

CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP FRANCOPHONE AFRICA COTONOU 8-9-10 JULY 2003

The Francophone Capacity Building Workshop (CBW) was held in Cotonou, Benin at the Centre International de Conference (CIC) on the 8th, 9th, and 10th of July 2003. The purpose of the CBW was to solidify the business competencies of Francophone participating companies in preparation of the Third Africa Asia Business Forum in Dakar, Senegal.

Participants, from 63 companies representing all five industry sectors, were made up of Industry Leaders, Managing Directors, and other company Decision Makers of the highest level from Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Mali, Senegal, and Togo. All were responsible for their travel and accommodation costs to Cotonou.

The CBW presented an arena wherein participants from the various Francophone countries met their industry counterparts thus generating synergies in the respective five industry sectors. The senior level of participants allowed for active debates and exchange of ideas.

Opening Ceremony

Following the full endorsement and cooperation of the Government of Benin, led by President Mathieu Kerekou, the Francophone Africa CBW was formally opened by the Benin Minister of the Environment, Habitat & Urbanism. The Opening Ceremony, attended by the Benin UNDP Resident Representative, the SU/TCDC New York Representative, the Benin Chamber of Commerce Representative and a Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Employment Representative, launched an intensive three day series of lectures and business clinics. These were designed to prepare African businesses to engage in tangible negotiations with their Asian counterparts.

The Opening Ceremony and speeches made by the Minister Luc-Marie Gnacadja, the UNDP Resident Representative and the Afrifinance Director were televised on the National Benin station. A number of local and West African newspapers and radio stations were present and reported on this high profile event.

Goals Accomplished

1. Participants submitted Secondary Data Capture documents designed to define their Project / Joint Venture proposals thus enabling them to clearly provide Asian counterparts with concrete Business projects and Joint Venture opportunities.
2. The innovative approach of a Banking perspective in the AABF III process was successful in providing strong African companies with financial experience and credibility. Banks throughout Francophone Africa were invited by all National Focal Points to submit potential candidates among their client base. This AABF III innovation ensured the presence of viable, prepared and enthusiastic companies.
3. The Francophone CBW provided companies assistance with further refining their MOUs and Joint Venture Business Projects. Additionally, companies were sensitized on the AABF III matching process and utility of the e-forum.
4. Participants attended presentations and networked in Industry Sector Meetings (ISM) over the three days. Participants appreciated the ISMs which allowed them to network and exchange experiences with other Francophone Africans in the same industry sector.

Organization & Participant Feedback

Presentation topics were seen as relevant and useful for the African business man and woman. Speakers were praised for their high level of expertise and thorough treatment of the topics. Given the Africa-Asia context, participants were particularly appreciative of the presentations revolving around financial issues and on the “Doing Business in Asia” intervention.

Participants felt that the experience was most beneficial in preparation for the Business Forum. All participants demonstrated both their competency and readiness to meet their Asian counterparts in each sector.

High praise was also received for the smooth and efficient running of the event from participants, as well as from observers and Government officials present.

Closing Ceremony

The Minister of Industry, Commerce and the Promotion of Employment, Mr. Fatiou Akplogan, closed the CBW following closing remarks and summary of events by the Director of Afrifinance. The UNDP Resident Representative also commented on the CBW and the importance for African companies to get involved on the international business market.



Sponsors

- The Association Professionnelle des Banques (APB) of Benin (http://www.wabao.org/waba/about_waba.html) sponsored the Opening Cocktail and Dinner Reception.
- The Benin Ministry of Industry, Commerce and the Promotion of Employment (<http://www.commerce.gouv.bj/>) in conjunction with the Benin Chamber of Commerce (<http://www.cotonou.org/ccib.htm>) hosted a Gala Dinner for all participants. The highlight of the evening was a performance by the National Benin Ballet. The Minister of Industry, Commerce and the Promotion of Employment was the guest of honor.



- Afrifinance sponsored all the Coffee Breaks and Lunches for participants during the CBW and hosted the Closing Dinner. Afrifinance also provided a shuttle bus service to transport country delegations from the airport to their hotels. For the duration of the CBW, these shuttle buses provided access to and from participants' hotels to the CIC.



Conclusions

The Francophone Africa Capacity Building Workshop met and exceeded all expectations. The quality of the Francophone Africa companies present and the expressed commitment of participants to the AABF III process is representative of the current wave of competent, viable and serious companies coming out of Africa.

Participants left the CBW confident in the AABF III process and commended the handling of the organization by a private African Firm.