



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs

STRATEGY FOR NORWAY'S EFFORTS IN THE SAHEL REGION

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Introduction

The name ‘Sahel’ is derived from the Arabic word for coast or shore, and refers to a belt of land along the southern border of the Saharan Desert. There are several definitions of the the precise area the Sahel region covers. According to some definitions, the region extends as far as Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti in the east. In this strategy, the ‘Sahel’ is used to refer to the following countries that lie between the Sahara and the savannah to the south: Mali, Niger, Mauritania, Chad, and Burkina Faso, and to parts of northeastern Nigeria. There are other countries in the region that share characteristics with the Sahel countries, such as Algeria, Morocco and Libya to the north and Cameroon in the Lake Chad region.

The white papers on Norwegian foreign and security policy (Meld. St. 36 (2016–2017): *Setting the course for Norwegian foreign and security policy*), on the Sustainable Development Goals and Norwegian development policy (Meld. St. 24 (2016–2017): *Common Responsibility for Common Future*) and on global security challenges (Meld. St. 37 (2014–2015): *Global security challenges in Norway’s foreign policy*), together with the *Strategic framework for Norway’s engagement in conflict prevention, stabilisation and resilience building*, describe a challenging global landscape, and outline Norway’s objectives and priorities for the years ahead. This strategy translates these objectives and priorities into guidelines and provides us with a concrete framework for our efforts in the Sahel.

1 The main challenges and causes of conflict in the region

The greatest challenge is security. Since the collapse of Libya in 2011 and the outbreak of conflict in northern Mali in 2012, the situation in the Sahel region has given growing cause for concern. The combination of poverty, organised crime, violent extremism and weak institutions is making the region increasingly insecure, unstable and conflict-ridden.

Violent extremists, terrorist groups and criminal networks involved in smuggling people, weapons and drugs have gained a foothold in areas where the authorities do not have a strong presence and government control is weak. Radical groups are using the proceeds of organised crime to provide services, employment and protection to vulnerable local communities. For people in these areas, radical groups may appear to be the best or only alternative as employers or providers of security.

The fragility and instability of the Sahel is most clearly visible in Mali and its surrounding areas, and in Libya. Violent extremists are active in large parts of Mali, and have spread their operations to the neighbouring countries of Burkina Faso and Niger. There is also a risk that their activities could spread to more countries.

The countries in the Sahel region have seen little progress in terms of development. Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad are at the bottom of the UNDP Human Development

Index, with low scores on health, education and living standards. There is considerable potential for economic growth in these countries. Poor security is one of the main reasons why this potential is not being realised.

At the same time, the impacts of climate change are creating increasingly difficult conditions for traditional agriculture and animal husbandry. Droughts last longer and harvests are poorer; this is giving rise to seasonal food insecurity and humanitarian disasters, as well as heightening the level of conflict.

Poor prospects for the future are making people leave their homes. The majority move to other parts of their own country, most of them from the north to the south. Others migrate to neighbouring countries in search of work. For example, previously many million West Africans found employment in Libya. As the region has become increasingly destabilised in recent years, irregular migration to Europe – particularly through Libya and Niger – has risen.

Developments in the Sahel and Maghreb are often related, and it is important to view the broader region as a whole. The source of the conflict in Mali is, to a large extent, to be found further north, for example in Libya, which has collapsed. Algeria, on the other hand, has traditionally played a major role in enhancing security and fighting terrorism in the region.

2 Why do we need a Sahel strategy?

The rise of militant Islamism is threatening security in a number of countries and regions. When states' sovereignty and capacity to govern is weakened, this creates a breeding ground for threats to security and stability, which can also affect Norwegian interests. Norway's primary interest is to ensure security in our own region.

The security challenges we are seeing in the region are transnational in nature, closely related and mutually reinforcing. They also pose a direct threat to Europe and to Norway. A number of terrorist attacks and an increase in irregular migration have put Europe under increasing pressure, especially over the last two years. It is therefore in Norway's interests to work to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate in the short term, and to fight poverty and promote stability, lasting development and good governance in the long term. The countries in the region must be given support to enable them to deal with these challenges themselves.

Targeted and coordinated action to increase stability, strengthen the presence of the authorities, promote development and alleviate need is necessary to address these challenges. Norway has, for a long time, been a partner in the efforts to bring security, stability and development to the Sahel region. The Government has intensified its efforts over a period of several years by providing funding for peacekeeping and

conflict-prevention efforts, development aid to promote stabilisation and improve living conditions, and life-saving humanitarian assistance.

The purpose of this strategy is to help us to set the course for our efforts in the years ahead. It sets out the objectives, the framework and the tools at our disposal, describes goals at global, regional and national level, and highlights important working methods and policy instruments. Our ambition is to ensure an integrated approach based on our strengths and capacity and our ability to cooperate with relevant partners.

The Sahel strategy is part of our work to implement the guidelines set out in the white papers and strategic framework mentioned above. It translates the Government's primary objectives into specific goals for the Sahel region. It also outlines the framework and general direction for our work in this area in the years ahead, and thus provides guidance for the development of concrete plans at country and regional level in the Sahel in a long-term perspective. It is to be used as a basis for our ongoing strategic efforts in the region, particularly in Mali and Niger, with which we cooperate closely.

The strategy is also intended to make it easier to see how our various foreign policy tools – promoting dialogue and reconciliation processes, contributing to peace operations, supporting development and job creation, providing vital humanitarian assistance, promoting human rights and engaging in development and institution-building efforts – interact with one another.

3 Strategic goals

As set out in the Strategic framework for Norway's engagement in conflict prevention, stabilisation and resilience building, Norway's primary objectives for its efforts in this field are:

1. to promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution
2. to promote political stabilisation and enhance security
3. to build resilience and lay the foundation for inclusive economic, social and political development, with a view to improving living conditions and reducing the need for humanitarian aid

The intention of this strategy is to identify how Norway's efforts at global, regional and national level can contribute to the achievement of these objectives in the Sahel. Our aim to stabilise individual countries and the region as a whole is closely related to our aims to improve living conditions for the population, prevent irregular migration, and strengthen governance and democratic development.

A major effort is needed, by both civilian and military actors, to enhance security in the short term and make it possible to implement measures to improve the situation in the longer term.

Humanitarian and development efforts that are implemented promptly give people hope for the future and foster confidence in, and support for, peace processes. In the wake of a conflict, it is particularly important to build up local communities and institutions, especially with regard to security.

In this strategy, Norway's primary objectives in the areas of conflict prevention, stabilisation and resilience building have been broken down and translated into specific goals for the Sahel region. These goals are set out below, and possible measures that could be implemented within the global, regional and national frameworks are outlined under each of them. It will be useful to consider these measures in the follow up and implementation of the strategy.

Primary objective 1: to promote conflict prevention and conflict resolution

Goal 1.1: The United Nations (UN) is to be given the necessary resources and a stronger position so that it can play a meaningful role in conflict resolution and peacekeeping.

Possible measures include promoting a targeted, solution-oriented, forward-looking discussion on developments in the Sahel in relevant international forums, such as the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly. Norway supports close coordination and cooperation between MINUSMA (the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali), the G5 Sahel and other partners that have a presence in the region. At the same time, we will continue to be a clear and reliable partner for the UN in conflict-resolution and peace efforts in Mali. Norway's participation in MINUSMA is an important contribution in this respect. The decision to continue the rotation scheme for the provision of military transport aircraft to MINUSMA is significant in this context.

Goal 1.2: Peace processes are to be inclusive and the participation of women is to be increased in line with UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Norway will use its participation in the UN Peacebuilding Commission to influence the priorities set for the UN's peace efforts and increase the focus on prevention. We are willing to share experience we have gained from the implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 and our expertise in this field with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the G5 Sahel, for example by identifying targets and drawing up an action plan and reporting framework. In cooperation with individual Sahel countries, we will also share Norwegian experience of dialogue and reconciliation processes, with a view to preventing and dealing with conflicts and with particular

emphasis on securing broad representation and sustainable outcomes by ensuring the inclusion of women.

Goal 1.3: Regional and national actors are to be more closely involved in resolving conflicts in the region and in the efforts to build and sustain peace in Mali.

Providing financial support and sharing Norwegian analytical expertise will help to strengthen the UN's capacity to deal with conflicts. Our cooperation with the African Union (AU) could include efforts to resolve and prevent conflicts in the Sahel, and we will maintain our support for the African Centre for the Study and Research on Terrorism established by the AU in Algeria. We will also consider providing support for regional initiatives, for example the G5 Sahel, together with partners such as the AU, the European Union (EU), Germany and France.

In order to strengthen the capacity of African countries to take part in peacekeeping operations on their continent, we will continue to support the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in Ghana, which runs peacekeeping training and research programmes in cooperation with ECOWAS. Norway will also continue to fund the Training for Peace in Africa programme, which enhances countries' capacity to provide civilian and police personnel for UN and AU peace operations. As regards bilateral cooperation with individual countries, measures to promote exchange of information and capacity-building in the police and justice sector are under consideration. For example, we are considering a contribution of civilian/police components to Mali. Given that developments across the Sahara, and especially in Libya, have a considerable impact on the conflict landscape in the Sahel, we are considering closer political dialogue, including on security policy, with the Maghreb countries, in particular Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. We are also considering engaging in a cooperative effort to prevent radicalisation that may lead to violent extremism.

Primary objective 2: to promote political stabilisation and enhance security

Goal 2.1: Efforts to combat the financing of terrorism and transnational crime are to be strengthened, and cooperation on combating organised crime and people smuggling is to be improved.

Norway is at the forefront of efforts to prevent radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. Initiatives to include young people in the labour market and society as a whole are key to this work, and should be supported in cooperation with relevant partners. We will consider increasing our support for measures to fight organised crime under multilateral initiatives at regional level, such as the Regional Programme for West Africa under the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). We are planning to

continue our support for the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), and will engage in the discussion on how we can use the Trust Fund to build resilience and strengthen local communities. Our cooperation with countries in the region will include capacity-building measures and efforts to strengthen national and local authorities to enable the countries concerned to decentralise services and meet the needs of all their citizens, including those in remote areas.

Goal 2.2: Anti-corruption efforts and cooperation with the authorities in the region on strengthening institutions in the security and justice sectors are to be strengthened.

Norway will seek closer operational cooperation with the multilateral development banks and the UN in areas such as institution building and job creation. We will strengthen Nordic cooperation in the Sahel. Norway is a partner in the Danish Regional Sahel Peace and Stabilisation Programme, which, among other things, promotes dialogue and reconciliation. We will help to strengthen good governance and democratic development by focusing attention on the fight against corruption. We will also cooperate with partners such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the EU on institution building and knowledge transfer.

Goal 2.3: Respect for human rights and an independent civil society is to be strengthened.

At the global level, we will contribute to efforts to ensure respect for human rights and the rule of law through constructive, pragmatic cooperation in the UN Human Rights Council and under the core international human rights instruments. We will cooperate with institutions that strengthen the rule of law, such as independent national human rights institutions, ombudsmen and relevant civil society organisations. We will also support civil society organisations that challenge the authorities and hold them accountable.

Primary objective 3: to build resilience and lay the foundation for inclusive economic, social and political development

Goal 3.1: More children, especially girls, are to be able to complete their education, including vocational education and training.

We will continue to promote education and health at the global level. Relevant efforts include increasing access to vaccines and combating infectious diseases through Gavi (the Global Vaccine Alliance) and the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM). We support education in emergencies and crises through Education Cannot Wait and the Global Partnership for Education.

At the regional level, we will work to channel more of the funding provided by the major actors in the field of education towards the Sahel region. At national level, we will maintain our focus on promoting education through well-established channels such as UNICEF, Norwegian Church Aid and the Strømme Foundation; we are also considering making use of new channels.

Goal 3.2: Access to reproductive health services that can improve women's health and rights is to be increased.

At the global level, we are stepping up our efforts to promote reproductive health, and we support key multilateral actors in this field, including the Global Financing Facility (GFF). At the regional level, we are considering cooperation with existing partners such as the AU, ECOWAS and the OECD's Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) in vital areas such as climate-resilient agriculture, job creation and women's rights.

We will promote reproductive health at country level in Mali and Niger in cooperation with key actors in the field such as the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Women, and with NGOs such as Care and Save the Children.

Goal 3.3: Employment levels and value creation are to be increased, and private sector development is to be strengthened, for example by improving conditions for traditional livelihoods and adapting agriculture to climate change.

Relevant measures include promoting the global effort to combat illicit financial flows and organised crime. In cooperation with the African Development Bank, Norway will highlight the importance of job creation, as well as continuing its extensive efforts in the areas of infrastructure development and food production in the Sahel. Cooperation with individual countries may include continued efforts to promote climate-resilient agriculture, for example in cooperation with the Department of International Environment and Development Studies (Noragric) at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, and through participation in the the Lake Faguibine ecosystem restoration project in Mali. Our support for job creation will mainly be channelled through the World Bank's Conflict Affected States in Africa Initiative (CASA).

4 Framework and resources

The geographical focus of Norway's efforts will primarily be Mali and Niger, northern Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

When designing and implementing projects and programmes in the Sahel region, it is important to cooperate with relevant partners, primarily with individual countries in the region, like-minded countries in the North and West, and organisations and institutions like the AU, ECOWAS, the EU, the UN, the World Bank, the African Development

Bank and NGOs. We will strengthen our cooperation with multilateral organisations that have a visible and credible presence in the Sahel. We intend to increase our cooperation with Germany and France, including in the Sahel. Countries in the Maghreb region that are engaged in the Sahel are potential partners of interest, and we will consider cooperating more closely with them. Several of these actors have good strategies for security and development efforts in the region. These provide useful guidelines that are also relevant for Norway's engagement. Of particular relevance for Norway are the 2013 UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel, which is currently being revised, and the EU and AU strategies.

The national programmes and strategies of the countries in the region tend not to have very clear priorities. This may be due in part to the fact that there are huge needs in many areas. One of the main challenges is to foster a willingness to undertake reforms and to build effective structures at the national level, so that these countries are themselves able to implement measures to combat violent extremism, terrorism and illegal trafficking, and to take part in regional cooperation. The G5 Sahel cooperation between Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad on regional security and development is one example of how the Sahel countries are joining forces to take responsibility for tackling the region's challenges.

Norway's participation in MINUSMA is an important contribution to the efforts to improve security in the region.

In order to get the most out of the resources that have been invested in the Sahel and make the best use of the tools and instruments at our disposal, it is important to build up expertise and a thorough understanding of the regional context and of the various roles of the key actors and like-minded countries involved. A good understanding of the role of the regional organisations (the AU, G5, ECOWAS, etc.) is also important when considering partnerships and the value added Norway could provide. Dialogue with the various actors in North Africa and an understanding of their methods and approaches are also important, both from a security perspective and for dealing with migration. Norwegian research and analysis centres will be encouraged to focus more on the Sahel region, particularly those working with security issues, including terrorism and radicalisation.

French is the main language in most of the countries in and around the Sahel region. English skills are generally poor, even in the public administration. It is therefore important to continue schemes that improve skills and help to foster contacts between different centres of expertise.

5 Risks

There is little to suggest that the challenges relating to security and corruption in the region will be less of a problem in the future. Both these issues will have a major impact on the various projects and initiatives. However, the cost of not engaging is likely to be greater, both when it comes to the prospects for putting a stop to terrorism and fostering sustainable development in the region, and when it comes to Norwegian and European security. We must therefore be willing to accept that our ongoing engagement will entail clear risks, relating both to the use of resources and to our ability to achieve goals. Ensuring the safety of our personnel and those of our partners will, however, remain an absolute requirement.

By providing funding through various channels (the UN system, civil society organisations, multilateral/global mechanisms), the risk of corruption can be reduced. Cooperation with other major donors can also reduce the risk of corruption. In addition, it is important to strike a balance between taking a long-term approach and achieving tangible results in the short-term.

6 Monitoring, reviewing and adjusting our efforts

To enable predictable and long-term planning, this strategy has an initial timeframe of three years. At the end of this period, the Ministry will review progress to determine the extent to which our approach is helping us to achieve the objectives we have set, and whether we need to make adjustments. The strategy is to be implemented in a flexible way, with scope for adaptation to take account of new developments.

Close contact and exchange of information with relevant experts will be essential. Discussions with the many institutions and NGOs that have insight into, and contacts and activities in the Sahel region, can provide valuable input for our work to implement this strategy.

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