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Contact:
Alice Thomas

SAHEL: RECURRENT CLIMATE SHOCKS PROPEL MIGRATION; RESILIENCE EFFORTS FACE CHALLENGES

Recurrent climate-related shocks in West Africa's Sahel region are having severe impacts on vulnerable populations. Increasingly, those unable to feed themselves or their families have no option but to leave their villages, resorting to new forms of migration that bring with them serious protection risks. New resilience-building¹ initiatives launched by regional bodies, the United Nations, and donors have the potential to begin to tackle the root causes of these populations' vulnerabilities. However, a lack of coherence and coordination is seriously threatening the effectiveness of these initiatives. With implementation still in the initial stages, there is a window of opportunity to address these shortcomings before significant time and resource commitments are made.

BACKGROUND

The Sahel is a semi-arid swath of grasslands and shrubs that borders the Sahara Desert. It is home to many of the world's poorest countries, and malnutrition rates in many

areas regularly exceed the emergency threshold of 15 percent. In Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, and Chad, nearly half of children under five suffer from chronic malnutrition. The ecological fragility of the Sahelian environment contributes

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

☐ The United Nations:

- In each country where resiliency initiatives are being rolled out, the UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) should take the lead in coordinating the various resiliency initiatives. Based on the input of the UN country team, donors, regional bodies, and international financial institutions, s/he should develop one national-level resilience plan and coordination mechanism, in cooperation with the national government, to which donor initiatives can link.
- With support from donors, the UN should provide technical assistance to national governments to implement the Kampala Convention on the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons and to ensure protection of those displaced by climate-related shocks.

☐ U.S. Agency for International Development:

- Require resiliency programs to track and monitor distress migration resulting from recurrent climate shocks, and identify and address protection risks both to migrants and those left behind.
- Link resiliency programs in Burkina Faso to programs which address the alarming health, safety, and child labor conditions at gold mining sites.
- Broaden West Africa resiliency programming to other countries, especially Nigeria, a crucial player in terms of regional markets, migration, and security.

☐ U.S. Congress:

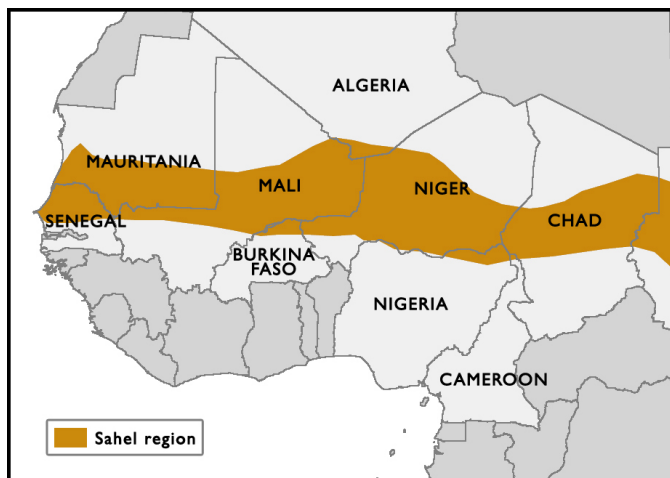
- Support robust funding for Title II non-emergency programs by passing a Farm Bill that includes authorization for non-emergency programs which build resilience.

to the food insecurity of its people, 80 percent of whom rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. Explosive population growth means that the Sahel's population of more than 100 million people will double in 25 years. Sahelian countries also experience frequent political instability, with the separatist insurgency and military coup d'état in Mali being the most recent example. In addition, the historic trade routes traversing the region have proven highly vulnerable to terrorist and criminal networks that present regional and global security risks.²

Although the Sahel region is prone to droughts, over the past decade, marked changes in rainfall patterns have emerged.³ Rains have become more erratic in terms of quantity, timing, and geographic scope,⁴ making droughts and poor harvests more frequent.⁵ These changes are, in turn, having enormous impacts on the region's livestock herders (pastoralists) and farmers who rely on crops to feed their animals (agro-pastoralists), given their dependence on rainfall for their livelihoods. This is especially the case for agro-pastoralists, for whom proper forecasting of the timing, location, and quantity of precipitation is crucial for planting.

In 2012, poor rains combined with high food prices across the Sahel region resulted in a food crisis – the third in seven years – which left 18 million people without sufficient food and put one million children at risk of starvation.⁶ At the same time, flooding has also become more acute. In 2012, severe floods in Niger and Chad displaced more than a million people while flooding in northern Nigeria displaced more than 6 million.⁷ Numerous climate experts have attributed these changes in rainfall patterns to global warming, and there is strong consensus that in the coming decades, continued climate change will result in more unpredictable weather accompanied by temperature rise in the range of 7 to 10° Fahrenheit by mid-century.⁸

In June 2013, RI visited two of the Sahel's poorest countries, Burkina Faso and Niger, and met with vulnerable pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities. All were highly aware of abnormal and harmful changes in temperatures and rainfall patterns that were directly undermining their ability to feed their families. In village after village, the refrain was the same: "The rains are no longer predictable." "They come too early and then end too soon." "There is too much rain, or too little." In one village in Burkina's Center North Region, villagers described how in 2010, there was not enough rain. Then, in 2011, sudden downpours came early, causing massive floods that destroyed houses and schools – something people there had never seen before. But thereafter, the rains largely ceased and crop yields were poor.



These repeated shocks have sent the poorest households into a downward spiral wherein there is insufficient time to recover before the next crisis hits. During bad years, they are forced to resort to negative coping mechanisms, including eating less, selling their limited productive assets (e.g., livestock), and taking on debt, leaving them even more vulnerable and less able to withstand future shocks. One man in the aforementioned village who was forced to sell livestock during the 2012 food crisis in order to buy food for his family explained that it would take him at least a year to save enough to purchase a single cow. A recent food security trend analysis conducted by the World Food Programme (WFP) in Niger found that two years after the 2009 crop failure, poor households in Niger had not recovered, despite above average crop yields in 2010. Worse yet, in roughly a third of districts, resiliency levels (measured in terms of the extent to which households resorted to negative coping strategies like eating less, borrowing, and selling assets) were even lower in 2010 than in 2009.⁹ In short, it takes most poor households more than a year to recover from a drought or other crisis, and a single crisis can continue to have negative impacts beyond one growing season.

Increased climate variability, combined with structural factors such as smaller plot sizes, consistently high food prices, and population growth, mean that a significant number of poor households find themselves with no other choice but to leave their villages in search of other forms of income. Leaving home has become a negative coping mechanism – a form of "distress migration." According to the director of one NGO with long-standing ties to the region, recurrent drought and food crises have resulted in as many as a third of families leaving their villages altogether.

In food-insecure villages in northern and central Burkina Faso, this "distress migration" often forces people to seek work at gold mines. Nearly every family RI interviewed in Burkina's Central North and Sahel Regions had at least one

family member who had gone to work at a mine. Although not covered in this report, conditions at many gold mining sites are extremely dangerous and pose significant health and safety risks. Child labor is also widespread: according to one UN official in Burkina, as many as 600,000 children are working at mines. RI met with numerous families who had children as young as 12 working at local mining sites.¹⁰

In neighboring Niger, a similar phenomenon has emerged wherein poor families find themselves with no option other than to leave their villages. In these instances, family members cannot afford to migrate internationally to countries that might offer them opportunities like new skills or higher wages.¹¹ Rather, as a last resort, they go to urban centers to engage in petty trade, or in the worse cases, to beg. This distress migration is especially widespread during crisis years. One NGO representative in Niger with whom RI spoke estimated that during the 2005 food crisis, 80 to 90 percent of people in some hard-hit areas were forced to leave their villages to survive.

But exactly how many are leaving and for how long is not entirely clear. In addition, there are insufficient analyses of how closely migration trends correlate with climate-related shocks, and whether this migration is to urban areas, gold mines, or other agricultural areas. Another crucial data gap is the positive or negative impacts on those migrating and those left behind, and significantly, the new protection risks such movement creates. More broadly, at present, there are no global estimates for the number of people displaced by slower-onset disasters like droughts or food crises that may evolve over several years because there are no widely accepted methodologies for doing so. The annual estimates of numbers of people displaced by natural disasters compiled by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) do not include individuals displaced by slower-onset disasters like droughts or more gradual changes linked to global warming.¹²

RESILIENCY INITIATIVES – PROMISES AND CHALLENGES

More recurrent droughts, food crises, and complex humanitarian emergencies in the Sahel in recent years have led to a widespread recognition among national governments, regional institutions, donors, and humanitarian and development agencies that more must be done to enhance the resilience of chronically vulnerable households to be able to withstand shocks and recover more quickly.

This has led to the adoption of a wide array of resilience-building initiatives and strategies for the Sahel. Chief

among them is the Global Alliance for Resilience – Sahel (AGIR), launched in 2012 and adopted by Sahelian and West African governments, regional organizations, UN agencies, and other stakeholders.¹³ AGIR represents a “shared understanding of resilience” among its members for supporting and accelerating implementation of West Africa’s regional agenda on food and nutritional security, with an overarching goal of achieving “zero hunger” in 20 years by building upon existing regional and national agendas. In the shorter term, AGIR seeks to build resilience among vulnerable households to be able to resist future food shocks. Political leadership rests with ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) and UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union), with CILSS (Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel) in the Sahel providing technical assistance for implementation. Earlier this year, AGIR released a regional roadmap to serve as a basis for formulating national resilience priorities. These national priorities, in turn, are expected to provide operational frameworks for funding, implementation, monitoring, and assessments. The European Union has been a key supporter of AGIR and has pledged to invest 1.6 billion euros in the strategy over the next six years.

UN agencies working in the region are also embracing a resilience approach. Last year, they adopted the UN Common Strategy on Resilience Building in West Africa, which is now part of the UN Integrated Strategy on the Sahel adopted by the Security Council in June 2013.¹⁴ In addition to improving governance and regional capacity to address security threats, the UN Integrated Strategy seeks to integrate development and humanitarian interventions to build resilience.¹⁵

Major donors have also adopted their own resiliency strategies and projects. For instance, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) has published an approach paper on “Defining Disaster Resilience” and is committed to building resilience into all of its country programs by 2015. It is also supporting the Political Champions for Resiliency, a global initiative that is producing a set of pilot, country-level plans, including for Niger. In March 2012, the European Union adopted a strategy for security and development in the Sahel aimed at addressing the root causes of poverty in the region. And earlier this year, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) solicited proposals from partners to implement a new five-year, \$70 million project called Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel – Enhanced Resilience (REGIS-ER). REGIS-ER is one of three new USAID procurements that will target vulnerable livelihood zones in Niger and Burkina Faso.¹⁶

In the Sahel, the concept of resilience makes a great deal of sense to the extent that it addresses the failure of development interventions to treat chronic vulnerabilities, which are in turn contributing to more recurrent humanitarian emergencies and undermining development gains. One high-level UN representative articulated the problem as follows: “The response to the 2012 food crisis was seen as an improvement to the extent that early warnings prompted early action by humanitarian agencies that mitigated the crisis. Yet donors still spent over \$1 billion in humanitarian response costs,” (with the U.S. government alone having spent over \$400 million). “Looking ahead, the long recovery time for vulnerable households means that it’s very likely that there will be another humanitarian emergency one or two years from now.” If implemented effectively, resilience-building programs can mitigate humanitarian emergencies by forcing development actors to target assistance at the most vulnerable, while forcing humanitarian actors to think beyond the immediate emergency intervention and facilitate sustainable recovery.

Nonetheless, AGIR and the UN Integrated Strategy face significant implementation challenges that must be addressed if these programs are to achieve their intended results. Foremost is the sheer number of different resilience initiatives and projects, which has led to a great deal of confusion on the ground. Compounding this problem is the fact that the various resiliency programs are driven by different entities (e.g., regional bodies, UN agencies/envoys/special representatives, donors, financial institutions) that have somewhat different definitions of “resilience”, as well as different scopes (regional versus national) and targets (populations alone versus populations, governments, and systems). Rather than being linked to each other in a comprehensive fashion, they are linked to other initiatives, actors, and programs. For example, AGIR is linked with an array of existing regional and national food security and drought initiatives, while the UN Integrated Strategy includes an array of security- and governance-related objectives and initiatives. As one high-level UN official admitted, “It is a source of confusion for all of us. Basically, it’s being worked out as we speak.”

The lack of national ownership or “buy in” for these high-level initiatives is also slowing implementation. Part of the problem is that there is no formula or consensus on how AGIR is to be implemented on a national level or who should lead. While some have suggested that UN regional and country-level Resident Coordinators/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) should take the lead, the UN is taking the position that it has no formal role in AGIR. Some countries have relatively advanced national programs for

tackling food insecurity and malnutrition (e.g., the Nigeriens Nourishing Nigeriens Initiative, better known as 3N) that could form a basis on which AGIR could build. However, according to officials with whom RI spoke, many countries lack the capacity or political will to implement AGIR’s top-down objectives, and in some countries it is still unclear which government officials or ministries are responsible.

A third and related challenge is coordination. All of the initiatives call for coordination, but not through the same mechanism or set of actors. In short, there is no unified framework or vision for coordination among (and in some cases within) the various resiliency initiatives. For example, the UN Integrated Strategy proposes a “coordination platform” wherein the main multilateral donors would meet every six months (starting in September 2013) to ensure that needs are met and overlap is avoided. AGIR calls for the establishment of coordination mechanisms at the global level (although not yet defined) and at the country level, for coordinating mechanisms to be established based on “already existing mechanisms of technical and financial partners of the Alliance,” which will vary from country to country. As one NGO representative in Niger remarked when asked about resiliency initiatives, “Theoretically, it’s a good idea. But in practice, it’s very messy.”

Most donors and UN agencies RI interviewed agreed that at the country level, national governments should take the lead in coordinating the various resiliency programs, and this is supported by the various strategy documents. However, while national ownership is essential, it is unrealistic to assume that national governments in the Sahel, which face enormous humanitarian, budgetary, and security challenges, will have capacity to coordinate this wide array of initiatives. Given the significant financial flows planned for resiliency programs (potentially amounting to billions of dollars), the broad array of actors involved, and the limited financial and human capacity of regional bodies and national governments, the importance of effective coordination cannot be overstated.

Rather than pursuing various resiliency initiatives independently and expecting national governments to coordinate them, a far better and more streamlined approach would be for the UN RC/HC in each country to take the lead on coordinating the various resiliency initiatives. The RC/HCs would be responsible for getting the input of other UN agencies, donors, regional bodies, and international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, and then working with the national government to create one national-level resilience plan. In addition, the RC/HCs would

identify or develop one mechanism or platform for coordinating the UN Integrated Strategy with AGIR and other donor- or IFI-led initiatives.

This approach is similar to the one adopted by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) under the Common Framework for Preparedness, part of the IASC's Transformative Agenda (TA). One of the goals of the TA is to build global capacity for disaster preparedness, an important component of resiliency. Towards that end, the Common Framework establishes a process for supporting national capacity for disaster preparedness "in a coherent manner using a systematic country level approach that collectively assesses capacity and need, uses this assessment to jointly develop programs and plans, and coherently implements these programmes and plans to strengthen preparedness."¹⁷ In addition to recognizing the need for joint planning and coordination, the Common Framework emphasizes the key role that RC/HCs can play in "supporting government leadership and providing coordination, in particular for UN entities, but also in seeking coherence with a wide range of relevant actors." It makes a great deal of sense for the same approach to be used in coordinating resiliency strategies at the national level in West Africa, as well as for linking them to the Common Framework and TA.

Donor-led resilience initiatives also require support. It is true that the resilience-building approach adopted in REGIS-ER is not all that different from ongoing, USAID-funded programs such as Title II Development Food Assistance Programs (DFAPs) (multi-year, non-emergency, cash-based projects that target the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition by, e.g., diversifying household incomes and strengthening agricultural productivity). Moreover, it is too early to judge whether REGIS-ER's goal of increasing resiliency "by scaling up, deepening, and expanding upon resilient adaptations and innovations already under way" will prove transformative. Nonetheless, USAID deserves credit for successfully instituting new, cross-sectoral, joint planning processes (i.e., Joint Planning Cells) that break down humanitarian and development silos. In addition, REGIS-ER's pool of funding from various humanitarian and development accounts represents a much improved, more comprehensive approach to programming that makes sense in countries experiencing recurrent humanitarian emergencies. USAID's efforts to replicate this approach in other countries/regions experiencing recurrent humanitarian emergencies are most welcome. In addition, to the extent that much of the funding for USAID resiliency-building programs is currently channeled through Title II non-emergency programs authorized in the Farm Bill (i.e., DFAPs), the U.S. Congress should support robust funding for Title

II non-emergency programs in line with the Senate Agricultural Appropriations bill for FY 2014, and pass a Farm Bill which includes authorization for non-emergency programs that build resilience.

One shortcoming in USAID's strategy, however, is its limited geographic scope. The REGIS-ER project is limited to parts of Burkina Faso and Niger in which USAID has already been working on food security initiatives, and the project is managed out of USAID's West Africa Regional Bureau in Dakar. Not included are other western Sahel countries like Chad, Mauritania, Senegal, and Nigeria – the latter being a crucial player in terms of markets, migration, and security, especially in neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso. For instance, both flooding and conflict in Nigeria over the past year have had adverse impacts on food prices and cross-border livestock trading in Niger, thus increasing food insecurity there. To achieve resiliency in the region over the long term, USAID must broaden its West Africa resiliency strategy to include other countries, especially Nigeria.

LINKING RESILIENCE TO DISTRESS MIGRATION

Resiliency projects must offer vulnerable households more secure livelihoods that avoid a reliance on distress migration. These projects must include activities to better track and monitor migration as a negative coping strategy, as well as institute measures to mitigate its adverse impacts on vulnerable households. Finally, project success should be evaluated, in part, on the extent to which project activities reduce distress migration.

USAID's REGIS-ER project recognizes the increasingly predominant role labor migration plays as a survival strategy for vulnerable households. It points to the risks that current labor migration practices pose to the most vulnerable households, including exploitation, extortion, sexually-transmitted illnesses (STIs), and gender-based violence (GBV), as well as their potential to undermine familial relationships and cohesion. REGIS-ER seeks to address these risks by facilitating access to national identification documents, developing the skills of workers to match skills in higher demand, and improving access to information about labor opportunities. Also included are support mechanisms to address the negative impacts of labor migration on women and families, including GBV, for both migrants and those left behind.

However, in the regions of Burkina and Niger targeted by REGIS-ER, very limited alternative livelihoods currently exist. While the identified activities may mitigate climate-re-

lated migration and displacement to some extent, they are highly unlikely to stem the flow completely. As such, in addition to mitigating migration-related risks, REGIS-ER and other resiliency programs must incorporate the need to better protect individuals who resort to distress migration in response to climate shocks. For those forced to flee to cities to engage in petty trade, more must be done to track them and to improve services and protection.

In Burkina, this means providing support to national and local governments to address the horrendous conditions at mining sites and implement improved health, safety, and child labor laws. At present, the U.S. Department of Labor is funding a \$5 million, four-year technical assistance project to support efforts to reduce child labor in cotton farming and informal artisanal gold mining.¹⁸ In addition to providing education and social protection services for children, the project seeks to deliver alternative livelihood and income-generating options for families who send their children into the workforce for their own economic survival. USAID resiliency projects should link to and expand upon these projects.

Other donors, UN agencies, and national governments should likewise recognize the link between recurrent climate shocks and involuntary migration/displacement as a negative coping mechanism, and incorporate protection from displacement-related risks into their resilience-building strategies.

Finally, resiliency projects must incorporate the need to build government capacity to manage increasing levels of climate-related displacement. One important mechanism for doing so is the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa (Kampala Convention), which came into force in late 2012 and has been ratified by both Niger and Burkina Faso. The Kampala Convention extends protection to those who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or natural disasters. It also gives humanitarian and development actors an important rights-based framework within which to develop programs to mitigate natural disaster displacement and protect displaced persons through improved access to housing, basic services, and increasing livelihood opportunities, thereby reducing poverty.¹⁹ The UN, with donor support, should provide technical assistance to national governments as they implement the Kampala Convention and ensure the protection of those displaced by climate-related shocks.

CONCLUSION

The new focus on the complex threats facing the Sahel is certainly welcome, as are resilience-building initiatives that reflect a more fine-tuned understanding of the underlying causes of vulnerability. But just as building resilience requires a focus on the causes of vulnerability, so too must it include a more nuanced understanding of recurrent climate-related changes as drivers of new forms of displacement and migration which may not fit well into existing definitions or classifications. In light of the serious protection risks created by distress migration, far more research and resources must be devoted to better tracking and monitoring. In addition, the UN, donors, and others must act quickly to address the significant coordination and other challenges facing effective implementation of the region's numerous resiliency-building initiatives. Finally, reversing the growing resiliency deficit in the Sahel will not be possible unless the countervailing pressures of population growth and rapid climate change are addressed. Resilience building should not distract the U.S. and other major emitters of greenhouse gases from the urgent need to slow and reverse climate change before it is too late, while also mitigating its devastating impacts on populations, like those in the Sahel, who are least responsible.

Alice Thomas traveled to Burkina Faso and Niger in June 2013 to assess the situation of vulnerable households affected by repeated droughts and food crises, and gather information on the implementation of new UN- and donor-led resilience initiatives.

1. The term “resilience” has been defined somewhat differently by various stakeholders, but in general, it means the ability of people, countries, and systems to withstand and recover from shocks and stresses. Other definitions include: “The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner.” UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) (2013). “Terminology for Disaster Risk Reduction.” Accessed July 2013 from <http://www.unisdr.org/we/inform/terminology>; “The ability of a social or ecological system to absorb disturbances while retaining the same basic structure and ways of functioning, the capacity for self-organisation, and the capacity to adapt to stress and change.” Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2007). “Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report: Glossary.” Accessed July 2013 from http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/syr/en/annexes/glossary-r-z.html.
2. For a more thorough analysis of current governance and security challenges facing the Sahel, see the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2013). “Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Sahel region,” S/2013/354. Accessed July 2013 from http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2013_354.pdf.
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8. Potts et al., *supra* note 5.
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12. IDMC, *supra* note 8.
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14. UNSC, *supra*, note 2.
15. *Ibid.*
16. United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2013). “Request for Applications. RFA-685-13-000003: Resilience and Economic Growth in the Sahel - Enhanced Resilience (REGIS-ER).” Accessed July 2013 from <http://senegal.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/REGIS-ER%20RFA-685-13-000003.pdf>. Related procurements are REGIS-Accelerated Growth, which seeks to increase the incomes of vulnerable households by improving the productiveness of three product value chains: cowpea, small animals, and poultry. The third project, Sahel Resilience Learning, will serve as an instrument to promote effective collaborative performance management between the various REGIS programs.
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