



ORGANISATION DE COOPÉRATION ET  
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT ÉCONOMIQUES



ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC  
CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT



## CIP Stakeholders meeting on the ECOWAS cross-border cooperation programme

ECOWAS Commission  
Abuja, 18-20 May 2009

Statement of Mr. Normand LAUZON

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a very special meeting for the Sahel and West Africa Club because, in many regards, it completes the process begun some years ago. If you please, I would like to recall some of the important moments.

In early 2000, the Malian Government asked the SWAC to help move forward the cross-border areas concept, an idea developed by His Excellency Alpha Oumar Konaré, President of Mali at that time. This idea, which consisted of promoting genuine co-operation between local actors living on both sides of the border, was not widespread well-known in West Africa nor Africa in general at that time.

We accepted this mission because it seemed to fit in perfectly with the SWAC's mandate to support West African regional co-operation initiatives.

First of all, we helped organise seminars to brainstorm on this concept and gather opinions from a wide-range of actors. Then, we joined up with ENDA Diapol, an NGO, and the three of us (the National Borders Directorate of Mali, ENDA Diapol and the SWAC) created a cross-border co-operation network. In 2003, at the invitation of the UEMOA Commission, we held the first meeting of this network which came known as WABI, West African Borders and Integration.

We then carried out field missions to meet with locally-elected officials, local government representatives, villagers, merchants, agricultural producers - in short - local actors. At the same time, at the urging of the National Borders Directorate of Mali, awareness was being raised within other governments of the region who were then brought on board.

In October 2004, right here in Abuja, at the invitation of ECOWAS, the second WABI network workshop was held. This workshop facilitated dialogue between ECOWAS officials and representatives of local actors. For the first time, a representative of the Association of European Border Regions participated. At the end of this workshop in Abuja, ECOWAS officially announced its intention to launch a cross-border initiatives programme.

Building on this momentum, as from 2005, the WABI network began to support the creation of pilot projects conceived with local actors and supported by locally-based operational entities. These projects will be further described during the course of this meeting. Our strategic thinking, in my opinion, should be based on their success as well as their shortcomings.

The African Union followed by entering into the game. It asked the supporters of the WABI network for help in developing a pan-African programme which has since become operational.

The ECOWAS Commission provided institutional support by including cross-border co-operation in its organisational chart and its strategic plan.

This was a very brief summary of five years of work, its successes and constraints, but above all persistence. These five years of work have today brought to fruition this first meeting of the ECOWAS Cross-border Initiatives Programme.

However, we must continue to look towards the future. Please allow me to set out a few ideas which could be debated over the next three days. What challenges are we facing?

1. Firstly, it seems to me that together we should find a solution to the immediate problem of short-term financing for pilot operations. The last few years has demonstrated how difficult it is to finance a cross-border co-operation experience simply because it stretches over borders. We need to come up with concrete measures. How can the ECOWAS Commission simplify their intricate and complex procedures to channel money to field operations? I think we can all agree that pilot operations are the C.I.P.'s greatest achievement and I suggest we focus on this hot topic.

2. Secondly, I believe that we should help the ECOWAS Commission develop a long-term plan for a genuine community policy based on an array of suitable legal and financial instruments. It is a long road ahead so we should start as soon as possible.
  
3. Finally, it seems to me that with the growing number of actors involved it is essential to work more tightly in network. Local actors, locally elected officials, governments, regional organisations as well as the African Union, and the supporters of European and cross-border co-operation must be ready to keep the communication channels open, to exchange practices and develop initiatives. I suggest we take this opportunity to outline this network by capitalising on assets such as one another's know-how and expertise.

May we have plenty of success in our work and I thank you.