The Sahel – Towards a Region of Stability, Prosperity and Growth

Dr. Donald Kaberuka
President

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With its partners, the Bank is working towards creating the conditions for peace and stability in this Sahel region in order to make it a zone of stability, opportunities, more inclusive growth and regional cooperation. We want to focus on transformative projects in the infrastructure domain, especially in the energy sector. The task in the Sahel region is, of course, resilience to external, climatic and others shocks, but above all, the creation of jobs for young people.

I would like to thank the Government and people of Mali for their warm welcome and join my colleagues to bow in memory of the two journalists killed in cold blood in Kidal and all the victims of the crisis that Mali has gone through.

For centuries, Mali and the Sahel region have been the centre of an ancient civilization, crossroads of trans-Saharan trade and a melting pot of peoples and cultures.

However, over the last few decades, the region has been witnessing repeated climate-related crises, a source of persistent suffering and vulnerability. The population has been coping with these crises with courage and determination, as I noticed a few years ago when I visited a large irrigation project on Djéné Dam.

At a time when Africa is beginning to make positive economic change and the region is also turning the corner following the end of conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone, another security crisis is compounding the situation - a crisis that is not only national or regional, but African and international.

That is why I would like to extend my sincere congratulations to President Keita and all the people of Mali who, with the support of its friends, are overcoming this crisis by successfully organizing an election and taking many other measures.

The task facing the region is also that of Africa and the international community. We are here, with my colleagues, to express our solidarity with you and create the conditions for peace and stability in the Sahel Region in order to make it a zone of stability, opportunities, more inclusive growth and regional cooperation, in other words, restore hope to the entire Sahel Region in order for development efforts interrupted by the crisis to resume, for the good of the region and that of the continent.

Since its creation, the African Development Bank has always been a partner of Sahel countries and, from the onset, we have been part of efforts to end the crisis. I personally participated in the meeting of Mali’s donors held in Brussels in May. We committed to contributing to the country’s stabilization and recovery with a
EUR 240 million support for the 2013-2014 period, some of which has been committed, including a budget support.

As I said in Brussels, we have known the Sahel Region for a very long time. But we are here to listen to you, to work together to identify your needs. Currently, we have on-going programmes for each of the five countries. They are estimated to about USD 2 billion and we will use all flexibility to restructure this portfolio and accelerate its implementation for rapid disbursement.

We will also accelerate major integration projects. It is on this basis that we will from next month undertake the funding of the road linking Chad, Niger and Algeria. With regard to our needs, we require both a national and regional approach. Already, I can tell you that we will make available to the five countries USD 1.9 billion, including USD 950 million for regional transport and energy projects to create integrated economic regions.

We would like to focus on transformative infrastructure projects, especially in the energy sector. Of course, the challenge in the Sahel region is resilience to external and climatic and other shocks, but above all, the creation of jobs for young people. That is why we will mobilize our private sector window as was the case for the Markala Sugar Project here in Mali. This project had the potential of transforming the region. Its abandonment due to the political events is, hopefully, temporary.

In an environment as fragile as the Sahel, neighbourhood effects are ensuring that beyond the five countries, there are also expectations from the other countries affected by the crisis. That is why we will make available to these countries USD 250 million to enhance the people’s resilience in the five most vulnerable countries. The programme extended to all CILSS countries will bring an additional USD 250 million.

We know that resources are and will always be limited, but our determination and will must be up to the people’s expectations. It is not enough to provide financial support. It will also be necessary to review our procedures and coordination systems. That is why this meeting is necessary. It is also necessary for the AU, WAEMU, ECOWAS and the countries themselves to play leadership roles. It is up to you to show us the trajectory. Our role is to provide you with the resources.

In our experience of responses to crises on the continent, we have learned a lot. We know that these interventions, whether in the Horn of Africa or in the Great Lakes Region, are risky, but risks must be taken in order to succeed. Courage and intelligent risk management are the only guarantees of success.
The international community, through the UN, has asked the Bank to host an Action Fund for the Sahel to receive resources from all donors of the region who want to lend their support. We are discussing its modalities and I hope we can succeed together and that this tool will be useful and effective.

There is hope on the horizon – the hope of a lasting, peaceful, stable and prosperous Sahel region. The action we are taking today together is a first but important step.

Thank you.