



UNOWAS Magazine

Together for Peace

Quarterly Magazine of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel

Access to education, a political priority



Écoliers, Sierra Leone - Photo : Annie Spratt - Unsplash



UNOWAS

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FOR WEST AFRICA
AND THE SAHEL

BUREAU DES NATIONS UNIES
POUR L'AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST
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Leonardo Santos SIMAO
Special Representative of the United Nations
Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel
and Head of UNOWAS/CNMC

Access to education, a political priority

"Education, in addition to being a fundamental human right, is the path that enables everyone to move towards a better future, in a more peaceful and tolerant world," declared, last September, the United Nations Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, during the celebration of the International Day for the Protection of Education Against Attacks.

But the situation of education in general displays an alarming reality : 224 million children and young people are in urgent need of educational assistance as a result of armed conflict, and 72 million of them are completely out of school.

Our region, West Africa and the Sahel, is not spared. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Armed conflicts, terrorist attacks and multiple ongoing crises affect sternly children, teachers, educational staff, and schools, and deprive children and young people of their fundamental right to education.

More than 10,000 schools have been closed and millions of children have been taken out of school as a result

of the deteriorating security situation and repeated attacks on schools, particularly in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.

This bleak and sad situation requires an increased mobilization and unwavering commitment from us all. Education - of children and young people - cannot be considered a less important issue. It must be placed at the heart of all actions and objectives of governments of the region, as the political priority.

Seized by this major issue, the United Nations Security Council, through its resolution 2601(2021), and the declaration on safety in schools condemn these attacks on education and urge the parties to the conflict and governments to take the necessary measures to safeguard the right to education, in line with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Governments, local civil society organizations, international and regional organizations continue, despite the complexity of the situation, to make tireless efforts to ensure the protection of schools and children's access to education.

To contribute to this effort, UNOWAS, in coordination with its partners in the UN system and in the sub-region, took the initiative, last November, of organizing a colloquium on "Security Council Resolution 2601(2021): the nexus between security, access to education and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa."

"Beyond the need to place the issue of the impact of insecurity on education at the center of political and not just humanitarian concerns, the aim of this initiative was- among other things - to contribute to accelerating the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2601(2021) and the Safe Schools Declaration, and to provide concrete recommendations to protect children's access to education.

The key message delivered by the participants at the end of two days' discussion confirms the urgency and importance that we must- all together - attach to this issue. "Today's children are tomorrow's decision-makers, and education cannot wait," they declared.

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.
- ◆ UNOWAS implements the mandate given by the United Nations Security Council to prevent crises and conflicts through an active role in preventive diplomacy, good offices and political mediation.
- ◆ The UNOWAS mandate covers 15 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo-Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.
- ◆ 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 15 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 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 also contributes to the analysis and assessment of the impact of climate change on security and stability 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 (CNMC), 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 needs of populations affected by demarcation work. Since its creation, CN has demarcated 2050 km of a border estimated at 2100 km, and built 2213 pillars out of a total estimated at 2969.

SRSG Simão at the 64th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government



The Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), Leonardo Santos Simão, participated in the 64th Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja on 10 December 2023. Simão stressed the importance of continued dialogue and engagement with transition countries for a return to constitutional order. "The ongoing situation in Niger arguably remains the most concerning politico-security development which has impacted peace and security in the Sahel with implications for the entire region," he warned. He also underlined the need for a stronger effort to address "economic issues such as the inequitable redistribution of resources; unemployment, especially amongst youth; and other forms of socio-economic marginalization of the vulnerable, including women."

Special Representative Simão visits Algiers



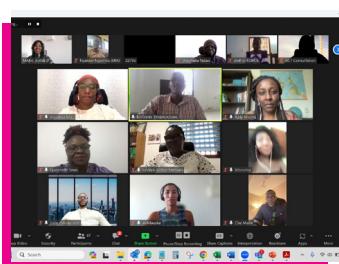
Special Representative Simão undertook a working visit to Algiers from October 29 to 30, 2023. The objective of the visit was to take stock of the security situation in the Sahel region, particularly in Mali and Niger, and to exchange views on the perspectives for a political settlement of these crises. Mr. Simão was received in audience by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the National Community Abroad, Ahmed Attaf, with whom he discussed the latest developments in Mali and Niger, and the need to explore all means of promoting a lasting political solution in these countries. The Special Representative saluted the vital role played by Algeria in consolidating peace and stability in the Sahel region and reiterated the commitment and readiness of the United Nations to work with Algeria and partners in the sub-region to safeguard peace and stability in the Sahel region.

UNOWAS supports the West African Bar Association



As part of continued engagements to help revitalize the WABA to reorganize its organs and membership to enable it to leverage its expertise and contribute to finding lasting solutions to some of the complex challenges facing the West African region, and in accordance with its strategic objective to support regional efforts to enhance democratic governance, the respect for the rule of law and human rights, UNOWAS hosted on 20 November, a Virtual Seminar of the West African Bar Association (WABA) to discuss required amendments to the Association's legal and institutional framework. Addressing the participants, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, encouraged the WABA and Bar Associations to further strengthen their efforts to consolidate democracy, the rule of law and human rights, critical to peace and stability in a sub-region which is facing political and security challenges.

Session focused on "Harnessing Technology to Combat CRSV in West Africa and the Sahel"



On 7 December, UNOWAS with UN Women, and WANEP, organized a Knowledge-Building session focused on "Harnessing Technology to Combat CRSV in West Africa and the Sahel", to emphasize the importance of technology in combating Conflict-related Sexual Violence. The forum brought together 65 participants, including practitioners, civil society representatives, and experts from various sectors. The outcomes of the session highlighted challenges in leveraging technology, such as the digital divide and legal limitations, while offering specific recommendations as a roadmap for effectively utilizing digital innovation to combat Conflict-related Sexual Violence and gender-based violence.

Cameroon-Nigeria Mixed Commission in Action

Activities

Facilitating the withdrawal of troops and transfer of authority in Lake Chad area, along the land boundary and in the Bakassi Peninsula

Achievements

The CNMC facilitated the peaceful transfer of authority over Bakassi to Cameroon through the Greentree Agreement, in accordance with the judgment of the International Court of Justice.

Demarcation of the land boundary and delimitation of the maritime boundary between the two countries

2,050 kilometers of demarcation have been surveyed and approved by Cameroon and Nigeria out of a total of approximately 2,100 kilometers

Delineation of the maritime boundary in accordance with the Judgement of the International Court of Justice

Out of a total of 2696 pillars to be built, 1673 pillars have already been built and placed

Addressing the situation of local populations in boundary areas affected by the demarcation activities

The CNMC, in liaison with partners, has developed confidence building programs to mitigate the impacts caused by the demarcation.

Making recommendations on confidence-building measures aiming at promoting peaceful cross-border cooperation

The Mixed Commission also approved the recommendations for crossborder cooperation on hydrocarbon deposits straddling the maritime boundary

Education, political priority

In West Africa, and more particularly in the Central Sahel, thousands of children and young people do not have access to education because of the resurgence of armed conflicts and insecurity. This finding is even more alarming given that the experts, gathered at the annual colloquium organized by UNOWAS on 21 and 22 November on the nexus between security, access to education and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa, called on national and regional actors to place education at the center of their political priorities.



“Education is the most powerful weapon on to change the world,” said Nelson Mandela in his book *A Long Walk to Freedom*. Without stretching the meaning, we could rephrase and contextualize this quote from the world’s most famous man, a symbol of the fight against racism and for peace, by saying that education is the most powerful weapon for changing the Sahel, West Africa and Africa as a whole.

Today, several countries in West Africa and the Sahel are in dire need

of a return to the path of peace and prosperity. This involves, among other things, and inevitably - the establishment of effective education systems in a healthy and peaceful learning environment. Moreover, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 emphasizes that education is an essential element of a democratic and sustainable society, which makes it possible to form active citizens and encourage their personal development. Education is a human right, which national authorities and the international community

have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil, including in emergency and crisis situations.

In the Sahel, in particular, persistent insecurity characterized by recurrent attacks on populations and infrastructure, including schools, is having a devastating effect on the future of millions of children and young people. In March 2023, UNICEF sounded the alarm on the plight of ten million children in need of emergency assistance. As of November 2023, it was estimat-

ed that more than 9,130 schools remained closed in West Africa and the Central Sahel region, either because they were directly targeted, because teachers fled, or because families were displaced or feared to send their children to school.

Accelerating the implementation of Resolution 2601

Based on this observation, UNOWAS, in line with its role and commitment to conflict prevention, and the consolidation of peace and stability, organized a colloquium on “Security Council Resolution 2601(2021): the nexus between security, access to education and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa”. This colloquium was organized in collaboration with several key regional partners: the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), UNICEF, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNWOMEN, UNESCO, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC), the Global Coalition to Protect Education against Attacks (GCPEA) and the Italian Cooperation (COOPI). Its objectives were to raise awareness among the various actors on the impact of insecurity on education and governance in the sub-region and to contribute to the acceleration of the implementation of resolution 2601, which calls for the protection of the right to education in conflict situations.

This resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the United Nations Security Council in 2021, highlights the links between education, peace, and security. Members of the Security Council called for urgent preventive and corrective measures to ensure equal access to education in situations

of armed conflict. The resolution also urges all parties to an armed conflict to respect the civilian character of schools and educational institutions, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

In his remarks at the opening ceremony of the colloquium, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simão, said that “Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) is a revolutionary legal and policy-making tool, which has pushed the issue of denial of access to education far beyond the humanitarian sphere.” The Representative went on to say that the Resolution places education at the heart of the security and governance nexus. “It is the cornerstone and foundation for the future of peace and governance as well as the sustainable development of any given space, especially in the Sahel and the West African region,” he said.

Education, a political priority

In addition to the Safe Schools Declaration, the African Union process on improving education through Agenda 2063, and the recommendations of the United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES) in September 2022, Resolution 2601 served as a basis for discussions for more than sixty participants in the colloquium, including experts and practitioners in governance, education in emergencies and security, including senior officials from the ministries of education, defence and finance of countries in the region, national and international non-governmental organisations, and representatives of civil society.

At the end of the discussions, which focused on the main factors of insecurity affecting access to education and the goal of quality, inclusive and equitable education, the participants formulated a series of recommendations

contained in a final declaration. They deliberated on practical initiatives to be adopted to ensure the continuity of alternative methods and mechanisms for emergency education within communities struggling with the multiple challenges of insecurity in the West Africa and Sahel sub-region.

Participants called for education to be made a political priority. They recommended ensuring the continuity of education through distance learning, the relocation of closed or at-risk schools to safer areas, and the establishment of mobile schools that monitor the displaced. They also recommended amplifying advocacy with Heads of State and Government in the region and other key policy makers, under the leadership of the Special Representative of the United Nations Office for Africa on prioritizing education, including in emergencies, on their policy agendas.

Investing more in the education of children and young people is urgently needed in a sub-region where young people under the age of 30 make up 65 percent of the population. Investing in the education of children and young people is an urgent matter and a political priority.



Security Council resolution 2601 (2021) is a revolutionary legal and policy-making tool, which has pushed the issue of denial of access to education far beyond the humanitarian sphere.



Final declaration

UNOWAS Annual Conference 2023 Resolution 2601(2021): the nexus between security, access to education, and governance in the central Sahel and West Africa

Background

On 21 – 22 November 2023, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) organized in Mbour, near Dakar in the Republic of Senegal, its annual colloquium, which this year focused on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2601(2021) on the nexus between security, access to education, and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa.

The colloquium brought together around sixty participants, including experts and practitioners in governance, education in emergencies, and security, senior executives from the ministries of education, defense, and finance coming from the countries of the region, as well as national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as representatives of regional and international organizations, notably, ECOWAS, the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Government of the Kingdom of Norway, the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children in situations of Armed Conflict (CAAC), UNICEF, UNHCR, UNESCO, UNDP, IOM, the Working Group for Education in Emergency Situations (WG EiE), the Global Coalition for the Protection of Education against Attacks (GCPEA), COOPI and Plan International.

The conference was held in a context of increased armed conflicts and insecurity in the Central Sahel and West Africa region. This situation has negatively impacted on access to education for children and youths with a sharp surge in the number of closed schools. This persistent insecurity manifests itself, among other things, through attacks against civilians and state infrastructures, including schools and health centers. As of November 2023, more than 9,130 schools were closed in West Africa and the Central Sahel region, either because they were the direct target of attacks by non-state armed groups (NSAGs), or indirectly due to different manifestations or consequences of insecurity.

The symposium was based on Security Council Resolution 2601 (2021), the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD - 2015) to which almost all countries in the region and a total of 118 States in the world have adhered, the African Union process on improving education through Agenda 2063, and the recommendations of the September 2022 United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES), as well as Sustainable Development Goal #4. The conference intended to build on existing initiatives, on the political and programmatic responses already formulated and currently being implemented by the States of the region.

The discussions, which focused on the main insecurity factors affecting access to education and the objective of achieving a quality, inclusive, and equitable education, facilitated a better understanding of the role of governance and public policies in accessing education in situation of emergencies, while protecting and promoting education. The exchanges allowed to propose measures as well as concrete strategies that governments and other stakeholders can take up to prevent the resurgence of insecurity, ensure the continuity of unfettered access to education, even in conflict situations, while mitigating the negative effects of insecurity on access to educational opportunities for young girls and boys. Therefore, participants made the following recommendations.

Recommendations

- 1) Promote the full implementation of Resolution 2601(2021) and the Safe Schools Declaration (SSD-2015) by leveraging the good offices of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Head of UNOWAS, in close cooperation with national, regional, and international partners, with Heads of State and Government of the region and other key political decision-makers for the prioritization of education, particularly in situation of emergency, onto their political agendas.
- 2) Take urgent action to end attacks on education and provide targeted efforts to prevent armed conflict, by focusing on the root causes and contributing factors, including inclusive governance, good management of the country's resources, their equitable distribution amongst geographic areas and different populations' segments.
- 3) Adopt a holistic approach to respond to situations of insecurity, combining security efforts with socio-economic and political commitments, including dialogue with non-state armed groups where appropriate.
- 4) Governments must ensure close collaboration between stakeholders and work for the development of concerted synergies in their responses to endangered access to education, particularly between the different departments and institutions of the State, decentralized and deconcentrated entities, defense and security forces, communities and citizens in affected areas, as well as partners.
- 5) National Governments and their technical and financial partners, including the private sector, must invest in the development of specific methods for the dissemination of audio, audiovisual and digital edu-

- cational programs, both online and offline.
- 6) Respect the imperative "education cannot wait!". In this regard, ensure the continuity of access to education, among other things, through distance learning, the relocation of closed schools, or at risk to be closed, to secure specific areas, the establishment of mobile schools apt to support displaced populations and their children, the hiring of local teachers, and the construction of temporary learning spaces in the so-called 'reception areas' in order to respond to sudden and growing numbers of students in the 'reception localities'.
- 7) Systematically involve young people in initiatives aimed at improving their own situation, particularly through creation of socio-economic opportunities, thus contributing to making them less vulnerable.
- 8) Raise awareness among teachers, students, and parents about the factors determining insecurity in accessing school, including anti-personnel mines, publicize emergency evacuation procedures and the attitudes to adopt in the event of attacks, work to establish new and strengthen existing community based early warning mechanisms.
- 9) Plan for measures to take in post-conflict settings for "building back better", in order to be able to rehabilitate, rebuild, and reopen schools by providing psychological support for students, and those victims of trauma, as well as care for young dropouts or orphans.
- 10) Develop resource mobilization strategies and strengthen investments in state education, including in emergencies. Ensure coherence between the provision of education as delivered by public or private institutions. Donors and partners must remain open and listen to educa-
- tion stakeholders so that funding is in alignment with the reality on the ground.
- 11) Frame any measure promoting good governance of education, in an integrated approach that includes gender considerations with a view to resolving the difficulties of access to education for girls, a cause of disparity and delay in achieving true sustainable development.
- 12) Support any necessary measure to ensure accountability of those guilty of violations and attacks on children's rights to education through fair and effective justice.
- 13) Prioritize children's rights while emphasizing not only the right to quality education, but also the centrality of children's role as agents of change for safer schools and a more secure world.
- 14) Promote reliable data generation and their utilization as a basis for planning, including through the development of any appropriate high-tech tools to support understanding of the factors revolving around unsafe schools and unsecure access to education. Data should inform the crafting of responses to unsafe access to schools for those to be adapted to the reality of each context.
- 15) Continue exchanges within a Community of Practitioners to nourish the experiences' sharing, good practices and lessons learned initiatives, particularly between African countries and regions.

Virginia Gamba: “I recommend ensuring that child protection is central to all decision-making processes”



Virginia Gamba de Potgieter
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Children and Armed Conflict

Virginia Gamba de Potgieter has been the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict since April 2017. Last November, she participated via videoconference in the annual UNOWAS symposium on UNSC 2601(2021), dedicated to the link between security, access to education and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa. She agreed to answer our questions. Interview.

You have been serving as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Children and Armed Conflict since April 2017. What are the key elements that you could underline regarding the situation of children in armed conflict today?

Multidimensional conflicts, including across regions, chronic crises and new armed actors have had an adverse impact on children's lives. Hostilities

spreading into new areas contributed to an increase in grave violations. The splintering of armed groups and inter-communal violence affected children, contributing to an increase in grave violations. An upsurge in the activity of armed groups, including those designated by the United Nations as terrorist groups, caused severe deterioration of the situation in the central Sahel. Blatant and systematic disregard for international humanitarian law and international human rights law contin-

ues to severely affect the protection of children. Among factors having the most severe impact was the use of explosive weapons, including those with a wide impact area, notably in populated areas, which led to greater child casualties and damaged schools and hospitals, depriving children of education and health services. The highest numbers of violations were the killing and maiming of children, followed by the recruitment and use of children and the abduction of children. Children

were detained for actual or alleged association with armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the United Nations, or for national security reasons. The denial of humanitarian access remained very high, and there was a large increase in attacks on schools and hospitals. While non-State armed groups were responsible for 50 per cent of grave violations, government forces were the main perpetrator of the killing and maiming of children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and the denial of humanitarian access.

Last November, you took part in the UNOWAS remote symposium on the link between security, access to education and governance in the Central Sahel and West Africa". How do you assess your partnership with regional organizations ?

Regional partnerships are a priority to my Office, and I cooperate closely with the African Union, the European Union, and the League of Arab States. Activities include exchanges on policy development, information-sharing and joint advocacy, the promotion of good practices, and special initiatives, such as my work with the African Union at the recent ministerial and high level open session of the peace and security council of the African Union on the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children in conflict situation in Africa, and the League of Arab States on organizing a regional CAAC conference this year. In doing this work, I am guided by the specific needs and priorities of the regional partners, based on the principles of consultation, burden-sharing, com-

plementarity, and comparative advantage. I am engaging with the ECCAS region on prevention and would appreciate similar exchanges with the ECOWAS region.

On the UN side, do you believe the UN system is efficient in tackling the complexity of the issue?

The United Nations provides a multi-pronged response to protect children affected by armed conflict: from the work of my Office with Member States, regional organisations, and parties to conflict; to the programmatic response of the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes in the field; as well as the role of United Nations peacekeeping and special political missions with a mandate on child protection. My Office, in cooperation with the United Nations on the ground, engages constructively and practically with parties to conflict to enhance the protection of children, including signing concrete time-bound action plans with parties that are listed in the report of the Secretary-General. As always, there is a need for further coordination of efforts, through the efforts towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals to ensure that the programmatic response supports the political engagement to end and prevent violations.

Looking forward, what are your major recommendations vis-à-vis the different actors, including the UN system?

There are many measures regional organizations can take to strengthen efforts on child protection. I recommend

ensuring that child protection is central to all decision-making processes and that decision-making bodies regularly receive briefings on children and armed conflict trends and engage with experts on recommended measures. Child protection should be mainstreamed in regional security architectures, as well as in specific regional strategies, and appropriate capacities should be established and adequately funded. Regional organizations can also facilitate cooperation and information exchange between their

Member States and encourage the adoption of good practices. As first responders to conflict, regional organizations can make an important difference, including by ensuring that early warning and early action and mediation processes are sensitive and responsive to the rights and needs of children.



Child protection should be mainstreamed in regional security architectures, as well as in specific regional strategies, and appropriate capacities should be established and adequately funded.



Little Juliette remains hopeful of becoming a teacher



A young girl in a classroom in Burkina Faso - Photo:
UNICEF Burkina Faso/2023/Cisse

With more than 5,700 schools closed, over 800,000 children face difficulties accessing education in Burkina Faso.

There are situations that remind you that it is not always easy to realize your dearest dream, and that many parameters come into play. When Juliette, 14, harbored the hope of becoming a teacher one day, she had little idea that her country would fall into an armed conflict which would force her to leave her native Dablo.

"We left Dablo to come to Kaya because of the conflict. One day, we were in class, and they came to take us out, and we fled. We put our things on a cart, and we came to Barsalogho where we took the bus to get to Kaya," recounts Juliette.

In Burkina Faso, an unprecedented security crisis has been raging for several years. Like Juliette and her mother Habibou Sawadogo, some 2 million people have fled their homes due to

violence and have found refuge in urban areas, notably, for safety. The family moved to Kaya, the capital of the Centre Nord Region.

"Because of the conflict, we fled and settled here. On the road, we suffered from hunger and thirst. We slept in the bush. When we arrived in Korko, we would like to stay there but there was always insecurity, so we kept going. We continued suffering until we got to Kaya," says Sawadogo.

At the end of their journey, Juliette and her mother settled at some acquaintances' house in Kaya, with few resources. Since their arrival, Habibou has struggled to make ends meet. "In Dablo, I sold food products to take care of my children. But since we got here, there has been no work. Every day, I go to town to look for small jobs to have

the daily meals. I am very worried," explains Sawadogo.

In Burkina Faso, around 5.5 million people need humanitarian assistance, including 3.2 million children. A situation which also weighs on the host families who welcome them, especially those who lived in a situation of extreme vulnerability before the crisis.

In October 2023, 5,723 educational structures are closed in Burkina Faso compared to 6,149 at the end of May 2023, affecting 888,837 including 427,748 girls and 26,559 teachers, including 8,338 women. To bridge the gap, the Ministry of National Education, Literacy and Promotion of National Languages (MENAPLN), UNICEF and its partners, have set up remedial courses, and an education by radio programme. Over 900 schools are

closed in the Centre Nord Region, affecting more than 160,000 children.

As soon as she arrived in Kaya, Juliette rekindled her dream of becoming a teacher. The house where she settled with her mother is adjacent to a public school. She arrived in July when the remedial classes started. "Juliette was enrolled in the catch-up classes organized for children who had dropped out due to security problems. During the 2023-2024 school year, she will join a public school for free," explains Sébastien Yameogo, Education Officer at the UNICEF office in Kaya.

To facilitate the return to school for thousands of vulnerable children living in remote areas affected by the security crisis, 108,300 school kits consisting of bags, notebooks, pens, slates and

other school materials were delivered to hard-to-reach areas.

"I am happy to have received this school kit because I nearly went to sell in the streets to pay for supplies and schooling. I want to be a teacher, to give knowledge to children. I will also have a salary to support my parents. I thank UNICEF which gives us advice and school supplies," says Juliette.

In 2023, despite security challenges, UNICEF has supported MENAPLN to facilitate access to education for 763,000 children, through formal education, accelerated schooling strategies, vocational training and education by radio programme, and distributed over 150,000 school kits and supplies. UNICEF also supported teacher training to ensure 350 new schools apply

the "Quality Child-Friendly School" standards and the Safe School approach.

Thanks to generous contributions from donors such as the European Union, Education Cannot Wait and Japan, UNICEF helps restore the right to education for thousands of children in Burkina Faso.

As the humanitarian crisis continues, challenges and needs persist while resources are dwindling. At the start of 2023, UNICEF launched an appeal for \$226.7 million in 2023 to continue providing children and vulnerable populations with life-saving goods and services. To date, only 13 percent of the required funds have been allocated.

UNICEF Burkina Faso



UNICEF team distributing school kits and supplies in Burkina Faso - Photo: UNICEF Burkina Faso/2023/Cisse

Hadizatou Mint Ziddou: “A nation without education is a nation without a future and development”



In a region, the Sahel, plagued by conflict and insecurity, there is a woman who refuses to embrace the prevailing fatalism and wants to believe in a better future. Hadizatou Mint Ziddou, a Malian woman and teacher, is committed to the advancement of women and girls' education. She is also a mother who has been fighting for years for the education of children and the opening of schools in northern Mali. A nation without education is a nation without a future and without development, she psalms with a voice full of hope.

Hadizatou Mint Ziddou was born in 1977 in Timbuktu, a city also known as “the Pearl of the Desert”, to an Arab father and a Sonrhaï mother who taught her the values of sharing and tolerance. The city of Timbuktu, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, will be her source of inspiration and commitment to the transmission of knowledge and education for all.

From Diré, where she was born, to Taoudenit, in the heart of the Sahara, where she spent her early childhood, Hadizatou Mint Ziddou remembers everything, and especially the conditions that nourished her commitment and forged her conviction.

Married at a very young age, Mint Ziddou became Mrs. Kounta. She had to brave the many social-cultural obstacles, with the support of her family and her husband, to continue her studies and remain active in the cultural life of her city. A dynamic, sporty, and creative young girl, she has contributed to various artistic and cultural biennials in her locality. An enriching experience that will help her understand the expectations of young girls and boys and the means that will have to be put in place to meet these expectations!

Few years later, she found her vocation as one finds her way. She became a teacher in 2001. Her first post in N'Da-

ki, a village located in the commune of Gossi, a border area with Burkina Faso, was the beginning of a calling, but also of a commitment that Hadizatou still carries today. “I love teaching, because being a teacher is also about cultivating oneself, strengthening oneself, sharing and receiving, know-how and interpersonal skills are also a duty and a right,” she declares with passion and conviction, before continuing in a calm but firm voice, “a nation without education is a nation without a future or development.”

Convinced of the importance of education and the need to involve young girls, Hadizatou wants to move for-

ward, and does not want to give up. "I want to set a good example for my community that doesn't give enough importance to girls' education," she says.

And like a politician, Hadizatou gives herself the means to carry out her program. She is an advisor in the commune of Algatarat, in the Taoudéni region, president of the Baggriya association, national president of G100, a non-governmental organization bringing together influential women. She travels across Africa to talk about her experience and the challenges her community faces. Her testimony at the colloquium on the nexus between security, access to education and governance organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), carried the cries and distress of all children displaced by the violence.

"I had to flee the insecurity in my country, Mali, to take refuge in Burkina Faso, with child students who were under my protection," she says sadly,

her eyes riveted into space. In Timbuktu, the challenges related to education are major: insecurity, nomadism, early marriage, early pregnancy, insufficient teaching staff, and food insecurity. But these obstacles and challenges did not discourage her. Unlike her women classmates, Hadizatou willingly agreed to stay and get involved with the children and her community, for whom she has great admiration. She is also one of the nine women who sit on the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algiers Peace Agreement (CSA). She conducts awareness-raising and communication activities on the implementation of the four main pillars of the peace agreement booklet: institutional policy, justice, reconciliation, and humanitarian issues, defense and security, and socio-economic development. "There has been some progress, but after 8 years, it is clear that the Algiers Agreement is still at an impasse," said Hadizatou. For her, "this situation makes it difficult to return to normalization and it leaves popula-

tions in a situation of continual lack or absence of economic development."

The involvement of women and young people in peacebuilding, security and social cohesion is very close to her heart. Hadizatou believes that they play an important role in the development of their community and that it is "necessary to support them in their activities, in particular, by strengthening their capacities in the industrialization of local products, namely the valorization of rock salt from Taoudéni, and by strengthening their participation in political life."

Hadiza calls on her community to multiply efforts for development and peace. "Without peace there is no sustainable development. Let's bury the hatchet and educate our children who will be our future electorates," says the Timbuktu native. The West Africa and Sahel region is in dire need of people like Hadizatou who are determined to build a better future for their children and communities.



Hadizatou with her pupils aboard a pirogue



I want to set a good example for my community that doesn't give enough importance to girls' education

UNOWAS supports women's increased participation in political and peacebuilding processes



Participants at the Open Day on the implementation of resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent in Nouakchott, Mauritania

As part of its continued commitment to supporting women and youth participation, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) organized last December the Regional Open Day on resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent, as well as a conference on women's political participation in West Africa and the Sahel.

Coordinated action by States is necessary to curb the multiple challenges countries of West Africa and the Sahel are confronted with. It involves the full participation of young people and women. The United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) supports the implementation of the various United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent on gender, women, youth, peace, and security, and encourages governments in the subregion to facilitate and promote women's participation in political decision-making

processes and their participation in peacebuilding and prosperity in their country.

For an accelerated implementation of Resolution 1325

Through its various activities, UNOWAS promotes the systematic inclusion of women in conflict prevention and resolution, mediation, negotiation, and post-conflict reconstruction as well as gender mainstreaming in all socio-political areas. To this end, two major events were organized in December

2023. The first, which took place on 20 December in Nouakchott, is the 13th edition of the Open Day on the implementation, in West Africa and the Sahel, of the United Nations Security Council resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent on Gender, Women, Youth, Peace and Security. Its objective was to strengthen the financial support of States and donors for the effective implementation of various Resolution 1325 national action plans in the region. The second event, the Conference on Women's Political Participation, took place in Dakar on 22

December, to reflect on strengthening women's participation in electoral processes in the region.

In the subregion, many initiatives have been carried out and have led to encouraging results. Unfortunately, despite these sustained efforts to implement these resolutions, women's participation in negotiation, peace-building, reconstruction, and development processes remains low. Yet almost all countries in the subregion have developed national action plans for the implementation of resolution 1325 and subsequent. But, due to resource constraints, many of these plans could not be realized. The various organizations working for women and youth in the different countries of the region need more support, both institutional, technical and financial, so that they can better play their role and produce more impact for peace and development.

Need for more financial resources

The allocation of a national budget for the implementation of national action plans on resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent, was at the heart of the discussions at the 13th edition of the Regional Open Day on resolutions 1325 (2000) and subsequent. The capital of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, Nouakchott, hosted the meeting organized by the Government of Mauritania and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel in collaboration with the Mano River Union.

Secretariat, UN Women, the United Nations system in Mauritania, United Nations country teams in the sub-region, the Working Group on Women, Youth, Peace and Security in West Africa and the Sahel.

The Open Day, which is held annually, generated a lot of hope and interest

among more than 200 participants mainly made up of women and young leaders from West Africa and the Sahel, regional and bilateral partners, members of the Parliament of Mauritania, UN agencies, members of the diplomatic corps, as well as women's media organizations. They shared their experiences and discussed the programmes to be put in place for an accelerated and effective implementation of the Women, Youth, Peace and Security agenda in West Africa and the Sahel.

These young and women leaders carried the voice of women and young people and invited States, regional organizations, the United Nations system, as well as technical and financial partners to work in synergy for the financing of action plans, and their activities towards peace and security.

Increasing women's participation in electoral processes

As several countries in the sub-region are preparing to hold crucial elections in 2024, UNOWAS was keen to organize a conference on women's involvement in elections. This meeting provided an opportunity for different political actors, civil society, governmental and non-governmental organizations to discuss the challenges that hinder women's participation in politics and to share experiences and strategies put in place to promote women's participation during electoral processes.

While acknowledging the opportunity offered by the current democratic arrangements for women's qualitative participation in electoral processes, participants assessed the implementation and impact of gender equality strategies on electoral processes. At the end of this exercise, they addressed the main security, socio-cultural and political challenges that di-

rectly influence women's participation in political spheres in the sub-region.

Participants also highlighted that although many instruments promote women's electoral participation, their implementation has been insufficient, and called for more effective legal frameworks to be put in place. According to them, state and non-state actors must not only ensure equitable representation of women on electoral lists and in decision-making bodies, but also ensure that the political and social environments are conducive to women's active and meaningful participation.



In the subregion, many initiatives have been carried out and have led to encouraging results. Unfortunately, despite these sustained efforts to implement these resolutions, women's participation in negotiation, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and development processes remains low.

UNOWAS/CNMC

wish you a happy new year

2024

Together for peace.