

**AfricaRecruit EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES
SHARING/EXCHANGE SEMINAR, ENGAGING WITH THE
AFRICAN DIASPORA**

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**THE AFRICAN DIASPORA AND REBUILDING THE
AFRICAN ECONOMY: ECOWAS PERSPECTIVE**

**HUMAN RESOURCES DIVISION
ECOWAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
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Introduction

On behalf of ECOWAS Executive Secretariat, I wish to express my profound gratitude for the invitation to participate in this very important programme. I wish also to convey, the deep appreciation of Dr Mohammed Ibn Chambas, the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS to the organisers of this conference for deeming it fit to call on ECOWAS to be part of this programme. The Executive Secretary wishes you a very useful and successful meeting.

ECOWAS has followed with keen interest the Africa Recruit effort to bring the Diaspora back into the continent to assist in Economic Development of Africa. This is also very high on the ECOWAS agenda and a platform such as this one provides us with the opportunity to share with you how we can work together to create the appropriate synergy in tackling the numerous problems facing Africa.

I must however, emphasise that for us, these are but challenges and not obstacles to Africa's development.

Challenges

It is quite obvious by now that the main challenges facing our African continent is at least four fold:

- How to re-build the African economy and ensure equitable distribution of wealth and progress.
- How to reposition Africa from a negative integration into the global economy: to a more qualitative and positive integration.
- How to attract the much needed private and public investments to drive the process.
- How to mobilise existing energies both in and outside the continent (the Diaspora) to address these challenges.

We at the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) believe that the best response so far is clearly articulated in the African Union blue print-The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

It is sad to note that despite ECOWAS modest achievements about two thirds of the 15 member countries of ECOWAS are listed among the poorest countries in the world. ECOWAS is therefore taking NEPAD seriously in order to bring the fruits of integration and the new development agenda to the doorsteps of its peoples.

NEPAD

NEPAD is about African development and a new agenda for ensuring that this development is achievable in a sustainable and accelerated manner. It is also about a two pronged strategic approach of partnership.

Partnership between the two different groups of actors in the African society.

This involves unleashing the energies, relevant expertise and synergies as well as the material resources of our peoples by creating the enabling consultative platforms and environment for a new partnership of: public/private sector, public/civil society, urban rich/urban poor, rural poor/urban rich and more importantly for this forum between the Africans at home and Africans in the Diaspora.

Partnership Between Africa and Development Partners

It also implies a partnership between Africa and her friends in the global village to complement the African effort which needs encouragement, active and meaningful moral and material support.

ECOWAS And NEPAD

When in May, 2005, ECOWAS Heads of State and Governments met in Yamoussokro, Cote d'Ivoire, they took the strategic decision to internalise NEPAD implementation in West Africa. Recognising that NEPAD priority programmes coincided with ECOWAS priority programmes, the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS was designated as the focal point to co-ordinate NEPAD implementation in West Africa. On the part of the Executive Secretariat, realising its own capacity deficit to effectively implement the NEPAD agenda, it adopted the following three point strategy geared at favourably repositioning the Secretariat.

- Build institutional capacity in the Executive Secretariat.
- Mobilise civil society and the private sector to help accelerate the integration process and the implementation of the NEPAD agenda.
- Engage our development partners to support the process under the continued guidance of ECOWAS leadership.

Institutional Capacity Building

Regarding the effective implementation of NEPAD, a Short Term Action Plan (STAP) for capacity building was developed by ECOWAS. One key aspect of the STAP was the identification of key human resources needs covering areas ranging from agriculture and regional food security, regional trade and transport facilitation to macro economic development, regional poverty alleviation and good governance.

Although short term consultancy allows for recruitment from outside the region and despite the fact that ECOWAS secured funding for recruitment from partners, it was agreed with the latter that experts would only be sourced from Africans in the sub region and in the Diaspora.

Accordingly, our partners agreed to fund additional advertisements in international magazines in London and Paris in order to attract Diaspora expertise. Regrettably, the Diaspora response was not as enthusiastic as was envisaged although a couple was eventually recruited from London and Paris respectively.

Mobilising Civil Society and the Private Sector

Mobilising civil society to accompany the integration process and implementation of the NEPAD agenda has proved to be successful. It is interesting to note that the creation of the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF) two years ago in Accra, Ghana, prior to the ECOWAS Summit, was a joint initiative between ECOWAS Secretariat and a combined West Africa Civil Society effort. It also benefited from active financial support initially from DFID, UK and thereafter, other partners like CIDA, DANIDA, EU and USAID.

A focal point has been created in ECOWAS Secretariat with the support of UNDP, Africa to provide WACSOF with the needed institutional and material support especially in its current transition to complete autonomy.

ECOWAS Network of Research Centres and Think Tanks

It is also within the context of mobilising civil society that the Executive Secretariat of ECOWAS has taken the additional step in tandem with an African Union initiative to create a network of

research centres and think tanks in West Africa. The aim of the forum will be to help ECOWAS accelerate integration and NEPAD implementation programmes with a knowledge based approach. The view of the African Union is that we must tap the brain within the continent and outside Africa to chart its development course through Africa's own vision and programmes. Hence the recognition of the Diaspora as one of the sub regions of Africa.

It is also in the same vein that in October, 2004, Dakar hosted under the auspices of the African Union, what was described as the First Meeting of Intellectuals of Africans in the Diaspora, under the theme, "Africa in the 21st century, Integration and Renaissance"

The ECOWAS initiative to create a network of research centres and think tanks subsumes a recognition of the need to link up with the Diaspora African groups as well. It will accompany the work of a new unit to be created in the office of the Executive Secretary-Policy Analysis and Strategic Planning Unit - which will provide relevant research support and advice on policy issues.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what emerges from the above discourse is that ECOWAS is engaging Diaspora Africans through :

- Recruitment.
- Civil Society Mobilisation on the regional level.
- The planned network of research centres and think tanks.

We, however, need to evolve working institutional arrangements with groups like Africa Recruit for sustainable engagement. We may also need to evolve appropriate policies with the active support of Civil Society organisations to help harmonise national

policies aimed at attracting our Diaspora Africans to contribute more meaningfully to the development of Africa back home.

Of vital importance is the need for the Diaspora Africans to begin to re-organise and present a serious front aimed at advancing Africa as a whole.

It is worthy to note that the current environment has evolved positively with tremendous opportunity for the African Diaspora to fully participate in the on-going effort to return Africa to its past glory. Beckoning to you is an African Union ready to do business, Regional Economic Communities like ECOWAS ready to do business, and of course, a Secretariat ready to do business. It is our hope now that Diaspora Africans, recognising these positive changes will reposition their efforts in order to play increasing useful roles back home.