MEMORANDUM

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Should a reader require a copy of the Memoranda, please address the request to fernando.matos.rosa@sapo or fernando.matos.rosa@skynet.be.

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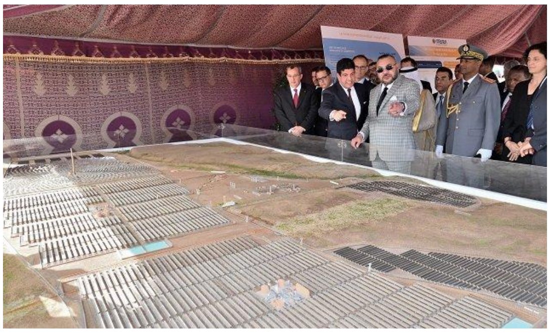
EU TO HOLD CONFERENCE ON SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF SYRIA AND THE REGION IN BRUSSELS NEXT WEEK

Supporting the future of Syria and the region
Brussels Conference - 5 April 2017

The European Union will host, in Brussels, on 4-5 April, the "Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", co-chaired with the United Nations and with the governments of Germany, Kuwait, Norway, Qatar and the United Kingdom.
The conference, to be held at ministerial level, will bring together over 70 countries, international organisations and civil society.
The conference will seek to: assess where the international community stands collectively in fulfilling commitments made at the London conference in February 2016, reconfirm existing pledges and identify additional support to Syrian inside Syria and in the neighbouring countries, as well as to the respective host communities; boost support for a lasting political resolution to the Syrian conflict through an inclusive and Syrian-led political transition process under the UN auspice, and consider the prospects for post-agreement assistance once a genuinely inclusive political transition is firmly underway. (EU 31-03-2017)
EEAS webpage on EU actions related to the Syria crisis.
Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria
Factsheet: The EU and the crisis in Syria

MOROCCO: WORK ON WORLD'S BIGGEST SOLAR ENERGY PLANT ENTERS LAST PHASE



King Mohammed VI, on Saturday, launched the construction of the Nour IV Power Station, in the town of Ghessate, located in the Ouarzazate Province (520 km south of Rabat) in what will be the world's largest solar energy complex, with a capacity of 582 megawatts.

The project, which will cover an area of 137 ha, using photovoltaic (PV) technology, is in line with the kingdom's international commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and with its main focus of increasing the share of renewable energies in the national electricity grid by 52 percent by 2030.

With an investment of more than €7 million (750 million dirhams), Noor Ouarzazate IV with a capacity of 72 megawatts, uses photovoltaic technology that allows the generation of electricity, directly from solar radiations, captured by semiconductor cells.
The maturity of this technology in a fast-growing market makes it a very competitive solution for Morocco.

The plant, scheduled to be commissioned in the first quarter of 2018, will be part of a partnership involving the Moroccan Solar Energy Agency (MASEN), a key player in renewable energies in Morocco, and a consortium of private operators
led by Acwa Power Group and selected following an international tender.

The operational phase will be in sync with a tripartite Independent Power Production (PPI) Scheme integrating the National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water (ONEE).

German development bank KfW Bankengruppe has provided nearly €62 million (659 million dirhams) to fund work on the plant.
The funding is in line with the continued support by KfW Bankengruppe and the German authorities, which proves their confidence in projects developed within the framework of the Moroccan Solar Plan.

Launched in February 2016, the second and third solar power station of the Noor solar complex (Noor II and Noor III), whose completion rate reached 76 percent and 74 percent, respectively, also adopted the IPP production scheme.

With a capacity of 200 megawatts, the Noor II plant is developed on a maximum area of 680 hectares, based on thermo-solar technology (CSP), with cylindrical-parabolic sensors.
For its realization, more than 3,870 employees have been mobilized so far, and 53 companies involved in its implementation, including 43 Moroccan firms.

The Noor III plant, on the other hand, is built on a 750-hectares, using the thermo-solar technology (CSP), with a tower, and will have a 150-megawatt capacity.
More than 2,520 employees have been mobilized to date, for its realization, and 53 companies, including 40 Moroccan, were involved.

The Noor Ouarzazate II, III and IV plants, combined with Noor Ouarzazate I (160 megawatts) that was commissioned in February 2016, make Noor Ouarzazate the largest multi-technology solar production site in the world.
Noor Ouarzazate complex also houses a belvedere tower with a panoramic view of the whole site, as well as a central security station.
(APA 02-04-2017)

JOHNSON & JOHNSON TO MAKE HOSPITAL CONSUMABLES AT NEW EAST AFRICA HUB IN NAIROBI

Peter Kimuu , head of policy, planning and health financing at the Ministry of Health, during the opening of the Johnson&Johnson operations hub in Nairobi

Healthcare products manufacturer Johnson & Johnson has set up an East African operations hub in Nairobi.

The company, in a major shift in its market strategy, will now depart from the initial business set up where it worked through distributors.

They said the move will help them understand the market better and come up with innovations that will solve the country's health problems.

Jane Griffiths, Group chairman Europe, Middle East and Africa, said in Nairobi on Wednesday that new vaccines and devices for better disease management will be manufactured in the Nairobi hub.

"Having a foot in the region will allow us to better understand the realities and the challenges specific to East Africa and come up with solutions which best addresses health issues in the region," Griffiths said.

She added that the choice on Nairobi as the regional hub was arrived at because of political stability and the market potential for their products.

Jaak Peeters , Johnson &Johnsons global head of public health, said that the company has already developed an Ebola vaccine.

"We have also developed a cure for the multi-drug resistant strain of TB," Peeters said.

The Nairobi office becomes the third after that of Ghana which was launched on Tuesday.

Johnson & Johnson has its other office in South Africa.

"Specifically, our team will prioritise issues that matter most to Kenya, including multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR TB) and the increasing burden of chronic disease, as well as continuing our focus on HIV and maternal, child and newborn health," Vittorio Sereni, Johnson & Johnson Kenya country manager, said.

Peter Kimuu, head of policy, planning and health financing at the Ministry of Health, said that the health sector needs more input from private sector players in order to improve services.

He represented Health PS Nicholas Muraguri at the meeting.

"The healthcare sector is a Sh240 billion economy. But what is important to us as a government is to ensure services are not only accessible but also affordable," Kimuu said.

The entry of the company will definitely help us address issues of drugs and equipment which still remain a challenge in the country," the official said. (The Star 09-03-2017)

GROUP OF SIX BANKS IN ANGOLA WILL BE ENTITLED TO 80% OF FOREIGN CURRENCY SOLD IN THE PRIMARY MARKET

The National Bank of Angola will select a group of five or six commercial banks that will be provided with 80% of the foreign currency that the central bank places on the primary market, according to the first five measures of a proposal on the "Adjustment of the operational framework of the foreign exchange market."

The five or six commercial banks selected from among the 28 operating in the Angolan market, are, according to the document cited by Angolan newspaper Expansão, Banco Angolano de Investimento, BIC, Banco Económico, Banco Millennium Atlântico, Banco de Negócios Internacional, and Banco Sol.

The remaining 22 banks authorised for foreign exchange will have access to the remaining 20% of the currency placed on the primary market where the BNA buys and sells foreign currency to banks, as opposed to the secondary market where banks buy and sell currencies to customers.

The proposal from the Finance Ministry was prepared based on five criteria, namely the history of operations, internal control capacity, compliance with regard to money laundering and combating terrorism, respect for the priorities set by the government and robustness and solidity.

The amount of currency to be sold will be determined quarterly by the government, based on a proposal from the National Bank of Angola and in the case of the portion allocated to food and the basic basket of goods the central bank's proposal will be made in conjunction with the Ministries of Trade and Finance. (28-03-2014)

UGANDA NEEDS A CAFFEINE FIX: INSIGHTS FROM VIETNAM'S COFFEE MARKET SUCCESS

Until recently Vietnam and Uganda shared a similar trajectory in the development of their coffee sectors. Today, Vietnam has emerged as the second-largest coffee producer in the world. In Uganda, poor agricultural inputs and a failing institutional environment have resulted in low yields and slower development of the sector.

In January 2017, world coffee exports already amounted to 9.84 million bags. As one of the most extensively traded agricultural commodities, coffee trade has an interesting structure given the fact that it is exclusively produced in developing and emerging markets. In fact, it's estimated that 25 million smallholder farmers are responsible for 80% of overall coffee production. But nearly all the 2.25 billion cups of coffee consumed every day are drunk in the developed world.

In the 1980s, Uganda was one of the largest exporters of coffee, responsible for about 2% of the world's coffee supplies. In 1980 it was producing approximately 2.1 million bags compared to Vietnam's 77,000 bags. At this time Vietnam hardly exported any of its produce.

Now the tables have turned. Vietnam is one of the world's top coffee exporters, accounting for over 18% of global coffee exports, while Uganda's has stagnated to between 2% and 3%.

What's interesting is that since the 1980s the development of the sectors in both countries followed similar trajectories – from heavy regulation through various policy reforms in the 1990s, to being relatively deregulated today.

But one fundamental difference stands out – productivity. Vietnam has far outperformed Uganda over the past two decades due to its levels of productivity. This is down to the use of agricultural inputs for production, particularly the quality and quantity of fertiliser and machinery.

Uganda's low yields

Coffee has been an important export for Uganda since it was introduced to the country in the 1900s. In 2015 it contributed 17.76% of Uganda's total value of exports.

The Coffee Marketing Board, established in 1930 to regulate the coffee sector, steadily gained powers until it eventually held a state monopoly over the coffee industry following Uganda's independence in 1962.

Between independence and the early 1990s the heavily regulated industry faced numerous challenges as a result of poor governance. It was eventually dismantled in the 1980s and 1990s and the sector became fully liberalised.

Today the coffee industry in Uganda is dominated by a large number of smallholder farmers, each with about 0.5 – 2.5 hectares of land. It's estimated that about 1.7 million households are engaged in coffee production. In 2010 this amounted to a total of around 182,875 hectares under production, compared to 549,100 hectares in Vietnam. Middlemen are needed to collect the small quantities of coffee produced by the multitude of farmers.

The large number of smallholder farmers is not a problem in itself. The challenge is that they produce very low yields per hectare. This coupled with relatively high transportation and processing costs are the main reasons that Uganda's coffee production has stagnated.

Vietnam's rise

Like Uganda, 85%-90% of the coffee in Vietnam is produced by smallholder farmers, who had 670,000 hectares of agricultural land under coffee production in 2015. Today, Vietnam is the second-largest coffee producer after Brazil, producing 27.5 million bags of coffee in the 2015/2016 planting season. Since 2007, coffee has become the country's second-largest source of export revenue.

Coffee was first introduced to Vietnam in 1857. It took until 1989 for increased production and regular trade in coffee to take off. Like Uganda, the increase in Vietnamese coffee production also followed the implementation of policies and reforms that liberalised the sector. For example, reform of land administration meant stronger property rights, allowing individual producers to own the titles to their land.

In addition, progressive dismantling of state-owned enterprises broke up the monopoly on agricultural trade.

And Vietnam put in place a number of interventions to address productivity levels. This resulted in Vietnam's agricultural production being far more capital and input intensive than Uganda's resulting in higher yields per hectare. For example, in the 2005/2006 planting season, Vietnam had 257 tractors per square kilometre of arable land, compared to Uganda's nine.

Equally important is fertiliser use. For the years that data is available, it appears that Vietnam was using 300 times more fertiliser than Uganda, per hectare of arable land. Fertiliser use has a significant impact on the yield per hectare.

For its part, Ugandan productivity has been poor. Uganda's 2008 agricultural census shows that the yield gap from low input use in the coffee sector amounts to 2,734kg/hectare. This means that on average, farmers are producing 396kg/hectare when they could be producing 3,130kg/hectare.

Determining quality

This phenomenon of low input use isn't confined to Uganda's coffee sector. It's a systemic feature of Uganda's agricultural sector at large. For example, recent research on maize inputs showed major shortfalls in quality. The findings showed that 30% of nutrients were missing from fertiliser, and hybrid seed contained less than 50% of authentic material at retail level.

Although no similar study has been conducted for the Ugandan coffee sector, there are numerous examples that can be used as reference, particularly since the introduction of new higher-yielding varieties of coffee plants. For example, in 1992 the government launched a national coffee replanting programme to replace old coffee trees with newer, higher yielding varieties. The programme was ended in 2004 due to the low survival rate of the plantlets.

Uganda's untapped potential

There are, of course, other theories and reasons that further compound the differences between the two countries. One is that Vietnam is deemed to have a far more conducive environment for setting up businesses than Uganda. And the Vietnamese government's assistance to the agricultural sector since the 1990s has been more supportive, helping the coffee sector withstand negative shocks due to weather and price volatility than has been the case in Uganda.

Notwithstanding these differences, the success of Vietnam's coffee sector hints at the untapped potential that lies in Uganda's coffee industry. To achieve similar growth, it's imperative to improve productivity via increased and improved agricultural inputs, fostering a supportive business environment and adopting newer technologies for smallholder farmers.(How we made it in Africa 14-03-2017)

AFDB READIES $24BN FOR TEN-YEAR AGRIC INVESTMENT

The President of the African Development Bank Group (ADB), Akinwumi Adesina has unveiled a $24 billion investment package for agriculture over the next ten years.

The AfDB President speaking in the Ivorian economic capital Abidjan at Tuesday's opening of the second International Conference on the Emergence of Africa said it was dismal that the continent, which owns 65 percent of the world's arable land, invests $45 billion to import agricultural products.

"Agriculture is the future of Africa. We must not import" the AfDB President suggested as he announced a $24-billion investment package in agriculture over the next ten years.

In addition, Akinwuni Adessina encouraged African countries to develop electricity nationally.
"Africa cannot develop without electricity, we need the political will," Adessina emphasized.

“An electrified Africa will be an Africa that will not stop” the head of the pan-African banking institution added.

The second edition of the International Conference for the Emergence of Africa (ICAE) is jointly organized by the Ivorian government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in collaboration with the World Bank, the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). (APA 28-03-2017)

BARCLAYS IN TALKS TO SELL ZIMBABWE UNIT TO MALAWI’S FIRST MERCHANT

As part of the group’s withdrawal from Africa, Barclays is looking to sell 56% of the Zimbabwe bank to First Merchant Bank in Malawi

Barclays is in exclusive talks to sell its stake in its Zimbabwe unit to Malawi-based First Merchant Bank, the lenders said on Tuesday, as the British bank continues its exit from Africa.

First Merchant Bank said in a statement on its website that it was in talks to buy out the 68% of Barclays Bank of Zimbabwe owned by the British company. A spokeswoman for Barclays confirmed the bank was in early discussions with a prospective buyer for its stake in the Zimbabwe bank.

Neither party disclosed a value for the prospective deal.

Barclays Bank of Zimbabwe has a market capitalisation of $60m, according to Thomson Reuters data. Barclays previously said it was looking to sell the stake as part of a broader exit from Africa announced a year ago when CEO Jes Staley said the lender would, instead, focus on a transatlantic strategy in the US and Britain.

Barclays Bank of Zimbabwe is one of two banks, the other being Barclays Bank Egypt, that do not form part of JSE-listed Barclays Africa Group, which is also up for sale. The remaining 32% of Barclays Bank of Zimbabwe’s shares are traded on the Zimbabwe stock exchange. (Reuters28-03-2017)

BOTSWANA BANS EXPORTATION OF DRIED FISH

The Botswana government has announced a ban on the exportation of dried fish for a twelve-month period to protect its local fish industry.

Environment, Natural Resources and Conservation minister Tshekedi Khama told the Yarona FM that the decision was motivated by the continued spate of overfishing which is giving foreign traders an unfair advantage over their local counterparts.
According to Khama, foreign traders have been fixing prices for dry fish hoards exported to their countries, something that put local fish dealers at a serious disadvantage.
He however blamed some local license holders of compounding the problem by selling their permits to foreigner dealers.
The Batswana government has been callig on stakeholders in the fisheries industry to consider coming up with standard prices for fish so local fishermen could benefit more from the trade.
However one fisherman, Frisco Gabokakangwe has criticized the ban, saying it would adversely affect their livelihoods since they depend on fishing as their source of income. (APA 28-03-2017)

AFRICA: GOVERNANCE PEER REVIEWS STILL OFFER AFRICA A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY

This year's African Union (AU) January summit, appropriately themed around the potential of the continent’s youth, sought to position the continental body to meet the challenges of the coming decades – an era during which the continent, having fallen behind its global peers, is pursuing a decisive developmental breakthrough.

A laudable aspiration, certainly, but one that the AU and its predecessor have long espoused. Is Africa poised to make its transition, or is this yet another false start?

The trajectory that Africa hopes to follow is set out in two initiatives. The first is Agenda 2063, the AU’s blueprint for revolutionising Africa’s political and socio-economic circumstances. Within 50 years, it envisages the continent as democratic, prosperous and peaceful, and its people as healthy, well-educated and economically productive.

The second is the Sustainable Development Goals, an initiative of the United Nations. The goals aim to provide minimum living standards for all – in nutrition, education, healthcare, environmental protection and so on – by 2030.

These are vast, ambitious visions. But putting them into action demands that governments and, increasingly, regional and continental bodies design and implement effective policies. These measures must be analysed and evaluated, weaknesses identified, errors corrected and successes replicated. It is imperative to understand what in Africa’s developmental journey is working, and what is not.

For this reason, the AU’s decision to assign monitoring and evaluation responsibilities of these initiatives to the continent’s homegrown governance evaluation system – the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) – is to be welcomed.

The APRM, founded in 2003 as an offshoot of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development, was explicitly intended to address Africa’s governance deficiencies. It aimed to encourage policies and governance practices that ‘lead to political stability, high economic growth, sustainable development and accelerated sub regional and continental economic integration’.

To this end, reviews of participating countries’ governance would be held, blending participatory domestic review processes and country review missions composed of experts from across the continent. The findings would be recorded in “country review reports” and then be discussed at high-level forums of heads of state of the participating countries. Mutual assistance and peer learning in dealing with problems would be encouraged, while those countries that refused to address their shortcomings would be disciplined by their peers.

Conceptually, the APRM is well placed to act as a monitoring agency for Africa's progress under Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals. It has established valuable expertise in governance evaluation, having completed reviews and published reviews on 17 countries so far. (A further four countries were reviewed in January and their reviews are expected shortly).

These reports have been highly regarded, and commended (generally) for dealing with sensitive issues forthrightly. The APRM has an established infrastructure which could be applied to these tasks, and is suited for the long-term monitoring that Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals demand. Over half of the AU's member states (accounting for over three-quarters of its population) have joined the APRM.

More importantly, like Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the APRM is a process focused on governance and development. It shares their ideological assumption. They seek not only generic "development", but development that benefits ordinary people, opening up their life possibilities and giving them agency regarding their own fate. They demand democracy, inclusion, accountability and the rule of law.

Not just a governance abacus, the APRM is designed as a governance activist.

Furthermore, the APRM is enjoined to promote peer learning. How well it has done so over is lifespan is unclear, but officials within the APRM system argue that it is indeed happening, albeit often out of public view. For example, Algeria has reportedly offered help to Uganda in developing its hydrocarbons sector. This has great potential for the Sustainable Development Goals in particular, where countries with similar conditions are similar problems.

However, challenges abound. Measuring progress in the developmental objectives will require new data gathering strategies – the APRM will need to gather and analyse information far more rapidly and frequently than has thus far been the case. Its mandate has become altogether more extensive, and it remains to be seen how it is executed.

Critics of the APRM can point to a list of failings. Reports of financial and administrative weaknesses over the years have made for disturbing reading – something that the APRM's expanded mandate cannot afford and will need to address.

Indeed, the APRM is only now moving out of an extended period of near-paralysis. While Chad, Djibouti and Senegal – and Kenya for the second time – were reviewed at the APRM Forum on the margins of last month's AU summit, these are the first to have been done since January 2013 – a lapse of nearly four full years.

Much of this has been due to indifference by many of the participating governments. Perhaps most notably, many have been remiss in paying their annual subscriptions. Meetings of the forum are poorly attended by the participating countries' leaders.

But African civil society, activist groups and intellectual bodies must share some of the blame. Few African initiatives have offered the possibility for participation and impact on policy conversation quite to the degree that the APRM has, but the will to exploit it has sometimes been found wanting.

Good governance will not be provided unless it is demanded.

Placing the APRM into the heart of Africa's developmental plans thus represents a major opportunity. It demands rejuvenation, certainly. It has not lived up to the hopes that it may have inspired at its founding. But it can point to a solid institutional design, and a brand identity signifying good governance.

An imperfect tool it may be, but one to be improved, and the best one that the continent possesses for seizing this once-in-a-generation chance.(All Africa 28-03-2017)

CASH-STRAPPED SWAZILAND SLAPS 12.5% LEVY ON GAMING AND LOTTERIES

The government of Swaziland will impose a 12.5-percent levy on gaming and lotteries from next month as part of efforts to diversify its revenue base, APA learnt here on Tuesday.

Tourism and Environmental Affairs Minister Christopher Gamedze said in Legal Notice No. 42 of 2017 that the levy would be calculated at 12.5 percent of the gross revenue of lottery operators or promoters of any gaming activities.

The imposition of the lotteries and gaming levy is among the revenue generation sources that the Swazi government is expected to introduce in a move to reduce its reliance on Southern African Customs Union (SACU) revenue.

Gamedze said SACU volatility has been a constraint to government policies in the past and noted that the drastic fall in SACU receipts in the 2016/2017 fiscal year was a negative economic shock and had spill-overs in multiple spheres of the economy.

Other revenue generation measures contemplated by the Swazi government include a hike in liquor licence fees, motor vehicle fees and driver's licence fees. (APA 28-03-2017)

GE OIL & GAS OPENS NEW SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA FACILITY TO SUPPORT ENI

GE Oil & Gas opens a new service facility in Takoradi, Ghana

GE Oil & Gas opened a new facility in Takoradi Port, Ghana Thursday, expanding its global footprint and supporting Italian oil and gas giant Eni, Africa's leading gas producer.

Based in London, GE Oil & Gas is a subsidiary U.S.-based conglomerate General Electric. The company says it plans to deliver more than 45,000 training hours for Ghanaian personnel over the next five years as it seeks to build a local team.

The GE facility will be the primary service center for deep-water offshore projects in Ghana, GE said in a press release. It has a 1,600-square-meter (17,200-square-foot) indoor test area and 4,000 square meters (43,000 square feet) of indoor and outdoor storage.
This new infrastructure is already supporting installation for Eni's Offshore Cape Three Points project. GE Oil & Gas is supplying Eni with subsea and turbomachinery equipment for the project.
With an oil sector that is less than 10 years old, Ghana has limited domestic capacity to serve the multinational oil companies that are commercializing its offshore petroleum reserves, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. Domestic companies have limited experience in providing technical services to offshore operators. Onshore services are somewhat more mature but still under-developed. The government of Ghana has mandated minimum levels of participation by local companies. For some portions of the oil and gas sector, up to 90 percent of equity will have to be held by domestic Ghanaian firms.
General Electric, once considered the second-largest U.S. company, lost its Top 10 ranking on the Forbes 2016 Global 2000 after dismantling its financial arm, GE Capital. Though its market cap increased, GE's sales, profits and assets all declined, Forbes reported in May 2016.
GE says it plans to provide support in Ghana for the local supply chain, and for small and medium-sized enterprises.
African exploration prospects took a hit over the last two years but, but Eni's successes demonstrate there is plenty of potential still worth securing, AfrOil reported:
Eni's exploration success rate is the envy of its peers.
The Italian company has almost 4,900 oil and 555 gas wells, with 10 field startups planned or under development.
Most of Eni's worldwide finds of 13 billion barrels of oil were discovered in the last decade, mainly in Nigeria, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Ghana and Angola.
A long-established presence in Egypt was rewarded with the discovery of the giant Zohr gas find in 2015. Other significant African finds include Ghana's Offshore Cape Three Points oil and gas project in 2009 and Angola's Block 15/06 gas field in 2006.
As a result of these discoveries, Eni is Africa's leading gas producer with an output of 2.23 bcf (billion cubic feet) per day of gas produced and sold in 2014, AfrOil reported. The company plans to invest US$12 billion in Africa from 2016 to 2019, according to Eni's CEO, Claudio Descalzi, who presented the company's 2016 results in March.
Employing 3,742 people in 14 countries in Africa, Eni is in exploration and production in Algeria, Angola, Congo (Brazzaville), Egypt, Ghana, Libya, Mozambique and Nigeria. Smaller projects are under way in Tunisia, South Africa, Liberia, Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire.
Eni also has refining and marketing operations in Gabon and Ghana.
Lorenzo Simonelli, president & CEO of GE Oil & Gas, attended the GE opening ceremony in Ghana with customers, suppliers and local government representatives.
"We are committed to partnering with Ghana to help support building critical skills and developing infrastructure for the country's future growth," Simonelli said.
GE Oil & Gas has recruited more than 30 Ghanaian staff to work at the new facility, including two trained field service engineers who are working offshore to support the installation phase for the Eni project.
"Ghana has decades of development potential," said Ado Oseragbaje, president and CEO of GE Oil & Gas sub-Saharan Africa. "We are excited to provide support to a project that will act as an important energy source for the country for many years with minimal environmental impact, while also driving the development of local infrastructure and capacity-building.
"We have the strength and scope to be able to stay close to our customers, work where they work, and invest in the training and facilities required to reduce complexity, provide faster turnaround of equipment deliveries, support our partners and build a solid talent pipeline in-country."
GE secured an $850 million contract to supply equipment to the Eni project block in 2015. This contract draws technologies and expertise from across the company, GE said in a press release.
"GE is known for its leadership in technology and innovation," said Robert Jackson, U.S. Ambassador to Ghana. "Here in Ghana, GE has partnered with our USAID-funded Supply Chain Development project to build the capacity of local small and medium businesses. That's not only a commitment to Ghana, it's a commitment to transitioning from donor funding toward private sector-led growth." (AFKI 25-03-2017)

ARMYWORM INVASION IN SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA DESTROYS MAIZE CROPS

The Agriculture and Natural Resources ministry in Ethiopia has confirmed the invasion of Fall armyworms, in the south of the country where crops have been destroyed.

Plant Health and Control Director-General WeldeHawariyat Asefa told journalists on Tuesday that the armyworms destroyed maize on 967 hectares land in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples State.

The worms are overrunning Bench Maji, Sheka and Kefa zones of the state.

“They have destroyed plants with wide leaves including various types of grasses. They destroyed particularly major crops such as maize, sorghum and rice”, Asefa said.

The caterpillars are known to be very destructive to crops such as field maize, sweet corn and sorghum.

Once they invade an area, they usually consume all the crops within reach and move to the next available food source once these are exhausted.

According to Asefa, before reaching Ethiopia, the army had reportedly destroyed maize in several parts of Africa.

Meanwhile, he said something was being done to destroy the worms.

He said in addition to using ‘pheromone trap’ to detect their presence as a means of early control and management, chemicals have been sprayed in the infected areas.

“The size of the land affected by the pest is about 968 hectares covered with maize, of which chemicals were sprayed on 275 hectares of land”, Asefa said.

More than 5,000 liters of pesticides have been sent to the state for this purpose and prevent the spread of the armyworm invasion to other parts of the country, WeldeHawariyat added.

Plant control Director Zebdiwos Salato said that the armyworms in the south of Ethiopia are different from other insects in that they are faster and more damaging to crops.

FallArmyworm, the larva of night-flaying moth, is a pest indigenous to the Americas.

It was first detected in Africa in early 2016 in Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Benin and Togo.

The worms were later detected in Southern Africa in December 2016, spreading to Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mozambique, Lesotho, South Africa and recently in Tanzania.

(APA 28-03-2017)

SADC’S MODEST EPA GAINS

Provisionally in effect since October 2016, the recently signed Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and the so-called 'SADC EPA Group' is a symbolic intensifying of trade ties. The more substantial impacts of the EPA, however, are likely to be felt outside the EU-SADC relationship. Part 2 of a mini-series on African trade agreements.

Background of the EPA

Following negotiations lasting more than a decade, the 'EPA Group' of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), which comprises Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia and South Africa, signed an EPA with the EU on 10th June 2016. While there is scope for Angola to join the ranks later on, the nine remaining members of SADC are either exempt or in discussions over other regional EPAs.

The bedrock of the free trade agreement is the *asymmetric* liberalisation of barriers to trade between the two blocs: EU reports indicate it is the most asymmetric agreement of all those to which the EU has signed up. SADC members, aside from South Africa, have gained quota and tariff-free access to the EU market in return for more moderate and gradual access to the SADC market over 15 – 20 years.

Expected impact on trade

SADC's gains from the EPA will be both modest and various. While some member states (for example Mozambique or Botswana) already had privileged access to the EU market in general or for specific goods, others (such as South Africa) have faced stricter trade conditions.

Botswana, Namibia and Swaziland can look forward to uninhibited access to the EU market, offering 74.1% full access and 12.1% partial access to their own markets in exchange. Although a step up in terms of legally-binding and increased market access, the three states already had unilateral access as of 2008. As middle-income states, and stakeholders in a potential EPA, the EU had provided them with Market Access Regulations – essentially temporary free trade agreements.

As low-income countries, Mozambique and Lesotho were privileged in the same way under the Anything But Arms initiative, allowing them to trade freely in all goods except for munitions and military equipment. Mozambique and South Africa have received a different deal to other players in the mix. Mozambique, as a large, low-income state, is granted free EU access while only being required to lift 74% of its own trade barriers. Mozambique, however, has yet to fully ratify the agreement despite its signature.

South Africa, the local giant among SADC economies, has been offered a distinct package given its relative competitiveness and advanced economy. The EU has granted South Africa 96.2% full access to its market, alongside 2.5% partial access, while South Africa offers the same as Botswana et al. That said, South Africa too maintains an existing agreement with the EU: the *Trade, Development and Cooperation Agreement Between the EU and South Africa* which was established in 2000 with an aim to liberalise 90% of all EU-South Africa trade.

All in all, the deal is not expected to yield enormous trade benefits for either bloc. All SADC states already have some sort of agreement in place, which is in some cases unilateral, offering states free access free of charge. That said, the legally binding EPA offers security on otherwise arbitrary trade deals.

In the same vein, the EU already has relatively low barriers for most goods with the exception of agricultural and finished products. The EPA is expected to benefit exporters of the former the most (especially sugar and red meat producers). Interestingly, it is also the first agreement that requires the EU to forfeit any export subsidies for its own agricultural exports. On the other hand, it is worth noting that the agreement concentrates solely on goods, avoiding opening the much more controversial discussion over trade in services. Given that services represent more than 62% of GDP for South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, the free movement of services is a more contentious issue.

Trade between the EU and SADC has not come a long way in recent years, having hovered around $32 billion worth of exports for both sides. The latest numbers put SADC exports at $31.7 billion and EU exports at $32 billion. This represents around 1.8% of the EU's total trade; SADC's exports are only expected to rise by around 1%. As such, gains to the SADC business community is noteworthy, but less than rhetoric might suggest. With protective measures in place for SADC's *sensitive industries* (e.g. textiles), it is not clear European entrepreneurs and consumers stand to gain substantially more.

Beyond the European Union

By contrast, the impact on SACU and SADC's own affairs could be more interesting. In the context of SACU, and in the absence of a specific regional body, South Africa's International Trade Administration

Commission has thus far determined all common external tariffs (CETs) on behalf of the customs union. States have complained that the Commission has overlooked regional needs, prioritising South Africa's own industrial agenda. The EPA has given a forum for SACU members to defend their own developmental agendas, putting in place sector-specific '*safety valves*', and reaching a legally binding CET agreement with a foreign body, taking this aspect of power from South Africa.

The EPA also contains a 'most favoured nation' clause, compelling SADC members to offer one another a deal as good as that received by the EU in every instance. It is hoped this will facilitate stronger, legally bound integration in the bloc, backed up by its largest trading partner.

A final ramification is the potential EPA-copycat, which South Africa appears to be looking to establish with a post-Brexit UK. The potential deal is thought to mimic the EPA, with greater provisions for South African agricultural exports. (BD 03-03-2014)

NIGERIA TO ESTABLISH NAVAL BASE IN LAKE CHAD AREA

Nigeria's Chief of Naval Staff Ibok-Ete Ekwe Ibas has said that President Muhammadu Buhari has approved the establishment of an operational base for the Navy in the Lake Chad area to beef up security there.

Ibas told journalists after briefing Buhari on the activities of his navy at the Presidential Villa, Abuja on Monday that Lake Chad "is a strategic location that provides the transportation means for four nations and that the presence of the Nigerian navy there would help in consolidating the security of the area".

He explained that the presence of the Navy in the Chad are would allow for economic activities to take place and hasten the development efforts of the community.

Ibas, who said that the briefing was to update him on the state of security situation in the maritime environment, added that the security situation in the maritime environment has remained favourable to allow legitimate economic activities to take place.

"I also hinted him on the ongoing exercise that the Navy is conducting with other partners within the region and other international partners. It is aimed at building capacity and intelligence sharing.

"The Nigeria's new maritime strategy sees our activities going just beyond maritime environment. We have been part of the various joint task forces including the operation in the troubled North-East of the country,'' he said.

He disclosed that President Buhari also directed the Nigerian Navy to continue to work hard to ensure safety on the nation's waterways to ensure safety and legitimate economic activities on the waterways.

(APA 28-03-2017)

OBTALA GROUP PREPARES TO EXPAND FORESTRY BUSINESS IN MOZAMBIQUE

The Obtala Limited group plans to make use of the closed forestry season in Mozambique to lay the foundations to expand its business and increase productivity of the ongoing operations in the country, the group said in a statement issued on Monday.

The closed season on forest resource exploration imposed by the government of Mozambique from 1 January to 31 March of each year is also being used by the group to carry out maintenance and repair of equipment as well as to plan activities to the end of 2017.

As a result of repairing some equipment, the Mozambican subsidiary of the group made use of the wood that was cut in the fourth quarter of 2016 to produce 1,500 sleepers, which were delivered to customers in February and increased the capacity of its sawmill located in Uape to process an average of 9 cubic metres of wood per day.

The group intends to increase the two concessions that were in operation at the end of 2016 to five operating concessions, and is currently in the process of hiring foremen as well as other staff and equipment, which should reach the site in the second quarter of this year.

The statement also said that a location has been identified for a new sawmill to be built in Nampula, and that construction of buildings and installation of equipment should be completed by the end of 2017, which will add a capacity of about 100 cubic metres per day.

The Obtala group, based in Guernsey, has 10 forest concessions in Mozambique covering an area of 120,000 hectares.

In a statement issued on Tuesday the group announced that it had reached an agreement in principle with Wealth Bank Limited, a Hong Kong-based company, to issue 20 million shares with an issue price of 4 million pounds. (29-03-2017)

AIR FRANCE LAUNCHES ACCRA-PARIS ROUTE; TARGETS FRESH PRODUCE EXPORTS

Air France has disclosed of its commitment to facilitate the swift export of fresh agricultural produce from Ghana to Europe in the short to medium term.

It follows the commencement of the airline's operations along the Accra-Paris route.

The assurance also follows the impressive cargo patronage recorded by the airline in its inaugural flight from Accra to Paris on Wednesday.

"Cargo will be as well a key success factor for the economies and the development of the route. On Tuesday night the flight left with cargo full of pineapple from Ghana to France and to Europe," the Chairman and CEO of Air France, Jean Marc Janaillac told **Citi Business News**.

According to him, the cargo capacity for the Airline's A330 and Boeing 2007 are 10 and 16 tonnes respectively.

Mr. Marc Janaillac who was speaking at the official launch of Air France's operations also highlighted plans to capitalize on Accra's position as one of the top long haul routes to facilitate business transactions between Ghana and France.

"Studies conducted prior to the launch of this flight confirm that in light of the growth potential, archives among the top along all destinations have not yet been served by AirFrance. Needless to say the business opportunities with Ghana are great and therefore we desire to back them by connecting Accra to Paris with just a few hours."

Meanwhile Air France is also confident its Ghana operations will propel other growth opportunities across the sub-region.

“Our airline will facilitate business travel and enable French and European companies to experience their presence their activities and exchange with their Ghanaian companies,” Marc Janaillac asserted.

The company will be operating a three time weekly flights from Accra to Paris.

Air France will also be operating with KLM which is part of the broader organization.

Currently the Air France-KLM flies to 51 destinations in Africa. (AF 01-03-2017)

DIAMONDS FROM LUCAPA’S MINE IN ANGOLA WORTH MORE THAN EXPECTED

The 54% increase in the average value of diamonds to US$1,246 per carat will offer a significant increase in the financial results of the Lulo concession in Angola, Australia’s Lucapa Diamond Company said in a statement on Monday.

An initial study estimated that the average price per carat would be around US$800 and the discrepancy is the result of the Australian company finding a large a diamond, of 404 carats, the largest found in Angola and the 12th in the world which, after selling for more than US$16 million, increased the average price.

The company, which operates the Lulo mine, reported that it continues to estimate alluvial mining operations over more than four years with monthly processing of 20,000 tonnes of rubble.

The two studies, carried out within 15 months of each other, were the result an analysis of results obtained from the processing of 220,000 bulk cubic metres (bcm) of rubble.

At the Lulo mine the Lucapa Diamond Company’s partners state diamond company Empresa Nacional de Angola Diamonds (Endiama), with 32% and Angolan private company Rosas & Pétalas with 28%. (29-03-2017)

SENEGAL TO RESTORE FIVE REGIONAL AERODROMES IN 2017

The rehabilitation and upgrading of Senegal’s regional aerodromes will be launched through the course of the current year, Maimouna Ndoye Seck sad at the opening of the Air Transport Days in Dakar on Thursday.

This first phase of the renovation of regional airports covers five regions in Senegal namely Saint Louis, Ziguinchor, Matam, Tambacounda and Kedougou, according to Ms. Seck.

The rehabilitation of regional aerodromes forms an integral part of the “Sub-regional Air Hub Project,” as well as the launch of the Senegalese national carrier, Air Senegal (SA) and the Blaise Diagne International Airport at Diass (AIBD) in December 2017, AIBD Director, Ibrahima Mbodj explained.

The project will help reach out to five million passengers and three million tourists by 2023, according to the Minister of Tourism and Air Transport

The construction of AIBD, one of the world's largest airports costs CFA405 billion, of which CFA30 billion was accounted for by the government.

According to its General Manager it is being built on a 4,500 hectare of land outside the Senegalese capital.

Air Senegal will be launched before the start of AIBD begins operation with an inaugural flight by a company-owned airplane, according to Mathiaco Bassane, the Director of Air Transport.

The Air Transport Days which will last for three days is themed: "Presentation of the Flagship Recovery Program of the Sub-regional Air Hub, under Senegal's Plan for Emergence." (APA 30-03-2017)

Fernando Matos Rosa

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