ECOWAS leaders gathered on 14 September in Ouagadougou at an extra-ordinary session on terrorism. While calling upon the UN Security Council to resolve the Libyan crisis, ECOWAS leaders adopted a priority action plan for 2020-24 focusing on eight areas. In a bid to leverage member countries’ contributions and strengthen ECOWAS leadership, the authority pledged USD 1 billion for the community’s counter-terrorism efforts. The purpose of the summit was to “consider the different initiatives taken thus far to prevent and combat terrorism and redefine priority areas of action to curb the spread of terrorist attacks in the region.” The summit gathered nearly all of the region’s heads of state, as well as many regional and international leaders, underscoring the gravity and urgency of the current situation. In their final communiqué, the authority proposed that a joint representative of the African Union and the UN for Libya be appointed. It also called on the UN Security Council to give MINUSMA a “more robust mandate to fight terrorism.” It encouraged the ECOWAS Commission to work with the AU to open dialogue with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for “security spending to be accepted as investment for development.” ECOWAS leaders also approved the principle of involving the ECOWAS Standby Force in counter-terrorism efforts, and encouraged the ECOWAS Commission to make the ECOWAS logistics depot in Lungi, Sierra Leone operational. The proposed USD 1 billion priority action plan for the 2020-24 period is based on the idea of pooling resources and improving co-ordination of counter-terrorism efforts, increasing intelligence information sharing, and developing training, equipment and border management. It also includes measures to step up the fight against organised cross-border crime, particularly trafficking in illicit drugs, tobacco and fake drugs. Lastly, it promotes a culture of peace and supports frameworks for religious practice through inclusive dialogues involving religious and community leaders, women, young people and relevant civil society groups. The finalised action plan with full details on the budget and implementation timetable, will be adopted at the next ECOWAS summit on 21 December in Abuja.
REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE FALL ARMYWORM

In response to the recommendation of the Food Crisis Prevention Network (RPCA), ECOWAS, UEMOA, CILSS and their partners organised the first regional conference on the fall armyworm, which was held on 10-12 September 2019 in Ouagadougou. Hosted by Burkina Faso’s President Christian Roch Kaboré with the participation of Niger’s President Mahamadou Issoufou, the conference was an important step forward in the development of a co-ordinated regional response to combat this trans-boundary crop pest.

AFRICAN GREEN REVOLUTION FORUM 2019: GROW DIGITAL

The theme of the African Green Revolution Forum (AGRF 2019), which brought together some 2 400 key stakeholders on 3-6 September in Accra, focused on using digital information and tools to support sustainable food systems in Africa. With the facilitation of USAID, the SWAC Secretariat presented the Africapolis database and key findings from its work on urbanisation. This 9th edition of the AGRF emphasised that “co-ordinated efforts of public and private sector actors can unlock the potential of advances in everything from big data to block chain systems, drones, robotics, and machine learning platforms.” Digital technologies can help address major barriers and help people across the continent to tap into agriculture’s potential and provide new economic opportunities.

Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo noted that AGRF 2019 was an essential opportunity to ensure agriculture is a top priority on every country’s development agendas. The forum saw the launch of a new Africa Regional Food Trade Coalition, building on the established African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The coalition aims to increase regional food trade via policies and mechanisms that encourage new agribusiness investments. Moreover, IFPRI launched the Africa Agriculture Trade Monitor 2019, which examines the effectiveness of efforts to increase regional trade integration and intra-African trade. The SWAC Secretariat promoted Africapolis, a tool for understanding urbanisation dynamics in Africa. The database helps improve the design of territorial and regional integration policies. It also explored opportunities for further collaboration on urbanisation dynamics in Ghana, notably within the UrbAfrica network. The 2020 edition of the Forum will be held in Kigali, Rwanda.

URBANISM AT THE MARGINS

The annual gathering of the African Borderlands Research Network (ABORNE) was held from 16-17 September in Lomé, Togo. Some 40 cross-border practitioners and experts analysed dynamics of border cities to shed more light on how the border setting shapes urban forms, livelihoods and aesthetics. The SWAC Secretariat presented key findings from Africapolis, a geospatial database on cities and urbanisation dynamics in Africa, and presented its analytical work on border cities. Seven panel debates addressed topics such as border twins, the size of border urbanism, border cultures, border crossings, mobility and livelihoods. Rapid population growth is blurring the lines between urban and rural areas. Drawing on 200,000 data points and estimates of the population and size of over 7,600 agglomerations in 50 countries, Africapolis is a powerful tool for understanding urbanisation dynamics. It helps improve the design of territorial and regional integration policies. Participants raised questions about how development partners could better address fast growing rural-urban linkages and provide stronger support for secondary cities. The SWAC Secretariat also presented its analytical work on border cities to identify and evaluate the drivers and obstacles of cross-border co-operation. Three presentations focused on: growth and density, businesses and health, and accessibility and infrastructure in border cities. Key findings have been published in the “Cities” collection of the West African papers series.
LONG TERM TRENDS ACROSS SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SAHEL

The most recent West African Paper, prepared by Daniel Eizenga, research fellow of the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, offers a broad overview of the current security-development situation in the Sahel. It analyses three central themes - poverty, migration and conflict - adopting a historical perspective to examine long-term trends in the region. The paper includes an analysis of the costs of security-based solutions. The author recommends paying continued attention to the political and economic ramifications. “The over-determined focus on terrorism and violent religious extremism risks ignoring the failings of regional governments to provide the public goods needed by their citizens and in turn perpetuating, or exacerbating, the root causes of conflict in the region,” Eizenga explains. “Since the securitisation of the response to the challenges posed by insecurity and underdevelopment in the Sahel, trends toward authoritarian and autocratic rule have emerged in Niger and become increasingly entrenched in Chad. Increased policing and security will also translate into increased economic costs, potentially undermining regional promises on development, and incentivising actors to engage in the political economy of conflict,” explains the author. On the other hand, much more support is needed to sustain a functioning justice system and support the rule of law throughout the Sahel. “Failure to do so will result in continued momentum for terrorism in the region, exacerbating insecurity and limiting any attempts to improve development,” the author concludes.

GOALKEEPERS 2019: EXAMING INEQUALITY

How geography and gender stack the deck for (or against) you

“No matter where you are born, life will be harder if you are born a girl”. This statement comes from the 2019 Goalkeepers Report, published by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. It analyses layers of inequality and how geography and gender affect peoples’ lives. Geography (place of birth) and gender are major determinants of health, success and overall well-being. The report also underlines the immense progress made in poor countries over the past 20 years. It is available in English, French, German, Chinese and Hindi.

“IF EUROPE MISSES ITS APPOINTMENT WITH AFRICA, IT WILL MISS A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY”

In this interview, published by Le Point Afrique, outgoing European Commissioner Neven Mimica offers his vision for better co-operation between Africa and Europe. “Our two continents are facing new challenges which can only be tackled together. We are at a crossroads: Africa is a continent in full swing, with huge economic and human potential. It is a giant in the making, at the gates of Europe. If Europe misses its appointment with Africa, it will miss a historic opportunity,” Mimica explained.

Commissioner Mimica talked about the achievements made during his mandate, including the Africa-Europe Alliance, a greater focus on the role of value chains, outreach to the African diaspora, financial and social inclusion, job creation and skills, as well as the current negotiations on a modernised ACP-EU partnership, which should be concluded in 2020. He was a strong advocate for multilateral co-operation, favouring co-operation among like-minded partners over competition.
Clarisse Agbegnenou is a French-Togolese Judoka, who won the gold medal in the 63 kg category for the fourth time at the 2019 World Judo Championships in Tokyo on 28 August, after a fierce final of more than 11 minutes against the Japanese Miku Tashiro. Born to Togolese parents in Rennes, France, Clarisse has dual citizenship and maintains strong ties to both countries. In 2014, Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé congratulated her in a letter, "wishing her many other brilliant victories." Together with her twin brother, she was born as a premature baby. Clarisse told her story in a video: "When I was born, I couldn’t breathe. I was basically dead and they resuscitated me. I went under surgery and I was in a coma for nearly one month. They even asked my parents if they can unplug me, but they wanted to wait a bit more. And one day I suddenly woke up. […] They said I was a fighter because I fought for life." Speaking about the French judo national team, Clarisse explained, "I think men should learn from us, they need a bit of women's mentality. We are respected now but in the past, we were asked why we were doing a sport for men. Now with our team we have changed the mentality. We want to instil in young girls and boys the idea that judo is a mixed sport," she explained. Clarisse started judo at the age of nine. She is today the most successful judoka in the history of France and Togo.

Official Development Assistance for urban development is mostly channelled to big cities, benefitting some 63 million people or 37% of the region’s total urban population of 171 million people. About 45% of urban development projects were implemented in agglomerations with more than 300,000 inhabitants. However, nearly half of West Africa’s urban dwellers live in small and medium-size cities. The mapping of urban development-related projects according to city size illustrates their highly uneven distribution in the region. Capital cities and large urban agglomerations — where infrastructure is already comparatively better developed — benefit from the strongest support from development partners. On the other hand, only one in five medium-size cities (300,000 – 1 million people) receives urban development assistance, and the large majority of small agglomerations (< 300,000 inhabitants) do not get any support. Considering West Africa’s rapidly growing small and mid-sized cities, development partners need to better target and scale up their support.