Niger mourns 71 soldiers following deadly terrorist attack

According to official figures, 71 soldiers were killed during a terrorist attack on a military base located in Inates, in the Tillaberi region of Niger near the Malian border on 11 December 2019. Twelve soldiers were wounded and 30 are missing. This is the deadliest attack on security forces in Niger’s history. The government declared three days of national mourning. The Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), originally a branch of Boko Haram in Nigeria, claimed responsibility for the attack. Demonstrating their solidarity, G5 Sahel leaders gathered at an extra-ordinary summit in Niamey on 15 December 2019 to pay homage to the soldiers who were killed. They called for closer co-operation and more international support in the fight against the Islamist threat. According to Niger’s defence ministry, the attack was conducted by “heavily armed terrorists estimated to number many hundreds.” The fighting lasted three hours, combining shelling and artillery fire with the use of kamikaze vehicles. “The terrorist threat against the Sahel countries is getting worse,” declared Niger’s President Mahamadou Issoufou. “These endless attacks carried out by terrorist groups in our region remind us not only of the gravity of the situation, but also the urgency for us to work more closely together,” said Burkina Faso’s President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, recalling the need to help the G5 Sahel Joint Force reach its full operational capacity as soon as possible. “Terrorists have become true professionals in the art of warfare. While attacking our troops, terrorists are also attacking our alliances. They are working hard to find intermediaries within communities to denounce the presence of the allied troops who fight at our sides. Those who play their games consciously or unconsciously, those who attack our alliances, those who want defeat the are doing something far worse than attacking men. We need to build public awareness about this problem in all of our countries”. While jihadists mostly attack army outposts to steal weapons, they also expand the areas under their control. Since September 2019, the Islamist insurgency has killed more than 230 soldiers in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The G5 Sahel-France summit in Pau was postponed to 13 January 2020. In addition to the French-led Barkhane operation, the United States is also scaling up its military co-operation with Niger by providing equipment (armoured vehicles, radio systems, etc.) and in-country support worth USD 21 million, including through its armed drones that can track down jihadists.
CLIMATE CHANGE: **CILSS DAY @COP25**

The UN Climate Summit (COP25) was held from 2-13 December 2019 in Madrid, bringing together some 29 000 representatives from nearly 200 nations. Many leaders expressed their disappointment with the meeting’s outcome. “The international community lost an important opportunity to show increased ambition on mitigation, adaptation & finance to tackle the climate crisis,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres declared. Key decisions on global carbon markets were deferred until next year’s COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland. CILSS/AGRHYMET presented information about the climate challenges facing the Sahel and West Africa at the CILSS Day on 12 December 2019. The presentations underscored the key role that regional organisations such as ECOWAS, UEMOA and CILSS play, since they attempt to develop synergies and help member countries better plan climate actions. For example, successful assisted natural regeneration (ANR) activities could be scaled up at the regional level. “Investments in natural resources management are vital. That’s why our efforts focus on scaling up agro-ecological best practices with the goal of making our ecosystems more productive in a sustainable way, which is one way to guarantee that communities in the Sahel and West Africa will be more resilient in the face of climate change”, declared Souleymane Ouédraogo, CILSS/AGRHYMET’s director-general. Regional organisations could also play a stronger role in mobilising funding for climate initiatives and co-ordinating national programmes. Many West African countries currently are revising their nationally determined contributions (NDC), which were first presented at the COP21 in Paris. However, their measurement, reporting and verification (MRV) systems of greenhouse gas (GHG) mitigation are at the early conception phase at best and the NDC revision process will require additional resources. CILSS and its partners plan to launch a regional discussion on the role of regional institutions in the NDC implementation process with the goal of developing a joint regional action plan. Strong regional leadership could help to harmonise national climate efforts and support better co-ordination between countries and partners, while capitalising on best practices and developing regional solidarity.

SAHEL ALLIANCE: **LOCAL SOLUTIONS, GOVERNANCE AND DECENTRALISATION**

At the initiative of Germany, UNDP and the Liptako-Gourma Authority, members of the Sahel Alliance gathered on 20-22 November 2019 in Niamey, Niger for a regional workshop on the theme, “Governance and decentralisation: Vectors of peace and stability in the Sahel.” Some 30 participants coming from various administrative levels (local, regional, national) from Sahelian countries as well as international development partners discussed current decentralisation trends, problems and perspectives. Local government representatives from the three countries of the Liptako-Gourma region (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) issued a communiqué in which they urged members and partners of the Sahel Alliance to stronger involve them in all project stages – from identification, formulation and implementation to monitoring and evaluation of results – within the Alliance’s priority investment programme. The workshop aimed at identifying new opportunities for collective action to strengthen decentralisation and local governance with the goals of eradicating poverty, preventing conflict and strengthening social cohesion, particularly in fragile border areas. Discussions emphasized the need to develop integrated development projects, in which local populations are heavily involved at all stages, rather than simply supplying development assistance from the outside without any ways to transfer knowledge or resources to local authorities. Drawing on a series of practical activities, participants shared experiences and best practices on how to best capitalise on local solutions and support local authorities in delivering basic social services for all. “Our vision is that the people of the Sahel should become their own development actors. Local authorities are best placed as they represent the government’s closest administrative level that is most accepted by citizens,” explained Ronald Meyer, head of the Sahel and West Africa division of the German Ministry for co-operation and development (BMZ). During the session on cross-border initiatives in the Liptako-Gourma area, participants examined examples of solutions adopted by local communities. Throughout the workshop, participants used the innovative “Labs” approach, which is based on four steps: 1) sense-making: analysis of current investments; 2) collective intelligence: integration of a large number of information sources; 3) mapping of local solutions likely to accelerate development by promoting bottom-up innovation; 4) development and testing of a portfolio of solutions to check what works and what doesn’t. The SWAC Secretariat participated in the event and put at the disposal of participants its analyses on cross-border co-operation and policy networks, on climate finance options available to border cities, on the role played by border towns in the process of regional integration, and its work on borders, security and development in West Africa.
MUST READ

BORDERS, SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA

The most recent issue of the West African Papers series looks at Borders, Security and Development in West Africa. While West Africa is a pioneer of regional integration, the gap between the set of standards adopted by regional organisations and the functional reality in border areas persists. Moreover, ensuring security in border areas remains a key challenge. Cross-border regions are the most deadly areas in North and West Africa: Between 2007 and 2019, 42% of violent events occurred within 100 kilometres of a land border. It is necessary to strengthen the links between capitals and peripheral regions, particularly with border cities, and to include a spatial dimension in conflict analysis and resolution.

THE POWER OF PARITY TO ADVANCE WOMEN’S EQUALITY IN AFRICA

“Gender inequality in Africa remains high, and progress toward gender parity has stagnated. This is a large missed opportunity for African societies and for the continent’s growth prospects,” finds a new report published by the McKinsey Global Institute. While Africa’s progress on gender equality is similar to other regions when it comes to work, Africa lags behind on progress toward gender equality in society. Africa has the highest average maternal mortality rate of any region - four times the global average. Child marriage, violence against women and legal protection remain major challenges. As a way forward, the report suggests five priority areas to achieve more gender parity in Africa: 1) invest in human capital; 2) create economic opportunities; 3) leverage technology; 4) shape attitudes; and 5) enforce laws, policies and regulations.

GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL AFRICA

Gender gaps in assets, livelihood strategies, and control over income clearly impose costs on households, communities and nations. Explicit attention to gender is thus key to achieving the Malabo goals of shared prosperity and improved livelihoods through inclusive agricultural growth. This is one of the key findings from the 2019 Annual Trends and Outlook Report, prepared by ReSAKKS. The report looks at gender equality in Africa’s rural areas. It analyses topics such as gender and social norms in agriculture, women’s land rights, financial inclusion of women, gender equality in agricultural value chains, women’s control over income and challenges related to gender data.
WHO’S WHO

AKINWUMI ADESINA, AFDB PRESIDENT

The former minister of agriculture of Nigeria, Akinwumi Adesina, just started his fifth year as the African Development Bank’s (AfDB) president. One of his most notable achievements has been the launch of the High 5s strategy that focuses on five key development priorities for transforming the African continent: energy, agriculture, industrialisation, regional integration and improvements to the quality of African peoples’ lives. During the 54th annual meetings, Adesina confirmed that he plans to run for a second term. “I will run again to continue the work we started,” Adesina declared (> see full presentation online).

MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY SEVERELY FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE

Current situation: October-December 2019
9.4 million people in “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)

About 9.4 million people are estimated to have been in immediate need of assistance (phases 3-5) during the October-December 2019 period in the 16 countries analysed in the Sahel and West Africa region (excluding Liberia), including 4 million in Nigeria, 1.5 million in Niger and 1.2 million in Burkina Faso. This is more than twice as many severely food insecure people compared to the same period in 2018. This situation is likely to worsen, mainly due to insecurity. By June-August 2020, 14.4 million people (5.4%) are projected to be in a crisis situation or worse, including 1.2 million in an emergency situation (phase 4). Vulnerable food insecure populations are concentrated in the conflict-affected areas in the Liptako-Gourma region and the Lake Chad basin. The border area between Mauritania and Mali will also be in a crisis situation, mainly due to a significant biomass deficit, which is likely to lead to early transhumance and high livestock concentration areas. In Borno State of Nigeria, 1.1 million people, or 23% of the population analysed, are facing a “Crisis” situation or worse (phases 3-5). Civil insecurity has led to a sharp increase in the number of displaced persons, particularly in northern Burkina Faso (480,000 people), northwestern Nigeria (310,000 people) and Niger (180,000 people). Nearly 1.9 million people continue to be internally displaced in Nigeria. The majority are hosted in local communities, placing increasing pressure on food resources and local livelihoods in the short and long term.

Projected situation: June-August 2020
14.4 million people expected to face “Crisis” or worse (phases 3-5)

Source: Cadre harmonisé analyses, regional concertation meeting, Niamey, Niger, November 2019