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

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THE 2017-18 AGRO-PASTORAL CAMPAIGN AND FOOD SITUATION

Within the framework of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), CILSS and its partners organised a PREGEC regional technical consultation on 26-28 March 2018 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso to present the final results of the 2017-18 agro-pastoral campaign and discuss key findings from the Cadre harmonisé analysis. Cereal production in the region is estimated at 67.7 million tonnes, up by 2.5% and 11.7% compared to the 2016-17 campaign and the five-year average, respectively. However, cereal production has declined in some countries (Gambia: -29 %; Burkina Faso: -11%; Guinea-Bissau: -7%; and Chad: -5.5%). Cabo Verde has not recorded any agricultural production for this year due to a drought. The food and nutrition situation has deteriorated in parts of the Sahelian belt, which faces a difficult pastoral situation. Nearly 7.1 million people, mostly pastoralists and agro-pastoralists, currently face a crisis situation, especially in the Lake Chad basin, the Liptako-Gourma region and central Mali. The number of people in need of assistance could reach 10.6 million by June-August 2018, if appropriate measures are not taken in time. Participants recommended that governments accelerate the rapid implementation of national response plans to assist populations in food and nutrition crisis and emergency situations in Sahelian countries, paying particular attention to the most vulnerable groups - young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women. They also recommended taking rapid action to protect the livelihoods of pastoralist and agro-pastoralist populations under stress. Members of the Cadre harmonisé Steering Committee discussed the future of the Cadre harmonisé analysis, which has gradually emerged as an internationally-recognised reference. However, Sahelian and West African countries must still develop stronger ownership and in-house capacity to produce and collect quality data and ensure sustainable funding for the analysis. The PREGEC recommendations will feed into the forthcoming RPCA restricted meeting, scheduled for 16-18 April 2018 at the OECD Conference Centre in Paris.

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On 22 March, the 25th World Water Day promoted nature-based solutions to address the world’s water challenges. “How can we reduce floods, droughts and water pollution? By using the solutions we already find in nature” was the official theme. The 8th World Water Forum was held in Brasilia, Brazil and brought together some 10,000 water experts and practitioners from the public and private sectors. In West Africa, Foundation Barka, Eau Vive Internationale and other partners organised the First Water Fair in Fada N’Gourma, Burkina Faso from 21-25 March, aimed at promoting a decentralised platform for discussion between water sector stakeholders. The Malian government organised a debate on the theme “Nature for Water” in Bamako. The importance of water is self-evident in the Sahel and West Africa region, which faces a large number of water challenges including: access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation services; growing water demand and water pollution in urban settings; climate-smart solutions for agriculture; peaceful and sustainable management of cross-border water resources, etc. According to UN-Water, in 2017, 90% of the untreated wastewater in sub-Saharan Africa was released into the environment. Some 500 million hectares of land in Africa was lost to erosion, mostly through water erosion. The African Development Bank has launched four flagship initiatives to address the continent’s water challenges (Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Initiative, African Water Facility, NEPAD Water and Sanitation Programme and the Multi-donor Water Partnership Programme). A large number of local solutions and best practices are available on the ground and could be scaled up. The next World Water Forum will be held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2021. It aims to become more inclusive and increase civil society participation.

The United Nations has reset its action plan to address the root causes of the complex crisis in the Sahel. The new UN Support Plan for the Sahel will cover the period 2018-22. During a strategic consultative meeting on the Sahel, held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, on 28 March 2018, UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed announced five key priorities: 1) inclusive and equitable growth; 2) public good services, including access to basic services, governance and rule of law; 3) climate and energy; 4) gender equality and women’s empowerment; 5) security, including preventing violent extremism, transnational crime and human trafficking. Empowering youth will be treated as an overall priority. Mohammed regretted the lack of coherence and co-ordination among the various actors active in the Sahel. “Over the past few years, while there have been well-intended efforts, one of the main challenges in the Sahel is the multiplicity of actors and initiatives in the region, often not pulling in the same direction. This cannot continue,” she declared. She also called for changing the narrative in the Sahel and for stronger support for national and regional efforts. “That means supporting national and regional efforts, increasing our own impact and working for the coherence and efficiency of all efforts, under national leadership, for concrete and quick results.” In 2015, UN channels spent USD 2.7 billion in the Sahel.

As the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is set to withdraw from that country, the UN transferred its radio station to ECOWAS on 23 March. “I am convinced that this powerful medium of communication will enable the regional organisation to have greater impact on its citizens, particularly at the grassroots,” stated President George Manneh Weah who participated in the ceremony. The radio station will promote regional integration, contribute to the education of the West African people and create awareness of ECOWAS programmes and its Vision 2020. Leopoldo Amado, ECOWAS commissioner for education, science and culture, called for greater support from the international community to sustain the radio station. “There is the need for huge technical investment, first to enable the radio remain on air, then to extend its broadcast to the other member states in the three official languages of ECOWAS, and finally to incorporate national languages that will foster the socio-cultural integration of our community,” Amado declared.
PHOTO ESSAY: WHAT NEXT FOR THE MILLIONS UPROOTED BY BOKO HARAM?

In April, four journalists published a photo essay in The Guardian about the consequences of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad basin. They visited refugee camps in Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Their photographs tell the stories of fractured families and untold suffering. While the Nigerian government has made great strides against Boko Haram, nine years of the insurgency have deeply marked the region. “Beneath the mayhem of Boko Haram lies the real problem, which is extreme poverty,” says Kashim Shettima, Governor of Borno State.

MUST READ: AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND JOBS IN WEST AFRICA

The food economy is the biggest employer in West Africa accounting for 66% of total employment. While the majority of food economy jobs are in agriculture, off-farm employment in food-related manufacturing and service activities is increasing as the food economy adapts to rapid population growth, urbanisation and rising incomes.

This OECD West African Paper aims to contribute to the debate by quantifying and describing the current structure of employment in the West African food economy and by looking at some of the emerging spatial and territorial implications linked to the sector’s transformations.

MUST READ: THE FIGHT AGAINST FAMINE: A SISYPHEAN TASK

The most recent issue of the Swiss Foreign Affairs Magazine Politorbis is dedicated to the fight against famine, including an article on the Sahel and West Africa region, produced by the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC/OECD). It reviews the region's progress in the fight against food insecurity over the past 30 years. While the region was spared from a major food crisis, food and nutrition security remains a major concern for nearly all countries in the region. Further progress could be achieved through better co-ordination to ensure the coherence and efficiency of all efforts, in line with national and regional priorities. It is always easier to make one individual move at one's own pace, but it takes much more time and effort to build consensus, get everybody on board and move together into the same direction in a sustainable manner. As this wise African proverb notes, “If you want to go quickly, walk alone, but if you want to go far, let's walk together,” conclude the authors. By taking more co-ordinated and collective action, we can work more efficiently and have greater impact.

OPINION: MALI, FOUR MONTHS AHEAD OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

This is a must read for anybody who would like to understand the issues at stake in Mali’s next presidential election, which are set for 29 July 2018. Joseph Brunet-Jailly, an economist and Mali expert, analyses the state of play in Malian politics. The prospects are far from encouraging. Mali is in a catastrophic situation: the Algiers Peace Agreement has become void, the opposition is divided and the forthcoming presidential election will probably change nothing. In the meantime, external enemies threaten Malians every day and they are exposed to a permanent climate of extreme insecurity and uncertainty. Brunet-Jailly calls for a political transformation in Mali - to get rid of a class of political elites who will not bring about change. “This is why the political mandate of MINUSMA needs to be considerably broadened, to cover the preparation and organisation of discussions between Malian parties with a view to formulating a new social contract,” Brunet-Jailly concludes.
Who’s Who: Julius Maada Bio, President of Sierra Leone

Julius Maada Bio is the candidate from the Sierra Leone People’s Party, who was sworn in as the new country’s president on 4 April 2018. In a tight runoff election, he received 51.8% of the vote, defeating former foreign affairs minister Samura Kamara from the All People’s Congress. President Bio succeeds Ernest Bai Koroma who led the country for the past ten years. A former military leader who joined the armed forces in 1985, Bio has already ruled the country after taking part in a coup. He ruled for less than three months before handing power over to a civilian government in 1996. Bio then emigrated to the United States where he lived for a decade and obtained a master’s degree in international affairs from American University in Washington, D.C. Bio returned to Sierra Leone in 2008 and started a cocoa and coffee farming company. He ran for president in 2012 but lost against the incumbent, President Ernest Bai Koroma. Bio’s presidential campaign called for giving all citizens of Sierra Leone a better life, particularly through free education. Bio comes from the southern district of Bonthe. His career path has been compared to that of Nigerian President Buhari, who once ruled the country as a military leader and is now a democratically-elected president. President Bio is pursuing a doctorate in peace studies at the University of Bradford in England.

The food and nutrition situation is severely deteriorating in parts of the Sahelian belt. According to the Cadre harmonisé analysis, nearly 7.1 million people currently face a crisis situation, especially in zones that are still plagued by insecurity, including in the Lake Chad basin, the Liptako-Gourma region and central Mali. The number of people in need of assistance could reach 10.6 million by June-August 2018, if appropriate measures are not taken in time. While the food situation has improved in the northeastern states of Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe) thanks to ongoing humanitarian interventions, Nigeria still accounts for more than 50% of the region’s food insecure people. About 3.7 million Nigerians currently require emergency assistance (March-May 2018). These figures are expected to increase to about 5.3 million people by June-August 2018. In Borno State alone, some 1.5 million people (27.8% of the population) are likely to face a crisis situation (phase 3-5). The situation is also set to become extremely difficult in Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali as each country will have to address the urgent needs of nearly 1 million people. Some 800 000 people may be food insecure in Niger by June-August. The majority of people in need of food and nutrition assistance in these areas are pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. Their communities have been severely affected this year by the lack of fodder and water and they have been forced to migrate early, with their livestock, to other areas within their countries or across national borders.

Source: Cadre harmonisé analysis, PREGEC regional technical consultation, Ouagadougou, March 2018.