For Official Use **SAH/GMAP(2000)14**

Club du Sahel
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLIS : 26-Sep-2000
Dist. : 27-Sep-2000

Or. Fre.

CLUB DU SAHEL

SAH/GMAP(2000)14
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Ministerial Lobby Group

CAN DECENTRALISATION BREATHE FRESH LIFE INTO INTEGRATION AND REGIONAL CO-OPERATION BETWEEN SAHELIAN AND COASTAL COUNTRIES?

Arguments and proposals for action

This document has been prepared for the meeting of the Ministerial Lobby Group, which will be held in Paris, on 2-3 October, 2000.

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Summary

Today, more than half the wealth and population of West Africa are probably concentrated in a 450 000 km^2 strip around the Gulf of Guinea (6% of the region's land area). If present trends continue, by the year 2020, two-thirds of West Africa's wealth could be concentrated in this one small area. And yet West Africa's Sudano-Sahelian belt has some major assets which, with the help of a concerted strategy, while not reversing the trend could promote a more balanced regional development, more focused on mobilising West African resources for the regional market.

The Sudano-Sahelian belt is the heart of the region's agriculture, the zone with the best farming potential. It is also the hub of regional trade: through it pass almost all flows of goods and people between the Sahelian countries and world markets, and between the Sahelian and coastal countries. The creation of the present frontiers set up particular economic and social dynamics that enabled the population to bypass the restrictions imposed by the new borders. However, away from the main north-south road and rail links between Sahelian capitals and coastal ports, the area still lacks infrastructure. Those responsible for regional integration in West Africa should consider that one of the key principles of integration is this area's eventual capacity to act as a counterweight, based on the regional market, to the existing West African centre of gravity, which relies on trade with the outside world.

The economy of the coastal belt is still dominated by economic rents that create a precarious balance of income, and this is a major obstacle to aspirations of regional integration. In that situation, the only scenario that is really in the interests of the Sahelian countries is one in which their comparative advantages (agro-pastoral production and trade) can be developed to serve the regional market.

For these reasons, we suggest that efforts should be made to develop concerted local/regional strategies for infrastructure and economic revival in the zone of contact between Sahelian and coastal countries. These strategies would be applied to coherent geographical areas, each structured by two or three towns depending on the number of countries concerned, for example:

- Maradi (Niger) - Katsina (Nigeria)
- Tenkodogo (Burkina Faso) – Dapaong (Togo)
- Bougouni (Mali) - Odiénné (Côte d'Ivoire) – Kankan (Guinea)
- Sikasso (Mali) – Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) – Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire)

These strategies would be based on a process of:

- getting to know the local economy (the analysis stage, for which the method developed under the joint Municipal Development Program (PDM)-Club du Sahel Secretariat programme ECOLOC could be adopted);
- consultation and co-operation among local stakeholders and between local stakeholders and national authorities;
- on this basis, defining a joint program for infrastructure development and revival of the local regional economy.

In the current situation, with tension running high between north and south in both Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, this might seem a provocative working hypothesis. However, it would alleviate three sources of worry in a single process:

- For Sahelian countries, it would start the long process of strengthening the role and influence of the Sudano-Sahelian zone in the regional economy.

- For coastal countries, it would mean launching programs to develop their northern regions, whose people feel, often with reason, that they are neglected.

- For local stakeholders, whatever their nationality, it would mean planning development, providing infrastructure for their area and reviving the local economy.

Governments and intergovernmental organisations (IGOs) must also be closely involved; they have the essential task of ensuring overall consistency at both local and regional levels. It would be a good thing if the process were instigated by governments and IGOs themselves.

The GMAP (Ministerial Lobby Group) could start an initiative to launch a new approach to Sahelian-coastal regional integration, through infrastructure building and local development, in agreement with ECOWAS, CILSS and WAEMU and the regional networks most directly involved (local elected officials, farmers and business people), and with the support of a coalition of donors. It could begin by organising and supervising two experiments, for example in the Sikasso-Korhogo-Bobo Dioulasso area on the Mali/Burkina Faso/Côte d'Ivoire border and the area around Birni-Nkonni and Sokoto on the Niger-Nigeria border.

The aim of these experiments would be to show *i)* that it is both possible and useful to address the issue of West African regional integration, and more specifically integration between the Sahel and the coast, from a local standpoint, *ii)* that this approach can generate ideas for the regional integration strategies of governments and regional IGOs and *iii)* that it is consistent with the logic of strengthening the link between decentralisation and regional integration.

These experiments would be presented and discussed in the decision-making bodies of the three IGOs and three regional networks concerned, and in the relevant aid agencies, the aims being:

- For the IGOs, to gradually define official strategies for taking account of decentralisation in the co-operation and regional integration process. Now that local authorities have responsibility for a number of technical tasks, and since many of them are located close to borders whose permeability is well known, it seems anachronistic today not to involve them in the regional integration process, within their spheres of competence and responsibility.

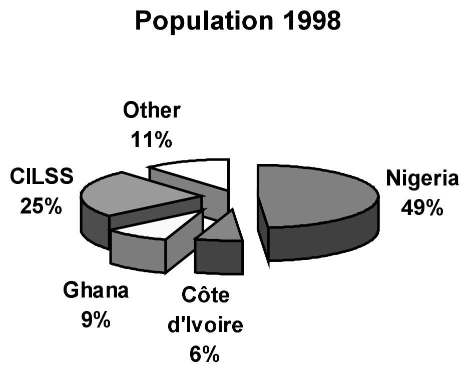
- For local elected officials, to become aware of their ability to give regional integration real content through infrastructure building and practical, concerted development programmes that meet real needs.

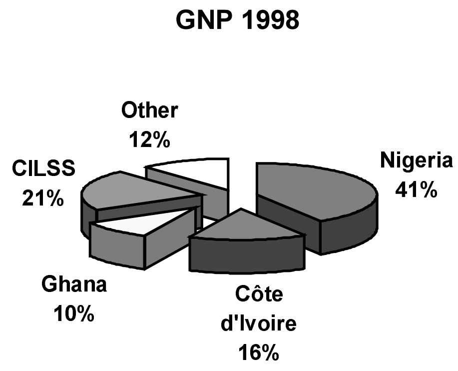
- For stakeholders' organisations, to discuss the usefulness of an approach that is simultaneously local (practical) and regional, and helps towards stakeholders' integration.

- For the aid agencies, to discuss the value of and conditions for implementing an approach which may in the long run break down the artificial barriers between bilateral co-operation and regional co-operation, and between urban projects and rural projects.

I. The regional economy has its centre of gravity on the coast

There is no need to expand on this obvious fact, but it is worth recalling the scale of the imbalance. According to the World Bank, in 1998 the population of West Africa stood at 220 million and its gross regional product at US$75 billion. As can be seen from the two diagrams below, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana between them account for 64% of the region's population and 67% of its economy. The region's average per capita GNP is US$343; in Côte d'Ivoire it is US$837, in Ghana US$384 and in Nigeria US$291, compared to US$297 for the CILSS taken as a whole.





More precisely, a likely estimate is that half the region's wealth and population are concentrated in a strip 300 km wide and 1500 km long running from Abidjan in the west to Port Harcourt in the east. This 450 000 km^2 zone (6% of the area of West Africa, or 10% if one excludes the desert areas) is the region's economic centre of gravity.

The medium-term scenarios worked out for the WALTPS study[1] show that there is no reason why this trend towards ever greater concentration of the region's economy along the Gulf of Benin coastal strip should stop. If current trends continue, by the year 2020 two-thirds of West Africa's wealth could be concentrated in this one small area.

But the WALTPS study also points out that West Africa's Sudano-Sahelian belt also has major advantages which, with the help of a concerted strategy, while not reversing the trend (this would be quite unrealistic), could promote a more balanced regional development with a greater focus on mobilising West African resources for the regional market.

Research into local economies conducted in recent years by the Club du Sahel, in close collaboration with the Municipal Development Programme, provides the approach and information needed to make proposals in this direction.

1 . *West Africa Long Term Perspective Study*, OECD/Club du Sahel/AfDB/CILSS, 1994.

II. For more balanced regional development, consider the south of the Sahelian countries and the north of the coastal countries together

To see how West Africa could develop in a more balanced way region-wide, starting from the simplistic distinction between Sahelian countries to the north and the main coastal countries to the south is not the right approach. The real potential lies in developing the east-west belt that straddles the boundary between Sahelian savanna and Sudanian savanna.

This belt lies at the heart of West African regional issues in four respects:

- It is the heart of the region's agriculture. This is the zone with the best potential for developing farming to meet the growing needs of the regional market: cereals, fruit, vegetables and intensive stock farming.

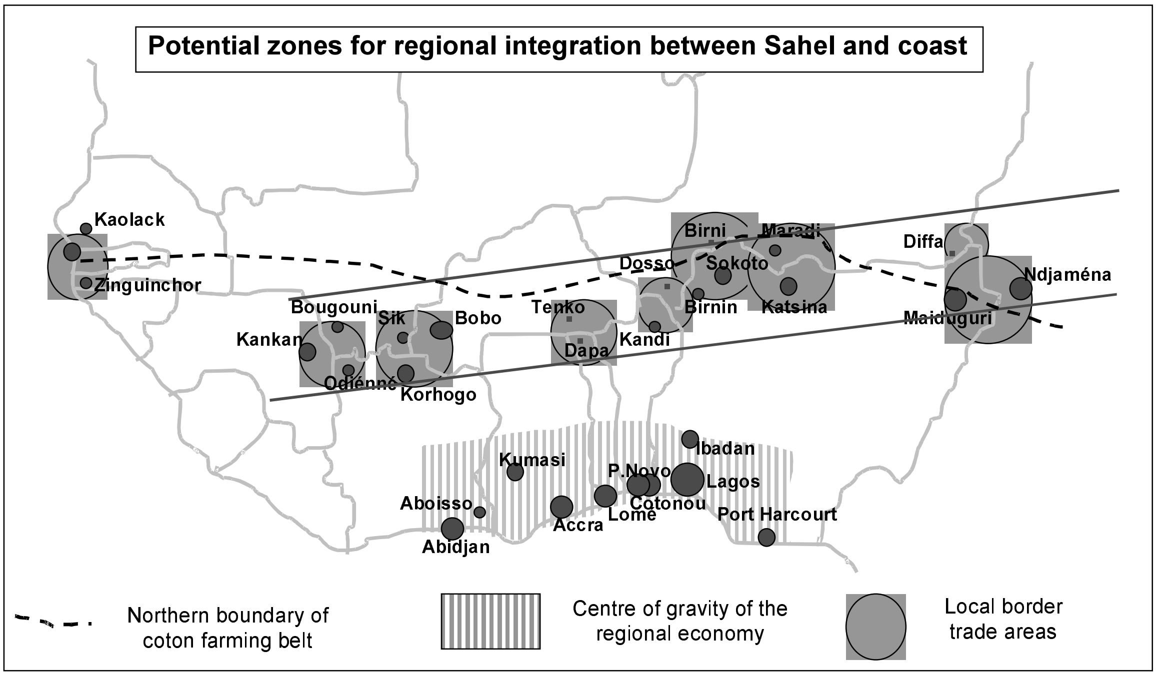
- Straddling the border between the Sahelian and coastal countries, it is also at the hub for regional trade: through it pass almost all flows of goods and people between the Sahelian countries and world markets, and between the Sahelian and coastal countries.

- The establishment of frontiers in this zone has created specific dynamics in the "national peripheries" or "alternative border areas" that *"have formed throughout West Africa wherever there is a strong potential for distribution, in neighbouring countries, of wealth derived from the sale of mineral or agricultural raw materials some countries have in abundance. Where there is also strong solidarity among populations that have suffered from the colonial partition, expressing their rejection of that partition. Thus the people of these border areas alleviate the constraints imposed on them by the colonial carve-up, by setting up a whole system of social and economic regulation based on intensive migration and trade"*[2]

- Nonetheless, once off the main north-south highways linking the Sahelian capitals to the coastal ports, this zone is still poorly equipped with transport infrastructures as well as processing and marketing capacity for its farm produce.

2. See the research by John Igué, especially *Land Use Policies in West Africa*, Club du Sahel, December 1993.

South to north and north to south, this belt is united by a common destiny within West Africa.



Those responsible for regional integration in West Africa should consider that one of the key issues for integration lies in the capacity of this zone to counterbalance, through regional market development, the region's present centre of gravity which has the world market at its core.

III. A local approach to "Sahel-Coast" regional integration

The economy of the coastal belt is still dominated by economic rents that create a precarious balance of income, and this is a major obstacle to regional integration. In that situation, the only scenario that is really in the interests of the Sahelian countries is one in which their comparative advantages (agro-pastoral production and trade) can be developed to serve the regional market. As we have also seen, the northern parts of the coastal countries have to some extent the same comparative advantages (see section II). So it seems desirable (necessary) to encourage the emergence of cross-border coalitions uniting common interests, so as to harness the potential of this zone and move ahead towards integration of the region as a whole.

III.1. The approach

The general principle of the approach is to define and implement concerted local/regional strategies for infrastructure building and economic revival in the zone of contact between Sahelian and coastal countries. To do this, one must work with coherent geographical entities focused around two or three towns, depending on the countries, for example:

- Maradi (Niger) - Katsina (Nigeria)
- Tenkodogo (Burkina Faso) – Dapaong (Togo)
- Bougouni (Mali) - Odiénné (Côte d'Ivoire) – Kankan (Guinea)

- Sikasso (Mali) – Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso) – Korhogo (Côte d'Ivoire)

Strategies would be developed by:

- getting to know the local economy (the analysis stage, which could be based on the method developed under the joint PDM-Club du Sahel Secretariat program ECOLOC);
- consultation and co-operation among local stakeholders and between local stakeholders and national authorities;
- on this basis, defining a joint program for infrastructure development and revival of the local regional economy.

III.2. Example: the Sikasso – Korhogo – Bobo Dioulasso area

Studies conducted in 1998 and 1999 assessed the local economies of the Sikasso, Korhogo and Bobo Dioulasso areas. The West African regional dimension is omnipresent in the conclusions of all three studies.

Common points for the three areas

- A degree of cultural unity: that of the Volta region with its Senoufo and Bobo farmers, and a large Dioula minority (Mandingue group) that has been active in trade and local power structures since ancient times. They also share a common history, with the kingdom of Kenedougou and the Samory conquests before the Europeans arrived and fixed the frontiers as they now are, dividing this vast and relatively homogeneous zone between three different countries.
- All three countries are WAEMU members, with a common currency and the aim of harmonising their economic policies and developing trade with each other.
- Most movements of goods and people between these countries go through these three towns, which act as trading posts.
- All lie within the Sudano-Sahelian climatic zone (between isohyets 900mm and 1200mm in non-drought years).
- The predominant industrial crop is cotton. Thus development planning for the area, based on industrial farming and regional trade, would first of all mean organizing the cotton sector: production, ginning, spinning, weaving, garment making, etc., geared to the big cities and the export trade. The next most important cash crop is sugar cane, for which there is no outlet to the world market. Tobacco comes third.
- These areas function as a market for collecting farm produce and distributing manufactured goods.
- All three of these landlocked areas are tributary to coastal Côte d'Ivoire. Most of the cotton produced in Mali and Burkina is processed in Côte d'Ivoire and exported via Abidjan, while the coastal towns also dominate the hinterland in the distribution of goods imported from outside Africa.

Local stakeholders see their environment first of all in terms of competition

- Commercial competition between three centres of unequal size. The populations of Sikasso, Korhogo and Bobo Dioulasso are respectively 90 000, 150 000 and 350 000. Each tries to keep control of its own hinterland, and in so doing has to compete with the other two.

- Competition in forest zone markets between Sahelian cattle and cheap cuts dumped by beef exporting countries (which was only very temporarily slowed by devaluation of the CFA franc), and conflict with Côte d'Ivoire's goal of self-sufficiency.

- Competition in the production and marketing of fruit (particularly mangoes), vegetables and tobacco.

This interpretation is realistic but incomplete. It would be useful to list some of the common interests connected with the above facts; revealing common interests and their practical implications in no way excludes the natural development of competition.

Consider the local implications of the globalisation process and integration in WAEMU

Up to now, all first-stage processing factories for primary produce and all light consumer industries (such as beverages) have been set up as a result of deliberate national policies. WAEMU's aim of reducing, if not eliminating, obstacles to free trade will accentuate the predominance of coastal towns, especially the concentration of modern industry in the largest cities. Factories set up in remoter areas under protectionist fiscal or customs measures are likely to close down, especially as factories producing the same goods in different countries often belong to the same group.

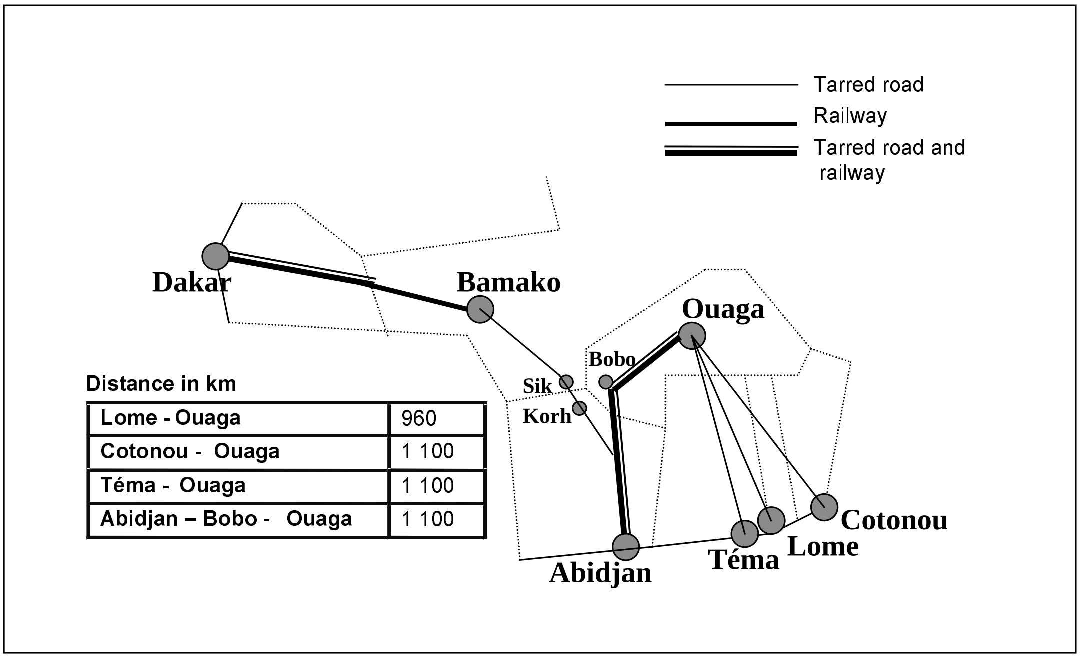
Is all this true of the S-K-Bo area? Have national development planning policies taken these factors into account? Can the three areas start talking to each other and to the manufacturing companies concerned with a view to dealing out the cards anew?

Think about a common strategy for developing the comparative advantages of the S-K-Bo trading centre within West Africa

All three towns lie on the regional transport links from Bamako and Ouagadougou to Abidjan. But both these Sahelian capitals also have other regional transport links of similar length, mainly from Bamako to Dakar and from Ouagadougou to Lomé, Tema and Cotonou. The future lies in developing competition between these different transport corridors.

Although the railway runs through Bobo Dioulasso, almost all imported motor fuel is carried by road, in heavy tanker trucks that increase wear and tear on the roads; cotton fibre is also trucked to Abidjan (or Bouaké or Dimbokro, where there is a mill and a weaving unit). Ongoing renovation of the railway (a CFA 40 billion investment by Sitarail) will soon change this pattern considerably. Sitarail's purpose is probably to take most of the Sikasso-Korhogo-Bobo Dioulasso triangle's cotton export market and goods transport (motor fuel especially) from Abidjan to Burkina and Mali. Lower costs will attract the sub-region's economic operators.

What consequences would this new configuration have? Would Sikasso and Korhogo necessarily lose out? What common strategy might there be for *i)* making the Abidjan corridor more competitive against its regional competitors and *ii)* developing the trading economy of the three towns?



Lome - Ouaga	960
Cotonou - Ouaga	1 100
Téma - Ouaga	1 100
Abidjan – Bobo - Ouaga	1 100

Think about a common strategy on regional complementarities between livestock and crop farming

There being no mineral raw material for processing (gold needs no industrial processing), in the medium term the core potential for processing local produce and supplying regional trade lies in agro-pastoral products such as cotton and livestock products. There is probably scope for joint examination of regional complementarities and possible specialization. Some very tentative suggestions might be as follows:

- introduce cotton growing throughout the zone suitable for that purpose, alternating with a cereal crop, making greater use of animal traction for farming in the north and mechanized farming in the south;

- develop trade in cattle raised extensively in the far north, against grain, tubers, fruit, vegetables and animal feed supplements from the Sudano-Sahelian zone (in which the Sikasso-Korhogo-Bobo Dioulasso triangle lies);

- develop the valleys of the triangle for intensive stock farming (giving an outlet for extensively raised stock from the sub-Saharan zone), tropical fruit (mangoes and citrus fruit) and out-of-season "European vegetables" for the regional and world markets;

- utilize grain and cotton oil meal for animal feed;

- trade equatorial fruits (bananas) and oil from the forested south against meat and perhaps peanuts and cashew nuts from the north;

- import rice via Abidjan port (and perhaps grow rice in the south if it can compete with imports);

- develop the trade in animal by-products (leather, horn, meal);

– sea fishing and inland fishing could also play an increasing role in trade (perhaps seasonal).

Specialization and trade require markets (cattle needs a cattle fair), storage facilities (maize needs clamps), packing (for fruit and vegetables, exports means air freight and refrigerated trucks) or processing (fattened cattle cannot be transported on the hoof), and therefore towns, which must be all the larger, more vigorous and better equipped the further they are along the line from producer to end consumer.

III.3. Is the principle acceptable at a time of tension between the northern and southern parts of some coastal countries?

In the current situation, with tension running high between north and south in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, this might seem a provocative working hypothesis. But in fact it would alleviate three sources of worry in a single dynamic:

- For Sahelian countries, it would start the long process of strengthening the role and influence of the Sudano-Sahelian zone in the regional economy.
- For coastal countries, it would mean launching programs to develop their northern regions, whose people feel, often with reason, that they are neglected.
- For local stakeholders, whatever their nationality, it would mean planning, providing infrastructure for their area and reviving the local economy.

The link between local development and the regional market, or in other words between decentralisation and regional integration, is obvious here.

The mistake would be to undertake this kind of exercise working only with local stakeholders – communities, elected officials and private operators. Governments and IGOs must also be closely involved to ensure the necessary overall cohesion at both local and regional levels. In fact it would be a good thing if the process were driven by governments and IGOs.

IV. Suggestions of proposals for the GMAP

The GMAP could start an initiative to launch a new approach to Sahelian-coastal regional integration, involving infrastructure building and local development. In agreement with ECOWAS, CILSS and WAEMU and with the regional networks most directly involved (local elected officials, farmers and business people) and with the support of a coalition of donors, it could begin by supervising two experiments, for example in the Sikasso-Korhogo-Bobo Dioulasso area on the Mali/Burkina Faso/Côte d'Ivoire border and the area around Birni-Nkonni and Sokoto on the Niger-Nigeria border.

The aim of these experiments would be to show *i)* that it is both possible and useful to tackle the issues of West African regional integration, and more specifically integration between the Sahel and the coast, from a local standpoint, *ii)* that this approach can generate ideas for the regional integration strategies of governments and regional IGOs and *iii)* that it fits into the logic of strengthening the link between decentralisation and regional integration.

As we saw earlier, the task is to facilitate formulation of a common strategy for infrastructure and local development. This strategy must start from a precise socio-economic analysis, backed up by figures and maps, incorporating a long-term perspective and making the most of complementarities between town and country. It must also be based on consultation and debate involving urban and rural local elected officials and operators.

These experiments would be presented and discussed in the decision-making bodies of the three IGOs and three regional networks concerned, and in the relevant aid agencies, the aims being:

- For IGOs, to gradually define official strategies for taking account of decentralisation in the co-operation and regional integration process;
- For the networks and their member organizations, to discuss the usefulness of an approach that is simultaneously local (practical) and regional, helping to integrate the various stakeholders;
- For aid agencies, to discuss the value of and conditions for implementing an approach which may in the long run break down the artificial barriers between bilateral co-operation and regional co-operation, and between urban projects and rural projects.

These three points are briefly argued in sections V to VIII below.

Lastly, the GMAP could suggest that, given the importance it attaches to regional integration, the European Commission could take the lead in this initiative on the donor side.

V. New options for governments and IGOs

Everyone, not least the African governments, agrees that decentralisation profoundly alters the conditions for implementing many national sectoral policies, from health and education to infrastructure, etc., and such responsibilities as defining local development strategies. In most countries of the region, laws governing the transfer of powers lay down the conditions under which local authorities must take their responsibilities (including financial responsibilities).

Within the scope of these powers and responsibilities, and considering that many of them are located near borders that are well known to be highly permeable, it seems anachronistic today for local authorities not to be involved in regional integration.

While monetary integration and defining common rules for customs duties, finance, insurance etc. must obviously remain the sole preserve of governments, it seems logical and necessary for the IGOs to encourage local authorities to exercise the powers they now legally have.

Today, only integration, in terms of regulations, seems to be making any progress. There are few actions on the ground, if any, to show people that official regional integration is moving ahead and is useful.

Involving local authorities in defining and implementing co-operation and regional integration should not mean further complicate the process; on the contrary, it must help to simplify it and give it practical expression.

VI. New options for local authorities

Local authorities are at the heart of the regional integration issue and they are well aware of the fact. But this awareness often entails doubts and fears, especially in isolated areas in the south of the Sahel countries and the north of the coastal countries:

- Open borders and privatisation of whole sectors of the economy mean region-wide restructuring of such industries as textiles, rail transport, brewing, bicycles and motor cycles, food, etc. It is feared that this will be to the detriment of isolated areas where these industries are currently established.

- In many cases, devaluation of the CFA franc did not enable areas producing fruit, potatoes etc. to win or win back market shares in the costal countries. This was often due to the way the sector was organized rather than factors inherent in competition.

- The border areas are quite literally in the front line when it comes to migration problems.

In view of these often justified fears, it is important to help local elected officials perceive the development potential of their areas and to see how urban-rural border coalitions could, in particular, make it possible to optimise farming, food production and trade.

Throughout the world, cross-border coalitions are being set up against a background of continental or sub-continental regional integration. These coalitions are initiated by local elected officials along with local interest groups. They are a response to the need to organise economic synergy, economies of scale, etc.; and of course they are operated within national and community regulatory frameworks.

African local elected officials must be in a position to develop initiatives of this kind, not for the sake of copying what goes on elsewhere but because the artificial nature of the borders is probably more marked in Africa than anywhere else.

VII. New options for farmers and entrepreneurs

Exploring the local and regional conditions and prospects for development must open new horizons for farmers and entrepreneurs too.

- Could two or three towns in the same border area join forces to discuss with a transport or agro-industrial company how to maintain, develop, or attract investment and business?

- Could transport operators and traders of these two or three areas define a common strategy to optimise their place in the more global regional transport and trade picture?

- Would a local regional coalition make it possible to develop new, shared processing and distribution capabilities in sectors such as hides and leather that are not profitable for one area in isolation?

- What benefit might there be in a common strategy for regional complementarities in farm and livestock products, negotiated between farmers themselves and between farmers and other local stakeholders?

VIII. New options for aid agencies

In principle, all aid agencies support regional integration. Many of them regularly mention the difficulty they have in defining actions that would really advance integration. They are also more concerned than they used to be to support projects that meet needs expressed by local development stakeholders.

The local/regional approach should make it possible for agencies to tackle a regional integration component that has not so far been attempted: a practical, participative component involving investments that would structure local areas and the region at the same time.

This approach should also help establish operational links between decentralisation support programs and regional integration support programs. While one must avoid a tendency towards unmanageable amalgam, it is surely important to consider the obvious regional dimension to local development in the Bobo Dioulasso area (currently receiving support from the French co-operation agency), the Odienné area (European Commission), etc.

Lastly, the approach suggested here implies integrating town and country in a single analysis and a single action program.

Appendix. West Africa: 1998 macro-economic indicators

	Population		GNP		GNP/capita	Aid 97	
	Millions, persons	%	US$ Million	%		US$ Million	per capita
Chad	7	3.4	1681	2.3	231	225	30.9
Benin	6	2.7	2343	3.2	405	225	38.9
Burkina Faso	11	5.4	2776	3.8	246	370	32.7
CapeVerde	0	0.2	469	0.6	1150	110	269.6
Côte d'Ivoire	14	6.8	11957	16.3	837	445	31.1
Gambia	1	0.6	429	0.6	349	41	33.4
Ghana	19	9.1	7362	10.0	384	498	26.0
Guinea	7	3.5	4207	5.7	573	382	52.1
Guinea Bissau	1	0.6	202	0.3	174	126	108.5
Liberia	3	1.3		0.0	0	96	36.0
Mali	11	5.1	2827	3.9	264	457	42.7
Mauritania	3	1.2	121	0.2	48	250	98.9
Niger	10	4.8	2179	3.0	216	341	33.8
Nigeria	**106**	**50.4**	**30920**	**42.2**	**291**	**202**	**1.9**
Senegal	9	4.3	5272	7.2	586	427	47.4
Sierra Leone	5	2.2	731	1.0	160	130	28.5
Togo	4	2.1	1484	2.0	338	124	28.2
Total	**211**	100	**73279**	100	**347**	**4224**	**20.0**
CILSS	**54**	**25.4**	**15956**	**21.8**	**297**	**2347**	**43.7**
Nigeria/Ghana/Côte d'Ivoire	**140**	**66.3**	**50239**	**68.6**	**359**	**1145**	**8.2**

Source: World Bank