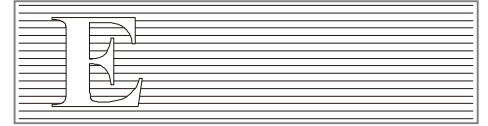




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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

First Meeting of the Committee on  
Development Information (CODI)

*28 June - 2 July 1999*  
*Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

***REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE***

**First Meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI)**  
**Addis Ababa 28 June – 2 July 1999**  
**Report**

**Introduction:**

1. The first meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI) was held at the Headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa, in Addis Ababa, from 28 June to 2 July 1999.
2. Delegates came from the following member States: Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, the Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Mali, Malawi, Madagascar, Morocco, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, United Republic of Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Uganda. States not members of the ECA represented were Indonesia, Italy, the Netherlands, the People's Rep. Of China, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.
3. Observers participated from the following sub-regional, regional and international organizations: the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), African Development Bank (ADB), African Centre for Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD), African Organization for Cartography and Remote Sensing (AOCRS), Regional Centre for Mapping of Resources for Development (RCMD), Regional Centre for Training in Aerospace Surveys (RECTAS), Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), l'Observatoire Economique et Statistique d'Afrique Subsaharienne (AFRISTAT), the Statistical Office of European Communities (EUROSTAT), the Programme for Environmental Information Systems for Sub-Saharan Africa (EIS), African Regional Organisation for Standardisation (ARSO), Sahara and Sahel Observatory (OSS), the Council for the Development of Economic and Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS), the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD), the Eastern Africa Statistical Training Centre (EASTC), the International Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ISPRS), the German Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), International Cartography Association (ICA), the International Institute for Aerospace Surveys and Earth Sciences (ITC), the International Federation of Surveyors (FIG), and the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC).
4. United Nations system organizations present were: United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD)-Department of Economic Social Affairs, the International Criminal Court for Rwanda, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), UNITAR (the United Nations Institute for Training and Research), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.
5. Other observers represented the British Council, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Global Information Infrastructure Commission, the US Bureau of the Census-International Programme Centre (IPC), the Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (ISAE), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the International Development Research Centre, the International Institute for Information Technology, the University of Lagos, Makerere University, the AGH University of Krakov, the University of Lausanne, the University of Hannover, the University of Natal, Statistics Sweden, The Krakow Surveying and Cartography Co., Intergraph, Leica, Aero-Sensing and Information Systems Services (ISS-Ethiopia).
6. Technical exhibitions were mounted during the meeting. The following exhibitors participated: INTERGRAPH, Aerosensing (Switzerland), the World Bank, Information Systems Services (Ethiopia), LEICA (Switzerland), the US Bureau of the Census (IPC), and ECA/DISD.
7. The list of participants is attached as Annex I.
8. The meeting was organized in plenaries and three sub-committees on: Information Communication Technologies, Statistics and Geoinformation.

**Agenda item No. 1: Opening**

9. The representative of Botswana, representing the bureau of the last United Nations Regional Cartographic Conference for Africa, whose functions have been subsumed by the Committee on Development Information, chaired the opening session.
10. The Director of Development Information Services Division welcomed the participants and delivered the opening statement.

**Agenda item No. 2 Election of officers**

11. The meeting elected the following Bureau:

Chairman : Nigeria.

First Vice-Chairman: Democratic Republic of Congo (The delegate of DRC was unable to participate in the Bureau).

Second Vice-Chairman: South Africa.

First Rapporteur: Tunisia.

Second Rapporteur: Ethiopia.

**Agenda item No. 3 Approval of the Agenda**

12. The meeting approved the draft agenda and the work programme without amendments. The agenda is attached as annex II.

**Agenda item No. 4: Key issues on the theme**

13. Under this agenda item keynote speakers made presentations on the theme: "Harnessing information for development".
14. In the area of statistics, the presentation addressed "African Statistical Development: A review and the Road Ahead in the New Millennium". The Committee noted Africa's statistical development since the 1960s and the current state of African statistics. It observed that many African countries did not have current statistics. Recent initiatives as well as the possible strategies to address the situation were detailed. Amongst the strategies proposed were use of the new ICT technologies to collect and disseminate data, training as many statisticians as possible, promotion of greater public awareness and user needs assessment, prioritization, promotion of private contributions to the budget, and increased regional co-ordination.
15. The Committee noted the problems and strategies and urged increased synergies between statistics, geoinformation and information and communication technologies, greater political commitment to the importance of statistics and called upon the private sector to contribute to the funding of national statistical services. The Committee also urged that actions be taken to confront the numerous challenges to the development of statistics in Africa.
16. In the area of geoinformation an examination of "the economic and social benefits to be derived from the use of geographic information technologies" was made, addressing the issues of better land management in favour of national/municipal economies, improved analysis and understanding of socio-economic and environmental data with direct impact on people's welfare, valued added products and opportunities for private/commercial marketing, as well as other positive impacts of the technology.
17. In the discussion that followed, several delegates indicated the importance of training and capacity building at different levels, the importance of using GIS as economic investment and as a tool to assist in alleviating some of the problems being faced by African countries. The private sector should also play an important role in harnessing the usage of geo-information either through joint ventures with the public sector and their integration in national development programmes and the utilization of co-financing techniques.
18. In the area of information and communication technologies, the presentation centred on the crucial element of content dissemination through the new technologies under the title "Content development and dissemination

in Africa: key issues". The presentation outlined the various forms of content dissemination and focused on content development and diffusion in the information age through the medium of Web Information Systems. Stress was given to the need for African institutions to participate fully in developing and disseminating content through this medium. A major effort was advocated to increase African content and improve Africa capacity to exploit global content because content was the basis of knowledge.

19. In the discussion, concern was voiced about the focus on emergent information technologies for development, and additional details were given on national efforts to dissemination information on web sites created in this area, with particular regard to statistics. Concern was also expressed about Africa's ability to develop web content in the situation of inadequate information infrastructure and the need to continue to sensitize African ministers on the importance of the new technology. Given the flood of content from global sources and emerging content from Africa, the need for good information retrieval tools was raised. The importance of information brokers who understand user needs was also noted. The comparatively low cost of infrastructure development in this area was pointed to as well as the need for leadership vision to build the necessary infrastructure.

#### **Agenda item No. 5 Challenges for the year 2000 and beyond**

20. The Committee noted that challenges to African statistical development in the year 2000 and beyond included sensitization of the public to the importance of statistics, responsiveness to new data needs, definition of priorities for statistical development, improvement of the quality of data and organization and management of national statistical offices.
21. In the area of geoinformation, the secretariat presented a number of clearly defined challenges confronting the rational utilization of geographic information technologies in the socio-economic development process of African countries. Many of these challenges are not new and have been in existence for many years; some derive from dramatic advances in technology; and some are the consequence of the globalization process and the pressures imposed by the need to compete in global market economies. In essence, the challenges relate to the prevailing gaps in base-line spatial data and information, the real capacities of African countries to apply new technologies to bridge spatial data-gaps and to transform the data into information and knowledge, the lack of awareness and commitment by decision-makers with regard to the potential benefits of these technologies, the new perception of geoinformation as a commodity, and the funding of geographic data that can not be financed by commercial activities.
22. In the area of information and communication technologies, the secretariat outlined the major challenges in this area as being: globalisation and the information age (the theme of ECA's forthcoming African Development Forum '99 to be held in Addis Ababa from 24-28 October 1999), technology challenges, cultural challenges, the need for enabling environments, the brain drain and the Y2K problem. In debate, participants stressed the importance of the Y2K problem and the efforts their countries were making on it. The continuing challenge of transforming data into information and knowledge was underlined, as well as the need for African telecommunication networks to facilitate its transmission.

#### **Agenda items No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8. Sub-committees sessions (annexes III, IV and V, respectively Statistics, Geo-information, and Information and Communications Technology)**

#### **Agenda item 9. Policies and strategies**

##### ***Agenda item No. 9.1 Reports of the Subcommittees***

23. The Committee received and endorsed the reports of the three Sub-Committees. The reports are summarized in the following paragraphs.

##### ***Report of the Sub-Committee on Statistics***

24. The Sub-committee met from 29 June to 1 July 1999. Eight member States and observers from fourteen national, sub-regional, United nations system and international organizations participated in the meeting. A number of decisions and recommendations were made including on: an evaluation of the implementation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Statistical Development in Africa in the 1990s; ECA to sensitize African governments at the highest level on the importance of statistics for policy formulation, planning, monitoring and evaluation of the performance of African economies; the steps that African countries might take to speed

up the process of implementing the 1993 SNA; the convening of an intergovernmental expert group meeting on household surveys in Africa; the formulation of a strategy for strengthening statistical training in Africa; and that ECA member states subscribe to the IMF General Data Dissemination System.

***Report of the Sub-Committee on GeoInformation***

25. The Sub-committee met from 29 June to 1 July 1999. More than 90 participants were present. The meeting counted representatives from 14 member States and observers from five sub-regional and regional institutions, eighteen national and international organizations, the private sector and the industry. The discussions showed an excellent interaction among delegates and observers.
26. The meeting addressed the progress reports by the eleven member States; progress reports by sub-regional, regional and international organizations; training and capacity building; awareness raising; data collection and standardization; data manipulation and utilization; development of global and national geospatial data infrastructure; cadastral and land information; commercialization aspects of geoinformation – role of private sector in geoinformation; review of the terms of reference of the subcommittee on geoinformation; and review of ECA work programme in this area. The sub-committee made recommendations on spatial data infrastructures, availability of spatial data and cost recovery, land-information management, capacity building, and established a Standing Preparatory Working Group of the Sub-committee. The Sub-committee adopted its report on 1 July 1999 at 20:15 hours.

***Report of the Sub-Committee on Information and Communication Technologies***

27. The Sub-committee on met from 29 June to 1 July. Approximately 85 members of CODI attended meetings of the Sub-Committee. The unique aspect of the meeting of that Sub-Committee was that it brought together delegates and observers who represented virtually every field and discipline involved in using information technology for the collection, management and dissemination of information: The diversity of the participants enriched the discussions enormously and contributed to the breadth of the results.
28. The Sub-Committee considered three pressing themes in information and communication technologies in the region: the development of African information infrastructure, the creation and dissemination of information content from Africa and the establishment by member States of national information and communication infrastructure policies, plans and strategies. Throughout it considered the importance of Governments accelerating their implementation of the African Information Society Initiative which they adopted at the ECA Conference of Ministers in 1996. The Sub-Committee examined in depth ECA's work programme in information and communication technologies and found it both consistent with ECA's mandate in this area and supportive of the achievement of the African Information Society. The Sub-Committee made several suggestions to the Committee as a whole on the revision of the CODI terms of reference. Participants presented reports on the status of ICT in their countries and organizations to the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee adopted its report and made 9 recommendations for the consideration of the plenary.

***Remarks by the Executive Secretary of ECA.***

29. The Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa Mr. K.Y. Amoako, who briefly joined the meeting, commented on the work of each of the sub-committees and put their work in the context of ECA's restructuring and ECA's vision for African development. He stressed the importance of ECA's thematic approach to its work which was reflected in the composition of this Committee and the synergy that different disciplines could bring to it. He emphasized the difficulty of reaching African development goals, with particular emphasis on the reduction of poverty in Africa and requested the commitment of the Committee to work towards this.
30. In reviewing the recommendations, the Executive Secretary addressed the challenges of sustainability and the goal of reducing poverty by half by 2015. To achieve that goal, Africa's economic growth rate would have to move from 4 to 7 per cent per annum, and that was a major challenge. ECA had, in response and with a view to addressing the issues effectively, developed three performance indices to monitor (i) annual performance trends, (ii) economic performance stance and (iii) economic sustainability.

31. Accurate and timely information was critical in monitoring progress in which statistics had an important role to play. He therefore expressed his full support to the recommendations on statistics. He stated that the evaluation of the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for statistical development in Africa was very timely and he would find resources for its implementation. He stressed the need for sensitizing policy makers at the highest level on the importance of statistics and underscored the importance of the IMF General Data Dissemination System as a tool for enhancing the quality of African statistics and urged African countries to subscribe to it. In conclusion he stated that there was no area where partnership was more important than in statistics.
32. The Executive Secretary indicated that although the area of geoinformation was new to him, he understood its importance in development, and would support it. He praised the recommendations of the Sub-Committee concerning capacity building, in particular the establishment of a Distance Learning Centre through a network of national institutions and universities, joint research projects and workshops, observing that these were among the type of activities encouraged by the Commission. He pledged his full support towards their implementation.
33. With regard to information and communication technologies, Mr. Amoako said that he had decided that this was a flagship area in which ECA could take the lead in Africa upon his arrival at the institution. He was very pleased to see the progress that had been made in this area in the last four years, and that would be highlighted at the first African Development Forum to be held in Addis Ababa in October 1999.

**Agenda item No. 9.2 Review of the Terms of Reference of CODI**

34. The Rapporteurs of each of the Sub-Committees presented the proposed amendments of the Sub-Committees with regard to the revised terms of reference of the Committee on Development Information. The Committee endorsed the proposed amendments and called upon the secretariat to align the different texts. The Terms of Reference of CODI as revised and adopted by are attached as Annex VI

**Agenda item No 10. Date and venue of next meeting**

35. The next meeting shall be held in about 18 months time at the headquarters of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. The exact date would be established in consultation with the Bureau of the Commission.

**Agenda item No 11. Any other business**

36. There was no other business.

**Agenda item No 12. Adoption of the report**

37. The draft report was approved, with amendments, on 2 July 1999 at 19:45 hours.