

The Sahel at the Crossroads

Geographically, the Sahel is located in the northern part of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) where incoming solar radiation and the NE and SE trade winds meet. Thus, the region is highly susceptible to the impact of climate change.

Geopolitically, this semi-arid corridor traverses the central-north of Africa covering part or all of ten countries including Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Sudan, South Sudan and Eritrea. In fact, these countries look like riparian states, sharing, not an actual river, but the “shore” demarcating the transition between the Sahara desert and the savannah. The Sahel covers about 3 million square km or 1.1 million square miles. Its population of about 50 million is predicted to double to 100 million in 2020 and to quadruple by 2050. Due to a combination of drought, political instability and rising food prices, an estimated 18 million people of the Sahel are facing food insecurity, caught in a vicious circle where human behaviors worsen the climate and the climate worsens living conditions.

Hydro-politically, the Sahel is a zone of convergence, influenced by many bodies of water: the Atlantic Ocean with its history of slave trade, colonization and now narco-trafficking; the Mediterranean Sea from which Islam crossed the Sahara desert. The Red Sea, the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean also brought cultures, opportunities and challenges.

Demographically and culturally, the area is rich in human diversity. It brings into contact North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans. Cultures mix, as do indigenous, Islamic and Christian religions, not always comfortably. At the same time, the weak states are unable to generate the forces and mechanisms to ensure territorial sovereignty. Border zones are increasingly becoming stateless territories.

In this context, I am grateful that *African Renaissance* is devoting a special issue to the Sahel. Articles discuss issues such as corruption and money laundry, dissect the relationship between climate change and conflict, and analyze foreign interventions. Of course, this single issue does not and cannot address the many challenges facing the region. A book will follow, also to be published by Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd. This introduction serves as a call for contributions to the book. For more information about the book including the full call for contributions, contact is the *International Consortium for the Study of the Sahel* at icgps2013@gmail.com.

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