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Blanca Palacián de Inza

The apparent paradoxes of the situation of women in the Sahel

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Abstract:

This working paper will analyse the conditions of women in the Sahel region. Some of the paradoxes that coexist and give shape to life and participation spaces for women through the difficult characteristics of the current context in this area will be highlighted: Their role in life and their survival is crucial, yet they are placed in peripheral or marginal margins; they suffer such a context of violence that they are vulnerable but at the same time strong and not fragile; and lastly, despite the fact that the difficult living conditions they suffer make them victims of many situations of injustice and violence, they are agents of change and fight for peace in their communities.

Keywords:

Women, Sahel, Africa, violence, agents of change, invest in women, paradoxes.

***NOTE:** The ideas contained in the **Analysis Papers** are the responsibility of their authors. They do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the IEEE or the Ministry of Defence.

Las aparentes paradojas de la situación de las mujeres en el Sahel

Resumen:

En este documento de trabajo se va a analizar la situación de la mujer en la región del Sahel. A través de las difíciles características del contexto actual en esta zona, se resaltarán algunas de las paradojas que conviven dando forma a la vida y espacios de participación para la mujer, como que su papel en la supervivencia sea central pero a su vez sean colocadas en márgenes periféricos o marginales; que sufran un contexto de violencia tal que sean vulnerables pero a la vez fuertes y no frágiles; y por último, que a pesar de que las difíciles condiciones vitales que sufren les hagan víctimas de muchas situaciones de injusticia y violencia, sean agentes de cambio y lucha por la paz en sus comunidades.

Palabras clave:

Mujer, Sahel, violencia, agentes de cambio, invertir en mujer, paradojas.

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G y/o [enlace bie³](#) (consultado día/mes/año)

Introduction

The conditions in the region discussed in this paper constitute daily challenges to the survival of communities. All vital areas or spheres seem to have worsened and continue on a downward spiral: the economy, governance, health, human rights, and all those sectors of development and well-being to which we pay attention.

Looking at the picture as a whole and at its constituent parts, it is necessary to refer to the particular difficulties Sahelian women face in their day-to-day survival. In doing so, we find the paradox that they are central and indispensable for communities to be able to face and overcome increasingly demanding crises; yet, they are still pigeon-holed into marginal roles and face exclusion. Their situation is fragile and as a consequence they are vulnerable, but at the same time they are strong and resilient people. So much so that the role of victims of violence, inequalities and circumstances, although it may fit them, does not do them justice because in many cases they have been and are active protagonists, agents of change and peace.

1. The Sahelian context.

1.1. Delimitation of the Sahel.

The Sahel is a geographic and socio-cultural region that has been defined in various ways throughout history. Even today, its conditions and boundaries are so unstable that it may be more appropriate¹ to take a "fluid" approach² to the area.

Despite this proposed "liquid" definition in view of the region's changing conditions, it can be said that the region, in a broad sense, is a wide strip of arid land stretching from the Atlantic in the west to the Red Sea in the east, and from north to south, separating the Sahara desert from the southernmost forested areas of the continent. It covers part of the territory of Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Eritrea, along with southern Mauritania, northern Nigeria and Cameroon and central Sudan. Sahel means "edge" or "coast" in Arabic, referring to the fact that it is precisely the southern edge of

¹ VV.AA. "Il respiro del Sahel. Rappresentazioni di un spazio in movimento", *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, 2022. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3280/rgioa1-2022oa13366> cited in: [Africa Platform \(europa.eu\)](https://africa-platform.europa.eu)

² In line with Zygmunt Bauman's definition of "liquid modernity", which refers to a society that shares the qualities of fluids: lightness, airiness, inconstancy, mobility, fluidity and change. BAUMAN, Z. (2003). *Modernidad líquida [Liquid modernity]*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica de Argentina

the great Sahara desert, an edge which in its broadest conception would encompass 12 countries with very different realities.

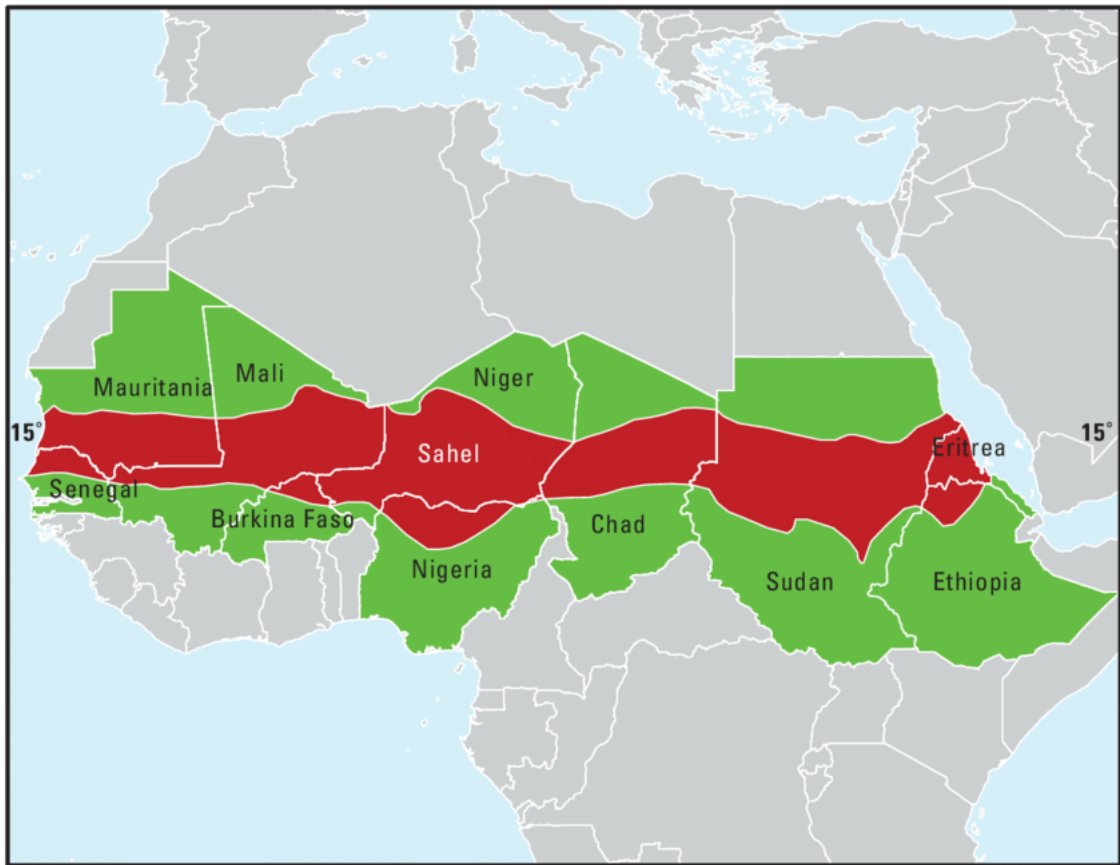


Figure 1: Map showing the Sahel in its broadest sense in brown.

However, in this working paper we will refer to a smaller area, which is the most widely used and is more culturally, historically and economically homogeneous. In this way, the term Sahel will refer to what diplomat Ángel Losada calls the *institutional Sahel*, as it includes the countries that have been part of the G5 Sahel organisation since 2014: Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad.³

³ LOSADA FERNÁNDEZ, Ángel. "The Sahel: a geostrategic approach", Real Instituto Elcano, ARI 95/2018. Available at: [The Sahel: a geostrategic approach - Real Instituto Elcano](#)

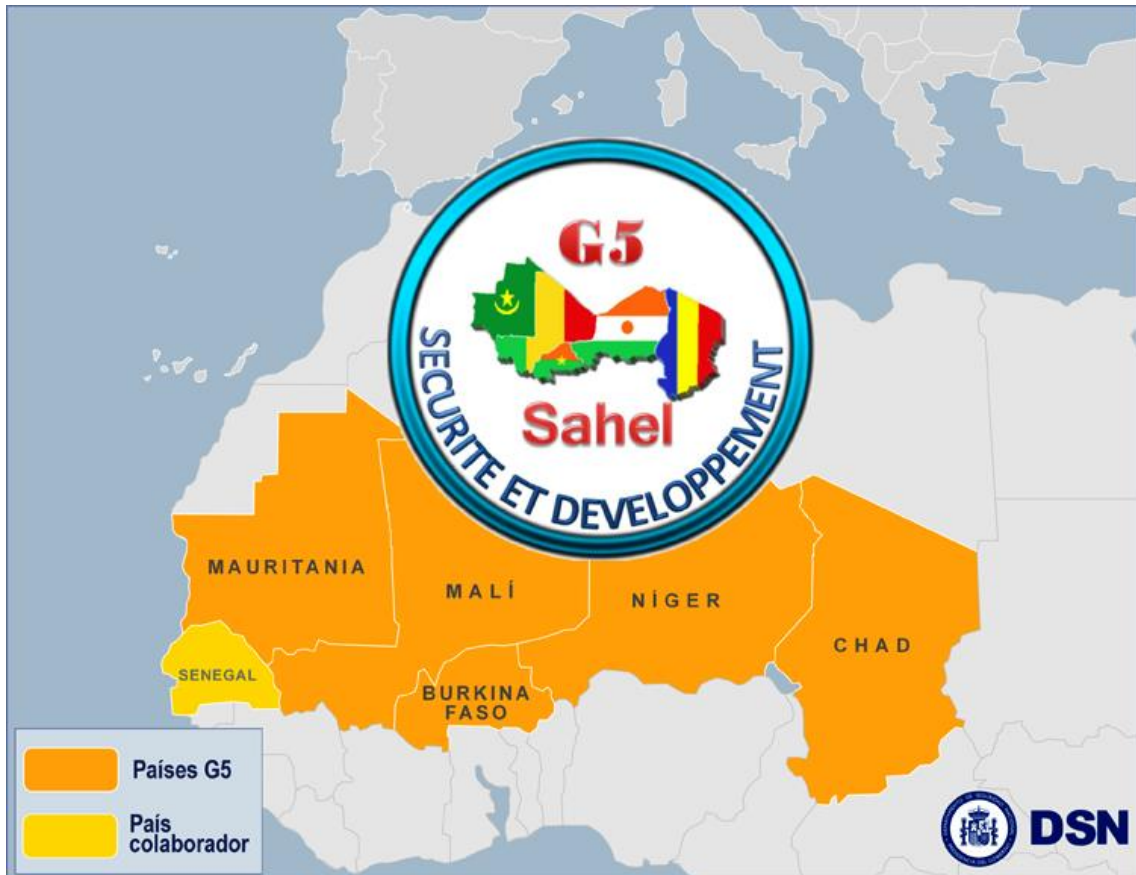


Figure 2: Map of the "institutional Sahel" or G5 member countries. Source: Government of Spain. National Security Department.

This limited meaning of the Sahel is more coherent as it groups together countries that share similarities in their history (they were the seats of the Sahelian empires of the past), politics (they share a political legacy based on centralised presidential systems), economy, culture and societies (French heritage and coexistence with Islam as the majority religion).

The situation in the Sahel is often referred to as a "perfect storm"⁴ as several risk factors coexist, resulting in a situation that can be considered catastrophic. These include poverty and the effects of climate change, which are aggravated by more structural conditions such as governance, and economic, political and social fragility. These conditions, in turn,

⁴ At the diplomatic level: LOSADA FERNÁNDEZ, A. *Op. cit.*; journalistic level: RODRÍGUEZ, María. "Sahel's worst hunger season, a perfect storm". Atalayar, July 2021. Available at: [Sahel's worst hunger season, a perfect storm | Atalayar - The keys of the world in your hands](#); and academic: MORTEN, Boas. "Sahel: The Perfect Storm.", Ed. C Hurst & Company Publishers Limited, 2023

foster the presence of actors linked to Salafist jihadist terrorism, illicit trafficking and inter-communal violence, all of which are increasingly interlinked security challenges.⁵

1.2. Insecure conditions in the Sahel.

The Sahel region, which we have just defined, had always rested on a complex equilibrium that is now broken by factors such as significant population growth, scarcity of natural resources and governance difficulties. These are compounded by even more destabilising factors such as terrorist activity – especially jihadist activity – and the ambitions of foreign powers in the region.⁶

In the context of the regional crisis in the Sahel region, there are many security threats and risks, such as armed conflict, the presence of terrorist groups, organised crime, economic instability, widespread violence and migratory flows. Other factors, such as climate change, lack of governance and coups d'état⁷ or poverty, also act as catalysts.

According to the Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview on the Sahel Crisis issued April 2021,⁸ which took into account the countries of what could be called, from west to east, the Western and Central Sahel (i.e. excluding Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan), produced by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)⁹ and reflecting updated data from the *Harmonised Framework for the Sahel*, 14 million people were food insecure at crisis and emergency levels. In addition, 1.6 million children suffered from severe malnutrition; 5.3 million people had been forcibly displaced (internally displaced persons and refugees) and 29 million people (out of a total of 121) were in need of assistance and protection. Of the nine countries that make up the Sahel region studied in this OCHA report, four (including Mali and Niger) were in the bottom ten in the list of the Human Development Report published in 2020.

⁵ ECHEVERRÍA, Carlos. "The Sahel. trafficking and terrorism", in "El Sahel y G5: desafíos y oportunidades", Strategy Paper 202, Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Madrid, 101. Available at: [Strategy Paper 202. El Sahel y G5: desafíos y oportunidades \(ieeee.es\)](#)

⁶ SÁNCHEZ HERRAÉZ, Pedro. The Sahel in flames: A return to autocratic leadership?", IEEA Analysis Paper 61/2022. Available at: https://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA61_2022_PEDSAN_Sahel.pdf

⁷ Coups d'état: in Mali (August 2020 and May 2021), in Chad (April 2021), in Guinea (September 2021), and in Burkina Faso in January 2022.

⁸ Sahel crisis: Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview, 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/sahel-crisis-humanitarian-needs-and-requirements-overview-april-2021>

⁹ UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. [OCHA \(unocha.org\)](https://www.unocha.org)

The average population increase of 3.375% per year in these two countries makes the entire region one of the fastest growing population areas in the world; by 2030, the population is expected to reach 438.325 million people. However, this increase is not accompanied by parallel economic growth, which poses a serious risk for the most vulnerable populations whose living conditions are deteriorating due to a lack of basic services and serious internal conflicts.

Widespread violence is made possible by the proliferation of firearms in the region. Arms trafficking can be traced back to France, but it appears that the vast majority of weapons originate from the continent itself, in particular from Libya. All indications point to them coming from the national armed forces themselves, either by capture on the battlefield, by theft or by purchase from corrupt individuals in the armies.¹⁰

The extreme vulnerability of the Sahel has been highlighted by the impact of forced displacement caused by widespread and rampant violence perpetrated by armed insurgents and criminal gangs.¹¹

Moreover, since 2016, the Sahelian region has suffered a significant increase in the number of terrorist attacks. The most difficult situation in this respect is in Burkina Faso, where it is estimated that jihadist groups already control 40% of the territory, including large rural areas in the north and east of the country.

Such difficulties have displaced the population, with the humanitarian consequences that such movements entail extending beyond the boundaries of the Sahelian area¹².

These conditions can therefore be seen as the triggers of a perfect storm that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for people in general, and women and girls in particular, to survive, as we will see in this paper. In this context, the risk for women to suffer all kinds of violence is also significantly increased.¹³

¹⁰ UNITED NATIONS. UNODC. "Firearms trafficking in the Sahel, 2023. Available at: [Reliefweb](#)

¹¹ UNITED NATIONS. UNHCR. "A sad milestone: violence in the Sahel displaces 2 million people within their own countries", January 2021. Available at: [UNHCR - A sad milestone: Sahel violence displaces 2 million people within their own countries](#)

¹² WILSON CENTER. "Converging Risks: Demographic Trends, Gender Inequity, and Security Challenges in the Sahel", New Security Brief, no. 3, 2022. Available at: [Converging Risks Demographic Trends Gender Inequity and Security Challenges in the Sahel.pdf \(wilsoncenter.org\)](#)

¹³ UNITED NATIONS. OCHA. "Sahel Crisis: Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview", April 2021. Available at: [Sahel Crisis: Humanitarian Needs and Requirements Overview \(April 2021\) - Burkina Faso | ReliefWeb](#)

2. THE SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE SAHEL

2.1. Gender and women. Paradox 1: central and indispensable but marginal and excluded.

Despite the essential and central socio-economic role women play in their communities, being the heroines of the struggle for survival,¹⁴ as will be discussed later in the section on the economy, they are marginalised and often deprived of their fundamental rights, thus living in a dual situation of being important yet marginalised, a central character relegated to the periphery.

In the Sahel area studied, gender inequalities are acutely pronounced. It is important to clarify that when we speak of gender inequalities, we are indirectly referring to the unfavourable treatment of women, but this does not mean that the words "gender" and "women" are synonymous, but rather that inequalities are often skewed negatively towards women.

Gender is a dynamic and non-universal construct, shaped by social beliefs about what roles, behaviours and activities a man or a woman should have. Therefore, we all have gender, not only women, although they are the ones who suffer the most inequalities and abuses.

Along these lines, gender-based violence has increased in the Sahel in recent years. Such violence is harshly visited upon women in domestic situations, but also in the economic, political and especially in the health sphere. In the latter area, its impact is serious in terms of widespread practices such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, early pregnancies, physical and psychological violence, lack of economic resources and the lack of infrastructure and medical personnel adapted to the needs of women, girls and adolescents.

¹⁴ BOSSARD, Laurent. "Sahelian women, central yet marginalised", iD4D, 25/06/2018. Available at: <https://ideas4development.org/femmes-saheliennes-centrales-marginales/>

2.2. Difficulties, inequalities and violence suffered by women. Paradox 2: vulnerable and strong.

Laurent Bossard, Director of the Secretariat of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) of the OECD, refers to the second paradox that we are going to highlight and which is experienced by Sahelian women: despite their central socio-economic role in the communities, they remain marginalised and often even deprived of their fundamental rights.

According to the 2018 Report on the Place of Women in Social Institutions in West Africa published by the same Secretariat, 17% of West African men think it is unacceptable for a woman to work outside the home. However, and this is a clear example of the paradox mentioned in this section, the role of Sahelian women is central both in the everyday economy and in the face of crises, while their social position remains marginal. Unfortunately, their social position is not only marginal. Women and girls face greater difficulties compared to men in accessing basic social services, attending school, higher mortality rates, little or no political capacity, economic inequalities, little or no access to resources, and a long list of other difficulties.

Despite these difficult life circumstances, it is not correct to say that Sahelian women are fragile.¹⁵ If anything, it is more accurate to say that the context in which they live makes their security and well-being fragile. The more appropriate term to describe these women is "vulnerable".¹⁶ Although related to fragility, we consider that the term fragility refers more appropriately to the context and not to the person.

Some elements that induce and aggravate this vulnerability are illiteracy, child marriage, a high birth rate and the limited access to basic services mentioned above and many others that we will consider in this paper. Women in the Sahel are considered heroes in the struggle for survival, so it cannot be said that they are chronically fragile.¹⁷

¹⁵ According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE): From Latin *fragilis*.

1. Brittle, and easily broken into pieces.
2. Weak, which can easily deteriorate. He is in fragile health.
3. Said of a person: Of little physical or moral strength.

¹⁶ From late Latin *vulnerabilis*, made up of *vulnerāre* 'to wound' and *-bilis* '-ble'.

1. Who can be hurt or receive injury, physically or morally.

¹⁷ As does, for example, the article by BOSSARD, Laurent. Op. cit.

Economy.

Looking at indicators that measure the rate of vulnerable employment, access to credit or access to land, we can conclude that women are more exposed to poverty than men, as there are specific barriers for them to enter these areas.

On the other hand, it is women who carry the burden of domestic work and provide care for children and the elderly, which drastically limits the time they can devote to paid activities.¹⁸

Sixty-eight percent of active Sahelian women work in the food system and increasingly in non-agricultural activities. In 2018, they accounted for 88% of the workforce employed in street food vending, 83% in food processing and 72% in the grocery trade.¹⁹

In terms of women's participation in entrepreneurship, according to Diyé Ba,²⁰ coordinator of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform, there are two main obstacles: access to finance and a lack of education.

The current climate crisis²¹ is affecting the entire Sahel in a pronounced way. It is a semi-arid region heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture and pastoralism. In this sense, gender inequalities make women's difficulties in adaptation and resilience more pronounced. This is because they encounter structural or regulatory barriers that prevent them from accessing resources that would allow them to recover from a time of climatic stress or even prepare for the next one.²²

Violence.

The almost perpetual crisis situation in the region has accentuated violence against women, both in the domestic and public spheres, despite legislation enacted in many

¹⁸ DOSSO, Aïssatou Aïda. "Investing in women in the Sahel creates a positive multidimensional impact on society as a whole", Alliance Sahel, March 2022. Available at: [Egalité de genre au Sahel: défis et opportunités \(alliance-sahel.org\)](https://alliance-sahel.org)

¹⁹ Allen, T., P. Heinrigs and I. Heo (2018), "Agriculture, food and employment in West Africa", West African Papers, No. 14, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/56d463a9-fr>.

²⁰ RODEMBOURG, Noëlle "Principal challenge for Sahelian women 'Access to education'" according to Ms BA, Coordinator of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform, G5 Sahel, 15 December 2022. Available at: [Principal challenge of Sahelian women " Access to education " according to Ms Diyé BA Coordinator of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform - Accueil Secrétariat exécutif du G5 Sahel](https://www.g5sahel.org/fr/actualites/le-principal-defi-des-femmes-saheliennes-est-l-acc%C3%A9s-%C3%A0-l-education)

²¹ McOmber, C. (2020), "Women and climate change in the Sahel", *West African Papers*, No. 27, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e31c77ad-en>.

²² *Ibid.*

countries. The central Sahel has the highest rates of gender-based violence – a violation of human rights – in the world.²³

While there have been efforts to narrow inequalities, at least in statutes, it is quite another matter to overcome impediments arising from custom and tradition. An example of the aforementioned efforts took place in 2017, when the member countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)²⁴ adopted recommendations to update the rights of women and men: right to education, right not to be forced to marry too young, right not to be maimed or beaten, right to land ownership, right to inherit, etc.²⁵

Gender-based violence is often underpinned by such inequalities. It is a power, health and protection issue that threatens survival.

Among the direct violence perpetrated in the Sahel against the population, we should highlight Political Violence Targeting Women (PVTW)²⁶ which is reaching levels that are considered unprecedented. Political violence is violence that consists of violent acts intended to prevent women from exercising their political rights. It can take different forms such as physical, sexual or psychological violence.²⁷

Another type of violence, which is related to the previous one, is gender-based sexual violence (GBSV). It is widespread in the region discussed in this paper. This violence, like political violence, is multifaceted and practically ubiquitous, as in the case of Mali, for example. It can be perpetrated by the country's armed forces, terrorist groups or even citizen self-protection groups. It is especially relevant when this violence coincides with

²³ OCHA "Gender-based violence in the central Sahel – Advocacy paper for the Ministerial Meeting on the Central Sahel on 20 October 2020", 2020. Available at: [Les violences basées sur le genre dans le Sahel central - Document de plaidoyer pour la Réunion Ministérielle sur le Sahel Centrale du 20 Octobre 2020 - Burkina Faso: ReliefWeb.](#)

²⁴ The Member States of this Community are Benin, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

²⁵ BOSSARD. *Op. cit.*

²⁶ ACLED. "Violence targeting women in politics: trends in targets, types, and perpetrators of political violence", December 2021. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/violence-targeting-women-politics-trends-targets-types-and-perpetrators-political>

²⁷ UNITED NATIONS. UN WOMEN. "Preventing violence against women in politics", 2021. Available at: [Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf \(unwomen.org\)](#)

population movements where the vulnerability of women and girls is heightened. The most paradigmatic case today is that of the people of Burkina Faso.²⁸

Social sphere. Education

The social dimension covers areas such as education and health. In terms of education, we find large differences in literacy and school enrolment rates between males and females. In general, women are educated to lower levels, which makes them less competitive in the labour market.

According to Diyé Ba, the difficulties faced by Sahelian women are numerous but access to education is the main challenge they face.²⁹ Access to education is the way to alleviate other social ills that harm women, such as early marriage, economic inequalities and poverty. Education becomes the gateway to better opportunities in the future.

Social sphere. Health.

Health security is defined as the necessary activities, both proactive and reactive, to minimise the danger and impact of acute public health events.³⁰

Gender inequalities are also found in health, some of them profound, such as female genital mutilation or difficulties faced by women in accessing sexual and reproductive health care. These inequalities are particularly serious given that health indicators in the Sahel region are the worst in the world. It has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world with 856 deaths per 100,000 live births, due to poor access to maternal and reproductive health care, as well as a high prevalence of early marriage. It is impossible to escape from this situation when the civilian population, health centres and schools are at the mercy of armed attacks, and the region suffers droughts or land degradation.³¹

²⁸ UNITED NATIONS. Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility. "Gender-based violence. Burkina Faso secondary data review. November 2022", available at: [2022 GBV Secondary Data Review Burkina Faso_final_WCAR-UNFPA-REGA_0.pdf \(gbvaor.net\)](#)

²⁹ RODEMBOURG, Noëlle. 15 December 2022. *Op. cit.*

³⁰ UNITED NATIONS. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. [Health security \(who.int\)](#)

³¹ UNITED NATIONS. WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION. "WHO releases more than US\$8 million for the Sahel's humanitarian response". April 2022. Available at: [WHO releases more than US\\$ 8 million for the Sahel's humanitarian response | WHO | Regional Office for Africa](#)

Mental health is also a particularly relevant issue with its own gender discrimination, as most women on the African continent do not have access to services related to these difficulties.³² It is not easy for men to find help either, and understandably so when you consider that, in 2017 on the African continent, there was an estimated one psychiatrist and one psychologist for every one million people.³³

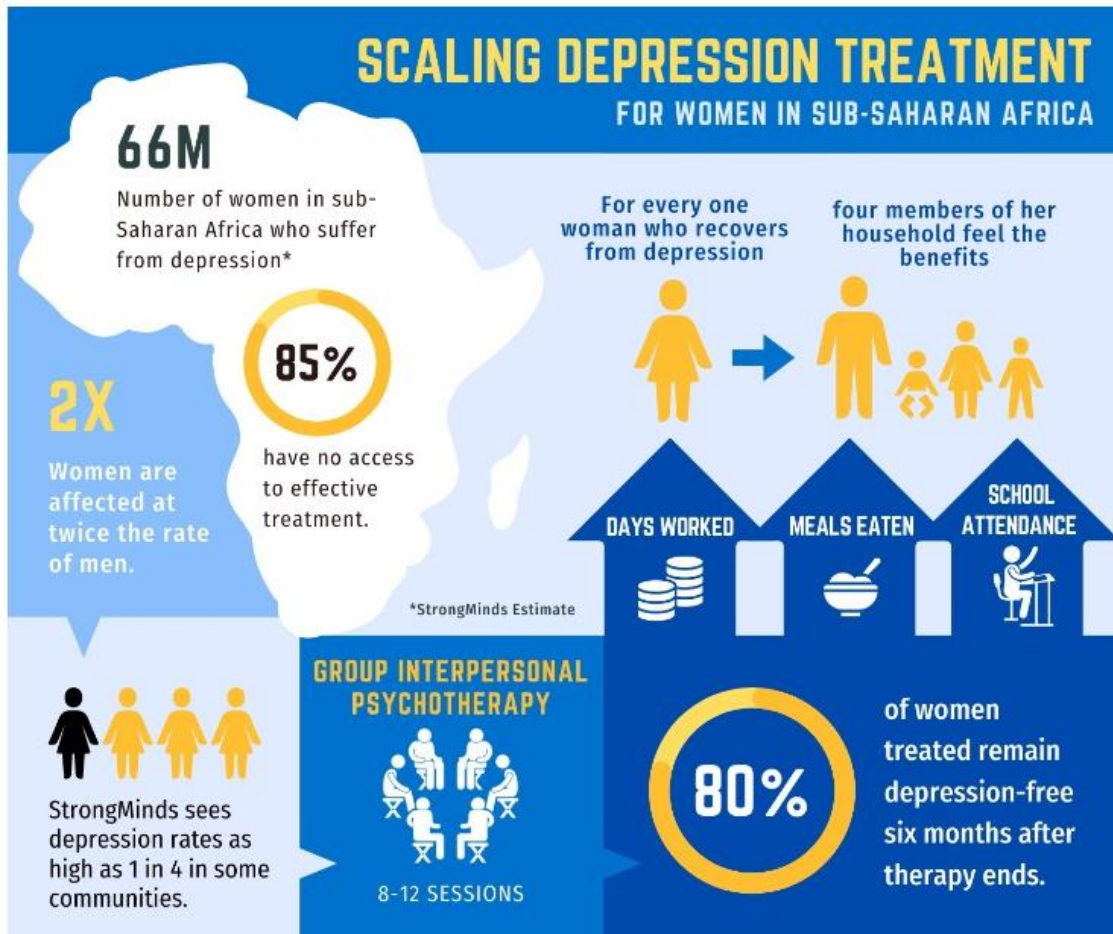


Figure 3: Facts on depression amongst women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Source: StrongMinds

³² MAYBERRY, Sean. "4 facts you didn't know about mental health in Africa", World Economic Forum, August 2021. Available at: [4 facts you didn't know about mental health in Africa | World Economic Forum \(weforum.org\)](https://www.weforum.org)

³³ ÁLVARO NAVARRO, María. "30 million Africans suffer from depression", El País, April 2017. Available at: [30 millones de africanos sufren depresión | Planeta Futuro | EL PAÍS \(elpais.com\)](https://elpais.com)

Armed conflict, genocide, violence and famine are causing major mental health challenges in Africa. In the aftermath of humanitarian emergencies, rates of mental disorders double.

The World Health Organisation defines this increase in mental illness as a silent crisis. It is often treated as a low priority, with funding and support focused on physically communicable diseases or malnutrition.³⁴

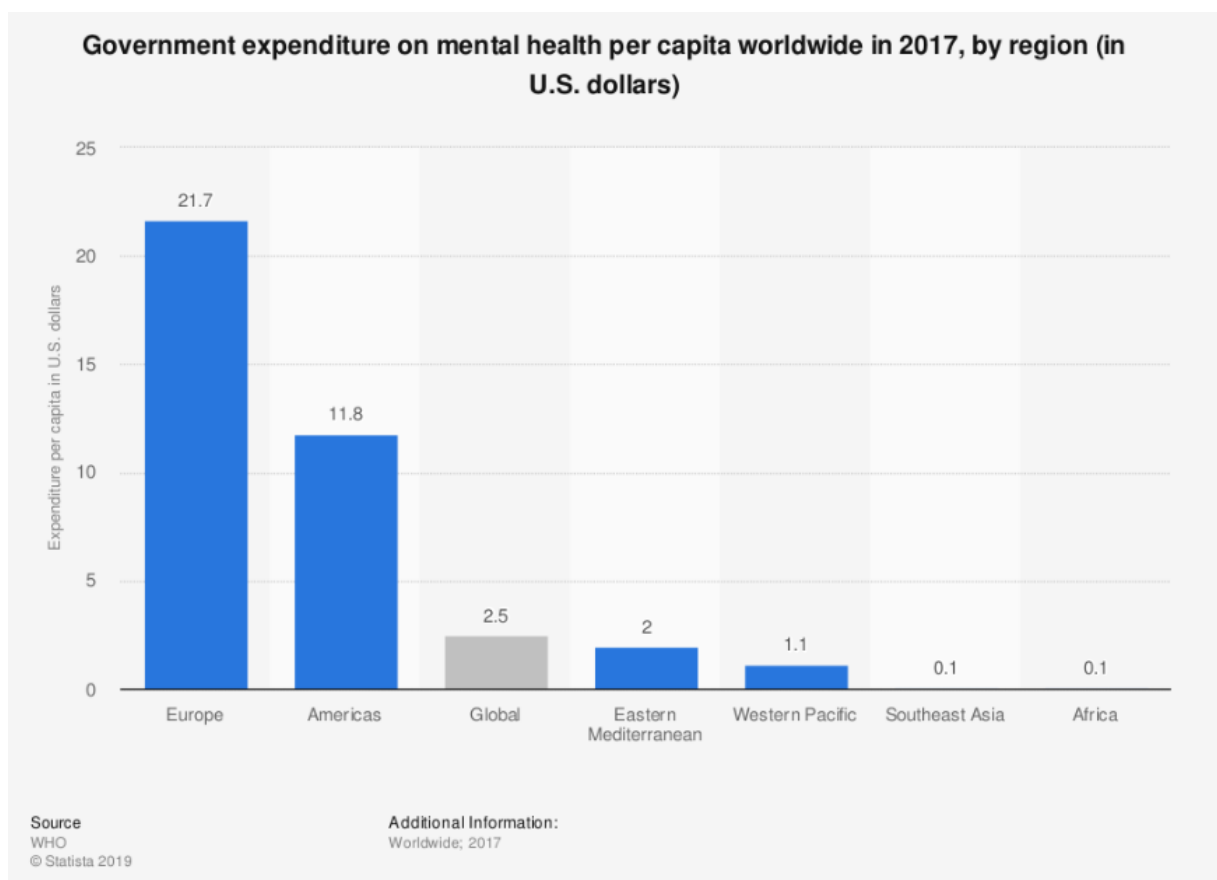


Figure 4: Government spending on mental health per capita worldwide, by region, in 2017. In US dollars. Source: World Economic Forum

Politics.

The participation of women in African political life has improved in recent years in some countries, particularly in terms of parliamentary representation. However, such

³⁴ VADILLO, Airam. "The forgotten of the forgotten: Mental health in Africa", Psyciencia, 2016. Available at: [Los olvidados de los olvidados: La salud mental en África * Psyciencia](#)

participation remains rare and does not allow women to have an impact on decision-making bodies unless their positions are shared and supported by men.³⁵ At other levels of the country structure, such in the executive, legislative and judicial branches, despite the establishment of quotas, female representation is also very low. Only 20% of ministerial portfolios in the G5 Sahel countries are held by women.

2.3. Projects. Paradox 3: victims and actors of change.

As has been described in this paper, the situations experienced by Sahelian women are extremely difficult and, on many occasions, they are victims of inequalities that are incompatible with improving their living conditions or even their subsistence. The impact of all kinds of violence on their lives should be highlighted. But, in addition to being victims, women in the Sahel are also actors of change and peace and have enormous influence on their surroundings.

The coordinator of the G5 Sahel Women's Platform has stated that women in this region have long contributed to conflict resolution and peace building. Women in the Sahel are real agents of change.³⁶

For this reason, the various organisations operating in the region see that the future lies in investing in development projects for women. This is a strategic investment, as doing so benefits all members of the household.

On this perspective, the Sahel Alliance projects³⁷ take into account this strategic investment, as it has been evident for years that the return on investment in women is very high, because there is a direct intergenerational benefit. Investing in projects related to improving women's quality of life is a strategy that allows for long-term results, because an empowered woman will invest more in her children's nutrition and education.

Other projects in the region to highlight are the "yayes daara" in Senegal³⁸ or the Talitha Kum network of women's religious congregations around the world combatting human

³⁵ RODEMBOURG, Noëlle. 15 December 2022. *Op. cit.*

³⁶ RODEMBOURG, Noëlle "When we say that women are agents of change, in the Sahel, it's not just a slogan!", G5 Sahel, 16 December 2022. Available at: <https://www.g5sahel.org/quand-on-dit-que-la-femme-est-agent-de-changement-au-sahel-ce-nest-pas-quun-slogan/>

³⁷ DOSSO, Aïssatou Aïda, *op. cit.*

³⁸ VÁZQUEZ MARTÍN, A. "The 'yayes daara', the Senegalese mothers who protect the 'talibé' children of Koranic schools", Africa is not a country blog, El País. Available at: [Las 'yayes daara', las madres](#)

trafficking and exploitation;³⁹ the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD),⁴⁰ which is supported by the United Nations Population Fund, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and other development partners; the support network between internally displaced women and host communities called Femmes Battantes in Burkina Faso;⁴¹ or *the sorority* mobile phone application offering mutual support for women suffering violence.⁴²

4. CONCLUSIONS.

Living conditions in the Sahelian strip are steadily worsening, even though the people seem to be braving the perfect storm they are going through. In this difficult situation, the lives of women and girls face greater obstacles in accessing all kinds of services or resources. And these difficulties are underpinned by gender inequalities that, once again, tip the scales against women.

There are apparent paradoxes in the situation of women in the Sahel. They are apparent because they are realities that coexist naturally and need not be mutually exclusive either conceptually or on the ground. Moreover, they are not unique to the Sahelian context. These paradoxes, as we have seen in this paper, are that Sahelian women are central and marginalised, indispensable and excluded, vulnerable and strong, and above all victims but agents of change.

Gender equality is not only a human right but is itself a fundamental element of inclusive security. There is abundant academic research and empirical evidence that shows that women's empowerment and gender equality are directly related to development, stability and peace.

Similarly, the development and prosperity of the Sahel has a direct impact on the well-being and security of neighbouring countries, such as Spain.

[senegalesas que amparan a los niños 'talibés' de las escuelas coránicas | África No es un país | Planeta Futuro | EL PAÍS \(elpais.com\)](#)

³⁹ PONTIFICAL MISSIONARY WORKS. "Talitha Kum's network extends to Mali", February 2023.

Available at: [La red de Talitha Kum se extiende a Mali - Obras Misionales Pontificias - OMP](#)

⁴⁰ See information on this project on the World Bank website:

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2019/09/18/coming-together-to-help-african-girls-create-a-brighter-future>

⁴¹ Information about this project on the website: [Femmes Battantes - Réseau Social Réel - Femmes Battantes \(femmes-battantes.fr\)](#)

⁴² The Sorority Foundation website: [ACCUEIL | Jointhesorority](#)

Thus, to close the circle, investing in women's development and well-being will benefit the region and neighbouring countries. If investing in women is a strategic action that is considered profitable and beneficial, investing in women in the Sahel is doubly strategic because of its impact and its proximity to our borders.

*Blanca Palacián de Inza**
IEEE Analyst