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Bridging the technological divide

A technological divide increasingly separates rich and poor nations. Most developed nations devote 2.5-4 per cent of their GNP to research and development. In the developing world generally and in countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) particularly, the average is only 0.5 per cent. This huge investment gap is illustrated by several indices such as the number of scientists and engineers in research and development. In Europe and Central Asia, there are 2,534 scientists per million people. This contrasts with only 15 in Nigeria and 3 in Senegal. The average figure for ACP countries is less than 10. Another striking indicator of technological output is the number of patent applications. In 1997, 800,000 applications were filed worldwide. Only 38 came from sub-Saharan Africa, of whom 23 from one country, Kenya.

Economic development is most likely to occur in societies that succeed in linking their knowledge base to innovation systems. Knowledge, indigenous and external, needs to permeate all aspects of social life and production. The above statistics clearly illustrate the challenge provoked by the technological divide.

The developing countries have a long history of research collaboration with Europe. The importance of Science and Technology (S&T) collaboration has been recognised in resolutions by the European Parliament such as the proposal by Michel Rocard, the former President of the Development Committee, to create a European Foundation for Research and Development. In addition, European Union policy statements and the recently signed Cotonou Agreement have confirmed the commitment to long standing S&T partnerships between developing countries and EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland.

The European Commission (EC) is presently formulating an S&T development policy to strengthen such partnerships. In this context, five country studies (Dominican Republic, Ghana, Senegal, Uganda and Vietnam) were undertaken to assess national S&T policies, including policy dialogues that led up to them. The studies were discussed during an ACP-EU workshop on S&T.¹

The workshop acknowledged the crucial role that S&T plays in economic development. Therefore, policy makers need to accord higher priority to S&T on their national and regional development policy agendas. *Policy dialogues involving different stakeholders are crucial in the development of such policy agendas.* The workshop accepted a methodology for assessing national S&T policy dialogues and noted its results in the various countries.

¹ The ACP-EU Policy Workshop on RTD (Legon/Accra, 29-31 January 2001) was organized by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) in Accra and the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) in the Netherlands and co-funded by the Government of the Netherlands.

Recommendations

1. Greater recognition should be accorded to the critical role of an *open dialogue* in the preparation of S&T policies for development.
2. ACP countries are therefore urged to formulate *national S&T policy agendas* through enhanced national policy dialogue. The dialogue is seen as an open learning process that ensures ownership and continuity of the S&T policy agenda. All stakeholders need to be involved, including the private sector, civil society, the grassroots, the research community and policy makers.
3. ACP countries are recommended to undertake *studies* that analyse the S&T landscape. By promoting participation of stakeholders in such studies, ownership of the results is enhanced. The countries are encouraged to refine and apply the methodology mentioned before and to promote training and capacity building to do such studies.
4. ACP regions are recommended to establish an *S&T Observatory* (clearing house) to collect and share information on latest developments in S&T and their applications. The Observatory will have antennae in each region to link with the private sector, civil society and regional networks.
5. The EC is recommended to finance a study for the establishment of a mechanism for *information dissemination on S&T*, recognising the importance of advanced knowledge management systems for development.
6. The ACP States and the EC are recommended to ensure *due recognition for S&T priorities* within the chosen priority areas in the national and regional support strategies, which form the basis for national and regional indicative programmes. In practical terms, EC Delegates and the ACP National Authorising Officers are urged to include S&T as an agenda item in their policy dialogue in the months to come.
7. The EC is recommended to establish a *research bridging facility* along the lines of similar existing mechanisms for the private sector. This Facility could provide seed money to activities designed to bridge the gap between policy makers, end-users and researchers. The aim of the Facility would be to generate the conditions and to develop the capacity for S&T in ACP countries. A feasibility study should be completed in 2001 preferably by Southern researchers and in co-operation with regional research networks and end-users. The Facility could promote capacity to undertake S&T diagnostic studies and national and regional policy dialogues in developing countries.
8. An ACP *Informal Working Group for S&T* should be established for mobilising intellectual and political support. This group could be composed of regional representatives and include policy makers, end-users and researchers. The ACP participants in the workshop requested the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development (CTA, Wageningen) to function as focal point for this Working Group.

9. The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) is planning an international conference on *Advanced Knowledge Systems in Development Co-operation*. It is recommended that the results of the feasibility study for the recommended research bridging facility be presented at this conference in the presence of a strong ACP delegation.