

WEST AFRICAN BORDERS AND INTEGRATION



LAUNCHING AN INITIATIVE

The West African Borders and Integration, or WABI Initiative was launched following a workshop on border cooperation held in Ouagadougou in July 2003. It is supported by a State structure (the National Frontiers Directorate of Mali, DNF), an NGO (ENDA-Diapol) and an international organisation (the Sahel and West Africa Club, SWAC-OECD) which provides funding.

The WABI Initiative is based on the convergence of these three institutions and the sharing of information among a network of partners around one joint concern: the promotion of cross-border cooperation as a driver of regional integration, development and peace.

AN HISTORY OF CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Field studies and work carried out by **ENDA/Diapol** and the **SWAC** highlighted the concepts of close proximity spaces, solidarity zones, and development corridors¹ or “cross-border areas”, which emphasised the key role of cohesion in border areas:

- Thus, between Nigeria and Niger, one of the oldest trade corridors in the region, the Maradi-Katsina-Kano axis is led by complementary production systems combining livestock rearing and cereal growing, structured around a homogeneous Hausa community.
- The role of markets dedicated to the collection of agricultural products and of redistribution centres of manufactured goods in Sikasso (Mali), Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire) and Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina) cannot conceal the structural need for these towns to work together on the development of their common influence area, despite the Ivorian crisis.
- The complementarities of their production systems, and the deposits of trans-national natural resources (oil between Senegal and Guinea-Bissau), are making the economies of the Gambia, Senegal and Guinea-Bissau move towards a still insufficient integration.
- The European experience which lights up the paths used by cross-border cooperation structures in order to promote an integration which, just after the War, was far from obvious.

DNF's experience and its proposal submitted to the ECOWAS Heads of State to set up a legal basis allowing them to overcome the legacy of their political and constitutional traditions in terms of border cooperation open a window of political opportunity for the WABI initiative. This action makes it all the more necessary to set up a dialogue between the various levels of regional integration.

The observation of these experiences can be added to a melting-pot of other cross-border work led by local associations or communities, cooperation agencies, and State structures, whose common objective is to promote regional integration.

ADDING BORDER COOPERATION TO THE POLITICAL AGENDA

Two key points should be highlighted as regards the WABI second workshop organised in Abuja (October 2004) under the auspices of ECOWAS:

- Experience sharing among border area actors and their confrontation with regional sector-based policies (transport and circulation of people),
- The suggested launch of a cross-border initiatives programme by ECOWAS and the introduction of a recommendation made to the statutory authorities by the Malian government relating to the creation of a working group on cross-border cooperation and, in the longer term, of a “Cross-border Observatory in West Africa”.

THE CHALLENGES OF A DIALOGUE BETWEEN LOCAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENTITIES

Cross-border activities have been set up as a response to social realities, but they lack some perspective in the regional construction. It is therefore necessary:

- To promote closer links between “real” and institutional levels. Such a rapprochement involves a return of regional integration on official agendas (UA, NEPAD, the new EU/ACP agreements, decentralisation policies). ECOWAS recently expressed willingness to open up to local actors and to get involved in cross-border cooperation is therefore particularly relevant (Abuja, 2004).

¹ *Regional workshop on cross-border cooperation, appendix “Intégrer les territoires, les économies et les sociétés ouest-africaines” (2003), Coll. WABI.*

- To help local actors gain better control of national, regional, and even international challenges, through a the widest range of networking possible.

COMMUNICATING LOCALLY AND REGIONALLY

One of WABI's roles is to promote the collection and sharing of information on border cooperation issues. This is made possible by the publications and the "West African Borders and Integrations" Website:

Printed and electronic media

Concept Notes: fieldwork results, meeting reports, forums

- *Key issues*: presenting local, national or regional initiatives; discussing the regional dimension of various issues: cotton, transportation, conflict, etc.

Both publications are now available on CD-Rom.

The Border Diaries: introduced during the Abuja workshop, this magazine gathering local and regional information is based on studies of cross-border realities from a journalistic angle. It is available upon request. Please contact the SWAC.

The Website <http://www.afriquefrontieres.org>: an information centre dedicated to cross-border cooperation and regional integration, by sharing field experiences, networking agendas, publications, and press review.

A wide dissemination

Ministries responsible for land planning or decentralisation; Ministries of Foreign Affairs; locally elected officials; private sector actors; professional associations; regional integration organisations; NGOs; donors; universities; experts; the media; cooperation agencies; international organisations.

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