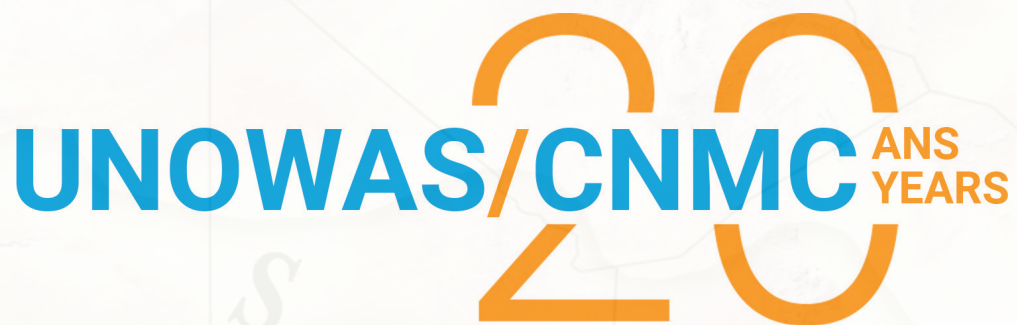




Women and Youth, key to Peacebuilding in West Africa and the Sahel



Green Caravan of the Youth of the Great Green Wall
in Aweivia, Mauritania - Photo: Fatimata Aliyu - December 2022



*20 years of commitment for the promotion
of peace and conflict prevention*

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Giovane BIHA

Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Officer in charge of UNOWAS/CNMC

Women and Youth are key to Peacebuilding in West Africa and the Sahel

The consolidation of peace, security and development in West Africa and the Sahel is a breathless task that requires strong conviction and continued commitment from all partners. The challenges facing the people of the subregion are multiple, complex, and pernicious.

The solidarity of the international community and of regional actors and partners is crucial to safeguard the gains of peace and to strengthen development. But ownership of problems and solutions by all West African actors is not only necessary, it is also urgent. It must be a strategic priority for the Governments of the subregion in the implementation of their national plans and programmes through a desire to include all social categories, in particular women and young people.

Indeed, women and youth represent a leading part of the overall population of West African countries and the Sahel. No country or organization can ignore the contribution and importance of the role that women and young people can play in combating the multiple challenges that threaten peace and security in the subregion.

Since its establishment in 2002, UNOWAS has never stopped to sensitize the various State and non-State actors, especially those of civil society, to strengthen their efforts to promote the active participation of women and youth in decision-making processes that stem the negative effects of various challenges and contribute to the construction of prosperous societies. Continuing its commitment in this regard, UNOWAS, in coordination with its various

regional, international and United Nations partners, has undertaken a series of activities to promote the role and involvement of women and youth in combating the adverse effects of climate change; promoting gender equality and empowering women in the security sector in West Africa; and the importance of gender in building peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel.

The story shared with us by the former Special Representative and Head of UNOWAS, Saïd Djinnit through his book “Carnet de Maputo ou ma lettre d’amour à la femme Africaine” is a moving statement for African women, but also a call for the mobilization of all so that women, and young people as well, can occupy the place they deserve.

WORLD POPULATION REACHES 8 BILLION

According to the World Population Prospects 2022 report, published by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the world population officially **exceeded 8 billion people** on 15 November 2022.

Over the next three decades, Nigeria's population is expected to increase further from 216 million to 375 million. This will make this West African country the fourth most populous country in the world after India, China and the United States.

Population growth is slowing down

The world's population is growing at its slowest rate since 1950, having fallen to less than 1% in 2020. The latest United Nations projections suggest that the world's population could reach around 8.5 billion in 2030 and 9.7 billion in 2050.

Life expectancy is rising

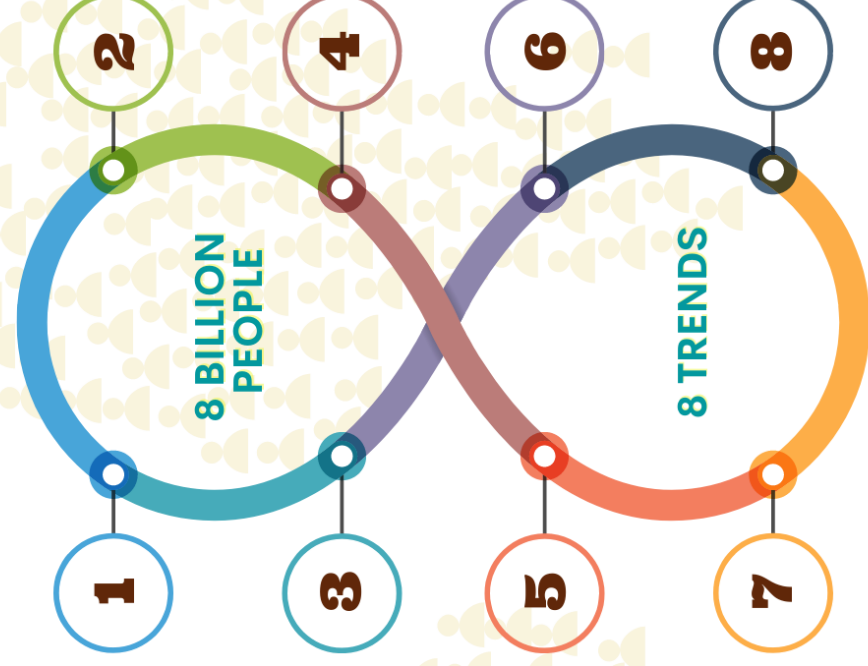
In 2019, life expectancy at birth stood at 72.8 years, up almost 9 years since 1990. It is projected to rise to 77.2 years by 2050.

The population ageing faster and faster

Between 2050 and 1990, the share of people 65 and over in the population rose from about 5% to about 6%. By 2050, people aged 65 and over will be over twice the number of children under 5.

Deaths from COVID-19 compounded the impact of HIV/AIDS

COVID-19 had a measurable impact on mortality. In 2020 and 2021, it led to 14.9 million more deaths.



More and more countries have shrinking populations

The global fertility rate has been falling for decades. In 1950, 5 children were born per woman. This rate is 2.3 in 2000 and is expected to reach 2.1 by 2050.

International migration is reshaping populations

281 million people live outside their country of birth, 128 million more than in 1990 and three times as many as in 1970.

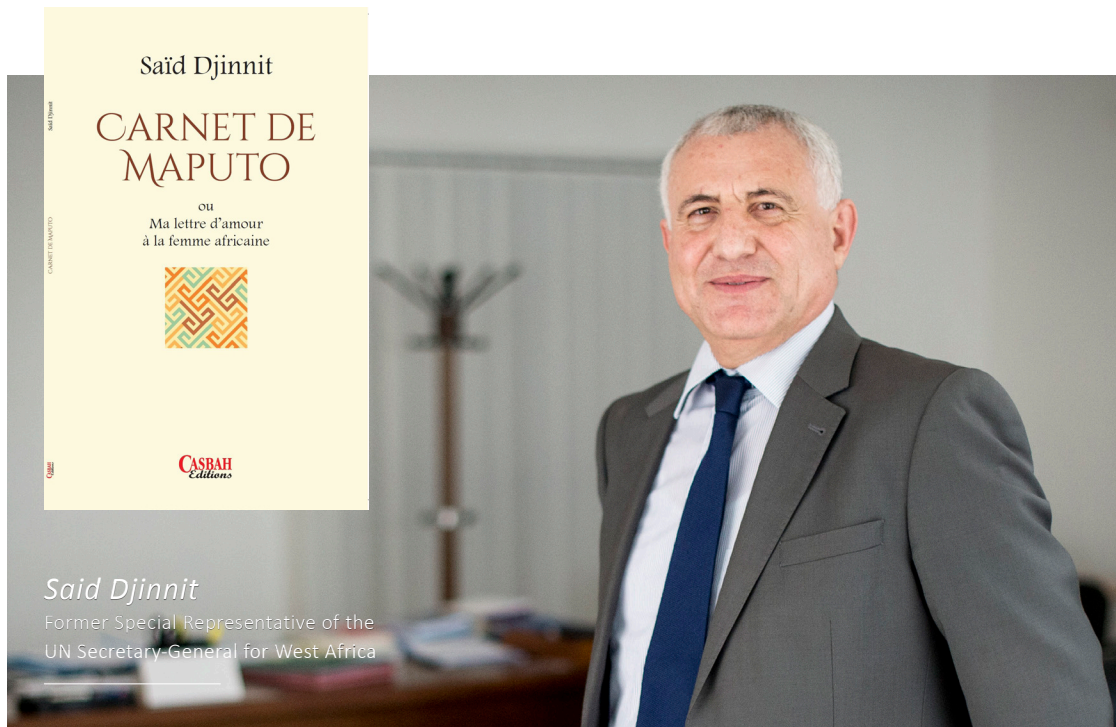
Women outliving men

Worldwide, nearly 106 boys are born for every 100 girls. But, women live longer than men.

Asia and Africa are driving population growth

Sub-Saharan Africa has been the region with the fastest population growth since the 1980s. It peaked at 3% per year in 1978 and has declined slightly since. Reaching 2.5% in 2022, it is still almost three times the world average (0.8%).

Saïd Djinnit: “Progress has been made towards gender equality in Africa, but a lot remains to be done to achieve the desired objectives”



The former Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Saïd Djinnit, (2008-2014) has always carried Africa in his heart and in his professional commitment. Throughout his career as an Algerian diplomat in the service of the African Union (AU) and then in the service of the United Nations, he has never ceased to bring together African actors, men and women, around peace, development, and the progress of Africa. Evidenced by his latest book entitled “Notebook of Maputo or My love letter to the African woman” (Casbah editions) in which he summons his memories of a child covered by the love of his grandmother and that of his parents, and recounts his role in the adoption of the protocol on the rights of women in Africa at the Summit of Maputo (Mozambique) in July 2003. An account that alternates between the memories of the child Saïd and the commitments of the diplomat Djinnit for progress of the African continent, which can only be achieved through the protection and strengthening of women’s rights. Interview

We were expecting you to write about your experience as a mediator of conflict resolution and prevention, especially in West Africa – but surprisingly, you have published “a love letter to African women”?

“Notebook of Maputo or my love letter to the African woman” is, in fact,

the second book I have written. As you allude to, conflict prevention and resolution have been at the heart of my professional and personal engagement since I joined the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in November 1989. In my first book, “Dialogue at any cost: At the heart of the 2013 political crisis in Guinea”, I recounted my role and ex-

perience as an international facilitator of the Guinean dialogue in 2013. With the support of the two national facilitators and the relevant African and international organizations, alongside the cooperation of the Guinean political leaders involved in the crisis, we succeeded in finding common ground. This collaboration meant a conflict,

feared by many Guinean political actors due to what had happened in neighboring Sierra Leone earlier, was avoided.

Let's talk about "Notebook of Maputo or my love letter to the African woman". Three major elements dominate your book: love, suffering and commitment. The love you have for "Nana", your grandmother, for your mother, and beyond that, for the women of your native village in Kabylia, their daily suffering, and finally your commitment as an Algerian and African diplomat

Indeed, the silent and dignified suffering of the women of my native village in Algeria, during the colonial period and that which immediately followed independence, has deeply marked me and inspired me throughout my life. I have found this suffering in every part of our continent that I have been able to visit during the last three decades.

As a child, I would spend my nights with my grandmother, who showered me with love. I returned this to her as much as I could express it, because in our society, we can find it difficult to verbalize our love. I was also intrigued by the modest love that united my parents. I dedicated a chapter of the book to them entitled "They loved each other so much". As I grew up, I could see the intensity of that love. After my

mother's early death, my father resisted the tradition of remarrying as soon as the forty-day mourning period was over. Honoring the love, he always had for the woman of his life, my father remained a widower, for over twenty years, until his death in 2014.

When one has grown up in a center for displaced populations, during a colonial period marked by deprivation, occupation, expropriation of land, marginalization, contempt and repression, one inevitably clings to one's dignity and to the hope of justice and freedom. For my part, as an Algerian diplomat, responsible within the OAU, which became the African Union, and then as a United Nations diplomat, I have been inspired by these values which have nourished my commitment to conflict prevention and mediation.

But isn't your declaration and love letter to African women also an alarm call for real awareness and political action to give African women the place and the status they deserve?

As the eldest of a large sibling group, I protected my sister from the beatings inflicted on her by my mother for failing to fulfil her domestic obligations. Indeed, from early teenage years onwards, girls had to help their mothers with the housework. The boys had to help their father in the fields. But the

status of girls was lower than that of boys. This has improved over time with the development of our country. But, despite some valuable developments, the status of women remained lower than that of men. During my schooling, from primary school to university, I had the chance to study in mixed schools. With our female classmates, we were equal in the eyes of the national education system. I learned to see them as equals. As a student, I took part in the main events organized in Algiers on 8 March 1975 to mark International Women's Day. I noticed that there were only women at these meetings. I then took the initiative to write a short note calling for men to join women in the fight for their emancipation. I sent it to the main national daily newspaper of the time; it was like throwing a bottle into the sea. To my surprise, the note was published a few days later.

During my professional travels, I observed the situation of women in villages and cities in other African countries. I noticed that there was a cultural continuity on the continent and that the status of women left much to be desired throughout Africa. When I was given the opportunity, in my capacity as AU Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs and Acting AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, to be involved in the preparation of a protocol on women's rights



in Africa, I was fully committed to it. I was approached by a group of representatives for African women's organizations who drew my attention to the draft protocol on women's rights in Africa that had been initially considered by member state experts before I took over as head of the organization's political affairs department. They complained that some of the provisions of the draft protocol as retained by the meeting of experts fell short of the commitments made internationally by African states, notably at the Beijing World Conference on Women. They sought my support to strengthen these provisions and to help them push through progressive language on controversial issues such as polygamy and abortion. For my part, I asked for their help in sensitizing member states towards holding the second meeting of experts, as previous attempts by the secretariat had failed to achieve the necessary quorum, reflecting member state reluctance towards this project. In return, I committed to harmonizing the draft text with commitments already made internationally by member states. On the few controversial issues, I committed myself to supporting them during the experts' meeting. This happened as planned and the meeting culminated in the adoption of a very progressive draft protocol.

At the Council of Ministers, preceding the second AU Summit in Maputo in July 2003, several state delegations opposed the adoption of the draft protocol, arguing, among other things, that it had not yet been considered by a meeting of ministers responsible for gender issues. In responding to the delegations' comments, I reached deep within myself to find the necessary strength of persuasion by recalling the important concerns of women and their expectations of the Summit. After my intervention, the President of the Council of Ministers expressed his satisfaction with my plea and asked delegations for their reaction. As no delegation responded swiftly to his request, the Chairperson took advantage of the moment of hesitation and quickly brought down his gavel, declaring the draft protocol adopted. The lobbying undertaken by the representatives of women's organizations before the Maputo meetings certainly



The United Nations, through its Sustainable Development Goals, and the African Union, through its Agenda 2063, have charted a course towards sustainable development in Africa that will surely contribute to the strengthening of gender equality in Africa.

contributed to the successful outcome of the Council of Ministers' deliberations. Subsequently, the draft protocol approved by the Council of Ministers was formally adopted by the Summit of Heads of State and Government and became known as the Maputo Protocol.

Nineteen years after the adoption of the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa at the Maputo Summit in Mozambique, how do you assess the situation of African women today? Are you satisfied?

While admitting that there has been significant progress in the situation of women in Africa, I am frankly not satisfied. Nor am I satisfied with the state of implementation of the Maputo Protocol. This was the same observation made by participants at the seminar on the launch of my book on "My love letter to the African woman", which took place on 27 July 2022. I was honored by the participation of my sister Sahle-Work-Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, who gave the opening speech. I was also pleased by the participation of my sister Minata Samate, Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs

and Social Development at the African Union who moderated the meeting as well as my brothers and sister Leila Zerrougui, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mahamat Saleh Annadif, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for West Africa and Huang Xia, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for the Great Lakes region. Mr. Fred Ngoga, Advisor to the Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union, also honored us with his presence. While welcoming the progress made towards gender equality in Africa, the participants considered that much remains to be done to achieve the desired objectives. They also reiterated their commitment to continue supporting this important cause.

You know all the UN Security Council resolutions that call for the promotion of women's participation. What needs to be done so that African women can be considered on an equal footing with men and play a full role in development?

I personally think that the United Nations has done a great job for the emancipation of women in the world, notably through the holding of a series of world conferences on women, the fourth and last of which was held in Beijing in 1995. The United Nations Security Council has also committed itself to this endeavor through the adoption on 31 October 2000 of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and subsequent resolutions. These UN initiatives, supported by African organizations, have continued to advance the gender equality agenda in Africa. The progress made so far is linked to the impact on education, especially for girls, and the financial empowerment of women through economic development and employment. But there is still a lot of resistance to this agenda. It is an uphill battle against the status quo and conservatism that will, unfortunately, take time. When you look at the progress made since the first World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, you can see how slow that progress has been in half a century. In whole regions of the world, including



I reached deep within myself to find the necessary strength of persuasion by recalling the important concerns of women and their expectations of the Summit

Africa, the situation of women remains worrying because of social constraints and the problems of poverty and underdevelopment. Continued development efforts in these regions will help advance gender equality. Despite the hoped-for acceleration of the women's empowerment movement with the contribution of social networks, it is understood that progress will not be as fast as hoped for and that generations will have to continue the struggle for equality. "The United Nations, through its Sustainable Development Goals, and the African Union, through its Agenda 2063, have charted a course towards sustainable development in Africa that will surely contribute to the

strengthening of gender equality in Africa." We must therefore continue the fight by building on the progress made towards achieving the ultimate goals.

What would 'Nana' say about her grandson Said?

I always try to live up to the values of integrity, justice, fairness and compassion that "Nana", my grandmother and my parents left me. I have done my best to behave as a good citizen and pass on these values to my children. I hope that from where they are, my parents and "Nana" are proud of their son and grandson.

Books and recent articles written by Said Djinnit

BOOKS

Le dialogue à tout prix: Au cœur de la crise politique de 2013 en Guinée

Presses Universitaires de Louvain (PUL) - Février 2022.

Carnet de Maputo ou ma lettre d'amour à la femme africaine

Éditions Casbah - Juillet 2022.

RECENT ARTICLES

Le leadership de l'ONU à l'épreuve des crises complexes

Article publié par: [*L'Observatoire Boutros-Ghali du maintien de la paix*](#) dans sa *Lettre d'information d'octobre 2022*

Dr Salim Ahmed Salim: An African transformational leader and a consensus builder

Article publié par: [*The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes \(ACCORD\)*](#) dans sa revue [*Conflict & Resilience Monitor*](#) - 10 février 2022.

The Case for updating the African Union Policy on Unconstitutional Changes of Government

Article publié par [*ACCORD*](#) dans sa revue [*Policy & Practice Brief Elections, Governance*](#) - 22 octobre 2021.

Reviving conflict prevention

Article publié par [*ACCORD*](#) dans sa revue [*Conflict & Resilience Monitor*](#) - 12 mai 2021.

An African Union Summit held in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic and against growing tensions in parts of the continent

Article publié par [*ACCORD*](#) dans sa revue [*Conflict & Resilience Monitor*](#) - 24 février 2021.

The COVID-19 crisis consequences: disrupting the African peace and security agenda

Article publié par [*ACCORD*](#) dans sa revue [*Conflict & Resilience Monitor*](#) - 30 septembre 2020.

An African Agenda for Peace, Governance and Development at Thirty: A retrospective look at the genesis and significance of the OAU's July 1990 Declaration on Fundamental Changes.

Article co-écrit avec El-Ghassim Wane et publié par: [*The World Peace Foundation*](#) - Juillet 2020.

The implications of COVID-19 for social cohesion and public order

Article publié par [*ACCORD*](#) dans sa revue [*Conflict & Resilience Monitor*](#) - 20 Avril 2020.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



1 NO
POVERTY



2 ZERO
HUNGER



3 GOOD HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING



4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



5 GENDER
EQUALITY



6 CLEAN WATER
AND SANITATION



7 AFFORDABLE AND
CLEAN ENERGY



8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH



9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION
AND INFRASTRUCTURE



10 REDUCED
INEQUALITIES



11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES



12 RESPONSIBLE
CONSUMPTION
AND PRODUCTION



13 CLIMATE
ACTION



14 LIFE
BELOW WATER



15 LIFE
ON LAND



16 PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS

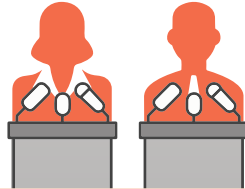




ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

IT WOULD TAKE ANOTHER

40 YEARS

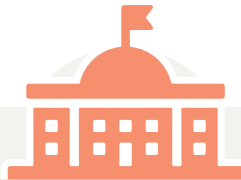


FOR **WOMEN AND MEN** TO BE **REPRESENTED**
EQUALLY IN **NATIONAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP**
AT THE CURRENT PACE

WOMEN'S SHARE IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

22.4%

2015



26.2%

2022



WOMEN ACCOUNTED FOR

39%

OF TOTAL
EMPLOYMENT

IN 2019,

BUT

45%

OF GLOBAL
EMPLOYMENT LOSSES

IN 2020

MORE THAN 1 IN 4 WOMEN
(15+ YEARS)



HAVE BEEN SUBJECTED TO INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE (641 MILLION)
AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIFETIME



GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING
NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED

PROPORTION OF
COUNTRIES WITH
SYSTEMS TO TRACK
GENDER-BUDGET
ALLOCATIONS
(2018-2021)



26%

COMPREHENSIVE
SYSTEMS

59%

SOME FEATURES
OF A SYSTEM

15%

LACKING MINIMUM ELEMENTS
OF SUCH A SYSTEM

ONLY 57%

OF WOMEN (15-49 YEARS)



ARE MAKING THEIR OWN INFORMED
DECISIONS ON **SEX AND**
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE

(64 COUNTRIES, 2007-2021)

Gender inclusion is fundamental to security sector reform in West Africa and the Sahel

A two-day roundtable on promoting gender equality and empowering women in the security sector in West Africa was held in Dakar on 7 and 8 December. Organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, this platform for exchange and sharing of experiences was attended by the chairs of the parliamentary defense and security commissions of Senegal, Gambia, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.



Participants at the roundtable on women's empowerment in the security sector in West Africa

Today, several countries in West Africa and the Sahel are placing an increasing focus on security sector reform. The latter must include all actors, including women, so that the management and functioning of the security system is

more effective, accountable, credible, rooted in the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In accordance with its mandate, the United Nations Office for West Afri-

ca and the Sahel (UNOWAS) provides continuous support to the States of the sub-region in ensuring they take necessary measures to include the gender dimension into security and justice institutions, and they consider

involving young people and civil society. For example, UNOWAS has supported national security sector reform processes launched in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, and currently in The Gambia.

The Gambia is today a pilot country for the project on promoting gender equality and empowering women in the security sector in West Africa. Thus, from 18 to 22 July 2022, UNOWAS, with the financial support of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, and in partnership with the permanent capacity "SSuRGe" of the United Nations, UN WOMEN, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF) organized five workshops on promoting gender equality and empowering women within The Gambia's Defense and Security Sector (DSS). A total of 68 officials including 38 women, from the police, the armed forces, the Standing Committee on Defense and Security of the National Assembly (SCDS) and the Office of National Security participated in the workshops.

This preliminary meeting in The Gambia made a series of recommendations, including the need to strengthen national capacities for gender mainstreaming, especially in human resources policies. Participants also stressed the need for national awareness-raising and advocacy campaigns to encourage women and other vulnerable groups to join the DSS, as well as the development and implementation of equitable, competency- and performance-based management systems.

Based on these recommendations, UNOWAS recently organized a regional roundtable in Dakar with the

main objective to share the findings of previous workshops held last July in The Gambia, and to identify best practices and lessons learned on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in the security sector in West Africa. This workshop, organized on 7 and 8 December 2022, brought together about thirty participants including parliamentarians, security advisors and gender focal points from the Ministries in charge of defense and security services of Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda as well as representatives of ECOWAS and the United Nations system.

In her remarks, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovane Biha, welcomed the meeting. "Parliamentary Committees on Defense and Security play a key role in monitoring and advocating on the issue of improving gender parity in defense and security services," she said. "The context may be country-specific, but the goal is the same for the region, and these challenges are common to the security sectors in West Africa and beyond," She added.

And Rwanda, through the Honorable Member of parliament Alice Muzana who is also the Chair of the Rwandan Committee on Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Security, shared its experience and good practices in promoting gender in the Security Sector. "Rwanda, like other African countries, is on the right track in empowering women in general and in security organs, in particular. Gender promotion has become a way of life," said Ms. Muzana. "In Rwanda, at least 30 per cent of decision-making positions are held by women. It is also one of the countries with the highest number of

women on peacekeeping missions," she concluded.

At the end of the discussions, the amendment and improvement of texts and laws were highlighted as one of the key recommendations. Participants also called for coordinated and regular exchanges between defense and security forces and parliamentarians on the importance of gender that will contribute to improving the status of women within these entities.

Ms. Biha encouraged parliamentarians to be ambassadors for gender promotion: "Be our spokespersons in the hemicycle and with regional institutions to increase the visibility of women's skills, successes and achievements in the defense and security services."



Parliamentary Committees on Defense and Security play a key role in monitoring and advocating on the issue of improving gender parity in defense and security services

Strengthening and expanding the role of women and youth for peace in West Africa and the Sahel



Image- @UNPeacekeeping

Between the 31st of October and the 16th of December, the UNOWAS Gender Unit in collaboration with the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel hosted five virtual thematic exchange sessions on various themes related to the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace, and Security Agendas. This activity represents a fundamental tool for the UNOWAS in assessing the state of Women and Youth movements in the region and raising awareness for both the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace, and Security agendas.

Contributing to the consolidation of peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel is at the heart of the UNOWAS' engagement which promotes the participation of key national and regional actors, such as women and youth, in conflict resolution processes and decision-making.

The unfolding security situation and the multiple emerging challenges to peace and security, require a coordinated support to women and youth who can play an important role in curbing these challenges. In this regard, UNOWAS Gender Unit in collaboration with the Working Group on

Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel took the initiative to organize five themes of the sessions on "Civil-military collaboration an effective and sustainable approach to security challenges in West Africa and the Sahel "; "democratic transitions and security risks in

the Mano River Union area”, “the role of women in the prevention of sexual violence and GBV in armed conflicts in West Africa”, “social networks, youth and security in West Africa and the Sahel”, and “youth engagement for a culture of non-violence in school and student environments”.

The objectives of these sessions were to stimulate dialogue on key issues of the region current political, peace, security, and development context, to highlight emerging challenges and opportunities and to document best practice initiatives and lessons learned. These sessions represent a fundamental tool for the UNOWAS Gender Unit in assessing the state of Women and Youth movements in the region and raising awareness for both

the Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace, and Security agendas.

At each session various members of the Working Group, as well as resource persons from across the region, were offered the opportunity to present on these thematic issues and provide insight based on their own country contexts but, also on regional perspectives on these key issues.

Overall, the sessions provided insight on emerging challenges facing the implementation of Women, Peace and Security and Youth, Peace and Security agendas, for the development of the 2023 strategies and activities of the UNOWAS Gender Unit and the Working Group. Key recommendations emerged from the sessions included the need to: integrate women and

young people into democratic conditions for the conduct of political dialogues, mediations, and negotiations, to strengthen protection mechanisms for whistleblowers on sexual misconduct in military contexts, to enhance data collection on violence against women in conflict-prone countries and to enhance education for youth on the dangers of social media usage.

The thematic exchange sessions displayed the strength of the relationship between UNOWAS, the Working Group and various partner organisations in the region and illustrates the commitment to the continued pursuit of the women and youth involvement in conflict prevention and political, peace and security processes in the region.



Tackling the root causes of insecurity in West Africa together



Mrs. Giovane Biha at the working meeting with the President of INEC in Abuja

The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel continues its commitment to support the countries of the subregion in their efforts to promote peace and stability. The Deputy Special Representative, Giovane Biha, recently made a series of visits to Burkina Faso and Nigeria to reinforce the need to strengthen regional cooperation in the sub-region in order to face the challenges that threaten peace and security.

With yet another coup in Burkina Faso at the beginning of the last quarter of 2022 in West Africa, unconstitutional changes of government continue to be a major challenge that generates serious threats to democracy and the rule of law. Faced with these multiple challenges to democracy and regional security, UNOWAS has redoubled its

efforts to strengthen cooperation between the countries of the sub-region.

Enhanced cooperation to fight insecurity

Ms. Biha participated in the International Conference on the Accra Initiative, held in Accra, Ghana, on 21-22

November 2022, under the theme, "Accra Initiative: Towards a Credible, Preventative and Coordinated Response to Challenges Facing the Coastal and Sahelian States". Under the chairmanship of H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa AKUFO-ADDU, President of the Republic of Ghana, the International Conference on the Accra Initiative took

place to draw the attention of the international community to the security challenges facing the region, showcase the Accra Initiative as a responsive mechanism to such challenges and to share lessons learned from previous interventions in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the sub-region.

During the ministerial meeting, held prior to the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Accra Initiative Member States, Ms. Giovane BIHA underlined the need for, “continued cooperation and collaboration between member states” to combat violent extremism, terrorism, and transnational organized crime. She further emphasized the “necessity to ensure a consistent response that combines the military approach with long term interventions aiming to address the governance deficits noted in affected communities” and reiterated “the support of the United Nations

to the Accra Initiative”. The Summit recommended that within the Framework of the Accra Initiative, concrete actions, specifically fundraising-related, be taken to support the countries severely affected by terrorism while commitments were reaffirmed to mobilize the necessary indigenous resources to operationalize the Multi-national Joint Task Force of the Accra Initiative (MNJTF/AI) within a month.

A regional peacekeeping force

Continuing her visits, the Special Representative took part, on 27 November 2022, in a transition assessment mission to Burkina Faso. As a reminder, on 30 September 2022 this West African country experienced a second coup in the space of eight months. This coup brought Captain Ibrahim Traoré to power, after the forced resignation of the former President of the transition, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba.

It is in this context that the assessment mission was initiated and led by the former President of Niger, Mahamadou Issoufou, ECOWAS Mediator for Burkina Faso. The delegation met with the new transitional authorities, civil society organizations and political leaders, religious and traditional leaders as well as the diplomatic corps.

The conclusions of this assessment mission were presented to the 62nd Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government held on 4 December in Abuja. During this conference, while expressing their concern about the security situation in Burkina Faso, the Heads of State and Government took note of the commitment of the new transitional authorities to respect the 24-month transition timetable that should lead to the organization of elections in July 2024. Regarding Guinea, they insisted on the immediate implementation of the consolidated 24-month transition



Mrs. Giovane Biha with the delegation of the ECOWAS Mediator, M. Issoufou during his audience with the President of the Transition of Burkina Faso, Captain Ibrahim Traoré.



ECOWAS Commission Headquarters - Abuja

timetable. They also called on the transitional authorities to hold a nation-wide dialogue that would include all Guinean political actors.

At the end of the Ordinary Session, the leaders of the countries of the region also agreed to create a regional peace-keeping force that would intervene against violent extremism and help restore constitutional order in countries facing unconstitutional changes of government. Before the Assembly of Heads of State, the ECOWAS 80th Ordinary Session the Council of Ministers was held. Addressing the Ministers, Ms. BIHA stressed the need to increase and coordinate efforts to address the root causes of insecurity in the sub-region. She also reiterated the readiness

of ONOWAS and the UN to work in collaboration with ECOWAS to support successful transitions in Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Mali.


For peaceful, transparent, and inclusive elections in Nigeria

Taking advantage of her presence in Nigeria, where presidential and parliamentary elections are scheduled to take place on 18 February 2023, Ms. Biha met with the United Nations country team, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), the Nigerian police, the flag bearer of the Labour Party, the United States Ambassador to Nigeria and an African Union pre-electoral mission. The Special Representative commended

and encouraged the security forces and INEC for their efforts to ensure peaceful, transparent, and inclusive elections.

The Special Representative then travelled to Kaduna on 1 December for the high-level meeting with traditional leaders, religious leaders and political party chairmen organized by the Kaduna State Peace Commission with the support of the UN and the National Peace Committee (NPC). She assured all actors of the UN's continued support to Nigeria and called for joint and coordinated efforts to ensure peaceful, transparent, and inclusive elections.

10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT UNOWAS

-  UNOWAS, United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, was established in 2002 as a regional special political mission of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs and Peacebuilding (DPPA).
-  UNOWAS is headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel. Ms. Giovane BIHA is the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Officer in Charge of UNOWAS/CNMC.
-  UNOWAS is mandated by the Security Council to act for the prevention and resolution of crises and conflicts through an active role in preventive diplomacy, good offices, and political mediation.
-  UNOWAS implements its mandate in 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo-Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and (Chad).
-  UNOWAS works closely with the various United Nations entities including regional and international partners such as the Economic Community of West African States, the Mano River Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Gulf of Guinea Commission, the Group of Five for the Sahel and the African Union, to consolidate peace and prevent conflicts.
-  UNOWAS supports the 16 countries in their efforts to consolidate good governance, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and gender mainstreaming in conflict prevention and management initiatives.
-  UNOWAS contributes to the analysis and assessment of the impact of climate change on security and stability in the sub-region. UNOWAS also supports sub-regional institutions and States in their efforts to address cross-border and cross-cutting threats to peace and security in the sub-region.
-  UNOWAS contributes to the implementation of the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) to support the countries of the Sahel facing multiple challenges such as, security, development, the management of the effects of climate change and the promotion of sustainable development.
-  Special Representative of the Secretary-General is also the Chairman of the Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission (CMCN), created to facilitate the implementation of the judgment rendered in 2002 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the border dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria.
-  CNMC supports the work of border demarcation between Cameroon and Nigeria. It also supports the response to the needs of populations affected by the demarcation. Since its creation, CNMC has been able to demarcate 2050 km out of an estimated borderline of 2100 km.

“Climate adaptation and peacebuilding go hand in hand”



In coordination with its partners, UNOWAS continues its engagement to help curb the adverse effects of climate change on security and peace in West Africa and the Sahel and ensure the response is regional, inclusive, and consistent with peace-building efforts.

For UNOWAS, youth in West Africa and the Sahel constitute a major actor that must be supported. Its involvement and participation in the consolidation of peace, development, and more particularly, in the fight against the adverse effects of climate change, are not only useful, but necessary, because the youth represent the future of the sub-region.

Inspired by this conviction which characterizes its continuous commitment in favor of West African youth, UNOWAS, in coordination with the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), orga-

nized last 11 and 12 October, in Abidjan, a workshop on youth empowerment, climate change, peace and security in West Africa and the Sahel. The objective of this activity was to promote the role of young people and their initiatives for climate action and conflict prevention. The two-day workshop allowed young innovators in climate change adaptation and activists from the sub-region to exchange on the experiences of their respective communities and make recommendations to improve the innovations that will contribute to curbing the negative effects of climate change on the populations of the sub-region.



In West Africa and the Sahel, climate change is referred as a “risk multiplier”



Strengthened coordination between the United Nations system and its partners is vital to support young people and countries in the sub-region in their efforts to combat the negative effects of climate change

Indeed, in West Africa and the Sahel, climate change is referred to as a «risk multiplier» because it accentuates the factors already present, such as failing crops, poverty, instability,

youth migration, displacement, and weak government resources. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has revealed that the frequency, scale and intensity of heat waves, droughts, dust storms, erosion, floods, and erratic rainfall throughout the region has significantly increased. Therefore, informed, and innovative solutions are rapidly needed (Read interview with Ngozi Amu).

The young participants present at the workshop agreed on several recommendations, including the need for knowledge and skills sharing programmes, networking opportunities, online visibility and coordination, and awareness of the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI).

To further the implementation of these recommendations and the Dakar Call to Action, UNOWAS then organized two side events on Climate Change, Peace, and Security at the annual COP27 (United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties) summit on the 15th and 17th of November 2022. During the two side

events, the discussions emphasized the need to streamline research, policy development and action, to prioritize solutions that are conflict sensitive, gender-informed and nature-based and to scale up women and youth locally led climate adaptation and innovations under the umbrella of the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI). Participants also agreed to come together to explore options for climate funding that could benefit populations residing in both conflict-affected and conflict-prone locations in West Africa and the Sahel.

While reiterating the commitment of UNOWAS, the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Ms. Giovane BIHA, underlined through videoconference that « climate adaptation and peacebuilding go hand in hand, and strengthened coordination between the United Nations system and its partners is vital to support young people and countries in the sub-region in their efforts to combat the negative effects of climate change».



COP 27



UNOWAS “fills a gap” in climate change and security



Ngozi Amu

Team Leader and Head of
Research & Analysis Section - UNOWAS

In 2020, the UN Security Council requested UNOWAS to take into consideration the adverse implications of climate change, energy poverty, ecological changes and natural disasters, among other factors, including by assisting governments of the region and the United Nations system in undertaking risk assessments and risk management strategies to these factors. Ms. Ngozi Amu, Team Leader and Head of Research and Analysis, explains the role of UNOWAS. Interview.

In 2020, the UNSC requested UNOWAS to assess the adverse implications of climate change on peace and security in WAS, can you tell us more?

The Security Council has been addressing issues that link peace and security with climate change since 2007. But it has been an ad-hoc process with a few Council members calling for open debates at different intervals. In 2020, following the renewal of UNOWAS' mandate, the Security Council

requested UNOWAS to “take into consideration the adverse implications of climate change, energy poverty, ecological changes and natural disasters, among other factors, including by assisting governments of the region and the United Nations system in undertaking risk assessments and risk management strategies to these factors.”

Indeed, in West Africa and the Sahel, climate shocks bring about recurring droughts, floods and heat waves, which in turn dry out arable land and

water resources, which increases competition for food and survival among farmers, herders, fishermen, forestry workers, miners and other groups. This scenario is amplified in places where violent conflict and other security threats are rampant, and where there is little resource governance or state capacity to manage the situation.

Some of these findings were captured in UNOWAS' 2018 Study on Pastoralism and Security in West Africa and the Sahel where climate change was iden-

tified as one major driver of the spike in farmer-herder conflicts. The Study also pointed to multi-layered security risks, exacerbated by climate change.

What are the main challenges facing the sub-region?

Because of its already semi-arid landscape, the Sahel is especially vulnerable to climate change. It is easy to understand the devastating impact that climate shocks have on populations living in this zone, which is located just underneath the Sahara Desert. While these populations are extraordinary resilient – they recovered from extreme droughts in the 1970's and 1980's and local knowledge about ecosystem survival has been passed on for generations – “the current speed of climate change is alarming. Temperature surges, sandstorms, flooding and soil degradation are more frequent and intense than ever before”.

In central Sahel – especially in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – and in the Lake Chad region, climate change intensifies an already complex interplay of poverty, terrorism, youth unemployment, massive displacement and migration, limited resource management and weak state presence, thereby serving as a risk multiplier. But what makes things worse is the instrumentalization of these challenges by both national and external actors for economic and political gains, and the erosion in many places of traditional dispute resolution instances that would normally resolve resource competition, including farmer-herder conflict, in community courts.

The first is that climate change is only one among many other factors – political, security, economic, demographic and others- that impacts human security in the Sahel and Lake Chad region. Yet, what makes climate change a significant risk multiplier is the narrow capacity of the region to curb the speed of it; its mitigation capacity is limited.

The second is that while the Sahel and Lake Chad region stands out in terms inter-linkages between climate change and insecurity because of existing vulnerabilities, increased attention must be placed on this nexus in West Africa,

from the standpoint of conflict prevention. How will countries prepare for this wave of internal climate migrants, including the management and distribution of scarce resources? This is as much a human development question as a conflict prevention one.

In this context, what are the main initiatives being taken by UNOWAS?

UNOWAS has embarked on a major collaborative and integrated effort with the UN system, ECOWAS, government agencies and civil society. Guided by three principles : Human Security approach; UN integrated co-operation; Capitalizing on its regional mandate to link grassroots perspectives with national and regional policy development and implementation, UNOWAS has established a strong partnership with the Climate Security Mechanism (CSM) at UN headquarters and has created two inter-related regional Working Groups: One with the UN system led by UNFCCC, UNEP, IOM and UNOWAS, to promote knowledge sharing and coordination on climate-related work, and another one with ECOWAS, the AU and the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall (PAA-GGW) to sensitize member states to the linkages between climate change and security considerations, to integrate conflict sensitive approaches into National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Climate Change Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and



The current speed of climate change is alarming. Temperature surges, sandstorms, flooding and soil degradation are more frequent and intense than ever before

to harmonize regional climate-related efforts with national ones.

UNOWAS conducted series of risk assessments missions with the UN system and the UN regional Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in five pilot countries in the region: Liberia, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

The findings of these risk assessments were presented at UNOWAS' Regional Conference on Climate Change, Peace and Security in West Africa, organized in Dakar in April 2022 which endorsed a Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel focusing on the need to boost efforts in three areas: evidence-based research and analysis, partnerships, and financing for climate adaptation. UNOWAS also organized a COP27 UN-AU-ECOWAS partners coordination meeting in Abidjan in October 2022 to agree on collaboration during COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheikh, with a specific focus on two events: UN side event on “Forging Partnerships to Implement The Call To Action with the objective to showcase how the UN is working in an integrated manner to accompany regional partners in support of national governments to address climate security risks from a conflict prevention and peacebuilding perspective; and a UN-AU side event on “Scaling up support to fully operationalize the Great Green Wall as a green regional peacebuilding solution” which could serve to elevate, magnify and connect climate adaptation work at the local and national level, including climate smart agriculture and innovations produced by women and youth.

Looking ahead, what are the priorities you envisage to consider?

Looking ahead, continuing to implement the Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security remains a top priority for 2023, with emphasis on the following three programmes:

(a) Rolling out of a Regional Climate Change for Peace Empowerment Programme for Women and Youth, drawing on UNOWAS' October 2022 engagements with women and youth entrepreneurs and innovators in West



Africa and the Sahel where they outlined the support they needed to promote the intertwined goal of climate adaptation and peacebuilding, (b) Setting up a Regional Working Group with ECOWAS' climate change focal points to explore ways to integrate local proposals for climate adaptation and peacebuilding into national climate adaptation plans and organizing strategy meetings and capacity trainings for government ministers to accompany this process, (c) Working with the UN Country Teams in West Africa and the Sahel to organize UN capacity-building sessions on integrating climate change considerations into peacebuilding and other programming.

At this stage, what is your assessment of the situation?

The only way forward is to stay positive and recognize that even though

millions of people in West Africa and the Sahel are living the negative effects of climate change and the daily risks it poses, they know best what is happening to them and the priority actions needed to reduce the challenges; they have the traditional knowledge and expertise both in terms of climate adaptation and peacebuilding; they are determined, smart and resilient. But the burden on them is too big given the speed of climate change and the multitude of intertwined security risks faced.

They need support, both in terms of on-the-ground assistance to cope but also long term: to have their priorities and knowledge reflected in national and regional climate adaptation, migration and peacebuilding policies and implementation. Multiple regional and national frameworks aimed at supporting women and youth in their

climate adaptation and peacebuilding efforts exist. UNOWAS is involved in supporting: the United Nations Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS), the UN Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security, the AU's Great Green Wall Initiative, the Regional Stabilization Strategy and Governors Forum of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the West African Science Service Center on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), and multiple initiatives led by ECOWAS, G5 Sahel, CILSS and the UN system, among many others. UNOWAS is also collaborating with the World Bank and regional financial institutions like the African Development Bank. The latter is promoting multiple climate adaptation programmes for women and youth.

Ultimately, despite these efforts, a greater national ownership and self-fi-



nancing, and a deeper commitment to inclusive and community-based approaches will be required.

This year was the first time that UNOWAS as a regional political office with a Security Council mandate on conflict prevention, participated in the side events organized in connection with COP27 in Sharm-el-Sheikh. One of UNOWAS' own side events focused on the

implementation of the Call to Action on Climate Change, Peace and Security which galvanized great participation and interest.

The Call reflects the growing understanding in West Africa and the Sahel that climate action, to be successful, also must be about peace action and that this dual path requires attention to human security, integrated UN ap-

proaches with multiple partners and stronger and more inclusive cooperation among actors at local, national, regional and international levels.

In this way, the mandate given by the Council to UNOWAS relating to climate change and security has allowed the office – through its regional advocacy, bridge-building and political convening power – to fill a gap.

“The Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa (RHFwCA), an innovative and unique tool to respond to the most urgent and critical needs of populations”



Olivier Ndidiaka (center left)
Donor field visit, April 2019
Kaga-Bandoro / Central African Republic - Photo: OCHA

Drawing on its expertise in the regional humanitarian context, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has set up the first Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa (RHFwCA). Directed since its launch in June 2021 by Olivier Ndidiaka, this fund, which aims to be an innovative and unique tool, has already allocated \$51 million in 18 months to meet the most urgent needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises in West and Central Africa. Interview.

How is this Fund innovative and what is its distinctive competence?

Operating from Dakar, this fund covers Niger, Burkina Faso, and soon Mali, and brings the benefit of country humanitarian funds to a group of countries in the Sahel region where it was not possible to set up country humanitarian funds. This is a new approach whose interest is to respond to regional and cross-border issues in areas impacted

by interconnected humanitarian challenges between involved countries. This approach also allows economies of scale with a single management team based in Dakar that covers several countries. Established since June 2021, the Fund has already activated two country funds in 2021 in Niger and Burkina Faso. Last August, OCHA commissioned an exercise on lessons learned from experiences in Niger and Burkina Faso to explore the opportunity

to optimize this mechanism and, probably, replicate this approach in other regions of the world.

Localization, where does this new humanitarian response philosophy and approach come from?

At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the humanitarian community made several commitments. One of them was to engage in the localization



This fund, which aims to be an innovative and unique tool, has already allocated \$51 million in 18 months to meet the most urgent needs of populations affected by humanitarian crises in West and Central Africa

of humanitarian aid. This is a response approach based on the added value of local actors, especially on their ability to reach the most vulnerable populations in hard-to-reach areas, where international organizations are limited because of security constraints. In addition, the involvement of local actors has a positive impact on the issue of acceptance and community engagement, with a positive result on accountability to affected populations. Localization is therefore at the heart of the objectives pursued by the humanitarian funds managed by OCHA, including the Regional Humanitarian Fund for West and Central Africa. The latter makes localization one of the pillars of its strategic vision.

Why Burkina Faso and Niger as starting points?

Between 2015 and 2019, OCHA conducted exploratory missions in the region to assess the relevance of creating country Humanitarian Funds, particularly in Niger and Mali. The results of these missions made it possible to understand that the conditions were not optimal for the launch of country humanitarian funds. Meanwhile, the humanitarian situation has significantly deteriorated in the Central Sahel region due to insecurity linked to non-state armed groups activities,

the COVID-19 crisis, and the impact of climate change. The most affected areas are the cross-border parts between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger and those between Niger, north-eastern Nigeria, Chad, and northern Cameroon, where civilian populations are crushed between vital humanitarian needs requiring a rapid, flexible and adapted response.

Is localization support one of the Fund's key success factors?

For humanitarians, the most important thing is to ensure that populations affected by a crisis can have access to aid in strict compliance with the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. In an approach aimed at supporting localization efforts, especially in areas where there are security issues and constraints that do not always allow international organizations to work optimally, the role of local and national actors becomes critical. This is the purpose of this Fund: to give a leading role to local humanitarian actors, including local associations whose role is preponderant in the involvement and participation of local communities, including affected people. Thus, the latter participate in the decision-making process by being involved in the management of the cycle of interventions in their favor.

Can we talk about a new form of humanitarian assistance?

Not strictly speaking. It is, however, a humanitarian response approach that puts affected people back at the heart of the response itself and provides an opportunity for communities to develop resilience to deal with similar crises in the future. This approach strengthens the capacities of local actors and gives them the means to take over when international organizations are no longer around. On the other hand, the objective is to put an end with the "making-do", to move to "doing together". This innovative approach strengthens the capacities of small local organizations so that they become key actors in the humanitarian response. The final goal is to strengthen the resilience of local organizations and communities for a coordinated

humanitarian response in line with humanitarian principles.

An example to share?

The partnership model between international, local, and national organizations goes further. A local NGO may be given a key role in subcontracting an international NGO. In Burkina Faso, we have a project executed by the national NGO "Association TIN TUA" which is a local NGO subcontracting an international NGO, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). The latter brings its expertise to the mine action component of the project. Through this collaboration, DRC not only brought its expertise to the local partner but also strengthened the capacities of the local partner, Association TIN TUA on aspects related to education and awareness on explosive devices. At the end of this project funded by the FHRAOC, the association will be able to take over and continue the work of advocacy, awareness, and education on the issue of Mine Action. As you can see, the Regional Humanitarian Fund is already bearing fruit, only one year after its launching!



This is a new approach whose interest is to respond to regional and cross-border issues in areas impacted by interconnected humanitarian challenges between involved countries



2023

HAPPY NEW YEAR

UNOWAS/CNMC 20 ANS YEARS