

ECA and Microsoft Sign Deal to Boost Africa's ICT Growth

By Michael Ouma

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and Microsoft have launched a partnership to foster regional cooperation in Africa through the utilization of information and communications technologies (ICTs).

The public private partnership (PPP), unveiled as a pre-event activity before the 14th African Union (AU) Summit will involve collaboration on issues relating to safeguarding intellectual property, security of information systems and networks as well how to minimize the impacts on attacks on citizens and critical infrastructure.

This year's AU Summit, runs from January 28 to February 2, under the theme, *Information and Communications Technologies in Africa: Challenges and prospects for development.*"

While launching the partnership, ECA Executive Secretary Abdoulie Janneh said that the agreement is meant to "enable Africa have a knowledge-based economy which is key for growth and development in the continent."

The ECA-Microsoft partnership, which is aligned to ECA's Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA), will see Microsoft assist in technology infrastructure planning for the ITCA and provide curriculum and certification to trainers to enable them effectively impart ICT skills to their students.

Microsoft Africa chairman Cheick Diarra will help in developing the requisite institutional capacity development as "investment in training is still a costly undertaking for young firms and institutions," a situation which is further aggravated by the fact that 80 per cent of Africa's population does speak either English or French.

Diarra said the partnership forms part of Microsoft's goal of training 45 million Africans on various ICT skills by end of 2010.

"This will involve training on policy and education to help develop firms and institutions that are efficient. It further aims to enhance the development of African countries' local software industries by assisting start-up companies and developers," said Diarra.

The collaboration broadens Microsoft's corporate social involvement in Africa and partnership with organizations. The software maker has on-going partnerships with the African Union, African Development Bank (AfDB), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

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