

MAKING THE CASE:

Including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in the Sahel Security and Development Agenda



Sahel countries face the compounding impacts of large youth populations, extreme poverty, food insecurity, natural disasters exacerbated by climate crisis, displacement and conflict, including transnational terrorism.¹ To address escalating transboundary threats, the G5 Sahel was formed in 2014 as a coordinated security framework among the five Sahel countries. In 2017, the 12-member Sahel Alliance came together as a group of donors to support the G5 Sahel's agenda. For the well-being of their populations, the Sahel countries, supported by the Sahel Alliance and the wider international community, must adopt responses to the region's complex range of challenges that go beyond traditional security approaches. This includes recognizing that gender equality, women's empowerment and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are critical components in conflict prevention and rebuilding societies.

To be effective and sustainable, both the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance must take rights-based and gender-sensitive approaches to underpin their security and development agendas. These efforts should, at minimum, ensure that: 1) G5 Sahel security operations prioritize the protection and empowerment of women, girls and young people; 2) strategic priorities of the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance include SRHR, with particular attention to the needs and rights of women, girls and young people; and 3) sufficient funding is allocated to fund SRHR as a priority.

Local and international civil society organizations (CSOs) should take the opportunity these dual initiatives provide to advocate for investments in SRHR to increase resilience and fight poverty and instability in the region.



THE G5 SAHEL

The G5 Sahel was established in December 2014 to foster regional cooperation among the five Francophone Sahel countries: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Its goal is to guarantee peace, security and development for the region's population, including meeting the objectives of regional and international development goals and international security commitments.² The current strategic priorities of the G5 Sahel are:

- 1 Defense and Security
- 2 Governance
- 3 Infrastructure
- 4 Resilience and Human Development

Central to the G5 Sahel's mandate is its security force launched in 2017 to address growing transnational crime and terrorism.³

THE SAHEL ALLIANCE

In July 2017, France, Germany, the European Union, the African Development Bank, the United Nations (U.N.) Development Program and the World Bank launched the Sahel Alliance international donor cooperation platform. They have since been joined by Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom, with Denmark, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as observer members. The Sahel Alliance is investing EUR 11 billion between 2018 and 2022 for over 730 projects in the G5 Sahel countries to enhance regional stability and development.⁴ The priority sectors are:

- 1 Youth Employment
- 2 Rural Development and Food Security
- 3 Climate and Energy
- 4 Governance
- 5 Decentralization and Access to Basic Services
- 6 Security

It remains unclear how much money has been approved, allocated or spent.

SRHR AND NATIONAL AND REGIONAL SECURITY

The fulfillment of SRHR addresses a suite of human rights beyond access to family planning (FP) methods and related health services. In addition to ensuring better health outcomes for populations, SRHR is critical to achieving gender equality as well as reducing a state's instability.⁵ It is linked to increased food security for women and girls, improved access to education for girls and women's economic empowerment.^{6,7,8} As the U.N. Commission on Population and Development yet again stressed in 2019, SRHR policies are a cornerstone of sustainable development.⁹ Addressing gender equality, women's empowerment and ensuring the SRHR needs of populations are crucial to security and building resilience.¹⁰

Meeting SRHR needs equips vulnerable communities, households, families and individuals to withstand shocks resulting from external threats. This is key in the Sahel, which is subject to the interlocking crises of climate change—including the natural disasters of droughts and floods—and transnational terrorism that has spread since 2012. Four of the five Sahel countries are among the 10 most underdeveloped in the world.¹¹ These countries face steady and rapid population growth as well as large youth populations that contribute to instability.¹² There is correspondingly growing unemployment, increasing poverty and low access to health care and education. The impacts of this instability are uneven across populations and women and girls face higher risks of violence and greater difficulties in access to health, education, housing and employment.¹³ With poor access to quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information and services and existing cultural barriers, there is low contraceptive uptake and women and girls face additional health challenges—including high maternal mortality and morbidity rates. As a result, women and girls are less able to realize their rights, protect their health and that of their children and fully participate in development.¹⁴

DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SAHEL COUNTRIES

G5 Sahel country	Human Development Index (rank)	Population (millions)	Percentage rural	Age structure	Maternal mortality (per 100,00 live births)	Total fertility rate	Modern Contraceptive Prevalence Rate (all women)
Burkina Faso	183	19.2	69%	45% under 14, over 65% under 25	371	5.4	24.2
Chad	186	14.9	77%	47% under 14, over 67% under 25	856	5.9	6.1
Mali	182	18.5	59%	48% under 14, over 67% under 25	587	6.1	14.6
Mauritania	159	4.4	40%	40% under 14, 60% under 25	602	4.7	10.6
Niger	189	21.5	81%	50% under 14, over 68% under 25	533	7.3	16.9

A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH FOR SECURITY AND RESILIENCE IN THE SAHEL STRATEGY

To make effective and sustainable investments in the Sahel, the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance must develop rights-based and gender-sensitive strategies that include SRHR programming. Currently, these initiatives insufficiently address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls and young people. Both should urgently dedicate increased attention and resources for gender equality, women's rights and empowerment, as well as meaningful youth engagement and women's and girls' participation in sustainable development, peace and security.

THE G5 SAHEL

For the G5 Sahel, women and youth are a focus of its resilience strategic priority.¹⁵ The G5 Sahel's current implementation strategy notes the need for gender dimensions and human rights but there is no mention of SRHR. However, there have been different efforts that demonstrate G5 commitments to gender, youth and health and therefore potential for SRHR integration. In October 2018, a one-year mandated G5 Sahel Women's Platform—which is linked but not under the direction of the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat—was created to foster women's participation in promoting peace, security and conflict resolution.¹⁶ A recent 2019 G5 Sahel youth strategy and a forthcoming gender strategy present further opportunities to integrate SRHR. The appointment of a gender expert to the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat in Nouakchott, Mauritania, who coordinates and provides technical support to the Women's Platform and the gender ministries in the five member countries is a promising step. Sufficient mainstreaming and technical support, as well as dedicated funding, is necessary to ensure that women's and girls' SRHR needs are incorporated into the G5 national and regional development and security agenda.¹⁷

THE SAHEL ALLIANCE

Currently, across its six priority areas, the Sahel Alliance regrettably fails to delineate women's participation or a gender strategy. Yet some of the alliance's identified priority areas could lend themselves well to these issues. While some of the funded projects include pregnant women and young mothers in nutrition security, there is no acknowledgment of the important role of SRHR in development, peace and security.¹⁸ At the April 2019 G7 meeting, both the G7—an informal group of industrialized countries that includes Sahel Alliance members—and the G5 Sahel countries approved the creation of public health platforms in the Sahel, identifying gender inequalities to health access as a priority. Because the G5 Sahel as a coordinating unit does not have the resources to ensure gender equality is successfully mainstreamed, the Sahel Alliance's investments should ensure funding to address these gaps, thereby strengthening the G5 Sahel's resilience programming to include SRHR, and broadly support and promote SRHR, women's empowerment and youth.

BUILDING ON EXISTING COMMITMENTS

The five Sahel countries have commitments to advancing SRHR and reproductive health indicators through international and regional initiatives and accordingly made advances, including revising their national strategies and budgets, to meet development objectives. Through the Family Planning 2020 (FP2020) initiative—a global partnership to empower women and girls by investing in rights-based FP—all five countries have recognized the essential role SRHR plays in attaining their development goals. All but Chad are also members of the Ouagadougou Partnership in Francophone West Africa that has the regional goal of reaching 2.2 million additional FP method users by 2020.¹⁹ As commitment makers, the countries have each set out distinct objectives aimed at improving the SRH of women and young people, achieving increased modern contraceptive use in the last seven years, revising laws around FP and developing youth-specific strategies, among other advances.²⁰



Despite these important commitments and strides, significant challenges remain to secure SRHR in the Sahel. Meeting the global and regional health and population goals and national commitments requires increased external funding. The G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance investments should build upon and harmonize these initiatives with their own development and security objectives. Many of the Sahel Alliance members are already strong reproductive health and FP donors with track records of supporting gender equality and women's empowerment, including SRHR. Both the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance's long-term goals of addressing regional shocks cannot be met without placing the SRHR needs of women, girls and young people at the center of their efforts.

Most stakeholders in the Sahel recognize the need for development activities to support the security agenda to offset future regional instability.²¹ Unfortunately, Francophone West Africa broadly receives less development assistance from international donors than other sub-Saharan African regions, particularly for reproductive health. For the Sahel specifically, the five countries received under USD 600 million for the broad health and population sector in 2017—roughly 10% of their net official development assistance (ODA) from all international donors.²² As the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance have identified overlapping areas of investment for the EUR 11 billion between 2018 and 2022, there is an opportunity to fund SRHR that aligns with their strategic priorities. Given the important role SRHR plays in building resilience, the Sahel Alliance should at minimum allocate 10% of unallocated funds to prioritize FP, maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, with a focus on young people and their SRHR needs. This would match the current levels of ODA to health and population.

MULTI-LEVEL ADVOCACY OPPORTUNITIES

With the complex challenges facing the Sahel region and the SRHR goals of the G5 Sahel countries, there is a need for immediate and concerted responses from international donors and national governments to bridge development, humanitarian and security priorities. To ensure viable conflict prevention and build resilience in the most fragile societies, the role of SRHR must be acknowledged as a driver in stabilization and development.²³ One pillar of this response must focus on investment in gender equality and access to quality SRH services for women, girls and young people.

KEY ADVOCACY TARGETS

The G5 Sahel Member Countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger—and their G5 national coordinating committees that include experts in the domains of health, education and security;

The G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat in Nouakchott, Mauritania;

The G5 Sahel Women's Platform—coordinated by Mali and country gender coordination committees that operate under the supervision of the ministries related to women and gender;

The 12-member Sahel Alliance donor countries, their in-country missions and the alliance's observers; and

The Sahel Alliance Secretariat in Brussels.



With the current investments in the Sahel, there is an opportunity to influence the G5 Sahel's investment areas as well as those of its donors—including the Sahel Alliance—and align with national SRHR strategies and development goals. However, all the suggested actions must be time-bound to current commitments by G5 Sahel states and the Sahel Alliance through 2022. The Sahel Alliance and the G5 Sahel should allocate funds for programs that promote gender equality and SRHR, including FP, maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment. Local CSOs and international organizations should develop and implement advocacy strategies to ensure SRHR is prioritized and funded by the G5 Sahel and the Sahel Alliance.

Below are recommendations to civil society to advance this agenda, followed by recommendations to the G5 Sahel, the Sahel Alliance and their respective members.

To civil society and international organizations:

- Advocate for the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance to develop and invest in SRHR initiatives. Call for at least 10% of the Sahel Alliance's unallocated funds to prioritize FP, maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, with a focus on young people and their needs.
- Dedicate organizational resources to monitor the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance SRHR and youth investments across the 730 currently approved Sahel Alliance projects.
- Develop and use policy briefs and materials on SRHR-security linkages and current G5 investments in each member state.
- Coordinate advocacy on the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance initiatives among SRHR advocates as well as across different CSO sectors, including organizations focused on women's health and rights, youth and adolescents, economic development and human rights.
- Harmonize advocacy to ensure complementarity with other regional donor initiatives, including the Ouagadougou Partnership, FP2020, the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend—a joint regional initiative by the U.N. and the World Bank Group—and the Global Financing Facility.
- Request a co-organized meeting at the national and regional levels with representatives of the G5 Sahel and civil society.
- Participate in country coordination committees and country gender committees of the G5 Sahel to influence the national agendas.
- Call for increased transparency from the G5 Sahel and Sahel Alliance on overall funding levels and funds that have been approved, allocated and spent across programs and for SRHR specifically.

To the G5 Sahel and its member states:

- Incorporate SRHR as an official priority area of intervention in youth and gender strategies. This would include outlining cross-cutting gender and human rights strategies for all programming.
- Ensure that the G5 Sahel security operations prioritize the protection and empowerment of women, girls and young people and allow the gender expert for G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat in Nouakchott to successfully carry out their role.
- In coordination with CSO representatives, identify and allocate funding for SRHR projects as part of the next priority investment program.
- Ensure that existing areas of programming, such as governance and justice, address gender equity and ensure women's and girls' access to educational, economic and political opportunities.
- Expand the G5 Women's Platform to address SRHR and ensure that it has an extended mandate to take up such issues to the G5 Sahel. If the Women's Platform will not be expanded or continued beyond its initial mandate, another platform should be created and ensure that beneficiaries, including women and youth, are involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of all activities that impact them.
- Increase transparency of the overall funding the G5 Sahel has received and the funds that have been approved, allocated and spent across programs and for SRHR specifically.

To the Sahel Alliance, its member states and observers:

- Provide resources for adequate staffing of the G5 Sahel coordination unit—specifically the gender section—to ensure that women’s empowerment, gender equality and compounding issues including SRHR are mainstreamed in all activities.
- Incorporate SRHR as an official priority area of intervention. This would include outlining cross-cutting gender and human rights strategies for all programming.
- Fund G5 Sahel- and CSO-developed SRHR projects as part of priority next investments. At least 10% of the Sahel Alliance’s unallocated funds from its EUR 11 billion pledge should prioritize FP, maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, with a focus on young people and their needs.
- Convene a group of CSOs with the Sahel Alliance donor representatives and observers by the end of 2019 to discuss framing development and security programs in the G5 Sahel countries with a human rights perspective and attention to gender mainstreaming and the critical role of SRHR. This would include establishing a consultation process of nongovernmental organizations with the donor group to advise on regional priorities.
- Increase transparency on its overall funding levels and funds that have been approved, allocated and spent across programs and for SRHR specifically.



PAI’s mission is to promote universal access to SRHR to improve the health and autonomy of women, girls and young people, reduce poverty and strengthen civil society. For more information about PAI and our work in Francophone West Africa, please contact Mercedes Mas de Xaxàs, consultant for international policy and advocacy, mmx@pai.org.

Endnotes

- 1 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2019). Pursuing elusive stability in the Sahel. Retrieved from: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2019/pursuing-elusive-stability-sahel>
- 2 Secrétariat Permanent du G5 Sahel. (2016). Stratégie pour le Développement et la Sécurité des Pays du G5 Sahel. Retrieved from: https://www.g5sahel.org/images/Docs/SDS_G5S_VF.pdf
- 3 International Crisis Group. (2017, December 12). Finding the Right Role for the G5 Sahel Joint Force. Retrieved from: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/258-finding-the-right-role-for-the-g5-sahel-joint-force.pdf>
- 4 Alliance Sahel. (2019). Retrieved from: <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en>
- 5 Urdal, H. (2007). "The Demographics of Political Violence: Youth Bulges, Insecurity and Conflict" in *Too Poor for Peace? Global Poverty, Conflict and Security in the 21st Century*. Eds. L. Brainard and D. Chollet, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C., pp. 90-100. Retrieved from: <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/the-demographics-of-political-violence-youth-bulges-insecurity-and-conflict>
- 6 PAI. (2016, October 13). Connecting Reproductive Health and Resilience: Why it Matters to Food Security. Retrieved from: <https://pai.org/blog/connecting-reproductive-health-resilience>
- 7 Family Planning High Impact Practices. (2018, August). Educating Girls: Creating a foundation for positive sexual and reproductive health behaviors. Retrieved from: <https://www.fphighimpactpractices.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/EducatingGirls.pdf>
- 8 Family Planning High Impact Practices. (2017, January). Economic Empowerment: A Potential Pathway for Women and Girls to Gain Control Over Their Sexual and Reproductive Health. Retrieved from: https://www.fphighimpactpractices.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/economic_empowerment.pdf
- 9 United Nations Meetings Coverage. (2019, April 2). Sexual, Reproductive Health Rights Key to Obtaining Sustainable Development, Speakers Stress, as Population and Development Commission Continues Session, Economic and Social Council, Commission on Population and Development, 52nd Session, 4th and 5th Meetings. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/pop1081.doc.htm>
- 10 PAI. (2016, September). Data Speaks: Women, Peace and Security. Retrieved from: https://pai.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Data-Speaks_-_Women-Peace-and-Security.pdf
- 11 The New Humanitarian. (2019, May 31). The Sahel in flames. Retrieved from: <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/in-depth/sahel-flames-Burkina-Faso-Mali-Niger-militancy-conflict>
- 12 UNESCO. (2019). Data for the Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from: http://uis.unesco.org/en/home#tabs-0-uis_home_top_menus-3
- 13 PAI. (2013, January). Why Population Matters to Security. Retrieved from: <https://pai.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Why-Population-Matters-to-Security.pdf>
- 14 PAI. The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World. Retrieved from: <https://pai.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/SOTC.pdf>
- 15 G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat. Priority Investment Program (PIP/G5 Sahel) First Phase 2019-2021. Retrieved from: https://www.g5sahel.org/images/DOCPIP/PIP_G5S_EN_VF.pdf
- 16 Secrétariat Permanent du G5 Sahel. (2019, April 16). Lancement du projet de renforcement de la participation des femmes dans les instances de décision du G5 Sahel. Retrieved from: <https://www.g5sahel.org/8-nos-activit%C3%A9s/1439-lancement-du-projet-de-renforcement-de-la-participation-des-femmes-dans-les-instances-de-decision-du-g5sahel>
- 17 PAI meeting with G5 Sahel gender expert, Nouakchott, Mauritania, July 2019.
- 18 Sahel Alliance. (2019). Resilience and Employment in Lake Chad. Retrieved from: <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/projects/resilience-and-employment-in-lake-chad-reste>
- 19 Ouagadougou Partnership. (2019). Countries. Retrieved from: <https://partenariatouaga.org/en/countries>
- 20 Family Planning 2020. (2019). Countries. Retrieved from: <http://www.familyplanning2020.org/countries>
- 21 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). (2019). Pursuing elusive stability in the Sahel. Retrieved from: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2019/pursuing-elusive-stability-sahel>
- 22 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2019). Interactive summary charts by aid (ODA) recipients. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/aid-at-a-glance.htm>
- 23 Guttmacher Institute. (2015). Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Are Key to Global Development: The Case for Ramping Up Investment. Retrieved from: https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/article_files/gpr180101.pdf