



MEETING OF MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ouagadougou, 18–19 December 2006

MEMORANDUM

Cross-border Initiatives Programme

Executive Secretariat
Abuja, December 2006

INTRODUCTION

1. This memorandum is a follow-up to the Memorandum on the “cross-border areas” concept presented to ECOWAS Ministers of Foreign Affairs in January 2005 in Accra as well as the Memorandum on the Assessment and Perspectives of the Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP), presented to the same assembly in January 2006 in Niamey. This memorandum presents to member States the progress accomplished in the area of cross-border cooperation, and propose new perspectives. The memorandum is divided into three parts:

- Definition of cross-border cooperation;
- Achievements of the CIP;
- Perspectives.

I. WHAT IS CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION?

2. Cross-border cooperation is a local initiatives approach through which actions are formulated and implemented by private and public local actors from two or more countries residing in cross-border areas. This approach should be based on the agreement and support of the governments of the countries concerned, with a two objectives: i) to improve the living conditions of cross-border populations who are often marginalised; and ii) to concretely build regional cooperation.

3. Cross-border cooperation is not a development sector, but a tool. Any institution that wants to support cross-border cooperation should therefore not set up a cross-border cooperation programme which would have the same characteristics as an “agricultural” or “health” programme. It should set up a programme whose mechanism would enable the promotion of cross-border cooperation in agriculture and health sectors, and any other development sector.

4. Cross-border cooperation is at the core of the most topical issues: peace and security, migration, food security, and health. As regards security, border areas are not where conflicts arise but where their consequences crystallize (refugee camps, trafficking, etc.). In the area of regional migration, the major challenge is the plan out future settlement and development zones so as to limit the tension in current immigration zones. However, there are many zones with great development potential of which many are cross-border areas. As regards food security, the recent food crisis in Niger demonstrated that access to food in the Sahelian fringes of Africa will depend on the regional market, and more particularly on cross-border trade. As regards health, borders are still obstacles to combating the spread of epidemics; health centres are not able to communicate with each other and work together.

II. WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE ECOWAS CROSS-BORDER INITIATIVES PROGRAMME?

5. In 2000, the Government of Mali adopted a new border management policy consistent with the new democratic momentum taking hold in the country. This was followed by an extensive awareness-raising campaign within the country, and numerous contacts with governments of neighbouring countries. On this basis, Mali organised a sub-regional seminar on the “cross-border area” concept, with the support of the Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC). The seminar was held in Sikasso from 4 to 7 March 2002 under the chairmanship of the President of the Republic, His Excellency Alpha Oumar KONARE.

6. The SWAC later organised a special meeting in Accra (Ghana) in May 2002; co-chaired by President Mr. Alpha Oumar KONARE of Mali and President John KUFUOR of Ghana. During the meeting, the “cross-border areas” concept was presented more broadly to West Africa and the international community.

7. In 2003, under the impetus of the SWAC, the Government of Mali and the NGO “ENDA-Diapol”, the *West African Borders and Integration (WABI)* Initiative was launched. WABI’s objective is to promote the implementation of programmes in support of cross-border cooperation and pilot operations on the ground. 2003 and 2004 were devoted to field work highlighting local initiatives and the willingness of the populations to implement cross-border cooperation actions.

8. At the end of 2004, ECOWAS hosted a WABI workshop at which it announced the launching of its Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIP), and requested the SWAC for support during its initial stages. The WAEMU and CILSS also announced the integration of cross-border cooperation into their regional integration strategies.

9. In 2005, two CIP pilot operations were defined at workshops of local actors in cross-border areas of the region with the support of the MDP¹, UNOWA² and UNDP³, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Austrian Development Agency.

10. The first of these pilot operations involved the Sikasso–Bobo Dioulasso area between Mali and Burkina Faso. Since then, for example, a network of community radio stations on both sides of the border was established and produced concrete results in the fight against trafficking and banditry. Furthermore, since this meeting, ambulances move freely across the border, a joint watercourse development programme is being studied, and a directory of health services, agriculture, and livestock contributes to the improvement of services to the populations.

11. The second pilot operation involved the area known as S n gambie m ridionale. In this zone also, community radio stations have created a cross-border network which has significantly improved day-to-day mediation activities between various communities. A cross-border directory is being finalised; beekeepers have created a cross-border network to improve the quality of their production and optimize marketing opportunities.

12. Concurrently with the launching of these initiatives on the ground, ECOWAS has prepared, with the support of the SWAC, a draft regional legal convention. This draft was submitted in November 2006 to a meeting of experts of ECOWAS member States, at which it was amended and validated.

13. In 2006, two new cross-border pilot cooperation operations were launched. The first is located in the Karakoro Basin between Mali and Mauritania and is headed by the NGO GRDR⁴ and financed by the European Union, CCFD⁵ and the SWAC. The second which focuses on the food security issue, involves the Kano–Katsina–Maradi zone between Niger and Nigeria. A joint analysis of cross-border challenges to food security in this area has been carried out by

¹ Municipal Development Partnership in West and Central Africa

² United Nations Office for West Africa

³ United Nations Development Program

⁴ Groupe de Recherche et de R alisation pour le D veloppement Rural (*Rural Development Research and Implementation Group*)

⁵ Comit  Catholique contre la Faim et pour le D veloppement (*Catholic Committee against Hunger and for Development*)

seven institutions⁶ with local actors, and will be the focus of a cross-border meeting at the beginning of 2007 with the aim of setting up local mechanisms for the prevention of food crises.

14. Based on these achievements, ECOWAS recently set up an internal *Task Force* to reformulate part of these major operational programmes (facilitation of transport, health, juxtaposed border posts, development of onchocerciasis-free zones, etc.) around the concept of cross-border cooperation.

15. Lastly, the Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, His Excellency Alpha Oumar Konaré, expressed the desire to draw on the West African experience to develop cross-border cooperation throughout the entire African continent. A steering committee and a task force comprising West African experts and the SWAC have been established.

III. PERSPECTIVES

16. This progress confirms the relevance of the cross-border approach in peace keeping, food security, economic development and cultural cooperation. It also highlights what remains to be done and underscores the constraints, particularly as concerns financing tools and a cross-border cooperation legal framework. The objective henceforth is to accelerate the process.

17. The future work of ECOWAS and the SWAC is clear: to broaden the scope of cross-border cooperation in West Africa. To achieve this objective, in the short-term work must be carried out in the following areas:

- the follow-up and development of CIP pilot operations;
- an analytical study on West African borders (traced, border demarcation, legal issues);
- a feasibility study on the creation of a regional fund for financing cross-border cooperation;
- operational strategic thinking on legal instruments related to cross-border cooperation;
- development, with several European border regions, of projects in support of cross-border initiatives in West Africa.
- organization of the first Africa–Europe Conference on cross-border cooperation programmes scheduled for June 2007 in Accra.

This Conference should be a significant step in building the political foundation and the implementation of financial and legal tools for cross-border cooperation in West Africa. Technical analyses, feasibility studies, and extensive lobbying will enable draft decisions, proposals for agreed actions and commitments to be put on the table.

The Conference will be co-organised by the SWAC, ECOWAS and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and placed under the auspices of the African Union.

18. Significant funds must be mobilised in order to meet this ambitious goal. The preparatory work and organisation of the Africa-Europe Conference require a budget of 600 000 €. This investment is in line with the expected results. The ECOWAS Commission will carry out discussions with its partners on this matter. More generally, the Commission intends to establish, in 2007, a programme to support the implementation of the CIP in order to provide the necessary financial and human resources.

⁶ CILSS, SWAC, WFP, FAO, FEWs Net, OCHA, UNICEF

19. The ECOWAS Commission is convinced that cross-border cooperation is a concrete response to the need for regional integration in West Africa. It is also convinced that the management of regional migration, the improvement of food security, the need for stability and good neighbour relations, and the need for free circulation will result in operational responses by increasing the number of local initiative cross-border cooperation projects.

20. This third memorandum demonstrates the remarkable efforts made since January 2005. In two years, significant progress has been achieved. Many ECOWAS member States have been involved in and have supported pilot operations.

21. The strong determination of all member States and a clear mandate on the perspectives defined in this memorandum should enable the new Commission to celebrate its creation by developing regional grass-roots cooperation, in other words, cross-border cooperation.