FIRST RUSSIA-AFRICA SUMMIT

In a move to expand its footprint across Africa, Russia held the first Russia-Africa Summit and Economic Forum on 23-24 October 2019 in Sochi under the theme “For Peace, Security and Development.” All 54 African states took part in the event, including 47 heads of state. Moving beyond business as usual dominated by arms and grain sales, the final declaration outlines a set of goals for Russian-African co-operation, including a new mechanism for dialogue. The Russia-Africa Summit will be held once every three years. In addition, annual political consultations will be organised between ministers of foreign affairs. The declaration outlines areas of co-operation in the fields of politics, security, trade, economic co-operation, legal co-operation, environmental protection as well as scientific, technical, humanitarian and information co-operation. The economic forum focused on three thematic pillars: forging economic ties, creating joint projects and collaborating in the humanitarian and social sector. Trade flows between Russia and Africa in 2018 amounted to USD 20 billion, which is twice what it was in 2015, but remains low compared to other partners such as China (USD 205 billion in 2018) or India (USD 63 billion in 2018). Egypt accounts for 40% of this trade flow (USD 7.7 billion in 2018), followed by Algeria with approximately 30%. Russia has historically predominated with its arms sales in Africa (mostly to Algeria, Angola, Egypt and Sudan), but is now promising to diversify into other areas without “political or other” interference. “We have many potential partners in Africa, it is true, and we are talking about potential partners with strong opportunities for development and huge growth potential,” declared Russian President Vladimir Putin. “The development and consolidation of mutually beneficial ties with African nations and their integration associations is now one of Russia’s foreign policy priorities,” he highlighted on the forum’s website. On the sidelines of the summit, the African Union Commission signed co-operation agreements with the Russian Federation as well as with the Eurasian Economic Commission.
The UEMOA Commission and the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) signed, on 8 November 2019 in Abidjan, a new co-operation agreement worth nearly EUR 1 million to complete phase 1 of the programme for local cross-border co-operation (PCTL). Cross-border activities will be conducted in two pilot areas: 1) the Sikasso-Korhogo-Bobo Diaoulalpha triangle, a dynamic cross-border area connecting Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Mali; 2) the Liptako-Gourma area (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger). The goal of the second area is to set up a decentralised cross-border co-operation unit between these territorial entities. A first agreement was signed in December 2016 worth EUR 4.8 million. It allowed for the implementation of two integrated cross-border development plans, focusing on the coastal strip and the Senegal River. Three pilot investment projects, namely the boreholes of Weleni (Burkina Faso), Loulouni and Nimbougou (Mali), the new road to the Tombeau-Kossi health centre, as well as the Terra market will soon be complete. In addition, UEMOA Commission President Abdallah Boureima signed a new co-operation agreement with the R20 Green Fund for Women to better integrate the climate aspect within projects conducted by local actors. This will allow more cross-border initiatives to facilitate access to basic services and strengthen regional integration, including setting up a street children initiative providing support to about 3 000 local authorities within the UEMOA area. Activities will also involve local and regional authorities in implementing projects that integrate climate considerations and boost “green jobs” for the benefit of young people and women. It will also provide general support to the UEMOA in order to mainstream climate concerns and responses from the local and regional levels.

Special envoys for the Sahel and their partners met on 17-18 October 2019 at the Casa África in Las Palmas, Spain. Traditionally an informal meeting bringing together representatives from various partner countries and regional organisations (African Union, Belgium, Denmark, ECOWAS, European Union, Finland, France, G5 Sahel, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, United Nations, the United States and the SWAC Secretariat), the event opened up to researchers and Sahel experts. They shared their analysis and insights on three major topics: security and stability, economic development and women’s contributions to peace and stability. Special envoys also discussed the difficulties in implementing the Algiers Agreement in Mali and the deteriorating security situation in Liptako-Gourma area. In his presentation, SWAC Secretariat Director Laurent Bossard spoke about the challenges of border management. In parallel, the G5 Sahel countries held a meeting in Nouakchott about how to the reinvigorate border police.

The CILSS Regional Agrhymet Centre celebrated its 11th graduating of class of senior hydrological technicians with a ceremony on 29 October. Twenty-nine senior experts completed the training, including three women. The majority of students were supported through scholarships from the African Development Bank and the Government of Burkina Faso. Present at the ceremony were: Albadé Abouba, Nigerien minister of agriculture and livestock, Kalla Moutari, Nigerien minister of hydraulics and sanitation, as well as Issaka Hassane Karanta, governor of the Niamey region. Improving the governance of water is a key priority in the Sahel and West Africa. Agrhymet has trained more than 1 500 experts since its creation. It currently runs six master’s programmes and several technical degrees for under-graduate students.
**AFRICA’S DEVELOPMENT DYNAMICS 2019**

by the African Union Commission and the OECD Development Centre at the 11th Private Sector Forum in Antananarivo, Madagascar on 5 November 2019. The 2019 edition focuses on the theme, “achieving productive transformation.” Available in English, French and Portuguese, the report includes five regionally-focused chapters (Southern Africa, Central Africa, East Africa, North Africa and West Africa). It proposes public policies areas that could support the region’s productive transformation. West African economies continue to rely heavily on the export of unprocessed raw materials. They face difficulties in boosting industrialisation, improving competitiveness and moving up the value chains. The report recommends five strategic policies to accelerate the productive transformation of raw materials in situ: 1) strengthening regional complementarities, 2) improving entrepreneurial innovation, 3) facilitating access to markets, 4) rationalising tax policy and 5) ensuring better access to energy and land. Moreover, Africa needs more dynamic businesses to turn economic opportunities into bigger profits, more investment and new jobs. This is especially true of small and medium-sized businesses in employment-intensive sectors. "The entry into force of the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2019 marks a strong commitment by African leaders towards productive transformation. But it only will work if African firms are strong enough to compete in this new, enlarged market. They need bolder and smarter government policies to support them,” declared Mario Pezzini, director of the OECD Development Centre. Key findings from the report will also be discussed during the 19th International Economic Forum on Africa, scheduled to take place in Madrid on 29 November 2019.

**AGENDAS 2063 & 2030: IS AFRICA ON TRACK?**

The African Governance Report, produced by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, is a rich source of information on the continent’s governance challenges. It analyses the progress that has been made in the implementation of Africa’s Agenda 2063 and the Global 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Both agendas have overlapping goals, and the report analyses, sector by sector, Africa’s readiness for both agendas. However, not all measures are quantifiable; not all indicators have targets. Data availability and statistical capacity remain key challenges in Africa. Almost half of the continent’s population live in countries where no census has been conducted over the last ten years. Only eight African countries have a birth registration system with a more than 90% coverage rate. The report calls for more support to address the data gap and strengthen the fragmented data landscape across Africa. It also points to some encouraging initiatives. The AU Institute for Statistics in Africa opened in Tunis in 2018, 33 African countries signed the African Charter on Statistics, and 23 have ratified it.

**MISSING IDENTITY: AN URGENT CHALLENGE FOR AFRICA**

Civil registration and vital statistics systems remain some of the weakest points in African national statistical systems. According to UNICEF, 41% of sub-Saharan African children under five years of age have never been registered. "The demand for registration services remains weak because many people do not have adequate awareness about the importance of civil registration for them and their families,” explains Camilla Rocca in a blog post published by the Mo Ibrahim Foundation. Without civil registration, future citizens will not be able to: obtain an ID card, go to school, attend university, gain formal employment, vote in an election, access financial services such as a bank account, buy property or prove the right to inherit land. It is a long list of obstacles. In the past, support programmes have often been conducted without connection to national development frameworks. Several continental and multilateral initiatives are now underway.
WHO'S WHO

SAMA TOUNWENDSIDA HUGUES RICHARD,
WEST AFRICA’S JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR 2019

Sama Tounwendsida Hugues Richard, a 24-year-old journalist from the Observateur Palga magazine in Burkina Faso, won the 2019 West Africa Media Excellence Award for his impactful reporting of mental illness in northern Burkina Faso. He collected first-hand accounts from an association called Sauler (“Save the rest”), which offers psycho-social care and facilitates the reintegration of people with a psycho-social disability. In May 2019, Richard won the Galian 2019 Award for his article on the northern road bridge in Ouagadougou (« Pour aller à Larlé, on monte ou on descend ? »). In an interview, Richard states that he never creates any challenges for himself. I live my daily life. I approach everything with optimism and the desire to give the best of myself regardless of the outcome. I do my job. If tomorrow there are other laureates, that’s great. If not, that’s ok as well. This won’t impact me. As long as I do a job that I freely chose, I do not necessarily expect to receive a reward for doing it,” he declared. He also advised his peers to always look at the experiences of the elders, and see them as models.

MAPS & FACTS

DOING BUSINESS IN WEST AFRICA IS GETTING EASIER, NOTABLY IN TOGO

Togo stands out from the crowd in the latest “Doing Business” ranking. For the second year in a row, the country is among the ten economies that improved the most. Moving up from rank 156 (2018) to rank 97 (2020), Togo became the best-performing West African country. The country implemented reforms making it easier to start a business and access credit and electricity. It also lowered fees for construction permits, and streamlined property registration procedures. Nigeria was also among the top ten business climate improvers, notably thanks to improved contract enforcement. Chad, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal and Togo improved access to credit information. While paying taxes was made easier and/or less costly in Côte d’Ivoire, Gambia and Senegal, it became more complicated in Ghana, Liberia and Mali. West African countries made substantial investments to modernise electricity infrastructure and improve distribution network maintainance. For example, Ghana and Nigeria reduced electricity connection times. Despite progress, West Africa remains overall a low-performing region with an average score of 52.3, below the global average of 63. Ten West African countries rank in the bottom 50, and only two African countries (Mauritius, rank 13 and Rwanda, rank 38), are among the top 50.

Ease of doing business score 2020 [rank out of 190 countries]

The rankings are benchmarked to 1 May 2019, and based on the average of each economy’s ease of doing business scores for the 10 topics included in the aggregate ranking.