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**Summary of the AISI electronic discussion
on ICT and Governance**

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AISI-L Discussion List

Summary of the discussion on ICT and Governance (15 July – 30 September 2002)

Summary of the discussion – Week 1

The electronic governance forum began on 15 July 2002. The aim of the forum was:

- to provide a space for discussion on e-government in Africa
- to determine trends and directions
- to provide realistic strategies for accelerating e-government process in Africa.

Other objectives includes – providing valuable input to the next African Development Forum (ADF IV) focused on governance and scheduled for next year, as a means to sensitize decision makers in Africa to adopt realistic approaches to launching e-government/e-governance programmes. In addition, the discussion will feed into the production of a briefing paper on e-governance being prepared for decision makers.

The first week of the forum was devoted debating the context and definition of e-government/e-governance. The following questions were posted for discussion to solicit contributions from forum participants:

- What is e-government/e-governance?
- What are the key e-government/e-governance components?
- Where are the relative strengths of the African e-governance process?
- What are the bottlenecks and barriers for introducing e-government? Are these barriers surmountable?
- What is the role of ICTs in meeting the best governance attributes (political representation, institutional effectiveness, economic management and corporate governance)?

One hundred and seven participants took part in an animated discussion, which yielded interesting insights on the e-government process in Africa so far. The following section below summaries the content of the discussions.

Context of e-government/e-governance (e-gov) in Africa

Participants agreed that e-government/governance are at early stages in most in African countries and initiated either by governments or driven by external institutions and IT experts and vendors. It was also noted that the voice of civil society was mute due to lack of awareness.

Participants also agreed that the relative strength of e-gov processes were largely dependent on the availability of infrastructure and resources, managerial capacity of individuals and independence of institutions that are implementing projects. E-gov does not only promote democratic systems, it also benefits from it.

Definitions

What constitutes e-gov?

The participants in their contributions defined e-government and e-governance. Even though there were several definitions, the e-government term was retained as being the optimal utilization of ICTs within the framework of good governance to ensure effective interaction between the various arms of government and its environment (citizens, civil society, private sector...). It was also proposed to include in the definition of e-government the use of ICT at all levels of state intervention within an administration.

E-government was defined as all the actions carried out by governments for better administration and management using ICT tools. It was agreed that technology was not enough and should be used in an appropriate manner. Participants further agreed that e-governance implied changes in relations between the government and its citizens, changes in the behaviour of local authorities, citizens, and in business processes (procurement, sales, exchanges etc), as well as a rethinking of administrative structures. E-governance was thus perceived as actions and behaviour, which includes e-administration, e-democracy (e-election for example), e-services, e-company etc. In a nutshell it encompasses all the aspects of life in society where transparency is the golden rule.

In this tentative definition of e-government and e-governance, the concept of e-election was discussed at length by participants, and was defined as being the automation of the entire electoral process, covering the stages from the constitution, the electoral lists to the publication of election results.

Finally, e-government and e-governance should enable Africa to reaffirm its culture and languages for better communication and effective administration. It was indeed noted that it would be difficult to develop e-government and e-governance in Africa by using European languages while the majority of citizens on the continent were excluded from these debates.

Role of ICTs in good the governance

Introduction and use of ICTs in government and in governance are seen as means to improve the process of governance. In the framework of e-government, they are enable to automate the major state functions and capacities (Legislative, Executive, Judiciary), thus facilitating the optimal functioning and better interaction of institutions attached to these three major wings of the state.

Within the government framework, ICTs allow better interaction between the government, its institutions and people. They bring greater effectiveness and transparency, while creating market opportunities for goods and services. It was noted that ICTs can improve:

- democratic governance: better representation of citizens within State institutions, enabling transparent elections, and participation of the wider society in national democratic discourses
- economic governance: cleansing of the general macroeconomic framework of the country, including the banking and financial sectors
- administrative governance: bringing citizens closer to the administration, civil registry, land management, population census, tax collection, etc.

E-gov also provides an ideal framework for dialogue between the principal actors of development: the State, private/business sectors, NGOs, civil society, political parties and local communities.

According to the discussions, the outcome of any e-government initiative should lead to a process of transformation, which increases the effectiveness, efficiency and transparency of government and administration.

In the framework of e-elections, it was agreed that ICTs allows the launching of online electoral campaigns (forums, vidéo conferences, meetings etc.) and improves processing time and publication of results, thus strengthening democracy and good governance.

Current initiatives

Examples on e-gov were cited from several countries including Egypt, Mauritius, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia.

Concerning introduction of ICTs in elections, the examples of South Africa, Senegal and Mali showed the positive effects of ICTs as follows:

- During the first multiracial elections in South Africa, there was a vast deployment of VSAT terminals in all the localities of the country where there were no telecom infrastructures. This allowed the transmission of results in real time.
- The examples of Senegal at the time of the presidential elections has shown the role of the media in bringing transparency (availability of electoral lists in the Internet) and in monitoring the electoral process, especially the proclamation of the results. This was made possible because of the growth in the number of rural radios and use of mobile phones.
- Morocco was quoted with the development of online administration (e-administration) with projects from ANRT, Customs CNSS etc.

Barriers and bottlenecks for introducing such initiatives

The barriers against such initiatives are technological and human. For technological barriers, the participants indicated the weakness of ICT infrastructure in Africa and the low rate of penetration. Concerning human barriers, the forum underlined the use of official and colonial languages, which are inaccessible to a great number of people, the rate of illiteracy, the lack of non application of good ICT policies and strategies, and the lack of awareness of decision makers on the e-government/e-governance issues.

Actions to be undertaken

Solutions may lie on publicity campaigns, information and training through seminars and forums, which would enlighten decision-makers on the challenges of e-government, and the development of pilot projects, which will bring ICT to communities.

It was also recommended that decentralization of power to local communities will bring government closer to the citizens, and may lead to e-governance. This goes together with the social aspects of governance (democracy, transparency, anti-corruption).

It was agreed that the above actions illustrate the need to implement recommendations of Bamako 2002 concerning infrastructure and human resource development in Africa in order to achieve e-government and e-governance. However participants agreed that if we want e-governance to have more significance and success, it would be necessary to overcome illiteracy and to include citizens in initiatives.

Web sites

E-Government on Global Development Gateway -
<http://www.developmentgateway.org/node/130619/>

Nigerian Congress - <http://www.nigeriacongress.org>

Western African Ngo Network - <http://www.wango.net.org>

Uganda Parliament - <http://www.parliament.go.ug>

Summary of the discussion - Week 2

Debates during the second week focused on readiness of governments to embrace e-governance, which has began in Africa to some extent. However, there is a need to consolidate fragmented activities and foster transition from automation to interaction, transaction and transformation of the government and society. It is also a long-term process that relies on e-readiness. Discussions this week led to the identification of seven e-readiness factors for e-governance outlined below:

a. Changes in attitudes and championship (political readiness)

Participants strongly argued that e-governance is about transformation of government, thus focus should be on political readiness; technology is merely a tool to make transformation possible. It is about a vision and action by government itself, beginning with political will.

Therefore e-governance should not be a quick fix. It should be regarded as a process. Unfortunately this is not the case in many countries. Most governments rather? think in terms of their 5-year term? This makes the articulation of a long-term vision and the development of strategies rather difficult.

One member of the list noted that vision does not have meaning without leadership. Therefore two kinds of leaders are required: those that integrate e-governance with the agenda of government and those that act promptly. On the other hand the process should not be left to champions alone and should be inclusive. Governments, the private sector and civil society should participate in the articulation of the vision and in its implementation. One participant stressed that young people should be an integral part of e-governance as they are critical in shaping e-governance concepts of the future.

Most stressed that as long as there is limited urgency for renewal in the governance process and as far as there is no open and transparent democracy, adding technology will not solve the problem. Neither seminars and workshops nor demonstrations lead to effective e-governance. Hands on training and? forcing? the use of new technology by policy makers is critical. Once

government officials begin to use ICTs they will not switch it off, and will become active users and promoters.

One participant noted that setting a vision is an iterative, cyclical and complex process. First there is need for analysis of the current environment, followed by a detailed roadmap and consensus-building with the development of a risk containment plan that prevents failure. Another member of the list made suggestions on issues to be integrated in a national e-governance vision. These include:

- building institutional capacities in managing and exchange of information using Internet technologies
 - improving the human resources capacities at all levels
 - - improving productivity and efficiency of government agencies particularly in financial and resource management
 - - transforming the legal and regulatory frameworks
 - - improving services for citizens

b. Institutional Reform and Work Process Redesign

Participants noted that the current government structure in Africa is not amenable for information and communication technologies. First, the chain of bureaucracy and corruption in the civil service makes it difficult to implement ICT projects. Second, the public sector is far behind in the use of ICTs and most of the ICT equipment used in the civil service are donated and outdated.

It was strongly argued that political will for reform is a prerequisite for effective e-governance. The ultimate goals of e-governance is to support the reform process, including being part of civil service reforms, and ICTs should not be a mere add-on but an integral part of the reform process. ICT promotes good governance, and at the same time benefits.

The reform process should cover a number of issues - 1) work process redesign 2) development of information resources 2) development of information and knowledge management strategies 4) improving the skills of human resources 5) improving flow of information between public and private sector and 6) reaching out to citizens.

c. ICT infrastructure

ICT infrastructure constitutes a significant barrier to implementation of e-governance projects in Africa. If the goal is to improve interaction between public services and its stakeholders, all stakeholders including average citizens should be able to have access. Yet ICT infrastructure in government institutions is technically inferior to those in private sectors and NGOs. The general public has limited access to basic tools such as radios and telephones. The cost involved in rolling out high bandwidth infrastructure as well as meeting universal access needs for the majority is very high.

One member of the list noted that the convergence of technologies and enabling environment could facilitate rolling out of infrastructure at lower costs. In a word of another participant? the ICT market in Africa can be competitive if the enabling regulatory frameworks are put in place. It is not only the high bandwidth fiber optic link that is needed but also traditional

communication tools such as radios are required to reach the majority and meet their information and knowledge needs.

E-governance and universal access are complementary. If the aim is to empower citizens and promote access to government information particularly to laws and regulations, then a combination of technologies should be used. Those promoting e-governance should also insist on a minimum level of infrastructure for e-governance.

d. Resources for e-government

Participants pondered about funding opportunities for e-government. It is not clear whether e-governance should be outsourced or done locally, and in either case countries may be forced to borrow money [one estimate is that over \$25 million is needed to start the process] to implement e-governance projects. This would lead to further debts for poor countries. Sustainability of e-governance is another critical matter. Even if a country borrows money to start, it still needs to secure further resources to keep e-governance running. Therefore, who knows the total cost of e-governance!

Thus far the majority of e-governance projects are funded externally either through donations or loans. One participant noted that if governments are serious about e-government, they should commit financial and human resources too. A centralized funding for e-governance that brings donors resources together with national budgets may be necessary.

A stimulating debate also took place on specific measures for cost cutting. One group argued that the promotion of open source would lead to innovation and cost reduction on long-term basis.

e. Human Resources

The availability of literate, efficient and dependable workforce is critical for the success of e-governance. However, those civil servants who will benefit from and promote e-governance in Africa are not yet ready. There is also a brain drain in the public sector, limiting the human resource base in the public sector.

Participants suggested that a critical mass of the public sector should be trained and retrained in application of new technologies for improved governance. To sustain this, there is a need for rethinking education as a whole to produce the future e-governance implementers, even though human resource development is a costly business.

f. Policy and Regulatory Framework

A number of policy issues were raised during the debate:

- Cyber laws and Internet governance? cyber laws and Internet governance issues are an integral part of e-governance. Readiness in developing, discussing and implementing cyber laws and active participation in Internet governance is critical.
- - Information Policies: availability of ICT policy that promotes exchange of information and development of infrastructure is critical for successful e-governance. Government willingness to share information, its readiness to uphold information exchange and dissemination norms is critical.
- - National ICT Policies and Strategies? there is a strong link between national ICT and e-governance strategies. E-governance-led national ICT strategies may be useful in some

countries to make governments and stakeholders committed to the implementation of ICT projects. Government involvement in national ICT strategies based on anticipated short and medium term benefits for the government itself could be a good marketing tool for national ICT strategies (NICI Plans). For this to happen, participants noted that the creation of awareness on ICT for governance and development is important. On the other hand e-government cannot succeed without a comprehensive national ICT strategy that articulates a broad vision on the development of infrastructure, human resources and the application of ICTs in the key sectors. For example the national strategy of Morocco (e-maroc) is not only interested in e-government but also other strategic sectors that support e-governance.

Participants also noted that national ICT strategies often fall short of implementation. Having strategies should not be the goal but rather the concrete programmes that emanate from them and their implementation should be the drive.

Others stressed that national and regional frameworks are equally important to mobilize resources and commitment at highest political level. For example there is a need to capitalize on existing initiatives such as AISI and the ICT component of NEPAD for promoting e-governance in Africa. Participants also stressed that in order to avoid duplication of activities and maximize use of existing proven frameworks, initiatives such as e-Africa should operate under the AISI framework.

g. Evaluation of e-governance

E-evaluation should be part and parcel of e-governance. In a word of a contributor? it is important to understand and measure both one's success and failures? Qualitative and quantitative data gathering would be useful to learn from the process and practice of e-governance in Africa. The integration of e-governance readiness with overall national e-readiness assessments (e.g. SCAN ICT, e-readiness assessment guides) is an important strategy. Morocco was cited as one of those countries that are undertaking studies on the use of ICTs in public administration and online administration. Morocco is implementing pilot projects aimed at improving the customs, social security, etc. A national observatory on the use of ICTs in public administration will gauge success and failures in implementing these projects.

Web sites:

Bisharat, <http://www.bisharat.net>

Bytes for all, <http://www.bytesforall.org>

CSPP guide, <http://www.csppguide.org>

Description on SCAN ICT project <http://www.uneca.org/aisi/activities.htm#3>

E-readiness guides? <http://www.readinessguide.org>

Summary of the discussion – Third week

The third week discussed best practices of e-governance throughout Africa. Issues covered include success and failure of e-governance, country specific best practices, challenges to e-governance, and suggestion on realistic approaches to e-governance in Africa.

Status of e-governance in Africa

Participants noted that most e-government initiatives are at early stages. Therefore it is difficult to cite sustainable e-governance best practices. African countries vary considerably in conceptualizing, developing and implementing e-governance programmes. Countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Senegal, South Africa and Tunisia are well ahead of others. Most of these countries have also instituted good governance programmes. The level of e-governance might reflect the status of transparency, accountability and democracy in a given country.

E-governance itself is understood differently among different countries. Those who understand its long-term benefits have made headway in implementing programmes others do not yet understand the implication of ICTs on good governance. A study on factors that lead to the take up of e-governance in Africa was suggested.

All participants stressed the need for a mechanism for sharing experience among African countries. Regular regional meetings between e-governance experts, government and civil society will be useful. Although meetings by themselves may not result in e-governance projects, they are indispensable for sharing of best practices. Regional meetings that have political weight could indeed result in concreted programmes. Such meetings are the forces behind the creation of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the adoption of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII).

Others suggested for integration of e-governance issues in upcoming meetings on ICTs and those on bridging the digital divide. The Economic Commission for Africa has already integrated e-governance issues in its upcoming Committee for Development Information (CODI III) meeting, and e-governance will be the main theme of the conference, which will be held in Addis Ababa in March 2003.

Country best practices

The Moroccan programme on social security information systems, regulatory information services, customs information systems was mentioned as one of the country best practices. Furthermore several studies have been carried out in the framework of the e-Maroc programme.

The government of Mali has also made a modest progress in e-governance. By launching a project to connect over 700 local government institutions. Furthermore, new technologies are being used by civil society organizations in Mali to exchange information and for advocacy at regional and global levels.

Senegal has launched a project entitled? Modernization of Government Information Systems? (PMSIA), which is part of the general programme on good governance. It is in this framework that the? Government Open Messaging System? (SMAP) was put in place to bring the administration closer to the citizen.

Almost all African countries have now developed government web sites. However, these generally lack coherence and vision. Most of the sites are not updated regularly. The sites do not encourage interaction and dialogue between government and citizens.

Besides government web sites there are other forums and web sites that contribute to e-governance in Africa. These are established by the civil society and those living abroad. These forums are not only aimed at discussing governance issues alone but also bringing issues that affect day-to-day welfare of citizens.

Challenges to e-governance

African e-governance challenges are wide and complex. These range from lack of infrastructure to inadequate human resources. There is a high failure rate of e-governance projects. Ambitious e-governance projects are bound to fail. It is useful to develop concrete and implementable projects. E-governance projects should be implemented in phases.

Integration of various information resources produced by different ministries and agencies is another challenge cited by the participants. A list member noted that information gathered for issuing identity cards should be integrated to vital statistics; this could be useful for institutions such as ministries of health, education and electoral commissions.

Other key features of African e-governance projects that were cited include:

- underutilization of existing ICT equipment
- difficulty in bridging the gap between government ICT needs and available resources
- lack of integration of the judiciary into ICT programmes and debate

Suggested e-governance models

Participants noted that the new models should encourage government to move away from static web presence and internal automation (creation of databases, statistical and financial systems) towards interactive information systems that increase citizen's participation. The public sector does not only need to simplify its procedures but also need to develop easily understood content useful to people with different educational and linguistic backgrounds. E-government should not be left to experts and few champions alone. Strategies should be put in place to increase civil society, private sector and government interaction in planning and implementing e-governance projects. Other related suggestions for improving e-governance in Africa include:

- Improve internal communication among public institutions
- Increase use of web sites by all government institutions for delivery of information to external partners
- Development of regional plans based on specific context of African countries
- Creation of a network of people working on e-governance in Africa
- Adaptation of e-governance to African realities
- Increasing access to wide array of rich public documents in the region

- Promotion civil society participation in governance process through increased use of information and communication technologies

Web sites:

Kenyan Community Abroad discussion on telecommunications reform
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/kca-tel/>

Morocco ADMINET

<http://www.septi.gov.ma/AdminenLigne/PadminenLingne.htm>

Womensnet

<http://womensnet.org.za/wn/index.shtml>

Summary of the discussion – Final Week

This week of the discussions were devoted to identifying a road map for e-governance in Africa. E-governance requires serious thinking, vision and piloting. It a long term, iterative

"learn-by-doing" process. The key issues discussed are summarized below.

Overall Strategies for E-governance Development

Members of the list noted that the development of a national e-governance master plan with clear objective, human, financial and technological resources is a necessary step. Since all the resources may not be available, such a plan should be broken down to short, medium and long-term programmes. In addition, there is a need for a) mobilization international technical, financial and moral support on e-governance programmes by involving "e-governance ambassadors" (e.g. Nobel Laureates, political scientists, statesmen, social scientists, international activists) and those shaping development the technology (technology gurus, heads of multinational corporations and directors of international organizations) b) carrying out research on "what works and what does not" in e-governance in Africa so as to learn from best and worst practices in the region. This should go hand in hand with awareness campaigns for policy makers and civil servants to increase their buy-in and participation in the process. One participant stressed the need for demonstration of the effectiveness of information and communication technologies in key areas such as electoral processes to secure commitment from policy makers.

The need for integration of e-governance in the overall civil service reform was highlighted. E-governance should not come after civil services reform; it should be an integral component of public sector restructuring. International institutions should integrate e-governance in their development assistance to Africa; there will be limited progress in ICT for development without government support.

Introducing E-governance

Government, given its larger market share plays a deterministic role in unleashing or stalling e-governance. One participant argued that e-governance couldn't go far without good governance and change of culture and attitudes in the first place. Another went ahead to caution that the current model of government might not encourage e-governance. E-governance should not be "the excuse for centralization" it should promote governance through alternative initiatives. Other noted that once the governments lead the way the civil society and the private sector could follow. The civil society and the private sector could assist the government in implementation of large-scale projects; they could promote the use of ICT in different sectors. The role of the Diaspora should not be understated.

As far as the steps towards e-governance are concerned, it was noted that there is a need for increasing awareness of government and its stakeholders while putting a national framework for e-governance together. Government should be aware of the importance of e-governance readiness and strategies and the potentials and the consequence of ICTs. Capacity building, development of conducive policies and infrastructure should go hand in hand with development of e-governance programmes and projects. Evaluation and research should also be an integral part of the e-governance process.

This presupposes a need for interaction and exchange of knowledge and resources among government, civil society and private sector. Different actors should be responsible in planning, designing and implementing e-government projects and programmes in their areas of competencies. The ministries of health, education, transport and communications, agriculture, tourism, etc., public utilities, NGOs, civil society organizations and private sector should work together to develop and implement knowledge management and information systems that seamlessly integrate with each other. E-governance projects should take local, national, regional and global dynamics into account.

Strategies for Dealing with Resistance

One problem facing e-governance project will be the resistance by different groups. List members stressed need for breaking the ICT phobia through incentives, awareness and training. Demonstrating the role of information and communication technologies for development in general and for governance in particular could reduce resistance. Other measures against resistance include increasing affordable access to rural and marginalized groups so as to demonstrated the effectiveness of ICT for all and using participatory design in e-governance projects so as to secure early endorsement from the key stakeholders. Research and analysis would also be useful to understand power structures, needs and incentives against resistance.

Mobilizing Resources for Designing and Implementing E-governance programmes in Africa

List members noted that there is no detailed cost and benefit analysis of e-governance in Africa. However, the cost of not embracing e-governance is far greater than the cost of its implementation. One member argued that ICTs could play substantial role in attaining the transparency and good corporate and public governance that are necessary for attracting foreign direct investment. Investment is fundamental for poverty reduction. Therefore good e-governance project could pay for itself in a long run.

In a medium term, funding by multilateral and bilateral institutions was suggested. The World Bank, the African Development Bank and others should be approached for financing e-government project in the region. The G8 DOT Force e-governance recommendation and its current take up by the Government of Italy, the World Summit on the Information Society provide some other avenues for mobilizing global cooperation and finances. Government and the private sector could also play a key role in mobilizing resources. Yet, the capacity of government to coordinated and implement e-governance projects are fundamental. Resources could easily be wasted without harmonization and co-ordination of e-governance initiatives at national and regional levels.