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PRESS RELEASE

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ZEF contributes to creating competence for climate change and land use in West Africa

The impact of global climate change strikes more and more people who are least prepared. Therefore, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has initiated and will provide funds for long-term research partnerships with West and South Africa. Two regional "Centers of Competence" are going to be set up there. The Center for Development Research (ZEF) of Bonn University takes the lead in establishing such a Center of Competence in West Africa. The overall goal is enabling African scientists, politicians and practitioners to meet the challenges of climate change and land use facing their continent - with their own expertise.

The Center for Development Research (ZEF) takes the lead in setting up "WASCAL", the West African Science Service Center on Climate and Adapted Land Use. Apart from many Africa based partner institutes, ministries and organizations, research institutes from all over Germany are involved. Institutes of the University of Bonn cooperating in the project are the Geographical Institute as well as the Faculty of Agriculture.

"The development of such an extensive regional network is unique and only possible because we can build on achievements of previous research cooperation within the region", explains Prof. Dr. Paul Vlek, Director at ZEF and leader of the WASCAL project. "The BMBF has funded projects on land and water use as well as biodiversity in West and South Africa for the past decade. ZEF has led and carried out the BMBF-funded GLOWA project in Ghana and Burkina Faso dealing with climate change and water management, so we can rely on contacts and research outcome from that. Moreover, we have educated dozens of African doctoral students who now work as our partners at universities and with international organizations in the region".

The BMBF is providing funds of 2.9 million Euros for an initial project phase lasting until mid 2011 for establishing WASCAL. Partner countries are 10 West African states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal and Togo). The second regional center is going to be set up in South Africa. Further funds will be made available for implementation after the initial phase.

The goals to be achieved in the initial phase (lasting roughly 1.5 years) are: Constructing the framework of a regional competence center in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. First of all, this is the place where data will be collected, recorded and analyzed. Besides, future regional activities will be coordinated from here. Secondly, African and German scientists will design a joint research program on climate change and land use. The third pillar of WASCAL consists of setting up seven graduate schools with different focus themes related to climate change. This is going to be a joint endeavor of West African universities and their German counterparts.

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