

Key conclusions and recommendations

Regional Expert Meeting on Ecolabelling

13 June 2007

Strategic

The why?

- African as a region need to develop a regional ecolabelling mechanism in order:
 - To expand market access to African products and increase its share in the global economy;
 - To enhance its progress towards meeting the MDGs by facilitating economic growth on a sustainable basis;
 - To demonstrate Africa's proactive engagement in emerging environmental market and promote the Branding of Africa;
 - To address the misperception and potential use of environmental considerations as technical barriers.

The what?

- Establish clearly the contribution that such an initiative would make to the existing priorities of AU and NEPAD.
- Work through the existing ministerial structures of the African Union (AMCEN, CAMI, CAMT, etc);
- Ensure that the Regional ecolabelling scheme gets the ministerial endorsement by working through the expert forums of the respective bodies.
- Actively engage regional institutions and networks that are working in the area of consumption and production.
- Establish and work through working groups at various levels/sectors.
- Build capacities for sustainable procurement in the public sector both at the national and local government level.
- The initial focus of the African ecolabelling mechanism has to be on establishing a mechanism for harmonization and facilitation;

The How?

- Link it to other initiatives that AU/NEPAD is currently addressing.
- Establish a Regional Expert Group that can provide inputs and recommendations to the AU process;
- Encourage governments to implement sustainable public procurement, provide strategic economic incentives/ disincentives and facilitate support programmes.
- Work through existing coordinating mechanisms such as the Marrakech Taskforce and the UN Industry, Trade and Market Access (ITMA) clusters in support of AU/NEPAD

Operational

The why?

- African industries need to be actively engaged in ecolabelling their products in order:
 - To benefit from the growing market demand for environmentally preferable products;
 - To maintain their market positions and go into new market niches;
 - To improve their profitability through improved resource utilization and productivity.

The what?

- Establish an inclusive process that ensures the active involvement of the industry sector;
- Work through champions to promote and endorse the objectives;
- Develop a screening criteria based on the importance of the sector for national economies, livelihood provision and sustainability;
- Develop technical and financial support programmes based on existing capacities and mechanisms within the region;
- Promote the active engagement of sectoral associations at national sub-regional and regional level;

- Utilize existing ecolabelling programmes as the building blocks after evaluating their credibility, relevance and feasibility;
- Consider the possibility of adopting well-recognized regional and international ecolabelling programmes to the region.
- Develop a strategic partnership with the key players at the regional and international level;
- Prepare brochures and media materials on the African ecolabelling highlighting the key features of the mechanism;
- Actively engage consumer organizations and industry support institutions such as universities, National Cleaner Production Centres (NCPCs) and industrial standard and research institutions.

The How?

- Encourage competition in business communities through different recognition mechanisms (Awards, profiling, etc);
- Promote the visibility of those businesses that are championing the cause;
- Identify the best practices based on the lessons from existing initiatives and use them for standardization and harmonization process.

Conclusions and Recommendations of the Regional Expert Meeting on Ecolabelling

1. The development of an African ecolabelling scheme would make significant contribution to expand market access to African products in a global market which has increasingly become conscious of environmental considerations while also enhancing the Region's ability to achieve the MDGs.
2. The political ownership and guidance of the African Union in the development and implementation of the Regional Ecolabelling mechanism is vital for the success of the initiative.
3. The development of the African Ecolabelling Scheme has to be responsive to the priorities of the AU/NEPAD Initiative.
4. Effort needs to be made in order to get the Regional Ecolabeling scheme as part of the Region's development agenda by working through existing structures of the African Union such as AMCEN, CAMI and CAMT.
5. In view of the various ecolabelling initiatives that are existing, the initial focus of the Regional scheme has to be on adaptation, validation, harmonization

and facilitation of existing ecolabelling initiatives with a possibility of initiating new ones for specific product areas.

6. Existing global and regional coordination mechanisms such as the Marrakech Taskforce on Cooperation with Africa and the UN Industry, Trade and Market Access cluster in support of AU/NEPAD need to be used to promote partnerships.
7. The mechanism needs to ensure the active engagement and participation of business communities, consumers organizations and other relevant stakeholders.
8. Existing capacities on standardization, certification and cleaner production need to be enhanced and effectively utilized in order to provide a cost effective support programmes for the effective implementation of the mechanism.
9. It is proposed to establish an African working group in which those institutions that are active in ecolabelling activities in the region could participate and contribute to the further development of the scheme.
10. The African Union in partnership with UNEP and UNECA is called upon to provide the required leadership and guidance for the further development and implementation of the mechanism.