



Economic Commission for Africa



Ministry of Communications  
Government of Ghana



Enterprise Africa of UNDP

## **The African Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS**

### **AFRICAN PRIVATE SECTOR TO PROMOTE AN INCLUSIVE INFORMATION SOCIETY IN AFRICA**

#### **Background**

In building an Information Society where key stakeholders can play a pivotal role, ECA, upon the request of its member States launched the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). This was the first framework of its kind to concretely prioritize the issue of ICTs within the socio-economic development agenda. This initiative was approved by the ECA Conference of Ministers Finance in 1996 and adopted in the same year by the Summit of Heads of State and Governments of the Organization of African Unity and ultimately supported by the then G7+1 as Africa's major ICT initiative in its 1997 Denver Summit. The AISI recommendations fed into the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Plans and are the cornerstone of the NEPAD ICTs Short Term Action Plan.

The AISI framework states that it is crucial that a critical mass of local business ventures capable of supporting and using the information infrastructure are established. Public policy, in concert with private initiatives, must collaborate in achieving an African Information Society. The private sector in Africa has to play a major role in realizing the African Information Society by stimulating growth and assuming market leadership in developing national information and communication infrastructures through investment in relevant areas and seizing the new business opportunities that arise from the implementation of the AISI. In re-affirming the role of the private sector, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) highlighted that “ the commitment of the private sector is important in developing and diffusing information and communication technologies (ICTs), for infrastructure, content and applications. The private sector is not only a market player but also has to play a role in a wider sustainable development context”.

To date, it has been difficult to concretize the consistent input of the African private sector in building the African Information Society, in general, and in the WSIS, in particular. Consequently, ECA remains committed to ensuring that the African private sector continues to play a significant role in the continent's Information Society, despite the fact that it still lags behind other sectors, such as civil society and mass media, in preparing for the next phase of WSIS to be held in Tunis in 2005.

### **III Forum Objectives**

The overall objective of the forum is to create a platform to discuss how to effectively involve Africa's private sector in implementing an inclusive Information Society at national, sub-regional and global levels.

#### **III Expected outcomes**

- Awareness of the importance of the private sector in building Africa Information Society. Launching of a global Africa ICT4D private sector network;
- Launching of the Africa ICT Innovation Task Force; and
- Identification of an appropriate research study or initiative to promote Africa's private sector participation in the ICT infrastructure investment, content development, education and Information Society implementation as a whole.

#### **IV Content**

This forum will base its discussions on a concept paper on Africa ICT Innovation Task Force that was the outcome of a meeting held in Tunis meeting with Med-It partners in September 29 - October 1 2004. A proposal for establishing an African ICT Innovation Task Force will be tabled. Discussions will address the following key issues:

##### **a) The role of Africa's private sector in sustaining an Africa Information Society**

ECA will present the African Information Society Initiative (AISI) – an ICT led socio-economic development framework adopted in 1996 to create effective digital opportunities to be developed by Africans and their partners. Highlights of countries that have used this framework and related action plans to speed up their entry into the information and knowledge global economy will be presented. In addition, ECA's work programme in relation to Africa's private sector will also be highlighted.

##### **b) Investment in basic ICT Infrastructure in Africa: challenges, lessons learnt and the way forward**

Infrastructure development generally requires initial huge capital outlay. By utilising the private sector for this type of financing, governments can divert their much-needed funds to other priorities, such as social development programmes that would otherwise not easily attract private sector funding.

- The session will also address the following questions: How can African countries create the right regulatory environment for private sector investment in basic infrastructure?
- What are the different models of funding telecommunications and ICT infrastructure in African countries?
- What are the possible approaches for achieving universal access to communications in Africa?
- What technologies are relevant to African countries – fibre optic, cable, Digital Subscriber Line (DSL), Local Multipoint Distribution Service (LMDS) satellite etc ?

- What are the implications of broadband wireless technologies for developing countries?

#### **c) Public Private Partnership**

- There are different models of public private sector partnerships that can be used symbiotically to achieve desired results. These include agreed lease agreements or concessions such as BOT's, BTO's, BOO's, BOOT's. The session will seek to explore the following questions: What are the various models for public-private cooperation in bridging the digital divide?
- What is the role that governments should play in order to facilitate rapid ICT private sector development?
- How can private sector initiatives and enterprises be encouraged and channelled towards achieving maximum benefits from ICT?

How can private sector companies collaborate with each other to achieve win-win situations in the context of ICT?

#### **d) Nurturing ICT Innovation in Africa**

It is becoming increasingly clear that if Africa is to advance its Information Society, emphasis should be placed on the economic viability of ICTs within countries. One concrete way of doing this is for public institutions such as governments and universities to collaborate with the private sector in building technology parks and business incubation institutions for the ICT sector. Incubation will nurture young firms and help them to survive and grow during the start up period when they are most vulnerable.

A concept paper on the way forward in the promotion of ICT innovations in Africa will be presented based on the following challenges:

- What are the emerging opportunities in provision of ICT infrastructure and services for businesses?
- What strategies should be adopted to attract venture capital and provide incubation facilities for nurturing start ups in developing countries?
- What are the key success factors for benefiting from opportunities in IT enabled services?

#### **e) Round-Table on Africa Private sector & WSIS Action Plan**

The role of private sector has been highlighted in the WSIS Plan of Action, which clearly articulates states "The commitment of the private sector is important in developing and diffusing information and communication technologies (ICTs), for infrastructure, content and applications. The private sector is not only a market player but also plays a role in a wider sustainable development context".

The round table will discuss what has been achieved in Africa with respect to the private sector in the Information Society arena. It will address the following questions:

- What can African governments do to advance the participation of Africa private sector in implementing the Information Society?

- What needs to be undertaken in the area of ICT policy to enable this role?
- What is being done at the national and regional levels?

Terms of reference for a research study on the way forward to effectively involve Africa's private sector in the implementation of the Information Society will be developed.