

The Integration of Economics, Migration and Security in the Sahara-Sahel:

Diagnostics, perspectives and policies

Some lessons from the debate

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The Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) hosted the Higher Council for Strategic Training and Research (CSFRS) of the École militaire (France) on 29 September 2017 for a symposium on Sahel-Sahara regional issues.

This note presents some lessons drawn from the debate by Laurent Bossard, Director, Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat.

More information on the symposium:

www.oecd.org/swac/events/symposium-economics-migration-security-sahara-sahel-sept-2017.htm

More information on the Sahel and West Africa Club:

www.oecd.org/swac

The Sahel is today at the heart of African and global concerns. The growing urgency and complexity of the situation require now, more than ever before, the mobilisation of governments, regional organisations, the international community, civil society and researchers.

Irrespective of the level of foreign aid, the key to the future of the Sahel lies in the hands of the Sahelian people. But the Sahel is also a crucial part of the present and future of Africa as a whole and even the world. Over the past few years, this region – long ignored and sometimes forgotten – has become the subject of significant attention, as well as a large number of studies, conferences and initiatives. The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC), for its part, has been committed to the region for over four decades.

SWAC contributes, through its Secretariat, to an understanding of the relevant challenges and issues. Its 2014 publication, *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel*¹ and its more recent efforts dealing with jihadism², insecurity³, and the impact of insecurity on cross-border markets⁴, are examples of these contributions.

It also helps by facilitating dialogue between researchers and policy makers. It was in this spirit that we decided to organise a symposium centred on two studies financed and co-ordinated by the [Higher Council for Strategic Training and Research \(CSFRS\)](#) of the *École militaire* (France):

- **A spatial reflection: “Bringing the Desert Together: How to Advance Sahelo-Maghreb Integration”** suggests that the stabilisation and development of the Sahara-Sahel can be achieved through the adoption of a shared, integrated approach in the Sahel and in North Africa (European Council on Foreign Relations).
- **A temporal reflection: “A Prospective Study of Sahelian Realities 2030”** puts forward different scenarios on the evolution of Sahelian countries by 2030, based on economic, social, political and security-related criteria (Thierry Hommel Conseil).

We decided to bring together approximately 50 individuals from different walks of life to debate the outcomes of these studies and to contribute to policy makers’ reflections on these issues. Participants expressed themselves freely, leaving aside any institutional positions. For this reason, we decided not to produce a detailed summary of the discussions. However, as far as the SWAC Secretariat is concerned, the prospects opened up by the two studies – beyond their specific content and the questions that they encourage us to tackle – are hugely important.

1 OECD/SWAC (2014), *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264222359-en>

2 Ibrahim, I. (2017), “The Wave of Jihadist Insurgency in West Africa: Global Ideology, Local Context, Individual Motivations”, *West African Papers*, No. 7, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eb95c0a9-en>

3 Walther, O. (2017), “Wars and Conflicts in the Sahara-Sahel”, *West African Papers*, No. 10, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/8bbc5813-en>

4 Van Den Hoek, J. (2017), “Agricultural market activity and Boko Haram attacks in northeastern Nigeria”, *West African Papers*, No. 9, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/13ba9f2e-en>

MATCHING POLICIES TO CHALLENGES

The study, “**Bringing the Desert Together: How to Advance Sahelo-Maghreb Integration**”, comes at just the right time to contribute to issues that many experts have been raising for several years. It is widely known that Sahelian instability is, in reality, Saharo-Sahelian in nature. Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQMI) is a mutation of the Algeria-based Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), the end of Gaddafi’s regime directly led to the chaos in Northern Mali in 2012, thousands of Sahelians are today fighting in Libya, and criminal trafficking – of drugs and migrants – has spread across the desert. In short, the vast Sahara-Sahel region has been the breeding ground for these threats.

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All of this has been common knowledge for some time now and underlines the need for countries in North Africa, the Sahel and, by extension, the whole of West Africa, to implement integrated and shared policies.

However, the European Council on Foreign Affairs study points out that such an aim is still a long way off due to the political rivalries that exist between North African countries and their opposing interests in the Sahel. The proposals laid out in the study deserve to be mentioned. They include: a joint framework for North African-West African migration, support mechanisms for North African investments in the Sahel, and tangible involvement of Maghreb countries in the G5 Sahel. These proposals constitute the basis for discussion that should be taken further and expanded.

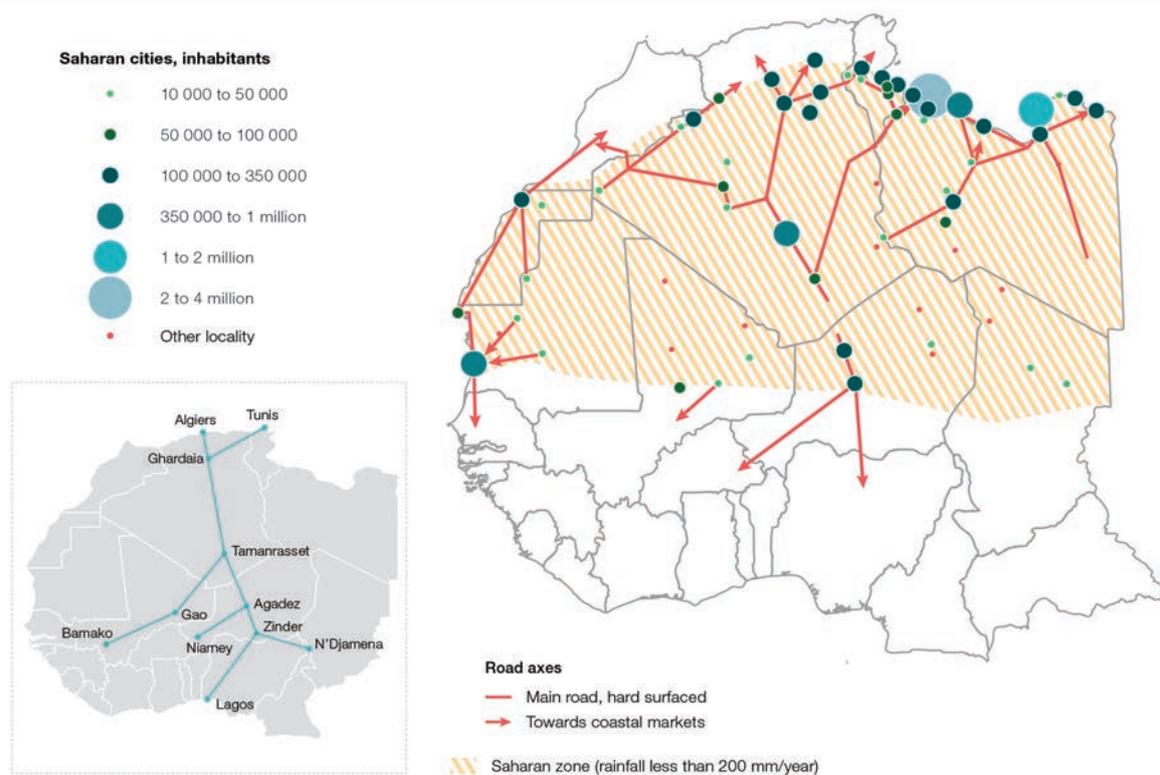
In this regard, a window of opportunity appears to have opened. Morocco and Tunisia have made official requests to join ECOWAS. As the study mentions, Algeria recently organised a forum relating to Algerian investments in Africa (Morocco is already ahead of the curve in this domain) and Morocco has also shown its readiness to support the G5 Sahel.

Last but not least, the French Development Agency (AFD) promoted the notion of “*Tout Afrique*” (“all Africa”)⁵ earlier this year, calling into question the impenetrable divide between the institutional approaches and organisations of the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. Similar reflections are ongoing in other European countries.

The concept of an African “*Grand Ouest*” (“Great West”) as an entity of co-operation and development stretching from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Guinea, is starting to take shape. [The vision of an Africa that is no longer split in two](#) is still a very uncertain one. On paper, it would seem obvious and necessary, for it is difficult to imagine that the Sahara-Sahel region could one day be stable and thriving without an increase in co-operation between the constituent countries. But will this vision be propelled – to the very highest level – by leaders who are both convinced and convincing? Without that support, it will likely dwindle away, when confronted with existing geopolitical rivalries, the great complexity of the dynamics at play on the ground, and institutional habits.

⁵ See the conclusions of the Symposium organised by the AFD in April 2017 (<https://www.afd.fr/fr/tout-afrique-voir-afrique-autrement>).

Map
The trans-Saharan road gap



Source: OECD/SWAC (2014), *An Atlas of the Sahara-Sahel: Geography, Economics and Security*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264222359-en>

Why not begin this discussion with the simplest, most practical suggestions, for example:

- **The completion of the trans-Saharan route.** A committee dedicated to the linking of trans-Saharan routes, bringing together Algeria, Chad, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Tunisia, has existed for over 30 years.
- **The technical feasibility of developing a trans-Saharan meat sector.** North African countries import 60 % of their meat from the global market while Sahelian countries are practically overrun by under-exploited herds.

The work now lies with policy makers to show some imagination and to ask the right questions of the experts.

FACED WITH URGENCY, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE IS ESSENTIAL

The “**Prospective Study of Sahelian Realities 2030**” brings up the usefulness of considering the medium-term or long-term future. It is obviously not a question of predicting but, as *Futuribles* points out, of “incorporating the long term into (the) decisions and actions” that are made today. For example, the IPCC produces medium-term and long-term climate change scenarios, the COP has set objectives (to not surpass an average temperature increase of two degrees by 2100), and governments (some of them, in any case) have implemented programmes to reduce carbon and methane emissions. Here is another example: in the 1980s, aware that rapid, inevitable urban growth would continue into the future, authorities in Ouagadougou decided to build a new district 10 kilometres south of the centre of the city. Long deserted and the subject of much mockery, Ouaga 2000 is today regarded as a model (one that is nevertheless open to criticism) of forward-thinking urban management.

However, it is significantly more complex to predict how human societies might evolve than it is to predict changes to climate or population increases within a given city. The study selected ten variables to analyse, the significance of which could be subject to debate. This resulted in the emergence of four contrasting scenarios, although many others could also be put forward. This raises a question about the method chosen for this approach. Should it draw upon a scenario that is as close as possible to the ideal situation required to build a social project? Or should it reflect a more pessimistic scenario in order to pinpoint the hurdles to come and the dangers to avoid? In both cases, a number of implementable policies would need to be developed to manage the countless variables involved as well as their equally numerous interactions.

The “Mali 2025” study published in 1999 clearly reflects the difficulty of relying on an ideal scenario to formulate credible policy. Such a scenario would require “consensual democracy, successful decentralisation, a strong and diversified economy financed by national savings, a positive trade balance, an educational system that cultivates excellence, and so on”. What is to be made of all these good intentions? Nevertheless, the Mali 2025 study *could have* been very useful because it draws from a large number of interviews with Malians of all social classes and from all of the country’s different regions. The interviewees shared their dreams (see the ideal scenario) and their fears, particularly this one: “It’s clear that we are living through a phase of radical Islamist infiltration and expansion within Malian society, which is a frightening thought [...] (a) threat to secularism, the encroachment of religious militantism on politics, [...] a hotbed for (the) recruitment of members and supporters of extremist religious movements. The state must take care to not, through its own inaction, give the impression that secularism equates to *laissez-faire*.” It is perhaps too easy to say that the government and its partners should have heeded this warning, but one can only admire the lucidity and accuracy of the assessment.

In any case, the debates which took place on the “Prospective Study of Sahelian Realities 2030” have, from our point of view, the merit of drawing attention to the need to think about the future of the Sahel beyond strategies and plans for development and stabilisation, the timeframe of which only extend forward a few years. It is not enough to simply manage urgent situations. So what can be done, and how?

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TACKLING DEMOGRAPHIC CHALLENGES

The key variable and the one that will have the most influence on changes to Sahelian spaces, economies and societies, is *population*. It is also the most predictable.

Today, there are 400 million people living in West Africa; there are likely to be around 550 million by 2030, 680 million by 2040, and 850 million by 2050. In the next 10 years (2017-27), the population of the region is set to increase by 30%, which equates to an additional 115 million people. This inevitable surge will be accompanied by an equally inevitable rise in mobility. Internal, regional and international migration will continue and probably accelerate.

THINKING ABOUT MIGRATION

There is no miraculous alternative to this rapidly changing demographic. There is no recorded example in human history of homothetic growth (where the proportion of population in a given territory remains static) during a period of demographic transition (apart from instances where force was used). In the 19th century, 60 million Europeans left their countries while at the same time cities were undergoing rapid growth and rural areas furthest from urban centres were in demographic decline as people flocked to more advantageous areas. The same type of process – but faster and more powerful – is at work and will continue in sub-Saharan Africa. There are, however, some notable differences:

- The factors prompting mobility are now much more influential: (i) The wealth gap between the richest and poorest territories has never been greater. (ii) World trade is increasing at a staggering rate, despite a few short periods of respite. Global trade has expanded 35-fold over the past 40 years, and global GDP has risen nine-fold. (iii) Technical and technological vehicles for the circulation of ideas, and the movement of people and goods, have never been more accessible, numerous, diverse and fast.

And in parallel:

- The obstacles to mobility have never been greater: i) Contrary to during the 19th century, there are no longer any “new worlds” taking shape and starting to industrialise, i.e. countries encouraging immigration. ii) The perception of immigration in developed countries has changed for the worse.

Where and how will the 550 million West Africans live in 2030? And what about the 680 million in 2040?

In this paradoxical context where mobility is both “stimulated naturally” and politically constrained, the question for the region – including the Sahel – and for the world becomes an existential one. The rapid and far-reaching changes to human geography (urbanisation, migration, territories), economy (including the job market), social relationships and mentalities against a backdrop of medium-term uncertainty caused by three factors (changes in geopolitical equilibrium, technological advancements, climate change), deserve attention and space within public policies and international strategies.

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