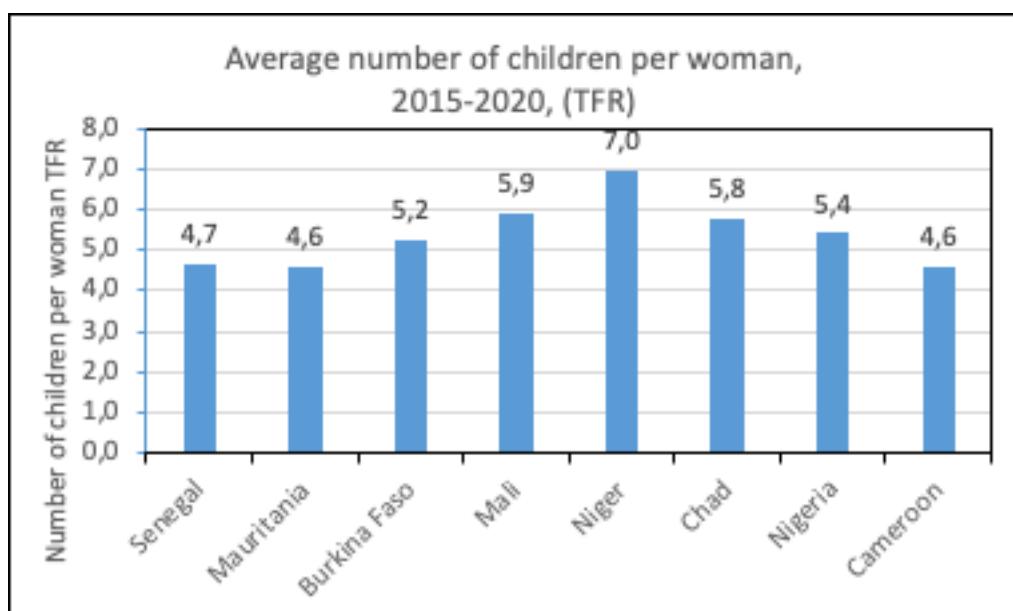
**Source:** United Nations 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

Infant and child mortality in the Sahel has declined sharply since the 1960s, contributing to accelerated population growth. Today, around one in 10 children die before reaching their fifth birthday, compared with some one in three children in the 1960s. Since life expectancy at birth is the average number of years lived (depending on the conditions at the time), this progress has led to an increase in life expectancy at birth in all countries. Mortality levels, particularly child and maternal mortality, remain high in the Sahel, however, and life expectancy at birth is lower than elsewhere. The latest estimates for the period 2015-2020 thus give life expectancies of less than 60 years for five of the eight countries considered here (with 54 years for Chad and Nigeria) and 67.5 years for Senegal.



**Source:** United Nations 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

Sahelian women's fertility (as measured by the Total Fertility Rate or TFR<sup>5</sup>) has also declined in recent years, albeit modestly. After peaking at close to seven children per woman in the 1980s and 1990s, in 2015-2020 it stabilized at between 4.6 children per woman in Senegal and Mauritania, and close to six per woman in Mali and Chad, with seven per woman in Niger.



**Source:** United Nations 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

While reproductive behaviour has begun to change, the process remains very slow in the Sahel, for three main reasons: (a) low levels of development in countries due to the persistence of extensive and lineage-

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5 The TFR is the average number of children a woman would have had by the end of her fertile life if she had the age-specific fertility rates of the period under consideration.

based<sup>6</sup> production systems in which minimizing risk is prioritized over maximizing productivity; (b) ongoing pro-birth attitudes in Sahelian societies due to persistently high mortality rates and weak social security systems; and (c) weak family planning programmes. According to data from the latest Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS),<sup>7</sup> Sahelian women still indicate a high ideal number of children, at between five and nine (in Niger) and six on average for the G5 countries, with men always giving higher numbers. These numbers have, moreover, remained broadly stable over the last 20 to 30 years. While they are lower among younger, more educated (degree-level) and more affluent women, they are generally still at around four or more children in these categories.

The continuing high fertility over the past 60 years, coupled with a reduction in child mortality, has resulted in a significant rejuvenation of Sahelian populations throughout the region. In 2020, for example, nearly half (47 per cent) of the population of the G5 countries were under 15 years and 80 per cent were under 35 years old. Young people aged 15 to 34 years accounted for one third of the total population of these five countries and 71 per cent of their population over the age of 15. The considerable weight of these young people obviously has many political and social implications. In all, the median age in the Sahel is around 17 to 19 years, i.e. very young.

Finally, the very rapid growth of the Sahelian population has been accompanied by an even faster growth in the number of people living in cities, transforming the overwhelmingly rural communities of the 1960s into more urbanized societies. In 2020, for example, three of the eight West and Central African countries considered here (Cameroon, Mauritania and Nigeria) already had more than half of their population living in urban areas, and all of them, except Niger and Chad, are expected to be predominantly urban by 2050. The number of people living in the capitals, as well as other cities, has literally exploded since the 1960s. Moreover, in the eight countries considered, there are 19 cities with more than one million inhabitants in 2020, including 10 in Nigeria. One of these is Lagos, with a population of almost 15 million. This urban explosion, which is set to continue, will be accompanied by an expansion of informal settlements or shanty towns, where conditions are precarious and access to basic services (water, electricity, sanitation, health, education, etc.) is difficult.

Given this situation, as well as the demographic outlook, sub-regional, regional and international organizations are particularly interested in the Sahel region. Perhaps still under the influence of some kind of rampant Malthusianism, these organizations fear that agricultural production capacities in the region are insufficient to meet the needs of a rapidly growing population. The memory of the great Sahelian droughts of 1969-1974 and the 1980s, still present in people's minds, is being mobilized to strengthen interest in the region and make it an international issue. The Sahel also comes to mind whenever desertification and/or climatic deterioration is discussed, although experts warn against the usual explanations of these processes. Finally, it is becoming increasingly synonymous with a soft underbelly in the "war on terror".

### 1.3. Poverty, education, employment and the status of women

The remarkable dynamism of people in the Sahel has not been accompanied by an equivalent economic dynamism. Wealth has certainly been created through the work of the region's population, and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the eight Sahelian countries in West and Central Africa increased between six and eight times for most of them between 1960 and 2019 (since 1961 and 1967 for Mauritania and Mali).

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6 See Afrique 2025: quels futurs pour l'Afrique sub-saharienne [Africa 2025: what future for sub-Saharan Africa?]

7 STATcompiler 2020. The Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program <https://www.statcompiler.com/en/index.html>

Given that the populations of these countries have increased between four and seven times, however, per capita GDP has grown only modestly. For example, in 60 years, Burkina Faso has seen its per capita GDP increase by 200 per cent (a threefold increase), Mali and Nigeria have increased by around 100 per cent (a twofold increase), and the other countries have recorded increases in their per capita GDP of only 16 to 60 per cent, with the exception of Niger, where in 2019 it was estimated to be 32 per cent lower than it was in 1960.<sup>8</sup> The limitations of GDP are, of course well known, and these disappointing results have not prevented countries from building infrastructure. It is clear, however, that a large part of the wealth created has been absorbed by the provision of basic needs for children and the corresponding social investments (health centres, schools, etc).

The average standard of living among people in the Sahel thus remains low. With per capita Gross National Income (GNI) varying roughly between \$800 and \$1,500, four of the eight countries considered here are classified as low per capita income countries (Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali) and the other four (Senegal, Cameroon, Mauritania and Nigeria) as lower-middle per capita income countries.<sup>9</sup> However, these figures must be seen in perspective since estimates of per capita income in "purchasing power parity" (PPP) are roughly three times higher.

These data do, however, reflect a degree of under- or poor human development. Indeed, despite the progress recorded in recent years, the latest available national data indicate significant proportions of people living below the national poverty line, between around 40 and 50 per cent, except in Mauritania, where it is 30 per cent. World Bank estimates of the percentage of people considered to be living in extreme poverty (i.e. on less than PPP \$1.90 per day) are very similar. Poverty is not only monetary, however; it also covers various deprivations in access to health, education, and sanitation, as well as to decent housing. The same is true of the multidimensional poverty index calculated by UNDP on the basis of national survey data: poverty affects more than half of the population in all Sahelian countries.<sup>10</sup>

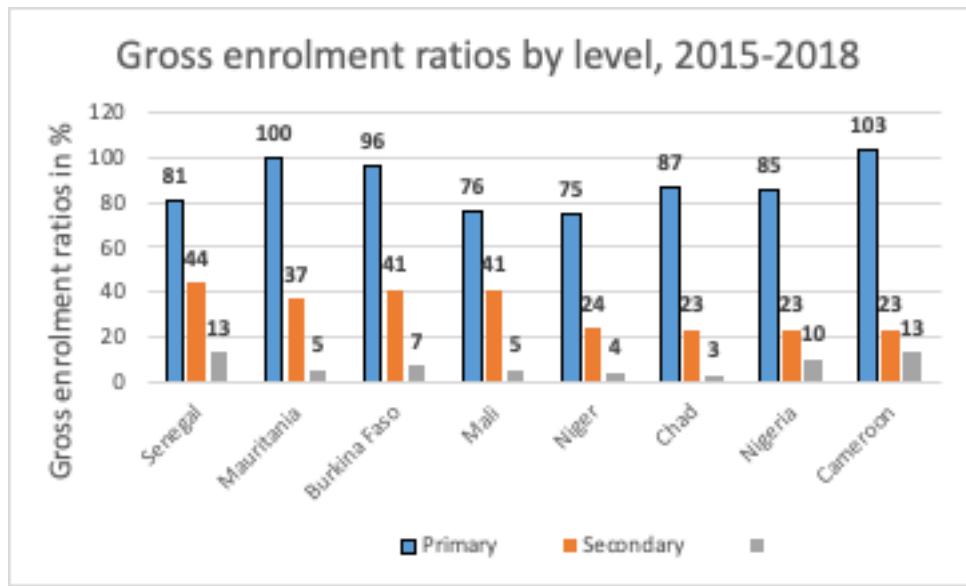
With regard to education, starting from very low enrolment rates in the 1960s, the Sahelian countries had to simultaneously seek to achieve the goal of universal primary school enrolment and increase their enrolment rates in secondary and higher education, while school enrolments were almost doubling every 20-25 years. The tremendous efforts made by countries to achieve these goals must be recognized and commended. Nevertheless, the results obtained remain inadequate. First, gross enrolment ratios include, in particular at the primary and secondary levels, a significant number of late and repeating pupils who are above normal school age. The 100 per cent rates achieved in Mauritania and Cameroon must therefore be seen in perspective. In the other countries, not all children are enrolled in primary school. Gross secondary school enrolment rates of around 20 per cent in Niger, Chad, Nigeria and Cameroon are clearly inadequate. As for higher education, even the best enrolment rates – 13 per cent in Senegal and Cameroon – are still too low to enable these countries to provide a satisfactory quantity and quality of human capital to underpin the countries' development.

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8 World Bank 2020: World Development Indicators (WDI) DataBank. Washington, D.C., updated on 01/07/2020. <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>

9 The World Bank classifies the world's economies into four groups according to their level of national per capita income (per capita GNI). Low-income economies are thus defined as those with a per capita GNI, calculated according to the World Bank Atlas methodology, of less than or equal to \$1,036 in 2019; lower-middle-income economies are those with a per capita GNI of between \$1,037 and \$4,045; upper-middle-income economies are those with a per capita GNI of between \$4,046 and \$12,535; and high-income economies are those with a per capita GNI of \$12,536; see <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/new-world-bank-country-classifications-income-level-2020-2021>, of 1 July 2020.

10 Human Development Report 2019. UNDP



**Source:** World Bank 2020: World Development Indicators. DataBank. Washington, D.C., updated on 01/07/2020

Apart from enrolment rates, it should be noted that school systems in most countries are finding it increasingly difficult to manage the massive flows of pupils at all levels; some are simply unable to cope. Also noteworthy is the persistence of lower enrolment rates for girls than boys, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels. Moreover, the massive increase in enrolments in recent years has been to the detriment of the quality of teaching, which has deteriorated sharply. Finally, technical and vocational education is clearly underdeveloped, despite the needs in this area. The poor performance of Sahelian school systems and the poverty of the population are also at the root of many primary school dropouts and low transition rates to secondary school. All in all, parents may question the return on investment of their efforts to educate their children, given both the low level of employment opportunities and, in part, the inadequacy of the training provided in relation to the realities of the labour market.

Sahelian countries will therefore face considerable challenges in the coming years in terms of improving the quality of their human capital. Not only are they starting from low levels of development but they will have to meet the needs of even more children and young adults.

With regard to employment, the failure of the modern sector, since the 1960s, to create sufficient jobs in a context of high population growth has resulted in a rapid expansion of informal activities and employment and a significant increase in unemployment and migration. The urban informal sector, along with agricultural and livestock activities outside the modern sector, probably accounts for between 70 and 90 per cent of the working population in Sahelian countries, whose jobs are generally vulnerable and associated with low and often uncertain remuneration. For young people, opportunities are thus reduced and come down to a choice between a long period of unemployment waiting for a job in the modern sector (which presupposes that they can be supported by their families), accepting a precarious, poorly paid, survival job in the informal or agricultural sector while waiting for something better, or abandoning the search for work and thus falling into the category of the economically inactive population. The low remuneration of the working population and lack of opportunities for young people who are therefore either unemployed or inactive ("not in employment, education or training") constitute a major threat in terms of conflict and social instability, particularly in urban areas where the expectations of young people (with or without qualifications) are high.

In practice, inactivity, like unemployment, requires a level of support. In a context of significant poverty, this support often comes from an involvement in illicit activities. It has also been noted in this regard that, having once been places of social advancement, African cities are now places if not of exclusion then at least of eviction, from the labour market in particular, which has facilitated the growing criminalization of African urban economies. With an eye to the future, a study on youth employment in Africa<sup>11</sup> points out that the “modern” or formal sector will be unable to absorb the very large number of new entrants to African labour markets, and that informal activity and precarious employment, whose contribution to the survival of populations must be recognized, will remain the norm for many young people.

Another dimension of the limited development of Sahelian societies concerns the status of women. In this regard, UNDP has calculated a gender index that measures the shortfall in progress resulting from inequalities suffered by women relative to men in the following three areas of human development: 1) reproductive health (maternal mortality rate and adolescent fertility rate), 2) empowerment (percentage of women in parliament and percentage of women who have completed secondary or higher education), and 3) access to the labour market (female labour force participation rate). Of the 162 countries ranked in 2018, Chad, Mali and Niger were among the 10 countries with the highest gender inequalities, followed by Burkina Faso and Cameroon (ranked 147th and 140th respectively), and Senegal (ranked 125th).<sup>12</sup>

With regard to reproductive health, as already indicated, the number of children per woman remains high, which partly explains the persistence of high maternal mortality rates. Adolescent fertility has declined somewhat in recent years but remains high due to the prevalence of early marriage, which is often not consensual, despite laws prohibiting it. Moreover, Sahelian women do not yet seem to be able to fully exercise their reproductive rights (i.e. the right to choose when and how many children they have) or are not interested in exercising these rights because of the pressures they face in a social environment that remains very pro-birth. Indeed, in the eight Sahelian countries of West and Central Africa, between one woman in three and even one woman in two expresses no need for contraception.<sup>13</sup> As a result, it is estimated that, in 2020, somewhere between less than 10 per cent (in Chad) and a little over 30 per cent (in Burkina Faso and Cameroon) of married (or cohabiting) women are using any form of contraception. Within households, important decision-making generally remains dominated by men, including when it comes to women visiting relatives and friends, or health care facilities. With regard to female empowerment, women are still underrepresented in centres of decision-making. The percentage of women in national parliaments is thus 20 per cent at most, with the exception of Cameroon and Senegal where women account for 31 per cent and 42 per cent of parliamentarians respectively. In terms of education, the persistence of lower enrolment rates for girls than for boys has already been noted.

Lastly, with regard to employment, women’s work on farms or in family businesses is not fully reflected in official statistics. Domestic activities and care for the elderly are hardly ever taken into account. In general, and particularly but not only in rural areas, the importance of these activities forces women to work in the informal sector (microenterprises, handicrafts, market gardening, etc.), in activities that they can carry out with their children close by.

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11 Filmer, Deon; Fox, Louise. 2014. Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa – Full Report. Africa Development Forum; Washington, DC: World Bank and Agence Française de Développement.

12 There are no data for Nigeria.

13 STATCompiler 2020. Ibid

The reduction and eventual elimination of inequalities experienced by women should help create more inclusive societies in the Sahel. Better trained, more economically and socially empowered and more aware of their rights, including their reproductive rights, they will potentially be in a position to contribute more than is currently the case to the creation of wealth in their countries and thus boost their economic performance

The picture of developmental shortcomings in Sahelian countries outlined above cannot, however, be limited to the period since independence. Indeed, these shortcomings form part of a particular historical and regional context that should be borne in mind.

#### **1.4. The Sahel faced with the effects of a colonial/externally-dependent political economy**

After the Second World War, the “development” of colonial territories was at the heart of the dominant discourse. While significant investments were mobilized in addition to the forced labour of the local workforce, they were used to expand physical infrastructure – dams, irrigation and transport systems – and were intended, above all, to increase the exploitation of natural resources. These strategies implemented by the colonial power had the effect of prioritizing urban areas, the export of tropical products and large companies to the detriment of rural areas and small farmers, while accelerating deforestation and land degradation. Subsistence agriculture and the traditional pastoral system based on transhumance were marginalized in this process of colonial development. This environmental degradation was thought to have been due almost exclusively to overgrazing and poor land management, although the development of cash crops (cotton, groundnuts, oil palm) clearly played a role in this process, if only because it encroached on grazing and water access areas.

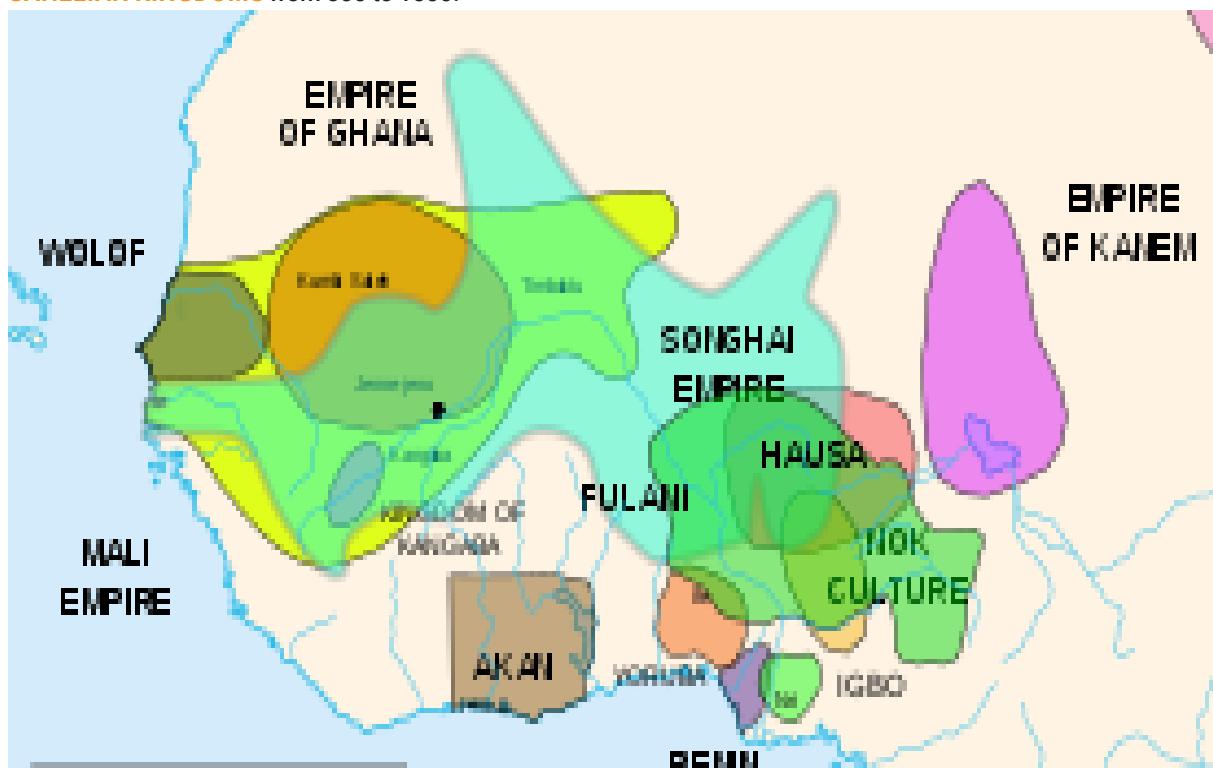
Nevertheless, humanitarian responses to crises have been accompanied by institutional and technical responses which, for the most part, have been based on the paradigm of modernizing Sahelian production systems, replacing nomadic pastoral livestock farming with settled farms, and agricultural intensification, all of which are variously appreciated for their effectiveness. Critics of this type of modernization argue that not only have these measures failed to reduce the region’s vulnerability to famine but have had the perverse effect of increasing the Sahel’s dependence on the outside world. Both populations and national governments have thus become more dependent on humanitarian and budgetary aid since the great Sahelian droughts; new external actors have played an increasingly important role in decision-making mechanisms and this process has worsened, or at least been accentuated by, the structural adjustment policies (SAPs) that were implemented for two decades, from 1980 to 2000.

#### **1.5. An impoverishing Balkanization**

The question of the most appropriate institutional infrastructure to manage this development arose very early on and the model of an integrated French West Africa stands in opposition to another model, characterized by more fragmented, national administrative entities. The 1956 “Framework Law”, which aimed to strike a balance between maintaining France’s strategic interests and greater representation of the African populations, was based on an institutional innovation that was to effectively settle the issue, that of regional assemblies. These latter effectively separated the individual colonies from each other, making the possibility of a wider regional federation that would unite the landlocked states with the wealthier coastal states more remote.

Yet the history of the Sahel is that of kingdoms whose succession and rivalries shaped the region until the 18th century, and whose influence was felt over vast areas with fluid contours. The logics of power and subservience were then hegemonic rather than sovereign in nature, this method of space management having resulted from the relatively recent European innovation of the nation-state. This innovation was transposed without adaptation onto a socio-cultural space that it has in some way dismantled, at least in terms of its historical-political path.

**SAHELIAN KINGDOMS** from 500 to 1500.



Despite the decolonization involved in gaining independence in 1960, the fragmentation of the postcolonial states of the former French West Africa has had the effect of considerably reducing the scope for political investment, on the one hand, and economic intervention on the other, throughout the region. The landlocked countries have been particularly affected. Ordinary travel between regions of the former French West Africa was reclassified as transnational migration. These movements, which are nothing new but are in actual fact part of a long pastoral tradition, so essential to survival in the region, were increasingly perceived as problematic by nation states.

## **1.6. Weakening of the State by structural adjustment policies**

SAPs were implemented throughout Africa between 1980 and 2000 with the support of the Bretton Woods institutions. According to many analysts, however, including within the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, these policies have unfortunately not achieved their objectives of transforming the economic structures of Sahelian countries since, in 2020, "the structural transformation of economies" still

remains a topical issue, an ambition to correct the effects of a political economy still marked by external dependency.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from failing to achieve their initial ambitions, these SAPs were accompanied by institutional reforms that resulted in greater administrative fragmentation and the development of various forms of decentralization and devolution aimed less at better administrative coverage of the territory than at a weakening of the central State, which was perceived as too imposing and inefficient. The erosion of the postcolonial State, already weakened by the sale of para-state corporations and staff reductions, inevitably led to its disengagement from the productive sectors and the transfer of control over health, education and development infrastructure to a multitude of non-governmental organizations which, in most cases, were no better equipped than the State. The link between the central State and the people was negatively affected.

### **1.7. Arab-Islamic and Western-Christian cultural influences**

The presence of Islam in the Sahel is as old as trade relations with the Arab world. It should be noted, in this respect, that the Sahara has never been an impassable barrier but a veritable “inland sea” of which the Sahelian countries form the southern shore, as evidenced by the term As-Sâhil (Sahel), which means “the shore” in Arabic. The Sahelo-Saharan interactions referred to in today’s security debates are part of a historical continuum that can be traced back to the caravan trade in gold, rubber, salt, hides and skins, and slaves.

The introduction of Islam had an impact on the social and political order of the region, as did colonial rule. Its impact on political balances and population movements was felt in terms of dynamics which, when analysed, do not take historical complexities into account when shedding light on the realities of today’s Sahelian regions.

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14 See the work by the Economic Commission for Africa on this topic. It should also be noted that the issue of structural transformation provided the subtitle for a study on the Sahel published in 1984 under the title *“The Sahel Facing the Future: Increasing Dependence or Structural Transformation”*.

### TRANS-SAHRAN TRADE routes from 1000 to 1500



Christianity was to play a similar role in parts of the Sahel.

One of the results of these imported religions was patriarchal lineage structures, and these were reinforced by the 20th century colonial administrations which chose to entrust traditional authorities or marabouts with the local management of legal affairs.

The fact remains that the Sahelian populations, while diverse, are thus linked by a common history that extends beyond the borders inherited from independence.

### **1.8. Recent radicalization of local and external protagonists: the Sahel in the eye of the storm**

In a Sahel weakened by its poor integration into the global economy, there is a strong temptation for certain social groups in competition for control of resources to challenge the State's authority. The temptation is even greater when, in the opinion of these groups, bad governance is prevalent, accentuating so-called horizontal inequalities. The use of violence to overthrow the political order is therefore not surprising. This is all the more so since ideological-religious contestation is nothing new in the Sahel. Radical movements such as Boko Haram, located at the crossroads of Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, at the heart of the Kanem-Bornu Empire, can thus argue that they are drawing on and modernizing a long tradition of reform in the form of jihad. In fact, today's extremist groups are able to draw on reconstructions of the past as a frame of reference and justification for their dissent.

External actors, particularly France, the United States and the European Union, have also reassessed their priorities and are now focusing more on security than on development. For these actors, radical Islamist movements pose an existential threat to Western economic interests, an argument that is not unfounded even though an analysis shows that terrorism causes more damage to the countries of the region whose economies and stability it affects. This argument makes sense, however, when terrorism is perceived as a civilizational threat to "liberal values" such as democracy and human rights.

However, while the above features are widely shared by the countries of the Sahelian zone, their impact varies from one country to another and we are thus witnessing a diversification/differentiation of trajectories.

### **1.9. Future demographic developments**

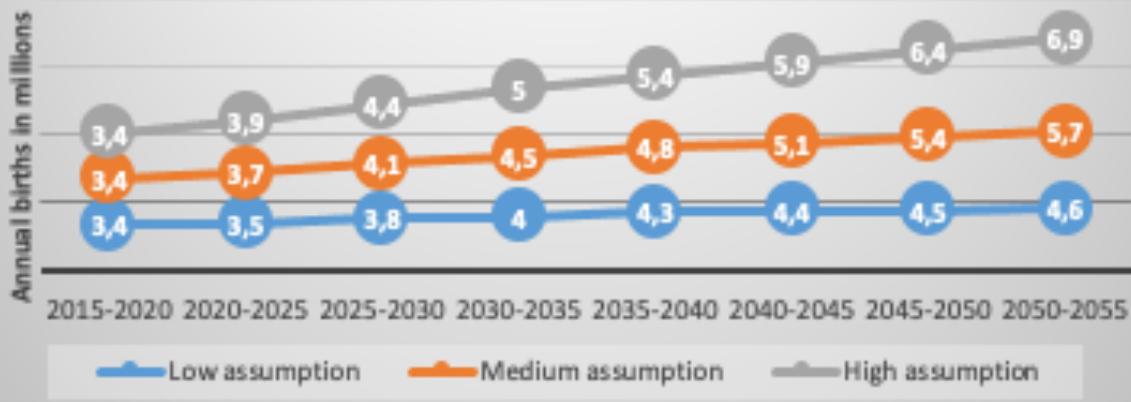
What can be said of future demographic developments in the Sahel? The United Nations 2019 projections for various countries around the world in the 21st century provide an answer to this question. Several variants of projections are constructed for each country based on three different fertility assumptions, combined with a single assumption for declining mortality and an assumption for international migration.

For the Sahelian countries, the medium variant takes into account, for each country, past trends in their fertility and the experiences of countries that have completed or are close to completing their fertility transition. The low variant is defined as 0.5 children below the fertility level of the medium variant, and the high variant as 0.5 children above the fertility level of the medium variant. These variants are intended to illustrate the effects of more or less rapid declines in fertility on the future size and age structure of the population.

For the G5 countries, the medium fertility variant assumes a relatively slow decline in fertility from around 5.5 children per woman in 2015-2020 to 3.5 children per woman by the late 2040s, with 3 children per woman for the low variant and 4 children per woman for the high variant. Other hypotheses could, of course, be considered.

Under the United Nations' assumptions, the population of the G5 countries could increase from 86 million in 2020 to 196 million in 2050 under the medium variant, 181 million under the low variant and 211 million under the high variant. The population of the G5 countries is thus expected to at least double by 2050. The difference of 30 million people between the low and high variants is the result of differing trends in the number of births projected for each hypothesis.

## Annual number of births (in millions) for the five G5 countries under three fertility assumptions



**Source:** Based on United Nations data 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

These divergent developments are reflected in the age pyramids. The difference of 30 million people in 2050 between the populations projected using the high and low variants thus corresponds to the difference between the survivors in 2050, aged less than 30 years, of the births projected for each of these variants between 2020 and 2050 (see below).

In this graph, the smaller population pyramid represents the population in 2020. The following, larger pyramid represents the projected population in 2050 with the low variant and the largest pyramid represents the projected population in 2050 with the high variant.

The slower increase in 0-14 year-olds with the low variant may offer a source of savings in maternal and child health and also lower expenditure on primary education than would be needed to cover the twice as large increase in 0-14 year-olds with the high variant. In 2020, the number of young people entering the labour market can be estimated at around 1.1 million. In 2050, this could be 2.4 million with the low variant and 2.8 million with the high variant (a small difference, since a large proportion of these young people have already been born).

Two other results should be mentioned. First, with the high variant, the G5 population growth rate remains above 2 per cent per year in all five countries beyond 2050. With the low variant, however, it falls to less than 2 per cent per year, except in Niger in the 2040s, and Mauritania in the 2030s. The demographic dependency ratio in 2050 also remains between 70 and 80 per 100 potential workers aged 15-64 with the high variant. On the other hand, it falls to 60 dependents, with the exception of Niger, in the other countries in the 2040s, which is a favourable condition for fully benefiting from a demographic dividend.

Similar conclusions can be drawn by comparing the results of the projections made for the other Sahelian countries. Nigeria's population, estimated at 206 million in 2020, could thus be between 371 million and 432 million by 2050 (a difference of 61 million depending on whether the low or the high variant is used).

All in all, it can be seen that, even in demographic matters, the future is not entirely written in advance.

### **1.10. What socio-economic developments are likely?**

With the return of growth to sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel countries at the beginning of the 2000s (of around 5 per cent per year), the outlook for Africa is becoming more positive. This growth is still driven by higher commodity prices, however. The fall in prices, especially of oil from 2015 onwards, changes the situation. Growth is collapsing in Chad and Nigeria and, given their high population growth, their average growth in per capita GDP turned negative over 2015-2019 and now stands at -3.2 in Chad and -1.4 in Nigeria. The six other countries in West and Central Africa with more diversified economies are more resilient, however, and have maintained economic growth rates of 4 to 6 per cent, allowing them to maintain (again between 2015 and 2019) positive average growth rates in per capita GDP of 3.4 per cent per year for Senegal, 2.7 and 2.3 per cent for Burkina Faso and Mali (where, it is true, gold production and exports are significant), 1.7 and 1.6 per cent for Cameroon and Niger, and 0.8 per cent for Mauritania. The possible continuation of the appreciable growth achieved by several countries must not mean we forget the slow increases in per capita GDP to which this growth corresponds: a doubling every 20 to 25 years for Senegal and Burkina Faso and 30 to 40 years for Cameroon and Niger. It is conceivable, under these conditions, that even in the best cases, citizens' perception of the benefits for their daily lives that they can derive from their countries' economic performance is limited, all the more so as the distribution of the fruits of this growth is far from equitable, and income inequalities are high.

The COVID 19 crisis, which has also affected countries in the Sahel, makes future projections even more difficult. In its June 2020 estimates, the World Bank anticipated reductions in economic growth of about one half or more for the Sahelian<sup>15</sup> countries in 2020 and negative growth for four of them (Nigeria, Mauritania, Cameroon and Chad). For 2021, however, it broadly anticipates a return to pre-crisis growth rates, i.e. 4 to 8 per cent (for Niger) but only 2.4 per cent for Nigeria.

What conclusions can be drawn from all these various factors? First of all, the economies of Sahelian countries remain poorly diversified, and still largely dependent on the production and export of their raw materials. Diversifying their economies is thus more of a priority than ever. Secondly, these economies and their societies need to be more inclusive, which implies greater transparency and accountability among State actors, better governance and the implementation of genuinely pro-poor policies.

### **B) Differentiated trajectories, singular entities, remarkable identities**

This difference in trajectory is true in the economic and social sphere but equally and perhaps even more so in the security sphere, which is marked by conflicts that increased and exacerbated in the 1990s. In this respect, and in order to conduct a detailed and contextualized analysis of these recurring crises and conflicts, it will be necessary here to distinguish three hotbeds of tension: the G5 Sahel countries, the Liptako-Gourma region and the Lake Chad basin. Internal conflicts, droughts and terrorism are present in different ways.

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15 World Bank, 2020. Regional Economic Outlook June 2020 Update, Sub-Saharan Africa. Washington, DC: World Bank, June 2020.

### 1.11. Hotbeds of tension

(a) First of all, the Liptako-Gourma region, which is the area where the border between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger meets;

A February 2019 study on risks, vulnerabilities and resilience assets in the Liptako-Gourma<sup>16</sup> region presented this area as vulnerable, with the following specific characteristics:

- Very high population growth rates (between 3 and 4 per cent per year).
- Young people under the age of 15 account for around 50 per cent of the cross-border population.
- Unemployment, underemployment and marginalization of young people. As a result, young people are constantly tempted by the adventure of joining the ranks of armed groups, sometimes out of conviction and sometimes out of opportunism.<sup>17</sup>
- Agriculture and livestock vulnerable to the shocks of climate change: the consequences of the droughts of the 1970s and 1980s are still being felt, in addition to the emerging difficulties linked to insecurity. In this transhumance zone, where different ethnic groups live side by side, the decline in grazing areas and water is a source of tension between socio-professional groups over the control of resources.
- Failure of governance, marginalization and injustice.

In addition to this already difficult situation, violent extremism is rampant and many attacks have been claimed by such groups. Faced with this situation, Tuareg, Imghad and allied armed or self-defence groups (GATIA), the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA) and militias, some of which have a community overtone, have become established.<sup>18</sup>

Between 2016 and 2018, the number of deaths related to insecurity and conflict in the border area of the Liptako-Gourma states increased from 242 to 1,464. Mali is easily out in front, with a high number of deaths, estimated at 1,255 in 2018. This latter country has seen its central regions become the epicentre of both intercommunal and terrorist violence. It is now proving difficult in this area to distinguish between banditry, local vendettas and the actions of radical groups.<sup>19</sup> Most often, these abuses take place in rural areas, far from decision-making centres and basic social services. This leads to a sense of frustration on the part of these populations.

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16 [http://www.food-security.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Liptako-Gourma-Diagnostic-27fev\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.food-security.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Liptako-Gourma-Diagnostic-27fev_FINAL.pdf)

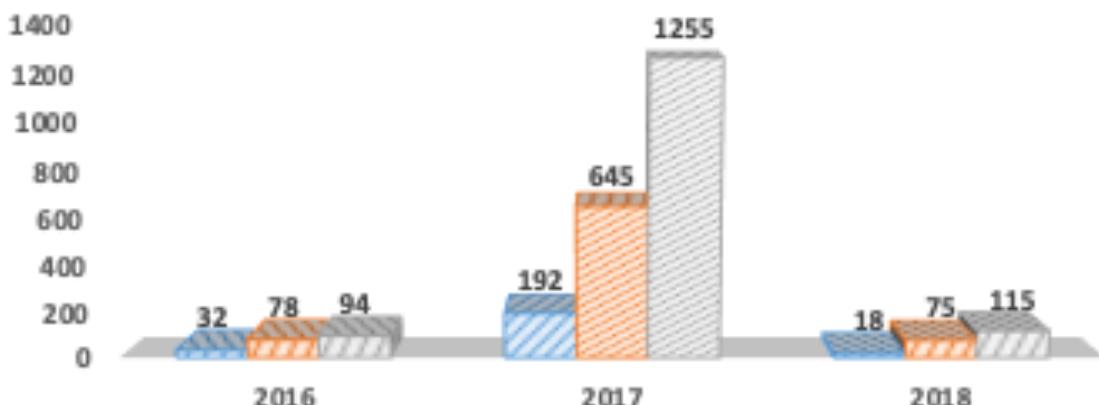
17 Ibid

18 <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-26-fr.pdf>

19 <https://www.crisisgroup.org/fr/africa/west-africa/mali/central-mali-uprising-making>

## NUMBER OF DEATHS IN THE LIPTAKO-GOURMA REGION

■ Burkina Faso ■ Mali ■ Niger



**Source:** Data study "Preliminary Analysis of Risks, Vulnerabilities and Resilience Assets in the Liptako-Gourma Region".<sup>20</sup>

(b) **Lake Chad basin:** The strong media coverage of tensions and attacks in the central Sahel has been to the detriment of those in other parts of Africa, such as the Lake Chad basin, shared by Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger and Chad. The crisis there is multidimensional.

First, it is *demographic*: the interest in Lake Chad lies in the fact that the population of the four countries sharing it reached 246 million in 2017, 75 per cent of which, i.e. 186 million inhabitants,<sup>21</sup> were in Nigeria.

Secondly, it is *environmental*, due to the drying up of Lake Chad.

Situations extrêmes des surfaces en eau du lac Tchad entre 1973 et 2013

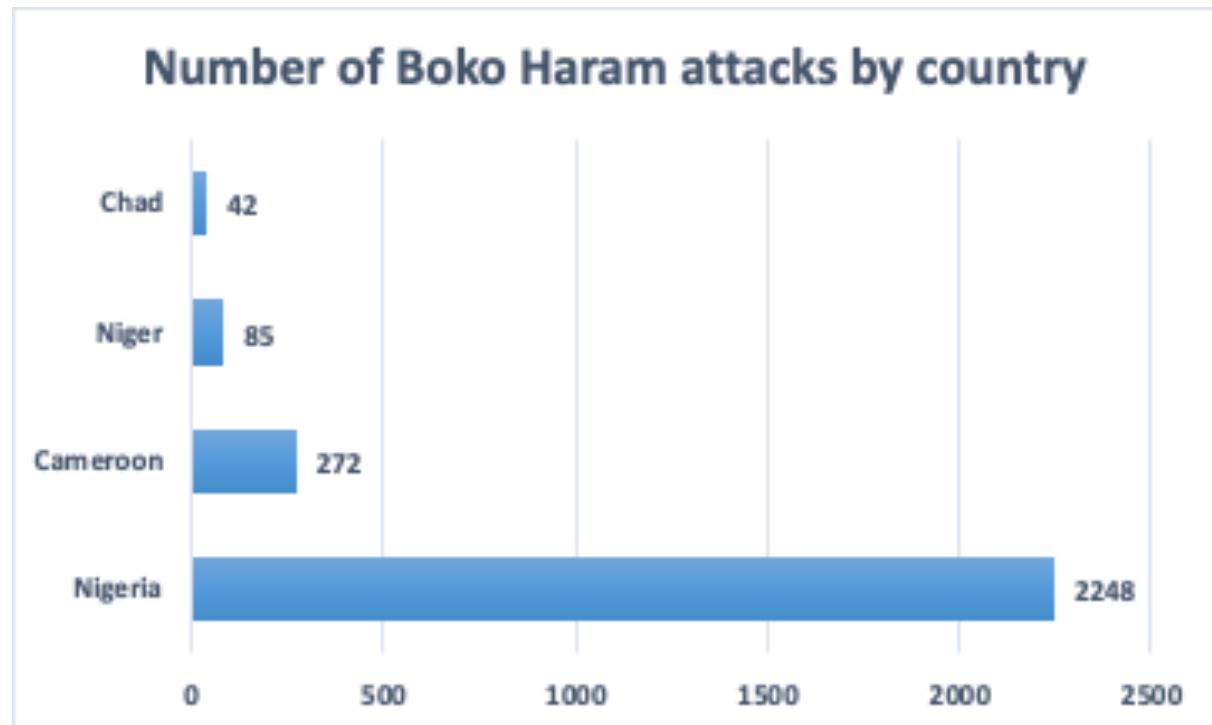


20 Regional Working Group for Resilience of the United Nations System in West and Central Africa, the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Working Group and the OECD Crisis and Fragility Unit "Analyse préliminaire des risques, des vulnérabilités et des actifs de résilience dans la région du Liptako-Gourma" [Preliminary Analysis of Risks, Vulnerabilities and Resilience Assets in the Liptako-Gourma Region], 3 February 2019

21 Demographic Dynamics and the Crisis of Countries around Lake Chad, UNFPA, 2017

Thirdly, it is *humanitarian*: the number of displaced people, now numbering in the millions, is so severe that UNDP has described it as one of the most serious such situations the world has ever seen, affecting more than 10 million people.<sup>22</sup>

It is also a crisis of *security*: The Lake Chad basin today lies at the heart of the terrorist threat because of the interventions of Boko Haram. Boko Haram's atrocities, which extend far beyond Nigeria's borders alone, have caused many casualties in the other countries around Lake Chad, namely Cameroon, Niger and Chad.<sup>23</sup>



Between 2009 and 2019, 2,649 terrorist attacks were carried out by the Boko Haram group, mainly in Nigeria (85 per cent). The highest peaks were recorded in 2014 and 2015, with 540 and 495 attacks respectively. The number of deaths remained high, especially in Nigeria, particularly over the 2014-2015 period, in line with observations at the global level.

We should recall that this movement (whose founder, Muhammad Yusuf, was assassinated in 2009) was born in 2002 and that, at least at the outset, crystallized the demands of those fringes excluded from the formal education system but also the victims of inequalities and poor development prevalent in the northern regions of Nigeria.

c) In the **G5 Sahel countries** of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mauritania, the violent extremism that sometimes overshadows the other recurrent conflicts in the region. In Mali, for example, in addition to the fact that several terrorist groups are operating in the North, the Centre has become a hotbed of tension in intercommunity conflicts between ethnic groups such as the Dogon and the Fulani. 2019 saw a number of massacres with ethnic overtones, including in Ogossagou, which was particularly deadly. Over the past

22 <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/fr/home/crisis-response/on-going-crises/northeast-nigeria.html>

23 Bakary Sambe, BokoHaram, du problème nigérian à la menace régionale [Boko Haram, from Nigerian problem to regional threat]. This is the title of Dr. Bakary Sambe's latest book published by Timbuktu Editions (March 2015 – Cairo). In this book, Dr. Sambe points out the spillover of the terrorist group's actions into all of Nigeria's neighbouring countries

two years, Burkina Faso seems to have rivalled Mali in terms of the number of attacks recorded. Beyond the jihadist angle often highlighted by the media, an analysis of this situation requires consideration of many other factors, including, inevitably, the latent community conflicts that continue to revolve around control of resources in a context of scarcity. Some protagonists even go as far as to highlight the fact that rival “ethnic” groups continue to monopolize arable land because of a high birth rate as a strategy for expansion. Others point to the growing need for arable land as farmers gradually expand into grazing areas and the bourgou pastures every day, especially in central Mali.

The **actors** In these three areas of conflict are different, as are the **strategies**.

In the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram reigns supreme and, although it has concluded agreements with other terrorist groups, it alone occupies the territory. It carries out spectacular actions and uses many intermediaries, including women and children, targeting Nigeria in particular. There do not appear to be any foreign troops supporting the Nigerian Government.

In the G5 countries, there are more players on the side of both terrorists and governments, with the G5 being strongly supported by Western countries.

There are terrorist attacks in the Liptako-Gourma region just as there are in the G5 countries and, as in those countries, there are Western interventions. In addition to the terrorist/jihadist attacks, however, there are also intercommunity conflicts.

## Partial conclusion

The postcolonial history of the Sahel is thus one of the break-up of an area of civilization, of the gradual destruction of the social bond between different but historically linked populations, and of the erosion of the relationship between these populations and young states, in favour of social reconfigurations – a reinvention of tradition<sup>24</sup> – in line with organizational methods of the most modern kind. Security issues, and their relationship to demographic dynamics, are a part of this context.

Against the backdrop of this common history, there are three areas of conflict, trajectories that therefore differ: the cross-border area of the Liptako-Gourma region, the G5 countries, and the Lake Chad basin. Conflicts in these three zones were to become focused on natural resources, inequalities (horizontal and vertical), the development crisis, etc.

Against the background of this common history, four interpretations of the issue of demography, peace and security and four trends emerge.

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24 This expression comes from JF Bayart.

## 2. FOUR TRENDS

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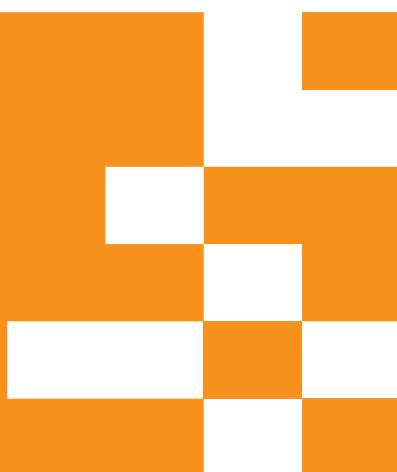
### 2.1. Demographic and environmentalist approach

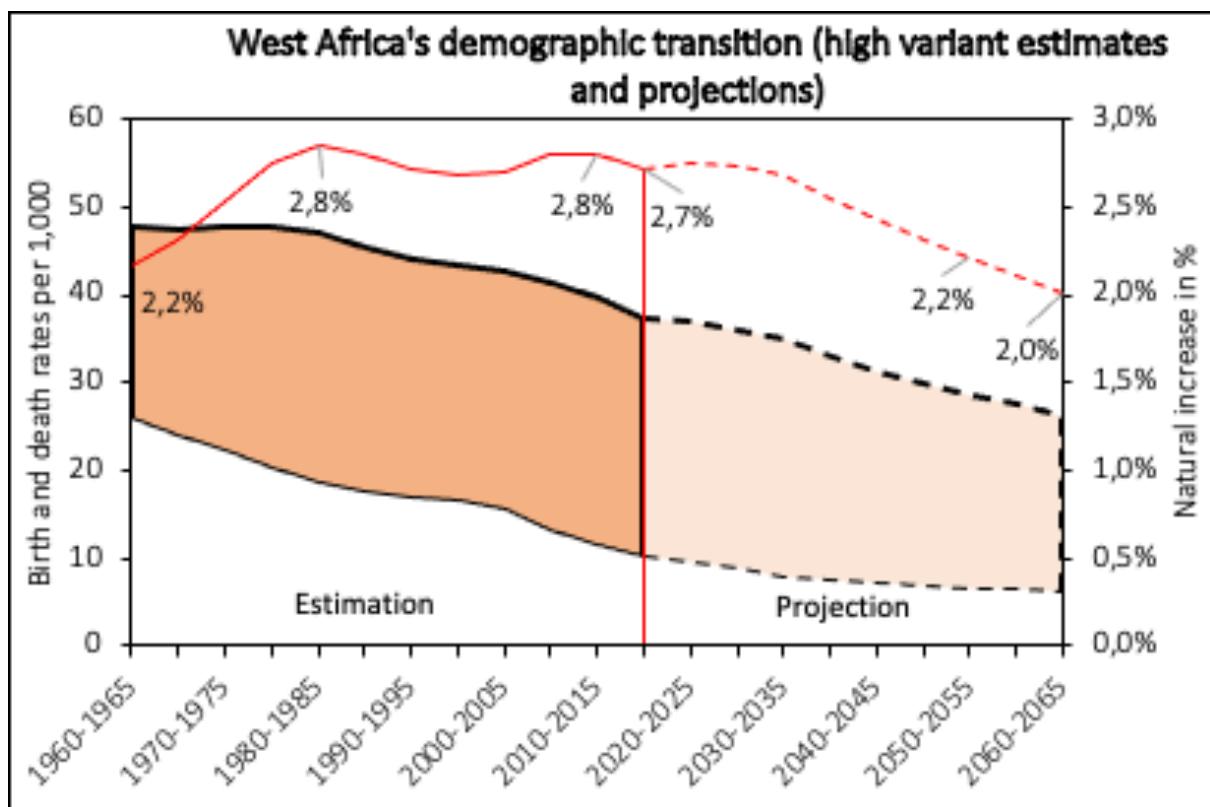
The literature on the correlation between demography, peace and security is not as extensive as population theories themselves. The main reason is believed to be the difficulty of braving certain socio-cultural but also "intellectual" taboos to establish a direct link between the demographic boom or explosion, which is thought to have a structural link with the insecurity situation in the Sahel, if only because of the recurrent conflicts over control of resources, the management of which is often problematic at the level of the different states. Nevertheless, for almost a decade, a number of studies have been conducted on the significance of the demographic issue in armed conflicts.

In this trend, two major elements stand out: First, demographic determinants seem to play a major role. Strong population growth is the variable that first comes to mind. It is followed by the youthfulness of the population, which is a major demographic factor in the Sahelo-Saharan strip because it is a source of exclusion, marginalization and, sometimes, exposure to recruiters of terrorist groups. The second determinant is the nature of production systems, based largely on the extensive exploitation of natural resources. In the absence of a change in production systems based largely on extensive resource exploitation, there is greater competition for resources that are not renewable or do not grow at the same rate.

#### a) Demographic variables: growth and age

Age seems to be a central issue in the problem of conflicts in Africa. Indeed, this continent is characterized by the youthfulness of the overwhelming majority of its population. The distribution of the population by major age groups in 2020 in the eight Sahelian countries of West and Central Africa illustrates this.





**Source:** based on United Nations data 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

The graph shows that young people under the age of 15 account for 44 per cent of the population, corresponding to a very broad age pyramid at its base.

The numerical superiority of young people in the African context, marked by the resurgence of conflicts of all kinds and the strong presence of young people in armed movements, are regularly highlighted both by the media and by studies on violent extremism; moreover, humanitarian organizations have often warned about the situation of children used as much by the armed groups that have acted as protagonists of the Malian conflict as by Boko Haram. The demographic profile of jihadist combatants has also led some research centres to examine the age of combatants in armed groups. Such is the case of the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), whose study shows that countries with a young population were 1.5 times more likely to experience civil conflict between 1950 and 2000.

Because of their persistently high fertility rate and higher numbers of surviving children, the population of the Sahelian countries shows a particularly low median age. This varies in 2020 from 15-16 years in Niger, Mali and Chad, 17-18 years in Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Senegal and Cameroon, and 19-20 years in Eritrea, Sudan and Mauritania.

This is also the case in Somalia, where the median age has been around 16 since 2000 and where, as observers note, Al-Shabab means "youth" in Arabic, despite being the name of one of the most violent groups in the Horn of Africa, indeed in East Africa, where Al-Qaeda is also active. In reality, the name is the embodiment of young people suffering from social exclusion, a lack of investment in education and a range of socio-economic vulnerabilities.

While there is relatively little research establishing a definite correlation between age and involvement in an armed group, the fact nonetheless remains that young people are in a majority in extremist groups, and constitute an inexhaustible breeding ground for indoctrination and recruitment. It is therefore understandable that participants at the annual Youth Forum for Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, held in Ouagadougou in 2018, "called on West African and Sahelian governments, regional organizations and the United Nations to take effective measures to systematically involve young men and women in all stages of conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives". The reference to young women in this quotation is welcome, since analyses of the role of women in conflicts in Africa, particularly in the Sahel, often place the emphasis on their status as "victims". The effect of the girls taken hostage by Boko Haram has accentuated this perception but one should not lose sight of the active role played by young women in facilitating operations or ideological work. This active role is more pronounced in the Lake Chad basin than in the central Sahel, where there is a predominance of young people in the ranks of armed and/or terrorist groups; women have been more prominent in this region as part of strategies to build resilience in the face of extremism. In the same way that women set themselves up as shields during the occupation of the northern regions of Mali, as in Timbuktu, they are increasingly playing an important role in raising awareness among young people.

#### **b) Depletion of environmental resources as a result of population pressure.**

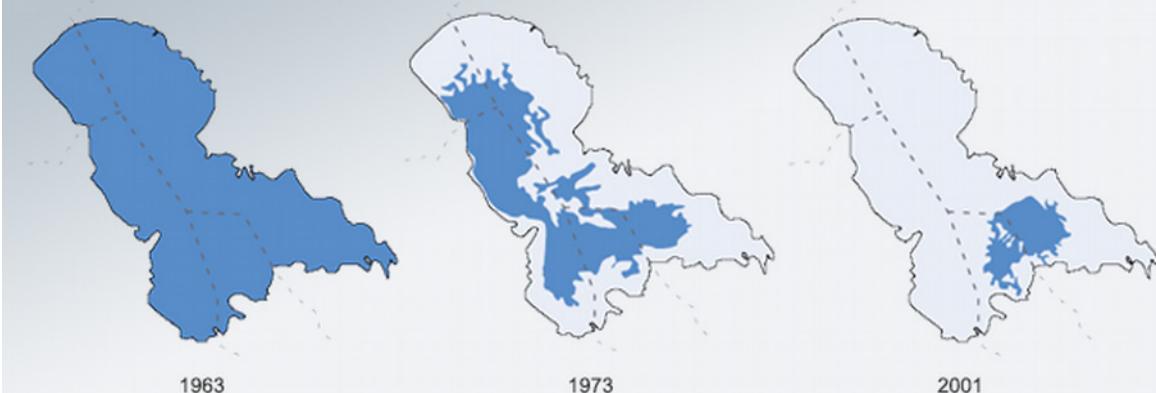
Professor Jack Goldstone addressed this issue in his article *Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict*.<sup>25</sup> In this article, he demonstrates how population growth can lead to violence or conflict. First of all, for him, when a population grows, its impact on the environment also grows. Environmental resources are thus used more rapidly, resulting in accelerated environmental degradation. This increasing scarcity of resources can lead to divisions that result in violence and conflict over control of remaining resources. This type of conflict gets bogged down when it pits communities against each other, as is the case today in certain regions of Africa such as the Sahel, particularly the countries of the Lake Chad basin.

In 2017, in a UNFPA study entitled *Demographic Dynamics and the Crisis of Countries around Lake Chad*, a clear correlation was established between population pressure and the outbreak of crises around Lake Chad, whose shrinking has continued to worsen and has reached levels that are extremely worrying for the sustainability of the ecosystems. The map below shows the correlation between the shrinking size of Lake Chad, on which agricultural, forestry and pastoral activities in this region are heavily dependent, and the evolution of insecurity in recent years.

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25 Goldstone J. Population and Security: How Demographic Change Can Lead to Violent Conflict? Journal of International Affairs, 2002

## Das Schwinden des Tschadsees



Quelle: VDG

© DW

The scale of the conflicts linked to competition over resources has also been at the centre of the Timbuktu Institute's reflections in recent years in relation to the issue of horizontal inequalities. The latter are a primary factor in the practice of political violence and the resulting insecurity (Langer, Mustapha and Stewart, 2007). As Alioune Ndiaye's work shows, these inequalities, accentuated by demographic pressure on resources, "reinforce the collective feeling of being excluded from the group and thus drive the formulation of grievances that form the basis of mobilization against the state".<sup>26</sup>

### Malthusian thought provides an explanatory and seemingly inescapable framework

The recent history of the Sahel would seem to give some credence to Malthusian theses.

Indeed, according to this theory, developed in 1798, population and resources (agricultural production) increase at different rates. While the population grows geometrically, and therefore more rapidly, resources, for their part, grow arithmetically, and therefore at a slower rate. Based on the "law of diminishing returns"<sup>27</sup> of agricultural production, Malthus notes that an increase in the population variable can have a negative impact on resource control. As a result, humanity may be exposed to a long-term risk of famine, war and epidemic. The environmental degradation and famines recorded in the Sahel seem to confirm the Malthusian thesis which, pushed to its limits, is based on the principle of limiting births in order to avoid a demographic explosion the disastrous consequences of which would be uncontrollable.

If we apply this Malthusian approach of geometric population increases to the Sahelo-Saharan context, we realize that population growth is a reality faced by states in the region. Is there a correlation with conflict? It

26 See *Lettre de l'Observatoire des Radicalismes* [Letter from the Observatory on Radicalisms] (Timbuktu Institute), Special issue: November-December 2018-11-30, edited by Dr. Bakary Sambe

27 This is a concept developed by economist David Ricardo, which posits that the more land is repeatedly used to cope with population growth, the more infertile it becomes and the lower the yields. <https://www.andlil.com/definition-de-rendements-decroissants-151553.html>

could be tempting to think so if one considers the presence of United Nations peacekeeping missions as an indicator that Africa accounts for a significant proportion of the world's conflicts. This obvious fact would seem to corroborate the thesis of the relationship between population density and the multiplication of conflicts. The parallel between demographic theories and insecurity in the areas being studied is therefore tempting because when the population growth of these countries is analysed by comparing it to the almost chronic economic and social challenges they face, it can be seen that demographic pressure has fostered the existing tensions. The example of the Lake Chad basin is once again apparently convincing since, in a context of increased anthropic pressure, forestry, agricultural and pastoral activities are very largely dependent on the water resources of Lake Chad, which are thus being overexploited.

Nothing is as obvious as it seems at first glance, however, and this analysis, which focuses on demography alone, will no doubt need to be supplemented by a consideration of other socio-political parameters, such as the question of the sometimes incoherent governance of resources and their unequal distribution.

## 2.2. Socio-political trend: utilitarian, structural and cultural violence

It would be interesting, in considering this issue, to focus first on a few sociological elements through which the correlation between the different expressions of violence in the Sahel and the issue of insecurity at the regional level can be perceived. Taking into account the different paradigms from a sociological point of view, different approaches have been developed according to the dimensions of violence:

Violence can sometimes have a so-called **utilitarian dimension**, in the sense of using a given situation to achieve a result, such as political or socio-economic objectives. Violence can then emanate from individual or collective behaviour, such as resource mobilization theory. The latter theory was the cornerstone of the American sociology of social movements and collective action in the 1970s. The risk of this utilitarian approach is its degeneration outside the field of rational behaviour, as in the crowd movements found in spontaneous or organized demonstrations. The post-electoral violence of the 1990s on the continent has sufficiently demonstrated how some initially negligible spillovers led to riot scenes that created a climate of insecurity, particularly in the major urban centres. The high proportion of young people in protest movements in the Sahel deserves to be considered more closely in this respect. Indeed, their interventions can be understood as a means of gaining socio-political recognition for their demographic weight and, in so doing, putting an end to their status as a sociological minority that makes them junior members of society. Noting that their needs, as well as those of disadvantaged groups, are not sufficiently taken into account in the development and implementation of public policies, they question the established order and, at the risk of breaking the social contract, they adopt models (residential, matrimonial, professional and cultural) that are different to those of the older generation and more focused on individualism.<sup>28</sup> In some situations they go as far as to adopt anomic behaviour (armed rebellion).

As long as it remains within the framework of protests contained within the limits of the functioning of democratic societies, this type of violence does not go beyond the level of ethnocultural instrumentalization, which is a real factor of instability as observed in the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin and elsewhere in Central Africa.

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28 J-M Ela

Among the factors of instability noted on the continent, there is also so-called **reactionary** violence. This type of violence often occurs in response to multidimensional crisis situations, such as those in different parts of the Sahel. It is caused, in this case, by events that create frustration (socio-economic difficulties, injustice, marginalization, etc.) and become unbearable for those who suffer them. The practical interest of such a paradigm is to place violence and the resulting insecurity within the framework of a process that breaks with structural approaches. The process approach is proving to be very useful in current conflict resolution, in the sense of an ongoing possibility of acting on agents and factors. This form of so-called reactionary violence was largely explained by Ted Robert Gurr in his book *Why men rebel* as early as 1970, the main premise of which remains perfectly applicable in the 21st century with regard to the manifestations of violence in many African countries. Through this theory, we can see that frustration does not necessarily lead to violence in a mechanical way but that certain stages of a process may be more conducive to violent practices. As explained above, the birth of Boko Haram in 2002 was the culmination of a long process of a religious instrumentalization of the frustrations of a certain section of the youth of northern Nigeria who were excluded from the formal system and who ended up rejecting the political system entirely. As analysed by Bakary Sambe, it was these young people, known as the "unemployed Maiduguri",<sup>29</sup> who formed the backbone of the movement born in Borno and which was to eventually become a regional threat throughout the Lake Chad basin. Their experience is in some ways reminiscent of the *Harakat al-Shabab al-Mujahidin* group or 'Youth Movement of Faith Fighters'.<sup>30</sup>

In the central region of Mali, for example, many analysts have often confined themselves to considering antagonism between the Fulani and the Dogon, ignoring the process of failed security governance that has led the central State to tolerate militias when combating violent actors similar to an ethnic group. The latter thus end up becoming the object of systematic stigmatization due to the simple fact of belonging to an ethnocultural group. An in-depth analysis of reactionary violence thus makes it possible to perceive slow mechanisms and processes beyond the apparent causes that may bias our understanding. The same is true when considering other factors, such as competition for control of progressively scarcer resources. Sometimes, it is the very fact of neglecting all these parameters that leads to abusive generalizations or even an essentialist vision of conflicts, to the extent that some analysts evoke a specific form of **violence described as "cultural"**. Such a theory, which is largely based on the survey by Theodore Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (in 1960) dealing with the rise of fascism in Europe through personality traits, is today relativized by a holistic approach that takes into account socio-economic and political interactions but also the crucial role of the potential for conflict over resources. It is precisely this type of conflict, which carries the seeds of instability and even destabilization, that has been slow to be analysed in all its aspects, such as those taking place in the Nigerian Plateau region between Fulani and Berom herders. A certain simplistic analysis has long stopped at an approach focused on the religious aspect in a supposed dispute between Muslims and Christians, whereas what we are actually witnessing is a classic confrontation between nomads and settled agricultural and livestock farmers.

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29 See, in particular, the book by Bakary Sambe, *Boko Haram, du problème nigérian à la menace régionale*, [Boko Haram, from Nigerian Problem to Regional Threat], Edition Afrikana, Montreal, 2015.

30 Indeed, in 2006, Al-Shabab gained a reputation for being a group that was protecting the population from the robberies suffered by some shopkeepers. This group's rise in power, however, and especially its popular anchoring, owe much to the negative perception that the population developed of a certain "foreign invasion", against which Al-Shabab declared it was fighting. It was later that this group of young people began to lose credibility due to the rise in suicide attacks, with a somewhat reduced presence in the rural world today.

Finally, it is by considering all these elements combined that it has been possible to make the link between the scarcity of resources, conflict and demographic growth, which has become a security issue. And yet, at the end of colonial period, Africa could almost have hoped to enter a new era of peace and devote itself to building resilient socio-political frameworks. With independence, however, we witnessed a redistribution of the political cards and an exacerbation of identities. In some countries, the divides are North/South.

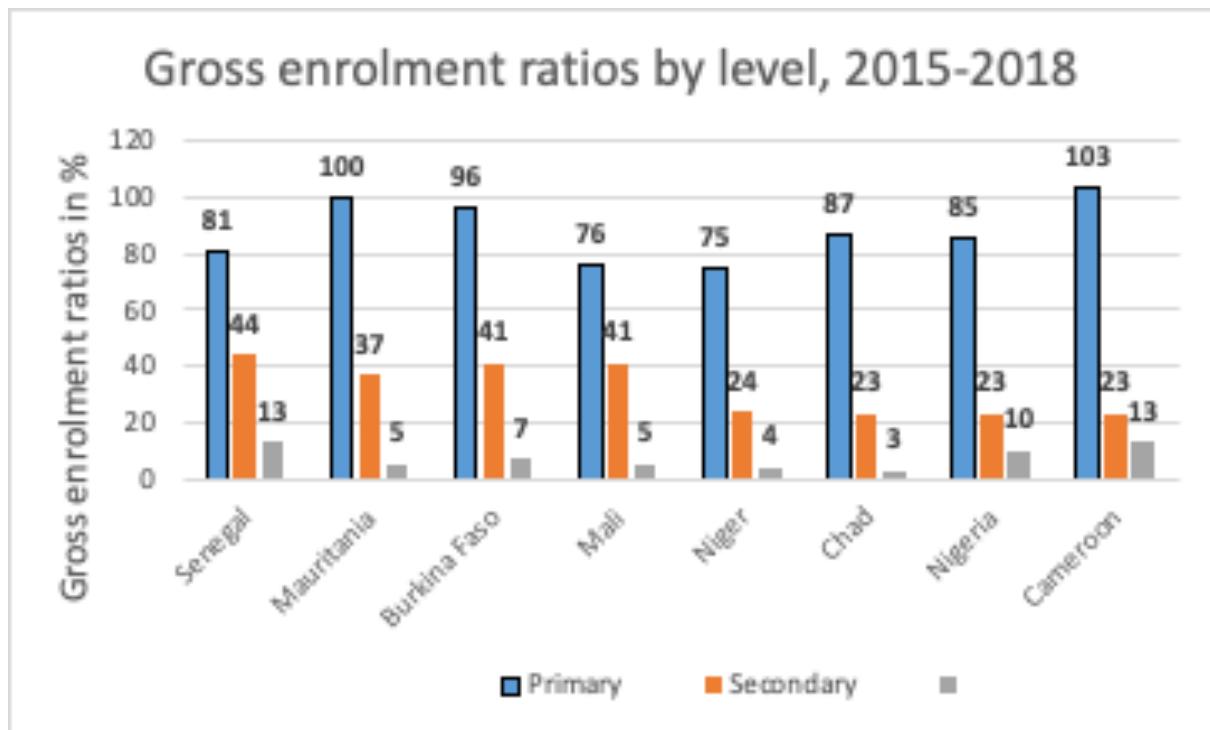
Nigeria is an emblematic example in this regard. The political game here is dominated by ethnic, geographical and religious considerations, which have their roots in a more or less distant past. The often troubled relationship between "Northerners" and those living in the south can manifest itself in religious tensions, differing claims in terms of notions of unworthiness, and differing views on how states should fit into global politics and world economies.

These divides reinforce ethnic identities, especially since parties in the postcolonial period are often based on ethnic considerations. Resource mobilization is therefore strongly correlated with the control of regional divisions of the central State, and leads to administrative divisions in which structures are duplicated to ensure the support of prominent political organizations. These structures become the channels through which access to jobs, capital and prestige is possible. They help to identify and marginalize minority populations as regional "outsiders" competing for economic niches or political influence, thus accentuating social disparities.

Just as independence was a missed opportunity to entrench the project of building homogeneous nations despite the diversity of human groups within them, the end of the Cold War in 1989 did not produce the "peace dividend" that was expected from it. The latter was not achieved in the Sahel because, paradoxically, with the end of the Cold War, Africa was to lose its strategic interest, and hotbeds of tension thus multiplied, spreading almost everywhere on the continent. While some of these tensions have purely political origins, others are rooted in economic considerations, with many crises severely affecting the local people.

Whether utilitarian, structural or cultural, however, violence cannot be fought and contained in any lasting way by violence alone.

In the search for solutions to armed conflict, it is important to revisit existing public policies that may affect the demography, the economy or the environment in the crisis countries of sub-Saharan Africa. In this respect, security seems to be a priority, judging by national, and sometimes foreign, budgetary allocations. And yet there is ample evidence to indicate an urgent need for massive investment in human capital as a contributor to the prevention of conflict and violence. The graph below summarizes this paradox, which is the antithesis of what is happening in the countries of the North.



**Source:** World Bank 2020

Clearly, if the Sahel region is not to become further entrenched in increasingly violent crises and conflicts, the trend in this graph must be reversed.

### 2.3. Development trend

A survey conducted in the border areas of the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin in 2015 revealed that the socio-economic dimension largely outweighed ideological or religious reasons in the jihadist commitment of young people. This refers to the intrinsic link between their economic situation, their demand for socio-economic integration and their involvement in terrorist movements.

This table from a survey of the border areas of the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin in 2015 (not yet published) highlights the weight of socio-economic factors on decisions to engage in violent extremist movements.

Reasons for youth involvement in extremist groups	Number	Percentage
Social status	13	18.3
Material motivations	37	52.1
Religious values	18	25.4
Drugs	0	0.0
Other	3	4.2
Total	71	100

A more recent study<sup>31</sup> conducted among young people in Zinder, Niger, also points to unemployment as the main factor (43 per cent) in radicalization, followed by social deprivation (43 per cent). According to data from Niger's National Institute of Statistics,<sup>32</sup> the Zinder region is the most densely populated in the country, with more than 70 per cent of the population there being young, due to rampant population growth. These young people are particularly affected by problems related to unemployment and access to basic social services, and unemployment tops the list of radicalization factors.

In practice, young people are easy prey for criminal organizations because of their often vulnerable socio-economic conditions. The various difficulties they commonly face include those linked to an imbalance in population growth caused by poor economic development, which can undermine the possibilities of social inclusion. In fact, some states are unable to provide sufficient opportunities for young people, who find themselves socio-economically marginalized.

Faced with unemployment and all kinds of associated vulnerabilities, young people in the Sahel often have no other recourse than legal or illegal migration, illegal trafficking or recruitment into armed groups or violent extremist movements as a means of escaping poverty. In reality, the increase in the "young unemployed population" clearly exacerbates feelings of marginalization, all the more so when communities feel discriminated against in comparison with others.

Throughout the Sahel, this phenomenon of a large, unemployed and marginalized young population is emerging and many analysts consider it, in tandem with the socio-economic exclusion of women, a veritable "social bomb".

The Boko Haram uprising in the North is interesting from this point of view. It is seen as a manifestation of the "*development crisis linked to the overexploitation of resources, particularly agrarian resources*" and which "*produces an environment conducive to the emergence of poverty, unemployment and inequalities, which in turn generate social discontent that leads to violence*".<sup>33</sup> According to Alioune Ndiaye, in his book on the Buhari<sup>34</sup> era, this aspect is rarely taken into account in analyses of the conflict in Nigeria.

This mass unemployment is no accident. It is rooted in the persistence of a colonial-type development policy, meaning that many geographical areas are poorly integrated into the national territory because they do not contain resources useful for capitalist exploitation. The spatial disparities that were evident during the colonial period have been maintained and even increased with independence, to such an extent that large areas have been left as economic or State wastelands, in the sense that economic investment is very limited and the presence of the State minimal. One aggravating factor is that these areas were particularly vulnerable to the great Sahelian droughts of 1969-1974. It is in these areas, lagging behind in terms of investment in health, education and employment, that the warlords step in.

The parallel between economic approaches and insecurity in the areas being studied here is thus instructive because, when one analyses the population growth of these countries by cross-referencing it with the almost chronic economic and social challenges they face, it can be seen that demographic pressure has

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31 Cf. "Violence des jeunes et enjeux de l'extrémisme violent chez les jeunes de la région de Zinder" [Youth Violence and the Challenges of Violent Extremism in Zinder], IOM-Timbuktu Institute (2016), edited by Bakary Sambe.

32 INS Niger, 2015

33 Ibid, p8

34 La gouvernance du balai: Le Nigeria sous Buhari : entre diversification économique et fédéralisme social, [Balai Governance: Nigeria under Buhari, economic diversification or social federalism?], Editions Afrikana, Montreal 2018

fostered but not created the existing tensions. Those advocating Malthusianism would thus appear to be refuted and its critics able to provide the most coherent explanatory framework. Among them, **Karl Marx** and Ester Boserup occupy a prominent place.

According to Marx, considered one of Malthus' most formidable opponents, there is no "natural law" independent of the conditions of production, and these latter structure socio-economic relationships. As a result, he was highly critical of the fact that Malthus ignored the development of the conditions of production. Indeed, he argued that: "Surplus population cannot be compared with the surplus of the means of subsistence but with its condition of reproduction".<sup>35</sup> The incentive to regulate births cannot therefore be based on an economic imperative. For him, the world and the economic systems that govern it suffer more from a poor or unequal distribution of resources than from a lack of resources per se.

The solution he advocates is therefore to distribute wealth equitably in order to be able to cover the needs of the population, even in a situation of extreme growth. He also explains that a large population constitutes an abundant workforce and, ultimately, a reserve industrial army. This is, indeed, what is found in the Sahelo-Saharan strip, where the dense population could constitute a significant workforce for both the formal (business) and informal (agriculture and livestock) sectors.

It should therefore be noted that anti-Malthusians postulate a policy that the poorest should be offered better living conditions in order to lift them out of poverty, as this is necessarily the result of injustice or horizontal inequalities.

According to Ester Boserup, who is also considered to be anti-Malthusian and whose experience refers to the 1950s and 1960s, rapid population growth can be considered a factor that stimulates development, particularly agricultural development, because it forces societies to adapt, leading to the necessary adjustments.

It should be noted, however, that since the first writings of Malthus in 1798, the writings of Marx in the 19th century, and those of Boserup more recently, the global context has changed significantly and the distinction between Malthusians/neo-Malthusians and anti-Malthusians is no longer as clear as it once was. This is especially true since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994. The ICPD moved away from government-set population policies with quantitative targets to focus on individual reproductive health and reproductive rights. This new paradigm has been fairly well accepted in Africa, although various forms of resistance to family planning programmes persist in many countries. In fact, most governments in sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahelian countries now report having policies to reduce their population growth rates and fertility levels, adopting development-oriented and reproductive health approaches.

## 2.4. Holistic approach

In 2016, the Institute for Security Studies published an analytical note<sup>36</sup> on 63 young ex-combatants in terrorist groups in Mali, in which it listed 15 factors of engagement, mainly coercion of a community/

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35 K. Marx, Œuvres [Works] volume 2, «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», Gallimard, 1977

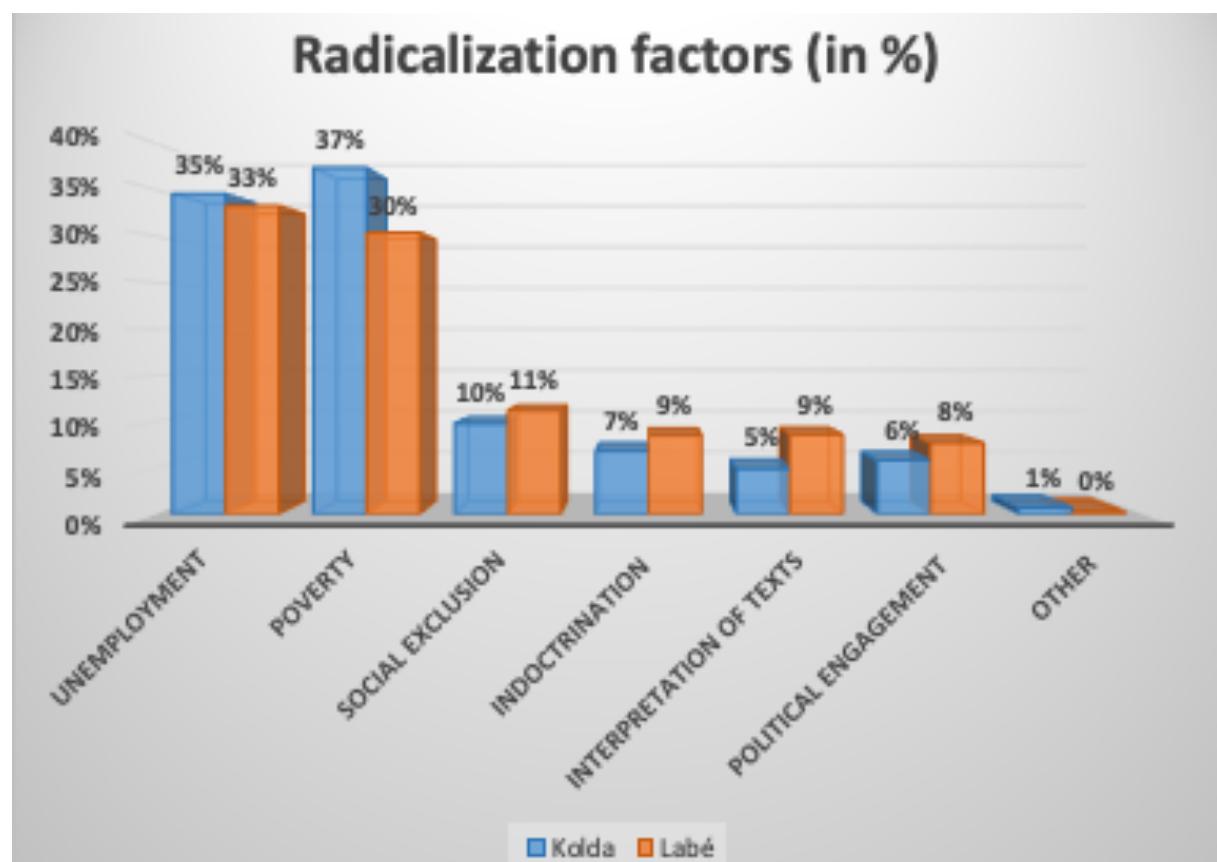
36 ISS, Mali's young 'jihadists': Fuelled by faith or circumstance?

cultural/ethnic/sociological, economic, etc. nature. The report described the complexity of the phenomenon of violent extremism and the vectors of jihadist engagement.

While it is certainly true that unemployment and deprivation are the main explanations, researchers have noted factors that have nothing “economic”, “religious” or “ideological” about them to explain the presence of young people in jihadist groups. This means that all young people in the area are potentially vulnerable to the threat of *“homegrown terrorism”*, which continues to gain ground. As a result, apart from phenomena of transnationality, African states have structural weaknesses within them that are reflected in youth policies where they exist. This idea was corroborated by the illustration given by Professor Alioune Sall of the African Futures Institute (AFI) during his speech at the Bamako Forum in March 2019, in the following terms: *“The population is young, with a median age of 20 years, which has an impact on security. Empirical studies show a very strong correlation between median age and the use of violence as a way of managing conflicts. The major challenge is to capture the demographic dividend, to have a healthy and educated human capital...it's a matter of public policy”*.<sup>37</sup>

In addition, since October 2016, the Timbuktu Institute has embarked on a series of perception studies aimed at mapping the factors of radicalization in selected African countries.

The most recent study was conducted in the border area between Senegal and the Republic of Guinea. The report highlights the common factors of radicalization identified by young people themselves, including poverty (34 per cent), unemployment (33 per cent) and social exclusion (10 per cent).



37 <https://blog.mondediplo.net/la-demographie-au-coeur-des-reflexions-sur-la>

**Source:** Timbuktu Institute (2018): «Facteurs de radicalisation et perception du terrorisme chez les jeunes des zones frontalières du Sénégal et de la Guinée» [Factors of radicalization and perception of terrorism among young people in the border areas of Senegal and Guinea], November 2018.

Even though it is ranked last, **exclusion** is certainly the most widespread feeling, because it is multidimensional.

Beyond the simple question of resource management or distribution, it is the power to influence decision-making processes that is, above all, at stake for disadvantaged groups. Indeed, despite the views of United Nations bodies, such as the Security Council in its resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security,<sup>38</sup> which emphasize the role of young people in preventing and combating conflicts, 92 per cent of the 800 young people surveyed in this study regretted that they were not involved in any initiative to prevent violent extremism.



**Source:** Timbuktu Institute (2018): «Facteurs de radicalisation et perception du terrorisme chez les jeunes des zones frontalières du Sénégal et de la Guinée» [Factors of radicalization and perception of terrorism among young people in the border areas of Senegal and Guinea], November 2018.

In addition to this major and determining challenge for the future of the region, however, there is another issue, one that is intrinsically linked to security and stability in the context of a logical link between population growth and security risk. It was raised by Henry Urdal, a researcher at the International Research Institute who, with regard to peace, said that as populations become denser, younger and more urban, countries are forced to develop appropriate resource management policies and boost their local and national capacities to reduce the risk of conflicts that threaten stability, peace and security.<sup>39</sup>

More recently, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study has shown that high illiteracy rates, rising unemployment and inadequate social support are major contributors to the marginalization of young people, particularly young women, in the Sahel.<sup>40</sup> When poverty and marginalization exacerbate other forms of inequality, young people are likely to fall prey to violence in all its forms. According to this report, "between 40 and 60 per cent of these young people are excluded from training schemes". This creates a large mass of young people with no prospects because of a lack of investment in human capital (health and education). As a result, the youthfulness of a population that should have been a "vital force" becomes a challenge that could have a clear impact on the development of threats to the stability of these countries. One of the biggest bombs to be defused, according to Bakary Sambe, is thus the so-called social bomb,

38 Security Council Resolution 2250, adopted in 2015

39 <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/demography-and-conflict-how-population-pressure-and-youth-bulges-affect-the-risk-civil-war>

40 GEM Report 2017-18

represented by a group of desperate young people with no prospects.<sup>41</sup> This becomes even more worrying in the context of the rise of armed and extremist groups in the region.

In their strategy to succeed in the Sahel and the rest of the continent, the process used by terrorist groups consists largely of instrumentalizing both socio-economic<sup>42</sup> vulnerabilities and latent conflict over the control of resources that are becoming scarce through irrational exploitation combined with the perpetuation of inequalities and frustrations. The various research works of the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) have been able to demonstrate the importance of such factors, sometimes far more than ideological motives alone.<sup>43</sup>

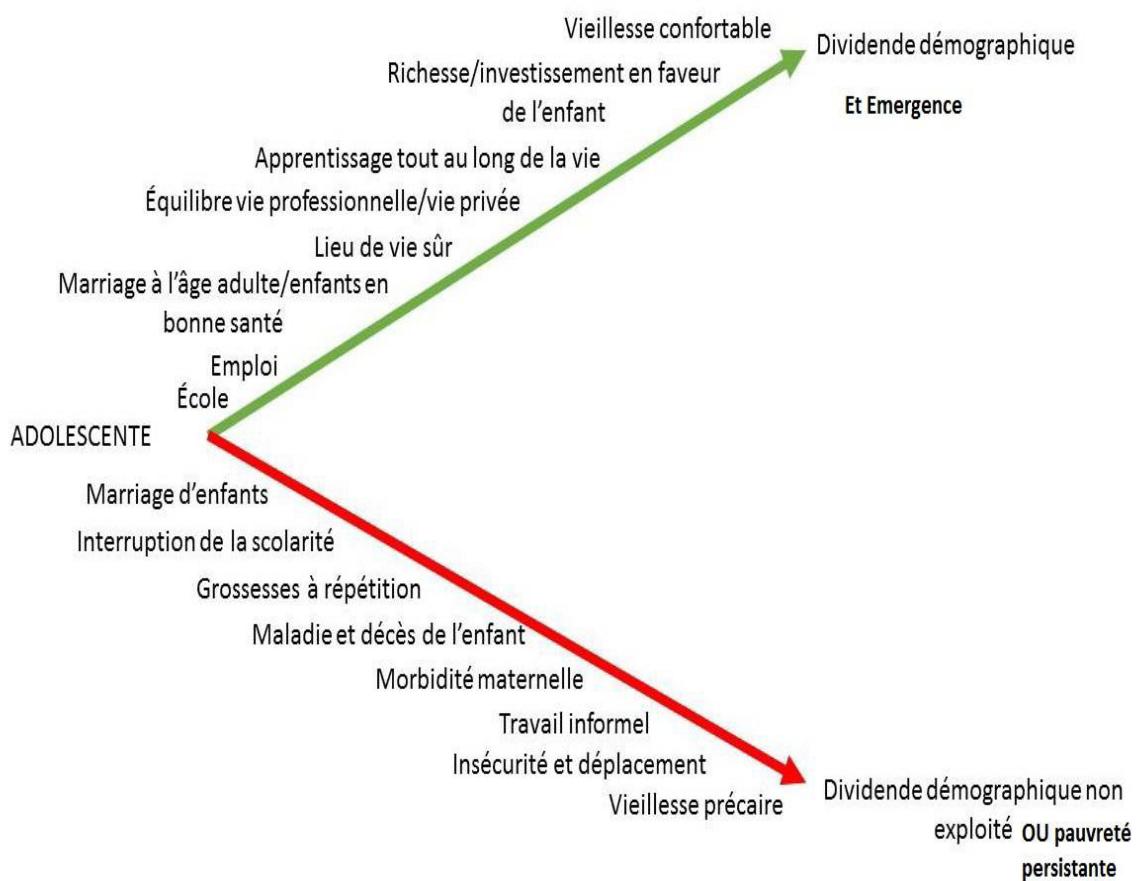
It is also a question of being able to take part in the processes that should make it possible to benefit from the demographic dividend. It is no longer enough to assert positions of principle and to stress, as Mabingue Ngom did at the launch of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project, that "*The Sahel is the youngest region in the world, and youth is not a lever to be underestimated*". It is also not enough to recall that "*Young people and women play an invaluable role in building the foundations of tomorrow's world, and [that] we must expect changes in the social norms and values that guide them*". In terms of the multidimensional difficulties they experience on a daily basis, disadvantaged groups dream of having life trajectories that allow them to work and live decently, to ensure that their children have access to high-quality health services and education so that they can become active and productive citizens, and have a comfortable old age free from want. In doing so, they will participate fully, at their own level, in the realization of the demographic dividend, by being involved in strategic choices in all areas, as illustrated by the following graph:

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41 WalfQuotidien No.8369, Tuesday 18 February 2020, Senegal

42 See the UNDP study, "Journey to extremism" [journey-to-extremism.undp.org](http://journey-to-extremism.undp.org)

43 See, in particular, the study "Mali's young 'jihadists': Fuelled by faith or circumstance?" <https://issafrica.org/research/policy-brief/malis-young-jihadists-fuelled-by-faith-or-circumstance>



From the same perspective, in October 2016, the Timbuktu Institute conducted a quantitative study on the marginalization factors that can lead to the radicalization of young people. According to the results of this survey of young people's perceptions, 45 per cent of those aged 18 to 35 believed that the reason a young person might join extremist groups was because of poverty, unemployment and exclusion.<sup>44</sup> The same was true of other studies by the same institute on the issue in Rosso Senegal (on the border with Mauritania) in March 2018 and in Vélingara and Labé – in the border area between Guinea and Senegal – in October 2018, which came to the same conclusions. These studies have shown that important initiatives on the part of Sahelian states to invest in the improving human capital and youth policies would be just one way of reducing the risk of young people turning to extremism.

In addition to other parameters, such as an absence of governance that might favour investment in high-quality health services and education, there is a correlation that is increasingly emerging in economic analyses between a lack of population growth control and governance. In this context, the occurrence of different kinds of conflict might be better explained by an economy of criminal acts in the regions currently most affected by long-term socio-political instability.

Here, it is the theory of demographic transition, an indispensable step in achieving the demographic dividend, that is thought to provide the most adequate explanatory framework.

44 Timbuktu Institute "Facteurs de radicalisation et perception du terrorisme chez les jeunes de la banlieue de Dakar» [Factors of radicalization and perception of terrorism among young people in the suburbs of Dakar], October 2016

Demographic transition is defined as the transition from a traditional demographic regime, characterized by high crude mortality and birth rates in near balance, to a demographic regime of low crude mortality and birth rates leading to a new near balance. In the initial stage, countries experience a decline in mortality, followed by a decline in fertility; then, in a second stage or second phase, a significant decline in fertility occurs and, ultimately, lower crude mortality and birth rates lead to low or even negative population growth.

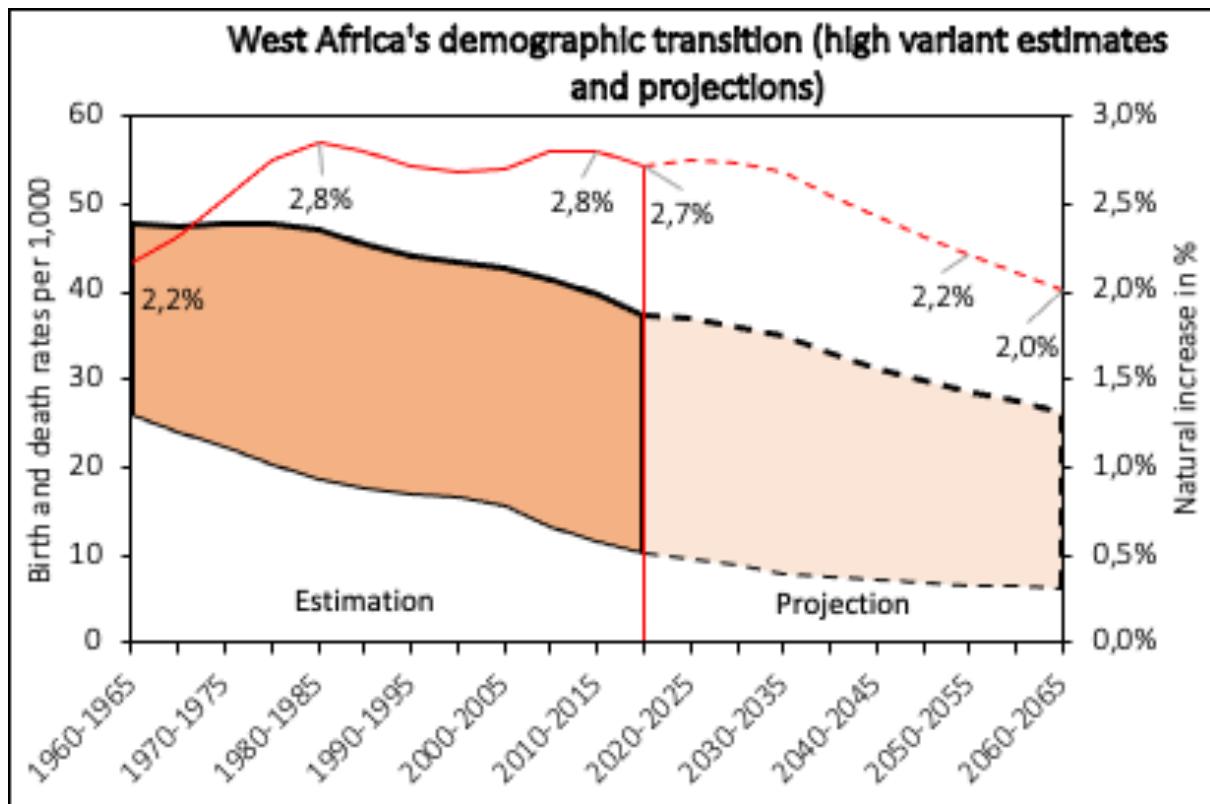
The demographic transition is a universal phenomenon but it has begun at different times and been more or less rapid in different regions and countries. It is now complete or nearly complete in all major regions of the world excluding sub-Saharan Africa, where only two countries had natural growth rates of less than 1 per cent per year in 2015-2020 (Mauritius and Seychelles). The demographic transition is not exclusively demographic, however. It is, in fact, associated with deep transformations in society and the economy, such as the transition from predominantly agricultural economies to industrial/manufacturing and/or service economies. These transformations are generally accompanied by urban growth and improvements in education, health and gender equality. Studies on this subject furthermore indicate that no country has been able to develop and emerge without a parallel decline in its fertility and mortality, that is, without initiating and achieving its demographic transition.<sup>45</sup>

The evolution of the demographic transition in West Africa since 1960 can be considered as representative of that of the Sahel countries generally (in particular because of the influence of Nigeria). It thus appears that while the decline in mortality has been well underway since the 1960s, the decline in the birth rate as a result of the decline in fertility began later, in the 1980s and 1990s (depending on the country) and remains modest. As a result, parallel declines in mortality and birth rates have led to a natural increase, exceptional and sustained, of close to 3 per cent per year, from the late 1970s to the present day. As for the future, the completion of the demographic transition will depend mainly on the rate of decline in the birth rate, and thus in fertility, since it is also desirable to continue efforts to reduce mortality.

A comparison of the trajectories of the low and high variants of the United Nations projections for West Africa shows that, with a shift from 5.2 children per woman in 2015-2020 to around 3 children in the late 2040s and 2.4 in the early 2060s, natural population growth could be 2 per cent per year as early as the 2030s, reaching 1.6 per cent in the late 2040s and around 1 per cent in the early 2060s. In contrast, with the high variant, natural population growth could be 2.3 per cent per year by the late 2040s, and still at some 2 per cent in the early 2060s.

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45 Sippel, L., T. Kiziak, F. Woellert, and R. Klingholz. 2011. *Africa's Demographic Challenges: How a Young Population can Make Development Possible*. Berlin, GE: The Berlin Institute for Population and Development



**Source:** Based on United Nations data 2019. World Population Prospects: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

## 2.5. Harnessing the demographic dividend

These contrasting developments raise the problem of the timing of harnessing the demographic dividend.

The demographic dividend is defined as the acceleration in economic growth that is made possible by a change in the age structure as a result of a rapid demographic transition. As noted above, when fertility declines, the number of births thus increases at a slower rate, then stabilizes or even declines. There are then relatively fewer dependent children. At the same time, many generations born earlier are then entering the labour market and the labour force is growing faster, so per capita income is also rising faster. Households and governments can thus free up resources to invest in economic development. The period of falling dependency ratios (the ratio of dependents to working people) then opens up a demographic window of opportunity of around 50 years, which allows us to benefit, under certain conditions, from a demographic dividend.<sup>46</sup>

Since the Sahelian countries have all begun to lower their fertility, it is reasonable to assume that they have all already entered the demographic window of opportunity. As we have seen, however, fertility declines in the Sahelian countries are recent and still modest. As a result, the dependency ratio remains high, and the benefits of the demographic dividend are still hardly noticeable. It should be noted in this

46 Lee, R. and A. Mason. 2006 "What is the Demographic Dividend?" Finance & Development September 2006, p.16-17

respect that, according to some authors,<sup>47</sup> the demographic dependency ratio must be equal to or less than 60 dependents aged under 15 and 65 years and over for every 100 persons aged 15 to 64 (who are considered potentially active) to benefit fully from the demographic dividend. This is far from being the case, since in 2020, the dependency ratios for these categories vary in the Sahel from around 80 to 100 (75 in Mauritania and 110 in Niger). The World Bank further defines countries at the beginning of the dividend as lower middle-income countries with fertility of below four children per woman, and where the fertility transition is well underway and expected to continue.<sup>48</sup> None of the Sahelian countries currently meets the last condition, and they are therefore considered pre-dividend countries, i.e. those where the full benefit of the demographic dividend will be realized in the near future, depending on the rate of fertility decline.

And yet capturing the demographic dividend, as well as preventing conflict and terrorism, is not solely a matter of lowering fertility and accelerating the demographic transition. The Sahelian countries need, at the same time, to accelerate the decline in maternal, child and adult mortality levels. They also need to significantly expand their education systems at all levels and improve their performance. They must also promote the empowerment of women and resolutely combat all discrimination against them. It is the synergies between a rapid demographic transition, socio-economic development, human capital training, job creation and the empowerment of women that will enable the Sahelian countries to benefit fully from the demographic dividend and also achieve the desired economic development. This integrated approach is, in fact, the one adopted in the African Union's 2017 "Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth". The document states that: "... to reap the full benefits of the demographic dividend, it is essential to make strategic investments that can improve health outcomes related to access to sexual and reproductive health, including family planning, to ensure that women can decide for themselves how many children they would like to have and the spacing between the births of those children."

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47 Parant, A. and T. Hommel. 2019 "La fenêtre démographique en Afrique de l'Ouest : une ouverture différée." [The demographic window in West Africa: differentiated opening"] *Futuribles International* 220: 1-18

48 World Bank and International Monetary Fund, 2016: *Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016*. A joint publication of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund

### 3. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS IN THE SAHEL

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From the points noted above, we can make the following assumptions:

- The demographic variable is taken into account in all scenarios. This is not surprising since the demographic question has always been controversial, both on a theoretical level and in the debate on its correlation with the issue of economic development. As a result, this field of thought is underpinned by a number of theories, with arguments that draw their legitimacy from observations, postulates and foresight.
- Population growth appears to be a significant risk, in that it amplifies pre-existing, potentially conflict-generating dynamics. In particular, what have been described above as horizontal inequalities, whether expressed between economic hubs and peripheral areas of different countries, between men and women, between religious groups, or between more distant caste or "ethnic" social structures, come to mind. It is therefore essential to place particular emphasis on inequalities between age groups, in a context where young people represent the largest social group (also understood as a method of individual identity insofar as young people think of themselves as young people), and are generally faced with the most acute socio-economic difficulties.
- The role of states and the different paths they may follow, particularly with regard to their capacity to anticipate and manage the needs of young populations, will be the determining factor in the region's future security, both in the immediate future and over a longer horizon, in terms of economic challenges, education, health and employment. The security challenges faced by countries in the Sahel are ultimately the result of anomie phenomena, which must be prevented from expanding further. Policies that could generate a demographic dividend seem essential in this regard, as they would make it possible to optimize the reproduction of limited resources to the current and future needs of populations. The success of such policies will, however, clearly involve a process aimed at renewing the legitimacy of states, and will require investment in both security and socio-economic development, in physical infrastructure and public service infrastructure. It goes without saying that the planning and management capacities of the State and of the people are key to a positive outcome, leaving no one behind. This is a major challenge insofar as methods of socialization and organization change rapidly, in directions that are often unforeseen and difficult to anticipate.
- In light of the factors presented earlier, it is probably not incorrect to think that the attractiveness of extremist groups is the result of social innovations, even if these are anomalous because they are due to organizations labelled as criminal. In any case, these methods of socialization and organization have a political dimension because what is at stake is the practice of democracy and the question of representativeness in the democratic space, as well as their long-term evolution. Likewise the role of the State in this situation, and its possible positive or negative impacts on the sociodemographic profile of the region.

By hypothesizing the different possible evolutions of these three elements, we can formulate, as the African Futures Institute has done,<sup>49</sup> the following three scenarios:

### a) Trend-based scenario

Highlighting the strong correlation between security pressure and the strategic direction of State investment in the region, M. Ngom shows how states enter into a vicious circle with damaging consequences for stability in the medium and long term: "Social demand is increasing exponentially, against a backdrop of youth unemployment. Half of the region's population is under 15 years of age and half of the children are out of school. They will be the adults of 2040. Security spending accounts for 30 per cent, 24 per cent and 18 per cent of the budgets of Chad, Mali and Niger, encroaching on education and health funding."<sup>50</sup>

This scenario is based on two assumptions about the behaviour of the two major actors, the State and society. In this scenario, neither the State nor society reinvents itself. This scenario can be said to be a trend-based scenario because it is in line with the major trends observed over the last few decades.

Over the next 20 to 30 years, the State's steering and management capacity will not really change in relation to independence; it will be marked in most countries by overlaps and conflicting authority between various administrations, all united by the fact that they are poorly equipped to carry out their missions. *Its relations with non-State actors seem to be based on the idea of "He loves me, he loves me not."* The State will continue to interfere where it should not and fail to intervene when it is expected to. It will disappoint the cooperation agencies and multinationals, which will accuse it of being timid in its reforms. This will be the case with population issues, where the State will not really address the issue of changing fertility norms, and will focus its action instead on improving maternal and child health and on birth spacing, all of which will gain resonance due to the new daily constraints (linked to urbanization, compulsory schooling for children up to the age of 16, women's paid work, the increase in the cost of living, etc.).

The State will also disappoint, to a very large extent, the disadvantaged groups to whom it has given the impression that it is using its power to achieve its political objectives, including meeting the interests of its allies. The label of parasitic State attached to it by so-called 'significant' political groups is not undeserved with regard to *corruption*. Society will be very uneasy about the pervasiveness of corruption, affecting morals and values at all levels and, in the face of this unease, the State will sometimes have to punish notorious deviants/offenders although many will have an impression that such sanctions are cosmetic or politically motivated.

*Internal security* in the Sahel region will remain a concern. There will be a strong sense of insecurity in both urban and rural areas, judging by some indicators. In response, the Government will retort that internal insecurity is clearly not simply anecdotal but that it is contained within acceptable limits given the devastation being caused in other African regions. In any case, in cities, the populations of which will have grown sharply, an architecture will have developed in which security considerations play a

49 African Futures Institute: "Perspectives socio-économiques de la région du Sahel" [Socio-economic outlook for the Sahel region], October 2018

50 <https://blog.mondediplo.net/la-demographie-au-coeur-des-reflexions-sur-la>

fairly significant role. *The State's presence throughout the country* will significantly improve following infrastructure development programmes initiated in the 2020s, often financed by emerging economies. Moreover, even in countries where the geography is a real challenge, information and communications technology (*ICTs*) will have significantly narrowed the gap between urban areas – the capital cities – and those that were still effectively State wastelands in 2015. Their development will be exploited to invent new forms of socialization (social networks at an affordable cost). And yet these *ICTs* offer both the best and the worst: from the most modernizing messages to the most conservative. As for *external security*, as in the period around 2015, it will be a source of concern because *border management* will remain sub-optimal and deficient.

In the Sahel of the 2040s and 2050s, there will be no shortage of *social and organizational innovations*, affecting all economic and social spheres. The vectors or key actors of these innovations will be mostly young people and women, but also returning migrants from Europe, America or other African countries; however, these innovations will not be powerful enough to change societal dynamics because the actors driving them will not be sufficiently armed and/or accepted by their elders – the decision-makers – to influence political and decision-making processes. Young people and women will see their influence limited by the gerontocratic and patriarchal nature of society. As for the returnees, some of whom will be relatively affluent, they will often not have the social legitimacy required to overturn the system; they will therefore seek to integrate into the social system in a more favourable position rather than to transform it. *Democratization* will have taken root in the Sahel region but elections will continue to be a source of anxiety because they will always be accompanied by protests and even violence that is not exclusively verbal. A class of political entrepreneurs will have developed since democratization in the 1990s, consisting of men and women with business connections who specialize in political bargaining. This increased burden of money will result in a collapse in the capacity for citizen mobilization or a restriction of their sphere of influence – and the persistence of the “living together” deficit.

*On the social front*, there will have been a limited decline in fertility but, due to the large number of young people reaching childbearing age, this will have resulted in an increase in the number of births per year. Births will increase in the G5 countries between 2020 and 2040 from 3.4 million per year to 5.7 million, an increase of more than 60 per cent. As a result, the population of the G5 countries, which will grow from 86 million in 2020 to 196 million in 2050 (and is expected to reach 254 million by 2063), will be young. The demographic dependency ratio will also remain high. The same is true of the population growth rate; it will certainly decrease a little but will remain high, still standing at 2.2 per cent, by the end of the 2040s. Many analysts conclude that the conditions for the G5 countries to fully benefit from the demographic dividend relatively quickly have yet to be met.

Moreover, it can also be seen that in this Sahel of the 2040s, political alternation has not curbed the *increase in inequalities*; quite the contrary. In a context of continuing high population growth, these inequalities are linked to education, health and access to training. While significant resources will have been devoted to these sectors by the states, as recommended by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), they will have had little impact because inequalities between girls and boys and between urban and rural areas have persisted. Within cities themselves, inequalities will have increased, giving rise to what some have been quick to call spatial apartheid, referring to a growing differentiation between neighbourhoods where the level and quality of services are as good as in the emerging economies and in the West, and other neighbourhoods, the most numerous, where access to services remains just as difficult, where education and health indicators are improving only slightly, and where access to other basic social services (drinking

water, sanitation, electricity and housing) remains just as difficult. The reason is to be found in a level of poverty that will have diminished neither in its extent nor its geographical distribution. Due to the rentier nature of economies, the evolution of economic growth will be uncertain and partly subject to variations in the prices of export products on international markets.

In this context, employment, especially youth employment, will be a central concern of policymakers. This is because demand will be out of all proportion to the absorption capacity of the modern sector and of productive systems in general, due to the low productivity of the various economic sectors. The informal sector will play an important role as a source of employment but will remain a low-productivity sector and therefore unable to absorb all job seekers. In line with populationist theory,<sup>51</sup> the idea that a large family is a source of wealth and a promise of a better future will continue to prevail in society. This is evidenced by the average fertility rate of 3.5 children per woman in the late 2040s for the five G5 countries and the other three countries. Although this rate will have declined since 2020, it will not have fallen enough to produce an acceleration in the demographic transition.

In this trend-based scenario, two logics coexist, neither of which really dominates. These are a logic of preservation of elites, on the one hand, and a logic of social tightrope walking, on the other. This tightrope walking, which is typical of the less affluent classes that are not well established, is only rarely the corollary of social mobility. Even if there is no watertight barrier between the two rationalities, the marriage between the two is not always easy. However, the transition from one to the other is a daily requirement and this is done by trying to limit the risks. This logic of risk minimization specific to lineage and rentier-based societies is reflected in advances with small calculated steps on a limited scale.

This trend-based scenario is certainly not desirable for all those who advocate emergence, but it remains very plausible. In this scenario, the equilibrium is very precarious and if it is disrupted – as a result of internal and/or external conditions – the Sahel may tip into a scenario that is less favourable to development. The lesson to be learned from this scenario is that the State may want to change paradigms quickly, but it cannot do so alone, even with external aid. It does not have the capacity to be the sole engine of transformation. The State must therefore understand the other forces and their roles and establish appropriate ways of collaborating with them. It is in this collaboration that the key to sustainability lies. The age-old proverb that “if you want to go fast, you have to go alone, but if you want to go far, you have to be in a group” thus takes on a modern twist.

## b) Adaptation scenario

By the end of the 2040s, average fertility for the five G5 countries (and the other three countries) will be around three children per woman. This evolution will be the result of a combination of factors, among which analysts cite urbanization, higher schooling, women's paid labour, the rising cost of living, etc. The relative success of ongoing public and private awareness campaigns since the 2020s, women's awareness of their reproductive rights, and the adoption of a contraceptive method by the majority of married women will also play a role in this evolution.

Despite the decline in fertility, the population of the G5 countries concerned will increase from 86 million in 2020 to 181 million in 2050 (and 230 million in 2063). It will remain relatively young, with 35 per cent

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51 Proponents of populationist theory include Ester Boserup and K.Marx

under 5 years old in 2050, compared with 47 per cent in 2020. As a result, the demographic dependency ratio will have risen from about 100 dependents under 15 and 65+ per 100 people aged 15-64 in 2020, to 60 in 2050. The population growth rate will also decline, from 3.3 per cent in 2015-2020 to 2 per cent in the late 2040s (and 1.4 per cent in 2063). The conditions for the G5 countries to draw full benefit from the demographic dividend relatively quickly and in the coming decades will have been met, provided that alongside the acceleration of the fertility transition, which will result in a transformation of the age structure, ambitious policies of economic diversification and major improvements in the quality of their human capital are being implemented.

Economic growth will have been amplified and become more inclusive and more sustainable, and the four G5 states classified in 2020 as low-income countries (Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mali) will have moved from the 2030s onwards into the category of lower-middle-income per capita countries, i.e. between \$1,036 and \$4,045 per capita; some of the four other countries in West and Central Africa could well have moved into the category of upper-middle-income per capita countries, i.e. above \$4,046 per capita by 2050.

In this scenario, the central assumption is that the State and society, understood here as the set of non-State actors, 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 governed by the law of the market alone. “Yes to the market economy, no to the market society” is the core message of this scenario.

After several years, emergence will have finally arrived in the Sahel. The international community will have reaffirmed<sup>52</sup> the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” and decided to treat the SDGs accordingly; former aid and cooperation agencies will be disengaging from social sectors and focusing on key areas, such as statistical information, strategic planning, regional integration, trade, and the green and blue economies. The national and multinational private sectors will be in favour of this development and *investment* will be going primarily to the productive and service sectors, with the hope that a *big push* in this area will give rise to national or regional “champions”.

Politically, *multipartyism* will remain the rule but electoral patronage will have imposed its iron fist and the process of democratization, with the establishment of strong institutions, will be underway and irreversible. *Corruption* will not have entirely disappeared but will have been reduced, with a positive effect on *public sector efficiency*. The State will nonetheless continue to advocate for the effective empowerment of communities and to affirm its willingness to support private initiatives in order to make this, along with public investment, the other main engine of growth. Many indicators are therefore in the green and the revenues from the Sahel’s mineral resources will be put to good use and reinvested in other sectors of the economy. The Sahel’s significant agricultural and silvopastoral potential will be in the process of being developed. Modernized agriculture and animal husbandry, benefiting from engineering and better integrated into the formal economy, will be increasing the number of lucrative jobs. Ambitious spatial planning policies will enable a better distribution of the fruits of *growth*, greatly reducing poverty and income inequality. The new paradigm of innovation will be underway, supporting the development of technology and industrialization and ensuring high and sustainable employability for young people and women. As a result, *security* and social peace will be strengthened, both in the cities and in the countryside. Socio-spatial disparities will have been strongly corrected by the development of medium-sized towns that are better connected to their rural hinterland and the development of economic activities, both in these towns

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52 The principle was affirmed as early as 1992 during the climate negotiations.

and in rural areas. All countries will have embarked on processes of institutional, economic and social transformation that are radically changing *the image of the Sahel*.

*The defining words of the State's steering and management capacity*, essential to emergence, will be rationalization, efficiency and eligibility. Synonymous with a more technocratic management of the State apparatus, it will give a pre-eminent role to younger, better trained actors with an entrepreneurial and managerial culture. The State will have demonstrated an undeniable ability to set the course and determine directions. Reformed to be a facilitator rather than a regulator, the State will have become a strategist. *Relationships between the State and non-State actors* will be built on a new social contract based on *decentralization*, which, in order to be effective, will be based on a strong and legitimate central power and the capacities acquired in planning and management at the level of decentralized entities. *Social and organizational innovations*, both technical and political, will be deployed along the chain of decision-making, implementation and evaluation of public policies to ensure greater accountability.

At the social level, these *social and organizational innovations* will also have contributed to the establishment of win-win relationships between states and societies. The demographic transition, identified as a major constraint, is thus being tackled without prevarication in debates involving all social forces, including religious leaders. In this respect, the family, school and religion will improve their adaptation to innovation and their relationship in the process of socialization of the individual to prepare a morally less vulnerable and more productive individual, who combines socio-cultural values and modernity. Dialogue will also be the preferred way of addressing the match between training and employment. Far-reaching reforms in education systems will be aimed at promoting greater employability of people and better linkages between the formal and informal sectors. Taken together, these advances will be turning the full benefit of the demographic dividend into a reality. It will be through dialogue that the need for identity affirmation will be taken into account, resulting in the search for solutions that make it possible to reconcile the ideal of a national identity with the reality of the plurality of identities. It will be through building pluralistic systems, backed by sound policies of economic transformation, that the spectre of civil war will gradually be dispelled in favour of a peace dividend.

It will also be through dialogue that the issue of *border management* will be resolved. Internal security will have improved because seasonal migration linked to the predominance of rain-fed agriculture in rural economies will decrease in intensity, since young people will now know how to generate value from the dry season and develop irrigation where possible. With the support of civil society organizations (CSOs) but also public agencies deeply committed to promoting green economies and decision-makers willing to listen to them and find appropriate solutions to their problems, young people in rural areas will be choosing to stay on their lands and territories to try to develop them.

In this Sahel of the late 2040s, the minimum conditions will have been created to enable every citizen to participate in defining and implementing the social projects that will help to cement the transformation. ICT infrastructure will have contributed greatly to this state of affairs, just as it will have fostered observable changes in the production and consumption patterns of Sahelian communities, especially the middle classes.

What we must take from this scenario is that the two major players, State and non-State actors, have realized that they have to join forces to grasp opportunities not yet capitalized upon. The idea that there is a common good and that the future is open will be forming in the minds of the actors concerned. Such a scenario is plausible for the Sahel as a regional entity on three conditions:

- First, the SDGs must be achieved or be on track to be achieved by the majority of the countries in the region, hence the central question for the United Nations system: what support can it give to said states so that they win the battle of 2030?
- Second, the political and technical means must be found to accelerate decentralization and African integration, which are two important levers in such a scenario.
- Third, this scenario also presupposes a greater capacity for mobilizing domestic resources, industrialization and access to employment for young people, the emergence of new methods of financing development and reduced State dependence on official development assistance.

### c) Scenario of worsening imbalances

Linking these accumulated vulnerabilities to rising insecurity in the Sahel, Mabingue Ngom, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, comments that “a negative spiral is being set in motion” and predicts that “the situation will worsen socially, and therefore security-wise” if nothing is done.

Despite the new daily constraints, pro-birth norms will persist in Sahelian societies, particularly in the absence of a genuine commitment by the authorities and CSOs to change reproductive behaviour.

The average ideal number of children desired by couples in the G5 countries and the three other Sahelian countries in question will remain high, at over four, and the average fertility by the end of the 2040s for the five G5 countries and the three other countries will be four children per woman, with contraceptive use among married women remaining a minority practice.

This modest decline in fertility, combined with the large number of young people reaching reproductive age, will lead to a continued sharp increase in the number of annual births, which in the G5 countries will almost double from 3.4 million per year in 2020 to 6.4 million by the end of the 2040s. As a result, the population of the G5 countries, which will increase from 86 million in 2020 to 211 million in 2050 (and nearly 290 million in 2063), will remain very young, with 40 per cent under 5 years of age in 2050, a figure still close to the 47 per cent of 2020. It is true that the demographic dependency rate will have fallen albeit only moderately; the decrease in the population growth rate will also be modest, falling from 3.3 per cent in 2020 to 2.7 per cent by the end of the 2040s. Increased spending on health and education will not have translated into improvements in the quality of care and services provided, and there will be virtually no room for massive investment in secondary, higher and vocational education, economic diversification or job creation.

In this scenario, the State will remain cumbersome and deaf to people’s needs. Cumbersome because it is operating on the wrong scale. It will still be “too small for the big things and too big for the small things”, as advocates of decentralization/modernization have already pointed out. And deaf because it will be held hostage by several interest groups and be resistant to the reforms that would have transformed it from a rentier State to a strategic one. Its lack of agility will stem from an obstruction of the channels of communication between the State and society, which standard solutions have been unable to remedy. This weakness will result in the scope of State intervention being reduced.

By the late 2040s, the *State's steering and management capacity* will be a distant memory. Insufficient productive use of resources from agricultural and mining rents will limit economic performance. The rate of wealth creation will be lower than the rate of population growth. The result will be not only a low per

capita income; inequalities between urban and rural areas, and between the well-off and the rest of the population, will also have increased. The poverty level of the population will not only have risen but also widened. There will have been an *impoverishment* of the middle classes affecting the composition of migrant groups: thus, in addition to the massive emigration of unemployed young people to Europe and America, the Sahelian countries will be experiencing a major brain drain to these continents. Infant and maternal mortality will remain dramatically high and the stagnation or even decline in indicators of access to education, health, water and sanitation will reflect the low level of investment and the poor management demonstrated by states in these sectors.

The State will consistently promise to take appropriate measures to promote development but increased economic growth will remain uncertain, subject to variations in the prices of export products on international markets. The four G5 countries, classified in 2020 as low-income countries, i.e. between \$1,036 and \$4,045 per capita, will not be able to move out of this category.

As the promised progress will not have been forthcoming, announcements will no longer have any effect on jaded citizens for whom the State has lost not only its aura but also its credibility and legitimacy. And when anger roars and the clamour of the desperate reaches its ears, the State will barricade itself in and multiply its intimidation, when it does not simply send in the troops. The international community will be in no better position. Europe will now have no policies other than security, anti-migration, anti-terrorist and anti-drugs policies and its official development assistance will now be dependent on its military intervention.

*Demographic pressure, community violence, chronic and sustained emigration, unequal development, economic decline, deterioration of public services, human rights violations and the strong intervention of the armed forces will be less and less supported by a civil society that, while not lacking in dynamism, is unable to reverse the situation peacefully.* A schism will have developed between society and the State. The latter will no longer be able to provide any impetus in terms of public policy, and society will have learned to develop by excluding the State from the equation. Nothing will provide more powerful evidence of the acute and spreading anarchy than the breakdown in secular intercommunity relations, which will affect nomadic-sedentary relations, nomadic-nomadic relations, nomadic-State relations, and relations between populations in border areas; a multiplication of self-defence brigades, some elements of which will end up as outlaws, will be a spectacular manifestation of this. No one will suffer more from this disintegration than women and young people. Young people with time on their hands are a godsend for protest movements, maybe even insurrectional movements that will turn them into feared fighters. As for women, they will pay a heavy price as victims of rape, forced marriage and other abuses.

Many kinds of protest will flourish against this backdrop. Some of them, strongly present in peripheral rural areas but also in urban shantytowns, of philosophical-mystical inspiration, will call for radicalism, one such method being a holy war on the grounds that "if war is not holy, man is nothing but grotesque dust".<sup>53</sup> According to a number of reports devoted to them, four motivations explain their formation and subsequent radicalization: "For some, radicalism is an opportunity to settle old scores with their real or supposed enemies; for others, it provides access to weapons to protect themselves and their property. It is perceived by parents whose children are unemployed as an opportunity to find work.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, there is a final motivation, which is to escape the sharia law imposed by the jihadists. These radical groups, initially

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53 Cormac McCarthy, *Blood Meridian*

54 [https://www.sahel\\_frontieres.org/eng/publications/analysis/perceptionstudies](https://www.sahel_frontieres.org/eng/publications/analysis/perceptionstudies), 2016, UNDP

forced into hiding, will signal their presence with attacks the barbarity of which will be equalled only by their precision and in comparison to which those carried out by Boko Haram in the 2000s will look almost amateurish.

In this Sahel, which hope appears to have deserted, the organic link that existed in ancient times between the army and the nation will be undermined. The army, like all other bodies, will be gangrenous with corruption. Joining its ranks will still be a way of earning a living for many young people to whom the doors to employment are closed but this will be at a price, and one that some families will be willing to pay, as they did with illegal migration a few decades earlier. In this army, promotions can be bought, and this will have a long-term effect on the morale of those who have neither the money nor a sponsor. The result will be a weakening of the State, which will find it all the more difficult to perform its main sovereign function of protecting borders, people and property because, especially in crisis situations, it will be in part dependent on foreign security forces which, in addition to their firepower, have significant strategic and geopolitical information at their disposal.

Faced with the State's difficulty in providing security, private security companies will flourish but households that cannot afford their services will have to live in fear because crime will, in some areas, have become more than a way of earning a living; it will be a way of life for groups of young people for whom the joy of life, pushed at times to extremes by the use of drugs of all kinds, is equalled only by an awareness of the insecurity of their situation.

We must remember from this scenario that the worst is not impossible. This worst-case scenario remains just as plausible as the previous two. The conditions for its implementation are both internal and external. As regards the main external factors that could contribute to the realization of such a scenario, the current and future geopolitical changes could be in the line of fire. However, this scenario is completely at odds with development and it is crucial for the economies of the region to put the right mechanisms in place to avoid its coming to pass.

## CONCLUSION

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**Unity and diversity:** these are the two notions around which this reflection on the Sahel has been structured. Unity has its origins in **geography**. In its northern fringes, the Sahel borders the Sahara, while in its southern parts it borders the savannas. The region is therefore a transition zone, in which aridity is a structural fact.

As much as by geography, the features of this region have been forged by a **history** that dates back centuries. In the era of the caravans and during the period of transatlantic trade as well as in colonial times, the Sahel was a contact zone between the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa, and between Africa and Europe. In the northern part, trade relations were coupled with cultural relations whose influence was felt on the spiritual universe of the Sahelians through Islam, which is widely practised there. In the coastal countries, the same alliance between missionaries and merchants, supported by the military when necessary, was found in the colonial era. It is history that explains why Islam, Christianity and traditional religions today form not only a part of the cultural but also the political landscape of this region.

With independence, the Sahelian area of civilization experienced a break-up, a progressive rupture of the social bond between diverse but historically linked populations, and an erosion of the relationship between these populations and young states, in favour of social reconfigurations along organizational lines that bypass, or even delegitimize, those states whose areas and means of intervention have been eroded by SAPs.

The unity of the region can also be seen in a **postcolonial economy** that has not, however, put an end to the region's dependence and its accompanying poverty. The development plans of the region's countries have been delayed as a result.

The twin project of building homogeneous nations has also been undermined by irredentist movements, making the Sahel not only a poor region but also an unstable one in political and security terms.

The unity of the Sahel, however, also lies in its **demographic** characteristics. The region is in the grip of rapid population growth, a preponderance of young people and therefore high demographic and economic dependency rates that strain local capacities for saving. Security issues and their relationship to demographic dynamics form part of this context.

Against the backdrop of this common history, a **certain differentiation** has taken place in the Sahel. **Three areas of conflict** can be distinguished, which have developed along specific paths: the cross-border area of Liptako-Gourma, the Lake Chad basin and the G5 countries.

In these spaces, the **factors** and **actors of the conflicts** are different, as are the **strategies**:

With regard to factors, we note that the conflicts in these three zones have evolved around natural resource governance, the management of inequalities (horizontal and vertical), the social effects of poor development and the political effects of a centralizing Jacobinism inherited from colonial France, or unfinished federalism in the case of Nigeria.

The actors that influence these factors also vary; they are public and private, national and international actors who are distinguished by their ideological discourses and postures, as well as by their international alliances.

In terms of strategy, we note that, in the Lake Chad basin, Boko Haram reigns supreme. Although it has made agreements with other groups in the terrorist sphere, it alone occupies the territory. It carries out spectacular actions and uses many intermediaries, including women and children, targeting Nigeria in particular. In the G5 countries, there are more players on the side of both terrorists and governments, with the G5 countries being strongly supported by Western countries. There are terrorist attacks in the Liptako-Gourma region just as there are in the G5 countries and, as in those countries, there are Western interventions. In addition to the terrorist/jihadist attacks, however, there are also intercommunity conflicts.

Against the background of this common history, **four interpretations of the issue of demography, peace and security** emerge together with four trends. These are anchored in:

- (a) demographics and natural resources
- (b) economic structures
- (c) political structures
- (d) the Sahelian system.

For each of these trends, there is an explanatory theory that draws on arguments that derive their legitimacy from observation, assumptions and also from foresight.

These are:

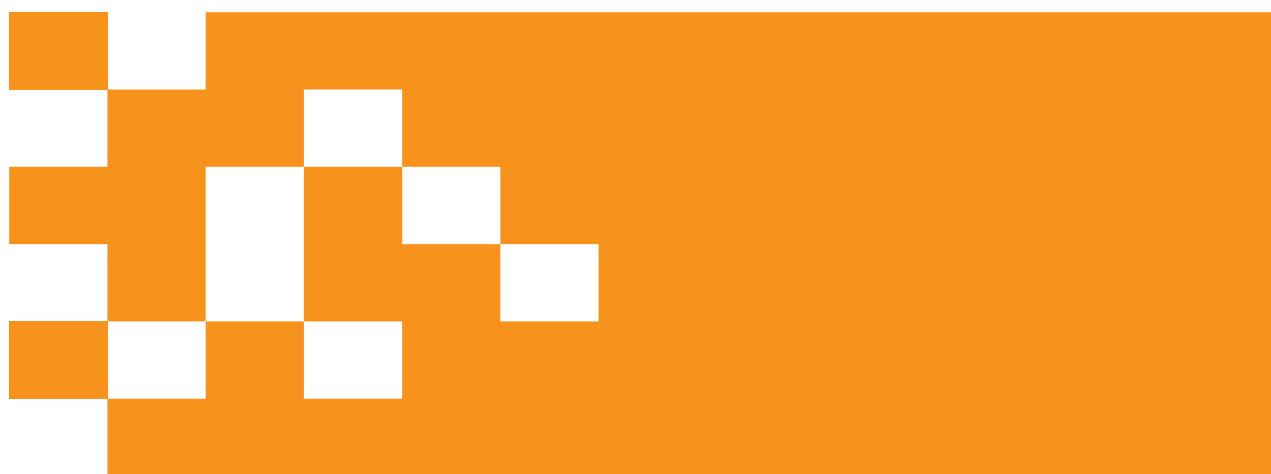
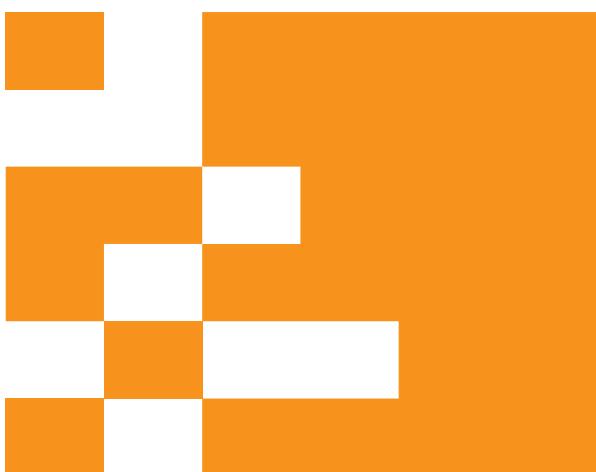
- Malthusianism, which still structures thinking among those who favour demographic approaches
- the Marxist approach, which is very much in evidence among development economists
- the socio-political approach to the different expressions of violence in the Sahel and the issue of insecurity at the regional level that prevails among politicians
- the theories on demographic transition that are widely in vogue among those who favour a holistic approach to the demography, peace and security problem in the Sahel.

The paper concludes with **three scenarios**, one trend-based, one adaptive and one based around worsening imbalances. In spite of how they have been described, which could suggest that they are weighted with value judgments, these scenarios are not normative but exploratory. They explore not what should but what could happen, and therefore shine a light on possible futures. These scenarios are sketched out on the basis of hypotheses concerning two main actors in the Sahelian environment, namely:

- **States** and the different changes they may undergo, particularly with regard to their capacity to anticipate and manage the needs of populations, not only from an immediate security point of view but also over a longer horizon, with regard to economic challenges, education, health and employment.
- **Societies**: socialization and organization patterns are changing rapidly, in directions that are often unforeseen and difficult to anticipate. They have an economic but also a political dimension, in that they positively or negatively affect the questions and issues of representativeness in the democratic space.
- In all the scenarios, the **demographic variable** is taken into account because the demographic question has always been a controversial issue both on the theoretical level and in the debate on its correlation with the issue of economic development.

Overall, the text is not strictly speaking a “white paper” but an attempt to explain the complex relationship between demography, peace and security on the basis of empirical analyses and theoretical considerations. Far from being an exhibit in a court case, UNFPA views this text rather as a working document, an intellectual contribution to a debate that is of undeniable importance and that involves a wide range of national and international actors and decision-makers in both the public and private sectors. It presents facts and tries to understand the underlying drivers and dynamics in order to learn certain lessons and offer recommendations.

What operational follow-up should be given to these results? This will be the issue facing the Niamey symposium at which this document is to be presented.





**Demography, Peace and Security in the Sahel**  
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