**NIGERIA: NEW PLEDGES TO AVERT FAMINE, BUT ACCESS REMAINS THE KEY CHALLENGE**

The humanitarian community gathered on 24 February 2017 at the Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad region. According to UNOCHA, more than 10 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in this area; 7 million experience food insecurity; 1.8 million are internally displaced; more than 1 200 schools are damaged; 3 million children need educational assistance and about 1 million houses were destroyed by Boko Haram. Co-hosted by Norway, Nigeria, Germany and the UN, the conference raised USD 672 million in additional pledges, but access and protection in Boko Haram controlled areas of Borno State remain key challenges.

The Oslo summit is a success for Norwegian diplomacy, which mobilised greater international involvement and increased funding for humanitarian efforts to address the severe food and nutrition crisis that is unfolding in north-eastern Nigeria and the wider Lake Chad region, one of the world’s most neglected humanitarian crises. Fourteen countries (mostly in Europe, but also including Japan and Korea) made additional pledges: USD 458 million for 2017 and USD 214 for 2018 and beyond, representing roughly a third of the USD 1.5 billion UN appeal for the Lake Chad region in 2017. “Our goal should be to provide stability and growth in a very troubled region,” declared Mr Børge Brende, the Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs in his welcome address. “We must act now, jointly, to tackle this complex humanitarian crisis, avoid famine in Nigeria and the Lake Chad region and secure long-term development that builds resilience,” he declared.

“The crisis could not have come at a worse time for Nigeria”, said Nigeria’s Foreign minister, Geoffrey Onyeama. “We are experiencing severe fiscal constraints. The economy has plunged into a recession. The enormous resources that we are spending on the military operation against Boko Haram, and, of course, as an oil producing country, the catastrophic drop in the price of crude oil, has made it extremely difficult for us economically. In Nigeria, 26 million people have been affected by Boko Haram. Maiduguri alone hosts more displaced people than the whole of Europe. […] We humbly appeal for your assistance,” he declared.
On 18 February, Adama Barrow was officially inaugurated as the third President of The Gambia, coinciding with Gambia's Independence Day. After more than a month and a half of uncertainty about the future of the country following President Yahya Jammeh's refusal to recognise his defeat after the 1 December 2016 elections, he finally agreed to step down under the threat of ECOWAS soldiers and support for the reestablishment of livelihoods. According to Mr Onyeama's announcement, the Government of Nigeria has already allocated USD 1 billion of domestic resources (including USD 632 million from its federal budget).

Thanks to humanitarian emergency assistance, the food and nutrition situation in Adamawa and Yobe States has significantly improved. But the risk of famine in inaccessible areas of Borno State remains real. Beyond funding concerns, the most urgent challenge for the next three to four months (before the start of the lean season) will be to open access to the remaining seven local government areas (LGA) of Borno, about a third of its territory. During a civil society meeting that was organised ahead of the Oslo Conference, many humanitarian actors have witnessed first-hand the gravity of the situation and underscored that fact.

In his statement, Mr Laurent Bossard, Director of the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) insisted on the regional dimension of the crisis. “Our collective action should be guided by the cross-border dimension of the crisis and its implications. And this calls for regional solidarity in a coordinated manner to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of our actions.”

In December 2016, the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) released a declaration to encourage international partners to develop more structural responses to this crisis. Conducted within the RPCA, the analysis of the Cadre harmonisé will provide updated figures on the food and nutrition situation and network members will monitor the impact of emergency responses at their next meeting on 10-12 April at the OECD headquarters in Paris. Many keynote speakers have underscored the need to think about the long-term, but these ideas must now be translated into action in 2017 and beyond.
ECOWAS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY

ECOWAS ministers met on 9 February 2017 in Abidjan to discuss how to make faster progress on gender equality and equity within the context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063. Côte d’Ivoire’s Vice-President Daniel Duncan participated in the opening session and encouraged ministers to take ownership of the newly approved roadmap, which aims to accelerate the implementation of Supplementary Act on equal rights for men and women for sustainable Development in the Community. An experts meeting, held ahead of the event, also presented a regional action plan on the fight against obstetric fistula; the ECOWAS Gender and Elections Strategic Framework (GESF) and its action plan; and the 2017-2020 action plan for the women, peace and security component of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework. The region has a large number of legal frameworks, policies, strategies and action plans, but implementation remains the key challenge in all West African countries where large gender gaps persist. The ECOWAS ministers in charge of gender affairs appealed to regional leaders to step up their efforts to create and maintain an environment to enable member states to meet gender equity and equality goals. The ECOWAS Commission committed to annually review the progress, obstacles and challenges to gender equality that member countries face.

GHANA MOVES FORWARD WITH ITS ZERO HUNGER STRATEGY

The foundation of former president John Agyekum Kufuor has launched the “Ghana Zero Hunger” strategic review to identify the gaps in achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 2 on ending hunger. Among the proposed actions, Kufuor announced the launch of a “planting for food and jobs” campaign. Farmers will be supported by various district assemblies and will benefit from improved seed distribution. Moreover, Mr Kufuor confirmed that the government plans to construct a dam in each village in northern Ghana. In the fight against hunger, Ghana is one of West Africa’s best-performing countries and scores as “moderate level” on the Global Hunger Index 2016 (score 13.2). The proportion of undernourished people has fallen from 36.9% in 1992 to 2.3% in 2016. However, the prevalence of stunting in children under five remains high. One out of five Ghanaian children in this age group fails to grow physically and cognitively as a result of chronic or recurrent malnutrition. The strategic review aims to “contribute to the government efforts to accelerate progress toward eliminating hunger and food security with subsequent effects on improving malnutrition.”

BENIN: NO MORE VISAS NEEDED FOR AFRICAN CITIZENS

Africans travelling to Benin will no longer require a visa. Benin joined a continent-wide campaign aimed at achieving the free movement of people and open visas across Africa. Eight West African countries — Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Togo — are counted as some of the most visa-open countries in Africa. The ECOWAS zone, which authorises free movement, also encourages regional mobility within West Africa. Visa openness contributes to fostering tourism, facilitating trade and investments, filling skills gaps in the labour market and creating jobs. Its implementation does not require any major investments. As a part of its Agenda 2063, the African Union urges the creation of an African passport and aims to end visa requirements for all African citizens by 2018.
OPINION

HOW TO OVERCOME DISPARITIES BETWEEN NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN GHANA?

The three northern regions of Ghana are home to 60% of the poor people in the whole country. By 2030, southern Ghana might have successfully eradicated poverty, while 40% of its northern population will still remain poor. How can Ghana overcome these strong regional disparities? In an interview published on the Ideas4development blog, Mariama Awumbila, a geographer and board member of the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority offers a few proposals for action.

PUBLICATION

FOR THE LONG RUN: A MAPPING OF MIGRATION-RELATED ACTIVITIES IN THE WIDER SAHEL REGION

Against the backdrop of the migration crisis in Europe, this report, produced by the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands, provides a mapping of the crisis management and peace operations as well as the most relevant international and regional actors that deal with irregular migration issues in the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin and in Libya. It points to a number of inconsistencies in the international approach, but it also recognises some key achievements. The report sets out a number of policy recommendations that focus on strengthening the strategy related to migration, avoiding ‘migrationalization,’ improving coordination, involving the countries that are sources of refugees, dealing with Libya, recognizing the home front and including Africa.

WHO’S WHO?

GILBERT FOSSOUN HOUNGBO, IFAD PRESIDENT

An experienced manager will now head the specialised UN agency and international financial institution dedicated to eradicating rural poverty. On 14 February 2017, the former Prime Minister of Togo, Gilbert Fossoun Houngbo, was appointed as the sixth president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) for a four-year mandate. He is the second West African to occupy this position, following the Nigerian Kanayo Nwanze. Houngbo is a recognised expert in international development, diplomacy and financial management. He began his career at Price Waterhouse, Canada, where he worked as a specialist in financial sustainability, operations and auditing. He then worked for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the director of finance and administration. In 2003, he was appointed the UNDP chief of staff and subsequently held positions as the Assistant Secretary-General and the administrator of the UNDP. Later in 2005, he was nominated as the director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, in charge of 1 500 staff. Less well known in his home country, his appointment as Prime Minister under the presidency of President Faure Gnassingbé (2008-12) came as a surprise to many. He quickly gained a reputation to be a “man of consensus,” and was also known for leading Togo on many economic and social reforms, such as the IMF debt relief programme for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC). In 2013, Houngbo returned to the international scene, this time as deputy director-general for field operations and partnership at the International Labour Organization (ILO). The governments of the African Union unanimously endorsed Houngbo’s candidacy. “I have come from the rural world. I have first-hand knowledge of the harshness of this kind of life,” Houngbo declared. Born in 1961 in Agbandi, in central Togo, Houngbo holds an advanced degree in business management from the Université de Lomé (Togo), and a Bachelor of Arts and DESS (Diplôme d’études supérieures spécialisées) in accounting and finance from the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (Canada). With Houngbo, IFAD gains an experienced and prudent manager. “We have to keep our ambition, and, at the same time, be realistic and pragmatic. We have to demonstrate that every dollar invested will have the highest value for money,” Houngbo announced following his appointment.