The West Africa Brief is published by the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD). It presents political, economic and social developments in the region. Special focus is given to news regarding regional organisations (ECOWAS, UEMOA, CILSS) as well other SWAC Members’ activities. The articles should not be reported as representing the official views of the OECD or of its member countries. Contact: julia.wanjiru@oecd.org

BRICS: CHINA HEAVILY INVESTS IN GUINEA

China announced it will loan Guinea USD 20 billion to support infrastructure development in the country over the next 20 years. In turn, the Guinean government granted several mining concessions to Chinese companies, including for the bauxite mines in northern Guinea. Details on the terms of co-operation are not yet known. The announcements were made on the side-lines of the ninth BRICS summit, which brought together leaders from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, from 3-5 September in Xiamen, China. Alpha Condé, President of Guinea and current chairman of the African Union, participated as an observer during the event. Several side events were organised to finalise a number of bilateral economic deals between China and Guinea. In terms of infrastructure development, the Guinean government will prioritise the reconstruction of the road connecting Conakry to central areas of the country, the extension of the port of Conakry, the construction of a university and the development of the electricity grid in upper Guinea. The Guinean government hopes that this massive investment will boost its economy and help it reach double-digit growth rates in the near future. Chinese President Xi Jinping called for solidarity between emerging economies and developing countries. In their final declaration, BRICS leaders expressed concern about the challenges the African continent faces in order to achieve independent and sustainable development and to preserve wildlife. They also reaffirmed their commitment to strengthen their co-operation with Africa. “We reaffirm our strong support for the African Union’s implementation of its various programs under Agenda 2063 in pursuit of its continental agenda for peace and socio-economic development,” they declared.
African and European leaders from Chad, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Niger and Spain met on 28 August in Paris to discuss how to better tackle migration flows from Africa to Europe. As a follow-up to the Valletta Summit on migration in 2015, they agreed on a short-term action plan to crack down on networks of people smugglers and to stop illegal migration, via Libya, to Italy and other European countries. European leaders notably confirmed their continued support for strengthening government bodies and border control facilities in northern Chad and Niger in order to stop illegal migration via Libya. European powers also agreed to better co-ordinate their efforts to create political unity in Libya. President Issoufou of Niger and President Déby of Chad underscored that the root causes of illegal migration must be addressed and called for additional support to fight poverty and insecurity in their respective countries. President Emmanuel Macron of France said the migration crisis was a “challenge for the European Union and the African Union” that needs to be approached with “solidarity, humanity and efficiency.” In her statement, EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini confirmed the Union’s commitment to help African countries deal with returning asylum seekers and prevent further migration flows. The EU is spending EUR100 million to fund International Organisation for Migration (IOM) centres in 14 African countries, including Chad, Niger and Libya. According to IOM, nearly 100 000 people have reached Italy from Africa since the beginning of 2017. An estimated 2 400 people are dead or missing in the Mediterranean.

**MINI-MIGRATION SUMMIT IN PARIS**

**TABASKI FEAST IN WEST AFRICA**

Aïd-El-Kébir, the Muslim sacrifice feast also known as “Tabaski,” was celebrated on 1 September across West Africa, 69 days after the end of Ramadan. It is one of the most important religious days on the Muslim calendar and represents a busy and expensive time for families. Every year, the holiday becomes an economic challenge for the many poor people living in the region. In Bamako, for example, it might cost between 50 000 to 120 000 CFA francs to buy a sacrificial sheep. Government-sponsored promotional campaigns aimed at making the purchase more accessible for everyone have helped reduce the price. The Senegalese government reduced customs duties for sheep imported from Mali and Mauritania to satisfy the strong demand for sheep in the country -- estimated at 750 000 heads. In Burkina Faso, the celebration was overshadowed by the recent terrorist attack on 13 August that killed 19 people, the economic crisis and the death of Salif Diallo. Muslims make up some 60% of the Burkinabe population, but this year’s Tabaski was an opportunity for the whole nation to gather and pray for peace and a better future. Traditional leader Mogho Naaba Baongho and Cardinal Philippe Ouédraogo joined in the celebration.

**NIGER IS STRUGGLING WITH FLOODS AGAIN**

After Sierra Leone, Niger is counting its flood victims as torrential rainfalls have plagued the country since June. At least 44 people have died from the floods according to the most recent government announcement; Dosso and Maradi are the two most affected regions. According to an UNOCHA situation report on 30 August, the floods have affected more than 80 000 people, destroyed 4 900 houses and 900 hectares of crops and caused substantial material damage. The situation is, however, slightly better than in 2016. Niger is regularly a victim of floods; in urban settings, they are especially dangerous due to collapsed houses and inadequate water evacuation infrastructure.
UK ANNOUNCES AID PACKAGE FOR NIGERIA

During a visit to Nigeria on 30 August, the UK foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, and international development secretary Priti Patel, announced a four-year aid package worth GBP 200 million to help northeastern Nigeria recover from the Boko Haram insurgency. This is less than they previously spent (GBP 100 million in 2017 alone) but the new package is intended to complement DFID's current humanitarian programme. The UK also intends to help mobilise other development partners. According to the press release, the UK aims to: deliver food for more than 1.5 million people in need; treat up to 120,000 children at risk of dying from severe acute malnutrition; help keep 100,000 girls and boys in school and ensure safe humanitarian access. Beyond emergency relief, the new aid package also includes the restoration of key infrastructure and services in northeastern Nigeria. The UK government announced an additional GBP 7 million to fight human trafficking and modern slavery. Nigeria is the fourth largest source of human trafficking to the UK. Nearly 80% of girls arriving to Europe through irregular migration from Nigeria are potential victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation.

NEW CILSS GRADUATES

On 30 August, the CILSS Agrhymet Regional Centre celebrated the fourth edition of its master’s programme in food and nutrition security. Twenty-five students, including four women, graduated in Niamey, Niger. The ceremony was chaired by acting administrator Samba Ly Souleymane. The majority of students benefited from a scholarship within the ECOWAS-sponsored Support Program for Food and Nutrition Security in West Africa (PASANAO). They are likely to work in national and regional administrations or support private businesses in the fight against hunger and malnutrition. For nearly 40 years, CILSS has been instrumental in training food security experts who “speak the same technical language.” More than 1,000 experts have been trained across West Africa since the creation of the Agrhymet Regional Centre in 1974.

OPINION: TRYING TO BLOCK MIGRANTS WON’T WORK

“Throwing big bags of money at a country embroiled in a civil war is not the solution to a migration issue,” says Sophie in’t Veld in a blog post published on the website of The Guardian. Individual EU countries cannot cope with migration flows by themselves, but Europe can as a whole. She says that Europe needs a realistic plan to tackle illegal migration. EU governments should start implementing existing frameworks for asylum and migration, and actually donate the funds they have pledged. Investing in Africa’s development is a more effective response to the crisis.
WHO’S WHO: SALIF DIALLO, FORMER PRESIDENT OF BURKINA FASO’S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Burkinabe people observed three days of national mourning following the death of Salif Diallo on 19 August 2017. He passed away at the age of 60 following a long battle with cancer. Diallo was the former president of the National Assembly and had been one of Burkina Faso’s most prominent political figures over the past 30 years. Several thousand people, including presidents Alpha Condé of Guinea and Mahamadou Issoufou of Niger, attended in the funeral ceremony. For a long time, Diallo was a close ally of Blaise Compaoré, the former president. Diallo started his political career as Compaoré’s cabinet director during the revolution led by Thomas Sankara (1983-87). He then occupied a number of different government positions under Compaoré’s regime. Known for his political instinct and excellent diplomatic skills, he was nicknamed “Gorba,” a reference to former Soviet leader Mikhaïl Gorbachev, and he was known as the “strong man of Yatenga,” his home region in northern Burkina Faso. In 2008, Diallo fell into disfavour with Compaoré and was pushed out of national politics just as he became the country’s ambassador to Austria. His revenge came in 2014, when he allied with current President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and Simon Compaoré, to form the “Mouvement du peuple pour le progrès,” a new opposition party to battle against Blaise Compaoré’s “Congrès pour la démocratie et le progress.” Moreover, Diallo is said to have actively supported the attack on the National Assembly that prevented the constitutional vote that would have paved the way for Blaise Compaoré to serve another term. He is also said to have contributed to the popular uprising that ousted Blaise Compaoré in October 2014. After the upheaval, Diallo was elected as president of the National Assembly in December 2015, a position that he occupied until his death.

Half of the 1,939 urban agglomerations in West Africa are considered to be rural clusters. Towns and cities in this group have an average city size of 20,000 inhabitants. Despite their small size, rural clusters have a relatively high market potential – total population living in the region of the agglomeration - implying that they are located in areas with high rural densities, for example within the main agricultural production areas of Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Their average local dominance (the measure of the size of an agglomeration relative to the size of other agglomerations in the region) is low, which combined with their high market potential and small city size, highlights the particular tendency of these agglomerations to cluster together. The large number of agglomerations in this group can be linked to the process of in situ urbanisation, or the transformation of rural settlements into urban or quasi-urban settlements, a key characteristic of the urbanisation dynamic and the emergence of new agglomerations in West Africa. Of the 566 new urban agglomerations that ‘emerged’ in the ten years between 2000 and 2010, two-thirds are rural clusters. These new towns are a key feature of urban-rural linkages, driving territorial transformation processes and acting as entry points to the food system for the vast majority of the region’s family farms.