world summit on the information society
Geneva 2003 - Tunis 2005

Briefing Paper

Economic Commission for Africa

AISI

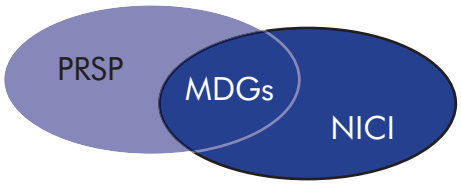
E-strategies for Poverty Reduction and the Millennium Development Goals

One specific element of the ICT policy process through the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plan is to align a country's development goals, more precisely the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) objectives. It is not an easy task as traditionally the decision makers see ICT as a completely separate domain and often fail to see the role of ICT as a tool to attain the PRSP goals. The national e-strategies (NICI) provide ICT tools to assist countries to reach their PRSP objectives and goals efficiently (see Box1 on in the case of The Gambia). The process begins with a vision statement that underlines the links between poverty reduction:

> *"To leverage the benefits of ICT for a people-centered, free market based and export-oriented socio-economic development strategy built on principles of public-private partnership for wealth creation".*

More precisely, a NICI Policy ideally contains a number of items that covers PRSP objectives and tries to support those goals through ICT led plans of action (see Box). This complementary process intermingles with the overall direction towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In a graphic illustration (Figure 1) the areas where both PRSP aims and NICI objectives complement each other may be marked as a common priority area of the MDGs. In other words, the NICI Policy and Plans are not only a means to achieve the PRSP goals but also a way to sustain the ICT led poverty alleviation activities through PRSP funding and planning process of the country. In this way the NICI plan activities are expected to be supported in the long run as a regular national activities rather than as one time, donor-driven, isolated pilot initiatives that are often abandoned after the donor has left of the pilot phase is over.

Figure 1: PRSP-NICI Complementary View



Box 1 : NICI Process in The Gambia

The NICI process in The Gambia is geared towards recognising the areas where ICT would contribute to the attaining the overall objectives of the four strategic issues identified in the PRSP besides other priority areas (called 'Pillars') of NICI:

1. Enhancing the Productive Capacity of the Poor.
2. Enhancing Access to and the Performance of Social Services.
3. Local Level Capacity Building.
4. Promoting Participatory Communications Processes.

Social service delivery aspects of the MDGs focusing on reducing child mortality, improving maternal health and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases are made a vital part of the ICT policy and deployment plans for the Health sector.

The MDGs related to environmental sustainability and establishing a global partnership for development are of crosscutting nature that demand a better sharing of knowledge and information not only at the national level but also at the regional/international levels. The NICI policy and plans incorporates these aspects through a specific emphasis on the creation of a visible environmental and disaster management website to monitor environmental degradation as well as for dissemination of information on country's natural resources through Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Under the e-Government pillar of NICI, for instance, The Gambia adopted a policy for "management of natural resources for wealth creation through strategic use of ICT and GIS for research on the complex relationship between natural resources and economic, environmental and social factors that affect them".

Role of ECA: The Commission is working to ensure that national e-strategies (NICI) are linked to National Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and

Box 2: Synthesizing PRSP Goals with NICI Policy and Plans

PRSP Objective	NICI Policy & Plans
Enhancing the Productive Capacity of the Poor.	
a. Promoting labour-saving devices for Women.	Rural Multimedia Centres for Women
b. Providing Access to Credit.	Credit / Loan Opportunities Information online
c. Re-organising Agricultural R&D to encourage labour intensive agriculture and development of small ruminants.	Agricultural Information Systems for rural community information centres
Enhancing Access to and the Performance of Social Services.	
a. Expanding access to Basic Social Services in Rural Areas.	Launching e-Government Initiatives / providing access at local area councils
b. Delivering responsive social programs to the poor.	
c. Enhancing sustainability and quality of social services.	
Local Level Capacity Building.	
a. A Political and Legislative framework for decentralisation.	Local Government Leadership Training for LG representatives
b. Empowerment of Local Government Authorities to assume Decentralised responsibilities.	
Promoting Participatory Communications Processes.	
a. Enhancing Participation beyond Consultation.	Planning Feedback / Local Govt Representative Links up to the National Assembly level
b. Addressing Gender at National and Local Levels.	Women Bureau's Rural Multimedia Centres as the participatory hub/link to the national development processes /programs.
c. Institutionalising Dialogue between Government, Civil Society and Donors.	NGO / CSO links through NGO associations (e.g. TAGNO, Action Aid in The Gambia)

also address the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). So, far the NICI process has been linked to PRS of Comoros, Mali, Malawi, and The Gambia to mention a few.

Further details on NICI, PRSP and MDGs:

- AISI: http://www.uneca.org/aisi/
- Gambia NICI:
  http://www.uneca.org/aisi/nici/Gambia/gambia.htm
  http://www.dosh.gm/gambia-ictpolicy/
- UN ICT Task Force - Millennium Development Goals
  http://www.unicttaskforce.org/mdg/default.html

The activities mentioned in this brief have been supported by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), the European Union, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), Industry Canada, the Government of Finland and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

For more on ECA's work on ICTs, please visit http://www.uneca.org/aisi