



Local Content and the African Information Society

Interview with Francis Egbokhare, African Languages Technology initiative (ALTI) of Nigeria. ALTI won second place in the 2003 AISI IICD Local Content Applications Award. This prize recognizes innovative features that apply ICT to the local context. iConnect Africa talked to Francis Egbokhare on ALTI activities in general and the significance of the award in particular.

iConnect Africa: *What does winning the IICD Local Content Prize mean to you personally and professionally?*

FE Personally, it is a great recognition and I am delighted. It is an important leverage and an opportunity to add my voice towards influencing the development of African languages and promoting a positive attitude towards technology and ICT. Professionally, it is a confirmation of the validity of a new thinking towards multi-disciplinary interfacing, engaging of ICT, adopting and localizing technology. The award provides the encouragement to continue to move in this direction for the benefit of African languages, cultures and peoples. And for the African Languages Technology Initiative and the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan, it is a great beginning and a good recommendation.

iConnect Africa: *What are your views with respect to the preservation of African languages in the information society?*



Keyboard guarantees that no Yoruba character will require more than two keystrokes

Language is a huge resource, an encyclopaedia, a library of sorts. Language is our window to the world, it is related and connected to everything. The loss of the least language is a tragic loss to humanity. It is imperative for us to take the preservation and transmission of languages seriously. ICT provides us with an opportunity to tackle the problems of endangerment and language death pragmatically and cost effectively. Technology provides us with an opportunity to move from 'communication babel' to 'linguistic Pentecost'. ICT provides the bridge between languages, the gateway between cultures and the network between minds. We must however engage it, adapt and deploy it.

FE: There are over 2,000 languages in Africa. This is a third of all the languages in the world. Within the next one hundred years or less, over 90% of them and their accompanying cultures, folk wisdom, medical practices, fauna, verbal arts, etc. will

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WOUGNET Wins!

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) site is winner of the 2003 IICD Award on Local Content Applications <http://www.wougnet.org>

The collection of information and web resources on ICT policies, for example, informs the audience of key ICT for development issues, such as open source and the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Gender Caucus.

WOUGNET is a non-governmental organization established in May 2000 by several women's organizations in Uganda. Its mission is to promote and support the use of ICTs by women and women's organizations in Uganda, so that they can take advantage of the opportunities presented by ICTs in order to effectively address national and local problems of sustainable development. The organization is also interested in how these technologies can be integrated with traditional means of information exchange and dissemination including radio, video, television and print media to improve conditions of life for women by enhancing their capacities and opportunities for exchange, collaboration and information sharing.

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News in Brief

First African to win World Technology Network Award!

Professor Clement Dzidonu, ECA's ICT policy consultant for Rwanda, Malawi and Ghana, recently won the 2003 World Technology Network Award for Policy. James P. Clark, founder and Chairman of the WTN stated: "*Professor Dzidonu's contribution in the field of Computer Science and ICT Policy has been outstanding, and his selection as the new WTN Fellow is public acknowledgement of that fact. And being the first African to win this international award is a great achievement*". More: <http://www.wtn.net/new/awards/2003/winners/index.html>

African Academics Dream

ECA and the Ford Foundation organized a two-day retreat on the theme "*Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative: What Role for Africa's Academic Community?*" The retreat, which took place from June 14-16 in Addis Ababa, assisted the African academic community to advocate for and define a role in the emerging information society on the continent. This is part of ECA's efforts to engage with key stakeholders in building an information society and solicit input for the WSIS process. More: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/academiaretreat.htm>

ePolicy Resource Centre for Africa!

In the DOT Force Plan of Action endorsed by G8 Leaders

at the 2001 Genoa Summit, a commitment was made to establish a Global ePolicy Resource Network (ePol-Net, formerly known as the 'International eDevelopment Resource Network' - IeDRN), designed to marshal global efforts in support of national e-strategies for development. The Africa Regional node of ePol-Net will be based in ECA and was officially launched recently in Addis. More: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/epolnet.htm>

Call for Applications: Acacia ICT R&D Grants

IDRC's Acacia Programme Initiative has announced its first ICT R&D Grants Programme for 2003-2004. The main objective of the Grants Programme is to promote an active ICT research environment in Africa for issues related to ICT based development applications, policy research and their impacts. Small grants up to a maximum of \$30,000 Canadian dollars will be awarded on a competitive basis to successful institutions from the African region. The deadline for submission of detailed proposals is September 1, 2003. More: www.idrc.ca/acacia (click on "R&D Small Grants").

Academics develop web-based multilingual dictionary

A group of academics known as TshwaneDJe have launched an online Northern Sotho-English dictionary. The project is designed to promote interest in the official

indigenous languages of South Africa. This is an initiative of Professor Danie Prinsloo, who also heads the African Languages department at the University of Pretoria, and Gilles-Maurice de Schryver, a Belgian researcher of African languages. Together with David Joffe, who created the website African Languages.com. More: <http://www.africapulse.org.za/index.php?action=viewarticle&articleid=1310>

Free Software recommended for African public administrations

A two-day workshop on Open Source Software (OSS) was held in Addis Ababa from 10 to 11 May 2003, in connection with the Third Meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI III). The workshop was jointly organized by ECA and the Francophone International Agency (AIF) and was attended by representatives of governments, intergovernmental organizations, free software users and developers, the private sector and civil society. Recommendations of the workshop include adoption of national legislative and regulatory measures on OSS use in African public administrations. For more information, contact Makane Faye mfaye@uneca.org

ICTs in African Schools

Africans involved in the grassroots application of ICTs in schools engaged

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Spotlight: Academia and the Information Society

Ageing of African Academics

By Prof. O. Akin Adubifa

Questions are being asked about the role of the African university in developing and shaping an Information Society, and to serve as an agent of change. We should first examine the ability of the African university to contribute effectively to national development and to play a leading role in Information Society. Present-day African academics are ageing and their ranks are not being replenished

simultaneously to balance the outflow of talent and experience. This could translate into a crisis a decade from now, especially as student enrolment rises rapidly and the teaching faculty thins out. The problem is bound to be most acute in the sciences.

It is timely and opportune to take the necessary steps because information and communication are at the very heart of the education enterprise, one viable option is to use the initiatives of

the African Information Society to facilitate a restoration of academic faculties, and prepare a future generation that can adequately meet the nation's needs in teaching, research and academic leadership.

The proposal here is to ameliorate the above conditions by the application of ICT tools. A number of simultaneous actions are possible, but the initiative must begin from the universities themselves. They would need to carry out their own institutional strategic planning which should be fully participatory and institution-wide. One of the outcomes of the exercise should be a deliberate government policy, backed by adequate funding, to target promising scholars for further specialization in their academic fields, with particular emphasis on encouraging the participation of women.

It would be essential to capture the talent and contribution of the African Diaspora to fill the gap and to strengthen the intellectual content of academic programs of African universities. There is considerable potential in this approach, particularly taking advantage of the virtual platform offered by ICTs; but the universities must begin the process now to formulate a framework for using this modality. Regrettably, Africa sends out some of its best and brightest scholars to the Western world's intellectual market, but doesn't know how to get them back. This is now a challenge that must be addressed with some priority. 🌐

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iConnect Africa: *Could you describe the significance of the Yoruba keyboard? How will it help advance use of ICTs in Nigeria?*

FE: It is significant in two respects. First, it helps to nativise technology. Its greatest impact is that technology will no longer be seen as belonging to foreign cultures and peoples. In this sense, it will influence the thinking process and attitude to technology. Second, it will increase the sense of pride and value in local languages and cultures and thus help to preserve them. ICT becomes something that can be owned and appropriated. Third, it will

enable Nigerians, especially over forty million Yoruba people engage in the Global Information Infrastructure. This innovation has a potential for redefining literacy since one can be literate only in Yoruba and still have access to the GII.

iConnect Africa: *How will it contribute to bridging social exclusion?*

FE: It bridges the gap between those who are literate in English and those literate in indigenous languages. Language is a principal instrument of inclusion and exclusion, not necessarily because of in built capacities but due to historical, economic and political dynamics. The disadvantage and advantage associated with a language can be further extended depending on its utility as an ICT medium. It is in this light that one can project that the equal opportunity may be realized first in the linguistic realm. If we engage ICT in the way we have done, perhaps linguistic rights may be realistic in the near future. 🌐

Bó tí n wọ 'letò bẹẹ ló n wọjú níáńlá
 Ó n kọní ní ojojú mó ní sínágógú wọń
 Ó sí n wáásù ìhínrere ỉjọba ọrun
 Gégé hí ọdọ agítàn Olórún
 Tó mú ẹ̀sẹ ẹ̀dá kúrò

Translation

As he visits communities, so does he visit big countries
 Teaching, daily, in their synagogues
 He preaches good tidings of the kingdom of God in heaven
 Exactly like the good shepherd.
 Who ensures man's steadfastness

Sample Yoruba Text

The Quarterly Story

The first steps of African Languages on the Internet

By Etienne Tassé (AISI 2003 IICD Local Content Media Award winner)

“Despite four decades since independence in Africa, the place given to African languages have not been developed for scientific, technical and technological knowledge”, according to Adama Samassekou, President of the Bamako-based Académie africaine des langues (ACALAN), and current Chairperson of the World Summit on the Information Society. How can this problem be tackled? During the African Regional Preparatory Conference, held in Bamako in May 2002, Samassekou chaired a meeting of linguists and information experts to develop a strategy to for African language content for the Internet.

According to Canadian Laurent Bourbeau from the organisation Proiciel BPI, in Montréal, “if African cultural identity is to be expressed via the Internet, everything should be done so that African languages have a presence”. Bourbeau, a language software developer explained that the use of African languages in informatics has been made

easier thanks to the international standard UCS/JUC (Universal Character Set), implemented since the beginning of 2000.

This standard allows the computerized processing of many African languages: mainly those that do not have sound characters. However, it is difficult for some languages such as Lingala (spoken in DRC) or the Ewondo (spoken in Cameroon), where the sound characters need the use of two or three signs instead of one. “*In the UCS/JUC standard, the French language, for example has solved the problem between the sounds of e, which is different from é by creating compound characters, such as the accented vowels and the cedilla ‘ç’. African countries should insist on similar solutions for their languages and demand this of International Standard Committees*”, insists Laurent Bourbeau.

There are a number of initiatives being undertaken on African languages. Proiciel BPI has

produced a CD-Rom software containing 20 African languages, such as Bambara, Ewondo, Fulfuldé, Swahili, and Wolof for example, which can be used on Linux systems as well as Windows. available for any African user. The International Linguist Society (La Société internationale de linguistique - SIL) has developed software on local languages that is also freely available. Based on this effort many other researchers have developed character sets that can transcribe African language alphabets.

Furthermore, the experts who met in Bamako advocated among other things for the creation of two funds: The first is the “African Multilingual Information Highway” fund (Autoroute de l’information multilingue africaine – Aima) to support the development and maintenance of web sites on African languages. The other fund is to support training of information experts to develop content in local African languages. 🌐

iConnect Media

AISI 2003 Media Awards in Focus!



The AISI Media Awards Programme aims to encourage more informed coverage of the information society and ICT for development issues in Africa. The overall awards programme is sponsored by OSISA (Open Society Initiative for West Africa) and ECA with sponsored categories by IDRC, IICD, and OSIWA.

In May this year, ECA along with a host of partners held the AISI Media Awards Ceremony to honour outstanding journalists and media organisations that are contributing to a greater understanding of the Information Society in Africa. Below are profiles of the award recipients and their brief comments.

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Print Category**ICT Focus Magazine, Ethiopia**<http://www.ictfocus.net/>

ICT Focus Magazine, the first of its kind in Ethiopia, has raised awareness among its Ethiopian readers on the WSIS process and implications for Ethiopia. Each issue offers timely news analysis, product, and company profiles, feature articles, and regular columns analysing the latest technology trends. *“We are deeply honoured to receive this prestigious award, and would like to thank AISI and OSISA for organizing this event. We have been committed to contribute a great deal to the development of ICT in Ethiopia, and so it is especially gratifying to receive this recognition,”* says the magazine.

*Winners display their awards***Radio Category****Radio Afrique Espoir FM 99.1, Benin**

Based in the capital, Porto Novo, Radio Afrique Espoir is one of the private radio stations which appeared in the late 80s during the process of democratisation in Benin. It provides a platform where citizens can call in, participate in radio discussions and give their points of view on any action taken by the government. *This award constitutes for us a challenge and a responsibility to go forward in this direction to promote good governance through the use of ICT in Africa,”* says Kouferidji Ramanou, proprietor of the station.

TV Category**Association Yampukri, Burkina Faso** <http://www.yam-pukri.org>

This award went to Association Yampukri, an NGO which produced a spectacular documentary programme that features ICTs being integrated into peoples lives. On receiving the award Theodore Somda, head of the association said, *“I dedicate this to all institutions, such as the ASSOCIATION YAM-PUKRI, which work hard for ICTs to make a difference in our population in general and the rural areas in particular”*. Yam Pukri has trained 900 people, established a computer library, and published 5 training books.

Special Award**Réalités Multimédia, Tunisia** <http://www.realites.com.tn/>

Réalités, which is published monthly and online, covers a wide range of ICT issues, from the WSIS conferences and Tunisia’s contributions to the process, as well as technical issues such as online security. Established more than 20 years ago, the magazine has been serving the public as the source of credible, independent and objective information. The editorial team of *Réalités* said they were *“honoured by this award.”*

**OSIWA Prize for Best Female Reporter on ICTs for Development**

Ms. Brenda Zulu of Zambia was selected for her progressive and personal stance in her reportage. Her article *“Why Does Africa Lag Behind?”* compares experiences and explores how ICT applications can help reduce poverty in the

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with policymakers from several national Ministries of Education in Africa. The workshop entitled "ICTs in African Schools," was held in Gaborone, Botswana in April. The event recognised the supportive role that policy can play in providing an enabling environment for the use of ICTs in schools and considered among others, research areas; and projects to integrate ICTs in the teacher professional development systems at national levels. Read the summary report : http://www.schoolnet africa.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=Web_Links&file=index&req=viewlink&cid=86

Rural radio in agriculture

Drawing on the example of Ghana, this paper calls for national communication and media strategies that incorporate pluralistic approaches to the media. The authors demonstrate the importance of sharing information locally and opening up wider information networks for farmers through radio programs. More: http://www.odi.org.uk/agren/papers/agrenpaper_127.pdf

Tony Zeitoun Awards

As a tribute to the late Tony Zeitoun from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the awards for the ICT Stories competition will become known as the 'Tony Zeitoun Awards'. Mr. Zeitoun, who passed away on May 5, 2003,

worked for the Policy Branch of CIDA as Senior Advisor, Knowledge for Development Initiative. He supported the ICT Stories Competition, a joint initiative of IICD and infoDev. Renaming the competition is a small tribute to Tony Zeitoun's achievements in the area of ICTs for development. The awards will be presented in December 2003 in Geneva (Switzerland), during the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). More: <http://www.iicd.org/stories>

First on-line counselling in Uganda

An online counselling service was launched on May 29, 2003 for 3 school-based telecentres, with training for teacher and student-peer counsellors. The objectives of the project include: demonstrating the integration of ICTs in HIV/AIDS prevention and caring services; expanding and diversifying opportunities for access to Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health (ASRH); information and services for young people in and out of school; and promoting the creation of HIV/AIDS information and educational communication initiatives by and for young people, to enhance behaviour change. The service is spearheaded by SchoolNet Uganda

(<http://www.schoolnetuganda.sc.ug>) and Straight Talk Foundation (<http://www.straight-talk.or.ug>). 🌐

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African context. In another article, "Voices from Kampala Know-How Conference" she advocates different modes to meet women's information and communication flow from grassroots to the top. "This honour provides an opportunity for women journalists to develop new skills and knowledge and to apply these to the task of reporting more effectively about development of ICTs in Africa".



Awards on Reporting Research and Innovation

First Prize: Takawira Musara, "Dialling for Africa", Zimbabwe

"Dialling for Africa", reviews limited coverage of telecommunication networks in Africa and examines wireless and satellite technologies and voice over IP (VOIP) to explore the potentials for servicing the mostly rural population in the continent. It also touches upon the regulatory frameworks and ICT policies, which play key roles in attracting investments and attaining socio-economic development. "I am very humbled to be one of the recipients of the awards. I feel the award, although it comes in my name, is a victory for Zimbabwean journalism and the country as a whole. I hope my winning will inspire fellow journalists in my country to report on ICT to better our country".

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IT & Telecom Digest, Nigeria www.it-telecomdigest.com reports on innovation and emerging technologies for Africa, while profiling and interviewing ICT entrepreneurs who are the providers of new services in Nigeria. Featuring mostly local stories and events, the magazine is a valuable source of information for ICT professionals and the business community. According to Mkpe Abang, proprietor of the magazine, *"The honour done us will definitely inspire us to work harder in order to help bring the knowledge of the benefits of ICTs to the greatest numbers of our peoples in Nigeria."*

Second Prize: Bianca Wright, South Africa. Her article *"Cities of the Future"* investigates the e-city phenomenon to see if Cape Town is about to become South Africa's Silicon Valley and what it will mean for the country. She writes about telecommuting and its potential for transforming South African business practices in her article *"To Commute or not to commute?"* *"I am honoured that I was selected for second place in this award"*.



Media Prize Etienne Tassé, Cameroun


Mr Tassé's work *"Les premiers pas des langues africaines sur Internet"* was recognized for

Media and ICT

Info & Resources Briefs


The Second Media Forum. On May 16th and 17th 2003, journalists and media practitioners from several African countries met in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia at the Second Media Forum on the Information Society. It was a follow-up to the pre-conference forum organised in Bamako, Mali in 2002. More: <http://www.dgroups.org/groups/aisi-media-l/>

8 – 10 September 2003, Grahamstown, South Africa. Highway Africa 2003. Mainstreaming Media in the Information Society Highway Africa 2003 aims to bring African media into the centre of debates about the Global Information Society. This year's conference will be held in Grahamstown from 8 - 10 September and will include panel discussions and debates, as well as hands-on skills training workshops. More: <http://www.highwayafrica.org.za>

State of Media Reporting on ICTs in Africa. ECA in collaboration with the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) are launching a publication on the state of ICT reporting in Africa examining 9 countries: Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda and Senegal. The basis of this report is will be media monitoring conducted over an eight-week period during March and April 2003. Roland Stanbridge, of Orebro University, Sweden, is coordinating the study. Contact: Aida Opoku-Mensah (aopoku-mensah@uneca.org). 

the consistent and informed reports about a variety of ICT issues, especially on the benefit of open source software to Africa. The article provided an insightful overview of the Bamako 2002 meeting and the development of African language software. He sees the award as *"an additional motivation which challenges me as well as all African journalists to engage more in the research and dissemination of African ICT initiatives and create awareness of the stakes of the information society to the wider population"*.

Salif Sanogo, "CyberNTIC", Mali

Mr. Sanogo created a 30-minute television programme entitled, "CyberNTIC" for Mali's national public television broadcaster. The programme aims to popularise the technologies among the youth in Mali. The programme reported on technical subjects, interviewed guests and demonstrated ICT tips and know-how. Mr. Sanogo stated, *"This award will encourage me to redouble my efforts to producing good quality broadcasting on ICTs"*. 

Forthcoming Events

July - October 2003


20 – 23 August, Forum on ICTs and Gender: Optimizing Opportunities, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. This meeting will examine issues surrounding gender and ICTs. to foster a greater appreciation of the gender-related barriers that barr women from access to ICTs. This will translate into policies that support women's access to ICTs and successful networking to enhance women's participation in the information economy, especially in the developing world. More: <http://www.globalknowledge.org/gender2003/>

26 – 29 August, ACT 2003, "Mobilising ICT Applications and Projects for Effective Corporate, National & Regional Development". This is an event for the continent's ICT users, suppliers, service providers, policy-makers and innovators. ACT will include a number of specialist forums, including the West African Internet Forum (WAIF), which AITEC will be holding in collaboration with the Nigerian Internet Group (NIG), the ISP Association of Nigeria (ISPAN), Balancing Act of the UK and the African ISP Association (AfrISPA). Contact: Sean Moroney (sean@aitecafrica.com).

8 – 10 September, Expert Meeting on Measuring Electronic Commerce, Geneva, Switzerland. This event will bring together representatives from both developed and developing countries involved in ICT-related statistics. Its objective is to provide a framework for introducing the developing countries' views into the existing debates and initiatives on digital economy statistics and indicators. Contact: Ms Susan Teltscher, e-commerce branch (susan.teltscher@unctad.org).

10 – 12 September, Durban, South Africa, 5th Annual Conference on World Wide Web Applications. WWW2003 will bring together academics, consultants, developers, practitioners and researchers to discuss and exchange current Web and portal developments. Focus areas include e-business, e-learning, portals, research issues and technical developments (such as open source, XML and web management). Contact: Prof. Pieter van Brakel, Conference Chair (pavb@rau.ac.za) More: <http://www.udw.ac.za/www2003>

12 – 15 October, Johannesburg, South Africa. HELINA 2003 Conference: ICTs in the Fight against HIV/AIDS in Africa. The goal of this meeting is to introduce all participants to the broad range of issues of mutual concern facing those who develop and manage HIV/AIDS interventions, and the potential for ICTs to further these aims. More: <http://www.uku.fi/english/organizations/helina-l/msglog/2003/0001.html>

14-16 October, Engineering and the Digital Divide, Tunis, Tunisia. This event is being organised by the Committee on Information and Communication (CIC) of the World Federation of Engineering Organisations (WFEO). The workshop, which is part of the WSIS process, will bring together several specialists in engineering, education, sociology, and communication from around the world. ECA will host a special Africa Day during this event with African engineers. Contact: Mr Kamel Ayadi (cic@coi-tn.org). More: <http://www.wfeo-cic.org> 

About iConnect Africa

iConnect-Africa is a quarterly web, paper, and email service that aims to raise awareness in the wider African development community regarding the possibilities offered by ICTs in development. It is produced by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD). It reports on activities forming part of the Africa Information Society Initiative "AISI" and Building Digital Opportunities programme "BDO". It is funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Department for International Development Cooperation (DGIS) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

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