

BACKGROUND of SIC&D

Innovation Systems and Clusters Programme in Eastern Africa (ISCP-EA)

The Innovation Systems and Cluster Programme in/for Eastern Africa (ISCP-EA) has been a university led regional programme, which started in 2004 and is being implemented collaboratively in three Eastern African states, namely Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda. It is coordinated and spearheaded in each of the three countries by respective Faculties of Engineering/Technology of the Universities of Eduardo Mondlane, Dar es Salaam and Makerere. The main objective is to stimulate, catalyze and promote the development of innovation systems and innovative clusters in Eastern Africa, and thereby facilitate speedy socio-economic development and poverty reduction. The programme enables the universities to fulfil their mandate of reaching out and impacting on societal development by stimulating, catalyzing and promoting generation of solutions to solve problems that confront their respective societies instead of remaining as ‘ivory towers’.

The actual start was in September 2003 when ten Eastern Africans from Tanzania, Uganda and Mozambique attended the 6th Global Conference on “Innovative Clusters: A new Challenge”, which was jointly organized by The Competitive Institute (TCI) and the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems (VINNOVA), in Gothenburg, Sweden. The focus of the conference was on the development of methodologies and policies for building innovative clusters and innovation systems. The ten (10) Eastern Africans, who were sponsored by Sida, represented the three main triple helix constituents of the national innovation systems in their respective countries led by the academia at the College of Engineering and Technology of the University of Dar es Salaam, Faculty of Technology of Makerere University, and Faculty of Engineering of the University of Eduardo Mondlane. The three academic institutions have been active partners in a Sida sponsored engineering research collaboration project since 2001.

The Gothenburg conference inspired the participants from Eastern African so much that they requested Sida to sponsor the organization of a replica of the conference for Eastern Africa. The request was granted by Sida and the 1st Regional Conference on Innovation Systems and Innovative Clusters in Africa was held in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, February 18-20, 2004. One unique characteristic of the conference was its primary intention of coming up with an action plan for the development of innovation systems and innovative clusters in the three African countries, which can also be adapted to the condition of any other African country. The Bagamoyo Conference gave birth to the Innovation Systems and Cluster Programme in/for Eastern Africa (ISCP-EA).

Pan-African Competitiveness Forum (PACF)

It is the successful implementation of ISCP-EA and presentations on the same at subsequent TCI Conferences that have inspired the establishment of Pan African Competitiveness Forum (PACF)¹. PACF was launched on April 16, 2008 as a new continent-wide competence and action centre for innovation and cluster based competitiveness initiatives for national and regional economic development in Africa. The launch of PACF took place at the end of its first and very successful conference in Addis Ababa, April 14-16, 2008. The Conference was organized and sponsored by the African Union (AU) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in collaboration with The Competitiveness Institute (TCI). It was attended by 110 people drawn from business, knowledge institutions, non-government, and government agencies and organizations from 22 African and 10 other countries.

¹ The idea to establish PACF was first conceived during the 8th TCI Conference in Hong Kong (2005), and continued during the 9th TCI conference in Lyon, France (2006). During the 10th TCI Conference in Portland, USA (2007), a Steering Committee was constituted to spearhead the initiative and organize the first PACF Conference of April 14-16, 2008.

The establishment of PACF is prompted by the desire to see Africa develop sustainably and achieve the Millennium Development Goals within the foreseeable future. It is the desire to see Africa integrated into the global economy not as a mere provider of raw materials/products rather as a competent competitor in export of value added products and services. This can best be achieved through innovation and cluster based initiatives, as indeed asserted by Michael Porter assertion that “clusters are the building blocks of modern economy”. Furthermore, practice show that clustering almost always enhances value-addition and the competitiveness of the businesses operating in clusters. A study from 2003 of 260 clusters initiatives around the world revealed that as many as 85% of cluster initiatives were rated as having increased the competitiveness of cluster firms (Sölvell, Ketels, Lindqvist, 2003).

On the ground in Africa, mobilization towards getting PACF established took place in stages as follows:

- Early 2006 the late Prof. John Bosco Turyagyenda participated in a seminar on “partnerships4competitiveness” organized in Ghana;
- In April 2007 a “Seminar on Pan-African Competitiveness” took place in Addis Ababa with participants from Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda, AU, UNIDO, USAID, JICA;
- In September 2007 proponents of innovation and cluster based competitiveness initiatives in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda convened in Cape Town together with representatives from Sida, VINNOVA, USAID, World Bank and SADC;
- In January 2008, a PACF preparatory meeting was held during the All African Leather Fair in Addis Ababa.
- Finally, on April 14-16, 2008 the 1st PACF Conference was held in Addis Ababa.

Swedish Cooperating Partner

Long term sustainable support to the development programme involving Tanzanian, Ugandan and Mozambican universities, business clusters and government representatives has been given by an international team of four persons, drawing on expertise from Sweden (VINNOVA and Blekinge Institute of Technology) and New Zealand (Cluster Navigators Ltd) financially supported by Sida/SAREC.

The establishment of a more coherent cooperation among the Scandinavian stakeholders from the triple helix as well as representing foreign aid and cooperation, cluster practitioners, innovation promotion was raised in 2008 for many reasons. A network platform was thus established at Blekinge Institute of Technology called the Scandinavian Institute for Competitiveness & Development (SIC&D). The supporting and collaborating functions of SIC&D have developed as a result of the long and solid interaction between Swedish and African actors and partners concerned.