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Sustainable development in the Sahel

Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system**Report of the Secretary-General****Summary*

The present report, submitted pursuant to Economic and Social Council decisions 2024/344 and 2024/345, provides an overview of efforts within the United Nations system to implement integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

* The present report was submitted late in order to reflect the more recent information and data.



I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decisions 2024/344, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its 2025 session a report on the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan by the United Nations system. Subsequently, in its decision 2024/345, the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its 2025 session a report on how the United Nations system is implementing integrated, coherent and coordinated support to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region.

2. While both contexts continue to face protracted crises and deep structural challenges – including political instability, economic shocks, conflict and climate-related disruptions – the report highlights not only the scale and persistence of these challenges, but also the resilience of local communities and the tangible progress achieved through United Nations support. In South Sudan, despite worsening humanitarian conditions, delayed political reforms and economic fragility, the United Nations has expanded area-based coordination models in strategic states, supported constitutional review processes and helped integrate humanitarian, development and peacebuilding efforts to address local needs. In the Sahel, the United Nations system has made progress through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, including expanded access to food security, maternal health and climate-resilient infrastructure, through coordinated national and regional initiatives. Those efforts have bolstered governance, peace and security, climate resilience and inclusive development, particularly in the context of new partnerships with national authorities, regional organizations and civil society.

II. South Sudan

3. During the reporting period, South Sudan faced a convergence of humanitarian, economic, political, security and environmental crises that unfolded simultaneously. Since November, the President of South Sudan, Salva Kiir Mayardit, has removed and reappointed a number of government officials in key leadership positions, which was criticized by various opposition groups. Rising political tensions between the Parties to the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan have progressively intensified, heightening the conflict between the South Sudan People's Defence Forces and opposition forces in many parts of the country. Ongoing regional and international efforts to mediate and keep the peace process on track stalled, when the Tumaini Initiative was adjourned without progress on 20 February 2025 by the President of Kenya, William Ruto, at the request of the Government of South Sudan.

4. Escalating violence and instability were evident through clashes and arrests of various key figures or leaders, notably in Upper Nile, Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria States, prompting regional and international concerns. The arrest of First Vice President of South Sudan, Riek Machar, and other high profile opposition leaders triggered widespread reactions and accusations that the peace process was under threat, with opposition groups claiming the abrogation of the peace agreement and suspension of security mechanisms until opposition leaders were released. Despite these setbacks, government officials reaffirmed commitments to avoiding a return to full-scale conflict.

5. In September 2024, the parties to the Revitalized Agreement agreed to extend the transitional period for a fourth time, from 22 February 2025 to 22 February 2027,

with elections rescheduled for December 2026.¹ Limited progress was made in 2024 to advance the activities of key technical and electoral institutions, i.e. the National Constitutional Review Commission, the Political Parties Council and the National Elections Commission.² Key provisions of the Revitalized Agreement remain pending, including those related to the permanent constitution-making process, national elections, transitional security arrangements, public finance management, reconstruction and transitional justice.

6. The humanitarian situation in South Sudan remains dire, with millions of people in need of urgent assistance. According to the South Sudan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2025, launched in December 2024, about 9.3 million people (69 per cent the population) require some form of humanitarian assistance, including food, shelter and healthcare.³ The Plan prioritizes 5.4 million people, including 1.23 million internally displaced persons, 680,000 refugees and 440,000 returnees. As at 24 March 2025, 10.5 per cent of the required \$1.7 billion had been funded.⁴ Between September and December 2024, the internally displaced persons population increased by 8.15 per cent, from 1.84 million to 1.99 million.⁵ In addition, more than 548,430 refugees and 3,903 persons have sought refuge in South Sudan in 2025.⁶ Of the refugee and asylum-seeker population, 64,351 individuals (40,804 women and 23,547 men) have been identified as persons with specific needs. Among them, 20 per cent are persons with disabilities, with the majority residing in northern South Sudan.

7. The economy of South Sudan continued to be characterized by rising inflation, with an overall consumer price index of 181.27 in March 2025,⁷ weak transparency and accountability frameworks, a depreciating South Sudanese Pound and declining government revenues, resulting in 11 to 12 months of salary arrears for civil servants and members of the organized forces. In January 2025, the Government of South Sudan announced the resumption of oil production in Upper Nile State, which accounts for 70 per cent of oil revenue, following the lifting of force majeure by the Government of the Sudan. Oil partners have requested the Government to address the gaps identified in security evaluations in operating areas, crude quantity assessments and reconciliations, and cash call issues as production resumes.

8. On 25 November 2024, the President of South Sudan signed into law the budget for fiscal year 2024/25. The approved budget of 4.2 trillion South Sudanese pounds (SSP) (approximately \$1.651 billion) has a deficit of 46 per cent, equivalent to SSP 1.9 trillion (\$758 million). The budget for 2024/25 is 22 per cent lower than that of fiscal year 2023/24. The Government plans to raise 50 per cent of total revenue through non-oil sources, which is substantially higher than the 13 per cent planned in the budget for fiscal year 2023/24. It intends to fund the deficit through grants and external borrowing.

9. The South Sudanese pound depreciated sharply by over 400 per cent on the unofficial exchange rate market, from SSP 1,260 to the dollar on 2 January 2024 to SSP 5,800 to the dollar on 25 March 2025. The official exchange rate has gradually moved closer to the unofficial rate, rising from SSP 1,092 to the dollar in January 2024 to SSP 4,525 to the dollar in March 2025.

¹ Reconstituted Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Commission, RJMEC Report No. 025/24, January 2024.

² See <https://press.un.org/en/2025/sc15989.doc.htm>.

³ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "South Sudan: humanitarians appeal for \$1.7 billion to assist 5.4 million people in need", 16 December 2024.

⁴ See <https://fts.unocha.org/plans/1223/summary>.

⁵ See <https://dtm.iom.int/south-sudan>.

⁶ See <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/ssd>.

⁷ See <https://nbs.gov.ss/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CPI-for-Mar-2025.pdf>.

A. Key development issues

10. In July 2024, the United Nations country team supported the Government of South Sudan in presenting its first 2024 voluntary national review at the high-level political forum on sustainable development. While the review highlighted the key milestones achieved in mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals into national development plans, policy, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation systems, it also documented only limited progress toward their achievement.

11. Progress on Sustainable Development Goal 1 has stalled. Of the estimated 12.4 million people living in South Sudan, over 8 million are estimated to be living in extreme poverty and in need of some degree of humanitarian assistance. The poverty rate is estimated to have increased to 84 per cent in 2023, with projections indicating a further rise to 92 per cent in 2024.⁸

12. Literacy among adults (age 15 years and above) remains the lowest in the region, rising from 27 per cent in 2008 to 34.5 per cent in 2022.⁹ Teacher retention and compensation, including delayed salary payments, remained a barrier to gaining access to education. Literacy among young people (age 15–24 years) stands at 47.9 per cent, with slightly lower rates among girls and young women (47.4 per cent) compared with boys and young men (48.4 per cent). Over 2.8 million children – 53 per cent of them girls¹⁰ – are out of school.¹¹

13. The food security situation remains severe, driven by multiple shocks, including widespread flooding, subnational violence, the conflict in the Sudan, displacement and a worsening economic crisis. Over 7.7 million people face severe food insecurity and malnutrition, with alarming levels of stunting and wasting among children,¹² including approximately 31,000 South Sudanese returnees who are at risk of catastrophe/famine-level conditions, or Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) phase 5, between December 2024 and March 2025. That number is projected to increase between April and July 2025, during the lean season.

14. South Sudan is grappling with a cholera outbreak, with cases spreading across the country. As at 23 March 2025, 42,308 cases and 759 deaths had been reported across 42 counties in 9 states and 2 administrative areas. The Ministry of Health, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and partners, has administered 3,928,962 oral cholera vaccine doses – covering 92.3 per cent of the target population. Vaccination campaigns continue in other affected areas. Separately, on 7 February, the Ministry of Health declared an mpox outbreak in Juba; as at 20 March, six laboratory-confirmed mpox cases had been reported in Juba and the Malakal protection of civilians site.

15. The national budget suffers from, inter alia, a narrow tax base, challenges in public financial management systems and limited gender-responsiveness, with insufficient funding allocated to basic services. Each fiscal year, divergence is observed between budget allocations, execution and actual spending. Enhanced budget oversight capacities are crucial to promoting transparency and equitable allocations.

⁸ See <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099031825031520159/pdf/P500556-9f568594-b30c-4fcc-bb7a-b96df92ed5fd.pdf>.

⁹ See <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/south-sudan/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>.

¹⁰ See www.unicef.org/southsudan/invest-education-invest-teachers-invest-future.

¹¹ See www.radiotamazuj.org/en/news/article/q-a-with-over-3-million-children-out-of-school-in-south-sudan-we-must-work-together-to-protect-children-save-the-children-boss.

¹² United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “South Sudan: humanitarian needs and response plan”, December 2024.

16. For years, social services delivery has remained highly dependent on donor contributions, undermining sustainability and weakening national capacities for policy design, implementation and oversight, including data generation and use. The ongoing fiscal and economic crises, coupled with recent donor funding cuts, threaten to erode essential services further.

17. The energy infrastructure continues to be underdeveloped. In 2023, it was reported that only an estimated 5.4 per cent of the population had access to electricity.¹³ Access to clean cooking is also extremely limited. In 2023, the proportion of the population covered by mobile network technology and Internet users stagnated at 30 per cent and 17 per cent, respectively.¹⁴

18. Only 2 per cent of the 20,000 km road network in South Sudan is paved.¹⁵ This impedes trade and market integration and the timely delivery of humanitarian assistance. Limited transport and communications infrastructure has also led to persistent marginalization and unequal access to social and economic opportunities.

19. Commitments toward security sector reform, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, community violence reduction, voluntary civilian disarmament and weapons and ammunition management remain outstanding due to political mistrust between key signatories, lack of transparency and funding constraints. Access to justice, protection of human rights and rule of law is impeded by weak accountability and the limited capacity of law-enforcement institutions, contributing to high rates of arbitrary detention.

20. The Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity has identified Sustainable Development Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) as an “enabler” to unlock progress across all the Sustainable Development Goals in South Sudan. However, gains remain fragile, threatened by subnational violence and the economic crisis that entrenches pervasive poverty.

21. The Revised National Development Strategy (2021–2024) is aligned with both Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with a focus on peace, governance, accountable institutions, economic diversification, resilience, economic growth, basic social service delivery and the empowerment of women and young people. The Strategy expired in June 2024, and a formal communication from the Government on its extension is still pending.

B. United Nations approach and response

22. The United Nations development system formulated the 2023–2025 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which articulates the collective offer of the United Nations in support of the country’s national priorities across all dimensions of sustainable development. In agreement with the Government, the Cooperation Framework was extended by one year to December 2026. In August, the United Nations country team agreed on four priority areas where efforts are to be intensified in order to deliver sustainable development and prevent any further deterioration in the country, including: (a) governance, an enabling environment and institutional strengthening; (b) food security and livelihoods diversification;

¹³ International Energy Agency and others, *Tracking SDG 7: The Energy Progress Report 2023* (Washington, D.C., World Bank, 2023).

¹⁴ See <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/south-sudan/voluntary-national-reviews-2024>.

¹⁵ See <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudans-road-out-hunger>.

(c) environment, conservation, sustainability and climate change adaptation; and
(d) health and education.

23. In September 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, in collaboration with the Resident Coordinator's Office, organized a high-level national consultation workshop for preparations ahead of the Summit of the Future. Participants emphasized the urgency of empowering young people and women and the creation of a conducive environment for their active participation in the social, political, economic and national development processes of South Sudan. The Government committed to working with the United Nations and partners to implement the commitments and recommendations arising from the Summit of the Future and the Pact for the Future.

24. In 2024, the Peacebuilding Fund supported the Government in developing a national strategy on youth and peace and security and advancing the enactment of laws establishing the Commission for Truth, Reconciliation and Healing and the Compensation and Reparation Authority. The Fund also provided technical and institutional capacity support to the National Constitutional Review Commission and supported the development of women's and youth charters on the constitution-making process. The Fund has approved five new projects for South Sudan, worth \$ 11 million.

25. With support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), South Sudan participated in the twenty-ninth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Government developed and operationalized an engagement strategy for the session to articulate its national climate priorities. This led to a mission from the Executive Director of the Green Climate Fund to create opportunities to align the priorities of South Sudan with the funding mechanisms of the Fund to accelerate climate action.

26. In 2024, the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations country team deployed climate security experts to integrate climate, peace and security efforts into their operations to address climate-induced conflicts. The efforts strengthened peaceful coexistence and built climate resilience through tailored response actions, capacity-building for staff and partners and gender-sensitive approaches in dialogues and civilian protection.

27. In 2024, UNICEF collaborated with the United Nations agencies to support the Government in organizing a joint sector review for water, sanitation and hygiene, following up on the Heads of States initiative and the water, sanitation and hygiene compact signed by the President. UNICEF also collaborated with the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and WHO to support the Government in shaping a national work plan for scaling up nutrition and ensuring an effective implementation of the 2024 Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification analysis for acute malnutrition.

28. In 2024, the United Nations country team and the humanitarian country team endorsed the system-wide implementation strategy for the period 2025–2029 on protection from sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment and the transition from a taskforce on protection from sexual exploitation to an all-inclusive network. The United Nations country team also adopted guidelines to institutionalize accountability for mainstreaming protection from sexual exploitation across programmes and a 2025 annual action plan to prevent and respond to sexual exploitation and abuse.

29. In 2024, FAO and UNMISS supported the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development, the South Sudan Land Commission, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and the National Bureau of Statistics in conducting a legal assessment linked to Sustainable Development Goals indicator 5.a.2 on the proportion

of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control. Subsequently, the report of South Sudan on promoting women's land and property rights was submitted to the economic cluster for approval. Furthermore, FAO supported the review of the draft South Sudan national land policy by the Standing Specialized Committee on Land and Physical Infrastructure and the Transitional National Legislative Assembly during an ordinary sitting of Parliament in November 2024.

30. In 2024, area-based coordination emerged as a key mechanism for delivering integrated responses to enhance cross-pillar coherence across humanitarian, development and peacebuilding-related activities in South Sudan. Led by area-based leaders stationed in strategic states – Upper Nile, supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; Unity, supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and Western Bahr el-Ghazal, supported by UNDP – the area-based coordination model brings together humanitarian, development and peace actors to conduct joint assessments, and plan and implement context-specific interventions. While area-based leaders receive support from individual United Nations agencies, they serve as neutral facilitators under the overall coordination of the Resident Coordinator's Office, ensuring coherence and impartiality. By linking immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term development and peacebuilding efforts, area-based coordination fosters local ownership, strengthens coordination and lays the foundation for long-term recovery and resilience-building.

31. In 2024, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) supported the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare and Ministry of Peacebuilding in drafting a new national action plan on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000), on women and peace and security. Support included a gender analysis of 27 pieces of national legislation and the adoption of the South Sudan Women's Charter,¹⁶ which empowers women and girls to engage with the reconstituted National Constitutional Review Commission and outlines their key priorities for the permanent constitution.

32. In 2024, UNMISS and UNDP provided training for national officials on security sector reforms, the drafting of legislation and prison reform. They also supported mobile courts in remote areas and facilitated final consultations towards the completion of the report of the Judicial Reform Committee.

33. In 2024, the One United Nations approach continued to focus on implementing the Revitalized Agreement through the support of the reconciliation, stabilization and resilience trust fund at the subnational level. The fund engaged diverse stakeholders, including donors, civil society, government and United Nations agencies to achieve sustained peace and accelerate 2030 Agenda. The fund empowered 5,664 vulnerable individuals, including 1,894 women and 3,797 young people, by creating livelihood opportunities and a voluntary savings scheme. In addition, 552 at-risk women and 799 at-risk young people gained access to career development and employment opportunities.

¹⁶ <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/06/south-sudan-womens-charter>.

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

34. The United Nations will continue to support the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework to advance progress on the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 by:

(a) Developing and implementing joint programmes with the Government on food systems, health, education and climate action and supporting the implementation of commitments and recommendations from the 2023 South Sudan Sustainable Development Goals rescue plan, the 2024 South Sudan voluntary national review and the outcomes of the Summit of the Future;

(b) Supporting peacebuilding efforts through Peacebuilding Fund projects and continued engagement with the Peacebuilding Commission, with a focus on promoting inclusive development that ensures the meaningful participation and leadership of women and young people in peacebuilding and political processes;

(c) Enhancing localization and decentralization efforts by scaling up area-based programming that integrates life-saving humanitarian assistance with the creation of durable solutions and expanded access to basic social services;

(d) Strengthening coordination mechanisms by operationalizing a United Nations system-wide portfolio approach among the United Nations country team, humanitarian country team and UNMISS, and promoting localization with Government counterparts and partners at the national and state levels to leverage synergies and foster national ownership, and improve efficiency and collaboration;

(e) Prioritizing catalytic investments in community violence reduction, governance and security sector reform in support of the Revitalized Agreement;

(f) Advocating for greater investment in data systems, infrastructure, innovation, risk management, research and technology, including digitalization and e-governance, along with enhanced public funding to strengthen service delivery and improve development outcomes;

(g) Ensuring full government participation and leadership at every stage of the Cooperation Framework cycle, including planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting, in alignment with the Revised National Development Strategy and the national development priorities;

(h) Working with national authorities and other stakeholders to help facilitate the passing of key pending policies and legislation that have stalled at the Transitional Legislative Assembly, Council of Ministers or Presidency.

D. Recommendations

35. Member States may wish to consider the following recommendations to support the implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated United Nations support for South Sudan, given that there is an urgent need to reinforce gains, scale solutions that have a demonstrated impact on the ground, and build on trust-building efforts to more effectively shift the country's development trajectory and reverse worsening trends:

(a) Reaffirm and support the Secretary-General's call for urgent de-escalation of tensions, immediate release of political detainees, adherence to the Agreement on Cessation of Hostilities, Protection of Civilians and Humanitarian Access, and encourage all parties to safeguard the Revitalized Agreement;

(b) Accelerate the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework as a platform to scale up results and deliver strategic transformative progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, and foster stability, reduce long-term vulnerabilities and decrease the risk of recurring crises by addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting trust, accountability and equitable resource distribution;

(c) Invest in long-term sustainable development solutions that build on existing gains. In addition, leverage the key transitions to address climate shocks, advance innovation and connectivity, improve access to sustainable energy, transform food systems, create decent jobs, enhance skills development, expand service delivery and strengthen governance and the rule of law;

(d) Support government efforts to expedite public financial management reforms, enhance transparency and accountability and diversify the economy to increase non-oil domestic revenues for basic services, infrastructure and data systems;

(e) Support the meaningful participation of women and young people in political, social and economic life and all decision-making processes, by advocating for gender responsive budgeting, institution and capacity-building, as well as through reintegration programmes and support for cooperative societies;

(f) Mobilize increased and predictable financing for development in the least developed countries, including through concessional finance, debt relief and innovative financing mechanisms; and leverage global convenings, including the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, galvanize political will and mobilize resources.

III. Sahel region

A. Context

Sustainable development

36. Progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2063 in the Sahel remains limited compared with other regions globally. While there have been improvements in some indicators, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding human security, governance, food insecurity and climate resilience.¹⁷ Over the past two decades, water availability across the Sahel has dropped by more than 40 per cent, driven largely by climate shocks and recurring conflict, affecting water infrastructure and access to water sources and causing community displacement. Only 72 per cent of the population has access to safe drinking water, compared with 90 per cent globally, leaving an estimated 96 million people without adequate water supply.

37. The Sahel region¹⁸ continued to experience distinct development trajectories, marked by modest economic growth, structural vulnerabilities and persistent human development challenges. Country performance varied significantly. The Niger is projected to achieve strong gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.6 per cent in 2025, driven by increased oil exports through a newly operational pipeline to Benin

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme, *Sahel Human Development Report 2023: Sustainable Energy for Economic and Climate Security in the Sahel* (New York, 2024).

¹⁸ For the purposes of the present report, the Sahel region covers the 10 Sahelian countries under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel (2013) and its support plan (2018), namely Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

and the lifting of economic sanctions by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In Chad, GDP grew by 1.5 per cent in 2024 and is expected to grow by a further 1.7 per cent in 2025 and 3.3 per cent in 2026, supported by oil production.¹⁹ Despite electoral tensions, Senegal has shown resilience, with GDP growth of 6.7 per cent in 2024 and a forecasted growth of 8.4 per cent in 2025 due to hydrocarbon production.²⁰ In 2025, the GDP of Cameroon is estimated to grow by 3.6 per cent, with a projected growth of 4.0 per cent in 2026. Guinea remains one of Africa's fastest-growing economies, with expected growth of 7.1 per cent in 2025 and 10.6 per cent in 2026, largely propelled by mining activities. Mauritania recorded a 5.1 per cent GDP growth in 2024, down from 6.5 per cent in 2023. GDP growth is projected to average 5.1 per cent over the period 2025–2027, driven by the launch of gas production and exports under the Grand Tortue Ahmeyim project. This growth may be offset in part by a decline in gold and iron ore production, reduced public investment and weaker fish exports.

38. Human development indicators across the region remain concerning. In Nigeria, despite an increase in government revenue from 5.5 per cent of GDP in 2023 to 8.7 per cent in 2024, poverty and unemployment persisted, with overall unemployment at 33.0 per cent and youth unemployment at 43.5 per cent.²¹ In Chad, poverty increased to 36.5 per cent, with multidimensional poverty affecting 84.2 per cent of the population.²² Senegal faces significant demographic pressures due to a high population growth rate (2.5 per cent), a fertility rate of 4.9 children per woman and a predominantly young population, with over 60 per cent under the age of 25. While this youth bulge presents economic potential, it also poses major public policy issues and requires targeted resource allocation.²³ In Guinea, poverty remains high at 43.7 per cent, with high unemployment among young people and social protection systems covering only 2 per cent of the population.²⁴ The Gambia continues to face persistent human development and social inclusion challenges, with a poverty rate of 53.4 per cent.

39. Access to education across the Sahel remained uneven, constrained largely by insecurity and resource limitations. Chad achieved slight improvements in primary education completion rates but continues to face high secondary school dropout rates and frequent school closures due to insecurity and violence. In Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, more than half of adult population lacks formal education. In 2024, Senegal allocated over 20 per cent of its national budget to education, but challenges persist, including high out-of-school rates, infrastructure gaps and skills and jobs mismatch.

Political and security situation

40. During the reporting period, national authorities in the region took steps towards dialogue initiatives. In Burkina Faso, on 16 December 2024, following the appointment of Rimtalba Jean Emmanuel Ouédraogo as the new Prime Minister on 7 December, the transitional Head of State, Ibrahim Traoré, launched a platform with religious leaders to promote dialogue and peace. In Mali, on 31 December 2024, the

¹⁹ International Monetary Fund (IMF), *World Economic Outlook: A Critical Juncture Amid Policy Shifts* (Washington, D.C., 2025); and IMF, *World Economic Outlook: Policy Pivot, Rising Threats* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

²⁰ IMF, *World Economic Outlook: Policy Pivot, Rising Threats* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

²¹ World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: Staying the Course – Progress Amid Pressing Challenges* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

²² ECOSIT5, Household Living Conditions and Poverty Survey (February 2024).

²³ Agence Nationale de la Statistique et de la Démographie du Sénégal (ANSD), Demographic Projections 2024.

²⁴ Data from Institut National de la Statistique Guinea.

transitional President, Assimi Goïta, emphasized the need for greater involvement of religious leaders in addressing the terrorist threat. In the Niger, the national conference on institutional reforms was held from 15 to 20 February 2025 to define the principles, timeline and priorities for the political transition, as well as a road map for State reforms. The conclusions include a proposal for a 60-month transition period, subject to modifications depending on the security situation, reform programme and the agenda of the Confederation of Sahel States.

41. The formal withdrawal of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger from ECOWAS in January 2025 reduced its membership from 15 to 12 States, reshaping the political and security landscape of West Africa. Guinea maintained its commitment to ECOWAS, despite internal uncertainties, including constitutional disputes and limited democratic space.

42. On 29 June 2024, Mauritania held presidential elections, in which President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani was re-elected through a process widely regarded by observers as peaceful.

43. The security situation across the Sahel deteriorated, driven by increased violent extremism and significant humanitarian needs. Organized crime further destabilized the region, with illicit trafficking of gold, arms, drugs, medical products and fuel intensifying competition among criminal groups and financing their activities. The economic incentives created by these illicit markets attract not only criminal networks but also vulnerable communities, entrenching organized crime within local economies and weakening State capacity to uphold the rule of law.²⁵

Humanitarian situation

44. Civilians, particularly women and children, faced increased risks of gender-based violence, recruitment of children by armed groups and attacks on essential facilities, such as schools and healthcare centres. Security threats related to Boko Haram and other extremist groups in north-eastern Nigeria continued to disrupt local economies and exposed civilians to risks, including injuries and fatalities from mines and explosive devices.

45. Climate-related shocks added to the humanitarian pressures and hindered progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Floods across the region affected approximately 5.9 million people. In Chad, floods displaced significant populations and damaged homes and livelihoods. Nigeria experienced widespread flooding, displacing close to 900,000 individuals, damaging infrastructure and causing agricultural and economic losses.²⁶ These conditions also contributed to public health challenges, including cholera outbreaks.

46. Food insecurity remained critical, affecting an estimated 12.7 million²⁷ people across the region at crisis level (IPC phase 3), due to conflict, economic challenges and climatic disruptions. Acute child malnutrition rates remained high, especially in Nigeria, the Niger and Chad. Access to basic social services declined, with around 10,000 schools closed in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, with over 1,200 health facilities becoming non-operational across the region.

²⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel: Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment – Sahel* (Vienna, 2024), p. 13.

²⁶ International Organization for Migration, “Global Data Institute Displacement Tracking Matrix: Nigeria joint post-flood situation report – 18 states”, 30 November 2024.

²⁷ Across the Sahel, 12.7 million people experienced food insecurity at phase 3-crisis, between September and December 2024.

47. Chad is hosting around 2 million refugees and internally displaced persons, including 1.1 million Sudanese refugees, adding pressure to already strained resources.²⁸ Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria collectively faced displacement crises affecting millions, while humanitarian appeals remained significantly underfunded.²⁹ According to February 2025 data, Burkina Faso was hosting 2.1 million internally displaced persons, with Mali hosting 378,363, the Niger hosting 202,925 and Nigeria hosting 2.3 million.³⁰

B. United Nations support for the Sahel

48. The Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel continued to collaborate with the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Development Coordination Office and other entities to advance the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, focusing on governance, resilience and peace and security.

49. The Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, in partnership with the Development Coordination Office and other United Nations entities, conducted several high-level missions in the region to strengthen engagement with Sahelian authorities. In mid-2024, the Special Coordinator, along with the Development Coordination Office in Africa, led strategic visits to the Confederation of Sahel States countries, alongside United Nations regional directors and resident coordinators, reinforcing dialogue and trust with the transitional national authorities, paving the way for an enhanced collaboration.

50. Water diplomacy efforts advanced, with the Special Coordinator, FAO and ECOWAS leading an advocacy mission to the Fouta Djallon Massif in June 2024, resulting in the Labé Declaration, calling for regional cooperation and a proposal to classify the Massif as a World Heritage site of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The Office of the Special Coordinator also convened technical workshops in May and September 2024 to develop a Sahel regional action plan on water, to be launched in June 2025, as part of the “grand coalition on water” in the Sahel, positing water as a development accelerator in the region.

51. The Office of the Special Coordinator advanced efforts on the empowerment of young people and women. In July 2024, the Office led sessions at the ECOWAS youth summit on digital inclusivity in Accra and the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel, co-led by UNOWAS and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), leading to improved coordination of the youth and peace and security agenda and the training of up to 80 young people on peace advocacy activities.

52. In October 2024, the Office organized the second edition of the regional consultation series with Sahelian young people, engaging regional directors of United Nations entities for a four-week discussion on young people’s and women’s perspectives to inform regional policies and programmes.

²⁸ United Nations, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Humanitarian needs analysis and response plan 2024: Chad”, March 2024.

²⁹ The tracking of the funding allocated to HRP is through the Financial Tracking System, available at <https://fts.unocha.org/>.

³⁰ See <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/rbwca>.

Security

53. In the reporting period, the United Nations intensified efforts to promote peace, security and stability in the Sahel, enhancing inter-agency collaboration and targeted interventions across political, security and socioeconomic dimensions. The United Nations entities supported initiatives on peacebuilding, conflict prevention and addressing violent extremism.

54. UNOWAS actively pursued diplomatic engagements across the Sahel to mitigate political tensions and encourage dialogue following the withdrawal of the Confederation of Sahel States from ECOWAS. Through high-level visits and consultations, UNOWAS facilitated regional discussions aimed at maintaining cooperation and mitigating fragmentation risks. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of UNOWAS held dialogues in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, advocating for inclusive governance, structured transitions and regional stability.

55. The United Nations entities strengthened regional security frameworks. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), through the Peacebuilding Fund's project in Mauritania and Senegal, trained 140 community representatives in conflict prevention and border security. Operation KAFO V, led by UNODC, and the Integrated Border Stability Mechanism for West Africa, involving UNODC, IOM, the Office of Counter-Terrorism and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), improved local capacities in conflict prevention and enhanced operational cooperation of security agencies across the region.

56. UN-Women supported inclusive peace through empowerment efforts, supporting 103 women's organizations and training 1,700 women mediators across Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, strengthening women's leadership in community reconciliation processes. In addition, UNICEF deployed 14 young United Nations Volunteers in Mali to support country programme implementation, monitoring, advocacy and logistics. The deployment by WFP of United Nations Volunteers specialized in climate resilience further integrated climate adaptation into peace and security narrative.

57. Recognizing the link between climate change and security, UNOWAS advanced the 2022 Dakar Call to Action, supporting ECOWAS in formulating regional resilience strategies. Collaborative initiatives with the United Nations Office for Central Africa included comprehensive climate-security risk assessments in the Gulf of Guinea and Lake Chad Basin, aimed at mitigating climate-related conflict drivers.

Governance

58. The United Nations made substantial strides in enhancing governance across the Sahel, emphasizing institution-building, administrative capacity, civic engagement, human rights, gender equality and regional cooperation.

59. In October 2024, in the Gambia, UNDP supported initiatives including nationwide civic education, reaching over 100,000 individuals with information on the country's draft constitution. These initiatives fostered deeper community-government interactions, particularly through youth-driven dialogues.

60. Cross-border cooperation saw advancements through strategic regional initiatives. As part of its initiative on Sahel resilience, UNDP supported strengthening the capacity of the Climate Commission for the Sahel Region to address transnational governance challenges linked to climate security. Infrastructure enhancements, notably the introduction of a migration data analysis system at border posts between

the Gambia and Senegal, implemented by IOM, improved migration management governance.

61. In addition, five community prevention and safety committees were established in the Gambia with 100 members (50 women and 50 men) to enhance community-security collaboration. FAO established cross-border fire management committees (37 per cent women), to improve transboundary resource management.

62. United Nations-led youth governance dialogues on 3 and 4 December 2024, implemented by UNFPA, aimed to empower participants to champion the Cotonou Youth Action Agenda and Security Council resolution [2250 \(2015\)](#) on youth, peace and security, by equipping them with tools to integrate the priorities of young people into national and regional policy frameworks.

63. At the community level, United Nations entities led initiatives to reinforce governance through conflict prevention and resolution programmes in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali and Mauritania. In 2024, more than 1,300 young people received targeted training in conflict management, to support efforts in mitigating local tensions.

64. Rule of law and human rights governance saw progress, illustrated by legal assistance provided to 802 individuals in the Gambia, coordinated by UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), alongside reinforced human rights monitoring initiatives by OHCHR in Chad and Senegal. In addition, UNDP led the process for the creation of the United Nations regional working group on the rule of law, justice and human rights for West and Central Africa, to serve as a platform for collaboration and exchanges between United Nations entities working in West and Central Africa on the rule of law, justice and human rights and to stimulate joint actions at the regional level.

Resilience

65. The United Nations continued its efforts to strengthen resilience in the Sahel through an integrated approach, addressing health, food security, sustainable agriculture, water management and the empowerment of young people, women and vulnerable groups. Coordinated efforts by United Nations agencies – including WFP, FAO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, WHO, IOM and UN-Women – sought to mitigate the impacts of humanitarian crises, climate shocks and instability. Through the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend project, UNFPA and the World Bank helped to enhance maternal health by training 14,050 midwives in core and specialized skills, improving contraceptive supply chains and expanding access to reproductive health services. The project reached over 1 million new users of modern contraceptives and reduced to 18 per cent contraceptive stock-outs at service delivery points.

66. Food security remained a critical challenge, with over 40 million people facing acute insecurity.³¹ The United Nations focused on increasing agricultural productivity, enhancing food systems and increasing market access for smallholder farmers. Interventions, such as the WFP “zero hunger village” initiative, integrated nutritional programmes with climate-smart agriculture to achieve sustainable food systems and community resilience. This approach integrates traditional WFP programmes – such as school meals, nutrition, Food for Assets and smallholder agricultural market support – to create rice value chains to achieve zero hunger within two years. In the reporting

³¹ According to Cadre Harmonisé in December 2024, over 40 million people across the region are food insecure (IPC Phase 3+), including 2 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), with numbers projected to rise to 52.7 million by mid-2025. Nigeria (25.1 million), Cameroon (3.1 million) and Chad (2.9 million) account for well over half of this number.

period, WFP increased the number of zero hunger villages from 13 to 37, with interventions in a total of 151 villages.

67. In 2024, water, sanitation and hygiene services were strengthened, particularly in flood-prone and conflict-affected areas in Nigeria. UNICEF led efforts to improve access to safe drinking water, sanitation infrastructure and hygiene practices, including special attention to menstrual health management in schools. In the Gambia, UNFPA established a gender-based violence management information system, registering 912 cases (96.6 per cent women), and sensitized 1,000 schoolgirls on menstrual health. Meanwhile, resilient water systems, often powered by renewable energy, were established, contributing significantly to the sustainability of essential services. In Mali, UNICEF supported the construction and rehabilitation of climate-resilient water systems, benefiting 66,573 people with durable water services and 218,486 people with improved sanitation access.

68. Initiatives such as the Great Green Wall and Sahel resilience partnership involved young people and women in climate-smart agriculture, green economy projects and income-generating activities, enhancing community resilience and promoting gender equality. These initiatives also targeted education and protection systems, ensuring the active participation of young people, women and vulnerable groups in resilience-building. Women-led civil society organizations across Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal received support, with disaster preparedness training benefiting 45 participants, including 23 women and 15 internally displaced persons.

69. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme and UNDP implemented urban resilience initiatives to address rapid urbanization challenges, including through urban planning, capacity-building, infrastructure development and local capacity-building. Efforts focused on climate resilience, disaster preparedness and community-driven urban planning. In Guinea, 678 community structures were established to support conflict prevention and early warning, contributing to local dispute resolution. Sustainable urban plans were also adopted for five municipalities, benefiting approximately 300,000 people.

Coordinated framework in the Sahel

70. In response to the request by the transitional authorities of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger – and following recommendations from the joint mission of the Regional Directors and the visit to the region by the Deputy Secretary-General – the United Nations developed 10 integrated flagship programmes, intended as platforms for structural transformation and designed to accelerate progress across four critical transition pathways of the Sustainable Development Goals: food systems; education; youth employment; and energy. Aligned with national priorities and co-designed with sectoral ministries, the programmes seek delivery at scale. Going beyond sectoral interventions, the flagships integrate cross-cutting areas such as climate-smart agriculture, inclusive agri-food value chains, land restoration, rural infrastructure, digital learning, youth entrepreneurship, off-grid electrification, local governance reform and conflict-sensitive service delivery. This integrated design ensures cross-pillar coherence and supports stabilization, cross-border collaboration and economic governance while embedding health, education and social protection systems into broader development objectives.

71. On advocacy and women's empowerment, the Office of the Special Coordinator, UN-Women and UNOWAS led the development of the Sahel Gender Compact, which promotes gender equality as central to sustainable development, peace and security by: (a) systematic integration of gender into policies and programmes; (b) promoting the participation of women and young people up to 50 per cent in peace and security

initiatives; and (c) leveraging the Sustainable Development Goals to transform socioeconomic and political structures by placing women at the centre of decision-making processes.

72. United Nations entities undertook significant efforts towards stronger engagements between the United Nations and Member States from the Sahel region, regional partners and international development actors. The advancement of the dialogue series between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on cross-pillar coherence brought together United Nations leadership and representatives of major international NGOs in the Sahel region.

Perspectives for future work

73. The 17th meeting of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel steering committee, held in Dakar on 4 and 5 February 2025, resulted in key conclusions and recommendations to guide future United Nations engagement in the Sahel:

(a) The Office of the Special Coordinator will continue to advocate for the need to recalibrate the strategy to reflect the evolving nature of the region, including through enhanced coordination;

(b) The United Nations will maintain its presence and commitment in the Sahel region, emphasizing its critical role in supporting stability and development, including by reinforcing engagements and actions on the ground to address the socioeconomic, environmental and security challenges;

(c) The Office of the Special Coordinator will reinforce coherence through an inclusive, integrated and people-centred approach, engaging civil society, promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law and advocating for the participation of women and young people in political decision-making processes;

(d) The United Nations will leverage its convening power to engage a broad range of stakeholders, including Governments, regional institutions, academia, media and the private sector;

(e) The United Nations will strengthen peace, security and sustainable development efforts through the continued development of long-term peacebuilding strategies and enhanced regional cooperation for security, including by addressing evolving threats, and ensure sufficient resources are allocated to support integrated efforts;

(f) The United Nations will accelerate actions on integrated programmes that can help accelerate sustainable development, as identified by previous steering committees, namely, water, industrialization and governance;

(g) Enhancing strategic partnerships with regional organizations, such as ECOWAS, the African Union and international financial institutions, is crucial;

(h) Addressing the root causes of instability, including weak governance, corruption and inequality, remains a priority for the United Nations in the Sahel; strengthening institutions and promoting inclusive and good governance practices such as transparency, accountability and social contract are essential drivers for long-term stability.

C. Recommendations

74. Integrated approaches should be scaled up in order to build on results and accelerate impact across pillars. Cross-pillar coherence should be strengthened at all levels to develop and implement climate and conflict-sensitive development

strategies. In multiple settings across the Sahel, coordinated action – enabled through existing United Nations frameworks and joint planning mechanisms – has proved to be effective. These approaches must be expanded, supported by greater investment in data and technology to inform policy and decision-making in complex, rapidly evolving environments.

75. The United Nations will continue to strengthen the shift from short-term stabilization to long-term resilience and inclusive development. This entails unlocking the region’s economic potential, reinforcing national and local institutions and fully integrating climate-security approaches. These efforts must be reinforced and scaled, drawing from lessons learned, trust already built with national counterparts and coordination mechanisms that are demonstrating value. Strategic partnerships, expanded private sector engagement and innovative financing mechanisms tailored to the region should be mobilized to sustain this shift and ensure continuity of development gains.

76. Access to predictable, flexible and multi-year financing should be expanded to drive transformative progress on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the Sahel. Addressing the region’s intersecting challenges – including climate vulnerability, food insecurity, weak governance and high youth unemployment – requires bold, sustained investment. The 10 integrated flagship programmes developed for the Central Sahel demonstrate the potential of coordinated United Nations support to accelerate inclusive economic recovery, strengthen resilience and reinforce social cohesion. Urgent financing is needed to operationalize the flagship programmes to realize their full impact, and the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development provides a pivotal moment to mobilize targeted investments for the Sahel and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals in one of the world’s most vulnerable regions.