

ECA-Finland Partnership to Strengthen Africa's ICT Policies

By Michael Ouma

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the government of Finland have entered into a partnership meant to strengthen ICT policy implementation in Africa.

To support the initiative, the Finnish government recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for 3,750,000 Euros to support cooperation between the ICT, Science and Technology Division of ECA and Finland on ICT development in Africa during the 2008-2010 period.

A statement issued by ECA head office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia says the cooperation, now in its second phase, aims to improve capacities at the national and regional levels to formulate, coordinate and implement information policies and strategies, and to analyse, monitor and evaluate the impact on African development.

In the first phase (2004-2008) the project had the following components: National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) plans in selected countries, evaluation and monitoring the ICT sector and its impact on information society (Scan-ICT), telecommunications regulation as well as ICT research and innovation.

The Scan-ICT programme, launched in November 2000, is a collaborative project between the Acacia programme of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the ECA that monitors the penetration, impact and effectiveness of information and communication technologies (ICT) applications in pilot countries across Africa.

In the first phase, various countries received support in formulating national e-strategies (NICIs). These were Cameroon, Chad, DRC, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, and Togo. In addition, National Statistical Offices were supported on developing ICT indicators in Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Mauritius, and Rwanda.

Says the statement: "Apart from supporting sub-regional ICT programmes of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), African countries also benefited from this programme through capacity building efforts, development of regional research institutions and networks, and creation of ICT indicators to assess and monitor penetration of technology in the African context, and awareness building to put in place an enabling environment."

An evaluation on the first phase focused on the effectiveness and outcomes of the programme compared to the set objectives and their relevance for the countries, as well as the efficiency of ECA to coordinate the programme on the African continent.

The evaluation outcomes formed the basis for the second phase of the cooperation between UNECA and Finland which will constitute support in the area of developing and implementing national ICT policies and strategies.

The second phase of the programme (2009-2011), would support the following components: National Information and Communications Infrastructure (NICI) plans in selected countries by developing new NICIs in 8 additional countries, and support implementation in existing 10 Finland NICI countries), evaluation and monitoring the ICT sector and its impact on information society (Scan-ICT) in in 6 new additional countries, and continued support to 5 existing Finland Scan-ICT countries, and capacity building in 15 new countries to support NICI development and implementation.

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