

World Summit on the Information Society
AFRICA AND THE INFORMATION SOCIETY
BUREAU OF THE AFRICAN GROUP
BAMA KO, 22-24 MAY 2003

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
OF THE FIRST MEETING
OF THE BUREAU OF THE AFRICAN GROUP

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The President
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Introduction

The Bureau of the African Group to the WSIS was set up at the BAMAKO 2002 African Regional Conference for the WSIS, and it met for the first time in Bamako, May 22-24, 2003, in the Conference Room of the “Mission de l’Informatique et des Nouvelles Technologies de l’Information (MINTI)”.

The first phase of the WSIS will take place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. The second phase will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

The meeting was chaired by the President of the Bureau, Dr Mamadou DIALLO Iam, Chief of the MINTI in Mali.

Were present at this meeting:

Government representatives:

- Pius Dayambaje
- Pierre Haguma Rwanda

- Jalel Chelba Embassy of Tunisia in Bamako

- Patience Eboumbou
- Justin Essiam Pierre Cameroon

- Mamadou Diallo Iam
- Lassana Fofana
- Mrs. Hawa Konaté
- Ousmane Bamba, Mali

Civil Society Representatives:

- Mustapha Masmoudi Tunisia
- Olivier Nana Nzepa Cameroon

Private Sector Representatives:

- Mouhamet Diop Senegal

Rapporteur of the Bureau:

Makane Faye ECA

Observer:

- Mr. George Christensen of the AMARC/AFRICA,
Civil Society Gambia

Absent:

- Malick Diaye Government of Senegal

- Mrs. Anne Rachel Inne, Private Sector, Niger
- Mrs. Ingrid Poni Government of South Africa
- Mrs. Lynn Wanyeki, Femnet Civil Society, Kenya
- Mr Ridha Guellouz, Government Tunisia

Meeting Agenda:

- Examination of the Draft Declaration of Principles
- Examination of the Draft Action Plan
- Procedural questions and operating procedures of the Bamako2002 Bureau
- Agenda of the Bamako2002 Bureau from now till Tunis 2005.

The official opening ceremony was placed under the presidency of the Minister of Communication and New Technologies of information of Mali, represented by his Chief of Staff, Mr. Dieudonné Ahmadou Alpha SOW.

The closing ceremony was chaired by the Head of the MINTI.

At the end of three days of work, the meeting after examining the various points on its agenda:

- formulated observations on form and substance of the Draft Declaration of Principles and Action Plan,
- Made some recommendations to the Public Sector, Civil Society and the Private Sector
- Discussed and adopted its rules of procedures,
- And made a calendar of activities to lead until Tunis 2005.

1. Observations on the form of the documents

The bureau has the following observations on the Draft Declaration of principles and Action Plan issued after the Second Preparatory Committee (PrepCom II) of the World Summit on Information Society held in Geneva during 17-28 February 2003.

1.1. on the Draft Declaration of Principles:

The Bureau notes that this draft document needs to be further refined in its presentation as well in its semantics. The plan of the text needs more clarity.

1.2. on the Draft Action Plan

The Bureau notes that the Draft Action Plan also needs to be further refined in its presentation as well as in its substance. The Bureau wishes that actions to be taken have definite time frames, with quantitative and qualitative indicators. It recommends that some responsible people/entities be designated, so that so that we are able to evaluate the commitment of the different actors as well as the impacts. The Bureau proposes that all actions be financed by the Digital Solidarity Fund, which working mechanism must be well codified. African countries need such an action plan for their efficient entry in the Information Society.

2. Observations on the substance

2.1. on the Draft Declaration of Principles:

The Bureau notes that work assigned to the SubCommittee 2 was among others to propose an improved text while integrating wherever possible, the contribution made by the group of the observers. Unfortunately this was not made.

That explains that we now have to deal with four drafts:

- Two drafts originating from Sub-Committee 2's working group
 - a draft declaration of principles
 - and a draft Action Plan
- and two contributions made by the group of observers
 - one draft declaration of principles
 - and another on the draft action plan.

The Bureau suggests to Sub-Committee 2 to make the fusion of the two sets of documents to make a unique version that should be submitted to PrepCom III.

2.2. on the Draft Action Plan

The Bureau noted some gaps in the action plan and to make sure that it does not move away too much from the Declaration of Principles, it recommends that an online discussion be started and that a profound reflection is led to find the indicators, the deadlines, the persons responsible and the means for doing everything so that the Action Plan is really an operational plan. For every element of the Action Plan, the Bureau suggests that an answer is given to the following questions: What? Who? When? How? and with what financial means.

The Bureau calls for the development of an Action Plan that fixes objectives and deadlines, establishes some quantifiable indicators of assessment, and makes the different actors accountable on the requirements of their respective duties.

The Bureau reminds the Africa Region that it is important for Africa to keep the second phase of the Summit, the Tunis one, like an ultimate stage of transition toward the information society. Tunis must be the deadline for the assessment of mid-course engagement of the international community towards the construction of an Information Society based on openness, transparency and fairness.

A Universal Charter for digital Solidarity and a Digital Solidarity Fund, as proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade, must be considered.

The Bureau believes that what is important for Africa is to know in term of actions to lead, what the new Information Society proposes to Africa to reduce the digital fracture.

The Bureau thus invites the African Group to concentrate its reflections and its efforts more on the Draft Action Plan in order to include concrete, feasible actions that will effectively be financed.

The Bureau calls for the elaboration of studies to evaluate the digital divide and proposes the setting up of a complementary mechanism between all the different funds for the development of communications that are scattered within the different international organizations.

It also asks that the Fund for International Solidarity created lately by the United Nations allocates an important part of its resources to the resorption of the digital divide and to the development of the supporting mechanisms of the Information Society.

The Bureau recommends that the Action Plan contains precise and clear roles imparted to each of the big actors in the construction of the Information Society.

The Bureau believes that a particular accent must be put on the role of associations in the promotion of volunteer actions of the community initiatives and aid to the disabled and it calls in general to a propagation of the digital culture as well as the development of the associative sector.

The Bureau emphasizes at the same time that the realization of this important mission implies a backing of human and technical resources, wherefrom, the necessity to devise a specific program of development of the associative sector concerned.

The Bureau notes that the recommendation on Internet governance doesn't reflect the will of Internet actors, nor the requirements of stability and security of the Internet. The Bureau believes that Internet governance must be the fruit of collaboration between Public and Private Sectors and asks for the backing of this partnership that is currently fulfilled by the ICANN and the GAC.

The Bureau recalls that all other world regions except Africa have a regional structure that takes care of their needs concerning IP addresses of Internet networks and demands in this respect, that all dispositions be taken by ISPs and all concerned for the setting up of AFRINIC, only missing institution among the Regional Registries.

3. Recommendations

3.1. Public Sector

The Bureau of the African Group invites African States to each set up their national WSIS Commission that includes the public and private sectors, and Civil Society before Prepcom 3.

3.2. Private sector

The Bureau exhorts all private sector parties to send their contributions to these 2 documents to its secretariat at the CEA.

3.3. Civil Society

The Bureau asks African associations to better be involved in the proceedings of the Civil Society Bureau at the WSIS which was assigned the task to help the Summit preparation

by being present at meetings. The Bureau urges Africa's associations to lead a reflection on how to ensure a bigger presence of Africa within this organ since it will be revised at the end of the first phase of the Summit.

3.4. to International Organizations as well as the United Nations System

The Bureau asks International Organizations and all development partners, notably the United Nations System, a financial and technical support for the organization of its internal meetings as well as the participation of its members to all meetings of the preparatory process of the WSIS.

The Bureau asks the United Nations, notably the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to support the setting up of the national WSIS commissions.

4. Calendar of the Bureau

Principles:

The Bureau estimated that the question of opening its membership to others was a matter beyond its expertise. However it remains favourable to all initiatives and accepts the involvement of all observers during its meetings.

Will be accepted as observer all non member of the Bureau who can finance his/her own trip and involvement to the meetings programmed by the Bureau on the Continent as well as in Geneva and Tunis.

The Bureau admits that every member state can send more than one representative but reiterates the principle of one member one vote in case of vote.

The Bureau sets a goal for its next meeting: the development of its internal rules that would clearly define its mission, its assignments, its mechanisms of dialogue and validation as well as its channels of communication.

4.1. From Bamako 2002 to Geneva 2003

The Bureau received a formal invitation from the Tunisian government to meet in Tunis at the time of its next meeting. It decided to propose the period of the 1-3 September 2003 to the Tunisian government.

The Bureau is going to organise and as much as it possible to participate in all meetings that are held during the preparatory process of the WSIS, or to send representatives.

The Bureau intends to organise thematic regional meetings in each of the 5 African regions. The themes to debate as well as the host countries will be the subject of the Bureau's next deliberations.

The Bureau calls Africa's partners and international organizations to help it organise these meetings in order to associate to the debate on the Information Society a critical mass of the African populations that have not yet grasped the stakes of the Information Society.

Every time the Bureau meets in a region, it will send a formal invitation to the National WSIS Commissions of the African countries of the concerned region, calling them to come to participate in its works.

4.2. From Geneva 2003 to Tunis 2005

The Bureau was made aware of a project put forward by Mali to organise a Regional African Conference named Bamako 2004, in preparation of the phase of Tunis 2005.

The Bureau also projects to organise three African forums dedicated respectively to the Private Sector, Civil Society and the Public Sector on Information Society before the second phase of the Summit.

Bamako 24 May 2003,

For The Bureau of the African Group

The President

Dr Mamadou Diallo Iam

The Secretary

Makane Faye

5. annex 1: Minutes of Meeting

Day one – 22 May 2003

The first meeting of the African Bureau started on this day 22 May 2003 in Bamako in the Conference Room of the “Mission de l’Informatique et des Nouvelles Technologies de l’Information (MINTI).

The agenda planned the opening ceremony, the review of the Draft Declaration of Principles and the adoption of the outline of the contribution of the Bureau for that text.

The quorum was not attained despite the presence of 3 government representatives, and 1 representative of the Civil Society. The President of the session, also President of The Bureau, proposed to postpone the official opening ceremony while waiting for the arrival of members on their way to Bamako.

The following participants were on their way and the group decided to wait for their arrival, the following day to start the meeting:

Mrs. Patience Eboumbou, Cameroon,
Mr Makane Faye , ECA, Rapporteur,
Mr Mouhamet Diop, Private Sector, Senegal,

South Africa’s representative had her office call the Bureau to cancel her arrival because her father’s death.

Mr Ridha Guellouz, representing the government Tunisian, although announced, could not join Bamako because of the difficulties of flights connection from Tunis-Bamako due to strikes. Tunisia was therefore represented by the Tunisian Embassy in Bamako’s First Secretary, Mr Jalel Chelba.

The Bureau agreed to associate the diplomatic representatives of Senegal and South Africa to its works, unfortunately, the solicited embassies were not able to send participant to the meeting.

After all these reports, a casual meeting was started to allow the present members to exchange some information and to learn about the working documents.

The rest of the agenda was about the contributions of governments, the civil society and of the private sector to the draft declaration of principles.

The president seized the opportunity to recall that in the absence of consensus, the whole Draft Declaration of Principles is bracketed, which meant that the text will later be negotiated. He continued to say that in its present shape, the Draft Declaration of Principles had taken into account the African propositions that came out of the Bamako Declaration.

Then the members present discussed the best way to serve the interests of Africa in this process.

After exchanges and analysis, it was recommended to concentrate on concrete initiatives to lead in favour of our continent. Therefore we are invited to make propositions for concrete actions; the declarations of principles can be a devout wish if it is not accompanied by an operational and realistic plan of actions.

We all agreed to concentrate more on the Draft Action Plan, to include propositions of actions that the Bureau wishes to see adopted to achieve the efficient entry of Africa in the Information Society.

Another question raised at the time of online exchanges and that deserved to be decided quickly was the one of the widening of the Bureau to new members. After exchanges of points of view, the Bureau decided that it didn't have authority to conduct this widening.

However, for synergy's sake, the Bureau agrees to open its meetings to observers, and to associate all major actors of the different African subregions where the Bureau will be called to meet in the future.

This clarification done, we proceeded to the different contributions.

The Representative of the Government of Rwanda insisted on a certain number of points:

- the contribution of all intervening parties,
- the financing question,
- the clarification of responsibilities.

Mr Olivier Nana Nzepa presented civil society's contributions that came out of a certain number of meetings held in South Africa, in Uganda and in Ethiopia and online reflections. The following points were stressed:

- Make the existence of an efficient and well functioning communication infrastructure one of the prior essential conditions to the existence of a real information society in Africa;
- Conduct the decentralization of the connection process to encourage access for all, and particularly rural areas;
- Reinforce the synergy between the actors: the government, the private sector and the civil society;
- Encourage overall basic education to create a critical mass of "alphabetized people";
- Accelerate the setting up of a favourable environment;
- Make cultural and linguistic diversity an element of the common wealth, and not a handicap;
- Reinforce the ethical dimension to all levels;
- Reinforce the regional and international cooperation while taking into account the perverse effects of globalization.

The Representative of Tunisia especially insisted on a certain number of points:

- Find the the linkage point between the Geneva Summit and the one in Tunis in 2005;
- Insist more on the dimension of universal solidarity in a society of convivial information;
- Encourage the backing of these values in children and the youth in general;
- Create a legal setting that encourages the healthy competition, the transparency and the respect of the rules while taking into account the specificity of every country.

He further proposed holding a Bureau meeting in Tunis, shortly before PREPCOM III in September. This proposition was welcomed by the Bureau, but a decision was not taken then.

The Representative of Mali made his observations on the form of the document, that is not always in conformity with the suggestions made in Geneva. That concern was answered by saying that considering the fact that everybody works on the present document as is, the Bureau must make its propositions while respecting that form, and raise questions in the suitable format.

The agenda's third point relating to the draft outline of the Bureau's contributions was then proposed and accepted by all.

Before the meeting ended at 17:30, participants were reminded that the opening ceremony would take the following day May 23, since that day's agenda was modified to take into account the opening ceremony.

Day two - 23 May 2003

The official opening of the Meeting was done by Mr Dieudonné Ahmadou Alpha Sow, Chief of Staff of the 'Ministère de la Communication et des Nouvelles Technologies de l'Information' of Mali.

Mr Sow's speech in Annex 3.

After the pause and departure of the Minister's representative, the Bureau resumed its work. It recorded the arrival of Mr George Christensen, from AMARC-Gambia. He was accepted as observer, as decided the previous day.

The Bureau decided to dedicate most of its efforts to the study of the Draft Action Plan. After careful analysis, this document does more importance for our African populations than the one of the Draft Declaration of Principles that we had studied the day before and that remains all things considered, a political document.

The President Diallo Iam, in conformity with the reviewed agenda exposed his observations on the Draft Action Plan.

Essentially his intervention was well researched and point at the following things:

in the document:

- the absence of concrete actions to lead
- the absence of deadlines for executing identified tasks,
- the absence of measurable quantitative and qualitative indicators,
- the absence of agencies for implantation, persons responsible, and of very definite mechanisms of financing,

on the propositions, the necessity:

- to designate United Nations System's agencies to help African countries to establish well identified ICT programmes and/or pilot projects,
- to adopt measurable indicators to conduct a good assessment of the programs and/or pilot projects at national, sub regional and regional scale,
- to set up the Digital Solidarity Fund proposed by President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal, so that it finances the actions to lead,
- to define a good mechanism for financing ICT programmes and pilot projects,
- to mobilize Africa's internal financial resources through its national, international, and regional banks,
- to define reasonable deadlines for the execution of the different actions to take in all ICT areas covered by the Action Plan.

To finish, the President signalled that paragraph 45, was the prototype of the actions that he wished to see all over the Draft Action Plan, including deadlines of execution, the agencies of the United Nations responsible for the establishment, the mode of financing, the indicators, the implied local people responsible and of course an evaluation of the whole.

When her turn came, Ms. Patience Eboumbou gave her point of view on the Draft Action Plan. She stressed that the document is especially descriptive; one would say a political document whereas we need concrete action for Africa.

She insisted that the Bureau works directly on concrete propositions on the basis of what is in the different documents and propositions being made.

Mr Pius N'Dayambaje was then given the floor as representative of the government of Rwanda.

He insisted on the following points:

- sources of energy in our poor countries constitute a first-class blockage,
- the Draft Action Plan doesn't nearly mention R&D, however this action is to be increased,
- there is grounds to conduct an assessment of the needs concerning ICTs in our countries,
- In paragraph 1 nothing is indicated on the financing of the actions,
- Para 29 - the investments in rural areas should be added,
- Para 53- it is necessary to insist on the Diaspora's contribution,
- Para 55- add: "Global and regional initiatives must be encouraged and must be supported to allow developing countries to participate effectively in the knowledge and Information Society, while taking into account the specificity of the different regions. To this regard it is crucial to sustain the activities of the UNICT Task Force, the Africa Information Society Initiative (AISII) and the New Partnership for the Development of Africa (NEPAD) ".

As for Olivier Nana Nzepa, he transmitted to the Bureau the major preoccupations of the Civil society which are:

- To fix clear objectives with fixed deadlines,
- To bring Africa to the level of a developing country like South Korea within 20 years,
- To underline the importance of putting the when, how and whom of the deadlines, in a Draft Action Plan,
- The high cost and the low bandwidth almost everywhere on the continent,
- The necessity to establish a portal for each African country in the next 5 years,
- The necessary junction to establish with the NEPAD,
- To bring Africa to put 12% of the content on the Internet in the next 12 years – the same as its world proportion in terms of populations,
- To conceive transversal projects,
- Olivier encourages us to participate in the Nouakchott, Mauritania meeting on Information Society and local collectivities, 8-10 July 2003.
- The setting up of the "Intelligent Community."

Mr Masmoudi intervened to say that the Draft Action Plan needed to be improved. He noted some deficiencies in the text as for the answer to the aspirations of the African populations.

Mr Masmoudi proposed to take in account the needs of handicapped people, he also insisted on the visible engagement of Civil society locally and the need to sustain that sector vigorously. For him, economic solidarity is a new discipline that will contribute to the development of the ICTs in Africa. As a good professor Mr Masmoudi explained what he means by bound economy and its importance, he insisted on training of human resources.

Mr Masmoudi referring to Para 49 asked that we all help Civil Society in its actions.

Concerning Para 55 he made us notice that there already is a Fund for International Solidarity put in place by the United Nations System and that it is necessary to put it to contribution to finance the WSIS Action Plan.

He informed us that UNECSO has a fund, the ITU has a fund, if we asked for a new fund it would be a problem. He advised and ask for a mechanism of complementarity and communication between funds.

Mr Mouhamet Diop, from Senegal and representing the Private Sector, centred his expose on the contribution of the private sector in the process of preparation of the WSIS stating that this sector constitutes the big absentee. He also mentioned the necessity to have a precise plan with dates, deadlines and indicators.

He noticed that only one small paragraph evokes the role of the Private Sector timidly. For him the states only cannot finance the development of the ICTs in Africa. The local private sector have to not only be part of the process but be implicated by States. Intermediation structures hardly exist in our countries as he stated and that complicates matters a bit more.

He asks for fixed and clear market rules and for an enabling business environment to be established for the development of the private sector.

Financing mechanisms should be clearly defined. It is also necessary to strengthen the African networks of entrepreneurs.

After all these enriching exposes, proceedings discussions followed on how to make a quality contribution to the WSIS in the name of the Bamako2002 Bureau.

It was decided that each of the members rereads the Draft Action Plan and the three other documents that night, to come the following day with propositions of very definite concrete actions; with deadlines for execution, identified responsibilities, measurable quantitative and qualitative indicators, a transparent, equitable and democratic financing mechanism.

In the various questions, he/it was decided to address some letters to the African governments to present them the Bamako2002 Bureau, to inform them of his/her/its missions.

Then in the miscellaneous part of the agenda, it was decided to propose the following day the Bureau's agenda from this meeting till Tunis 2005.

The session was adjourned around 17:30.

Day three 24 May 2003

On 24 May 2003 the Bureau started by examining the propositions to the final document and the adoption of the previous days' minutes taken by the rapporteurs. All agreed there was room for improvement. Then the Bureau examined its proposed agenda and the invitation addressed by the Tunisian government to the Bureau to host its next meeting in Tunis. This invitation is contained in the message that Mr Ridha Guellouz sent the Bamako Bureau to support its work and to report his inability to come to Bamako.

For the Bureau's calendar, 4 major points stood out of the set of propositions made:

- The proposition of the Bureau on the Draft Action Plan;
- The inventory of the activities to come and the manner in which to assure a presence of the Bureau in each one;
- The calendar of the Bureau
- The Tunisian invitation.

The position kept on the Project of the Action Plan is to see it keeping African priorities in mind again, following the traditional presentation of action plan and to submit it for discussion on the network.

According to The Bureau, the Draft Action Plan must concord with the Draft Declaration of Principles, the actions must be concrete, assorted with measurable, controllable indicators, that are entrusted for execution to entities of the United Nations System or to international or regional intergovernmental organizations, with very definite deadlines.

The priority of the Bureau must be the elaboration of a realistic applicable calendar. The Presidents said the Bureau must move to the next level.

As such, the Bureau agreed to put its energy on the organization of 5 regional meetings in the 5 regions of Africa around the thematic that will be decided commonly online.

Themes were proposed by Tunisia like:

1. Digital divide
2. Digital dimension
3. Dialogue between civilizations
4. Cultural diversity
5. Economic solidarity.

One of these meetings could be conducted with the coming Kigali, Rwanda meeting. Involvement to these meetings will be function of the capacity of the Bureau to mobilize financings. The ECA was said to be able to financing a certain number of these activities, if told on time.

The last point discussed was the Tunisian invitation. The Bureau welcomed it favourably, but does not wish that this meeting coincides with PRECOM III. The Bureau wishes that the meeting of Tunis is clearly dissociated from the Geneva meeting of 15-26 September 2003. The Bureau will agree on a date with the host country, Tunisia.

The Bureau decided that all correspondences sent in its name must be sent by the President. Finally, The Bureau debated the modalities of posting the different contributions online and the possible information that must be submitted for approval to the President of the Bureau before all diffusion.

To finish, the President gave the floor to each participant so that they could give their feelings on the meeting but also update the Bureau on the initiatives and progress in their countries and respective regions.

In Cameroon for example, they are soon to organise a meeting on ICTs and the media, quality and price of connectivity have improved, and the Bureau also learned about some of the major difficulties of the present. The activities of the National WSIS Commission were described.

In Mali, the representatives of the host country informed the Bureau extensively on the ongoing projects: connectivity (the optic fibre between Bamako and Kayes -500km to the west is a reality), the jump in cellular phones use with the arrival of Ikatel a second operator and the interconnection fights with fixed and mobile networks with the historical operator, the Sotelma; the visits of President Samassékou and his meetings with the MINTI, the decrease of telephone, water and electricity prices under the injunction of President Amadou Toumani Touré.

In Rwanda, there are 3 telephony operators servicing the country in cities as well as rural areas; the country also adopted a National Policy and an Action Plan following the conjoint support of UNDP and the ECA; a national meeting will also soon be organised that the Bureau wishes to see widened to the participants of the neighbouring countries.

Senegal evoked the recent decreases of telephone and internet prices. This raised a discussion as to the reality of the decrease in Senegal, in Mali and in Cameroon.

In Tunisia the accent was put on the activities of the National WSIS Commission.

The President thanked all and exhorted the participants to remain in contact with him and with the Secretariat (ECA) once they go back home, to answer questions to be debate on the Bureau's discussion list while respecting the deadlines (3 days minimum and 7 maximum). He asked them once they go home, to continue their efforts to sensitize, to inform and to collect the reactions of the national actors so that the aspirations of the African populations reach the WSIS.

Finally the President underlined the necessity to lead concrete activities on the continent now that the Bureau is operational.

He closed the first Meeting of the Bamako2002 Bureau, Bureau of the African Group for the preparation of the World Summit on Information Society, around 18:00.

Note: The Ministry and the MINTI treated the participants to two dinners during the meeting: at the “Monte Cristo” on Thursday 22 May 2003 at 20:30, and Saturday 24 May at 20:30.

The participants express their grateful appreciation to the MINTI and the Malian Authorities for their never ending help and solicitude to them.