



The African Regional Preparatory Conference for the WSIS

National, regional, local and sectoral e-strategies

29 – 30 January 2005

WSIS has affirmed that e-strategies are an essential component in the use of ICT for Development. E-strategies mark a shift from the old sectoral framework for policy-making based on broadcasting, telecommunications and information technology to a new layered framework for policy-making on ICTs, in which the role of all these sectors is conceptualized in an integrated approach.

The e-strategies are formulated and implemented at local, national and regional levels or can relate to specific sectors e.g. e-commerce, e-government, e-schools, e-health etc. The objective of the pre-Conference is to discuss the conditions for the formulation and implementation of these e-strategies, taking into account linkages between these various levels.

The pre-Conference will have plenary and parallel workshops with breakout sessions.

1- National e-strategies

As a response to the challenges and opportunities presented by the information age, ECA launched the African Information Society Initiative (AISI). The basic objective of AISI is to set out a framework by which Africa could bridge the ICTs gap created between itself and the developed world and facilitate its entry into the information age.

Recognizing the linkage between connectivity and national development, ECA in collaboration with partners initiated the National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) policy and plan development process that aims at advising member States on the need to formulate and implement national information and communication strategies. Since the launch of AISI, ECA mounted various advisory services to member States that have not yet defined their national strategies and to those intending to implement sectoral ICT programs and projects in health, education, electronic commerce, etc.

The development of national ICT policies and plans has been completed in over 28 member States. The next step is to review the plans and identify concrete projects for implementation and mobilize funds for this purpose.

The objectives of the workshop are:

1. To provide a forum whereby countries share information on best practices with regard to development of national ICT strategies and policies;
2. To gather opinions on how the NICI exercise can relate and synergise with the existing global and regional ICT initiatives (NEPAD, MDGs, PRSPs, etc);
3. To strategise on how the NICI could address such issues as poverty eradication, economic recovery, human resource development, peace and security etc.;
4. To analyse how the NICI process facilitates the creation and maintenance of e-government applications;
5. To discuss and agree on the modalities of integrating geospatial data infrastructure (GDI)¹ in the NICI development process.
6. To review some completed NICI plans and identify concrete ICT projects and programs for implementations and mobilize the necessary funds.
7. To review the NICI implementation process in selected countries and make recommendations.

2-Regional e-strategies

Realising that ICTs are not limited by borders, it becomes important that regional e-strategies are undertaken in such a way that they link and are compatible to national e-strategies and simultaneously address regional communications policy, financing and regulatory issues in a way that promotes harmonization

For this reason, the ECA has been working with several Regional Economic Communities (RECs) including ECOWAS, UEMOA, COMESA, EAC and UMA to develop Regional Information and Communication Infrastructure (RICI) Initiatives.

In this regard, there is need to come up with a model to ensure harmonized assistance to the RECs.

In view of the above, it has become necessary to organise an e-strategy pre-conference bringing all the stakeholders together to discuss current activities and review the ECA initiatives with various RECs and come up with a Harmonized Framework for the RICI and Regional e-Strategies

3-Local and sectoral e-strategies: Local Governance and ICT

ICT applications to governance have been widely recognized as a potentially powerful tool to enhance effectiveness and efficiency as well as transparency and accountability in providing public services and facilitating people's participation in decision-making processes. Many African member States have embarked on the development of e-governance applications especially in the areas of taxation and natural resource management, and registered a certain level of success in increasing efficiency.

¹ constitutes socio-economic and institutional databases and serves as a highway for the flow of geographic information from local to national systems and eventually to the global community.

However, it is at the local level where the citizens interact with government offices and public services most frequently. It is at this level that people's participation can make a significant impact on reducing poverty and achieving socio-economic development among the poor.

With this background, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized a workshop on Local Governance and ICT in June 2004 in Addis Ababa. This workshop was organized within the framework of the Partnership on ICTs for Africa (PICTA).

The workshop was aimed at providing an inventory of the research needs for practitioners working in the development field and identified innovative applications which are being implemented at the local level. The workshop stressed on the importance of people's participation in decision-making processes. The development of local economy, facilitated by ICT, was sighted as a financing mechanism which could initiate, maintain and expand e-governance applications. The identified research needs led to a recommendation on the establishment of a research network specifically targeting at local governance and ICT.

The workshop on Local Governance and ICT (WSIS Regional Preparatory Conference, Accra, 30th January 2005) will be a follow up to the above-mentioned workshop and aims at advancing the following overall objectives:

- Strengthening democratic governments at all levels by improving effectiveness, responsiveness and transparency of institutions.
- Connecting citizens to government and improving service delivery.
- Building the capacity of civil society to participate in the governing process.
- Supporting decentralization and democratic local governance.

The workshop will review the status of implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action and other recommendations produced at the Nouakchott meeting on local governance in 2003 and identify key constraints, focus areas and recommended plan of action leading to the WSIS II in Tunis in November 2005. The review will also address the progress made in the connectivity of the local collectivities, and the generalization of the use of ICT by local collectivities to improve local governance.

During the workshop, the Research Network on Local Governance will be launched as a mechanism to promote ICT applications for local governance.

4-Sectoral e-strategies

The sectoral e-strategies relate to the use of ICT in various socio-economic sectors. The workshop will focus on e-Commerce, e-Education, e-Government and e-Health.

4.1 e-commerce

The participants will discuss how e-Commerce applications and ICT for Trade facilitation can ensure that this sector is supported by appropriate policies that strengthen the competitive position of the African countries. Barriers to e-commerce development including the legal framework will be examined.

4.2 e-education

The ICT strategy will have to consider ways of introducing ICTs in the various levels of the education system and building ICT skills to develop computer literacy at the primary and secondary school levels.

The strategy will also examine efforts to build the capacity in the use ICTs including the Internet in education. This will also entail the creation of locally appropriate content in developing curriculum materials and books, and using e-learning methods.

4.3 e-Government

The workshop will discuss implementation of recommendations from CODI III, ADF IV etc to help governments better serve the people. The objective is the modernization of the government and its transformation into a service oriented public enterprise that works for the public good. This should lead to Public sector transformation into an open, accessible, informative, helpful and user-friendly service for the citizens and enterprises. Discussion will also focus on useful strategies to implement the transformation of government into an e-enabled public enterprise.

4.4 e-Health

The Workshop will discuss how e-health applications bring efficiency and productivity to the management and delivery of health and medical services. Participants will identify key applications, like Telemedicine, that can have a positive impact on health delivery especially in remote and rural areas.

4- Date and Venue

The workshop will be held on the 29th-30th of January 2005 from 8:30 to 17:00 Hours.

5- Expected outputs from the pre-Conference

The following outputs are expected from the pre-Conference:

1. Recommendations on strategies required to synergise activities with regional and global ICT for development initiatives in Africa and for Africa;
2. Recommendations on how to implement e-government applications with the view to addressing poverty alleviation programs, economic recovery, human resources development, peace and security, etc;

3. Recommendations on strategies to exchange information on good practices and achievements;
4. Recommendations on the development of African infrastructure, applications, including generation, diffusion and utilization of indigenous knowledge;
5. Concrete ICT projects and programs for implementation;
6. Concrete steps in integrating SDI and NICI
7. Recommendations on the links to be established between the various levels of the e-strategies.

6-Sponsors

The event will be co-sponsored by ECA and e-PolNet

