

Water, peace and security in the Sahel

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies by addressing water threats

EDD2019 19 June Tour & Taxis

Inner Niger River Delta, Mali

The Niger River touches 9 countries and the Inner Niger River Delta in Mali is Africa's 2nd largest wetland area. It is the most natural reproductive area of Mali and is essential to nurture people and nature therefore impacting peace and security in the area. Today 2 million people are competing to make a living in an area of 10,000sq km of flooded area compared to 20 years ago when there were only 500,000 people making a living within 40,000 sq km. With the decrease of the wetland area by 75% and 4 times the number of people living in the area, scarcity of wetland resources such as food, freshwater and fertile land has caused violent conflict to rise since 2015 creating human insecurity. Safeguarding and restoring wetlands is now of great importance with climate change causing water resource unpredictability.

Another factor contributing to water insecurity in the Inner Niger Delta was the construction of dams which were put in place to retain water upstream. However, for those living downstream, this caused an increase in water scarcity contributing to less fish coming downstream and leading to greater competition. People don't have enough water to make a living and the shrinkage of fertile land, fisheries and pastures has led to armed conflicts between farmers, pastoralists and fishers who in the past made use of the wetland's natural resources to make a living without conflict over access to farming and grazing land. Human displacement has increased due to water insecurity and combined with a high population growth rate of 3 to 3.6% a year creating competition as stated by Keita. Keita also mentioned that ¼ of the world's population live along wetlands and lakes requiring wetlands to become a priority of the global agenda on peace and security. Ruiz also refers to the increasing population creating tension and conflict over water access and limited wetland resources. Dagnet mentions how the limited crops are not surviving climate change due to water stress and Jahn refers to the land being over exploited and underestimating the power of the sun causing desertification. Mizzi highlights the problem of acute hunger which is contributed to by increasing food, climate and conflict insecurity. He states that over 113 million people across 53 counties are suffering acute hunger making it a global problem. Other global statistics include that 36% of world's population live in water scarce regions and 1.8 billion people lack access to safe drinking water worldwide.

Start of Talk- Climate and Security

Yamide Dagnet -Senior associate for World Resources Institute

Describes the effects of climate on her visit there 30 years ago. The temperature was between 43 and 48 degrees. Incidents of flooding caused death and loss of fish. She calls it an ecologic crisis that requires holistic and ecological solutions.

Karounga Keita Sahel Office Director, Wetlands International Mali

Describes the links between water availability and security. He remarks on how the use of military and top down strategies are not working in achieving security. Establishes the need to start implementing greater community involvement to find sustainable solutions.

Carmen Marquez Ruiz, Policy Coordinator Environment & Water, Global 2/ Global and Economic issues, EEAS- Escalation of conflict,

States that in the Sahel region, “security and development cannot be separated” and achieving both measures can only be attained through regional cooperation. States “Water should be a tool for peace.” Aims to enhance diplomatic engagement of EU on water issues such as supporting the right to water and sanitation and reminding the EU commitment to ensure access to water and sanitation during humanitarian crisis. Remarks on recent council conclusions relating to water diplomacy, EU human rights guidelines to safe drinking water and sanitation as well as an active involvement supporting transboundary cooperation globally and in the Sahel region. States the council conclusions adopted last year establish water as a key global challenge and how a new approach to water security reflects new challenges. States Policy Framework affects the EEAS’ decisions on funding. The EU supports different Sahel river basins, research and support innovative solutions.

Policy framework that will affect decisions on funding. Focus on holistic solutions linking development and security.

Hans- Harald Jahn, Head of Division, Agribusiness in Rural Development, European Investment Bank

States that the EIB deals with credits not grants. Describes problem in Sahel and Mali as the soil, sun and water interacting and failing due to overexploitation and underestimating the power of the sun. “We should not underestimate what we damage”. Describes Sahel wetland problem as not unique and states water must be taken care of in a different way to have fertile soils and to bring together the needs of the rural and urban population. States the EIB supports only a competent partner that uses the money properly and gives it back. Describes solutions should be innovative and not fall back on old ones such as irrigation. ***Policy Coordinator Environment & Water, Global 2/ Global and Economic issues, EEAS*** Uses example of Senegal River basin where efforts were able to find plants that could withstand the salinity in the soil to allow the rice project however they underestimated nature as birds ate the rice. Says future solutions should involve financing research into new seed varieties, cropping patterns and adaption projects. Also refers to solution on region where they better reuse sewage water.

Leonard Mizzi, Head of Unit C1, Rural Development, Food Security, Nutrition, DG DEVCO

Focuses on tracking progress of resolutions and strategies in a regional approach. Refers to food crisis influenced by conflict insecurity, climate and natural disaster insecurity and economic shocks. Explains that more than 113 million people across 53 countries experiencing acute hunger and IPC phases of 3,4 and 5 in countries like Sudan and Yemen (15 million in food crisis). 74 million worldwide are struck by food insecurity due to conflict including the Sahel. Council conclusions and strategies need better framework and holistic approach. States regional approach in policy making is required with more bottom up approaches. More civil society engagement and national ownership. States more common objectives and standards need to be established as well as early learning mechanisms that will prevent constantly going into crisis mode. Discusses rural revitalization policy as a resilient action plan that considers water stress and water availability in the context of links between rural and urban pressures. The rural revitalization strategy is not happening due to sectorial processes and should use a more landscape approach. Solutions should involve research such as on crops that are resistant to climate change, water stress and salinity as well as further research into recycling water. Stresses importance of tracking progress of strategies and goals.

QA Key Points

Water sector DEVCO- requires political willingness to discuss water resources and develop regional programming solutions, cross disciplinary and cross sectorial including water, energy and food security nexus

EIB- "Efficiency and knowledge combined in competitiveness"- working towards resource efficiency and away from consumerism approach of the last 2 generations.

Water Aid, Burkino Faso- Community participation in water management project aiming to increase the capacity of communities in remote areas in Ghana, Mali, Niger and Burkino Faso. They do this by training people to use simple, affordable tools to monitor the water resources so they can make informed decisions relating to the usage of water. They link communities with local authorities to share their findings.

Combine traditional governance and innovation, as well as involving civil society and local communities as a mean to find a middle ground is key in finding solutions to the problem. There needs to be better management of natural resources to resolve conflicts and growing water insecurity.