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Terms of Reference

ATAC Subcommittee on Partnership

Background

ICTs have the potential to empower people culturally, economically and socially through increasing access to and facilitating information flows. The use of ICTs to achieve sustainable economic growth, to enhance people's welfare, to create politically and culturally informed citizens, to promote governance, to foster peace and stability, requires massive investment in terms of obtaining the required hardware and software products, training of personnel, developing and managing various Internet applications, developing national, sub-regional and regional backbones, setting up regulatory institutions, etc.

To achieve this, policies should be in place to successfully stimulate investment in appropriate infrastructure, the provision of affordable, sustainable services and effective human resource development. Such policies are however difficult to design, implement and sustain because ICTs require significant investment in appropriate infrastructure as well as the provision of affordable services and human resource development. As a result, the necessary investment exceeds the capacity of most organisations with poverty alleviation agendas. Market-driven strategies, on the other hand, tend to focus on the most profitable areas and exclude the poor.

Efforts of the public/private sector and donor agencies in developing countries have still been unable to extend ICTs to isolated remote and disenfranchised areas. It has become increasingly evident that developing the Information Society cannot be sustained without stronger participation of international development partners in the planning and implementation of ICT activities.

Equitable access to infrastructure and content is most likely to be achieved through the combination of the specific strengths and resources of partnerships between regional, national and local government departments, public sector organizations, NGO's, the communications industry and other private sector actors with an interest in developing widespread ICT networks.

The AISI initiative was put into place through the collaborative actions of a network of partners, sharing the aim of promoting connectivity and information technology development in Africa. Included among the original list of ECA partners are the International Telecommunication union (ITU), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Bellanet International Secretariat. The implementation of AISI is supported by a consortium of donor and executing agencies working together in an informal network called the Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa (PICTA).

This approach will help to reduce duplication of efforts, enhance follow up mechanisms and build national and regional programmes of assistance that are structured, cost effective, long term and sustainable.

Synergies should be sought from all partners so as to avoid duplication, competition and wastage of Africa's meager resources. Smart partnerships are essential in the knowledge economy and international development partners are urged to join hands and integrate efforts to bridge the digital divide.

Partnership building, maintenance and management however remains a challenge due to conflicting interests and unclear understanding of objectives and responsibilities.

Objectives of the Sub-committee

In this context, a Sub-committee on Partnerships has been established by ECA as part of ATAC to provide the secretariat with strategic advice in the context of partnerships in ICT for development and providing technical support, organizing workshops, coordinating discussion forums and participating in partnership building meetings.

Elements for consideration

Members of the Sub-committee should consider some of (not limited to) the following elements within the context of the advice on partnerships:

- Partnership building, maintenance and management – establishment of a broader forum for collaboration and information sharing.
- Creating synergies from all partners in the implementation of the AISI so as to avoid duplication, competition and wastage of Africa's meager resources.
- Regional and International partnerships in ICT4D.
- Involvement of the private sector in a Public Private Partnership (PPP) framework.

The Way forward

Under the leadership of its coordinator, the Sub-committee is expected to deliberate on the above issues and prepare a one-year work programme of implementation within the framework of ATAC and upon consultations with the ECA secretariat.