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SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA IN THE AFRICAN SAHEL REGION

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Abstract. This study examines the intersection of security and development in the Sahel region of Africa and their impact on human security. Through critical analysis, the study concludes that despite the Sahel's uniqueness as one of the richest regions in natural resources and human potential, it remains one of the most violent and conflict-prone areas. This can largely be attributed to political instability, security vulnerabilities, and the widespread occurrence of security threats. These factors have significantly hindered development in the region, which is considered highly fragile. The study emphasizes that human security goes beyond military protection to include food, water, and social security, making development a crucial element in promoting stability. It also highlights that the lack of sustainable development exacerbates security threats, while developmental gaps contribute to conflicts and worsening humanitarian conditions. The study further concludes that achieving human security in the Sahel requires a comprehensive strategies focused implementing effective policies; strengthening national states; engaging all stakeholders in the development process; enhancing regional and international cooperation.

Keywords: Security; Threats; Development; Human security; Africa; African Sahel

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ДИЛЕММА БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ И РАЗВИТИЯ В АФРИКАНСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ САХЕЛЬ

Амель Тергини*

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Абстракт. В данном исследовании рассматривается взаимосвязь между безопасностью и развитием в регионе Сахель Африки, а также их влияние на человеческую безопасность. В результате критического анализа делается вывод о том, что, несмотря на уникальность Сахеля как одного из богатейших регионов по природным ресурсам и человеческому потенциалу, он остаётся одной из наиболее конфликтных и подверженных насилию территорий. Основными причинами этого являются политическая нестабильность, уязвимости в сфере безопасности и широкое распространение угроз. Эти факторы существенно препятствуют развитию региона, делая его крайне хрупким. Подчеркивается, что человеческая безопасность выходит за пределы военной защиты и включает в себя продовольственную, водную и социальную безопасность, вследствие чего развитие становится ключевым элементом обеспечения стабильности. Отсутствие устойчивого развития усугубляет угрозы безопасности, а дисбалансы в развитии способствуют возникновению конфликтов и ухудшению гуманитарной ситуации. В заключение отмечается, что обеспечение человеческой безопасности в Сахеле требует комплексных стратегий, направленных на реализацию эффективной политики, укрепление национальных государств, вовлечение всех заинтересованных сторон в процесс развития, а также усиление регионального и международного сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: Безопасность; Угрозы; Развитие; Человеческая безопасность; Африка; Африканский Сахель

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TƏHLÜKƏSİZLİK VƏ İNKİŞAF DİLEMMASI: AFRİKA SAHEL REGIONU NÜMUNƏSİNDƏ

Amel Terghini*

Ouassaf Nouwar**

Abstrakt. Bu tədqiqat Afrika Sahel regionunda təhlükəsizlik və inkişafın qarşılıqlı təsirini və onların insan təhlükəsizliyinə olan təsirlərini araşdırır. Tənqidi təhlil əsasında belə nəticəyə gəlinir ki, Sahel regionu təbii resurslar və insan potensialı baxımından zəngin olmasına baxmayaraq, dünyanın ən çox zorakılıq və münaqişələrə meyilli bölgələrindən biri olaraq qalır. Bunun əsas səbəbləri siyasi qeyri-sabitlik, təhlükəsizlik boşluqları və təhlükə risklərinin geniş yayılmasıdır. Bu amillər regionun inkişaf prosesinə ciddi maneələr yaratmış və onu yüksək dərəcədə kövrək vəziyyətə salmışdır. Tədqiqatda vurğulanır ki, insan təhlükəsizliyi yalnız hərbi müdafiə ilə məhdudlaşmır; o, həmçinin ərzaq, su və sosial təminatı da əhatə edir. Buna görə də inkişaf sabitliyin təmin edilməsində mühüm amildir. Dayanıqlı inkişafın olmaması təhlükəsizlik təhdidlərini dərinləşdirir, inkişaf sahəsindəki boşluqlar isə münaqişələrə və humanitar böhranların ağırlaşmasına gətirib çıxarır. Nəticə olaraq, Sahel regionunda insan təhlükəsizliyinin təmin olunması üçün aşağıdakı istiqamətlərdə kompleks strategiyaların həyata keçirilməsi zəruridir: effektiv siyasətlərin tətbiqi, milli dövlətlərin möhkəmləndirilməsi, bütün maraqlı tərəflərin inkişaf prosesinə cəlb edilməsi, regional və beynəlxalq əməkdaşlığın gücləndirilməsi.

Açar sözlər: Təhlükəsizlik; Təhdidlər; İnkişaf; İnsan təhlükəsizliyi; Afrika; Afrika Sahel regionu

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1.Introduction

The African Sahel region, is characterized by significant geographical and economic uniqueness. This region is considered as a vast area stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red Sea in the east, faces a complex and multifaceted dilemma at the intersection of security and development. This region, which includes countries such as Mali, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and parts of Sudan, has long struggled with issues of political instability, fragile states, poverty, refugees and migrants, transnational organised crime (TOC). These challenges create a dynamic and often paradoxical relationship between security concerns and development efforts, where progress in one area can sometimes undermine progress in the other.

Security in the Sahel is severely compromised by violent extremist organizations, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and various local militia groups. These groups exploit political instability, weak governance structures, and porous borders, making it difficult for states in the region to exert control and provide protection to their populations. The presence of these armed groups, along with inter-communal violence, has led to widespread displacement, loss of life, and disrupted social and economic systems.

At the same time, the pursuit of development in the Sahel is severely hindered by persistent security challenges. Humanitarian aid and development programs are frequently obstructed by violence and instability, making it difficult for governments and international organizations to implement long-term projects aimed at improving infrastructure, education, healthcare, and governance. Furthermore, the region's high levels of poverty compounded by climatic shocks such as droughts and desertification intensify the struggle to achieve sustainable development. Therefore according to human security concept, it is not possible to speak about security without development, and vice versa.

Research Problem:

Despite ongoing regional and international efforts to restore stability, the Sahel continues to face an intricate web of overlapping security and developmental crises. These interconnected challenges have profound implications for human security, affecting not only physical safety but also access to essential services and the protection of basic rights.

In this context, this article aims to analyze the impact of the security and developmental situation in the Sahel region on the levels of human security. The core question guiding this analysis is: To what extent do the security and developmental situations in the Sahel affect human security, and how can this humanitarian situation be addressed from a critical perspective?.

Methodology:

This study adopts a multi-dimensional approach to analyze the various aspects related to human security in the Sahel region, including political, economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The analysis is grounded in data and reports published by international and regional organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and specialized research centers focusing on Sahel-related issues, security, and development.

In addition, the study involves a comprehensive review of academic literature related to the concepts of security, human security, and development. Furthermore, it offers a critical perspective on the possible pathways to improving the humanitarian situation in the region.

Literature Review:

Security is one of the fundamental human needs, alongside essential necessities such as housing, clothing, and food. In fact, it is often regarded as the most critical among these needs, as it forms the foundation upon which individuals can safely enjoy and benefit from their access to shelter and sustenance.

The concept of security, commonly understood as the antithesis of fear and synonymous with safety, has historically been regarded as a fundamental objective of the state. As Kenneth Waltz asserts, "In anarchy, security is the highest end" [Waltz 1979, p.126]. Traditionally, security has been defined in terms of the state's ability to safeguard its sovereignty and protect its borders from external threats. This classical interpretation is closely aligned with the realist school of thought, which frames security primarily within a military context. From a realist perspective, security entails the preservation of the state's territorial integrity and the physical protection of its citizens, emphasizing the role of military threats and the application of hard power [Walt 1991].

According to the Encyclopædia Britannica, security is defined as "the protection of a nation from coercion by foreign power," which underscores the traditional association of security with the preservation of state independence and the prevention of subjugation by external actors. This definition emphasizes the centrality of sovereignty and political autonomy in early conceptions of security. Henry Kissinger further expands this understanding by incorporating the notion of survival, defining security as "any actions taken by a society to preserve its right to exist" [Tashtoush, 2012, p.12]. This perspective highlights the existential dimension of security, linking it not only to political autonomy but also to the fundamental right of a society to maintain its continuity and identity.

All of these definitions reflect a conceptualization of security that is primarily rooted in the realist tradition, linking it to hard military power and

associating it with traditional threats such as military aggression, occupation, or colonization.

However, the contemporary understanding of security has evolved beyond the traditional military boundaries. In its modern sense, security encompasses the elimination of any form of threat, regardless of its source or nature. Within this broader framework, the concept of *human security* emerged, shifting the focus from the security of the state to the security of individuals. It emphasizes the protection of people from a wide range of threats military, economic, environmental, and beyond. As such, human security is defined as a condition in which individuals, both individually and collectively, are protected from threats in a manner that promotes the exercise of their freedoms and supports their human development [Serge Bambara, 2018, p.13].

In the post-Cold War era, security threats have become increasingly diverse and multidimensional. One of the most influential modern definitions of security is that of Barry Buzan, who conceptualizes security as "the pursuit of freedom from threat" [Buzan, 1997, p.6], regardless of the nature of those threats. This perspective aligns with the dynamics of the anarchic international system, where traditional state-centered, military-focused approaches to security have become less dominant. Buzan argues that during the 1980s, there was a noticeable decline in the prominence of political-military security concerns, particularly as many states came to view war as an obsolete tool in managing their international relations [Buzan, 1997, p.6].

On one hand, the high cost of war and military interventions placed a heavy burden on state budgets, yielding minimal returns especially within the context of accelerating economic globalization. On the other hand, the post-Cold War period witnessed the rise of new, non-traditional security concerns that garnered significant global attention. Among these, environmental issues emerged as critical components of international relations and are now regarded as some of the most pressing determinants of national security.

The second concept in the study is **development**, which is defined as "a planned scientific movement of a set of social and economic processes carried out through a certain ideology to achieve the targeted change from an undesirable state to a desirable one" [Aknouch & Hathout, 2018, p.199]. Furthermore, development is often understood as "a comprehensive and continuous process aimed at enhancing the economic, political, social, cultural, and ideological dimensions of life. It entails both quantitative and qualitative changes and structural transformations intended to improve the standard of living for all members of society and to enhance quality of life through the optimal utilization of available resources and capacities.

Therefore, based on these definitions, development can be understood as a comprehensive, partial, or continuous evolutionary process that takes on

various forms in its pursuit of progress, advancement, and stability adapted to the specific needs and capacities of a given society. As such, development is a fundamental necessity for all societies, regardless of whether they are classified as developing or advanced.

The relationship between development and security is deeply interconnected, with each being a fundamental pillar for the other. As highlighted by the United Nations Development Programme (1994), "development and security are interlinked; without development, there can be no security, and without security, there can be no development" [United Nations Development Programme, 1994, p.12]. In this sense, development is essential not only for achieving security but also for maintaining stability across political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. However, the absence of internal security- whether stemming from individual or institutional factors- has the potential to disrupt not only development efforts but also external security.

Indeed, external threats often have internal origins, and addressing domestic challenges is a critical first step in managing external risks. Therefore, development must be viewed as an integral component of security, while security is similarly indispensable for fostering sustainable development. The absence of development, particularly weak economic performance and low individual incomes, can directly threaten security, leading to instability and a rise in crimes, which may start as small offenses to meet basic needs but can later evolve into organized crime that is much harder to control [Tbina, 2015, p.46].

Moreover, weak development inevitably leads to weakened security, as instability and poor governance foster environments ripe for criminal activities. Attacks on wealth and individuals become more frequent, underscoring the need for robust security measures. Therefore, security is a paramount concern for governments worldwide, and its achievement directly contributes to prosperity, economic progress, and social stability.

In general, security and development are not just linked; they are mutually reinforcing. Development initiatives can help address the root causes of instability, such as poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic services, thereby enhancing security. Conversely, security is a prerequisite for sustainable development, as conflict and instability can severely hinder economic growth, disrupt social cohesion, and erode governance structures.

The African Sahel: A Region of Opportunities and Challenges

African sahel is located within the African continent, often referred to as the world's tank of energy and mineral resources. The African continent holds about 10% of the world's proven oil reserves, with the majority, around 60%, concentrated in north Africa and Sahel region, specifically in three main countries: Nigeria, Algeria, and Libya. Proven gas reserves constitute about

8% of the global reserves, with more than 50% distributed in two countries: Nigeria and Algeria [Saify, 2016, p.219].

Regarding Sahel region as an economic important region, it holds a considerable developmental resources, which can provide a good opportunities for economic diversification and raising levels of human development.

The Sahel region is considered one of the richest areas in natural resources, including important minerals such as gold, uranium, phosphate, and oil. For instance, Mali is the third-largest gold producer in Africa, following South Africa and Ghana [The Habari Network, 2024, p.12]. Niger is the third-largest exporter of uranium in the world, after Australia and Canada [Deutsche Welle, 2023, p.7]. Additionally, Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa, producing around 2.5 million barrels per day, with proven reserves of approximately 37 billion barrels [The Nation, 2024, p.34].

This energy importance has made the security of this region linked to the security and stability of other regions in the world. For instance Mauritania represents an important reserve of iron for the steel industry in Europe, and Niger ranks fourth in the world in uranium production with a percentage of 8.7% of global production and covering 12% of The needs of the European Union. [Sally Farid, 2021].

In addition, the Sahel region possesses significant natural resources, particularly water resources shared by several countries, such as the Niger and Senegal Rivers, and the Lake Chad [Sahara and Sahel Observatory, 2019, p.13]. The region is also characterized by a high diversity of wetlands, which serve as a vital water source for local populations. These include freshwater reservoirs such as the Inner Niger Delta, natural lakes like Lake Chad the largest inland water basin in Africa shared by eight countries and Lake Tana in Ethiopia, the main reservoir of the Blue Nile. [Sahara and Sahel Observatory, 2019, p.14]. These resources play a crucial role in sustaining the region's social and economic life, as well as in supporting ecosystem services in the Sahel.

Sahel region is also characterized by its rich cultural diversity and ancient history, reflecting a blend of Arab, Islamic, and traditional African influences. The African Sahel is the boundary separating North Africa from Sub-Saharan Africa, a transitional zone between the Arab Maghreb and the countries south of the Sahara. It is a traditional trade route between West Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. Moreover, it is a region where civilizations and cultures intersect, acting as a bridge between sub-Saharan African and Arab-Islamic civilizations. However, cultural contradictions, conflicts, and wars have made it pay the price for this strategically important location. [Samir, 2020, p.336]. This is attributed to the complex ethnic makeup of the region, representing a convergence point for various races and religions living

different lifestyles (nomadic pastoralists, urban herders, farmers, etc.). The Sahel region can be divided into a southern part inhabited by Black Africans and a northern part inhabited by Whites [Benkita and Bouieda, 2016, p.214].

Conversely, despite all these resources, the Sahel region remains one of the poorest regions in the world, facing severe security, economic, social, and environmental challenges. Fragility is particularly acute in remote and cross-border areas, where government presence is limited and access to basic social services is either scarce or nonexistent. The pressure on natural resources is a recurrent source of conflict among various parties.

Poverty levels continue to rise at an increasingly rapid rate. For instance, 42.3% of the population in Chad living below the national poverty line. Extreme poverty (\$2.15/day per capita) also remains high in the country and has risen significantly, from 31.2% in 2018 to 34.9% in 2021 and 35.4% in 2023. [The World Bank, 2024]. Additionally, the region suffers from debt, economic dependency, and declining growth rates due to reliance on extractive economies. Moreover, the area grapples with a crisis of national integration, manifested through political systems' inability to build a national state and unify loyalties towards it, resulting in conflicts and widespread political violence.

From a public health perspective, the poor health indicators observed in the African Sahel region underscore the profound fragility of the healthcare system and the overall health situation in the area. This situation can be attributed to a range of factors, including the inadequate availability of health facilities, a shortage of skilled healthcare professionals, poor quality of service delivery, systemic corruption, mismanagement, and the lack of comprehensive social safety nets. [Sardan and Ridde, 2015, p.01].

In addition, climate change has had detrimental effects on the region, as it exacerbates environmental degradation, contributes to desertification, reduces agricultural productivity, and intensifies water scarcity. Despite African Sahel countries contributing less than 0.01% of global greenhouse gas emissions, they are among the most vulnerable areas in the world to droughts, floods, severe heatwaves, and other climate-related impacts resulting from climate change. Mali, Chad, and Niger are among the top seven countries most vulnerable to climate change. Since 2000, an average of 248,000 people annually have been affected by floods that have destroyed homes, roads, and other infrastructure. At the same time, droughts have affected over 20 million people between 2016 and 2020 due to food and security shortages. [Baroudy et al, 2022, p.05]. Consequently, this climate phenomenon has impacted development gains in the region by affecting health and nutrition, exacerbating poverty rates, and increasing the intensity of conflicts and violence.

The severity of these risks may intensify in the context of significant demographic expansion, as growing populations place mounting demands on limited natural resources and fragile infrastructure. According to various researchers and demographic studies, the current demographic trend in the Sahel- where the combined population of the G5 countries [Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger] exceeds 80 million and is projected to reach approximately 200 million by the mid-2050s significantly intensifies the region's vulnerabilities. [Yahia H.Zoubir, 2022, p.01], Such rapid growth amplifies the strain on natural resources, public services, and governance structures, thereby compounding the existing challenges.

Security and Development Challenges in the Sahel Region: An Analysis of the Dimensions of Human Fragility

The Sahel region is one of the most security-fragile areas in the world, where multiple overlapping crises political, social, environmental, and security-related intersect. This deteriorating security situation stems from a combination of factors, most notably the weakness of central governments, the erosion of state security institutions, and the proliferation of armed groups. These include jihadist movements such as Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), as well as ethnic militias and local self-defense groups. These actors have contributed to the undermining of state authority, particularly in rural and border areas, where they often impose alternative systems of governance and provide basic services thus complicating the security landscape further [Lecocq & Niang, 2019, pp.41-49].

This security fragility has had a direct impact on human development indicators. The region has experienced a significant decline in education levels, a deterioration in health services, and a rise in poverty and malnutrition. Countries such as Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso consistently rank among the lowest globally in the Human Development Index published by the United Nations Development Programme. Armed conflicts have also led to mass displacement, the destruction of infrastructure, and the disruption of economic and agricultural activities, thereby exacerbating food insecurity and fueling recurring humanitarian crises [UNDP, 2023].

Additionally, climate change and environmental degradation further deepen the region's fragility. Drought, desertification, and resource scarcity have triggered conflicts between farmers and herders and created fertile ground for recruitment by armed groups especially in the absence of economic alternatives and employment opportunities. In this way, the link between insecurity and underdevelopment becomes a vicious cycle that severely undermines any meaningful efforts to establish stability and prosperity in the Sahel.

2.Proliferation of security threats

The African Sahel region has been witnessing a significant rise in non-traditional security threats, as terrorist groups increasingly exploit institutional and security fragility across several countries in the region to expand their influence. This deterioration is driven by a combination of armed conflicts, civil wars, organized crime, political instability, economic underdevelopment, and widespread poverty conditions that have created a fertile environment for the entrenchment of extremist groups, most notably Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb [Wanoughy, 2021, p.646].

As a result, terrorist operations have intensified across the Sahel and the greater Saharan region. These include direct attacks on security forces, as witnessed in Mali, as well as assaults on strategic facilities, such as the 2013 attack on the Tiguentourine gas plant in In Amenas, southeastern Algeria. Moreover, these groups have adopted tactics such as kidnapping for ransom and securing trafficking routes for drugs and arms in exchange for financial gains provided by criminal networks.

In this context, Eizenga (2019) emphasizes the increasingly complex interplay between development and security in the Sahel. He argues that weak state institutions and poor governance have prolonged the region's crises, while security-centric interventions lacking comprehensive developmental strategies have yielded only limited long-term results. The persistence of these threats, therefore, stems largely from the absence of integrated solutions addressing root causes such as poverty, marginalization, and lack of economic opportunity.

The situation is further complicated by the possession of advanced surveillance technologies by terrorist groups, which may surpass the capabilities of regional armies. Additionally, these groups have sought to exploit ethnic minority grievances particularly among the Tuareg communities by encouraging separatist tendencies against central governments, as seen in the Gao and Timbuktu regions of northern Mali. This adds further layers of complexity to the already challenging efforts to restore peace and security in the region [Wanoughy, 2021, p.646; Eizenga, 2019].

The security landscape in the Sahel has witnessed a dramatic deterioration over the past two decades, with terrorism-related violence reaching unprecedented levels. Between 2007 and 2021, terrorism-related deaths in Sahelian countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Nigeria, and Niger increased tenfold. By 2021, the region accounted for 35% of global terrorism-related fatalities, a stark rise from just 1% in 2007 [Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022, p.8]. The tri-border area where Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso intersect became an epicenter of violence, accounting for more than 70% of all attacks in the region. Niger

alone recorded 588 terrorism-related deaths in 2021, a 100% increase from the previous year, with 78% of the victims being civilians [Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022, pp.9-10].

Further analysis by Eizenga (2019) revealed that from 2007 to 2022, the Sahel region experienced a 2,000% increase in terrorism-related fatalities, with over 22,000 deaths from 6,408 attacks. In 2022, the Sahel was responsible for 43% of all global terrorism-related deaths, surpassing both South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa [Eizenga, 2019, pp.3-5].

The 2022 Global Terrorism Index, published by the Institute for Economics & Peace, underscored that despite a global decline in terrorism, the Sahel's share of global terrorist incidents rose from 1% to 22%. Notably, half of the 20 deadliest terrorist attacks recorded globally in 2021 occurred in the Sahel. Three countries from the region Burkina Faso (10%), Mali (8%), and Niger (8%) were among the top ten most affected worldwide, collectively contributing to 26% of global terrorism-related deaths [Aletihad News Center, 2023, p.6].

The most recent 2024 report reaffirms the continuation of this dangerous trend, noting that the central Sahel remains the fastest-growing region in terms of terrorist activity. While the Middle East previously dominated global terrorism dynamics due to groups such as ISIS and Jama'at Nasr al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), the Sahel has overtaken it in severity. In 2023, Burkina Faso recorded the highest death toll from terrorism globally, with a 68% increase in fatalities, despite a 17% drop in the number of attacks. The situation in Mali and Niger also deteriorated significantly in the same year [Institute for Economics & Peace, 2024, pp.4-6].

These data reflect a worrying shift in global terrorism, positioning the Sahel as the new epicenter of violent extremism. The persistent escalation underscores the limitations of current counterterrorism strategies and the urgent need for integrated approaches that combine security, governance, and development.

On the other hand, the African Sahel region, with its unique natural features, extensive land borders, and vast expanses, has become increasingly vulnerable to security threats. This vulnerability has facilitated the expansion of organized crime groups, which have infiltrated the borders of Sahelian countries to engage in various illicit activities, including smuggling operations, arms trafficking, and the illegal migration of people from the Sahara Desert to European countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. The region has also emerged as a significant transit point and hub for criminal activities. Furthermore, Sahelian countries serve as key transit areas for the smuggling of cocaine and heroin trafficked by organized crime syndicates from Latin America via the Gulf of Guinea, a major international route. In addition to

cocaine trafficking, the cultivation and trade of cannabis is widespread in North Africa [Khalifa, 2022, p.78]. According to Ammari (2023), the porous borders and weak governance structures in the region have exacerbated the situation, allowing these criminal networks to operate with relative impunity, further destabilizing the region.

Ammari (2023) also emphasizes that the rise in criminal activities is not only a direct security threat but also severely hampers sustainable development in the region. The Sahel has been described as a "poverty trap," where economic, social, and political challenges overlap, making it increasingly difficult to achieve tangible progress in both security and development. The lack of coordinated strategies between local actors and international partners has been a significant factor in the perpetuation of these crises. Effective countermeasures, as noted by Ammari (2023), require integrated approaches that combine security, governance, and socio-economic development to create a more stable environment and to reduce the appeal of criminal networks.

These security challenges, including terrorism and organized crime, have led to another pressing security issue : the rising waves of illegal migration in the region. Various factors, such as climate change, poor living conditions, ongoing wars, conflicts, and political instability, have exacerbated the issue of illegal migration, which has significantly increased, particularly in countries with low levels of development, such as those in the Sahel. This region, one of the poorest in the world, suffers from escalating political, economic, social, health, and environmental insecurity. These conditions have had a severe impact on the security, livelihoods, and mental well-being of individuals, prompting them to seek refuge in northern regions with more developed infrastructures.

The spread of organized crime has intensified as criminal groups infiltrate the region, exploiting weak governance and institutional fragility in Sahelian countries. These illicit activities, which include human trafficking, arms smuggling, and drug trafficking, often target individuals attempting to migrate illegally in search of better opportunities in North Africa and Europe. According to a report published by the African Center for Strategic Studies on February 3, 2023, 85% of the 1.5 million Africans forcibly displaced came from conflict-affected countries such as South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon. This finding underscores that conflict and authoritarian regimes are major drivers of displacement in the continent [The Africa Center for Strategic Studies 2023].

3.State failure

The Sahel region has witnessed a significant deterioration in security and development indicators over the past decade, which has manifested in a

noticeable rise in violence and political instability. This decline is not merely a reflection of local governance challenges but is deeply rooted in structural socio-economic vulnerabilities, environmental pressures, and transnational threats such as terrorism and organized crime. The increasing prevalence of armed conflict, coupled with weak state institutions, has created a fertile ground for the proliferation of non-state actors, further undermining efforts toward sustainable development and peace. Consequently, the region finds itself trapped in a vicious cycle where insecurity hampers development, and underdevelopment fuels further instability.

Moreover, all these circumstances have contributed to fueling conflicts and increasing instability in the region, with escalating ethnic, religious, and tribal tensions, alongside threats from terrorism and organized crime. The African Sahel has emerged as one of the most tension-filled regions in recent times due to a complex web of interconnected factors, including recurrent political crises, institutional failures, weak development frameworks, and pervasive political instability. These challenges significantly hinder the development process and exacerbate the humanitarian situation. According to Hillier (2007), Africa suffers enormous economic losses due to armed conflicts and violence estimated at nearly \$18 billion annually resulting in severe developmental setbacks.

In recent years, the fragility of the Sahel region has become increasingly evident, with around 10 coup attempts occurring since 2020 alone, highlighting deep-rooted governance and stability concerns [Adetayo, 2023]. Furthermore, approximately 40% of African countries are currently classified as fragile or in conflict. The latest Fragile States Index report by the Fund for Peace [FFP, 2023] underscores the alarming status of most countries along the African coast. Nearly all nations within the Sahel are categorized as fragile states, though the degree of fragility varies. For example, Senegal is identified under the "Elevated warning" level and is trending toward "Alert," while countries like Niger and Chad are labeled under "High Alert." Somalia remains in the most critical category "Very High Alert" signaling an acute state of institutional breakdown and persistent conflict. The report provides detailed classifications, which shed light on the pressing need for comprehensive regional and international interventions to address the root causes of fragility and restore pathways toward stability and sustainable development.

The following table provides the classification of some of the African Sahel countries in the Fragile States Index according to the fragile state index 2023. [FFP, 2023, 07]:

Table (01): Fragile states in Sahel region

Country	Fragility Level	Scores
Mali	Alert	5.99

Senegal	Elevated warning	5.71
Burkina Faso	Alert	0.94
Nigeria	Alert	4.93
Chad	High Alert	6.104
South Sudan	High Alert	5.108
Eritrea	Alert	5.94
Sudan	High Alert	2.106
Somalia	Very high alert	9.111

Source: FFP, Fregile States Index: Annual report 2023, p.07.

The classification of Sahel countries in the 2023 Fragile States Index reflects an alarming reality, as most countries in the region fall under high fragility categories, indicating the escalation of political, security, and institutional crises. Somalia ranks as the most fragile state, classified under the "Very High Alert" category, reflecting an almost complete absence of state functions, the persistence of armed conflicts, and the dominance of non-state actors that threaten national unity and stability. Similarly, countries like Chad, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso fall under the "Alert" category, signaling a rise in military coups, intensifying socio-political tensions, and the state's limited capacity to monopolize legitimate violence [FFP, 2023, p.07]. Senegal and Nigeria were placed under the "Elevated Warning" and "Alert" categories, respectively, indicating the persistence of structural challenges that affect their stability, despite maintaining a relatively stronger degree of institutional resilience compared to their neighbors. These classifications underscore the deep-rooted structural crisis facing the Sahel, characterized by weak governance, declining rule of law, widespread poverty, and mounting security threats. The situation calls for serious regional and international interventions aimed at reinforcing stability, building institutional capacity, and achieving comprehensive and sustainable development.

4.Environmental degradation

The Sahel region faces profound environmental degradation that poses serious challenges to ecological sustainability, economic stability, and human security. One of the most pressing concerns is desertification, with over 80% of the region's land at risk of losing fertility due to vegetation loss, wind erosion, and recurring droughts [United Nations Environment Programme, 2022]. In parallel, the region suffers from widespread soil degradation, declining groundwater levels, and the escalating impacts of climate change. These environmental stressors severely undermine the capacity of populations to live sustainably and maintain productive livelihoods.

Water scarcity is another defining feature of the environmental crisis in the Sahel. According to a 2023 report by the United Nations University Institute

for Water, Environment, and Health, titled *Global Water Security*, nearly 5.2 billion people worldwide face water insecurity, including 1.3 billion Africans, with 13 African countries- several of which lie in the Sahel- suffering from acute levels of water insecurity [Kingsley, 2023]. This widespread shortage is driven by a combination of factors including rapid population growth, conflict, weak governance, and the intensifying effects of climate change. Despite Africa's abundant water resources, the continent remains among the least water-secure regions globally, with the Sahel identified as one of the most vulnerable subregions [Kingsley, 2023].

In addition to environmental pressures, the region also grapples with deep socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Climate change poses a distinct set of economic and humanitarian challenges, particularly in rural and informal sectors. With over 90% of the workforce operating in informal economies, many individuals and their families are exposed to climate-related disruptions such as poor irrigation, land degradation, prolonged droughts, and limited rural employment opportunities all of which devastate pastoral and agricultural systems, the economic backbone of many Sahelian communities [Conkar, 2020, p.64]. These factors have become major drivers of mass migration, both within and beyond national borders, further straining urban infrastructure and social cohesion.

Furthermore, over the last fifty years, the Sahel has undergone profound ecological, economic, political, social, and cultural transformations that have significantly shaped the persistence and complexity of crises in the region. Since the 1960s, climate change has triggered recurrent droughts, culminating in near-regular famines since the mid-1970s. These ecological degradations have not only undermined environmental stability but have also become a source of political and economic exploitation. Various actors have capitalized on these crises through corrupt systems and exclusionary practices, often structured along ethnic lines, thereby reinforcing social divisions and weakening regional resilience [Baz Lecocq & Niang, 2019].

Moreover, governance-related challenges, particularly systemic corruption, exacerbate the region's environmental and developmental struggles. Corruption hinders both internal reform efforts and external investment, undermining sustainable development initiatives and the effectiveness of environmental policies [Conkar 2020, p.64]. Combined, these interlinked environmental, political, and institutional challenges contribute to a cycle of vulnerability, deepening the region's exposure to conflict, displacement, and long-term underdevelopment.

5.Food insecurity

Food security remains one of the most pressing structural challenges facing the Sahel region. A combination of environmental, economic, and political

factors contributes to widespread food insecurity, affecting millions across countries such as Niger, Chad, Mali, and Burkina Faso. The region is particularly vulnerable to climate-induced agricultural disruptions, with frequent droughts, land degradation, and a lack of productive infrastructure significantly reducing local food production [World Food Programme 2023].

Climate change has led to a decline in crop yields by up to 30% in some parts of the Sahel, exacerbated by declining rainfall and rising temperatures, which limit arable land and increase the risk of harvest failures [International Committee of the Red Cross, 2023]. Economic fragility and high poverty levels further weaken the population’s ability to access food sustainably. It is estimated that over 33 million people across the region require urgent food assistance, with children particularly at risk due to acute malnutrition [FAO, 2022].

Armed conflict further compounds food insecurity. The war that erupted in Sudan in early 2023 has escalated into one of the worst humanitarian crises in Africa. By April of that year, intensifying inflation and deteriorating food supplies had displaced more than five million people, and left over 20 million individuals- approximately 42% of Sudan’s population- facing acute food insecurity [IMF, 2023]. This crisis mirrors similar dynamics in other African contexts, where conflict, instability, and weak governance deepen existing food crises.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Africa remains the most affected continent by severe food insecurity, particularly in 2022, when overlapping shocks such as conflict, climate change, and economic volatility pushed millions into hunger. These compounding issues create a vicious cycle, in which food insecurity fuels social unrest and displacement, which in turn disrupt agricultural production and undermine development. The following table illustrates the prevalence of food insecurity in Africa:

Table (02): The prevalence rate of malnutrition worldwide and in the African continent (2015-2022).

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
World	588.9	586.4	571.8	586.8	612.8	701.4	738.9	735.1
Africa	189.6	204.1	207.9	215.6	225.1	254.7	270.6	281.6

Source: FAO.The State Of Food Security And Nutrition In The World 2023.

This is attributed to the continent's political, security, and economic crises, where the percentage increased in 2022 compared to other years.

Additionally,the area faces regional security challenges, including violent extremism, arms and drug trafficking, which impact stability and sustainable development.

More recently, the Sahel region has continued to experience an escalation of multidimensional crises, particularly in the environmental sphere, which have adversely affected regional stability and hindered sustainable development. The region remains vulnerable to recurring environmental hazards, including droughts, irregular rainfall, and frequent flooding- all of which have significantly intensified food insecurity. As of 2024, more than 38 million people are facing acute food and nutrition insecurity. These conditions have been further exacerbated by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the global repercussions of the war in Ukraine, especially in terms of disruptions to grain and fertilizer markets, thereby deepening existing economic, health, and nutritional vulnerabilities. [Sahel Alliance, 2024, p.28].

6.Human development rates

The Sahel region is experiencing a sharp decline in human development levels, with its Human Development Index (HDI) ranking among the lowest globally, according to the 2023 Sahel Human Development Report issued by the United Nations [United Nations, 2023]. This low ranking reflects significant limitations in access to basic services such as education, healthcare, clean water, and economic opportunities, leaving millions of people in a state of severe vulnerability.

This deterioration is driven by a convergence of interrelated crises, most notably political instability, armed conflict, environmental degradation, and climate-related hazards. These factors have led to a deep decline in comprehensive human security across the region. This decline becomes especially apparent when human security is viewed through a broader lens that goes beyond traditional, state-centric notions of security to encompass economic, food, health, environmental, personal, and political dimensions.

Within this expanded framework, the impact of overlapping crises is even more concerning. Protracted violence, widespread displacement, and limited access to essential services have left millions at risk. Food insecurity, a lack of clean water, and inadequate healthcare continue to undermine community resilience. According to the United Nations Development Programme report 2023, the humanitarian situation in the Sahel is among the most severe in the world, with rising needs and diminishing coping capacities, all within a context of limited resources and structural challenges in governance, conflict resolution, and climate adaptation [UNDP, 2023].

In this context, the following table illustrates the evolution of human development indicators in the Sahel region from 2000 to 2021, as reported in the latest United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report. The data quantitatively reflects the slow and uneven progress across the region highlighting modest improvement in some countries, while others have seen

stagnation or decline, depending on their national contexts and the degree of exposure to the aforementioned challenges:

Table (03): Human Development Index in sahel region

	country	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2021
01	Burkina Faso	0.296	0.331	0.372	0.418	0.449	0.449
02	Cameroon	0.442	0.475	0.513	0.560	0.578	0.576
03	Chad	0.291	0.327	0.362	0.389	0.397	0.394
04	Gambia	0.404	0.431	0.460	0.478	0.501	0.500
05	Guinea	0.345	0.387	0.415	0.440	0.466	0.465
06	Mali	0.317	0.366	0.404	0.416	0.427	0.428
07	Mauritania	0.465	0.490	0.510	0.544	0.556	0.556
08	Niger	0.262	0.298	0.338	0.376	0.401	0.400
09	Nigeria	0.000	0.469	0.482	0.516	0.535	0.535
10	Senegal	0.388	0.419	0.468	0.505	0.513	0.511

Source: United Nations Development Programme. Sahel Human Development Report 2023 p.111

The data presented in the table indicates that most Sahel countries have experienced gradual improvements in the Human Development Index (HDI) between 2000 and 2021, although the pace and extent of progress vary across countries. While some nations have made notable advances in education and health, others have seen only limited improvement due to political instability, armed conflicts, and weak infrastructure. This disparity highlights the structural challenges hindering development in the region and underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and effective policies to sustainably enhance human development indicators.

A Critical Analysis of the Humanitarian Situation in the Sahel in Light of Developmental and Security Challenges:

The Sahel region faces complex humanitarian challenges, where the dimensions of security and development are deeply intertwined. These challenges encompass terrorism, organized crime, poverty, irregular migration, and ongoing conflicts, all of which contribute to the growing complexity of the humanitarian situation. Addressing these issues requires multi-dimensional strategies that integrate military, legal, and developmental efforts to achieve sustainable stability.

6.1.Diagnosis and Analysis:

The various security threats facing the African Sahel region share a set of common characteristics, which are:

Interconnected Nature of Threats: Security challenges in the Sahel are marked by their interconnectedness, particularly the convergence of terrorism and transnational organized crime. Illicit activities such as drug trafficking,

arms smuggling, and human trafficking are often carried out by criminal networks with direct or indirect links to terrorist groups [Tinti, 2022]. These actors exploit porous borders and weak governance structures, thereby complicating efforts to counter both criminality and terrorism. Moreover, the resulting insecurity frequently drives irregular migration, as individuals seek safer and more stable environments.

Illicit economies governed by organized criminal groups expose individuals and communities to systemic human rights violations, including exploitative labor conditions, inadequate healthcare, and environmental degradation [UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, p.08].

Root Causes of Insecurity: A meaningful understanding of the security dynamics in the Sahel requires a contextual analysis of the structural drivers underlying these threats. The rise of terrorism and organized crime in the region is inextricably linked to entrenched socio-political and economic grievances. These include extreme poverty, social and political marginalization, widespread corruption, weak and fragile state institutions, climate change, recurrent food insecurity, rapid demographic growth, and deep-rooted ethnic tensions [European Union External Action Service, 2011]. Addressing these root causes necessitates comprehensive, multi-sectoral strategies that extend beyond conventional military responses to include development, governance, and climate resilience interventions.

Multidimensional Impacts on Stability and Development: The consequences of terrorism and organized crime are multifaceted, affecting security, governance, economic development, and the humanitarian landscape in the Sahel. These threats erode state legitimacy by undermining institutional capacity and weakening public trust. Criminal and terrorist networks frequently co-opt or coerce local authorities, deepening governance deficits and perpetuating cycles of violence and corruption.

Economically, illicit activities result in significant revenue loss through smuggling and black-market trade, disrupt formal economic systems, displace communities, and deter both domestic and foreign investment. Such outcomes hamper sustainable development and exacerbate poverty and marginalization. Human trafficking and migrant smuggling further fuel humanitarian crises, exposing vulnerable groups- particularly women and children- to exploitation, displacement, and violence.

A recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) titled *"Impact of Transnational Organized Crime on Stability and Development in the Sahel"* emphasizes that these illicit activities not only undermine state capacity to enforce the rule of law but also hinder long-term economic and social development. For instance, at informal artisanal and small-scale gold mining sites, criminal actors may exploit child labor, impose

inhumane working conditions, or entrap workers in cycles of poverty through exploitative pre-financing arrangements [UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 2024, p.08].

6.2. Comprehensive Strategies Needed:

Addressing the various security and development challenges facing the Sahel region requires the formulation of national, regional, and international policies that meet the following conditions:

Implementing Comprehensive and Effective Policies: Effectively addressing the complex humanitarian and security challenges in the Sahel requires the adoption of comprehensive, multidimensional policies that integrate social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Sole reliance on military solutions is inadequate and may further exacerbate existing crises if not accompanied by integrated development strategies that address root causes and enhance community resilience.

These policies must prioritize investment in education and healthcare, especially in rural and border regions where basic services are often lacking. Equitable distribution of resources and inclusive educational strategies can have a significant impact on community empowerment and human development. Moreover, environmental degradation caused by climate change demands policy responses that promote sustainable agriculture and efficient water resource management.

Human rights must be at the heart of all development efforts, with a specific focus on protecting vulnerable groups such as women and children, while promoting social justice and inclusion. Enhancing livelihood opportunities, creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and raising quality of life are central to winning the development battle which is inextricably linked to achieving long-term security. Otherwise, the fight against terrorism risks remaining a series of temporary security and military skirmishes, or what could be described as endless short- and medium-term hit-and-run engagements [Aletihad News Center, 2023].

Strengthening National States:

State-building and institutional strengthening are fundamental pillars for achieving political stability and sustainable development in the Sahel. Security and development strategies cannot be effectively implemented without strong institutions capable of enforcing the rule of law, delivering services, and fostering social cohesion.

A key priority is supporting the rule of law by enhancing the judiciary's capacity to hold criminals accountable and ensure fair justice. This reduces the influence of criminal networks and restores citizens' trust in public institutions. Combating corruption, enhancing transparency, and promoting accountability are also essential to reinforcing state legitimacy.

Furthermore, encouraging local participation through decentralization and community empowerment is critical to improving the effectiveness of public policies and the responsiveness of the state to citizens' needs. Engaging communities in decision-making processes enhances development outcomes and strengthens the state's ability to respond to insecurity, especially in fragile areas exploited by armed and criminal groups [European Union External Action Service, 2011; UNODC, 2024, p.08].

Engaging All Stakeholders in the Development Process: The success of security and development strategies in the Sahel depends on an inclusive and participatory approach that involves all relevant stakeholders at both local and international levels. These include national governments, local communities, NGOs, the private sector, and international and regional partners.

Particular attention must be given to the empowerment of women and youth, who make up the majority of the population and have the potential to drive positive change when meaningfully included in decision-making processes. Their role is vital in peacebuilding, development, and community stabilization.

Multi-level cooperation enhances coordination and ensures that resources are directed toward the region's real priorities, thus enabling more comprehensive and effective responses to the multifaceted challenges facing the Sahel [Tinti, 2022; UNODC, 2024].

Enhancing Regional and International Cooperation for Stability in the Sahel: Resolving the multidimensional crisis in the Sahel necessitates coordinated efforts among political elites, national governments, and various stakeholders across both the Sahel and the African continent at large. A central component of these efforts must be the development and implementation of coherent policies and programs aimed at addressing the structural issues of marginalization, poverty, and institutional failure factors that have long characterized the socio-political landscape of Sahelian countries. These conditions constitute major drivers behind the proliferation of violent extremist groups, the escalation of organized crime, irregular migration, and the entrenchment of transnational terrorism and instability [Aletihad News Center, 2023].

Furthermore, regional and international cooperation must be strengthened, particularly at the levels of law enforcement and judicial prosecution. Effective cross-border collaboration is essential to ensure proper investigation and prosecution of organized crime groups operating in the Sahel [UNODC, 2024 p.36]. This includes enhancing information sharing, intelligence cooperation, and the exchange of best practices among states.

The establishment of regional frameworks for data collection on trafficking flows, as well as mechanisms for timely information exchange and joint operational responses, is imperative. These measures can substantially

reinforce border security and disrupt transnational criminal networks engaged in human trafficking, smuggling, and other illicit activities [UNODC, 2024, p.36]. Sustained solidarity and strategic collaboration- both within the region and with international partners- are foundational to creating long-term, resilient solutions to the Sahel's ongoing challenges.

7.Conclusion

In conclusion, the African Sahel region is confronted with multifaceted challenges that lie at the crossroads of security and development. Persistent conflicts, transnational threats, weak governance structures, and socio-economic vulnerabilities collectively contribute to a vicious cycle of insecurity and underdevelopment. The following indicators exemplify the profound impact of these challenges on both security and development in the region:

High levels of violence and instability: The Sahel remains one of the most violent and unstable regions globally, marked by ongoing conflicts and frequent political upheavals, such as coups, which have become characteristic features of the region's political landscape.

State failure and the spread of security threats: The failure of state institutions is a key driver behind the proliferation of various security threats in the Sahel, including the rise of terrorist organizations, bribery, organized crime, arms and human trafficking, and the escalating phenomenon of illegal migration. Recent increases in these issues have further exacerbated the region's security crisis.

Declining development indicators: The instability and insecurity in Sahelian countries severely hinder socio-economic development. As discussed in the study, and reflected in various other reports, development indicators in the Sahel show a significant decline, with the region lagging behind other parts of the world. This decline is driven by the compounded effects of insecurity, poor governance, and socio-economic challenges, contributing to widespread poverty and inequality.

Environmental and socio-economic degradation: The political and security instability in the Sahel is coupled with fragile infrastructure, low living standards, and pervasive poverty. Furthermore, environmental degradation, exacerbated by climate change, significantly undermines the region's potential for sustainable development. The widespread presence of organized crime and violence in the region further deepens the socio-economic crisis, leading to diminished development prospects or, in some cases, the complete absence of progress.

In sum, the interplay between security threats and developmental challenges in the Sahel has resulted in a severe erosion of human security. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and integrated strategies that address

both the immediate security concerns and the long-term development needs of the region.

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