



## **SOS SAHEL Conference: Building Climate-Smart Sustainable Livelihoods in Communities across the Sahel**

United Nations Africa Dialogue Series – October 17 & 18, 2018

SOS SAHEL had the privilege of participating in the United Nations Africa Dialogue Series on October 17 and 18 in New York, including **hosting a side event together with the Permanent Mission of France and the Permanent Mission of Germany to the UN, “Building Climate-Smart Sustainable Livelihoods in Communities Across the Sahel”.**

Along with SOS SAHEL Executive Director Rémi Hémercyck, we were pleased to gather Ambassador Jean-Marc Châtaigner (French Special Envoy for Sahel), Anne Gueguen (Deputy Permanent Representative of France to the UN), Jürgen Schulz (Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the UN), Noura Hamladji (Deputy Director for the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa), Paul Clements-Hunt (Founder of The Blended Capital Group), and Pierre Thiam (Chef, Restaurateur, social entrepreneur, and Culinary Ambassador).

[We invite you to listen to the discussion via webcast here](#), while also distilling the following takeaways:

- 1. An integrated approach is essential – and there is great hope to be found in multiple, coordinated strategies for the Sahel.**

At the start of our discussion, Anne Gueguen pushed us to look beyond existing programs and partnerships to de-compartmentalize our work in the Sahel. The reorganization under UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed with the UN Integrated Strategy for the Sahel is an essential step to bring all of the plans, programs, strategies and players together for greater impact.

This cause has been advanced notably through the launch in July 2017 of the Sahel Alliance, within which SOS SAHEL is a close collaborator. The Alliance seeks to enhance stability and development of the Sahel through more than 500 projects that take a holistic view of development to include security, demographic, economic and social dimensions.

Noura Hamladji underscored the importance of such integration, particularly as we look geographically in tackling cross-border programming that is the true key to unlocking potential opportunities for development.

## **2. Development and security are two sides of the same coin.**

Jean-Marc Châtaigner stated it simply: Without security, there can be no development. We must redouble efforts here, building the foundation for people to lift themselves out of poverty.

Yet before we focus all energies peacemaking, Jürgen Schulz reminded us that security cannot exist without development. It is through unlocking new opportunities, lifting individual well-being, and lessening competition for precious resources that we build true alternatives for individuals who may otherwise be drawn to causes of terror and violence.

This is why, as Rémi Hémercyck shared, SOS SAHEL takes a regional and system-wide approach to development programs in the Sahel, particularly around strengthening agricultural livelihood resilience for a part of the world where more than 80% of all people live in rural areas.

## **3. The Sahel is a paradox of challenges and opportunities – particularly when we look to climate and demographics.**

Jean-Marc Châtaigner reminded us that the dangers posed by climate are of a different kind than the threats of insecurity – and they will be most acutely felt in the Sahel in the years to come. Simultaneously, as climate challenges threaten populations, the most vulnerable groups (women and youth) are most likely to be affected.

The Green Initiative, which is integral to the approach of SOS SAHEL in the region, is a key tool for addressing these threats – building potential for prevention of climate impacts, but also resilience in living through changes that cannot be stopped. This includes climate-adaptive technologies, integration of sustainable approaches like solar-fueled irrigation, reforestation efforts, and the creation of additional economic opportunities, notably for women and youth.

Pierre Thiam shared with us all another exciting collaboration with SOS SAHEL to promote local knowledge as a tool for resilience – specifically related to the fonio cereal crop. Drought-resistant with a short growing season and numerous health qualities that appeal to a Western audience, fonio is a unique opportunity for the Sahel as a crop that, with the right support, has been brought to market through retailers like Whole Foods and Amazon. This

is just one example of scaling up the potential of locally-generated ideas and traditions for greater development in the Sahel.

#### **4. The international community should rally behind and support the localization of development actions for the Sahel.**

In his concluding thoughts, Paul Clements-Hunt, Chairman of « SOS SAHEL International Advisory Council » grounded our discussion further by reflecting on the importance of localizing our approaches to development and achieving the SDGs. In every speaker's remarks, the importance of on-the-ground collaboration and sourcing ideas and energy from the local communities was a centerpiece – underscoring the agency of the Sahelian people who seek to be the leaders of their own development. While partnership and support from the outside may be essential to the process, it cannot stand alone.

It was in this that Mr. Clements-Hunt announced to the room on behalf of SOS SAHEL the forthcoming launch of the Hub Sahel within the Local 2030 Agenda. We are proud to lead this group as a key nexus point for stakeholders in the Sahel, through which they will engage with the development process – from design through implementation of initiatives.

Of course over more than an hour, the conversation had a great many other interesting insights and stories, and we hope that you will [watch the entire webcast to learn more](#). As we closed the event, we ended the discussion only temporarily – with key next steps taking place in November in Niamey.

For SOS SAHEL, in Niamey and beyond, we will continue to drive forward on programs with local actors and communities, and bring those to even more significant scales for greater impact in partnership with Sahelians and the international community. Together, we will unlock the opportunity and hope that exists within the Sahel – identifying, enacting and expanding integrated solutions that activate the region's numerous human, cultural and natural resources for community prosperity through sustainable livelihoods.

*[You can view the complete webcast of our side event, "Building Climate-Smart Sustainable Livelihoods in Communities Across the Sahel", here.](#)*