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or contact:

Publications
Economic Commission for Africa
P.O.Box 3001
Addis Ababa,Ethiopia
Tel.:251-1-44 31 68
Fax:251-1-51 03 65
E-mail: ecapubs@uneca.org or ecainfo@uneca.org

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INTRODUCTION
Introduction

In the past 5-6 years, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has made great strides in bringing alternative and diverse views on board, through electronic discussion lists on the information society. These lists include members from civil society, academia, Africans in the Diaspora, the public sector, the media and the private sector; they thus provide a platform for interaction, dialogue and information sharing between ECA and the constituencies it serves.

Discussion lists for interactive communication between stakeholders on the continent are one of the major activities outlined by ECA’s African Information Society Initiative (AISI). Electronic discussions provide opportunities for people with email but limited online access to exchange information and keep up-to-date on recent developments and research. Participation requires access to information and information technologies (ICTs), the confidence to use the tools and a willingness to expose ideas to an unknown and unseen audience.

Electronic discussions set up by ECA have taken various formats. The majority have been slightly structured, and moderated. Others have remained fluid and dynamic with no specific timelines, shifting from animated discussion to exchange of information. For ease of access, discussants receive the discussions in the form of email messages. Those with fast Internet access can also use a web interface to send messages or view the archives, addresses of list-members and links to resources related to the discussions.

The collection of views presented in this document is culled from several electronic discussion groups established in the past 5-6 years. They are presented thematically as opposed to the specific discussion group they were aired in. Due to technical mishaps the names of the contributors from the 1999 discussion are not retrievable. These discussion lists have often benefited from the technical support of Bellanet in Canada. They include:

- Globalization and the Information Age — theme of the African Development Forum (ADF) held in 1999;
Background on Selected Discussion Lists

Among discussion groups set up by ECA as part of the African Information Society Initiative are the following:

AISI African Diaspora and the Information Society

http://www.dgroups.org/groups/Diaspora-l

The African Diaspora electronic discussion list was launched in February 2003. It aims at engaging the African Diaspora in ICTs for social and economic development in Africa. Currently, there are 80 members on the list.

AISI Civil Society and the Information Society:


AISI-L is a discussion list launched in 1999. It was used and effectively used to
gather views and perspectives of the public during the first African Development Forum (ADF’99) that took place in October 1999 on the theme “The Challenge to Africa of Globalisation and the Information Age”. The list served as a platform for general information exchange among the principal organizations and individuals involved in the implementation of the AISI programmes.

Currently, there are 359 members on the list, and it is actively being used by African civil society for their preparation to the World Summit on the Information Society.

The WSIS focal points for African Governments
http://www.dgroups.org/groups/aisi-wsis

The discussion list aims to provide focal points for the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), where African governments can share experiences and lessons about preparations at national and regional level, to ensure adequate and active African participation in the process. It serves as a platform for common African voices in the development of the information society with coordination from the Bamako Bureau of the African Group to the WSIS. This was set up at the BAMAKO 2002 African Regional Conference for the WSIS as Africa’s official representative in the WSIS process. Currently, there are 83 members on the list.

African Media and the Information Society
http://www.dgroups.org/groups/aisi-media-

This online discussion list was launched in June 2003 as a result of the recommendation made during the Second Media Forum that was held from 16 to 17 May 2003 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on the theme “Media and Capacity Building in the Information Society”. It provides a platform and space for African media practitioners to reflect on the many issues involved in enhancing the role of the media (journalists and institutions) in the information society. It also serves as a forum for exchange of knowledge, information, lessons and resources on information society
issues in Africa. Currently, there are 70 members on the list.

**Academia and the Information Society**

http://www.dgroups.org/groups/aisi-academia-l

Set up in 2003 prior to the Retreat on African Academia and the Information Society, the aim of the discussion list is to determine how universities and other higher education institutions see their involvement in the development of information society and identify the specific areas of their participation. Discussions first held on the list made input into the Retreat on “Intellectual Leadership and the African Information Society Initiative: What Role for Africa’s Academic Community?”, 15-16 June 2003, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Retreat was organised by ECA in collaboration with the Ford Foundation to provide a platform for a select group of leading African academics to reflect on the many intellectual issues that they face as they develop strategies for enhancing their role in the information society. Currently, there are 100 members on the list.

**African Stakeholders Network “Closed” List**

The ASN aims to optimize the frameworks for partnership and resource sharing with the existing networks on the continent working on ICTs for development. It draws on the experiences by regional and international institutions. ASN will also mobilize actors to highlight and address gaps and constraints in policy and strategies in the work of the UN ICT Task Force and the implementation of its Plan of Action.

With its secretariat based at ECA in Addis Ababa, members of the network meet annually. At the national level, ASN will aim to build capacity on ICT for development issues among governments, policy makers, civil society, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs); the private sector and ICT professionals. In addition, based on the implementation plan of the African Information Society Initiative, the ASN will build on major existing regional and global efforts.
Summary

The discussions in some of the lists have resulted in concrete collaborative projects and activities. One such example is the Free and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSFA), launched during PrepCom II of the World Summit on the Information Society held in Geneva, Switzerland. FOSFA is the result of on-line and face-to-face discussions before, during and after a Civil Society Workshop that was held in partnership with the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in November 2002. New lists will be created in the future to facilitate the collaborative work of partners involved in the implementation of AISI.
Examples of Organizations Working on Gender and ICTs Advancement

Women’s Net has built a website which contains a huge amount of information about, and for, women in South Africa. The website gives information to women on gender equality legislation and contains guidelines as to what to do, for instance, in case of rape. Women’s Net provides training to women working in the NGOs so that they can repackage information from the website, using such formats as posters, to reach women who do not have direct access to the Internet.

The joint effort that is being made by FEMNET and APC to train women design and launch websites that would track the implementation of the resolutions of the Beijing Conference on Women in nine African countries was yet another example cited from the continent.

Another example is the application of ICTs to disseminate information on existing and new legislation concerning violations of women rights; a case in point is the extensive on-line advocacy being made to women living under Muslim law on violations of women’s rights with the aim of protecting individual women from violations.

Examples of Private-Public Partnerships

It is generally acknowledged that partnerships must be developed between the public and private sector, but ICT strategies are hindered by the lack of trust between those two groups. Government-sponsored programmes in Morocco and Tunisia are good examples of a national-guided effort. Almost all African countries share examples of private firms making the best out of the transformation. Some examples include: teleshops in Dakar, newspapers such as Les Echos of Bamako, artisans in Uganda, Botswana and Senegal marketing their products through the ITC Virtual Handcraft Exhibition centre, thousands of University of South Africa (UNISA) students across the continent taking internet correspondence courses, travel and tourism information service for almost all of Africa, Africa Online and its E-Touch service, Airlines, specialty products such as glassware, regional wine merchants.
Information and communication technology for development (ICT4D) actors

The various actors on the stage of ICT4D are: the Diaspora, civil society, the private sector, the public sector, academia and the media. Quotes from electronic discussion lists including these groups are given below.

An African Digital Diaspora?

The role of the Diaspora in ICT4D

“IT can even be argued that ‘digital Diaspora’ is a contradiction in terms: ICTs mean that location no longer limits. The expertise of digital Diaspora can only be tapped if a digital environment is created at a local level in African countries. Given the right technologies digital knowledge can be tapped from anywhere and many members of the Diaspora are eager to volunteer their participation.” Establishing the African Digital Diaspora organisation (ADD) in North America or Europe with branch offices on the continent could help the Diaspora work very closely with government agencies and professional organisation to identify areas where these interactive bridges must be built.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Sceptics argue…

“Africans in Diaspora are more interested to work for their own country than for other countries, and each country has peculiar challenges and strategic priorities for development. There should be more of a consortium that would enable exchange of experience on various challenges, strategies, success and failure stories obtained along the process of development.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“Developing a database of people with expertise in key areas and key institutions [and] organizing basic information systems to enable the right people to be in the right place at the right time with the right information [and] develop the institutional support they will need is a good strategy to facilitate the intervention of the Diaspora in development endeavors of the continent.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“It is essential to co-ordinate the willingness and efforts of the Africa-Diaspora in a manner which will be meaningful to how ordinary Africans make living in their homes and communities. Africans abroad are Africa’s largest “aid donors”. Thus the issue needs to be how can we capitalise [on] and best utilise the “intellectual capital” contributions of the Diaspora regarding ICT development and utilisation in the continent”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Possible areas for intervention of the Diaspora

“Manufacturing computers and computer related products such as motherboards, sound cards, modems, video cards, etc. and network products such as cable, hubs and other accessories are possible areas of intervention for Africans in the Diaspora. The Diaspora can also participate in providing remote data processing services over the Internet.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“A strategy for harnessing the digital Diaspora at the regional level is essential to promote ICTs, to increase transparency and accountability of ICT programmes, to mobilize resources for village connectivity and to contribute to skills and experience shortages in Africa.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

The ever-so contentious issue of repatriation “If the Continent wants to rise from its knees, repatriation is not only necessary, but a must. For this to happen, trust needs be developed between the Diaspora and the government, and the return of the Diaspora should not be taken as a threat to the local elite; it should rather be considered as
a reinforcement of the efforts that have already been exerted locally”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

But…

“Repatriation is somehow controversial in that considering many of the Africans in the Diaspora may have chosen their present countries of residence seeking relief from the asperity in their countries of birth/origin; whether these asperities are of political, social or economic origins (or a combination thereof). In this connection, the choice to come back to Africa or to stay behind and work closely with the continent should be left to the Diaspora itself.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Using the intellectual capabilities of the Diaspora does not necessarily mean bringing them back home, it means drawing the most out of their knowledge and experience and putting it into ‘home service’. Rather, governments should give permission to the Africans in Diaspora to obtain dual citizenship, and consultancy assignments must be given to them instead of the Europeans and Americans who ‘get paid fat salaries and turn around and ask advice from the African intellectuals’.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“ICTs offer the opportunity to repatriate intellectual capital. For one, they can link local sites with expertise abroad. Electronic access reduces the pressure to become part of the Diaspora and creates a temptation to return.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Optimism about ICTs and the role of the Diaspora

“The Diaspora in US especially, must be viewed as ‘part of the investment community’ and every possible effort needs to be exerted by governments to foster credibility and transparency. The need to utilise the skills, knowledge and experiences of Africans in Diaspora for trade and others negotiations is important.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“Where the Diaspora chooses to remain behind and contribute whatever it is possible, it is important to utilise ICTs to tap the resources — human and material — of these groups (the Diaspora) through a co-ordinated network building scheme in order to provide a solid base for forging partnership for common objective.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“The basic issue is not to question the role of the African Digital Diaspora in bringing the benefits of ICT to Africa but how best to utilise ICTs to enhance their contribution. Efforts that are being made to expand and sustain telecenter initiatives in Africa can be augmented by African civic organizations operating all over the world.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Unless and until the politicians and military provide a safe and stable environment, talented Africans will continue to seek their fortunes in places which, if not particularly friendly, at least tolerate them and respect their talents and work ethic.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Africa already missed out the information Age in the 90’s. And it has lost its most talented citizens to the brain drain as well? Diaspora could be the seed of African salvation, and its accumulated skills and organisational talents can be used for African development.”

Former Tanzanian Ambassador to Ethiopia, ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Africa has been the largest per capita exporter of skilled, home-grown human resources. Many Africans of the Diaspora are hesitant to invest because they feel the environment in their home countries is hostile to enterprise. Thus, in addition to encouraging a favourable investment climate, policies should also encourage the repatriation of native expertise.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“I’m a living statistic of the brain-drain. What will prevent those students who benefit from ICT in academia from becoming part of the
Diaspora? Most good graduates of African universities inevitably join the brain drain.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

Need for the services of the Diaspora

“Africans in the Diaspora are willing to participate in African development projects. There are many people of African descent who are a highly undervalued resource of people who would be quite willing to contribute, because of their own sincerity and deeply held feelings and desires for connections.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“However, clearing the ‘two way misconception about Africa among Africans on the continent and the African-Diaspora’ and creating a ‘reciprocal awareness’, among Africans in the continent and those in Diaspora, will eliminate the negative attitude of the former towards the latter.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

We’re developing a project to assist in upgrading, standardizing, and migrating education curriculum in the African School Systems to a highly interactive multimedia format.

Thomas Larmena, Chicago — United States, African Stakeholders Network List discussant

Ways of attracting the Diaspora

“Improving social and political situations in Africa is a major step forward to attract Africans in Diaspora to extend their contribution to the development of the continent. To improve Africa-Diaspora relationship, the primary step towards long-term effective networks of Africa and Africa-Diaspora will be to generate and disseminate positive knowledge of the African existence to counteract the misconceptions. The positive values, principles and knowledge of African community societies could be animated and digitized as instructional tools to disabuse minds in the Diaspora and vice-versa”.

ADF ’99 List discussant
“The government and the African Diaspora have to trust each other and work together within the given sector mandated by law and the government or the professional bodies in Africa must show seriousness that they need to tap into the knowledge of these people”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Africa Programs is assisting peaceful African countries, as opposed to “boiling countries” like the Congos and CAR [Central African Republic], to “reduce the gap between their undergoing economy and the fast growing international market” by using services from their citizens in Diaspora. The Return and Reintegration of Qualified African Nationals Programme (RQAN) “offers assistance in returning to employment or self-employment in target or non-target African countries, in sectors of priority to the recipient country’s development”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

However…

“RQAN Programs have failed to attain the goal set simply because the funds available from the program were insufficient to support the project intended to be accomplished by the returnees.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
Civil Society’s Participation in ICT Policies

The views here focus on the following questions: How can ICT be used to improve women’s disadvantaged position in the region? What policy actions are necessary to ensure that women have access as ICTs become more available in the region?

Civil society: change of focus necessary?

“I think the participation of civil society in the articulation of ICT policies is very important in that it not only broadens participation in the process of the articulation but also allows policy planners to have a wider input that reflects the views of users, which in the past has always been missing. Additionally, civil society that has been concerned with the issues of governance would be in a better position to advise policy planners on what policies to evolve that would promote good governance through the use of ICTs. Civil society also has itself to shift the focus of its advocacy, which has over the years been essentially to see Africa as consumer of ICTs [rather] than one that is capable of production. We cannot achieve the democratisation of access to ICTs without some level of internal production capacity, not just in software but also in hardware.”

Y.Z. Ya’u, AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“Forget people”

“There is a perception out there that you always have to focus all the available resources on the poor or the have-nots. How about those who have just a little capacity that need[s] nurturing for success?” This group is marginalized by its knowledge and is truly the “forgotten people of Africa” today.

ADF ‘99 List discussant
ICTs and gender equality

“ICTs policies should be gender-sensitive. The policies formulated in any sector of the national economy should balance the gender issues in that the interests and needs of women should be reflected. ICT policies must advocate the promotion of women’s entrepreneurial role in owning and controlling ICT businesses and they need to clearly show how ICTs are used to promote women’s causes.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Several virtual networks for women of Africa have been set up and connectivity to regional and global networks has become a reality. ICTs, especially the Internet, are advantageous for women because they create forums that could be used to discuss issues of common interest and hence initiate collective actions for development.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Providing training courses to women on the language of the web and the use of techniques required to tap information from the Internet and manipulate its various resources is of paramount importance. ICTs can also be used as a delivery mechanism in both formal and informal education programs to women.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Women in rural areas are the fastest processors and communicators of information [and] this ability can further be developed by making accessible to them more sources of information like Internet”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Sceptics speak…

“I am sceptical about the real impact of the Internet on women due to lack of familiarity with the language of the web (non-existence of knowledge in the case of women from Francophone countries) and the irrelevance of the information obtained from the Internet. People in the rural areas have more pressing needs (roads, health, food access, etc.) than access to the Internet.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“There is an overemphasis on access to computers as an ultimate solution of problems of rural women – I suspect business promotion motives.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

But…!!

“The language problem could be overcome by re-packaging the information from the Internet using local languages, and NGOs and women organizations could play an instrumental role in this respect. Reaching rural women located in remote areas and conducting online distance learning courses in the vernacular is another potential benefit of ICTs.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“The existence of good governance and stable political and economic situations are prerequisites for effective utilization of the Internet. ICTs could be used as a tool to improve the situation of rural women only if they are integrated within the overall national development process. ICTs can be used to take women from positions of waiting for the men to be the sole bread-winner to positions where they are involved in decision making, not just in their homes but in their communities and the nation at large”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Although….

“The majority of African women have always been the bread-winner through their active engagement in various informal sector activities and agricultural production”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“[W]omen’s associations that focus on using ICT for harnessing socio-economic development...could lay the foundation for creating a well-informed society. Abantu in Kenya, ENDA in Senegal, SANGONEt in South Africa, Boginet in Botswana, ISIS-WICCE in Uganda and other African wide organizations like FEMNET and APC are examples where ICTs are used to realize gender equality and to promote their concerns and voices.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

...and what really counts

“....letting the communities know what to do and engaging them in a dialogue on the same is the starting point. A dialogue cannot begin in a vacuum, it has to be initiated. This is not a one man’s job — it requires the highest order of cooperation and partnership. The point to consider is that we cannot ignore the means of communication already in use and familiar to communities unless we think we can ‘technologically revolitionalize’ rural Africa overnight. Whatever new idea we want to bring should be one built in to what is already in place and familiar to the users. We do not want to make mistakes done 5 decades ago! It is a different approach if the community in which a new idea to be diffused has never been exposed to it in the past. For instance, how would a radio serve the community differently? If we say the new “radio” is community based then this differentiates it from the ‘usual radio’ in the way of its usefulness as gauged by its input and output and not simply its mere presence/existence in the village/community telecenter. The diffusion process must make a difference in terms of its output: adoption of new values, attitudes, practices that will indeed show that such communication technologies have an impact in transforming rural Africa.

Eda Mutuah-Kombo, AISI Civil Society and Academia discussant
The role of Private Sector and Emerging Issues

Does Africa have the capacity to conduct viable e-commerce? What of the information economy? Is there such a thing in Africa? The views expressed here focus on how the private sector, on the Continent and in the Diaspora can partner with public and other sectors to advance ICT issues. Opinions on Africa’s emerging information economy range from pessimistic to veiled optimism.

**Information economy**

“There is still no good definition of the Information Economy. Because of dynamic developments in ICTs, the week’s discussion leader pointed out that the perceptions, and consequently, the working definitions, of the information economy are constantly changing. African countries do have their own information economy already. In order to move forward in terms of generation, processing and use of information, African economies must work based on the current transformation in network technologies.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“Despite the hype, the Information Economy as a whole has been slow to show truly substantive developments anywhere – witness that it still relies on traditional credit card settlement set-up, a contributor notes. Implications for Africa could be potentially huge if problems of access to financial systems such as credit cards and banking were resolved.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“As small- to medium-sized firms are usually the source of new marketing solutions, they are potential sources. However, although many small, micro and medium scale enterprises (SMEEs) feel technology will enable them to compete globally they don’t feel they have the expertise to take advantage of it.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“African firms must focus on innovation, and be an ICT producer. We should resist being ICT consumers and strive for being ICT Exploiters and Maximisers. Keeping in mind that no miracle or flood of money will turn any odd place into a Silicon Valley in a fortnight.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“If we are to recommend ICT/AISI policies to African governments, we must have a conceptual framework to help us understand and articulate the dynamics of policymaking in Africa. . . I am trying very hard to resist the temptation of using western models.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“We need to facilitate credit card transactions over the Internet, encourage a build-up of human and physical infrastructure and, as always, provide a secure, conflict-free environment to encourage growth.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Reality and “hype”

“A caveat: Africa’s participation in an information economy may not happen without a strong local vision and vibrant ICT institutions. The private sector will not necessarily invest in problems of considerable importance to society in the Information Economy. Markets do not respond to need but demand (i.e. need + money to pay).”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Beware of the hype: different players have vested interests in painting a positive picture of technology. An individual cannot share in the hype surrounding the information economy until technologies make it easy to use applications in every day life – and not many ICT meet these criteria, a contributor notes.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
Social costs and developments

“ICT is a sector where the rich can make a fortune but the poor have little chance to participate, merely increasing economic disparities. Other social costs include displacement of workers and perceived/real loss of national sovereignty. As always, conflict is a constraint: Even a minor conflict can have far-reaching consequences for investment”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“The private sector should be taken as a partner. But as its target is profit, it can not be viewed as a promoter of social needs. Apart from working collaboratively with other stakeholders on policy issues, the private sector should also join hands with the government in the process of building the infrastructure especially in the rural areas.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Regional integration

“Little is known about the role and position of the ICT entrepreneurs in regional integration. Analysis of the role and challenges to the ICT private sector should be undertaken within the context of regional integration. This should cover issues such as policy incentives, cross-border opportunities and role of the ICT private sector in regional cooperation and integration.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

E-commerce: constraints and benefits

“Specific area of interest is ‘ICT for E-commerce in Africa’. ICT today cannot enable Africa to compete favourably in the global marketplace. This is because of the comparatively high costs of power/energy, telephone charges, low bandwidth, ISPs, taxes on hardware and software, and Corruption.

Nelson Umah Tete, Kampala – Uganda African Stakeholders Network List discussant
“In the African context e-commerce should not be understood in the same strict terms by which it has been defined elsewhere. From a development perspective, the benefit of Internet access and ICTs will come through their capacity to generate income and opportunity in poor communities. E-commerce at the micro level is comparatively insignificant in the north.”

Kate Wild, ADF ‘99 List discussant

Chambers of commerce: “use their business acumen”

“ICTs to support business and economic development are not realistic unless they are based on a solid understanding of how business is done: Chambers of Commerce have this understanding. Their memberships are demand-driven and so are forced to deliver to the satisfaction of their constituency. Chambers of Commerce are the most likely candidates to apply their business acumen to find ICT-based solutions to support local businesses and economic development – that is, solutions which are both financially self-sustaining and can be operated to performance standards.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Telecentres should be located at/near Chambers of Commerce offices in provincial African towns to promote e-commerce and concurrently discourage capital flight.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Good For One, Good For All? What about appropriate technologies?

“‘Appropriate’ technology for Africa: is there such a thing? I sometimes wonder why we tend to think that what is good for Europe, USA or other industrialised countries can’t be good for Africa. To quote McLuhan, ‘Technology is an instrument of human liberation’.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“If people continue to nurture the belief that what is good for one isn’t necessarily good for the other, they will continue to subscribe to the inferiority complex that has been killing the African continent for many centuries.... The same people maintained that the Internet would not work in Africa. But today, they are all using it to communicate with Africans.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Of course, ICT can help Africa speed up its development process if and only if there is co-operation in terms of policy, investment and human capacity-building.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Should Africa be a testing ground? Exploitation or exploration?

“Although Africa is smart in its urge and demand to catch up, it should not be a testing ground for new technology. Let there be no computer in Africa until we are able to produce [a] simple floppy drive, Africa’s own technology must evolve – in tune with the rest of the world – but on its own. We can not afford to be the recycling area of technology,”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“Regardless of the arguments for or against, it is also important to recognise that information and communication technologies are not necessarily neutral in their effects. The extension of computer technologies into every aspect of social and economic frameworks reorders the social and economic environments. This re-ordering is also wrapped up with a whole wave of speculation on, enthusiasm for, and fear of technologised futures. However, when groups – such as community centres or African transnational enterprises – take various ICTs and master their use to suit their particular needs, this reordering is locally directed.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“Why shouldn’t Africa be a testing ground? After all, with a minimal degree of literacy and access to a machine anyone can download software or order online. Africa should be an environment where ‘cutting edge development’ takes place. This should be one of the “pillars” of the leapfrogging issue. Having Africa as a technology testing ground presents the advantage that the technologies which should be tested and adapted to human purposes and not imposed from without.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“This is not to say there are not real risks regarding the importation of technologies – these risks must be considered and avoided if possible. But Africa would be well advised to take some – even poorly defined – risks to be able to capture potential benefits from ICTs early. The more we leave out any aspect of what is happening globally in the name of appropriateness...the more we deny ourselves the paths for trendy development and therefore continue to be ‘dumping grounds’. Is not information facilitated by the means to access and share it; what will move us from inability to innovate for our betterment? Niche uses for older technology exist as well but the application needs to be well thought through.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“Africa does not appear to have institutional support or even is wary of entrepreneurship. On the other hand, I think the private sector is small and as a result risk averse and unwilling to allow new entrants into the market."

Ms Otema Yirienkyi ATAC List discussant
Public Sector Accountability

This section focuses mainly on the issues of e-government and e-governance. E-government is not just about reforming work processes. It is about improving services to and interaction with the community. It requires transparency, political conscience, accountability and a broad reform process...

Good government: regulation vs. accountability and entrepreneurship

“All lawmakers and those that make rules and regulations have to rethink the purpose of the laws, rules and regulations. They should create a mechanism to detect problems at the implementation of the laws, rules and regulations and to take quick corrective actions.

Secondly, discussions should be made between those who make laws, rules and regulations and those on whom these laws, rules and regulations apply to establish trust. Over-regulation does not give room for creativity. Thus, the lawmakers should trust the businesspeople enough to give them some room. The government should make sure that each law, rule and regulation not only prevents its citizens to do undesirable things but also that it does not prevent them from doing desired things (such as entrepreneurship).”

Dr Dawit Bekele, ATAC List discussant

“The fundamental truth is that African governments have to be accountable to their people first – while one can talk about governments using ICTs to organise, disseminate and manage information for effective governance, the key question is whether these efforts will make them more accountable to the taxpayer.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant
“ICTs should be used first and foremost for the political education of the masses: when the population is properly informed about subjects like finance and economics, the level of debate is enhanced and they will demand better services from their governments. If there is anything special in the so-called information economy, it is that people’s smartness is what makes the difference, not materials and energy.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

**E-Governance and interaction with the community**

“I believe that definitions are a particularly useful starting point. In considering e-governance and e-government it might be useful to look at the various initiatives and applications as they impact three overlapping focal points: Process improvement, External interaction, and Connected citizens. In viewing the level of overlap, one might be able to discern whether an application or initiative falls within the bounds of e-governance or e-government.”

Simbo Ntiro, Tanzania AISI civil society list discussant

“....e-government is not only or even primarily about reforming the work processes within governmental institutions, but is rather about improving its services to and collaboration with the business and professional community, non-profit and nongovernmental organizations and associations, political parties, trade unions, churches, and public interest groups.”

Cheick Gologo, ECOWAS AISI civil society list discussant

**Preventing wasteful e-governance projects**

“Unless e-government is part of a broad reform and transformation process, then you will tend to run into uncoordinated projects on e-governance, and in the end they waste financial and human resources. The problem in Africa, using say the example of Uganda which I know well, is that the push to introduce e-governance or “e-anything” tends to come from IT enthusiasts and IT equipment or software vendors. They convince decision makers who then go ahead to purchase hardware and software without the necessary needs assessment and accompanying training programmes. In the end the vendor gets his cut, but the country
ends with uncoordinated and incompatible systems and tools. Before you know it, another expert advises that everything be changed and a new system be put in place. And so on and resources are wasted. The short and long of this is that before introducing technology, thorough discussion should take place and as many people as possible should be engaged so in this planning phase. Before big projects in e-governance are introduced, there should be successful pilot projects. Then lessons learned will be useful as you roll out the e-governance program from pilots nationwide.”

Johnson Nkuuhe, Uganda AISI civil society list discussant

“No matter what we talk about, in Africa funding for almost everything comes from the government. We are so unfortunate to be saddled with a governing system where once one government is out power, the next one just cancels every project began by the previous without giving serious consideration to consequences of cancelling such ongoing projects. If academia can be the torch-bearers, then changes of government will not make us slide back into the doldrums of technological decay. Maybe, the civil services should be entrusted with such projects and their implementation after all governments come and go but the civil service remains.”

Nana Kofi Obiri-Yeboah AISI-Academia discussant

Transparency and political conscience

“Transparency must take the top on the whole of the activities of the State. However as most of our governments come from dictatorship, corruption, etc. are these governments going to accept to play the transparency game? What will it take to achieve the goal of e-governance in Africa if there is no adhesion of the countries and the authorities to it?

ADF ’99 List discussant

“One of the fundamental things I believe, it is the sensitizing of the African policy makers on the importance of ICTs in the economic and cultural development. This sensitizing will have to go beyond seminars and discussion forums. The pan-African and International institutions should act as emulators in ‘e-managing’ relations with their various African partners, be they governments or civil society... the pressure
must come from the bottom (the rising generation) and from the top (international partners which are in most cases their principal interlocutors). Olivier says it well: without this change of mentality and attitude at the top nothing will happen. African countries in which something is happening are countries where democracy (or rather political conscience) is real and where the performances of the administration meet expectations of the population…"

Adiel A AISI Civil Society List discussant

Strategic perspective

“It seems to me that, with a few exceptions, ICT and e-governance have been viewed as technical issues. This seems to reflect the training and perspective that comes naturally to the participants. I do not think this is helpful. The benefit of ICT and e-governance in Africa is not to catch up or imitate the West or any other place. ICT brings the possibility of inventing the future. If one considers this from first principles then the issues are spectacular. If one considers it from a technical perspective — then the issues are lack of: infrastructure, technical knowledge, skills sets etc. Without a strategic perspective all is lost. E-governance should be a process, which transforms and incentivizes the population along a path of development. We need to establish 1. who benefits 2. who loses? Any coherent approach has to show how the existing government will benefit — otherwise no resources will be released, how other sectors will benefit otherwise no buy in will take place.”

Dapo Ladimeji, UK AISI discussant

Trickle-down effect of e-governance

“Governments have to be the focus in implementing this awareness. One thing that I have spent time looking at in different settings is the governments’ role in implementing ICT. In cases where governments have widely deployed ICT and moved to ICT-based e-government to some extent, the awareness trickles down to businesses, schools, and other public and private sectors. Maybe the option lies in convincing governments to take a practical lead in the implementation and use of ICT in all its branches.”

Joseph A. Opio AISI Civil Society list discussant
“Personally I think that Africa especially governments are the biggest consumers and have large market share and therefore if governments embrace e-government, the ripple effect would be easily evident in that civil society and private sector would automatically respond. I think that there should be a lot of interaction and intellectual capital exchange between government, civil society and private sector in the implementation of a high mandatory e-government and governance programme. I think the phobia of ICT needs to be broken and government must understand and take a critical leading role on this exercise in their leadership style and practises.

Concurrently as the awareness is going on, there must be a strong research and information collection exercise on the relevant indicators of the level of ICT availability in government, private and civil society machinery. In the implementation the bottom line of understanding is not to be technical but to be more socio-cultural and economic with the deliverables.”

Eric Osiakwan, Ghana, AISI Civil Society List discussant

The Role of Academia in the Information Society

African academia has tended to shy away from the Information Society discourse, leaving it up to civil society and others to engage in analysis of the dynamic development of the ICT sector. The views here provide a snapshot of the thinking process of the African intellectual.

Getting involved in ICT Policy

“Discussions on the responsibilities of the academia have to be grounded in the realities of the socio-political realities of the environment they work in. Like any other continent, when those realities become too difficult or unbearable, the first groups to ‘drain’ out are the middle class of which the academia form a significant majority. Inevitably the academics ‘left behind’ get caught up in the task of staying alive, never mind engagement in any serious scholarship.”
The absence of transparent and committed political leadership has taken its toll on the African academia, and ironically, it will take a determined move by the academia to re-create the necessary socio-political environment in which their profession can flourish. To my mind this is where the convergence of interests of the African Diaspora, the private sector and the academic community within Africa can still seize the initiative to recreate such an enabling environment.”

John Dada, Nigeria AISI- Academia List discussant

“There has to be a change in attitude for academia — from being individually selfish and serving the interests of outsiders to being selfish from our communities’ perspective as the primary driver of our involvement in ICT projects. Of course, we cannot be totally selfish without due recognition of the interests of other key stakeholders.”

Tim Waema, Kenya AISI- Academia List discussant

“It would be a very good thing that the State shows interest and commitment by rewarding periodically, for example, those of the scientific societies which have demonstrated outstanding achievements not only as researchers but above all as (the) “science-society” activists. Nationally, the problem we might face here is that our African modern societies are sometimes too much fragmented, compartmentalized, some policy makers jealously guarding their domain or fearing to confront...challenges from the ground and...people that might eventually question their practice. Sometimes, depending on one personality in the government, things might present well within one or another department...until the next cabinet reshuffle.”

Mawaki Chango, Mozambique/Togo AISI- Academia List discussant

Assuming leadership

“Academia had always provided the leadership and research and handed technology to industry. Industry in return, did fund research in academia. This was a win-win situation. Slowly that trend is returning to academia taking the lead. We should expect to do the same in Africa. The survival of our societies rests solely and squarely on our shoulders.”
“... we as the academia in Africa have failed very miserably! Worst of all cases of senior professors thwarting efforts of newly arrived academics trying to implement latest ‘technologies’ is very rampant. I believe academia is in a better position to build societies than politicians. I am therefore appealing to all to start putting national interests ahead of personal interests.”

“....what does AISI mean to me personally or collectively as a member of academia: we cannot rely or count on the government to provide leadership in critical areas like information gathering, collation, distribution and implementation. It’s past due for us to assume that responsibility.”

Nana Kofi Obiri-Yeboah AISI- Academia List discussant

African Media, a neglected sector?

Discussants in the AISI Media list were requested to make their input into the Status of Media and ICTs Reporting, Documentary Evidence – a study that was commissioned by ECA. A major point of debate was the poor state of reporting on ICTs in Africa. Below are snippets from the discussions that took place.

“Some of the steps towards rectifying this avalanche of poor state of ICT reporting in the continent, include:

• Training of the media chiefs on the importance of ICTs and how it could assist or help the industry to grow as well as boost their businesses, especially with on-line publication;

• Good salary structure that is paid as at where and when due;

• Constant reminder through training and retraining of ICT reporters to keep up the work and abreast of latest developments;

• Encourage ICT reporters to form an umbrella for better exchange of information and ideas;
• Encourage independence of ICT reportage to forestall editing of its-related stories out of context by non-ICT inclined news-managers or edit with close consultation with the reporters;

• Encourage vigorous computerization and provision of Internet without abridging reporters – not limited to a segment of ICT reporting;

• Alliance with local PC assembling plants to make it cheaper;

• Telecommunication (phone) allowance for reporters in Africa, particularly those covering ICT, or find means of reducing cost of telephony in the continent;

• Provision of good working environment, infrastructure, etc.;

• ICT reporters should be encouraged to work – typeset their stories or write on PCs themselves. (Both are relevant — writing manually and typing electronically).”

Remmy Nweke, Nigeria AISI-Media List discussant

Training issues

“Another angle is the training needs that exist in terms of using the full potential of ICTs. For example web casting is under explored. (It also raises policy advocacy issues around Africa’s limited bandwidth, which often prevents us from exploring and using the new services that ICTs could offer us.) “

“Information terminology: Wireless networks, IXPs, broadband, narrowcasting, web casting, root servers etc...these words have no meaning to many people. A glossary of ICT words and a workshop to explore them would be a starting point.

“How can those needs be best served; Who and which organizations should be associated to the event? APC, AMARC [Association mondiale des radio diffuseurs communautaires, or World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters] and ARTICLE 19 are all key Africa wide organisations that work on policy and implementation.

Tracey Naughton AISI Media List discussant
Networking

“Merging of High and Low ICT. I am particularly thinking of how we can canalize the oral African tradition to the written, the computerized, and the digitalized. Issues in the subject will involve merging radio and other traditional communication and media to the digital. Networking. This, I feel, is rather a very important issue which the African media needs to address. ICTs should come in handy in maintaining a strong network of African Media and Communication Actors.

“I know that the African Network of Information Society Actors (ANISA) was declared during the Nouakchott meeting. I am thinking that such a network of Media Actors, if it does not exist, should be established, and if it does, should be strengthened. On content and its creation, I understood, from Addis that templates could be shared among African communication systems. Ibrahim Zene of Bush Radio gave that Idea. Is it possible to pursue it further?”

Nnenna Nwakanma, Nigeria, AISI Media List discussant

A beginning...

"The example of Senegal at the time of the presidential elections showed the role of the media in the transparency and the follow-up of the elections and especially in the proclamation of the results. Admittedly, one cannot speak yet about e-election and far from the e-governance but it is a beginning which should be taken into account.”

Archimedes Ahamada, Comoros AISI Media List discussant
2. Sectoral Applications: ICTs combating HIV/AIDS

Promotion of application of ICTs in the key sectors such as education, agriculture, public administration, business and trade and health within the context of regional integration could maximize benefits of ICTs at regional levels.

In tele-health this would cover use of ICTs in the fight against pandemics of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, developing regional telemedicine programmes in key specialities such as radiology, dermatology, pathology, ophthalmology and for promoting medical education and setting up of regional networks and centres of excellence in telemedicine and medical informatics.

Use of both old and new communication technology

“Although a number of African NGOs and others have established successful projects using new information communication tools the problem of access to computers and the high cost of connectivity remains. It has been proved that e-mail-based forums are more accessible than web-based programmes.”

ADF II ICTs and HIV/AIDs List discussant

“An important initiative to provide for broader access to ICTs is the telecenter initiative that has been started in several African countries. In the fight against HIV/AIDS it will however be important for organizations to not neglect older technology such as the television and especially radio that provides access to a much broader audience.”

ADF II ICTs and HIV/AIDs List discussant

Electronic networking against HIV/AIDS

“One activity of an InterAfrica Group initiative called MESOB (http://www.mesob.org) is in networking among efforts against HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia. The project makes use of the Internet, informal consultation, meetings and print newsletters to network Who’s Who, Who’s Doing What and What Can Be Done.
We are trying to use ICT as a networking “tool among tools”, along with more conventional forms of networking and communicating. Of 300+ NGOs in Ethiopia, nearly half have some kind of Internet access. Also, there is an active, interested and well-informed Ethiopian Diaspora worldwide. The idea for networking has been to move the information in all directions according to both supply and demand.”

InterAfrica Group, ADF II ICTs and HIV/AIDS discussant

“Nigeria-AIDS is an internet based discussion forum and news group on HIV/AIDS in Nigeria that was started in 1988 as a monthly email news bulletin. Members exchange ideas and circulate information on their work or development on the AIDS situation in Nigeria. Subscribers and visitors to Nigeria-Aids come from varied backgrounds, such as UN agencies, media organization, public service, educational institutions, community organisations, scientific organisations and human rights organisations. About fifty per cent of the subscribers are based in Nigeria. On the Nigeria-AIDS forum members discuss current issues and information about HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. They receive a monthly Nigeria AIDS bulletin containing news and views on HIV/AIDS from Nigerians across the world. The bulletin also includes information on grants and resources, international vacancies, conferences and other relevant news. Members can also post information about their work and organisations or make enquiries on health issues.”

Co-Moderator, ADF II ICTs and HIV/AIDs List

Digital medical training resources

“The sub-Saharan HIV epidemic and the shortage of doctors in Africa necessitates solutions to the provision of more medical graduates on the one hand and functional telemedicine within the constraints of rural settings, on the other. Not only is there a shortage of medical service providers, there is also a shortage of medical educators. I am working [on] a model of digital medical teaching resources that can be shared by medical schools across Africa, with the resources being repackaged and redistributed in a way that can accommodate differences in local diagnostic and treatment algorithms.”

Maurice Mars, South Africa, African Stakeholders Network List discussant
3. Content Development and Access Concerns

Among the debate items on content of information is the importance of tailoring for local culture – and the necessity of this for sustainable development.

**ILO programme**

“Knowledge management and sharing is a crucial component of the ILO ASIST Programme which advises governments and their development partners on how to maximise employment creation in investment strategies in infrastructure.

Creating awareness and building knowledge and skills to all those involved in the process of infrastructure delivery as well as the end users of the assets is key. The Programme employs a variety of Information and communication tools to create, gather, organise, process, store, and disseminate knowledge and information resources to a wide variety of target groups.

Angela Kabiru-Kang’ethe, International Labour Organisation (ILO), Harare, Zimbabwe
African Stakeholders Network List discussant

**Local content for sustainable development**

Our main concern in using ICT for development is the creation and dissemination of African local content. This is actually our mission, with a focus on African legal content. We have a vision of what should be done for disseminating legal information in Africa, in terms of information products and services using ICT. A specific target which should be reached is African Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). SMEs are we think the main vector of African development in general. It is where sustainable jobs and revenues can be best created and maintained. This activity of publishing local African content is an opportunity for the creation of local SMEs in Africa.

Marc-André Ledoux, Dakar — Senegal African Stakeholders Network List discussant
“..Africa can change for the better, only if...so many ifs...so many ideas and debates that preoccupy great intellectual minds, but little to show in terms of using that knowledge to create wealth and prosperity that can be shared by all the citizens of the country. The competition is about what should bring sustainable growth and create employment opportunities for local people.”

Batsirai Mike Chivhanga AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“Laptops for peasants? for what?” This raises the vast and difficult issue of developing an ‘African’ content. The real needs of the intended beneficiaries of ICT application must be clearly defined in order to answer this question. Content will develop by targeting users on the basis of literacy, traditions, social infrastructure, lifestyle and personal priorities. But don’t expect a village farmer to be immediately impressed by your laptop, a contributor warns.”

ADF ‘99 List discussant

“The mere awareness of technology will not impel people to use it unless they can see its relevance to their lives. This is easily imaginable among professionals and scholars, but less so among peasants and other marginalised groups. Rural peoples need data on income generation, leadership, literacy support, government policies on rural development and soil conservation. If the goal of implementing ICTs in Africa is to bring these latter groups in from the margin, we must build not only access, but content, that is directly applicable to them”.

ADF ‘99 List discussant

Directing knowledge

“The collection, collation, and distribution of useful knowledge is to me the starting point. So who is determining what ‘knowledge’ is useful for nation building. Who is collating, digesting and classifying such ‘knowledge’? Is it the governments responsibility? Who is accepting to be the repository of such knowledge? What about identifying the sectors that use that ‘knowledge’? Who will be distributing and how? Considering the trends in Africa, all these aforementioned responsibilities falls squarely on the shoulders of academia!”

Nana Kofi Obiri-Yeboah AISI-Academia List discussant
4. ICT Policy: Whose Responsibility? What are the Issues?

To enable implementation, ICT policy must become law. This is one of the ideas discussed in this section on policy issues. Among others is the need to harmonize national plans for regional cooperation, the importance of engaging the media in policy issues, and examples of positive institutional change in Uganda and Senegal.

**Appropriate legal environment**

“Nigeria has a new IT policy that is a fairly comprehensive document. It has some excellent proposals to encourage indigenous IT industries, through

— zero import-tax for component parts
— lower company tax for the first years of operation
— government IT orders to be favoured to these local companies.

Unfortunately passing this policy into law has not been a priority for the political establishment, so it has not been possible to implement this and other measures that will create the necessary enabling environment.”

John Dada ATAC List discussant

“.... At all levels, lobbyists should proselytize on the benefits in each sector (education, health, administration, commerce, agriculture, culture.), using concrete examples, significant success-stories and strong images such as “vicious circles” (before ICT4D are introduced) turned into virtuous spirals” (after their implementation), etc; Creating appropriate legal environments to spread ICT4D is the first step they should tackle, in spite of the issue of telecom revenues that will decrease during a transitional period.”

Marie-Josée Lauriente, France/Côte d’Ivoire/Senegal AISI Civil Society List discussant
Formulating ICT policy

“Defining and implementing ICT policies is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders (government agencies, non-government organisations, private sector, civil societies, etc.). Formulation of ICT policies should not be taken as a one-time business, but as an ongoing process.”

ADF III Regional Integration List discussant

“As the goal of a national ICT policy is to improve the flow and utilisation of information at all levels, the core of the policy should rest on building up ICT infrastructure that could facilitate both national and global connectivity.”

ADF III Regional Integration List discussant

“There is a tendency to generalise the approach of delivery of assistance to Africa without taking into account varying levels of literacy and technical competencies from country to country and village to village. It must be kept in mind that the political and economic environments and infrastructure support of ICT vary considerably”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“In promulgation of ICT policy in Africa, I will suggest we focus on at least four themes:

• Access and types of technology, availability, target audience/population, etc.

• Methods of Diffusion — the best way to get the information technology to a particular area/population.

• What is the cost? is it affordable? How can a particular technology be affordable?

• Socio-economic development implications of our Recommendations – how can technology make relevant advancement to both social and economic development?”

Sanjo Omoniyi, USA/Nigeria AISI-Diaspora List discussant
«I believe the starting point is for us as academics to get involved in shaping our nations’ National Information Society Strategies and Policies. This way, we shall get «hooked» into the forces driving the so-called information society in our societies and we shall have a guiding policy and strategy framework. We can then use this framework to make contributions in specific areas, e.g. the development of ICT standards, development of the ICT industry, etc.»…Closely related to this, we need to lobby for, if it does not exist, a strong partnership with our governments so that we can give our innovative ideas to our governments, our governments can turn to us to assist in implementing some of the information society strategies and at the same time we be proactive in implementing other information society strategies, etc. Without this, our contributions are likely to become a hit and miss affair, some copied from other irrelevant societies and contexts.»

Nana Kogi Obiri-Yeboah AISI Academia List discussant

Need for regional strategy

“Harmonizing e-readiness assessments and national ICT strategies is an important means for promotion of regional cooperation. Cross-border and regional cooperation should be promoted through the harmonization of national ICT plans. There is a need to create an African Regional Information and Communication Strategy to harmonize ICT policies and strategies, to build economy of scale for building regional backbones, Internet exchange points, undertaking research, monitoring and evaluation and for increasing Africa’s participation in global ICT governance.”

ADF III Regional Integration List discussant

ICT policy at the international level

“Support for ICTs must be two-pronged: private sector investment in combination with development of local capability. The profit motive can work as a driving force but only if the investment environment is enhanced by conducive government policies and infrastructure. Africa first needs to find voice and become influential in the international telecommunication policy-making process because the decisions in Geneva and New York do have strong implications on the development. For instance, the connectivity issue and future deployment of mobile
Communication systems could easily be tackled through capacity building.”

Tokunbo Ojo AISI-WSIS List discussant

Need for media interest in policy issues

“The media in Africa are often using ICTs as tools of the trade, but are not reporting on the social, economic or policy issues that affect the environment that ICTs exist in. There are significant policy issues in relation to public interest. The media may not even be aware that ICTs include media and mediums such as broadcasting. There are many subjects that would be worth unpacking for a meeting in which African media practitioners arrive with a commitment to follow up reporting. This should be linked to an exploration of the international bodies that make decisions about the ICT environment and a look at Africa’s under representation of them.”

Tracey Naughton, Namibia AISI Media List discussant

Telecom reforms: for positive institutional change

“One must take into account the peculiar situations that exist in the country under consideration while considering telecom reforms, and the issue of ownership needs to be addressed in relation to long term development effects. In Uganda, whereby a six months license is given to a telecom operator to provide pre-defined services and if it fails to do so, then its license is revoked and given to someone else. ICT policies should be oriented toward satisfying the demands of the user communities.”

ADF ’99 List discussant

“The problem is institutional. How can African countries create vibrant public ICT institutions that understand opportunities and move the private sector and others forward? The modernisation of the telecom structure in Senegal with the involvement of Sonatel is a good example of positive institutional change with dynamic private sector involvement.”

ADF ’99 List discussant
5. Human Resource Development for ICT4D

On the subject of human resource development in the field of ICTs a discussant from Kenya examined the role of higher education.

“..... Higher education and research institutions in Africa should fully integrate ICTs in all their applications. This means firstly:

— using ICTs in management (budget, registration, administration, etc.)

— using ICTs as teaching tools (which means fitting institutions with internet connected computer rooms to allow the use large groups to use the equipment);

— training teachers on how to use such new tools and on the subsequent new pedagogical practices;

— training support staff to produce and manage the required electronic pedagogical aids (websites, self-teaching CDroms, distant learning plate-forms, online learning, etc.);

— modernising/updating the curricula so as to take into accounts the new professional practices as a result of the use of ICTs in the various business sectors;

— creating new subjects preparing to new occupations or new problems generated by the IS,

— developing new research programmes on the use and ownership of ICTs in Africa as well as on their political, cultural, economic and social impacts; and

— developing, in partnership with the private sector, research-development programmes so as to enable the development of applications, even hardware.”
“I believe that development of appropriate human resource capacity at all levels is the key to successful development, implementation and use of ICT in our societies. Universities and other HE [higher education] institutions can contribute to information society in the area of HR [human resources] development in a number of ways:

— Advocacy. We should be involved in advocacy work with respect to the appropriate national policies and strategies for human resource development in ICT. Without a policy and strategy framework, it is likely that efforts in ICT HR development are wasted and may not make the impact on information society, as they should.

— Development of high-level ICT human resources. This involves implementing appropriate and relevant curricula for Diploma, Degree and Ph.D. levels in order to train citizens at these levels.

— Higher Education (HE) Enterprise partnership programmes. HE institutions should create strong partnerships with the productive sectors of our economies so that there can be cross-fertilization of ideas. These include consultancy work, applied research and development that generate new knowledge and/or products, development and delivery enterprise-based courses, other professional development programmes, participation in off-campus distance learning programmes, etc.

— Dissemination of information on ICT. Our scholars should disseminate information on ICT and its relevance to our societal needs in the web, in relevant journals, etc. This information could be of a general nature or results of research work.

— Participation in national fora on human resource development.”

Tim Waema, Kenya AISI Academia List discussant
6. Africa’s Priorities for the World Summit on the Information Society — WSIS

As Africa prepares for the WSIS process, various issues have been raised as to the benefits of the Summit. In the following discussions, the questions of Africa’s priorities, the need for Open Source technologies and telecom harmonization are responded to with passion and intensity.

Africa’s Priorities in the WSIS

“What are we negotiating for in the WSIS process? What do we expect to get from the five priorities? Are the priorities “African” or are they the ones that we Africans want to be, as part of the final documents of the WSIS? Are the other African Stakeholders aware of the CS [civil society] debate? Are we aware of theirs? How do we know if we will get to a consensus? Are we believing that the WSIS outcome will become the official guideline for all ICT initiatives in Africa? What will be the weight of the outcomes in comparison to existing African ICT initiatives? “

“.... The last thing for now I want you to consider is that at the end, there won’t be Africa government and Africa Civil Society priorities. We are going to have Africa priorities. Full stop. It’s therefore important for us to be ready to help our governments in developing powerful arguments to back up what we consider as our top Africa priorities. Not forgetting that when the Action plan is going to be adopted, the civil society will become the watchdog...[T]he focus should not be narrowed to education, healthcare and transportation, as if the impact of Internet technologies was non-existent on the quality of service delivery in those sectors! After all, the efficiency of public service delivery in all countries is also dependent on internal communications, knowledge-sharing and data-management... “

“In view of the present economic situation of Africa, the OSS approach is of primordial importance in the development of content, especially
local. Since OSS is a cross-cutting initiative, it becomes fundamental in ICT4D for Least Developed Countries in areas of e-health, e-administration, e-governance and e-education. Since the fact has been proved that computers running on OSS are more affordable, and hence more accessible to the larger population, it becomes money-wise to build the development of software applications in Africa around OSS.”

Nnenna Nwakanma, Nigeria AISI Civil Society List discussant

“The fact is we need both locally manufactured and developed hard and software to be able to sustain ICT applications and infrastructure in all African countries. Foreign material cannot sustain ICT development in Africa. The case of India and the Asian countries should be an eye opener.”

Patrick Yiriyelleh, Ghana AISI Civil Society List discussant

“I think this initiative will increase our African solidarity and we will be more able to share our thinking together for the benefit of our continent.”

Nermine El-Saadany, Egypt AISI Civil Society List discussant

“Africa should come together in a strong way to present a common position in all the priority areas...We have peculiar problems in Africa and this should be adequately addressed in whatever decision that will be taken at the submit (WSIS)”

Vincent Olatunji, Nigeria AISI Civil Society List discussant

“...what I do suggest is to negotiate on the critical elements that interests Africa most and sensitive to other parties like EU, USA, Japan, Canada etc. I mean that those issues that such a forum would set a momentum for. In my opinion, we need to focus on issues like: Digital Solidarity (Charter and funding), Internet Governance, and Intellectual Property for universal access to information and knowledge, etc.”

Eshetu Alemu, Ethiopia AISI Civil Society List discussant
Telecom harmonization

“I fully share the vision of having harmonized regulations at the sub-regional or regional level. Any regulation tools clearly defining the roles of Government, Operators (Private sector) and protecting the consumers against abuses can work in Africa. The process should be transparent and national regulatory authorities must be empowered to implement all the relevant decisions.”

Cheick Omar GOLOG, ECOWAS/CEDEAO
AISI Civil Society List discussant

“Government needs to go further than transforming state monopolies into private monopolies: it must also liberalise to encourage new entrants in the field. In tandem, regulatory agencies must be strengthened before full privatisation to ensure a level playing field. Of course, privatisation in Africa has proven to be a slow-moving process. Perhaps, the “bottom-up” approach, where investment begins with less risky and more short-term businesses, is an alternative.”

ADF ’99 List Discussant

Open Source Issues

“In view of the present economic situation of Africa, the OSS approach is of primordial importance in the development of content, especially local. Since OSS is a cross-cutting initiative, it becomes fundamental in ICT4D for Least Developed Countries in areas of e-health, e-administration, e-governance and e-education. Since the fact has been proved that computers running on OSS are more affordable, and hence more accessible to the larger population, it becomes money-wise to build the development of software applications in Africa around OSS. Since there already exists a Free and open Source Solutions Foundation of Africa www.fossfa.org we believe that OSS as part of the Action Plan, will constitute a great push for the development of infrastructure as well as human resources on the continent.”

Nnenna Nwakanma, Nigeria AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“I would like to stress that if Germany, one of the G8 and all the concomitant resources can convert all its’ government systems to Open Source for reasons of cost savings, surely developing countries must re-
evaluate their positions. Not just for CSOs or NGOs, but also for our governments. It is a resource-based and cost-of-ownership decision that we should all consider very carefully.”

Simbo Ntiro, Tanzania AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“Open Source meaning the Source code of it is available (Open) for anybody to own use and customise, hence user and developers have an equal chance of participating in the intellectual exercise of developing the technology and not necessarily reinventing the wheel when it has already being invented. So it is a more communal and inclusive process and that types into the African sense of community so at that level it is a good module for our kind of life style. The high level of intellectual capital development also create a platform for us to develop as well as entrench our own wealth system in a more decentralised function so this also ties in the Internet’s definitive feature of decentralisation which employs a sense of community and social engineering (parallel to technical engineering).”

Eric Osiakwan, Ghana AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“Open source will not be of any use for Africa unless we take steps to provide sufficient quantity and quality of open source qualified tech support personnel!”

Dapo Ladimeji AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“How long it will take to introduce Open Source Software? Does our educational system have the resources to introduce Opens Source as the basics of learning in our system? The choice to invest in Open Source is wide and worthy and we should go over that way but the how should be defined; we should ask ourselves how will African governments harness Open Source through their educational systems and their professional environment? Is the Public Educational System out of the process? Is that the duty and the privilege of the private sector and the private educational sector only? Has the solution come from the private or public initiative?”

“If we want to fund e-governance, shall we outsource it and increase the debt of these poor countries or shall we invest in the human resources to be able to get a critical mass of experts that will be able to set up systems
and solutions and to be able to cover security and transparency requirements to the e-governance, the e-democracy, the e-election.

We cannot overcome the need for transparency and democracy if we cannot handle the technologies inside the administrative and legislative system. If funding this initiative means increasing deeply the debt, do we have right to engage it without thinking about the sustainability of the project. We should think about it?”

Mouhamet Diop, Senegal AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“....so long as Africa continues to spend heavily in proprietary software, she will further widen the digital divide, no local capacity will be built and most significantly, most people will not afford it. Developing free software by Africans for Africa seems to be the only logical way forward.”

Bill Kagai, Kenya AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“Africa can bridge the ‘Digital Divide’ by adopting Open Source thus narrowing the effect of techno-colonialism. The potential of Open Source will improve productivity and quality of life in developing countries. The process of transformation into information societies requires the full participation of all member states.”

Gideon Hayford Chonia AISI-Civil Society List discussant

Academia’s role in WSIS

“Academia can play a central role in shaping national policies in line with WSIS. Their active engagement in the national ICT policies directly translates to WSIS (and also possibly the other way round). Academia overall feels that governments hardly involve them in high-level and important decision matters and they feel that governments have to reach out to them to draw and enhance their contributions. Numerous scholarly and academic associations and societies that can and should play prominent roles in major national issues and governments exist. And governments should approach these existing networks of expertise to develop healthy and more relevant policies...including of course IS/IT. A massive network of expertise lies unused in many African countries and governments have to learn how to tap these resources.”

Damtew Teferra, Canada/Ethiopia AISI-Academia List discussant
“The failure of the African ICTs sector to grow and become a major source of revenue and big employer for its people can be partly attributed to lack of innovative and forward looking policies and the failure of the private sector to challenge the need for better and conducive environments. Africa is consuming Western ICTs solutions and products — but there are a horde of well qualified professionals that due to lack of incentives from the government would rather work for a company instead of even thinking about setting up companies that will work on developing innovative ICTs solutions.”

Batsirai Mike Chivhanga, UK AISI-Civil Society List discussant

“As we well know, a lot of ‘innovation’ introduced into Africa has turned out to be ill-conceived and counter productive. A major reason for this is often an absence of dialogue and debate with adopters. Communities should not just be told in advance what is about to happen, they should be actively involved in discussion as to whether the proposed innovation should happen at all.”

Roland Stanbridge, Sweden/South Africa AISI-Civil Society List discussant