MEMORANDUM

N° 121/2017 | 17/07/2017

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Daily news of Africa, without comments, as they are published

SUMMARY

EU COUNTRIES SEEK TO CUT AID BUDGET FOR 2018

European Union countries have proposed cutting the bloc's development aid funds by 6.5 percent as an amendment to the 2018 budget, in a move that was swiftly condemned by a coalition of NGOs.
The EU's draft budget for 2018 was presented by the European Commission — the body responsible for proposing legislation — at the end of May, including a suggested aid budget of around 9.6 billion euros. This represented a cut of 5.6 percent compared to 2017.
However, ambassadors representing each of the EU's 28 member states on Wednesday proposed trimming it by a further 90 million euros compared to the commission's suggestion, representing a total cut of about 6.5 percent against 2017 levels.
It came as part of a wider proposed cut to the overall draft budget, with the group taking "a generally frugal approach, [focusing] resources on those areas with the highest added value," a representative of the Council of the EU said in a statement.
But NGOs, including Oxfam, Plan International, ONE and Save the Children, denounced the move as a "triumph of self-interest."
"The EU is capable of creating a more just, sustainable and prosperous future for all — in Europe and beyond," said Alexandra Makaroff, Plan International's EU representative. "The budget member states are proposing is far from ensuring that no one is left behind. Instead, it seems to be more about serving their own national interests."
The EU institutions are the world's fourth largest aid donor as of 2016, according to figures from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
However, it has been criticized in recent times for channeling a large proportion of its aid toward efforts on migration control.
Reacting to the decision, Natalia Alonso, Oxfam International's deputy director for advocacy and campaigns, said "It's not just the amount of money which is crucial — where and what it's spent on are every bit as important. Development aid must go to those who need it most, no matter who or where they are."
"EU member states are increasingly tying aid to their own political interests, rather than focus[ing] it on the poorest countries and poorest people. Reducing migration towards Europe should not become an indicator for the success of development aid," she added.
A final decision on the 2018 budget is not expected until November. Before then, the Council of the EU — which is made up of ministers of state from the EU countries — and the European Parliament — which is directly elected by EU citizens — will each formally adopt a position and then negotiate a final agreement.
The proposed amendment with the cuts was agreed by a meeting of ambassadors to the EU acting on behalf of its member states. Although the group is part of the Council of the EU, it does not yet represent the council's formal position.(DEV 12-07-2017)

Q&A: WHAT IS DECENTRALIZED DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION?

The volume of decentralized development cooperation grew by 12 percent in real terms between 2005 and 2015 — despite an economic downturn and rising populism — according to a study by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.
The interim findings were presented at a Committee of the Regions conference focused on "decentralized development" in Brussels this week — where participants also tried to pin down a clear meaning for the term.
"It's about time we have a common definition of this process," said Rosario Bento Pais, a representative of the European Commission's development arm, DEVCO, which commissioned the OECD report.
4 ways NGOs can work better with local government
Delegates at a European conference on decentralized development tell Devex how NGOs can collaborate more effectively with local and regional authorities in developing countries.

Citing the lack of consensus to date, she put forward a definition from a 2015 DEVCO study: Decentralized development cooperation is “a partnership between two or more local authorities from different countries with the possible inclusion of other territorial actors, like civil society, private sector, schools, health care and universities.”

Devex sat down with Aziza Akhmouch — head of unit at the OECD’s Sustainable Development Goals, water, local public services, and regional development policy division — to discuss the report, which will be released in full early next year. The conversation here has been edited for length and clarity.

Do we have a shared definition of decentralized development cooperation — and do we need one?

You have as many definitions as you have countries using decentralized cooperation. If you take the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD, 18 of its 30 members are reporting on decentralized cooperation activities, and nine of these are EU countries. Some have explicit standardized definitions — Portugal, Italy and France, for example — while some have no definition per se but they have guidelines to frame decentralized cooperation activities; others have definitions or guidelines but more at a sectoral level.

“We want to come up with clusters of cities or regions that have a common vision of what decentralized development cooperation is.”

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For the OECD, our proxy is the share of official development assistance that is extended by local and regional governments, rather than the type of decentralized cooperation activities that they’re doing.

I don’t think you really need a standard definition, and I think it would be difficult to have one. What we are trying to do with this work is to come up with a typology. We want to come up with clusters of cities or regions that have a common vision of what decentralized development cooperation is, that have common modalities for channeling it through NGOs and networks, and that have common criteria for defining the priorities.

Why was this report on decentralized development cooperation necessary now?

At the OECD it was necessary because for the last 15 years, we’ve had different communities of practice with different views on what decentralized cooperation means and what it brings.

In my area, territorial development, where the work with subnational governments is done, there was this implicit view that decentralized cooperation is a very good mechanism to develop local solutions and transfer know-how across countries. But there had never been any evidence-based work on that.

[Meanwhile], at the DAC, there was an implicit view that decentralized cooperation was a fragmentation of ODA flows that didn’t necessarily follow the principles on aid effectiveness and that there was limited accountability, or monitoring of the accountability, of those governments.

The OECD has never taken a stand to say what we know about the topic, what we think is working or not working, and what we advise for those who want to use it.

Development Assistance Committee members now spend about $2 billion annually on decentralized types of cooperation. You can’t pretend it’s not there. It’s peanuts in terms of development cooperation [overall], but it’s there, so you want to make sure that this is channeled properly and outcome-driven.

What were your main findings?

“We’ve moved on a bit from the traditional vertical cooperation, where the donor country just channels funding and there’s no accountability mechanism.”

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Between 2005 and 2015, relative volumes of decentralized development cooperation have remained stable at 6 percent of total bilateral ODA when considering the same group of donors. That’s interesting because that’s despite the economic crisis, but also despite the rise of populism, which we know has played against decentralized cooperation regions. The extreme right is lobbying extensively against channeling money to build wells in Africa [for example]. You know, as a French taxpayer, it’s fair enough — “am I paying taxes for that?”

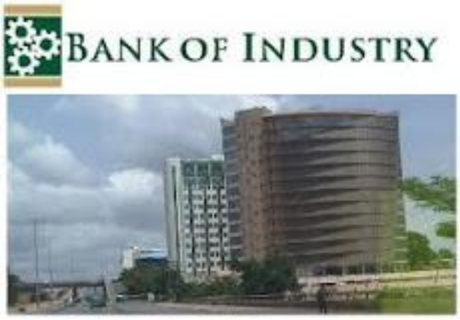
In many countries, bilateral ODA [overall] has increased faster than decentralized development cooperation projects. With the exception of some countries like Spain or Austria (where decentralized cooperation has increased by 360 percent), it remains a tiny part of the larger development cooperation portfolio.

What does this kind of assistance usually involve?

It’s mostly peer to peer. You have other types of activities such as technical assistance that exist, but we saw an increasing trend (from 2005 to 2010 to 2015) for peer-to-peer dialogue. And also more North-North or triangular types of cooperation. We’ve moved on a bit from the traditional vertical cooperation, where the donor country just channels funding and there’s no accountability mechanism. You are in a context where there is a lack of trust in government, where scrutiny on public expenditure is higher and higher, and it’s all this that makes it one of the areas where if you’re spending a euro you want to know what has come out of it.(DEV 12-07-2917)

NIGERIA’S BANK OF INDUSTRY PLANS TO INJECT OVER $3BN INTO NIGERIAN ECONOMY

The Managing Director of the Bank of Industry (BOI), Mr. Olukayode Pitan, has said that the bank plans to inject N1 trillion (about $3.27bn) into the Nigerian economy through collaboration with financial institutions in the country and development institutions in Africa.



Pitan told journalists on Tuesday in Abuja that the synergy would further deepen the bank’s involvement in the development of the nation’s economy.

He explained that it will also provide necessary impetus in revitalising key sectors that have been stressed by the global economic downslide.

According to him, the intervention is the resolve of the new management to be abreast of advancing the economy in furtherance of keeping the bank’s mandate of providing financial assistance for the establishment of large, medium and small projects as well as the expansion, diversification and modernisation of existing enterprises; and rehabilitation of existing ones.

The BOI, he said, would invest the fund in infrastructural development, focus more on small and medium enterprises without neglecting large scale businesses and assist in remedial activities such as building road network to attract investors who are interested in working with the Nigerian government.

He disclosed that the bank is interested in investing in the Calabar Free Trade Zone, Kano Free Trade Zone, Nnewi Free Trade Zone and the Akwa Ibo Deep Port. (APA 12-07-2017)

AID EXPERTS WARY OF G20’S ‘MARSHALL PLAN’ FOR AFRICA

G20 leaders in Hamburg will on Saturday hail their “Africa Compact” as a bold new initiative to boost investment and end poverty on the continent.

Germany has billed the “trade, not aid” deal it developed during its G20 presidency as a quantum leap, supplementing traditional development aid with a new public-private partnerships to create jobs and improve infrastructure. For Europe it comes at a crucial time, Berlin says: throttling the flow of migrants to Europe.

“We in Germany have a fundamental interest of good economic development in Africa and that’s why we are discussing a Marshall plan for Africa,” said Chancellor Angela Merkel, in a nod to the American plan that rebuilt postwar Europe.

But Berlin’s proposal has been castigated by aid analysts for, in their eyes, ushering in a new era of private sector exploitation of Africa – with state subsidies. At its heart the Africa Compact is a quid pro quo: African countries who commit to reforms and welcome investors benefit from public-private funds. One such fund is the Africa Agriculture and Trade Investment Fund (AATIF), a public-private partnership dedicated, it says on its own website, “to uplift Africa’s agricultural potential for the benefit of the poor”.

Using public money, it aims to attract private investment to invest “patiently and responsibly” into projects that improve food security and provide employment – to farmers and labourers alike.

The Zambian example

Not everyone is sure the new G20 deal for Africa will deliver on its promises. German state television station WDR visited one farm in Zambia that produces soy, wheat and corn for export, run by a private investor using €10 million from German development aid public-private fund.
The investor promised to create 1,000 local jobs and give back to the local community. Locals complain of part-time jobs and their subsistence farming land lost to the investor.
The Zambia farm manager interviewed by WDR spoke with pride of “negligible” labour costs on his highly mechanised farm. Company reports show employment having dropped from 258 in 2011 to 208 last year, with about 40 locals working the fields.
The AATIF fund is based in Luxembourg because, according to Berlin’s federal development ministry, “Germany lacks the legal framework”. And, according to WDR research, the AATIF legal construct puts investors to the front of the queue for profits from their African investments – but at the back of the queue for losses, behind the public purse and banks.
“Africa has to look like a beautiful bride,” said Jane Nalunga, a trade expert at the Alternative G20 summit in Hamburg. “Investors only want profit; that is the bottom line.”
Entrepreneur turned philanthropist Bill Gates was diplomatic on the Africa Compact during a visit to Hamburg. On Germany’s main evening news, he welcomed Merkel’s leadership on Africa but warned G20 leaders not to “take our eyes off the current situation”.
“Even if child mortality has halved or we boost agricultural productivity, the challenges facing Africa affect us all,” he said.(Irish times 12-07-2017)

ANGOLA’S BPC SELLS US$1.385 MILLION IN UNPAID LOANS

Angolan state bank Banco de Poupança e Crédito (BPC) intends to sell bad loans in the amount of 231 billion kwanzas (US$1.385 billion) to public limited company Recredit as part of the bank’s financial recovery plan, the chairman of the board said.

Under the terms of the plan, BPC will increase its capital through subscription of ordinary shares by shareholders in the amount of 90 billion kwanzas (US$540 million), as well as issuing convertible subordinated debt instruments eligible for equity worth US$72 billion (US$432 million), Ricardo Viegas de Abreu also said.

The chairman, who spoke at a press conference on the first 100 days of this board, said the BPC capitalisation plan was a set of initiatives intended to maintain a sound financial position and a sustainable level of profitability that is appropriate for the bank’s risk profile.

Quoted by Angolan news agency Angop, Viegas de Abreu noted that the recovery of bad loans depends largely on economic growth, “given that most of the creditors have lost their financial capacity due to the cyclical situation that the country is experiencing.”

The stabilisation, restructuring, dynamisation and control of BPC’s business is expected to be completed in 2018, the chairman of BPC said.

BPC is owned by the Angolan state, with 75%, the National Social Security Institute (15%) and the Social Security Fund of the Armed Forces, with the remaining 10%.

The BPC ended 2016 with a loss of 29.5 billion kwanzas (US$177 million), due to provisions needed to cover impairments resulting from doubtful loans.

Recredit, which is wholly owned by the Angolan state, with the powers and obligations of the State exercised by the Ministry of Finance, was conceived as part of the recovery of Banco de Poupança e Crédito and its scope was extended by presidential decree last December to the whole of the Angolan banking sector. (11-07-2017)

THE G-20'S NEW COMPACT WITH AFRICA: A PROMISING INITIATIVE REQUIRING SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

At their meeting in Hamburg on July 7-8, G-20 leaders will formally launch the new G-20 Compact with Africa—the flagship Africa program of Germany's G-20 Presidency. While there has been a long history of G-7 initiatives relating to Africa, this is the first major initiative of its kind between the G-20 and Africa. Given the wider composition of the G-20, the initiative includes all of Africa's important economic partners—particularly China.

The Compact with Africa (CWA) sets up a structured partnership between volunteering African countries and the G-20 with the inclusion of key multilateral and bilateral partners and, also very importantly, the private sector. The CWA aims to serve as an enabling platform to boost private investment and close the large investment gap, notably in infrastructure. So far seven African countries have already joined the initiative—Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Ethiopia, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tunisia.

Several novel features of the CWA initiative enhance its likelihood to succeed. First and foremost, the CWA is anchored in the African Union's 2063 agenda and each country's aspirations under the 2030 development agenda, emphasizing country ownership: The participating countries have complete autonomy over the programs and projects in their compacts. This tailor-made approach keeps participation in the CWA consistent with the country's own development agendas. Relatedly, participation is voluntary and comes with a clear commitment by local authorities to promote reforms to foster strong macroeconomic, business, and financing frameworks—the three pillars of the program. Finally, bringing together the G-20, international financial organizations, the private sector, African countries, and other partners to coordinate efforts around a well-defined objective is an important and promising feature of the initiative. (20-06-2017)

MARSHALL, MERKEL, AND AFRICA

Like with any programs, though, the CWA is not without risks. Given that it is a medium- to long-term program, the most important requisite is sustained commitment and continuity over the next several years, both on the part of the African governments and the G-20 and other development partners.

The G-20's presidency turns over every year, and each new presidency has the discretion over the choice of themes to emphasize. Late this year, Argentina assumes the presidency of the G-20, and early indications are that the CWA will remain high on the agenda. Beyond next year, though, it is uncertain whether the CWA will remain in focus and sustain the momentum that it has garnered. To further improve the chance of success, a long-term commitment is necessary, including fine-tuning and adjusting the program as necessary based on lessons learned from implementation of early cases. In addition, reinforcing the G-20's structure to ensure operational continuity will be valuable.

Continuity risks do not just lie on the G-20 side. African countries experience turnovers in administrations, and the associated political risks as well as the challenging nature of some of the necessary reforms could undermine their commitments to the compact. Strong coordination mechanisms are also needed, both at the country and cross-country levels. By necessity, the implementation of the CWA will require alignment and effective coordination of efforts in each country with well-articulated programs and accountabilities. Coordination at the G-20 level with the involvement of key development partners is also needed to ensure collective momentum and support including addressing gaps in actions and financing.

By making Africa's issues an important priority on the G-20, Chancellor Merkel and Germany have displayed leadership in the efforts to unlock the potential of Africa at a time when international cooperation is under assault in some corners. So far, their objective of bringing Africa closer to center stage has been successful. What about the CWA itself?

By design, the CWA places the ownership as well as the responsibility with the African countries. This signals a welcome paradigm shift in the cooperation with Africa. Notably, it will be up to African policymakers to convince the private sector both at home and abroad that the risk-return profile of their investment projects are attractive enough.

While it might be too soon to assess whether the CWA will succeed, the initiative has the potential to ignite a virtuous cycle of country actions and private investment on scale with international support. Its success should encourage other countries to join with the ultimate goal of transforming all parts of the continent. The case for optimism on the CWA is stronger than the case for pessimism. Perhaps some of the pre-emptive skepticism about the CWA reflects past experience. When it comes to Africa, there are no shortages of initiatives; there are actually over 100 recent ones. This proliferation of initiatives attests to the scale and diversity of the economic challenges of the continent, but perhaps also to insufficient coordination and continuity to ensure success of each new initiative. Coordination is a critical novelty and a strength of the CWA. With its successful launch, the challenge is to build momentum and to manage the continuity risk.(Brookings 25-05-2017)

EMIRATES PUTS “IMMEDIATE” END TO MANAGEMENT CONTRACT WITH ANGOLA’S TAAG

With immediate effect, Emirates has terminated the concession contract for management of Angolan airline TAAG due to “constant difficulties in repatriating the revenues obtained in the country,” the airline said.

The contract was signed in September 2014, with Emirates appointing a management team whose mission was to have the Angolan flagship airline return to profits through a smaller workforce and downsizing of the air network.

Emirates also said in a statement issued in Luanda that it will reduce its presence in Angola. The move began on Monday by reducing the number of flights per week to Luanda from five to three.

“The issue of repatriation of revenue from ticket sales has remained unsolved, despite numerous requests to the competent authorities and guarantees that measures would be taken,” the company said.

The concession agreement entered into with Emirates Airlines for the period between 2015 and 2019 showed positive operating results of US$100 million after four years, after TAAG reported losses of US$99 million in 2014. (11-07-2017)

BIRD FLU CONFIRMED IN TWO MORE SOUTH AFRICA LOCATIONS

A highly contagious strain of bird flu has been confirmed at two more locations in SA, bringing the total of affected farms to four.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries confirmed on Tuesday that the two farms, all involved in commercial layer chickens, are in Gauteng and Mpumalanga. The outbreak was first confirmed in June at another two farms in Mpumalanga. The affected farms were subsequently placed under quarantine, and the birds were culled and eggs destroyed.

Department spokeswoman Bomikazi Molapo said that the two latest farms to be affected have been placed under quarantine by the state veterinarian. The quarantine includes, as a minimum, a prohibition of the movement of chickens and chicken products onto and off the farm.

"The necessary measures have been taken to contain and eliminate the disease as efficiently as possible on both farms," she said. "Forward tracing was done and cull chicken depots were identified, which had received live cull chickens from one of the affected farms in the last 21 days. The records of these cull depots are being followed up to trace as many of these chickens as possible. The new Poultry Disease Management Agency system of registration of persons buying and selling live chickens made it possible to trace these culls."

The department reiterated that this particular strain of bird flu did not affect humans.

"[The] viruses isolated from these outbreaks are similar to the viruses isolated from Zimbabwe in June 2017 and from Egypt in 2016, which makes the likelihood of the involvement of wild birds high. Chicken owners and farmers are encouraged to prevent contact of their chickens with wild birds as much as possible," said Molapo.

Increased surveillance in wild birds, commercial chickens and backyard chickens was continuing: "Chicken owners, farmers and the public should remain vigilant and all cases of high mortalities in chickens and other birds should be reported to the nearest state veterinarian."

In June, the department introduced a raft of measures to contain the spread of the disease. Buyers or sellers of more than five live chickens for any purpose other than direct slaughter at a registered abattoir will be subjected to conditions, including registering with the agency. Furthermore, farmers can sell only live chickens certified as healthy by a veterinarian or an animal health technician.

Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia have all halted imports of poultry products from SA.(BD 11-0-2017)

BANK OF CHINA IN ANGOLA PLANS TO GROW THROUGH BILATERAL TRADE

The director of the Bank of China – Branch in Luanda intends to base the institution's growth strategy on trade between the two countries, considering that the greater the trade, the better the business opportunities, state newspaper Jornal de Angola reported.

The Angolan branch of the Bank of China, which started operating in early June, is currently focusing on business banking, but intends to start retail operations with offers targeted at private customers, the bank told the newspaper.

The current leadership's strategy is to establish it as a commercial bank for business customers and gradually expand market share based trade between Angola and China, which last year totalled US$15.579 billion.

In 2016, Angola sold products (mainly oil) worth US$13.818 billion (-13.54% year-on-year) to China and bought products from Chinese companies worth US$1.761 billion (-52.69%).

The Chinese bank revealed that it does not plan to include Angolan capital in the branch, for now, presenting itself as a branch of a Chinese financial institution, and not a bank under Angolan law, which requires that most of the capital be Angolan.

The Bank of China's branch said that since the start of post-civil war reconstruction in 2002, Angola has achieved "impressive" economic performance, making it one of the most important economies in Africa.

According to the bank, although the Angolan economy is going through a difficult time due to the impact of the oil crisis, these obstacles are temporary.

The Bank said it focuses on the process of implementing economic diversification policies in order to overcome excessive dependence on oil, which it says is "the right direction for development." (11-07-2017)

AIR ZIMBABWE FIRES MORE THAN A THIRD OF STAFF TO STOP IT FROM GOING BANKRUPT

Air Zimbabwe is firing more than a third of its workforce to prevent the state-owned airline from going bankrupt.

The airline had debts of about $330m, transport minister Joram Gumbo said in June. The carrier was also banned from operating in the EU in May on safety concerns even though it did not currently fly there.

As many as 200 jobs, or more than a third of its workforce, would be cut, a person familiar with the situation said, asking not to be named as the information had not been made public.

"In light of the huge financial challenges which the company is faced with, a decision to compulsorily retrench employees with immediate effect has been made," the airline said in a letter sent to affected employees and seen by Bloomberg.

The job cuts were necessary to "contain operational costs and save the national airline's viability as a going concern," it said.

The fortunes of the airline, founded as Central African Airways in 1946, have declined with the country's economy, halving in size since 2000 as unemployment and a shortage of cash cut consumer demand for products ranging from plane tickets to beer over the past few years.
In addition to domestic flights, the airline, which used to operate routes to Europe and China, flies to SA and Zambia.
Employees affected were told they would receive three months' pay as well as two weeks pay for every year worked.
Air Zimbabwe CEO Ripton Muzenda did not immediately answer calls to his cellphone, while Gumbo's phone was unreachable. (Bloomberg 11-07-2017)

FOSUN TESTS BUSINESS MODEL IN PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES

The Fosun group has announced that it will use Portuguese-speaking countries to test a business model combining healthcare and financial services following acquisitions in Portugal, the group's founder and chairman told Hong Kong newspaper South China Morning Post (SCMP).
The group's acquisitions in Portugal began in 2014 with the purchase of Fidelidade, the largest insurance company in the country, for 1.04 billion euros, followed in the same year by the purchase of healthcare company Espírito Santo Saúde, and culminated in an investment of 174.6 million euros in November 2016 in the purchase of a stake in private bank Banco Comercial Português (BCP).
"The first purchase was mere chance, and Fidelidade was identified by the potential investment search department," Guo Guangchang told the SCMP, adding that from that moment "we decided to outline a strategy to verticalize operations in Portugal."
Guo said that controlling an insurance company, a bank and a hospital allows the group to create what it has called an, "interrelated business ecosystem that creates mutual synergies."
"Fidelidade policyholders can receive medical care at Santo Saúde (now Luz Saúde), while BCP can provide financing services so these business units can send clients to each other and grow in a joint way," the group's chairman told the SCMP.
The Fosun Group now intends to replicate the business model created in Portugal in Portuguese-speaking countries, including Brazil, Mozambique and Angola in Africa, Timor Leste (East Timor) in Asia, as well as Macau at the gateway to mainland China. (11-07-2017)

LIBYA: EU AND UN TEAM UP FOR REHABILITATION OF WATER WELLS

The UN Migration Agency (IOM), with funding from the European Union, has completed the rehabilitation of 18 water wells in 12 out of 14 neighbourhoods of the Libyan city of Sabha.

The project, part of the IOM Community Stabilisation programme “Together We Rebuild”, included the provision of new electrical pumps for wells to allow the restoration of a domestic water supply.

It comes at a critical time when the city of Sabha has been suffering from an ongoing water crisis, which is particularly critical during the summer season when water consumption increases.

“We highly appreciate the support of the EU and the efforts made by IOM in rehabilitating 18 water wells in Sabha city which has been suffering from serious water shortages. This support comes at a critical time when the Water and Waste Water Company is in need of such support to help us maintain this essential service to the people of the city,” explained engineer Mohammad Aboul-Qassem Yaqa, the Head of Works and Maintenance Department at the Water and Waste Water Company.

EU Ambassador to Libya Bettina Muscheidt said the EU supported Libyan efforts to end the current crisis through a political solution. “In the meantime,” she said, “Libya’s people cannot wait. Families across the country are in dire need of services. They want a return to normality. This is where this partnership between the Water and Waste Company in Sabha, the IOM and the EU can make a difference to improve lives and alleviate the suffering in an area where many different communities have been affected by the conflict.” (EEAS 11-07-2017)

FUNDS FOR COOPERATION WITH AFRICA ARE AVAILABLE, BUT WELL PREPARED PROJECTS ARE LACKING

The availability of European funds to finance cooperation projects in Africa is large, but there is a lack of well-prepared projects, particularly in Portuguese-speaking African countries, according to the president of the Portuguese Development Finance Society (Sofid).

Last week, the European Parliament approved the European Sustainable Development Fund, which intends to raise up to 44 billion euros for investment in Africa and in neighbouring countries of the European Union, with at least 28% of the funds earmarked investments in climate action, renewable energy and resource efficiency.

The president of Sofid, Mariana Abrantes Sousa, spoke at a conference organised by the AIP Foundation and Africa Monitor Intelligence and held in Lisbon about Sofid’s great interest in taking part in projects in the areas of renewable energy and tourism, which have a “significant impact on development.”

In a context of crisis in several African countries, where commercial bank financing is scarce, Sofid, she said, may “help get more resources” from European funds for cooperation with Africa, or the European Investment Bank, but “well-prepared projects are lacking in Africa.”

“If there is a project that has legs, we can intervene very early on, help to understand what the purpose of it is, if it is well structured, if the promoter has capacity and guide them to seek funds from another entity,” said Abrantes de Sousa.

Currently, there are “large amounts of funds in various forms for Africa,” notably the recent ElectriFI fund, to which Sofid can apply for renewable energy business projects in Africa.

“The big change we want to make is to intervene more upstream. There are few files ready to analyse and sign off,” said Sofid’s president, stressing the complexity of the requirements, namely social and environmental studies.

The lack of information makes it harder to conduct such studies in Africa, she said, which makes it easier for banks such as the European Investment Bank to lend in Asia than in Africa.

But there is also “a lot of money” available to prepare the files, through grants, which countries and promoters can access, although these are also little used by Africa, and Portuguese-speaking African countries are almost absent from the lists, Abrantes de Sousa said.

Created 10 years ago, Sofid is active in Portuguese-speaking African countries, Brazil, Timor-Leste (East Timor), Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, South Africa and other countries in West Africa and Latin America.

It manages the InstiMOZ fund for the Portuguese State, which has an endowment of around 94 million euros, created in exchange for the transfer of control of the Cahora Bassa dam to the Mozambican state.

It is also setting up a credit line for Sao Tome and Principe, with 10 million euros guaranteed by the Portuguese and Sao Tome state to support business investments. (10-07-2017)

A DAY IN THE DANGEROUS LIFE OF SOUTH SUDAN'S DE-MINERS

Margret has decided that South Sudan is not a place to raise children, but she is changing this for future generations. That's why, 10 years ago, the mother of two joined the country's 400 to 500 de-miners, digging up remnants of past and present wars — bombs, unexploded ordnances and landmines.

She's one of a growing number of women to take up the risky business, most of them mothers wanting to provide safety for their families. "It's my way of contributing and making this country better," she says. "I sent my children to Uganda, but I want them to come back one day. It's a sacrifice for me, but a gain for those returning when the war is over."

Landmines have a long history in South Sudan, the world's youngest nation, which won independence from Sudan in 2011 after a long and violent liberation struggle. After just two years, a political squabble escalated into renewed civil war in late 2013, fracturing the new nation along ethnic lines.

More than 4-million mines and explosive devices have been found and destroyed in South Sudan over the last decade, says the UN's Mine Action Service (Unmas). While some accidents are recorded, Unmas believes at least 90% go unreported.

War remnants

Margret currently works around Kolye village, a 30-minute drive on unpaved bumpy roads from the South Sudanese capital Juba in a lush setting of green fields and mango trees. The area saw heavy fighting between the Sudanese army and southern rebels during Sudan's long civil war, which ended in 2005, paving the way for the South's independence.

Deadly anti-personnel fragmentation mines were laid by Khartoum's forces to protect their barracks. More than a decade later, they are still killing civilians.

"Soldiers placing mines think carefully about how humans behave, where they go and what they do. That is why mines are found alongside roads, in market places or by water points," says Jan Møller Hansen of DanChurchAid's de-mining project, the organisation that also employs Margret.

While mines are easy to place, they are hard to remove. After an eight-week training course, Margret has dug out hundreds of them throughout her career and — on a good day, she can cover up to 30m².

"We can use the safe land to build roads, hospitals and schools and that's what excites me the most," she smiles.

According to Unmas's de-mining chief, Tim Lardner, it will take at least another 10 years to clear up the whole country, which is roughly the size of France. South Sudan signed the Mine Ban Treaty less than six months after independence in 2011, deeming anti-personnel mines illegal and their removal mandatory.

Renewed war has complicated efforts to remove mines from previous conflicts, while rebel forces, without providing evidence, have accused the government of laying new explosives in violation of the treaty, a charge it denies.

A de-miner's day

Margret works with her friend Angaika, a mother of four and a de-miner since 2006. They start at 8am, with a driver taking the 10-person team out to the field. Their operation area is well equipped with a briefing tent, several medics and an ambulance. But the nearest hospital is 15km away along dire roads, while the threat of ambush or looting by armed groups makes the work even more dangerous.

"Each day we communicate through high frequency radios and satellite phones to find out if conditions are safe. We don't want to become victims of violence," says Margret, who does not give her full name.

Finding explosives is hands-on work and, dripping sweat in their thick uniforms, teams clear the area inch by inch with metal detectors, scissors and garden tools to cut down grass and dig out explosive devices.

"My heart still beats faster when my detector beeps. I know that I could be very close to a mine, but I know my work and am not afraid," says Angaika. "I think about my children in those moments. My work is for them and their future families. That's what makes me strong." Once the mine is dug up — it can take up to 30 minutes — a controlled explosion is usually carried out on site.

Ongoing work

Newly discovered minefields are still registered monthly in South Sudan. "Local communities often inform us about devices they have seen," DCA's Møller Hansen says. "They recognise them from the awareness training they receive."

Koyle, a once lively community, is now deserted due to the menace of landmines. Farmers have left their green and fertile fields, leaving silence except for birdsong.

After 10 weeks, Margret and Angaika's team is on its final stretch before a week's break. They started in mid-May and have since cleared almost the whole field of about an acre. Ahead of them are red posts and danger signs — marking out their next project. (Thomson Reuters Foundation 11-07-2017)

ANGOLA PLANS TO PRODUCE MILITARY UNIFORMS

The Angolan government has approved the founding of a public company for the production of military footwear and uniforms in the country and to stop imports of this type of products, according to a presidential dispatch.

Empresa Fabril de Calçados e Uniformes – Empresa Pública was granted initial capital of 1.920 billion kwanzas (US$11.5 million), with the respective factory built in the industrial zone of Cazenga, near Luanda.

The dispatch quoted by Portuguese news agency Lusa refers to "the need to reduce the costs of importing military uniforms and footwear," to justify the creation of this state factory, but also the "strategic importance" that production represents, especially for military personnel.

The company's statute stipulates that although it has the "main purpose of making footwear and military uniforms," it may carry out other commercial activities "provided that they do not jeopardise its main purpose" and establish branches of the company elsewhere in country or even representations abroad.

The three branches of the Angolan Armed Forces currently comprise more than 100,000 soldiers, plus the security forces, firefighters and civil protection.

In 2015, Angola spent US$44.6 million on the purchase of uniforms and other military equipment from Chinese state-owned China Xinxing Import and Export Corporation. (12-06-2017)

JORDAN: NEW PROJECT TO DEVELOP NATIONAL MONITORING SYSTEM FOR WASTE

A new project has been approved in Jordan to implement the recommendations of the ENI SEIS (Shared Enviromental Information System) South programme in the area of waste disposal. The project will be funded by the EU and implemented by the Development Agency of an EU Member State, jointly with the national environment agency.

Over recent months, the ENI SEIS II South Support Mechanism has provided technical support to assist the Jordanian government in framing one of the key policy measures of the country's National Solid Waste Management Strategy, related to the establishment of a National Monitoring Information System for recording and monitoring the activities of the Municipal Solid Waste sector and environmental monitoring of dumpsites and new sanitary landfills.

The support from ENI SEIS II South consisted in identifying and funding an international waste expert to conduct a mission to assist Jordan in clarifying division of labour between various ministries/institutions involved in municipal waste monitoring, and to develop the Terms of Reference of the project "National Monitoring Information System for Municipal Solid Waste" to be funded by the EU.

The National Monitoring Information System for Municipal Solid Waste is intended to facilitate the collection and collation of data, and reporting of progress of implementation and achievement of results, to support evidence based decision-making and management. With a budget of €3.5 million, the new aims to start in November 2017 for a duration of 20 months.

ENI SEIS programme

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The Memorandum is supported by the ACP-African, Caribbean, Pacific Secretariat, Chamber of Commerce Tenerife, Corporate Council on Africa, CIP-Confederation of Portuguese Enterprises, Hellenic-African Chamber of Commerce and Development, HTTC - Hungarian Trade & Cultural Centre, NABC- Netherlands-African Business Council, SwissCham-Africa and other organisations.
The Memorandum is also made available by AHEAD-GLOBAL, BCA, Chamber of Tenerife (by posting it at the Africa Info Market), CCA - Canadian Council on Africa, CCA - Corporate Council on Africa (USA), CIP,HTTC,NABC (by posting selected news) and SwissCham-Africa to their Members.

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