



CEDEAO
Communauté Économique des
États d'Afrique de l'Ouest

ECOWAS
Economic Community
of West African States

**Ministerial Conference of ECOWAS states on Biotechnology
Hôtel de l'Amitié, Bamako, Mali, June 24 2005 .**

MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

June 2005

The ministerial Conference of ECOWAS States on biotechnology was held on June 24 2005 at Amitie Hotel in Bamako (Mali), under the chairmanship of his Excellency Ahmed Diane SEMEGA, the Minister of Energy, Mines, and Water of the Republic of Mali, representing His Excellency the Prime Minister and his counterpart the Minister in charge of Malians of the Diaspora and African Integration

The objective of the conference was to adopt the necessary conditions defined by the meeting of experts held on June 21 to 23 2005 for the implementation of the recommendations of the conference of Ouagadougou, on the “mastery of sciences and technologies to increase agricultural production in Africa: west African perspectives”.

Were present at the conference, representatives of all ECOWAS member States, socio-professional organisations, intergovernmental and international organisation and research institutions. Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali and Senegal were represented at the level of ministers. (list of participants attached)

The opening ceremony was marked by the welcome note of his Excellency Seydou TRAORE, the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Mali, the speech of the representative of ECOWAS Executive Secretary Dr Daniel EKLU, the speech of his Excellency Ahmed Diane SEMEGA, the Minister of Energy, Mines, and Water of the Republic of Mali, representing His Excellency the Prime Minister and his counterpart the Minister in charge of Malians of the Diaspora and African Integration.

In his welcome short-speech, His Excellency Seydou TRAORE, the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Mali, reminded about the meeting of Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, held June 21 to 23 2004, to convince the audience about the great opportunity that Biotechnology offers for a sustainable agriculture in our Sub-region. He outlined that the objective of this meeting of Bamako in Mali, is to set up a practical framework for the implementation of the recommendations of the Conference of Ouagadougou. He also noted the franc dialogue and the confidence created among researchers and professionals of the civil society. He ended by addressing words of thanks and congratulations to all those who contributed to the success of this meeting.

Doctor Daniel EKLU, representing the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, thanked, on behalf of his Institution, Malian authorities and development partners for the organisation and their input to this conference. He reminded about the importance of the agricultural sector which remains a strategic sector for ECOWAS member States and needs to be valued. He also underlined that ECOWAS states remain exposed to the fluctuations of international prices, and must face the challenges of feeding the population of west Africa, promoting a sustainable development both at social and environmental levels and creating a regional market. The opening of ECOWAS member States to Biotechnology in accordance with the orientations of the meeting of Ouagadougou is an opportunity to increase agricultural productivity. To end his speech, he stated that it is a duty for all (political, public and private authorities, civil society, development partners) to participate actively and contribute to the development of a stable and integrated West Africa.

In his opening speech, His excellency Ahmed Diane SEMEGA, the Minister of Energy, mines and water, representing His Excellency the Prime Minister and the Minister of African integration and Malians of the Diaspora was delighted about the choice of Bamako to host the conference. He thanked ECOWAS for the meeting and exposed the context of such meeting which fits with the strategy to fight hunger and poverty, and must bring about a new initiative for crop production through the introduction of biotechnologies. He stressed the need of accessing and mastering new technologies discussed at Sacramento and Ouagadougou. Awaiting the conclusions of the meeting, he underlined the need to carry out concrete actions in the fields of capacity building, equipment and the development of a partnership between scientists of ECOWAS member states and Northern international institutions. He indicated that the expectations of decision makers are high and they must be enlightened to allow them take adequate decisions in the development of biotechnologies.

After the opening ceremony, the conference set up a session bureau composed as follows:

- **President** : Mali
- **General Rapporteur** : Burkina Faso

Three countries requested and obtained the opportunity to present their addresses to the Ministers. They are: Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal. Further, the conference registered three messages respectively of Mr Prabhu PINGALI, the representative of the General Director of FAO, Mrs Mattie SHARPLESS of USDA and Franklin MOORE of USAID. The synthesis of the different documents is attached as Appendix.

The conference examined the report of the meeting focused on:

- The development and use of biotechnologies;
- The regional approach for biosafety;
- The information and communication strategy and policy in biotechnology;
- The institutionalisation of a ministerial conference on biotechnologies.

After congratulating the ECOWAS Executive Secretariat and the meeting of experts for the quality of the work achieved, the conference stressed the necessity to:

- Involve the stakeholders (producers and consumers) in the formulation and monitoring of the regulations;
- Pay a particular attention to issues dealing with patent, the right of the producers, the equal access to biotechnologies, capacity building and sovereignty especially in the area of seeds :
- Build the capacity of research institutions in the field of *in vitro* research and micro propagation.
- Create a forum of scientists in biotechnology in addition to the centres of excellence

- Involve stakeholders in the definition of research priorities and the need to take into consideration the opinion of local communities;
- Review the list of priority crops established by CORAF in its proposed biotechnology program;
- Mention the evaluation of biotechnology impact;
- Take effectively into account the local private sector in the biotechnology program and its support by the public sector having in mind the profits generated by the small producers;
- Consider the issue of patents for the profit of local communities when their traditional knowledge and varieties are used;
- Find adequate solutions to the lack of human and financial resources that could lead to the development of a non-functional biosafety system and the formulation of inadequate regulations.
- Take into account the diversity of development stages of national biosafety frameworks.
- Disseminate widely and adequately information to all the stakeholders,
- Maintain a communication and dialogue between all the stakeholders.

Besides, the conference made the following recommendation:

1. Regarding Biotechnology

1.1 For the action plan in agricultural biotechnology

In the short term (2 years)

- To reinforce research priority setting identified by CORAF/WECARD by a quantitative economic analysis;
- To increase investments through partnership between private and public sectors to drive the best use of biotechnology tools to alleviate the constraints of production, especially in the area of
 - tissue culture
 - use of molecular markers
 - use of diagnostic tools
 - development of vaccines

- ***In the mid term (5 years)***

- Implement the development strategy elaborated by CORAF /WECARD
- Put in place a common phytosanitary legislation in ECOWAS member States and reinforce the national legislations.
- Put in place a regional regulatory biosafety framework and reinforce the national seed production systems to facilitate the distribution of improved seeds
- Encourage the establishment of a regional policy and the development of national systems on intellectual right management in order to facilitate the acquisition, the development and the diffusion of knowledge and innovations.

- ***In the long term (10 years)***

- Implement the use of more efficient molecular biology techniques to tackle the major constraints.

1.2 Concerning agricultural cooperation in biotechnology

- Establish a group of experts in biotechnology composed of all the stakeholders and partners concerned with the validation of developed activities within the framework of the regional program of biotechnology
- Put in network national laboratories specialised in the development of agricultural biotechnology.
- Identify and mobilise African Diaspora in the implementation of regional biotechnology.

1.3 Regarding the establishment of the centres of excellence in agricultural biotechnology

- Put in place a commission with the mandate to define the term of reference which will help identify the centres of excellence on a competitive basis.
- Put in place a mechanism of putting in network the centres of excellence in biotechnology with the West and Central African Biosciences facility foreseen by NEPAD

2. Concerning the regional approach to biosafety

In the short term (2 years)

- To call on those countries that have not ratified yet the Cartagena Protocol to do it as soon as possible, so that by July 1st, 2006 at latest, all the ECOWAS country members would have adopted their national policy and legislations on biosafety, thus, facilitating regional harmonization of the biosafety system from now until July 2008;
- Implement the regional strategic Plan on biosafety for the benefit and access of biotechnology in west Africa;
- Adopt a regional initiative based on :
 - The creation of a regional supporting structure for the implementation of action planned
 - The elaboration within a period of one year of a national regulatory framework on biosafety in each country

In the mid term (5 years)

- Harmonize national legislations and put in place a regional regulatory framework on biosafety.
- Put in place a independent fund for the assessment of the socio-economic impacts of the use of GMO.

3 Concerning the information and communication strategy

In the short term (2 years)

- Finalize an action plan for the implementation of the regional strategy of information and communication
- Create a sub-regional facility for information and communication on biotechnology making profit of the information and communication system of CORAF/WECARD
- Encourage and support countries in creating national information and communication units in charge of raising public awareness on biotechnology and acting as focal points for the sub-regional facility

In the mid term (5 years)

- Support ECOWAS to achieve its missions of advocacy and coordination of the implementation of the information and communication strategy on biotechnologies.
- Encourage ECOWAS to establish relationships of cooperation with other regional and international organisations having an experience in the field of information and communication on agricultural biotechnologies.

4. Regarding diligent implementation of retained actions

4.1 Institutionalisation of ministerial conference (short term)

The conference after having examined the possibilities given by the revised ECOWAS treaty, particularly in its Chapter 3, has decided to institutionalise the ministerial conference on biotechnologies. To do this, the conference has invited the executive secretary of ECOWAS to:

- Take all necessary arrangements for the organisation on an annual basis of a West African ministerial conference on biotechnologies,
- Make the contact with the commission of African Union for the organisation of an African conference on biotechnologies

4.2 Reinforcement of capacity and competences (short term)

In this regard, the conference acknowledges the support of USAID and USDA and wishes the possibility of making available scholarships. The conference invites also ECOWAS to explore other possibilities with other partners of the north (EU, Canada, Japan) and of the south (China, India, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa).

4.3. Finance (short term)

Concerning the funds related to promote biotechnology, the conference recalls the US commitment of Maputo to allocate at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture. The conference urges the partners to contribute more in the development of biotechnology

4.4. Final precise action plans (short term)

In order to urgently implement the retained actions, the conference requests ECOWAS in relation with CORAF/WECARD and INSAH to finalise and make available in 6 month period, a detailed action plan which contains the objectives, expected results, activities, expected impact, beneficiaries, costs, the role and responsibilities of stakeholders and the timetable of its implementation.

5. Place and date for the next ministerial conference

At the end, the conference has adopted the report and takes the decision to hold the forthcoming meeting at _____ in 2006.

It has also addressed a motion of thanks to his Excellency Amadou Toumani TOURE, President of the republic of Mali, to the government and the Malian people for their legendary DJATIGUIYA which has contributed to the success of this conference.

A motion of thanks has also be addressed to the partners for their technical and financial support.

Bamako, June 24, 2005

For the conference

**Seydou TRAORE
Malian Agricultural Minister**