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Implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support for South Sudan and the Sahel region by the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report is prepared pursuant to Economic and Social Council decision 2019/251, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to submit a report for its consideration under the sub-item entitled “African countries emerging from conflict” of the agenda item entitled “Coordination, programme and other questions”. Subsequently, in its resolution [2020/2](#), the Council requested the Secretary-General to include a section on the implementation of the resolution, including on how the United Nations system is implementing integrated, coherent and coordinated support to achieve sustainable development in the Sahel region, consistent with national and regional priorities and in line with General Assembly resolution [72/279](#), within existing reporting obligations to the Council at its 2020 session. The present report addresses the reporting requirements for both South Sudan and the Sahel region.

2. The report provides an outline of the major developments in South Sudan since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan on 12 September 2018. Following the independence of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, the Economic and Social Council, through its resolution 2011/43, decided to address the humanitarian, peacebuilding and development challenges facing the country. The present report is the eighth report on South Sudan submitted to the Council since the country’s independence.

3. The report also provides an outline of the major developments and collective actions achieved under the recalibrated United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.



4. The focus of the Support Plan was on prevention and resilience, in order to efficiently address the root causes of crises in the region, transform the economies of the Sahelian countries and attract investment to the region, so as to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and implement Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union. Collaborative efforts have been deployed, emphasizing the humanitarian-development nexus and its linkages to peace, to ensure that development aid efficiently reaches populations in need in the Sahel.

5. The report provides updates on progress in joint programmes and cross-border initiatives implemented across the following 10 countries: Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

6. While progress has been made in the Sahel region, much remains to be done to stabilize the situation in those countries and enable access by their populations to governance; basic social services, including health and education; economic opportunities; and energy. The Deputy Secretary-General called upon the heads of United Nations departments, agencies, funds and programmes to advance the implementation of the recalibrated integrated strategy and ensure collective achievements in, and a visible impact on, the Sahel. She invited the heads of those departments, agencies, funds and programmes to showcase, through the decade of action for the Sustainable Development Goals success stories in the region that reflect a more balanced resource allocation between peace, humanitarian and development interventions.

7. Both South Sudan and the countries of the Sahel have been affected by the spread of the coronavirus. As outlined in the policy brief of the Secretary-General on the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in Africa, the relatively low number of COVID-19 cases reported to date have raised hopes that African countries may be spared the worst of the pandemic.

8. In the Sahel and the Lake Chad basin, where conflict, terrorism and violent extremism continue to take a heavy toll on communities, the COVID-19 context further complicates the situation, and countries will require strengthened support. The pandemic is affecting capacities to support peace and security efforts in the Sahel, deteriorating the humanitarian landscape and reversing hard-won development gains.

9. The start of trade in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area, previously scheduled for July 2020, has been postponed due to the pandemic, delaying the promise of new opportunities for exports, jobs, investments in infrastructure and financing for development in Africa in general and the Sahel in particular. The intrinsic linkages between the health, humanitarian, peace and development dimensions in responding to COVID-19 only confirm the need for an integrated approach as advanced in the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel. Refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced and Stateless people in the Sahel are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. Many are hosted in crowded camps and areas of fragile security, with weak health systems and limited access to services such as water, sanitation and hygiene.

10. Following the meeting on the Group of Five for the Sahel (G5 Sahel), held on 28 April 2020 with the African Union Commission, the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel countries, the European Union and the United Nations, the Deputy Secretary-General noted that, within the overarching framework of the integrated strategy for the Sahel and the Support Plan, the United Nations was redoubling its efforts to support the COVID-19 response and ensure that Sahelian countries remained on a path towards stability and development. Noting that the COVID-19 had become a threat multiplier, she urged concrete genuine solidarity at the international, regional, national and

community levels to confront the multifaceted demands posed by development gaps and health and security crises and to recover better, leaving no one behind.

11. The President of Mauritania, who holds the rotating presidency of the G5 Sahel in 2020, noted with concern that the unprecedented crisis caused by the spread of COVID-19 had severely affected the limited resources of Sahelian countries, already strained by security and development challenges. He called upon the international community to take actions commensurate with the magnitude of the emergency, requesting, on behalf of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel countries, that foreign debt be cancelled, so as to enable countries to dedicate all resources available to addressing the multifaceted challenges in the region, which have been compounded by the pandemic, and that coordination and information-sharing mechanisms be strengthened. While acknowledging the positive results of the joint operations achieved in the fight against terrorism, he warned that the impact of the health and security crisis on the Sahelian population could heighten intercommunal conflicts and be instrumentalized by terrorist groups. Turning to development challenges, he noted the need to mobilize resources for the implementation of the G5 Sahel Development and Security Strategy through the implementation of the Priority Investment Programme.

12. The Chairperson of the African Union Commission announced three measures to respond to the current security and health crisis: (a) the deployment of 3,000 troops for the fight against terrorism in the Sahel; (b) the mobilization of emergency support, the collection and distribution of medical material and the establishment of a dedicated African Union task force to develop a unified and continent-wide COVID-19 strategy; and (c) the establishment of a solidarity fund that would place the Sahelian countries among the priority recipients of assistance. The Chairperson proposed that a task force be established, within the framework of the Sahel Alliance, for the response to the multidimensional threat posed by COVID-19.

13. The President of the European Council acknowledged the complexity that COVID-19 added to the situation in the subregion and expressed the willingness to keep the issues of security and development in the Sahel on the front burner of the international agenda. The European Union was realigning its efforts to support the health response and strengthen requisite capacities. Responding to the appeal for the cancellation of foreign debt, he committed the Council to working at the European and international levels, including with the International Monetary Fund, to ease the financial pressure on African nations.

II. South Sudan

A. Context

14. Since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement, significant progress towards peace has been made, with a reduction in conflict-related violence throughout the country, although intercommunal violence has increased. A significant benchmark was achieved with a step towards the formation of the executive branch of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, when the federal Cabinet was formed on 13 March 2020. The Presidency to oversee the transitional period, comprising the President, the First Vice-President and four Vice-Presidents, had been sworn in on 22 February 2020. In addition to the decision to adopt a structure comprising 10 states and 3 administrative areas, those steps mark a significant move forward into the transitional period in the South Sudanese peace process. Nonetheless, as at 29 May, many key pre-transitional tasks remained, including the establishment of the transitional security arrangements, the screening, training and redeployment of

a unified force and the appointment of governors and state administrators in the new governance structure. Furthermore, the allocation of ministerial portfolios by the parties, the restructuring of the Council of States and submissions to the Transitional National Legislature also remain to be addressed. Overall, there is renewed optimism on the part of the international community that the political momentum gained through the implementation of the Revitalized Agreement will be maintained with the support of the United Nations and other partners.

15. The economic recovery, which began in 2018, continued throughout 2019, with increased oil production, favourable global crude oil prices and the advance sale of crude oil, as well as prudent macroeconomic reforms, including the abolition by the Government of deficit financing by the Bank of South Sudan.

16. At the same time, the Bank of South Sudan continues to introduce policy reforms to reduce inflation and stabilize the exchange rate, and it has resumed its engagement in the foreign exchange market through the auctioning of United States dollars. The reform of national payment systems was initiated as a critical condition for rolling out the Anti-Money-Laundering and Counter-Terrorist Financing Act, 2012 (Act No. 29). With peace returning, sustaining monetary policy reforms and ensuring coordination with fiscal policy will be essential for maintaining macroeconomic stability.

17. Still, the economic situation in South Sudan was challenging even before the COVID-19 crisis. Effective management of oil revenue and other resources was a major priority for economic stability, for financing and for putting in place systems that ensure transparency, integrity, and accountability. Prudent management of public resources is critical to enabling investments in the essential social services sector so as to deliver peace dividends and provide a secure and enabling environment for the people of South Sudan to sustain peace and achieve sustainable and inclusive development, especially in the light of the socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19. With the plunge in the price of oil and no viable alternatives to commodities as a source of growth, the economic situation in South Sudan has become critical.

18. Public financial management continues to attract attention from stakeholders, owing mainly to its significance in financing the peace agreement implementation. In early 2020, the public financial management donor working group was reactivated to coordinate partners' support for the public financial management reform agenda, as set out in the Revitalized Agreement, and to complement the work of the National Constitutional Amendment Committee, which is reviewing economic and financial laws, as prescribed in the Agreement.

19. Despite a period of relative stability since the signing of the Revitalized Agreement in late 2018, humanitarian needs remained high across South Sudan throughout 2019. The cumulative effects of years of prolonged conflict, chronic vulnerabilities and limited essential services left 7.2 million people, or two thirds of the population, in need of humanitarian assistance or protection. Women and children continued to be the most affected, with 1 in 10 children dying before their fifth birthday and 2.2 million children out of school. Between May and July 2019, nearly 7 million people were estimated to be acutely food insecure, as acute malnutrition increased, exceeding global emergency thresholds. Nearly 4 million people remained displaced by the crisis: 1.7 million of them internally and 2.2 million as refugees across six neighbouring countries. Although many South Sudanese nationals explored options for returning home, conditions were unsustainable for voluntary returns. Abnormally heavy seasonal flooding affected more than 908,000 people and destroyed an estimated 74,000 hectares of cultivated land, leading the Government to declare a state of emergency in the affected areas. In addition, the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in the Democratic Republic of the Congo triggered active

surveillance of the disease across the border, but there were no confirmed cases in South Sudan. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country is not only challenged by the steep reduction in revenue, but also by rising food prices and desert locusts. More than half the country's population might need food assistance by the second half of 2020.

20. While there was a decrease in the overall number of human rights violations and abuses perpetrated by armed groups in South Sudan, a trend that continued throughout 2019, human rights violations and abuses and protection threats persisted, as the population remained exposed to repeated and deliberate attacks on civilians and their property and other violations of international, humanitarian and human rights laws, including conflict-related sexual violence. Continued disruption of supply routes and primary roads through regular ambushes negatively affected the freedom of movement of civilians. Ongoing fighting and insecurity continued to force people to leave their homes in search of safety and assistance.

21. In the lead-up to the end of the 100-day extension of the pre-transitional period, between January and mid-February 2020, at least 54 cases of forced recruitment, including the forced recruitment of at least seven minors, were carried out by armed groups. Intercommunal violence in some areas resulted in mass civilian casualties. Warring parties continued to commit conflict-related sexual violence, albeit to a lesser extent compared with previous years, despite undertaking commitments to prevent and address sexual violence in conflict situations.

B. United Nations support for South Sudan

22. Because armed conflict was confined to specific areas, the operating environment for humanitarian organizations improved, as they were able to reach previously inaccessible communities. Cost-efficient movement by road and river increased by 10 per cent in 2018 as compared with 2017. At the same time, bureaucratic impediments affecting access also increased as compared with the previous year, despite efforts made by the international community. By the end of 2019, more than 5.3 million of the most vulnerable people received humanitarian assistance through the 2019 Humanitarian Response Plan for South Sudan. Response-related achievements included more than 4 million people receiving food security and livelihood support; nearly 2 million people provided with emergency health care services; and more than 1 million people supported through protection, nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene services. Of the nearly 200 Response Plan partners contributing to those achievements, over 55 per cent were South Sudanese non-governmental organizations.

23. Progress in the peace process, together with increased stability and improved access in many locations, have created conditions for more effective delivery of assistance for recovery and resilience. These accomplishments have led to strengthened dialogue with national partners to ensure that international support for recovery and resilience during the transitional period is anchored in national ownership at both the national and local levels.

24. In July 2019, a consultation event between the United Nations and the Government was held to review the 2018 results and financial report of the United Nations country team and to discuss the type of support the country team would provide for the remainder of 2019 and in 2020. The event was the first consultative forum of its kind held since the civil conflict began in late 2013 and reflected the commitments made by both the country team and the Government, under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2019–2021 for South Sudan, to engage in focused and constructive dialogue with the United Nations and

the wider donor community. Later in the same month, the Government convened the first high-level partners' meeting with bilateral donors, international financial institutions, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and government leaders. A second high-level meeting was convened in February 2020.

25. There has also been increased localized dialogue on support for recovery and resilience in many areas of South Sudan where there is enough stability to allow the inclusive convening of different groups and local partners that are willing and able to work to achieve progress. Those dialogues receive support from the United Nations and other international actors, which help to organize meetings and local conferences and support follow-up action. Defining a governance structure will provide a basis for a continued focus on dialogue and cooperation with local governments.

26. The shared commitments undertaken jointly by a broad range of non-governmental organizations, donors and the United Nations, through the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience, are aimed at reducing vulnerability and building resilience at the local level in South Sudan. These commitments gained considerable traction in 2019. Donors and United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are beginning to align their programmes with the principles and outcomes of the Partnership for local dialogues. It shows that a more integrated approach for sustainable solutions across the humanitarian, peace and development sectors may advance self-reliance for the people of South Sudan. Coordinated support for local livelihoods and service delivery is making people less dependent on humanitarian assistance. Resilience-building activities in the form of joint programmes based on locally agreed priorities and action plans are being undertaken in a number of locations.

27. The engagement of the United Nations in recovery and resilience has been bolstered by the implementation of the reforms of the United Nations development system in 2019. Following extensive consultations, the United Nations Cooperation Framework 2019–2021 was signed by the United Nations country team and the Government in 2018 and launched in January 2019. The Cooperation Framework is based on a local approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda and is concurrent with the three-year transitional period under the Revitalized Agreement. It is guiding the work of the country team in support of national development priorities and aspirations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, with the following four priority areas: (a) building peace and strengthening governance; (b) improving food security and recovering local economies; (c) strengthening social services; and (d) empowering women and youth.

28. To operationalize the Cooperation Framework and boost the transition of South Sudan to recovery and long-term development, the United Nations country team developed nine high-impact flagship initiatives designed to deliver tangible and transformative results by 2020, including with regard to health and education, livelihoods, local governance, gender-based violence and preparations for a national census. The flagship initiatives also known as “core contributions” have been presented to the Government and donors and were recognized by partners as a useful framework for programming efforts.

29. The United Nations system collectively addressed issues related to the humanitarian-development nexus and its linkages to peace under the Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration. A set of collective outcomes on food security and gender-based violence was agreed on by the humanitarian country team and the United Nations country team for improved coordination, planning, targeting, co-location, sequencing and layering of the Humanitarian Response Plan and the activities under the Cooperation Framework for 2019–2021. The objective is to have at least 10 counties moved out of food insecurity and a minimum package of services and activities rolled out for the prevention and

risk mitigation of, and response to, gender-based violence in 80 per cent of priority locations by 2021.

30. Through a collaborative and partnership-based effort, the donor community in South Sudan has significantly increased funding for recovery and resilience. In 2018, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes mobilized and delivered \$172 million for those purposes, 8 per cent more than the previous year. In 2019, they delivered \$213 million, a 23 per cent increase over 2018. The World Bank and the African Development Bank (AfDB) are active participants in the activities of the United Nations country team in South Sudan, providing significant funding for programme implementation by United Nations agencies, funds and programmes on a partnership basis, through innovative modalities. They plan to scale up that funding in the coming years.

31. In 2017, the United Nations country team developed a system-wide peacebuilding plan for South Sudan for the period 2018–2021, designed to strategically channel resources and guide projects along identified common priority areas, including supporting dialogue; strengthening the rule of law and democratic institutions; reducing conflict caused by displacement and returns; and protecting and empowering women and youth.

C. Outlook

32. With the formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity, the scene has been set for a renewed and intensified dialogue on development cooperation in South Sudan during the three-year transition period. The Government announced its intention to review the National Development Strategy to ensure that it is inclusive and provides a strong foundation for achieving lasting peace, national development objectives and the Sustainable Development Goals. It will be important for international development partners to engage constructively in that process and to build on the momentum created by the peace process, so as to step up the focus on recovery, resilience and development during the transitional period. The long-term impact of COVID-19 is expected to be significant and will require a dedicated response.

33. For the three-year transition period, plans are underway to undertake reforms of public financial management systems and to rebuild confidence between the Government and its partners in development cooperation. There are ongoing efforts to develop a disaster risk reduction strategy, build technical and institutional capacity and set up early warning systems to detect, prevent and respond to natural disasters such as flooding and drought. The Government and its partners are also developing a strategy to support returns and related issues such as land and property rights, social tensions, conflict reduction, transitional and durable justice, livelihoods and service delivery. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes are already working with the Government in these priority areas and, during the transitional period of the Revitalized Agreement, will maintain the focus on recovery, resilience-building and area-based support, while ensuring the continued provision of life-saving humanitarian assistance. The United Nations country team will continue to focus on a participatory approach and national ownership of the recovery and development process through consultation with national partners, including civil society. Further engagement and support by international donors will be important.

34. The United Nations country team is taking practical steps to strengthen development programming, with an emphasis on service delivery and accountability systems and by building on existing joint initiatives, including the Cooperation Framework, the core contribution, the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience and

the peacebuilding plan. It will coordinate interventions to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure continuous engagement among United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan, so as to strengthen collaboration on peacebuilding and governance initiatives. The country team will also continue to maintain and reinforce linkages with other development partners, including the World Bank, AfDB and bilateral donors.

35. In the first six months of the transitional period, the United Nations country team will engage with key counterparts in the Government to offer coordinated support and prepare the ground for strengthened cooperation. This will include dialogue between the country team and line ministries to take stock of contributions under the Cooperation Framework. The country team will prioritize outreach and discussions with all stakeholders, including different national actors, donors and civil society. The country team will also assist the new Government in reviewing the National Development Strategy; build the national capacities of public financial management systems; support rule of law and justice; and engage in other institutional capacity-building initiatives to put in place critical systems in support of the Government. In addition, the country team will contribute to the establishment of a development coordination architecture that facilitates dialogue among all actors, develop and implement a strategy to manage returns and support the Government in passing pending legislations and engaging in reforms.

36. In the medium term, during the transitional period and leading up to elections, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and their international partners plan to build on the aid coordination architecture to launch well-funded, targeted and high-impact programmes in priority areas that support progress towards development and lasting peace. The trend in increasing development funding over the past few years is important, as part of a systematic re-engagement of international development partners. It will be a key challenge to ensure that that international support is well coordinated and firmly anchored in inclusive national ownership through broad-based dialogue with the Revitalized Transitional Government and national actors.

III. The Sahel region

A. Context

Sustainable development

37. The Sahel countries have been facing complex and multifaceted challenges that impede the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and the Niger have development indicators that are among the 10 lowest, globally, according to the 2019 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) human development index. With almost 50 per cent of people living in extreme poverty, high levels of inequality and uneven access to social services and basic infrastructure, competition over resources represents a source of grievance and conflict. High levels of food insecurity, combined with unpredictable migratory patterns of pastoralist communities and a lack of socioeconomic opportunities for urban and rural youth, contribute to insecurity. Rapid population growth, environmental degradation, drought, desertification and related impacts of climate change are jeopardizing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

38. With high temperatures and low and unpredictable rainfall patterns, recurring droughts are commonplace, creating severe consequences for fragile environments and livelihoods. The dramatic impact of climate change is further compounded by large-scale soil erosion and the degradation of already scarce natural resources, due in large part to a rapidly growing population, overgrazing and poor land use and

management. The convergence of these and other factors compounds challenges, as most of the countries in the region are highly dependent on rain-fed agriculture and livestock for their livelihood, making them more vulnerable today than they were 20 years ago.

39. The acute fragility faced by the Sahel region has resulted in conditions that leave women and girls vulnerable, requiring targeted responses. Despite their key role as economic actors, women often encounter severe constraints in accessing the resources they need to be key agents of change, such as land, information, finance, infrastructure technology and markets. Despite the existence of norms and standards on the political participation of women, they are unevenly represented in parliaments and in decision-making positions. Apart from Cameroon and Senegal, women make up less than 30 per cent of parliamentarians in Sahelian countries. On a positive note, in January 2020, Burkina Faso introduced a 30 per cent quota for women candidates for legislative and local elections.

40. Gender-based violence is widespread in the region, regardless of race, class, ethnicity and religion. Despite the significant increase in the number of laws on violence against women and girls, sociocultural barriers perpetuating gender-offensive traditions and impunity challenge their enforcement. Female genital mutilation and child marriage are practised in a large majority of countries.

41. The Sahel region has an estimated population of 350 million people and the highest population growth rate in the world, with 60 per cent of the population under 25 years of age. The population of the Niger is expected to double in the next 15 years.

42. Large numbers of young people in most Sahelian countries either have never been to school or dropped out early, leading to unemployment and underemployment, with a lack of opportunities to generate income.

43. Despite those trends, according to the *World Economic Situation and Prospects 2020* report, growth before COVID-19 had been projected to be 6.0 per cent or more in Burkina Faso and the Niger, and growth in Chad had been expected to increase from 3.8 in 2019 to 5.5 per cent in 2020, underpinned by rising oil production and more efficient extraction policies. Mauritania had averaged 3.6 per cent growth in 2019, while Mali had been projected to achieve 4.8 per cent growth in 2020.

44. All countries in the region have undertaken voluntary national reviews related to their Sustainable Development Goal achievements and shared their experiences in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. According to the reviews, the countries have institutionalized the planning and implementation of the Goals through national development plans and strategies and have committed to reducing inequality and improving social and economic conditions through social protection, education, health, infrastructure, productive capacity and competitiveness.

Humanitarian situation

45. The humanitarian situation in the Sahel has worsened significantly in recent years. In 2020, it is estimated that a new record high of 26 million Sahelians will need assistance and protection, owing mainly to violent conflict, including intercommunal violence and conflict over land and resources due to climate change, organized crime, drug and human trafficking and the illicit trade in arms. In a context of rising insecurity and high vulnerability, human rights violations, including sexual and gender-based violence, have been on the rise. Forced displacement in the Sahel has reached a new peak, with 4.1 million people uprooted from their homes, 1 million more than in 2018.

46. Conflict in the Lake Chad basin has worsened needs. A total of 3,000 schools are either closed or non-operational because of direct attacks on education infrastructure and personnel, affecting more than 650,000 children in a region where 70 per cent of the population is illiterate. Almost 200 health centres are closed or not fully functional. The disruption of education and basic services affects millions of children in a region struggling to reap a demographic dividend.

47. In both the Liptako-Gourma region, along the border areas of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, and in the Lake Chad basin, insecurity and the difficulties of physical access constrain the delivery of humanitarian assistance. As a result, affected people are often forced to move for assistance, exacerbating existing levels of displacement. In north-eastern Nigeria alone, 1.2 million people are estimated to live in inaccessible areas.

48. Humanitarian needs in the Sahel are substantial and growing fast. Six countries, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, have developed humanitarian response plans. In 2019, assistance reached more than 10 million of the initially targeted 15 million people in need. United Nations agencies, funds and programmes have scaled up their responses and will continue to strengthen their regional coordination efforts and operational presence in the affected countries. Despite escalating needs, the response plans remained significantly underfunded, with average funding at only 59 per cent of the \$2.5 billion required to respond to the needs of 17.5 million people in the Lake Chad basin and Liptako-Gourma regions with regard to shelter, food, water, sanitation, nutrition and health services. To bring the response to scale and address the most urgent needs across the region, humanitarian actors will need a total of \$2.8 billion. By June 2020, less than 20 per cent of the requested resources had been obtained, and, despite efforts to increase the availability of funds in the context of COVID-19, humanitarian needs are also on the rise.

49. The funding shortfall represents one of the most significant challenges to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and the scaling-up of resilience-building initiatives.

50. According to the harmonized framework for the analysis and identification of areas at risk and vulnerable groups in the Sahel (Cadre harmonisé),¹ by mid-2020, 4.8 million people in the region are projected to be severely food insecure, with increases ranging from 77 per cent in the Niger to 225 per cent in Burkina Faso. Malnutrition rates are reaching emergency levels in many communities, posing one of the greatest human development challenges and mortality risks. The prevalence of global acute malnutrition exceeds the emergency threshold of 15 per cent.

B. United Nations support for the Sahel

51. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel was adopted in 2013 and recalibrated through the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel in 2018 to meet the current needs of the populations and address the root causes of the crisis. The strategy is aimed at: (a) strengthening effective and inclusive governance; (b) enabling national and regional security mechanisms to address cross-border threats; and (c) integrating humanitarian and development interventions to ensure life-saving activities, while building the resilience of people and communities as part of efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda. It provides an overarching framework for international response through a more coherent, coordinated and comprehensive

¹ See <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-website/where-what/cadre-harmonise-in-west-africa-and-the-sahel/en/>.

approach. The strategy is being implemented through three pillars that are mutually reinforcing and interlinked: security, governance and resilience.

Security

52. In its response, the security pillar of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel has scaled up investments to strengthen security, rule of law and criminal justice institutions, looking in particular at transboundary communities, young people and women as agents of peace and development.

53. The United Nations supported the G5 Sahel countries in developing and implementing a gender strategy and facilitated the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in security-related activities. Gender-responsive peace dialogue platforms led by women's groups helped to broker discussions between vulnerable communities, defence and security forces and the criminal justice system, strengthening cross-border community dialogues for peacebuilding and for rebuilding trust. United Nations-led joint programmes are promoting reforms in the gender and security sectors, including through targeted training in gender-based protection and small arms trafficking and control.

54. In September 2019, the United Nations and the Government of Mali organized a regional dialogue for protection and solutions in the context of forced displacement in the Sahel. The outcome of the dialogue, namely, the Bamako conclusions and ministerial declaration, involving the Governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and the Niger, made far-reaching recommendations that have helped to strengthen coordination between security and humanitarian actors so as to ensure humanitarian access, protection and assistance to affected populations. In-depth analysis and research underpin all interventions, so as to identify the linkages between climate-related security risks and impacts on sustainable development.

Governance

55. The Sahel region has registered some progress in democratic consolidation, with several presidential elections resulting in a peaceful transfer of power, as well as peaceful parliamentary and local elections, notably in Mali, Mauritania and Nigeria. However, tensions around presidential term limits, constitutional and electoral reforms and disputed election results have marred some political transitions. Political tensions have, at times, diverted attention from other pressing challenges related to development, human rights, security and rule of law.

56. In crisis epicentres, such as the Liptako-Gourma region, central Mali and the Lake Chad basin, the United Nations is deploying stabilization packages to facilitate the restoration of State authority and the rule of law, notably access to justice and security; the reactivation of administrative and social service delivery capacity, including basic administrative and community infrastructure; the building and/or rebuilding of core local governance systems, including citizen participation; and the revitalization of the local economy. Such stabilization facilities are a key step forward in establishing regional ownership and the cross-border framework needed for addressing crises. The Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad underwrites the Regional Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience Strategy for Areas Affected by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin Region. Developed by the Lake Chad Basin Commission and endorsed by the African Union, the Strategy is aimed at strengthening coherence and coordination of the response in the subregion.

57. In non-crisis settings, the United Nations worked towards the accelerated achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, through support for sustainable democratic systems and processes, strengthened natural resource and public expenditure management systems, efficient national statistics systems and sustainable

development planning by local and national governments. Accelerator labs and innovative approaches have been deployed to provide solutions for rural access to cost-effective energy for production and transformation purposes, local-level cross-border cooperation, adapted climate living facilities to address climate change and disaster risks and financial inclusion tools to increase access to finance and financial services for vulnerable and marginalized groups, including women, young people and people living with disabilities or HIV/AIDS.

58. The United Nations and its partners provided technical and policy support for the creation of social protection schemes and raised awareness on the fundamental principles of human rights. The capacities of national parliaments, human rights institutions and civil society organizations in the countries of the Sahel region were enhanced to monitor, report on and advocate against human rights violations. Targeted training and capacity-building enabled better interaction with international human rights mechanisms to provide first-hand information to the treaty bodies, the universal periodic review and the special procedures for the implementation of the recommendations of human rights mechanisms.

59. Regarding rule of law and judicial systems, building the capacity of the public administration, notably the ministries of justice, has enabled the implementation of human rights policies and justice reforms, including the establishment of computerized data management systems for the effective management of related facilities in accordance with the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules).

60. Targeted community engagements facilitated the voluntary surrender of 37,896 weapons and ammunitions in communities spanning the border between the Niger and Nigeria and unprecedented levels of cooperation on community disarmament agreements. This goodwill was augmented by targeted capacity-strengthening for municipal and customary administrative authorities and civil society organizations working against the proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the Sahel.

61. Collaboration with regional institutions, notably the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), led to the first small arms and light weapons mapping study and provided a basis for coherent responses to preventing the proliferation, control, flow and use of small arms and light weapons in the region. The mapping provided critical evidence and country-specific information on actors, partnership dynamics, interventions, successes and lessons learned, which were fed into the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework database, the weapons and ammunitions management programme and prevention of violent extremism interventions in the region.

Resilience

62. Building resilience in the Sahel, including early warning systems, is critical to surmounting the region's unique vulnerabilities. For example, the scaled-up resilience programs in the G5 Sahel countries and the Lake Chad basin are supporting local communities in safeguarding and taking advantage of their natural, human and cultural resources as the basis for sustainable peace and development.

63. Initiatives to strengthen regional capacities in ecosystem management are enhancing scientific measurement of the ecological impacts of land degradation and best practices to guide future investment decisions. Several countries in the Sahel are being supported in adaptation and conservation planning, in line with the implementation of the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, such as with regard to the conservation and sustainable use of the international watershed and biodiversity of the Fouta Djallon highlands. To date, 7 of the 10 countries under the

United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel have set voluntary targets to halt land degradation by 2030 and achieve target 15.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals.

64. The United Nations worked to make health, nutrition, education, water, sanitation, hygiene and cultural services resilient to climate- and disaster-related shocks and stresses, including through providing jobs and livelihoods to local, displaced and conflict-affected communities, building peace by strengthening social cohesion and empowering people and helping them to overcome trauma.

65. The Education Cannot Wait global funding programme is helping to transform the delivery of education in emergency situations in the Sahel, notably in Cameroon, Mali and northern Nigeria, benefitting more than 150,000 displaced children in the Lake Chad basin alone.

66. The United Nations also provided alternative radio education programmes in northern Burkina Faso and in the Niger, broadcasting lessons in various local languages, using trained facilitators, in order to deal with school closures due to armed attacks and insecurity.

67. The United Nations and its partners promoted transformative pedagogy, through educational approaches empowering learners, including adolescent girls and marginalized young women, to critically examine their contexts, beliefs, values, knowledge and attitudes, with the goal of developing spaces for self-reflection, the appreciation of diversity and critical thinking. This initiative enabled teachers and teacher educators in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Senegal to instil in young people the competencies to engage with their communities to foster peace and build resilience.

68. The United Nations supported women's access to land, finance, climate-resilient skills and technology and markets in selected value chains, through high food security policy reform and programmatic interventions. In Mauritania and the Niger, market-based livelihood options have strengthened the resilience of more than 150,000 refugees and their host communities, including through enhanced regional cooperation, skills upgrades, knowledge-sharing, innovative programming and evidence-based labour market policies.

69. Strategic partnerships with the private sector helped to address environmental degradation and revitalize youth-led businesses in all the countries of the Sahel. A United Nations-supported local, autonomous and sustainable gas supply system provided 260,000 vulnerable refugees and their host communities with access to liquefied natural gas cookers in Diffa, the Niger, making it one of the best-served border areas in the Sahel in terms of access to clean cooking energy, while saving 300 hectares of wooded land.

70. With United Nations support, 6 of the 10 countries under the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel joined a drought initiative to enhance the resilience of communities and ecosystems against severe droughts, from a proactive and risk-based approach. The United Nations established spatial data catalogues for Sahelian countries, incorporating 87 global public data sets covering the socioeconomic context, water, land degradation, extractives, natural hazards, historical climate data and climate projections, to support the capacity of Governments to understand and incorporate environmental and climate-related risks facing the Sahel region in order to prepare an appropriate response.

71. In Burkina Faso, under the sustaining peace strategy, the United Nations increased emergency response levels and expanded its footprint by establishing integrated presences in five locations across the country. Scaled up interventions helped the Government to accelerate and localize development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actions and intervene in a coherent and integrated manner for peaceful

coexistence. To support the Government's efforts, several initiatives were undertaken, including on community resilience, rural electrification, cross-border cooperation and stabilization facilities in the Liptako-Gourma region. In addition, strengthened mechanisms for civilian and democratic oversight of the security sector reform, including a platform of civil society organizations on governance and the capacity-building of parliamentary commissions, aided the formulation of the national security policy. Strengthened trust between the population, local authorities and security forces, was achieved through intercommunal consultation frameworks in the Centre-Nord Region, facilitating dialogue among all stakeholders at the local level. A major challenge has been the absence of a system-wide integrated plan that underlines all operational and logistical start-up activities required for a fully integrated presence, backed by dedicated resources to garner impact.

C. Coordination framework in the Sahel

72. To implement the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, the Organization has established a coherent coordination structure at the country, regional and Headquarters levels, underpinned by a clear division of labour, including roles, responsibilities and accountability. The engagement of the United Nations in the region has evolved from an agency-centred approach to a more collective outlook, which was largely facilitated by collaboration during the process of developing the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

73. At the regional level, unified leadership of United Nations coordination rests with my Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, with the regional entities of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group as the primary implementation arm. Among the structures established to ensure coordinated and integrated approaches is the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel steering committee, which brings together the Resident Coordinators of the 10 countries, among other actors, to engage and exchange with each other and to obtain support and guidance so as to ensure coherence in implementing the strategy. An integrated strategy implementation support unit, co-chaired by the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel and the regional entities of the Sustainable Development Group, is being established following the internal review on the Sahel conducted in 2019. It aims to provide overall support for programme implementation, coordination and coherence across the three pillars of security, governance and resilience. At its meeting in October 2019, the steering committee highlighted significant progress in cross-border and cross-pillar programmes throughout the region.

74. Within the spirit of the reform of the United Nations development system, the United Nations country teams in the Sahel, working in close collaboration with the Resident Coordinators, are developing new cooperation frameworks that articulate the collective response of the United Nations to help the Coordinators to address national priorities for and gaps in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the socioeconomic and humanitarian impact of COVID-19. That revamped planning framework provides the country teams with the tools to tailor responses to countries' specific needs and realities. Irrespective of cooperation framework cycles, all country teams in the Sahel are currently engaged in updating the common country analysis, a tool that provides the country team with broad-based analysis that reflects the country situation, while taking into account the context of the region. The common country analyses prepared by countries in the Sahel therefore include an analysis of regional issues and priorities and their impact on national development plans and priorities and have resulted in the design and implementation of multi-country and transboundary development programmes.

75. The effective implementation of new cooperation frameworks is subject to the common challenges affecting the region, including the need for countries to strengthen their resilience to both natural disasters and complex crises; institutional and human capacity; data collection and analysis; and the mobilization of adequate internal and external financial resources.

76. As early examples of the adoption of those new tools and programming frameworks, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger have taken a coordinated approach to the implementation, in the Liptako-Gourma triangle, of the cross-border initiative supported by the Peacebuilding Fund. Furthermore, to ensure the humanitarian-peace-development nexus in Mali, the United Nations country team and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali have jointly developed integrated plans and responses to support the Government in its peacebuilding processes, in the operationalization of humanitarian and development collaboration and in the interlinkages of those activities with peace.

77. As United Nations country teams design new common country analyses in 2020, the opportunity exists to further integrate regional and cross-border initiatives into the countries' programming implementation frameworks, in collaboration with development partners. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group will work closely with the 10 Resident Coordinators in the region to strengthen coordination and reporting on programme interventions.

D. Perspectives for future work

78. The situation in the Sahel is challenging the United Nations to pursue new modalities and programmes combining sustainable development, resilience, governance and security-related issues. In the face of COVID-19, development partners need to work together to protect hard-won gains and avoid pushing millions of people back into extreme poverty.

79. Given the potential positive impacts of cross-border interventions with regard to addressing the root causes and structural nature of the protracted insecurities, the United Nations will upscale interventions that pool the assets of the system to maximize results, as seen in the recently developed Regional Stabilization Facility for Lake Chad and the upcoming joint initiative for the Liptako-Gourma region.

80. United Nations partnerships with Governments in the Sahel, including through subregional entities such as the G5 Sahel, the Sahel Alliance, ECOWAS, the African Union, the Lake Chad Basin Commission and the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority, and its innovative partnerships, including with the private sector and African foundations, are building important inroads in advancing critical interventions and creating empowerment for young entrepreneurs.

81. The economic and political empowerment of women could play a significant role in transforming the Sahel region. Existing initiatives aimed at introducing quotas in different countries in the Sahel to strengthen the political participation of women offer an opportunity for concerted advocacy and joint efforts. Of particular relevance is ensuring that the response to COVID-19 addresses women's economic needs, given their high levels of participation in the informal sector and unprotected work.

82. The transformative potential of renewable energy solutions focused on the rural populace can power the productive sector, create livelihoods and employment and strengthen socioeconomic development prospects through climate-smart agriculture.

83. The United Nations will work towards the continued assessment and better communication of its efforts in the Sahel. Better coordinated delivery and prioritization as more resources become available will be crucial to optimizing the

United Nations value proposition in the Sahel and the implementation of key initiatives on governance, energy, climate-smart and sustainable agriculture and resilience under the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel.

84. So far, only a fraction of what is required by the regional entities of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to upscale implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel through a nexus approach across all pillars, with special attention to the G5 Sahel epicentre countries, has been obtained. Mobilizing resources for most countries outside the G5 Sahel for joint activities under the United Nations Support Plan for the Sahel remains challenging, thus hampering implementation. The Peacebuilding Fund is a strategic partner for promoting prevention, integration and cross-border elements. Since 2017, \$31 million in catalytic funding has helped to address the root causes of instability.

IV. Recommendations

85. Addressing the challenging situation and bringing health, peace and prosperity to South Sudan and the Sahel region, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic, requires redoubling efforts in the advancement and implementation of integrated, coherent and coordinated support by both the United Nations system and partners. With that purpose in mind, I recommend the following actions:

(a) In line with the continent-wide strategy put forward by the African Union in response to COVID-19, and building on such initiatives as the establishment of a solidarity fund that would place the Sahelian countries among the priority recipients of assistance, Member States and partners should urgently provide the assistance needed to respond to the political, social and economic impacts of the pandemic and support recovery processes in the countries of the Sahel;

(b) Member States and partners should strengthen cooperation and coordination in the region to advance the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel and ensure that, together with regional partners, including the G5 Sahel, the Sahel Alliance, ECOWAS, the African Union and the Lake Chad basin authorities, greater development results are obtained, and, to that end, should increase the sense of urgency for a coherent and multifaceted response, through integrated, people-centred, context-driven, results-based, cross-pillar and joint planning and programming;

(c) In order to address recurring food and nutritional crises and support the building of resilience to the regional climate trends observed over the past 40 years, Member States should consider opting for pooled funding, including through the Joint Sustainable Development Goals Fund and the Peacebuilding Fund, so as to enhance joint programming and integrated implementation and ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to the multiple crises the region is facing;

(d) Building on the implementation of the G5 Sahel integrated youth strategy, all Member States and the international community are encouraged to further strengthen their support for youth in the Sahel, through enhanced collaboration and the scaling up of the initiative under the trilateral African Union-European Union-United Nations partnership;

(e) The international community should demonstrate genuine solidarity at the international, regional, national and community levels in order to confront the multifaceted demands posed by development gaps and health and security crises and should consider the request of the Heads of State of the G5 Sahel countries for the cancellation of foreign debt in order to enable countries to dedicate all resources

available to addressing the multifaceted challenges in the region, which have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, and to allow them to build back better;

(f) Partners, including international financial institutions, should provide integrated support, combining the requisite short-term response with long-term measures addressing the drivers of instability, in order to build resilience and relaunch economic growth, and, in the light of the commitment of the World Bank to supporting the countries in the Sahel region through the implementation of its new fragility, conflict and violence programme via its international development assistance refugee and host community sub-window (IDA19), should consider opportunities for closer cooperation with the United Nations system to see results on the ground.

86. The international community has the responsibility and the opportunity to accelerate shared prosperity and lasting peace in South Sudan, the countries of the Sahel and the region at large. By working together, it is possible to advance sustainable development, leading to a prosperous and peaceful Sahel.
