MEMORANDUM

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SUMMARY

NIGERIA: 16 MILLION VISIT FACEBOOK ON MOBILE MONTHLY

Facebook announced 16 million people in Nigeria visit Facebook every month with 100% of them coming on mobile. Each day, 7.2 million people visit Facebook with 7 million on mobile.

This announcement comes on with Friends Day (4 February), or Facebook's 12th birthday. During the past five years, the global Facebook community has more than doubled in size, and its community in Nigeria continues to grow.

"For us, Friends Day in Nigeria was about hearing the stories of our community using Facebook our platform to grow and connect with others. We have made amazing progress over the past year. We're only 1% done in Nigeria and inspired to do even more in this fast-moving, mobile first country," said Nicola Mendelsohn, Vice President, EMEA, at Facebook.

Nunu Ntshingila, Head of Africa for Facebook, said: "This is the year we deepen our partnerships with Nigerian businesses. We're committed to Nigeria, and during this visit we shared insights with our business and agency partners on how to deliver personalised marketing, at scale, where people are – on their mobile phone. We want to make sure Nigeria – its people, its agencies and its businesses – realise the opportunity that technology and mobile bring."

Ntshingila continued: "We know the mobile platform people use the most in Nigeria is Facebook and up to 77% of Nigerians on Facebook use their mobile device to discover new products and services. Nigerians are sophisticated mobile users and this sophistication is increaseing fast – people are ahead of businesses, and we're here to help businesses create mobile-first solutions to grow their business."

Facebook also hosted a dinner for women leaders in Nigeria where Mendelsohn and Ntshingila spoke about entrepreneurism and technology can drive economies and create jobs. (IT News Africa 05-02-2016)

UGANDAN AUTHORITIES HAND OVER STOLEN VEHICLES TO UK OFFICIALS

The Uganda Revenue Authority has handed over 27 top of the line vehicles allegedly stolen from the United Kingdom (UK) to police officers of the UK's Vehicle Crime Intelligence Service.

The cars, mostly Audis, BMWs and Range Rovers were recovered from various vehicle bonds in Kampala, the Ugandan capital.

The Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) earlier on Tuesday handed over the vehicles to officials from the UK led by the outgoing British High Commissioner, Alison Blackburne. (APA 09-06-2016)

SOMALIA LAUNCHES NEW FOREIGN POLICY

The Somali Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement released in the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa on Monday that it was launching a new comprehensive foreign policy to determine its relations with the rest of the world in matters of trade and the war against terrorism among others.
The statement said its foreign policy initiative is part of a broader vision to ensure that Somalia could play its part in multilateral affairs.
Somalia's foreign policy is built on the pillars of promoting national, regional and international peace and security through effective participation in bilateral and multilateral diplomacy it said.

It added: Somalia's foreign policy is clear in its neutrality and its commitment to the protection of Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It also underlined that Somalia will remain committed to the implementation of obligations regarding international treaties and conventions and the promotion of commercial and economic activities for sustainable development.

It also said Somalia was committed to working with neighbouring countries and the international community to tackle wide ranging challenges that include conflict, terrorism, poverty and environmental degradation. (APA 08-02-2016)

FREE WHATSAPP FOR TANZANIANS

Tigo Tanzania, has announced free WhatsApp services for its 10 million users.
This makes Tigo the first telecom in the country to offer the social media service for free, once again demonstrating its leadership in delivering cutting-edge technology and innovations in market, according to the General Manager, Diego Gutierrez.

Making the announcement in Dar es Salaam on 2nd February 2016, Gutierrez said all Tigo customers subscribing to the company's weekly and monthly internet will henceforth be entitled to free WhatsApp service.

"From now onwards, all Tigo customers buying any of our weekly or monthly packages will be eligible to enjoy FREE WhatsApp. This of course, is for customers with data enabled devices. We want to encourage our non-smartphone user customers to acquire highly discounted smartphones sold in Tigo shops to be able to enjoy this new offer," Gutierrez said.

The general manager further clarified that the service will be available on iPhone, Blackberry, Android and Nokia Symbian60-phones.

With an excess of 1 billion users globally, WhatsApp is the most popular mobile messaging application that enables users to exchange media, texts, video clips and voice calls.

WhatsApp is a sister application to Facebook, the social network that Tigo partnered with in 2014 to become the first telecom in Tanzania to give its customers free Facebook access in Kiswahili, the country's national language also widely spoken in east, central and southern African countries.

According to the company, Tigo in 2014 also became the first telecom in Tanzania to provide free Facebook in Kiswahili Kiswahili ; the first to launch a mobile money App for Adroid and iOs users and the first in East Africa to introduce cross-border money transfer with currency conversion (IT News Africa 05-02-2016)

AUSTRALIA SUPPORTS FIGHT AGAINST HUNGER IN NIGERIA, OTHERS WITH $3M

The Australian Government says it has allocated $3m to help fight hunger in Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad caused by the Boko Haram insurgency.

A statement by the Australian High Commission on Monday in Abuja said that it had dedicated additional $2.4m to existing projects to combat malnutrition in Niger and that its total global contribution to the World Food Programme for 2015-2016 was $43.3m.

It added that Australia's contribution to the WFP is being used in all four countries to assist up to 400,000 of the region's refugees, Internally Displaced Persons and the communities hosting them to gain access to life-saving food assistance.

"Special attention is being paid to children under five, pregnant women and nursing mothers faced with malnutrition," the statement added.(APA 08-02-2016)

US OPENS UP FOR MORE OF SOUTH AFRICAN'S GOODS

After intense discord over SA's participation in the African Growth and Opportunity Act (Agoa), the trade relationship between SA and the US is on the mend, with talks now under way to provide greater access for SA's agricultural products into the lucrative US market.

The discussions between the US and South African governments over expanding the range of SA's agricultural exports that can enter the US market duty free under Agoa have already yielded results, as the US Department of Agriculture has issued a regulation to allow SA to export litchis to the US.

Other "low hanging fruit" under discussion are avocados, mangoes and beef, assistant US trade representative for agricultural affairs and commodity policy Sharon Bomer said last week. Ms Bomer has overall responsibility for trade negotiations and policy co-ordination regarding agriculture, and was deeply involved in the recent negotiations with SA on the export of US meat.

The talks were deadlocked on several occasions over SA's restrictive sanitary and phyto-sanitary rules, which the US regarded as unnecessarily strict, and which placed obstacles in the way of exporting US poultry.

The looming threat of SA agricultural products losing their duty-free access to the US under Agoa if a deal was not concluded was decisive in breaking the logjam, but as a precautionary measure, the US administration set a deadline of March 15 for SA to demonstrate that it was implementing the agreements.

Ms Bomer and her delegation were in SA last week for discussions with government officials and business representatives to ensure that everything was in place to give effect to the agreement between the US and SA for the export of US poultry, beef and pork to SA.

She said everything was "on track" in this regard.

Trade and Industry Minister Rob Davies has often stated his ambition to negotiate greater access for SA's agricultural products into the US.

Agricultural products benefiting from duty-free access to the US under Agoa are citrus, wine and macadamia nuts. The export value of these products is more than R2bn annually.

Ms Bomer said on the sidelines of an engagement with the media the US would like to see more South African agricultural products entering the US.

There was, for instance, a huge demand for avocados. However, SA would have to first address US concerns over sanitary and phyto-sanitary issues related to the identified agricultural products.

"SA is very interested in expanding into the US market and has identified a number of top priorities and we are fully on board to work with SA to find a way forward to make sure that the food safety and animal and plant health issues are adequately addressed, and we are making progress," Ms Bomer said.

Department of Trade and Industry spokesman Sidwell Medupe said yesterday the first consignment of litchis had already been sent to the US.

"With regard to avocados and mangoes, there are discussions and technical exchanges on the pest risk analysis," he said.

"Discussions on avocados are more advanced than those on mangoes." He said the technical exchange was a normal trade process.

Meanwhile, the department said in a statement that the African National Congress (ANC) had directed its economic transformation subcommittee to review the trade deals SA had signed since 1999.

These include agreements with the European Union, European Free Trade Association and the Mercosur trade bloc in Latin America.

Agreements to be looked at include the Southern Africa Customs Union and the Southern African Development Community free trade protocol, and the talks for a Tripartite Free Trade Area in East and Southern Africa.

"The aim of the review is to inform the national executive committee (of the ANC) of all the trade agreements currently in place and assess the implications of these agreements to inform SA's approach to future negotiations.

"The purpose is not to amend or end existing trade agreements," Mr. Medupe said.

The department welcomed the initiative, as it would promote broad understanding of trade deals and the market access opportunities they provided. (BD 08-02-2016)

NIGERIA: MINISTER URGES END TO GAS FLARING

Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs and Social Development, Senator Aisha Jummai Alhassan, has called on the Ministry of Petroleum Resources to end gas flaring and utilise it for domestic purpose.

The Minister disclosed about 95,300 women die from smoke alone while others suffer from related health complications annually in Nigeria.

Alhassan told a one-day consultative forum on gender issues in renewable energy management and options that energy professionals should embrace gender analysis as a tool to understanding energy needs of the entire population.

Nigeria flares most of its associated gas due to the absence of gas gathering facilities in most oil fields in the country.(APA 09-02-2016)

AFRICAN MINERS CAN TURN CRISIS AROUND, SAYS MCKINSEY

THE crisis facing African mining companies, which have fallen behind their global peers due to declining productivity and return on invested capital, can be turned around, says a McKinsey report released on Monday.

While African companies supply 83% of the world's platinum, 73% of the world's cobalt and more than half of the world's manganese, chromium and diamonds, they have underperformed in terms of value creation, according to the report titled Creating Global Mining Winners in Africa.

The good news is that African mining companies "have access to a range of levers to triple or quadruple their chances of becoming world-class performers".

By taking specific actions in productivity, strategic merger and acquisitions, and allocation of capital, "African mining companies can boost their odds of moving up the power curve by a multiple of three or four", the report said.

Companies should complement these moves by facilitating access to infrastructure, collaborating on regulatory frameworks, investing in local labour and community development and cultivating a local supplier base, the report proposed.

Doing so would improve companies' odds of moving from the mid quintile to the top quintile on the power curve by up to 31%, said Lorenz Jüngling, the leader of McKinsey's global energy and materials practice in Africa.

The report was released to coincide with the start of the Mining Indaba in Cape Town on Monday, which brings together more than 7,000 mining professionals, investors, executives and government officials in African mining from more than 100 countries.

The meeting this year takes place amid a bleak outlook for commodities, with China's slowing demand for raw materials, a reduction in oil prices and global financial uncertainty.

Michael Kloss, McKinsey director and co-author of the report, said even though there was a global downturn in commodity prices, investors should still spend money in this critical sector.

"A downturn is a good time to buy, and at least half of all African companies have the headroom to fund this growth based on their debt to equity ratio to do it.

"Our analysis shows there are also plenty of targets: 77% of mining companies account for just 30% of the industry's market capitalisation in Africa," said Mr. Kloss.

Jonathan Moore, MD of Mining Indaba, said on Monday that the current market forced the African mining industry to take a hard look at how it did business and the aspects that were most critical to its future success.

"Looking ahead, governments and companies are focused on developing strategies to invest in African mining beyond the current mining cycle," he said. "In a capital restrained market, it is notable that we have one of the most influential representations from the investment community that we have seen to date.

"It is imperative to explore the possibilities of big, bold strategic moves that offer the best odds of moving companies from good to great," the report explained.

"The industry will have to go beyond the traditional means of collaboration. As such, mining companies should do everything to create a better business environment — they should support regulators to create the right conditions, collaborate with labour to create a mutually beneficial environment for capability building and labour, work with governments to create a more favourable business climate and with communities to build an environment that creates shared value and productivity enhancements.

"The time for action is now, and by taking action now, we believe that the odds for the future of African mining companies will be on track as one of the most attractive regions for mining globally." (Fin24 08-02-2016)

NIGERIA CAN GENERATE OVER $25BN ANNUALLY FROM SOLID MINERALS

Nigerian exporters under the aegis of Association of Metal Exporters of Nigeria (AMEN) have called on the government to intervene in the solid minerals sector and tap the abundant benefits as the sector has opportunity of generating N5 trillion annually.

The President of AMEN, Mr. Seun Olatunji, told journalists that Nigeria could generate at least N5 trillion (about $$25.2bn)annually from mining and exporting of its vast solid mineral deposits, with several multiplier effects on job creation, state development and social infrastructure that could make the solid minerals sector as the main catalyst for the national development.

The metal exporters called on the Nigerian Government to provide the enabling environment for the development of the Nigerian solid minerals sector.

“Metallic solid minerals are the most exported solid minerals from Nigeria,” he added.

According to Nigeria’s Vanguard newspaper report, the Association, which comprises of various companies in the business of metal export, commended the focus of the Minister of Solid Minerals, Mr. Kayode Fayemi, and expressed its readiness to partner with the government in the development of the Nigerian solid minerals sector.

“There is need for synergy between government agencies and private operators to unlock the values in solid minerals sector. With not less than 38 viable solid mineral deposits in sustainable export quantity in Nigeria, the solid minerals sector has the potential to generate not less than N5 trillion annually once the government put in place necessary frameworks,’’ he said.

He added that the solid minerals industry could serve the much-needed solution to unemployment as the development of the value chain from mining to export could create more than five million jobs.(APA 09-02-2016)

SOUTH AFRICA: RANDGOLD PROFIT FALLS 11% ON DECLINING GOLD PRICES

Gold miner Randgold Resources said its full-year profit from mining fell 11%, as gold prices continued their decline.

Gold miners have been struggling as prices fell for the third straight year in 2015, hurt by the increasing strength of the dollar and the first rise in US interest rates in nearly a decade.

Randgold, which mines gold in Mali, Côte d’Ivoire and the Democratic Republic of Congo, said profit from mining for the year ended December 31 fell to $572.2m, compared with $643.1m a year earlier.

BMO Capital Markets analyst Andrew Breichmanas said in a note to clients that the results were "positive," adding that the company’s results were ahead of their expectations.

The company also raised its total dividend for the year by 10% to 66c per share. (Reuters 08-02-2016)

LIBERIA, EU SIGN $64M AGREEMENT FOR ENERGY, CAPACITY BUILDING

The European Union has signed two financing agreements with the Liberian government for projects totaling US$64 million in the key sectors of electricity and institutional capacity in aid management.

The EU has also confirmed an additional US$34 million in grant funding as part of its ongoing budget support program to Liberia.

Speaking at the signing ceremony in Monrovia on Monday, the EU Ambassador to Liberia Tina Intelmann said they are committed to working with the government of Liberia to deliver the Agenda for Transformation.

Ambassador Intelmann also confirmed the EU's decision to increase its budget support in response to Liberia's request. “The European Union recognizes that Liberia's public finances are under strain. While this additional support will not prevent the need for budget cuts, we hope it will contribute to achieving the government's agreed objectives under the program, improved economic governance, macro-economic stability; provision and accountability of health, justice and security services, particularly in light of additional costs associated with the preparations for UNMIL drawdown,” the EU envoy noted..

She then called on the Liberian government to make efforts to meet all agreed conditions and sector indicators, so that all of the foreseen amounts can be paid into the budget, adding, “I also hope that where necessary, the legislature will act swiftly to pass any associated legislation.”

In his remarks, the Finance and Development Planning Minister Amara Konneh said though Liberia is still a fragile state, the country is on the right trajectory. He assured that Liberia is committed to its reform process and will do everything to ensure that the government creates the necessary environment for the conduct of the 2017 elections.

The financing agreements signed between the EU and Liberian government marked the formal commitment to move forward the consolidation of the Monrovia Electricity Transmission and Distribution. The total value for the project, according to the EU, amounts to 55 million Euros. The overall objective is to contribute to the reduction of poverty in Monrovia by improving the environment and socio-economic conditions of the people.(APA 09-02-2016)

SOUTH AFRICA: FURTHER VISA CONCESSIONS POSSIBLE FOR TRAVELLERS FROM RUSSIA, INDIA AND CHINA

SA will consider waiving the need for visitors from China, India and Russia to have a visa, the director-general of the Department of Home Affairs, Mkuseli Apleni, said on Friday.

The government is also considering granting visas on arrival to travellers who already have permits in their passports to travel to the US, UK, Canada "or any other country that applies stringent checks on visitors to their countries, to ease travel for tourists," Mr. Apleni told reporters at a briefing in Pretoria.

Last month, Home Affairs Minister Malusi Gigaba waived the requirement for Chinese travellers to apply for a visa in-person, as long as they were part of a tour group.

This is because the tourism sector in China is highly regulated and operators are already accredited with the government there.

The home affairs department was also considering a long-term multiple-entry visa for a period exceeding three months and up to three years for frequent travellers.

"A 10-year visa waiver for business executives from Brics (Brazil, Russia, India, China {and SA}) countries is also available … allowing such executives to remain in (SA) for 30 days at a time," said Mr Apleni.

Mr Apleni also said the department had made progress in implementing concessions to its contested immigration regulations, according to a tourism industry executive.

Last year, a Cabinet-appointed interministerial committee considered the concerns of stakeholders, particularly the tourism sector, and recommended that the department make some compromises.

This was after an uproar that the requirements, which came into effect in June, were causing damage to the tourism industry and the economy.

The new visa regime, which critics had described as onerous, required prospective visitors to have their biometric data captured at a visa centre and parents travelling with minors to be in possession of a certified unabridged birth certificate, as well as a letter of consent, in cases where a child was travelling with one parent or a relative.

Ms Apleni said the department had decided that it could do without having to change the law.

Between November and December last year he met the stakeholders to give them an update on the progress made in implementing the concessions. He said the department was already capturing travellers' biometrics at ports of entry, starting at OR Tambo, King Shaka and Cape Town airports.

The department has developed a standardised template for school principals to issue letters confirming permission for children to travel on school tours.

It has also extended the validity of the parental consent affidavit from four to six months, and is working on printing the details of parents on their children's passports so they do not have to carry birth certificates.

Also present Friday's briefing was Southern Africa Tourism Services Association CEO David Frost, who said: "I think this hopefully brings to an end what has been … an arduous 18 months."

He added that "good progress" had been made since the possible changes to immigration regulations were announced.(Bloomberg 05-02-2016)

NIGERIA INSISTS ON PAYMENT OF FINE BY MTN PRIOR TO ANY REVIEW

The Federal Government of Nigeria has said that MTN Nigeria has to pay some fraction of the fine imposed on it before any form of review of the $3.9 billion fine.

Nigeria's Minister of Communications, Mr. Adebayo Shittu, told journalists in Lagos that the Federal Government would not give any attention to any settlement until the demand was met.

The out of court settlement by the Nigeria Communications Commission (NCC) and MTN Nigeria may, however, end in deadlock.

He said initially when MTN was fined; the company acknowledged the registration default and pleaded for leniency.

"When MTN came to us, we understood their pleas and reduced the fine, for the interest of all stakeholders.

"MTN is yet to respond on that. The next thing was for me to get a call that they are going to court," the minister said.

According to the minister, the ministry does not want MTN to die, but should obey the law.

He added that if the company cannot meet up with the fine, it has to write a letter and attach its financial account details to show that upon paying, it will collapse.

A high court in Lagos gave MTN till March 18, 2016 to settle out of court with the Federal Government on the fine.(APA 09-02-2016)

PALESTINE: EU CONCERNED ABOUT EXPANSION OF ISRAELI SETTLEMENT

The EU has expressed its renewed regrets over the expansion of settlements and reiterated its concern that the peace process between Israel and Palestine might be compromised as a result. “On 25 January, Israel decided to declare 154 hectares of land near Jericho in the West Bank as state land, probably to permit further settlement expansion”, an EU External Action Service spokesperson said in a statement published on Saturday 6 February, about the latest developments in Area C of the occupied Palestinian territory.

The spokesperson also noted that on 3 February, several Palestinian residential structures in the south Hebron hills were demolished. “We call on the Israeli authorities to reverse the decisions taken and to halt further demolitions”, she said.

Area C is part of the occupied Palestinian territory. It forms almost 60 % of the West Bank and is home to 300,000 Palestinians. This area is fundamental to the contiguity of the West Bank and the viability of the future State of Palestine. It is under full Israeli administrative and security control. (EC 08-02-2016)

ETHIOPIAN AIRLINES GROUP IS INAUGURATING ITS NEW AVIATION ACADEMY

In line with its vision 2025 strategic road map, Ethiopian Airlines Group has invested USD 100 million in breakthrough expansion and upgrading its Aviation Academy.The scale and scope of the expansion seals the Academy’s position as the largest and the finest Aviation Academy in Africa with annual intake capacity of 4,000 students.

The new Ethiopian Aviation Academy has many class room buildings. The Technical block is housing the Pilot Training School and the Aviation Maintenance Training School; while the Commercial and Leadership block accommodates the Inflight Services Training School, Commercial and Ground Services School and Leadership School. It also has separate Administration building, workshops, auditorium, students’ dormitory and large cafeteria. As an ATO (Authorized Training Organization), the B-777, B-787, B-737, B-767/757 and the Q-400 full flight simulators which enables the academy to offer full type rating trainings for pilots, according to Ethiopian Airline.

Currently, the academy hasthe best aviation training technology like full range of fleet cabin emergency, evacuation and door trainers fitted with standard swimming pool for cabin crew ditching exercises and more than 20 pilot training aircraft, the finest expertise, dedicated and experienced instructors and a perfect environment for students.

Mr. Tewolde Gebre Mariam, Group CEO of Ethiopian said, “Education is the greatest equalizer in today’s global village. We are proud to be in a position to avail the latest and next generation aviation technology training machines and facilities where we can train the continent’s youth and prepare them for the 21st century African Aviation development. The Ethiopian Aviation Academy is positioning itself to be the catalyst leader in aviation training technology in supporting the African Union to realize its vision 2063”

Ethiopian Airlines, the largest and most profitable airline in Africa, is continuously expanding rapidly in the development of most departments. The New Cargo Terminal, expected to be operational towards the end of 2016,will have an annual storage,for both dry and perishable goods, of 1.2 million tons with capacity to handle eight B747-800 freighters at any one time. Construction of just the first phase will cost about a total of US$ 150million.

A four star hotel construction is a further development taking place at Ethiopian Airlines.The hotel, to be built on 40,000sqm located in front of Millennium Hall on Bole Road, will be operational in 24 months.

The academy a full ICAO TRINNAIR PLUS member has been accredited by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) as Authorized Training Center (ATC) was also recognized as Airline Training Services Provider of the Year in 2014 by AFRAA. It is certified by the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority, the U.S Federal Aviation Administration, the European Aviation Safety Agency and IOSA (International Air transport Association (IATA) safety Audit). The academy will be able to take 4000 students a year at the end of 2025.(Financial 08-02-2016)

ALGERIA: 'EAU II' DYNAMIC TO BE MAINTAINED

The EU Delegation in Algeria announced on Monday 8 February the closing of the 'EAU II programme'. "The dynamic is underway ... now we have to maintain it", the Delegation said in a press release, issued today.
This three-year programme in the area of water and sanitation has benefited from EU support in the amount of EUR 30 million.

"For the first time in cooperation between the EU and Algeria, the EAU II programme used Sector Budget Support (ABS), under which the funds allocated by the European Union become available after the completion of a project, when the jointly-agreed indicators have been met", said Hasina Hammouche, director of the programme.

'EAU II' has "contributed to the introduction of mechanisms and concepts to modernise administration of the water sector", she said. (EC 08-02-2016)
http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/algeria/projects/list_of_projects/programme_eau_fr.htm

MOROCCO LAUNCHES SOLAR POWER PLANT DUBBED AS 'LARGEST IN THE WORLD'

King Mohammed VI on Thursday (4 February) inaugurated Morocco's first solar power plant, a massive project that the country sees as part of its goal of boosting its clean energy output.

Prime Minister Abdelilah Benkirane and French Environment Minister Ségolène Royal were among local and foreign officials who attended the opening on the edge of the Sahara desert, around 20 kilometres (12 miles) outside Ouarzazate.

Royal said the project gave "great hope to all countries with a lot of sun and desert" who could also use solar panels to produce electricity.

Arrivée sur site Noor Ouarzazate pour l'inauguration du plus grand complexe d'énergie solaire au monde #ActionClimat pic.twitter.com/MM8zveRzj3

— Ségolène Royal (@RoyalSegolene) February 5, 2016

"The solar plant underlines the country's determination to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, use more renewable energy, and move towards low carbon development," its developers said in a statement.

With an electricity production capacity of 160 megawatts, Noor 1 is supposed to allow Morocco to significantly reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

The project's next phases — Noor 2 and Noor 3 — are to follow this year and next, and a call for tenders is open for Noor 4.

Largest in the world

Once all phases are complete, it is to be "the largest concentrated solar power plant in the world" and produce 500 megawatts of electricity, providing power to more than one million Moroccans by 2018, its developers said.

It is to reduce Morocco's carbon emissions by 760,000 tonnes per year, they added.

That would be equivalent to about one percent of Morocco's CO_2 emissions of around 56.5 million tonnes in 2011, according to World Bank figures.

Morocco has scarce oil and gas reserves, and is the biggest importer of energy in the Middle East and North Africa.

The solar plant's launch comes as Morocco seeks to raise its renewable energy production to move beyond this heavy dependency and face growing electricity consumption set to quadruple by 2030.

The country started producing electricity at Africa's largest wind farm in its southwestern coastal region of Tarfaya last year.

Morocco, to host next year's world climate change conference COP22, aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 32% by 2030.

Morocco launched construction of Noor 1 in 2013, at a cost of 600 million euros ($660 million) and involving roughly 1,000 workers.

A consortium led by Saudi developer ACWA Power won the contract to build the plant.

The African Development Bank, the European Investment Bank and the World Bank are helping to fund the project.

Spread over an area equivalent to more than 600 football pitches, the plant's half a million metal mirrors follow the sun as it moves across the sky.

They store thermal energy from its rays and use it to activate steam turbines that produce electricity. (AFP)

DEVELOPMENT IS GEOPOLITICAL

Changing geopolitics has progressively eroded the foundations of the ACP-EU partnership and the bargaining power of both the EU and the ACP Group, writes Rhys Williams.

Rhys Williams is Communications Officer at the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) a think and do tank working on global development based in Maastricht (Netherlands) and Brussels (Belgium).

Europe and Africa have a long history of cooperation on economic, social and environmental development dating back to the Lomé Conventions of 1975. Since 2000, the partnership between the 28 EU member states and the 79 countries that make up the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) is underpinned by the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

It manages a budget of €30.5 billion through the European Development Fund. This is Europe's biggest budget for development cooperation that delivers long-term and predictable funding to the ACP, in particular countries in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The agreement is often hailed as a comprehensive model of cooperation between the 'global north' and the 'global south' as it is based on a legally binding agreement with three key pillars: development cooperation, trade and political dialogue. However, it will expire in 2020 and a well-informed debate needs to urgently take place in Africa on the shape and format of EU-ACP cooperation on many urgent global challenges.

Questions are increasingly being asked as to whether the ACP - as a post-colonial construct that includes only Sub-Saharan countries and omits North Africa - is still relevant in a context of rapid and dramatic changes in Africa, in Europe and the rest of the world.

A changing Africa

In Africa**,** the gap is widening between wealthier middle-income countries and several fragile countries that are confronted with endemic problems of poverty, weak governance and conflict.

Over the past 15 years, the influence of the African Union (AU) and the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in economic and political terms has increased - not least in dealing with new global challenges like climate change, the fight against terrorism and migration. So, there are many questions as to whether there is a duplication of efforts between the mandates of the African Union and the ACP Group.

In addition, over the years the three regions of the ACP have become much more heterogeneous - that is the A, the C and the P have gone in very different directions in terms of economic development, integration into the global market and how they deal with future challenges like climate change.

Laudable ambitions, weak on delivery

The African Union, in partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), recently organised a special conference to kick start this debate in Africa. A report by the African Union of the day's debate sets out some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and was circulated to delegates at the AU summit in Addis Ababa last week.

From the passionate debate on display, it was clear that there is a contrast between those who want to pursue the ACP-EU cooperation after 2020 in largely the same fashion as before and those who openly cast doubt as to whether the Cotonou framework is still fit for purpose.

One message that came strongly from many participants was that changing geopolitics has progressively eroded the foundations of the ACP-EU partnership and the bargaining power of both the EU and the ACP Group.

This chimes with a recent report from the European Centre for Development Policy Management which found that the Cotonou Partnership agreement has a limited track record in delivering on several of its core objectives and the framework is ill-suited to deliver the aims of the recently agreed Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Political coalitions in multilateral fora between the ACP Group and the EU have seldom materialised. This is largely due to the lack of political traction caused by the divergent interests of the member states states, and that the ACP Group does not include the whole of Africa.

In practice, the Cotonou Partnership Agreement has been reduced to an aid delivery mechanism with limited political value. The recent negotiations of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) saw the trade 'pillar' move away from the ACP to the African RECs as Africa has set its own objective to build a continental Free Trade Area on the basis of the regional Free Trade Agreements.

The 2015 Valletta Summit between Europe and Africa on migration demonstrates how the African Union benefits from more political traction and legitimacy than the ACP Group, providing a better structure as a continental body to negotiate with the EU.

It is essential that the African Union take on a pro-active role and to stimulate an honest debate in all corners of Africa on the future of its partnerships.

The challenge for all sides will be to design alternative ways of international cooperation for future challenges, which can deliver better outcomes for all states and citizens of Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Europe. But these new frameworks can only deliver on ambitious goals with serious political power behind them. (EurActiv 05-02-2016)

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND

Botswana, Ghana - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1623.htm

Botswana - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1632.htm

Ghana - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1639.htm

Kenya - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1629.htm

Kenya - http://www.imf.org/External/NP/LOI/2016/KEN/011816.pdf

Kenya - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=43665.0

Lesotho - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=43666.0

Lesotho - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/podcast.aspx#384

Morocco - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1626.htm

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Nigeria - http://www.imf.org/external/np/tr/2015/tr020516.htm

Rwanda - http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/cat/longres.aspx?sk=43647.0

São Tomé e Principe - http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2016/pr1649.htm

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Fernando Matos Rosa

fernando.matos.rosa@sapo.pt
fernando.matos.rosa@skynet.be