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**PRELIMINARY REFLECTION TO LAUNCH AN AFRICAN
ACTION PLAN ON E-GOVERNANCE**

1. An e-governance action plan for the African information society

E-governance or the utilization of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to facilitate public administration at the national, regional and local levels is considered as an important element of the information society building process. Both the draft declaration of principles and draft action plan of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), that emerged from its second Preparatory Committee (PrepCom-2) meeting held in February 2003, have put the role of e-governance in the information society. This paper aims to initiate discussion for drafting an African e-governance action plan for submission to the third preparatory meeting of the WSIS (PrepCom-3) expected to take place in Geneva from 15 to 26 September 2003. The contents are compiled from the various submissions to the WSIS by African entities as well as e-governance related issues included in the recent versions (21 March 2003) of the working documents for the Draft Declaration of Principles¹ and Draft Action Plan² of the WSIS. Comments relating to the latter are expected to be submitted to the WSIS Secretariat before the 31 May 2003 deadline.

2. Governance, e-governance and ICTs

The linkage between the above three can be summarized as follows based on the contributions presented to the Draft Declaration of Principles and Draft Action Plan of the WSIS:

- Good governance as an enabling environment for building an information society
- ICTs as tools in serving communities to participate in governance issues
- The importance given to the private sector in e-governance initiatives

2.1 Good governance as an enabling environment for building an information society

Good governance is cited as one of the criteria for an enabling environment in the key principles of building an information society for all. This is described in Section I, C, 6 of the WSIS Draft Declaration of Principles of 21 March 2003 as:

39. **Good Governance:** The Information Society must support participative democracy, transparency, and accountability, at all times upholding the principle of legality. Information is the basis of a well-functioning and transparent decision-making process for both global society and local communities. ICTs can be an important and very effective tool not only for good governance but also for more accessible government.

Section II, B of the same document refers to transparency, accountability, sustainability, predictability, and generalization of administrative reforms as the good governance procedures needed to bring governments into e-Model users and as the essential requirements for an equitable development of the Information Society.

¹ Draft declaration of principles, WSIS/PC-IP/030721/TD/GEN/0001, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispcip/td/030721/S03-WSISPCIP-030721-TD-GEN-0001!!MSW-E.doc

² Draft action plan, WSIS/PC-IP/030721/TD/GEN/0002, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispcip/td/030721/S03-WSISPCIP-030721-TD-GEN-0002!!MSW-E.doc

Good governance is needed for facilitating access to the benefits of the information society by creating an enabling environment. Section I, A of the Draft Action Plan of the WSIS describes this as follows:

1. **Good Governance:** To maximize the economic and social benefits of the Information Society, governments need to create a trustworthy, transparent, and non-discriminatory legal, regulatory and policy environment, capable of promoting technological innovation and competition, thus favouring the necessary investments, mainly from the private sector, in the deployment of infrastructures and development of new services:
 - Commitment and responsibility should be defined at the national and regional levels.
 - With the active participation of all stakeholders, the development of an enabling environment should give due regard to the rights and obligations of all stakeholders in such areas as freedom of expression, consumer protection, privacy, security, intellectual property rights, open-source solutions and management of Internet addresses and domain names, while also maintaining economic incentives and ensuring trust and confidence for business activities.

Again, Section II, A, 6 of the Draft Action Plan further emphasizes the role of good governance in the information society.

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The Report of the African Regional Conference for WSIS held in Bamako, Mali from 28 to 30 May 2002, also known as the Bamako Declaration³ describes access to information as “of particular importance to the developing countries, especially the African countries.

2. Every citizen should be guaranteed freedom of expression and protected access to information in the worldwide public domain as part of their inalienable right to freely accessing the information constituting the heritage of man kind which is disseminated in all media including new multimedia systems;
3. Technology supply should be diversified through:
 - The removal of regulatory, political and financial obstacles to the development of communication facilities and tools so as to meet the specific needs of citizens in all circumstances;

2.2 ICTs as tools in serving communities to participate in governance issues

³ Bamako 2002 Declaration, <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/docs/Bamako2002DeclarationEN.doc>.

One application of ICTs in the information society is to enable the participation of communities in governance issues. This is stated in Section II, C, 7 of the Draft Declaration of Principles as:

47. Enhanced possibilities for community-level participation in governance issues.

ICTs have a role in enhancing the transparency, accountability and efficiency of public administration. This role is explained in Section I, A, 7 of the Draft Action Plan:

2. **E-Government:** Public administration should use ICT tools to enhance transparency, accountability and efficiency—at all levels of government, and in particular at the local level:
 - In the delivery of public service to citizens and to enterprises.
 - In the design of online services, adapted to the needs of citizens and businesses.
 - In the better management of financial, human and public resources and goods.

The Bamako Declaration also highlights the importance of ICTs in the governance process as one of the principles in articulating a vision of the information society:

1. All citizens should be provided with the means of using ICT networks as a public service;

The Egyptian Working Document presented to Prep-Com II⁴ highlights e-government as one of the “development oriented ICT application” and states the elaboration mechanism as the development of a “citizen driven applications.” E-government related actions included in the proposed list of actions are:

- Using ICT integrated applications as government enabler, fostering synergy, ensuring smooth delivery of citizen driven services.
- Developing ICT applications geared to remove bureaucratic obstacles to investment.
- Using ICT applications to offer information useful for decision making process at political, social and economic levels. Use ICTs to decrease government spending through use of prototypes and exchange of expertise.
- Developing e-campaigns on national causes
- Establishing interactive public services, and public procurement.

2.3 The importance given to the private sector in e-governance initiatives

e-Government initiatives are cited as an area of involvement for the private sector. Section I, C of the Draft Action Plan addresses this as follows:

3. **Private sector** involvement is crucial for a sound and sustainable development of infrastructures, content and application.

⁴ Egypt: Working Document Presented to Prep-Com II, http://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/md/03/wsispc2/c/S03-WSISPC2-C-0015!!MSW-E.doc

- The private sector is not only a market player but plays a role in a wider political and social context, i.e. helping countries to develop ICTs and overcome the digital divide.
- The private sector can be involved in practical partnerships for innovative application, for instance, in e-Government initiatives.

3. Elements of an African e-governance Action Plan to the WSIS

The African action plan on e-governance to be drafted for submission to the Prep-Com 3 of the WSIS should consider the already discussed issues of governance, e-governance and the role of the private sector in the e-governance process. The action plan will be enriched with an African perspective based on the various information and governance related discussions taking place during the third meeting of the Committee on Development Information (CODI-3.)

4. The Way Forward: ideas to develop e-governance strategies

An e-governance strategy for Africa should define a role for the continent, member states, and the ECA and its partners.

- a) Africa:
 - to consider e-governance as one of the sectoral applications of ICTs for development
 - ensure the participation of the various sectors of society including the private sector, civil society groups and women
- b) Member states:
 - to embrace e-governance in their national ICT strategies
 - develop applications that promote public participation/access to public sector information
 - improve the governance fo ICTs in the country with the aim of broadening access to ICTs by the population
- c) ECA and partners
 - identify, develop and pool financial resources for implementing e-governance application in member states
 - promote e-governance as one of the main sectoral applications of ICTs in development
 - promote regional efforts to promote e-governance and share experiences with activities in other continents
 - facilitate the development of a continental e-governance agenda in line with existing efforts at the international level and promote it at various for a such at the WSIS.