

Strategy and Policy Group meeting (SPG)
Of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC/OECD)
25 and 26 January 2007
GTZ, Berlin



INTERVENTION BY MR. CHARLES GOERENS, PRESIDENT OF THE SWAC¹

*Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen, representatives of OECD Member countries and of the Club,
Ladies and gentlemen representatives of international and regional organisations,
Dear guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

First, I would like to thank the German Government and in particular Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul, Minister of Cooperation and Development, for hosting our SPG meeting in Berlin.

It is a great honour for the Club to organise its Strategy and Policy Group meeting in this beautiful capital, Berlin, just at the time when Germany is taking over the Presidency of the European Union as well as the G8. This clearly demonstrates Germany's interest in Africa and notably West Africa. (We also had the pleasure of meeting with the Representatives of German Parliament yesterday to present the Club and have an exchange of views regarding West Africa.)

I would also like to thank you, SPG members, for having accepted to participate at this important meeting of the Club and for West Africa. Our partners from the US, Switzerland and the UK send their messages of solidarity for this meeting as they are unable to participate this year. Mr. Kiyoo Akasaka, OECD Deputy Secretary-General and Mr. Eric Burgeat, Director of the OECD's Centre of Cooperation with Non-Members, also would have liked to be here with us today but had to cancel due to last minute engagements.

Several high level personalities of regional and international organisations such as the African Union, UEMOA, UNDP, UNECA, and UNOWA also send their regrets as they are unable to join us due to scheduling constraints.

¹ Original text in French

This year's SPG meeting in Berlin is especially significant. It marks the thirty years of the Club's existence and also my first year as President.

For the past year I have worked closely with the Club and I appreciate the crucial role that distinguishes it through its regional approach, its balanced reading which takes into account the progress in the region as well as the challenges and its medium- and long-term strategic thinking as well as the Club's capacity to react quickly to timely issues (desert locusts, food security, etc.).

As a facilitator, monitor and leader of open and constructive exchanges, the Club has established itself in the international debate as a leading advocate for West Africa. With the passing of time, its role, its scope of intervention and know-how have evolved. Today the Club is characterized by, in my opinion, its remarkable capacity to bring into dialogue actors from all parts of society (civil society, decision-makers, politics, the media, entrepreneurs, women, the younger generation, etc.). In 2006, I had the pleasure of participating in several workshops as well as the Forum which were organised by the Club. On these various occasions, I have been amazed that the Club has been able to bring together around the same table military, human rights activists, age-old enemies, politicians, and representatives from civil society, etc. in order to take part in a constructive and forward-looking dialogue. This dialogue is even more significant than that at the regional level. Imagine various actors from 18 countries of the region, from Cape Verde to Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania all at the same meeting.

The SWAC's Perception of the Region

The regional approach, which is at the centre of the Club's mandate, is compelling as it is not exclusive. Indeed, it takes into account the complementarity between the local, national and regional levels.

The Club shares the same view with that of the African Union, ECOWAS and UEMOA which is that in order for countries in the region to be able to fully capitalise on their potential and meet the challenges facing them they need to create a regional zone encouraging the adoption of joint policies, the implementation of complementary investment, food security, conflict management and prevention, inter-State cooperation and the promotion of the private sector and trade essential for ensuring rapid economic growth as well as job creation and income.

The SWAC's Medium- and Long-term Strategic Thinking

As you know, one of the Club's specificities is its medium- and long-term strategic thinking on the development of the region through exchanges and informed debates with actors of the region, taking into account the historic and prospective dimensions as well as the spatial, cultural and endogenous aspects. This strategic thinking essential for decision-makers and development partners does not imply that the SWAC is not concerned with pressing issues and short-term actions. In 2006, for example, the Club was highly involved with such issues as food crisis management, the avian flu, desert locusts which, in addition to long-term strategic thinking, require immediate action.

The SWAC's Network Approach and its Partners

Another distinctive feature of the Club, which is neither a research centre nor a consulting firm, is how it implements actions on the ground. Unlike projects such as those of cooperation agencies, the Club **supports dynamics on the ground and works in network** with West African actors representing governments, civil society, the private sector and development and research institutions. The Club also maintains close relations with West African development partners as well as regional and international organisations within the framework of joint initiatives in particular with ECOWAS, ROPPA, the CILSS, UEMOA, the African Union and Women and Youth Associations.

Furthermore, in 2006, considerable effort has been undertaken for more frequent meetings and deeper exchanges with **high level** Africans, in order to raise their awareness and garner support with regard to the Club's initiatives on the ground. The Club is convinced that action on the ground will have all the more momentum if it is taken on by decision-makers. Normand Lauzon has thus met with several Presidents and Heads of Government, Ministers and decision-makers at various levels. At the same time, the Club has strengthened its ties with the African Union and has signed agreements with its three closest partners thus formalizing the close relationships formed over the last few years with ECCOWAS, the CILSS and UNDP. Other agreements are foreseen for 2007, notably with the AfDB, ROPPA, UEMOA, UNECA and UNOWA. The idea is not to increase the number of the Club's initiatives but to mobilise the greatest possible number of partners in order to work together within the framework of joint initiatives of high priority for the region.

Thirty years already!

What a thirty years it has been! However, even if the overall view of the Club is positive, no institution can deny that it is essential to have its own niche, to produce results complementary to those being produced by other institutions and to effectively use the funds available. The Club is no exception!

Without going into detail, I would like to share with you the very positive evaluations of the Club carried out by Germany and Canada as regards the Club's relevance, utility and effectiveness. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the Club's working methods contributed to the mobilisation and strengthening of analytical, decision-making and action-oriented capacities of various actors of the region.

We are aware that in order to ensure the follow-up of our joint initiatives with our partners on the ground and in developing countries, we need stable, foreseeable financial resources. We will have the opportunity to address this issue in detail tomorrow when we review the Club's financial and administrative issues.

In 2007, the Club will prepare its Work Plan for 2008 and beyond. The Canadian evaluation supported suggestions made by partners of the region as well as some of the Club's donors, to prepare a five year Work Plan as of 2008. This would imply more flexible planning which would help identify joint initiatives to undertake with partners over a period of time and to respond to the short, medium and long-term needs of the region. We will have the opportunity during this meeting to further examine this proposal.

Before concluding, please let me say a few words on the Club's capacity to raise its visibility. At the last few meetings, members had stressed the Club's need to make their work better known. In 2006, considerable effort was undertaken to better disseminate the results of the Club's work. But we are midstream. In 2007, we intend to step up our actions and improve our tools to raise the visibility of our initiatives and the concrete results of our work. I would like to thank Canada for its specific contribution as from 2007 to support our communications.

I indeed would like to thank our development partners who have provided and continue to provide the Club with intellectual as well as financial support over the last 30 years. We hope that we can count on you and continue this momentum over the next 30 years!

I thank you.