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The demographic explosion in the Sahel region: its governance's new challenge

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Abstract:

The demographic explosion in the Sahel region will strengthen the cycle of instability, which connects three aspects: the government's inability to provide its citizens with basic goods and services, the insecurity and the low level of human development. The weak governance of these countries won't allow them to absorb the young people's labor, which will cause the youth to join terrorist groups, to reinforce illegal trade networks and to migrate to Europe. In 2050, the Sahel region will be the transit route for almost 200 million Africans who will look forward to crossing the Mediterranean Sea.

Keywords:

Sahel, Demographic Explosion, Migration, Stability and Europe.

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Introduction

Half of the world's growth population from now to 2030 will come from Africa, according to the United Nations (UN)¹. Almost 24 percent of the global demographic increase between now and 2050 will occur in ten of the eleven countries located in the Sahel area². Sahel is an ecoclimatic and biogeographic zone of transition in Africa between the Sahara Desert to the north and the Sudanian savanna to the south. It stretches across the south latitudes of northern Africa between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea. The analysis will include the following countries: Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Sudan, South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia. Nigeria will not be considered since only a small area of its northern region is part of Sahel. The other ten countries, out of the 54 that make up Africa, will be responsible for 48 percent of the population increase of the entire continent during the next decade, according to the UN³.

The qualitative and quantitative data is transformed into features that allow the analysis of the population's demographic behavior to be a key point to implement initiatives of change. The demographic trends from the Population Division of the UN Department of Social and Economic Affairs show that this region of the sub-Saharan Africa will have an uncontrolled population growth that won't be comparable to the demographic increase of any region of the world. This population expansion in the Sahel will be an event that will create a tough challenge due to the fact that it is an area with very weak governance, where nations don't have the capacity to control the entire territory and neither to provide the basic goods and services to all of its inhabitants.

As a result, that broad mass of the population will have a big share of people, mostly young community, who will continue having a reduced access to basic goods and services, as well as to employment, education and resources, will eventually make it harder for the local authorities to coordinate their cooperation with the national administration and with the civil society organizations.

¹ United Nations. "Africa, the continent that grows the fastest. The world in 2100. Available at: <http://www.un.org/es/sections/issues-depth/population/index.html> Accessed: 06.03.19

² UNDP, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), (2017). "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects: The 2017 revision". Population division. DESA. <https://population.un.org/wpp/> Accessed: 06.03.19

³ Ibid.

In this respect, with the high demographic growth in the Sahel its weak governance will have to face an important number of emerging challenges, because the population increase will intensify the current issues that affect its people, such as insecurity, low level of human and economic development and political instability. Among the areas that will have critical shortages are employment absorption and education, which will get even worse since generating stability will be a tough task to do.

Here is when a cycle of increasing instability is created, in which the government's actions, security and human and economic development get linked. Essentially, the state's inability to give its citizens job offers in the formal sector will force people to survive, at times, by the means of joining illicit networks or collaborating in other informal economy areas. In this socio-economic perspective the reinforcement of criminal groups and illegal activities that take place in the Sahel region has been the subject matter of many research projects⁴ that have evaluated the jihadist terrorism as one of the main obstacles to stability at both national and regional levels⁵.

Furthermore, insecurity becomes a barrier to the human and economic development of citizens as it is shown in the many terrorist attacks to schools that have occurred. In Burkina Faso more than 300 schools have been closed since the beginning of conflict, while in Mali there have been 800 only in 2018⁶, and near 5,000 altogether since the violent period started. Regarding education, the degradation of public schools will create a pattern that is likely to include more civil war and long periods of political uncertainty⁷, especially in a society where the number of young people is increasing.

⁴ For more information on the insecurity in the Sahel region visit: LESPAGNOL, Anastasia. (2017). "Security and sustainable development in Sahel". Working paper 01/2017. Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_trabajo/2017/DIEEET01-2017_Seguridad_DesarrolloSostenible_Sahel_IFC.pdf Accessed: 22.05.19

⁵ ECHEVARRÍA, Carlos. (2018). "Mali and the rest of the western Sahel as a privileged scenario of Salafist jihadist activism". Research paper 22/2017. Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2018/DIEEEINV22-2017_Mali-SahelOccidental_Yihadismo_CEcheverria.pdf Accessed: 22.05.19

⁶ TIMES LIVE. (2018). "Hundreds of schools shot in Burkina Faso over jihadi attacks". November 19, 2018. Sunday Times. Available at: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2018-11-19-hundreds-of-schools-shut-in-burkina-faso-over-jihadi-attacks/> Accessed: 22.05.19.

⁷ MADSEN, Elizabeth, DAUMERIE, Beatrice, HARDEE Karen, (2010). "The effects of age structure on development policy and issue brief". Washington, United States. 2010. Available at: https://pai.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/SOTC_PIB.pdf Accessed: 06.05.19 p. 2.

However, the connection between conflict and the youth is not focused on age but on the opportunities to which these people have access. Therefore, the challenge is rather oriented to improving the effectiveness of the central government's support to the local authorities, in order to implement policies adapted to the population growth. Lastly, the new scenarios will become a self-evident fact of the need for the authorities to compromise and invest in the youth, in furtherance of contributing to decrease conflicts and have political stability.

A demographic foresight with explosive numbers

Ten of the countries that make up the Sahel will have a demographic growth that will put one of them, in this case Ethiopia, in the list of countries that will concentrate half of the world's population increase by the end of this century. The graph 1 shows a steady raise in the number of inhabitants of all ten countries, where Ethiopia is the nation that will have a greater expansion on the amount of people, however, it will not be the one that multiplies its current total population the most.

In Ethiopia there will be a constant population growth between 2015 and 2055, which means that the number of people will raise by the same amount every year. For example, between 2015 and 2035 the number of inhabitants in Ethiopia will go from 100 million to 150 million. The same thing will happen between 2035 and 2055 when the sum of citizens will grow from 150 to 200 million. From 2050 on, the population increase will slow down until it stagnates when it reaches the 250 million people during the 2085-2100 period⁸.

⁸ "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects". Op. Cit.

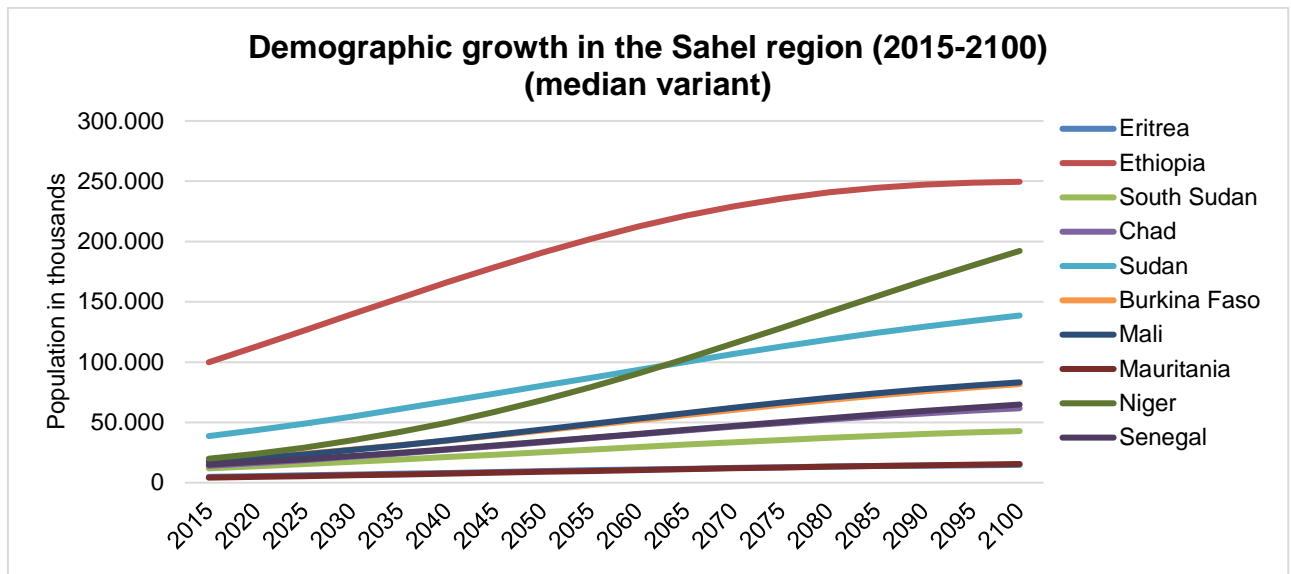


Figure 1. Demographic growth in the Sahel Region. Source: Prepared by the author based on the World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. February 2019.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia takes up an area that is close to double Spain's⁹ and in the same way its population is almost 2.3 times larger¹⁰. However, in 2050 the number of inhabitants in Ethiopia will be 4.3 times bigger than Spain's¹¹. As a matter of fact, currently Ethiopia is ranked fifth on the list of 9 countries that will concentrate half of the world's population by 2050, according to the UN's demographic projections collected in the document titled "World Population Prospects", a 2017 review. The first nations on the list are: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, and after Ethiopia comes Tanzania, United States, Uganda and Indonesia¹².

Ethiopia will multiply its population 2.4 times by the end of the 21st century, nevertheless, it will not be the one that will do so the most. Senegal and Burkina Faso will expand their number of inhabitants up to five times and Niger will even do so ten times. The Republic of the Niger, the third biggest country in the Sahel region, will go from having 19 million

⁹ The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Country comparison: Area. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/279rank.html> Accessed: 07.03.2019

¹⁰ The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Country comparison: Population. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/335rank.html> Accessed: 07.03.2019

¹¹ "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects". Op. Cit.

¹² UNDP, DESA. (2017). "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables." New York, 2017. Working paper. No. ESA/P/WP/248.

people to 192, from whom 120 million will have from 15 to 65 years of age¹³. Thus, with the demographic growth the working age population will increase, but this time it will do so exponentially.

The region's explosive growth of its demographic dividend

If the Department of Social and Economic Affairs from the UN continues using the same pattern to elaborate the statistics, Ethiopia will be the country that will see a higher increase in its demographic dividend¹⁴ from now until 2055. In 2055 the working age group will be 67 percent of the population. Meanwhile, Niger will have the smallest working age community of all ten countries because it will represent the 49 of the totals. However, from 2055 on, Niger, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and South Sudan will see a faster growth on its demographic dividend¹⁵.

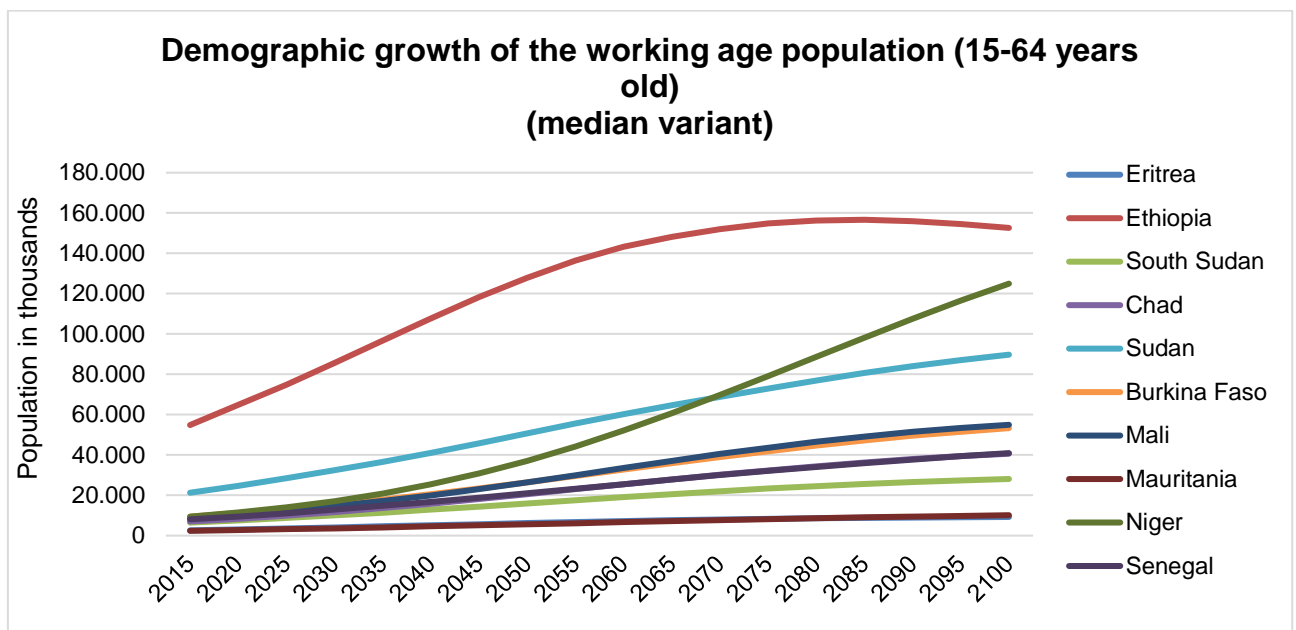


Figure 2. Demographic growth of the working age population. Source: Prepared by the author based on the World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. February 2019.

¹³ "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects". Op. Cit.

¹⁴ Demographic dividend: The working age population (15-64 years old).

¹⁵ "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects". Op. Cit.

In Niger and Sudan, the total number of inhabitants aged 15 to 64 will go from growing one to three million people, to five million every year, which can be seen in graph 2, where Niger has the largest slope among all¹⁶. In fact, Niger will increase its working age population by 80 million until they reach the 120 million people by 2095, which will end up being almost 67 percent of its citizens¹⁷.

However, in order to understand graphic 2 it is important to take into account that in the Sahel region not every women aged 15 to 64 are part of the workforce. Sudan has the lowest percentage of working age women that take part of the labor market with only 24 percent, according to 2018 data from the International Labor Organization (ILO) which excludes women with high income. After Sudan comes Mauritania with 32 percent of its population; then Senegal with 48 percent and Burkina Faso with 59 percent¹⁸.

The absence of women in the workforce is determined by the high fertility rate. In the ten countries of Sahel the average fertility is 4,9 children per woman, which goes up to 7.1 children in Niger¹⁹. This is due to the fact that women have to stay home to do chores and take care of the young ones that is why unless families' sizes get reduced the situation will remain the same.

Although this is a common scenario for the Sahel Population, the UN has registered that there is a percentage of people who would like to delay childbearing but do not access any contraceptive method. For instance, in Ethiopia the number of people who desire to delay births reaches the 21 percent of its inhabitants. The possibility of deciding upon the family size remains an idealization for the Sahel region. The majority of the ten countries either don't have any data registered or only seven percent of its people can decide when to start a family and the size it will have. The states that are the exception are Ethiopia, Chad and Burkina Faso with a 45, 27 and 20 percent, accordingly²⁰.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ International Labor Organization (ILO). Work market indicators. World Bank. Available at: https://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/SL.TLF.ACTI.FE.ZS?end=2018&name_desc=false&start=2018&view=map Accessed: 07.03.2019

¹⁹ UNDP. United Nations Population Fund. (2019). Panel of the global population. Fertility rate. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard> Accessed: 23.05.2019

²⁰ UNDP. United Nations Population Fund. (2019). Panel of the global population. Decision making regarding sexual and reproductive health. Available at: <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population-dashboard> Accessed: 10.05.2019

The vast amount of people, women and men, who are available to join the workforce is going to require more job opportunities in growth industries. Otherwise, the lack of work vacancies in the formal sector will result in the expansion of the illegal economy since it will be their only source of income. Moreover, the enhancement of the cocaine trade in West Africa²¹ will make the governments spend a big amount of their national security budget on the fight against drug trafficking. Consequently, the strengthening of the mafias will cause a huge budget decrease, which will block the government's efforts of investing other areas that could contribute to stabilize their countries.

Indeed, the growth on the demographic dividend will intensify the dynamics of the cycle in which government, security and human and economic development are connected. This can occur in either a positive or negative way, in other words, the demographic dividend's increase can act for or against the stabilization of the countries. For instance, the demographic dividend will have a negative effect if the government is not able to provide new jobs needed from the formal sector to the huge amount of people who will be available to work. This will cause the discontent and the despair to grow, which will eventually result in the escalation of insecurity.

Therefore, the challenge that will face the government will be dealing with a growing group of young men and women with no work opportunities. Clearly, in an environment of frequent political crisis and a low level of human development, the large percentage of the population younger than 30 years of age will be a potential factor of political instability for the governance in the region.

Consequences of an uncontrolled demographic growth in the Sahel region

A low Human Development Index

The population's trends in the Sahel that has been presented will have an impact on the quality of human development of their countries. Indeed, people will live longer, however, it is important to question if they will be well educated and if they will have better life opportunities.

²¹ AFFA'A-MINDZIE, Mireille, PERRY Chris. (2013). "Mali and the Sahel-Sahara: from crisis management to sustainable strategy". New York: International Peace Institute. November 2013. Available at: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2358138 Accessed: 30.05.2019

Niger is the country with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI)²², with 0.354, the third lowest nation is South Sudan, with 0,388 and the fourth lowest is Chad, with 0.404, according to 2017 UN indicators²³. The most remarkable change has been South Sudan's, in 2015 it held the seventh place in the list of countries with the lowest HDIs of the world and in 2017 it became the second country with the lowest HDI. This decrease in the HDI occurred with a population growth of 2,4 percent (between 2015 and 2017)²⁴, for which it may be thought that in the next years the situation will become much worse because there is an expected demographic growth of 37.3 percent between 2017 and 2030²⁵.

As a result, the school outlook of the ten Sahel countries includes very low secondary education enrollment ratios. Senegal has had the highest rate, with 48 percent of its children population, who has the age to go to secondary education, enrolled, and South Soudan has had the lowest, with a 10 percent of its kids enlisted, between the years of 2012 and 2017²⁶. The lack of youth education contributes to the high unemployment rates, as it can be seen in the data registered for the percentage of people, between 15 to 24 years old, who do not work or study. For example, in countries such as Mauritania and Senegal the numbers reach the 39.5²⁷ and 36.2²⁸ percent of this age group, respectively.

In this context, the negative prospects are based on data from the UN's 2015 Human Development Report²⁹, which calculates that as from the year of 2018 the percentage of young people from Sub-Saharan Africa, who are between 20 and 24 years old and have

²² Human Development Index (HDI): "a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and have a decent standard of living." UNDP. Human Development Index, (2016) Available at: <http://desarrollohumano.org.gt/desarrollo-humano/concepto/> Accessed: 02.05.2019

²³ UNDP. (2018). "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 statistical update". Communications Development Incorporated. New York. P. 29.

²⁴ The following documents were used to calculate the numbers: "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 statistical update". P. 49 and "Human Development Report 2016" (2016). P. 225.

²⁵ "Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 statistical update". Op. Cit. P. 49.

²⁶ Ibid. P. 57.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 64.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ UNDP. (2016). "Human Development Report 2016". Communications Development Incorporated. New York. P. 1-286.

attended school less than 4 years, should decrease in an 18.2 percent every year³⁰. This target has been formulated to fulfill the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in specific the goal number 4.3 which proclaims that all boys and girls have to receive free and quality primary and secondary education that will ensure them a strong base on which to build their future. However, in order to achieve this the region needs to work on its investments and on attaining stability. Yet, the current high level of insecurity will hamper these measures.

A potential factor of instability: the youth

In the Sahel's region age structure, there is a factor that stands out from the rest: the large percentage of the population younger than 24 years old. There is a quite high probability that armed conflict rises in a country with an age structure where the young ones, who are less than 24 years old, are the 60 percent of the citizens³¹. This possibility is added up to the lack of human development, since the less education and work opportunities the youth has, the more the connection between them and conflict will strengthen.

For example, in Mali, where the 18th of April 2019 the prime minister and its whole cabinet resigned after the massacre of 160 Fulani herders by the other ethnic group, Dogon, the amount of people younger than 24 will account for 66 percent of its total inhabitants by 2020³². Furthermore, in countries such as Burkina Faso and Niger, where there is a fair amount of terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic Magreb, Ansar al Din and AQIM, by 2020 the population this age will be the 65 and 69 percent of this country's total citizens³³, respectively.

The rise of the youth creates a higher proportion of young Islamic terrorists that will join these terrorist groups, some of who also live and interact with the local population. The

³⁰ "Human Development Report 2016". Op. Cit. P. 164.

³¹ "The effects of age structure on development policy and issue brief". Op. Cit. P. 2.

³² The following document was used to calculate the numbers: "Probabilistic population projections based on the World Population Prospects: The 2017 revision": Op. Cit.

³³ Ibidem.

fact that the young terrorists get socially mixed with the civilians will reinforce the diffuse and endogenous threat that will have the governments to control terrorism³⁴.

At the same time, consolidated jihadist groups such as the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) in Mali, will have more young people at their disposal to continue with the shipping of new trainees to foreign countries such as Syria and Libya, as has been the case since 2014³⁵. Thus, the lack of job opportunities is a factor that will facilitate terrorist recruitment.

On account of the poor conditions that their nations are offering them, the need to migrate will rise. Despite the fact that the vast majority of migrations in Africa occur inside the continent, the other countries capacity for immigrant's absorption is limited. As a consequence, 20 percent of those people will look to migrate to Europe, which will entail an amount of almost 200 million people in the next 30 years³⁶.

Therefore, it is likely that in a very few years the African displacement towards Europe reaches similar numbers to the ones caused by the Mexican migration in the United States between 1980 and 2015, which hit the 6.6 million³⁷. In order for this to occur the Sahel's region will need to obtain the level of development that Mexico had by the end of the 70s. Now, even though one could say that the countries have worked vigorously to increment their economic growth, since according to data from the World Bank, the Sahel's GDP per capital went from 0.9 to 3.3³⁸, between 2015 and 2017, they still certainly need to achieve a higher level of development.

³⁴ FUENTE COBO, Ignacio. (2018). "Jihadism in the Sahel: the expansion of the dark threat". Analysis paper. 12/2018. Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2018/DIEEEA12-2018_Yihadismo_Sahel_IFC.pdf Accessed: 26.05.19 P. 7.

³⁵ Ibid. P. 19.

³⁶ Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (2018). "Overview of geopolitical tendencies, 2040 prospects". Official publication. December 2018. Available at: http://www.ieeee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Nacional/2019/panorama_de_tendencias_geopoliticas_2040.pdf Accessed: 28.05.19 P. 54.

³⁷ Office of immigration statistics (2018). "Population estimates. Illegal alien population residing in the United States: January 2015". December 2018. Homeland Security. United States. Available at: https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/18_1214_PLCY_pops-est-report.pdf Accessed: 23.05.19. P. 2.

³⁸ World Bank. World Development Indicators. Database available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/source/world-development-indicators> Accessed: 23.05.19

Conclusions

The Sahel's explosive demographic growth will definitely have an impact over people's daily lives. It is crucial that governments execute development strategies that integrate programs and policies that can transform the population's age structure and that can help the youth. In this respect, this paper formulated that one of the ways that the excessive demographic growth could be regulated is through putting an emphasis on family planning.

A region's age structure, where youth takes the largest percentage, can represent an advantage to the economic growth of their countries. However, in the case of the Sahel's region the young people will be a potential factor of instability due to the lack of job opportunities and education, which leaves them with very few options. Therefore, it is required that the government invests in the young population, which will help it build a relationship of trust and cooperation with its citizens and improve its legitimacy.

Certainly, immediate actions need to be taken because as generations take part the discontent will spread and with it will do the disorder and the despair. As it has been said, under these circumstances the citizens will be more vulnerable to see radicalization as a place to find answers regarding the reason for them to be in their difficult situation. Besides, radicalization will most likely be their only feasible source of income and their last resort.

In conclusion, there is no doubt that the Sahel's demographic explosion is a challenge that goes beyond its local nature to become a regional and global matter. Consequently, addressing this issue requires a concerted action by the international community.

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