The 52nd ordinary session of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and government was held on 16 December in Abuja, Nigeria. This annual meeting was an opportunity for regional leaders to take stock of the West African regional integration process and to call for its acceleration by implementing regional infrastructure projects and improving the business environment in a co-ordinated way. Although there has been some progress – notably, the recent adoption of the ECOWAS Customs Code – there are still many obstacles on the road to greater regional integration. A sluggish harmonisation process of regional monetary policies has delayed the creation of a monetary union, and the free movement of people and goods continues to be constrained by irregular border practices. The encouraging economic prospects of the zone (the real GDP growth rate is projected at 2.1% in 2017 and 3.1% in 2018) make it conducive to continuing the work and structural reforms necessary to increase integration and economic diversification, but the risks of food and nutrition insecurity after a mixed agro-pastoral season are concerns. The same is true for terrorism, which remains an imminent threat in the region despite the successes of the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram of the Lake Chad basin and the operationalisation of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. In addition, they also discussed several country-specific situations at the conference, which gave member states the opportunity to promote peace and democracy by managing electoral and post-conflict crises in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali and Togo. The region’s leaders have also strongly condemned the treatment of African migrants and refugees in Libya. At the institutional level, the conference was marked by the appointment of Jean-Claude Brou as president of the ECOWAS Commission and the establishment of a committee to study and oversee the candidatures of Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia for membership.
G5 Sahel: Urgent Funding Needs

On the initiative of French President Emmanuel Macron, France hosted on 13 December a meeting in support of the G5 Sahel where Macron met with his counterparts from the G5 countries -- Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (Mali), Mahamadou Issoufou (Niger), Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (Burkina Faso), Idriss Déby (Chad) and Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz (Mauritania). Other heads of government, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and other partners, including the UN, the African Union and the European Union, also participated in the discussions. The objective of the meeting was to speed up the structuring of the G5 Sahel at the military, political and financial levels, and make it operational in a context where the jihadists in the Sahel are exacerbating the pressure on the region and its stability, which has already been weakened by the problematic peace process. One of the main issues is the initiative’s funding; operational needs are estimated at EUR 400 million. A first portion, of EUR 250 million, is needed to implement the initial actions, including forming a force of 5,000 people by mid-2018, but the international contributions that have been received are not enough to achieve this first objective. Following the meeting, Saudi Arabia and the United States should confirm a significant pledge, but a second round of financing will still be necessary to address the funding gap. It will take place at a summit in Brussels in February and will include Algeria and Senegal.

Linking Borderlands Research and Policy in Africa and Europe

Hosted at the Laboratory of Studies and Research on Social Dynamics and Local Development (LASDEL) in Niamey, Niger, this regional conference on cross-border co-operation and regional integration covered strategies to address the global migration crisis, increasing securitisation of Africa’s borders in the midst of a growing terrorist threat and demands for regional trade promotion and market development. The conference provided a platform to disseminate key findings from the Sahel and West Africa Club’s (SWAC) publication on cross-border co-operation and policy networks resulting from on-going collaboration between SWAC and the Sahel Research Group of the University of Florida. A joint presentation was made by SWAC, the University of Florida and the University of Niamey on cities and borders in West Africa. The event which brought together researchers, policy makers and practitioners from across West Africa and beyond, attempted to identify commons areas for future collaboration particularly in the area of border management by bridging the gap between research and policy.

Pastoralism and Conflict Prevention in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa

From 6-8 December in Cotonou, Benin, CILSS organised a conference on “Operational approaches to conflict sensitivity and prevention in pastoral areas,” which was chaired by the Beninese minister of agriculture, livestock and fisheries. The purpose of the event was to present the achievements of the Pastoralism and stability in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa (PASSHA) project. This project was designed in 2016 to address the “conflict prevention” dimension in the two regions, where existing programmes to support pastoralism - PRAPS in West Africa, and the RPLRP in the Horn of Africa - ignored the risks of conflict associated with pastoral mobility. PASSHA complements these programmes by implementing tools that take into account the “Conflict Sensitivity and Prevention” (CSP) methodology. Using a risk analysis that integrates social, environmental and economic factors, this operational approach makes it possible to develop partnerships and solutions to facilitate the cross-border mobility of pastoralists and their reception in the countries they cross.
The 8th edition of the Open Doors Day on the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and the subsequent resolutions on women, peace and security, was held on 11 December in Dakar. Organised by UNOWAS, ECOWAS and UN WOMEN, the goal of this day was to initiate a dialogue between regional women and regional actors on the implementation of the three-year action plan (2017-20) of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework’s (CPCC) component on women, peace and security. This programme, which recognises the growing involvement of women and young people in the fight against the cross-border crime, terrorism and radicalisation that affects West Africa, aims to strengthen the involvement of women in peace building and in the prevention and resolution of conflicts.

MUST READ: FINDING THE RIGHT ROLE FOR THE G5 SAHEL JOINT FORCE

This report from the International Crisis Group outlines the security and political reasons for creating the G5 Sahel Joint Force (FC-G5S), 10 months after its launch. It analyses the difficulties the force faces in its implementation, particularly in its ability to co-ordinate with the other military interventions that are underway in the region. The report includes recommendations for the FC-G5S to succeed, highlighting the need for the force to be part of a larger framework that not only addresses security issues, but political and social issues as well.

OPINION: “THE MAIN RESERVOIR OF JOBS TODAY AND TOMORROW IS THE FOOD ECONOMY”

Beyond its short-term implications, food issues raise other major regional challenges, including employment - especially for young people. But the food economy - when viewed as a value chain that is not just limited to agriculture, but also includes processing, transport and trade - is the main source of employment in the region today and tomorrow. The agri-food sector, which already accounts for 70% of employment in the region, must continue to be developed by increasing peoples’ awareness of nutrition issues, modernising agriculture and making food value chains more fluid. This last challenge is fundamental, because only better connections between the different segments, and between production and consumption zones, will increase the performance of these value chains and, thus, their capacity to generate employment, food security and stability in the region.

Laurent Bossard, director of the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat, talks about the region’s key challenges and the issue of youth employment. The interview was conducted on the sidelines of the Sahel and West Africa Week 2017 in Cotonou, Benin.
At the 52nd ECOWAS Summit in Abuja, the Ivorian Jean-Claude Brou was appointed as president of the regional organisation’s commission. Born in 1953, Brou holds a master’s degree in economics from the National University of Côte d’Ivoire, an MBA in finance and a PhD in economics from the University of Cincinnati. He began his career in 1982 at the IMF, where he served as country economist in several African countries before being appointed, in 1989, as the resident representative of the institution in Senegal. After this international experience, he returned to Côte d’Ivoire in 1991, where he held senior public positions, first as an economic and financial adviser to Prime Minister Daniel Kablan Duncan, then as president of the privatisation committee, at the head of which he oversaw the privatisation of 70 Ivorian state-owned companies. He later joined the BCEAO, where he held the positions of director of international relations in charge of UEMOA integration policies, director of economic studies and currency, and the special advisor and comptroller general. He was appointed as the representative of the World Bank in Chad in 2010. Brou joined the government of President Alassane Ouattara in 2012 as minister of industry and mines, which he held until his appointment as president of the ECOWAS Commission, succeeding the Beninese Marcel Alain de Souza. Brou will take office in March 2018 for a four-year term.

According to the most recent analysis of the Cadre harmonisé1, some 5.2 million people in the Sahel and West Africa are currently in need of food assistance. They could be 9.6 million during the next lean season in June-August 2018, if appropriate measures are not taken. Although the situation has improved in the Lake Chad basin, the food emergency still continues. Nigeria alone counts some 3.2 million people in a crisis phase or worse, including 450 000 people in phase 4 (emergency) and 1 800 people in phase 5 (famine). Six months ago, Nigeria still recorded more than double as many people in phase 3-5. Humanitarian interventions helped improve the situation. Northern Mali and the Liptako-Gourma region, a border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, are faced with recurrent food and nutrition insecurity. Some pockets of food insecurity require special attention. This is particularly the case of Cabo Verde which reports almost no harvest due to an exceptional drought. Livestock feed is a cause for concern in Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) where an early and very difficult lean season in the pastoral areas is likely to appear.

1 West African tool to analyse and identify areas and numbers of people at risk of food and nutrition insecurity.

Source: Regional Analysis, PREGEC Experts Meeting, Bamako, Mali, November 2017

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WHO’S WHO: JEAN-CLAUDE BROU, ECOWAS COMMISSION PRESIDENT

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