

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Report on the Sahel

Presentation by

By M. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye

UN Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel

New York, 21 July 2021.

Introductory remarks:

Good Morning/Afternoon Chair and members of the ECOSOC,

1. Let me start by recognizing the UN Security Council resolution 2391/2017 & ECOSOC resolution 2020/2 in which member states called for the strengthening of collective and integrated engagement to curb the deteriorating security, humanitarian, and development crises in the Sahel.
2. These two resolutions reaffirmed the centrality of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) and its Support Plan (UNSP) in providing a comprehensive framework to strengthen governance, peace and security, and development in the region. It is on the basis of these two resolutions that the Secretary-General appointed me, as the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel early this year, to lead the required collective efforts to implement UNISS/UNSP by drawing on all the UN's assets in the Sahel to foster development including engaging with & supporting the efforts of other partners in the region.
3. The 2021 ECOSOC report for the Sahel shows the work carried out in 2019-2020 by the Offices, Agencies, Funds and Programs of the United Nations in implementing activities around the three (3) UNISS Strategic goals of Governance, Resilience, and Peace and Security as well as the UNSP six (6) priority areas of (i) cross-border cooperation, (ii) prevention and sustaining peace, (iii) inclusive growth (iv) climate action (v) renewable energy and (vi) women and youth empowerment.
4. I am pleased to submit before you a synopsis of the main features of the report, but with an added sense of present context and of perspectives.
5. The Sahel region entered 2019 with an extension of its relatively sturdy economic progress, with a reported GDP growth rate of 4.8%; but inclusive growth remained a challenge; as about 43% of the Sahelian live below the poverty line of \$ 1.90 a day; with an informal economy accounting for about 50% of national output. This in effect, translates into low productivity and vulnerability to shocks, which collectively perpetuate income inequality and poverty of the populations.
6. The Covid-19 pandemic added stress to the fragility and vulnerability of the Sahelian economies. The GDP plummeted below 1.0% in 2020; the fiscal spaces severely contracted; development and humanitarian support and responses became seriously affected and delayed. It is projected that the Sahelian economies will progressively recover to the tune of 4.4 % in 2021 and 5.1 % in 2022; but this will require strong and more dedicated international support including in terms of supply of covid vaccines, substantial debt reduction and greater financial inflows to boost the recovery process .

7. The security landscape continued to be extremely volatile. Security incidents continue to progress at an alarming rate of more than 30%, annually.
8. The armed conflict *has continued to escalate since the beginning of 2020, forcing more people to flee across the region. In November 2020, in the five Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad), the number of internally displaced people almost reached the threshold of two million (1,930,482), while 839,761 refugees were in exile - 35% of them in the three central Sahel countries, namely Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.*
9. The humanitarian situation is still deteriorating. Today, 29 million people in the Sahel need humanitarian assistance and protection; this is 5 million people more than just one year ago. This number is the highest ever recorded in the Sahel region. Thanks to generous contributions from donors, the UN and humanitarian partners provided life-saving assistance to more than 15.8 million people in 2020 - often in challenging environments and hard-to-access areas. UN agencies, partners and NGOs have stayed and delivered throughout this intensifying crisis, providing food aid, therapeutic nutrition, emergency shelter and access to health care, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, and protection.
10. Yet Humanitarian Response Plans are hardly reaching 20% of funding to date. It appears we are facing a major food and nutrition crisis.
11. The context of the Covid-19 pandemic was also a moment for the UN Agencies Funds & Programs to step up their collaborative effort to work in a more coordinated way. They jointly supported governments and relevant institutions of the 10 countries in their covid-19 response and recovery plans, including through: (i) strengthening national social protection systems ; (ii) providing critical PPEs and (iii) strengthening partnerships with regional institutions such as the African Union, ECOWAS, and G5 Secretariat.
12. It is gratifying to note the appreciation of the G5 Heads of State Summit in Ndjamen, Chad on 15-16 February 2021, of the work of UN agencies particularly in the areas of stabilization, resilience, and support of the role of women in peace consolidation.
13. It is the ambition of UN agencies, funds, and programs to intensify, amplify and upscale their joint initiatives and programs going forward including changing the Sahel Narrative as the Sahel is also a land of opportunities. The recent launch of the Group of Friends of Women in the Sahel and the upcoming launch of Sahel Generation Unlimited, which will complement already existing National Generation Unlimited Initiatives, will provide further impetus to increase support to Women and Youth empowerment and agencies in the region.

I thank you.