

**World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)**

**National Consultation Workshop – Ethiopia**

13 February 2003  
UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Workshop Report**

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### Report of the workshop

#### 1. Background

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will be held in two phases. The first phase of WSIS will take place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. The second phase will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, in 2005.

The first phase of the Summit in Geneva will create a common vision and action plan on how to deal with the new challenges of the ever-evolving information society, specifically identifying ways to help close the gap between the "haves" and "have nots" of access to the global information and communication network. The second phase in Tunisia will reassess that plan and generate additional action if necessary.

The Summit will provide a unique opportunity for all key stakeholders to assemble at a high-level gathering and to develop a better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the international community. It aims to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single high-level event.

The roles of the various partners (Member States, UN specialized agencies, private sector and civil society) in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe will also be at the heart of the Summit and its preparation.

Africa's participation to the WSIS started with the Africa Regional Preparatory Conference on the Information Society, which was held in Bamako, Mali from 26-30 May 2002, and is known as *Bamako2002*. Africa is the first continent to organize a regional conference in line with the framework of the WSIS. Over seven hundred participants took part in the conference, which was organized at ministerial level and was opened by Presidents Wade (as the President in-charge of the ICT component of NEPAD) and Konare (as the convener and host of the Conference).

The conference was preceded by 14 pre-conference workshops, which were held from 26-28 May 2002 and were organized by ECA, other United Nations agencies, international organizations, governments, the private sector and the civil society. The main conference was held from 29-30 May 2002 and was divided into the following four themes, which received input from the pre-conference workshops:

- What Africa brings to the Information Society?
- What the Information Society brings to Africa?
- What Africa wants to preserve in the Information Society?
- How Africa would benefit from the Information Society?

At the end of the meeting, the conference adopted the Bamako 2002 Declaration ([www.uneca.org/aisi/bamako2002](http://www.uneca.org/aisi/bamako2002)), which guides Africa's participation to the various phases of the World Summit in Geneva and in Tunis.

In view of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), it has become necessary to define the role of member States in the development of the information society in Africa and build national consensus among the major stakeholders as to how to re-orient the various information for development activities being undertaken at the national level.

Ethiopia's participation in the WSIS process so far has been found to be very little. Most African countries are preparing and engaging themselves in the WSIS process, and some even have produced their national position documents to the Summit. It is found to be high time to launch the process in Ethiopia, and in this regard, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in collaboration with the Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency (ETA) has organized a half-day consultation workshop on Thursday, 13 February 2003 that took place at the United Nations Conference Center (UNCC), located at the ECA compound.

## **2. Workshop Objectives**

The objective of the workshop was to sensitize participants on the genesis, objectives and development of the WSIS, to assess Ethiopia's readiness for the information society vis a vis the WSIS process and revisit the roles of various stakeholders in enhancing the entry of Africa into the information age. The workshop has also provided stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss and brainstorm on Ethiopia's digital agenda and its participation in the forthcoming WSIS events: PrepCom2, PrepCom3, the summits in Geneva and Tunis.

## **3. Agenda**

After introductory remarks from ECA and ETA, participants were briefed on the WSIS process with background presentations from ITU, ECA and UNESCO. There was also a presentation on Ethiopian ICT capacity building programme, and then participants discussed on what the WSIS means to Ethiopia and the roles of all stakeholders in the process. The agenda is attached in Annex 1.

## **4. Participation**

About 50 participants drawn from government, private sector, civil society and development partners have attended the workshop. List of participants is attached in Annex 2.

## **5. Presentations**

The meeting started with introductory remarks from Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director of the Development Information Services Division of the ECA, and Ato Eshetu Alemu, General Manager of the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency. Ms. Karima's presentation focused on ECA's role in supporting African countries to prepare themselves to the WSIS, and the expectations from the workshop. Ato Eshetu's introductory remarks focused on the status of Ethiopia's preparation to the WSIS, which calls for more work to be done by all stakeholders concerned. (the remark is attached in Annex 3).

Mr. Brhahima Sanou from ITU Regional Office has presented an overview of the what, why and how of the WSIS process at global and regional levels. Mr. Makane Faye from ECA has made a presentation on the African preparatory process to the WSIS focusing on the Bamako 2002 conference. (the presentation is attached in Annex 4).

Mr. Guenther Cyranek from UNESCO has made a presentation on civil society participation in the WSIS process, the outcomes thus far, and UNESCO's role in engaging the civil society in the WSIS consultations.

Ato Bekele Gebre Medhin from Ministry of Capacity Building also briefed participants about the national ICT capacity building programme, and the current status of the national ICT strategy/policy development process.

## **6. Main issues discussed**

The workshop addressed various issues related to Ethiopia's participation in the WSIS process. The main issues were:

- WSIS' contribution to the ICT policy development process of Ethiopia
- The role of Africa in the global information society
- The need for a policy and a conducive environment supporting innovation
- The need to create links between stakeholders in Ethiopia and those participating in the WSIS process in Geneva
- The need for/role of advocacy on information policy issues
- The need to prepare Ethiopia's position at least for PrepCom3
- The need to brief participants of the workshop on the outcomes of PrepCom2
- The role of the Ethiopian Mission in Geneva in serving as a bridge between the work at the WSIS and at the national level
- The need for constituting an Ethiopian WSIS task force
- Status of ICT policy formulation process and capacity building
- The role of regional and international organizations to support national WSIS preparatory processes and their participation

## **7. Key recommendations**

After discussions, participants have made the following recommendations, which are grouped by thematic areas:

### **7.1 Major focus Areas:**

- Experiences from other African countries should be sought for to make sure that Ethiopia's specific considerations are included in the final WSIS document.
- It is necessary to go beyond the ICT policy exercise, and the WSIS process in Ethiopia should address issues such as:
  - support to Ethiopic script and development of local languages and content
  - promoting cultural heritages and values
  - participation in software development business, advocacy, and consultation.
- There is a need to link the WSIS process and the development of national e-strategies. The visions and plan of action of WSIS should be rooted in the national ICT policy. Because each country's intervention is dependant on what is enshrined in its national e-strategy.
- The information society development in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular should lay emphasis on the development of infrastructure, promotion of equitable access to and use of ICTs in key socio-economic sectors such as education and health, development and use of open source software products, etc. Annual budget should contain allotment for ICTs development.
- Ethiopia's integration in the WSIS process should take into account such value of the WSIS as poverty reduction, political pluralism, freedom of speech, avoiding exclusion, etc.

- Supporting local companies and ICT industries for specific technology resolutions. e.g. a technology park (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2710319.stm>), incentives for IT companies, etc.

### **7.2 Processes and participation:**

- The WSIS site currently have documents submitted by other countries highlighting their recommendations for consideration in the final WSIS meeting in Geneva, December 03. Ethiopia lacks such documents and therefore should embark on a process to create one.
- Ethiopia should actively engage itself in the WSIS process;
- Ensure more inclusive participation of all stakeholders and define their roles in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical participation of Ethiopia in the development of the information society;
- It is necessary to reconsider the recommendations made during the various preparatory meeting that took place to date so as to define the role Ethiopia should play in the rest of WSIS events;
- While co-ordinating the preparation of Ethiopia to the Summit, the crucial point is not who leads the process but how can we best mobilize all the stakeholders towards galvanizing their resources and support;
- Bridge the communication gap between national preparatory process including the activities of the task force and Mission in Geneva through active engagement and participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- Encourage the participation of the Ethiopian Diaspora in the national WSIS consultation processes.
- All minutes of meetings including those of the task force should be properly disseminated. A proper dissemination will include print catering for stakeholders without access (or frequent access) to computers.
- A mechanism should be setup to involve the active participation of the budget and ministry of finance and economic development. They need to be more aware of fund requirements for inclusion in annual budgets with specific emphasis on ICTs.

### **7.3 Coordination mechanisms:**

- A co-ordination mechanism needs to be devised and put in place to keep the consultation process going and make its voice heard vis a vis the development of information society and the WSIS process.
- Co-ordination should focus on how best to mobilize all the stakeholders towards galvanizing their resources and support, rather than focus on who leads the process
- There might be the need to prepare newsletters in print and electronic copies for distribution to stakeholders.
- Mailing list should be maintained.
- A web based discussion list should be maintained and all stakeholders made aware of its existence. Discussions should be archived and always available on site.
- Organise a regular (bi-monthly) consultative meetings of all stakeholders ensuring continuity, flow and frequency of discussions/ proceedings. This will keep the momentum up especially towards the WSIS process and start preparatory work to final draft Ethiopian paper for inclusion in the final WSIS document.
- There is a need to form a task force to lead the WSIS preparatory process in Ethiopia (refer to outcomes)

### **7.4 Advocacy:**

- The WSIS process is not clear enough for all the stakeholders, thus advocacy should be made at all levels (private sector, government, civil society, parliamentarians, etc.) in order to harmonize the voices of Ethiopian stakeholders.

- Specific weekly column that targeted at those stakeholders that may not be involved in the consultation processes in any of the daily papers should be sought. The focus will be to moderate discussions going on in the mailing lists and weekly resolutions put out weekly in print for these stakeholders and other parties that may be interested in proceedings. The advantage here is that the government also will be drawn into the process, as they will use this medium as a means of hearing the voice of the populace or concerned parties. Suggested papers include the Ethiopian Herald and the Monitor.
- The WSIS issues should be brought to the attention of decision makers and concerned authorities on a regular basis through the ETA and the Task Force.

## 8. Outcomes

- Participants were sensitized on the genesis, objectives and development of the WSIS
- Assessment was made on Ethiopia's readiness for the information society vis a vis the WSIS process
- The roles of various stakeholders revisited
- Participants got an opportunity to discuss and brainstorm on Ethiopia's digital agenda and its participation in the forthcoming WSIS events
- Coordination team that will look into the follow-up of the recommendations of the workshop and the WSIS process was constituted. Composition of the task force include:
  - Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency – Ato Eshetu Alemu
  - National ICT capacity building programme – Ato Bekele G. Medhin
  - Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Ato Getachew Mulualem
  - Private Sector– Ato Assefa Dagne, CyberSoft
  - Private Sector – Mr. Ben Akoh, ICTAfrica
  - Civil Society – Ato Afework Temtime, Ethiopian Information Technology Professionals Association (EITPA)
  - Academia – Dr. Dawit Bekele, Addis Ababa University

## **Annex 1. Agenda of the Meeting**

### **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) National Consultation Workshop – Ethiopia**

**Date:** February 13, 2003

**Time:** 2:30 PM – 6:00 PM

**Venue:** UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Organised by:** Economic Commission for Africa and the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)

#### **Provisional Agenda**

- 2:30 – 3:00    Introductory remarks:  
                  UNECA – Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director, DISD  
                  ETA – Mr. Eshetu Alemu, Manager, Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency
- 3:00 – 3:15    The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) – the what, why, and how  
                  of the WSIS – Mr. Brahima Sanou, ITU Regional Office
- 3:15 – 3:30    The African preparation to the WSIS (Bamako 2002) – Makane Faye, UNECA
- 3:30 – 3:45    Stakeholders participation in the WSIS process: the case of civil society groups  
                  – Mr. Guenther Cyranek, UNESCO
- 3:45 – 4:00    Briefing on current status of the national ICT strategy and capacity building  
                  programme – Mr. Bekele G. Medhin, ICT Capacity Building Programme
- 4:00 – 4:30    *Coffee Break*
- 4:30 – 4:45    The WSIS and Ethiopia: focus areas, participation, coordination, stakeholder  
                  consultations, possible related events, and support required – Mr. Eshetu Alemu,  
                  Manager, ETA
- 4:45 – 5:45    Discussions
- 5:45 – 6:00    Wrap-up

## Annex 2. List of participants

### **World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) National Consultation Workshop – Ethiopia February 13, 2003**

#### **List of Participants**

- Mr. Ben Akoh  
ICT Africa  
P.O.Box 57149  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 632131  
Fax: 632141  
E-mail: [bakoh@ictafrica.com](mailto:bakoh@ictafrica.com)
- Mr. Seife Mulugeta  
Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)  
P.O.Box 9991  
Addis Ababa  
Tel: 653995  
Fax: 53 12 55  
E-mail: [tele.agency@telecom.net.et](mailto:tele.agency@telecom.net.et)
- Ms. Menbere Taye Tesfa  
World Bank  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 627700  
E-mail: [mtesfa@worldbank.org](mailto:mtesfa@worldbank.org)
- Mr. Dereje Teferi  
Faculty of Informatics, Addis Ababa University  
P.O.Box 1176  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 125801  
E-mail: [dereje@sisa.aau.edu.et](mailto:dereje@sisa.aau.edu.et)
- Mr. Wondwessen Eshetu  
African Lakes  
P.O.Box 13232  
Tel.: 518444  
Fax: 517788  
E-mail: [wondwessene@yahoo.com](mailto:wondwessene@yahoo.com)
- Mr. Bekele Gebre Medhin  
ICT Capacity Building Programme  
Ministry of Capacity Building  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 577312  
E-mail: [Bekele@telecom.net.et](mailto:Bekele@telecom.net.et)
- Mr. Eshetu Alemu  
Manager  
Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)  
P.O.Box 9991  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 656011  
Fax: 655763  
E-mail: [eshetu\\_eth@hotmail.com](mailto:eshetu_eth@hotmail.com) or  
[tele.agency@telecom.net.et](mailto:tele.agency@telecom.net.et)
- Mr. Awad A. Sebor  
ENA  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 565221/24  
E-mail: [awadahmad@hotmail.com](mailto:awadahmad@hotmail.com)
- Mr. Tesfu Kidane  
Ministry of Infrastructure  
P.O.Box 1238  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 152623  
E-mail: [ketecom@telecom.net.et](mailto:ketecom@telecom.net.et)
- Mr. Bahru Temesgen  
Radio Ethiopia  
P.O.Box 654  
Tel.: 718931  
E-mail: [bahrut@yahoo.com](mailto:bahrut@yahoo.com)
- Mr. Tesfu Refera  
Addis Ababa  
E-mail: [tesfure@yahoo.com](mailto:tesfure@yahoo.com)
- Mr. Messay Zegeye  
Concept Data Systems  
Addis Ababa  
Tel. : 09200580  
E-mail: [contact@conceptsdatasystem.com](mailto:contact@conceptsdatasystem.com)
- Mr. Yichnekachew  
P.O.Box 5544  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 524078
- Mr. Lemma Chimsa  
Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)  
P.O.Box 9991  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 668202  
Fax: 53 12 55
- Dr. Dawit Bekele  
Addis Ababa University  
P.O.Box 3479  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 620185  
Fax: 620285  
E-mail: [dawitb@ethiolink.com](mailto:dawitb@ethiolink.com)
- Ms. Kristin Seljeflot  
UNDP  
P.O.Box 5580  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 444100

E-mail: [Kristin.seljeflot@undp.org](mailto:Kristin.seljeflot@undp.org)

Mr. Gunther Cyranek  
UNESCO  
P.O.Box 1177  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 09202701  
Fax: 511414  
E-mail: [g.cyranek@unesco.org](mailto:g.cyranek@unesco.org)

Ms. Frehiwot W.  
Addis Ababa University  
P.O.Box 385  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 09 226174  
E-mail: [fwbayou@yahoo.com](mailto:fwbayou@yahoo.com)

Mr. Woldemeskel Gebremariam  
Ministry of Agriculture  
P.O.Box 101958  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 09 241873/512345  
Fax: 51 29 84  
E-mail: [MOADP@telecom.net.et](mailto:MOADP@telecom.net.et)

Mr. Tekeste Berhan Habtu  
CyberSoft  
P.O.Box 7408  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 516250  
Fax: 515259  
E-mail: [thabtu@cybersoft-intl.com](mailto:thabtu@cybersoft-intl.com)

Mr. Abiye Yeshitella  
EITPA  
P.O.Box 6918  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 09 216845  
Fax: 533368  
E-mail: [abiyeth@hotmail.com](mailto:abiyeth@hotmail.com)

Mr. Ahmed Addissu  
Chamber of Commerce  
P.O.Box 2458  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 513882  
E-mail: [aachamber1@telecom.net.et](mailto:aachamber1@telecom.net.et)

Mr. Wossenyeleh Tigu  
Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)  
P.O.Box 9991  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 652442  
Fax: 53 12 55  
E-mail: [tele.agency@telecom.net.et](mailto:tele.agency@telecom.net.et)

Mr. Ayalew Getaneh  
Ethiopian Broadcasting Agency  
P.O.Box 58350  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 538752

Fax: 52 79 75  
E-mail: [ayalewg2002@yahoo.com](mailto:ayalewg2002@yahoo.com)

Mr. Moges Delelegne  
EAL/EITPA  
P.O.Box 1755  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 178584  
E-mail: [mogesd@ethiopianairlines.com](mailto:mogesd@ethiopianairlines.com)

Mr. Getachew Mulualem  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
P.O.Box 393  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 155139  
Fax: 514300  
E-mail: [geachalem@hotmail.com](mailto:geachalem@hotmail.com)

Mr. Zenebe Desta  
ENA  
P.O.Box 530  
Addis Ababa  
E-mail: [zenedesta@hotmail.com](mailto:zenedesta@hotmail.com)

Mr. Abraham Tameru  
ICT Focus  
P.O.Box 12414  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 561444  
Fax: 556092  
E-mail: [editorial@ictfocus.net.et](mailto:editorial@ictfocus.net.et)

Ms. Aster Gebremariam  
ECA  
P.O.Box 31862  
Tel.: 443231  
E-mail: [agebremariam@uneca.org](mailto:agebremariam@uneca.org)

Mr. Getachew Shiferaw  
Press  
E-mail: [get-shi@yahoo.com](mailto:get-shi@yahoo.com)

Mr. Brahima Sanou  
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)  
Addis Ababa  
Tel: 513346/514977/514855  
Fax: 517299  
E-mail: [brahima.sanou@itu.int](mailto:brahima.sanou@itu.int)

Mr. Assefa Dagne  
Cybersoft  
P.O.Box 32666  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 09 221414  
E-mail: [adagne@cybersoft-intl.com](mailto:adagne@cybersoft-intl.com)

Mr. Tadiwos Gere  
Fana  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 516777

Mr. Fekadu Hailu  
Addis Lissan  
Addis Ababa  
Tel.: 562771

Mr. Gezahegn Mekonnen  
Addis Lissan  
Tel.: 562396

### **ECA Secretariat**

Mr. Afewerk Temtime  
Associate Information Officer  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [atemtime@uneca.org](mailto:atemtime@uneca.org)

Ms. Aida Opoku-Mensah  
Team Leader, Promoting Information  
Technology for Development  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: 251-1-511167  
Fax: 251-1-510512  
E-mail: [aopoku-mensah@uneca.org](mailto:aopoku-mensah@uneca.org)

Mr. Assefa Bahta  
Web Development Officer  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [abahta@uneca.org](mailto:abahta@uneca.org)

Ms. Bethlehem Teshager  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [bteshager@uneca.org](mailto:bteshager@uneca.org)

Ms. Eskedar Nega  
Information Development Officer  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001:  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [enega@uneca.org](mailto:enega@uneca.org)

Mr. Frew Dubale  
Information Assistant  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [fdubale@uneca.org](mailto:fdubale@uneca.org)

Mr. Girma Dessalegn  
Researcher, ITCA  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [gdessalegn@uneca.org](mailto:gdessalegn@uneca.org)

Mr. Gorfu Assefa  
Information Network Officer  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [gassefa@uneca.org](mailto:gassefa@uneca.org)

Ms. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane  
Director  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1510512  
E-mail: [kbounemra@uneca.org](mailto:kbounemra@uneca.org)

Mr. Makane Faye  
Senior Regional Advisor/ITCA Manager  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [mfaye@uneca.org](mailto:mfaye@uneca.org)

Mr. Tefera Woldeyes  
Development Information Services Division  
(DISD)  
P. O. Box 3001  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel.: 251 1 51 11 67  
Fax: 251 1 51 05 12  
E-mail: [woldeyes.uneca@un.org](mailto:woldeyes.uneca@un.org)/  
[twoldeyes@uneca.org](mailto:twoldeyes@uneca.org)

**Annex 3. Introductory Remarks by Eshetu Alemu**

Introductory Remarks by  
Eshetu Alemu,  
General Manager of Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency

On the Consultative Workshop  
On  
Ethiopian Preparatory Process for the forthcoming  
World Summit on Information Society (WSIS)

February 13, 2003  
UNCC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

**Organised by:**

UN Economic Commission for Africa  
and  
the Ethiopian Telecommunications Agency (ETA)

## **Good Afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The WSIS issue/initiative is not yet widely known by the Ethiopian stakeholders. Only very few individuals and institutions have been aware of the ongoing process on the summit. The essence and the actual target to be achieved is not that clear. In addition, no one has so far raised questions like: *What does WSIS mean to Ethiopia and to the local ICTs development stakeholders? What has been done and achieved so far? What roles does countries like Ethiopia is expected to play? Who is who in the WSIS process? Who finances the process and the associated activities and how?* We have never discussed such issues while the summit process is moving ahead.

Besides the very limited understanding that the Government has, the Ministry of Infrastructure has assigned the Ethiopian Telecommunication Agency to coordinate the WSIS process in Ethiopia. It is based on this fact that ETA has approached UNECA-DISD to assist us in formulating the necessary framework on how to go about it. This consultative process is therefore one of the positive steps that UNECA-DISD has worked out so as to create a ground work to start the process.

## **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Ethiopia should move in equal pace with the rest of the world in the areas of ICTs – as Ethiopia is making serious efforts to invest a huge resource in the ICTs sector as an accelerator of sustainable development. As the world is joining hands to transform the world society to Information Society and the corresponding economy to be Knowledge intensive economy, there is no reason for Ethiopia to stay behind. We need interactions - in the interest of compatibility of vision and thinking – meaning, with regard to the speed of learning process and implementation, appreciation of diversity of culture, language, etc.

We firmly understands that working in teams and, in more systematic and organized manner is much effective and the Government has been taking the necessary measures towards fostering such partnership.

On one hand, Ethiopia has the responsibility to take part in the initiative of intergovernmental nature and around which we are very weak in exploiting such forums and resources – particularly UN based initiatives. On the other, Ethiopia has the right to share the global resources and should be ready to compete for.

Above all, Ethiopia has a grand national initiative which we want it to be in line with global and regional visions and initiatives. We therefore, want to exploit the benefit of consultation among the stakeholders in responding to global agenda like that of WSIS.

Finally, I would like to extend my heartfelt thank to UNECA-DISD who have financially supported and actively cooperated in organizing this consultative workshop. I would also like to thank the participants who accepted our invitation in a very short notice and enthusiastic to contribute to respond to this global initiative.

Thank You very much for your attention.

**Annex 4. Presentation on Bamako2002**

[WSIS process and Africa - ET.ppt](#) (Check the PPP file attached)