Merkel’s West African tour in support of G5 Sahel countries

Following Merkel’s business-focused West Africa tour in August 2018 of Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal, the German chancellor came back to the region for a three-day tour of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger on 1-3 May. This time, discussions focused on security and counter-terrorism efforts in the Sahel. Chancellor Merkel participated in the G5 Sahel Extraordinary Summit on 1 May in Ouagadougou.

We talked about the deteriorating security situation and we want to be on the side of Burkina Faso, especially in terms of co-operation on security,” Merkel said after a meeting with Christian Roch Kaboré, president of Burkina Faso. “This is necessary because in the East and North of the country there is a situation where children cannot go to school, where populations seem to live in insecurity. We need to end these problems as quickly as possible”, Merkel said. Germany pledged an additional EUR 46 million for Burkina Faso and EUR 35 million for Niger to support development projects and to pay for security force equipment and training. In addition, Germany has already contributed EUR 60 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force. G5 Sahel nations commended Germany’s new role in the Sahel and called for support to resolve the Libyan crisis, which is still having a significant effect on the region. The Sahel region has become the main focus of Germany’s Africa policy. Africa became a priority under the German G20 presidency in 2017, which led to the launch of the G20 Compact with Africa. To date, seven West African countries have joined the compact (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Senegal and Togo).
SWITZERLAND, BCEAO SUPPORT FINANCIAL INCLUSION IN THE UEMOA AREA

Switzerland is partnering with the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) to support the implementation of a regional financial inclusion strategy in the UEMOA area. The two partners aim to develop regional financial education programmes and targeted information campaigns, in particular for women, youth and rural populations. In particular, they plan to integrate financial education modules into school and university programmes. A mapping study with disaggregated data on the current demand and offers of financial services in the eight UEMOA member countries will help officials design policies, innovative tools and financial inclusion programmes. The five-year funding convention, worth EUR 5.7 million, was signed on 13 May at the BCEAO headquarters in Dakar during a meeting between Swiss Ambassador Marion Weichelt Krupski and BCEAO Governor Tiémoko Meyliet Koné. Switzerland will cover two-thirds of the costs (~ EUR 3.8 million), while the remainder (~ EUR 1.9 million) will be covered by BCEAO resources. Despite the progress West Africa’s has made over the past 20 years, financial inclusion rates in the region remain the weakest in the world. The vast majority of West Africans do not have a bank account or use mobile banking.

NIGERIA: NEARLY 900 CHILD SOLDIERS RELEASED

According to UNICEF, a total of 894 children, including 106 girls, were released from the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) in Maiduguri, in northeastern Nigeria, on 10 May. The CJTF was formed in 2013 a local militia that supports security forces in the fight against insurgency in northeastern Nigeria and protects communities from attack. The release is part of CJTF’s commitment to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children. “Any commitment for children that is matched with action is a step in the right direction for the protection of children’s rights and must be recognised and encouraged,” said Mohamed Fall, UNICEF representative in Nigeria.” According to UNICEF, more than 3 500 children were recruited in northeastern Nigeria and used by non-state armed groups between 2013-17. To date, CJTF has released 1 727 children and young people.

BURKINA FASO CREATES FASO DAN FANI LABEL

The Burkina Faso Ministry of Commerce has decided to protect the “Faso dan fani”, the famous African “pagné” traditionally woven by Burkinabé women. The measure aims to combat counterfeiting and unfair competition and to support local production by consolidating some 30 000 jobs in the cotton sector. It will also protect the cultural identity of the fabric. “The newly created label will be promoted in a catalogue with samples from different regions of Burkina Faso,” indicated Mahamadi Tassembodo, director of the National Centre for Intellectual Property. Faso dan fani means “woven loincloth of the homeland.” Thomas Sankara made it a symbol of local arts and national pride in the mid-1980s. It is commonly used at public ceremonies and family celebrations. Besides the Faso dan fani, other labeled and protected products include the Saponé hat, shea butter and Kaya leather.
REGIONAL EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE OF WEST AFRICA

Some 150 West African bishops, archbishops and cardinals currently gathered for a week at the 3rd General Assembly of the Regional Episcopal Conference of West Africa in Ouagadougou. Burkina Faso’s President Christian Roch Kaboré spoke at the opening ceremony on 13 May and called upon all citizens to stay united regardless of religion or ethnicity. “Terrorists have reorganised their operation methods, seeking first to create inter-communal conflict, and now an inter-religious conflict. Christians have been killed for practicing their religion by people who have no morals or ethics,” deplored the President Kaboré. Burkina Faso is known for the peaceful co-existence of its Muslim and Christian communities. However, a deadly terrorist attack on a church in Dabo, in the north of the country, killed 6 people just one day before the opening of the conference. The conference was held under the theme “The new evangelisation and comprehensive human development in the Church, family of God, in West Africa” and aimed to address questions related to the future of African youth. Founded in 2012 in Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, the conference brings together Catholic leaders from 16 West African countries.

MUST READ

THE MOBILE ECONOMY - WEST AFRICA 2019

This report produced by GSMA, a group of 750 operators with nearly 400 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, offers a wealth of information on mobile operator data, analysis and forecasts about West Africa. The number of unique subscribers in the region will reach 248 million (54%) by 2025. 3G will overtake 2G in 2019 to become the leading mobile technology in West Africa. Smartphone connections accounted for 38% of total connections in 2018; this number will rise to nearly 70% by 2025. The mobile ecosystem directly employs around 200,000 people in West Africa, supports 800,000 jobs in the informal employment sector, and an additional 600,000 jobs across the wider economy.

OPINION

PREVENTION CALLS FOR STRENGTHENING DEVELOPMENT, HUMANITARIAN, PEACE “TRIPLE NEXUS”

This op-ed, published on the IPI Global Observatory, by Jorge Moreira da Silva, OECD director of the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD) and Eric Rosand, director of the Prevention Project and Brookings non-resident senior fellow, calls upon governments and development partners to develop a new approach to development that prioritizes prevention. The number of people living in fragile contexts is constantly growing. Funding for humanitarian action is being outstripped by growing needs, and close to 90% of humanitarian aid - which is supposed to be short-term by its very definition — is now flowing to protracted crises. On the other hand, only 2% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) is spent on prevention. A stronger focus on prevention will require “a much more coherent effort among political, security, development, humanitarian and peace actors—recognizing that the challenges in fragile contexts are too big and too complex for one set of actors to tackle alone,” explain the authors. To translate this into practice, long-standing bureaucratic, programmatic and funding silos within donor governments and multilateral institutions and among development, humanitarian, and peace and security actors, need to be broken down.
Maïmouna N'Diaye, nicknamed the "heroine of African cinema", is a socially committed pan-African actress and director. She was one of the only African artists representing African cinema culture at the Cannes Film Festival this year, where she participated as a jury member. “For me, cinema is a weapon for mass reconciliation,” N'Diaye explained in an interview. “I used this art to show or say, everything that minorities can’t express.” Defining herself as a pan-Africanist with parents of Senegalese and Nigerian origins, N'Diaye was raised in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. In 2015, N'Diaye won the 2015 FESPACO Award for the best actress. She was also nominated for best actress at AMAA awards in Nigeria and became internationally recognised for her film “Eye of the Storm”. N'Diaye was also in “Kinkou and the Sorceress,” in which she recorded the mother’s voice of the famous West African village boy. She has directed several documentaries about Africa on topics such as violence against young girls and people battling psychiatric troubles. N'Diaye has become a key power player in African cinema, and is a critical voice for women's empowerment in a male-dominated industry.