

News Update

West African Journalists dominate AISI awards ...as Nigeria tops again

West African journalists have scooped the 2006 Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII) Media Awards introduced in 2003 to encourage more informed coverage of the information society and Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) issues in Africa as part of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's (UNECA's) Information Society Outreach and Communication Programme.

Five Nigerians have topped the awards aimed at individual journalists and media institutions based in Africa that are promoting journalism which contributes to a better understanding of the information society in Africa were presented in Grahamstown on 13 September 2006 at a joint award ceremony of the 2006 Highway Africa Awards for Innovative use of New Media and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

Aida Opuku Mensah Officer in Charge in the Development Information Services Division (DISD) said that the 2006 AISII awards entries have doubled as this year over 170 entries were received. She also said that it was good to see a growing number of woman journalists getting awards in other categories as well.

First prize category of the AISII, GTZ media awards on promoting the Information Society for print media went to Marie Noelle Guichi (Cameroon) whose article focus was on the challenges faced by ICT regulatory agencies in Africa and how they can impact on citizen's lives. The article focuses on unique and particle examples of how rural villages in Africa have improved food security and achieved economic growth through the use of ICTs.

The second prize in the same category went to Jacob Kofi Mensah from Ghana whose interesting analysis of financing ICT infrastructure plans and building synergies between related projects and initiatives. The author raised the question of investment in infrastructure and its impact on the country socio- economical development and wealth creation.

In the radio category of the same award the first prize went to Rapid-Mbon Didier Parfait of Cameroon whose story discusses interesting and original topic digital radio software, tailored for the target audience.

The second prize was given to Eric Ombok from Kenya whose radio program focuses on ICT business information. Its perseverance in following up the evolution of the news and information its audience on regular basis is appreciated.

The first prize in the AISII, GTZ Media Awards on promoting the information Society-Television category went to Don Pedro Aganbi from Nigeria whose programme ICT Africa is a weekly broadcast on initiatives in Africa showing how ICTs can empower rural communities.

The second prize went to Salif Sanogo from Mali whose programme presents ongoing project on implementing national exchange point in Mali based on an interview with former chairperson of Youth Parliament and youngest MP in Mali on development issue.

The AISI, IICD media award on local content applications first prize was given to Laid Zaghmi from Algeria whose article makes a good analysis of challenges facing Algeria in building an inclusive society and urges the need for sound policy focused on local content application.

The second prize in the same category was given to Segun Oruame from Nigeria whose article attempts to show how ICTs can be adapted to the local context and culture. For example, it explains how ICTs can be used to strengthen Africa traditional art forms and achieve social and economic development.

The AISI, IICD Media award on Local content first prize went to Rodger Taakam (Cameroon) whose article debates on the relevance of Free and Open Source Software and implications for the development of the software industry in Africa.

The second prize went to Chima Akwaya from Nigeria, in which the author is calling for an urgent strategy in telecommunication sector to promote local industry in Nigeria,

The AISI, IDRC Award on reporting on research and innovation first prize was taken by Jeanine Fankam from Cameroun whose story was a compiling and informative article that introduces the reader to an otherwise unknown Africa inventor who utilized mobile technology as a tool for reinforcing vehicle security.

The second prize in the above category was taken by Highway Africa News Agency journalist David Muwanga from Uganda's whose article introduces a new application of low cost technology in Uganda's health sector. The author presented complex issues in an accessible and informative manner that made a direct connection between the technological investment and the lives of the citizens who will ultimately benefit from it via their health care practitioners.

AISI-IDRC Media Award on Reporting on ICT policy first prize was given to Emmanuel Okwuke from Nigeria whose article helps provide understanding of the need for a unified regulatory environment for both mobile and fixed telephony to enhance regulation effectiveness.

The second prize in this category went to timothy Kasonde Kasolo from Zambia whose article stands out for it's approach , primarily presenting complex ICT policy issues in a form that was not only accessible, but also related those issue to the daily life of an average citizen.

The AISI-OSIWA Reporting on ICTS and rural Communities first prize was scooped by Evelyn Tagbo from Nigeria whose story demonstrates the use of ICTs to overcome daily challenges in Northern Nigeria and clearly demonstrates impact on rural communities.

The second prize was given to Guedegbe Gerard from Benin whose article was informative in its portrayal of a particular constituency's use of ICTs to address everyday life. His story was a good account on the way mobile telephony was being used to reduce poverty and empower a community.

The AISI-OSIWA Best Female Reporter was scooped by Ester Nakkazi from Uganda whose article is a fleshing account on an under reported issue in Africa- the management of domain names which is crucial and hotly contested global issue based on managing and governing the internet.

The second prize went to Ramata Sore from Burkina Faso on a well-written account on how ICT could empower women's communities while altogether being sensitive to environmental protection.

The AISI awards are being sponsored by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD), Open Society Initiative for Western Africa (OSIWA) and the International Development Research Council (IDRC).

The awards show that there is a click of journalists who are interested in reporting on ICT4D issues in that some entries as much as ten could just come from one person.

Many past winners of the AISI awards who had witnessed them being given at the UN headquarters in Addis Ababa observed that giving them at the Southern Africa Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) and Highway Africa media awards had diluted them.

“AISI awards are regional awards but the fact that they can not even show off the second prize winners has in itself been diluted by the time given to the SABC and Highway Africa Media Awards,” said Wanjohi Kabaruku a former two times AISI award winner.

He also proposed for the re-allocation of the awards to Addis Ababa where they are given much prominence. He said the AISI awards needed their own space so that all winners are given prominence.

Judges included Joel Kibara Director of Commerce Commonwealth secretariat, Annie Rachael Inne, Policy Analyst ICANN, John Mukela, Director NSJ training from Maputo, David Bekele, University of Addis Ababa, Kakuna Kerina Media and Development Consultant, Thandi Mbrunda, NEPAD e-Africa and C'sion, Pierre Dinjinon, ICT Adviser UNDP.

More on the AISI Media Awards: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/mediaaward.htm>

Blogging still a dream for many Africans

Blogging still remains a dream for many Africans. The states of Africa's infrastructure problems and the digital gaps on the continent have contributed to shaping Africa's information society.

Blogging which is simply self production of content on free spaces on the internet has still not been fully developed in Africa.

The first Digital Citizen Indaba on blogging in Africa that took place Grahamstown, South Africa from 14-15 September 2006 depicted a senerio at which many Africans wanted to know more about blogging and how they could market and make other people read their blogs.

This event brought together bloggers, citizen journalists, media practitioners, industry experts and representatives from the civil society who exchanged different views and learned from each other on the importance of blogging.

The indaba, which was mostly theory sessions, left to guessing the concepts like blogging, mob-blogging, Web 2.0, flicker, etc. Some participants who had never blogged in their lives could not understand presentations on such technological concepts such that they thought that to blog many people needed to be technicians or programmers, which is not the case.

It was however interesting to see how bloggers in Kenya, Egypt and South Africa had created blog rings where bloggers in the named countries where using blogs progressively. Some bloggers in Africa have however been using blogs as tools for social movements, advocacy and marketing themselves. Blogs also act as an alternative medium where the voiceless can air their views without being censored.

It should however be known that blogging is not Journalism. To be a blogger in Africa one needs access to the Internet. A blogger also needs readers of their blog. Blogging can however be done systematically by Journalists in that they have been trained in a certain way to write and that they are always producers of content in different languages. Kenyans and even Tanzania's have already started blogging in Kishwahili while in Egypt they were blogging in Arabic and in Ethiopia people were blogging in Amharic.

It is however sad that Africa which has the highest mobile phone subscriber base in the world still does not have mobile service providers who actually allow them to send SMS, pictures and text to blog the Internet.

In the recent past we have seen how Africans have behaved towards sending SMS to reality TV shows like the "Big Brother Africa". People in Africa with access to pay TV were brought together by technology as people sat to watch and send text messages to vote for their favourite characters.

Many people in Africa have expensive mobile phones, which they use for the SMS and talking facility only. Even when they may have taken pictures with their mobile phones they have never downloaded them. The phones are bought and used as a status symbol. It would be nice if they took pictures and wrote text, which they would then send to the Internet like what happened during the Tsunami and London bombings. Africa has so many disasters, which could be documented using the mobile phone technology.

That is why, it was also sad to hear how the government mobile service provider in Ethiopia had discontinued the SMS facility which was highly used in the elections campaign because of easy of communication and advocacy among the electorate.

As it is already known, not so many Africans use the Internet compared to other regions in the world. Africa's use of Internet still lags behind because of lack of access to the Internet.

Infrastructure gaps:

According to an International Telecommunications Union (ITU) support to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) report, African countries must face the challenges of closing two types of infrastructural gaps that exist in the different countries. These gaps are non-existent or low capacity national transmission backbones and also non-existent or low capacity international links.

Africa still lags behind the other regions of the world in the deployment and exploitation of ICTs. The indicators speak for themselves:

- Africa with about 13% of the world's population, accounts for only 2.3% of the world's total number of telephone subscribers, currently estimated at close to 2 billion subscribers.
- Teledensity (telephone lines per 100 inhabitants) is 2.62 compared with the world's 17.19; significant variation exists between the sub regions and between urban and rural areas.

Overview of Infrastructure in Africa:

Many African countries have in the last decade witnessed a rapid development of their ICT infrastructure, although they are in different stages of development. This has been spurred in most cases by sector reforms and in a limited number of cases, through political will to improve the infrastructure.

Perhaps the most significant is the rapid expansion of mobile networks, which have provided a number of advantages including increase in teledensities and extension of services to rural areas.

Another major building infrastructure success story is the establishment of SAT3 cable, which has been implemented by a consortium of mainly African operators.

Policy and Regulation institutions:

The main players in the ICT Sector from policy-making and regulatory aspects are mainly respective Ministries and Regulators.

It is clear that in most countries, ICT policy is determined by at least two separate government agencies of Ministries. This is no doubt creates the need for effective coordination amongst all the relevant government agencies.

Most countries have set up their regulatory agencies. However there are still some countries that have not yet set up any regulatory agency and where regulatory functions are carried out within the Ministry. It is not worthy to point out that this does not necessarily result in a negative impact on the growth of the network. In the specific case of Tunisia, it has achieved better growth rate than its neighbours in the same sub region that have established regulatory frameworks.

Infrastructure Providers:

The main incumbent operators have lost their position as the main infrastructure providers as more mobile operators have been licensed to provide service. In most countries, competition is mainly amongst two or three mobile operators except countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Nigeria, which have four or more operators.

One noticeable development is the emergence of some major operators that are predominately African and that have won licenses in many African countries. These include CELTEL, MTN, Orascom, TELECEL and Vodacom. ***This development raises the question as to whether there is a risk for the emergence of a new monopoly of regional carriers.***

Some countries have licensed fixed wireless operators that provide ICT services within a limited coverage. This best illustrated in Nigeria where about 30 fixed wireless operators. In many countries, the incumbent operator has been privatised and the development of regional infrastructure may not be given the priority it deserves because the new owner (usually a foreign operator) is constrained by its business plan.

In the broadcasting sector, the mainly government owned broadcasting entities still dominate the provision of broadcasting infrastructure. Private FM radio and Television broadcasting networks are emerging such as in Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Service Providers:

In addition to infrastructure providers, several internet Service providers (ISPs) are emerging with increasing competition that is coming from the incumbent operators who are gradually waking up to the enormous business potential of internet and internet related services such as Voice over IP (VoIP).

In many countries, a separate category of GMPCS service providers exist where they provide mobile satellite service using the Inmarsat, Iridium and Thuraya networks.

Although most of the fixed line operators provide VSAT services, a number of private entities have been licensed in many countries fixed satellite services. The growth of VSAT has however been hampered in a number of countries because of the regulatory framework which limits the provision of service to the main incumbent. One example is Telkom South Africa.

Subscriber numbers:

Available data shows clearly how the mobile operators are now the dominant players in the liberalised markets. There are however some exceptions. In Ethiopia where the monopoly

incumbent is the mobile operator, subscriber growth is still very low coupled with a long waiting list.

Internet continues to grow in Africa with an increasing number of Internet cafes being established in all nooks and corners of the continent.

In Egypt, the effect of a political will, which translated, to the policy of free internet access is mainly responsible for the high number (over 3 million) of internet subscribers, the highest in the region.

Fixed Telephone Networks:

Many of the fixed networks in the region use similar switching and transmission technologies and have undergone considerable levels of digitalisation beginning with international switching centers as well as the satellite earth stations.

In general, many of the networks are plagued with inadequate capacities, utilise old and obsolete technology and many instances suffer from network failures.

Under these conditions, operation and maintenance of the networks become very difficult and this results in poor quality of service. These are however few exceptions, such as South Africa, Mauritius and Senegal with well-developed backbone networks.

WLL technology is implemented in almost all countries with the attendant advantages of reducing waiting lists for telephone connections.

Mobile Networks:

GSM is the dominant standard in mobile networks, a fact that has not only enabled subscribers to migrate from one network to another within the same country, but also makes it possible to purchase a SIM card when visiting a neighbouring country and use it in their mobile phones.

Mobile technology presents its own challenges, which include coverage, standards and its impact on the growth of the fixed line. ***The high growth of mobile subscribers in Africa raises the question as to the future of fixed line.***

The high growth of mobile subscribers in Africa raises the question as to the future of fixed networks, which have slowed down in growth. This is a dilemma that countries need to address as the fixed line networks have their tremendous advantages, especially in their lower costs for Internet access.

One of the major challenges faced by the mobile operators in the apparent lack of transmission infrastructure, and where available, the apparent high cost for leasing such capacity. This has led many of the operators to build their own infrastructure, which sometimes results in capacity duplication.

The issue of parallel infrastructure is one that has to be addressed by regulators and one suggestion is for regulators to develop an infrastructure Master Plan that will address this amongst other issues.

Satellite Networks:

Most African countries use the Intelsat network for their international fixed links and for domestic networks. Other satellite networks that are being on the continent include Arabsat, Eutelsat, NewSkies and Panamsat.

The Inmarsat and Thuraya satellite network are being used for mobile satellite service.

Some African countries have launched mini satellites including Algeria, Nigeria and South Africa whilst Egypt operates the Nilesat communication satellite used mainly for broadcasting purposes. Nigeria and South Africa are considering the possibility of launching their own communication satellite and following an international tender has awarded the contract for building a communication satellite to a Chinese company.

IP Infrastructure:

IP bandwidth usage continues to grow in the region despite the high cost. As at end 2004 only 10 countries had established Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) to stop local Internet traffic from going out on the expensive international links.

Internet Exchange Points (IXPs) are not yet being used for exchange of sub regional and regional traffic, and neither are they being used for consolidation and bulk purchase of expensive international bandwidth.

Basic Internet infrastructure is providing mainly using bandwidth from 1 to 2 Mbps.

IP Technology, on which e-applications/services depend, is not well understood by the sector players, regulators and policy makers. Currently, Internet Service Providers (ISPs) appear to be the technology drivers, yet most ISPs lack the financial muscles required to build appropriate IP infrastructure. The telecom operators who have deep pockets and some basic infrastructure, on which an IP backbone can be developed, are focused on traditional voice services, and view IP technology as a threat rather than an opportunity.

Inter-state IP traffic is still carried to the United States and Europe, since the national IXPs in the various African countries are not directly connected.

There is need for projects aimed at interconnecting the IXPs in the various African countries, so that African traffic can be kept in Africa, and thereby reduce the amount of international bandwidth requirements and associated cost implications.

Broadcasting infrastructure:

Broadcasting infrastructure is still predominantly analogue with virtually no series plan to move to digital broadcasting, except in Mauritius where some serious consideration has commenced.

Digital radio broadcasting has been introduced on a very limited scale through the satellite based WorldSpace digital system. The WorldSpace system is a good example of infrastructure sharing as it supports up to 50 channels of digital audio.

It is a reality that in Africa, Terrestrial Digital Broadcasting is almost non-existent; however it is nonetheless true that Satellite Digital Broadcasting is widespread enough. It is to be noted that over 20 satellites distribute radio and TV programmes of about 30 African countries in digital format (DVB).

It should be noted that the preference for satellite transmission compared to terrestrial network is often driven by size of the territories to be covered, the low density of the populations.

Regional Infrastructure:

There are a number of ongoing and planned national, sub-regional and regional infrastructure projects. These are in different stages of development and include SAT3/WASC/SAFE, Eastern African Submarine Cable System (EASSy), RASCOM, E-Schools project, Southern Region Information Infrastructure (SRII), COMTEL, INTELCOM II, East African Digital Transmission Project (EADTP), COM-7 and the African Virtual University.

Africa must go digital - ITU

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is challenged by the use of analogue instead of digital technology by some African countries.



In an interview with the ITU Regional representative for Africa, **Brahima Sanou** said that the ITU was not happy with the quality of service of some African countries in that they were still offering analogue system of technology when digital was the way to go and emphasised for all countries to maintain their telecommunication equipment.

He said ITU was encouraging countries in Africa, Europe and the Middle East to move to digital frequency as it gives better quality.

He explained that the ITU activities under standardization have already helped create a global and interconnected communications network and foster the growth of new technologies such as mobile telephony and the internet, are now being put to use in defining the building blocks of the merging Global Information Infrastructure (GII), and designing advanced multimedia systems which deftly handle a mix of voice, data, audio and video signals.

He however pointed out that there is no market in Africa for the manufacturing of telecommunication equipment. Out of 190 countries manufactures of telecom equipment there is only 1.7% of Africa's contribution to the world market. "The market is not there," said Sanou.

He explained that to help elevate the situation in Africa there is project that is has been designed with the help China and Korea who are supposed to set up manufacturing companies for telecom equipment in Africa. Sanou said this will help Africa create an economic value instead of being consumers as where ever these companies will be set up, the countries will gain in tax and also creation of jobs and training for Africans.

"I don't see an industry for Africa but one working for the world," said Sanou.

He said ITU works as a managing agency in the area of all telecommunication in the world. He said currently they are working on technology for the future called ENUM where the protocol wants to put together internet and telephone numbers.

He said tests are going on in Austria, Korea, Europe and the US.

The ITU Radiocommunication activities includes the management of the radio-frequency spectrum in order to ensure that radio based systems like cellular phones and pagers, aircraft and maritime navigation systems, scientific research stations, satellite communication systems and radio and television broadcasting all continue to function smoothly and provide reliable wireless services to the world's inhabitants.

"One cannot launch a satellite without the knowledge of the ITU. There are about 264 commercial satellites for telecommunication," said Sanou.

He explained that because of ITU regulation we don't see TV stations interference. He said it was because of interference that on the aeroplane passengers are told to switch of their mobile telephones because the frequency band of mobile telephones is just next to the frequency band of the aeroplane radios. He hoped passengers on board would be given a full explanation as to why they need to switch off their mobile phones because in many cases the announcement is made on the aeroplane without an explanation.

The ITU development activities are aimed at playing an important role as a catalyst for forging development partnership between government and private industry in helping bring about rapid improvements in telecommunication infrastructure in the worlds under developed economies.

Sanou said that the ITU encourages African countries to upgrade their networks as they have been opening up to liberalisation and setting up regulatory.

“Our plan is to revise the green paper and give direction to African countries on why it is important for them to consider convergence and how to deal with it,” said Sanou.

He explained that it was important to think about technology for the future because it is coming and also revise the green paper which was drafted in 1994 as technology has changed so much.

ITU has also been assisting New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) on creating a partnership framework for ICT infrastructure development in Africa to support their efforts towards meeting its objectives.

The Declaration of principles and the Action plan from the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) held in December 2003, stressed the need for regional dialogue, cooperation and partnership among national, regional and international stakeholders in order to realise the objectives, goals and targets for building an all inclusive information society.

As a follow up to these developments and after due consultation, the ITU, together with the African Telecommunication Union (ATU) initiated this preliminary Assistance study to define precisely the scoop and level of support required by Africa to meet the NEPAD objectives in the ICT sector as part of the global WSIS objectives as well as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

ITU Secretary General, Yoshio UTSUMI said in his World Telecommunication Day speech that in an increasingly networked society, safeguarding cyberspace as well as ICT systems and infrastructure has taken on real urgency. It was essential to instill confidence in online trade, commerce, banking, telemedicine, e-government and a host of other applications. It is also critical for the future social and economic development of the world.

He explained that achieving cybersecurity depends on the security practices of each and every networked country, business, and citizen. To guard against the sophisticated skills of cybercriminals, we need to develop a global culture of cybersecurity. This will require not only good policing and legislation but also acute threat awareness and development of tough ICT-based countermeasures.

He added that from the days of the telegraph, ITU has mastered space age communications and continues to develop its expertise in cyberspace. It now takes on the additional mantle of leading the global movement to build the Information Society. World leaders meeting at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in November 2005 recognized this evolution of ITU and proposed that 17 May World Telecommunication Day should henceforth be celebrated as World Information Society Day.

Quarterly stories: e-Governance

Computerising local government in Tanzania: the Kinondoni experience

By Aloyce Menda

Background and context: Tanzanian e-governance is in its infancy. The central government website was inaugurated in 2000 and since then some government branches and local government authorities have focused on e-governance initiatives. Currently, an elaborate e-government strategy has been approved by cabinet and is awaiting implementation. The e-governance project was the brainchild of the Tanzanian Commission of Science and Technology (COSTECH), intended as a follow-up to the recommendation of the 1998 national ICT round table on Governance facilitated by IICD. The project proposal followed a feasibility study of August

1998 conducted to investigate, identify and recommend possible areas for sustainable computerization in the local governments.

The development problem/obstacle addressed: The feasibility study identified data flow patterns and their reporting mechanisms within and across various government sectors. The COSTECH director of information, Mr. Theophilus Mlaki approached the Kinondoni Municipal Council (KMC) administration in 1998 to propose that it host the pilot e-government project. KMC is one of three municipal councils that form Dar es Salaam City Council (DCC), the top authority of the de-facto capital of Tanzania.

The Kinondoni area is regarded as home to the city's high and middle-income earners, privileged in terms of infrastructure improvement, living accommodations, social service provision and security. Most top government officials reside in the Kinondoni district. Based on its superior infrastructures and security, KMC attracts more local and foreign investors than the rest of the Dar es Salaam city area.

Mlaki and his team from COSTECH faced a challenge in illustrating to key KMC officials how ICT and the e-government project would improve the KMC performance in all departments. The main concerns of KMC were cost saving and improvement in tax revenue collection, so the COSTECH team had to demonstrate how the e-governance project would boost good governance as well as revenue collection and service delivery without excessive costs and extra burden to tax payers. They succeeded and the pilot project took off in 1999 with financial and technical support from IICD and COSTECH. Thus the KMC became the first of the 126 local government authorities of Mainland Tanzania (municipalities and districts) to initiate an e-governance project.

Lessons Learned: The KMC project is now the reference model for all local governments in Tanzania, as the central government has approved that it be replicated across the country. Yet despite its remarkable successes and broad acceptance, replicating the model countrywide poses new challenges. In Tanzania, as in most developing countries, budget proposals often face a daunting question: Where should the meager state resources go?

The right choice for development: e-governance in Mali

By Almahady Moustapha Cissé

Mali's ambitious government ICT project seeks to use the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a development and anti-poverty tool for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The main objective: to make ICTs an instrument of good governance.

According to Gaoussou Drabo, the Minister for Communication and New Information Technologies, ICTs can serve as tools for opening up isolated areas of the country to the outside world, thus contributing to the fight against poverty and helping the democratic process to take root. This vision drives the government's ICT project.

The project has two components. The first is modernisation of the government and the establishment of a network encompassing all ministerial departments and public services, including their subordinate directorates at national and regional level. The second involves connecting the country's 703 municipalities to the Internet.

According to Moulaye Sidaly Haïdara, Managing Director of the Implementing Agency for Information and Communication Technologies (AGETIC), the first objective, creating a government network, is well under way: "To date [as of September 2005], we have connected 14 departments and central services.... By the end of the year, we expect to have completed the 16 remaining departments."

Mali has 27 ministerial departments and three central services – the Presidency of the Republic, the Primature (Prime Minister's Office) and the government's General Secretariat – making a total of 30 entities to be connected. "If we complete this task, a large proportion of all government administrative work will be done on-line," he noted.

This huge project will be spread over three years, from 2005 to 2007. The Managing Director of AGETIC reveals that the project in fact began in 2004-05, using domestic financing. For the next three years, 2006-08, the European Union will provide funding to the amount of 6 billion CFA francs.

ICTs foster good governance

"In development circles, we are always talking about good governance, and this notion is included in the government's Intranet project," says Touré Aïssata Lady, an AGETIC official. By way of example, she points to the contribution made by ICTs in managing the locust invasion that afflicted Mali in 2004: "ICTs made it possible to localize the invasion of desert locusts thanks to the GPS system."

According to Ousmane Bamba, a lawyer and expert on ICTs, these technologies can facilitate the democratic process. "With ICTs, we can ensure fair elections through the use of an electoral database based on biometrics," he says. The financial advantages will also be substantial, says Bamba, citing a study showing that in Mali the state spends the colossal sum of 6 billion CFA francs per year on communication via telephone and fax.

As Mamadou Iam Diallo, technical advisor to the Ministry for Communication and New Information Technologies, notes, "The intranet allows the government to communicate both internally and with users." Diallo contends that ICTs are the right strategic choice for development, since, as he argues, the main costs incurred will be those for the initial investment. His conclusion: information technology, and ICTs in general, are tools that can foster good governance and development.

Connecting municipalities:

The second major component of Mali's ICT project involves connecting the country's 703 municipalities to the Internet. Wiring all local communities is a long-standing dream first voiced in 2000 by former President of the Republic Alpha Oumar Konaré. "This dream is now becoming a reality," declares AGETIC head Haïdara with a smile.

Connecting towns to the Internet will give users direct access to information on their civil status and to many other kinds of data that they can currently obtain only by going through a multitude of bureaucratic procedures. In view of the size of the country, the government has broken down the project schedule into phases.

In March 2005, during the testing phase, three municipalities were connected to the Internet: Ouélessébougou, 80 km south of Bamako; Kati, 13 km north of the capital; and Commune VI in Bamako District. Gaoussou Drabo, the Minister for Communication and New Information Technologies, visited these communities in person on the occasion of the reception of the ICT equipment. "Bringing the Internet to local communities strengthens the decentralisation process and makes communities less isolated," read a banner at the entrance to the town hall of Ouélessébougou, the first town to receive the minister. Each municipality has set up a community cyber area, equipped initially with five PCs and a server. The computers are networked and connected to the Internet. "Our connection to the Internet is a wind of modernity blowing through our town. I am sure that it will resolve our communication difficulties and make up for the shortage of information that we experience every day in managing municipal affairs," said Souleymane Dougnon, the mayor of Commune VI of Bamako District, thanking the Ministry for Communication and New Information Technologies.

His counterpart in Kati, Yoro Ouologuem, expressed the same feelings of satisfaction and gratitude. In his view, connecting municipalities to the Internet means the dawn of a new era for local authorities. The initiative should be encouraged and extended to all communities in the country, he asserted.

The availability of electricity and telephone services, but even more importantly the involvement of the local population, was the selection criteria used for the test phase of the "Internet in local communities" project. In years to come, the project will cover all the municipalities in the country in order to fulfill its aim of enabling citizens to communicate with one another and with the government. Once connected, each municipality will manage its own community cyber area, where local development stakeholders will gather to inform themselves, to obtain training and to communicate with one another and with the rest of the country.

This project is one of the pillars of Mali's national policy concerning ICTs, with its primary objectives of popularising ICTs through community cyber areas in the towns and developing applications to support socioeconomic development. "Above all," says Minister Drabo, "we are strengthening the decentralisation process while at the same time reducing the isolation of local communities and authorities by bringing citizens closer to government in order to establish practices of good governance."

Other goals of the government's ICT project include establishing modern, reliable channels of communication linking all segments of society, including women, young people and NGOs, and opening up the country with a view to poverty reduction. The project benefits from the support of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

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Transforming Local Government: E-Governance in Uganda

By Davis Weddi

In response to the high costs and inefficient labour involved in running a government, some forwardlooking Ugandans have developed the concept of e-governance to minimize the expenses involved in the local administration of the country's districts. Participants in various sectors are striving to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to prompt changes in the standards and delivery of local government services and, more importantly, in the way citizens interact and participate in governance. Voluminous paperwork, long service delivery times and stifling bureaucracy may soon be a thing of the past, if new ICT plans are implemented across the country.

Local Government Transparency via District Net

Uganda's e-government initiative, known formally as The District Administrative Network Project and more commonly as District Net, was designed for Uganda's Ministry of Local Government. As current National Project Coordinator Engineer Stephen Dagada explains, "This project was born during a round-table conference in 2002, when we realised that there was a need for transparent governance in the Ministry of Local Government." It immediately caught the imagination of central government and international donors who provided support for its pilot phase. Among the external funders were the International Institute of Communication for Development (IICD) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), who have followed this project from its start.

With external funding for one and a half years, District Net was initially implemented in 2002 in four districts - Mbarara, Lira, Mbale and Kayunga, representing the country's west, north, east and central regions, respectively - with the hope that, if successful, it would be extended to the rest of the country. The project set out to remove obstacles to communication links among the

district headquarters, central government agencies and other stakeholders working with districts, and to address problems of inadequate ICT basic skills among the district staff. The Local Government Ministry states that the District Net project was created “to improve performance in the Local Governments by establishing functional data/ information management and public communication systems for effective and efficiency service delivery in decentralised governance. Hence, this project [was created] under the slogan ‘ICT for Rural Development!’” According to Constantine Bitwayiki, who has worked on the project, “Districts were faced with challenges in funding routine administrative expenses. For interoffice communication, staff traveled to Kampala, the capital of Uganda, to deliver and collect routine documents. In addition, data and information for planning and other decision-making functions were often inaccurate or unavailable when needed.”

International observers have followed Uganda’s e-governance developments closely. Major media and news teams stream to Kayunga District to interview people about one of the most successful pilot projects, and the District Net project has even been nominated for the Stockholm Challenge. By the start of 2005, the project had entered into a mainstreaming phase, and has now acquired private sector partners in addition to government, IICD and DFID. Today, Ugandans are coming to realise that e-governance can bring individuals into close contact with decision-makers and officials in the government. The Ministry is currently in the process of acquiring more funding to extend the project to other parts of the country.

Connecting Constituents

Soon after the District Net project’s 2002 kick-off, implementers began installing Local Area Networks (LAN), Wide Area Networks (WAN), e-mail and internet systems, as well as data and voice communication links between District headquarters, the pilot sub-counties and the central government headquarters. Through the project, the Ministry of Local Government established computerised databanks and information dissemination systems, and initiated an extensive training programme for users (mostly district officials) in basic ICT skills and the use of basic computer applications.

So far, the districts where the project was implemented have made savings in administrative expenses, “freeing these funds to be used to other pressing economic activities geared towards economic development initiatives,” says Bitwayiki. “In addition to improvement in communication channels, we are seeing that users are accessing useful information for planning purposes.”

“In social terms, the communities in the districts covered by the project have been sensitised about the usefulness of utilizing ICTs and how these technologies can bolster development,” he adds.

One result, he says, is a “demand for accurate and timely information from technical staff by the politicians for planning and other decision making functions.” Thus, higher levels of ICT awareness are now helping development. The success has been duly noted, and Members of Parliament have promised to roll District Net out to the rest of the country.

Positive Feedback

A project evaluation report released in 2005 indicated increased ICT awareness and knowledge empowerment. A questionnaire was distributed to forty end users of the District Net: 83% were staff and the rest were Heads of Departments in the Ministry of Local Government. In their answers, 50% of the respondents approved of the District Net project because they hoped to improve their ICT knowledge, 35% wanted to see an improvement in the flow of information and communications in the Ministry of Local Government, and 15% wanted to gain access to the Internet. When asked how they had so far benefited from the project, 38% said they had achieved these goals, 50% identified an improvement in their work and 50% claimed they had improved in handling ICTs.

In describing the positive impact of the District Net, 53% said the project had enabled them to improve ICT awareness while 25% claimed to have been empowered to make informed decisions in their departments using their new ICT skills. In addition, 25% thought they had been motivated by the decreased costs in their work, and 20% had seen an improvement in reporting, documentation and levels of transparency.

The Future of District Net

Implementers of the pilot phase have learnt an important lesson: "Think big but begin small. Piloting is the way!" The pilot activities are now being replicated in other projects and programmes and implemented in other districts.

In order for District Net to work, it must be supported by human capital and an enabling environment. "Change management is critical," Bitwayiki stresses. Whether ICTs prove to be a sustainable solution for enhanced communication and information flow "depends on the willingness of the human capital to tackle the challenges in a sustainable manner." Although the ICTs introduced are user-friendly, new technologies will inevitably require time for people to adapt to them. And, of course, the financial cost of implementation is daunting. While the local beneficiaries have tried to contribute, they have confronted difficulty because their tax base is still very small.

But the costs of failure would be greater. Dagada, the current project leader, emphasizes that ICTs are essential. "The challenge is that ICTs may be expensive, but they are necessary and useful. We need to find all means of mainstreaming the project in order to lower operating costs like transport and production of documents. Our ability to replace the traditional methods of operation and to beat the bureaucracy in local governments will extend the life of District Net."

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Boosting Local Authorities: E-Governance in Zambia

By Kabukabu Mambwe

Countries around the world are striving to incorporate e-governance as a means of improving transparency and good governance in the public sector. Sadly, this trend has eluded the Zambian public sector, where the potential for e-governance is not being fully utilised.

Promoting Efficiency and Transparency

In order to promote efficiency and transparent governance in the African public service, UNESCO and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) conceived a three-year pilot project on "E-governance for African Municipalities," which began in 2001 and involved selected municipalities from five African countries: Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Tanzania, and Zambia. Lusaka, Zambia's capital, was the country's representative in this project.

The project's promoters noted that African municipalities are often heavy bureaucratic structures with unclear procedures and processes for treating requests from city residents. Furthermore, these municipalities tend to function in isolation and fail to benefit from the experiences and best practices of other municipalities within their country or region. The project aimed to ensure transparency and citizen participation in governance, and, while building on existing community facilities, also involved developing websites so that municipalities could share and exchange experiences. To meet these goals, the pilot emphasized two major components: developing a multimedia training package for municipal personnel; and developing pilot applications in the selected municipalities. The equipment and training necessary to achieve these goals also formed a critical element of the project.

The Lusaka City Council Project

The Lusaka project, involving the Lusaka City Council (LCC), is headquartered in the city's civic center building. According to LCC IT Manager Judy Beene, also the LCC project supervisor, the project's objective is to promote free flow of information and thus to open dialogue among municipalities and the local communities they serve. In addition, the project strives to improve access to information required for decision making, to communicate effectively with citizens and to establish a municipal information system using ICTs.

"There has been a spirit of teamwork on the project from representatives of the departments within the City Council," says Beene. The e-governance project has transformed the LCC into a knowledge hub and could be used as a tool for service delivery and revenue generation, as well as a teaching and learning centre for e-commerce, she says.

As the local government has a profound impact on the lives of citizens, the governance processes and structures that accompany it must be – and are becoming - participatory, transparent, and accountable. "These objectives are becoming a reality in Lusaka City Council through the newly-built website, which will open dialogue between the Council and the community it serves," Beene says.

The LCC can now use ICTs as a means of improving responsiveness and reliability in its services. As Beene explains, ICTs could improve economic opportunities, lower the cost of delivery of public and private goods, and help streamline bureaucracy, enhance the transparency in the institution's administration, and improve productivity. For instance, Internet connectivity has boosted the Council's operations by improving communication among the workers, about 50% of whom are now using ICTs. The local network has also streamlined the operations of the Rates Department, as they are able to update their records on a regular basis.

In the past, citizens had to walk to the LCC headquarters to access information; today, Beene says, the project has opened municipal services to the city's population. In time, she says, the minutes for the full council meetings will be posted online, enabling members of the public to know what transpires in these meetings. Through the website people can come to know their councilors in the wards, to learn of development projects and to explore the Council's delivery of services. However, the website has not yet been launched for full public access.

Funding Challenges

Unfortunately, the LCC project suffered a set back when the funders did not release the last parcel of funding for training council workers in e-governance. According to Beene, there has been little feedback from UNESCO and DANIDA, the project's initiators. The shortage of funds has also stalled the creation of the Public Information Center, and further budget constraints, owing in part to escalating prices of equipment, have meant that staff was not properly trained for network administration and web design maintenance. "The project has ended because there has been no feedback from the funders and the Council has taken up the duty of paying the Internet bills," Beene says. The LCC is searching for financing alternatives to help establish an Information Centre to improve interaction with the public and to enlighten people on the benefits of e-governance, still very much in its infancy in Zambia. Although e-governance has opened a window on new opportunities for the LCC, its workers need training sessions both to improve their basic computer and ICT skills and to help educate the public on how to use ICT to interact with the LCC effectively.

Project Results

The project has achieved significant results as the Council can now communicate with other countries through the Internet. "There are noticeable changes," says Chansa Makanta, the LCC Public Relations Manager. "We are able to speak to other countries and to discover what other municipalities are doing about certain issues."

John Kapenda, Acting Director for the Engineering Department, says Internet access has improved his work, as he is able to conduct extensive professional research and to download relevant materials. In addition, he notes that the Engineering Department can use its site to provide updates of activities, such as posting maps showing which roads are closed for maintenance and where new road construction is taking place. Kapenda, who checks his e-mails three to four times in a week, notes that Internet access is available to all of the 530 workers in his department -- provided one knows how to use it and is working at the Council headquarters.

According to LCC Senior Software Developer Johns Kafwilo, the project has improved the operation of the Council as most of the communication is done through the Internet. "Research is done easily and we are up-to-date with technology," he explains. "As an individual I am also benefiting. And the more I improve my skills, the more the City Council improves." The Internet has opened many resources to Kafwilo, enabling him to contact other specialists to find solutions to their shared problems. Such discussions are a two way process as he is also able to give advice on technical matters in which he is well versed. " There is an increased demand for the use of the Internet," he notes. "However, the bandwidth has remained static, which has to change if the service is to be used efficiently."

The LCC has about 1500 workers but so far only those who work at the headquarters have access to the Internet. "We require more computers for use at other sites, so we will need supporters to come to our aid," says Makanta, who explains that the City Council intends to use the website (www.iicd.gov.zm) to post calendars of events and other initiatives that would assist donors who wish to help the LCC in expanding the e-governance initiative.

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Spotlight: ICT capacity development in Africa

Technical community development in Africa is a priority



African networks need to be strengthened by the expertise of the operators. This is the measure of success of African Network Operators Group (AfNOG) as seen in the following interview with Prof. Nii Narku Quaynor, Co-Convener of AfNOG.

iConnect Africa: What is AfNOG?

NNQ: AfNOG is a network technology knowledge transfer program to develop the capacity of network operators in Africa. It also provides a forum for operators, private sector, civil society, government organizations and individuals operating networks to share and coordinate their Internet development. It was first convened in 2000 by two Africans and an American Internet worker, a friend of Africa. The primary information source is at www.afnog.org.

iConnect Africa: What is its goal?

NNQ: The goal is to develop a sustainable technical capacity development and acquisition mechanism in support of the very rapid development of networks in Africa. In particular, an objective is the migration of the technical capacity development processes from the developed countries to the developing countries where the capacity is needed. This puts the both the development of capacity and the Internet systems in the hands of Africa.

iConnect Africa: Where does AfNOG hold its training workshops?

NNQ: The AfNOG meetings are held annually and in different locations in Africa. AfNOG meetings have been held in South Africa, Ghana, Togo, Uganda, Senegal, Mozambique and

Kenya. The next event will be in Nigeria in April 2007. Proposals are being sought for the hosting of the next AfNOG in 2008 and 2009. A typical meeting comprises week-long workshops in four technical tracks, days of tutorials and conferences, days of meetings of groups related to AfNOG to exchange and coordinate their activities.

iConnect Africa: What type of training or capacity building has AfNOG been providing and who are your target groups?

NNQ: AfNOG holds annual workshops on scalable network services and backbone routing in both English and French. The graduates are required to return and train others and operate their networks. They also become members of a human support network who guide each other on mailing lists. The target group is engineers who must oversee networks including those who have to work comfortably with Internet servers and routers.

iConnect Africa: What are the main issues that AfNOG would like to address in its capacity building?

NNQ: The main issue is how to develop top notch technical capacity to support the rapid growth of Internet in Africa. Most African networks are young and not so well operated. Thus there is a need for specialists to follow best practices, transport traffic properly, efficiently and secure the networks. AfNOG is the best and most consistent non vendor specific network instruction program in Africa. AfNOG is non-commercial and volunteer driven.

iConnect Africa: What is your success story?

NNQ: AfNOG has been training approximately 60 participants annually for the past seven years in Africa. Numerous networks in Africa are being managed by former participants at AfNOG workshops. It has become the principal technical networking forum in Africa attended by the more serious Internet professionals annually. The attendance at AfNOG often exceeds 400 at each event. AfNOG was also a consensus forum for the establishment of AfriNIC, the numbers registry for Africa.

iConnect Africa: What problems have you encountered in your efforts to build capacity among African ISPs?

NNQ: The networks are growing faster than we produce expertise to support the networks. This is a challenge. Funding for scaling the capacity development program is also a challenge. The workshops are advanced and sometimes have difficulty finding good candidates who meet the entrance requirement, forcing creation of entry level courses detracting from rather creating more advanced workshops. Despite that, AfNOG now has a cadre of technical professionals who have remained in one community and are key resources for supporting each other in building the networks.

iConnect Africa: How much does each course cost per participant? Is this affordable?

NNQ: AfNOG is non-commercial and not for profit. It costs approximately \$2,500 per participant. We make effort to raise funding to support the needy to attend the workshop but we have been fortunate that 30% of participant pay for participation improving the sustainability of AfNOG. It is the most cost effective such program in Africa. It's not an affordable cost which poses a scaling problem for AfNOG. We have been fortunate to get assistance from concerned some sources including UNECA, Francophone, ISOC, IDRC, NSRC, Cisco and others to assist the needy.

iConnect Africa: How many African ISPs have been trained so far?

NNQ: There have been more than 400 technical professionals strengthened through the AfNOG workshops. More importantly, the conference topics and tutorials on new technologies have prepared the AfNOG community to cope with the developments of the new networks.

iConnect Africa: What is the relationship between you and the AfriNIC?

NNQ: AfNOG and AfriNIC share the same community of operators. AfNOG became the forum of operators where consensus for the establishment of the numbers registry was developed at

AfNOG. The relationship has advanced further and there is an MOU between AfNOG and AfriNIC to do co-locate meetings, services and to support each other in our growth.

iConnect Africa: What has been put on the AfNOG agenda to benefit ISP providers in Africa?

NNQ: The best gift to ISPs from AfNOG is the knowledge transferred which has strengthened networks in Africa. Now, together with AfriNIC, the African ISPs have opportunity to make policies for numbering which is suitable to the continent's needs. Many ISPs now have their own IPs and are becoming independent of their upstream ISPs who had hitherto been controlling the growth of the Internet by allocating a few IPs for the feeble ISPs in Africa further limiting growth. AfNOG and AfriNIC have also agreed with the Association of African Universities to cooperate in developing the African Research and Educational Networks (AfREN).

Building an African Media ICT4D Network needs support of all stakeholders

By Brenda Zulu

The government not only provides for the existence of a suitable and stable political climate for development, but provides the requisite policies, standards and guidelines under which the society should operate to achieve agreed development goals. While some resources are best provided by governments, there are others which can be provided more effectively and efficiently by other stakeholders.

Structured stakeholder participation mechanisms help to maximize the diversity and quality of expertise available for policy formulation and implementation by drawing on sources beyond government and generate a rich source of information on opportunities.

AISI:

Since its launching in 1996, Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII) has been implemented mainly in the form of national ICT policies and plans. They are known as National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and plans. The role of the media in the process of building an inclusive Information Society has been highlighted in the AISII.

“In addition to being an essential means for information dissemination, the mass media plays a critical role in spreading awareness in Africa of the importance and benefits of the information revolution.” AISII hopes to use information to accelerate development, include good governance and foster stability.

The African Media ICT4D Network:

The African Media Information Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) Network was born under the AISII programme and it represents a framework which brings together Media professionals and institutions at national, sub-regional and continental levels to discuss and establish policy and strategies for building an inclusive Information Society. The African Media ICT4D network is located under the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA's) AISII programme.

The African Media ICT4D Network is a regional network, which has established independent Media ICT4D networks at national, sub-regional and regional levels. Currently, the national Media ICT4D Network has been stimulating debate at national level while the African Media ICT4D Network has been stimulating debate at regional level. The Networks have contributed to formulation of ICT policies and plans of action, broadened the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) agenda by participation and contribution to the process, shared ideas and knowledge and strengthened the capacity of the regional network.

Thus African journalists who are part of the regional network have learned more about ICT4D issues and also improved their reportage as depicted in the AISII awards, which have been running for four years now. The media networks have been structured to be self-sustaining in their operations as seen by some running projects, which have been funded.

The ECA however pledged to support these media networks during the Accra WSIS in Ghana last year. Most of the Media ICT4D Networks at national level have not yet been registered with the registrar of societies, which is something that needs urgent attention if these networks are to be funded. There is need to establish a Permanent Secretariat to ensure their credibility at all levels of operation.

The idea of setting up media networks at national, sub-regional and regional levels grew out of a media online discussion group using the ECA platform. Many African media personnel interested in reporting on ICT4D issues are members of this discussion group.

The African Media ICT4D network also acts as a platform for research, training, policy formulation and information sharing. Since journalists are creators of content, the regional network has also been documenting the African ICT4D story through the various media represented by the members. The regional network has thus fulfilled the overall objective, which has been encouraging Journalists to specialise in reporting on ICT issues.

Newspapers, radio and television provide an easy, accessible and cheap means of carrying information to the end user. Communities in Africa do not have to wait for the Internet to receive much of the information it carries. The mass media can access many of the existing sources of information and provide broad channels of communications to the poor and to remote areas.

Focal points at national level have been identified to establish Media ICT4D Networks at national level. There is however need to identify more focal points in countries where they do not exist. Existing national Media ICT4D Networks have been identified and linked to the African ICT4D Media Network. Focal points have been identified in Rwanda, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Congo, Mali, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, The Gambia, Namibia, Nigeria, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, Seychelles, Burundi, Kenya, Benin, Tanzania, Togo, Ghana, Senegal, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Niger and Botswana. In most of these countries there are online discussions at national level.

More over, there is need for identification of sub-regional focal points and also hosting organisations, for instance, the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) has indicated interest in hosting the West African Media ICT4D Network. Other sub-regional networks also need to find organisations, which are willing to host them. Once sub-regional representatives are identified, there is need to create sub-regional online forums to discuss sub-regional issues.

Under the AISI programme, the Media Forum held during the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Africa regional preparatory conference at the Accra International Conference Center (AIC) recommended the promotion of Media ICT4D Networks at national and sub-regional levels to foster better implementation of the WSIS Action Plan and strategies by media. The forum which lasted two days deliberated on the role of the Media in the process of building an inclusive information society.

To this effect a steering committee of media professionals were appointed to lead the process of establishing an African Media ICT4D Network. This structure would consist of a Regional Coordinator, five sub-regional representatives and a member of the Diaspora. This Core Group would be assisted by Competent Experts as and when required. Setting up of a Regional Steering committee was done in Accra. Online discussions never started because of lack of a volunteer translator for both English and French languages. Once operational the steering committee and members of the council will make suggestions on how the Media ICT4D networks would be put on their agenda.

The second phase of the WSIS presented a unique opportunity to consolidate the efforts of media during the first phase and the Accra WSIS while also presenting an opportunity for them to continue the projects that they started to have showcased in Tunis. Media personnel and journalists participated in the second phase of the WSIS and deliberated and reported on many issues from an African perspective.

The overall goal of the forum is to build a critical mass of journalists that can specialise on Information Society issues whilst promoting awareness in society based on the AISI media-training module. The forum has contributed to creation of an African Media ICT4D framework conducive to sustaining the overall goal.

The Media Forum held in Addis Ababa 2003 during the CODI III, Accra 2005 during the Africa WSIS and Grahamstown 2004 during the Highway Africa Conference has helped familiarize participants with terms such as ICT4D, information society and how to combine the MDGs as goals. Media personnel learnt that ICT4D was a means and involvement of Media as a process in the most effective way. It has helped examine threats and challenges facing ICTs, and define what is meant by an AISI framework: national and sub-regional e-strategy development and implementation and SCAN-ICT project.

The forum also outlined threats and challenges facing ICTs and also discussed and highlight the importance of policies and the function of NICIs, RICIs, VICIs and SICIs, in particular. The training also discussed and outlined the challenges and debates surrounding Intellectual Property (IP), the advantages of open source software and open content and strategy of knowledge management.

Achievements:

Women journalists interested in reporting on ICT4D have been identified and a regional mailing list set up. The African Women's Media ICT4D network in Africa needs to be registered and also needs a regional woman's organisation to be host of the group. The women journalists are interested in having their capacities build and thereafter take up media ICT4D projects.

At national level, the positive thing is that identified media focal points have made a step forward to identify journalists interested in reporting on ICTs and also created national mailing lists without any funding. They have done it on volunteer basis. There is however need for Media ICT4D to create web based discussion groups which can be an achieve for all discussions.

The challenge has been to sustain these mailing lists and also hold meetings without any money involved. This has limited continued participation of some journalists who have since decided to join more active media networks. Lack of funding has also contributed to Journalists leaving the network as they have not benefited from the network.

There is need to set up structures at sub-regional level to allow partnership of the Media ICT4D Networks with sub-regional organisations. The networks will be strengthened if they are hosted by sub-regional organisations at sub regional level. This can also be possible if the African Media ICT4D Networks were launched at a regional ICT4D platform where all these organisations will be present to showcase and act as a platform of exchange.

It now almost three years since the idea of setting up Media ICT4D Networks in Africa was born. It is hoped that this would be completed in the first five years. It has been a time consuming exercise but credible and sustainable visa vie its mandate to sensitize at local, national, sub-regional and regional levels as stated in the Africa Regional Action Plan on the knowledge Plan (ARAPKE). The ARAPKE will create the foundation for national, regional and international cooperation on information society issues over a period of 10 years up to 2015.

In order to help define an African approach to ICTs, the ECA has created an online discussion group for Media ICT4D training of trainer's and an ICT4D News Agency Journalists Networks.

Conclusion:

Media Networks have played a role in uniting the grounds of analysis and in building opinion. However, this does not seem enough. There is need to mobilize at regional level around a few issues and help to develop the power to transact on issues which both legitimises journalists and simultaneously calls attention to influential lobby institutions such as the ECA and governments.

The network need to physically get together to identify one or two poles around the launch and way forward of the regional steering committee which is hampering the creation of active sub-regional media networks. Meeting in cyber space is good but has its own limitations especially to those without access.

There's a need to establish Media ICT4D networks at national level beginning with committed members from various areas of the country. There is need for networks to frequently meet physically to discuss issues raised on online discussions. This will improve communication and inter-action between members.

The network should adopt a realistic and workable Plan of action, including clear objectives, products, activities, indicators of success, means of verification of these indicators and timetable. Major objectives of the networks should include capacity building for members, lobbying, leadership and implementation of the Plan of action.

There's a need to have a strong program of partnership promotion, development and maintenance. Media should avoid simple fund-raising strategy but view partnership as a framework of win-to-win. Media should approach partners with ideas, projects and programs showing how they could advance the objectives of their mandate or contribute to the acceleration of the countries' development, based on Media's capacity, human resources, specific skills channels etc...

An example regarding ICT can be a national awareness raising campaign for three months on ICT4D from policy to implementation, through newspaper, radio station, and on-line media, including articles, interviews and debates. This can help to increase awareness of development partners' decision-maker, the community at whole and help in the implementation of the country ICT Policy and Plans.

The Accra conference was a great leap forward for building the ICT4D media movement in Africa and thus there is need for funding to help implement the plan of action in the ARAPKE. The idea of having the Media Forum should be encouraged and continued as this is a platform where media personnel in Africa have more interaction.

Between Accra and the Tunis ICT conferences, I saw a different ethos emerge. To some extent, it could be called the new culture in the global village of the media in Africa. This culture included media personnel being trained to report on ICT4D. ICTs were on everybody's lips including Policy Makers, Academicians, researchers; ICT advocates in different civil society organisations including women based organisations and media. Preparatory workshops and meetings on ICT in preparation to the WSIS were held at all levels.

Money was being fundraised for all the stakeholders to attend the second phase of the WSIS and some media networks were set up in different African Countries. Media ICT4D networks are necessary but a sufficient condition of bringing them up needs collective strength together with all stakeholders to bear on society and on the state.

Networking has improved the effects, visibility and efficiency of the media personnel involved in advancing the Media ICT4D Networks. Networks are also powerful for working for social change. Their strength lies in their exceptional ability to enhance and deepen critical thinking and creativity through dialogue and exchange to address regional problems by joining forces to take regional action.

It is necessary for Governments and International Institutions to promote partnership with media association in the implementation of activities such as creation of awareness and building capacity in the Information Society.

Nurturing of New Media Initiatives especially those with strong local and community based

components is also recommended for example Community Radio networks should be promoted and showcased as best practice examples of ICT4D at ICT platforms in Africa.

Outlook: Features on Internet Governance

Everything but language at the IGF

By Brenda Zulu

What can African countries do in the area of multilingualism to help preserve their culture in relation to Internet governance? What is being done so far in Africa?

Have governments implemented programmes that guarantee the presence of African languages on the Internet and use of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) in order to fight against the linguistic digital divide and ensure the participation of all in the emerging new society under diversity, openness and development?

An inclusive African information society will still remain a dream until communities and individuals have widespread access to the use of information communication technologies (ICTs) in African languages.

Language was a big issue during the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS). It was observed that building an African information society cannot be done with foreign languages only.

The value of African languages should be officially recognised by establishing them as working languages of Africa's countries and communities in the context of the promotion of complementary functional multilingualism.

Support should also be provided by African governments for the low cost development of open, compatible, adaptable and evolving ICT solutions and platforms focusing on the promotion of African languages and the creation of content to meet the needs of African societies.

The issue of language had been recurring at all ICT events held so far and it is still an issue at the coming Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Athens. Africa's infrastructure is rural and remote population often bypassed by new technologies because of geographical location.

Many women are illiterate and often are marginalised. Africa has many local languages, which are under represented in ICTs especially the Internet. For instance the Internet has a lot of content in the English language and not in African languages.

Recently, however it was good news for Africans to hear that Microsoft had come up with a software for the use of Kiswahili language on the Internet. It should also be noticed that Africans have also embraced the use of community radio stations and have thereby formed listening clubs.

The mobile phone apart from having an easy connection is a success story in Africa because people speak their local dialect when conveying their messages. Therefore, cultural and linguistic diversity should be supported with a view to the development of an inclusive information society in Africa. Language and culture still remain inseparable in Africa.

Many Africans would like to see their grand mother use a computer and surf the Internet in their own language, which they understand better.

It is challenge to Africans to use Open Source software as a tool for creation of local language programmes. The use of FOSS in order to fight against the linguistic digital divide and ensure the participation of all in the emerging new society is a way forward for Africa.

Implementation of programmes that guarantee the presence of African languages on the Internet is still very vital.

There is need for e-governance programmes at national level to implement problems that help the deaf and the blind and the illiterate ones in the national languages should be planned for by African governments.

The problem should be considered by the creation of different programmes which can help the deaf and the blind and also another picture programme for those who national and local language illiterate.

Do African governments have action plans on implementation of reducing the digital language divide? What is the state of the ICT policies in the African countries? Many are still in a state. Governments should decide to create national projects to minimize the difficulty of using the Internet especially for people with language problems.

Each region has a right to manage its culture. Africa needs to manage its culture. Participants to Africa WSIS in Accra in February 2005 officially recognised the value of African languages by establishing them as working languages for all aspects of their daily life in African countries and communities in the context of the promotion of complementary functional multilingualism.

They also called for the speed up of the establishment of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) as a specialized institution of the African Union and establishment of an Africa centre for human resources training and development in the field of applied African linguistics.

Participants also called for support in creation of a network of public libraries, which would integrate use of African languages to foster access to information for all in an inclusive information society, and also incorporate FOSS as an integral component of digital solidarity.

The linguistic digital divide was seen as one of the factors that should be eliminated in order to build an inclusive Information Society and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Apart from radio in Africa, the presence of African languages on other ICT tools such as Television and Internet is still a small percentage especially on the Internet. It is however interesting to see people starting to make an effort of increasing local language visibility by blogging in local languages such as Kiswahili and encouraging production of local films which are then aired on local television.

Africa put gender on the IGF agenda

By Brenda Zulu

In planning for the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Athens, Africa's focus should include gender issues to universal access, security, legislation, freedom of expression, multilingualism and local content, infrastructure, Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs), economic issues and social cultural issues.

Internet Governance (IG) has gender issues. During the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) it was clear to see the lack of gendered analysis of Internet governance issues by the Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) in their report.

Many women activists observed this and said that Internet governance debate and illustrated this from an African gender perspective and highlighted some Internet governance issues that are particularly important to women.

The inclusion of content and use of the Internet within the framework of Internet governance illustrates the importance of end users applications of ICTs, therefore placed content at par with structural and technical aspects of technologies.

Including content in the definition raises concern on the broader consequences to freedom of expression given that governments in Africa, Asia and Saudi Arabia had already sought to regulate content.

It was observed that there were differences in approach between the traditional freedom of expression and the African women's movement with respect to for example pornography.

This had come to the fore with the recent decision by the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) to defer the decisions to allow **xxxgTLD** until September 2005.

Content should not be regulated by governments given the fact that abuse of women's rights and human rights has been justified on the pretext of protecting women.

Many women felt that freedom of expression and human rights should be cross cutting in internet governance issues and therefore stress the need for a clear definition of 'harmful' content that is based on human rights norms and standards.

For African women, it was observed that Infrastructure was vital to provide universal, equitable and affordable access to ICTs that would create access to opportunities for all.

"This would however remain a myth in Africa, already faced with an urban-rural and gender divide, unless the issue of infrastructure is dealt with."

ICT costs affect Africa women's access to and use of ICTs for development. Internet connection costs are therefore a key issue in closing the gender digital divide. Even regional initiatives such as the East African Sub Marine Cable System (EASSy) once operational should have a plan for reaching the people in the rural areas where the digital divide is very real compared to the urban areas.

Africa is also concerned about the potential loss of revenue from the new telephony system such as the Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) as this would also affect governments to provide gendered universal access to ICTs.

It should be noted that short term compensatory measures supported by the international community should be set up to assist Africa to offset these losses.

Radio was seen to be an avenue for African women to access and create local information, as it was most accessible to many African women. Community broadcasting has been especially seen as a community ownership control in which African women could participate, as it was not for profit. It has also been seen as a media that could serve as a means for communities to engage in debate on development, governance and human rights at local level and the promotion of local culture and indigenous knowledge.

Despite the significance of community radio as a participatory ICT, many African countries are yet to provide a conducive regulatory environment for public and community broadcasting.

Women in Africa are voiceless when it comes to the media in Africa but with the use of community radio women have slowly found themselves contributing to development through the radio. This is because community radiobroadcasts in the local languages that many women can speak, as many are illiterate in the official languages such as English and French.

Under multilingualism it is clear that this was to help Africans communicate across communities and give effect to cultural expression and to access shared knowledge for development. The idea

is to make Internet users to navigate across linguist boundaries and become content creators in their own languages.

Many African women also know how to use the mobile phone and are able to make calls to the community radio stations to participate in radio programmes such as don issues of health, governance, HIV/AIDS, etc

Internet governance should at national level promote the necessity for an independent broadcast body to regulate airwaves. Given that the radio spectrum was a national resource, governments should distribute it in an open and transparent manner with the full participation of stakeholders.

Security issues included data interception, data interference, illegal access, spy ware and identity theft. Possible perpetrators include hackers, cyber criminals, cyber-warriors or cyber terrorists. Targets are numerous from individual to private companies and public institution to critical infrastructures, governments and military assets.

Cyber attacks are the order of the day for many women who are seen to be online by many men in cyber. Just like walking on Devil's Street in Malawi, Lilongwe a woman is at risk when identified to be a woman in cyber space. This mainly happens when a woman is online either by using skype or any chat facility.

Spam or unsolicited e-mails mainly used for commercial promotion, social activism, political material was also one of the IG issues which affect the normal functioning of the core applications especially e-mail.

When it comes to Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) knowledge ideas are seen to be the key resource in the global economy. Many women in Africa are involved in basketry and many are times when their indigenous knowledge is duplicated in foreign countries.

On economic issues it was clear that issues of e-commerce and consumer protection or trust and regulation were vital. It is the women in Africa who are mainly involved in cross border trade. Some women in Zimbabwe are involved in selling dried vegetables on the Internet. If women had the knowledge of e-trade, many would be selling their items using the Internet. Many women need their capacity to build as they lack knowledge in the area of e-trade.

Social aspects of the digital divides encompassed a variety of issues including literacy, ICT skills, training, education, and language protection. Many of these social issues affect African women.

African women need local content on the Internet. Currently, Africa has very little local content, which can interest women. There is need for African content creators to create local content, which can help benefit women of Africa.

Forthcoming Events: October – December 2006

10 – 12 October 2006, the second Connecting Rural Communities Conference, Abuja, Nigeria.

Organised by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), the event will be hosted by the Nigerian Ministry of Communications. This is the second in a four-event series, which focuses on the development of ICTs and in particular the progress, which is being made in connecting rural communities. The agenda will cover several topics essential to enhancing company's understanding of the market, including latest regulatory initiatives for promoting ICTs in rural areas; marketing strategies to drive rural revenues; best practice case studies of successful rural communications projects; an overview of the variety of current and upcoming ICT technologies for connecting rural communities; how ICTs can be used to deliver e-health, e-education, e- agriculture, e-government and e-commerce to rural areas; future financing mechanisms for setting up rural communications; Governments' plans

to expand rural ICT access; and developments on mobile and satellite communications.
<http://www.cto.int/crcafrica06/>

16 – 20 October 2006, Workshop on the formulation and the implementation of the ICT policies in Africa, Dakar, Senegal. As a follow up to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), ECA, l'Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the USAID, the NetTel@Africa network as well as the governments of the UK and Canada (through E-Policy Resource Network (ePol-NET) in collaboration with the Ministry of telecommunications and new technologies of Senegal, are organizing this workshop under the theme "formulation and implementation of ICT policies in Africa". The workshop is organised for French-speaking African countries. It constitutes the second of a series of four seminars being held in various regions of Africa. Participants include the representatives of Governments, regulators, institutions in charge of implementation of national ICT policies, operators and service providers, associations of the consumers, private sector, civil society, research institutions, development partners, etc. More: Makane Faye (mfaye@uneca.org).

26 – 27 October 2006, "ICT4All Forum Tunis+1". Hammamet, Tunisia. The Forum is organized by the Government of Tunisia under the High Patronage of His Excellency the President of the Republic, Mr. Zine El Abidine BEN ALI, in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), on the occasion of the first anniversary of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, which took place in Tunis in November 2005. The Forum will address issues related to ICT investment in Africa, including enabling environment for ICT development, e-strategies in Africa, trends of FDI in ICTs, the role of TNC through partnership, and opportunities for investment in ICTs. The Forum will be attended by policy makers, officials and potential investors. More: Thierry Amoussougbo (tamoussougbo@uneca.org).

16 – 18 November 2006, The Fifth African Development Forum (ADF V), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. ADF V will be held on the theme "Youth and Leadership in the 21st Century". The Forum is organised by the ECA jointly with its strategic regional partner, the Africa Union and in collaboration with other stakeholders in African development. ADF is a multi-stakeholder platform for debating, discussing and initiating concrete strategies for Africa's development. The Forum initiated in 1999, has already been held four times with very good concrete outcomes including the initiation of a programme to support national ICT policy formulation and implementation in Africa. The objective of ADF V is to give meaningful expression to the recognition of youth as a development asset and to deepen strategies at the regional and national levels for translating the potential of youth as a development asset into practical benefits for Africa's democratic, gender-equal, peaceful and rights-based development, in line with the objectives of the African Union Youth Charter, NEPAD and internationally agreed development goals including MDGs. As a parallel event, the ICT, Science and technology Division (ISTD) will organize a session on "ICT and Youth entrepreneurship" on the 16th November 2006. The breakout session will look at the issue of creating the enabling environment for realizing the potential of young people as leaders through ICTs and to examine how adequately prepared countries are to harness ICTs for youth employment and entrepreneurship. In addition, ICT social enterprise, youth career guidance strategy in Africa will also be addressed. An online discussion is underway in preparation for the Forum. More: Thierry Amoussougbo (tamoussougbo@uneca.org).

4 – 5 December 2006, UNCTAD Expert Meeting "Using ICTs to achieve growth and development", Geneva, Switzerland. The meeting is organised in support of the implementation and follow-up of WSIS. The main objective of the event is to provide a discussion forum for Government representatives, experts, business people and academia on the potential of harnessing ICTs for economic and social development. During this two-day event experts will examine the latest empirical evidence on the way ICTs impact on the productivity and growth of firms, industries and countries with a view to identify how developing countries can best benefit from the information economy. Additionally, the analysis of recent trends in trade in ICT-enabled goods and services, labour markets and employment in the ICT sector, including outsourcing and offshoring to developing countries will help experts in formulating their future ICT strategies. Confirmation to participate is expected before 17 November 2006. More: <http://www.unctad.org/Templates/Meeting.asp?intItemID=3876&lang=1> and <http://www.unctad.org/ecommerce>

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17 – 19 December 2006, First World Congress on Grassroots ICT4D Practices & Third Amader Gram Knowledge Fair, Bangladesh. The Amader Gram ICT4D Project is organizing the First World Congress on Grassroots ICT4D Practices, together with the Third Knowledge Fair, in Bangladesh. Originally slated for 5-7 September, this event has now been moved to 17-19 December 2006. This 3-day Congress will bring together ICT4D professionals engaged in innovative development initiatives, policymakers, development practitioners, donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, community representatives, and academics from around the world to share experiences and best practices in this growing field for a common understanding of Information and Communication Technology for Development. Participants will be selected through the call for abstracts/proposals. More: <http://www.amadergram.org/>

19 – 20 December 2006, ECOWAS workshop on e-commerce and harmonized framework for ICT regulation, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. With the objective of building the Information Society within the West Africa sub-region with particular reference to the intra sub-regional trade liberalization and facilitation, including e-commerce, ECA is collaborating with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine (UEMOA) to develop a harmonised legal framework for e-commerce. In line with this, ECA has commissioned a study on this issue to assess the current situation of legal frameworks for e-commerce in the sub-region. As a follow-up to the study, a workshop will be organized from 19 - 20 December 2006 in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso to discuss the outcomes of the study report. The workshop aims to discuss the results of the study on the legal framework for e-commerce, make recommendations for the implementation of the legal framework for e-commerce in the sub-region, and provide directions for a formulation an harmonised legal framework for ICT in the sub-region. More: Mohamed Timoulali (mtimoulali@uneca.org).

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About iConnect Africa

iConnect Africa is a quarterly web, print 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 that form part of the Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII) and Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) initiative. *iConnect Africa* draws content from its partners, links resources and expertise and encourages collaboration. It is compiled by Aida Opoku-Mensah and Afework Temtime with collaboration from IICD.