



## MEETING OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS MINISTERS

ACCRA, 18 JANUARY 2005

### MEMORANDUM

#### **“CROSS-BORDER” CONCEPT OR LOCAL INTEGRATION**

Executive Secretariat  
Abuja, January 2005



1- The strengthening of the regional integration process takes on a new dimension when new actors enter the process, namely local border populations. In effect, more and more cross-border dynamics are developing within common zones. Populations who live in these zones regularly take initiatives to collaboratively manage the borders.

2- On either side of the border, within a band of one hundred twenty kilometers it is not out of the ordinary for populations to share, in an informal manner, health, education and market facilities.

3- All of these initiatives converge with ECOWAS' aim to strengthening regional integration.

4- However, surveys carried out on the ground reveal that these initiatives are scattered and not very well known. There is not enough institutional handover to the national and regional levels. The Republic of Mali, who understood early on the importance and significance of this approach, has committed to joint strategic thinking with the Sahel and West Africa Club and ENDA-Diapol on the border issues involving certain local actors, civil society, State structures, ECOWAS, the WAEMU with an aim to developing a tool to promote regional integration.

5- The Malian Initiative has come a long way because the Executive Secretariat, the Sahel and West Africa Club, the National Borders Directorate of Mali and ENDA-Diapol have, over a certain period of time, been able to outline the "Cross-border" concept. This Memorandum sets out the concept's origin, focus and proposals for the concept to be made operational.

## **Origins**

6- This innovative approach to the regional integration process was first put forward in early 2000 by Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, ex-President of Mali calling it "cross-border areas". These areas share the same geographic space that could not be divided by physical borders. This was the beginning of a conceptual process of the "cross-border area" idea. Successive meetings of experts along with Ghanaian and Malian Heads of State in March and May 2002 in Sikasso and subsequently in Accra have made it possible to better understand local border realities, to share various experiences of cross-border cooperation and to come to the following conclusions:

- To improve trade routes of agricultural and fishery products within common border zones;
- To implement an integrated public health programme improving access to health care by populations on both sides of the border;
- To share a common border market;
- To permanently carry out work on conflict mediation and prevention by the Youth Groups living in the border zones who meet each other regularly.

7- Convinced of the validity of this pragmatic approach to the regional integration process and above all of the potentials for integration in cross-border zones and for those who live there, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat has become involved in the process.

8- Hence, ECOWAS took the initiative to organise a workshop from 27 to 29 October 2004 in Abuja, in conjunction with the Sahel and West Africa Club, on "Borders and Regional Integration".

9- The Workshop brought together approximately sixty participants from regional cross-border zones. It resulted in, among other things, the adoption of a joint declaration on cross-border cooperation supporting the integration process.

10- In this regard, encouraged by the agreement and the richness of the debates and the vital role played by local actors, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and the Sahel and West Africa Club agreed to strengthen their cooperation by creating a Cross-border Initiatives Programme (CIT).

11- An ECOWAS Executive Secretariat Programme, the CIT aims to place cross-border cooperation at the heart of the regional integration process in West Africa and to promote it as an integration tool to support populations.

12- A technical meeting took place in Paris on 20 November 2004 bringing together ECOWAS, the Sahel and West Africa Club, the National Borders Directorate of Mali and ENDA-Diapol examining a cross-border initiatives programme.

13- At this meeting, the cross-border initiatives programme's specific objectives were defined around four areas:

- The development of an agreement on cross-border cooperation in the ECOWAS zone to allow local border communities to conclude agreements between themselves.
- The awareness of cross-border initiatives in all of ECOWAS' Member States
- The creation and implementation of cross-border pilot projects.
- The strengthening of cooperation with the European Cross-border Movement.

### **CONCEPT'S CONTENT**

14- From the field work carried out by the Sahel and West Africa Club, the National Borders Directorate of Mali and ENDA-Diapol at border villages it is obvious that there are numerous possibilities for exploitation of a local border integration policy

15- The case of a villager from one country cultivating land that is actually situated within a neighbouring country is cited. There is also the case of children in one country attending school in a neighbouring country; using neighbouring infrastructure can also be seen in the health sector. This can result in local health clinics being more advanced in one country than in another or a doctor's reputation going beyond the border. The case of patients from a Malian village who seek treatment in Djibo in Burkina Faso because of the reputed surgeon in Djibo due to better medical training is also cited.

16- In the trade sector, there has been a lot of talk of border markets being frequented by populations residing in a neighbouring country. This is the case of the sub-regional market of Diaobé in Senegal. A system and market calendar exists throughout the region.

17- Transhumance pastoralism occurs all along the border. There are plenty of other examples in the sub-region. These are all telling signs of solid socio-cultural and economic links bonding the border zones.

## **CONCLUSION**

18- At the same time as efforts undertaken within the framework of ECOWAS, the Member States develop other forms of strengthened cooperation in some areas.

19- Moreover, other actors, notably intra-state territorial communities regularly experiment with diverse types of collaboration which converge with regional integration. All of these efforts are complementary and can produce positive effects even more significant than if they were closely coordinated.

20- The Malian Initiative has already been integrated by ECOWAS whose regional mandate allows it to go beyond any division that may exist between Member States or between populations. ECOWAS' should promote the "cross-border" concept and assure its implementation in the years to come because of its significance at all levels of the regional integration process.

21- With this view, at the meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers, the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat asked for the approval of the following proposals:

22- The introduction of the "Cross-border" concept on ECOWAS' agenda.

23- The organisation by the Executive Secretariat of a meeting of Experts of Territorial Administration of ECOWAS Member States with a view to developing a draft agreement on cross-border cooperation at the ECOWAS level which would allow local border communities to work directly on themes of common interest. This meeting will also examine practical ways to create a "Cross-border" Observatory proposed by the Republic of Mali. Such an undertaking would further involve all of ECOWAS' Member States in the strategic thinking concerning better decision-making to which they are committed.

24- Identification, creation of cross-border pilot projects on a participative basis involving ECOWAS, local actors, and development partners.

25- The acceptance of the "Cross-border" concept in all of ECOWAS' Member States with a view to reduce the lack of information.

26- The creation of a Regional Association of West African Border Towns. This could be used as a framework of collaboration and dialogue among local actors. Given its regional dimension, ECOWAS can take the initiative to organise the constitutive meeting of this Association. The Association could then be accorded the statute of observer.