



# AMCOST Bulletin

The Inter-Ministerial Dialogue on Building an African Network of Centers of Excellence in Water Sciences and Technology

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## INTER-MINISTERIAL DIALOGUE ON BUILDING AN AFRICAN NETWORK OF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE IN WATER SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY:

22 NOVEMBER 2006

The Inter-Ministerial Dialogue on Building an African Network of Centers of Excellence in Water Sciences and Technology was held jointly by the Bureaus of African Ministerial Council on Science and Technology (AMCOST) and the African Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) on Wednesday, 22 November 2006, in Cairo, Egypt. The dialogue was attended by ministers from Lesotho, Senegal, South Africa and Zimbabwe, senior representatives from Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, and South Africa, and representatives from the Office of Science and Technology of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Union (AU) Commission. Throughout the day, delegates considered issues related to criteria and guidelines, financial mechanisms and governance for the network of centers of excellence in water science and technology (the network), before agreeing to its establishment.

### OPENING STATEMENTS

Chair of the dialogue and of AMCOST, Yaye Kene Gassama Dia, Senegal's Minister of Science and Technology, highlighted the importance of technology transfer and science and development in agriculture, health and water resources, and welcomed progress in the establishment of a network of centers dedicated to science and technology (S&T) in the water sector. She called for a dynamic partnership between AMCOST and AMCOW, and for enhanced coordination between the two bodies. She stressed that the network would assist in the development of common policies and the provision of research and data.

Lesotho's Minister of Natural Resources, Mamphono Khaketla, welcomed the dialogue as an important opportunity for interaction between ministers of water, and S&T. South Africa's Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Lindiwe Hendricks, noted that Maria Mutagamba, Minister of State for Water (Uganda) and AMCOW Chair, had stressed the importance of water research being demand-driven, and that AMCOW should play a pivotal role in setting Africa's water research agenda. She emphasized the importance of AMCOW having direct access to Africa's water research capacity. She also expressed concern regarding the proliferation of water and S&T-related processes and called on the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology to ensure coherence and coordination.

A representative for Egypt's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation said that water, like S&T, is a cross-cutting issue requiring coordination between ministries and across sectors. He said the main problem is not always scarcity of water resources, but often the management of such resources, and urged a focus on applied research in the water sector.

### REPORT OF THE AFRICAN TASK TEAM ON WATER SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

Kevin Pietersen, Water Research Commission (South Africa), on behalf of the Task Team, presented on the development of the flagship programme of Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA) on water, science and technology development, and related criteria and guidelines. He said the flagship programme is currently focusing on stakeholder relationships, attracting financial resources, and learning and innovation. He stressed the need to link the flagship programme with international water programmes and global partnerships.

On resource mobilization, he said a target of US\$2 million has been set. On the way forward, he said there would be a process of assessing institutional profiles, selecting institutions, promoting and supporting funding proposals, and considering governance mechanisms. He noted that a database of African water institutions and experts is being developed, along with a comprehensive business plan for 2007-2012, and the identification of potential nodes for the centers.

In the ensuing discussion, a representative for Egypt's Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation stressed the need to learn from previous experiences and to include applied research centers in the field of water research in the network.

### CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING A NETWORK OF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE

John Mugabe, NEPAD Office of Science and Technology, introduced the experts' recommendations for criteria, guidelines and indicators for identifying centers of excellence. He said there has been an increasing focus on the importance of centers of excellence, that no common definition of centers exists, and that AMCOST had requested the AU and NEPAD to develop criteria and guidelines to identify such centers. He then outlined the generic criteria prepared by the AU and NEPAD.

In the ensuing discussion, Chair Gassama Dia stressed the need to have a system for weighting indicators and a process for identifying experts tasked with deciding on the designation of centers. South Africa supported the idea of networks of institutions across borders. Lesotho expressed concern that the current guidelines address S&T generally, rather than water specifically. She proposed an indicator dealing with teaching excellence, including a mechanism to review curricula, and an indicator on mentoring, suggesting that designated centers could mentor other institutions. She said the guidelines should not be limited to government-run institutions.

Noting that Africa's five regions are not equally developed, a representative from Algeria's Embassy in Egypt said there should be unique criteria for each region. He also noted concern over the indicative list of institutions and questioned how institutions would be selected. Egypt proposed additional criteria on applied research and training. Zimbabwe's Minister of Science and Technology Development, Olivia Nyembezi Muchena, stressed the need for centers to exploit Africa's academic resources and to focus on building a critical mass of African scientists in the water sector.

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John Mugabe clarified that the generic criteria could be amended to meet the needs of each sector and welcomed the proposals on mentoring, teaching excellence and the inclusion of private institutions. South Africa underscored the need to address the definition of a water center of excellence and said AMCOW could not endorse generic criteria, but could only endorse specific criteria on water S&T. Chair Gassama Dia said the criteria should reference the ability of centers to meet water and sanitation objectives. Lesotho highlighted the need to have water-specific guidelines and supported Chair Gassama Dia's comment on criteria related to sanitation.

After informal discussions, John Mugabe presented revised guidelines, highlighting that they now included objectives, indicative projects and indicators for identifying water centers of excellence. He noted that the indicative projects emerged from previous consultative sessions and AMCOW's Strategic Plan, and that they were adopted by AMCOST in the CPA. He also explained that the indicators were categorized as related to scientific research and innovation, social and economic outputs, and capacity-building and mentorship.

Several countries, including South Africa, said the revised guidelines were a positive development. Egypt suggested referencing water management in addition to scarcity. South Africa proposed explicit reference to the Millennium Development Goals and, with Lesotho, proposed comparing the listed indicators to the generic indicators. Lesotho questioned whether diseases were included when referencing "disasters," recommended discussing water for a broad array of uses, stressed the importance of emphasizing droughts, and questioned the relative weight given to the indicators.

In response, John Mugabe said the document would be revised to take account of ministers' comments. Ministers then adopted the text as a "living" document.

#### **FINANCIAL MECHANISMS FOR THE NETWORK OF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE**

John Mugabe presented the experts' recommendations on financing. He highlighted recommendations on: establishing a special trust fund to finance the network under the African Water Facility (AWF), and calling on countries hosting nodes to make minimum annual contributions and on all African countries to make non-voluntary GDP-based contributions; establishing donor groups to contribute to the trust fund while ensuring that donors do not "contribute to incoherence"; ensuring the network becomes self-sustaining via, *inter alia*, public-private partnerships, and considering the collection of water fees for this purpose; developing guidelines for the allocation of funds; and establishing a ministerial committee focused on funding the network.

Lesotho said the AWF is struggling to attain adequate funding and questioned whether the trust fund would compete with the AWF for funds and how funds generated by centers of excellence would be shared. She suggested that the AWF's mandate would have to be modified by the African Development Bank to incorporate the aims of the trust fund and, with Egypt, supported the suggestion that countries hosting nodes in the network be required to contribute funds. Lesotho and Egypt agreed that the collection of water fees requires further consideration. South Africa suggested that considering funding only within the AWF could be limiting, that funding directed at research should also be sought, and that guidelines for accessing funding be separated from guidelines for recognizing centers.

In response, John Mugabe agreed on the need to explore whether the AWF could accommodate such a trust fund and said other institutional possibilities existed. Ministers deferred on the recommendations on financing, given the need for refinement by the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology.

#### **GOVERNANCE OF THE NETWORK OF CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE**

John Mugabe presented the experts' recommendations on governance. He stressed that the governance mechanisms need to reflect the intergovernmental nature of AMCOW and

AMCOST, and outlined a possible three-tiered governance structure. He explained that the first tier would be comprised of an inter-ministerial committee of AMCOW and AMCOST as the governing council of the network, which would approve the programme of work and make decisions on financing, including on resource allocation. He said the second tier would consist of a technical advisory committee that would report to the inter-ministerial committee, which would ensure quality control, review proposals on a competitive basis, and evaluate and monitor implementation, and that the third tier would be comprised of a network coordination office to oversee daily administrative and coordination initiatives.

In the ensuing discussion, South Africa noted the experts' recommendation that the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology, in collaboration with AMCOW, prepare a comprehensive proposal for the governance of the network. She said that AMCOW needs to further discuss the experts' recommendations and said it would be premature to adopt the proposed governance structure. John Mugabe clarified that the task team had proposed the governance structure for consideration by ministers, but stressed that a decision is not immediately required. He said the NEPAD and AMCOW Secretariats would further develop the governance structure for consideration by AMCOST and AMCOW. Supporting South Africa, Lesotho opposed the creation of new layers of administrative bureaucracy and said existing structures such as the AMCOW Secretariat could be used for governing the network. Chair Gassama Dia concluded the session by noting that the NEPAD and AMCOW Secretariats would refine the governance structure for future consideration by AMCOW and AMCOST.

#### **CLOSING SESSION**

John Mugabe presented a draft inter-ministerial declaration. Lesotho, supported by South Africa, said the language on governance and finance could not be approved, as these issues are still being deliberated. Regarding ASIF, Lesotho said this was not a decision for AMCOW, but noted that it may be appropriate for AMCOW to encourage AMCOST to consider allocating a percentage of ASIF funds to the network. She agreed with John Mugabe's recommendation that the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology report to both AMCOW and AMCOST at their next meetings. South Africa said the text should specifically reference the water S&T criteria, and that the reference to the indicative list of institutions should be deleted from the resolution. Lesotho and South Africa also said it would be appropriate to adopt resolutions related to the establishment of the network and to recognize the criteria and guidelines as a "living" document that would be further refined and improved. Ministers then adopted the inter-ministerial declaration as revised, approving the establishment of the network, approving its guidelines as a "living document," and requesting the AMCOW Secretariat and the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology to work further on governance and financing.

In closing the dialogue, Chair Gassama Dia welcomed the agreement on the creation of the network and thanked dialogue participants, officials involved in drafting documents for the dialogue, and the Government of Egypt for its hospitality. A representative for Egypt's Minister of Science and Higher Education said that Egypt considers the work of AMCOST and AMCOW to be vital to all AU member states. Lesotho expressed pleasure that the dialogue had ended in a constructive manner and, with South Africa, noted that they would convey the outcomes of the dialogue to AMCOW. South Africa also expressed hope that, as participants had given their political stamp to the establishment of the network, they would be able to receive documentation to take back to their capitals for preparing institutions that might join the network. Chair Gassama Dia closed the meeting at 4:25 pm.