



Challenges for research and sustainable development in a highly contested region of a geopolitically changing world

FONA Status Seminar – Alsa Hotel Accra (Ghana) – 03.06.2025

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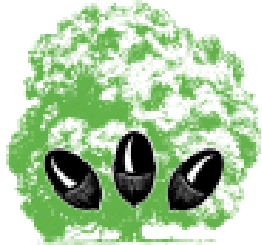
New China-built fishermen's harbour in Accra

Excellence – an attempt of a definition



FOSTERING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

JOHN McLEOD
University of Saskatchewan, Canada
and
ARTHUR CROPLEY
*University of Hamburg,
Federal Republic of Germany*



PENGAMON PRESS

1989

ISBN 978-0-08-036459-9

What is academic excellence?

Academic excellence is the demonstrated **ability to perform, achieve, and/or excel in scholastic activities.**

How can we achieve academic excellence?

To achieve academic excellence, it is essential to create an environment that fosters the **development of a community that can grow intellectually, socially, and ethically, and is therefore able to pursue successful and fulfilling careers.**

Youngstown State University (OH, USA)

African Excellence – an attempt of a definition



Africa-German efforts:

Since the early 2000s the African Excellence Programmes (Graduate Schools and Project Consortia) funded by the BMFTR + the Foreign Office/BMZ with DAAD aims at establishing high-impact and sustainable research (co-creation of knowledge) & education cooperation that address bottlenecks across academic disciplines and meet local and regional needs.

Implementation with and at African partner institutions by:

- strengthening research capacities, and thereby
- contributing to the development of socially relevant sectors
- improving the quality of education
- implementing innovative study programmes for experts and professionals

=> Sustainable Equitable Partnerships

Geopolitical changes: post-colonial challenges and opportunities for Africa?



ET 961 COO-ADD @ 24-11-2024

***Status Quo* of African Academic Institutions**

(difficult to generalize due to large diversity and often unclear status)



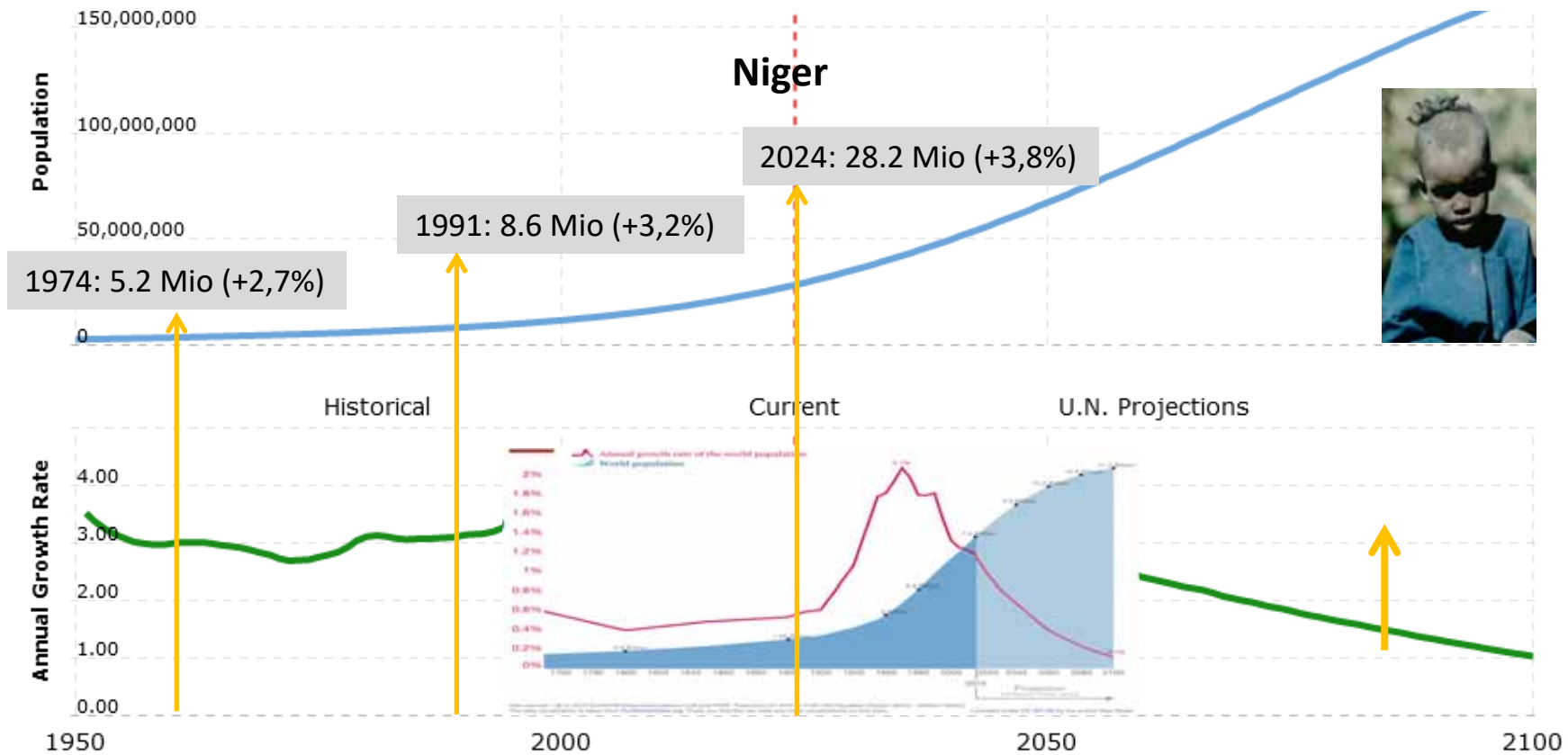
African academic institutions are increasingly having

- Internationally trained staff with a rapidly growing share of PhD holders
- MSc and PhD programmes in English
- Access to internet facilities and international data / literature databases
- Decent infrastructure
- Female faculty (depending on discipline heavily underrepresented / absent)
- Incentives for promotions / salary increases depending on academic performance
- Interuniversity exchange / cooperation in programmes (within and outside Africa)
- Access to international funding opportunities

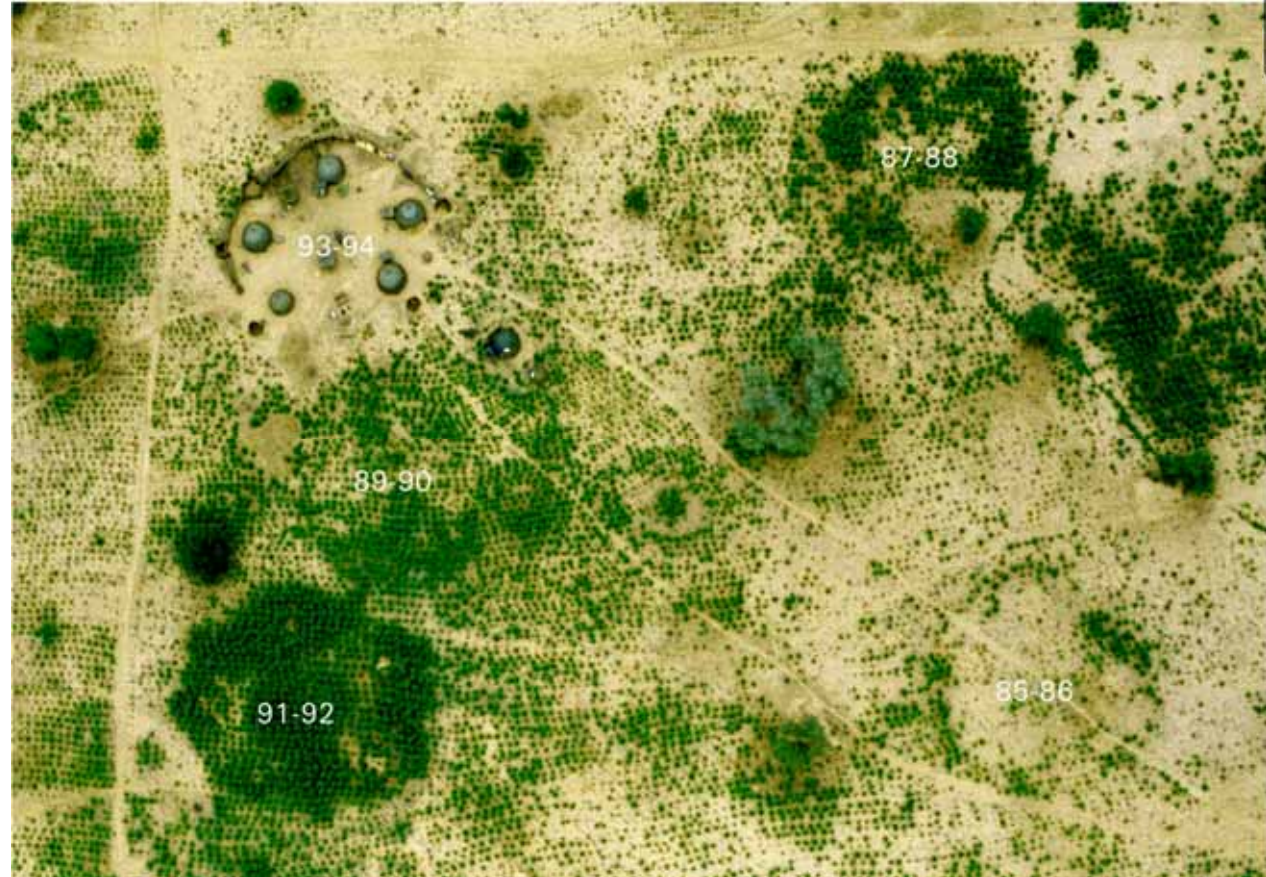
Remaining challenges are:

- Unstable and often insufficient core funding
- Limited experience in and zeal for (incentive?!) acquisition of external (inter-)national funds
- Unclear definition of the role of Applied *versus* Basic Sciences
- Too little research-oriented / -based teaching

Africa's challenge - rampant population growth => threat to ecosystem services?

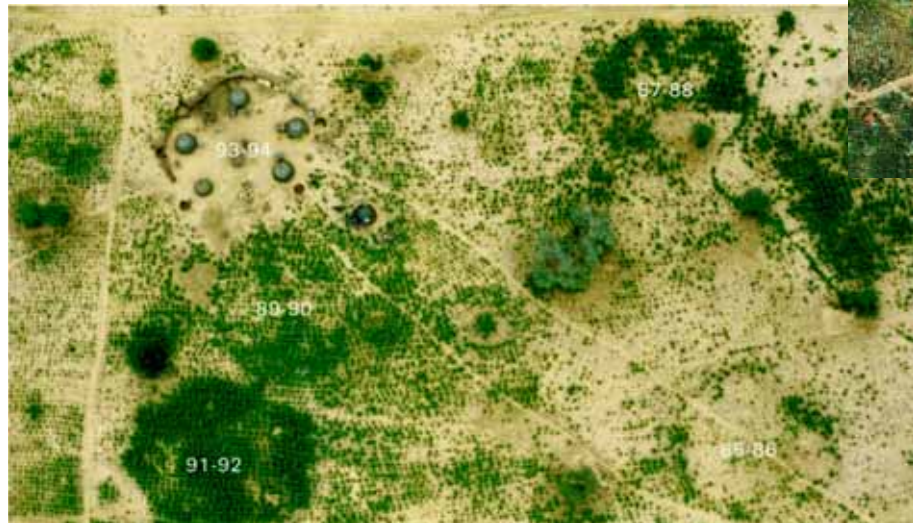
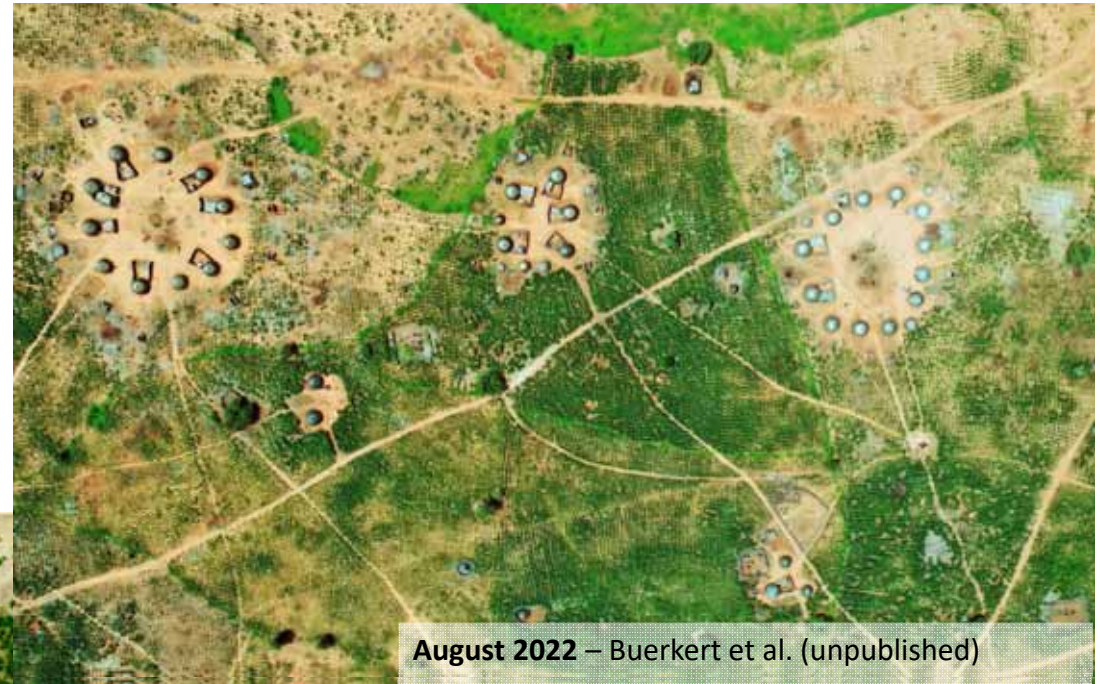


Effects of human settlement activities on millet growth in the Sahel



Aerial photograph showing residual effects of changes in soil productivity due to farmers' settlement activities. Numbers indicate the years during which the settlement of the farmers remained at a particular site. The picture was taken 75 days after sowing from an altitude of about 300 m above ground. Hardpans (indicated by lacking plant growth) within the boundaries of former settlement areas are the result of clay applications to the foundations of the five houses belonging to the one extended family. Note that the increases in millet growth in former settlement areas lasted four to five years. Buerkert *et al.* 1996. *Plant and Soil* 180, 29-38.

Population growth affects ecosystem services



August 1994 - Buerkert et al.(1995). Plant and Soil 180, 29-38.



Stress 1: Soil degradation and climate change



**Stress 1: Out-migration: trying one's luck as a consequence of poverty
- a vicious business model**



Stress 2: (Il-)legal gold in Niger - opportunities and curse



Pellerin, 2017

Miner burrial field (Djado)



Djibo Issifou, 2016

Stress 2: (Il-)legal gold in Ghana - Galamsey



© D. Schories

Stress 3: Legal restrictions: boarder closures and privatization of common land



Stress 3: Legal restrictions: boarder closures & privatization of the commons (orchards)



Stress 4: Post-colonial crisis of Western values and institutional models



US-President Donald Trump during a news conference with Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg in the East Room of the White House, Washington, DC, USA. 10-01-2018 © AP

Haiti, El Salvador, and African countries
=> *“Shithole Countries”*



US-comedian Tony Hinchcliffe during US Electoral Campaign on 28-10-2024

Puerto Rico
=> *“Floating Island of Garbage”*

Stress 4: Post-colonial crisis of Western values and institutional models

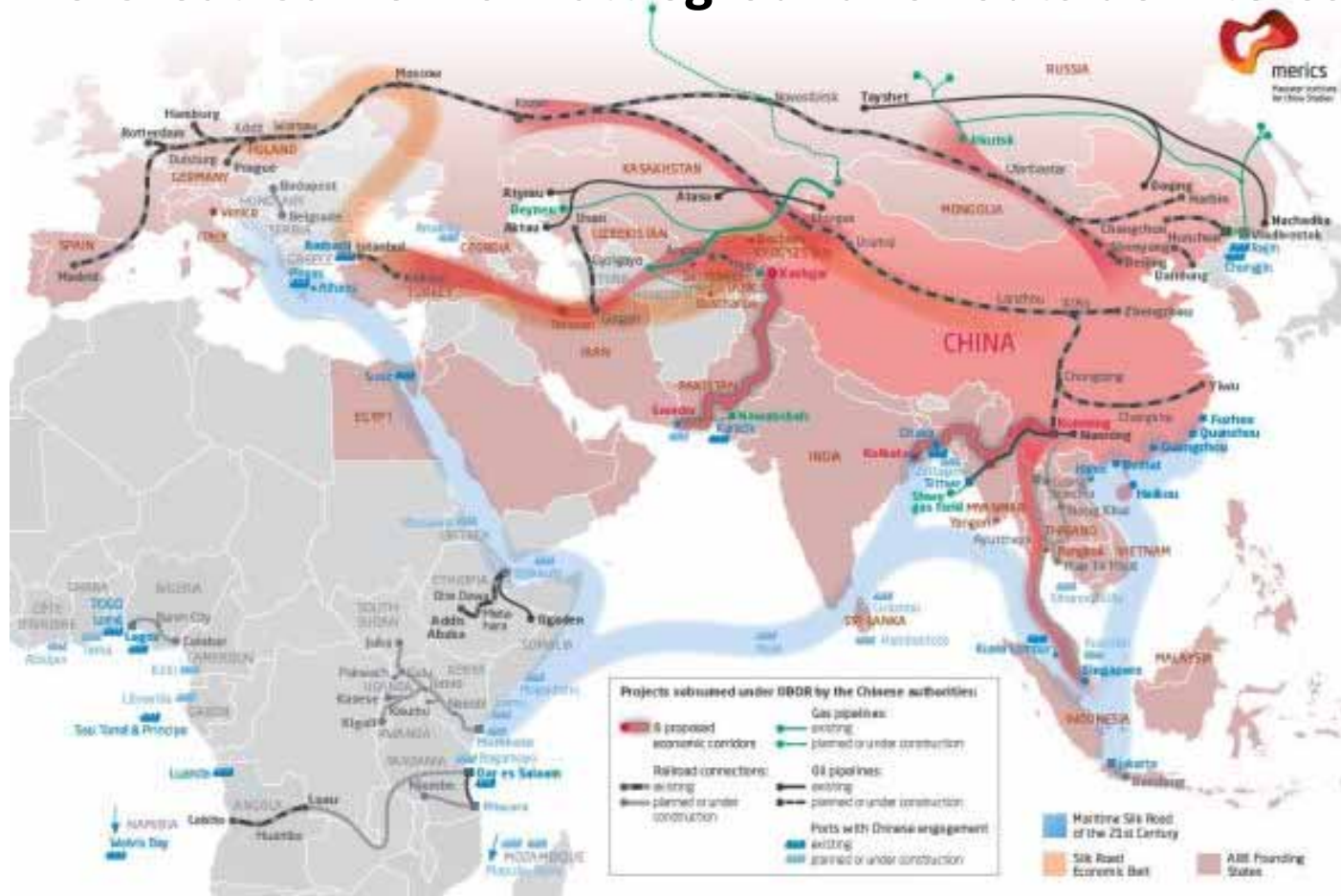
Gaza @ 06-04-2024 © Reuters



Beirut 27-11-2024 © AFP

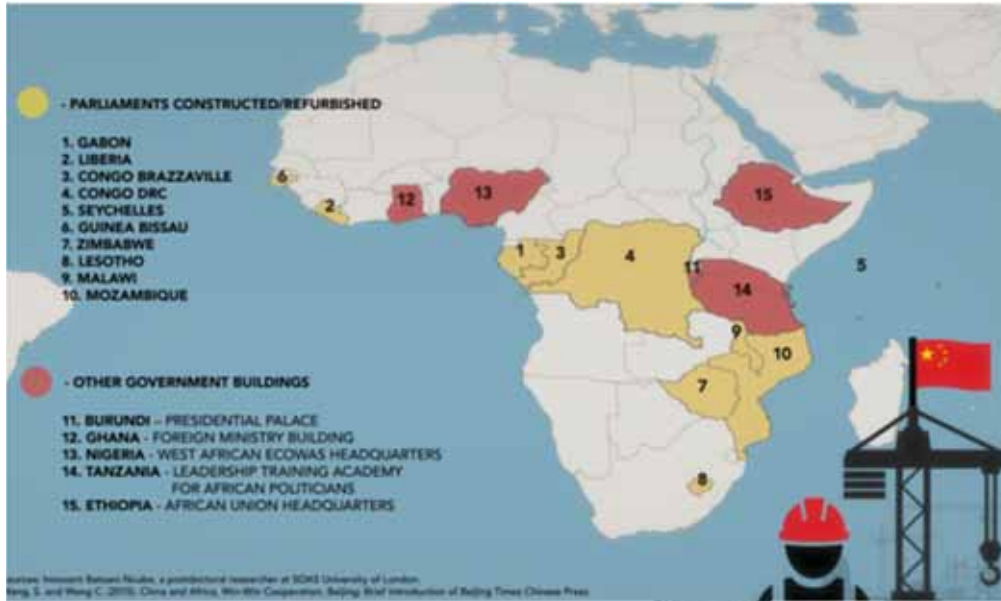


Stress 5: The Great Game 2.0: Battleground for outside interests

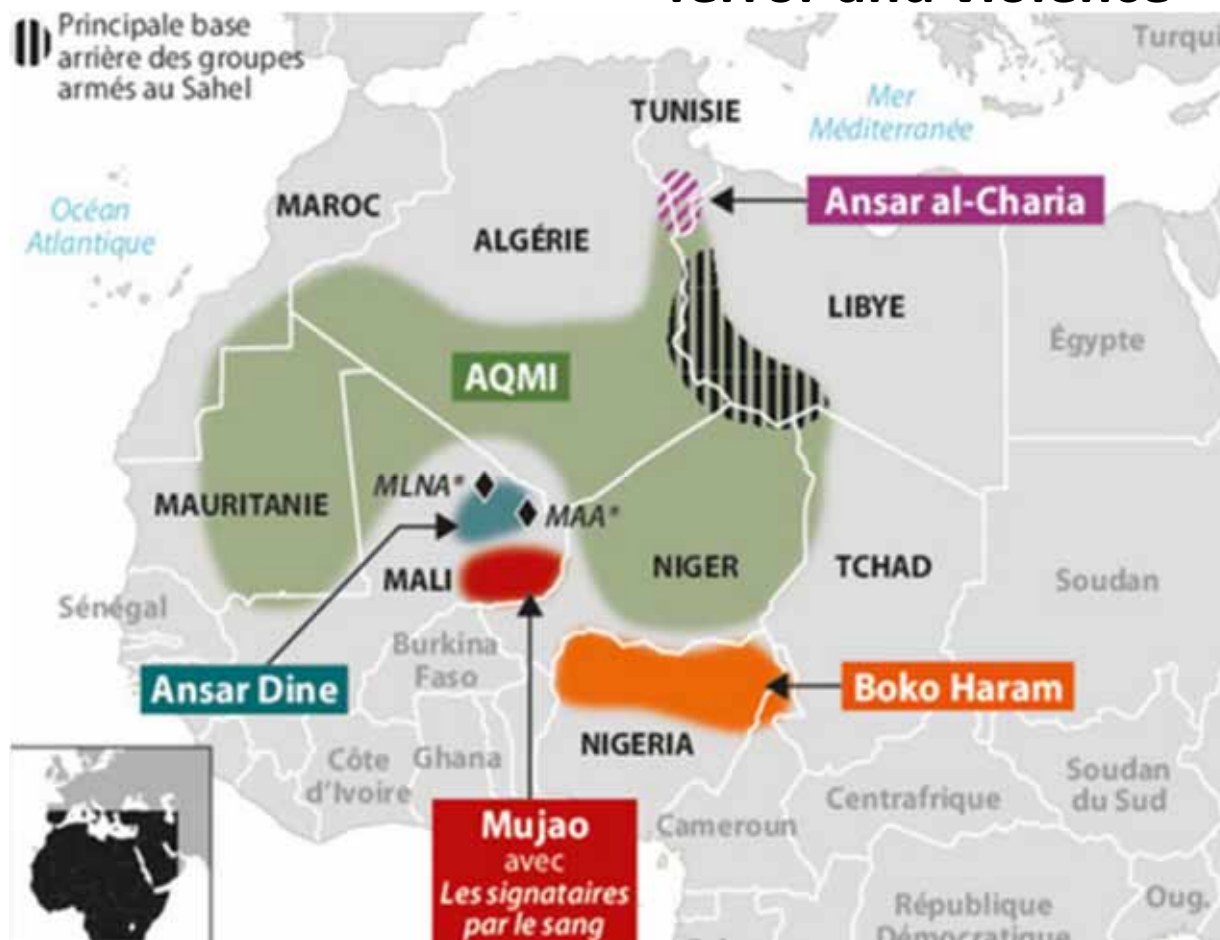


Che, Y. 2018. Silk Road to the Sahel: African ambitions in China's Belt and Road Initiative
<https://lawrencefreemanafricaandtheworld.com/2018/08/13/chinas-belt-road-initiative-truly-is-helping-africa-develop/>

Stress 5: The Great Game 2.0: Battleground for outside interests



Stress 6: Loss of state control over large territories => Terror and violence



Stress 6: Popular support: a sign of frustration about poverty and violence?



Niamey @ 11-04-2024 © Reuters



Stress 6: Alliance of the three West African Sahelian States



Stress 6:

Political violence in West Africa

1 January - 29 November 2024



Reuters World Business Markets Sustainability More

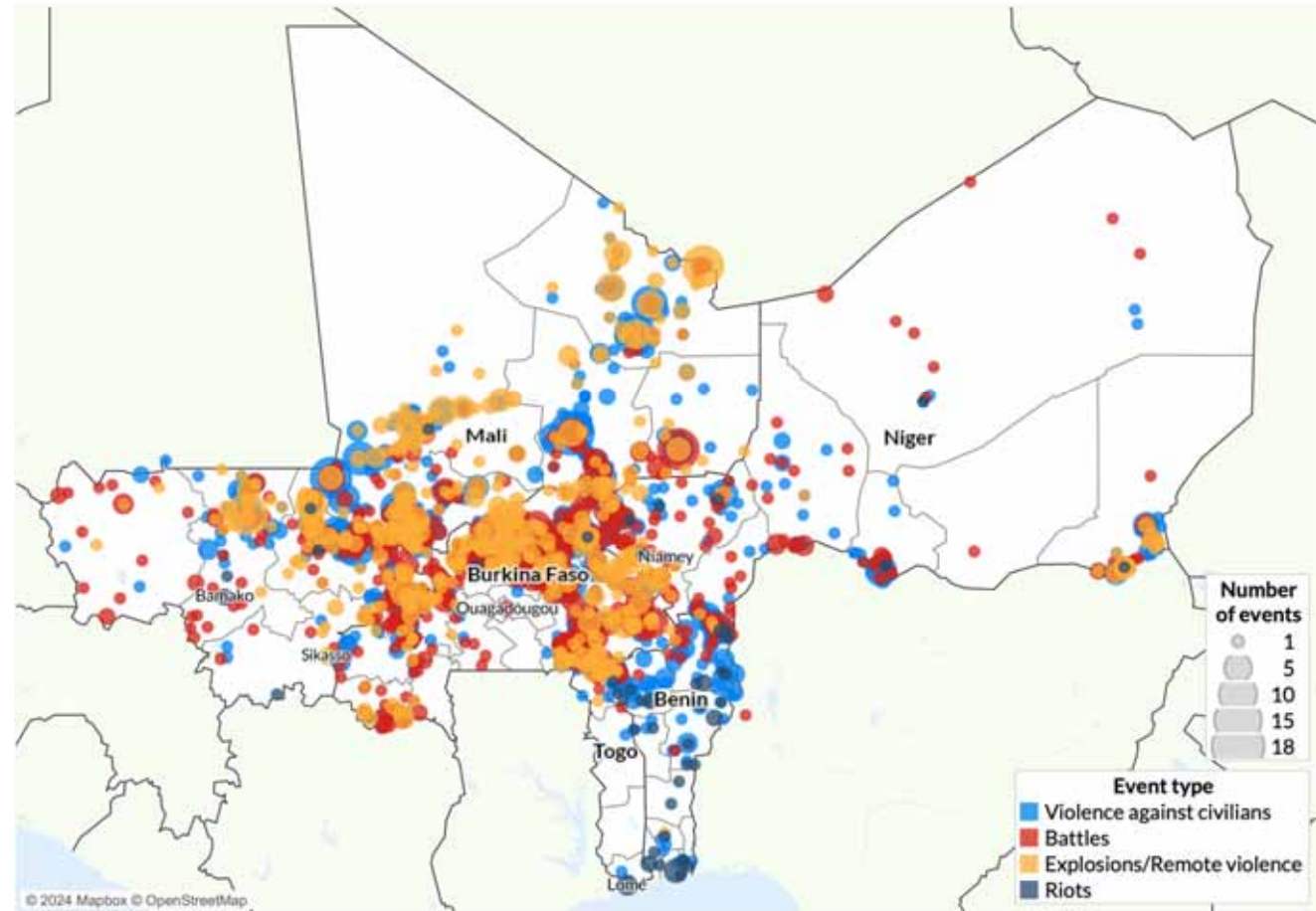
Why West Africa is now the world's terrorism hotspot

By David Lewis, Jessica Donati and Kaylee Kang
September 24, 2024 6:26 PM GMT - Updated 8 months ago

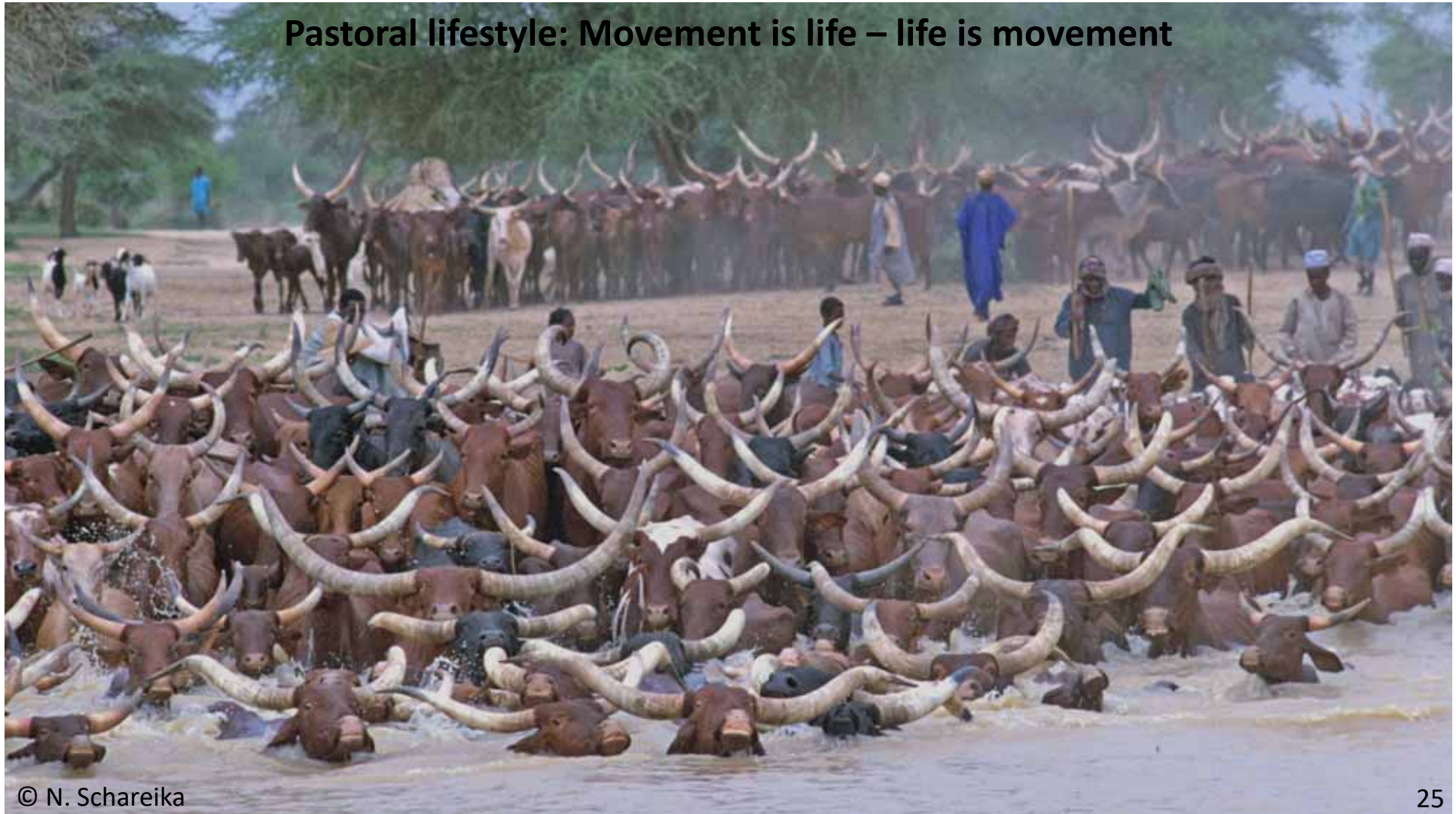
ACLED

Conflict intensifies and instability spreads beyond Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger

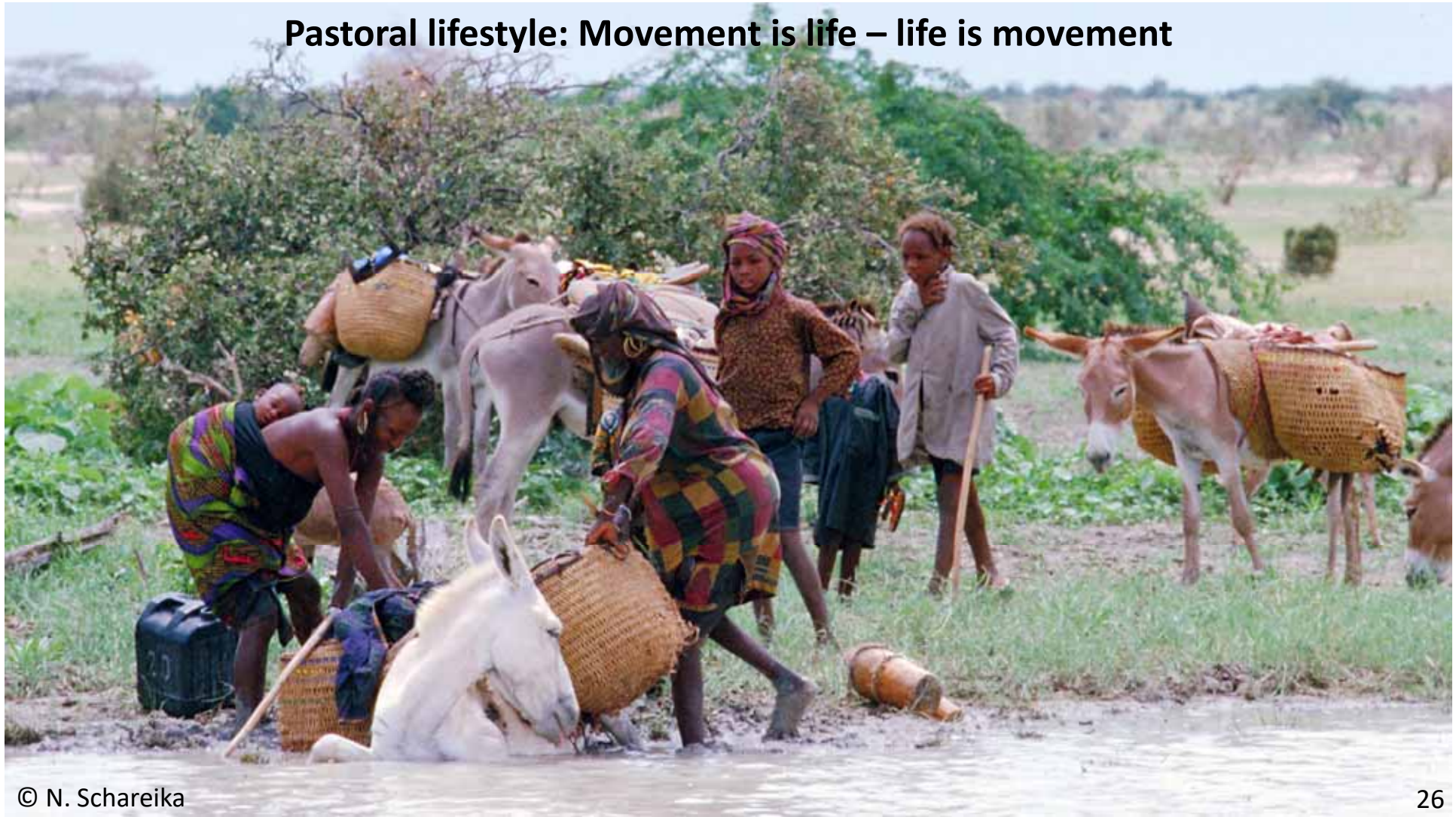
Posted 17 December 2024



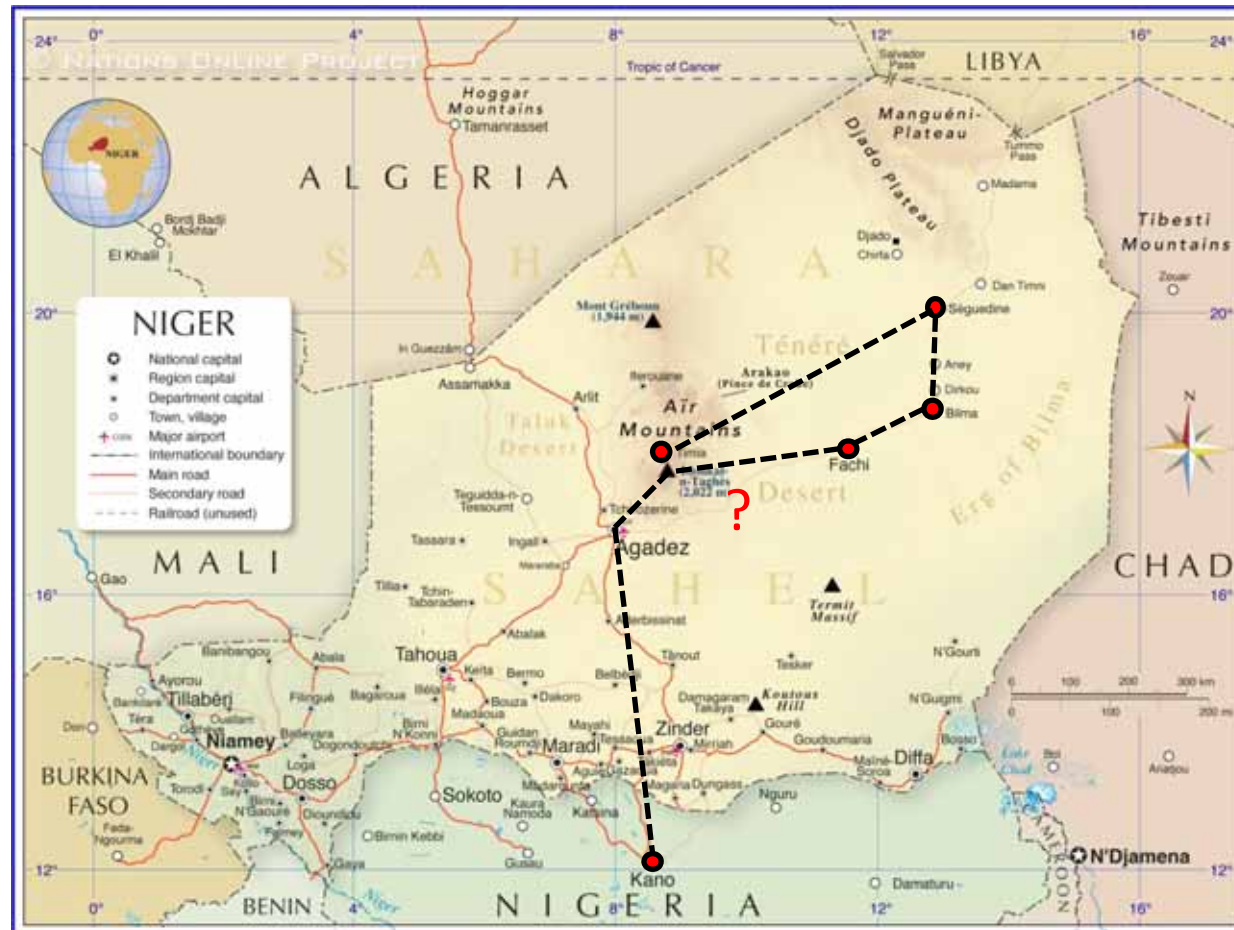
Pastoral lifestyle: Movement is life – life is movement



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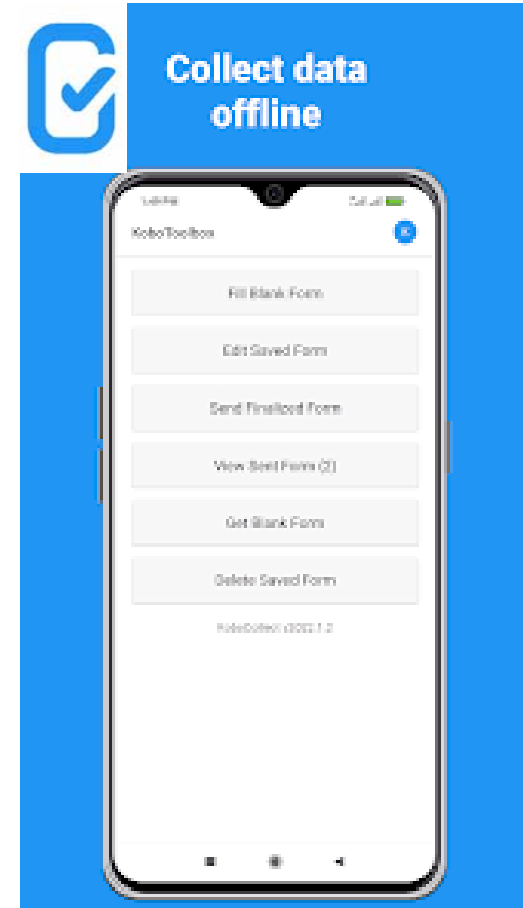
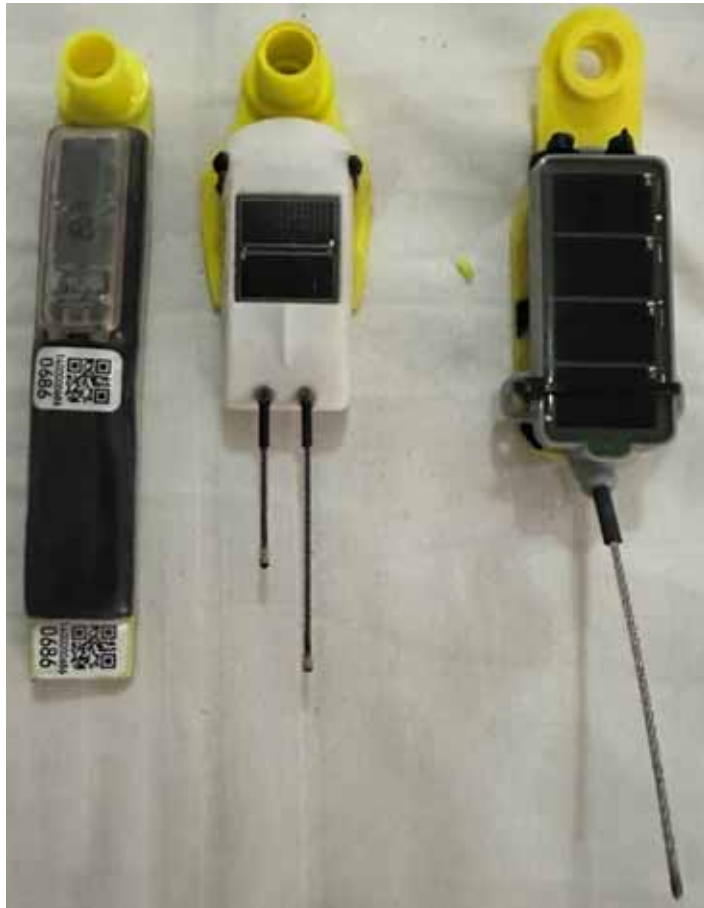


Case study: Millenia-old Saharan salt trade into the Sahel



Methods:

GPS eartags and Digital Questionnaire (KoboCollect)



Weekly photo recording of herd in its environment



11-01-2024



17-01-2024



24-01-2024



05-02-2024



18-02-2024



02-03-2024



20-03-2024

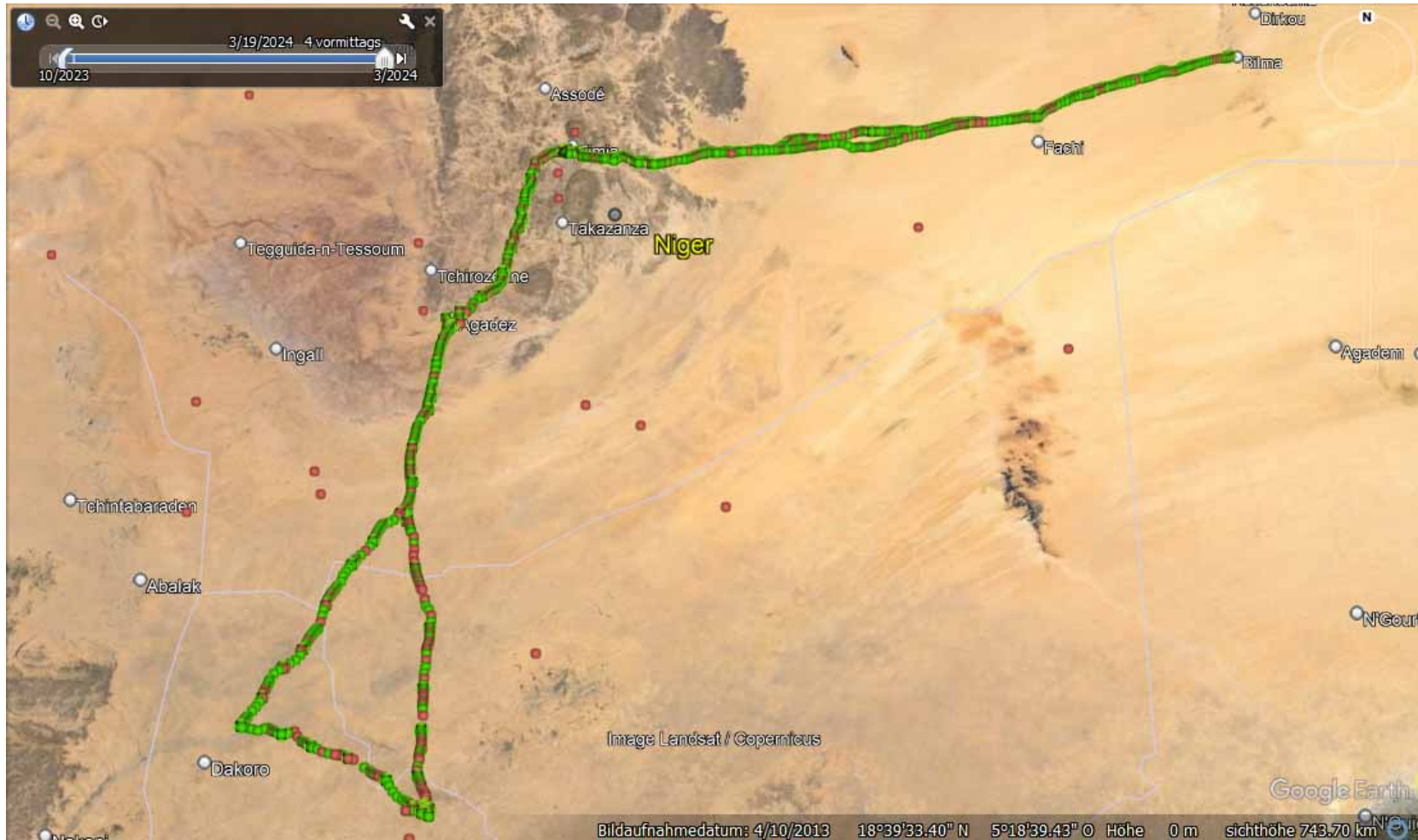


30-03-2024

Case study: Saharan salt trade into the Sahel – camels back to Air Mountains (4.12.2023)



Case study: Millenia-old Saharan salt trade into the Sahel





What does all of this mean for our collaborative research in West Africa?



To what degree shall one try to melt when conducting participatory research?



Important for participatory research in West Africa:

- Take partnerships seriously => „eye-level cooperation“
- For field research => Define risk borderlines (dynamically) together
=> more than ever before we MUST become part of the often „inofficial“ structures of protective authorities to confront terror and ignorance
- Field research in West Africa is safe only if it is „embedded“



Never ever give up^. sustainable & equitable partnerships in Africa



From being everybody on his / her own.....

Never ever give up: sustainable & equitable partnerships in West Africa



.... to making the enriching experience of mutual learning!

West Africa has an enormous diversity



West Africa ... and is a generator of innovative opportunities



Let's get inspired and foster leadership in research and education



- Let's stand up for our common values of sustainable, true partnership, respect, and tolerance
- Let's all avoid being unilaterally „educative“
- Let's avoid imposing „Values of the West“ (democracy / human rights) but rather live them
- Let's provide space for „open-ended“ exchange of visions for the future
- **Let's do the utmost to foster our eye-level research and co-creation of knowledge to the level of *Excellence in Science & Problem Solvin*. We may thus want to aim for more than just the formation of professionals, but strive to provide open grounds for supporting tomorrow's visionary leaders of Africa such as *Jomo Kenyatta, Thomas Sankara, Julius Nyerere, Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, Desmond Tutu, or Ellen Johnson Sirleaf*.**



Jomo Kenyatta
(1897-1978)



Thomas I.N. Sankara
(1949- 1987)



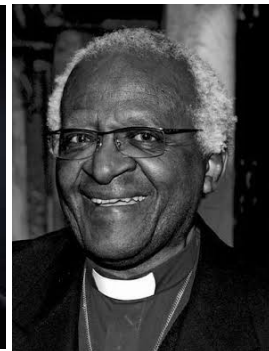
Julius Nyerere
(1922- 1999)



Nelson R. Mandela
(1918- 2013)



Nelson R. Mandela
(1938- 2018)



Desmond M. Tutu
(1931-2021)



Ellen Johnson
Sirleaf (*1938) 39