



VOICES FROM THE SAHEL

Conversations, Visions and Solutions

A Report of the Conversations between the United Nations
and Women and Youth of the Sahel

November 2021



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Voices from the Sahel: Conversations, Visions and Solutions

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UN Principals

Moderators of the Sahel conversations



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UN Assistant Secretary General,
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FOREWORD

The Sahel region has been at the center of international discourse for many years, in the areas of peace, security and development. Though it represents one of the most fragile regions of the world, the Sahel is replete with opportunities, both natural and manmade. With an enlightened youthful population (standing at 65%) great potential exists for the growth of Sahelian countries in specialized sectors like knowledge management, technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The UN system in the Sahel desires to support an alternative path that emphasizes direct interaction and consultation with Sahelians to re-orient and re-engineer its development, humanitarian, peace, and security interventions in the region. This will better inform present and future actions on design, planning and execution going forward. The World Bank publication by Lawrence F. Salmen and Eileen Kane (2006), 'Bridging Diversity: Participatory Learning for Responsive Development' rightly underscored that 'beneficiaries and affected populations can participate in development in many ways...by providing information through needs assessment, identification of options, collaboration in design, and mobilization and implementation of activities; monitoring and evaluation of projects; and general enhancement of their own power to direct their futures.'

For the UN to 'deliver as one' via a humanitarian, development, and sustaining peace (HDP) nexus, it must establish a collective - a catchment of ideas and

information on specific areas of focus including building a tapestry of knowledge with governments in the region as well as beneficiary communities.

Consultations creates space for all, including women and youth to proffer solutions to create a better understanding of the contextual remedies to issues affecting their communities. It therefore holds the key to tackling root causes and durable solutions for sustainable development, peacebuilding, and the strengthening of institutions.

In the case of the Sahel, the youth are increasingly educated and extremely innovative. There are excellent medical doctors, researchers, business and agriculture entrepreneurs, scientists in aeronautics, ground water as well as mining resources. There are peacebuilding experts, climate and environmental experts, engineers, teachers, lawyers, lawmakers, and more.

In this report, we chronicle the Sahelian voices shared during the maiden conversations the UN system organized with women and youth of the Sahel over a four-week period. These voices are part of the ingredients that will guide our work as a UN system.

I invite you to share in these reflections – of visions, aspirations, and solutions – and to use them to inform engagement with women and young Sahelians.

Sincerely,

Abdoulaye Mar Dieye

UN Special Coordinator for the Development in the Sahel

AKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, profound thanks to all Sahelians; youth and women who participated in this conversation. It is a measure of the strength of belief in their ability to chart the region's course forward.

Thanks also go to the moderators of the conversations - four senior UN officials: The Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, who launched and moderated Week 1 - setting the tone to brainstorm and share innovative ideas to tackle root causes, tap existing opportunities and harness potential in the Sahel. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General, United Nations Office of West Africa, and Sahel (UNOWAS) Ms. Giovane Biha, who moderated Week 2: employing a political, peace and security lens on issues at play. Ms. Marie-Pierre Poirier, UNICEF Regional Director for West and Central Africa, who moderated Week 3 focusing on youth and children's education. The 4th and final week was moderated by Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa, UN Assistant Secretary General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Africa. She focused on

leadership and governance – challenging women and youth to get involved in shaping the Sahel they want.

The role of colleagues at UNOWAS (Ms. Aissatou Jobe and Mrs. Angelita Mendy Diop), UNICEF (Ms. Anne Fouchard and Ms. Lucia Michelini) and UNDP (Ms. Joy Kategekwa, Ms. Jane Yeboah, Mr. Ishmael Doodoo, Mr. Njoya Tikum - all of whom provided support for the Principals – is greatly appreciated.

Special thanks to the Spark Blue team for provision of technical expertise; Ms. Nina Grinman, Mr. Romolo Tassone and Mr. Zach Hongola who ensured the successful set up and facilitation of the online consultations.

Finally thanks also to the team from the Office of the Special Co-Ordinator for Development in the Sahel who anchored this work; Ms. Elodie Atsou, Mr. Ashu Hailshamy, Ms. Diane Yameogo, Mr. Jean Providence Nzabonimpa and Ms. Nwanneakolam Vwede-Obahor

A big thank you to all direct and indirect contributors/ participants.



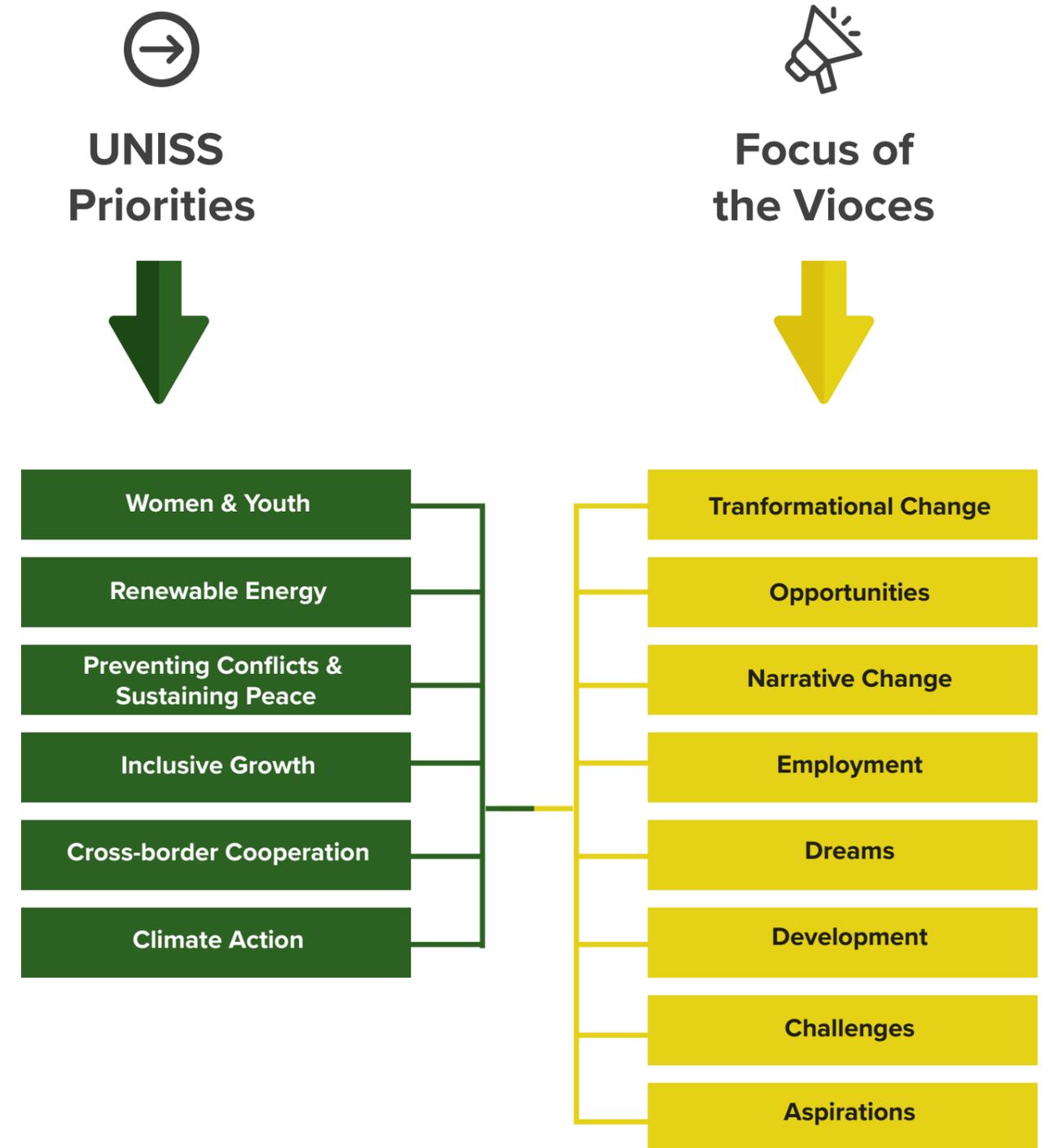
KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The report captures a series of insights as provided by participants.

Figure 1. Focus areas of women and youth voices in the Sahel



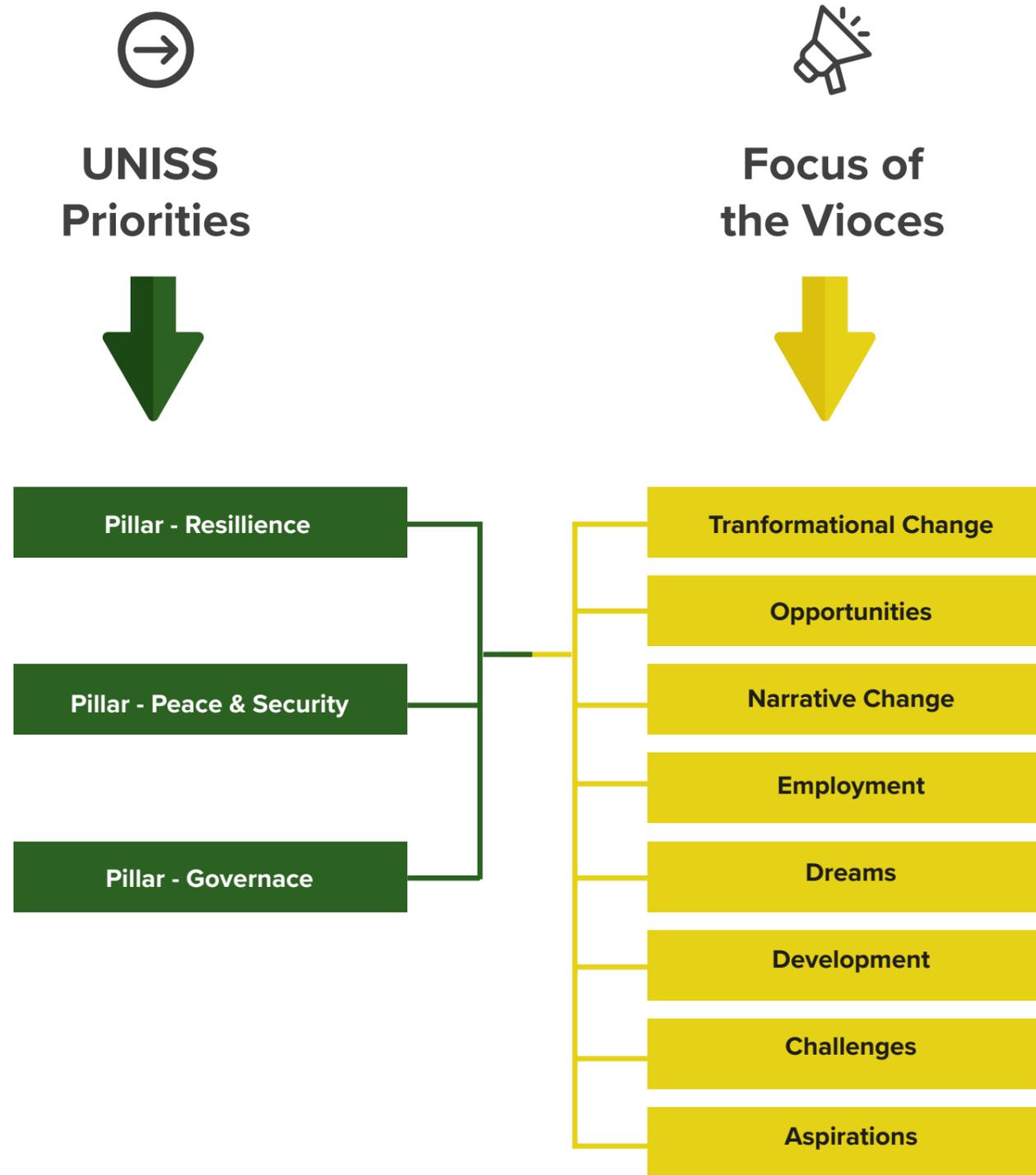
Figure 2. Alignment of UN priorities with youth/women voices in the Sahel



The interlinkages of UN priorities with youth and women voices in the Sahel

Conversations touched on transformational change (including good governance), opportunities, employment, development, aspirations, and dreams, as well as change of narrative and challenges in the Sahel all of which align with the UNISS-UNSP. Analyzing what was said, the Sankey diagram below illustrates alignments (the bigger and broader the width, the more the voices or contributions proffered align with UNISS/UNSP-related priorities).

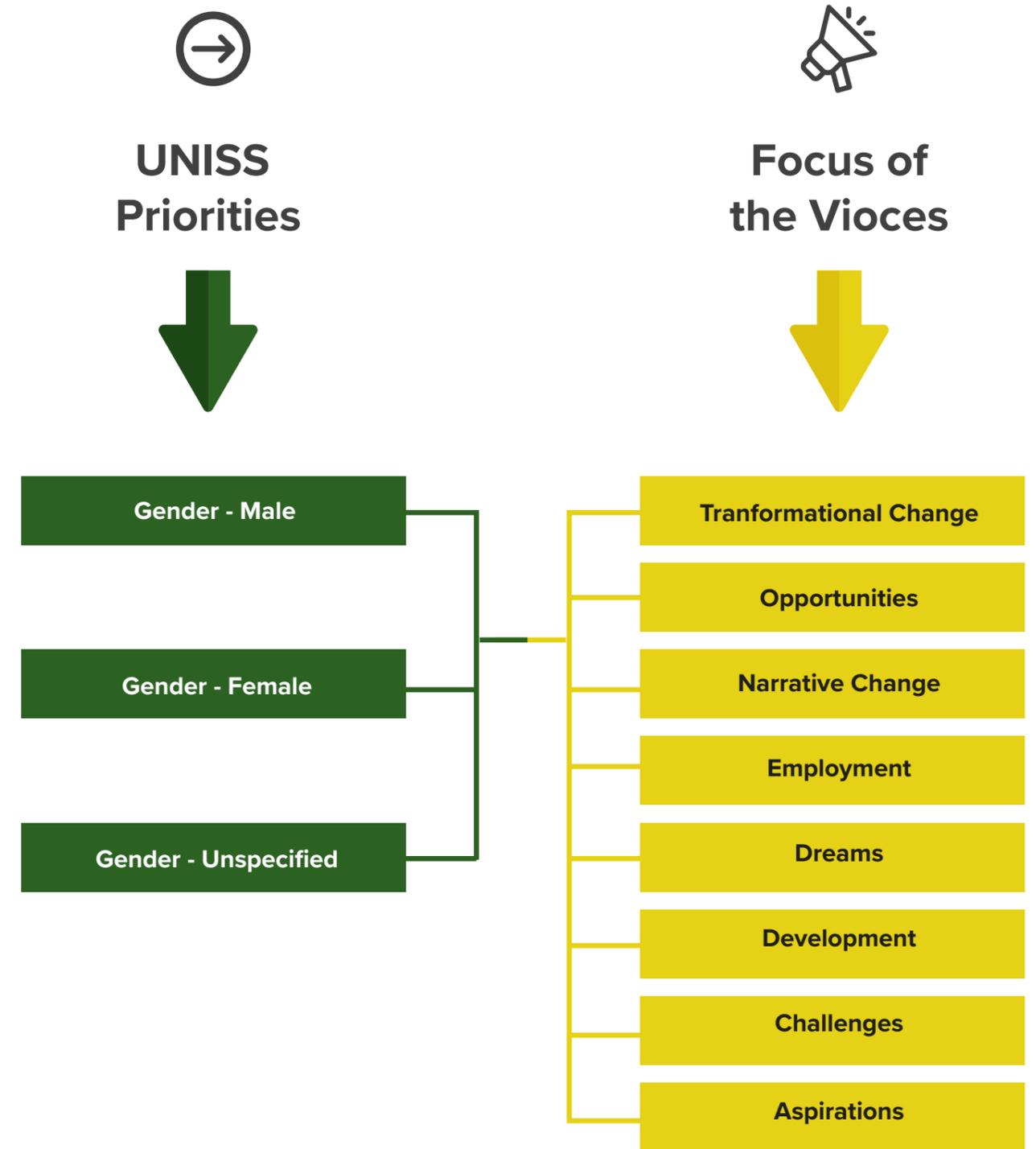
Figure 3. UNISS Pillars in women and youth voices



The interlinkages of UN strategic directions with youth and women voices

Youth and women voices are echoed mostly in matters related to peace and security. The diagram below depicts where the voices lie the most. As illustrated, transformational change and development are mostly expected in peace and security. On a relatively equal footing, resilience and governance appear in the desired change pathways as do employment and development.

Figure 4. Gendered voices towards UN priorities in the Sahel



Gendered Voices

Results show that women and youth hold similar views as there is ample feedback from the contributors that women suffer the most from the effects of climate change, lack of or non-use of renewable energy, absence of peace and security, and poverty or gender-insensitive growth.

CONTEXT OF THE CONSULTATIONS

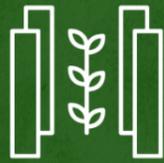
The Sahel, the vast semi-arid region of Africa separating the Sahara Desert to the north and tropical savannas to the south, is a land of opportunities – currently caught up in challenges. The region is endowed with abundant human, cultural and natural resources, offering tremendous potential for rapid social and economic growth. Yet there are deep-rooted ecological, political, human rights and security challenges affecting the development, prosperity, and lasting peace of the region. The nature and complexity of these problems cannot be overstated. Despite this, the people of the region, together with the UN System have proven to be resilient and taken a firm stand to address the complex human security and development challenges facing them. Therefore, in 2013, pursuant to the UN Security Council resolution 2056 and recalibrated in 2017, the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel (UNISS) was created to tackle the crisis in the Sahel. UNISS supports UN and African Union (AU) goals for the region through operationalization of the UN Support Plan (UNSP) of 2018.

In 2021, the UNISS Steering Committee agreed that a revitalized communication plan was needed, aimed at - ensuring that voices of Sahelians are fully captured in the development discourse to find meaningful and sustainable solutions through direct exchanges that is inclusive of all, including women and youths.

UNISS IS FOCUSED ON THREE BROAD AREAS:



Governance



Resilience



Peace and Security

formulated as strategic goals in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU Agenda 2063. These goals are complementary and uses an integrated approach premised on the humanitarian, development, and sustaining peace HDP nexus. To achieve these three goals as one UN, the UN system in the Sahel established three strategic working pillars: Governance pillar, Resilience pillar and Peace and Security pillar. UNISS also seeks to promote integrated regional approaches to all its activities of the UN in the 10 UNISS countries (Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, The Gambia and Senegal) to tackle the problems together whilst respecting specificities and bringing greater coherence to implementation of broader international interventions in the Sahel.



KEY OBJECTIVE

The overarching purpose of this Spark Blue initiative was to let the Sahelian voices guide the work of the United Nations system in the Sahel. Entitled

“Voices from the Sahel: Conversations, Visions & Solutions”

the online consultation created an opportunity for engagement.

The conduct of the consultations:

The conduct of the consultations: In advance of the launch of Generation Unlimited Sahel (Gen U Sahel), which aims to create conditions, business opportunities, unlock investments and mobilize resources for the youth of the Sahel -part of package of interventions on Youth by UNISS, the first Spark Blue consultations focused on how youths can be actors of development in the Sahel: what best practices can be learned from youth-driven initiatives/ innovations and how such can be leveraged as entry points for development partners; including the UN as well as Governments.

The online, open, and thematic discussions were launched on 11 October 2021 and closed on 8th November 2021, targeting women and youth from the Sahel from across the 10 UNISS countries, members of the UN system (Agencies, Funds and Programmes in particular working on the Sahel), regional/sub-regional organizations, Representatives from Governments of the 10 Member States, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Academia, and other non-state actors working on youth-related issues. This first consultation focused primarily on youth and women, their contribution/thoughts to development, their vision for a peaceful and prosperous Sahel and proposals on quick wins (the priorities that need to be addressed to change the negative narrative of the Sahel and which can guide and better inform UN actions in the region going forward).

The basis of the discussions was not only the surmountable natural and man-made challenges but also the opportunities and possible solutions.

Each week, the following questions were discussed at length from multifaceted angles:

From the context of your country, provide your comments and remarks on the following questions:

1. What priorities of the UN Sahel Plan are the most relevant to your context and why?
2. How can young people, including women, contribute to a peaceful and prosperous Sahel?
3. How can the UN and young people work together to change the negative narrative on the Sahel?
4. How can youth, women and governments partner in the areas of development, resilience and peacebuilding in the Sahel?

The responses were expected to be primarily guided by the UNISS-UNSP priorities below:



RESULT OF THE CONSULTATIONS

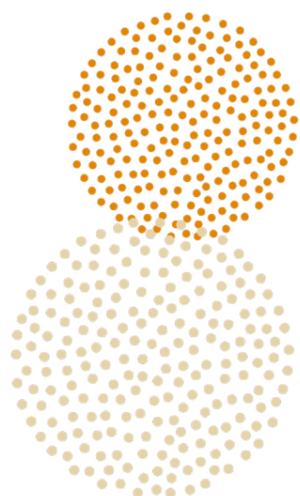
More than **270** ideas, views, perspectives were shared by youth & women from the Sahel.

The following Sahelian countries participated in the conversations:

Cameroon, Chad, The Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal

As well, Sahelians and other persons living in the continent and from the diaspora in the following countries participated:

Belgium, Burundi, Central African Republic, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Denmark, Ethiopia, France, Ghana, India, Italy, Kenya, Madagascar, Norway, Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Switzerland, Uganda, United States of America, Zimbabwe.

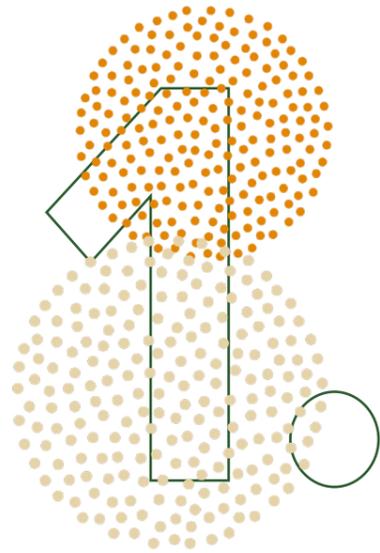


A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS ALSO PARTICIPATED:

ACTION DE SOLIDARITE POUR LES DROITS HUMAINES ET LA DEMOCRATIE (ASDHD, CAMEROON), ACUPED, AFRICAN YOUTH INITIATIVE ON CLIMATE CHANGE (AYICC), AFRIQUE ESPOIR, AFRIYAN NIGER, AFSM, AGRI BUSINESS CONSULTING (ABC), ALBARKA HEALTH SPRING FOUNDATION, ALDEPA, ALVF/EN, ARDA YESSO, ASEFCE INTERNATIONAL TCHAD, ASSOCIATION FOR THE WELFARE OF WOMEN AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLE, BEFCONSULTING, BIG FAMILY 360 FOUNDATION, BRIAN BUILDERS' YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE CAMEROON NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL, CAMEROONIAN BLOGGERS ASSOCIATION, CARTOTCHAD, CEIDES, CELLULE NIGERIENNE DES JEUNES FILLES LEADERS, CENTRE AFRICAINE D'ESTUDES INTERNATIONALES DIPOMATIQUES ECONOMIQUES ET STRATEGIQUES, CENTRE FOR ADVOCACY, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVE, CIRID, CITOYENNET-ELLES, DYNAMIQUES MONDIALES DES JEAUNES, EDUCOMMUNICAFRIK, ENDEAVOUR MINING (SMI), FUTURE PROWESS ISLAMIC FOUNDATION, GENDER EQUALITY, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE, GLOBAL SOIUTH DIALOGUE ON ECONOMIN CRIME, GLOBAL VILLAGE HEALTHCARE INITIATIVE FOR AFRIA, GOMBE YOUTH FOR GLOBAL GOALS, GOVERNMENT OF MAURITNIA, GREEN CLIMATE AFRICA, HAMADAR, HOPE SAHEL, INOVEA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION, INSTITUT NATIONAL DE LA RESERCHE AGRONOMIQUE, INSTITUT NATIONALE POLYTECHNIQUE HOUPHOEUT-BOIGNY, ISRA/BAME, IWELLO, JUNIOR CHAMBERS INTERNATIONAL – NIGER, JENDALMA EXPRESS, JEUNE VOLONTAIRE DU NIGER, JEUNESSE ESPOIR, KARYAL ORGANIC PRODUCTS, LETSAI, LIFE AT BEST DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE, LOCAL YOUTH CORNER CAMEROON, MAROUA UNIVERSITY, CAMEROON, MAURE STUDIO, MBORORO SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, NORTH WEST REGION CAMEROON, MEDICOS DEL MUNDO, MINISTRE DE LA JEUNESS ET DE L'EDUCATION CIVIQUE, CAMEROOUN, NATIONAL YOUTH PARLIAMENT – GAMBIA, NIGERIA YOUTH SDGS NETWORK, OBSERVATOIRE DE L'EXTREMISME VIOLENT ET DES VIOLATIONS DES DROITS DE L'HOMME EXTREMME-NORD DU CAMEROUN, ONG AIDD, ONG OUVRIR LES HORIZONS, ORGANISATION DE LA SOCIETE CIVILE APPIFAPE, HOSPITAL MAYNILA MEDICAL CENTER, OUAGADOUGOU PARTNERSHIP, RESEAU DES JEUNES POUR LA POPULATION ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT, RECONSTRUYAMOS LA NATURALEZA, RNJ, ROME CENTRE FOR SUTSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS – EGMONT, SAHA CAFÉ – MAURITANIA, SAUTI SETU, SCHOOL OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION, SMART SYSTEMS SERVICES, MAURITANIA, TEAM MUDA, TEMPLE LEGAL PRACTITIONERS, TODAY FOR TOMORROW FOUNDATION, UNIVERSE FOR SUSTIANABLE DEVELOPMENT, YAMBA DIGITAL HUB, YOUTH Kmer Volunteers for SDGs, ZENITH OF THE GIRL CHILD AND WOMEN INITIATIVE SUPPORT, UNITED NATIONS

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATIONS

In the discussions, the following key highlights and messages were expounded by the participants:



SAHELIAN REMEDIES ARE ALSO POSSIBLE

→ Sahelian youth know what they want as they have the ability to think and act

Youth and women such as Hawa Traore (Mali), Mariam Aliyu (Nigeria), Mohammed Bello (Nigeria), Samuel Adunreke (Nigeria), and many others stated that they know what is right for them, and what will work in their contexts. Thus, any interventions deployed by the UN and other partners, must keep them in the loop— as framers and implementers.

Ramatu Abdu (Cameroon) explicitly echoed: ‘bring the youth to the table when decisions are made, involve youth and women in decision making and give them key positions in the community to enable them raise their voices. This will be a great step towards peace building and development’.

→ Sahelian problems are global but also require locally oriented solutions

According to Bigambia Bitimi Charles Lebon, (Cameroon) “the problems we all face are global, but they need local solutions”. Samuel Adunreke (Nigeria) rightly reiterates “Young people in the Sahel without doubt have the solutions to global challenges in local context ... The Sahel has come to a point of its destiny where we can no longer leave anything to chance, hence a call on all to collectively deploy our rich culture, human resources, character and local content for our own liberation”.

Expressing frustration, Djeumegued Pascal (Cameroon) noted, “the crisis in the Sahel has developed in many young people and women the spirit of dependence on foreign aid/support as they are used to receiving donations including relief support. This reality has plunged the region into underdevelopment” a condition youth and women now consider unwanted and for which they want change. Samuel Aderunke (Nigeria) equally noted; “the real problems are not far-reaching...critical areas of locally led adaptations... for example resilience building for farmers, are important for advancing Agricultural development.”

→ Utilize local resources as instruments for job creation

Participants such as Farida Boube Dobi (Niger) gave a particular example which should be explored “the Sahel is indeed very rich in ground water resources. A 2021 scientific paper by McDonald et al classified the Sahel as a zone with the highest ground water storage in Africa”.

→ Leverage good practices that exist in the Sahel

Tambari Idrissa (Niger) proudly pointed out the “Samaria” model in Niger, which is “a group of young people based on mutual aid and solidarity who carry out activities on a voluntary basis to provide solutions to the community problems” should be resuscitated as he regrettably noted “the initiative ended in the 1980s”.





INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

→ Trust youth's transformative ability and savvy

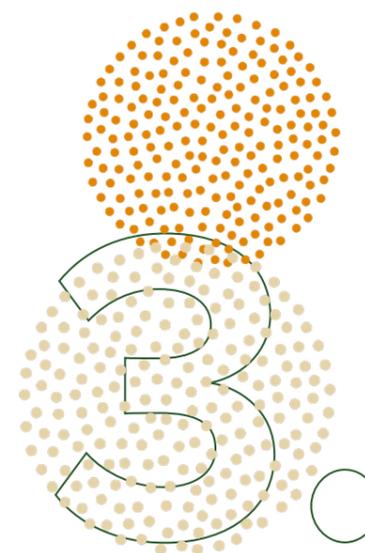
Echoed by various participants such as Momodou Manneh (The Gambia) Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria) Moussa Diouf (Senegal), Hawa Traore (Mali), Teslem Meissa (Mauritania), Abubakar Sadiq Muazu (Nigeria), Mohammed Bello, (Nigeria) and others, youths can transform any challenge into an opportunity. Presently, young people in the Sahel are contributing to resilience building with innovative solutions, in driving social progress and inspiring and orienting political change. They are agents of change, mobilizing to advance the SDGs to improve the lives of people and the health of the planet. "Young people and women must be empowered [...] this can be achieved when they are digitally connected, digitally literate and have access to electricity." Ahmed Abdulkadir (Nigeria)

→ Ensuring internet and electricity access will boost youth's innovative works

In Sandiour Gaye's (Senegal) words: "Today many Sahelians still do not have access to the Internet or electricity. Thus, talking about inclusive leadership in the Sahel through digital [technologies] means first facilitating access to the Internet for all. Today, the Internet is still a luxury for most of these populations. This is why I invite States and the United Nations to invest more in this area in order to reduce the digital gap."

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POVERTY REDUCTION AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH IS A TOP PRIORITY FOR SAHEL

→ The need to urgently tackle the root causes of poverty and insecurity

According to the youth voices, this will substantially ensure peaceful coexistence of Sahelians. As they noted, instabilities and the absence of social cohesion are the result of poor governance, poverty, lack of economic prospects/opportunities, and non-participation etc. To Hawa Traore (Mali) "the underlying causes of the armed conflicts and struggle for the control of resources and international terrorism across the region include social and political exclusion, lack of economic opportunities and unemployment, high levels of poverty, poor governance, poor resource management, etc."

Substantiating the same viewpoint, Saidou Kanambaye (Mali) stated: "poverty, the mother of all evils in the Sahel, must be fought by ensuring that the wealth created in our countries benefits all social layers of our societies." And Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria) emphasized: "The widespread crimes and insecurities are not unconnected to the problem of poverty. The inability of youths and women to participate in national development is mostly linked to lack of education which is equally sponsored by poverty."

As a pragmatic means to addressing the root causes of poverty, according to the participants, more investments and incentives for a prosperous Sahel are needed: "Governments of the Sahel countries can provide economic incentives to youth and women to shield or protect them from harsh businesses/economic environments such as inflation, foreign exchange fluctuations etc. Such incentives include tax exemptions, import duties waivers, grants, export incentives etc." Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria)





GOOD GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP MUST BE STRENGTHENED IN THE REGION

Ms. Ahunna Eziakonwa (Moderator-Week Four) pondered: “Women are poorly represented in leadership and governance institutions in the Sahel. Is this not slowing progress in the region? How can we create new governance and leadership structures that are accessible to both women and men?”. And participants shared their viewpoints.

→ Tackling leadership issues from the core

Samuel Adunreke (Nigeria) thought that: “The issues of transparency and accountability in governance have lingered on long enough in Africa and this is why most times the innocent African citizens are being sold out in some forms of modern slavery to the western world.”

According to Tijan Kuyateh (The Gambia) “empowering youth and women to become key actors in sustaining peace and development in my country context is paramount. Youth constitute over 60% of the country’s population. They are faced with a lot of challenges including inclusive participation in decision making, governance and national development programs. UNSP and UNISS should focus more on this priority area for The Gambia.”

→ Proactive inclusion and participation of young people and women in the governance processes and systems in Sahelian countries

To achieve a peaceful and prosperous Sahel, “young people must get involved in governance, monitor public services, become aware of the laws to enable them ensure their application. Women must dare to take up politics so that they are represented at the decision-making table, at the local, legislative and executive levels” Fatoumata Cherif (Guinea).

→ Adopting transformative leadership models

In the same spirit of promoting good governance, participants specified the need for transformative leadership and meaningful engagement of young people. A contributor stated that “Any decision made for youth without youth is against the youth” and according to Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria) “this [for example] hinges on the fact that training the youths without a platform or framework to express themselves will be futile and lead to frustration.”

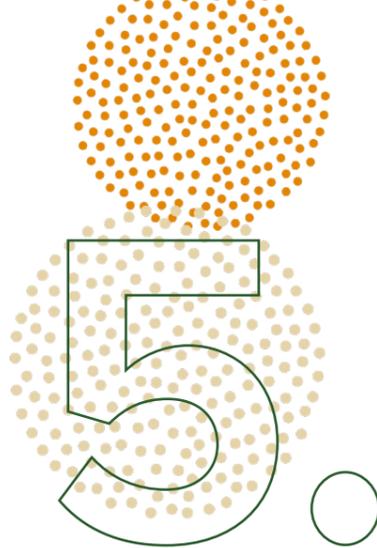
The need for transformative leadership in all sectors of the Sahelian countries remained one of the resounding and recurrent echoes of the Sahel conversations. To sum it up, Samuel Adunreke (Nigeria) passionately opined: “To focus on climate action, renewable energy, women participation, our region needs transformational leadership that engenders a multi-stakeholder framework by adapting locally - led solutions to addressing the challenges in the Sahel.” Vandi Fache (Cameroon) and Ramatu Abdu (Cameroon) put emphasis on “youth leadership” and Fara Ndiaye (Senegal) on “youth empowerment” as strategies to fill the leadership lacuna.

To achieve leadership representation, some participants proposed what Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria) synthesized: “Governments of Sahel nations can be lobbied to commit to minimum quotas for women and youth at various levels of leadership. With a clear-cut quota, women and youths can be encouraged to participate to fill up those quotas and more.”

→ Weakened and broken social contracts is a truism for Sahelian societies.

According to the youths and women, it is a priority to rebuild the social contracts as a catalyst to addressing the gaps and reinforcing social protection for all segments of the population. In Hawa Traore’s (Mali) views, “the most relevant solution is to create a new social contract to address the gaps and reinforce social protection to touch the middle class.” Adding another perspective to the discourse, Vandi Fache (Cameroon) opined the following: “young entrepreneurs are confronted with an overly rigid business legislation that feeds a system of corruption that does not allow prosperity. [...] As a result, young people, despite their entrepreneurial will, find themselves blocked and condemned to unemployment with the risk of being recruited into violent groups such as Boko Haram, a threat to peace.”





SAHELIAN YOUTH AND WOMEN CAN PLAY AN INSTRUMENTAL ROLE IN THE PEACE AND SECURITY QUESTION OF THE REGION.

→ Rethink DDR and create centers for the reception of ex-combatants

It is necessary to think, as suggested by Djeumegued Pascal, (Cameroon) about the ex-combatants present in the community who do not have a permanent job. Without employment, young people are exposed to the tempting (re-)recruitment of Boko Haram and certain criminal networks.

→ A Nexus approach can be used to address core peace and security issues

This can be done by linking peacebuilding with social inclusion, governance, and development, balanced power relations, fight against all forms of discrimination and the promotion of regional solidarity and integration. Institutionalize the sustainable inclusion of young people and women in all peace processes. These were the authoritative articulation by Vandi Fache and Ramatu Abdu. (both from Cameroon)

→ Establish a High Council of Youth and Women for Peace and Development in the Sahel

Such a council could be utilized as an instrument to give both advice and/or achieve resolutions, organize inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogues to promote peace and fight against violent extremism Sandiour Gaye (Senegal) and Modibo Toure (Mali).

→ Conflict resolution and the source of miseries in the region, should be top priority for all

According to Unusa Karimu (Nigeria). "conflict is like a nursery for many other issues affecting the region. In conflict there is no development, no education or it badly affects education either because schools cannot operate in conflict hotspots or youths of school-going age are likely to be those used in the conflict." In his opinion, "rape, kidnapping for ransom and wanton killings are growing in geometric progression. In conflicts, fundamental human rights are violated. The vulnerable in normal times (women and youth) become even more vulnerable. Conflict is very contagious; if conflict is not quickly resolved in State A it is very likely that State B shall also be engulfed by conflict."

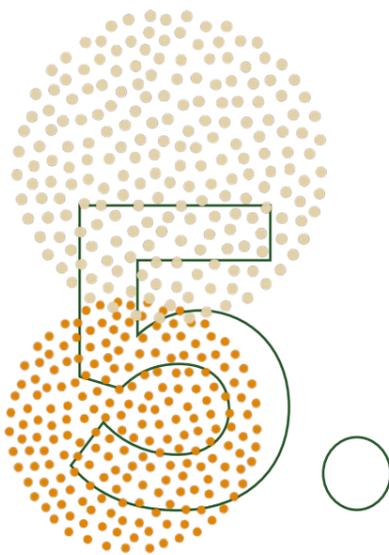
→ Countering Violent Extremism in local and uninformed communities will foster peace

As stated by participants, specifically Ramatu Abdu (Cameroon) and Ahmed Abdulkadir (Nigeria) they recommend the creation of Youth Peace Clubs in schools for students to know the importance of peace and the early warning signs which lead to violence, using audience-specific communication tools to bring the change they want to see.

Hawa Traore's (Mali), stated that "violent extremism is largely fueled by exclusion, lack of opportunity, human rights violations, and lack of trust in state authorities, including in the security forces. People without income or education join extremist groups faster than others."

Ahmed Abdulkadir (Nigeria), repeating Traore's argument above, pointed out: "youth unemployment gives room for violence to thrive as violent extremists easily recruit vulnerable youth into their ideology, a threat to achieving a peaceful Sahel and when there is no peace, we cannot achieve meaningful and sustainable development."





ACTIONS TOWARDS YOUTH AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT MUST BE ENHANCED AND ACCELERATED

→ Youth and women's participation and inclusion

According to Hawa Traore (Mali), on how the UN and young people can work together to change the negative narrative on the Sahel, "they have to be well educated and empowered, once this step is reached, UN and young people can work together in three areas: Planning : design of program, they can help collect information to be used to plan programs;, Delivery : be implementing partners, they can take part in implementing a program or its outcome, Monitoring and Evaluation of programs: youth can help collect information on progress, results and/or effectiveness of the initiative."

Engaging women and youth require specific entry points. According to Unusa Karimu (Nigeria) "some of the communities are very much closed, [hence requesting to] systematically strengthen community-based organizations to serve as entry points." Moussa Diouf (Senegal) thought there is need for "Youth- and women-led organizations to be encouraged and empowered to participate in translating Agenda 2030 and UNISS into local, national and regional policies."

→ There is need for awareness-raising among youth and women on their rights.

Mariam Aliyu (Nigeria) suggested the creation of behavioral change radio programming and listening groups, establishment of community dialogue fora, conducting of learning workshops with experiential and adult learning approaches, conducting of capacity building and training designed by and for community champions, not by organizations and their staff. In Sandiour Gaye's (Senegal) view, youth and women "will be the carriers of the peace message."

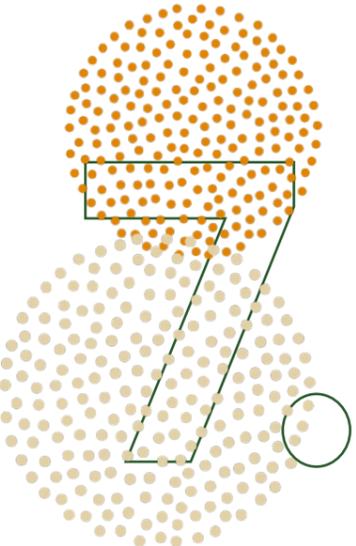
→ Economic empowerment and entrepreneurship as a priority:

Vandi Fache (Cameroon) argued "it is not about 'helping' people even if it may be necessary, but first it is to prepare them through professional training and to create a framework of entrepreneurial freedom. This was further emphasized by a contributor, who believes that "opportunities offered by the African Continental Free Trade Area [can] stimulate job creation and contribute to the fight against insecurity in the Sahel".

→ The role of traditional/religious leaders for women empowerment must be leveraged

"The engagement of traditional rulers and religious leaders in discussions to eradicate socio - cultural norms in the community that affects women negatively, especially the rights to inheritance, education of women, widows' rights to land ownership and rights to decision making - will go a long way to boost the moral and capabilities of women and increase their participation which in turn will lead to women empowerment in the Sahel" Ramatu Abdu (Cameroon).

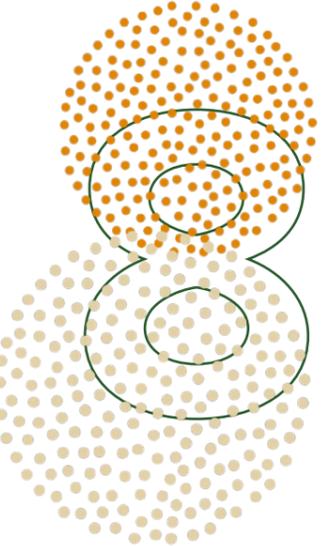




SPECIFIC YOUTH ASPIRATIONS AND INSPIRATIONS

→ Youth-friendly, up-to-date services

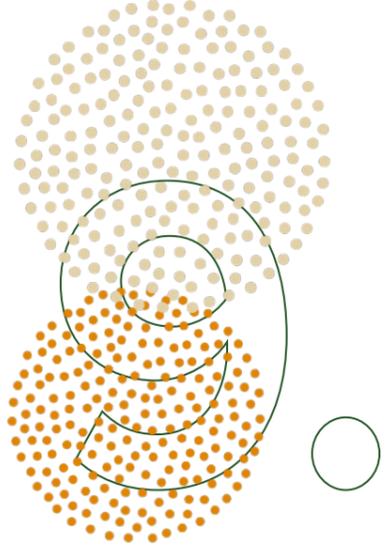
A young Sahelian girl resident in the USA, summarized the current youthful worldview “young people have aspirations, hope and inspiration. They are looking for catalysts to support their drive. As they collectively voiced, they want to move fast. They are for action, not for rhetoric, they work with peer pressure i.e., they will emulate good examples/practices, successes. They are inspired and driven by new media such as videos, music, films, fashion, images, stories, social media. They are inspired by stories of change by other successful youth.”



CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

→ A Call to action on Cross-border cooperation

Contributing ideas from manifold themes, Samuel Adunreke – (Nigeria) called for intentional “focus on cross-border security control; cross-border trade and economic facilitation; regional government and diplomatic relations; cross-border land, air and maritime transportation security measures; and cross-border culture and tourism promotion.” A contributor reiterated cross-border businesses based on past experiences: “Long ago, there were weekly markets in border areas in the Sahel. These could be rehabilitated to strengthen the cross-border social links and promote trade and therefore job creation, especially for women and youth.” Strengthening cross-border cooperation, in (Nigeria) Samuel Adunreke’s words , “[can] address the illicit movement and transportation of arms.”



YOUTH AND WOMEN ARE KEY ACTORS IN CLIMATE ACTION

As mentioned by many participants, climate change has a negative multiplier effect. Saidou Kanambaye and Hawa Traore (both from Mali) listed issues resulting from climate change: desertification, lack of water, lack of pasture or arable land, floods, etc. which generate community conflicts, including those between herders and farmers.

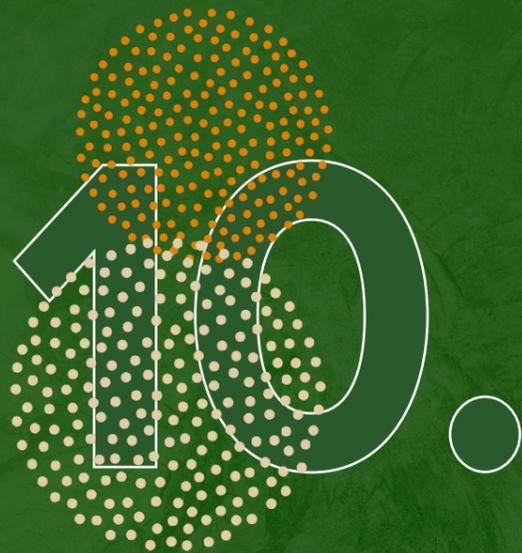
→ Adapting agro-systems to climate change

This proposal was highlighted by participants namely Moussa Diouf, Fatoumata Chérif (Guinea) and Hawa Traore (Mali) who essentially recommend building resilience and addressing root causes of migration by creating more opportunities for Sahelians to thrive at home. They further opined that the Sahel needs climate action, renewable energy, and women’s participation.

→ The need for a Youth4Climate and Climate4Youth Annual summit for the Sahel

Quoting and referencing Greta Thunberg’s stance on climate action, some of the participants such as Moussa Diouf (Senegal) and another contributor-requested that a summit be organized in the Sahel region that will bring together young leaders to talk about the development of Sahel. This summit, in their view, “will also double as a networking and learning event about youth empowerment, sharing of experiences and different perspectives; an opportunity for others to hear from other young leaders how they are thinking about climate change.” This according to another contributor was termed as allowing “Young people talk to young people.”





YOUTH AND WOMEN'S REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE SAHEL

As substantiated by a few participants who voiced their priorities: "Entrepreneurship should be a priority in Sahel as it is a catalyst to solving the vast social and economic challenges. Notably, it is the key to decent jobs creation, shared prosperity and access to social services for a better life and inclusive economic growth which is one of the core drivers of the UNISS agenda for the Sahel." (Bigambia Bitimi Charles Lebon, (Cameroon) and Samuel Adunreke, Nigeria).



ACTIONS ON RESILIENCE BUILDING: A PRIORITY FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE SAHEL

Moussa Diouf (Senegal), **Ahmed Abdulkadir-**, **Unusa Karimu** (Nigeria) and **Hawa Traore** (Mali) are committed and call others to join: "Build farmers' resilience to climate change by increasing their ability to implement climate-smart soil management practices and increase communities' awareness about climate change and their ability to adopt climate-smart practices. The priority of the UN in the Sahel must be the fight against climate change, which is emerging as a killer throughout the region."

To achieve access to water, **Farida Boubé Dobi** (Niger) pointed out need for farming and rearing of cattle using innovative methods. She talked about 'Water for All' in the Sahel, unlocking' water resources, studying Sahel groundwater resources potential, understanding the functioning of the aquifer systems, and then quantifying these resources as important. Only with such interventions can we create sustainable projects regarding those resources.

According to **Hawa Traore** (Mali) "prioritize the resilience of young people and women through the conservation and sustainable use of land and all ecosystems in order to improve the livelihoods of small farmers or agropastoral communities through the improvement of their know-how".



YOUTHS WANT A CHANGE OF NARRATIVE ON THE SAHEL AND THEY HAVE SOME SUGGESTIONS

Chinenye Ajayi (Nigeria) listed several actions worth attending to in order to change the narrative of and on the Sahel:

- Help youths to discover the unfavorable impact of these negative narratives to their future and the urgent need to change it if they must thrive.
- They need to know that their countries are all they have and if they do nothing to change the narrative, they will soon have a country they wouldn't be proud to call home.
- Youths should be made to understand and discover their potentials and how valuable their contributions can be in changing a narrative.
- They should think about the various ways that they can contribute to changing this narrative (from the perspective of leadership, entrepreneurship, political participation, education, participation in economic activities) amongst others.
- Platforms, policies/frameworks, and financial resources should be provided for the youth to develop their leadership skills, acquire vocational skills.
- Having obtained these skills, the youths must then be given an opportunity to implement all they have learnt, build businesses, participate in politics, lead at various levels of the economy. This is hinged on the fact that training the youths without a platform or framework to express themselves will be futile and lead to frustration.

Sharing the same perspective on changing the negative narratives, **Momodou Manneh** (The Gambia) notes "The power of information is invaluable in this collaboration. The youth working in mass media and communication must be supported, protected and educated."



YOUTH AND WOMEN'S REFLECTIONS ON THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH IN THE REGION

The voices were converging towards quality education as illustrated in (Nigeria) **Ahmed Abdulkadir's** argument: "Young people and women must be empowered with access to relevant and quality education in ways that best work for them. Schooling is a basic service essential for the development of a critical and resilient society and for a new ruling class determined to serve the common good".

→ Sahel has precarious health services which must be developed

According to the youth and women voices, Sahelian populations suffer from poor healthcare systems and coverage. They noted that public hospitals do not provide quality health services causing the populations to go to clinics which are rather more expensive especially when compared to their low levels of income and standards of living of most Sahelian families.

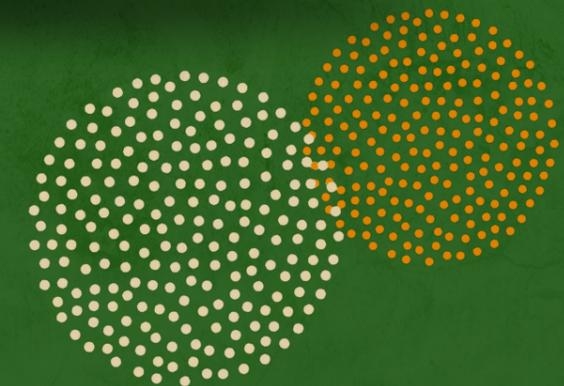


CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

These maiden conversations were held online, and they involved youth and women across the region (located in and outside Sahel) with access to the internet. Whereof, it is safe to assert that, the views of many other youths in areas with zero or little internet access did not take part in the conversations. Nonetheless, as this is just the first of many other anticipated direct dialogues it reflects one of the ways to effectively capture the voices of such youth and women in future conversations. It is therefore recommended that more calibrated approaches be employed to reach and capture the voices of youth and women who are not digitally literate or have no or limited access to internet especially those in the rural areas, to ensure that no voice is left behind.

Nonetheless, the Voices from the Sahel Conversations: Vision and Solutions with women and youth of the Sahel was a successful four-week event which allowed for direct interaction between the UN and Sahelians. Concomitantly, the information garnered provide further evidence that UNISS strategic goals and the UNSP priorities are in harmony with the desired change which women and young people are thirsty for. Therefore, the conversations were timely and achieved the desired outputs as women and youth spoke of their several concerns and proffered recommendations to guide the UN. Participants recommended that similar conversations be organized in the future on a regular basis. Through this request, The UN can use this medium to organize thematic discussions on salient policy planning especially those that directly affect the peoples of the region.

In ending, the production of this **'Ask the Sahelians'** publication is to ensure the documentation of this initial effort of voices from and of the Sahel for posterity and to serve as a constant reminder to use the ideas contained therein to inform the humanitarian, development and peace and security interventions as stated in the United Nations Strategy for Development in the Sahel (UNISS).





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