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***ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA***

Third Meeting of the Committee  
on Development Information (CODI)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
10 – 17 May 2003

**African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN)**

**AVLIN Advisory Committee (AAC)**

**Report of the First Meeting of AAC**

## INTRODUCTION AND MEMBERS OF AAC

1. The African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN) Advisory Committee (AAC), appointed by the ECA Executive Secretary, was formally inaugurated by Dr. Karima Bounemra Ben Soltane, Director, ECA's Development Information Services Division, on 10 May 2003. The following are the members of the Committee:

Prof. Edward O. Ako,	University of Yaounde I, Yaounde, Cameroon
Prof. Anaba Alemna,	University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana
Mr. Adnane Bencheroune	National Documentation Centre, Rabat, Morocco
Ms. Henda Ben Ghezala	National School of Computer Science, University of Tunis II, Tunis, Tunisia
Mr. Justin Chisenga	Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Ghana
Mr. Girma Mekonnen	Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Ms Ellen Tise	University of the Western Cape, Bellville, South Africa
Mr. Henri Sene	Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal
Mr. Felix Ubogu	University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

2. All the members are to serve on the Committee in their personal capacities for initial period of two years, renewable.

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. The terms of reference of the AAC are the following:
  - a) Advise the ECA Secretariat on general technical and policy issues relating to the development of AVLIN
  - b) Advise on implementation strategies and framework as well as content of its programme related to AVLIN
  - c) Propose approaches, actions and means for the mobilization of resources for the implementation of the project and other related activities and programmes emanating from it
  - d) Promote and disseminate activities of AVLIN to all stakeholders, including member States and sub-regional organizations

## FIRST AAC MEETING

4. The first AAC meeting was held on 10 and 11 May 2003 at the UNECA Conference Centre (Conference Room 6). Seven members attended the meeting and the following were elected Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur:

• Chairperson	Mr. Felix Ubogu
• Vice-Chairperson	Mr. Girma Mekonnen
• Rapporteur	Mr. Justin Chisenga

## BUSINESS OF THE MEETING

5. The business of the first AAC meeting was to review the following draft documents prepared by the AVLIN Secretariat and to provide advice or recommendations on issues arising from the documents:
  - i. Terms of Reference of AAC (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/3)
  - ii. Guidelines for AVLIN Membership (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/5)
  - iii. Business Plan for AVLIN 2003 – 2005 (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/6)
  - iv. Any other matters arising from the documents

### Terms of Reference of AAC (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/3)

6. The draft document (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/3), Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Committee, outlined the following: Establishment of the Committee; Functions of the Committee; Membership; Officers; Meetings; and Funding.
7. The Committee noted the terms of reference outlined in the document. However, a proposal was made to make the following minor modification:

**From:** *“Promote and disseminate activities of AVLIN to all stakeholders, including member States and sub-regional organizations”*

**To:** *“Promote and disseminate, where opportunities arise, activities of AVLIN to all stakeholders, including member States and sub-regional organizations”*

8. The above modification was proposed because the AAC felt that promotion and disseminations of activities on AVLIN should among others, be the responsibility of the AVLIN Secretariat and the ECA. The Committee should only play an advisory role on this matter.

### Guidelines for AVLIN Membership (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/5)

9. The Committee reviewed and discussed the draft document (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/5) outlining the guidelines for membership to AVLIN. The guidelines covered the following:
  - i. Criteria for membership
  - ii. Responsibilities of members
  - iii. Governance
10. The following were noted:
  - The first bullet under the *Criteria for Membership* covered all types of libraries and institutions that could become AVLIN members. Therefore, it was recommended and agreed that the second bullet: *“Members may be representatives of university/academic and research institutions at the national, sub-regional or regional level in the African Region”* “should be dropped.
  - The need to implement AVLIN initially as a pilot project with selected institutions before opening up to more member institutions.
  - While the responsibilities of members were outlined in the document the responsibilities of the AVLIN Secretariat were not included.

- The urgent need for an AVLIN project coordinator with appropriate secretariat support.

### **Business Plan for AVLIN 2003 – 2005 (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/3)**

11. The Committee reviewed the draft work plan for AVLIN 2003 – 2005 (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/3) and endorsed the following:
- The AVLIN operational framework with emphasis on the following:
    - i. Participation in AVLIN activities should be voluntary
    - ii. Capacity building will be a very important component of the the AVLIN implementation process
  - The AVLIN technical framework in which all databases of information resources will be distributed and housed in participating institutions.
  - The proposed budget for the 2003 – 2005 and a recommendation to the AVLIN Secretariat to included in the work plan for the period under review, the activities emanating from the recommendations of the AAC and workshop on the technical aspects of building digital libraries and electronic information networks.

### **OTHER MATTERS**

#### **AVLIN Web site/Interactive Portal**

12. The Committee noted the work that has been carried out by the AVLIN Secretariat towards the development of the AVLIN Web site. The Web site will serve as gateway to AVLIN information and knowledge services resources provided by participating institutions.

#### **Creation of Sub-Committees**

13. In order the set a mechanism for providing input in the development and implementation of the AVLIN technical infrastructure, a technical working group was established. The group is composed of:

Mr. Adnane Benchekroune  
 Ms. Henda Ben Ghezala  
 Mr. Justin Chisenga (convener)

14. Other working groups to be established are capacity building working group, to be convened by Prof Alemna; and partnerships and governance working group to be convened by Mr. Ubogu.

15. Meetings of the working groups will be held by electronic means, unless opportunity for face-to-face discussions arises. Each working group can co-opt non-AAC members.

### **AVLIN Web site - Language**

16. The Committee discussed the importance of developing the AVLIN Web site in various languages, including English, French, Arabic and if possible other languages like Kiswahili. Provision of access to AVLIN resources via various language interfaces will increase information access, however, this approach will require assistance from potential development partners for site translation and maintenance of the various language sites.

### **Paying for AVLIN Resources**

17. The idea of charging for some services to be provided by AVLIN was discussed. The Committee noted that paying for information services under the model adopted by AVLIN was a complicated one. Participating institutions are expected to make their resources available to AVLIN users for free and therefore it would be difficult to justify charging for the information resources. However, a mechanism for costing the AVLIN information services and resources will be developed.

### **Copyright**

18. The Committee noted the complex nature of copyright and intellectual property rights in the digital environment.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

19. After reviewing the documents presented to the Committee by the AVLIN Secretariat, and taking into account the various issues that emerged during the discussions, the Committee made the following recommendations

#### **Implementation of AVLIN**

- i. ECA should engage the services of a consultant to conduct a study on the preparedness of various types of libraries in Africa (including their technical infrastructure, capacities, available information content, etc) to participate in the digital information revolution and contribute to the achievement of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII).
- ii. The AVLIN pilot phase should start as soon as possible and should comprise about 10 participating institutions, including two institutions from each of the five ECA sub-regions in Africa. The participation in the pilot phase should be by invitation.
- iii. To facilitate continued interaction and discussions among the members of the Committee, an interactive discussion forum should be established, as part of the proposed AVLIN Web site

#### **AVLIN Web Site**

- iv. To facilitate easy discovery and retrieval of resources, AVLIN Web site should incorporate metadata of various AVLIN information services

- v. AVLIN Secretariat should look for potential partners to assist with the development and maintenance of the French and Arabic versions of the AVLIN Web site

### **Copyright**

- vi. ECA should assist AVLIN in the development of the copyright framework under which AVLIN would operate

### **Membership to AVLIN**

- vii. AVLIN Secretariat should prepare a document outlining its responsibilities relating to AVLIN. The document should be circulated to the members of AAC and upon its adoption to be included in the final Guidelines for Membership.
- viii. The ECA should develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that will be signed between the ECA and the participating member institutions. The MoU, among others, should outline the responsibility of AVLIN Secretariat and the participating members.
- ix. Regional bodies and economic groupings such as African Union, African Development Bank, IGAD, East African Community, Southern African Development Community, and the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) should be brought on board. In addition, development partners and UN agencies such as the European Union, UNESCO, IDRC, Carnegie, FAO, The World Bank as well as national development agencies, should also be approached and see in which areas of AVLIN they could possibly contribute to.

### **Governance**

- x. ECA should appoint an AVLIN Coordinator as well as provide appropriate secretariat support, as soon as possible to facilitate the smooth development and implementation of AVLIN.