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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

ICT Policy Environment within the Great Lakes Countries

**Workshop on creating an effective Enabling Environment for ICT
Development**

First COMESA business Summit

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1. E-strategy Framework in Africa: the African Information Society Initiative

In the global networked economy, information and knowledge have become strategic resources, based on which governments, corporations and the public at large make their decisions. The countries which have created an enabling environment are experiencing revolutionary effects especially in the governance, education, health and business sectors, as its citizens are now more empowered, change the equilibrium of power and start creating choices and opportunities for themselves. Yet, there are countries in Africa where people are not able to make informed decisions on their daily lives because of lack of access to ICTs, information and knowledge.

As a response to these realities, the Conference of Ministers of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in May 1995, adopted the Africa Information Society Initiative (AISI)¹. Driven by critical development imperatives, AISI focuses on priority strategies, programmes and projects, which can assist in building African information societies. A key component of the AISI is the development of national ICT Policies (e-strategies), or the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plans.

On a continental basis, the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) framework has identified a number of projects and initiatives for ICT development, which will also speed up sub-regional and regional connectivity and inter-connectivity plans at the same time. NEPAD insists on strengthening the role of the Regional Economic Communities (REC) that should be coordinating national efforts and aiming at harmonizing national regulatory frameworks across the sub-regions. AISI serves as the framework for co-ordination of the support that UN agencies provide to the NEPAD.

¹ <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/>

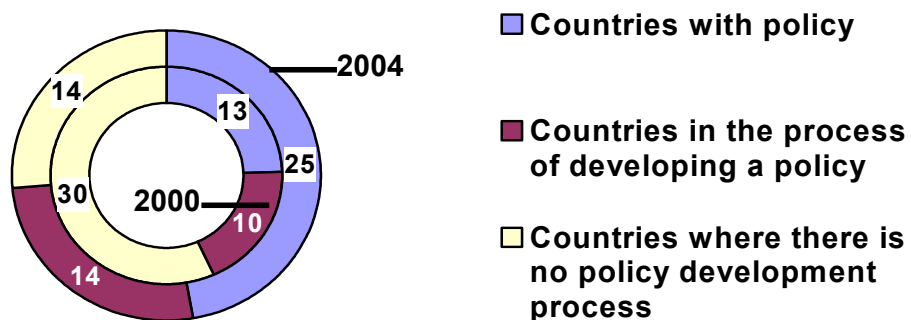
Furthermore, AISI recommends that ICTs be mainstreamed in other sectors that are judged potentially important for Africa’s development, and these include: job creation, culture, trade and commerce, and governance, which was added to the list during subsequent assessment exercises of the AISI in the African Development Forum (ADF)’99 and Bamako 2002.

This report assesses progress made in national ICT policies, plans and strategies in Great Lakes countries, focusing on the role of ECA. It also highlights lessons learned from the e-strategy development process.

2. National E-strategies in Africa

ECA has been assisting member states in their endeavours to initiate, formulate and implement national e-strategies with a view to achieving their development goals. The success is evident in the fact that the number of countries with ICT policies increased from 13 in 2000 to 25 in 2004, while countries in the process of developing a policy jumped from 10 in 2000 to 14 in 2004. Thus, the number of countries without a plan was reduced from 30 to 14 in 2004.

Development of National ICT Policy



This progress has been a result of increased awareness on the importance of ICT policies and plans among decision and policy makers and key stakeholders, which is

also reflected in the inclusion and emphasis, placed in various international and regional agendas. For example, the NEPAD framework identifies ICT policies and regulations as a priority area. The formulation of national policies, strategies and legislation has been highlighted as the foundation for the ICT development in the member countries as well as in the region. A number of countries have already stepped up to the next phase of the plan implementation.

3. ICT Policies In Great Lakes countries

ECA is working with countries on the Sub Region to formulate and implement ICT policies in collaboration with various Partners.

The situation of ICT Policies Formulation and implementation in Great Lakes Countries is described bellow.

Burundi

The Cabinet adopted the National strategy for the development of information and communication technologies in Burundi in 2002.

The document was circulated for wide dissemination and consultations before implementation.

Kenya

The process of a comprehensive national strategy based on a broad national consultation has started in 2001. The process is being re-engineered by the current Government and a Stakeholders Convention was held in March 2004.

Efforts are made to draft the document on National Strategy with the participation of all Stakeholders. In the meantime, the Kenya Government has chosen e-Government as one of its main priorities “towards the realization of national development goals and objectives for Wealth and Employment Creation”. In this regard an e-Government strategy was approved in January 2004 by Cabinet. A request has been sent to ECA for funding through EPOLNET.

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Rwanda

The Cabinet and Parliament adopted the NICI plan in 2002.

The Cabinet officially launched the NICI Plan, NICI 2005, in January 2002. The proposed implementation structure has been created. It consists of the National Information Technology Commission (NITC), the NITC Working Group and the Rwandan Information Technology Authority (RITA). The law encourages investment on ICT development issues, including building of infrastructure and software, telecommunications operations and ICT service provision. Customs duty and taxes have been removed from ICT equipment, computer assembly plants are established, and also 250 VSATs have been deployed in rural areas carrying voice and data. In addition to developing the Rwanda NICI Plan, ECA is assisting in developing the general e-Government architecture.

Tanzania

The National Information and Communications Technologies Policy was adopted by Cabinet in March 2003. The process has been launched for the development of the strategy. A request was sent to ECA to assist in developing the policy implementation plan.

Uganda

A draft national policy – Strategy for Developing a National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Policy for Uganda - was completed in September 2002.

The NICI plan is being developed. Meanwhile the competition is kept and the ICT sector is developing.

4. Lessons Learned and regional cooperation and integration

A number of lessons have been learnt over the past years in the development of national ICT plans and summarised below:

- Need for increased awareness
- Importance of the high level leadership
- The NICI process could be more participatory
- Need for learning from experiences of others – best practices
- Transition from ideas and concepts to concrete action plans
- Need for increased attention to sectoral policies and strategies
- Human and institutional capacity must be strengthened
- Prioritisation of external assistance
- Increasing regional cooperation and integration

After the successful formulation of NICI plans, the countries have been requesting further assistance from ECA in sector-specific areas. Services required range from development of an implementation strategy to examination of the work programmes, to resource mobilization, development of sectoral strategies and monitoring of the implementation plan. This underlines the importance of ECA's role in providing assistance for the formulation and piloting of sectoral policies and strategies. Special attention is being paid to e-governance, democratising access, private sector development and content development to meet AISI and MDG objectives. In addition, ECA is proposing a new dimension of village information and communications infrastructure (VICI) plans to the existing process to extend policy-making and implementation. ECA will also place more emphasis on the expedited participation of the countries currently without a national ICT policy in the global knowledge society.

However, from ECA's perspective, national e-strategies as part of the AISI goals will increasingly be geared towards addressing the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) so that ICTs can assist in the reduction of poverty, improve healthcare delivery, provide education opportunities for all, particularly the girl-child, create employment opportunities as well as food security.

In addition, even though governments need to take the lead in the development of national strategies, other key stakeholders should be encouraged to play their part in both the formulation and implementation process. This is partly the reason why ECA places a great deal of emphasis on the NICI consultation process ensuring that stakeholders' needs and interest are reflected and accommodated in the policy documents. Given the importance of various actors in enabling the implementation of national strategies, ECA has also embarked awareness raising through extensive outreach and communication activities targeted at Members of Parliament, civil society groups (particularly women's groups), academia, the media, as well as the Diaspora. The policy process should be flexible to incorporate other thematic and emerging issues emerging both at the national and regional levels that have relevance to countries.

5. Conclusion

ECA and his Partners are cooperating with Great Lakes Countries formulating and implementing National ICT Policies with the objective to build the information Society and to use ICT for socio-economic development purposes.

The ICT Policies has to set Environment for business conditions right - tackling:

- Obstacles to risk funding
- Obstacles to entrepreneurship
- Obstacles to employment

The ICT Policies has also to address the need for Establishing New and Innovative mechanisms for:

- Funding Universal Services
- Starts up Financing
- Partnerships for setting Up Technoparks, and incubators...

