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**REPORT OF THE 1st AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE
FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

REPORT OF THE 1st AFRICAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Introduction

The first Conference of Ministers of Science and Technology was held in November 2003 in Johannesburg, South Africa. The conference took a decision to establish the African Ministerial Council for Science and Technology (AMCOST) as a high-level forum for critical examination and dialogue on emerging issues of science and technology development and their implications for Africa's sustainable development as well as policy and political guidance on the development and application of science and technology in Africa. The Ministerial Council consists of all Ministers responsible for Science and Technology in African countries. According to the rules of procedure adopted, the host country Minister – Minister B. Ngubane of the Department of Science and Technology of South Africa assumed the chair for a period of two years. A bureau of Ministers was also elected and it consisted of Ministers of the following countries: South Africa, Senegal, Algeria, Kenya and Gabon.

A Steering Committee constituted by a membership at the level of Directors-General, Permanent Secretaries or officials of equivalent rank, was established to oversee the implementation of the decisions of Ministers.

The Ministers examined the question of how to address the daunting challenges of poverty reduction through the development and application of science and technology and adopted an Outline of a Plan of Action with twelve Flagship Programmes.

The above-mentioned conference took place mainly under the auspices of NEPAD, prior to the establishment of the AUC Department of Human Resources Science and Technology (HRST). Recognizing the potential for duplication of activities between NEPAD and the HRST and the need for building synergy, the Commissioner and the NEPAD Chairman, took a decision to appoint a consultant to assist in the definition of roles and the integration of S&T programmes of NEPAD and HRST. This was duly authorized by the AUC and undertaken. The outcome of the consultancy was used to produce Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action - a joint activity plan of NEPAD and the AU, which also outlines the roles and responsibilities between HRST and the NEPAD S&T programme.

The second Conference of Ministers of Science and Technology was held in Dakar, Senegal from the 29 – 30 September 2005 to consider the above-mentioned Consolidated Plan of Action and to formalize the appointment of the new Chairperson of the Ministers' Conference. According to the rules of procedure adopted by the Ministers, the chair changes every two years and a new bureau of Ministers is elected. Senegal as the host country assumed the chair of the Ministers' Conference and a new bureau consisting of Senegal, Congo, Ethiopia, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Nigeria was elected. As the host of NEPAD, South Africa was retained in both the Steering Committee and the Ministerial Bureau as member without voting rights. HRST Commissioner is an ex-officio Member of the Bureau.

2. Outcomes of the Conference of Ministers

Ministers adopted Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action, which includes the following key aspects:

a. Governance of the African S&T Programme

The Ministers endorsed that AU Commission shall be responsible for providing overall political and policy leadership for the implementation of this Consolidated Plan of Action. Its specific roles will include:

- (i) convening meetings of African Ministers for Science and Technology and ensuring that resolutions of such meetings are transmitted to the AU summits
- (ii) initiating policy processes that are aimed at addressing specific science, technology and innovation issues
- (iii) mobilizing financial resources for the implementation of the Consolidated Plan of Action
- (iv) leading AU-NEPAD delegations in international processes and negotiations on science, technology and innovation issues
- (v) providing a focal point for liaising with the United Nations agencies on matters pertaining to policy, and
- (vi) creating various schemes for promoting science and technology, including engaging the African youth, Diaspora and women in the implementation of the Consolidated Plan of Action.

On the other hand, the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology shall provide overall technical and intellectual leadership for the implementation of this Consolidated Plan of Action. Its specific roles will include:

- (i) mobilizing and directing technical expertise, including networks of centers of excellence, to implement the programmes and projects
- (ii) convening meetings of the Science and Technology Steering Committee of AMCOST
- (iii) providing technical leadership for the establishment of the proposed African Science and Innovation Facility
- (iv) providing technical support to AU Commission's policy processes and activities
- (v) monitoring international trends in science and technology and ensuring that the necessary adjustments are made to this Consolidated Plan of Action to respond to the trends,
- (vi) monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the programmes and projects.

The Ministers' Council would be operationally supported by a Steering Committee for Science and Technology which is constituted by a membership at the level of Directors-General, Permanent Secretaries or officials of equivalent rank, two representing each of the five geographic regions of Africa and the Director of HRST as ex-officio member.

The Steering Committee oversees the development and implementation of programme activities, including the formulation of the business plans. It will be responsible for reviewing progress of implementation of the 'Consolidate Plan for Collective Action'. In other words, the Steering Committee constitutes what is normally called the "Experts' Group."

b. Improvement of S&T Policy Conditions and Building Innovation Mechanisms

Ministers also endorsed the plan to undertake activities to create an enabling policy environment for the development and promotion of Science and Technology in AU Member States. The Plan identifies the following key activities in this regard: (i) Capacity building of Officials in Member States and the development of university courses in policy development (ii) the development of Science, technology and innovation (STI) indicators to assist Member States to monitor scientific and technological development. (iii) Establishing an African STI Observatory to ensure that the STI indicators and information gathering as well as collation, compilation and validation are standardized. (iv) Improving Regional cooperation in S&T to include joint science projects, sharing of information, conferences, building joint or common laboratories, setting common standards for R&D, and exchange of expertise. A common problem or challenge, such as the development of a HIV/AIDS vaccine, can be one of the primary factors stimulating cooperation. (v) Promoting public understanding of Science and Technology. Ministers recognized the importance of actively promoting the value of science and technology in order to attract more young people to scientific careers and to build a culture of science in Member States.

c. Flagship Research and Development Programmes

Ministers approved the outline of the planned 9 flagship research and research and development programme. The programme was developed through consultative workshop of scientists in the various regions of the African Union and as such the implementation of the programme will be collaboratively undertaken in the regions with the leadership of Centres of Excellence. This will enable the sharing of resources and expertise and will maximize on the scarce resources. The flagship programme is the first group of activities to be initiated. However, more will be developed as implementation of the initial ones proceeds. The flagship programme includes the following clusters of research and development programmes:

- Biodiversity, Biotechnology and Indigenous Knowledge – This is a research programme for the conservation and sustainable use Africa's natural wealth/biodiversity. It also aims at building African capacities to develop and safely apply biotechnology in agriculture, health, mining, industry and other areas. This programme include the promotion, protection and development of Indigenous knowledge with the view to using it to contribute to economic development

- Energy, Water and Desertification – The overall objective of this cluster of research and development programme is to enlarge energy security through the generation and application of scientific knowledge and related technological innovations. It also sets out to strengthen the scientific and technical capacities of African countries to combat drought and desertification.
- Material Sciences, Manufacturing, Laser and Post-harvest technologies - This programme aims at building Africa's capacity to engage in material research and related technology development. It will also focus on revitalizing engineering training in African higher education institutions in order to increase the number and quality of engineers. The programme will also build capacity to engage in laser research and technologies. In addition, the programme will identify, develop, and promote diffusion of relevant or appropriate technologies to reduce post harvest food loss, with initial emphasis on crops.
- Information and Communication Technologies and Space science and Technologies.

This programme aims at establishing a continental research network on ICTs. It will bring together leading universities and research centres to design and implement projects that generate software with African content. It also aims at determining the feasibility of establishing an African Institute of Space Science.

3. A Technical and Financial Mechanism for Implementation

Ministers discussed the financial implications of the programmes they have endorsed. They highlighted the need to promote synergies in implementation, and the establishment of a mechanism for coordination. Ministers agreed that in order to maximize on the efficient utilization of scarce African human and physical resources, trans-African/continental networks of centres of excellence would implement the programmes and projects. In this regard, an African Science and Innovation Facility (ASIF) is proposed for the coordination of the programme. The ASIF would provide the pan-African mechanism necessary to sustain the networks of excellence, encourage creative individuals and institutions to generate and apply science and technology, and promote technology-based entrepreneurship. It would:

- a. Mobilize technical expertise and financial resources to develop and implement the proposed projects;
- b. Develop and implement guidelines and procedures for mobilizing and allocating African and international funding
- c. Monitor and evaluate the implementation of the programme based on agreed upon policies and procedures

- d. Provide technical backstopping to the AU Commission to implement science and technology policies adopted by the African Ministerial Council on Science and Technology (AMCOST)
- e. Facilitate the emergence and growth of partnerships between African R&D networks and International ones e.g. European Research Area and the Networks of Excellence
- f. Monitor global scientific and technological trends and mobilize expertise to advice AU
- g. Support AU Commission to develop capacity for science and technology policy formulation and implementation.

4. Partner-support for Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action

A number of international partners (UK-DFID, Canada-CID & IDRC, Sweden-SIDA, Norway, USA and France –AUF) attended the Ministerial Conference and made presentations in which they congratulated the AU/NEPAD for the solid programme they have developed. They also outlined how their own programmes can interface with the Consolidated Action Plan. Most expressed interest in supporting the Plan.

5. Recommendations

Ministers of Science and Technology made the following recommendations towards the implementation of the Consolidated Action Plan:

- a. That the AU Commission and the NEPAD Office of Science and Technology shall be responsible for mobilizing financial and technical resources to implement programmes and projects contained in the Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action.
- b. That Member States raise their national S&T budget to 1% GDP as agreed by the Summit Heads of State and Government and also commit to making voluntary and earmarked financial contributions to ensure that the programmes and their projects are effectively and efficiently implemented.
- c. That in order to ensure effective and coordinated implementation of the Research and Development programme of the Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action and effective mobilization of African Scientists around it, the AU Commission and NEPAD should explore modalities for the establishment of the African Science and Innovation Facility (ASIF) to carry out the said function.

- d. That AU Commission and NEPAD S&T Programme develop the Terms of Reference and establish the AU-NEPAD-UNESCO High-Level Working Group to prepare a comprehensive programme for establishing and funding centers excellence in accordance with the Commission for Africa recommendations.
- e. Establish a Forum for engaging and partnering with the international community, including fostering cooperation with other developing countries to secure the necessary additional financial, technical and informational resources for the implementation of the Africa's Science and Technology Consolidated Plan of Action.
- f. Review and where necessary revise national science, technology and innovation policies and related institutional arrangements; to promote the integration of science, technology and innovation considerations into national development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers or related frameworks for achieving the MDGs.
- g. Strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation on science and technology, and develop best practices in this regard.

6. Date and Venue of the Next Conference

The date and venue of the 3rd Conference of Ministers of S&T are unresolved as both Egypt and Kenya offered to host. Ministers urged the AUC to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

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