RPCA CALLS FOR ACTION TO ADDRESS THE CRITICAL PASTORAL SITUATION

The Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA) organised a regional consultation on the critical pastoral situation in the Sahel on 21-23 February in Niamey. Fodder production is significantly lower compared to the five-year average, particularly in Mauritania (deficit of 95%) and Senegal (deficit of 80%). This has led to early cross-border transhumance and the risk of conflicts in host countries. Bringing together six Sahelian countries, the main host countries on the West African coast and development partners, the Network members made a series of recommendations to the region's policy makers on how to address the crisis. The meeting was chaired by the Nigerien Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, with the facilitation of the Hub Rural and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD).

The analysis confirmed the early start of significant cross-border movements. Animal movements take place within Sahelian countries, from Sahelian to coastal countries and within coastal countries. For example, Senegal has recorded massive entries of Mauritanian herds since September 2017. Burkina Faso currently hosts about 150,000 animals from Mali and Niger. Benin recorded some 465 herds, including 33,000 bovines in January. This situation negatively impacts agricultural production in host countries and increases the risk of conflict between sedentary agricultural producers and transhumant agropastoralists. While response plans have already been elaborated in nearly all of the concerned countries, the funding gap is estimated at 75%. Moreover, discussions revealed that Sahelian countries' response plans do not sufficiently take into account the needs of cross-border transhumants. Coastal countries (i.e. Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Togo), in turn, better anticipate the large number of seasonal cattle flows that come into their countries, which helps improve host conditions and prevent conflicts. Other countries take protective measures that challenge the ECOWAS Protocol on the free movement of goods and people. The state of Benue in Nigeria, for example, has closed its borders to block transhumant movements. ECOWAS will hold an extraordinary ministerial committee meeting on 27-29 March 2018 in Abuja, in order to address security issues related to transhumant pastoralism.
On 2 March, Ouagadougou once again experienced two deadly attacks. A vehicle packed with explosives was placed in front of the army’s headquarters and a group of jihadists attacked the area around the French Embassy. According to the Burkinabé Ministry of Security’s official report, eight Burkinabe soldiers were killed in the attacks and about 80 people, including some civilians, were injured. Eight of the attackers were killed as security forces tried to regain control of the situation. Some of the attackers were wearing Burkinabe army uniforms. According to the Mauritanian news agency Alakhbar, Nusrat Islam wal-Muslimin, an AQMI affiliate, claimed responsibility for the attacks. These events coincided with a meeting about the G5 Sahel force, which had to be relocated to a different setting at the last minute. While a large number of security incidents are regularly reported in the north of Burkina Faso, this is the third attack that has hit the capital city within the past two years. On 15 January 2016, terrorists attacked a hotel and a restaurant in the city center, killing 30 people. On 13 August 2017, an attack on a restaurant on the capital’s main avenue, killed 19 people. Security conditions have now been strengthened within the capital city and security forces patrol potential targets. However, the attacks have deeply affected the people of Ouagadougou who mourn their victims and stay away from nightclubs, popular restaurants and public gatherings.

1 March was marked by some important leadership changes in West Africa’s regional organisations. The Ivorian Jean-Claude Brou took office as new head of the ECOWAS Commission. He replaces the Beninois Marcel de Souza, who has served as interim head for the past two years. A number of new commissioners were confirmed at the same time. CILSS also took an important step forward by appointing Souleymane Ouédraogo from Burkina Faso as the new general director of the CILSS Regional Agrhymet Centre, based in Niamey. He previously managed the CILSS Executive Secretariat in Ouagadougou as acting head. The Intergovernmental Group of Action against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) also changed its director. The Togolese Kimélabalou Aba became the new general director, replacing the Ivorian Adama Coulibaly who has been in office since 2014.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan embarked on 26 February on a five-day Africa tour to visit four African countries - Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Senegal - in a bid to extend Turkey’s influence on the African continent. It was president Erdogan’s first visit to Mali and Mauritania and his second African tour. He visited Chad, Sudan and Tunisia in December 2017. “Every day, our relationship with Africa is growing in the field of tourism, culture, trade and education,” declared President Erdogan. While Turkey has progressively increased its diplomatic representation and has 41 embassies on the African continent, it has also deepened its economic co-operation, especially in the construction sector. For example, a consortium of Turkish firms completed the construction of the new Blaise Diagne International Airport in Senegal. Several new contracts were signed during Erdogan’s Africa tour. Moreover, the Turkish Ministry of Economy hosted a forum on “Deepening Economic Partnership between Turkey and ECOWAS Members” on 22-23 February 2018 in Istanbul. The forum aimed to raise awareness of Turkish-West African business circles and identify new co-operation opportunities between Turkey and West Africa.
MUST READ: ILLICIT FINANCIAL FLOWS: THE ECONOMY OF ILLICIT TRADE IN WEST AFRICA

West Africa is losing about USD 50 billion a year in illicit financial flows — more than it receives in official development assistance (ODA). Nearly 80% of illicit financial flows from West Africa are generated from the theft of natural resources, principally oil. Human smuggling across the Sahel generates more than USD 100 million in illicit financial flows for West Africa per year. About 60% of the market value of all medication in the region is estimated to be falsified or substandard. These are some of the key findings of a new OECD study, which analyses the nature of 13 overlapping, and often mutually reinforcing, criminal and illicit economies. The study draws on a collaboration with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA), the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the World Bank. It identifies the networks and drivers that allow these criminal economies to thrive, with a particular emphasis on the actors and incentives behind them. The report underscores that there is no shortage of strategies, initiatives and declarations in the ECOWAS region. Given the scope of the criminal economies, it is crucial to set priorities and reinforce the implementation of national and regional legislation. However, West African policymakers will need support from their development partners. "OECD member countries can play a far more rigorous and active role in addressing criminal economies and illicit financial flows outside the region," concludes the report.

MUST READ: EMPOWERING WOMEN IN WEST AFRICAN MARKETS

As part of the VAM Gender & Markets Initiative, the WFP West Africa office published a new study on market conditions faced by women farmers and traders in two culturally similar yet administratively different areas: the Kano-Katsina region in northern Nigeria and the Maradi region in southern Niger. The two case studies analyse gender barriers that limit women’s participation in the sub-regional agricultural and livestock economy, in agricultural markets and value chains. It provides a series of recommendations to empower women traders in these cross-border areas.

OPINION: BURKINA FASO: “ONE ATTACK TOO MANY”

In this article published by a Burkinabe online platform, Newton Ahmend Barry, president of the country’s independent National Electoral Commission, analyses the double attack that took place on 2 March in Ouagadougou. "We are wrong to believe that France or the G5 Sahel will solve our problems. No people in the world has ever been rescued by another people," Barry wrote. The attacks were organised less than two weeks after a joint military operation at the border with Mali. This points to the fact that Burkinabe actors are actively involved in the jihadists’ networks. "Iyad no longer sends us his Arab or Tuareg commandos, which would have been easy to detect in our environment, but our own brothers who are not easy to identify at first sight", Barry states. Jihadist movements no longer attack soft targets, but are striking at the heart of the Burkinabe security system. They invaded the army’s headquarters with simple weapons (Kalashnikovs and Molotov cocktails). The northern areas of the Sahel have been largely neglected. The government clearly missed an opportunity to effectively control its borders with Mali. The security strategy must not solely focus on just securing the capital city ("Bunkerisation"). The people cannot claim Thomas Sankara and mourn his fate, he writes. “If we are not able to defend our homeland and keep it free, then we deserve the terrorists to terrorize us.”
Who's Who: Souleymane Ouédraogo, Director-General, CILSS/Agrhyмет

The Burkinabe Souleymane Ouédraogo was appointed as the new head of the CILSS Agrhymet Regional Centre on 1 March. He previously worked as the acting head of the CILSS Executive Secretariat from November 2016-April 2017. Ouédraogo is familiar with the internal workings of CILSS. From 1997-2000, he contributed to the regional co-ordination committee on national resource management and production systems at the CILSS Sahel Institute. He became the head of the natural resources department in 1999, a position that he occupied until 2008. From 2009-13, Ouédraogo worked as advisor to the Burkinabe Ministry for Agriculture. At the same time, Ouédraogo has had a long career teaching at the university of Ouagadougou and has published a large number of scientific papers and other reports. Ouédraogo trained as an agricultural engineer, and holds degrees in rural economics from the National university of Côte d’Ivoire and has a PhD in agricultural economics and business from the University of Groningen in The Netherlands.

Maps & Facts: Transhumance and Nomadism

Transhumance is a mobile livestock farming method that is based on regular, seasonal movements. The movements are mostly predictable; each year, herders follow the rhythm of the seasons and pass over the same trails and pasturelands that they already know. On the other hand, nomadism is characterised by the continual and unpredictable movements of all members of a family or a group. Most agro-pastoralists in the Sahel today practice semi-transhumance. Only a part of the family moves according to the seasons, while the rest of the family practices sedentary farming. Agro-pastoral livestock farming is prevalent throughout West Africa. Animals move within Sahelian countries, from Sahelian countries to coastal countries and within coastal countries. Livestock farming is probably the most integrated economic activity in West Africa. Every year, hundreds of thousands of animals are moved to supply coastal markets. These internal and cross-border movements are often sources of conflict between sedentary farmers and transhumant agro-pastoralists. However, transhumant livestock farming also contributes to the development of abandoned and isolated areas by ensuring a human presence in areas with significant security issues.