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To all EBCAM Members

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ONE)- EUROPEAN COMMISSION REQUESTS FURTHER HUMANITARIAN FUNDING TO RESPOND WORSENING FOOD CRISIS IN SAHEL AND SUDAN

In response to the worsening food crisis affecting the Sahel and Sudan, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva announced today that the Commission has proposed an additional €40 million in humanitarian funding to be drawn from the EU budget's Emergency Aid Reserve. €30 million of this would be additional funding for the Sahel and €10 million for Sudan. This extra €30 million will bring the total humanitarian aid funds allocated by the Commission to fighting malnutrition in the Sahel since the end of 2009 to €98 million. The additional funds will be used to boost the humanitarian aid operations carried out by European Commission humanitarian aid partners and will help provide food assistance to over 500,000 extra beneficiaries during the next critical months until harvest time in October. Currently, over 10 million people in the Sahel region are at risk of food insecurity. Of these over 7 million are in Niger and 3 million of these are considered to be severely food insecure and in need of urgent food assistance.

The risk of a looming food crisis in the Sahel was identified by humanitarian aid experts from the European Commission as early as September 2009. The Commission reacted swiftly to the first reports of erratic rains which resulted in poor harvests and allocated €10 million in December 2009. Since then, the European Commission has been working closely with its non-governmental, Red Cross and United Nations partners to raise awareness of the scale of the crisis and of the need to work pro-actively to ensure that funds and food were available in time to help. Subsequent allocations of humanitarian aid in response to the growing food crisis included €20 million in January 2010 to fund the 2010 Sahel Global Plan to fight malnutrition of children in the Sahel and a €24 million food crisis response decision in June 2010. €14 million was also allocated in 2010 in Chad for food assistance for the victims of drought.

Extensive poverty and lack of infrastructure and basic services mean that large parts of the population in the region are extremely vulnerable to external shocks such as climate change and high food prices.

The current "lean period" between harvests is the most difficult part of the year for these vulnerable households. This year's food shortages caused by last year's erratic rains and drought compounded by continuous high food prices have aggravated the situation and pushed many households over the edge into crisis. Acute malnutrition rates are rising rapidly and emergency food and humanitarian assistance is necessary to enable the most vulnerable households to survive through the hungry period until the next harvest in November.

The countries most affected by the food crisis in the Sahel region are Niger and Chad with many pockets of severe malnutrition also identified in northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Mali and northern Cameroon. Although less severe than in Sahel, the impact of the drought in Sudan has further compounded the situation of thousands of people exposed to violence and displacement in the Darfur and in the southern part of the country.

The Commission's food assistance draws on previous experience and is based on a wider toolbox of 'smart food assistance' solutions. One of the main lessons from the 2005 drought is that early diagnosis and rapid treatment are essential. The funding will target the most vulnerable populations and finance operations in the nutrition and health sectors, including short-term food assistance, the treatment of malnourished children, and livelihood support to pastoralist and nomadic populations.

The Commission also promotes local food purchases. This year's rains have been adequate so far which gives hope for a better harvest in Niger this year. If the harvest is good by September, priority should be given to cash transfers, allowing beneficiaries to purchase directly from small local food producers. This is cost-effective and helps small scale farmers who are the main victims of this year's drought. It also avoids the risk of imported food aid interfering with local market conditions and preserves the dignity of the population.

Beyond the humanitarian response, the EU established the Food Facility, funded with €1 billion, in 2008 as a reaction to the food price crisis. Projects have been initiated in Burkina Faso and Niger to encourage increased agricultural production. In Mali, the Food Facility supports a project that aims, among other things, at improving the nutrition status of mothers and infants by distributing essential vitamins, minerals and medicines.

Funds are channelled through UN agencies, the Red Cross and non-governmental organisations.

TWO)- SAUDIS READY TO PAY 20 MILLION DOLLARS TO SOMALI PIRATES

Une compagnie d'assurances saoudienne s'est dite prête à payer une rançon de 20 millions de dollars à des pirates somaliens pour qu'ils relâchent un pétrolier et ses 14 membres d'équipage détenus depuis cinq mois, a rapporté lundi le quotidien saoudien Arab News. "Le propriétaire d'Al-Nisr Al-Saudi, pris par des pirates somaliens, a indiqué que sa compagnie d'assurances avait donné son accord pour payer une rançon de 20 millions de dollars afin d'obtenir la libération du navire et de ses 14 membres d'équipage", écrit le journal de langue anglaise. Le propriétaire, Kamal Arri, a affirmé au quotidien que les pirates torturaient les membres d'équipage, 13 Srilankais et un Grec, et a dit attendre un accord des autorités pour le paiement de la rançon par l'assureur. Le pétrolier était à vide quand il avait été abordé par les pirates dans le golfe d'Aden. Il revenait du Japon vers le port de Djeddah (ouest de l'Arabie). La communauté internationale a déployé depuis 2008 des dizaines de bâtiments de guerre pour sécuriser le golfe d'Aden, une route maritime cruciale pour le commerce international. Mais les pirates ont étendu leur rayon d'action, allant jusqu'à capturer des navires près des Maldives, vers l'est, et dans le canal du Mozambique au sud. Le nombre de navires et de marins actuellement détenus est l'un des plus élevés depuis l'expansion de la piraterie somalienne en 2007. Selon des chiffres non officiels, plus de 200 attaques ont eu lieu en 2009 dans la région, dont 68 prises réussies de bateaux. On évalue à 50 millions de dollars les rançons payées pour libérer les bateaux.

THREE)- COMMISSION ALLOCATES 15 MILLION EUR TO BRING RELIEF TO WORLD'S BIGGEST REFUGEE CAMPS IN KENYA

The European Commission has adopted a € 15 million aid package to provide assistance to Somali populations at Dadaab camps, the biggest refugee camps in the world, hosting more than 278,000 people. The sectors covered by this decision include health, water and sanitation, non food items, shelter and protection. In addition, € 5 million will be allocated from this new funding to provide immediate food and livelihood assistance to people who are struggling to cope with the increased frequency of severe drought in the arid, semi-arid and coastal regions of the country.

The Dadaab Camps, situated on the border of Somalia, are mainly inhabited by Somali refugees fleeing civil war in their country. They belong to the Dagahaley, Ifo and Hagadera populations and are located in the North-Eastern Province of Kenya. Set up in 1991 to accommodate 90,000 refugees, these camps now host more than 278,000 refugees. In order to decongest the 3 camps and to shelter the expected new arrivals, the Kenyan Authorities have recently allocated 1,370 hectares of land for the expansion of Ifo Camp in March 2010. This extension will allow the accommodation of up to 80,000 refugees.

Kenya's arid and semi-arid districts and coastal areas have been hit by severe droughts. The main objective of the Commission is to ensure the availability of and access to food by addressing acute malnutrition and by stabilizing conditions to promote rehabilitation and restoration of self reliance. The aid will provide support to the most vulnerable populations in the form of food assistance, health care, water and sanitation programmes, the protection of livestock assets, as well as other forms of short-term livelihood support in the region, in tight coordination with its regional drought preparedness approach.

On 31st March, 2010, the Commission adopted a Communication on Humanitarian Food Assistance. This lays out a new policy framework for EU humanitarian action to strengthen efforts to tackle food-insecurity in humanitarian crises. In recent years, hunger and malnutrition have increased in the world; in 2010, over 1 billion people are considered to be food insecure. Of these, approximately 100 million are living in crisis contexts, and face extreme and acute food-insecurity and malnutrition that poses an immediate threat to life. The Communication states that EU Humanitarian Food Assistance will aim to save and preserve life, to protect livelihoods, and to increase resilience for populations facing on-going or forecasted humanitarian food crises, or recovering from them.

FOUR)- DEVELOPING MORE TOP AFRICAN WOMEN RESEARCH SCIENTISTS

In a tiny village near Kisumu city in Kenya, scientific researcher Mary Anyango Oyunga spends most of her time educating women about something they have always done – grow sweet potatoes. But Oyunga's message to the female farmers in Kisian village is new, even though it is based on her scientific research findings published in 2009 in the refereed African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development. The research, which revealed that Orange Fleshed Sweet Potatoes (OFSP) were extremely rich in vitamin A, may have been in the scientific domain for a while but until recently the women in Kisian knew nothing about it.

For Oyunga this implementation of her research findings is just as important as conducting the research was: "Conducting a study is one important step. But making it real by using the findings as a tool to improve livelihoods of people on the ground is what makes it complete."

And how to go about doing this is one of the skills she acquired after winning a fellowship with the African Women in Agriculture Research and Development (AWARD) programme. The programme brings together African female agricultural research scientists based on intellectual merit from 20 different agricultural science disciplines.

"Scientists are on the cutting edge of solving Africa's food crisis. But we need to urgently address the gender gap in our scientific community. We need more women pursuing careers in agricultural science. Because women are the face of African farming," said Dr Akinwumi Adesina, the vice-president of Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa.

Oyunga is just one of the 180 top ranking female agricultural research scientists who have been awarded fellowships under the AWARD programme, and who is already putting into practice what she learnt.

In Kisian it is considered a disgrace if a woman does not have some vines of sweet potatoes growing on her farm. The potatoes are highly treasured in this part of the world. They are grown all year round and supplement sometimes meagre diets. Oyunga, who works at the Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), is busy communicating her research findings to women smallholder farmers here. Particular types of sweet potatoes have an important nutritional value that is crucial especially to young children, she tells them.

These findings could save some of the 43 million children under the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa who are at risk of Vitamin A Deficiency (VAD). According to the World Health Organisation, VAD is responsible for most cases of impaired blindness in children and significantly increases the risk of severe illness, and even death, from such common childhood infections as diarrheal disease and measles. In pregnant women VAD causes night blindness and may increase the risk of maternal mortality.

Through the Sweet Potato Action for Security and Health in Africa programme, Oyunga has received funding to assist popularising the OFSP varieties in the region. In a pilot project in Western Kenya, all pregnant women attending clinics in public health centres are issued with a voucher that allows them to go to designated potato seed growers in the region and receive 120 vines of OFSP.

"If the method proves successful, then we will replicate it all over the sub-Saharan Africa region," said Oyunga. "When your study is implemented especially to serve the rural poor, you feel like you've created a bridge that people are using to cross from the world of poverty to economic development. It is extremely satisfying," Oyunga adds.

A report released in June 2010 by ActionAid International shows that small holder farmers, majority of whom are women, are responsible for 90 percent of food grown in Africa and produce about a half of the world's food supply. Yet the women scientists are rarely involved in scientific agricultural research or leadership positions in that field. Vickie Wilde, the director of the Gender and Diversity program at the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research and founder of AWARD agrees it is time for change. "Investing in Africa's women is a smart investment ... Yet investing in Africa's women scientists is the best bet," said Wilde. AWARD was developed in 2008 to strengthen research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science. It offers female researchers mostly from sub-Saharan Africa, though including West Africa, two-year fellowships focusing on mentoring partnerships.

By sitting with highly experienced mentors, fellows acquire various skills like writing competitively in scientific journals, developing competitive proposals to fund implementation of their research findings, and working with poor communities during implementation.

"The roadmap to ending poverty in Africa is based on empowering women, who play an important role in food production," said Dr Ephraim Mukisira, the director of KARI. Aishatu Bashir Ardo, a Fulani Muslim from Northern Nigeria is another fellow who has broken traditional barriers by joining men to administer artificial insemination for cattle. She is the only woman in her region doing what has traditionally been stereotyped as a duty for men.

And it seems as if the situation for women across the continent is slowly changing. According to a 2008 survey conducted over eight years across sub-Saharan Africa by AWARD in partnership with Agricultural

Science and Technology Indicators, the number of African women professionals employed in agricultural sciences grew by eight percent during the study period, while the number of African men grew by two percent per year.

Though the gap is narrowing, the research found that women still represent less than one quarter of Africa's scientists holding positions in agricultural research, and that less than 14 percent of leadership positions are held by a woman.

"Women have always played a central role not only in food production, but also ensuring that it is brought to the table. They therefore know what is good for society," said Mukisira explaining why the numbers of women in agricultural research needed to increase.

FIVE)- UN CALLS ON SAUDI ARABIA TO STOP DEPORTING SOMALIS

The United Nations refugee agency called on Saudi Arabia on Friday to halt expulsions of Somalis to Mogadishu, rebuking the kingdom for deporting 1,000 a month by aircraft to the violent capital. Neighbouring countries should offer legal residence to Somali workers and asylum-seekers until it is safe to return to Mogadishu, where civilians are often targeted in the fighting between Somali forces and Islamist al Shabaab rebels, it said. "Given the deadly violence in Mogadishu, UNHCR is urging the Saudi authorities to refrain from future deportations on humanitarian grounds," Melissa Fleming, spokeswoman of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), told a news briefing. Saudi authorities have told the UNHCR that they are deporting Somalis who have been staying in the country illegally, according to U.N. sources. UNHCR said a week ago that Somali refugees were also being harassed and rounded up in Kenya and the semi-autonomous enclave of Puntland following deadly bombings by Al Shabaab in Uganda. Authorities in Puntland have also been deporting Somalis, but so far Kenya has not, it said. Al Shabaab, which is linked to al Qaeda, controls much of southern Somalia bordering Kenya and is fighting to topple the Western-backed government in the lawless Horn of Africa nation. Saudi Arabia deported 1,000 Somalis in June and nearly 1,000 so far in July, Fleming said. The majority have been women who said they had worked in Saudi Arabia for some time. The deportations to Mogadishu had been going on for at least a year. Most deportees say they fled Somalia due to conflict, violence and human rights abuses, according to reports received from its local NGOs. "Prior to their deportation, they report being held in detention facilities for several weeks under conditions which many described as appalling," Fleming said. Saudi Arabia, the top OPEC oil producer, is not among 144 countries that have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention obliging states to protect civilians fleeing conflict or persecution. But by deporting Somalis, it has flouted UNHCR's guidelines issued last May urging all countries to return Somalis to central and southern Somalia only on a strictly voluntary basis until it is safe to return, according to the agency. "As we all know, this has not been the case in Somalia for almost 20 years," Fleming said. Dozens of civilians have been killed and scores wounded in fighting this week in Mogadishu, she said. The death toll has been driven up in the first seven months of this year by increased shelling and fighting in the central region, a human rights group said on Thursday. After Afghanistan and Iraq, Somalia is the country generating the highest number of refugees, fleeing the conflict, economic collapse and drought, according to the UNHCR. There are now 600,484 Somali refugees, mainly in Kenya, Yemen, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Tanzania and Uganda, plus 1.4 million Somalis displaced within the country, it says. (See [statement](#))

SIX)- TALKS ON FUTURE OF SUDAN'S ABYEI OIL REGION DEADLOCKED

Talks have stalled between Sudan's rival northern and southern halves over the disputed oil-producing [Abyei region](#) and could re-ignite a conflict which claimed millions of lives, the region's leader said on Sunday. Abyei has been the most contentious dispute between the former southern rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and the ruling northern National Congress Party (NCP), both before and after a 2005 peace deal that ended Africa's longest running civil war. The conflict was fought over religion, ethnicity, ideology and oil -most of which lies along the north-south border. It claimed 2 million lives, say aid agencies, mostly from hunger and disease and destabilised much of east Africa. South Sudan will vote in a referendum on independence in January and Abyei should hold a simultaneous vote on whether to join the south. But the

partners cannot agree on the makeup of the Abyei referendum commission, who will be able to vote or whether to hold long-delayed elections there. "The issue of the Abyei referendum has come to a standstill," Deng Arop, the head of Abyei's administration, told reporters in Khartoum. "This has the potential to ... cause a regional and international conflict." Arop, who is from the SPLM, also complained the nomadic Missiriya tribe had begun to settle 75,000 people in the north of Abyei to change the demographic of the region and influence the vote. Arop estimated there were some 100,000 original Abyei residents excluding the Missiriya. "The aim is ... at the very least to influence the referendum with large numbers or, if they are told they don't have the right to vote, then they will derail the referendum," Arop said of the Arab nomads. The ruling NCP says the Missiriya, a huge pro-unity nomadic tribe who graze their cattle in the south during the dry season, should vote in the Abyei referendum. The SPLM says the tribe as a bloc should not be allowed to vote but that individuals with long-term residence in the region should be able to do so. Arop called on the NCP to stop the settlements. "If the government is not supporting this then it should take action to stop it," he said. The former north-south foes had referred Abyei's border to [The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration](#) and both had agreed to abide by its [ruling in 2009](#). Arop said threats by the Missiriya had prevented the border being demarcated on the ground. Northern presidential advisor Salah Gosh reopened the border debate in comments late on Saturday by saying a new approach was needed to resolve the dispute. "The decision of the international court did not solve this problem and did not satisfy the needs of the two partners," he said in comments carried on state news agency SUNA. "The two partners must find new solutions." Separately the long-time SPLM spokesman and Minister of Agriculture in south Sudan's government Samson Kwaje died on Sunday of kidney failure in Kenya, SPLM officials said. Kwaje was for many years the international face and voice of the rebels during their decades of struggle with the north.

SEVEN)- REALISING TRADE IN VIRTUAL WATER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

The vegetables Omphemetse Monyi sells at the Francistown bus rank come from 400 kilometres away in South Africa. One approach to development might seek to replace her suppliers with local farmers, but Southern Africa's water managers are considering the merits of reinforcing a regional trade in "virtual water". Depending on the season, Monyi sells watermelons, tomatoes, potatoes, onions from the back of her truck. The 44-year-old makes the trip to South Africa each week to purchase vegetables for sale; she says she buys about 10,000 pula worth of stock (\$1430), and makes a profit of between P3,000 and P4,000. It's not just informal traders who bring fruit and vegetables to northern Botswana from elsewhere. The supermarkets down the road from her stall also import their produce from South Africa. It's part of a trade in virtual water, though Monyi doesn't think of it that way.

"For those [Botswana farmers] who do harvest and sell, they do not produce the quality that we get in the South African farms. Take potatoes for example, they will not be cleaned well and not packaged according to size," she says.

Until recently, one of the first questions economists might ask would be, why can't the farmers in Botswana compete? The answers might include disadvantages in terms of good soil and sufficient water, or capital to allow them to mechanise production and put more land under cultivation. The recommendation might be to address these problems to help local farmers gain a foothold in their local market.

But some disadvantages cannot readily be overcome with money or training. Enriching soil, for example, is a slow process, but possible.

Increasing available water presents its own challenges. Irrigation schemes can be prohibitively expensive to construct and maintain; the high temperatures and low humidity in northern Botswana can mean significant amounts of precious water are lost to evaporation. When these costs are factored in, even irrigation may not allow local farmers to produce vegetables or fruit at a competitive price.

David Phillips an independent consultant and researcher based in Namibia, explains that countries can use virtual water to strategically enhance their overall access to fresh water.

"Perhaps the best examples of this are Israel and Egypt, both of whom import large quantities of foodstuffs and other items containing virtual water. Israel for example uses about 2.2 cubic kilometres of fresh water annually but imports about three times this volume every year in virtual water form."

The concept of virtual water means thinking of an agricultural product - or other commodity - in terms of the amount of water required to produce it.

Due to richer soils, lower temperatures and evaporation, and better farming techniques, a thousand litres of water used in a farm along the South African stretch of the Limpopo will produce more tomatoes or sugar than

the same amount of water used somewhere upstream in Botswana, where the river runs through more arid countryside.

Phillips is one of those involved in developing guidelines for basin-wide management of transboundary rivers in the Southern Africa region.

He explains how virtual water can give managers additional flexibility in negotiating allocation of water resources. The idea is that certain countries have optimal conditions for growing food; a benefit-sharing approach is to maximise production of crops per unit volume of water.

"Where these countries attain high levels of productivity, it implies a global saving of water compared to producing the crops elsewhere and this is important if we are to continue to feed the world's growing population," Phillips said.

A benefit sharing approach to local economic development and food security along the Limpopo River recognises that these advantages can mean greater productivity and food security at lower cost for everyone: consumers in Botswana can make virtual - optimum - use of water if the farming is done in South Africa.

There are many other factors to consider, including the livelihoods of local farmers: virtual water is a concept that policy makers in river basin organisations are still working to grasp in order to see how they stand to benefit.

During a June brainstorming session of the Limpopo Basin Technical Committee held in Francistown, Botswana, water managers from throughout the basin were still cautiously assessing how benefit sharing might work.

"We need to build confidence first before we can say anything on this issue," the delegation from Mozambique said.

"We will have to look at the cost-benefit to the country," was all South Africa's delegation would say.

Tracy Molefi-Mbui, River Basins Coordinator at the International Office in Botswana's Ministry of Minerals, Water and Energy Affairs said the question of how the trade-offs will work in the full social, economic and political context of a transboundary river basin is not yet clear.

"If a country says, I will forgo this resource so that country B could produce this amount of products, how will that country benefit economically? Its applicability is still remote because we have not fully comprehended it," she said.

Like any other decision making tool, Molefi-Mbui said, countries will need facts on the value of the system in order to "play our cards right as per the findings of the studies. It is complicated by the fact that [the trade-offs are] not even just between the countries, but also between provinces within a country."

As the benefit-sharing concept is developed by the Southern African Development Community's Water Sector, the hope is that it will become another concrete example of the regional body's objectives, including sustainable collective development, harmonization of political and socio-economic policies, and interdependence of member states.

EIGHT)- SOMALI PIRATES SEIZE FREIGHTER IN GULF OF ADEN

Somali pirates seized a Panama-flagged freighter in the Gulf of Aden early Monday, the European Union's anti-piracy mission said. The cement carrier MV Suez was hijacked in an international corridor patrolled by warships from the EU and other nations, EU NAVFOR said. The mission dispatched a helicopter to the scene after the freighter sent an SOS, but attempts to make contact with the pirates failed. The MV Suez has a crew of 23 from Egypt, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and India. Somali pirates are currently holding at least 22 ships and around 400 crew members, according to non-governmental organizations. Heavily-armed gangs take to the seas in search of multimillion-dollar ransoms despite the presence international warships, which were sent to region following a spike in pirate attacks in late 2008.

NINE)- EU DECIDES NOT TO RENEW GUINEA-BISSAU SECURITY MISSION

The European Union will not extend a mission to help reform Guinea-Bissau's security forces because the country has failed to respect the rule of law since an army mutiny in April, the EU said on Monday. The existing mission, launched in June 2008, will end on Sept. 30 when its mandate expires, the EU said in a statement. "Political instability and the lack of respect for the rule of law in the country make it impossible for the EU to deploy a follow up mission, as originally foreseen, without compromising its own principles," the statement said. An army mutiny on April 1, led by General Antonio Injai, ousted Guinea-Bissau's military chief and briefly detained the prime minister. The European Union has since repeatedly expressed concern at the detention of civilian and military leaders, as well as the impunity of those behind the mutiny, and called on Guinea-Bissau to respect the rule of law. But on June 25, Injai was appointed chief of the armed forces, frustrating the EU's efforts. Monday's statement said Injai's appointment "confirms that the conditions for deployment of the new mission are not met". U.N. officials say the tiny country on the coast of West Africa has become a hub of the drug trade between Latin America and Europe. Last month, the United States said it could not help in international efforts to reform the country's armed forces unless they were purged of suspected leaders of the growing West African drug trade. Washington has named two senior Guinea-Bissau military officers as drug kingpins, one was the former chief of staff of the navy and the other the chief of staff of the air force.

TEN)- BOOST CROSS-BORDER TRADE FOR FOOD SECURITY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Small-scale traders on either side of the Mwami Border Post between Zambia and Malawi are key to meeting local demands that larger importers do not.

During acute food shortages in Malawi during the drought in the early 1990s, small-scale traders brought maize across the border from Zambia to Malawi; the same traders bought unused fertiliser in Malawi and brought it back to Zambia. At the time, Zambia had adequate rainfall, but serious problems with fertiliser imports left farmers short of the critical farm input.

The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa recognises this kind of activity as key to ensuring supply and access to basic needs by border communities, able to quickly meet local demand that larger importers ignore.

A Simplified Trade Regime which waives all customs duties and taxes on shipments worth \$500 has now been in operation for three months. The STR is intended to strengthen food security as well as improving rural incomes for smaller traders.

The kind and quantity of food available on one side of the border is often quite different from just 20 or 50 kilometers away.

For example in the Luangwa valley of Chama District on the Zambian side, significant quantities of rice are grown; a strong market for this exists across the border where conditions are ill-suited to grow rice. With the price of rice imported from faraway places like Thailand rising steeply in the global food price hike in 2008-2009, the Zambian farmers can find a ready niche for their crops.

In Chipata town, fish is scarce, meaning opportunities for fishing communities on Lake Malawi have opportunities to supply an important source of protein from across the border.

The STR dovetails neatly with trade programmes such as the 10 million euro Regional Food Security and Risk Management programme (REFORM) of the European Union, which aims to help small traders increase the supply of locally-produced food crossing borders.

"(REFORM) specifically aims at improving regional and national trade, social protection and disaster risk management," Alexander Baum, head of the European Union Delegation in Malawi said.

"And one component of this programme is to enhance Cross Border Trade in agricultural commodities and is implemented by COMESA. Indeed, areas of surplus food production should have ready access to markets, especially those close to borders. A stable and uninterrupted demand for food from neighbours will result in farmers in surplus regions investing more to ensure long-term supply."

Simplified tariffs will also benefit a different class of small-scale traders. In Lusaka's "COMESA Market" - named for and situated behind the headquarters of the actual headquarters of the regional trade body - much of the merchandise is cheaper than equivalents in formal retail outlets like the multinational-chain store Shoprite. This is mainly because they are brought into the country in small amounts by small traders who evade official border posts.

Agrippa Miti says he buys the goods he sells at the market from petty traders near the Mwami Border Post. Miti explains that he calls someone on the Malawi side of the border to explain what goods he needs. "When I go to Mwami, I will find them - sometimes stored in a safe house in a small village. I pay and bring them to

Chipata where I will load them on the bus leaves early in the morning."

"There are many people who bring in things from Malawi. Some will come through the border post, but many do so using [clandestine] routes that are known here as 'zalewa'," Gloria Mwape an official at the border post told . Felix Mutati, the Zambian Minister of Commerce, Trade and Industry, observes that the new rules are eliminating bribes and corrupt practices that were endemic and border posts like Mwami as well as encouraging traders who previously evaded the border post to bring their goods through it, enabling both countries to gain a better picture of real volumes of trade between them.

"The old rules led some traders to go round the check points at the border for fear of paying high customs duties and other taxes on even small amounts of goods," Mutati said.

He is confident that the STR will also encourage increased trade of goods between the neighbours. In June, Zambia initiated the Simplified Tariff regime to cover Zimbabwe as well.

SIDEBAR (The Other COMESA Market): Aggripa Miti got into cross-border trading just a year ago, importing soft drinks from Malawi. He started out with capital equivalent to 200 U.S. dollars, but this year he says he will import merchandise worth ten times that much.

Miti sells most of his goods at the crowded "COMESA Market" - in in the shadow of the actual COMESA secretariat, bargain hunters jostling between stalls hugging each other tight as ticks on the hide of an ox. Here bottled Windhoek Lager from Namibia vies for attention with wax cotton prints brought in from the Democratic Republic of Congo - the European-made fabric is known in Zambia as chitenge. There are also herbal remedies from Tanzania, leather footwear and belts from Ethiopia or Egypt and corned beef from Zimbabwe.

Miti sells bottles of Coca-Cola, Sobo Cream Soda and pineapple squash; he admits that competition is intense, especially from traders who bring in Mazoe Orange Crush from Zimbabwe which for ages has been a household product in Zambia.

The bustling market and the small sums needed to enter trading in markets like this are an important part of economic life across Africa, a sector whose dimensions are of increasing interest to researchers and policy makers.

ELEVEN)- MICROFINANCE IN THE THIRD WORLD MAY BE A GOOD INVESTMENT

Microfinance and its goal of helping people escape the poverty trap is starting to draw mainstream investors who, ethical cudos aside, are lured by its inherent insulation from global financial trends. Microfinance schemes involve loans of a few dollars to some of the world's poorest -- long treated as unbankable -- allowing them to grow their businesses by things as simple as buying better seeds or fertiliser or expanding street stalls. From a modest beginning 30 years ago, the sector has ballooned in the last decade, particularly since Bangladeshi microfinance pioneer Muhammad Yunas won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. But once the purview of development charities, now hard-nosed mainstream investors are getting involved. From 2005 to 2009, MIV assets grew to \$6 billion from \$1.2 billion, according to microfinance rating agency [Microrate](#). The world's poorest might struggle to feed themselves on a daily basis, but they have proved surprisingly reliable at repaying their loans. Their position at the bottom of the global financial pyramid also means that while they might be vulnerable to local shocks such as floods and riots, their businesses are less correlated to official monetary policy and the ups and downs of global markets. "Investors come in because they think it is good diversification. (Microfinance is an) asset class that has different drivers than other asset classes ...and doesn't react to shocks in the same manner," said Jean-Pierre Klumpp, CEO of [BlueOrchard](#), a microfinance investment company. The steady growth in investment interest has been remarkable during one of the most turbulent periods for developed world finance and the global economy in 60 years. Big institutional investors such as pension funds, acting mostly through Switzerland-managed microfinance investment vehicles (MIV), are starting to look at this specialist area as a viable long-term asset class. Microfinance institutions lend small sums to large numbers of borrowers, but for each loan, interest rates are relatively high, a key reason why the sector is appealing to institutions. **BETTER THAN STOCK EXCHANGES** So how has microfinance performed relatively for anyone who locked into it several years ago? A study from think-tank [Consultative Group to Assist the Poor](#) (CGAP) showed JPMorgan's Low Income Financial Institutions index, which consists of four microfinance institutions that went public in 2007 and measures publicly-traded stocks of banks servicing low income clients, would have outperformed global equity indices by more than 700 percent from 2003 to 2009. While the index did plummet alongside other world bourses and emerging financial stocks as the credit crisis triggered a world recession, it has more than recovered those losses and investments made in 2007 would be

back in the money. By contrast, despite a recent rally neither the MSCI world index nor its emerging market sub-component have made it back to their late 2007 peaks. Yet even microfinance cannot insulate itself completely from the dominant global trends. MIV growth slowed during the financial crisis, growing only 22 percent in 2009, compared to the 97 percent growth seen in 2007, according to Microrate. The survey also noted that less than half the MIV funds actually reached microfinance institutions. The global financial crisis put a stop to the industry's frenetic growth, and consequently institutions stopped asking for funding. Ironically, as institutional investors show an increasing interest in the sector, bringing it more in line with the global financial system, microfinance is at risk of losing its attractiveness as a diverse asset. "The industry cannot be completely de-correlated," said Christian Speckhardt, a member of the management board at [responsAbility](#), a social investment company. **THE RISKS** Political and social risks also remain extremely high. A good example is Nicaragua, a country which has one of the more mature microfinance industries. By late 2008, an economy that was already facing shrinking remittances from the United States turned on microfinance, saying its interest rates were exorbitant. Borrowers defaulted en masse and some even tried to burn down a microfinance office. "If a microfinance country would go into a prolonged war situation or a serious political unrest -these are situations that can have a significant impact on the local microfinance industry," added Speckhardt.

TWELVE)- U.S. TRADE REPRESENTATIVE CONFIDENT OF DOHA PROGRESS THIS YEAR

The Obama administration's top trade official said on Monday "real progress" could be made in the long-stalled Doha round of world trade talks by the end of 2010. Political changes will help spur momentum for the World Trade Organization talks, now in their ninth year, said Ron Kirk, who has insisted large developing countries like Brazil, China and India must do more to open their markets to U.S. farm and manufactured goods. "I'm confident and hopeful that once we get past the elections in Brazil, now that we're through the elections in Japan, and others, that we will have enough momentum going into the end of the year to make some real progress," Kirk told reporters in Washington. Japan's ruling party lost its majority in one of two houses of Parliament in July, and Brazil will hold presidential elections in October. Representatives of the world's largest developed and developing economies will meet in November in Korea for the G20, where trade will be on the agenda. Kirk said the atmosphere around the talks was improving. "There is less anxiety now over the notion that it is a desirable thing" to engage in world trade talks, Kirk said. "A year ago that was almost unanimously rejected." The WTO talks, now in their ninth year, were designed to spur trade in developing countries. However, negotiations have floundered over how much rich countries like the United States and the European Union should cut their trade-distorting farm subsidies and tariffs in exchange for new market access from Brazil, India, China and other leading developing countries. Kirk spoke on the sidelines of an annual forum on U.S. trade with Africa. AGOA, or the African Growth and Opportunity Act, is a U.S. trade program that allows countries in sub-Saharan Africa to export over 6,400 varieties of goods to the United States without paying duties. Kirk said the AGOA will likely be renewed by Congress before its 2015 expiration, though it is unlikely to be made permanent. African trade groups have said the program's temporary nature discourages long-term investment in the continent. Kirk promoted completion of the Doha round as the best way to increase African trade. "If we can get Doha done right, with an ambitious and balanced outcome that encompasses more than just agriculture, I think many of the sub-Saharan African countries could marvelously benefit from that," he said.

THIRTEEN)- HERBAL CONTRACEPTIVES UNDER THE RADAR IN KENYA

An arrow points the way from a busy street along a rough pathway; visitors clutch their bags more closely. The door is open: sachets are displayed on the table with labels indicating treatment for ulcers, diabetes, hypertension, fibroids. Thirty-five-year-old Sophie - she didn't want her surname used - came here for six months for a herbal contraceptive.

She says she gained a lot of weight and suffered severe bleeding in connection with the injectable contraceptive she was getting at a government health facility, so she turned to this alternative, oblivious to official warnings that it has been linked to serious health problems. "I stopped using conventional family planning pills because a friend of mine told me about this particular herbal pill which has no side effects. I used it for a period of six months with no side effects except not having my monthly period for that duration," she

says.

But gynaecologists have alerted the Pharmacy and Poisons Board - whose mandate is to investigate the composition of all drugs in the Kenyan market - that a number of women who were using herbal contraceptives were suffering serious problems.

"This particular herbal contraceptive was being distributed by a Chinese clinic and the packaging was in Chinese," says Board legal counsel Dr Joseph Yano.

"The side effects being reported by the women included pain and swelling in the legs. Children as young as three years whose mothers were using this pill during breastfeeding were reported to have developed enlarged breasts and uterus."

Investigations by the Board found that the pills contained high levels of the hormones levonorgestrel and quinestrol.

Yano says loopholes in the country's legal system are creating an avenue for people to sell unlicensed drugs as "herbal remedies". The herbal classification requires an import and distribution license only from the Ministry of Culture, which has no capacity to test the products. "Our law on traditional medicines did not envisage a time when we would have herbal remedies imported from abroad. So they come in through the Ministry of Culture while the Ministry of Health has no idea about them. As a result, all manner of concoctions are being brought into the country and being sold under the guise of being herbal remedies," Yano says.

Professor Joseph Karanja, an obstetrician and gynaecologist, says due to a combination of difficulties accessing standard family planning and a degree of ignorance of their proper use, many women in Kenya are being exploited by unscrupulous people selling "herbal" alternatives.

"Some of these herbalists are not qualified and their claims to treat all manner of diseases are actually not based on any evidence. These people are simply preying on women's desperation to avoid pregnancy and are exploiting their ignorance and making money.

"Women need to stay away from such clinics because the products contain high doses of unknown hormones which could have very serious side effects," Karanja says.

Canny operators

Calls for attention at the back alley dispensary go unanswered; a group of people seated across from the door chat on undisturbed. Suddenly a voice from across the street says the attendant has stepped out and advises us to call the number displayed on the wall.

When one dials and asks about the herbal family planning pill, the person who answers hurriedly says the pill is out of stock and promises to call back when it is available. With that, the phone goes dead.

The people running dispensaries like this one are cautious: According to Sophie, clients are not allowed to take the pills off the premises; instead they come to the clinic once a month and swallow the tablet on site. A helpful call from the operator reminded her when it was time to come in for a next dose.

"You only need to take one pill in a month and they will remind you in good time. It is only 200 shillings (about \$2.50) and no one ever needs to know what you are up to," Sophie says. "Even your husband will have no idea that you are using this pill since you do not take it home with you and have to swallow it every day like the conventional pills."

As far as Sophie is concerned, the herbal family planning pills did her no damage - she came off the contraception to have a baby - and she intends to return to using it after she delivers, as she does not want any more children.

National health policy suggests safe family planning methods should be readily available in government hospitals for free or at a heavily subsidised rate. The reality is persistent stock-outs.

"Kenya faces chronic contraceptive stock-outs because the budget allocation towards the health sector is low and that of the family planning division is even lower," says Dr Charles Ochieng, a gynaecologist at Marie Stopes in the eastern city of Kisumu.

As a result, he says, women are often told that their chosen contraceptive is unavailable and are forced to seek an alternative.

He concedes that conventional family planning methods sometimes have side effects, and these can be worse if one keeps changing from one method to another. Ochieng says this is an important reason why women turn to alternatives of unknown composition, but not the only one.

"Staff attitude in hospitals might also be to blame. There is a misconception that women who want family planning methods are promiscuous and thus they are stigmatised. This can force women to seek services from herbalists."

FOURTEEN)- NIGERIA THREATENS TO WITHDRAW PEACEKEEPERS OVER WEAK RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Le président nigérian Goodluck Jonathan a menacé lundi de ne plus prêter de troupes aux missions de paix de l'ONU si celle-ci ne modifie pas ses règles d'engagement pour empêcher la mort des soldats. "Je ne veux pas perdre un soldat à cause de négligences et c'est pour cela que l'ONU doit modifier les règles d'engagement si des soldats du Nigeria doivent être impliqués dans des opérations de paix", a déclaré le président devant un séminaire consacré au maintien de la paix. Il n'a pas précisé quelles règles d'engagement il souhaitait. Le Nigeria, actuellement membre du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU et pays le plus peuplé d'Afrique (150 millions d'habitants), a perdu sept soldats en mission de paix en 2007 au Soudan dans une embuscade. L'an dernier, un soldat nigérian a été abattu près de son domicile dans la région soudanaise du Darfour par des inconnus qui ont volé son véhicule. Le président Jonathan a estimé que des miliciens qui tendent des embuscades et tuent des soldats ont un comportement "totalement inacceptable". Ce pays a également participé à des opérations de paix au Liberia et en Sierra Leone. Le site de la mission du Nigeria à l'ONU indique que plus de 6.000 de ses soldats sont engagés dans des opérations de paix des Nations Unies dans le monde mais il est difficile de déterminer si ce chiffre vaut pour l'heure actuelle. M. Jonathan a aussi accusé les entreprises des pays riches de contribuer aux violences en Afrique. "En Afrique, les pays industrialisés bradent leurs petites armes et armes légères et c'est un des plus grands problèmes. Cela encourage beaucoup les activités criminelles et de groupe de miliciens dans toutes sortes de conflits", a-t-il affirmé.

FIFTEEN)- SPANISH FRIGATE IMPEDES SOMALI PIRATES ATTACK ON NORWEGIAN CARGO

Une frégate espagnole a mis fin mardi à une attaque de pirates somaliens contre un chimiquier norvégien dans le golfe d'Aden et interpellé les sept assaillants, a annoncé la force navale antipiraterie européenne Atalante. Alertée par un message de détresse lancé tôt mardi par le chimiquier Bow Saga, Atalante a immédiatement envoyé la frégate Victoria à son secours. L'hélicoptère embarqué sur l'unité espagnole est alors parti en avant-garde pour stopper l'attaque en cours. Sept pirates somaliens à bord d'une chaloupe avaient fait feu sur le pont du bâtiment norvégien et le chimiquier était en train de manoeuvrer pour tenter de les empêcher de monter à bord, quand l'hélicoptère est arrivé sur les lieux, 10 minutes après le début de l'assaut, a indiqué le QG d'Atalante dans un communiqué. Les pirates, qui tentaient de prendre la fuite, en ont été empêchés par des salves d'avertissement de l'hélicoptère puis de la frégate. Des marins espagnols sont ensuite montés à bord de leur chaloupe où ils ont confisqué des armes et interpellé les pirates. Quant au sort des pirates pris en flagrant délit, il doit encore être tranché, a expliqué un porte-parole d'Atalante joint par téléphone. "Les sept (pirates) sont gardés sur la chaloupe. Nous avons des procédures standard à suivre. La première chose est de confisquer le bateau et ensuite de décider s'ils doivent être traduits en justice", a-t-il dit à l'AFP. "On y travaille", a-t-il poursuivi, expliquant que les présumés pirates pourraient être conduits au Kenya, qui a passé un accord judiciaire avec l'Union européenne pour traiter ce genre d'affaire impliquant des Somaliens, ou bien en Norvège, pays du propriétaire du cargo attaqué.

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Brussels

