

Reducing violence in African borderlands: Policy perspectives

This chapter includes the views of experts and prominent figures involved at several levels in security and development issues within the region, on the transnational nature of violence in North and West Africa and its impact on policies. The deterioration in security is not limited solely to terrorist and jihadist phenomenon, but also reflects the emergence or re-emergence of community conflicts, insurgencies and the multiplication of militias with varying motives. This poses new challenges for states and partners. To cope with this worrying situation, the contributors to this chapter emphasise the need to reduce social and economic disparities between territories, helping to restore the legitimacy of the state and public authorities. Territorial continuity can be achieved through greater social cohesion between populations and states, by ensuring the informational continuity between border areas and the capitals, and through the continuity of socio-economic activity. Communities, local and national authorities, regional institutions, and development partners should redouble their co-ordination efforts to improve security notably in the Sahelian borderlands and to enable a sustainable pathway to transformative development in agriculture.

KEY MESSAGES

- » Growing insecurity in the Sahel over the past 15 years resulting from the actions of terrorist groups, further highlights the internal and social fragilities of states and societies.
- » The importance of a “civilian and political surge” that focuses on long-term sustainable social, environmental and economic development is indispensable.
- » It is crucial to protect the dignity of populations, rethink territorial and information continuity, and promote local regional integration.
- » The transformation capacity of agriculture in borderlands will not catalyse into wealth creation without adequate and contextualised strategies to counter political violence.

EMANUELA CLAUDIA DEL RE

European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the Sahel (EU), former Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy

As stated in the European Union’s (EU) Integrated Strategy in the Sahel, the nature and forms of violence present a border dimension. How do the recent European strategy and mechanisms integrate this border and or multiscalar (local, national, regional) dimension?

In the Sahel, the EU focuses its actions on the fight against terrorism and armed groups,

cross-border trafficking and organised crime. All this is in accordance with the 2020 Council conclusions on EU external action on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism. One important element that the EU enhances strongly is the commitment shown by several Member States in supporting EU successful missions devoted to training the military (European Union Training Mission, EUTM) and to capacity-building for police forces (European Union Capacity Building, EUCAP). Also very important is the adherence by several EU Member States to the Takuba Task Force aimed at supporting the Malian armed forces in combat.

The scope of the EU's efforts in the region is to promote good governance, which is a key aspect of the new EU Integrated Strategy in the Sahel (April 2021) that is based on the strong awareness that lack of access to quality basic services — amongst other causes — is at the heart of a failing social contract, which favours terrorism and violence. Strengthening the resilience of local populations, with an emphasis on the mitigation of vulnerabilities through the reduction of social imbalances, particularly in favour of young people and women, encourages greater social cohesion which is a powerful tool to counter violence. It is important to reduce disparities between territories in terms of social and economic development, helping to restore the legitimacy of states and public authorities.

The EU stresses the importance of a “civilian and political surge” and proposes a new political and governance pact with a focus on short-term stabilisation and long-term sustainable social, environmental and economic development perspectives that go beyond military efforts. What is the aim and functioning of this new pact?

The new pact that the EU has proposed aims at accompanying the stabilisation of the region by working in close co-operation with its Sahelian partners. The EU Integrated Strategy crystallises the new European long-term vision through a stronger focus on governance. In this vision, the EU highly values the fundamental contribution of civil society: the Integrated Strategy mentions the need to be attentive to inputs from civil society and local authorities. The Strategy also emphasises the importance of consolidating credible judicial systems and fighting against impunity within armed forces to build greater trust between armed forces and populations. Trust building and a healthy relationship between civil and military constituencies is indeed paramount to achieving greater stability.

The EU is fully committed to work with its partners in the Sahel for sustainable political solutions because these are necessary to address the political and security crises in the region.

The EU Strategy mentions clearly that mutual accountability based on close and continuous political dialogue within a climate of trust, is crucial for reaching progress in jointly-agreed priority areas. An important element taken into account is that Sahelian states hold the brunt of the responsibility for stabilising their territories. This concept of responsibility should be understood, in my view, as the recognition of the guarantee of African ownership: that is African solutions to African problems. We, the EU, will accompany our partners in finding the best solutions to their pressing challenges.

In your view, what are the more pressing challenges in the short and medium term for the region and its partners?

The challenges in the Sahel are complex and multi-faceted. Colonial legacy, poor governance, persistent economic instability, extreme poverty, climate change, drought and desertification; population growth without education, youth unemployment, political and social fragility, mounting terrorist threats, armed groups, a growing number of refugees and IDPs, and recently a global pandemic that is causing and exacerbating ongoing issues such as food security, constitute what might sadly be described as a perfect storm in which insecurity and poverty create a vicious circle of instability.

Education is one of the most alarming challenges. According to studies, only one young person in two is literate in the region (compared to an average of over three in four across Africa) and only one student in three completes secondary school. Access to education — and more broadly to basic services — is of paramount importance in the region, especially in the context of strong demographic growth (+3% per year), aggravated by the fact that the increase in school enrolment rates has been accompanied by a decline in the quality of education. Considering that the Sahel's youth constitutes a formidable human capital that deserves to be able to realise its dreams, contributing to the development and stabilisation of its communities, I think that beside the need to invest in security measures we must in parallel invest largely in education. Although

the conditions in the region are extremely challenging, there is much potential for growth. The Sahel is one of the most dynamic regions in Africa, but the structural transformation of its economies is slow.

Greater co-ordination between all partners and stakeholders is needed to place the Sahel at the core of our policies. The realisation of the nexus between security and development is the key to building the future for and with Sahelians.

AMBASSADOR MAMAN SAMBO SIDIKOU

High Representative of the African Union Mission for Mali and the Sahel (MISAHHEL)

Operating “citizen protection” in the Sahel

What do you consider to be the priorities for the future of the people of the Sahel?

Since the 1960s, we have been casting a concerned eye over the Sahel, with questions that elicit certain — almost “automatic” — responses. By “we” I mean a broad community of thinkers, doers and “enthusiasts”, who often like to connect ideas to actions and who care about the impact (regardless of the methods devised to (try to) identify and determine said impact...).

Over the past fifty years, at different levels and on several continents, I have been involved in several institutional schemes with objectives that combined security and prosperity. In my opinion, the development of the Sahel-Saharan strip should be looked at against an international backdrop — that of the majority of the analytical tools and operational references to which we are exposed. There are, for me, three particularly salient priorities: protecting dignity, rethinking territorial and information continuity, and promoting local regional integration.

What do you mean by “protecting dignity”?

A crisis is a test from which we must emerge stronger. At the end of the Second World War, the socio-economic slump was accompanied by an unprecedented humanitarian initiative. The NGO CARE or “Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe” distributed several million food rations. In Germany, which received these donations until 1960, people of my generation

associate the name of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) with an initiative in which the victor helped the vanquished without depriving them of their dignity. It is true that some of the donations came from Americans wishing to help their families living on the “Old Continent”.

This is, to my knowledge, an unprecedented moment of mass philanthropy combining government action, diaspora contributions and active solidarity from the general public. It is perhaps an example to ponder, for those of us who “produce” or “welcome” migrants in a world where borders are both more subtle and less penetrable...

This aside gives me the opportunity to underline a central fact, at a time when some actors in the humanitarian world are concerned about access to certain conflict zones while respecting the principles of independence and impartiality. Without commenting on the merits of using military escorts to accompany certain “humanitarian” convoys, I wonder about the importance of using “local content” in the Sahel.

I think that the best way to preserve each other’s dignity, while initiating a virtuous circle, is to create a movement based on an exchange of (good) services. This includes the social engineering of our interventions (as recommended by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan (2021^[1]), the logistics chain, and the “goods” distributed (ideally, cereals produced in the region rather than imported from distant continents with the associated carbon footprint).

For too long, sometimes with the best of intentions, we have been designing schemes where most of the added value is only of marginal benefit to the areas we define as being “priority”. Underemployment, unemployment ... or sometimes ad hoc contracts with menial tasks entrusted to graduates — this is sometimes the effect of “project approaches” and of policies

drafted in ignorance of the context of our “activities”.

In the Sahel, we need to support the upscaling of a private sector that meets the objectives of what successful societies call the “social economy”. Creating jobs and producing “social public goods” while making the most of the expectations and tools of a society.

The challenges are operational and “trans-actional”. Proceeding in this manner is often more efficient and discreet. It allows certain local values to be respected, values that safeguard the discretion of the donation.

Most importantly, working in this way makes it possible to identify the real issues at stake and consolidate the links in a chain of value creation starting, in particular, with trust between stakeholders whose destinies are inseparable, thus strengthening each other’s dignity.

How do you go about rethinking territorial and information continuity?

The economy of the Sahel-Saharan zone cannot be properly understood unless it is placed in the context of international flows, notably via the Maghreb, the Mashriq, the Horn of Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, etc. The activity of rearing livestock highlights the importance of creating shared value(s) not only in the immediate area but also thousands of kilometres further afield.

I was involved in the production of “HOTTUNGO: when pastoralists meet farmers in the Sahel”, a documentary recently nominated at an international film festival in Australia. The filmmakers’ objective was to highlight a Nigerien civil society initiative (by the NGO Kawtal Waafaakey) and the quality of the co-operation between producers (breeders’ and farmers’ associations) and administrations.

It was also about promoting diplomacy between the Sahel-Saharan strip and the more southerly regions so that a mutually beneficial management of transhumance could benefit the greatest number of economic actors - in accordance with certain objectives of organisations of which our States are members (ECOWAS, AU, etc.). This project was also motivated by a desire to innovate “Sahelian-style” in terms of both achievements and communication.

The West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) has taken the bold step of investing in a pilot cross-border co-operation initiative between municipalities in the Sahel (Burkina Faso), Timbuktu (Mali) and Tillabéri (Niger) regions, which are home to 5.5 million inhabitants and 30% of all the livestock in the three countries. The operational challenge is clear, as strengthening the value chain of the pastoral economy requires the creation of infrastructures that benefit the actors in the sectors concerned (pastoral facilities, water points, passageways, cattle trails and sheds, slaughterhouses).

I believe it is essential that we do more to support a sector with great potential for regional integration in that it “links” producers in the Sahel and consumers in the major cities of the Gulf of Guinea. It is therefore a question of responding to the urgent needs of our fellow citizens without losing sight of the fact that “free trade” is a priority for established economic (UEMOA) and political (ECOWAS, AU) institutions.

Continuity is therefore the continuity of a socio-economic activity within — a given territorial area. What can be done to allow some breeders to maintain their know-how and “vocations” while adapting to the needs of the contemporary market? Continuity is also the continuity of flows on communication routes that have become the targets of insurgents, when mines are laid that maim civilians and soldiers. How can air bridges be developed? How can we make better use of inland navigation? Lastly, continuity is also the continuity of local social cohesion between citizens and their elected officials. How can a vote be organised when the inhabitants of a community have almost all become denizens elsewhere, scattered across several areas because of growing insecurity?

What assistance can social media and radio offer us in helping to organise remote municipal council meetings and prepare the way out of the crisis by making the most of communication tools that have become indispensable? These are some of the questions that come to mind when I meet the main social and economic players of the Sahel countries where my mission takes me.

How to leverage local regional integration and support the region's transformations?

In September 2018, Yacouba Sawadogo, a tenacious and resourceful farmer from Burkina Faso, was awarded the so-called “Alternative Nobel Prize”. He had been working for four decades to change the course of history in his region. In the Sahel, we have to take into consideration extraordinary climatic events that can disrupt fauna, flora and human communities in a matter of months. A large part of our economy relies on rain, and Mr Sawadogo’s leadership has consisted of introducing (in Burkina Faso and Niger) *zai*, small artificial basins that are part of ancestral practices. Much remains to be done, and we need to bolster the empiricism of our producers by giving them the attention and resources (human, financial and political) they deserve.

We tried centralisation after independence, and then opted for decentralisation, which too often lacked financial funds and a vision of how to make prosperity accessible to the masses. Our societies are now mature enough to know that our way ahead must combine private sector momentum with good government. Using *zai* does not mean that all the solutions to our challenges lie in our past. Significant efforts must be made to promote research. The key must be to strengthen our capacity to transform the results of our investigations into interventions that have a rapid, tangible impact and that foster a “virtuous circle”.

In many countries in the Sahel-Saharan strip, the uneven and unco-ordinated management of natural resources (water, land and forests) is weakening the social fabric, undermining local governance and eroding the creation of shared value. It is, above all, a social and economic challenge.

The current challenge is to identify better “social engineering” to match our values (mutual respect, sharing) with our tools, through an appeal to the civic-mindedness of our citizens and simple, efficient and predictable administrative management. What is at stake is the (quality of) life of our “fellow citizens” and our collective capacity to create stability and prosperity

through “local regional integration” based on the production and first-stage processing of our agricultural resources (including cotton, for example).

I know that the African Union “is calling on the governments of the region to make a concerted effort to improve the governance of natural resources” and I am convinced that any sustainable outcome will require working with our private sector. For a tangible improvement in the (quality of) life of Sahelians to occur, we must enable as many people as possible to contribute to a circular economy that guarantees sustainable and shared prosperity.

In conclusion, we need to combine the protection of citizens and the creation of shared value.

The gold rush trends we are seeing in several Sahelian countries are partly the result of under-employment and the size of the economy that continues to be referred to as “informal” even when it turns out to be larger than the “formal” economy... Thousands of young women and men are setting off along our roads and through the bush. Driven by dreams of quick success and ready to make remarkable efforts, they are demonstrating courage in their efforts to triumph over adversity.

Above and beyond the anathemas surrounding artisanal gold mining, and conscious of how important the hard currency offered by some multinationals is in balancing the budgets of some of our states, I am hearing more and more voices calling for a more balanced approach.

Mining deposits pay no attention to borders, nor do some players in the mining industry. The strong socio-economic demand of the citizens of the Sahel is an unavoidable factor. The time seems to have come to combine sound management of natural resources with a better distribution of the profits created by rising gold prices. The challenge is immediate: to give more Sahelians the opportunity to live with dignity from the fruits of their labour in their region. This way of combining “the protection of citizens” and “the creation of shared value” seems to me to be worthy of reflection — and action...!

DR ALAIN ANTIL

Researcher, Director of the Sub-Saharan Africa Center, French Institute of International Relations (Ifri)

Barkhane and security in the Sahel

The breakdown of security in the Sahel over the past 15 years has highlighted some of the vulnerabilities of Sahelian states and societies. This situation is not just the consequence of jihadist attacks on fragile states, but is also due to the emergence of other problems such as community conflicts, insurgencies, and the proliferation of militias. The trends are very negative, particularly in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. These local conflict dynamics are compounded by the absence or “downgraded presence” of the state in some areas, and limited capacities in terms of controlling borders and border areas. Sahelian countries and their main partners are trying to address these weaknesses and the flow of arms, fighters, drugs and migrants across their borders. The Sahelians have realised that a patchwork of national policies is not enough to address and solve these issues. Moreover, co-operation between states on these transnational issues was initially not easy, set as it was against a backdrop of mistrust and hostility between the two sides of the Sahara.

Multiple security initiatives with a specific border focus

Over the past few decades, security initiatives with varying degrees of effectiveness have gradually been put in place in the Sahara-Sahel region. This region straddles three regional economic communities: the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Initially driven by Libya, the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD), which unites 29 countries bordering the Sahara around economic co-operation and development objectives, has also developed security initiatives, initially to deal with Sudan-Chad issues and then

through its Security and Development Strategy for the Sahel-Saharan Zone.

In 2010, on Algeria’s initiative, the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC - *Comité d’État-Major Opérationnel Conjoint*) proposed the co-ordinated management of Algerian border areas in collaboration with its southern neighbours. A joint headquarters was set up in Tamanrasset and a right of pursuit across national borders was put in place. The creation of CEMOC was combined with a parallel intelligence exchange initiative called the Fusion and Liaison Unit (UFL), albeit without much success. Algeria wanted to politically assert its central position in the fight against terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel in relation to other players (Morocco, Libya and France). The CEMOC provided for a right of pursuit across borders, although the Algerian constitution (Article 26) banned the People’s National Army from intervening outside its borders (Porter, 2015_[2]).¹ This contradiction left CEMOC paralysed and led the Sahelians to look for other solutions:

- In January 2010, Chad and Sudan, which had been in conflict with each other through proxy wars for a decade, signed a border security protocol and decided to create the Chad-Sudan Joint Force (CSJF), consisting of 3 000 soldiers, dedicated to securing their shared border. The 1 500 soldiers from each country had a right of pursuit of up to 100 kilometres into the neighbouring country, and command of the force alternated between senior officers from the two countries.
- Further west, the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was founded on 21 March 1994 by the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) to fight crime in the area. It remained relatively quiet for almost two decades, but faced with the problem of terrorism in the area (Boko Haram), the LCBC countries decided to mobilise the MNJTF as a counter-terrorism apparatus.
- Announced in 2014 by Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad, the G5 Sahel (G5S) was created for the same purpose of sharing border control. The G5 Sahel is

a development and security organisation focussing on border areas (Antil, 2018^[3]) that aims to establish a portfolio of development actions through its management scheme, the Priority Investment Programme (PIP) (Desgrais, 2019^[4]). It is also behind security initiatives such as the G5S Defence College, based in Nouakchott, and the secure exchange platform.

Operation Barkhane

Operation Barkhane was created against a backdrop of growing co-operation. The operation was rolled out across the same geographical area as the G5 Sahel and followed on from two previous French operations. The first, Epervier, was set up in February 1986 to help Chad repel attempts by the Libyan army to seize control of the Aouzou Strip, before serving as a back-up for the Chadian army and part of the defence force protecting the Chadian capital. This explains why Barkhane's HQ was located in N'Djamena, while the bulk of the effort and military presence was in northern Mali and Liptako-Gourma. The second operation was Serval, launched in January 2013 at the request of the Malian transitional authorities and interim president Dioncounda Traoré. Serval perfectly fulfilled its three assigned objectives, namely stop the advance of Al Qaida-affiliated jihadist groups in central Mali, liberate the main settlements in the North, and annihilate the logistical capacities of the armed groups as much as possible.

Operation Barkhane was launched on 1 August 2014, a few months after the announcement of the creation of G5 Sahel, over a larger area than that covered by the operations it succeeded. It was assigned counter-terrorism objectives, without any clearly defined criteria for what constituted mission success. Its main assigned objective was to put in place a "glass ceiling"² to ensure that jihadist groups were no longer able, as was the case in 2012, to conquer vast areas of territory and control towns and transport routes. Barkhane's missions were subsequently based on accomplishing this central objective and involved providing combat support for local armies (on the ground and in the air), neutralising jihadists

by bombing columns of vehicles, and eliminating 'high value targets' so as to disorganise the groups. These missions were shared with another French force, Task Force Sabre, on the ground since 2009 and based in Ouagadougou, which reported to Special Operations Command (COS).

Barkhane's other essential objective was to support the armed forces of the G5S countries in terms of training, planning joint operations, and helping them coordinate with each other during joint border operations, particularly within the framework of the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S). Indeed, the creation of the FC-G5S in 2017, recognition of which in UN Security Council Resolution 2359 (2017) received diplomatic support from the French government, gave the G5 an armed wing. However, the Security Council refused to grant this force status, which would have given access to UN funding. FC-G5S's approach was directly inspired by the experience of the CSJF. It was not a question of creating a G5 army but of designating units within the five armies that would be dedicated to jointly securing three sectors. The Eastern sector covering the Chad-Niger border area, the Western sector covering part of the Mali-Mauritania border area, and the Central sector in the tri-border area between Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. The force's HQ, initially in Sévaré, pulled back to Bamako after an attack by a jihadist group in June 2018.

The Barkhane force initially comprised 3 000 men, before quickly increasing to 4 500 and then to 5 100 after the Pau Summit in January 2020. The bulk of the operation's activity took place in the north of Mali and then gradually shifted to the Hombori region and the tri-border area. The French authorities repeatedly referred to FC-G5S as the entity that would eventually replace Barkhane. If the Eastern and Western sectors were ultimately relatively well secured by the Sahelian armies, the problems in the Central sector worsened. The Malian army's failure to rebuild itself, the Burkinabe army's lack of combat experience, and the Nigerien army's setbacks in the west of its territory all contributed to security deteriorating. Despite the efforts of Barkhane and the Joint Force, the areas affected

by insecurity gradually expanded (OECD/SWAC, 2020^[5]). Doubts, along with forms of anti-French conspiracy theories, gained traction in Sahelian public opinion, including among the ruling classes, notably through social networks via which particularly aggressive messages were circulated.

Having acknowledged France's declining image in the region, at the end of 2019 French President Emmanuel Macron decided to invite his opposite numbers in the region to Pau to ask them if they still wanted France as a security partner. Although this initiative was in substance necessary, it was diplomatically tactless as it looked like the Sahelian heads of state were being summoned to a French town that also happened to be the military base for a unit that had just suffered heavy losses in northern Mali. These image problems started to influence French public opinion and voices could be heard, both in the opposition and in the parliamentary majority, calling into question the fairly broad consensus around Barkhane since 2014. There were several recurrent criticisms, including the inability to translate tactical successes into political successes, France's excessive political exposure in the Sahel, and the unresolved governance problems of the Sahelian countries. These issues restricted France and other partners to intervening solely on the symptoms of conflicts without ever being able to act on the causes, i.e. the operations served to reassure regimes that were in fact at the heart of the issues being addressed.

Task Force Takuba

Barkhane achieved many successes on the ground, such as the neutralisation or arrest in 2021 of the main leaders of the Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS). These achievements nevertheless concealed the fact that the overall situation was deteriorating. In Mali, the implementation of the measures provided for by the Algiers Agreements (2015) were delayed to the point that some of them became hypothetical. In January 2020, President Macron stated that it was unrealistic to want to improve the situation if the territories liberated from the jihadist

presence were not then reintegrated by the states. France and the international community called for a "civil surge" in areas abandoned or disinvested by states.

A few weeks after the Pau meeting, in March 2020, Task Force Takuba was created within Barkhane, comprising members of the special forces. The force had a European dimension since 10 countries joined France in this initiative to support, advise and accompany the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) in combat, mainly in the Gao and Ménaka area. Three phases were announced, with deployment to the area from July 2020 to the beginning of 2021, combat support for Malian units during 2021, and in 2022, support for highly autonomous Malian units from Takuba, the newly formed light reconnaissance and intervention units (ULRI). This third phase may be renewed going forward.

In November 2021, France, Sweden, Estonia, the Czech Republic, Italy and Romania had already sent soldiers, while Hungary and Denmark are preparing to do so in early 2022. A Swedish colonel has taken command of the Task Force, which consists of a command post in Niamey, two sub-units located in Gao (Franco-Estonian) and Ménaka (Franco-Czech), and a Swedish rapid reaction force based in Malian Liptako. There are currently 700 soldiers in the force, which will reach 2 000 at full strength (France Info, 2021^[6]; French government, 2021^[7]).

Through its presence, Takuba aims to help Mali better secure its borders, especially in the Gao-Ménaka area where the Malian army has been absent for several years, by trying to concentrate the military efforts of allies against the IS-GS, without overlooking the fight against the Group for Supporting Islam and Muslims (JNIM). At the same time, Barkhane is beginning to withdraw from its bases in northern Mali (Tessalit, Kidal and Timbuktu), which have been re-occupied by the FAMa and MINUSMA. Eventually, an international anti-terrorist coalition will gradually take over in the Sahel. FC-G5S, Takuba and Sabre will certainly be a part of it, and in this manner France expects to be present in the Sahel in a "different manner" and to be less politically exposed.

DR KEHINDE A. BOLAJI

Knowledge & Innovation Advisor/Programme Manager, Africa Borderlands Centre, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resilience Hub, Nairobi, Kenya

Farmers' vulnerabilities and challenges in the context of insecurity in the Sahelian borderlands

Agriculture remains the mainstay of Africa's economy, with enormous opportunities for job creation, food security, poverty alleviation and inclusive economic growth. Most inhabitants of Africa's borderlands are engaged in farming activities, either as their primary source of livelihoods or at subsistence level. Through this, they can earn a living, feed their families and take care of migrants and refugees who have been displaced by the impacts of climate change, conflict and war. However, the transformation capacity of agriculture in borderlands will not catalyse into wealth creation without adequate security.

Prolonged insurgencies by non-state armed groups shape the context of insecurity in borderlands. Terrorist groups duel with states over control of national territories whilst taking advantage of the large expanse of borderlands to engage in transnational organised criminal activities, mobilisation of combatants, and looting and destruction of state infrastructure. Incidents of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), open combat between security forces and insurgents, social unrest, rural banditry and imposition of unofficial taxes and levies have undermined farming activities. Perceptions in some quarters that borderland stakeholders aid and abet smugglers and terrorists add to the tension between security forces and stakeholders in these communities. In addition, perception that their communities receive less security cover compared with official border crossing towns also complicates relationships between security forces and local communities. Farming in the marginal spaces of the Sahel is therefore further complicated, making it an increasingly endangered vocation.

Insecurity prevents borderland farmers from accessing arable land. Land that should be a profitable asset can no longer support economically viable production. Incidents of forced displacement of farmers from their land due to armed conflict and the presence of IEDs is commonplace, so are cases of killings, abductions, and physical attacks. Farmers cultivating arable lands are mainly targeted by insurgents who seek new frontiers to collect levies to fund their activities, mainly in the Lake Chad Basin. It is often impractical for security forces to secure most of these areas. Conflict over land exacerbates existing tensions and often results in violence and criminal activities. Whilst the conflicts persist, the land remains a nominal asset. Due to communal conflict over land, there are cases of farmers being forced to sell off their produce cheaply or abandon their farms, in the latter cases, leaving behind their products to waste off. In other situations, farmers become victims of robbery when their crops are close to harvesting.

Borderland farmers often find it challenging to mobilise adequate capital to grow their crops and improve their vocation to a business model because of the high-security risks involved in investing in such areas. The growing crowd-funding trend seen in the agro-allied sector, which has unlocked latent capital from the middle class, may not benefit border farmers due to the absence of insurance cover for investors and farmers from armed conflict. Thus, it becomes difficult to attract the much-needed capital. Even alternative credit scoring systems may not be enough to convince private sector investors to put their money in border communities that encounter insecurity because of the high risk of failure. In the absence of public and private sector funding, the growth potentials of most farming activities at these marginal spaces remain stunted.

Insecurity presents an inter-generational threat to food security ([Maps 6.1-6.3](#)), as it serves as a disincentive for young persons to engage in farming. With the risks and low yields associated with subsistence farming, young persons are often tempted to migrate from the periphery

to the centre of a country to seek other livelihood opportunities. Many are unsuccessful due to the limited opportunities made available to young people by formal institutions. Some engage in illicit activities such as irregular migration outside their native countries without any skills to sell, engaging in violent extremism, drugs, human trafficking, and banditry. Young people engaged in such activities contribute to the worsening security situation in border regions and it is difficult to reform and re-engage them in productive agriculture activities because of the limited wealth generation of subsistence farming. The cyclical impact of violence, therefore, can create generational food scarcity with dire consequences for resilience building. A significant concern is what happens to food production in borderlands when the current farmers pass on.

In the absence of security, there is a lack of an environment conducive to creating value from agriculture and developing a chain of products that can create jobs, improve infrastructure, serve industry clients, and expand market opportunities. Private sector investors, who can provide infrastructure such as solar powered machines, internet access, and telecommunications, may hesitate to invest due to the high cost of security and risks of destruction of their facilities. In this situation, where enabling infrastructure is missing, perishable goods can spoil quickly, affecting profitability as farmers are forced to sell their products as commodities and not as refined or processed products. Facilitating institutions such as chambers of commerce and industry and the organised private sector often do not link up with borderland farmers to promote advocacy and visibility, partly due to the difficulties of organising such outreach in highly volatile security contexts. The opportunity to bring more players, knowledge and capital into the equation is therefore lost. In addition, enabling capacities such as logistics and marketing become impossible to deploy due to perceived and actual threats to the providers of these services. This hinders the opportunity to build critical infrastructure, such as roads and silos and freezing facilities, to preserve goods, which are critical to connecting the farmers

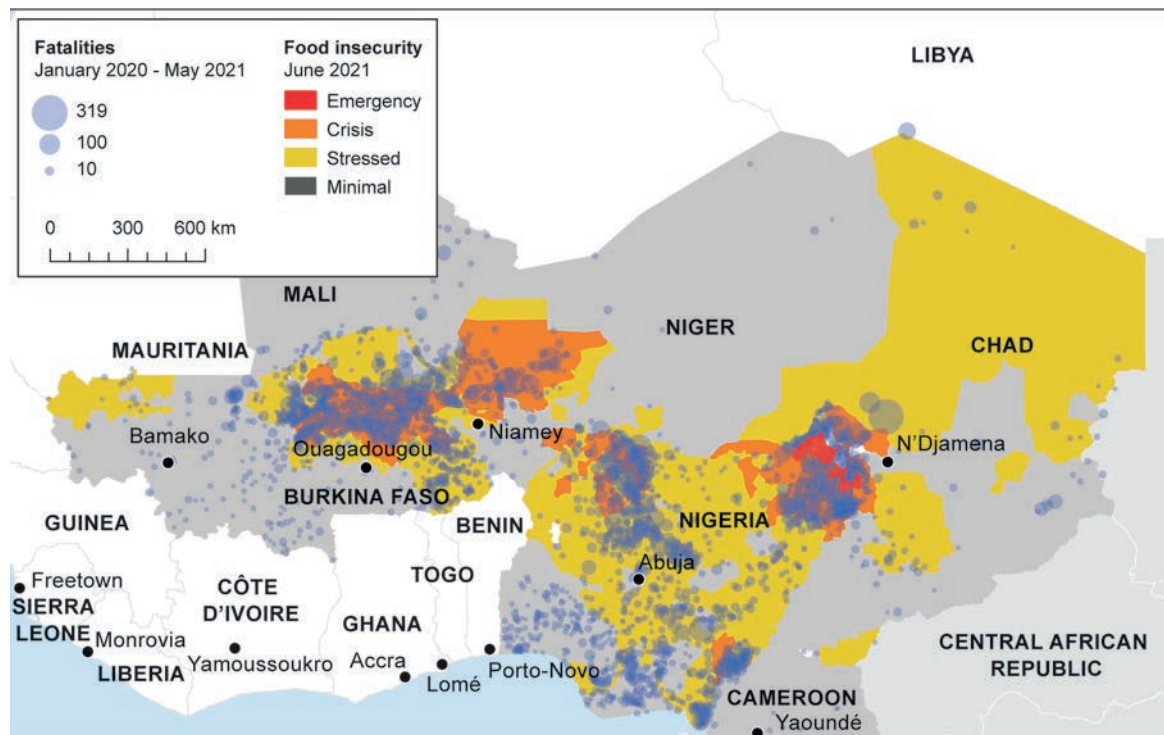
to off-taker markets. In an overtly securitised environment, it also becomes impracticable to fully leverage the opportunities provided by business innovation.

Insecurity has an even more disproportionate impact on women farmers, who are often unacknowledged for their agility and resilience, despite institutional, cultural, social and economic disadvantages. For instance, cultural practices make it difficult for women to own, keep and maximise the use of land. Even so, land-owning women farmers may attract criminal groups who would likely prey on their produce. Many women farmers have been forced to become the sole providers for their households due to the death of their spouses as a result of insecurity. Yet, they struggle with basic security to earn a livelihood. Armed attacks also expose them to additional risks, thus making it difficult to engage in farming safely. They are often subjected to assault and rape in their farmlands, and cultural stereotypes make it difficult for the victims to acknowledge such atrocious crimes openly. Though perceived to be more entrepreneurial than men, security risks make it difficult for borderland women to maximise their capacity to create value from farm products.

Security challenges deprive borderland communities from building relationships with providers of technical advice and tools for high-yielding crops and technology. The presence of development partners is often tenuous, and most activities are implemented through third parties due to insecurity. This situation affects the quality of monitoring and evaluation and the sustainability of implemented interventions. The capacity of agricultural extension services is also limited. Agriculture extension can no longer establish direct contact with farmers, hampering work to improve crop productivity and efficiency. With all its difficulties and disadvantages, remote support does not usually have the expected transformative effect. Development partners may hesitate to commit significant funds and human resources if they are unsure of the security of the facilities being provided. Over the past decade, this situation has eroded trust between these marginal communities and aid agencies who promised much but could not fully deliver on the ground.

Map 6.1

Fatalities and food insecurity in West Africa, 2020-21

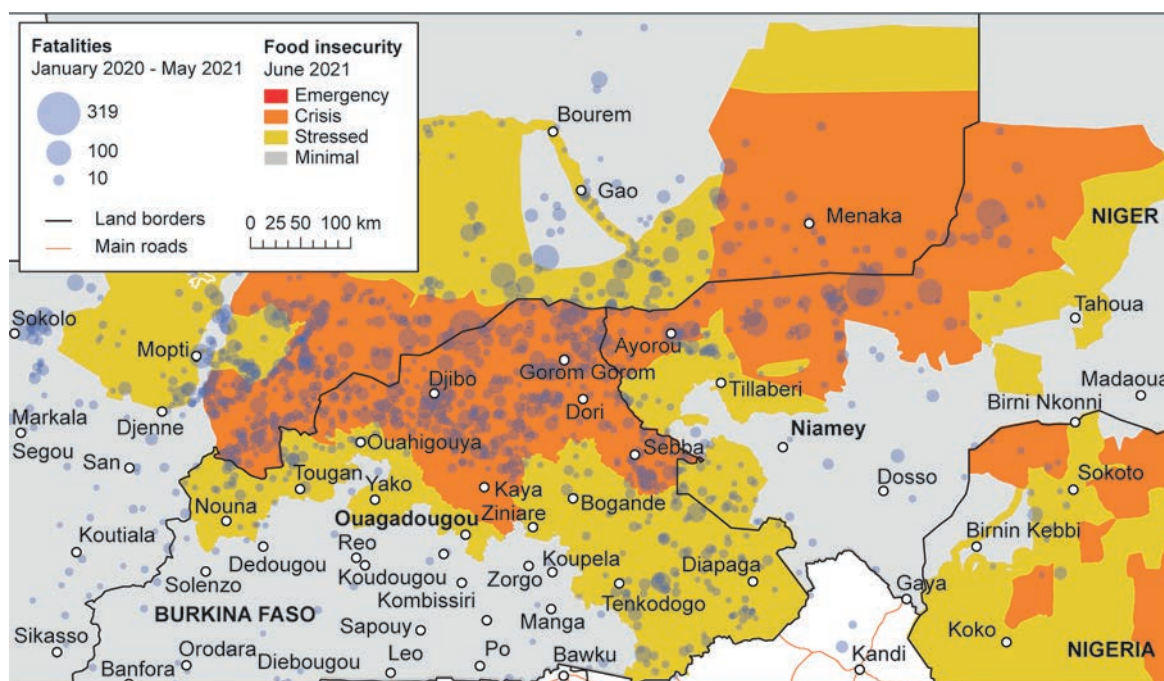


Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

Source: ACLED (2021^[9]) and FEWS NET (2021^[10]). ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 6.2

Fatalities and food insecurity in the Liptako-Gourma, 2020-21

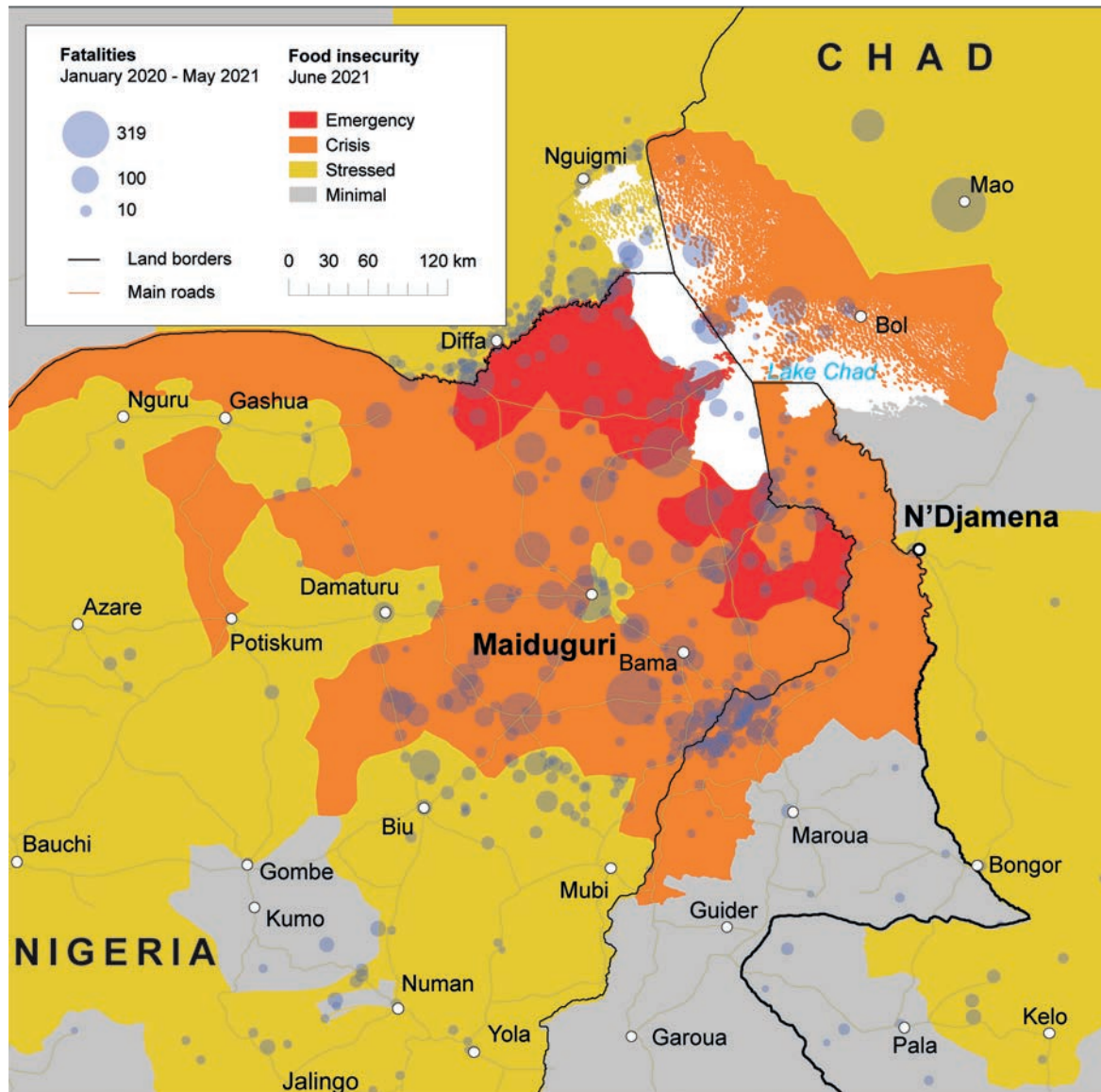


Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

Source: ACLED (2021^[9]) and FEWS NET (2021^[10]). ACLED data is publicly available.

Map 6.3

Fatalities and food insecurity in the Lake Chad region, 2020-21



Cartography: José Luengo-Cabrera and Olivier Walther.

 Source: ACLED (2021^[9]) and FEWS NET (2021^[10]). ACLED data is publicly available.

In conclusion, insecurity represents a real threat to realising Goal 1 of the 2030 Agenda for Development and ending poverty for subsistence farmers in Africa’s Sahel borderlands. Insecurity heightens risks, increases transaction costs, decreases the quantum of capital available for farming, stunts value chain development, undermines trust and social capital, and puts at risk the prospects of agriculture as a catalyst for sustainable development. It puts the farmer in a difficult situation and increases their dependency on development aid.

Modest progress has been recorded by security forces in reclaiming land from insurgents across the region in recent years. However, this is not enough. As UNDP has done in the last few years, liberated areas in borderland regions must be supported by robust stabilisation programmes. Rebuilding damaged infrastructure, local governance, social cohesion, community security, access to justice, and the rule of law remains critical. Interventions need to refocus and strengthen their borderlands efforts. Stabilisation must have a clear pathway from

aid dependency to sustainable development. For this to happen, safe and secure conditions must be implemented for borderland farmers to return to their lands and turn this latent resource into a driver of prosperity. Specific actions are therefore required to secure borderland spaces, de-risk farmers, improve shared infrastructure, incentivise young farmers to use their natural

resources, and improve protection for women engaged in farming. In the light of the foregoing, communities, local authorities, national governments, regional institutions, and development partners should redouble their co-ordination to improve security in the Sahelian borderlands and to enable a sustainable pathway to development through farming.

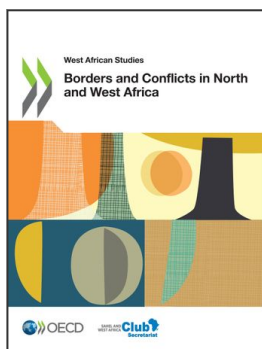
Notes

1 This has now been made possible by recent amendments to the constitution (Article 91) in December 2020.

2 Not the official term.

References

- ACLED (2021), *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project*, <https://acleddata.com>. [8]
- Antil, A. (2018), "Le G5 Sahel : combien de divisions ?", in *Ramses 2019, Les chocs du futur*, Dunod. [3]
- Desgrais, N. (2019), "Cinq ans après, une radioscopie du G5 Sahel", *Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, Observatoire du monde arabo-musulman et du Sahel*. [4]
- FEWS NET (2021), *Famine Early Warning Systems Network*, FEWS NET, <https://fewsn.net/>. [9]
- France Info (2021), "Mali : au cœur de la force Takuba, déployée pour pallier le retrait de l'opération Barkhane", October. [6]
- French government (2021), *Barkhane - Task Force Takuba : la France passe le commandement à la Suède*, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/actualites2/barkhane-task-force-takuba-la-france-passe-le-commandement-a-la-suede>. [7]
- OECD/SWAC (2020), *The Geography of Conflict in North and West Africa*, West African Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1787/02181039-en>. [5]
- Olivier de Sardan, J. (2021), *La revanche des contextes. Des mésaventures en l'ingénierie sociale*, Karthala, Paris. [1]
- Porter, D. (2015), "Le non-interventionnisme de l'Algérie en question", *Politique étrangère*, pp. 43-55. [2]



From:
Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa

Access the complete publication at:

<https://doi.org/10.1787/6da6d21e-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/Sahel and West Africa Club (2022), “Reducing violence in African borderlands: Policy perspectives”, in *Borders and Conflicts in North and West Africa*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/76e4630e-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document, as well as any data and map included herein, are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area. Extracts from publications may be subject to additional disclaimers, which are set out in the complete version of the publication, available at the link provided.

The use of this work, whether digital or print, is governed by the Terms and Conditions to be found at <http://www.oecd.org/termsandconditions>.