



Economic Commission for Africa



Ministry of Communications
Government of Ghana



The African Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS

Information Society and Regulation, Access and Infrastructure

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have fundamentally forged new ways of creating knowledge, educating people and disseminating information. ICTs have restructured the way the world conducts economic and business practices, run governments whilst developing new products and services, which are transforming the way of life. ICTs have not only become indispensable in the delivery of aid, healthcare, education and environmental protection but have also created new avenues for entertainment and leisure. Access to information and knowledge is a prerequisite to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in turn, improving living standards for millions of people around the world. Information and communication infrastructure is an essential foundation for an inclusive Information Society and this has been addressed by the African Information Society Initiatives (AISI) and the first phase of the WSIS.

As technology continues to grow by leaps and bounds, the Government consultation and the policy formulation process has been substantially slower. The role of government is to provide a vision and strategy, within a legal and regulatory framework that will promote the development of the Information Society and to ensure that all sectors of society can benefit from it.

Inadequate regulation has been one of the limiting factor constraining *e*-economy and information society development. This does not simply entail the removal of regulations or eliminating regulators but implementing sound regulatory foundations as a prerequisite to attracting investment, fostering applications of new technologies and developing new services. The speed of regulatory reforms must increase and be directed to stimulating investment in the infrastructure foundation for Information Societies.

The countries' own regulatory policies can have a marked impact on the digital divide and the major challenges revolve around the development and implementation of policies that create a favourable climate for stability, predictability and fair competition in order to attract private investment for ICT infrastructure development and the meeting of universal service obligations in disadvantaged areas. The "New Economy" is capable of faster growth without inflation because of productivity gains from affordable and effective access, globalization, deregulation and innovation support from capital markets.

Objectives of the workshop

To share views, experiences and explore a regulatory framework which is effective and complementary to the common vision of building an inclusive Information Society in a convergent environment and focusing on, but not limited to the following issues:

- Access
- Infrastructure deployment
- Universal service access/fund
- New services/spectrum management
- Investment
- Multistakeholder Partnership
- Licensing

Focus areas

Some of the focus areas include:

a) Telecommunication/ICTs regulation in Africa:

State of regulatory policy in Africa since the aftermath of liberalization, deregulation and more recently the Information Society:

Overview of the study commissioned by ECA to provide an overview on the state of telecommunication regulatory policies in Africa with regards to current trends and developments at the national, sub-regional and global levels. This should include issues such as interconnection, licencing etc and an assessment of regional and national market structures.

b) Enabling environment:

National development policies to support an enabling and competitive environment for the necessary investment in ICT infrastructure and for the development of new services:

Widespread and affordable broadband access is essential to realise the potential of the Information Society. A secure broadband infrastructure is essential for the development and delivery of services and applications. Competition should drive investment, generate innovation and lower prices and the regulatory regime should be well equipped to deal with the challenges of the convergent emerging environment.

c) Access to information:

Development of policy guidelines promoting public access to information through various communication resources, notably the Internet and removing barriers to equitable access to information and infrastructure deployment:

Regulatory obstacles should be removed in order to enable public authorities and the private sector to offer their content on different technological platforms (multi-platform content).

d) Universal access:

Developing appropriate universal access policies and strategies, and their means of implementation, in line with the indicative targets, and the development of ICT connectivity indicators:

To ensure an Information Society for all and greater territorial cohesion, the use of a universal service fund could enable less investment attractive areas to be prioritized in the development of the Information Society. Promotion of the deployment of new access technologies (unbundling the local loop, efficient spectrum utilization, software applications) and appropriate access research activities should be supported.