



## **SDG 2, Zero hunger: The Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme and Scale-Up, 2023–2028**

Sahel is a geographical region in Africa that stretches along southern part of the Sahara Desert and covers the countries of Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal. This is one of the most vulnerable regions in terms of food security and agricultural activity. The dry season there lasts for up to 10 months, and yearly precipitation is 100–900 mm. The lowest rainfall is observed in Sudan, and the highest is in Burkina Faso. Due to its location, the region is extremely vulnerable to climate change. It suffers often from droughts and megadroughts. A very severe drought was experienced in 1968, which caused many deaths and losses in the national economy. The phenomenon is becoming more radical due to climate change. This is one of the regions where climate was already extreme, and with the raise of global temperature, it is becoming unbearable for local communities; according to the UN, the temperatures there are increasing at 1.5 times the rate of the global average (UN News, n.d.).

Ibrahim Thias, a UN adviser, claimed that this region has probably the biggest number of people affected by climate change (ibid.). The number of ‘victims’ of global warming is so big due to the other problem Sahel struggles with, namely overpopulation; the region is inhabited by 300 million people, out of which more than 10% (33 million) suffer from food insecurity, and 4.7 million children under 5 suffer from malnutrition. Moreover, countries in the Sahel region have the fastest-growing populations: Niger is expected to reach a population of 65 million people by 2050. Thus, the problem of food security will grow even bigger, and overpopulation in the region will aggravate food insecurity and water scarcity even further (Vision of Humanity, n.d.). The countries in the Sahel region experience difficulties with various intensities, for example ‘Chad has the lowest percentage of population with access to basic drinking water in the world, equal to just 39%. In addition, Chad has the highest mortality rate due to unsafe water at 101 people per 100,000. In comparison, the global mortality rate is 12 people per 100,000’ (ibid.). Even though the situation among countries in the region varies, all of them struggle to secure the basic needs of their inhabitants, like access to food and water.

The problem in the Sahel is not only due to the harsh climate and hard environmental conditions. It is further deteriorated by a series of terrorist attacks that destabilised the region. According to the organisation *Vision of Humanity*, the number of deaths from terrorism in the



region has increased by 658% since 2015 (ibid.). Behind this phenomenon are religious extremist groups and militias. Thus, the situation in the region has become highly unstable; Nigeria achieved the infamous 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 2020 Global Terrorism Index. In the 2023 Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria was ranked 8<sup>th</sup>. Other countries in the region are also very high in the index, with Burkina Faso in second place. The acts of terror have steadily grown in number in this country over the years: ‘Burkina Faso had its deadliest year on record in 2019 with 593 deaths and 122 incidents (...) By the end of 2020, 10,000 civilians were killed’. (Vision of Humanity, n.d.). Playing on local ethnic differences, terrorists aggravate competition for resources and deteriorating living conditions in the region. The inhabitants of this area have been forced to leave their homes in search of better living conditions. ‘In a growing humanitarian crisis, over 2.5 million people have been internally displaced within the Sahel region. That is a twenty-fold increase in just two years’ (ibid.). This movement of people puts additional pressure on the competition for resources and food scarcity.

In response to this crisis, the World Food Program (WFP) started to collaborate with the governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger, and they launched The Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme and Scale-Up 2023-2028. The aims of the programme are to boost resilience, help local communities adapt to climate change, and answer the challenges described above. ‘The programme combines sustainable land and natural resource management and ecosystem restoration activities, including soil and water conservation measures such as stone and soil bunds, half-moons<sup>1</sup> and zai,<sup>2</sup> water works, sand dune fixation, forestry and agroforestry, smallholder farmers value chains support, market interventions, and nutrition and home-grown school feeding programmes’ (WFP, n.d.).

Over the five years of the program’s implementation, it has brought significant results, such as:

- 290,000 hectares of degraded land have been rehabilitated,
- The programme has helped 4 million people,
- The programme aims at making people less dependent on international help; during the 2022 and 2023 extreme weather events, 80% of WFP villages were able to survive without international humanitarian assistance,

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Half-moons’ is a ‘strategy for rainwater retention. These small, semicircular ponds help dry and degraded soils hold rainwater longer and are much less expensive for aid agencies to build and maintain. Excavated soil is deposited on each pond’s downhill edges, forming systems of terraces that keep the immediate area well-supplied with water to support surrounding vegetation’. (Ramthun, Mishra; 2022)

<sup>2</sup> The zai technique is used in extremely dry regions and helps to grow crops in Sahel. The method is based on creating a small hole to collect and store rainwater.



- There has been significant improvement in access to food and water; children's nutrition has improved, and the whole population's diet is now much healthier.

The programme scale-up for 2023–2028 plans further improvements for the Sahel region, such as strengthening resilience in the region's food system, expanding activities to new sites, enhancing programme integration, reinforcing 'complementarity with partners to facilitate access to land, enhance investments in local food systems (food processing, transformation, innovative agricultural production technologies, post-harvest losses, etc.), reinforce linkages with local energy and water investments, and strengthen social cohesion' (ibid.).

With international assistance, some of the countries in the Sahel region were able to improve their access to water and food. With training in agricultural practices and a little support, many communities have become more resilient and able to provide decent living conditions. However, some countries in the region still need help. Bagayoko (2024), discussing help programmes in the Sahel region, points out that international institutions have been unable 'to curb the entrenchment and spread of radical Islamist groups' (ibid.), which is a significant hindrance in helping some countries in the Sahel region. On top of this, helping in the Sahel region is not an easy task due to the growing resentment towards international institutions. This can be seen on social media and in the expansion of national movements, which are seen as being in opposition to the liberal–democratic concepts promoted by international actors. These highlights show some of the challenges to implementing The Sahel Integrated Resilience Programme and Scale-Up, 2023–2028. Even though it is too early to evaluate the programme itself, it has to be recognised that previous programmes in the region have been criticised for the above-mentioned reasons. Will this programme be successful? Time will tell.

### Questions

1. What else could be done to alleviate the living conditions for people in the Sahel region?
2. Can the Sahel countries deal with food insecurity without international assistance? How could international assistance help Sahel to become more independent in its struggle for food security?
3. What could be done for countries in the Sahel region about the unstable political situation?
4. Do you think individuals in developed countries have a moral obligation to help developing countries? Justify your decision.



5. Does the international community have a moral obligation to help countries in such a catastrophic situation?
6. What could be done to avoid the criticism presented in the last paragraph of the case study?

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