



Security Council

Distr.: General
12 November 2015

Original: English

Progress towards the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2056 (2012), in which the Council requested me to develop and implement a United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel region. It is also submitted pursuant to the presidential statement of the Security Council dated 27 August 2014 ([S/PRST/2014/17](#)), in which the Council requested me to inform it of the progress towards the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel through an oral briefing by 15 December 2014 and through a report and a briefing no later than 30 November 2015.

2. The present report summarizes the major developments in the Sahel region from 1 June 2014 to 30 October 2015 and provides an update on the status of implementation of the Integrated Strategy. It also provides information on efforts undertaken to strengthen regional ownership and consolidate partnership, as well as regional and international coordination initiatives and efforts undertaken to mobilize financial resources for the implementation of the Integrated Strategy. It builds on the analysis included in the oral briefing by my Special Envoy for the Sahel to the Security Council on 11 December 2014 (see [S/PV.7335](#)).

II. Emerging trends in the Sahel region

3. The situation in the Sahel remains a source of concern. Electoral processes continue to be a source of tension in Sahel countries. The security situation also remains volatile, with the continuing crises in Libya and Mali, and the persistence of illicit trafficking and terrorism constituting the main threats to regional security. Governance and security challenges, combined with the effects of climate change, persist as factors contributing to a dire humanitarian situation in the Sahel, with a high number of people displaced and many more in need of humanitarian relief. In addition, funding for humanitarian assistance remains insufficient.



A. Political and governance trends

4. Democratic governance remains fragile in most Sahel countries. Political transitions and electoral processes in the region continue to be a source of tension and potential unrest, as illustrated by the complex transition that has been taking place in Burkina Faso since October 2014 and the coup d'état carried out in September 2015. At the same time, the signature of the peace agreement in Mali in mid-2015 was a significant development in terms of the country's stabilization process and the overall stability of the region.

5. Political participation by certain segments of the population, including youth, women, minorities and communities living in remote areas, needs to increase throughout the region. The socioeconomic conditions of youth and women in the Sahel remain a major challenge. Despite the fact that more than 60 per cent of the population in the Sahel is under 25 years of age, youths are not systematically involved in decision-making processes in most countries of the region. Youths also face greater obstacles to their socioeconomic integration and experience higher unemployment rates.

6. Women face social and cultural challenges that translate into limited access to resources, economic opportunities and political participation. The representation of women in parliament and at ministerial levels in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger stands at 14 and 19 per cent respectively. This remains far below the 30 per cent minimum level of representation of women in decision-making called for by the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action, article 4 (l) of the Constitutive Act of the African Union and its 50/50 parity principle. Affirmative action, including the introduction of quotas, can have a positive impact on women's political participation. For example, in Senegal, the representation of women in the national assembly increased from 22.7 per cent to 42.7 per cent as a result of the 2012 legislative election, which followed the adoption in 2010 of a law establishing absolute gender parity in all public institutions with fully or partially elected membership. Women's representation in parliament also improved in Mauritania and the Niger following the adoption of laws on quotas for women in 2006 and 2000 respectively. To date, Chad and Mali do not have any quota for women's representation in decision-making, while the quotas adopted in Mauritania (20 per cent) and the Niger (10 per cent) fall short of the 30 per cent minimum level of representation. Burkina Faso has yet to reach the level set by its own national quota (30 per cent).

7. Sahel States continue to face significant challenges in exercising effective State authority over the entirety of their territories and providing basic social services to their populations, especially those living in the peripheral desert or semi-arid zones, leading to a feeling among these populations that they are being neglected and marginalized by the central Governments. In a bid to address this, most Sahel countries have opted for a decentralized system of governance. However, in practice, many are facing challenges in establishing functioning local institutions. In many of these countries, the texts on decentralization have not been complemented by adequate implementation measures. The transfer of human and financial resources and the development of local capacities are still limited.

B. Security trends

8. The security situation in the Sahel remains volatile. Of particular concern are the situations in Libya and Mali, the terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups, the increase in drug trafficking and the surge in irregular migration.

9. Despite the ongoing political process being carried out under the auspices of the United Nations in Libya and the signing of a peace agreement in Mali, the security situations in the two countries continue to pose a threat to regional stability. Libya is still a safe haven for terrorist groups operating in the Sahel, including those with alleged ties to Al-Qaida and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. Algeria and Tunisia continue to seize important stocks of illicit weapons along their national borders with Libya and to intercept convoys of terrorists with weapons, ammunition and explosives. However, the absence of strong national mechanisms to monitor weapons is also a source of insecurity and instability.

10. In Mali, terrorist groups have intensified asymmetric attacks in the north and have even moved southwards with attacks in the centre, including in the capital, Bamako, at the border with Burkina Faso and Mauritania, and in the south at the border region with Côte d'Ivoire. A new violent extremist group, the Massina Liberation Front, claimed responsibility for an armed attack on the Tenenkou prefecture in Mopti region in January 2015 and is suspected of also being behind other attacks perpetrated in central Mali. During the reporting period, groups based in northern Mali also claimed terrorist attacks that had been carried out in neighbouring countries, including Algeria, Burkina Faso and the Niger.

11. In the Lake Chad Basin region, the terrorist group Boko Haram has intensified its operations in Cameroon, Chad, the Niger and north-eastern Nigeria, resulting in over 2.1 million displaced persons in Nigeria and 200,000 refugees in Cameroon, Chad and the Niger. The group has carried out systematic and widespread human rights abuses, including killings, abductions, rape, the use of children in hostilities, including as suicide bombers, and the destruction of property. The Boko Haram insurgency has separated at least 23,000 children from their families in north-east Nigeria alone. In order to effectively counter the group's attacks, member States of the Lake Chad Basin Commission as well as Benin have established the Multinational Joint Task Force, which consists of 8,700 troops and has commenced operations against the group.

12. The Sahel continues to be an epicentre of drug trafficking, with networks reaching out to the wider West Africa region and into North Africa. Illicit trafficking, including of drugs, cigarettes and migrants, remains a major threat to regional security owing to the involvement of armed groups and terrorist movements, as well as competition among them for control of routes. Armed groups provide security and escort for trafficking convoys across the areas under their control and in return receive substantial amounts of money. This has an adverse effect on the peace process in Mali, owing to the substantial monetary gains accrued from illicit trafficking. Malian authorities seized at least 3.6 tons of cocaine and 4.7 tons of cannabis in 2014.

13. The Sahel is also at the centre of human trafficking and mass migration from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe. The region is both the departure point and a transit corridor for illegal migration and the forced displacement of people, as well as for people seeking safety and protection abroad. The International

Organization for Migration (IOM), quoting local authorities in Agadez, northern Niger, estimated that at least 2,000 migrants and forcibly displaced persons enter Libyan territory through northern Niger every week. These migrants are often forced to pay substantial amounts of money to smuggling networks in order to cross vast and dangerous territories, including in Libya, with the goal of embarking on a boat towards Europe. Environmental degradation, trade imbalances, poor socioeconomic development, weak governance, human rights abuses, protracted insecurity and conflicts are among the major factors driving migration and forced displacements.

14. In August 2014, France launched Operation Barkhane to fight terrorism in the Sahel, with up to 3,500 troops stationed in several bases in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. Counter-terrorism activities carried out by Operation Barkhane in partnership with Sahel countries resulted in the death or arrest of more than 100 terrorists in one year and reduced the operational capacities of terrorist groups. Between August 2014 and September 2015, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger conducted eight cross-border joint military operations with the support of Operation Barkhane, which were coordinated through quarterly meetings of deputy chiefs of defence in charge of operations and biannual meetings of chiefs of defence of the countries of the Group of Five for the Sahel (G-5 Sahel). Operation Barkhane also supports regional efforts to fight Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin and has contributed to the stabilization of Mali, in cooperation with the Malian Army and in coordination with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the European Union military mission to contribute to the training of the Malian Armed Forces.

C. Humanitarian trends

15. Across the Sahel, conflict-related violence, food insecurity, malnutrition, epidemics and natural disasters continue to be the key drivers of humanitarian needs. Poor harvests in parts of the Sahel in 2014, insecurity and conflict have worsened food security in the region. The food security of communities in southern Mauritania has sharply deteriorated, while late and erratic rains in 2014 prolonged the lean season for many communities across eastern Chad, Mali and northern Senegal. Approximately 5 million people are food-insecure in the Lake Chad Basin area as a result of Boko Haram-related violence. Across the Sahel, 5.8 million children under 5 years of age are at risk of moderate or acute malnutrition. At the peak of the lean season, in September 2015, over 20 million people were food insecure and 4.4 million were in need of food assistance across the region, representing a significant increase from the 2.5 million people in need of such assistance in January 2015.

16. While many of the Sahel countries experienced a fair level of rainfall during the current rainy season, flooding affected over 300,000 people in Burkina Faso, the Niger, Nigeria and Sierra Leone and destroyed more than 700 hectares of farmland. Concerns exist that the rain-rejuvenated vegetation could encourage the spawning of desert locusts in certain parts of the Sahel. An outbreak of avian influenza continues to spread in parts of West Africa, penetrating Burkina Faso, the Niger and Nigeria. As of September 2015, 490 farms and 1.7 million birds were affected by the virus in Nigeria alone. Recurrent epidemics of diseases such as cholera, measles and

meningitis and endemic diseases such as malaria continued to pose major public health challenges across the Sahel. The Ebola outbreak that ravaged some of the Sahel's neighbours was a stark reminder of the urgent need to strengthen health systems.

17. Across the region, 4.4 million people are currently uprooted from their homes, representing a sharp rise from 1.6 million in January 2014. Communities in northern Mali remained in a very precarious situation for the third consecutive year, with bleak prospects for refugee returns or improvement in public services. As of September 2015, the conflict in the Lake Chad Basin had displaced over 2.5 million people, including 2.1 million in Nigeria, making it the continent's second-largest displacement crisis. Children were particularly affected, with an estimated 1.4 million currently displaced in Nigeria and neighbouring countries. Security measures, notably the closure of borders, severely affected economic activities and trade, leading to a sharp rise in food and commodity prices. Livelihoods and household food security have been further jeopardized by a ban on fishing in Lake Chad.

18. The 2014-2016 Humanitarian Strategic Response Plan for the Sahel aims to respond to acute and chronic needs through life-saving and resilience-building interventions, including capacity-building for Governments and the strong engagement of development actors. As of September 2015, donors had provided just over \$756 million to the region, against a \$1.9 billion appeal, showing a sharp increase compared with the 2014 appeal of \$1.4 billion. Humanitarian programmes in the Sahel continue to be underfunded, hampering prevention activities and timely responses to humanitarian needs. Funding for intervention is also uneven across sectors, with the education, water, hygiene, sanitation and health sectors lagging behind and receiving less than 30 per cent of their requirements.

III. Strengthening ownership and consolidating partnership

19. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy pursued efforts to reinforce the coherence of United Nations interventions in the Sahel within the framework of the Integrated Strategy. The steering committee continued to serve as the main platform for the internal coordination among the United Nations entities implementing the Strategy. The Committee focused on advancing project implementation, enhancing regional and national ownership of the Strategy and aligning programmatic activities with the changing political and security context in the region.

20. In order to enhance ownership and cooperation with countries of the region, my Special Envoy carried out several visits to the five priority countries, namely, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger. She also used the visits to provide support and guidance to the United Nations country teams in the implementation of the Integrated Strategy, emphasizing the importance of a regional approach to addressing cross-cutting challenges in the Sahel.

21. The United Nations undertook a series of consultations with the G-5 Sahel and its permanent secretariat, which helped to promote convergence between the Integrated Strategy and the priority investment programme of the Group, and led to a road map for consolidating cooperation between the two entities. The road map makes provision for the joint formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects.

IV. Progress in the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel

22. During the reporting period, my Special Envoy put in place mechanisms to accelerate the implementation of the Integrated Strategy, such as the provision of technical support to regional organizations and United Nations entities for the development of regional projects and cooperation agreements on key thematic issues. This allowed for tangible progress to be achieved in the identification, formulation and implementation of projects, at both the regional and national levels.

A. Leadership and facilitation role of the Office of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for the Sahel

23. In an effort to boost the implementation of the Integrated Strategy, my Special Envoy for the Sahel supported the concept of regional flagship projects, which are high-impact and high-visibility projects conceived purposely as cross-border initiatives. The Office of the Special Envoy provides technical support to relevant United Nations entities in the development of the projects.

24. The Office improved its communication tools with a view to keeping the spotlight on the regional challenges facing the Sahel and increasing the visibility of the efforts of the United Nations. It has launched a website and a quarterly e-magazine, which are used to disseminate information on the implementation of the Integrated Strategy and highlight challenges and successes.

25. Under the leadership of my Special Envoy, the United Nations also provided direct support to Sahel countries and regional organizations on cross-cutting issues, such as preventing and fighting radicalization and violent extremism, and strengthening the role of women in addressing challenges in the Sahel region.

26. The Office of the Special Envoy conducted, in consultation with relevant United Nations entities and regional organizations, a regional study to analyse the context in which radicalization and violent extremism continue to flourish. The main recommendations of the report are in the process of being translated into concrete projects to prevent and combat radicalization and violent extremism in the Sahel.

27. The Office also helped the G-5 Sahel to organize a high-level meeting on radicalization and violent extremism in the Sahel, held in Niamey from 11 to 14 May 2015. The meeting was attended by ministers of security and religious affairs and experts from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger and by regional and international partners. Participants discussed concrete measures to combat radicalization and violent extremism and adopted a declaration of the G-5 Sahel on the fight against radicalization and violent extremism in the Sahel. The declaration is a commitment by the Group countries to employ a holistic approach to tackling radicalization and violent extremism by strengthening legal frameworks, building the capacity of religious leaders and ensuring the appropriate oversight of religious education institutions. It also focuses on creating opportunities for youth and women, preventing radicalization in areas of detention and building the capacity of state institutions to educate populations and discourage public appeals to violent extremism. Crucially, the declaration also announced the establishment of a regional cell for the prevention of radicalization under the Group's permanent secretariat in Nouakchott, with the support of the United Nations.

B. Status of regional programmes and projects

28. A total of 19 regional projects have been developed in close collaboration with international partners and bilateral donors within the framework of the Integrated Strategy, including 4 projects under the governance pillar, 5 under the security pillar and 10 under the resilience pillar. Three projects under each pillar were designated as flagship projects to be prioritized for implementation. The focus of these projects includes border management, insecurity and violent extremism, access to justice, the fight against transnational and cross-border organized crime, small arms control, resilient pastoralism, demographic dividends and women's economic empowerment.

29. Under the governance pillar, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is implementing a flagship project on border management and border communities in the Sahel in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, with the objectives of enhancing the involvement of communities in the management of border areas, building the capacities of border agencies and addressing insecurity, including by promoting food security through women's cross-border trade.

30. UNDP and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) completed a project entitled "Perception studies on insecurity and violent extremism drivers in border areas in the Sahel", which aimed at assessing the perceptions of communities living in border areas on the drivers of radicalization, insecurity and violent extremism in eight Sahel countries. The results of this flagship project will serve to inform context-specific strategic and programmatic approaches on advancing the regional development, peace, security and development agenda. CTED also secured partial funding, through the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre, for a project on strengthening the counter-terrorism coordination and information-sharing capacities of six States in the Sahel region, to be launched in December 2015 in the Niger.

31. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is implementing a regional project aimed at combating discrimination against women and increasing their participation in democratic processes. The project addresses gender stereotypes and promotes gender equality in the mass media by promoting the visibility of women involved in public and political life. It covers four countries, namely, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, the Niger and Senegal.

32. Under the security pillar, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) continued the implementation of its Sahel flagship programme focusing on capacity-building activities in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger in the areas of terrorism prevention and the fight against transnational organized crime. During the reporting period, UNODC concentrated its efforts on training law enforcement and judicial authorities, strengthening financial intelligence units and measures against money-laundering, improving border management and facilitating information exchange between justice officials. UNODC has implemented 145 activities, reaching approximately 4,500 direct beneficiaries in the region. UNODC also supported the adoption of a law on legal aid in Mauritania and the adoption of a law on human trafficking in the Niger.

33. UNDP and the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa undertook a series of surveys on small arms and light weapons in the core Sahel countries of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger and in the

neighbouring States of Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Nigeria and Senegal. The initiative was launched in April 2015 and is expected to be finalized in December 2015. The implementation of the project is expected to result in the development of practical small arms control and reduction recommendations that respond to the actual needs of each country and the subregion, as well as an improved capacity to respond to the challenges posed by small arms and light weapons.

34. Since 2014, the Regional Centre has also been implementing a flagship project on technical assistance to enhance small arms control and physical security and stockpile management in the Sahel, for which funding has been partially secured. The project covers mainly Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

35. Under the resilience pillar, a major United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) programme on women's empowerment and the demographic dividend in the Sahel was approved by the World Bank in December 2014, for an estimated total cost of \$207 million. The programme is aimed at improving the availability and affordability of reproductive health commodities, strengthening specialized training centres for rural-based midwifery/nursing services, and piloting and sharing knowledge on initiatives for adolescent girls. Implementation has started, and preparatory technical meetings were held in early 2015, including on human resources for health (February 2015) and the empowerment of girls and women (March 2015). All the Governments concerned, namely, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, have signed funding agreements with the World Bank for the implementation of the programme in their respective countries.

36. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) is implementing a project on information management, risk and vulnerability analysis, and resilience measurement, which is aimed at facilitating effective and efficient multisectoral programming based on a cohesive analysis of the multiple risks and vulnerabilities affecting households, communities and systems in the Sahel. This project supports the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel and is being implemented in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger and Senegal.

37. Several United Nations agencies are providing technical and financial support for the implementation of the initiative for Sahel and West Africa by the European Union-led Global Alliance for Resilience Initiative for the Sahel and West Africa, at both the country and regional levels. The Initiative is an umbrella resilience programme combining agriculture, food security, nutrition and social protection interventions under the leadership of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the West African Economic and Monetary Union and the Permanent Inter-State Committee at the regional level.

C. Status of national programmes and projects

38. National projects continue to be implemented primarily under the respective national United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. While some of the Frameworks predate the Integrated Strategy, a concerted effort has been made to align them with the latter. In some countries this has led to a convergence of up to 80 per cent between the Integrated Strategy and the Framework. The road maps for the revision of the Frameworks for Chad and Mauritania already refer to the

Integrated Strategy as the overarching strategic document that guides all the operational activities of the United Nations system in those two countries.

39. With regard to governance, three projects are under way in Burkina Faso, namely, a \$5 million project funded by Japan to support good governance; a \$5 million electoral support project funded by UNDP, Switzerland and Sweden; and a project implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on social accountability. OHCHR is also implementing a series of projects aimed at building national human rights capacity and enhancing women's political participation.

40. In preparation for the upcoming presidential elections, UNDP developed a \$15.9 million electoral support project in the Niger, which was validated nationally. In addition, a \$3 million project on biometric voter registration is currently under way. In July 2015, the Peacebuilding Fund approved a new \$10 million priority plan for peacebuilding, including up to \$1 million for establishing an environment conducive to peacebuilding in the country.

41. In Chad, UNDP set aside \$25 million to support elections for the period 2014-2017. Additionally, in partnership with local non-governmental organizations, OHCHR, IOM, UNICEF and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, it is implementing two projects worth \$15 million on conflict prevention and peace consolidation. In Mauritania, a project on the establishment of a favourable framework for renewable energy development was completed during the reporting period. Five new projects were launched, with a total budget of approximately \$2.7 million, while the implementation of 22 other projects, which were launched before the reporting period and had a total combined budget of over \$26 million, was pursued. These projects cover various areas, including the legal protection of refugees, capacity-building in the areas of peace consolidation and the justice sector, the fight against violent extremism, infrastructure development and rehabilitation, and maternity and reproductive health.

42. In Mali, in addition to the sustained efforts of MINUSMA in support of the political and security process, the Mission launched a quick impact project for the creation and support of a network of elders for reconciliation and peace in Goundam, in the Timbuktu region. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization and UNDP are also implementing a \$2.1 million joint project funded through the Peacebuilding Fund for capacity-building in conflict resilience for women and youth in the Gao and Timbuktu regions.

43. Under the security pillar, the second phase of the joint project between the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and UNDP on urban security, as well as the small arms management project, are continuing in Burkina Faso. In the Niger, three projects on security, including a \$1.7 million project to support security agencies and the small arms management project, are ongoing. Within the new priority plan for peacebuilding, financed by the Peacebuilding Fund, a budget of \$3.6 million is available for activities to support community security in the border regions of the Niger.

44. In Chad, three projects worth \$15 million, two of which are focused on border management and border communities and one on landmines, are currently under way. The projects are being implemented by IOM, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and UNDP. In Mauritania, two new projects were launched, with a total budget of \$2.4 million.

The first is on international cooperation and coordination on the development and implementation of border management strategies, and the second is on capacity-building for the collection and analysis of data on cross-border flows of people. The implementation of three other projects on strengthening national capacities for border management and control and the fight against terrorism, launched prior to the reporting period, was also being pursued, with a total budget of almost \$3.2 million.

45. In Mali, MINUSMA trained a total of 4,615 law enforcement officers from July 2014 to October 2015. The United Nations Office for Project Services has commenced the implementation of a \$2.99 million project on confidence-building through support to the cantonment process in Kidal. Construction work at six cantonment sites is ready to begin as soon as the sites are formally approved by the parties. A programme for improved access to justice and security for women victims of sexual and gender-based violence in the peacebuilding process in Mali is also being implemented by UN-Women, UNFPA and MINUSMA.

46. Under the resilience pillar, over \$100 million worth of projects are currently being implemented in Burkina Faso. They focus mainly on nutrition, education, social security, agriculture, population services and humanitarian assistance. For agricultural livelihoods, FAO has supported 7,000 households through unconditional cash transfers and through the promotion of agricultural input trade fairs. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has started the implementation of a project on the revision of the national employment policy, with a focus on employment-sensitive budgeting. The project is aimed at supporting national efforts to boost employment, especially for youth and women, through the budgeting, monitoring and evaluation of policies in all the sectors of the economy.

47. Projects worth over \$1.2 billion are currently being implemented to build resilience in Chad. They include the provision of assistance to returnees from the Central African Republic, capacity-building to increase community resilience, disaster risk prevention and management, and social protection, including cash transfers. FAO has supported rural households through the distribution of cash and in-kind agricultural inputs and livestock.

48. In Mauritania, one project on the management of severe acute malnutrition and another on the control of diseases related to epidemics, with a total budget of over \$1.5 million, were completed. Two other projects were launched during the reporting period, for a total cost of more than \$6.7 million. One focuses on strengthening the capacities of agropastoral communities in sustainable natural resource management, and the other supports community-based humanitarian and resilience interventions to address malnutrition. The implementation of 13 other projects with a total combined budget of over \$32 million, which were launched before the reporting period, was also being pursued. The areas covered by the projects included the fight against gender-based violence, the protection of refugees and income-generating activities for refugees and local communities. The projects also support community stabilization through the promotion of counter-seasonal agriculture and pastoralism, including through voucher schemes for animal fodder, the strengthening of national capacities for disaster preparedness and response, the protection of vulnerable children and women affected by malnutrition and food insecurity, and the strengthening of sustainable livelihoods.

49. In the Niger, the United Nations country team and local authorities signed an agreement on 15 action plans worth \$38 million to reduce vulnerability in

35 communes. The Niger also benefited from \$3 million in the Africa Adaptation Programme to mitigate the effects of climate change. In addition, \$62 million of the \$349 million required were mobilized for a project aimed at saving lives and protecting subsistence means for chronically vulnerable communities. The United Nations system in the Niger is also involved in the development of a disaster risk reduction plan covering the period 2015-2030. ILO is implementing phase II of its project to support the national commission on the fight against the persistence of forced labour and discrimination and capacity-building for local organizations, including the association of traditional leaders, to provide support to victims. The interventions enable the Niger to ratify the 2014 Protocol to the Convention on Forced Labour, 1930, and to adopt an amending law aimed at eradicating forced labour. In the new priority plan for peacebuilding, the Peacebuilding Fund has approved \$4.8 million to support youth empowerment in communities at risk in the Niger.

D. Strengthening the role of women in addressing challenges in the Sahel region

50. The integration of gender perspectives and the reinforcement of the participation of women in the implementation of the Integrated Strategy remains a priority for the United Nations system in the region. During the reporting period, in addition to the development of programmes aimed at reinforcing gender equality, the United Nations, under the leadership of the Office of the Special Envoy and with the technical support of UN-Women, reinforced the integration of gender perspectives into the strategies and programmes of the Sahel countries and regional organizations, as agreed in the road map on cooperation between the G-5 Sahel and the United Nations.

51. As part of United Nations efforts to strengthen the role of women in the Sahel region, the Office of the Special Envoy organized, together with UN-Women and the African Union and in partnership with the Government of Chad, a Sahel women's forum, held in N'Djamena on 22 and 23 July 2015. The purpose of the forum was to gain a better understanding of the situation of women in the region and to identify emerging priorities and concrete actions to enhance their role in the implementation of regional and international strategies and initiatives for the Sahel. The forum brought together ministers of gender affairs, members of parliament, women from rural areas and civil society representatives from Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger.

52. The Office of the Special Envoy, UN-Women and other United Nations entities are currently supporting the implementation of the declaration adopted by the forum, in particular the establishment of a Sahel women's regional platform. Once operational, the platform will contribute to the elaboration of regional analysis on the status of women, enhancing opportunities for the involvement of women in the maintenance of peace and security and promoting socioeconomic development in the Sahel region.

53. In the context of the project on border management and border communities in the Sahel, UNDP and UN-Women will conduct a study on women's informal cross-border trade in the Sahel region, undertake capacity development and training activities with the border agencies of the G-5 Sahel countries on gender issues

pertaining to border management, and establish a knowledge management platform as an advocacy and networking tool for practitioners and other stakeholders.

E. Resource mobilization efforts

54. As a key element of her mandate, my Special Envoy has been actively supporting the resource mobilization efforts by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes by engaging with potential donor countries and organizations to accelerate the implementation of selected regional projects. A key barrier to fundraising, however, is the lack of a mechanism for fund collection and governance, which is often a prerequisite for donors. The Office of the Special Envoy and its United Nations partners in the region are, therefore, in the process of establishing a United Nations multi-partner trust fund for the Sahel, with clear objectives and a clear governance structure. Such a funding mechanism will enable the United Nations to meet the expectations that the Integrated Strategy has raised among the Governments and people of the region through a coordinated, coherent and delivery-focused United Nations response. The trust fund will pool contributions from donor countries and the private sector and build on existing funding sources and United Nations agency-based funding mechanisms to support regional specialized interventions under the three pillars of the Integrated Strategy. The establishment of the trust fund was positively acknowledged by a number of donor countries, some of which have already expressed their willingness to contribute to it. In parallel, other donor countries and organizations have expressed an interest in increasing their partnership with the United Nations system and with the G-5 Sahel through the implementation of specific regional projects that are in line with their objectives in the region.

55. My Special Envoy has also sought support from the European Union aimed at enhancing its programmatic and strategic partnership with the United Nations within the framework of the regional action plan for the implementation of the European Union Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and the announced European emergency trust fund to enhance stability and address the root causes of illegal migration in Africa.

V. Coordination

56. The Office of the Special Envoy continued to support coordination initiatives in the Sahel, including regional mechanisms established by the countries of the region, such as the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel, the G-5 Sahel and the Nouakchott Process. The Office also supported efforts to ensure coherence in the approaches adopted by international partners towards the region through the establishment of an informal contact group of international partners for the Sahel.

A. Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel

57. A significant milestone was reached during the reporting period with the Ministerial Coordination Platform for the Sahel positioning itself as a key coordination mechanism for the effective implementation of Sahel initiatives and strategies. During their third meeting, held under Mali's presidency in Bamako on

18 November 2014, the members of the Platform adopted a number of resolutions, including the extension of membership to the G-5 Sahel, the creation of an office for the technical secretariat in Bamako and the establishment of four thematic groups, under the pillars of governance, security, resilience and development, under the leadership of Burkina Faso, Chad, the Niger and Mauritania, respectively. The objective of the thematic groups is to support, in their respective areas, the Ministerial Coordination Platform in the effective coordination of the implementation of Sahel strategies and initiatives. It was also agreed that the Coordination Platform will remain the main political framework for the coordination of the various Sahel strategies and initiatives, while the Group will focus on operational aspects in its five member States.

58. The technical secretariat of the Ministerial Coordination Platform, co-chaired by the African Union and the United Nations, subsequently organized a series of meetings to officially launch the work of the thematic working groups and adopt a plan of action, with a focus on the sectoral mapping of ongoing programmatic activities in the Sahel. The mapping exercise, which is being conducted with the support of a consortium of research centres, will allow all stakeholders to identify the gaps and possible synergies between the various regional and international actors in the areas of security, governance, resilience and development.

B. Group of Five for the Sahel

59. In my previous report ([S/2014/397](#)), I informed the Security Council of the establishment, by Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, of the G-5 Sahel to promote among its members a common vision of development and security. During the reporting period, the G-5 Sahel evolved into an institutional framework for the coordination and monitoring of regional cooperation, with the adoption of a convention among the five member countries during an extraordinary summit held in Nouakchott on 19 November 2014. Pursuant to the presidential statement issued by the Security Council on 27 August 2014 ([S/PRST/2014/17](#)) encouraging my Special Envoy to pursue cooperation with the G-5 Sahel and other regional organizations, the United Nations supported and undertook joint regional initiatives with the G-5 Sahel.

60. The G-5 Sahel undertook several initiatives to reinforce security cooperation among its member States, including through regular meetings of chiefs of defence and the creation of a security cooperation platform to enable the establishment of an integrated network for the exchange of operational information and serve as a framework for training in the areas of security and border management. UNODC, through its contribution to the implementation of the Integrated Strategy, is supporting the operationalization of the platform. The G-5 Sahel is also reinforcing its regional security cooperation capacity by carrying out joint cross-border military exercises with the support of partners, especially France, through Operation Barkhane.

C. Nouakchott Process

61. During the reporting period, the Nouakchott Process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security

Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region, launched by the African Union in March 2013, reinforced its status as the most inclusive security cooperation mechanism in the region. Within the framework of the Nouakchott Process, a summit of Heads of State, bimonthly meetings of heads of intelligence and security services and semi-annual meetings of ministers for foreign affairs, defence and security of participating countries were held. The meetings served as platforms to review the security situation in the region, reinforce security cooperation and review national and regional capacity-building activities. Steps were also taken towards establishing a secure communication system for the exchange of security information by participating countries, as well as several capacity-building activities.

D. Informal group of international partners for the Sahel

62. On 17 November 2014, one year after my visit to the Sahel region with the President of the African Union Commission, the President of the World Bank, the President of the African Development Bank and the European Union Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation and Development, the special envoys and representatives for the Sahel of the five institutions met in Bamako to take stock of our collective efforts and to discuss ways of enhancing coordination and ensuring common messaging to the region. The meeting resulted in the creation of an informal contact group of international partners for the Sahel, which serves as a forum for ensuring common messaging, enabling concerted diplomatic efforts and harmonizing advocacy on issues related to the Sahel among international partners. At a meeting held in The Hague on 22 April 2015, members of the informal contact group agreed to extend membership to the special envoys for the Sahel of Belgium, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

VI. Observations and conclusion

63. The Sahel region continues to face grave security, development and socioeconomic challenges. The proliferation of weapons, the free movement of armed groups across borders and the presence of terrorist groups continue to have an adverse effect on livelihoods, good governance and human development in the region. Against this backdrop, I welcome the establishment and operationalization of the Multinational Joint Task Force to combat Boko Haram. I call on Member States to support the Task Force and emphasize that its operations must be carried out in full compliance with their obligations under international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law. I also congratulate Mali and the mediation team led by Algeria on the signature of a peace agreement, which I hope will lead to sustainable peace and development for all Malians.

64. Drug trafficking remains a lucrative trade that benefits from the collusion and protection of armed groups and extremist movements across the Sahel. The effects of three armed conflicts — those in Mali and Libya and the conflict related to Boko Haram — are pushing Sahel States to prioritize the funding of the security sector over other critical socioeconomic needs on which the long-term development of the region depends. In order to reverse this trend, security interventions must be complemented by programmes aimed at boosting socioeconomic development.

65. I am indeed concerned about the dim prospects facing millions of young people in the Sahel as a result of socioeconomic marginalization, environmental degradation, lack of access to education and insufficient employment opportunities. This is occurring in the midst of a demographic boom in a region badly in need of investments in the education, health, employment and infrastructure sectors. With the support of the international community, the countries of the region must do more to promote good governance, including through effective decentralization schemes, to boost sustainable livelihoods, including by enhancing agriculture, small-scale businesses and entrepreneurship, and to protect the environment. Addressing these issues can create opportunities for youth in the region and reverse the tide of mass migration, radicalization and recruitment into extremist groups.

66. The existence of multiple Sahel strategies demonstrates the recognition by the international community and the countries of the region of the urgent need to address the situation in the Sahel in a sustainable manner. However, success can be achieved only through effective coordination and cooperation among international partners, regional organizations and countries of the region. To this end, I urge all Member States, donors and the international community to strengthen programmatic cooperation and coordination, including by making use of existing mechanisms, in order to address the pressing issues facing the Sahel. United Nations efforts in the region are being carried out in close cooperation with all relevant regional and subregional actors, including the African Union, ECOWAS and the G-5 Sahel. The United Nations will redouble its efforts to reinforce its partnerships with these actors on the basis of their respective strengths and comparative advantages.

67. The United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel has made important strides in mobilizing partnerships, facilitating national and regional ownership and promoting regional cooperation to address the structural causes of instability in the region. I commend the efforts of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in fostering integration in programming, in the true spirit of the One United Nations initiative. The Integrated Strategy will continue to guide the efforts of the United Nations to help Sahel countries address their challenges from a regional perspective while respecting and encouraging national ownership. To this end, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are intensifying their efforts to develop a truly regional approach to dealing with emerging threats to peace, security and development in the Sahel. As it implements the Integrated Strategy, the United Nations will continue to use its convening power to bring together relevant actors to help to tackle regional challenges and support resource mobilization and advocacy efforts.

68. The implementation of the Integrated Strategy provides a concrete example of the tailored approach to conflict prevention based on partnerships, regional engagement and strengthened preventive capacities outlined in my recent report entitled “The future of United Nations peace operations: implementation of the recommendations of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations” ([A/70/357-S/2015/682](#)). The Strategy must also remain a flexible instrument to be reviewed and refined on a continuous basis, through consultation and cooperation with the countries of the region and the international community. I commend the leadership of my Special Envoy for the Sahel and the staff of her Office in mobilizing support for the Strategy and promoting enhanced cooperation among United Nations entities, Member States, the countries of the region and donors to promote a holistic response to reversing some of the most worrisome trends visible in the Sahel region in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.