

Opening remarks for DSG Frantz
SWAC Strategy and Policy Group meeting, 13th June 2016

It is with great pleasure that I open this Strategy and Policy Group meeting of the Sahel and West Africa Club, which is the oldest initiative of solidarity and partnership between the OECD and Africa. Since its creation, the Club has brought West African regional organisations and international partners together to pursue a common interest: regional action and co-operation.

For close to 40 years now, the SWAC has championed the cause of regional co-operation and integration in West Africa, with the idea that the right regional policies are those which are defined and implemented by the regional organisations.

Over the course of time, trust and dialogue, fed by analysis and innovation have progressively built SWAC to be a unique, international platform of co-operation. Beyond its achievements for the Sahel and West Africa, the SWAC was also a precursor, a source of inspiration for the rest of the African continent, and more generally for the developing world. Let me give you some examples:

- the international Food Aid Convention of London, adopted in 1999, aims to improve the ability of the international community to respond to emergency food situations. It is very similar in its objectives and recommendations to the Sahelian food aid charter adopted ten years earlier in 1989;
- in 1997, the Members of the SWAC endorsed a “Banjul declaration” on aid effectiveness, which echoes the Paris declaration of 2015;
- the Food Crisis Prevention Network, created in 1984, more than 30 years ago, is now an example that other African regions would like to follow.

The OECD also sees the SWAC as a source of inspiration. As a global organisation we are convinced that Africa is the continent of the future and that the world needs Africa.

Africa’s rapid demographic, economic and geographical changes represent an immense opportunity for Africa itself and for the world. A market of 2 billion people in 25 years (compared to 1.2 billion today) whose per capita income could double is an opportunity for both Africa and its partners, as the outlook for the BRICS becomes dimmer. In a world committed to a comprehensive, far-reaching and people-centred set of universal and transformative sustainable development goals and targets, Africa cannot be left behind.

The continent has to simultaneously address three major challenges: its demographic transition, its insertion into the global economy, and global warming. To build on opportunities and address those challenges, African countries need to continue building strong and increasingly accountable institutions, showing leadership and implementing effective policies at the national and regional levels, to strengthen resilience to the effects

of external shocks while implementing medium-to-long structural policies, broadening access to financial instruments, improving payment systems and adapting their economies to climate change.

One of the more important lessons that the SWAC can bring to the OECD is that the regional approach of development should become a corner stone of the co-operation with the African continent. Africa is the continent with the largest number of countries (54). This is a challenge for any organisation wishing to develop its co-operation with the continent. Out of these 54 countries, 18 have less than 5 million inhabitants, 31 have less than 15 million and so on. These countries deserve to be part of larger regional markets to develop their agriculture and industries. They need regional responses to food and nutrition insecurity, they need regional co-operation to face transnational instabilities, and to implement joint responses to climate change and environmental threats.

In this matter, the Sahel and West Africa Club shows the way forward. It also demonstrates the value of a real long standing partnership where the African voice and leadership become the engine of international co-operation.

Finally, I am proud and happy to be with you today on the occasion of this very important board meeting, which takes on the task of discussing and reflecting on the future programme of work of the Club for the 2017-18 biennium. The Strategy and Policy Group's priorities and visions must be heard and reflected in the Club's future agenda. I am confident that your discussions will be fruitful, and will contribute to establishing a future work programme for the benefit and well-being of the Sahelian and West African people.

I wish you a successful and productive meeting.