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on Development Information (CODI)

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African Virtual Library and Information Network (AVLIN)

Summary Report on the

**Workshop on Technical Aspects of Building Digital Libraries and
Electronic Information Networks**

INTRODUCTION

As part of pre-CODI 3 events, the ECA organized a workshop on *Technical Aspects of Building Digital Libraries* on 10 and 11 May 2003. The workshop was attended by 39 participants from 16 countries, three (3) UN agencies and 2 regional economic groupings based in Africa.

PRESENTATIONS

The following papers were presented at the workshop and discussed within the context of AVLIN:

- Sustainability of Digital Libraries: Developing and Maintaining Digital Library Documents and Collections (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/8)
- Digital Libraries and Virtual Libraries: Definitions, Concepts and Goals" (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/9)
- Implementing AVLIN: Reflections on Potential Barriers and Possible Solutions (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/10)
- Digital Libraries and Virtual Information Services: Architecture and Models (L/ECA/DISD/AVLIN/11)
- Relevant Economic, Commercial and Legal Issues
- The Project of Computerization of Tunisian Academic Libraries, BIRUNI

In addition to the presentations, the proposed design of the AVLIN Web site was demonstrated.

MAJOR ISSUES FROM THE PRESENTATIONS

Overall, the following issues emerged from the presentations and discussions that followed:

Technical Infrastructure

- AVLIN should stay abreast of new developments in digital technologies and efforts should be made to plan for the technology and content of the future
- Issues relating to standardization and security of information resources should be taken into account when implementing AVLIN
- Serious considerations should be given to using open source software platforms in the implementation of AVLIN information systems

Implementation of AVLIN

- AVLIN should learn from the various mistakes made in the past when implementing information sharing network projects in Africa
- AVLIN Secretariat should have information regarding the current status of ICTs and digital content in various types of libraries in Africa
- There is a need to develop guidelines regarding digitization of content for potential AVLIN members
- AVLIN should strive to provide access resources from different sources, i.e. the industry, ministries, libraries, NGOs, etc

Access to AVLIN Resources

- Women should not be left out of AVLIN activities, especially access to AVLIN information resources and services
- It should be noted that there is a digital divide among countries in Africa regarding access to digital information and AVLIN should work towards narrowing the gap

Barriers to AVLIN

- There are several potential barriers to implementation of AVLIN and among them are: inadequate technical infrastructure in potential AVLIN member institutions, lack of funds for digitization, shortage of appropriate skills, lack of access to ICT facilities by potential AVLIN users and lack of appropriate policies and strategies to support the development of a digital information environment
- Libraries in Africa are under-funded and a large number of them are yet to automate their operations. Therefore, implementation of AVLIN activities in some countries will require a lot of work, resources and support from various organizations

Sustainability

- Participation in AVLIN should be voluntary and institutions should bear the cost for their participation.
- Digital information management policies and strategies at institutional and national levels will be required to ensure the successful development of AVLIN.

Capacity Building

- Capacity building will form a major component of AVLIN and it will require substantial funding

Copyright and Digital Information

- Creation and dissemination of digital information has resulted in new challenges and concerns regarding the protection of copyrighted works. Some institutions may not participate in AVLIN out of concern about the possible abuse or exploitation of their digital information resources

Information Resources

- AVLIN should provide access to digital information in different formats, including full-text, bibliographic (metadata) records, data sets, and statistical information. Other information systems, such as Geo information should also be considered

- Although AVLIN will operate as a free information service to ECA member states, the cost of providing its information services and products should be worked
- The UN system has a lot of information resources that could be integrated into AVLIN

Information and ICT Policies

- Availability of appropriate and clear information and communication policies and implementation plans at country levels would assist the implementation of AVLIN.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the major recommendations from the workshop:

1. ECA and the AVLIN Secretariat should ensure that there is gender balance in participation in AVLIN activities and provision of access to AVLIN resources
2. ECA should commission a survey of the ICT infrastructure and digital information resources, including policies and strategies relevant to the digital information environment, in various potential AVLIN member organizations to determine their readiness to participate and contribute to AVLIN
3. Implementation of AVLIN should be based on international standards regarding storage formats for information resources to ensure future migration of the resources
4. ECA should ensure that, in addition to providing access to AVLIN resources via the Internet, various AVLIN products should also be made available in different formats, i.e. CD-ROMs, print, etc
5. ECA member states should revisit their copyright and intellectual property rights to ensure that they respond to the advent of the digital information environment
6. ECA should examine the various cases of best practice associated with building digital and virtual libraries in order to guard against re-inventing the wheel when implementing AVLIN
7. ECA should, in so far as it is possible adopt open source standards and systems when implementing AVLIN
8. ECA and other interested parties should vigorously promote the AVLIN concept among potential development partners as well as institutions in members states
9. Implementation of AVLIN should take into account the need to develop various capacities in participating institutions