

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL FORUM**  
**OF BUSINESS GROUPS IN WEST AFRICA**  
**HELD ON 4<sup>TH</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 2007**  
**AT THE**  
**SHERATON HOTEL AND TOWERS, ABUJA**  
**NIGERIA**

**JANURARY 6, 2008**

## **Table of contents**

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction and Background
3. Highlights of the Forum
  - 3.1. Brief introduction of the Forum
  - 3.2. Opening ceremony
  - 3.3. Keynote Address by ECOBANK
  - 3.4. Panel of donor agencies and partners in development
  - 3.5. Roundtable discussion by delegates, NBG Nigeria and NBG-Côte d'Ivoire
4. Recommendations of the Forum
5. Conclusion
6. Annexes

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A forum regrouping NEPAD Business Groups active in West Africa and identified delegates from other countries in West Africa met in Abuja (Nigeria) to establish the foundations of NEPAD Business Group-West Africa. Like other business associations in West Africa, the NEPAD Business Groups have convened as recommended by the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of ECOWAS Business Forum to strengthen their capacities and position themselves as key partners to ECOWAS and other international organizations.

NEPAD Business Group- Côte d'Ivoire and NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria collaborated to organize this event with the sponsorship of ECOWAS. Highlights of the forum included:

- A well attended Opening Ceremony under the chairmanship of Ambassador Tunji Olagunju, Special Adviser to the President on NEPAD, and CEO of NEPAD Nigeria. Other participants included Nigerian legislators, ECOWAS officials, representatives from international donors, members of established NEPAD Business Groups, delegates from 12 ECOWAS member countries, and media reporters
- A keynote address by ECOBANK
- A panel of international donors dealing with the private sector development
- A roundtable with delegates from ECOWAS member countries.

Lessons learned from this Forum focused on best practices from NEPAD Nigeria, NEPAD Business Group- Côte d'Ivoire and NEPAD Business Group-Benin challenges and opportunities for the private sector in West Africa. It also gives the occasion for international donors to foster the private sector development taking into account some updated issues such as the ongoing EPA discussions, the increased interest in Africa by countries in the world, the need for a more regional economic and trade integration in West Africa. Finally, the roundtable with private sector delegates helped the Forum assess the need to accelerate the inception of NEPAD Business Group in their respective countries, examine the best ways and means for the private sector in each country to organize national chapters of NEPAD Business Group.

In conclusion, the Forum agreed on the foundations and formation of NEPAD Business Group –West Africa. NEPAD Business Group-Côte d'Ivoire and NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria will constitute the steering committee working on this project in collaboration with NEPAD Business Group Chairman Alhaji Bamanga Tukur, and the Forum convenes to meet in Abidjan during the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the International Business Conference organized by NEPAD Business Group- Côte d'Ivoire, March 3-5, 2008 en Abidjan (Côte d'Ivoire) to set-up officially the NEPAD Business Group-West Africa as a private sector platform in West Africa dealing with all regional and international stakeholders. End summary.

## 2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

After the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the ECOWAS Business Forum in Accra (Ghana) October 29-31, 2007, all business organizations were called to be more organized regionally and have their capacity strengthened. NEPAD Business Group Côte d'Ivoire and NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria, key members of the planning and implementation committee for this Forum, took an active part in the organization and its working sessions.

On the double initiative of NEPAD Business Group- Nigeria and NEPAD Business Group –Côte d'Ivoire, the idea of the launch of NEPAD Business Group-West Africa took form, and both worked together to organize the launch of NEPAD business Group-West Africa in Abuja (Nigeria) on December 4-5, 2007. NBG-Nigeria has the responsibility for logistical arrangements (hotel, airport welcome, ground transport, room facilities and conference logistics), sponsorship with ECOWAS and other donors, and lobbying for Nigerian officials involved in NEPAD. NBG-Côte d'Ivoire has the responsibility for identifying private sector delegates from ECOWAS member countries, securing mailing and correspondence to business organizations in West Africa, travel arrangements for delegates, and follow-up.

## 3. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE FORUM

### 3.1. Brief Introduction of the Forum:

The Forum was organized by NEPAD Business Group Nigeria and NEPAD Business Group Cote D'Ivoire for Business Groups in West Africa, with the theme “**Promoting Regional Commercial Platforms for the Integration of West African Markets**”. The forum’s major objective was the creation of West African sub-regional regional private sector institutional platform for the socio-economic integration of the sub-region. This objective was inspired by the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), established by the African Union as an alternative strategy for Africa’s development. The forum aimed to establish and strengthen NEPAD Business Group-West Africa as sub-regional equivalent of NEPAD Business Group-Africa, and to entrench the private sector in a critical position to drive the economic development of the sub-region.

### 3.2. Opening ceremony

3.2.1. Mr. Gerard Amangoua, Executive Director, NBG-Cote D'Ivoire, on behalf of the co-organizers, in his welcome address, expressed his happiness to see this meeting convened in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, and ECOWAS. He also was delighted at witnessing the attendance of very high caliber of delegates from both private and public sectors whose presence he stated, underscored the importance of the forum. He enjoined the participants to engage in serious deliberations on the theme of the conference, and commended ECOWAS, the EU, ADB, ECOBANK, UNDP, USAID for their support.

3.2.2. Ambassador Tunji Olagunju, Special Adviser to the President on NEPAD, and NEPAD Nigeria CEO, in his remarks, noted that the Forum is taking place at a time when the Nigerian Government has signaled a renewed commitment to governance as the best instrument for tackling the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment in the country and indeed in West Africa. He also shared with the audience the fact that the current Nigerian administration has put in place appropriate standards and practices to ensure that the private sector remains the most reliable vehicle of economic growth and wealth creation. He stated that political and economic progress has been recorded in Africa in recent times by appreciable increases in real per capita income and Gross Domestic Product in most parts of the continent. He further noted that the Nigerian Government would exploit the platform of NEPAD Business Group and other national/regional organizations to partner with the private sector to deepen economic integration in the sub-region.

3.2.3. As far as the African Peer Review Mechanism, he informed participants that Nigeria will be peer reviewed in June, 2008, and that nation wide validation exercise of the Country Self-Assessment Report for Nigeria has just been concluded, leading to the inauguration of National Programme of Action (NPoA) which will address issues of corporate governance and good government in the political and economic sectors of the Nigerian society. He enjoined the NEPAD Business Group-West Africa to embark on public enlightenment, particularly of its members on corporate governance in order to entrench best practices in business organizations.

3.2.4. Mr. Guy M'Bengue, Chairman, NEPAD Business Group-Côte d'Ivoire in his remarks, thanked the organizers of this event which is first of its kind, and noted its historic nature. He pointed out that NEPAD Business Group-West Africa will be a unique effort to establish the primacy of the private sector in the economic development of West Africa. Accordingly, he lauded the development partners such as ADB and ECOWAS for facilitating the success of the conference.

3.2.5. M. Goodie Ibru, Chairman, NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria remarked that this forum was significant because it brought together for the first time all national chapters of NEPAD Business Group to share their experiences and explore areas of interface with development partners and Governments to achieve economic integration in the sub-region. Commenting further, he stated that this kind of collaboration will strengthen the spirit of economic integration, accelerate development and reduce the level of poverty in the sub- region and thereby enhance the

attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He called on the public sector to create enabling environment for the private sector to thrive in economic development.

3.2.6. On behalf of Alhaji Bamanga Tukur, Chairman of NEPAD Business Group, and Chairman of the African Business Roundtable, M. Goodie Ibru reported that he commended the foresight of the NEPAD Business Groups of Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire for arranging the forum and called for sustained effort to achieve the desired objectives of integration and economic development of West Africa. He advocated the entrenchment of the private sector as the engine room of the process of economic development in West Africa. He also said that by pooling their resources together and sharing their experiences, business leaders under the auspices of the various national chapters of NEPAD Business Groups in West Africa can be a decisive factor in the implementation of the NEPAD programme.

3.2.7. M. Aidara, Special Adviser on regional integration, on behalf of the Ministry of Regional Integration of Côte d'Ivoire, praised this initiative that his ministry supports. He also have showed the great support to NEPAD Business Group – Côte d'Ivoire for a more regional approach of the involvement of the private sector in NEPAD implementation programs in West Africa.

### 3.3. Keynote Address by ECOBANK

3.3.1. This session was chaired by Mallam Ibrahim Aliyu, Chairman Intercellular Nigeria Limited. The lead paper of the conference was delivered in the form of a keynote address by Group CEO Arnold Ekpe, represented by M. Rotini M. Nihinlola, ECOBANK Director of microfinance and international organizations. The keynote address titled **“Promoting Regional Commercial Platforms for the Integration of West African Markets”** was well received by delegates with highlights on challenges, issues, and opportunities below:

i) that NEPAD Business Group West Africa has a key role to play in the realization of NEPAD's mandate at country and regional levels. Consequently, it is important for the Group to put its activities in a regional context.

ii) that NEPAD Business Group- West Africa is an attempt to help lift West Africa out of endemic poverty, and to achieve sustainable development through the process of integration of the sub-region's markets, which will facilitate effective participation of West Africa in the global market. To achieve functional integration of her uncoordinated market and economic processes, West Africa requires the capacity and the will to harness its enormous resources efficiently.

iii) that the challenges facing West African States include poverty, underdevelopment and marginalization in the globalization process .To overcome these challenges, West Africa must achieve a functional integration of its markets, peoples and policies in order to productively and efficiently harness her enormous resources. Integration has become a necessity for West African States because these States are, given their structural weaknesses, incapable of successfully competing individually in the global market, wherein other countries of the World are acting in regional blocks.

iv) that to effect the desired economic integration, subsisting obstacles characterized by restrictive national policies must be removed in order to ensure free movement of peoples, capital and goods across the borders of the sub- region,

v) that the process of integration would be enhanced through access to information about opportunities available in West Africa. Presently, West Africans remain largely ignorant about business opportunities in their sub-region, particularly in the sub-sectors such as money market, capital market, products market, factor market and general commerce. To reverse this trend and further the cause of integration, all stakeholders should come together and play their roles.

Governments should create conducive policy and regulatory framework that promote integration, while permitting the private sector to actually build the required platform for such integration.

vi) that ECOBANK was ready to work with NEPAD Business Group-West Africa to achieve the objectives of NEPAD in the sub-region.

vii) that ECOBANK has been successful in promoting integration and facilitating trade across West Africa, through its extensive branch network in West African countries. This is necessarily so because ECOBANK was founded by regional players, and consequently, started out with a regional mandate.

viii) The audience applauded the paper and agreed with Mr. Arnold Ekpe's diagnosis of the development issues experienced in West Africa, as well as on a package of solutions. They commended ECOBANK's success in spearheading the expansion of banking services across West Africa, and enjoined other banks to emulate ECOBANK.

### **3.4. Panel of donor agencies and development partners**

3.4.1. This session was chaired by Senator Gbenga Aluko, and the following development partners presented papers: ECOWAS Commission, United Nations Development Programme, International Labour Organisation, African Development Bank, United States Agency for International Development, and Department for International Development.

3.4.2. The development partners in their presentations generally dwelled on their primary responsibility of assisting in the development efforts of their host countries through the empowerment of the private sector in the following areas amongst others:-

- capacity building for small and medium scale enterprises
- empowering the youth, women, the physically challenged and other vulnerable members of the population
- partnering with the Governments of host countries in specific areas that have relevance to the economic and social development of the host countries, encouraging best practices in corporate governance and rule of law, generally advising on, and funding pro-poor policies and projects

3.4.3. In particular, the ECOWAS Commission, through its representative, Mr. Souleymane Zeba, has made a very significant contribution on the rationale behind the process of regional integration in West Africa. He noted that NEPAD Business Group-West Africa is a unique experiment in economic integration that must be supported and succeed. He advised that the Group in order to succeed require a good quality, experienced and committed leadership whose dedication to the cause of socio-economic integration in West Africa is not in doubt. He suggested that the Group prioritize its activities through the identification of projects that will urgently impact on the economy of the sub region.

3.4.4. In conclusion, these organizations identified themselves with the objectives of NEPAD and NEPAD Business Group-West Africa, and pledged to partner with the group and its national affiliates in creating wealth, alleviating poverty and thereby contributing to the economic development of West Africa.

3.4.5. Ms. Sweet –Giwa Osagie, NEPAD Business Group, Nigeria CEO, on behalf of the organizers thanked the officials, the speakers and the participants for coming together to deliberate on the role of the private sector in regional integration. She also stated their active participation had encouraged organizers to strive even harder to achieve greater success in subsequent Forums of the Group.

### **3.5. Roundtable discussion between delegates and NBG Nigeria and NBG-Côte d'Ivoire**

3.5.1. This roundtable was co-chaired by MM. Goodie Ibru and Guy M'Bengue, Chairmen of NEPAD Business Group Nigeria and NEPAD Business Group Cote d'Ivoire respectively. Other key members of both organizations attended as well as delegates from 12 member countries. It focused on deliberations of the first day, enabling delegates to provide their individual contributions, and the Forum to agree on a framework for implementing the recommendations.

3.5.2. The co-chairman, Mr. Goodie Ibru called on delegates to deliberate on the presentations of December 4<sup>th</sup>, and state the contributions/positions of their national business groups to regional integration. (See list attached)

3.5.3. Delegates expressed opinions and made suggestions in several areas in order to promote private sector participation in economic integration of West Africa.

- that NEPAD Business Group West Africa (NBG-WA), the private sector has potent opportunity of strengthening its role in the process of economic integration of West Africa,
- that in many West African Countries like Guinea, Sierra-Leone, Senegal etc., the private sectors have not been formally organized in the form of NEPAD Business Groups to drive the process of economic integration in the region
- that all West African countries should establish and promote NEPAD Business Groups as a formal mechanism for entrenching the private sector as a major driver of economic integration in the sub-region
- that given the limited success of the West African Governments in the area of integration through Public-Private-Partnership, the governments in the sub-region should provide the enabling environment for the private sector to drive the economy
- That NBG-WA should encourage its members to emulate the success of ECOBANK in economic integration, given the Bank's long-standing business involvement in West African Countries
- that transport, energy, water resources and other infrastructure which are critical to the process of economic/social development are presently lacking in West Africa and should be put in place as a matter of topmost priority by the governments and the private sector in the context of Public-Private-Partnership. In particular, the lack of regional networks of road, air and marine transportation, which constitutes serious limitations to socio-economic integration and development should be seriously addressed
- that in order to demonstrate seriousness, NBG-WA and its National Groups should adopt short and medium term goals, set targets, make concrete proposals to governments and monitor the planning and implementation of NEPAD branded projects that have relevance for the integration process
- that NBG-WA should create a general data base of its members and products available in the sub- region, as well as a formal structure for networking and promoting competitiveness of West African businesses in the global market
- that entrepreneurial skills, technical capacity and language barriers which presently circumscribe the potentials of West African business men and hamper effective communication should be addressed

- that courtesy calls on the Presidents and other key government functionaries of hosting countries of NBG-WA, should be encouraged as a way of sensitizing governments on the activities of the Group
- that there should be concerted efforts by both the governments and the private sector to popularize and domesticate NEPAD among businessmen, industrialists, ordinary West Africans and critical institutions of countries
- that West African businessmen should cooperate in establishing large business concerns, explore the advantage of economies of scale, and improve on the quality of their products to counter the threat from Chinese and Asian businessmen whose activities may result in their takeover of West African economy
- that West Africans should end their long-standing suspicion of each other and learn to overcome limitations of language and geo-political division inherited from their colonial masters
- that the Portuguese speaking and other countries that are yet to sign up for NBG-WA, should be invited to the Group in order to achieve total inclusiveness.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Forum recommended the following:

- 4.1. A steering committee be constituted immediately comprising key officials of NBG-Nigeria, NBG-Cote d'Ivoire and two other National Business Groups, to collaborate and advise on the modalities for the implementation of the recommendations of the delegates in collaboration with the NEPAD Business Group Chairman Alajhi Bamanga Tukur.
- 4.2. A large multi-national organization to handle and render common services across West Africa in all the critical sectors be established.
- 4.3. All countries in West Africa should establish NEPAD Business Groups (NBGs) for necessary linkages with NBG-West Africa. Delegates wishing to establish NBGs in their countries should liaise with officials of NBG-Nigeria and NBG-Cote d'Ivoire for guidance and relevant documents. (Accordingly, Mali, Sierra-Leone, Guinea, Senegal and other interested countries should proceed with the process of establishing their national NBGs immediately)
- 4.4. A comprehensive information including mailing list of companies, products and businessmen-particularly members of NBG-WA and national NBGs- should be compiled and circulated among delegates and other stakeholders
- 4.5. Through a joint action within NBG-WA and in cooperation with ECOWAS and the public sector, steps must be defined to enhance the competitiveness of West African businesses and products in the global market
- 4.6. A detailed action plan must be drawn to achieve the objectives of NBG-WA, should be prepared for consideration and adoption at the next meeting in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, scheduled for March 2008.

The final vote of thanks was delivered by Moussa Diarra, a delegate from Mali, who congratulated the delegates for holding a successful meeting. He further thanked the delegates for their attendance and business-like contributions during the plenary and working sessions. He also expressed appreciation on behalf of the organizers for the welcome arrangements provided to delegates, the first class interpreter services.

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

The Forum agreed on the foundations and formation of NEPAD Business Group –West Africa. NEPAD Business Group-Côte d’Ivoire and NEPAD Business Group-Nigeria will constitute the core team of the Steering Committee working on this project in collaboration with NEPAD Business Group Chairman Alhaji Bamanga Tukur. As for the way forward for the action plan, The Forum has agreed on:

- The mobilization of the private sector (English and French speaking countries) to establish national chapters
- The agenda of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the International Business Conference organized by NEPAD Business Group- Côte d’Ivoire, on March 3-5, 2008 en Abidjan (Côte d’Ivoire)
- The formal creation of the NEPAD Business Group-West Africa during a meeting of all stakeholders. This entity will serve as a private sector platform in West Africa dealing with all regional and international stakeholders.

The Forum thanks the Nigerian government, local states, regional organizations and institutions like the African Development Bank Group (AfDB), the Economic Community for West African states (ECOWAS), the World Bank, United Nations for Development Program (UNDP), ECOBANK Transnational Inc. which have provided their institutional support and sponsorship to help make this Forum a success. Thanks also to the Sheraton Hotel, supporting staff of both NEPAD Business Group Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire without whom this Forum would not be a successful one.

## **6. ANNEXES**

**Annex 1:**

**Programme of the NEPAD Business Group –Forum  
December 4-5, 2007, Abuja (Nigeria)**

**Annex 2:  
List of attendees  
NEPAD Business Group**

### **List of attendees - NEPAD Business Group-Forum**

Amb. Tunji Olagunju, Special Adviser to the President of Nigeria on NEPAD/CEO OF NEPAD Nigeria  
Senator Gbenga Aluko  
Representative of Chairman Senate Committee on Cooperation and Integration in Africa- Nigeria  
Representative of Chairman, House Committee on Cooperation and Integration in Africa- Nigeria  
Representative of Honourable Minister of Commerce and Industry-Nigeria  
Aidara, Special Adviser, Representative of Honourable Minister of Regional Integration- Cote d'Ivoire  
Ibrahim Aliyu, Chairman Intercellular Nigeria Limited  
Goodie M. Ibru, Chairman, NEPAD Business Group – Nigeria  
Guy M'Bengue, Chairman, NEPAD Business Group Cote d'Ivoire  
Kadjé Komla, Commissioner for infrastructure, ECOWAS  
Dr. Souleymane Zeba, Special Adviser, ECOWAS Commission  
United Nations Development Programme Representative  
ADB Representative Nigeria  
European Union Representative  
African Development Bank Representative  
DFID Representative,  
USAID representative  
Diallo Ousseine, CGECI, Cote d'Ivoire  
Umma A. Rimi, Intercellular Nigeria  
Gerard Delaune., Union of Transporters/Niger Labor Council  
Kantienon E., Belle Nature, Burkina Faso  
Dr. Arnaud Z. Tape, BNETD, Cote d'Ivoire  
Amadou Massan Sarr, CNP/Senegal, Senegal  
Safiatou Traore, CEDEAO, Burkina Faso  
Amangona Gerard, NBG- Cote d'Ivoire  
Chief Mrs. Nike Akande, NBG-N, Nigeria  
Abubarka Abdulkadir, Consultant, Nigeria  
Kouferidji Ramanou, NBG-B, Benin  
Moussa Diarra, RECOMA/REAO, Mali  
Augustine Adongo, FGE, Ghana  
Anssoumane Savané, CNP,Guinea  
Victor C.N Oyolu, Ikeja Hotel, Nigeria  
Maurice Gbappie, SBF, Sierra-Leone  
Edward B,SEDIC, Sierra-Leone  
Paul Igbinogba, Consultant, NBG-N, Nigeria  
Dr. S.E.Uhiene, NEPAD Nigeria, Nigeria