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Senior Officials and Experts for West
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Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

**Review of the implementation of regional
and international development agendas
and special initiatives**

**Report on progress made by West African States towards attainment of
the Sustainable Development Goals**

* ECA/SRO-NA/ICSOE/39/1–ECA/SRO-WA/ICSOE/27/1.



I. Introduction

1. More than half the time allocated for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has passed, yet the world, in general, and Africa, in particular, are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. As set out in the 2024 report of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on the progress made in achieving the Goals in Africa (E/ECA/STATCOM/9/2024/7), at the current rate, African States are on track to achieve just 3 per cent of the targets under the Goals for which measurement is possible, while there are signs of regression in relation to 27 per cent of the targets. Progress made towards achieving the Goals varies significantly, depending on the Goal or target in question and on the country, with many developing countries lagging behind.

2. One major contributor to the lack of progress is the development financing gap, which stood at an estimated \$2.5 trillion per year before the start of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and had reached \$4 trillion by April 2024.¹ The current global financial architecture is, along with the intense geopolitical tensions and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the chief obstacle to progress with the Goals.

3. The first 10-year implementation plan under Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, of the African Union was completed in 2023. African States and institutions are now implementing the second 10-year plan, under which seven ambitions, referred to as “moonshots” and inspired by the seven aspirations under Agenda 2063, will be pursued in the period 2024–2033.

II. Tracking progress

4. In the present chapter, analysis of the subregional trends in West Africa is set out, with a focus on Goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 14, 16 and 17. The rationale for this focus is that Goals 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17 will be considered at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2025, while the Subregional Office for West Africa is prioritizing Goals 1, 2 and 16.

5. As shown in the *Sustainable Development Report, 2024*,² the world average Sustainable Development Goals Index score increased only modestly between 2015 and 2023, from 64 to 66. A State’s score on the Index shows its degree of progress towards achieving the Goals, with a score of 0 being a lack of any progress at all and 100 representing complete attainment of all 17 Goals. In West Africa, Cabo Verde tops the ranking with a score of 68.2, followed by Senegal, with 63.4, and Ghana, with 63.0, while 73 per cent of West African States had scores that exceeded the regional average of 54.0; moreover, the score of Cabo Verde exceeds the global average. Even the best-performing States in the subregion remain some distance from achieving the Goals by 2030, however.

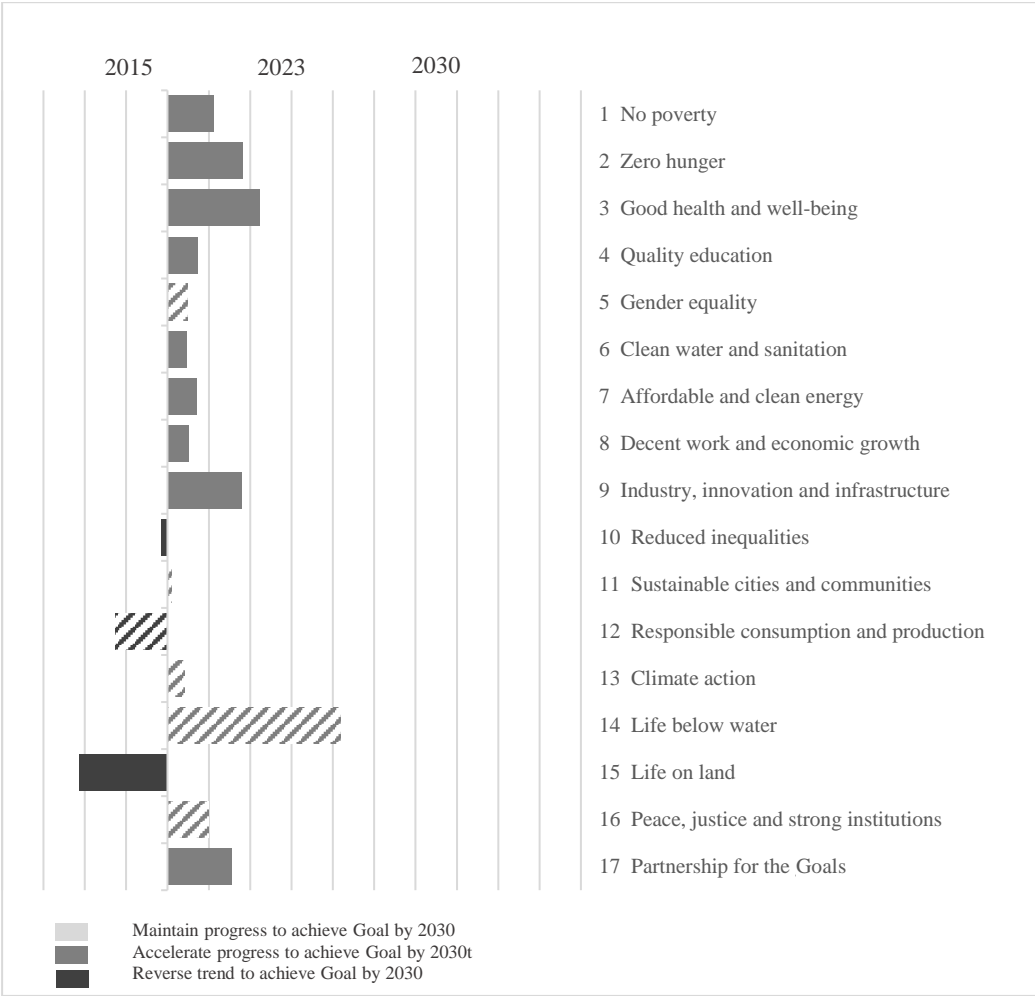
6. Progress with the Goals has been uneven, but insufficient in all cases. In figure I, the average progress made towards achieving each Goal by West African States by 2030 is shown. As shown in the figure, States in the subregion had not, in relation to any of

¹ *Financing for Development Report, 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

² Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guillaume Lafortune and Grayson Fuller, *Sustainable Development Report, 2024* (Dublin: Dublin University Press, 2024).

the Goals, achieved the degree of progress that should have been made by 2023 if the 2030 deadline is to be respected.

Figure I
Overview of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in West Africa, 2023
 (Degree of progress made towards achieving each Sustainable Development Goal by 2030)



Note: Where the bar for a given Goal is in solid colour, full data are available; where the bar for a Goal is hatched, data are available for only a limited number of indicators and for certain years.

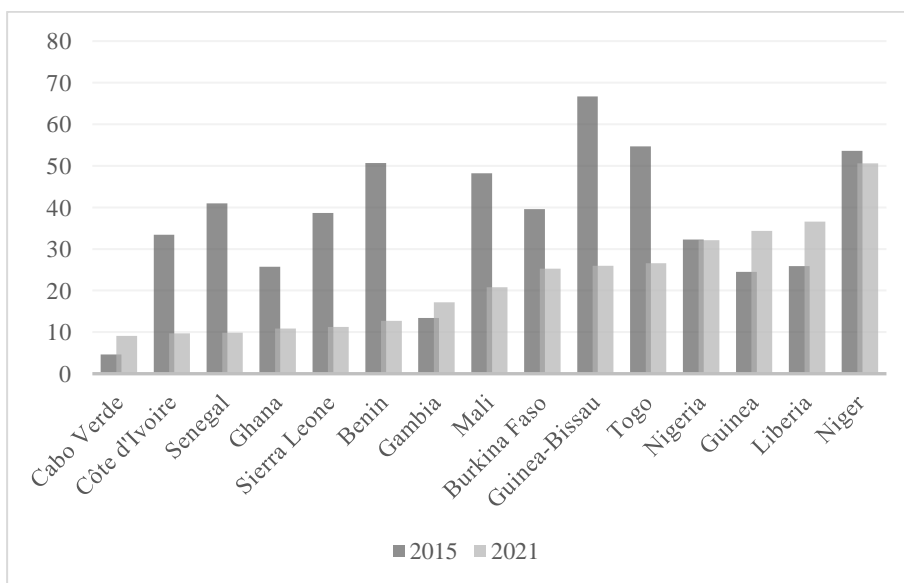
Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

A. Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

7. The poverty reduction policies and programmes implemented by West African States, with the support of development partners, were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022, and have been hampered since 2022 by the food and energy crises caused by the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

8. The robust economic growth recorded by West African States in the first two decades of the twenty-first century substantially reduced rates of extreme poverty in the subregion, which decreased, on average, from 51.3 per cent in 2003 to 35.4 per cent in 2015, 27.3 per cent in 2018 and 27.0 per cent in 2021.³ As shown in figure II, although most States in the subregion reduced their rates of extreme poverty between 2015 and 2021, Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea and Liberia recorded increases. The increases were likely due to the effects of the multifaceted crises mentioned above. In figure II, countries are listed in ascending order of the proportion of the population below the international poverty line in 2021.

Figure II
Proportion of population below the international poverty line of 2.15 United States dollars per person per day, 2015 and 2021
 (Percentage)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

9. While average real per capita GDP growth in the subregion was as high as 4.00 per cent in the period 2011–2019, it declined to 2.75 per cent over the period 2020–2023, falling to as low as -0.70 per cent in 2020.⁴ Moreover, one of the economic effects of the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine has been the severe erosion of purchasing power by inflation, which averaged 13.0 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa over the period 2020–2023, compared with 8.3 per cent over the period 2011–2019.⁵

³ ECA calculations, achieved by weighting country poverty rates provided by the World Bank. World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

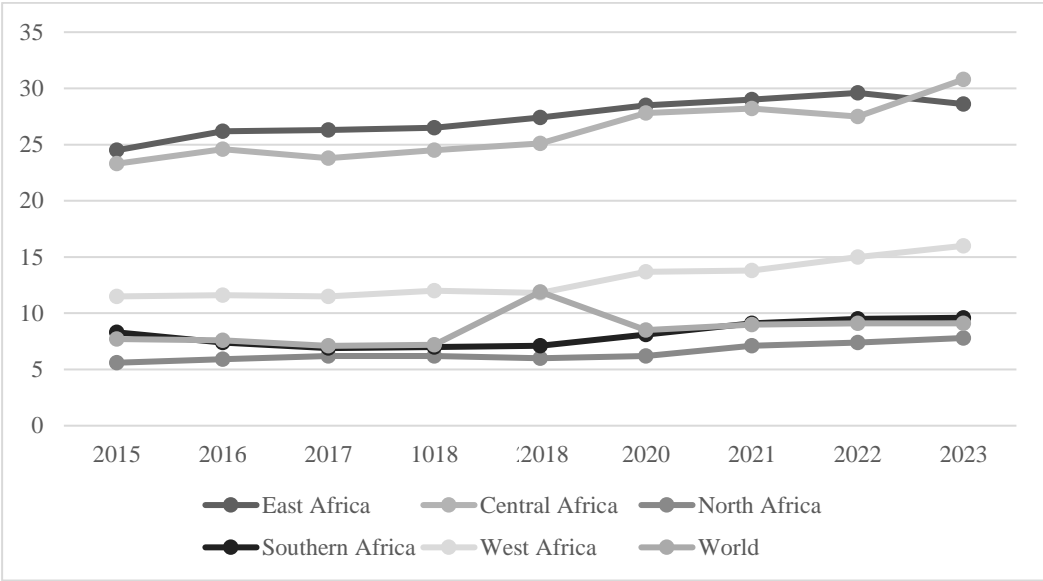
⁴ International Monetary Fund (IMF), “Real per capita GDP growth”, Africa Regional Economic Outlook, April 2024 database. Available at www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/AFRREO (accessed on 12 August 2024).

⁵ IMF, “Regional economic outlook: sub-Saharan Africa, April 2024 – a Tepid and Pricey Recovery” (Washington, D.C., 2024).

B. Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

10. As shown in figure III, levels of undernutrition remained relatively stable across all subregions between 2015 and 2023, with levels throughout Africa trending slightly upward towards the end of the period. Overall, West Africa ranked third in terms of food security, below North Africa and Southern Africa, although the situation deteriorated slightly from 2020 onwards. East and Central Africa faced the most severe undernutrition challenges.

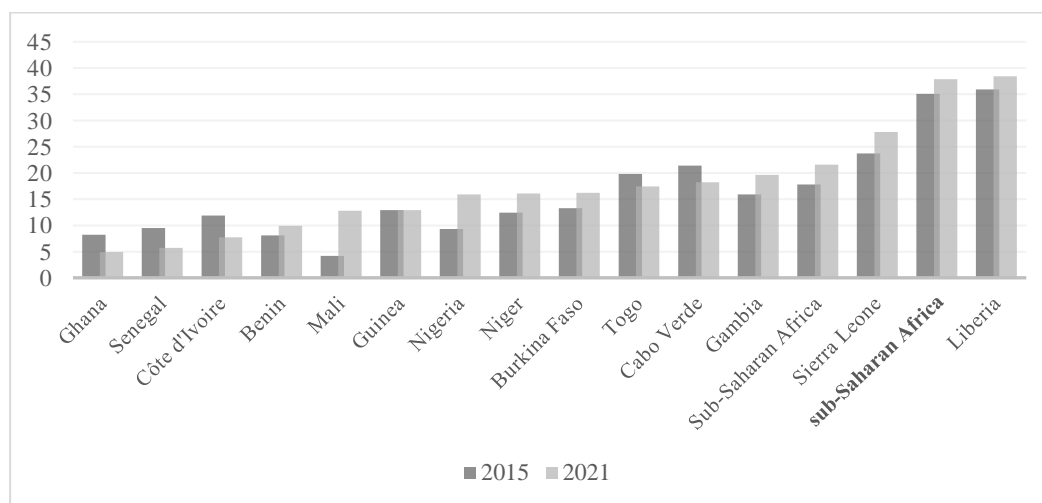
Figure III
Prevalence of undernutrition in the population by subregion, 2015–2023
 (Percentage)



Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

11. As shown in figure IV, the rate of undernutrition worsened in 9 of the 15 countries in West Africa between 2015 and 2021; in Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone, the increases were above the average for sub-Saharan Africa. In the cases of Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Nigeria, the increased undernutrition rates were partly due to the effects on the food supply of the particular challenges that they face: security threats, such as terrorism and conflict, and climate shocks, such as floods and droughts. With the exceptions of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana and Senegal, all of which recorded undernutrition rates of less than 10 per cent in 2021, it will probably be impossible for West African States to eradicate undernutrition by 2030 in the absence of robust, targeted reforms and strategies, including action-oriented policies to increase agricultural yields and productivity, and to effectively address the threats to security and social cohesion faced by individual countries.

Figure IV
Prevalence of undernutrition in the population by country, 2015–2021
 (Percentage)



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAOSTAT database, available at www.fao.org/faostat (accessed on 13 August 2024).

12. In 10 of 15 West African countries, more than 50 per cent of the population is moderately or severely food-insecure.⁶ As a result, it is crucial to accelerate progress towards meeting, by 2030, the commitments made under the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa and the Malabo Declaration on Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods in order to increase investment in the agricultural sector. As of the period 2019–2021, only the Governments of Benin and Sierra Leone had achieved the target of allocating at least 10 per cent of public expenditure to agriculture, although the Governments of Burkina Faso and Mali were each allocating over 9 per cent.⁷

13. Cereal production for the 2023/24 agricultural season in Central and West Africa is estimated to be 12 million tons lower than for the previous season, resulting in a 2 per cent reduction in per capita cereal availability. In addition, 55 million people in Central and West Africa will be food-insecure in 2024, in particular during the June–August lean season, which represents 4 million people more than was forecast in November 2023; the number of food-insecure people in the two subregions has quadrupled since 2019.⁸ The largest production declines were the 7.2 per cent recorded in Chad, 5.7 per cent in Nigeria and 5.5 per cent in the Niger, and were chiefly due, in all cases, to insecurity and armed conflict.⁹ Such insecurity has led to mass population displacements in Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad basin, both in the Sahel, which disrupt transhumance routes, disturb food supply chains, and reduce cereal

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, FAOSTAT database, available at www.fao.org/faostat (accessed on 13 August 2024).

⁷ ECA, World Food Programme (WFP), Economic Community of West African States and Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, presentation given at a preliminary event of the tenth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, 22 April 2024.

⁸ WFP, “Worsening hunger grips West and Central Africa amid persistent conflict and economic turmoil”, 12 April 2024.

⁹ Famine Early Warning Systems Network, “West Africa: food security outlook, February–September 2024” (Washington, D.C., 2024).

production and availability, all of which degrades or destroys livelihoods while simultaneously increasing demand for food, as the humanitarian needs in the subregion rise.

C. Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

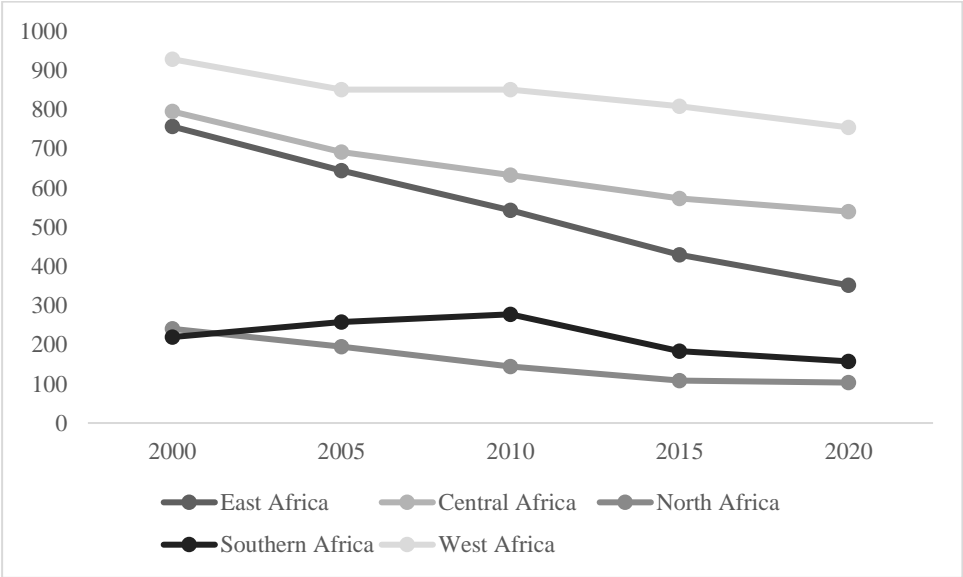
14. In West Africa, progress is being made across all targets under Goal 3. Significant acceleration is required, however, if the targets are to be met and, therefore, health and well-being are to be achieved for the entire population of the subregion.

1. Maternal mortality ratio

15. Maternal mortality is a critical health indicator that reflects the quality of healthcare systems, in particular in terms of maternal and reproductive health services. In 2020, the global maternal mortality ratio was 223 deaths per 100,000 live births, more than three times the level stipulated in Sustainable Development Goal target 3.1: by 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births. Sub-Saharan Africa accounted for approximately 70 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide in 2020.¹⁰

16. Despite the very high level in 2020, substantial reductions in the maternal mortality ratio were achieved in all African subregions between 2000 and 2020, as shown in figure V. Nevertheless, the levels achieved fall far short of the maternal mortality ratio of 70, required under target 3.1. Throughout the period 2000–2020, West Africa was the subregion with the highest maternal mortality ratio, despite a decline of about 18.7 per cent.

Figure V
Maternal mortality ratio by subregion, 2000–2020
 (Number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births)



Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

17. From 2015 to 2020, most West African States made progress with reducing maternal mortality: notable improvements were recorded in Guinea (from 649 maternal deaths per

¹⁰ World Health Organization, “Maternal mortality”, 26 April 2024.

100,000 live births to 553), Senegal (from 321 to 261) and Sierra Leone (from 588 to 443). Nonetheless, increases were experienced in some countries, such as Guinea-Bissau (from 713 to 725).¹¹ With a view to further reducing maternal mortality rates across the subregion, continued efforts to sustain and enhance maternal healthcare services are required.

2. Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel

18. At the global level, the rate of skilled birth attendance increased from 80 per cent of births in 2015 to 86 per cent in 2023. In sub-Saharan Africa, however, only 73 per cent of births were attended by skilled personnel in 2023, the lowest rate in the world.¹²

19. The level of skilled birth attendance increased greatly in all African subregions between 2015 and 2020. Significant subregional disparities remain, however. At 96.9 per cent and 93.4 per cent, respectively, Southern and North Africa had much higher levels in 2020 than Central, East and West Africa, at 74.7 per cent, 70.5 per cent and 59.1 per cent, respectively. The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel in West Africa increased from 51.8 per cent in 2015 to 59.1 per cent in 2020.¹³ Despite the progress, West Africa remains the subregion with the lowest coverage and, therefore, targeted efforts are needed to improve maternal health services in the subregion.

3. Under-5 mortality rate

20. In 2021, 5 million children worldwide died before reaching 5 years of age, with nearly 40 per cent of those deaths – approximately 1.9 million – occurring in Central and West Africa.¹⁴ While progress was made in all African subregions on reducing under-5 mortality rates between 2000 and 2022, the extent of the progress varied. As shown in figure VI, West Africa was the subregion with the highest average under-5 mortality rate, although it was nearly halved over the course of the period. The five largest reductions were in: Cabo Verde, with 32.8 per cent; Sierra Leone, with 28.3 per cent; Senegal, with 27.3 per cent; Ghana, with 23.5 per cent; and the Gambia, with 23.4 per cent.¹⁵ Despite these positive trends, however, under-5 mortality rates remain high in some countries.

¹¹ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

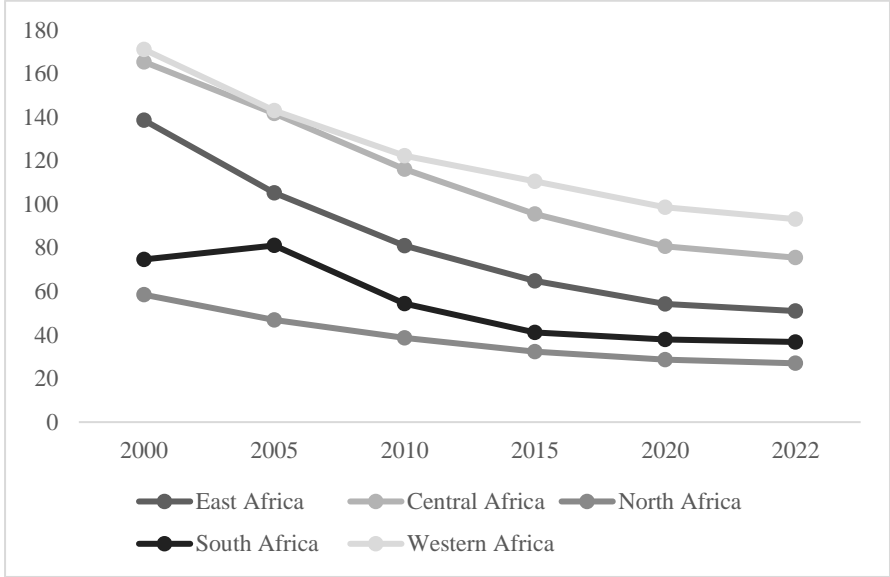
¹² *The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

¹³ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database.

¹⁴ United Nations Children's Fund, "Levels and trends of child mortality in West and Central Africa" (New York, 2023).

¹⁵ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database.

Figure VI
Under-5 mortality rate by subregion, 2000–2022
 (Number of deaths between birth and the fifth birthday per 1,000 live births)



Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

21. Gender-disaggregated data on under-5 mortality rates, the collection of which also improved, provide important insights into child health disparities and the effectiveness of health interventions. Such disaggregated data show that, over the period 2000–2022, the under-5 mortality rate for girls fell by 46.3 per cent, compared with 44.9 per cent for boys. Continued efforts to improve healthcare services, maternal health and early childhood interventions are essential, with a view to sustaining and further accelerating these positive trends.

D. Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

22. Data gaps continue to hamper the assessment of progress under Goal 5. It can be discerned from the available data that intimate partner violence against women and girls is a pervasive issue across all West African countries, with the highest level of such violence being reported in Liberia, where it affects 20.8 per cent of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 years and older, and the lowest level reported in the Gambia, where it affects 10.0 per cent. Those statistics underscore the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to combat gender-based violence, including prevention, protection and support services for victims. It should be noted, however, that not all cases of violence are reported; the number of unreported cases depends on the cultural context of and taboos in a given society.

23. Women’s representation is critical to promoting and speeding up progress relating to gender equality and empowerment. The representation of women in West African national parliaments is increasing overall, with notable progress in Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, stagnation and even regression can be observed in some countries, such as the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Nigeria, demonstrating the need for intensified efforts to promote gender equality in political representation. Moreover, while the average for West Africa is improving, it still lags behind the continental and global

averages.¹⁶ Continued advocacy and policy interventions to support women's political participation are therefore necessary.

E. Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

24. Since 2015, economic growth, worldwide and in Africa, has been strongly influenced by major events, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic and the food and energy crises caused by the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Despite these exogenous shocks, West Africa has demonstrated greater resilience than Central and Southern Africa, with swifter recovery of economic activity and with faster growth. It is clear from trends in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita growth, however, that West Africa, like the other subregions, remains far from achieving the target of at least 7 per cent per annum sustained growth by 2030.¹⁷

25. Individual countries have also suffered the negative effects of regional and global exogenous shocks. As shown in figure VII, all West African countries, apart from Benin and Guinea, have experienced a decline in average per capita GDP growth since 2015, with negative growth being recorded in Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone over the same period, partly as a result of the combined effects of the Ebola virus disease epidemic of 2014 to 2016, the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022, and the ongoing energy and food crises. No West African State is on track to achieve the target of at least 7 per cent per annum sustained growth by 2030. At 2.43 per cent, on average, economic growth was closer to the target in the period 2005–2015 than it has been subsequently, when it has averaged 1.56 per cent.¹⁸

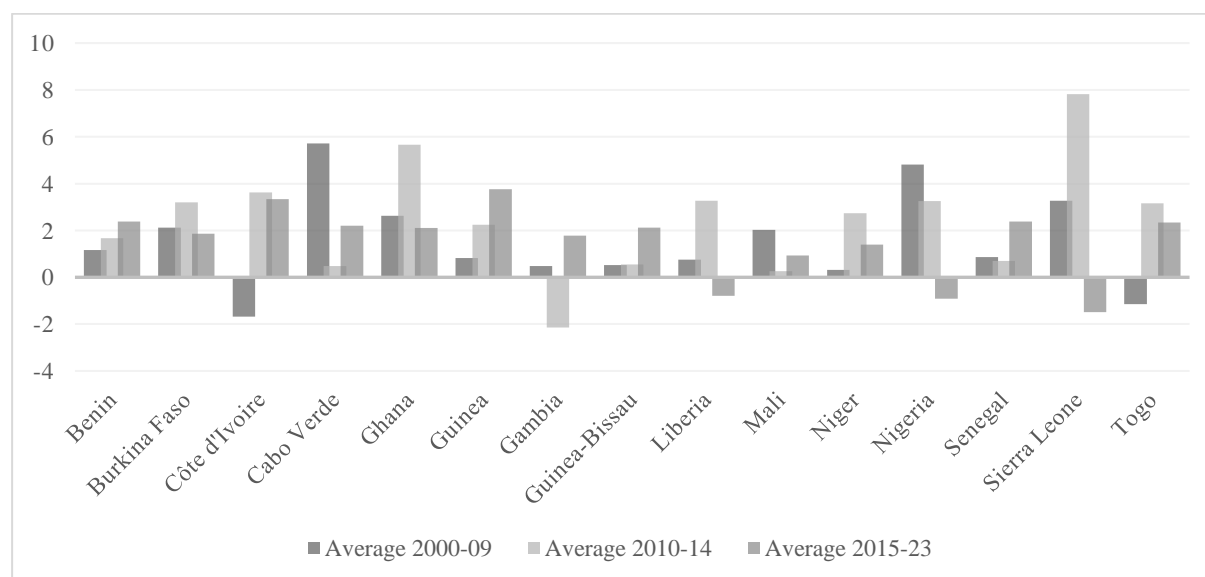
26. Additional structural challenges contributing to economic underperformance include the high frequency of climate shocks, mainly floods and droughts; low agricultural productivity; the need for modernization of industry, which is complicated by prohibitive factor costs; a huge deficit in economic infrastructure; and persistent inequality.

¹⁶ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database.

¹⁷ United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database.

¹⁸ World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

Figure VII
Average gross domestic product per capita growth, 2000–2023
 (Percentage)



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

27. Economic growth cannot be sustained, inclusive or sustainable if the quality of human capital, which is a determining factor in productivity, innovation and technological progress, is not improved. In 2018, 64 per cent of the population of Central and West Africa was under 24 years of age¹⁹ and there is no reason to think that this proportion has changed significantly. Such a proportion represents enormous potential for increased production and productivity, provided that mean years of schooling, quality of education, healthcare, skills and economic empowerment are sufficiently enhanced through consistent investment.

28. According to recent statistics for the period 2018–2023, on average 33 per cent of West Africans between 15 and 24 years of age are not in education, employment or training, with rates exceeding 40 per cent in Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Liberia and the Niger. In four fifths of countries in the subregion, more than 24 per cent of young people are not in education, employment or training. Furthermore, as data for the period 2017–2023 show, more than 86 per cent of jobs in West Africa are informal.²⁰ The predominance of informal employment undermines productivity and, ultimately, sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

29. To bridge the human capital gap, Governments should both invest more in young people and address the growing insecurity and violent extremism in the Sahel.

¹⁹ United Nations Population Fund, *Adolescents and Youth Report: West and Central Africa* (New York, 2018).

²⁰ Our World in Data, Share of Young People not in Education, Employment or Training database. Available at <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/youth-not-in-education-employment-training?region=Africa> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

F. Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

30. The assessment of Goal 14 remains difficult, as most States in the subregion do not collect data on the indicators by which the associated targets could be measured. West African States therefore need to build the capacity of their national statistical systems.

31. As shown in the table, establishing marine and coastal protected areas is one major action that many West African States have taken to preserve their marine ecosystems. Despite challenges hindering the sustainable use of marine resources and the protection of biodiversity, such as the dependence of a sizeable proportion of the subregion’s population on its fishery resources, the establishment of protected areas is an essential first step. The distribution of protected areas across different West African States reflects their distinct conservation strategies, each tailored to a country’s specific geographical, economic and environmental situation. The low total number of protected areas in some countries suggests a need for increased conservation efforts in the subregion.

Number of marine and coastal protected areas by country

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of coastal protected areas</i>	<i>Number of marine protected areas</i>	<i>Total</i>
Benin	0	6	6
Cabo Verde	1	23	24
Côte d’Ivoire	14	1	15
Gambia	8	7	15
Ghana	6	0	6
Guinea	0	6	6
Guinea-Bissau	0	6	6
Liberia	2	1	3
Nigeria	20	4	24
Senegal	3	20	23
Sierra Leone	0	5	5
Togo	2	0	2

Note: Since Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger are landlocked, they are not included in this table.

Abbreviation: “..” = data unavailable.

Source: International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, *State of West African Marine Protected Areas, 2022* (Gland, Switzerland, 2024).

32. A number of bodies have played a role in increasing cooperation and coordination among Governments in the subregion on sustainable fisheries management, including combating illegal fishing. The Subregional Fisheries Commission, which was established in 1985, comprises Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, Senegal and Sierra Leone. The Fisheries Committee for the West Central Gulf of Guinea, which was founded in 2007, is made up of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Togo. The Programme for Improved Regional Fisheries Governance in Western Africa was a European Union-funded initiative, implemented by the Economic Community of West African States between 2018 and 2023.²¹

²¹ European Union, “Improved regional fisheries governance in Western Africa”, 31 May 2024.

G. Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

33. Since the early 2010s, instability has been spreading across Central and West Africa, in particular the Sahel. Liptako-Gourma and the Lake Chad basin, both in the Sahel, are now the joint epicentres of terrorism, violent extremism and armed conflict in the subregion. In 2023, the number of deaths caused by terrorism in the Sahel accounted for 47 per cent of the world total.²² The instability is disrupting social cohesion and overwhelming national institutions, making it difficult for Governments to uphold the rule of law. An effective response to the phenomenon will necessarily involve States within the subregion pooling their efforts and a non-partisan intervention strategy implemented by regional institutions.

34. The number of persons displaced by terrorism, armed conflict and violent extremism exploded between 2018 and 2023, increasing by around 100 per cent in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, and by around 50 per cent in Nigeria; the situation in Ghana and Senegal also worsened during that period.²³ The fiscal space of States in the subregion is being eroded by the need to bear most of the resulting humanitarian burden: in June 2024, more than 3.12 million displaced persons were recorded in Liptako-Gourma, 92 per cent of them located in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger,²⁴ and more than 6 million in the Lake Chad basin, 74 per cent of them located in Nigeria alone.²⁵ The scope of the security issues in these parts of the Sahel extends beyond the continent's borders: they form part of the main transit corridor for migrants heading to Europe.

35. In addition to undermining peace and social cohesion, such insecurity presents a significant obstacle to structural investments and sustainable development initiatives, as the limited funds available for such projects are diverted into the humanitarian response, increased demand for social services, and rising defence and security expenditure. For example, between 2003 and 2022, military spending increased more than fivefold in Burkina Faso, Mali, the Niger and Togo, rising from 0.9 per cent of GDP to more than 5.0 per cent.²⁶

36. Despite the efforts made by States since 2019 to strengthen their national civil registration systems, in particular regarding the registration of births and deaths, a large proportion of children born in the subregion still lack a birth certificate. The proportion of the population lacking a birth certificate ranges from over 50 per cent in Guinea-Bissau to less than 10 per cent in Cabo Verde and Sierra Leone.²⁷

²² Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund, "Mali", 2023.

²³ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, IDMC Data Portal. Available at www.internal-displacement.org/database/displacement-data/ (accessed on 14 August 2024).

²⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Situation in central Sahel, Liptako-Gourma and coastal countries: monthly dashboard No. 50".

²⁵ IOM, "Situation in Lake Chad basin: monthly dashboard No. 65" (Le Grand-Saconnex, Switzerland, 2024).

²⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database. Available at www.sipri.org/databases/milex (accessed on 15 August 2024).

²⁷ United Nations Children's Fund, "Birth registration", UNICEF Data. Available at <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/> (accessed on 15 August 2024).

H. Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

1. Total government revenue as a proportion of gross domestic product

37. The Governments of Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Niger and Senegal reported that their revenue as a proportion of GDP declined from 2020 to 2022. In all West African countries, government revenue as a proportion of GDP was below the global average of 33.2 per cent in 2022.²⁸ This can be attributed to the economic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and climate change.

2. Net official development assistance, total and to least developed countries, as a proportion of the gross national income of donors of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

38. In 2023, official development assistance (ODA) from members of the Development Assistance Committee reached \$223.7 billion, representing 0.37 per cent of their combined gross national income. This was a 1.8 per cent increase in real terms since 2022 and a 47.0 per cent increase since 2015.²⁹ One notable component of the total increase was \$25.9 billion allocated to humanitarian aid.³⁰

39. Between 2015 and 2022, ODA to eight West African countries increased, while ODA allocated to the other seven countries in the subregion decreased; in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the decreases were significant. Most States in the subregion saw ODA increase in 2020, relative to both 2010 and 2019, which was mainly attributed to a substantial rise in budget support and lending from international financial institutions to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹

3. Volume of remittances (in United States dollars) as a proportion of total gross domestic product

40. Remittances continue to play a crucial role in supporting the current accounts of various African States grappling with food insecurity, supply chain disruptions, drought, floods and debt servicing challenges. In 2023, remittance flows to sub-Saharan Africa totalled \$54 billion, a 0.3 per cent reduction since 2022. In Cabo Verde, the Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia, remittance inflows represented more than 10 per cent of GDP, making those countries especially reliant on remittances. In Nigeria, remittance inflows decreased in 2023, relative to both 2015 and 2022. In Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Liberia, Mali and the Niger, meanwhile, remittances increased from 2022 to 2023.³²

²⁸ IMF, "Government revenue, percent of GDP", IMF Datamapper. Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/rev@FPP/MOZ/AGO/CPV/BRA/COM/SWZ/LSO/MDG/NAM/SYC/ZAF/TZ> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

²⁹ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

³⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "International aid rises in 2023 with increased support to Ukraine and humanitarian needs", 11 April 2024.

³¹ World Bank, World Development Indicators database. Available at <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed on 12 August 2024).

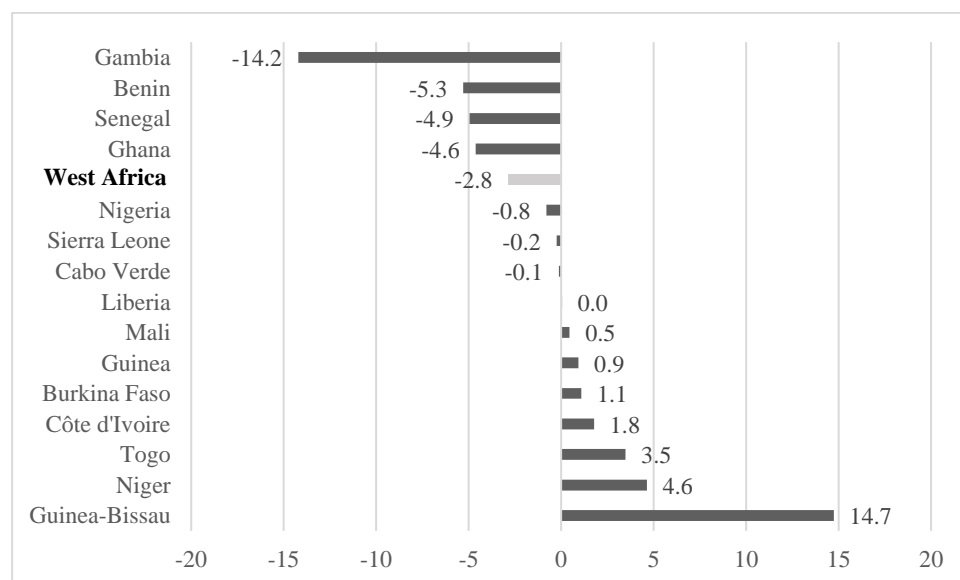
³² World Bank, *Remittances Slowed in 2023, Expected to Grow Faster in 2024: Migration and Development Brief 40, June 2024* (Washington, D.C., 2024).

4. Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services

41. Total public debt in Africa reached \$1.8 trillion in 2022, which was an increase of 183 per cent since 2010; that was approximately four times the continent’s total GDP growth in dollar terms over the same period. The external debt of African States increased from 19 per cent of GDP to nearly 29 per cent from 2010 to 2022. During the same period, their external debt as a share of exports increased from 74.5 per cent to 140.0 per cent.³³ It can be seen from the data that, probably owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, the period 2020–2021 was especially challenging for all African subregions, which can be seen to have differing levels of economic resilience and debt management capability.

42. Despite the overall increase during the period 2020–2021, debt servicing as a proportion of exports of goods and services fell for the subregion as a whole by an average of 2.8 percentage points during the period 2021–2022, as shown in figure VIII. The change was uneven, however: during the same period, increases in that metric were recorded for seven West African States, with the largest increase, of 14.7 percentage points, in Guinea-Bissau, while significant increases were also experienced in Côte d’Ivoire, the Niger and Togo. In Benin, the Gambia and Senegal, by contrast, debt servicing as a proportion of exports of goods and services declined between 2021 and 2022. Since 2022, the debt of African States has been increasing, owing to widening fiscal deficits caused by overlapping crises, slower growth and the depreciation of their currencies relative to the dollar. Public debt as a share of GDP increased in 13 of 15 West African countries between 2015 and 2023.

Figure VIII
Change in debt servicing as a proportion of exports of goods and services, 2021–2022
 (Percentage points)



Source: United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals Indicators Database. Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/dataportal> (accessed on 13 August 2024).

³³ United Nations Conference on trade and Development, “Regional stories: Africa”, A World of Debt dashboard. Available at <https://unctad.org/publication/world-of-debt/regional-stories> (accessed on 19 August 2024).

III. Conclusions and recommendations

43. The socioeconomic effects of the crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war between the Russian Federation and Ukraine have stalled West African progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Consequently, while progress with reducing extreme poverty in the subregion had been steady before the pandemic, some States have seen their gains reversed. Economic growth has slowed, inflation has surged and social protection systems remain inadequate, in particular for the most vulnerable populations.

44. In parts of the subregion, furthermore, cereal production has been severely hindered by insecurity, leading to reduced food availability and sharply increased food insecurity, with a resulting rise in undernutrition rates, in particular in conflict-affected areas. In addition, the ongoing displacement of millions of people due to that insecurity is further exacerbating food and nutritional challenges.

45. Improving health outcomes, in particular for women and children, is also as much of a challenge for West Africa as for the rest of the continent. While maternal and child health indicators, including the maternal mortality ratio and the under-5 mortality rate, have generally improved since the mid-2000s, they remain alarmingly high. Regarding gender equality more broadly, progress has been made on women's representation in national parliaments, although the pace of change varies from one country to the next. Gender-based violence remains pervasive, with data gaps hindering a full assessment of the problem. Moreover, the immediate security and humanitarian needs arising from the insecurity in affected parts of the subregion have strained the fiscal capacities of the affected States, forcing them to divert resources away from development initiatives.

46. Targeted, action-oriented policy interventions are urgently needed to increase progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the subregion. Therefore, West African States should:

(a) Expand and enhance social protection systems to include the most vulnerable population groups, in particular those working in the informal sector;

(b) Implement policies that combat poverty by stimulating economic growth, in particular in sectors in which large proportions of their populations are employed, such as agriculture, which could include such objectives as improving agricultural yields and productivity through investment in modern farming techniques, access to markets and infrastructure development;

(c) Meet their commitments under the Maputo Declaration and the Malabo Declaration to increase investment in the agricultural sector with a view to addressing food insecurity, which should include the prioritization of investments to boost cereal production and reduce dependence on food imports, along with other actions that are especially important in conflict-affected areas, where food production has been disrupted;

(d) Intensify efforts to reduce levels of maternal, neonatal and under-5 mortality by improving healthcare infrastructure, increasing access to skilled birth attendants, and enhancing maternal and child health services;

(e) Ensure stable and increased funding for healthcare systems, in particular through the consistent channelling of official development assistance to the States that have the greatest need, to support ongoing health initiatives and address regional disparities in health outcomes;

(f) Develop comprehensive, context-specific strategies to combat gender-based violence, including prevention programmes, protection mechanisms and support services for victims;

(g) Continue to advocate and implement policies that promote women's representation in leadership positions, in both the public and the private sectors;

(h) Address the poverty, unemployment and social exclusion that so seriously undermine peace and security in the subregion, with a view to ensuring long-term stability and development, by working with regional institutions on resolving conflicts, promoting social cohesion, empowering young people and ensuring that displaced persons are provided with the support that they need to rebuild their lives, in line with the peace-security-development nexus;

(i) Invest in building the capacity of national statistical systems to fill data gaps, in particular for underassessed Goals, such as Goal 14;

(j) Argue for more sustained assistance from international organizations and foreign Governments, in order to improve the financial and technical capacity of the Governments in the subregion to undertake sustainable development initiatives and manage the crises that they face.
