CILSS TAKES KEY DECISIONS IN MAURITANIA

At the 52\textsuperscript{nd} Ordinary Session of the CILSS Council of Ministers, held on 11 March in Nouakchott, members made important decisions about CILSS leadership positions. CILSS Executive Secretary Djimé Adoum will resume his duties. The vacant position of the Institute of the Sahel (INSAH), a specialised agency of CILSS based in Bamako, will be filled by Mauritanian Mohamed Abdellai Ebbe, who will head the institution for a three-year term that can be renewed once. As for the Agrhymet Regional Centre, based in Niamey and currently managed by an acting administrator, CILSS will start the recruitment process for a new general director as soon as possible.

Following the recommendations of the audit firm, CILSS will undertake major structural reforms, particularly related to financial management. The objective is to completely reconfigure the accounting system of CILSS by 2020. In addition, the construction of the new INSAH headquarters will be launched shortly. Mali has already identified a three-hectare plot to host the institution. The Council also announced increased collaboration between ECOWAS-UEMOA and CILSS through a “tripearte and inclusive framework of co-operation that will enable CILSS to carry out its missions in the region for the populations of the Sahel and West Africa.” Kassoum Denon, Mali’s Minister of Agriculture and the Minister-Coordinator of CILSS chaired the meeting. It brought together the delegations of CILSS countries, members of the governing board, Regional Programming and Monitoring Committee, experts and partners. The Sahel and West Africa Club was represented by its president François-Xavier de Donnea and his special representative, T. Jean de Dieu Somda. The next CILSS heads of state and government conference will be held in Niger during the last quarter of 2017.
ECOWAS STREAMLINES ITS FIGHT AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

West Africa’s main food and nutrition security players met in Lomé on 13-18 March. At this annual meeting, participants reviewed the implementation status of projects and programmes co-ordinated by the ECOWAS Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food (RAAF) and CISSS. They discussed ways to better co-ordinate these efforts so that regional actions becomes more efficient and coherent, and not limited to just the sum of these projects and programmes. Indeed, since 2014, ECOWAS and its partners have been scrutinizing each project’s progress and will, on the basis of the results, improve the planning and coherence of the work at the regional level. The steering committee also validated the 2016 activity reports and made some recommendations for ongoing programmes. For example, significant progress has been made under the auspices of the West Africa Food and Nutrition Security Support Programme (PASANAO), which will expire in June 2018. The programme has sought to integrate urban vulnerability indicators in the analysis of the Cadre harmonisé. They will soon prepare to capitalise on those lessons in order to inform the national agricultural and food and nutrition security investment plans (NAP-FNS) that are currently prepared by ECOWAS member countries. Another ECOWAS flagship project is the establishment of a regional food security reserve as a third safety net – in addition to local and national reserves. The stakeholders, however, believe that some countries lack accountability and seem to rely solely on the regional reserve, which create enormous costs in the project implementation at the regional level. Faced with this situation, the steering committee recommended that the implementation of the project be refocused on its initial mandate. Last but not least, stakeholders underlined once more the importance of aligning the partners with ECOWAS priorities and management mechanisms. Within the framework of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPJA), the SWAC/OECD Secretariat is currently mapping interventions related to food and nutrition security and resilience. This tool should not only make it possible to measure the scale of the challenges, but also to develop concrete proposals about how to strengthen the co-ordination and coherence of regional interventions.

BRUSSELS BRIEFING ON RURAL-URBAN LINKS

“Strengthening rural livelihoods in the face of rapid urbanisation in Africa” was the topic of a Brussels Briefing organised on 20 March by the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and partners. Thomas Allen, from the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) participated in a panel discussion on rural transformation and job creation. Focussing on the employment opportunities in West African food systems, his presentation argued that although the farming sector will continue to provide the most jobs, labour is increasingly moving out of farming, requiring people to develop different skills. The demographic and urbanisation dynamics in West Africa are driving profound economic and societal transformations.

The dietary patterns of households are changing. West Africans are consuming more fruits and vegetables, more meat and fish, and more processed foods. This is transforming the structure of West African food systems. The region’s food economy is the first sector of the West African economy, amounting to USD 178 billion in 2010. Food systems are also diversifying away from agriculture with upstream and downstream segments of the value chains – from food processing to retailing – representing a larger share of the food economy. In 2010, these non-agricultural activities represented about 40% of the total value added of the food economy. As a result, the employment opportunities in this sector are changing. Recent studies indicate that off-farm activities represent a large share of employment in the food economy – for example, 40% in Nigeria. Most of these off-farm opportunities are in commercial activities rather than in food processing. While farming will continue to provide the largest number of jobs, the downstream segments of food value chains are going to provide, proportionally, more and more jobs in the near future. These emerging activities, requiring new skill sets, may offer attractive opportunities to the large number of youth that are entering the labour market. Rural development strategies must accompany these changes by increasing their support for job creation in the rural non-farm economy.
Ghana is 60 years old. This birthday is an opportunity to review some of the country’s great achievements since it gained independence in 1957. Its first achievement is the country’s political stability. It has undergone several elections and changes of governments that were conducted without violence. In 2016, Ghana was ranked as the sixth most peaceful country in Africa and the 44th in the world. Several Ghanaian political leaders, such as Kofi Annan, have held senior positions at regional and international levels. Ghana’s second success lies in its quality of education; it ranks 46th out of 148 countries in the world. The literacy rate is 71.5%, the enrolment level of children in school has reached 90% and the government is currently working to provide free secondary education. In the health field, Ghana can congratulate itself on the modernisation of its hospitals and clinics and the development of the health system and medical personnel (see article “Ghana’s pharmaceutical industry”). On the economic front, the country continues to stand up to challenges, achieving significant growth rates, increasing exports and creating more jobs every year. In sports, Ghanaians are distinguished in several disciplines, such as football and boxing, and their successes contribute to the international influence of the country. This is also reflected in Ghana’s growing attractiveness as a tourist destination, especially among European, American and Asian travellers. All these achievements are a source of pride for Ghana, although much more remains to be done.

A RECOMMITMENT TO PEACE IN MALI

Members of the Algiers Process Mediation Team, Ecowas, the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations issued a joint declaration calling for further implementation of the Peace and Reconciliation Accord in Mali. The organisations congratulate the signatory parties on the establishment of interim authorities in Kidal, Ménaka and Gao, and encourage them to rapidly establish authorities in the Tahouen and Timbuktu regions. They also welcome the establishment of the first joint patrol in Gao, and hope that the patrols in Kidal and Timbuktu will be operational as soon as possible. They urge the signatory parties to establish, without delay, the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, the Integration Commission and the National Council for Security Sector Reform, which are three key features of the peace process. The AU, UN, Ecowas and the EU also express concern about the deteriorating security situation in Mali, especially in the northern and central regions. They call on the parties to work to improve intercommunity relations to better prevent violent extremism, and welcome the G5 Sahel initiative to support Mali’s security efforts. Finally, the organisations reaffirm their firm commitment to support the implementation of the agreement and their determination to counter the actions of those who threaten peace.

GHANA, ECOWAS: INCREASE PHARMACEUTICAL PRODUCTION

During a courtesy visit to the new Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo, the Director General of the ECOWAS West African Health Organisation (WAHO), Dr. Xavier Crespin, called on Ghana’s head of state to make the country a leader in pharmaceutical production in West Africa. This appeal is part of WAHO’s ambition to double the amount of medications produced in the region, which is only about 25% today. Compared to other West African countries, Ghana has made significant progress in the health arena, including through the introduction of universal health care coverage and the development of traditional medicines. The country is also an important part of the Regional Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, which ECOWAS set up in 2015 in response to the region’s Ebola epidemic. Two Ghanaian institutions, the University of Ghana and the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, train medical intervention teams that are attached to the Centre. Building on these experiences, Ghana should play a leading role in the health security and pharmaceutical production in the region, including in the development of regulations and in the promotion of their harmonization at the ECOWAS level.
In Mali, “the Algiers Process is painfully slow, and peace is not advancing,” noted Jean-Hervé Jezequel, Deputy Project Director for West Africa at the International Crisis Group, offering his analysis of the situation in an interview on the website Sahelien.com. “The setting up of the interim authorities is a significant step towards clarifying the division of responsibilities and power in the north of the country. Beyond local tensions, it is also interesting to note that young Malians have been appointed to important positions (sometimes because they are the only graduates). But this remains a fragile and insufficient step,” he said.

The attack on 5 March on the Malian military post in Boulakessi, on the border between Burkina Faso and Mali, is not a surprise for those who know this area. The Algiers Process, focused on the north of the country, and offers few responses to the growing instability in central Mali, which extends to Burkina Faso. The Malian government’s recently envisaged special plan for the centre of the country has not yet seen the light of day. Mali should work with its Burkinabe neighbour, because the Malian crisis has spilled over into that country and it has instability factors that are comparable to those of Mali and other Sahelian countries. These factors include: distrust of the state in neglected zones, the social disappointment of their inhabitants, and the rise of various kinds of armed groups. These root causes of the crisis, which are common to all Sahelian countries, are crucial in the search for sustainable solutions at national and regional levels, including the military plan. The future GS Sahel regional force, whose creation was announced in February, will, for example, contribute to restoring the bonds of trust with the local populations so that it can carry out its mission. These security responses will not work if they are not accompanied by reinvestment in the areas that have been neglected by public authorities and especially by the development of services for the population. In this way, the difficulties of the Algiers Agreement in progressing and producing results in the north of the country show that it is necessary to consider a more productive amendment to the agreement.

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**PUBLICATIOn**

**NIGER AND BOKO HARAM: BEYOND THE COUNTER-INSURGENCY**

This report by the International Crisis Group analyses the expansion of Boko Haram in Niger and assesses the responses provided by the authorities. It describes, in particular, the way in which the jihadist insurgency is exploiting the social and economic dynamics of Niger, especially in the region of Diffa, in the south-eastern part of the country. On the basis of this analysis, the report makes several recommendations to the Nigerien authorities and their partners, which encourage them to develop a counter-insurgency strategy that does not only focus on the military response that is so favoured these days.

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**WHO’S WHO**

**STEPHANIE OKEREKE LINUS, UNFPA AMBASSADOR**

Stephanie Okereke Linus, a famous Nigerian Nollywood actress, has been appointed the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Ambassador for West Africa and Central Africa. Born in 1980 in Benin City, Nigeria, Linus grew up in the Delta State. She began her acting career in 1997, when she appeared in two Nollywood films, before continuing her studies in English and literature at the University of Calabar. She came in second in the most beautiful woman in Nigeria contest in 2002 and became known to the general public by playing in the popular film Emotional Crack, released on Nigerian screens in 2003, which won awards in several international film festivals. She has received several awards for acting, but she went to the United States in 2007 to study film at the New York Film Academy. The following year, she produced and directed her first film, Through the Glass. In 2014, she presented a second film, Dry, which features a young teenage girl who has been sexually abused and suffers from vesicovaginal fistula (VVF) following childbirth. The choice of this topic reflects Linus’ longstanding commitment to fighting for women victims of violence (FVV) and against rape, which earned her Nigeria’s Beyond the Tears Humanitarian Award in 2008. It was in the context of her fight for women’s dignity that she expressed a desire to join UNFPA. As an ambassador for West and Central Africa, she hopes to use her reputation and her network to raise awareness about women’s issues in the region.