

World Summit...
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and political. Hence, for development and women's empowerment, women need to be active participants at all levels (government, private sector and civil society) within the Information Society"

Yawo Assigbley of the Association of African Universities (AAU) based in Accra, Ghana, contends "the continent is at a growing disadvantage with respect to the global information and technological revolution. More critically, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Africa, which should be at the forefront of ensuring Africa's participation in the revolution, are themselves unable and

ill prepared to play such a leadership role due to the poor infrastructure and its inequitable distribution. Yet, global trends in the application of ICT demonstrate its capacity to transform the several interconnected functions of universities and strengthen conventional education while rapidly transforming distance education. It not only expands the research and development opportunities of these institutions but also strengthens libraries with access to an unlimited body of digital information globally, bringing considerable efficiency and effectiveness to university management. Therefore as we go to Bamako, the development and application of ICTs for African HEIs becomes crucial and urgent if the continent is to be able to reduce the knowledge, technological, and

economic gap between itself and the rest of the world".

Patrick Effiboley, historian and museologist from Benin, says "Africa has to use the information age to preserve her identity and promote her unique cultural heritage. By securing for example things such as pharmacopoeia, languages, oral tradition, etc a great deal can be accomplished. For this to happen governments need to play a leading and facilitating role. So far the continent has been at the receiving end of globalisation and is a major consumer of information not from Africa. If this situation continues, the continent will lose a large part of its identity. Therefore the knowledge age should be based on African beliefs, values and heritage.

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Networking Academy program in Ethiopia, providing full residential scholarships for nearly 50 African women who will gain access to the same opportunities as women in advanced or more developed countries. Together, Cisco, UNECA and InfoDev have addressed one of the fundamental objectives of African States and of the United Nations - the full participation of girls and women in the economic field and society in Africa. While the program at UNECA is a one-year pilot, it is hoped that the impact will be felt on both local and global levels.

The first group of women, representing 16 English-speaking countries, graduated from the UNECA Academy program in February 2002. The second group of women, representing a wide variety of French speaking countries in Africa, will start classes in May 2002. For the first class of graduates, the students have either returned to their previ-

ous positions, in some cases being promoted, or are securing new high-paying jobs and in most cases are encouraging other African women to follow in their footsteps. What's more, the women are leaving the Networking Academy program with a new sense of confidence regarding opportunity, potential and gender. Committing to this intensive coursework challenges students mentally and forces them to create the time needed to complete the course successfully. While the road to graduation is never easy, each student reflects on the experience with a great sense of accomplishment and with a newfound perspective: that they can achieve their dreams.

Anita Twum-Ampofo, for example, is an installation engineer at Africa Online in Ghana. Upon earning certification from the Networking Academy program, Twum-Ampofo returned to work with a new set of networking skills and a new position - one in

which she could apply her newfound expertise. Understanding the importance of computer literacy, Twum-Ampofo is committed to fostering the interest of other women in IT. And as a result of her exposure to gender awareness issues, Twum-Ampofo's personal goals have shifted. Soon she will pursue her Masters Degree.


Clara Kimaro teaches computer basics in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. With her certification from the Networking Academy program, Kimaro plans to open a computer training center for women. Her objective is to demystify the computer as a tool to be used only by those with a high-level education. Kimaro is dedicated to offering affordable and convenient computer courses to women and to encouraging them to learn English so that they may read the majority of online content. More: http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/ts_042502.html.

About iConnect Africa

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iConnect Africa

ICTs at work

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WORLD SUMMIT ON THE INFORMATION SOCIETY - BAMAKO 2002: Giving voice to African expectations!

As various stakeholders on the African continent prepare for the forthcoming Regional Meeting for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), iConnect Africa spoke to various individuals on their expectations for this event, which will define Africa's position in the information society.

Anne-Rachel Inne an ICT consultant based in Niger, says: "we definitely have to keep in mind that ICTs are just tools! That we are the ones making those tools work, according to our needs, priorities, and local environments. So, Bamako 2002 will help Africans focus on their individual sectors and discuss through thematic workshops on access, involvement of the rural world, African language usage, regulation, etc and what they can do best to improve them with ICTs. This preparatory conference will help mostly in aggregating ideas so that in Geneva in 2003 Africa has her priorities set and can ask for 'what she wants' and not 'what others think she wants'!"

Prof. Clement Dgidonu, Senior Research Fellow of the International Institute for Information Technology (INIT), Ghana warns that "Africa is at risk of being further marginalized if it fails to take the opportunities to deploy and exploit ICTs for socio-economic development. The prediction is that the gap between the winners and losers in the new global economic order dominated by ICTs will be larger than the current development gap that exist between the developed and the developing nations". He also recognises that, "the Bamako meeting is an important milestone which we hope will continue to energise Africa on the path to transform its economies and societies towards an information and knowledge-based environment. The role of policy and decision-makers in defining the road map towards a sustainable information society is paramount!"

Mercy Wambui, former ICT activist, ECA employee and member of APC Women's Network says: "An important issue for Bamako is the need for collaborative work on monitoring and evaluation of the information society and its development in Africa. So much has happened, and a lot still needs to be done as to where we are and where we are going. Of course the lack of infrastructure to collate data is a big issue, but this can be complemented by all the quick surveys on the continent. I think some serious research that informs economic analysis for example, would be very helpful. I feel that this is a weak link in Africa. A second issue is governance. I think that based on the stuff being worked on by Privacy International, there is a lot that Africa needs to be aware of regarding who governs the Internet, particularly post 9/11. There are many issues such as cyber-terrorism that Africa needs to be informed about, but would this be an excuse to stifle democratic thought and freedom of expression? This is becoming a real issue of debate post 9/11!"

Kwami Ahiabenu, II, Ghanaian Journalist, Steve Biko Fellow, Associate Editor - Computers in Africa and President, of Penplusbytes.org, claims that "Our world is experiencing rapid changes from an industrial to an information society, where the capacity of individuals, societies and nations to access and use knowledge and information is fundamental to their very survival. The role of the media is very critical in the development of any society. This role becomes very critical in light of a rapid evolving Information society. The major goal of journalists and media organizations in this direction is to make people active participants in the process of developing an information society by helping them adopt and master new technical skills. Skills so as to cope in a society where its citizens are defined as active, eager to learn, open minded, flexible, ready for changes, dynamic and technology-literate. By default Journalists must become active participants and fully contribute to this process as agenda setters, gatekeepers, facilitators and agents of change".

Dorothy Okello, Coordinator of the Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET) states "as the Information Society evolves within Africa, information and communication technologies (ICTs) are becoming ever more pervasive and a key factor in a whole range of activities - economic, social

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NEWS IN BRIEF

NIGER: The ICT sector is coming to life in this country with the number of Internet users increasing despite the limited infrastructure. The sector is being overseen by the Centre for the Coordination of ICTs, which is also talking to ECA on transforming its national plan designed under the UNDP's SDNP (Le Réseau de Développement Durable) into a NICI. The Centre is also developing the government's web site www.gouv.ne as part of the country's e-government initiative.

GRASSROOTS JOIN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY: Online Conference: Information Access For Rural Women June 3 - 21, 2002 www.wougnet.org/projectnews.html The NGO Women of Uganda Network (WOUNET) is organising an online conference on "Information Access for Rural Women". The main objective of this event is to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences on information access for rural women. WOUNET are currently obtaining as much input as possible from rural women and invite the participation of organisations/groups that are managing rural information centers or having projects targeting rural women. Contact: dokello@wougnet.org. A report on the conference proceedings will be presented at the Know How Conference Kampala, July 2002. For more information about the Know How Conference, visit: <http://knowhow.isis.or.ug>

K.Y. AMOAKO CHAIRS DEVELOPMENT GATEWAY FOUNDATION EDITORIAL COMMITTEE. At the second meeting of the Development Gateway Foundation's Board of Directors in April, K.Y. Amoako was appointed Chair of the Foundation's Editorial Committee for a two-year term. Mr. Amoako is the Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA). The Editorial Committee will provide guidance to the Development Gateway portal (www.developmentgateway.org) on editorial policies, publication standards, content management, and more. Mr. Amoako, will appoint members of the Editorial Committee in consultation with the President of the Foundation, Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. Find out more about the Editorial Committee at www.developmentgateway.org/node/118859/en/board

CALL FOR PROPOSALS! US\$1.25 MILLION IN COUNTRY GATEWAY IMPLEMENTATION GRANTS. Under the scope of its Grants and Investments Program, the Development Gateway Foundation is calling for proposals for Country Gateway Implementation Grants. Implementation Grants enable Country

Gateways to begin offering the products and services described in their business plan. The Foundation has allocated US\$1.25 million for this competition, with each grant set at a maximum of US\$250,000. Proposals should reflect the scale of operations expected during the first year of implementation of the Country Gateway, and grant-funded activities must be completed within a year of receiving the award. The deadline for submitting proposals is May 31, 2002. For more information, visit www.dgfoundation.org/implementation-grants/

AFRICAN WINNERS OF THE ICT STORIES COMPETITION

Four pioneering projects designed to improve access to communication technologies for those most marginalized by the global 'digital divide' have won top awards in an annual competition highlighting technology 'success stories' in the developing world. The four winners of the 2002 ICT Stories Competition have been selected, and two African-based stories were among them. InfoDev and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) run the ICT Stories Competition. The winners will present their stories at INET 2002 in Washington DC in June. The winners are: *Connecting India, Village by Village; Marrying Radio with Internet in Nepal* as well as the two African stories: *Sole Comfort Dot-Com* and *Kabissa* - available from www.iicd.org/stories

- In the project '*Connecting India Village by Village*', Drihste is a platform to develop IT enabled services to rural and semi-urban populations. The services include access to government pro-

grammes and benefits, market related information, and private information exchanges and transactions. Using a tiered franchise and partnership model, Drihste can support the creation of approximately 50,000 Information Kiosks all over India within a span of six years.

- In the story '*Marrying Radio with Internet in Nepal*' Internet is used for the first community FM radio in south Asia: Radio Sagarmatha. Since 2000, more than 100 programmes on ICTs have been broadcast with live transmissions from ICT events, interviews, and live internet browsing.
- The third project, '*Kabissa - Space for change in Africa*' enables non profit organisations to have their own presence on the Internet. Kabissa provides access to Internet and several services such as mailing lists.
- The fourth winning story is called '*Sole Comfort Dot-Com: Bridging the Global Income Gap Through Hard Work, Quality Sandals, and ICTs*'. Here, the Internet is used to market Ecosandals from Kenya throughout the world, providing work for 27 Kenyans.

AFRICA ICT MAPS

The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has developed various ICT maps based on data collected from different sources. Currently maps on the status of National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) strategies, Africa's Internet and tele density, the number of ISPs (and ownership), mobile teledensity, and broadcasting (regulation, radio, TV) can be found at: <http://www.uneca.org/disd/ictmaps.htm>

The Quarterly Story: Gender and the Information Revolution in Africa

Bridging both the digital and gender divides in Africa. Recent graduates from an all female class of the Cisco Networking Academy Program in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia learned new technical, entrepreneurial and management skills, encouraging greater participation of women in information technology throughout the African continent, as Claudia Church reports:

In April 2001, Cisco partnered with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the Information for Development Program (InfoDev) to launch a pilot program at the UNECA Headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

UNECA is a recognized leader in the field of gender development, with more than 20 years experience in advancing African women in the fields of science and technology. And providing a strong partner in this effort is InfoDev, a global grant program managed by the World Bank that promotes innovative projects on the use of Information Technology for economic and social development, with particular emphasis on developing nations.

This partnership project proactively promotes greater participation of women in information technology through the

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SPOTLIGHT: Creating Local Content

LOCAL LANGUAGES AND SOFTWARE DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

The information revolution is changing the language map of the world with English becoming the dominant language of the electronic era. This is even threatening those languages that have dominated parts of the world for the past centuries. Local African languages are in grave danger and face marginalization in the Internet revolution. Unless concerted efforts are made to include the use of local languages in the electronic world, the digital gap will widen, resulting in greater exclusion. Afework Temtime reports on efforts underway in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia has been at the forefront in Africa of developing software standards for local language usage on the computer and the Internet. Software developers are developing *Ethiopic*, which is the script used for writing Ethiopian languages, particularly those derived from *Geez*, an ancient language used mainly by the Orthodox churches of the country.

However, there are some unresolved issues in this innovative and pioneering work as the development of *Ethiopic* has not been standardized - each software developer is creating their own version of keyboard layout making it difficult for users to grasp the various forms. Consequently, through the efforts of the Ethiopian Computer Standards Association and the Quality and Standards Authority of Ethiopia, sets of standards for *Ethiopic* computing are being developed. The first standard on character set definition was recently finalised. The others to follow include the character encoding system, keyboard layout, and *Ethiopic-Latin* transliteration. The standards will facilitate communication using *Ethiopic* scripts in the digital world and contribute significantly to Ethiopia's participation in the information society.

Such developments should be encouraged as best practices for other African countries to follow as they generate and disseminate local content in local languages, creating and democratizing access to the information society by all Africans. The harmonious development of the information society is made stronger by the availability of multilingual and multicultural information. The diversity of the potential user population in Africa in terms of different languages raises a host of technological challenges and calls for us to take advantage of technologies which facilitate communication and access to information in as many languages and scripts as possible so as to ensure maximum self-expression, education, science, culture and communication. Yet, African languages are among those mostly marginalized in the Internet revolution and it is for this reason

that ECA and La Francophonie are holding a workshop during Bamako 2002 to examine the necessary actions needed to promote multilingualism in the information society.

LOCAL HEALTH CONTENT IN NIGERIA BLENDS TRADITION AND SCIENCE. In his contribution to a DFID-funded local content study, John Dada illustrates how communities in Nigeria are using new ICTs to document traditional healthcare knowledge.

Nigeria has about 120 million inhabitants, 70% living in rural communities where there is limited access to health and information. With little disposable income, and the prohibitive cost of hospital bills and medication, many people in rural communities have turned to traditional medicine. This trend initially looked to be a setback for health workers. However, it also presents an opportunity to work with the health knowledge possessed by local people, especially women.

In recent years, the Fantsuam Foundation, a group membership organisation has worked with rural women to try to understand various traditional healthcare practices and, where appropriate, to introduce 'best practice' and safer techniques. The members of the Foundation are established women's groups in rural communities in Kaduna State. Fantsuam has a membership of about 80,000 and provides indirect benefit to over 700,000 people through its microcredit and community learning centre programmes. The project recognizes the role of traditional medicine, especially in communities where it is the only healthcare available. It also recognizes the often-ignored strategic roles of women as primary caregivers in these communities. The project is entirely driven by the communities and its participatory approach has allayed suspicion of any attempt to undermine traditional medicine or bring it into disrepute.

These communities have a largely oral tradition with very little information in written form. This project is the first attempt to document their traditional health knowledge and skills. So far, information has been categorised in the following areas: Communal hygiene (sewage disposal and drainages), types of fevers, 'bad back' (a musculo-skeletal problem experienced by many middle-aged farmers), leprosy, female genital mutilation, dysmenorrhoea, diet-control in diabetes and hypertension, non-sexual transmission of HIV/AIDS through use of unsterilised razors for circumcision and facial tribal marks, and hygienic preparation of traditional recreational drugs (these are stimulants prepared from tree barks).

Common treatments used by traditional healers include the emollients and local anesthetics of the traditional bone setters, and the

use of herbs as an inhalant during labour, to stimulate lactation, and to treat ringworm. In the Kafanhan area where we work, there is no record of collaborations with research departments of the local universities to investigate the biomedical properties of these treatments. The communities, especially the older members, generate all information held in the catalogue. Such knowledge remains the property of the communities.

A medical database is under development for each participating community. This was initially conceived as a vital registration database (births and deaths), but it now incorporates a traditional pharmacopoeia specific to that community. The information is stored on CDs and hard disk and is in the custody of the Village Head.

In addition to the knowledge and information collected from the population, other sources of health information are regularly consulted for information that can be adapted and grafted into the existing body of local knowledge and practices. The health channel of the WorldSpace Radio, Satelife, WHO fact sheets, and numerous discussion lists are translated into the local dialect and shared with the women.

Some lessons:

- Start with the knowledge base available within the community and build from there.
- Developing local content cannot stand alone - it should be conducted within the context of a wider community health programme to facilitate its sustainability.
- It is possible to evolve an information management system that preserves traditional knowledge and practices while making it receptive to new ideas about healthcare.
- Traditional medical knowledge has aspects that can be modified and improved for better healthcare delivery.
- Local content that is largely determined by the host community has a better chance of being adapted, upgraded and improved through additional external information from orthodox medicine.
- Traditional knowledge is amenable to modernization if the effort is one of partnership. Intellectual property rights can be safeguarded while making the knowledge available to all members of the host community.
- It is important to have access to regular updates of reliable health information from a variety of sources.

There is a need for local capacity for the translation of externally generated information from sources such as textbooks, newspapers, journals and the Internet into the local dialect.