



CAAST-Net engagement with ECOWAS – 2010 to 2012

Summary report

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INTRODUCTION

In regard to the articulated role of Africa's regional economic communities in implementing Africa's continental S&T priority objectives, CAAST-Net, through its expanded configuration from 2010, sought to facilitate and advance cooperation in science and technology between regional economic communities (RECs) of sub-Saharan Africa and Europe for mutual interest and benefit but more specifically as a means of contributing to REC priority objectives via activities of international STI cooperation. As a first step to addressing this overall goal, for each of four sub-Saharan RECs (EAC, SADC, ECOWAS and ECCAS), CAAST-Net requested preliminary meetings with officers responsible for S&T portfolios at REC secretariats, plus any other representatives of REC secretariats and/or member state organisations at the invitation of REC officials. The proposed aims of preliminary meetings were 1) raising mutual understanding, 2) exploring possible (researchable) topics for cooperation between interested parties in RECs and Europe, and 3) preparing tailored and strategic information on the EU's framework programme for research. Preliminary meetings would be followed by substantive engagements (such as a conference, workshop or symposium) between REC and EU parties around a topic of mutual interest, identified in preliminary meetings to explore detailed scope for cooperation.

Over the period 2010 to 2012 several preliminary, exploratory and awareness raising meetings were held between CAAST-Net and officials of the ECOWAS secretariat. This report summarises those meetings and any significant outcomes. It concludes with a summary of the *status quo*, noting any constraints and barriers to progress, and makes suggestions for continuing engagement for mutual benefit under CAAST-Net Plus. Most meetings between CAAST-Net and ECOWAS were mediated by the CAAST-Net Africa Region Coordinator (ARC) Dr Eric Mwangi and / or representatives of CAAST-Net partner NOTAP in Abuja, Nigeria, because of their proximity to the ECOWAS offices.

I. March 2010 – First meetings in margins of AMCOST IV

CAAST-Net engagement with ECOWAS began at the AMCOST IV meeting in Cairo during March 2010 through one or more side meetings between Dr Umar Bindir (CAAST-Net partner NOTAP, Nigeria) and / or Dr Eric Mwangi, and ECOWAS representatives Prof Maga Director of the ECOWAS Department for Education, Culture, Science and Technology of the ECOWAS secretariat, and Mr Roland Koukou, the Principal Programme Officer Science and Technology. At these first meetings CAAST-Net tabled the suggestion of an exploratory ECOWAS – CAAST-Net meeting to advance ECOWAS – EU S&T cooperation. At the same time, an invitation was extended to ECOWAS representatives to participate in CAAST-Net's May 2010 Assembly (although the invitation was not taken up).

II. May 2010 – Regional workshop on capacity building in science, technology and innovation policy reviews and science and technology statistics and indicators for West Africa

The CAAST-Net coordinator and ARC were invited to participate in the above event to meet ECOWAS member state representatives, raise awareness of CAAST-Net objectives, and to learn about ECOWAS member state STI policies.

III. ECOWAS Science Policy workshop from 26 July to 1 August, 2010 at Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire

A workshop on methodological approaches in formulation of science and technology policy which was organized by the ECOWAS Commission was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire from 27th to 30th July 2010. The workshop was attended by participants from 11 ECOWAS member States and 25 international organizations and development partners including UNESCO, UNECA and the NEPAD Agency.

Workshop objectives were as follows:

- To analyze, develop and synthesize knowledge and awareness of important issues related to science and technology in the region;
- To share experiences and procedures, methodologies within the framework of the public and sectoral policies especially those of science and technology; and
- To adopt a consensual roadmap that will lead to a policy on science and technology.

As a development to CAAST-Net's introduction to senior officials of ECOWAS Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, CAAST-Net was formally invited to participate at the ECOWAS Science Policy workshop. The occasion provided the opportunity for the CAAST-Net project to be introduced formally to ECOWAS. It also afforded the project a good insight into the workings of ECOWAS, with special emphasis on its science, technology and innovation initiatives, projects and strategies. CAAST-Net presentations were made by the partners from Senegal, Kenya and Portugal. CAAST-Net was recognised at the workshop and was assigned some specific roles. Specifically, CAAST-Net was assigned a rapporteurial role for one of the sessions, which was successfully implemented by Dr Eric Mwangi of MoHEST and Jose Bonfim (CAAST-Net Consortium Partner FCT, Portugal).

A side meeting was held on Saturday 31st July 2010 between CAAST-Net representatives and senior officers of ECOWAS from the Directorate of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, led by the Director, Prof Abdoulaye Maga. The CAAST-Net team was led by the CAAST-Net ARC Dr Mwangi, accompanied by Jose Bonfim. A concept note very similar to the one discussed with SADC in February this year was presented.

The meeting discussed the road map for the establishment of ECOWAS-CAAST-Net cooperation, with ECOWAS formally endorsing the engagement with CAAST-Net and also making firm commitments towards promoting the EU-Africa bi-regional partnerships through its S&T projects as contained in the evolving ECOWAS Policy on

Science and Technology (ECOPOST) and in synergy with the EU-Africa Partnership framework. Minutes of the meeting were requested of ECOWAS but have not materialised.

IV. CAAST-Net-ECOWAS exploratory meeting, August 2011, Abuja

Over one year elapsed between ECOWAS science policy workshop of July 2010 and the exploratory meeting of 9th and 10th August 2011 at Abuja, Nigeria. The CAAST-Net team at the latter comprised CAAST-Net ARC Dr Eric Mwangi and representative of CAAST-Net consortium partner NOTAP, Mr Emeka Orji, while the ECOWAS team was made up of Prof Maga and Mr Roland Kouakou. The delay was occasioned by the logistics and manpower challenges at ECOWAS, with only Mr Kouakou as the substantive Science and Technology Desk Officer and very minimal support staff. He combines this assignment with other tasks in the multi-disciplinary Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology. However, within the one year time lag, the ECOWAS was constantly briefed by NOTAP on the outcomes of the CAAST-Net events, such as the Marseille meeting. Most of these briefings were carried out through direct meetings, emails and numerous telephone discussions.

Participants reviewed the discussions of the 2010 Abidjan meeting and stressed the need for organizing the CAAST-Net-ECOWAS workshop based on mutually defined thematic areas and in conformity with the EU-Africa bi-regional partnership which has already emphasised on thematic societal challenges.

The meeting discussed key features of the ECOPOST (ECOWAS Policy on Science and Technology), the policy document guiding the Science, Technology and Innovation programmes in the sub-region, and how these could leverage the existing EU-Africa bi-regional partnership platform. Other critical issues from the meeting include the following:

- Identify the thematic focus for the proposed CAAST-Net-ECOWAS workshop and develop the framework for the workshop. CAAST-Net (through the consortium partners in the region) would drive the process with the active involvement of the ECOWAS S&T Desk;
- ECOWAS identified the proposed workshop as a strategic platform to further enrich the ECOPOST document. The outcome of the workshop would serve as key uptakes for the policy document;
- CAAST-Net to facilitate the participation of ECOWAS senior officials in CAAST-Net events as a means of creating the necessary awareness and strengthening the required synergy;
- ECOWAS would facilitate the engagement with CAAST-Net on its relevant activities towards promoting its agenda on EU S&T cooperation;
- ECOWAS was updated on the progress recorded with SADC as a success in the engagement with the RECs and there was the proposal for the participation of

the ECOWAS S&T Desk in the proposed SADC-CAAST-Net meeting in Malawi and subsequent CAAST-Net events.

Based on the importance of the proposed workshop as a key deliverable of the CAAST-Net project and the relevance of its outputs to the EU-Africa partnership, the ECOWAS-CAAST-Net workshop was proposed for the first or second quarter of 2012.

V. CAAST-Net preparations for an EU-ECOWAS thematic policy dialogue workshop in November 2012

Further to the Abuja meeting, CAAST-Net representatives from WP3, 4 and 5 began preparation for the proposed workshop through series of tele-conferenced meetings. A meeting was held by the three Work Packages during the CAAST-Net stakeholder conference of 25 April 2012 in Dakar, Senegal. This meeting, guided by the ECOPOST and the established societal challenges in the EU-Africa co-operation, identified the health thematic area as primary focus for the proposed workshop. The workshop was developed as the ECOWAS-Europe Thematic Policy Dialogue Workshop and had the theme as 'Developing West Africa-Europe Partnership in Natural Health Products Innovation'.

A concept note for the workshop was developed with the overall objective of the event defined as kicking-off a process to develop first recommendations for developing research-based collaboration addressing REC priority topics of mutual concern that will benefit from enhanced EU-ECOWAS cooperation. The proposed process allowed for raising mutual awareness of policies and programmes, and then exploring scenarios to expand and add value to on-going cooperation or raise new cooperation opportunities while optimising the interfaces between relevant ECOWAS and EU policy domains. The concept note was shared with ECOWAS and it was very well welcome with much enthusiasm. This stems from the fact that the thematic focus of the workshop was seen by ECOWAS as complimentary to the ECOWAS Policy on Science and Technology (ECOPOST). Specifically, the REC was anticipating that the output of the workshop will effectively feed into its proposed workshop on the ECOPOST in December 2012. The workshop aimed at bringing stakeholders together, to share information and experience in current developments in the domain of natural health products for mutual understanding and for potential collaborations in this field. The key stakeholders proposed for the workshop were policy makers from the public sector, private sector entrepreneurs that take innovations to the market, scientists and researchers working in relevant scientific institutions in West Africa and Europe, NGO representatives involved in the sustainability of biodiversity resources. Specific objectives of the workshop would include:

- Discussing current policy initiatives and frameworks in the regions for promoting research and innovation on natural health products;

- Sharing information and experiences in scientific research and innovation in the domain;
- Examination of the relationship between private and research sectors so as to address key opportunities and challenges on national and regional levels in ECOWAS and Europe;
- Exploring potential and scenarios for enhancing Europe-ECOWAS private sector linkages in the natural health product research sector.

Anticipated outcomes of the workshop were projected to be;

- Improved mutual knowledge on research and innovation in the field of natural health and about potential links that could be implemented with the private sector;
- Identification of priority topics, niches for EU-ECOWAS partnership to develop the natural health sector, including potential funding mechanisms;
- Recommendations for cooperation in this field, including potential activities.

The workshop was scheduled for November 8-9, 2012 in Abuja, Nigeria, while the mobilization of participants commenced immediately after the Dakar meeting. However, due to congested events towards the end of the year and to maintain the required mutual partnership and ownership of the project, getting all the identified experts, stakeholders and participants from ECOWAS and Europe to be available for the workshop at the scheduled period became a crucial challenge. The inability to mobilize all the stakeholders eventually stalled the workshop despite all the arrangements on ground

CURRENT STATUS OF THE ECOWAS – CAAST-NET RELATIONSHIP (AT END OF 2012)

The relationship between CAAST-Net and ECOWAS is very strong, cordial and functional. ECOWAS identifies CAAST-Net as a strategic project whose activities are very complimentary to its focus on regional development anchored on a robust science, technology and innovation system. Additionally, ECOWAS viewed CAAST-Net as a vital supporting instrument towards addressing regional societal challenges, especially in the field of health, food security, renewable energy etc. The REC appreciated that some member States, specifically, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and Cape Verde were actively engaged in the project and identified these engagements as pivotal to sustaining the drive for the development of the STI culture in the region. There was never any issue that created a challenge in the relationship between the two partners.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ENGAGEMENT BETWEEN CAAST-NET PLUS AND ECOWAS

One major draw-back on the ECOWAS – CAAST-Net engagement was the inability to have the former attend and participate at most of the meetings and workshops

organized by the latter. This proved to be a critical challenge to the partnership and which should be addressed in CAAST-Net Plus. There is a current drive within the ECOWAS to strengthen the S&T Desk and it is envisaged that this initiative will facilitate a more active participation of the REC in CN+. It is therefore recommended that ECOWAS should be adequately sensitized on the engagement of the REC's in the CN+, and with special emphasis on WP4 tasks. The participation and engagement of ECOWAS in CN+ could further be strengthened through more direct interactions and sensitization of its key officers and ensuring an early communication of the CN+ calendar to them. This would enhance the early reflection of these critical events in their annual schedule.

RELEVANT CONCLUSIONS FROM THE PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT (2010-2012)

The process of ECOWAS engagement within the period 2010 – 2012 was challenging. On the one hand, the S&T Desk Officer may be willing to participate at CAAST-Net events, while the bureaucracy of the system would engage him in other assignments. This was made quite peculiar by virtue of the tripartite nature of the Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, which superintends the REC engagement with CAAST-Net. There was however much optimism from ECOWAS for an improvement in the engagement within CN+ based on the anticipated strengthening of its S&T Desk.