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PLAN OF ACTION OF PANAMA

“Translational Science, Technology and Innovation: Knowledge for Competitiveness and Prosperity”

(Approved during the Eighth Plenary Session held November 17, 2011 and pending revision by the Style Committee)

Within the context of the meetings of Ministers and High Authorities of the Hemisphere, the Inter-American Committee on Science and Technology (COMCYT) constitutes a forum for policy dialogue and provides follow-up to mandates adopted in these ministerial meetings.

During their sixth regular meeting, held in September 2010, COMCYT representatives acknowledged the importance of focusing on the application of science, technology, and engineering as fundamental to fostering innovation, competitiveness, growth, and prosperity. Most significantly, they recommended the development of a long-term inter-American program on science and technology with measurable goals and objectives, as well as the creation and strengthening of monitoring and cooperation mechanisms, including the COMCYT Portal.

In response to the COMCYT recommendations, during the Third Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities on Science and Technology, held in Panama on 17 and 18 November, 2011, the country delegates were presented with the document: *Towards a Vision 20/25 in Science, Technology and Innovation for the Americas: Hemispheric Cooperation for Competitiveness and Prosperity in a Knowledge Economy (Vision20/25)*, which contains mandates from the science and technology ministerial process in the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS).

The purpose of this plan of action is to advance the implementation of said ministerial mandates by creating working groups and establishing clear actions and cooperation mechanisms to ensure their effective and sustained functioning.

Therefore, we, the Ministers and High Authorities of the Americas, on the occasion of the Third Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities on Science and Technology of the OAS (REMCYT III), adopt the following Plan of Action:

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION

I. ROLE OF THE MINISTERS AND HIGH AUTHORITIES OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

A. Areas of Action

The Ministers and High Authorities of Science and Technology should generate opportunities conducive to achieving the ministerial mandates contained in Vision 20/25 which reflect strategic areas for development and prosperity, including:

1. Promoting the drafting, revision, updating and follow-up of policies and regulations, particularly those that result from ministerial mandates;
2. Fostering partnerships with social actors, particularly with key stakeholders in academia, the private sector, civil society, and communities for common projects, programs and initiatives that help improve the quality of life of the population and to increase the competitiveness of the productive and service sectors, especially micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs);
3. Taking actions to help create a knowledge-based society and to encourage the development of human and institutional capabilities with a gender perspective;
4. Disseminating science, technology, and engineering information, promoting innovative thinking and the exchange of best practices for technology transfer, based on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, upgrading education, community extension services, and job creation;
5. Promoting increased investment and the availability of funding mechanisms to advance in priority areas of science, technology, and innovation;
6. Strengthening collaboration and policy dialogue with other ministries and high authorities to engage them in initiatives concerning science, technology and innovation;
7. Allocating resources considered necessary to participate in the implementation of the Plan of Action and to support initiatives resulting from the working groups.

B. Levels of Action

The role of the Ministers and High Authorities should be carried out at the national, regional and hemispheric levels, which complement one another:

1. At the national level, consisting of the actions to foster private-public partnerships and collaboration with all social actors, particularly with academia, civil society, the business community, local governments and communities, to move forward on the areas of action mentioned above;

2. At the sub-regional and regional levels, involving actions that correspond to commitments or intentions resulting from agreements, partnerships, or projects;
3. At the hemispheric level, covering actions derived from agreements or common projects and instructing the Inter-American Committee on Science and Technology (COMCYT) to follow up on those initiatives.

II. COMCYT

The Chair of COMCYT (Panama) in collaboration with the two Vice-Chairs (Peru and St. Vincent and the Grenadines), with the support of the OAS Office of Science, Technology and Innovation as its technical secretariat, and in consultation with the COMCYT representatives, will be responsible for promoting the implementation of the Plan of Action and for improving collaboration and cooperation with the relevant regional and international organizations, civil society and other actors in the Americas. These institutions include cooperation agencies, the OAS, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the Andean Development Corporation (CAF), the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ibero-American and Inter-American Network for Science and Technology Indicators (RICYT), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), the International Council for Science (ICSU), the Inter-American Network of Academies of Sciences (IANAS), the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD), the Latin American Cooperation of Advanced Networks (CLARA), and the Latin American and Caribbean Collaborative Information and Communication Technologies Research Federation (LACCIR), among others.

In addition, the COMCYT has specific roles in relation to the working groups that are described in the following section.

III. WORKING GROUPS

A. Coordination, membership and composition

The COMCYT chair will coordinate the working groups. The chair, supported by the two vice chairs, will seek the means to actively engage the participation of all member states and other partners to implement the Plan of Action (e.g. distinguishing and encouraging leadership, participation, and gender representation, etc.).

Participation in working groups will be open to all member states. Each working group will be led by one member state which will commit to undertake concrete and tangible actions to advance the group's objectives, and to put forward proposals that impact on the whole production apparatus, with particular emphasis, where necessary, on MSMEs.

Participation will also be open to international and regional organizations as well as other social actors, including civil society, previously approved by COMCYT authorities.

B. Meetings, seminars, studies and project proposals

Depending on the availability of resources, working groups will endeavor to meet at least twice a year—either face-to-face or virtually—at dates and locations to be determined by consensus among the members of each working group.

Each working group should aim to schedule at least one seminar, workshop and/or conference per year on their specific area of responsibility. The preferences, priorities, and interests of the countries and regions of the Hemisphere should be considered in the organization of these events.

Additionally, each working group will develop comprehensive case studies and/or project proposals based on available technical and financial support from participating countries and regional and international institutions acting in the science, technology, and innovation areas.

C. Functions

1. Working Group 1. Innovation

Working Group 1 will work towards developing a culture of technology-based innovation in the Americas that fosters inclusiveness, entrepreneurship, and creative thinking in society in general, academia, and the private and public sectors. . For this purpose it will:

- a. Identify, select, define and collaborate to propose innovation indicators in member states;
- b. Promote national policies and frameworks to foster innovation, including investment, in collaboration with the Ministers and High Authorities;
- c. Define the theme and supervise the development of a case study and/or project in the region and make recommendations to COMCYT to take action;
- d. Design and coordinate regional and hemispheric projects and develop partnerships to:
 - i. Raise awareness on the importance of innovative thinking and a technology-based innovation culture for competitiveness and economic growth;
 - ii. Emphasize the participation of women and vulnerable groups in order to promote more inclusiveness in innovation;
 - iii. Build institutional capacities for the development of clusters, technology parks, knowledge transfer organizations, incubators and spin-offs for MSMEs;
 - iv. Support and foster sectoral and regional innovation subsystems.]
 - v. Disseminate and popularize scientific and technological developments and best practices.

2. Working Group 2. Human resources training and education

Working Group 2 will work to help increase the number of female and male graduates in science, technology, engineering, and technical education, and to improve study programs in these areas to respond to the changing needs of industry, especially MSMEs, and communities. It will also work to:

- a. Enlist universities, to upgrade study programs in science, technology and engineering so as to graduate a critical mass of qualified men and women in strategic industries and fields, emphasizing multi-disciplinary approaches, strengthening private-sector linkages in line with to the social and economic situation of their countries;
- b. Promote the strengthening of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education in primary and secondary schools;
- c. Encourage opinion surveys among secondary school students on science and scientific professions.
- d. Define the theme and supervise the development of a case study and/or project for the sharing of best practices and experiences in the region and make recommendations to COMCYT to take action;
- e. Promote the continued professional development of faculty members in their fields and periodic training on the latest teaching and research methods;
- f. Promote the exchange of students in the Hemisphere taking into account gender equity and greater participation of minorities;
- g. Facilitate hemispheric cooperation mechanisms so that member states collaborate in their efforts to upgrade and maintain their science, technology, and engineering study programs;
- h. Facilitate information sharing pertaining to academic mobility for students and professionals among OAS member states;
- i. Create and/or strengthen extension services and technology transfer based on voluntary and mutually agreeable terms to the community and industry, especially MSMEs;
- j. Design and coordinate regional and hemispheric projects and develop academia-public-private partnerships in the above-mentioned topics, reinforcing particularly the “Engineering for the Americas” hemispheric initiative, approved at the First Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Science and Technology and endorsed by the Second Meeting;
- k. Encourage peer-to-peer scientific research cooperation in the hemisphere.

3. Working Group 3. National Quality Infrastructure

Working Group 3 will work to help member states to have access to internationally recognized quality-infrastructure services to foster competitiveness, innovation, trade and consumer safety. To this end, this working group will:

- a. Define the theme and supervise the development of a case study and/or project to promote the importance of national quality infrastructure in the region and make recommendations to COMCYT to take action;
- b. Promote the definition of a minimum set of metrology services in member states that satisfy their local demand for services, and ensure their international traceability;
- c. Help consolidate the Inter-American Metrology System (SIM) and promote member state participation in the Inter-American Accreditation Cooperation (IAAC) and the Pan American Standards Commission (COPANT);
- d. Support the design of programs that foster a culture of quality and social responsibility for MSMEs and other production units;
- e. Create and/or strengthen national quality systems in the region's countries.
- f. Design and coordinate regional and hemispheric projects in the mentioned topics.

4. Working Group 4. Technological Development

Working Group 4 will work to help strengthen inter-American cooperation in science, technology and innovation in selected priority areas to achieve more effective and faster technological development in the region. Working Group 4 will make efforts to:

- a. Define specific themes of interest and follow up on the development of a case study and/or project in the region and make recommendations to COMCYT to take action;
- b. Create and/or strengthen cooperation and knowledge-sharing programs, projects and activities, in order to foster the development of MSMEs, universities, and community and other production units in one or more of the following areas:
 - i. Biotechnology and food security
 - ii. Clean and renewable energy, energy efficiency, and cleaner production
 - iii. Nanotechnology
- c. Promote the creation of specialized and advanced networks and observatories as well as the use of high technology in the areas mentioned above, and in particular, those that foster supply chain management and transport logistics.

IV. METHODOLOGY

By March 2012, and with the support of its technical secretariat, the COMCYT chair and the leaders of the working groups will jointly develop a calendar of events and activities for each group and the framework for case studies and/or project proposals, in consultation with the member states and the participating regional and international institutions.

The working groups should report to COMCYT at least once a year. Furthermore, they should develop systems for monitoring activities and evaluating results in their areas of action.

The working groups should coordinate their work in view of the complementary nature and interdependence of their activities. Ongoing communication and exchange of knowledge, experience, and results will provide reciprocal benefits.

The working groups will consider appropriate means to develop partnerships to create synergies with other ministers and government bodies with competence in science, technology and innovation. In this regard, working groups should make every effort, within the framework of existing national and institutional competencies, to establish a comprehensive productive and regular dialogue with ministries of trade, education, agriculture, economy and finance, competitiveness, environment, and energy, as well as other institutions, in order to further the objectives of the working groups.

V. RESOURCES

The Plan of Action addresses a large number of complex themes reflecting the acute challenges currently facing the Ministers and High Authorities in Science and Technology. In addition, in light of current global and regional economic situations, many ministries face financial and other limitations. Therefore, it is indispensable that the working groups make efforts to obtain funding to support their activities and be efficient in the use of these funds in order to achieve synergies, maximize efficiencies, improve sustainability, and disseminate results.

Member states should allocate the necessary economic, technical, and human resources to participate in meetings of the working groups. In addition, member states should endeavor to contribute or help locate funds to cover specific activities, such as workshops, meetings, videoconferences, etc, as required by the working groups.

With the support of the Technical Secretariat, the COMCYT Chair and the leader of each working group will invite the relevant regional and international organizations and other potential donors and partners to participate, make voluntary contributions, and provide financing mechanisms to support activities, projects, and programs resulting from the implementation of this plan.

VI. COMCYT PORTAL (COMCYTnet)

Member states should support the updating and improvement of the OAS COMCYT Portal to promote hemispheric cooperation and policy dialogue, and as a monitoring and supporting mechanism and information repository of programs, projects, activities, best practices and achievements from the working groups. The OAS, as Technical Secretariat, will offer its installed capacity and infrastructure for the network's operation, as well as its staff on a part-time basis.