The five presidents from G5 Sahel countries met on 6 February in Niamey, Niger at the 4th ordinary session of the Heads of State Conference. Discussions focused on ensuring sustainable funding for the recently launched G5 Sahel Joint Force, which is in charge of combating terrorism, drug and human trafficking; re-establishing state authority; facilitating humanitarian operations; and contributing to development actions. “Given the pressure that the current security situation is placing on the public finances of member states, the heads of state invite the international financial institutions […] to put in place additional resources to face it,” indicates the final communiqué. “We bring this combat against terrorism not only to protect our own people and countries, but for the whole world,” declared Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou who is taking over the presidency of the G5 Sahel from the Malian president for a one-year mandate. The Joint Force was officially launched at the extraordinary summit on 2 July 2017 in Bamako, Mali, but still lacks funding to become fully operational. The five member countries pledged EUR 10 million each, representing approximately 11% of the required resources (EUR 450 million). In addition, Saudi Arabia pledged USD 100 million, the European Union EUR 50 million, France EUR 8 million (mostly technical equipment) and the US announced USD 60 million in bilateral aid. An international high-level conference on the Sahel, co-chaired by the G5 Sahel, the African Union and the EU, is scheduled for 23 February in Brussels. It aims to raise additional contributions to fill the funding gaps. In the meantime, in Niamey the G5 leaders approved the Joint Force’s operational set-up, the creation of a dedicated trust fund, procedures and guidelines, a measure to integrate a regional police academy within the national police academy of Chad and the creation of a G5 Sahel Defence College in Mauritania. They also announced an organisational audit to advance the restructuring of its Permanent Secretariat based in Nouakchott “to allow it to fully play its role.” G5 leaders appointed the Nigerien Maman Sambo Sidikou, as the new permanent secretary. Among other things, the Permanent Secretariat is in charge of organising, together with CILSS, a round table in Brussels (27-28 June 2018) to raise funds for the Priority Investment Programme (PIP G5 Sahel). The next ordinary session of the G5 Sahel Conference of Heads and State is scheduled to take place in February 2019 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.
CILSS Summit focuses on reforms

CILSS leaders gathered on 7 February in Niamey for the 18th ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government. Organised back-to-back with the G5 Sahel summit, six presidents (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) as well the Prime Minister of Togo participated in the event. Discussions focused on how to advance reforms of the 45-year old institution and how to provide the institution with sustainable financing. CILSS leaders formally re-committed to regularise outstanding payments and ensure the regular payment of membership fees. However, the institution remains heavily dependent on external funding. Winning a stronger buy-in from its membership base could be one way to change this situation. In their final communiqué, CILSS leaders decided to strengthen member countries’ political support of CILSS activities in order to increase the visibility and impact of CILSS work at the national level. Moreover, they committed to increasing co-operation with other regional bodies such as ECOWAS, UEMOA, CEEAC-CEMAC, the G5 Sahel as well as the Pan-African Agency of the Great Green Wall. Sudan was admitted as a new CILSS member, becoming its 14th member country. The institution has progressively expanded its geographic coverage from the Sahel to coastal countries. To date, CILSS counts eight coastal countries, five landlocked countries and one group of islands (Cabo Verde). With Sudan, CILSS is strengthening its base of Sahelian countries and fulfilling its original mission to combat desertification and promote drought control in line with the slogan, “Another Sahel is possible!” However, the new membership configuration might complicate its collaboration with ECOWAS; CILSS is often seen as the technical branch of ECOWAS, but it now counts three non-ECOWAS members (Chad, Mauritania and Sudan). The rotating presidency was transferred from Mali to Burkina Faso and President Christian Roch Kaboré has become the new CILSS chair. His minister of agriculture, Jacob Ouédraogo, is the new CILSS co-ordinating minister in charge of leading the reform process, along with CILSS Executive Secretary Djimé Adoum.

Sirleaf wins 2017 African Leadership Award

Less than one month after handing over power to George Weah, former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has already found a new job as “ambassador” for Liberia in the world. On 12 February, she was granted the 2017 Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, in recognition for her efforts to rebuild her country following two civil wars. “As the first woman to receive the award, it is my hope that women and girls across Africa will be inspired to reach for their true potential, to navigate the challenges, break through barriers, and to pursue their dreams. Where there is a first, there comes a second, and a third, and a fourth,” Sirleaf declared. The prize aims to change perceptions of African leadership by “showcasing exceptional role models from the continent.” The USD 5 million (payable over ten-years) is reserved for former African heads of state or government who have left office in the past three years and demonstrated exceptional leadership. The African Leadership Award was established in 2006, but so far only five African leaders were granted the prize: President Nelson Mandela (South Africa, Honorary), President Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique, 2007), President Festus Mogae (Botswana, 2008), President Pedro Pires (Cabo Verde, 2011) and President Hifikipunye Pohamba (Namibia, 2014).

Climate Change Adaptation: Lessons Learned from Three Cross-Border Projects

From 30 January to 1 February, as part of a study co-ordinated and financed by the Sahel and West Africa Club (OECD), the Transfrontier Operational Mission (MOT) participated in the European Conference on Energy Transition to present its on-going research on adaptation to climate change in three West African cross-border agglomerations: Dori-Téra, Gaya-Malanville and the coastal corridor from Ghana to Nigeria. The research aims to provide local communities with a practical guide to the legislative and financial tools that can be used to develop cross-border initiatives on climate change adaptation. Participants presented their experiences with decentralised co-operation as it relates to adaptation. They also brainstormed about how to engage and exchange ideas with African communities on this topic.
CILSS, WORLD BANK SIGN FUNDING AGREEMENT
FOR SAHEL IRRIGATION INITIATIVE

On 5 February, CILSS and the World Bank signed a new funding agreement worth USD 20 million for the Sahel Irrigation Initiative Regional Support Project (PARIIS). The project covers six Sahelian countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal) and aims to improve stakeholders’ capacity to develop and manage irrigation and increase irrigated areas in the Sahel by 2024. The project follows a regional approach, but each country will receive a grant of USD 25 million. The priority intervention areas have already been identified. One third of direct beneficiaries are women. CILSS is in charge of facilitating the project’s regional co-ordination. PARIIS is composed of three pillars: 1) modernisation of the institutional and planning framework; 2) funding of irrigation solutions; and 3) knowledge management and co-ordination. The project is part of the Sahel Irrigation Initiative supported by ECOWAS, UEMOA and the World Bank. It is scheduled to officially launch in Dakar.

MUST READ: NIGERIEN RESPONSES TO FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC SECURITY CHALLENGES

The Sahel crisis and spillover effects of the Boko Haram conflict in the Lake Chad basin have affected Niger. So far, the country has been mostly successful at containing external threats. However, Niger faces many economic and domestic challenges. Administrative state structures are few and far between in the areas outside of the capital city Niamey, and ongoing protests against the government threaten to weaken the country’s administration. This paper, published as part of the SWAC/OECD West African Papers series, examines the state of play in Niger and advances three possible scenarios for its future stability.

MUST READ: THE UNSTABLE FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL STABILITY IN CHAD

Another must read in the SWAC/OECD West African Papers series looks at the role Chad has played in the fight against both Boko Haram and the other violent extremists who threaten to spill over its borders. It investigates the country’s growing domestic grievances due to an ongoing fiscal crisis, the attacks on civil liberties and its disrupted electoral calendar. The mitigation of these diverse and multi-dimensional issues would benefit from an environment that is more supportive of democratic institutions and the rule of law, thus enhancing the country’s prospects for stability in the short- and long terms.

OPINION: FOOD PRICES MUST DROP IN AFRICA. HOW CAN THIS BE ACHIEVED?

Food is particularly expensive for households in sub-Saharan Africa – relative to their incomes. Prices are 30-40% higher than in the rest of the world with comparable per capita GDP levels. In West Africa, markets provide at least two-thirds of household food supplies and households spend an average of 55% of their budgets on food. “Transforming the food economy is key to lowering prices”, explains Thomas Allen from the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD) in an article published on the OECD Development Matters blog. First, productivity gains are needed to drive down prices. Second, challenges in the downstream segments of food value chains, i.e. in food processing, logistics and marketing must be addressed. Third, strengthening and facilitating regional trade will help reduce transaction costs and achieve economies of scale. And finally, more investment in price monitoring systems is needed, notably for non-cereal commodities.
On 16 February 2014, the heads of state of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger met in Nouakchott to create the G5 Sahel, a regional body designed to co-ordinate strategies and policies on defence, security, governance, infrastructure and resilience in the Sahel. Its convention was signed in December 2014 and its permanent secretariat, based in Nouakchott, manages its joint operations. The G5 Sahel presidency is rotating and recently passed from Mali to Niger. It officially launched its joint force at an extraordinary summit on 2 July 2017, after receiving support from the UN Security Council on 21 June. In December 2017, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution authorising UN peacekeepers deployed in Mali to provide the joint force with logistical and operational support. The joint force has been placed under the command of General Didier Dacko from Mali and should eventually comprise some 5,000 soldiers (seven battalions spread over three zones: West, Centre and East). Its headquarters is based in the Malian city Sévaré, near Mopti. Its initial budget is estimated at EUR 450 million, which would cover the cost of setting up command centres, equipping the battalions and paying the operating costs for one year. G5 Sahel countries have each pledged EUR 10 million; Saudi Arabia will contribute USD 100 million, the European Union EUR 50 million and France will provide equipment worth EUR 8 million. Nonetheless, there is still a significant budget shortfall and the question of how the joint force will cover its operating costs – about EUR 120 million per year by some estimates – is also still unresolved. Mobilising the necessary troops that will make up the joint force battalions is yet another challenge.

**WHO’S WHO: MAMAN SIDIKOU, G5 SAHEL PERMANENT SECRETARY**

A Nigerien replaces another Nigerien at the head of the G5 Sahel Permanent Secretariat. Maman Sidikou was appointed on 6 February by the G5 Sahel leaders at their summit in Niamey. He succeeds Najim El Hadj Mohamed who has headed the institution for the past three years. A close ally of Nigerien President Mahamadou Issoufou, Sidikou has many years of international experience as a diplomat and politician. Prior to his current appointment, since 2015 he headed the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). He also worked for the African Union as its special representative for Somalia and as head of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Within Niger, Sidikou’s served as minister of foreign affairs and African integration (1997-99) and then became the director of the president’s cabinet. Until 2011, he occupied various positions in the development sector. He worked for the World Bank (United States), UNICEF (Afghanistan, Iraq, Jordan and Nigeria) and UK’s Save the Children (Rwanda, DRC). A journalist by training (Dakar, Paris, Montréal), Sidikou also holds a degree in political science (Madrid) and a PhD in education (United States).