

Special Issue: WSIS Accra2005

PICTA Bulletin is a monthly publication that provides information on activities of members in the partnership, as well as offers news on ICT-related activities in Africa. This bulletin is also available at: <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/picta/PICTAbulletin>

WSIS Africa Regional Preparatory Conference - Accra2005
“ Access: Africa’s key to an inclusive Information Society”
28 January – 4 February 2005, Accra, Ghana



http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/it_for_development/events/accra/index.htm

The Conference



The Africa Regional preparatory conference for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was held from 2 to 4 February 2005 in Accra, Ghana under the theme of "Access: Africa's key to an inclusive information society." The three-day conference, officially opened by His Excellency John Kufuor, President of the Republic of Ghana was attended by over 1000 delegates from African countries, stakeholders from governments, civil society, private sector, media and academia as well as representatives of the international community, to prepare an African agenda for the second phase of the Summit (WSIS II) scheduled in November 2005 in Tunis. Among the

high-level delegates were His Excellency Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda, His Excellency Mohammed Ghounnushi, Prime Minister of Tunisia, and His Excellency Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

The pre-Conference workshops

Prior to the main conference over 14 workshops were held from 28 January to 1 February focusing on various issues including e-strategies, multi-stakeholder partnerships, poverty reduction, Information Society indicators, Internet Governance, and financing mechanisms to formulate recommendations that will constitute Africa's contributions to WSIS II. The pre-conference workshops provided in-depth discussions that were further fed into the main conference sessions.

The Accra Commitments

The conference resulted in a document entitled "Accra Commitments for WSIS Tunis 2005" reflecting Africa's position with regard to the key issues of the WSIS process. The document outlines the key principles,

development orientations, resource mobilization including human resources, international cooperation, and operational aspects including the way to Tunis 2005, general implementation strategies, financing mechanisms, internet governance, partnership and the way ahead: beyond Tunis 2005. For details of the Commitment document, speeches, and presentations made: http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/it_for_development/events/accra/index.htm

Statements by high-level delegates

Executive Seceretary, ECA

Speaking at the Conference, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Mr K.Y. Amoako has bemoaned the outdated telecommunications infrastructure on the continent, which hampered the development of ICTs. "Infrastructure development continues to be the Achilles heels of Africa's information society," he said. He called for speeding up the pace of national legal and regulatory environments to bring about the effective introduction of ICTs in various fields. "The other unresolved issue is financing mechanisms for the information society," he added, urging a bold and innovative approach in this regard: "Africa needs to show that it is ready to carry more of its own load in this area." Stressing on the importance of partnership, Mr. Amoako said, "We must distinguish between projects and initiatives that will be supported by our development partners, those by governments, as well as the private sector. There will also be a role for public-private partnerships."

The President of Rwanda



African leaders present at the conference elaborated on the situation in their countries. Rwanda's Paul Kagame said the second phase of his country's ECA-sponsored National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) plan was aimed at "increasing access and contributing to a genuine information society as action plans alone will not deliver the desired results". Touching on Rwanda's efforts to move on from the traumatic impact of the 1994 genocide, he said ICT applications were now being used by the government to enhance unity and reconciliation and strengthen the participatory justice system known as "Gacaca". "As things are now, African countries are not adequately reaping the benefits which accrue from being neighbours," he pointed out. "Only regional integration will contribute to the development of the Global Information Society, as it will yield economies of scale, generate demand and capital, while at the same time strengthening bilateral ties."

The President of Ghana



For his part, Ghanaian President J.A Kufuor underlined the strides made in his country through a strong ICT policy and plan. Stressing the importance of ICT access and infrastructure, he said, "It is surely time to resolve to harmonize telecom infrastructure usage under a common regulatory environment in all the sub regions of Africa under the NEPAD arrangements. It is also time to come out with an African ICT infrastructure backbone plan that will run across the whole continent and beyond." President Kufuor stressed the need to take timely action. He said, "We need to take some brave decisions. We do not have a lot of time. Future generations will not forgive us if we should lack the will to take these decisions. This is a call to partnership in line with the

letter and spirit of NEPAD. Africa should not and need not be a scar on the conscience of the world. It is time for us to take our place as proud members of the world community." He further pointed out that "...we would not be left behind and that by the 2015 deadline, we will be in the mainstream of the ICT revolution, not just in the consumption of the products of ICT but also in providing the wherewithal to produce some of them."

The Prime Minister of Tunisia



Tunisian Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi highlighted the preparations currently underway for the second phase of the WSIS summit to be held in November 2005 in Tunis. He said, "the second phase will be conducive to the adoption of practical solutions in order to optimize the potential that information technologies offer and to bridge the growing digital divide between North and South. Mr Ghannouchi also reiterated Tunisia's call to all parties including: governments, international and regional organizations composing the civil society, as well as the private sector to take part in the Tunis Summit on November 16-18, 2005, adding that the Summit will no

doubt contribute to provide to all the African countries with progress and prosperity within a solidarity, peaceful, stable and secure environment.

Secretary-General, ITU



Speaking at the Conference, Mr. Yoshio Utsumi, Secretary-General of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) stressed that Africa played an active role during the first phase of WSIS. He said, "The political leadership and commitment signified by Africa and other nations in the Geneva phase, have been documented and proclaimed to the world. The Geneva Phase laid a foundation by defining an inclusive, long-term vision and an approach to develop a more equitable and safe Information Society. Now is the time to start building on this foundation, by transforming our shared vision into reality. We are now here to move words into actions. He also made reference to the recent Tsunami disaster saying, "we had plenty of time to warn them that the Tsunami was expected to come and we could have saved their lives if we had had an effective communication system and the will to utilise it. Disaster prevention by monitoring systems is one of the items in the WSIS Plan of Action; we now realize how crucial information and communication technologies are in our activities. We must really realise what we agreed in Geneva."

In addition, representatives from a number of partners including the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), Industry Canada, UNESCO, and Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF) made remarks at the opening session of the Conference.

The full text of the speeches and remarks made by high-level delegates and representatives of partners are available at: http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/it_for_development/events/accra/index.htm

Resolutions from stakeholders



The deliberations of the stakeholders from civil society, private sector, youth, women, academia, and parliamentarians resulted in concrete resolutions reflecting their respective perspectives towards Information Society issues.

Following are the key recommendations made, and the complete texts of the resolutions are available at: http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/it_for_development/events/accra/index.htm

- The adoption of African languages, as working languages in the public domain, is a requirement to the development of the continent and to the preservation of the cultural and linguistic diversity in the Information Society.
- A collective action of all African stakeholders is mandatory for the integration of gender perspective in the information and knowledge society in general and ICTs in particular.
- Africa's youth will play a key role in bridging the digital divide in establishing an Information Society that focuses on people in development over profit and technology.

- The African continent with its high illiteracy rate and vulnerable populations should develop specialized centers and relevant materials to overcome these major handicaps.
- Civil society and the private sector have a key role to play in the development process in general, and especially in building the Information Society.
- Scientific and Technological Research should focus on the concomitant development of society and efficient use of technology.
- Media is catalyst of social changes and can, through multi-channel partnership, foster the implementation of WSIS Plan of Action.
- Considering the important role Parliamentarians play in the Information Society development, there is a need to establish an African ICT4D Parliamentarians network to ensure their active participation in the processes of building an inclusive information society at national and regional levels, and the WSIS process towards Tunis and beyond.

Conference Newspaper

In collaboration with ECA and Highway Africa News Agency (HANA), a daily Conference newspaper was produced, known as “*WSIS Africa Agenda*” - with updates on the proceedings of the pre-conference events and the main conference. For more on this: <http://newsagency.blogspot.com>

Conference Site Radio Station

ECA, in collaboration with AMARC Africa, had an onsite radio station broadcasting in English and French. To listen to the programmes online: <http://simbani.amarc.org/>

Partners @ WSIS Accra2005



A number of partners collaborated with ECA and the Government of Ghana in organizing this important regional event. Financial support came from the governments of France and Finland, the Ford Foundation, Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP), Industry Canada, International Development Research Center (IDRC), Organisation internationale de la francophonie (OIF), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the United Nations ICT Task Force, and the United Nations Secretariat of the Working Group on Internet Governance who sponsored over 300 participants to the Conference. The African Union has also provided support to the local Secretariat

for organization of the Conference.

Examples of joint collaboration include:

- Multistakeholder Partnership Forum (GKP/ECA/UNESCO),
- African languages and open source software workshop (ECA/OIF/AAL),
- ICTs and poverty reduction workshop (OECD / ECA),
- e-Strategies workshop (ECA/CePRC-Industry Canada),
- Internet Governance workshop (UN-ICT TF/CePRC-Industry Canada/OIF/ECA),
- Information Society and regulation: access and infrastructure workshop (ATU/ ECA/CTO),
- Enterprise Africa-UNDP/ECA Private Sector Forum,
- Evaluation of the implementation of the Geneva Action Plan and information society indicators workshop (ECA/IDRC/CA/Finland),
- ECA/SDC/UNESCO Media Forum,
- ECA/eNotus workshop on investing in Africa’s Information Society: the view of business,
- ECA/GKP/CePRC-Industry Canada joint exhibition stand.

Other agencies in attendance include African Development Bank (ADB), African Union (AU), AfriNIC, Association for Progressive Communication (APC), European Commission, ICANN, International Institute for Development and Communication (IICD), International Telecommunications Union (ITU), NEPAD Secretariat, Open Society Initiative for Western Africa (OSIWA), OECD, Regional Economic Communities

(RECs), UK Department for International Development (DFID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank – Africa Bureau.

For photo gallery of the Conference:

http://www.uneca.org/eca_programmes/it_for_development/events/accra/gallery/index.htm

PICTA Bulletin is a monthly information sharing service designed to keep members informed of each other's activities in the area of ICTs in Africa.

Please send relevant information, stories or exchanges you may want to share with other members to atemtime@uneca.org for inclusion in subsequent issues of the PICTA Bulletin. If you have any comments and/or suggestions, please contact:

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