

Ford Foundation

UNECA

DRAFT

AFRICAN INFORMATION SOCIETY RETREAT

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information
Society Initiative:**

What Role for Africa's Academic Community?

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Chapter 1. "Dream Catchers"	10
Background	10
Prelude: An Africa Where Everything Works	11
Retreat Objectives and Vision:	13
Methodology / Desired results	14
Chapter 2 "Clearing a Path to the Future."	15
Session 1: Removing the Bottlenecks:.....	15
Chapter 3 "Envisioning 2030."	19
Session 2 - Panel I - What is a Knowledge Society?	19
Chapter 4. "Moving to 2040."	24
Session 3 Panel II - The relevance of the University in 2040.....	24
Chapter 5 "Dreaming in Daylight."	30
Session 4: Dreaming about the University in the Information Society	30
Session 5: Overheard!	32
Chapter 6. "Acknowledging Innovation."	35
Session 6: Panel III - The Heroes Fund Award	35
Session 7: Plenary III - ICT for Development Platform	41
Session 8: Plenary IV – Tough Talk	43
Closure – Is there value in dreaming?.....	47
Wordplay.....	53

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Executive Summary.

The Information Society and the role of African Academia

The advent of the Information Society is characterized by the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in all sectors. By the year 2020, it has been predicted that 12 billion devices will be available, including such ubiquitous items as light bulbs, heart pacemakers and fridges. Consequently, the role of ICTs in the development process is seen as a key challenge for humanity.

A country's ability to fully develop an Information Society depends on the capacity of society to be educated, to assimilate, and to process complex information. This, according to Manuel Castells, “starts with the education system, from the bottom up, from the primary school to the University.” This point underscores the critical role that universities and other higher education institutions have to play in the information society, whilst repositioning themselves for the challenges of globalization and the information age.

Africa's academic and intellectual communities are relative newcomers to discourses on the information society. Apart from the absence of systematic programs on research and development activities there is very little literature on the information society produced on Africa by Africans. Whilst the information society has produced its own sets of scholars through various programs being introduced in different parts of the world, scholarship in this endeavor is confined mainly to South Africa and countries in North Africa. Consequently, what measures should be taken for the involvement of Africa's academic community in the information society beyond the mere usage of ICTs? How can higher education institutions provide a leadership role to ensure that they become innovative contributors?

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

The Retreat

To respond to these questions, the Ford Foundation and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) collaborated to provide a platform and space for a select group of leading African academics/thinkers to reflect on the many intellectual issues for enhancing the role of academia (academics and institutions) in the information society. This collaboration culminated in a visioning retreat entitled “Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative: What Role for Africa's Academic Community?”

Location & duration

The meeting and lodging took place at the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), located in Nazareth, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from June 14 to 16th, 2003. The ILRI compound has a comfortably tranquil environment conducive for maximum thought and reflection.

Objectives

Supported through the Ford Foundation's Higher Education in Africa Project, this event aimed to:

- Define and advocate for a role for Academia in the information society in Africa from a national, regional and international perspective.
- Develop coherent strategies and a framework for realizing the role and intervention of the African academic community (academics and institutions alike) in the information society. This will provide a basis for how academics and universities can participate in the development of the Information society in their respective countries.
- Define the contributions of other stakeholders including the role of governments, civil society and the private sector in relationship to academia.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- Provide a space for participants to reflect on the particular evolution of the information society in their countries and the way(s) in which their exposure through their education, teaching, scholarship, and administrative experience has influenced their approaches to leadership as well as to their understanding of and advocacy for ICTs and the information society at national, regional and international levels.

Participants

Participants comprised academics and representatives from Africa and the Diaspora, knowledgeable or interested in information society issues from across various academic and professional disciplines. Twenty-nine persons made up this diverse group of critical thinkers, committed to this issue, along with staff of the Ford Foundation and ECA.

Orientation

- *Electronic:*

To facilitate discussions during the retreat, an online discussion was held between the participants, from mid-November 2002 to January 2003, on 'the role of Africa's Academia in the Information Society' through the AISI¹ discussion list. These discussions served as a guide to developing the retreat program and identifying the thematic issues for this event.

- *Written:*

As a way to spur creativity and a visionary thought process in advance of the Addis retreat, the Ford Foundation and ECA requested that each participant make a short written contribution. These submissions which are appended at the end of this report, were meant to encapsulate or symbolize participants' thoughts relative to the university's role in developing and shaping an information society and its overall role

¹ African Information Society Initiative (ECA)

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

as an agent of change. The pieces could take the form of a personal essay, an excerpt from song lyrics, a poem or even a story.

(see appendix)

Methodology

The meeting approach was an innovative one that had been used with great effect in previous Ford Foundation Higher Education retreats. Two facilitators, Hope Chigudu and Ezra Mbogori, lead the group in discussions using a range of 'out-of-'the-box' exercises that proved challenging, inspirational and provocative of thoughtful responses to the question of what role academia should play in the information society. Because of this approach, an agenda was not be available before the meeting and participants were asked to arrive with an open mind.

The Report

The Addis Retreat was unconventional, unexpected and exhilaratingly rewarding for those who participated in it. However, in order to relay the essence of this experience, its objectives and the recommendations which resulted from it, it has been necessary to take a more conventional approach to the recording of that experience.

Accordingly, this report is divided into seven chapters, each dealing with a particular theme. Each of these themes may have been approached from more than one perspective and it is for this reason that several sessions may be recorded under a single chapter heading.

In **Chapter 1 – Dream Catchers**, participants are introduced to the **methodology** which shall be used by the facilitators throughout the Retreat. The process of introduction begins even as the participants begin to arrive at the idyllic venue in Nazareth: those who arrive early are able to visit Ethiopia's national museum and see,

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

perhaps for the first time, humankind's earliest ancestor, "Lucy". Tunji Lardner delivers the **Opening Address** which speaks to the theme of An Africa Where everything Works. Building on this theme, the ECA and Ford Foundation representatives remind participants of the **Retreat objectives and vision**. They describe Africa's current situation as one where imaginative solutions must continually be generated to address the myriad challenges the continent faces. A clear vision of what African intellectual leadership could and should mean in the era of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is the main objective of this retreat. Without dreaming or visioning or projecting our minds into the future, it would, they argued, be impossible for Africa to forge a path through the very real obstacles to appropriation of new technologies by African universities - and indeed the continent as a whole – in order to arrive in the place described in the Key Note address, an Africa where everything works. The facilitators, Hope Chigudu and Ezra Mbogori then describe the methodology they shall use as 'dreaming.'

Chapter 2 – Clearing a Path to the Future, covers a single session entitled 'Removing the Bottlenecks. In this session, participants are guided through a process of ridding themselves of whatever they can collectively identify as hindrances to their imagination and thereby, their full participation in the Retreat.

In Chapter 3 – Envisioning 2030, participants explore what a 'knowledge society' might mean in the future. This Panel session allows them to examine the concept of a knowledge society and/or the impact of ICTs on particular societal groups– women, the City, federal government and public health. Themes of exclusion and leadership emerge and continue to recur throughout the Retreat.

In Chapter 4 – Moving to 2040, participants interrogate the relevance of the African university in the future. The Panel comprises not 'experts' but delegated from across the social spectrum. Each presentations provides some insight into the possible impact

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

of the university on diverse stakeholders – peasants, policy makers, big business and the youth - within an ever evolving society, A plenary session thereafter throws up new considerations – the definition and role of the university of the future; the impact of the current AIDS scourge in the year 2040; the funding of education in the future...

Chapter 5 - "Dreaming in Daylight", comprises two sessions. The first, Session 4: Dreaming about the University in the Information Society, builds upon the previous session which had focused on the relevance of the African university in 2040. This session explored the practical role that the university might play in making the information society an everyday reality. Three participants adopted the personas of a Policy-Maker, a university professor and a rural woman in Africa, some time in 2040. From this new perspective, each shared their 'dream' of the impact of the university in particular and of the Information Society in general, upon their lives and their livelihoods. Whilst the professor and the policymaker were happy beneficiaries of the new technologies, such advances remained, for the rural African woman, something she had only heard of. Regardless, she too had a very clear vision of how such technologies could improve her life and those of her dependants – but no one had asked her.

The objective of Session 5: Overheard! was to recollect participants to the lacuna between an unconventional vision and the possibility of its realization in real time in 'the real world.'

Chapter 6. - "Acknowledging Innovation.", focuses on how Africa has responded to the information era. Session 6: Panel III - The Heroes Fund Award, is set in 2050. It is concerned theoretically with how to promote and support the role of higher education in the new information society, and take the process forward "in real time."

Session 7: Plenary III - ICT for Development Platform brings into sharp relief a topic much discussed over the past day and a half, exclusion. It becomes apparent that with or without Africa's participation, the direction and nature of 'development' in the information society is being planned, discussed and decided.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

The sessions contained in **Chapter 7."Appropriating Innovation."**, reinforce the urgency of the situation – Africa's relationship to ICTs is wanting and as a result, some 'tough talk' is necessarily the subject of Session 8: Plenary IV. Session 9:

Closure – Is there value in dreaming?, covers the participants' evaluation of the retreat, its methodology, its objectives and their own personal expectation sin having accepted the invitation to participate.

Session 10: Recommendations for the Future covers the participants' vision for building bridges in partnerships& policy; Curricula development; personal engagement and them lists "specific objectives, measurable deliverables..."

The Report concludes with a play on the words which informed the Retreat: vision, dream, reality.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 1.

"Dream Catchers"

Background

As the various participants began to converge on Addis Ababa from across the continent and the Diaspora, some took advantage of the unique historical location to visit “Lucy”, humankind’s earliest ancestor, housed at the National University Museum. The retreat commenced with an evening reception in the ILRI² grounds. Perplexed mutterings about the unavailability of an agenda, were soon over-ridden by more immediate concerns – the renewal of old acquaintances, the making of new friends, the formal introduction of participants. The Retreat facilitators Hope Chigudu and Ezra Mbogori exhibited a light-hearted confidence as they reminded participants not to expect the conventional and to remember to trust the process.

Starting with a dream

An open mind proved a prerequisite to this two day meeting as facilitators Hope and Ezra introduced a novel approach to the vexed issue of the role of the African intellectual in leading the African Information Society Initiative. The methodology they introduced was dreaming. Indeed, the opening address was itself a dream, a dream of *An Africa where everything works*. While it is true that all did their best to bring with them minds open to compelling argument and imaginations free of the detritus of daily life, it cannot be said that participants could ever have been adequately prepared to enter, on that first morning, a conference room bathed in warm candle light, with soft music playing somewhere in the background... although the room was conventionally laid out. Facilitators Hope and Ezra asked people to sit where they wished, seemingly oblivious to the bemused looks all round. Within no time, participants were happily

² ILRI – International Livestock Research Institution situated in Nazareth, near Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

seated, ready, they hoped, to think 'out of the box' while anchored in reality by their names boldly printed onto recently distributed tags.

Prelude: An Africa Where Everything Works

Tunji Lardner, CEO of WANGONET, larger than life, stumbled sleepily into the conference room scratching his head, a green dressing gown tied firmly round his middle. Taking a seat at the front of the darkened room, he shared with us a recurring dream which had visited him again in Addis. In this dream, he recognized the setting: it was his own campus apartment; but the view from his window was one of matchless beauty, a garden unsullied by weeds, flourishing, beckoning. In his dream, it was obvious – as is often the case with dreams – that the magnificent garden was in fact the whole of Africa. It was an Africa where people, flora and fauna complemented each other; where famine and war were archaic words whose meaning had been forgotten for lack of usage, an Africa, in short, where everything worked.

In response to this vision, Tunji would dash downstairs and fling open his door wanting nothing so much as to be in that garden. He would step out expectantly only to find himself on his own familiar weed-covered patch of turf. Dejectedly, he would return indoors, climb the stairs and return to his bedroom window – only to find that the view had not changed. Africa, outside, was marching on without him. Again, he would fly down the stairs, out the door, into the garden. Again he would be disappointed and again he would climb the stairs and return to his bedroom window... to find that Africa was *still* marching on without him. And once again he would fling himself down the stairs, out the door and into a weed choked patch of lawn...

Addis, however, had wrought a change on this recurring dream. Last night, a time-warp of sorts had occurred and this time, in his dream, Tunji had finally been able to play his own role in Africa's past, present and future. In that bountiful garden which he had repeatedly tried to visit, Tunji now found himself walking around as though he had always belonged. He discovered that the year was 2015, ICTs had been

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

introduced everywhere and no one thought this worthy of comment. Many events had occurred, more would occur and while Tunji was there, a research student discovered that the Bakassi berry was the long sought cure for AIDS – and AIDS became no more of a threat to humanity than dandruff. Equally exciting was that the use of ICTs had enabled Nigeria and Cameroon to claim the intellectual property rights to the Bakassi berry – war between these two nations ceased forever. As for fossil fuels, so many alternative sources of energy were discovered that these too were rendered obsolete – the threat posed to humanity and the environment by extractive industry also became a thing of the past.

In the Addis conference room, where Tunji shared his dream, he concluded by the wish that he could teach his students not just “how”, but “why”.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Retreat Objectives and Vision:

After the opening address, the Ford Foundation Representative for East Africa, Tade Aina and the Director of the Development Information Services Division, UNECA, Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, explained what they hoped this meeting would achieve.

Karima explained that the ECA origins were steeped in an ICT background and that its very existence would never have been possible had it not been 'dreamed up' as a response to various challenges faced by Africans across the world. However, its evolution was now in danger of being stymied by unimaginative requests for grants and computers, in lieu of new ideas. Tade added that if innovative solutions to Africa's challenges were to continue to be found, then bottlenecks to 'dreaming' them up, must be removed.

Both stressed the need to move away from thinking of leadership in the Information Society in terms of bandwidths and gigabytes – access to hardware and connectivity - to a clear vision of what African intellectual **leadership** could and should mean in the era of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Without dreaming or visioning or projecting our minds into the future, it would, they argued, be impossible for Africa to forge a path through the very real obstacles to the appropriation of new technologies by African universities - and indeed the continent as a whole – in order to arrive in the place described in the prelude, an Africa where everything works.

A discussion ensued on the terminology used to describe the meeting. It transpired that the term 'retreat' - a word more commonly associated with an experience of spirituality, of relaxation, of dreaming, than the more customary terms, 'workshop', 'conference' or 'seminar' - had been deliberately selected for its varied nuances. This space was, over the next two days, to be a place of refuge, a space of trust, a retreat to a safe environment infused with the elements of surprise and discovery and filled with the possibility of melding dreams with reality.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Methodology / Desired results

The key words for the retreat were, **dreaming** – the process by which all would **arrive**, at the end of the second day, with a clear vision of where African intellectual leadership wished to place itself within the information society.

The meeting organisers hoped that by the end of the process, all would have a clear idea of the real struggle African universities face in overcoming resistance to engaging with, appropriating and using new technologies. In addition, it was hoped that the dreaming process would result in a tangible notion of HOW, as in Tunji's dream, to create "an Africa where everything works."

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 2.

"Clearing a Path to the Future."

Session 1: Removing the Bottlenecks:

Facilitator Hope Chigudu expounded on the idea of “the burden of names” suggesting that most people do not choose their names and must yet build an identity around them. She argued that if participants were to become “co-visionaries”, then they must first find identities that would allow them to envision new possibilities. This, she argued, would enable the shedding of the names and titles each brought along with them. There was, Hope insisted, “*a need for a new identity that will allow us to dream new dreams.*”. To this end, she suggested that each **choose** a new name for themselves, names that were commensurate with what they planned to achieve in the retreat

Assuming new identities

Despite some initial outrage – one participant insisted that she *liked* her name and that it carried within it the special between her and her parents – all overcame the discomfort of parting with their past. Inverting the name tags on the table, participants boldly printed out the new names by which they wished to be known forthwith. Badges were similarly changed. Twenty ‘new’ participants were now ready for the business of dreaming.

(See Appendix 1 for new and old names)

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Identifying the enemies of Dreaming

Armed with new names and new identities, participants spent the next session identifying 'the enemies of dreaming'. These transpired to be the reasons behind the seeming lack of foresight which dogs government policy, the reasons why African universities fail to keep step with their communities and indeed with the rest of the world, the reasons why Africans do not take upon themselves the role of leading rather than following.

The 'new' participants were asked if it is possible or even responsible, to dream in Africa, given the reality of poverty, AIDS and wars which surround us. The facilitators guided the participants to a shared understanding that the question might be better asked in a different way:

“How can we come up with a future we want if we do not envision / dream it?”

The Interment

Participants discussed the constraints, fears and challenges to dreaming and agreed with the facilitators that if the process was to be successful, these “enemies of dreaming” would have to be buried and forgotten. Working in couples, participants identified the ‘enemies to dreaming’ and wrote these out. The colonial legacy was felt to be the greatest enemy to dreaming in Africa and sub themes under this broad heading were generally classified under three: conditioning, fear, afro pessimism and negative thinking.

- *Conditioning*

Many participants shared the view that Africa's enormous challenges had given Africans the perception that dreams are indeed a luxury and one too costly to indulge in given our “insurmountable” social and economic problems. *The elephant is just so big* is how one participant identified this particular attitude to dreaming. In short, having been conditioned to be practical, thinking in abstract terms is a problem.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- *Fear*

Fear, in its numerous guises, emerged as the most prevalent enemy of dreaming. Typical fears included that of the unknown and that of waking up to face an uncompromising and unchanged reality. With respect to ICTs, it was feared that an emphasis on instrumental uses would result in people being left behind and ICTs social uses being ignored or forgotten. Again there was a fear of social perception, the notion that being visionary leads only to ridicule and that only great people are entitled to dream: while it was apparent that all dreamt, many had come to feel that their dreams were either private or unworthy of merit.

- *Afro-Pessimism*

The final group of enemies can be clustered around Africa's participation in afro-pessimism. It was felt that our complicity in Afro-pessimism is a result of our colonial baggage: this is reflected in a lack of self-confidence, a rigid education system, cultural inhibitions and a propensity to devalue things African, from our leaders to our dreams.

- *Negative thinking*

This heady cocktail of social-conditioning, fear and complicity in afro-pessimism had resulted in statements such as:

“how will people look at me as a dreamer?”

“I am too old now, I stopped dreaming long ago”

“I don't dream in company, I dream alone”

“only great people like Ghandi and Martin Luther King dream publicly, not ordinary mortals like us”

(See Appendix 2 for comprehensive list of enemies of dreaming)

In order to free themselves from the enemies of dreaming and enable the success of the Retreat, a ritual burial was conducted. Each participant carried their inscribed

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

fears to a small pit and 'buried' them in the soil. Having inscribed and interred their enemies, the participants were now freed to move on to building upon their strengths and talents.

Technological Relevance: Harnessing Existing Skills:

"*Nobody is a blank slate*" were the opening words to this exercise. Participants were reminded that in working to introduce or broaden the use of ICTs within communities, success would depend on their ability and willingness to recognize and build upon those skills and talents already present within community.

It transpired that the "community" attending this Retreat also possessed a myriad of hidden talents: amongst them were poets, humorists, hunters, hikers, sportspeople, problem-solvers, singers, drummers, writers, dancers and even a talent for crochet! Participants worked in groups, in pairs or individually to prepare and present a demonstration of how their particular talents could be adapted and moulded to have relevance in solving everyday challenges. Within just a couple of hours, poetry had been composed, a story written and a myriad cases made for adapting old skills to new tasks.

(See Appendix for summary of presentations)

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 3. "Envisioning 2030."

Session 2:

Panel I - What is a Knowledge Society?

The task:

Projecting to the year 2030, the setting for this Panel is the “Guiding and Accountability Forum” in a vibrant city in Central Africa. Every three months this forum meets to review developments and suggest interventions that will improve the quality of life of citizens. On this occasion, the forum is to be presented with the views of “experts” who will speak to the relevance and impact of the information society (both negative and positive) on a cross-section of the community who inhabit this imagined city.

The Panel:

The Panel of ‘experts’ was moderated by Tunji. Four “experts” spoke on the concept of a knowledge society and/or the impact of ICTs on particular societal groups as follows: Dorothy spoke on Women; Pradeep spoke on the City; J A Boon spoke on federal government; and Lola spoke on Public Health.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

'Expert' Presentations:

- *Women and the Knowledge Society in 2030*

The Panel was informed that women continent wide, in both rural and urban areas have access to appropriate communication methods and tools and are well placed to exchange and disseminate information which is relevant to themselves and their particular circumstances. ICTs have facilitated wide societal awareness of women's and men's rights and advocacy efforts on topical issues are informed by grassroots voices. The result is a better-informed population enjoying increased social and economic development.

There are challenges however, such as how to deal amicably with the changing gender and power roles within society.

- *A 'City Perspective' on the Knowledge Society in 2030*

Whilst every household has access to 'basic services', such services are now perceived and defined as "access to technology", rather than to water, electricity and sanitation – which are a given. The environment is paramount: vehicles use alternative fuel sources; water is safe; and urban rivers are recreational areas. Every member of society is equipped with a 'smart card' yielding biometric recognition that gives everyone access to all services provided by the City. In this past-paced context, even the definition of 'literacy' has evolved to mean, "*how quickly one can learn, unlearn and relearn.*"

The City's greatest challenge is its 'faceless society', the omnipresence of government and the loss of cultural values.

- *Federal Government and the Knowledge Society in 2030*

The role of federal government, previously that of supplying the citizenry with services such as education, has been inexorably altered by the advent of ICTS into every sphere of existence. ICTs have facilitated great strides in society, particularly in the area of higher education where all students in schools and in the university, have laptops and think pads. University programmes are web-based across a consortium of virtual African universities. The standard quality of

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

education has risen to such a level that all students leave school and university equipped with technology and communication skills as well as information and knowledge. African centres of excellence in areas such as mining, tourism, culture, social justice, healthcare and multi-linguism have made the continent an exporter of knowledge, and not merely an importer of information.

Federal government now faces tough choices as to what areas to support. The influx of 'foreign' information is making it increasingly difficult to focus on Africa's own areas of expertise. The nature of the brain-drain has changed: some African faculty have become e-tutors for overseas universities and the cost of education in Africa continues to rise beyond the reach of many.

- *Public Health and the Knowledge Society in 2030*

In 2030, medical education has broadened in terms of both access and the skills base. Improvements in patient care have been brought about through telemedicine with the SCAN CITY tool facilitating access for previously geographically marginalized groups. Virtual reality and augmented reality centers within all communities have expanded the frontiers for consumer educators and participants. Synthesized records have meant better control of epidemics and a fundamental change in the practice of medicine means that traditional and non-traditional medicine are practiced side by side.

Inter-planetary travel throughout the knowledge society has resulted in a changing epidemiological profile and the incidence of new disabling diseases. Patient-provider care has become depersonalized leading to a detrimental emphasis on distance diagnosis and prescription. Automation has brought an end to doctor-patient confidentiality and even the obtaining of informed consent - the ethical basis of medical practice has been compromised. An exacerbation of iniquities continues apace as the digital divide widens.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

‘The Public’ Responds:

After the ‘expert presentations, the floor was opened to the members of the public who comprised the “Guiding and Accountability Forum.”

- *Forum Discussion on the Knowledge Society in 2030*

The Panel doubted if the Experts were really targeting the right **priorities**, questioning whether adequate consideration had been given to how the benefits of the Information Society might be measured: - Are people happier? Do they live longer? Have the psycho-social effects of the technological advances been adequately addressed?

Concerns were raised about the **demographic structure** of a post-Aids population and whether the health and education policies outlined had taken that significant pandemic into account.

The **role of government** also received considerable attention with members wishing to know more about the nature of democracy in the information age, and indeed, whether government would restrict its role to the provision of education. The ‘experts’ were also asked to elucidate on how the cost of government investment in such costly services (education, health, etc.) would be raised and how government would determine who was entitled to subsidies.

The nature of **exclusion** in the Information Age proved controversial, with the Forum expressing a fear that the experts might be suggesting that the concept would no longer exist 2030. The Forum wished to know the extent to which the Panel of Experts had taken cognisance of the extensive societal skills base (as demonstrated earlier) which pre-dated the Information Age and to what extent the Information Society in Africa would be indigenously based in 2030.

The nature of **leadership** was also questioned by the Forum: one member wished to know what African academics had done or were doing to take control of the

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

human genome project; another member wished to know from whom leadership in education would come, given the paradigm shift to life-long learning. The Forum argued that “knowledge always needs leaders’ and therefore investment in teachers would continue to be a requisite of education.

With respect to **social exclusion**, the Panel concurred that while the nature of inequity would have changed with broader services being offered by both government and the NGO sector, this challenge would still remain. It was noted that in 2030, inter-galactic travel would mean that men would be competing for the services and favors of women – still comprising 50% of the workforce – with the Martians! The cost of education would be managed by greater emphasis on e-learning and distance learning, but the burden of cost would still fall on society despite means-testing for government subsidies, and a new group of excluded – those who were technologically illiterate would certainly be a factor in 2030. The expert on Women in the Information Society concluded the session with a definition: “...an information society is one which combines all knowledge bases – singing, dancing, culture... - with technology.”

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 4. "Moving to 2040."

Session 3:

Panel II - The relevance of the University in 2040

The task:

In the year 2040, Africa is a federation of states with a University which continues to believe in its relevance to society. Given the ever-increasing costs of its services, the University has been obliged to make a case for increased public funding. Recognizing the need for public support, the University Council has commissioned a group of experts to conduct a survey of society's views on the relevance of the University to their lives.

The Panel:

Rather than relying on the experts to translate their views into the commissioned report, stakeholders from across the Federation have traveled to Timbuktu to give their own response to the University Council. These stakeholders are representatives from community clusters reflecting the cross-section of focus groups convened by the experts.

The University Council which heard the community's views was chaired by Chabani.

- *Peasants:*

The peasantry announced that they had benefited from the information and knowledge provided by the University. There was a caveat however, as it was explained that the peasantry, in 2040, now comprised two distinct groups: a diminishing number who still lived in remote villages; and a second, far larger group comprising farmers, fisher-men, etc. who lived close to the metropolis

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

and through their lap-tops, have access to the information and knowledge beamed from the University.

Concerns:

- advances in bio-technology have been made through the appropriation of their indigenous knowledge
 - asymmetrical partnership between University and peasantry: latter continuing to be used as objects of research; University continues to talk down to them instead of using the languages of the peasants
- *Policy Makers;*
- The view was proffered that if the University was to remain relevant beyond 2040, then its vision must transcend the old post-colonial approach and embrace the challenges of post-globalization. This new vision would mean that regardless of whether it would be entirely cyber-based by 2060, the African University would still have to remain rooted in its community.

Policy Makers argued that ICTs had not yet been adequately used by the University to engage CBOs (community based organizations) in policy-making. Product-related or applied research had taken the place of basic scientific research and a more globalized approach to knowledge was needed.

Accordingly, Policy Makers wished to build basic and fundamental research in African Universities and to link sound graduate programs located in both basic and applied research.

Concerns:

- Learning and teaching has not changed enough, e.g. University approach to the brain drain needs to envisage how better to connect with the Diaspora, rather than concentrating scarce resources on trying to attract people into returning to Africa

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- Enterprise will never fund basic research hence need for Council to continue petitioning government for funding
 - University must continue its role in building the good citizen, building communities and facilitating their participation in the Information Age, i.e. the creation of public goods
 - Public goods should continue to be funded from the public purse
- *Business:*

The Federation of African Business desired an assurance from the University that the knowledge base from which it drew, was indeed the best there is.

Concerns & Opportunities:

 - Intellectual property rights: the FAB* were unsure that having developed the bio-technology industry and shared their learnings with the academy, that their intellectual property rights were adequately protected; the Federation also believed that they were in a position to help the University commercialize its own intellectual property rights if the partnership between them could be strengthened.
 - The FAB agreed with the policy makers that a greater shift needed to be made in learning and teaching particularly in the area of curricular development, which they felt had failed to keep up with business needs: current qualifications, i.e. B.A.s and M.A.s were no longer relevant and there was an ever-increasing need for work related skills.
 - The FAB felt that more focused research and exploration into ways of reversing the brain drain was required of the University.
 - Enhanced partnership was the FAB's greatest concern, with particular respect to intellectual capacity in strategic planning for technological advances
 -
 - *Youth:*

The youngest participants were well placed to describe the bleak prospects faced by graduates in 2040: their skills were increasingly irrelevant, rendering

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

them unemployable and those same skills made them equally irrelevant to their communities.

Concerns & Opportunities:

- The youth believed that they reflected the changing needs of their communities and the University curriculum could have greater relevance to all if it reflected this diversity by offering a multiplicity of skills – social and entrepreneurial, as well as professional.
- They were convinced that partnerships with other universities would introduce a level of competition and thereby raise standards of learning and teaching.
- The ever-increasing cost of university education had made it a luxury: if it was to be brought within the reach of ordinary people then the University should investigate the possibilities of engaging with industry so that students would be offered employment during their studies and provide their skills in return for fees.
- They contended that brain drain would be effectively arrested if the above measures were taken.

The Plenary:

The Chair then opened the floor to delegates from the University Council and members of the public, inviting all to ask the commissioned experts and the delegates from Focus Groups for clarification on their presentations.

- *Plenary on the Role & Relevance of the African University in 2030:*
Questions were raised as to whether the University had any relevance in 2040 with some participants suggesting that greater emphasis ought to be given to institutions of higher learning in general rather than focusing on the university. In the same vein, a delegate wondered whether the Council/Focus Groups had examined what, if any progress had been made since the first Council Meeting in 2003 and whether any learnings had accrued which might be useful in planning for the future.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

One delegate was unconvinced that the AIDS scourge of the previous era had been adequately addressed in the thinking of the focus groups and that of the University Council, while another wanted to know if Business would be interested in committing to a mutually beneficial partnership with the University, as proposed by the Youth.

Clarification was sought as to the precise nature of a “post-global” society and the precise modality of “Net-worked Universities” and “Partnered Universities”. With respect to funding, a delegate wanted to know the cost of maintaining geographically located universities in the era of cyber location was justifiable.

Finally with specific regard to the African university of the future, delegates wanted to know how it might be possible to capture and define the various intellectual spaces currently inhabited by Africa. They also wondered how it might be possible to retain the integrity of intellectual property rights in an Information Society.

- *Responses to Plenary:*

In response to questioning, it was conceded that the University could only remain relevant in 2030 if it was:

- (i) networked, i.e. plugged into the needs of all stakeholders in Society, as represented by themselves, and thereby reflective of society's needs; and
- (ii) partnered, i.e. specialization had occurred leading to fewer but stronger universities in Africa.

Unconvinced by this line of reasoning, one Council Member argued that far too much effort was being spent on fine-tuning structures and processes which had existed since 2003. The member posited the example of how “*resource-poor communities have perfected bricolage methods without external assistance... in conflict resolution and in reabsorbing child-soldiers into their communities against whom they have committed atrocities...*” as an area in which the proceedings had failed to acknowledge and build on Africa's inherent strengths.

Council and Experts agreed on the importance of looking back to the distant past – 2003 and before – both to remember and hopefully avoid past mistakes.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Such a process would facilitate long-term planning, and move the University and indeed the African Federation, away from the instant gratification of short-term planning.

While the Policy Makers admitted that research on the precise nature of a “post-global” society was scanty, they insisted that it was already certain that Africa remains disadvantaged. The Experts confessed that they had given no further thought to the AIDS pandemic since the discovery of a cure in 2010. They however insisted that the term ‘partnerships’ was more nuanced and of greater complexity than could have been imagined in 2003 and implicit within its usage was an emphasis on African excellence, rather than national objectives as in the past.

Finally, in response to the challenge from the Youth, the FAB concurred that they would indeed be interested in committing to a mutually beneficial partnership with the University.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 5.

"Dreaming in Daylight."

Session 4: Dreaming about the University in the Information Society

Building upon the previous session which had focused on the relevance of the African university in 2040, this session explored the practical role that the university might play in making the information society an everyday reality. Once again, Hope and Ezra prompted an out of the box approach to breaking down the complexities of this very real challenge.

In this session, three participants adopted the personas of a Policy-Maker, a university professor and a rural woman in Africa, some time in 2040. From this new perspective, each shared their 'dream' of the impact of the university in particular and of the Information Society in general, upon their lives and their livelihoods.

Waves

"Matrix", a policy-maker described the changes wrought by technological innovation, speaking of new rules, new ways, new markets... He described these changes as having arrived in a series of 'waves'. Finally, he shared his dream of a future where policy-makers will strive to achieve **utopia** – not the impossible, but rather, "*things not yet heard about.*"

Erudition

"Di@ck," a university professor, gave an account of his work with students in an information-rich society.. ICTs have rendered this new era an exciting and interactive time to be learning and teaching. At this time, the entire education process is a richer and more satisfying process for everyone.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

A Better Life

“Diwe”, a woman in Africa, dreams of how this wonderful university she has heard of, might help her to find “...a better life out there.” With her multiple identity – mother of three, farmer, wife - she dreams of a solar-powered plough that would release her children from toil. She dreams of expanding the horizons of her modest bee-keeping enterprise, through the telecentres she has head of. Unable to read, she can only lament, “*Why can't they bring all that to me?*”

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Session 5: Overheard!

Objectives

As participants warmed to the novel methodology, the facilitators pushed the boundaries of exploration still further. In this session, the conference room blinds were drawn and candlelight provided a setting of peaceful intimacy. The facilitators then enacted a skit in which the participants ‘eavesdropped’ on a phone conversation between an unknown couple, *Embattled Ezra* in Addis and *Hostile Hope*, in Harare. The objective of this exercise was to recollect participants to the lacuna between an unconventional vision and the possibility of its realization in real time in ‘the real world.’

Telephone Conversation

In the skit, Ezra is embattled because Hope, his partner who lives in Harare, simply does not believe that he is truly in Addis to attend a conference. She has good reason to be skeptical for she has telephoned the conference venue and been informed that no one by the name ‘Ezra’ is available to speak with her. In addition, having been assured by Ezra that he would be facilitating a meeting of Africa’s finest minds, Hope has waited eagerly before her TV set to watch the opening ceremony... there has been nothing, not even a mention of the President’s key note address.

Ezra has tried to explain that the key note address was a dream and that the reason the Retreat receptionist could not find his name in the register is because all the dignitaries have assumed new names for the purpose of facilitating the process. Hope’s skepticism is fast turning to cynicism as rumors of the ‘fantastic goings on’ in Addis have reached her in Harare.

Hostile Hope: Well how come you were seen digging graves?

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Embattled Ezra: We buried the enemies of creativity to allow us to dream new dreams.

Hostile Hope: What about the drummers and Singers? Poetry? Stories?

Embattled Ezra manfully attempts to explain the use of consultative and participatory methods to engage the wide skills base inherent within communities. His exegesis is received with shouts of laughter by Hostile Hope and yet more incredulous questions...

HH What about women? Do they have a voice?

EE: Yes, in fact part of the Retreat was a forum where a woman representative spoke on the impact of the university and the of the information society on women.

HH: Are you suggesting that universities are becoming *accountable* communities? Ha ha ha ... Dream on Ezra!

Openly amused at what she perceives to be Ezra's naivety, Hope recalls him to the reality of being resident in today's Zimbabwe by informing him that 'Government Intelligence' has mentioned the existence of a Creativity Box at the entrance to the Retreat, a box which has remained curiously empty... The juxtaposition of politics and creativity in that one sentence is a reminder to all participants of the 'enemies of dreaming' which had been interred on the first day. Not content with a single jarring reminder, Hope goes on to promise Ezra that she will do her best to get him included in the 'Zimbabwe land-allocation roster', if only to compensate for the shocking waste of his time that this Retreat has proved to be.

Session Five had served as a creative reminder of each of the preceding sessions: the opening session in which objectives were defined and a 'dream' was the Prelude which set the scene for every successive activity. The identification and removal of barriers to creativity had facilitated the envisioning of a university

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

which was continually reinventing itself to remain relevant to its immediate context – Africa – and to the global context of the information era. These exercises pushed to the forefront issues of accountability between institutions of higher learning, government and the disparate communities which rely on their services they provide.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Chapter 6.

"Acknowledging Innovation."

Session 6:

Panel III - The Heroes Fund Award

Setting:

The setting for this plenary session is 2050, two decades after the University of Timbuktu first demonstrated its continuing relevance to society. At this time, the Federation of African States has established a fund for promoting and supporting the role of higher education in the new information society.

Named in honor of the Africa's visionaries, the Heroes Fund is a prestigious grant awarded on a triennial basis to the institution which presents the most persuasive proposal on how to keep African societies at the cutting edge of the Information Society. Competition is intense as the winner of this august award assumes a host of privileges, including automatic membership to the Pan African Policy Council which develops federal policy for the continent.

This year, four contenders from each of the award categories, are left in the bidding. Each must show how they will enhance gender and youth equity within their particular vision. Their proposals should not be constrained by current realities. Other criteria on which they will be judged are:

- the reach across the entire continent of the university's proposed program;
- the extent to which the program has taken cognizance of continental diversity;
- the extent to which the proposal is understandable, persuasive and compelling to ordinary people.

The judges have the final word and hold discretionary powers as to time-keeping.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

University of Ibadan – R & D in the Information Society

This proposal focused on **language** as the university's key area of research towards the institutionalization of the knowledge society. Using somewhat arcane technology (a flip chart), this presentation comprised a chronology of language beginning in antiquity (2003) and ending with a vision for post 2050. (see appendix)

- *Central Argument*

The ethos of this presentation was, “*Now, we can all talk to each other in real time*”. The Ibadan team argued that breaking the language barrier meant “*universal access*”: women were now as technologically enabled as men; university entry had tripled.

Ibadan justified its focus on language for the diffusion of technology by demonstrating how the technology they had developed had allowed *all* Africans to converse in simultaneous time, using the common language of ICTs. Once a veritable Tower of Babel, Africa and Africans were now negotiating their identities in a newly empowered manner as all their languages were web-enabled

Language, the team emphasized, had, as a vehicle for their common culture, opened up a new African cultural intellectual space for a re-writing of Africa's history, the tracing of genealogies and the re-inscription of the African genome project.

- *Next Steps*

The team believed that in the very near future, their research and development program would result in AU parity with the EU. The African ID card project would facilitate free and easy movement across borders. Instantaneous translation at conferences would be a given and the business of government within the Federation of African States would benefit from simultaneous translation of the Hansard.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Makerere University – Strategic Partnerships and Societal Relevance

This team combined technology, gravity and water to demonstrate their vision of the University's relevance to all sections of African societies. A PowerPoint presentation, which is available, illustrated the key points of their argument.

- *Central Argument*

The team argued that in 2050, there has been a change in the relationship between the producers and consumers of knowledge, the two are now indistinguishable. Makerere University, they argued, is the vessel in which, much like water in a glass, the stuff of life – intellectual leadership – is contained and prevented from wasting away.

Their presentation illustrated *why* their links with civil society merited the label 'strategic partnerships':

MU's link with government now means that they play a key policy role in both its research and its implementation

MU's link with Business ensures their continued relevance in the growth of the nation

MU's link with other research organizations now means *sharing*, i.e. collaboration as well as competition

MU's link with schools has led to a continuous learning cycle based on a methodology of curriculum + technology

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Fort Hare University – Securing Technology within the Community

A three part approach was adopted by this team in order to demonstrate the best methods for securing broad adoption of technology by society and the promotion of the benefits of the information society.

- Central Argument

The team shared a Vision of a 2050 in which “...*a Super Brain will dominate the IT landscape... as a designer, a producer and a consumer*”. In order to achieve this vision, they argued that basic definitions would change so that

‘society’ would come to mean ‘*all people*’ and technology would mean ‘*a shift from adoption to adaption*’. In order to achieve their vision of 2050, the team argued that linked up LICs (Learning and Innovation Centres) would be centrally embedded within all universities and within all communities.

The team outlined three main challenges to the fulfillment of their vision:

Maintaining the relevance of the global village to the local culture, heritage, economic and health needs of the community – technology would have to adapt itself to the needs of people

Broadening the concept of ‘interface’ in order to expand the intellectual capacity and access of the *entire* community government now means that they play a key policy role in both its research and its implementation

Using innovation to mobilise resources and involve people “*at the level at which they are.*”

- *Questions/ Comments*

It was noted that that technology does not exist on its own but is there to be driven by people: accordingly, LICs would facilitate *human* contact in this era of cyber-technology.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Univ. of Ayn-Shams, Cairo – Leadership in Technological Development

Technological wizardry facilitated this presentation in the form of a virtual presenter. Beamed in from Cairo, this presentation argued for the continuing relevance of the university as a channel/ centre for technology development by reflecting back to 2003 when Africa comprised meant poverty, borders, disease, a plethora of languages and cultures... and moving to a 2050 where the language barrier has been broken and connectivity is ubiquitous.

- *Central Argument*

The challenge of 2050 is ‘**massification**’ – the masses are still unaware of advances in technology. The university’s function is to demonstrate leadership by playing an ever stronger role in bringing ideas from the community out – and bringing financing to the community, e.g. from venture capitalists-

The vision of Ayn-Shams is one where the University is a world leader in R&D and has facilitated for Africa:

Leadership / global excellence in niche areas

Critical mass of expert skills leading to export of technology

The **model** for achieving this vision is that:

the communications structure underlying Africa is fully transparent to the Federation of African States

nodes of excellence at micro or national level can be tapped into by all

a combination of virtual and physical entry points for women and youth, and leadership training for women

Poetic Vision

Ray then shared with the group, *A Poem for Practical Dreamers, or Dreams at Work*, a vision of pan African connectivity, industry and creativity.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

The Verdict: And the winner is...

The judges returned to recap the highlights of each presentation, such as the use of ICTs, the depth and breadth of content, the clarity of vision.... and announced that their verdict had been unanimous.

The winning team from Fort Hare exercised their privilege by distributing their winnings equally amongst all present, prompting the judges to insist that *everyone* was a winner. As the bounty was shared, Hope and Ezra facilitated an assessment of the judging panel and a reflection on the methodology used.

- *Some practical reflections on time:*
 - plenary should have been accorded time to ask questions, both for clarification and to enrich / contribute to judging process
 - more time for group preparation would have allowed team members to absorb the complexities of their task and ‘dream from the same script’
- *Some winging about the judging:*
 - a Sore Loser declared the judgment ‘*a triumph of form over substance*’
 - this was a view substantiated by others who went so far as to doubt the impartiality of the judges !
- *Assumptions & complexities:*
 - while all had assumed that Africa ‘works’ in 2040, there was no shared definition of ‘working
 - the approach was indicative of a human tendency to ignore our own complexities – poetry was an aside in the sessions – an illustration of humanity’s propensity to compartmentalize and not use all our learning in all situations
- *Challenges from the Retreat:*
 - having dreamt ‘well’, how to translate this experience into ‘real time’

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- how to build on our newly formed community of dreamers/ use the methodology 'out there' in a world which judges harshly

Session 7:

Plenary III - ICT for Development Platform

The afternoon session began with a CD Rom presentation on an "ICT4D Platform to be co-organised by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) as a key element of the WSIS Series of networked events."

This final session highlighted a topic much discussed over the past day and a half, **exclusion**. A CD ROM presentation expounded on an ICT4D platform to be held in Switzerland in December, 2003. Slick graphics and an airport announcer type voice-over informed the room of the great things that would occur in Geneva, in the name of 'development'. Few of the participants had been aware that such a conference had been planned. Yet the planning was so intricate and so far advanced that one section of the presentation was dedicated solely to a graphic description of the parking and residential facilities that would be available at the conference venue.

The atmosphere became somber as the reality of exclusion was forcibly brought home by the power of ICTs. Here was a roomful of African Phds., CEOs, entrepreneurs - a knowledge base of skills, talents and experiences nurtured in Africa and honed by global exposure and interaction. And since everyone in that room had for the last 36 hours, been sharing a dream of Africa, why was it that not one person in the Addis conference room was present or represented in that slick presentation which had just announced an ICT for Development Platform to be held in a place called? Was this, then, a roomful of the excluded?

Like nothing else over the past day and a half, this example of technological exploitation to appropriate even the development agenda of the African continent,

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

brought home to the African participants, the true nature of exclusion. It was a forceful demonstration that the excluded groups of the future would not be restricted to those all were already aware of and planning for – the physically disabled; the mentally challenged; the poor; women; the youth, but could easily include everyone who sat in that room that afternoon. For, with or without their participation, the direction and nature of ‘development’ in the information society was being planned, discussed and decided. Somewhere else.

The presentation was received in total silence. Yet it was a silence that was palpable as participants retreated into their own personal spaces of reflection.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Session 8:

Plenary IV – Tough Talk

Having digested the ICT4D presentation and silently questioned what they had seen and heard, participants were now ready to share their feelings. In their role as agents provocateurs, two participants reiterated the question which had been at the back of every person's mind since the first morning: in a continent that faces numberless demanding crises within and political, fiscal and technological exclusion at every turn, is dreaming ever justified and is there any 'excuse' for reasonable, intelligent, responsible and privileged Africans to 'waste' two' days in Addis on dreams.

Begging for bandwidth

Ahmed, having become increasingly disgruntled over the course of the day, exploded out of his seat, bombarding the room with a barrage of statistics:

- in South Africa, life expectancy is down to 39 as a result of HIV
- in Mozambique, less than 1% of the population have access to post-school education – in Canada, it is 80%
- every African university is suffering erosion
- our health issues are basic – malaria, diphtheria, etc

Acting as devil's advocate, Ahmed had two pertinent questions:

*“What the h... have we been doing for the past TWO DAYS PONTIFICATING about ubiquitous networking when **the reality is that we are begging for bandwidth?! Can We Have A REALITY CHECK PLEASE?!?!”***

Can We Have A REALITY CHECK PLEASE?!?!”

Please define “D”

Another participant who described himself as a sore loser, had a third question, but first he too wished to share his feelings. The Swedish presentation we had watched on ICT4D was, he declared, an example of,

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

“Some people somewhere doing stuff for us somewhere, when we don't have the resources to do any of it... I am sick and tired of projects that never turn into processes ... I am the D, why won't they ask me, come to me?”

“4D”, this participant continued, “could mean ‘for development’ or even, ‘for dreams’, but what about the quantification of dreams?” As a social entrepreneur, this CEO insisted that he understands the implementation of development dreams, the need for ‘massification’, economies of scale. But, he concluded, *“I see dreams. What I want to see is reality!”*

Why dream at all?

Other participants now interjected with a storm of complimentary and contradictory opinions as to the value of the Retreat and of its methodology. Lola argued that to fail to dream is to fail to start, a sentiment which met with derision from a heckler. Tina argued that Africa suffers from not taking pride of its achievements while Pradeep agreed that it was precisely just such an occasion to dream that allowed us to take cognizance of our reality. Juma interjected that Africa's problem was not dreaming, but discarding its dreams unexamined.

J A Boon took issue with the notion that we must choose either to dream or to engage with reality, an attitude seconded by Tim, who felt Africa needed to dream more *and* take ownership for fulfilling its dreams or run the risk of being over-run by the kind of ‘cowboys’ who would attend the ICT4D meeting in Switzerland.

Chabani “not wishing to rain on your party” felt obliged to mention that higher education which he had thought to be the purpose of this Retreat, had not in fact been its focus. He suggested revolutionary methods for ensuring that those with the power to alter policy and lives are also encouraged to dream. Taking up the issue of power, Ray directed our attention to NEPAD. However, Tina argued for the power of ideas as more potent than the power of politicians. A Case Study offered by Boshra illustrated this perspective, demonstrating a compelling “reality based on nothing at all.”

Francis argued for the value of dreaming, its ability to alter mundane tasks, saying,

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

“If we had a vision of changing society, would we not approach the teaching of linguistics in a completely different way?” Dawit shared this view but noted that some dreams are best left unrealized (Ethiopia’s experience with Communism). If dreaming was meant to create a vision for the future, then, he argued to fail to dream was to head for a future awash with precisely the same problems as those faced in the present.

All very nice, but where is your Credit Card?

Moving the discussion away from the intangible course it was threatening to take, Aida rose to deliver first an anecdote about a university drop-out called Bill Gates and then a brutal illustration of the true nature of the Information Society. Stating that the Information Society is driven by Research and Innovation, she insisted that “...*the African academic community is not prepared.*” Noting that the African academy had benefited from on-line and cost effective research and documentation, she sketched the changing nature of this interface:

“Intellectual property rights will soon mean downloading papers from the Net with a credit card, in hard currency – is the African intellectual ready?”

Brazil and India had caught the wave and were fighting the changes that would become effective within the near future. “*But where, she asked, is the African academic?*”

Engaging with Reality

Ahmed, retiring from his role as devil’s advocate, summarized the session findings, pulling together the key points which had emerged :

- Africa must dream, but must come back to reality
- Africa must *build* on its dreams, not keep re-inventing the wheel
- The difference between dreaming and real time in our real terrains does mean moving from project to process and this means working *with* government
- African intellectuals must engage with reality and must dream – or face the consequences of leaving all public fora to the ‘cowboys’, multi-nationals, etc.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- Finally, we must be engaged in reality if we are to dream and we must surely dream if we are to be engaged in reality

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Session 9:

Closure – Is there value in dreaming?

At this point, participants were requested by the facilitators to give an evaluation of the Retreat. A request for evaluation forms was denied on the basis that no one ever reads them anyway. Instead, participants were invited to share their impressions about the Retreat objectives and methodology in open forum.

Participants' Evaluation: swimming in a pool of indifference v standing on Kili

Many acknowledged their initial discomfort at having been removed from their comfort zones – travelling without an agenda, giving up their names, dancing and dreaming in public – and their resultant pleasure in having learned something new by trusting in the process. Visions had been broadened from a narrow departmental focus within a national university, to encompass a Federation of African states.

Finding “*the levers for the mobilisation of power and policy*” was acknowledged as a challenge to be overcome if participants were not to return to their institutions only to swim in a pool of indifference. Many felt that the Retreat had proved the participants up to that task – they had learned to process complex issues in short bursts of time and present them in a coherent manner – as demonstrated by Prakash, we could now stand on Kilimanjaro and see the whole picture, or sit at its feet and watch the world walk past us.

The facilitators were commended for the hard work they had put in which had freed participants from what might have been days of preparation. In the words of one participant, “...*the ambush of the meeting was its greatest strength*” and the take out for another was that “*All the conventional solutions seem to fail*” agreed with many that the way forward was to roll out the process “*because we need dreamers.*”

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

ECA Closing Remarks

On behalf of Karima, Aida explained that the ECA had learned from their experience in promoting ICTs for development that this could not be left to government “as they do not make up the state.” She added that it was because an intellectual vision was missing in the first meeting which the ECA had convened on the vital area of ICTs, that this one had resulted.

Reminding all that the World Summit would be coming to Africa in 2005, she emphasized that whereas African NGOs are prepared for it, the ECA has started listserves for African intellectuals to facilitate their preparations. Aida emphasized the point that although ICT4D only dates back four years, Africa is already the subject of other peoples’ studies: “*What will African intellectuals showcase even if they do ignore Geneva?*” Aida concluded with the hope that each present would give further thought to their role in this process because African intellectuals must represent themselves. “*The information society is on its way and if it is to be sustainable, then it cannot be led by hordes of consultants. African intellectuals must lead it.*”

Ford Foundation Closing Remarks

A confession was made of early fears about the process, suffered by some Foundation members, but calmed by the professionalism exhibited by Hope and Ezra’s, to whom special thanks were given. Outlining the way forward, Ahmed explained that this was not a stand-alone meeting, but part of a process which had begun with a similar visioning meeting for Ministers, students, Vice-Chancellors, etc. and which might after an examination of the Retreat Report, continue with a 10-year visioning meeting. He hoped that the Foundation would be able to include all present in the next steps. Explaining that the Foundation had four regional offices and is interested in regional meetings and open to ideas from all, wherever, they may be, he spoke of “the crucial issue of networks” on linguistics, on incorporating civil society into NEPAD³, etc. The participants were thanked “*for being part of what the Ford Foundation sees as a process and not a project.*”

³ The New Partnership for Africa’s Development

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Creative Awards Ceremony

Prizes were awarded to:

- Remi Raji for his proposal that students be appointed as ICT ambassadors to their communities
- Ahmed Bawa for his two-pronged proposal that universities be encouraged to introduce capstone modules in all undergraduate programs AND that a national annual award be given to the community which has made the greatest strides in ICT usage and development
- The winning idea belonged to Dorothy Okello who proposed that tertiary students be encouraged to adopt a group within their communities...

Ritual: Name Reclamation

The solemn task of reclaiming names was undertaken to the beat of drums, the shuffling of feet, the waving of arms, the swaying of hips, the flashing of teeth and the clasping of hands.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Session 10: Recommendations for the Future

“Dreaming is part of planning. It is forecasting, visioning... a part of us.”

A ‘meditation walk’ allowed participants to reflect on the dreams shared over the past day and a half. Among the many recommendations they made for the future were variations on the theme of how to roll out this methodology to those in positions of power and influence. Almost half the participants gave **personal undertakings** as to *how* they would avoid “swimming in a pool of indifference” upon their return to their home institutions, by “selling” their dream to their colleagues.

A summary of recommendations made by the participants as a result of their Meditation Walk follows:

(Appendix 5 contains a comprehensive list of reflections.)

Building Bridges: Partnerships & Policy

Past experience had made participants all too wary of the challenge of convincing those in authority – governments and policy-makers who hold the power to make change – that change is necessary. Participants therefore gave careful consideration to how governments and policy-makers at every level could be implicated in translating the dream of African intellectual leadership in the Information Society, into a reality.

Acknowledging that the concept of partnership would have to alter if ICT4D was to become a fact, participants identified existing mechanisms and structures that they could work with to mobilise for the Information Society at national, regional and continental level. These included the AU, NEPAD, WSIS, the WTO and intellectual unions such as academic associations and student unions.

Practical suggestions as to how such partnerships could be built and the benefits which would accrue were also suggested. These included disseminating the Retreat conclusions to all African HEI policy-makers. This would be a first-step to engaging them in building a strategic vision for universities in the Digital Age. Retreat organizers (FF & ECA) were asked to help establish a list serve of all

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

participants which would enable them to transform their discussions into proposals for policy-makers. These proposals would emphasize inclusion of all of society's stakeholders in transforming Africa into an information society.

A radical vision for the future coupled with a practical working relationship between the African Academy and African government was felt to be the only way to harness the benefits of ICTs for the continent.

Curricula

Participants also made recommendations as to how to ensure the continued relevance of African institutions of higher education, including universities, in the global era. They felt that establishing a website for African universities would facilitate networking and the exchange of skills, needs and ideas.

Multi-lingual we-based curricula could form the foundation for an African virtual university which would tailor the qualifications it offered, to Africa's needs, including heritage sustainability.

One participant urged for the development of curriculum on "Dreams and Reality", while another gave India as a concrete example of a place where ICT courses which trigger student creativity and broaden their vision, have already been introduced.

The key objective was felt to be the need to engage the higher education sector continent wide in the formulation of a vision for universities in the Digital Age.

Personal Engagement

The retreat had clearly left many participants confident of their personal ability to be agents of change within their own communities or home institutions. They felt empowered to be leaders in effecting radical change in the thinking that would lead to averting Africa's eclipse in the Information Society and gave clear examples as to how this could be achieved.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

- Use the “Power of One” – each of us has the power to take forward the ideas of:
 - partnerships in the IS
 - closer interaction with the community
 - massification of education
- Each participant should pursue the actualisation of the dream of ‘new’ partnerships with their communities and share the resultant learnings with the group
- Each participant should review their departmental / institutional policy in light of the dreams shared
- Participants should seek out views of their colleagues in Academia on their role in the Information Society
- Each participant should undertake to influence the policy and direction of their institutions by creating a ‘dream’ and ‘selling’ to their colleagues a dream / road map that charts a course from where we are now to where we would like to be: in a year’s time: a second meeting should be convened to evaluate progress made after a year
- Organise a dreaming workshop for policy makers within our home institutions and governments, in which some of the participants in this Retreat could act as devil’s advocates to provoke creative imagination

Next Steps: “specific objectives, measurable deliverables...”

Despite initial resistance to the process of dreaming, the participants had found the **methodology** to be **valuable** and practical. They wished to see this approach incorporated into all future leadership development programmes for ICT visioning.

They recommended that a **follow-up meeting** be held in a year’s time. This meeting might last longer, participants might plan for a 10 year horizon and policymakers and other stakeholders might also be included to share their dreams of a Global African Vision.

Regional **innovation hubs** in North, South, East and West Africa might also be established to carry this process forward.

**Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative:
What Role for Africa's Academic Community?**

Wordplay

Vision

- the faculty of being able to see or be seen
- the ability to think about the future with imagination or wisdom

Dream

- series of images and feelings occurring in a person's mind during sleep

Reality

- the state of things as they actually exist

Over two days, we learned that dreams cannot be for the night only, we walked with Lucy amidst images of ubiquitous connectivity, we ate *injera*, we danced, we drummed, we learned to value crochet... And armed with these visions we braced ourselves to return to a world where credit-cards hew an abyss of exclusion from the real world of valuable engagement and the only way forward is to leap.

An

Africa

Where

Everything

Simply

Works!