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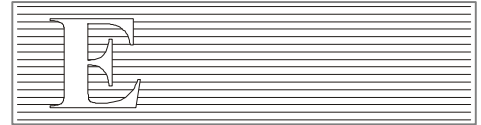
ECA/DISD/CODI.2/19
14 August 2001

Original : ENGLISH

Second Meeting of the Committee
on Development Information (CODI)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
4 - 7 September 2001

**BRIEFING NOTE ON ADF '99 AND FOLLOW-UP OF THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF CODI 1999**



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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

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Briefing note on ADF'99 and follow-up of CODI 1999

1. The African Development Forum (ADF) 1999

Convinced of the importance of a forum where major stakeholders could gather in order to discuss most crucial developmental issues, to consult with their peers, plan their own strategy and design corresponding action plans, ECA decided to launch the African Development Forum.

The *African Development Forum* is an ECA initiative to direct attention to a different critical development problem annually with a view to engaging African decision-makers, practitioners and thinkers and accelerating the search for solutions. Its 1999 edition, the first, was about the “challenge to Africa of Globalisation and the Information Age”. 950 people gathered at the UN Conference Centre in Addis Ababa from 24-28 October 1999 for the first *African Development Forum (ADF '99)*. Never before had African experiences in building an information society been showcased so comprehensively and in such detail. ADF'99¹ brought participants with the objective of assessing the progress made in the implementation of AISI at AISI+3 and defining new directions for ICT related activities in Africa for the coming years. As a result, new guidance was given to ECA and its partners to focus on, based on the countries' strategies and priorities.

On that occasion, ECA was privileged and honoured to have his Excellency President Alpha Omar Konare of Mali to share with participants his vision for Africa's information age. The Prime Minister of Ethiopia and the Vice-President of Malawi also participated in the ADF'99 Conference.

Some 950 participants attended the Forum from government, the private sector, civil society (including the academic sector and media), bilateral and multilateral organisations. Participants ranged from community activists and technical experts to national and international policy makers, private entrepreneurs and Heads of State.

In addition to Ministers in charge of communication and information technology, ministers from the following sectors also attended ADF'99: Trade, Finance, Planning, Culture, Education, Infrastructure, Regional Integration and Co-operation, Gender, Ethics, and Liberalisation.

ECA is working hard to bring the results of ADF '99 to African leaders so that they can assess the results at first hand, and reach consensus on the most promising initiatives for follow up at national, sub-regional and regional levels. For this to happen, a Post Forum Summit bringing together Heads of State and Government of 20 African countries will be convened during the last quarter of 2001.

¹ For more information access www.uneca.org/adf99.

A number of concrete initiatives and projects emerged from ADF 99, among them in distance education, policy and electronic commerce. Programmes in these areas constitute the basis of the follow up to ADF and the updated vision of AISI. Resource mobilisation exercises and consultations with partners are underway for implementation of these programmes.

1.2 A Strategy to accelerate African development through the increased use of information and communication technologies

The ADF '99 strategy answers the question "Why use scarce funds on new and unfamiliar technologies when needs for basic services such as fresh water and classrooms are not yet met?" The answer is threefold:

- ICTs are an enabling tool with a multiplier effect which can cut the costs, improve the quality and speed the delivery of basic infrastructure and services;
- ICTs offer many opportunities for rapid economic growth which will ultimately provide more finance for the many demands on the government coffers;
- ICTs have the potential to fundamentally transform the way governance operates, improving the ability of marginalised groups to participate across the spectrum - from the local grassroots level, to national governments and the regional and global forums which have insufficient representation from the South.

The risks of inaction will be high when compared to the plummeting costs of the new technologies and the growing potential for investment from private sector partnerships.

The strategy calls for commitment from the highest levels of leadership to applying ICTs to Africa's pressing social and economic problems.

It targets four areas:

- Applications to support the educational process and meet the needs of Africa's youth
- Applications in support of the delivery of health care
- Opportunities for business and trade
- Creating the enabling policy environment.

Programmes in these areas constitute the core of the follow up to ADF and the renewed vision of AISI.

Education and Youth – The African Learning Network

The moves toward a global knowledge society require a fundamental shift in thinking about the methodology of education. ICTs have already begun to exert massive transformation of education systems in developed countries. Failure to similarly change Africa's education and learning systems in the next 5 years will have dire consequences 10-15 years from now.

- ◆ There will be no next generation of leadership to guide African institutions in the global information society.
- ◆ African intellectuals will be active mainly in the universities and corporations of the North and of other developing regions.
- ◆ African children, male and female, will have little access to, or capacity to exploit, global knowledge and will have increasing difficulty making their own voices heard on a global stage.
- ◆ The brain flood from Africa will make the current brain drain appear a trickle. ADF follow up work proposes that The **African Learning Network** be instituted with participation from all African countries and regional groupings and with an immediate focus on school networking at the national level with support from a regional **SchoolNet Africa**. A detailed programme framework and business plan is available.

Health – Linking Capacities in Africa

Africa cannot ignore the potential of information and communication technologies to health service delivery. Thus far applications in Africa have been characterised by islands of donor-supported activity with limited impact on the growing health crisis because:

- they are too costly to be replicable;
- they are not rooted in community-based applications;
- they do not address fragmentation among the many different health sector actors at the national level.

An increasingly African-driven approach that draws expertise into an ever-widening network will better define applications appropriate to the different needs of the continent and provide a framework to enhance the value of donor initiatives.

ADF follow up work has identified applications in the areas of:

- Primary health care;
- Transferring diagnostic information to specialised centres;
- The operation and management of health services;
- Medical education and research;
- The fight against HIV/AIDS.

Recommended actions include:

- The creation of national tele-health task forces to establish priority application areas;

- The creation of a consultative committee on African tele-health, which was addressed through the ICT Focus Group of ADF 2000: AIDS, the greatest leadership challenge;
- The definition of pilot projects on HIV/AIDS to: support clinical researchers and health care providers; build the capacity of youth to manage and resist infection and its consequences; provide a knowledge base for the media; and establish fora for people with AIDS and activists; and
- The presentation of the pilot projects has been made during ADF 2000.

Electronic Commerce in Africa – the Pan-African E-commerce Promotion Initiative

The world of electronic commerce is moving fast. Africa has only a short window of opportunity to exploit any comparative advantage it may have.

Work carried out as part of the follow up to the African Development Forum '99 has identified two niche markets in which a number of African businesses are already active and which others can exploit now if certain conditions are met:

- Teleservices; and
- The diaspora.

Work must now be initiated to:

Build small business capability in e-commerce:

- Strengthen e-commerce education and training services;
- Identify and disseminate information on potential market niches;
- Develop effective mentoring, twinning and inter-mediation mechanisms;
- Create Africa-based, diaspora-focussed Internet portals; and
- Ensure the credibility of African e-business.
- Strengthening the financial sector (banks and insurance companies)
- Introducing e-payment mechanisms (credit card and e-transfers)
- Empowering SME's in Africa so that they would build capacity to business online.

Create a supportive environment:

- Electronic procurement systems in governments and regional organisations;
- E-business related legal, regulatory and tax environments;
- Consumer accessible electronic payment systems; and
- Local, national and regional fast package delivery systems.

Mentoring arrangements between African e-commerce start-ups and more established operations in the North, as well as the provision of a variety of training packages shaped to the needs of new e-business entrepreneurs, are obvious areas for private sector collaboration.

Information Policy – a Collaborative African Framework

The key information policy challenges facing Africa today are:

- The extension of access to rural areas where most of the population lives;
- The application of the technologies to solve development problems in key sectors: health, education, employment and income generation, for example;
- Collaboration – sub-regionally and regionally - to build market size and exploit economies of scale for ICT production, services and future tele-workers; and
- The articulation of an African vision in international negotiation on information society issues.

Policy processes must:

- Involve broad groups of stakeholders including representatives of user communities, the private sector and civil society;
- Identify issues that can best be addressed beyond national borders; and
- Recognise the need for a stronger African voice in global negotiation.

The recommendations developed through the ADF process target the key steps that can be taken at the national, sub-regional and regional levels to build Africa's capacity to grasp opportunities inherent in the information age and strengthen its voice in global decision-making bodies.

At the national level:

- initiate policy process within the framework of African Information Society Initiative (AISI);
- Include within the process:
- Rural Access Task Force on ICT Innovation to test experimental approaches to the extension of networks to rural, under-served areas;
- National Forum for Co-operation between Civil Society and Government in Global ICT Governance, to promote informed public debate and effective negotiation

At sub-regional and regional levels, maximise the benefit of national policy initiatives and build African capacity through:

- Community of National Regulators in Africa, to build capacity and define models appropriate for Africa;
- Initiate Policy research on market integration, to identify ways and means to exploit integration to promote information society initiatives;
- Regional Information Society Exchange Network, to share national experiences and best practices;
- Regional Task Force to provide policy, legal and regulatory advice to African governments.

At global level, influence global decision making on ICT issues through:

- African Community of Practice on ICT Global Governance, to make Africa's participation in global fora more effective.

These mechanisms will not all be put in place at the same time or cover the same geographic space. But over time they can lead to a body of knowledge and practice that will inform information policy and practice in the region, increase global understanding of Africa's position and strengthen its voice in world bodies addressing information society issues.

1.2 Post-ADF Activities

The African Development Forum is a process designed to capture results, build consensus and move proposals forward to implementation.

The Post-Forum Summit is therefore a key component of the overall ADF process.

Because ADF '99 focused on the challenge to Africa of globalisation and the information age this first Post-Forum Summit will review the information society strategies that were considered by ADF participants to be among the most promising to Africa's search for its own definition of the information society. Representatives of governments, civil society, the development community and the private sector will consider how best to partner to implement the actions proposed.

1.2.1 Consultation process

ECA staff involved in ADF '99, including the Executive Secretary, the regional advisors and other staff members working on information and communication policy, will take advantage of their travels to promote the strategy and its component elements, ensure that they adequately reflect national priorities and needs and identify opportunities for partnership.

ECA and its partners will convene a number of regional workshops designed to provide decision-makers and specialists with an opportunity for in-depth review of the proposals in the areas of education and youth, health and electronic commerce.

ECA is invited to showcase the ADF '99 strategy at meetings convened by sister organisations throughout the region. Such meetings on occasion provide the opportunity to initiate implementation of the proposals: the Community of National Regulators, for example, met twice at conferences convened, respectively, in South Africa in August and in Botswana in October 2000.

1.2.2 Post-Forum Summit

The **Post-Forum Summit** is an element of the Dialogue designed to:

Provide high level leadership and build African capacity

There is widespread consensus – confirmed in the Secretary General's report to ECOSOC² - that high-level political leadership is required if Africa is to capture the benefits and avoid the pitfalls of the information age that is increasingly knitting the world into one. The economic and social impact of the new information technologies is now an important topic on the agendas of Summits of the European Union and the G8 countries. Given the

² Report of the Secretary General for the high-level segment of ECOSOC substantive session in 2000 on the theme of "Development and international co-operation in the XXI century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy"

potential benefits and risks to Africa, it is even more important that African leaders begin to face the challenges and grapple with the implications of joining the information age.

Political leadership will both give rise to, and need support from, a growing body of African technical expertise.

There have been significant information society initiatives in Africa during the last half-decade. This Summit will bring together leaders who have begun to shape these initiatives. It is designed to imprint African leadership on the information society and stimulate the development of needed African capacity.

Fill the strategic vacuum

There is no dearth of information society strategies emerging from governments and from alliances between the private sector and the international public sector. These initiatives originate mainly from governments and institutions in the North. Most developing country voices are heard only indirectly through studies carried out by United Nations and other regional and international bodies.

Africa needs partners from the North – but it needs them to respond to strategies made in Africa not to impose strategies built elsewhere on the basis of limited knowledge or understanding of initiatives underway in the region.

The AISI/ADF strategy, crafted through years of collaboration between ECA and institutions in member States, gives partners the opportunity to reflect on and contribute to a made-in-Africa strategies.

Summit objectives can be achieved through a mix of the formal regional post-ADF Summit, individual face-to-face meetings, meetings arranged around other events (Sub-regional Summits in Africa, ECOSOC, General Assembly meetings) and virtual events.

1.2.3 ADF '99 Dialogue outcomes

ECA envisages six main outcomes from the Post-Forum Summit:

- Commitment from all partners (governments, sub-regional organisations, the private sector and the development community) to work together to enhance the value to the Africa region as a whole of specific information society initiatives;
- Initiation of projects to meet the needs of youth, the health sector and small businesses and of policy processes to create an information and communications environment that can sustain them;
- Creation of networking mechanisms that will lead to an African knowledge base on critical information society issues;
- Agreement from governments to champion the African Information Society;
- Commitment from sub-regional economic co-ordination organisations to build policy frameworks to enhance the impact of the national information society policies put in place in their member countries; and
- Increased public debate within countries on information society issues.

1.2.4 ADF '99 Follow up actions

Country level

Programmes and projects will be initiated and implemented at country level as a result of bilateral agreements developed during the process of dialogue.

Organisations from the *Partnership for Information and Communication Technology in Africa* (PICTA) and other private and public sector organisations will be encouraged to 'adopt' particular country level initiatives and take responsibility for the provision of appropriate support to national implementing organisations. PICTA members will also work with national institutions to monitor and evaluate projects and feed lessons and good practices into regional networks.

Sub-regional level

ECA will create a forum for the sub-regional economic organisations and work with them to identify ICT expertise and incorporate ICT issues into their programmes. Action on these issues will lead to progressively diminishing the communications barriers among countries, building sub-regional backbones and increasing market size for electronic businesses and teleworkers. A special session of ADF 2001 will be devoted to examining the role and contribution of the sub-regional economic organisations to information society development in Africa.

The ECA contribution

ECA is committed to maintaining its role as the secretariat for the African Information Society Initiative and the Partnership for Information and Communication Technologies in Africa.

It will use its strengths as a convenor, advocate and network hub to:

- Assemble a task force on legal, policy and regulatory issues to provide targeted inputs into national policy processes and sub-regional planning;
- Assign staff to liaise with the networks that emerge from the ADF '99 and Summit processes and ensure that they are linked with pools of expertise in the diaspora;
- Through collaboration with partners, ensure that policy advisory services are available to all countries in the region and that projects approved at the Summit receive on-going support- both technical and financial.

Through the Information Technology Centre for Africa it will:

- Provide targeted ICT training, initially at its headquarters in Addis Ababa, eventually through a network of distance learning centres in the region;
- Use state of the art technology to support the development of an African information society knowledge base;
- Provide a showcase to demonstrate sectoral ICT applications that meet African needs.

2. Follow-up of CODI 1999

The Committee on Development Information (CODI) Sub-committee on Information and Communication Technologies had held its first meeting from 29 June to 1 July 1999. 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 development and elaboration 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 (AISI), 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 organisations to the Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee adopted its report and made recommendations for the consideration of the plenary.

The outcomes of CODI 1999 have been highlighted at the first African Development Forum (ADF'99) which was held in Addis Ababa in October 1999. Some of the activities have been addressed through the various initiatives emerged out of ADF'99 and its follow-up activities.

In line with this, ECA has been very active in assisting member states in the development of their own National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policies and plans. Currently 28 member States have embarked on the process and 15 completed the task and are in the process of mobilising resources. This process also involves the encouragement of member States in privatising and liberalising communications services, which was one of the major recommendations of CODI 1999. Currently, 27 countries have set up "independent" regulators. ECA has also been working on building community of regulators.

Furthermore, as one of the outcomes of ADF'99, African Members were urged to consider the importance of the information economy, including the development of information industries and e-commerce, as an area of economic growth that can drive other sectors. The Pan African E-Commerce Initiative is one of the concrete initiatives emerged out of ADF '99, for which the first draft document has been prepared and discussed on.

Efforts have been made to publicise and implement the African Information Society Initiative by member States. AISI has been considered as Africa's common position in bridging the digital divide, as elaborated by the joint meeting of the African Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) and African representatives to the DOT Force in May 2001.

Some countries have started working on forming their own information society to co-ordinate and harmonise ICT activities in their respective countries (e.g. Kenyan Information Society).

Apart from the issues mentioned above, a number of other activities have been undertaken in relation to the recommendations of CODI 1999. These include:

- ECA had deployed ICT focal points to each of the Sub-Regional Development Centres (SRDCs) in order to monitor and co-ordinate ICT development and policy and regulatory activities in the various member States in the sub-regions. Each of the SRDCs have at least IT technical staff.
- ECA has worked very closely with its partners, through the Partnership for ICTs in Africa (PICTA) framework, to support ICT activities in member States. ECA's assistance has been available for training in content and web development activities. However, lack of resources must be noted even though these kind of services have been included in the work programme of ECA's Communication Team, and some agreements with partners (French Co-operation) are including training components in this field. The ECA web site is also being used as a portal.
- The Information Technology Centre for Africa (ITCA), launched as a major initiative dealing with technology brokering, training and information dissemination has developed three core services: a) ICT Exhibition; b) On-site learning Facilities; c) Web Gateway/Portal to African development information. Taking note of the need to align ITCA's focus areas with existing program activities of the ECA and the need to address the challenges facing the African continent, six thematic areas have been identified. These are Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs), Regional Integration, Health, Education, Public Administration and Governance, and ICT Policy (including Universal Access). The activities under each of the focus areas have been formulated in line with the three core services of ITCA. It should be noted that in addition to knowledge gathering and dissemination, ITCA is playing a key role in awareness raising/training for decision-makers and African Ambassadors, technical training for network administrators (in collaboration with CISCO Academy). ITCA is also playing key role in technology brokering through exhibitions (ADF'99, ADF 2000 exhibitions, and exhibition planned for ADF 2001).
- The African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN) initiative is organised in partnership with OAU, ADB, AERC, AAU and other regional and international organisations.

AVLIN will provide an enhanced information platform for African research and knowledge-based institutions. It will be a service to Member States in capacity building and a hub for the exchange of knowledge and information. It will also serve as the

physical framework for the Africa Knowledge Networks Forum (AKNF) to enable it coordinate collaborative knowledge development and information sharing. AKNF is an initiative led by the ECA to facilitate knowledge-sharing and research partnerships between professional and institutional networks, and between them and key knowledge end-users, including policy-makers, trainers at institutions of higher learning, civil society organisations and the private sector. The Africa Knowledge Networks Forum will "federate" existing networks with the aim of strengthening indigenous policy-oriented research and analysis for more effective use by African decision-makers. The Forum provides a continuous link between African research networks, policy-makers and training institutions (mainly Universities) and supports centres of African expertise and African think tanks -- tasks which are critical to the pooling of resources for effective knowledge production and use.

In an effort to improve efficiency and boost activities of the ECA Library as a knowledge base and repository for institutional memory, and for serving better the member States, ECA has initiated a library automation project since 1999. Currently, the project has entered its implementation phase whereby the necessary equipment have been purchased and installed, and training is being provided to staff.

- Effort has been made with all concerned to address the issue of devising solutions to the Year 2000 problem that enabled information systems in Africa less affected by the problem.
- In the invitation letter sent to member States, efforts have been made to ensure that Governments will include information specialists from as many disciplines as possible in their delegations to CODI 2001 (CODI II). Moreover, ECA funding facilitated sponsorship of information specialists to CODI.