

Draft ECOWAS Declaration on the Information Society

Recalling that the African Heads of State and Government have adopted the NEPAD Short Term Action Plan on Infrastructure to advance the continent towards the Information Society

Considering the adoption of the African Regional Action Plan on the Knowledge Economy by the African ministers in charge of Information and Communication Technologies

Considering the Geneva Declaration and Plan of Action; and the Tunis Commitment and the Agenda for the Information Society

Noting with satisfaction progress achieved in developing National Information and Communication Infrastructure policies, plans and strategies in member countries under the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII)

We recognise that:

- Building the ECOWAS ICT infrastructure and related enabling environment and regulatory framework is fundamental for putting in place necessary applications for use by our populations
- Development of national and regional ICT backbones and Internet Exchange Points are essential to reduce interconnection cost and broaden network access
- access to information and sharing and creation of knowledge contributes significantly to strengthening economic, social and cultural development, thus helping ECOWAS countries to reach the internationally-agreed development goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals
- ICTs have enormous potential to expand access to quality education, to boost literacy and universal primary education, and to facilitate the learning process, thus laying the ground for the establishment of a fully-inclusive and development-oriented Information Society and knowledge economy
- emphasis should be put on developing human capacity and creating ICT applications and digital content in local language, where appropriate, so as to ensure a comprehensive approach to build an inclusive Information Society
- ICTs are effective tools to promote peace, security and stability, to enhance democracy, social cohesion, good governance and the rule of law, at national, regional and international levels

- We agree that the financing of ICT for development needs to be placed in the context of the growing importance of the role of ICTs, not only as a medium of communication, but also as a development enabler, and as a tool for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals

We Heads of states; Meeting at

- support regional and international integration efforts aimed at building a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society
- reiterate that strong cooperation between ECOWAS countries is indispensable to support knowledge-sharing
- Wish to put in place an effective partnership in our investment and international cooperation efforts in building the Information Society.
- call for the development of a Regional Information and Communication Infrastructure strategy for increasing affordable national and regional connectivity, thereby facilitating improved and equitable access for our populations
- shall strive unremittingly to promote access to ICTs.
- shall pay particular attention to the special ICT needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups of society
- reaffirm our commitment to women's empowerment and to a gender equality perspective and acknowledge that the full participation of women in the Information Society is necessary to ensure the inclusiveness and respect for human rights within the Information Society
- reaffirm our commitment to empowering young people as key contributors to building an inclusive ECOWAS Information Society
- urge our Governments, the ECOWAS secretariat, and other community institutions in West Africa, civil society and the private sector to fully participate in policy decision-making relating to Internet Governance.
- commit to working towards making the Internet multilingual, and support local content development.
- support the promotion of Free and Open Source Software to facilitate development of local and secured Government and other applications and to build capacity for ECOWAS region's participation in the Information Society.

- urge member states to put in place appropriate and harmonized legislation to fight cybercrime and other abusive uses of ICT, and promote regional and international cooperation in that regard.
- agree that the issue of convergence among IT, telecomms, broadcasting, media, legal framework in both infrastructure and content be vigorously pursued.
- support the launch of the Digital Solidarity Fund (DSF) and commit ourselves to contribute to it.
- call upon the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa to continue providing support to member States in the development and implementation of their e-strategies and strengthen support provided to ECOWAS in putting in place its regional ICT strategy
- call upon bilateral and multilateral partners to support the member states and ECOWAS executive secretariat in developing and implementing its regional ICT strategy