

**SWAC Strategy and Policy Group meeting**

**Opening remarks**

**Deputy Secretary-General Masamichi Kono**

**Paris, 19 June 2018**

Members, partners and friends of the Sahel and West Africa Club,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

As Deputy Secretary-General of the OECD, it gives me great pleasure to open this Strategy and Policy Group meeting of the Sahel and West Africa Club. This meeting is very important as we will discuss the Sahel and West Africa Club's forthcoming programme of work for the 2019-20 biennium.

Since taking office in August 2017, I have been particularly impressed by the achievements of the Sahel and West Africa Club. One of its main achievements is that, for more than 30 years, it has been co-facilitating the Food Crisis Prevention Network, which brings together the "community" of food security stakeholders, helps build a coherent shared understanding of the food and nutrition situation in the region and nurtures decision-making. Thanks to the Club's efforts, West Africa may be the best prepared region in Africa to respond to and mitigate the impact of food crises.

Furthermore, as the oldest initiative of solidarity and partnership between Africa and the OECD, the Club is a unique international platform for policy dialogue and analysis devoted to regional issues in West Africa. It contributes to better understanding of ongoing transformations and trends in the region and their policy implications, and also promotes

dialogue and co-operation between OECD member countries and the West African region.

Today, the West African region is faced with key challenges, which I would like to briefly outline here:

1. The food and nutrition situation is deteriorating, particularly in the Sahel. According to the Food Crisis Prevention Network meeting last April, about 7.1 million people are in need of food assistance, 3.7 million of which are in north-eastern Nigeria.
2. Population growth and urbanisation rates are among the highest in the world, reshaping the region's economic and social landscape. The West African urban population is expected to reach 400 million by 2050.
3. Transnational criminal networks and terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel are affecting peace, security, and stability in the region. Long-term stabilisation here, and beyond, will not happen without reinforced co-operation between the Sahel and the Maghreb.

While these challenges require urgent attention and be high priority, there are tremendous opportunities for the region that merit to be strongly emphasised. For example, the West African food economy offers huge potential for economic growth, job creation, and food security. According to the Sahel and West Africa Club's analysis and data, 66% of total

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employment in West Africa is in the food economy, so there are opportunities for women and youth in this sector as well.

Our aim at the OECD is to strengthen our co-operation with Africa, support innovative policy making, and help identify best practices across the continent.

We believe that it is important to closely work together on key issues that promote inclusive growth and development, such as the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment, social protection and youth inclusion, to name but a few. A stronger partnership with Africa, which will be mutually beneficial, will also help achieve Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The OECD will continue to work with the Sahel and West Africa Club as we look to deepen our engagement with West Africa, and with the continent as a whole.

For more than 50 years, the OECD has set global standards and provided a forum in which governments work together to seek solutions to common problems, to share experiences, and identify best practices to promote better policies for better lives. In today's globalised, interdependent world, multilateral co-operation is more important than ever.

Enfin, Monsieur François-Xavier de Donnea, je voudrais vous remercier, de la part de l'OCDE, pour votre action en tant que Président du Club du Sahel et de l'Afrique de l'Ouest depuis

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2010. Vous avez su faire du Club un lieu de rencontre et de discussion. Vos efforts, votre expérience et votre engagement ont permis de donner à l'OCDE une vision renouvelée du continent africain.

With these thoughts, I wish you a successful and productive meeting.

Thank you for your attention.