



ACEPartner

1. Context

Through the ACE Impact regional project, targeting 12 countries in West, Central and Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Cameroon, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Ghana, Djibouti), the World Bank and AFD are financing 44 centers of excellence (ACE) competitively selected after an independent evaluation, for a total amount of more than 350 million USD. AFD is financing ACE programs in Côte d'Ivoire, Benin and Nigeria for a total amount of 78 million USD.

In this context and in accordance with the ACE Impact project's managers, starting with the WB and AAU in charge of the regional coordination of the project, AFD proposed an additional grant of 6M € dedicated to inter-ACE thematic networking. General feedback from the project highlights the difficulty of ACE programs to reach a regional level of influence as well as the lack of inter-ACE collaborations, even between programs working on common and sometimes complementary fields.

2. Objective and content

ACEPartner project aims at (1) strengthening Research networking between ACEs on Specific Topics (Thematic Networking - TN) and (2) building sustainable Thematic Networks with a broader spectrum than ACEs by opening it to non-core ACE actors (emerging ACEs, faculties and universities from ACE Impact countries, international research organizations, private sector, NGOs, etc.).

2.1 Thematic Network scope

A regional TN is based on 3 circles:

- **Core actors:** ACEs and emerging Centers on a common thematic area, with an ACE in position of coordination (through the recruitment of a coordinator);
- **First circle of academic and scientific** partners, composed of faculties, laboratories from ACE Impact countries' universities, and also research performing organizations (RPO) in the North ;
- **Second circle of non-academic partners**, such as NGOs, private sectors, foundations, etc.

2.2 Identification of TN

The pre-identification of TNs have been based on 3 criteria:

- ✓ Potential spectrum of the TN (number of ACEs on similar themes);

- ✓ Existing network activities at some level;
- ✓ Linkages and upfront exchanges between ACEs since Djibouti bootcamp

Based on these criteria, four TN have been identified:



SUSTAIBALE MINING



SUSTAINABLE WATER AND SANITATION



DIGITAL SCIENCE



HEALTH

Each TN will have its own scope based on identified needs. For instance, Mining, Water and ICT development TN could comprise the following partners:



Sustainable mining

Core : ACE MEM/INP-HP of Côte d'Ivoire, 2 Emerging ACEs (EMIG in Niger, ISMGB in Guinea.

Coordinateur: ACE MEM/INP-HP of Côte d'Ivoire

International partners: IRD, European partners



Sustainable water management

Core : ACE 2iE in Burkina Faso, ACE C2IA in Benin, ACE RWESCK and WACWISA in Ghana, ACE CCBAD in Côte d'Ivoire.

Coordinateur (tbc) : ACE 2iE in Burkina Faso

International partners: IRD, European partners



Digital Sciences and Technologies

Core : ACE MITIC in Senegal, ACE SMIA in Benin, ACE OAK-Park, CApIC and TEL in Nigeria, ACE ENSEA in Côte d'Ivoire.

Coordinateur (tbc) : ACE MITIC

International partners: INRIA, European partners

Each TN will have to determine its scope and objectives through:

- A letter of engagement of members
- TN workplan with budget.

Due to the number of ACEs on Health and the level of maturity of networking activities, the Health TN will have to determine, through a collaborative process involving ACEs, the type of activities to be funded and the scope of the TN.

2.3 ACEPartner's components

The ACEPartner project aims to provide and co-finance mobility grants, scientific events and expertise in the following four areas:

Component 1: Strengthening research capacities

The networks will be supported to (1) **define and implement a common scientific strategy through applied research programs**, (2) establish **young research teams** through the funding of research projects linked to a call for projects launched within networks, (3) design and implement **training cycles adapted to the needs of the scientific communities** in order to increase the skills of researchers on the following three pillars: **conduct and publish their research** (workshops for writing scientific articles, bibliographic research, research methodologies...), **fund their research** (grant writing, lobbying in specific fields of research), **promote and communicate on their research** (media training, expertise, maximize research results) in partnership with **the private sector**, (4) **mutualize and optimize the use of scientific equipment** by ACEs (computing centers, databases, digital tools, etc.)

Component 2: Strengthening higher education training capacities

Networks will be supported to (1) **create joint training programs** (master's programs, doctoral schools, continuing education...) for the reinforcement of existing training programs and their adaptation to the need of socio-economic partners, (2) **to bridge the gap between higher education and research** (creation of short and long inter-ACE training cycles at the regional level, workshops and thematic conferences, etc.). A mobility program (thesis, master and exchange programs between academic and administrative staff) will be implemented inside each network.

Component 3: Strengthening innovation capacities and ties with the non-academic sector.

Networks will be supported to (1) **involve relevant socio-economic actors** in existing or upcoming training and research activities through the use of innovative tools for analyzing the needs of the socio-economic sector (round tables with companies, students / employers training bank, alumni follow-up, social networks, doctoral programs). We aim at the creation of specialized academic modules and the development of a policy of support for innovation and research transfer for students (creation of start-ups, business / research / student collaborations, etc.), (2) **formalize services and platforms for innovation and research transfer toward the private sector** within Networks and Centers (training program for ACEs' research transfer managers, implementation of multi-actors projects).

Component 4: Ensuring the network's sustainability

Networks will be supported to (1) **identify and respond to funding opportunities** (call for

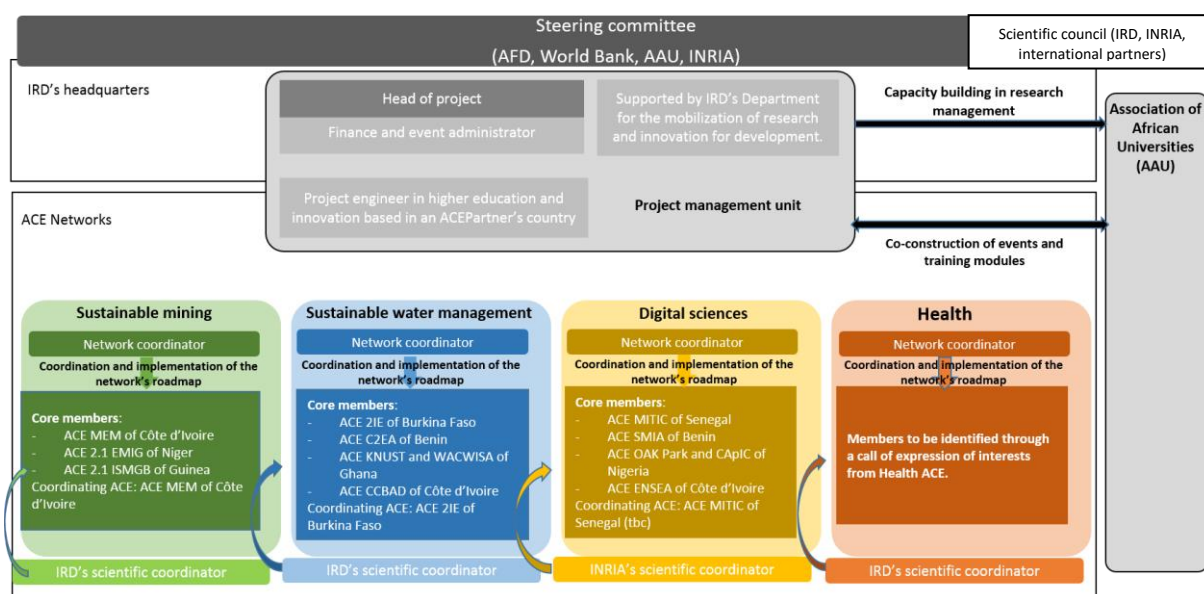
research project, call for expertise, etc.) from various financing actors (African and European Union, think tanks, development banks, government, foundations...) and (2) **develop resource-generating activities** (training dedicated to professionals, expertise, etc.).

TN support cost is estimated around **375 000 euros per year over four year (1,5 MEUR)**. Support will comprise four types of activities: expertise through missions and services, scholarships, equipment acquisition, scientific events and outputs). Distribution of funds expected is: scientific organization (30%), workshops/trainings (35%), equipments (15%) and scholarships (20%). Eligible expenditure will comprise: mission (travel), scholarships, services (events, expertise) and equipment.

A specific support to AAU to develop capacity on Research Management will also be undertaken in the project ACEPartner.

3. Organization

IRD will be in charge of implementing, supervising and reporting on ACEPartner achievements, with the monitoring of a ACEPartner steering Committee (composed of AFD, AAU, IRD, WB and INRIA). A scientific counsel will be in charge of scientific oversight of ACEPartner. IRD will report on a regular basis to ACEPartner steering committee and, on an annual basis, will provide a written activities and impacts report to the Ace Impact PSC, through AAU. INRIA (RPO on digital sciences) will be in charge of the digital TN.



Each **TN** will be coordinated by a **TN coordinator** with the following tasks: (1) implementation of TN workplan, (2) communication, organization of TN events and TN outreach, (3) coordination with IRD on several issues, (4) information oversight with ACEs. The TN coordinator will be recruited by IRD, with ACE from the TN associated through a selection committee. The TN coordinator could be hosted in an ACE.

Fiduciary management (and all procurement – equipment, scholarship, services) will be undertaken by IRD. ACE involved in TN will determine activities and objectives through its Workplan (common scientific program, common events and training, targeted technical assistance, scholarships, etc.). IRD will mobilize its current procurement scheme and will launch new procurement in order to respond to TN Workplan needs. IRD will also be the desk for Scholarship. ACE will benefit from all these activities.

Expected Impacts

The main objective will be the enhancement of Research and Academic collaborations between ACEs, whose impact will be subject to a review through an evaluation framework and a final independent assessment. Each TN will have specific achievement goals in terms of (1) creation of training and research common programs, (2) workshop activities (3) collaboration with socio-economic partners, (4) external revenue generation. ACEPartner's goal is also to impact indirectly on ACEs achievements.