

Report of the meeting of Partners for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa, Addis Ababa, 1 November 1999

Welcome (Agenda item one)

Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Chief of the Development Information Services Division at the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), welcomed participants to the meeting on behalf of ECA which was acting as secretariat for PICTA. She briefly reviewed the history and accomplishments of PICTA.

Election of officers (agenda item two)

Ms. Susan Pasquariella (POP-IN, United Nations Population Division) was elected Chairperson. Mr. Reinhard Woytek (Indigenous Knowledge initiative, the World Bank) was elected Vice Chairperson of the meeting. ECA volunteered to assume rapporteurial duties.

Report on major activities, programmes and projects in information and communication technologies (ICT) in Africa (agenda item three)

Association for Progressive Communications (APC)

APC is an NGO engaged in facilitating exchange of technical expertise with the aim of sharing new ideas, knowledge and experiences in the field of communications. APC conducts media training courses geared toward imparting knowledge on new techniques and skills of communications. APC is also undertaking community development projects supporting telecentre initiatives in South America and is interested in supporting similar projects in Africa. Further information on APC can be obtained at <http://www.apc.org>.

Bellanet

Bellanet has recently been engaged in two major activities this year – providing a web-to-email gateway so that people with e-mail-only access can retrieve information from web and developing a programme for an online small grant management system, which is available for use by organizations involved in management of small grants. Initially the program is being implemented in Latin America with future expansion planned to other parts of the world. Bellanet is also collaborating with similar institutions in the development of IDML and XML systems for standardization of web-based information resources. Bellanet would like to continue its partnerships, and especially its support to PICTA, in providing information management services

ECA

ECA reported that since the previous PICTA meeting, it had focused mainly on the preparation for ADF and development of national information and communication infrastructure (NICI) plans. ECA's first Committee on Development Information (CODI) meeting was held in July, focusing on ICTs, Statistics and geoinformation. At the country level, ECA was continuously being requested to provide more technical and financial assistance. ECA is working closely with IDRC and UNESCO to assist 22 African countries to develop their NICI plans. In collaboration with these and other partners, ECA is trying to involve all African States in this process. It was stressed that ECA's work on African content is vital, and strategies have to be identified to ensure the quality and sustainability of this activity. In this regard, collaboration is needed from Association of African Universities (AAU). ECA is also collaborating with UNCTAD and others on e-commerce and e-health applications.

La Francophonie

Mr. Moussa Camara, newly appointed as the representative of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie (www.francophonie.org) to ECA and OAU, underlined the high priority that La Francophonie gives to improving access to and developing national capabilities in ICTs in francophone countries, of which 26 are in Africa. He indicated that the Agence intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (agence.francophonie.org), the principal cooperation agency of la Francophonie

has established Institute of New Technologies (INTIF) in Bordeaux, France that strives to improved ICT deployment in French speaking countries. The Institute provides support to French speaking countries in sectoral applications of ICTs and in providing training and solicits projects from its member States in this area. The Agence de la Francophonie gives high priority to African countries and seeks further partnership with PICTA members. He alerted PICTA members to the Francophonie Web site: <http://agence.francophonie.org> and that of INTIF (intif.francophonie.org)

Indigenous Knowledge project (World Bank)

The main activities of the Indigenous Knowledge (IK) project of the World Bank focus on IK development, developing an IK best practice database, national policies and integrating IK in project development. It was stressed that the Bank is a clearinghouse for IK, not a repository. The Bank is working closely with a number of partners mainly through the PICTA mechanism. The Bank has developed an environmental assessment handbook in collaboration with CIDA, and joint activities are being undertaken with IFAD, ITU, UNDP, and GTZ. (The IK presentation to the meeting is available on the PICTA Web site).

International Telecommunication Union

ITU noted that arrival of a new Director of the Office for Telecommunication Development, Mr. Hamadoun I. Toure. It was continuing its work with UNESCO, IDRC, FAO and WHO on the development of pilot telecentres in Africa. It was also preparing a reference volume on the telecentre movement. The gender and telecommunications working group remained active

Leland Initiative

The Leland Initiative focuses on three areas:

- strengthening Internet policy/enabling environment,
- developing national infrastructure
- developing the user base through training and capacity building.

It was mentioned that there is growing sense of confidence in the United States Government towards the countries where Leland Initiative (LI) is operating. LI is working on integrating its activities with the US Government's Internet Economic Development Initiative (IEDI), under which a series of pilot projects is being implemented in 11 countries, 7 of which are in Africa. The number of countries where LI is being implemented has grown from 9 to 15 with the addition of Eritrea, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, and Uganda. Work has started with the national university of Rwanda focusing on networking, cost based tariffing and providing direct access to the university. Another activity is the installation of 3 VSATs in secondary cities in Guinea. The launching of the Education for Development and Democracy Initiative (EDDI), which has a component on connectivity was described. In line with this initiative, LI is working very closely with WorldLinks to wire over 100 universities in Africa in a few years. Some EDDI activities have already been started in Uganda and Kenya. Another activity is wiring over 1000 civil society entities in cooperation with Association for Development of Education on Africa (ADEA). LI is also working with the Federal Communications Commission to develop content for effective regulation, with the result to be disseminated to key African institutions working in this area. LI is working and will continue working very closely with all donors in the areas of information and communication technologies through the PICTA mechanism.

PACT

PACT's activity covers 17 African countries with a focus on indigenous institutions capacity building institutions with regard to ICTs and the skilled human resources for their use. PACT has launched projects in Madagascar aiming at developing national standards to facilitate information sharing among sectoral information systems. PACT's activities in the Greater Horn of Africa focus on setting up networks to facilitate information sharing for conflict management, including providing NGOs with necessary

equipment and support staff development programs. PACT also assists countries in strengthening their financial management capacity.

PACT supports telecentre initiatives in Mali and Uganda by conducting training for telecentre operators and funding baseline studies aiming at identifying community basic information needs and evaluating the impact of the telecentres on the overall life of the community.

Population Information Network (POPIN)

POPIN is a decentralized worldwide network of institutions concerned with population issues. Its primary objective is to facilitate and enhance the availability of population information in collaboration with the United Nations regional commissions, the specialized agencies and the non-governmental population community. The Network was established by the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is organized into regional and national networks in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Northern America. Plans are underway for the establishment of a population information network for Western Asia. The global POPIN Coordinating Unit is located within the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations Secretariat. POPIN is funded primarily by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

During 1999, POPIN continued to use the Internet as a tool to stimulate and facilitate global, regional and national networking for the dissemination and utilization of population information. A primary network focus is on increasing access to substantive population information and data to better enable implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and to provide information support for informed decision-making.

In partnership with the United Nations regional commissions and specialized agencies, the global POPIN Co-ordinating Unit focussed on strengthening the regional POPIN networks and building inter-regional, regional and national population information capacities in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa. During 1999, the Economic Commission for Africa Food Security and Sustainable Development Division (FSSD) also hosted a seminar on the inter-linkages between Population-Environment-Development and Agriculture (PEDA) and introduced a PEDA computer simulation model to demonstrate the impact of various policy options on food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable development in the Africa region.

Collaboration between the Global POPIN Co-ordinating Unit and the regional commissions also resulted in the creation of regional Internet websites for the display and dissemination of information about the regional implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and a global website for the 21st Special Session of the General Assembly on Population and Development.

Other websites created during 1999 include a site done by the League of Arab States Population Research Unit for the dissemination of Arabic population information and data; a bilingual French/English website designed to enhance the flow of population information within the Africa region (done by the Union for African Population Studies); a website for the Population Information Network for Africa (POPIN-Africa) created by the Economic Commission for Africa Food Security and Sustainable Development Division. In 1999, the FSSD also published the first two issues of *Africa's Population and Development Bulletin*, a new electronic/hard copy journal that incorporates contributions from regional African population research institutes. The global and regional POPIN websites were accessed over 5 million times in 1999.

Project on Information Access and Connectivity (PIAC)

In its initial 3 year project, PIAC is working closely with AAU. PIAC is also working with the Carnegie Corporation of New York to conduct a survey of ICTs in higher education institutions. In collaboration with ECA, PIAC is working on compiling African content on the Internet. It is planned that over 100 web sites will be described and evaluated by the end of the year. It was also reported that PIAC has a project in Mozambique on community based resource management in collaboration with IDRC and Ford Foundation

with IDRC providing radio connectivity in resource management camps and Ford Foundation providing satellite phones. Accounts of local information resource management are posted on the project's web site in a number of local languages.

SCAN ICT

Initiated by the Acacia project of Canadian International Development Research Centre, the objective of SCAN ICT is to build support for the phased development of a comprehensive African capability to collect and manage key information needed to support the growing investment in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the transition of Africa to an information society. SCAN ICT is an exercise to exchange experiences on lessons learned about utilisation of ICTs in various sectors (e.g. health, education, community information needs, etc). It is felt that setting up a network of institutions and facilitating interaction between them will create a conducive environment for implementing SCAN ICT. The exercise of SCAN ICT includes establishing benchmark and indicators and measuring progress in meeting targets.

It was noted that collaboration between stakeholders and indigenous experts is necessary to develop local capacity. It was also stressed that collaboration between NGOs, international organisations and others is very important. Carnegie was reported to have shown interest in working as a partner in the survey of ICTs utilisation in institutes of higher learning. It was emphasised that data collection activities need to be carefully planned and reliability of the data collected should be critically examined.

PICTA members commented on the desirability of including other partners, such as the AAU, CODESRIA and OSSREA (the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern Africa). Another participant stressed the importance of SCAN ICT working with existing African institutions.

UNEP - INFOTERA

The Information program under the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) maintains an environmental information network of designated government national focal points. INFOTERA, the information service wing of UNEP, maintains two databases for e-mail based query-response services aiming at providing users with requested information at a regular basis. UNEP's dialogue with other stakeholders is based on creating access to information, enhancing public participation in decision-making and enhancing access to environmental justice.

Toward establishing partnership, UNEP has started negotiation with Economic Commission for Europe, and a number of NGOs. UNEP is also looking for partners in the Geographic Information Systems (GIS). UNEP has planned two sub-regional consultations in the coming year: for the East and Southern Africa Region in March and for the West Africa Region in June.

UNESCO

UNESCO's ongoing activities include: Internet training, a telemedicine project in Uganda, a Sahel CD-ROM of best practices, the RINAF National Information and Communication Infrastructure building process, and preparation of ICT country profiles as well as Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCT) development in collaboration with IDRC and ITU. Among UNESCO's pilot projects in Africa are MCTs for radio-based distance education in Djibouti and ICTs for women's empowerment in Cameroon. UNESCO has developed a "cookbook" on the set up and management MCTs. In collaboration with Cisco UNESCO has conducted state-of-the-art training in Nairobi for owners and managers of ISPs. Two workshops are planned – one on distance education for Portuguese speaking countries in April and another one on scientific collaboration (virtual universities). UNESCO is also planning to identify centres of excellence that could become regional training centres in ICT.

UNFPA

The UNFPA representative reported on the 1998 Ankara Seminar on ICTs and population, as well as their funding of POPIN and various population information databases. They were actively trying to accumulate information on best practices and lessons learned in the area of ICTs and said that their participation in ADF had been valuable to them.

World Trade Organization

Although unable to be present at the meeting, WTO sent a message describing its activities which was presented to the meeting. WTO work working on establishing trade information Reference Centres linked through the Internet. To date 68 of these were operation in Least Developed Countries and other developing countries. WTO was encouraged by the enthusiasm of trade officials in developing countries for the information access that the Centres provide. Its 1999-2000 efforts focus on providing training through distance learning approaches (computer-based training and teleconferencing) and on delivering technical support for the network.

Follow-up on opportunities presented by ADF'99 (agenda item four)

Kate Wild, Coordinator of the Forum, said that as ADF '99 had just concluded, there was a need to digest its outcomes and evaluate the extent to which the outputs and discussions matched the objectives of the Forum to establish an African-driven development agenda in ICTs. ECA is developing follow-up plans to update the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) vision at the end of the millenium. There is also a need to reinforce the opportunities presented by ADF'99, namely:

- Collaboration and linkages of already established and emerging initiatives from the ADF process including
 - in education (e.g. Schoolnet Africa)
 - in e-commerce (e.g. Biz2BizNet)
 - the NGO civil society network
 - the telecentre network
 - diaspora organizing in the ICT area
 - the Alliance for African Business
 - promoting ICTs to strengthen African universities
- Country specific action plans based on national information and communication infrastructure

In addition, a full inventory needed to be made of the initiatives that ADF had spawned or catalyzed. Bellanet volunteered to establish mailing lists for any of the initiatives emerging from ADF that wanted them

ECA will organise a Post-Forum Summit gathering selected Heads of State and Government to ensure their full support for the country action plans and the Forum recommendations. Prior to the Post-Forum Summit, ECA will launch a moderated discussion list to promote dialogue on issues considered by ADF'99.

Other matters raised and discussed related to activities at ADF'99:

- It was reported that the European Commission (EU) in considering an allocation to support efforts by ECA, UNESCO and IDRC and others in the implementation of NICI plans and projects. Requests have also been made to ECA by additional countries to assist them in the development of NICI policy.
- It was noted that the US Leland Initiative had provided training on Internet usage to over 50 ADF participants, including ministers, who attended ADF'99. The Initiative promised to undertake similar activities in future conferences and workshops organised by ECA.

Following a question raised on the involvement of NGO's in the formulation process of NICI policy, ECA said that the development of NICI policies and plans, which will be a cornerstone of Africa's response to the challenges of globalisation, requires the participation and efforts of all stakeholders, especially civil society.

Results of the GKP meeting and its implications for PICTA (agenda item five)

As the implications of the Global Knowledge Partnership meeting held in Addis from 20-30 October were not yet clear, no conclusions were drawn on this agenda item.

Summary of proposals for joint work programmes in 1999-2000 (agenda item six)

Four areas were identified during the discussion.

Training and capacity building

PICTA members expressed their interest in collaborating on Internet-based training (including content development) in Africa. It was noted that UNESCO and Leland Initiatives have ongoing training in this area. Bellanet International has developed training module (I-train) that could be used by others. POPIN-Africa, ITU, PACT, UNESCO, the World Bank, and ECA all indicated their interest to collaborate in training and capacity building involving the following:

- Working together in defining course modules and conducting training
- Contributing participants in order to maximise resource utilisation
- Sharing course syllabi and materials
- Publicising courses in advance for maximum participation of PICTA members and beneficiaries

UNESCO indicated that it was seeking partnership in its virtual learning environment initiative.

Telecentre initiatives

IDRC, World Bank, Agence de La Francophonie, UNESCO, PACT and ECA expressed interest in collaborating on telecentre initiatives especially in:

- Sharing practical experiences and techniques for evaluation telecentres
- Setting up different models pilot telecentres throughout the region
- Developing a telecentres operators network as recommended at the ADF
- Surveying telecentre initiatives in the region and sharing the result
- Publicising and sharing existing resources on telecentre initiatives

It was noted that the capacities in research and academic institutions should be utilised in developing different evaluation models, in data collection and in creating national clearing houses for telecentres.

NICI plans

IDRC, UNESCO and ITU have already been working with the ECA in development of NICI plans within the framework of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII). ECA indicated that it is seeking further partnership for National Information and Communication Infrastructure development and plans in.

- Development of new plans
- Implementation of existing plans
- Developing specific sectoral applications
- Conducting national policy workshops

Indigenous knowledge

The World Bank indicated that it seeks more collaboration in its Indigenous Knowledge initiative.

New mechanisms to strengthen PICTA collaboration (agenda item seven)

The meeting was informed of the information mechanisms offered by Bellanet International for cooperation between PICTA members. Following that, participants were requested to suggest any new mechanism that could be used to strengthen the use of existing ones, mainly for better planning. Bellanet International voiced concern about with the low level of information sharing among PICTA members. Although various tools including picta-cl mailing list, the PICTA web site, GK and AI-AIMS projects data base, the events calendar and a document repository are available for information sharing they have not been used to their full effect. It was indicated that the cause of the problem seems not to be will but rather lack of time and the extra effort that some of these tools require.

ECA indicated that it would involve some of its staff to send alerts on progress of PICTA activities on a regular basis. It was agreed that PICTA members should continue to explore systematic and flexible ways to continue to share information. This would include using PICTA' established tools and promoting lively discussion on PICTA lists to stimulate the sharing of information. Lead institutions in theme and joint work programme areas could also allocate more time and resources to gather and disseminate information to PICTA members.

Concerning new mechanisms, participants expressed the opinion that many ways exist to meet the information needs of PICTA members, but the best thing was increased motivation to constantly share information on activities. Hence it was suggested that members should renew their commitment to share information on the list and in the GK-AI AIMS database as the most beneficial part of PICTA was information sharing.

Finally participants agreed to continue virtual discussions about this issue until the next physical PICTA meeting.

Any other Business (agenda item eight)

Representing ECA and the PICTA secretariat, Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane emphasized the need for members to continue their collaboration and actively share information about on-going and planned activities. She said that the next PICTA meeting will be organized for those attending the Global Knowledge II meeting in Kuala Lumpur in March 2000.

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