Ministerial Lobby Group

PROPOSALS RELATIVE TO THE PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES AND MODE OF OPERATION OF THE GMAP

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1. Summary of topics and issues

West Africa has undergone radical change in the last 10-15 years. Most countries have undertaken major structural reforms affecting both the organisation of government and mode of governance (democratisation of politics, redistribution of powers between presidency, government and parliament, decentralisation, anti-corruption measures, etc.) and aimed at macro-economic stabilisation through adjustment and liberalisation of the main sectors of production. At the sub-regional level, the countries in the CFA franc zone have embarked on an intensive process of economic integration within West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU), with a strategy of convergence of macro-economic and sectoral policies, a multilateral surveillance system and transfers of competence. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has taken a similar approach, which will lead to the implementation of a second currency zone, with a view to a single currency zone by 2004. Most of the countries in the region are drafting strategic poverty reduction papers to benefit from the HIPC initiative.

There is now a general consensus on the need for regional integration, based both on historical legacy and awareness that national territories are too small to implement viable economic development strategies or to manage shared resources. However, governance remains mainly national or sub-national, and most public decisions are taken within a national development perspective. The many inter-governmental organisations, which cover different areas and compartmentalise technical problems according to their specific mandates, do not make it any easier to arrive at a shared, consistent, cross-sectoral regional vision, which could then guide sectoral choices.

International development cooperation also tends to have a national focus. Despite strong support for the objective of integration, the aid agencies have never managed to produce a valid, coordinated strategy on integration. Instead, they have preferred links with individual governments through bilateral agreements.

The key challenge for the GMAP is therefore to generate effective discussion on regional integration, a key pre-requisite for making progress towards achieving integration. This involves political action steered by high-level public figures with a strong commitment to integration. It implies organising discussion between citizens, civil society organisations and public policymakers. It means choosing common issues and enhancing discussion of them by drawing on existing knowledge and by producing cross-sectoral analyses and proposals, as opposed to the usual sectoral approaches.

There are several reasons for changing approach and seeking a new impetus for integration processes:

- As economies and trade become increasingly globalised, only a regional approach to development will enable West Africa to escape marginalisation. This strategic option requires countries to be aware of the sub-region’s collective resources and the advantages that rational, shared development of these resources will bring to all the countries involved.
Democratisation and good governance have become decisive criteria for full membership of the international community and for engaging the support of citizens and other stakeholders for reforms. Disruptions to these processes in several countries are a major obstacle to the pursuit of integration.

Political problems such as acute and persistent socio-political crises are now the main brake on economic growth, without which sustainable regional integration is an illusion. There is an urgent need to remove these political obstacles, which hamper day-to-day integration processes and undermine sub-regional dialogue and the status of West Africa in international negotiations.

New issues are emerging in the sub-region with the Millennium African Renaissance Programme and the Omega Plan for Africa, which are promoted in tandem with the African Union. The Omega Plan proposes a new integration model for Africa. The coordination of this model with the foundation of the African Union is a major issue.

These issues have become a concern for all. The lack of a forum to investigate them properly prompted ministers from the region to take the initiative of setting up the GMAP. By developing partnerships and alliances with networks firmly engaged on the path to regional integration, the GMAP initiative aims to promote the collective regional interest in public policymaking.

2. Objectives

The GMAP initiative was a response to the current context of compartmentalised information and knowledge and lack of regional debate on the region’s collective resources and assets and on sensitive issues such as population flows, management of socio-political crises, reform of modes of governance, management of common goods and other matters that are keys to making progress towards genuine integration.

The GMAP’s five objectives:

- Create an informal discussion forum, outside diplomatic formalities, where all the important issues related to regional integration can be discussed and investigated, particularly those considered taboo in intergovernmental discussions.

- Develop a collective vision and approach to globalisation and its implications for a regional approach to development.

- Form a pool of persons to lobby and advise national and regional policymakers and aid agencies.

- Assist government leaders to formulate their national and regional decisions on the basis of general and cross-sectoral issues, which frame the management of sectoral issues and which form the "key areas" of a regional development strategy, but which are too broad to be encompassed by sectoral approaches.
• Decompartmentalise North-South decision-making centres and improve the level of information by developing communication and dialogue with organised non-government stakeholders in the region, with a view to providing a better understanding of the complex processes and transformations under way in the region.

3. **ORGANISATION AND MODE OF OPERATION**

3.1. **Institutional positioning**

The GMAP is an independent group. It sets its own work agenda and priorities and way of approaching them.

Supporting the goal outlined by the heads of state, i.e. integration of countries in the ECOWAS area, which was selected as the area for economic and political integration, the GMAP is positioned as a "advisory group", a "forum for discussion, proposals and exchange" with an informal mode of operation, although it is formally recognised by the heads of state of ECOWAS. It acts on its own initiative, but can be called on by ECOWAS and other institutions to steer a discussion on a particular topic of concern. It is free to choose whether to respond to such requests or not.

3.2. **Membership**

The membership of the GMAP is based on the need to involve ministers with a clear interest in regional issues and a truly regional vision of regional development issues, and who are consequently interested in fostering energy and ideas, making proposals and identifying expertise scattered across the different sectors of West African society.

On this basis, the members of the GMAP are co-opted by the group. The members are personally committed to the GMAP's innovative approach, which means fully supporting its objectives, making time for its work, participating in coordinating the group, making personal contributions to the debates and discussions, circulating the discussions steered by the GMAP within their own governments and presenting them to their heads of state.

3.3. **Partnerships**

To make its project a success, the GMAP is developing partnerships at various levels so that:

• Upstream, it can produce high-quality information by drawing on and enriching data, analyses and proposals from a broad network of expertise;

• Downstream, it can put its analyses and proposals to effective use by circulating them among decision-making circles.

To this end, the GMAP will establish partnerships with various types of institution:

• Regional networks: ROPPA (farmers’ organisations), WAEN and Interface (economic operators), MDP (local elected officials)
• The main IGOs: ECOWAS, WAEMU, CILSS.
• Aid agencies and the Club du Sahel/OECD.

In addition to these partnerships, the GMAP will mobilise a network of resource people:
• opinion-makers and leading civil society organisations, municipal representatives and members of parliament, high-profile journalists, academics, NGOs, etc.
• secretaries-general, ministerial and presidential cabinet directors and advisors.

3.4. Chair

The GMAP is chaired by a member minister appointed by the group. The chair is assisted by a vice-chair appointed in the same way. If the chair comes from a coastal country, the vice-chair will be chosen from among the Sahelian members, and vice versa. If the chair’s ministerial mandate ends, the vice-chair will act as chair until the next group meeting, at which a new chair will be appointed.

3.5. Organisation and secretariat

The GMAP and its chair are responsible for overseeing the group’s activities. The chair is assisted by a general secretariat and a technical unit.

The general secretariat consists of a secretary-general, assisted by a secretary/webmaster, an accountant and a courier. The secretariat general is in charge of coordination, organisation and communication.

The technical unit is managed by the general secretariat and comprises three African thematic experts. The technical unit’s main function is information gathering about and presentation of the main issues selected by the GMAP. The GMAP can also call on African and other external experts for short-term assignments.

The secretariat and technical unit are housed at ECOWAS, but remain independent.

3.6. Financial organisation

The GMAP enjoys the financial support of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) to develop its activities and work programme. These resources will be supplemented by direct financing from aid agencies and contributions in kind. The project document will be forwarded to the ACBF in July 2001, for submission to the board of directors in November 2001. The members of the GMAP will need to be mobilised before then to win the support of the ACBF’s financial partners. This support will be evidenced by letters of intent from donors before the board meeting in November. After the board meeting, the ACBF will only be able to release the funds if the donors confirm their financial commitments in letters of commitment. The full support of the members of the GMAP for the adopted work programme and their personal involvement in lobbying agencies are therefore of great importance.
ECOWAS will open two specific accounts, one in convertible currency and the other in local currency. The ministerial coordination committee is the steering committee for the ACBF project and is responsible for managing funds. The secretary general of the GMAP is preparing a prospective half-yearly budget, which will be submitted to the ministerial coordination committee for adoption, so that the funds can be released for the operation and conduct of activities for the corresponding period. The secretary general is also in charge of the day-to-day management of funds and must report on income and expenditure to the chair and members of the GMAP.

Financial management is subject to an annual external audit.

4. PRELIMINARIES TO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

To make the project a success, the GMAP needs to rapidly acquire credibility. This will depend largely on the GMAP’s ability to organise events where it can demonstrate its capacity to propose credible and innovative alternatives.

The GMAP first needs to settle matters related to the structure of its secretariat and technical unit, so they can play their roles as the group’s operational instrument.

The questions that need to be resolved are:

• What form of involvement in the GMAP are members prepared to take on to ensure the effectiveness of the programme of activities?

• What role are GMAP members prepared to play in mobilising the financial resources required for conducting the activities planned?

• How should the GMAP go about reaching an agreement with ECOWAS on hosting the GMAP’s secretariat and financing?

• When will the secretariat general and the technical unit be implemented, given the forecast financing? In the short term, the members of the GMAP should name the secretary general and the experts for the technical unit.

Next, the GMAP needs to select themes around which it can organise an event and negotiate partnerships with the other networks involved in sub-regional dynamics. An initiative should be taken by the end of the year, with a date and, if possible, a precise topic as a focus for the group’s ideas.

5. WORK PROGRAMME

In the first stage, the GMAP’s work agenda should focus on regional integration. This theme is what national leaders expect from the GMAP and it is a starting point for approaching other themes that have been discussed in previous months, such as food security and aid reform.
The GMAP considers that there is no longer any divergence of opinion in the region on the need for regional integration ("integration is no longer an option, it is self-evident"). Its main mission is therefore to contribute to a regional approach to development. Its functions: i) foster participatory, forward-looking debate, ii) contribute to the emergence of a shared regional vision, iii) encourage governments to take a regional approach to national strategies and policies, iv) encourage aid agencies to make the necessary reforms to improve aid effectiveness, v) help to renew partnership and overall dialogue between the international community and the West Africa region.

Concentrating on a central theme will enhance the group’s consistency and cohesion and make it easier to achieve tangible results, avoiding the dispersal of discussions, energy and human and financial resources.

The issues selected by the GMAP have two main characteristics:

- They are cross-sectoral issues, which have an impact on sectoral approaches, but which are not taken into account by sectoral policymakers;
- They are issues that will genuinely be furthered by a regional vision and approach to development shared by the main stakeholders in the region’s political, economic and social life.

The issues are approached in four stages:

- Analysis and comprehension of complex situations and their interaction
- Forward thinking and comparison of viewpoints, organised at working groups, meetings of the group of ministers, regional conferences and workshops
- Formulation of operational proposals
- Communication and advocacy.

5.1. The selected topics

The members of the GMAP are interested in three main areas:

- Political aspects of regional integration
- Building a competitive, integrated regional economy
- Infrastructure development, production and trade catchment areas, management of common infrastructure.

5.1.1. Political aspects of regional integration

The main focuses of regional integration in West Africa tend to be socio-political problems, economic and trade issues and currency zones. There is also the issue of communications infrastructure. However, political aspects are one of the main obstacles to the effective

implementation of commitments made by governments and to the transposition into national policy of decisions taken at sub-regional level. The need to encourage and control human activity, particularly in border areas, is causing an increase in informal obstacles to trade. It therefore appears difficult to progress on economic and sectoral issues without first tackling several major political issues:

✓ Managing identity crises. Integration can make it easier for sub-areas and networks of people to express themselves and be taken into account, but can also be perceived as a threat to nation-states and some social and ethnic groups. Can countries develop a common approach to these issues? How can the issue of regulatory institutions and, more generally, convergence of reform of modes of governance be approached?

✓ Population mobility and refugees. Under the principles of free movement of people and right of establishment throughout the West African area, people displaced by conflict are no longer necessarily considered as refugees, but as regional citizens: this poses problems of access to resources and control of trafficking and political activities. Owing to the fragility of governments and regimes, obstacles to population movement tend to be increasing in an attempt to control activities within national territories.

✓ Divergences in democratisation processes. Political dialogue in the sub-region is significantly weakened by particular types of political regime. This inevitably affects regional discussions and decisions. There is also the problem of convergence of institutional reform (particularly decentralisation) and of the impact on management and regulation of regional public goods and shared resources.

Which of these issues does the GMAP consider a priority, with a view to practical action that the group can undertake?

5.1.2. Building a competitive, integrated regional economy

All the countries in the sub-region now consider inclusion in the international economy as the main engine of their development. They are involved in multiple negotiations, at regional level (within the framework of ECOWAS and WAEMU) and at international level (within the framework of the WTO, the Cotonou Agreement with the European Union, environment conventions, etc.). These negotiations, which all take place in an identical international context, are conducted separately (overlapping negotiation frameworks) and do not allow countries to negotiate on the basis of a regional vision of their development strategies, even though a regional approach is the only way to resolve most of the questions at the heart of these negotiations. These include:

✓ What are the costs of integration and non-integration in West Africa? How can the gains and losses generated by integration processes be assessed?

✓ Under what conditions should the region become involved in free-trade areas, such as the Regional Economic Partnership Agreement with the European Union (ECOWAS area or WAEMU area?) and the free-trade agreement with the United States? How can the impact on key productive sectors, balances of payments and government budgets be assessed? Can export growth match import growth or are there specific risks for some sectors if they are opened too quickly to what may be unfair international competition?
How should changing labour, environmental and health standards be integrated into the adaptation of export sectors (given that these standards are gradually becoming a much bigger constraint than conventional customs duties)? How can small firms be promoted and how can the region take advantage of the relocation of industrial activities from the North to countries where production costs are lower? What common approaches does this imply in terms of political stability, investment security, tax policy and training?

When examining different trade integration scenarios, it is important to look at the "neighbouring-area integration" occurring in ECOWAS border areas. The terms and conditions of monetary integration also merit further discussion. It would also be appropriate to focus more explicitly on actual dynamics of stakeholders, and to take industries’ mode of operation and level of competitiveness into account in negotiations on opening the region's trade to international markets.

The GMAP needs to take a clear stance on these issues, proposing practical improvements in approaches to negotiations and positioning itself in favour of one of the regional structures on the basis of a common strategy.

5.1.3. Infrastructure development, production and trade catchment areas and management of common infrastructure

Infrastructure development has been a central component in the construction of nation-states. The economic crisis has considerably slowed investment in infrastructure. At the same time, transnational production and trade catchment areas have developed. These catchment areas, which concentrate a growing share of the population, pose new challenges and can be seen as opportunities and factors of support for integration processes. There are several questions that need to be answered. These include:

- What type of infrastructure development should be promoted, given that existing approaches are industry-based and are not an effective response to cross-sectoral development needs? This raises the particular issue of promoting development centres (urban centres, industrial centres, agricultural production catchment areas) and interconnection within and between them.

- What common communications infrastructure should be promoted and what forms of management can guarantee sustainable, shared use? Should co-management between public sector and private operators be promoted and, if so, in what form?

- In which sectors could regional infrastructure reduce costs for each of the countries involved and enhance regional awareness and regional networks: healthcare, education (universities and other tertiary institutions), transport (ports, railways, etc.) and energy (gas pipeline project, interconnection of electricity grids, etc.)?

- How can infrastructure be financed? Is combined financing from governments, aid agencies and private investors a viable option?